

Published By:  
**Woodstock Publications**

Publication Date:  
**April 2003**

Editor:  
**Andrew Muir**

Contributors:  
**Alan Davis**  
**Andrew Davies**  
**Dylan Dryden**  
**Robert Forryan**  
**Nick Hawthorne**  
**Nigel Hinton**  
**David Pichaske**  
**Lucas Stensland**

Design & Layout:  
**Keith Wootton**

Staff Photographer:  
**Duncan Hume**

Subscriptions:  
**Woodstock Publications**  
**8 Laxton Grange**  
**Bluntisham**  
**Cambridgeshire. PE28 3XU**  
**United Kingdom**

E-mail:  
**info@judasmagazine.com**

WebSite:  
**www.judasmagazine.com**

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Judas! is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. The subscription will be annual commencing on 1st April each year.

*UK £20.00*  
*Europe £22.00/€36.00*  
*USA/Canada \$38.00*  
*Rest of World £28.00*

Payment can be accepted by cheque, Postal Order or International Money Order made payable to *Woodstock Publications* or by visiting our website at [www.judasmagazine.com](http://www.judasmagazine.com) and using the online credit card payment service.

All copies are dispatched in board-backed envelopes by 1st class mail with overseas being sent by airmail.

All correspondence concerning this publication should be addressed to:

Woodstock Publications  
8 Laxton Grange  
Bluntisham  
Cambridgeshire. PE28 3XU  
United Kingdom  
E-mail: [info@judasmagazine.com](mailto:info@judasmagazine.com)

# from *Inside A Prune*

Hello and welcome to issue 5.

When issue four was sent out we had some postal problems. People in certain European countries or American states did not receive their issues at the same time as their neighbours did, despite all issues being mailed at the same time. Thankfully the majority eventually arrived, but the delays occasioned Keith writing out to many of our subscribers to check what was happening. This, added to many of you including notes with your re-subscription payments, had the happy benefit of letting us hear from a wider spread of you than is normally the case, especially happy as you added praise and support for the magazine along with details of your postal status.

This general acclaim for where we are heading was helpful as 'letters to the editor' tend to be on specific points. It was good for us to get an overall view on how we are doing. I apologise in advance if this has led to an overly positive letters' section!

A number of people have either asked in which direction we now see ourselves developing or told us how they would like to see us progress. I'll attempt here to give a broad, if basic, answer.

As we have said from the beginning, although we want you to have fun and pleasure reading *Judas!* we also want you to feel assured that you are reading something that treats Dylan with the serious attention he deserves. Professor Christopher Ricks has said that Dylan needs a critic who is an expert on 'lyrics and music' plus 'voice and voicing'. Such a critic does not exist, but being a magazine we can aim to bring you the most insightful writing on Dylan in these areas. Aiming is easier than achieving, though.

Lyrical analysis is something we have been able to bring you in sufficient quantity and quality to feel we are covering this topic handsomely, not denying that we will always be looking to bring you more and improve our offerings in any way we can. We do not advocate the kind of academic criticism that is written in a specialised language that only initiates can understand but we do look for a similar level of insight and research as an academic would be expected to bring to his work along with a clarity in communicating what that research and insight has revealed.

This clarity can be difficult to achieve when dealing in expositions of complex linguistic or poetic practices, and it would seem to become almost an impossible task for a writer in the other fields. Readers of Wilfrid Meller's book *A Darker Shade Of Pale* who don't already understand music will surely struggle with it. Similarly, the recent book *The Four Voices Of Dylan* looks on first glance a difficult undertaking for the general reader.

We are doing our best to cover these areas, however. Renowned guitarist John Perry is writing an article for us on Dylan's acoustic guitar playing in 1966 for a future issue and David Pichaske tackles one aspect of Dylan's 'voice' for us in a two-parter beginning in this issue. We have split his article into two as the subject is quite heavy going due to its specialised nature. David has done remarkably well in making it all understandable for those, like me, with no background in phonetics. As the article progresses its importance to the Dylan listener (dare one say, 'student'?) becomes ever more obvious. This is the kind of article we hope you will keep and refer back to long into the future. Well, we trust you'll keep all your Judases come to that.

The subject of Dylan's art has all kinds of subsets beneath that trilogy of 'lyrics, music and voice'. Perhaps most obviously in the split between studio and live performances. We are not ignoring the 'Never Ending Tour', but this is covered in great detail elsewhere and we do not want to duplicate that. (So we were delighted to get a letter saying how well we complement *Isis*.) Our different approach to commenting on the 'Never Ending Tour' in last issue polarised opinion. For many it seemed to be either the best or worst thing we'd ever done.

I am saying all this to let you know that we do concern ourselves with keeping a balance and variety in each issue and we are helped in this by Dylan doing things like writing for and appearing in films. *Masked And Anonymous* may be a 'work in progress' but its triple showing at the Sundance Festival was a new Dylan release of a kind and our man on the spot, Lucas Stensland reports back from there. As does Nigel Hinton in addition, Nigel has interviewed *Masked And Anonymous* producer Nigel Sinclair exclusively for *Judas!* We are extremely grateful to both as they had to go out of their way amidst other time-pressured projects to allow us to bring this to you in time for this issue. We take this opportunity to reflect on Dylan's first foray into the world of film too, with an insightful look at *Don't Look Back* from the wonderfully named Dylan Dryden.

Throughout this issue you will find allusions to our new 'Subscriber's Area' on the website. We are delighted to bring you this added benefit to subscribing. There you will find back-up to articles that appear in the issues, news of things to come in the Dylan world be they official or unofficial (sorry, though, we can only provide the news itself), outtakes from my previous magazine, **Homer**, *the slut* and a myriad of other delights. One being a section for material we think you should see but did not suit our magazine format, the first in that area is a delightful approach to Dylan and the Cowboy Song by Pat Fitzgerald. Perhaps most controversial is the section showcasing articles that were rejected by me, allowing you to see if you agree with my decision or not.

*Andrew Muir*

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*Front cover John Hume, USA 1986; Back cover John Hume, Bournemouth October 1997; Inside back cover Lorey Sebastian*

# *I'll Search For Love Wherever I'm Welcome*

by Nick Hawthorne

I am a huge fan of *Saved*. From the first time I ever heard it around 12 years ago I have held that album and those songs dear to my heart. I come back to it time after time and its power has never diminished for me, if anything it continues to grow and take on added meaning. It probably helped that I first heard the album when I had no preconceptions of Dylan's work whatsoever. I was an innocent lad and I had been protected up until that point from *Isis* and *The Telegraph*. I had never seen a fanzine, never read any critical analysis of Dylan and as for the Internet, it was but a glint in my young eye. I reacted to the album as I heard it. For all I knew this was the one people held aloft as THE Dylan album. For all I knew, this was *Blood On The Tracks* or *Blonde On Blonde*. As it turned out, *Saved*, as an album is not universally lauded as I perhaps thought it would be. Most seem to agree that *Saved* contains some terrific songs, marred by lumpen and uninspired production and performances. Each to their own. I couldn't disagree more. I prefer it 100 times out of 100 to *Slow Train Coming*. Of course, I had never heard the songs live at that point, and there can be no doubt that the songs found on *Saved* are vastly improved in their live setting. They take on new excitement, and are infinitely thrilling. However, this is true of many Dylan songs. The vast majority are greatly improved on live, so as to leave the originals sounding a little, dare I say it, watered down by comparison.

Of course, I now know that I had the horse and cart the wrong way around. These songs had been debuted live first, with their wild thrilling arrangements that caused the likes of Paul Williams to turn apoplectic with glee, and then the more toned down studio arrangements had been recorded for the album. At least this helped explain people's sense of disappointment concerning the album. They had been exposed to the songs in a way that defied the normal process of 'highs'. It seems when the process is subverted it always leads to disappointment. That is certainly true for me. When a song is debuted live, performed for a while and then recorded, it never seems to retain the same spirit, the same excitement. This not only applies to me in my experiences of listening to Bob Dylan, but to other artists as well. The excitement comes in hearing a new song for the first time, in the live setting. Nothing can beat that. How is a studio version going to live up to that, to what has already formed in your mind and in your sub-conscious? It happened with 'Caribbean Wind', and it happened with the *Saved* songs. You start on top of the mountain and there is only one way down. There ain't no going back.

It seems to me far better to actually be presented with the 'blueprint', as Dylan has referred to it, on an album. The songs are frameworks; works in progress, and it is best to hear them first on record. Then the process begins, as it should, with live versions often taking songs you already love, onto a whole other level. This has happened with so many great Dylan albums. *Blood On The Tracks*, *Time Out*

*Of Mind* and "Love and Theft" to name but three. We heard the recorded songs, began to form opinions, then had those opinions continually challenged on the road with live versions and changes to the works in progress. You need the starting point, and one that will start you on an up curve rather than a downward spiral.

Anyway, I digress...back to *Saved*. I always have the correct way round, the way things should be fixed in my head, which does alter things. I started with the album, it had a profound effect on me, and then the live outings and video of Toronto '80 etc built upon the foundations to make a mightily strong construction.

I have always wanted to write a very detailed piece specifically about *Saved* and maybe one day I will, but I have been driven to write these thoughts after a specific incident. And that incident is the performance of 'Saving Grace' during Bob Dylan's Australian tour in 2003. There have only been three performances as I write this, in Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane, and all three have featured 'Saving Grace' in the first performances of the song since 1980. Of course, there is a touch of déjà-vu because we went through all this last year with 'Solid Rock'. I was thrilled then, but I didn't capture my astonishment and delight at the time. And we got so many great performances of that rollicking song (that it seems fitting to call it by the full title given to it at its very conceptions, 'I'm Hanging on to a Solid Rock Made Before the Foundation of the World'). I was lucky enough to see the song live, something I thought would never happen, and lucky enough to hear

on CD the best performance of the song in 2002 as the jaw dropping opening song in Seattle. Banged out on a keyboard with Dylan in great voice and Charlie Sexton brewing up a storm on guitar it sends shivers down my spine every time I listen to it, the perfect opener for current piano fighter Dylan.

But 'Saving Grace' was always THE song for me. It was always the highlight of an album of highlights. I have loved it for years and when he played it in Canberra for the first time in almost 23 years I knew if anyone was going to write about it, it was going to be me. When I saw the set list I was stunned. It shouldn't have come as such a shock really given 'Solid Rock's re-emergence and Dylan's turning to songs from that period ('In The Garden', 'I Believe In You', 'In The Summertime', 'Every Grain of Sand') and religious material in general ('Pass Me Not Oh Gentle Saviour', 'Somebody Touched Me', 'Hallelujah I'm Ready To Go', 'I Am The Man Thomas'). But I still didn't expect it. And it made those early setlists totally. There it was, shining in amongst some mundane set lists (not necessarily mundane shows I admit, but that's another essay, another time).

As I waited for an MP3 of the song, I went straight back to the original. What a marvellous song and marvellous performance. Listening to it was like being greeted by an old friend. Everything was there where it should be; the magic had never died. I didn't think it would have. I don't want to turn this into a religious piece and it is always tricky when discussing the so called 'Born Again' albums with anyone as

at some point the songs and performances are going to have to be allied to your own belief etc in some way or another. I consider myself a spiritual person, but I hate organised religion, and hate the fact that most of the people I have met that call themselves strongly religious, or Christians (I am talking purely from my own direct experiences) are the most intolerant, narrow minded, mean spirited, bigoted people I have met. This doesn't make sense to me. I hate the exclusive nature of it all. In that sense it seems no different from some exclusive gentleman's club, or any club obsessed with its own being rather than the point of it, what is it they say these days... 'all singing from the same hymn sheet!' Do the right thing, wear the right clothes, say what we tell you and all will be ok. In other words, conform. Don't be different, don't express yourself, and don't question anything. I do have a faith though, a very personal sense of belief in God. So on that level, the text of the songs both appealed and repulsed me at the same time! I was drawn in by the passion of Dylan's belief, the elements of Jesus' teaching he incorporated, the message of giving that he sometimes was outlining, but I was turned off by the exclusive nature of it all that sometimes rose to the surface. The 'I'm one of the lucky ones, the rest of you can rot' feeling. I found less of this on *Saved*, despite a line in one of my other favourite *Saved* songs 'What Can I Do For You?'

...*chosen me to be among the few*

But much of *Saved* and 'Saving Grace' in particular left all those things behind, and addressed what it meant to him and it

cut straight to the core. The song opens in such a humble way, I am drawn straight in:

*If You find it in Your heart, can I be forgiven?  
Guess I owe You some kind of apology.  
I've escaped death so many times, I know I'm only living  
By the saving grace that's over me.*

It seemed so personal in its description of avoiding death, and yet so universal and we all have constant near misses with something that we can never avoid. It also of course brings the image of spiritual and moral death. It is such a tender opening, and the second line is so Dylanesque to me, that he 'guesses' he owes 'some kind' of apology. It is so shy, so humble. You might say 'but why, if he is truly humble, does he just not say that?' It is easy to take the rambling nature of that line as being a grudging half hearted apology. But I don't see it that way. I see it as part of Dylan's 'aw shucks' sort of act that we have seen before. He expresses the line in an almost coy, shy way, which adds to his sense of embarrassment at the actions he is asking forgiveness for. It adds to the feeling of shame.

Death is everywhere in the song, yet it is so uplifting, so inspiring. In the first verse he has escaped death, in the 2nd verse he refers to this again:

*By this time, I'd-a thought that I would be sleeping  
In a pine box for all eternity*

again, the image of Dylan's death which is bound to impact on the listener, confronting your own and Dylan's

mortality in such a stark way. The image presented here is again so visual. The use of language in describing the coffin as the 'pine box', and the pairing off of images. Death is referred to twice with 'sleeping' which of course he wouldn't be, and the 'pine box'. And time is dealt with both in the very real present, 'by this time...' and in the dare we think about it, let alone comprehend it, future, 'all eternity'. In the third verse we get:

*Well, the death of life, then comes the resurrection*

All the mentions of death are countered by a warming sense of what will follow, of his belief in resurrection through Christ.

But the next verse contains the lines which have always stayed with me:

*But to search for love, that ain't no more than vanity*

As a young boy this line stood out and lodged itself in my brain where it has stayed to this day. A line that caused to think and think on what it meant? Was a life devoted to looking for love a life lived in the search for vanity? Is our perpetual search for love all aimed at ourselves? We want someone to love us, to make us feel better. That's not vain is it? After all, isn't this the same man that had told me:

*Love is all there is it makes the world go round*

*Love and only love, it can't be denied  
No matter what you think about it  
You won't be able to do without it  
Take a tip from one who has tried?*

Maybe not, as Dylan has changed. But other songs by other artists whiz around

my mind, such as Townes Van Zandt's 'Still Looking for You':

*There ain't much that I ain't tried  
Fast living and slow suicide  
And running for a place to hide  
Still looking for you  
Looking low and looking high  
Looking far and looking wide  
Try to tell myself I tried  
But it just ain't true  
And it just won't do  
Still looking for you  
Still looking for you*

and Warren Zevon's brilliant 'Lord Byron's Luggage' from his most recent album *My Ride's Here*:

*Still out here in the wind and rain  
Look a little older but I feel no pain  
And it stands to reason  
I'm still looking for love  
Still looking for love*

The brilliant thing about those Zevon lines (and a reason why Zevon is a masterful songwriter) is his line 'stands to reason'. That is the line that makes the looking for love all the more effecting. In that one line he says 'of course I am still looking for love! When do we stop doing that?' That is a big part of life's journey for us all isn't it? A search for love? So why is it so important? Because it completes us, makes us feel whole, gives us love that we can then repay, gives us companionship, gives our lives meaning. But here was Dylan telling me that to search for love was an act of vanity! What did he mean? Was the line saying we should let love into our lives, but to actively search for it was an act of vanity? It maybe sheds further

light on that great theme of Dylan's, 'love', and the title of the album "*Love and Theft*". Dylan may see true unconditional love as the only kind of pure love that does not have selfish motives. It has been said before that to love someone is to also steal something from them. If you are stealing something from them you are doing it for yourself, out of your own inherent weakness as a human being, out of vanity. Love and theft. That line, '*But to search for love, that ain't no more than vanity*' is prefaced by a reference to temptation that maybe helps define it further:

*The devil's shining light can be most blinding*

So to search for love as a means of avoiding temptation, or as a means of blocking out the devils shining light, is an act of ultimate selfishness, and act of pure vanity? I can't give you an answer here, as my response to this line changes all the time. As events in my life change and as I get older. In some ways we do seek love to ingratiate ourselves. But without love where would we be, and without the search for love what are we? The line has an uncomfortable effect on me sometimes, as it has the power to humble me, make me think my love for people and my search for other peoples love is hollow and empty in a way. Certainly when compared to a true selfless, giving love, like the love and faith Dylan is expressing in Christ. But the power of the line is unquestioned as it has become a part of my thoughts for so long a time. Like all Dylan's truly great and inspiring lines.

I love the song because it doesn't preach, doesn't talk about the chosen few. It isn't pompous or attacking. It is beautifully written. The 'Saving Grace' is something I have felt with me all my life. The feeling of someone or something watching over me. Dylan explains it all, the unexplainable really, perfectly. It is determined, unwavering, passionate, humble, yes most of all it is humble. The line I mentioned earlier concerning temptation is a great example of how this is an inclusive as opposed to an exclusive song:

*The devil's shining light can be most blinding*

This stand as an acknowledgement, a humble acknowledgement by Dylan that temptation is a powerful thing that will defeat us all at some point in our lives. The line comes with no blame. No sense of 'why can't you see it you hapless weak fools' that some of the other songs of this period may have. It is sympathetic, instantly recognisable to us all. We can all hear this line and be utterly in tune with what the singer is saying. Temptation follows us every day and is not to be underestimated. We are all equal in this.

The final verse reaffirms all the positive uplifting, sympathetic messages of the song. First we get another level playing field line:

*The wicked know no peace and you just can't fake it*

A brilliant line. Again, Dylan appears not to be saying he is not wicked, we are wicked etc. Rather he talks of 'the wicked' as a group and to that you must read mankind. The wicked can find no peace,

no matter how much you run and hide, no matter how much you pretend, no matter how many masks you put on to try and distance yourself from your own actions, you will find no peace. No contentment. This is another truism it seems to me. People will be haunted by their own actions, and those that seem to revel in wicked actions, if not punished on Earth will be punished in the next life. They will find no peace. And this cannot be faked and Dylan here, in this song is not faking in any way. In this line I hear him counting himself as part of that group, part of 'the wicked'. Again he is sympathising with the listener. In the second line Dylan reaffirms his belief, but not in an aggressive way, it is clearly articulate:

*There's only one road and it leads to Calvary*

This doesn't offend me and it shouldn't offend non-believers either. It is a genuine belief on the part of the singer and must be taken. It is not an order, or it doesn't sound to me on this song, and in this context as an order. And that brings us to the nub of why so many of these songs, and those on *Slow Train Coming* get to so many people. Dylan's insistence that he is one of the chosen few leads to an alienating dogma. And lines like the above come across as direct statements of facts, orders and damnations from one who is among the chosen ones. As he said:

*There ain't no neutral ground*

And yet, taking this song individually, if you can allow yourself to do such a difficult thing, that sense of alienation seems

reversed. There seems more of a willingness to try and welcome the listener in by hearing the experiences of the singer. He can still tell me there is only one road, and that is leads to Calvary, and it is ok with me because he hasn't berated me, brow beaten me, alienated me throughout the rest of the song.

It is a conclusion reached after the journey and realisations of the song and as such it is immensely powerful. A genuine belief that Christ will redeem of course, but again it uplifts me beyond that in terms of faith and hope. Although specifically referring to one thing, it alludes to what faith in something in life can bring you, if you hang on to a solid rock.

The final lines of the song bring the whole thing to a glorious conclusion:

*It gets discouraging at times but I know  
I'll make it*

*By the saving grace that's over me*

the themes that make *Saved* such an admirable, warm and inclusive album are all contained in these lines. We get a window into the world of the singer. Again, linking to the acknowledgement of the peril temptation brings, and the sympathetic tone of the rest of the song, here Dylan is with us all once more. He knows life gets discouraging. We are not always encouraged by Christ, by life, by events, and he knows that and doesn't blame us. He is admitting, along with his own sin, his own temptation, his own weaknesses, that he gets discouraged. And how can you fight temptation, vanity, discouragement and wickedness? The singer offers a way, a way that is giving

him belief and he knows he is going to 'make it', i.e. make it on the road to Calvary, help him in his perpetual fight against all these things, is the saving grace. In this case, the saving grace of Christ, of God, but that rings true for whatever saving grace I feel in my life, and you all feel in yours.

That is the power of the song. *Saved* is full of Dylan at his most humble. The attacking, racist, offensive tone sometimes found on *Slow Train Coming* is here replaced by something quite different. Here we get:

*'What can I do for you?'*

*'And I just want to thank you once again'*

*'And to you so grateful I will forever be'*

*'Well I don't deserve it but I sure did make it through'*

*'It's the ways of the flesh to war against the spirit*

*Twenty-four hours a day you can feel it and you can hear it*

*Using all the devices under the sun.*

*And He never give up 'til the battle's lost or won.'*

*'Temptation's not an easy thing, Adam given the Devil reign'*

*'Are you ready? Hope you're ready  
Am I ready? Am I Ready?'*

The album is full of thanks and of praise, redemption and joy. And it is also full of Dylan explaining why he feels this way to his audience and sympathising with the every day situations people face. That life is hard, that choices are not easy. And 'Saving Grace' encapsulates all of this

and that is what spoke to me so clearly when I first heard it, and that is what speaks to me to this day.

*Saved* and the songs found on the album are also wonderful musically, again far better for me than those found on *Slow Train Coming*, which is always inexplicably lauded for its production and 'modern sound'. The other reason I loved *Saved* as an album when I first heard it, aside from its lyrical approach, was because of the music. I love the way 'Saving Grace' sounds like a hymn, then a cross between a traditional hymn and a true joyous gospel song and ends up as something unique that captures the spirit of both of those things. More specifically there are most notable and significant musical moments. I think it contains two things that cannot be scoffed at, and that completes the album up as truly memorable and great. The first is the harmonica playing on 'What Can I Do For You? I love it and it is my favourite playing on any Dylan album. Wonderful. So much expressed through those joyous notes on what is incidentally also my favourite ending of any Dylan song, as we are left with just the organ, hymn-like and stately, and Dylan blowing wild and free, truly expressing the feeling of the song. He gives the harmonica solo as an offering, this is what he can do. What can I do for you? Just listen! The second is the guitar solo on 'Saving Grace'. It is Dylan's solo, though many didn't believe it until the live shows, and also my favourite Dylan electric guitar solo from any album in his career. The solo on 'Saving Grace' complements the song superbly. It sounds

just right, it fits completely. It sounds humble, it sounds redemptive. It completes one of Dylan's great songs.

And then you have the vocal. The vocal is a joy. I can hear the passion in his voice, especially on lines such as:

*But as I look around this world all that  
I'm finding  
Is this saving grace that's over me*

and the wonderful

*I put all my confidence in him, my sole  
protection*

which not only is superbly sung with such gusto, but features that pun on soul/sole which I find appealing.

So now fast forward to 2003. I get my hands on the MP3 thanks to the amazing work of the people at Dylan Pool. I am almost too nervous to hear it, as I was with 'Idiot Wind' in 1992. I treasured the song so much, that I suddenly had doubts about what I would hear in 2003. But I needn't have worried, as with that great performance of 'Idiot Wind' throughout 1992, comes the 2003 version of 'Saving Grace'. It doesn't have that energy from '79 and '80. But then neither does Bob. Things have changed indeed and he has adapted to his age, his limitations vocally and in terms of energy and drama. But recently he has found something else, an ability to really find certain songs from inside their very being and put them over beautifully. It also doesn't feature that great guitar solo that Bob treated us to on the album and in concert. But guitar solos are not really Bob's things these days either. Pointless song-ruining noodlings and ghastly noise have been the order of

the day. But it does feature a vocal truly worthy of the song, with Bob getting the words spot on and using the lower reaches of his register, which are serving him so well of late, to great effect. And thankfully Bob plays electric piano on the song rather than guitar which sounds just fine and dandy and there is some beautiful pedal steel from the ever reliable Larry Campbell. Meanwhile, new guitarist Billy Burnette, trying to fill the size 14's left by Charlie Sexton, plays some very understated and effective guitar throughout the song, but especially towards the end. Disappointed? Not a chance.

To hear Dylan singing these words after so long seems like both the confirmation and completion of something, and also the starting of something. The new life that has been given to it, like 'Solid Rock' before it has delighted me. The very fact that it has re-appeared at all is significant because of the time of life Dylan finds himself at. The references to death, escaped death, salvation, and to resurrec-

tion seem ever more poignant and unbearable to consider at the same time. His humble nature seems even more so, his sympathy for his audience again seems heightened as he enters the late years of his life.

And one line in particular resonated around my head after hearing it in 2003. That after Dylan's great journey of almost 62 years, of all the themes he has confronted, of all the risks he has taken and hardships he has endured. Of all the mistakes he has made, people he has hurt. Of all the songs he has written, people he has confronted, people he has saved and impact he has made. Throughout a lifetime of temptation, both his own and his audiences, through a lifetime of weakness, both his own and his audiences, and throughout a lifetime of searching for love it comes down to this...

Wherever I am welcome is where I will be

'Saving Grace' 2003, a great story finally completed. Thank you, Bob.

# A Man Of Constant Sorrow

by Robert Forryan

*'Suicide means different things for different people at different times. For Petronius Arbiter it was a final stylish grace-note to a life devoted to high style. For Thomas Chatterton it was the alternative to a slow death by starvation. For Sylvia Plath it was an attempt to get herself out of a desperate corner her own poetry had boxed her into. For Cesar Pavese it was as inevitable as the next sunrise, an event which all the praise and success in the world could not put off'*

A Alvarez: *The Savage God*

For the last couple of years it has seemed that there has been a new compilation CD containing at least one track by Bob Dylan released every month. Many of them have little of interest beyond the Dylan track, but there was one that was worth the money even without Dylan. It is *There Is No Eye: Music For Photographs* - a compilation of recordings of musicians photographed by John Cohen (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings). The album contains recordings by some of the many folk artists John Cohen has photographed over the years. It includes such names as Carter Stanley, Muddy Waters, Reverend Gary Davis, Woody Guthrie and Bill Monroe; but Cohen himself warns the listener 'not to look out for any particular purity in these selections'. The disc is accompanied by a wonderfully-informative 32-page booklet studded with Cohen's photos of the musicians.

The selected Dylan track is 'Roll On John' taken from the 1962 Cynthia Gooding radio interview. Dylan himself says that he learned the song from Ralph Rinzler (of The Greenbriar Boys). In the booklet, John Cohen says that the original source version of 'Roll On John' is that sung by Rufus and Palmer Crisp of Allen, Kentucky, though Dylan changes some of the lyrics. Cohen says it is also known as 'Roll On Buddy' and 'Nine Pound Hammer'. 'Roll On John' is not the subject of this essay, but its Kentucky origins do have a relevance for what follows.

What follows on the CD - immediately after Dylan - are three of the album's highlights: 'Man Of Constant Sorrow' by Roscoe Holcomb, 'Hick's Farewell' by Doc Watson and 'Come All You Tenderhearted' by Carter Stanley. There is a neat geographical symmetry about the grouping together of these four songs: Holcomb was a Kentuckian, Doc Watson was from North Carolina and The Stanley Brothers originated in Virginia. The heartland of Bluegrass and American White Folk and Mountain Music is the Appalachian Mountains and Kentucky, Virginia and the Carolinas - the very states that were heavily populated by British settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They brought with them their English, Irish and Scottish folk songs. In his book, *A Darker Shade of Pale*, Wilfrid Mellers comments that: 'the relative affluence that has come to most white American peoples bypassed the hillbillies marooned in the creeks of the Carolinian, Virginian and Kentucky Mountains; industrial exploitation added to, rather than alleviated, their penury. The land was gouged and scarred, the streams polluted, animal life decimated, human life materially and spiritually impoverished'. In other words, the Appalachians and the surrounding countryside, were the homes of the Southern Poor Whites, and yet 'out of deprivation men and women wrested a music which, if niggardly, attained nobility'. In *Song & Dance Man III*, Michael Gray also talks about this music: 'Southern Poor White folk music, hillbilly mountain music, the music of the settlers, consisted of hybrids. Its songs fused Scots, Irish and English

influences and yet expressed a new-world pioneer milieu... It was a tradition linked fundamentally to Calvinist precepts: to the passionate belief in sin, the concern for individual salvation and the surety of a God on our side'.

When I say that four consecutive songs on the John Cohen CD were linked by their Appalachian/Southern geography, I am not simply referring to the origins of three singers and one song - 'Roll On John'. For 'Man Of Constant Sorrow' also has its roots in Kentucky. This information is contained in the liner notes to the Stanley Brothers' Bluegrass CD *Riding That Midnight Train*, which contains their famous version of 'Man Of Constant Sorrow'. The notes reveal that the Stanleys hailed from Dickenson County, Virginia - 'a beautiful ridge country area, between the Kentucky and Tennessee borders, but a place where it was hard to make a living'. They go on to explain that the earliest recorded version of 'Man Of Constant Sorrow' 'is attributed to Emry Arthur, a singer from Kentucky who cut the song in the 1920s, having learned it from Dick Burnett - one half of the Burnett and Rutherford duo - who may well have written it, or more likely adapted from traditional sources'. The CD notes go on to claim that all current versions, including Dylan's, are based on the Stanley Brothers' recording. Certainly Dylan's live performances echo their track very closely.

The Stanley Brothers' Bluegrass style evolved out of an earlier, more austere form of Mountain Music. They softened it, made it more accessible to urban audiences. But

just as you can hear the Stanleys' influence on Dylan in live performance, you can also hear that earlier 'Poor White Folk Song' on some of Dylan's recordings, especially on his first three albums.

Mellers looks at the reasons for the evolution of this severe, almost puritanical, folk music: 'Fortitude and endurance were necessary virtues in confronting the wilderness, in which social groups were small and defensively isolated. So, when 'Poor White' American folk sing dolorous words and tunes, their manner tends to be not merely impersonal but also laconic. Holding so stoically for grim life often deprives the traditional tunes of their lyrical warmth; sometimes pain is so 'distanced' that the music sounds like a pretence that suffering may be disconnected'.

Mellers calls this kind of singing the 'monody of deprivation' - a musical form in which 'the flatness, the rasping tone, the lack of vocal bloom become themselves a kind of lyricism'. One of the problems in Mellers' writing - for lay readers such as myself - is his regular use of technical musical terms. It can be quite off-putting. I had to look up the word 'monody'. It means: a song performed solo with accompaniment or a poem of lament for someone's death. I find this 'monody of deprivation' in a few of Dylan's early songs and I intend to discuss one particular example which perfectly encapsulates Mellers' description. The song is 'The Ballad Of Hollis Brown' - the story of a man of constant sorrow and one that conforms to both definitions of monody.

The impersonal style of early Appalachian folk song can be traced to its Anglo-Irish-Scottish roots. These songs, says Mellers, adopted objectivity to negate anguish and make pain endurable. In its early forms Poor White Mountain Music was often sung unaccompanied - just as Roscoe Holcomb sings 'Man Of Constant Sorrow' on the Cohen CD. The odd thing is that, though we know that Holcomb learnt the song from hearing the Stanley Brothers version, his own performance sounds so much older - as ancient as the Appalachians. This lack of instrumentation is traceable to the puritan traditions of the early settlers and a religio-cultural disapproval of musical instruments. Ultimately, of course, there was a softening of approach, and an adoption of banjo, guitar and mandolin. We can see this solo voice versus instrumentation argument echoed in the 1960s by the 'acoustic puritans' of the Folk Revival.

Before discussing Dylan's 'monody of deprivation' as portrayed on 'The Ballad Of Hollis Brown', I want to dwell awhile on Roscoe Holcomb because I think he may be a vital link in the chain that binds Dylan to the Poor White Folk Song of the Appalachians. Although influenced by the Stanleys', Holcomb's approach is both more ancient and austere. His style is at once tense and intense - singing seemingly from the throat rather than the chest or stomach. Michael Gray says that he 'makes Bob Dylan sound as smooth as Cliff Richard'. It's not the sort of music you would want to play when you've invited a few friends round for a meal.

Roscoe Holcomb was born and raised in the mountains and never aspired to be a professional musician. John Cohen describes his sound as ‘a mix of Old Baptist singing, blues and old-time songs’. Wilfrid Mellers described him as ‘Tall, lean and austere, he works in lumber camps, supports the Baptist Church, and thinks of his music as a service to the community. This service is not, however, mere entertainment: ‘You know music, it’s spiritual’... Especially after singing unaccompanied, he is likely to be ‘wrung out’, physically and spiritually exhausted’.

Mostly Holcomb is the antithesis of Dylan. He never sought fame and he looked like a lay preacher or scout master in his spectacles, hat and bird-like face. And yet the two are irrevocably linked through shared songs such as ‘Man Of Constant Sorrow’, ‘Moonshiner’ and ‘House of the Rising Sun’; and by a shared vocal style. At least, when Dylan sings in his early hillbilly voice you can hear at least as much of Holcomb as you can Guthrie. Cohen describes Holcomb’s voice as ‘the epitome of the high lonesome sound - tense, high-pitched, emotional, mournful and always moving’. It is starkly-presented and always controlled. The version of ‘Man Of Constant Sorrow’ on the Cohen CD has a weird, ghostly quality – as if he’s singing from beyond the grave.

It is an oft-quoted truth that Dylan has absorbed all kinds of music and melded and re-presented various styles throughout his performing and recording career. On certain songs from *The Times They Are A-Changin’* LP, Dylan creates his

own form of White Hillbilly Mountain Music - his own ‘monody of deprivation’. He even looks like ‘poor white trash’ in the cover photo. In 1972, in the first version of *Song & Dance Man*, Michael Gray described Dylan as ‘the great white folk singer’. He certainly was in 1964. Gray retains the phrase in the third version of his book, but by then he was also writing: ‘I wish it wasn’t the case that these early performances transcend the later ones... but it is’.

There are two songs from this 1964 album in which Dylan both sings like a hillbilly - inhabits the monody of deprivation - and talks about the poor white man: ‘The Ballad Of Hollis Brown’ and ‘Only A Pawn In Their Game’.

‘Only A Pawn In Their Game’ is a remarkable piece of writing because of the originality of thought by which it was inspired. Written in the aftermath of Medgar Evers’s murder (I know readers will know this, but it can’t be avoided) - with rich white liberal America in uproar - Dylan’s song sought to shift the blame away from the murderer himself and on to the heads of those who had manipulated his thought processes: ‘the poor white man’s used in the hands of them all like a tool’. At this time, Dylan was still the ‘messiah’ of the peace and civil rights movements, and complexity of thought did not come easily to liberal radicals. The situation was not dissimilar to Dylan’s later reaction to Lee Harvey Oswald and should have prepared us for his words at Live Aid.

Medgar Evers was a prominent Civil Rights activist who was murdered in

Jackson, Mississippi on 12 June 1963. His murderer with an aristocratic name - Byron de la Beckwith - doesn't seem to have been a poor white at all, in reality. Two allegedly rigged trials in 1965 failed to produce a conviction, but Beckwith was finally found guilty in 1994. Beckwith was from Greenwood, Mississippi, and, as Michael Gray observed, would have been living in Greenwood, aged 17, when Robert Johnson died there. On 6<sup>th</sup> July 1963 - just 25 days after the murder - Dylan sang 'Only A Pawn In Their Game' at a Civil Rights rally in Greenwood. A courageous action, one would think, but was anyone really listening to the words?

'Only A Pawn In Their Game' may be Dylan's clearest expression of sympathy for the poor whites of America:

*A South politician preaches to the poor  
white man,  
You got more than the blacks, don't  
complain.  
You're better than him, you been born  
with white skin, they explain*

Not only are these words not true in a racial sense, they may not even be true in a material or social sense either. It may be that 'poor white trash' are the least privileged group in America. They are a lost and invisible tribe. Other minorities have pressure groups and get noticed - women, blacks, gays - and are easily distinguishable from the white male elite by virtue of gender, colour, sexual orientation. Poor whites are only separated by their poverty and - like Ulster Protestants and Afrikaners - by their culture which, in all three cases, is rooted in Calvinism and which alienates them from the liberal intelligentsia. Poor

whites have no effective political voice and are rendered less visible by living, like Hollis Brown, on the outside of town. Which is where the fictitious (in Dylan's portrayal) Byron de la Beckwith meets Hollis Brown: 'From the poverty shacks he looks from the cracks to the tracks'.

'The Ballad Of Hollis Brown' is a song of emptiness. In his book, Michael Gray quotes David Horowitz ('Bob Dylan: genius or commodity' from *Peace News*, 11.11.64): 'Technically speaking, 'Hollis Brown' is a 'tour de force'. For a ballad is normally a form which puts one at a distance from its tale. This ballad, however, is told in the second person, present tense. So that not only is a bond forged immediately between the listener and the figure of the tale, but there is the ironic fact that the only ones who care are the hearers who are helpless to help, cut off from him, even as we in a mass society are cut off from each other'. I'm not sure that I entirely agree with Mr Horowitz. I don't think the singer does engage our sympathies, and so no bond is forged. He is reporting a tragedy. He leaves us to draw our own conclusions; much more than he does on 'Only A Pawn In Their Game'.

Gray himself writes: 'The guitar-work and melodic structures on 'Ballad Of Hollis Brown' are straight from the Appalachians, where such forms and modes had evolved, in comparative isolation, over a period of almost two hundred years'.

Listening to 'Hollis Brown' is not a pleasurable experience. It is impersonal in the way that Mellers described Poor White Mountain Music as being - the way

Roscoe Holcomb's songs can be at times - and it achieves that separation by the negation of emotion in Dylan's voice and in his guitar-strumming. It adopts the understatement of hillbilly music to render the anguish endurable. For the song and the story are truly bleak. As Mellers again wrote in *The Dylan*

*Companion*, 'Hollis Brown' 'induces only acceptance of and habituation to a state of spiritual as well as material deprivation... 'Protest' is not evident in the music nor even in the fact-recording words'. Hillbillies don't protest.

In his book, *My Back Pages: Classic Bob Dylan 1962-69*, Andy Gill gets this



song badly wrong. He writes: 'Hollis Brown appears not just dirt-poor and tragic, but stupid, feckless (in letting his farm deteriorate in such a manner), ruthless and spiteful (in shooting his family, making them pay the price of his incompetence)'.

Gill has not listened carefully. Brown was not feckless:

*You look for work and money and you  
walk a ragged mile*

He may have been stupid, but when was stupidity ever a crime? It is certainly not confined to the unintelligent. Gill merely confirms that there is little sympathy for poor whites among the prosperous chattering classes, of the left or of the right. Maybe Gill would like it more if Dylan's voice conveyed either sadness or anger. But in its lack of expression it nullifies sentiment. It is a perfect example of Mellers' description of poor white folk song and it could have been sung by Roscoe Holcomb. It is pure tension. It is not without passion but there is no attempt to engage the listener's emotions. To that extent it is a Calvinist performance: man alone with his God. It is a more honourable approach to a harrowing situation than to sentimentalise it. There is something tasteless about the 'prettification' of tragedy. I am thinking of songs like the Bee Gees' old record '1941 New York Mining Disaster', which has too much beauty for its subject matter. It makes the shedding of tears a pleasurable experience - makes death quite romantic, when what is called for is 'monody'. I am afraid that 'The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll' tends to fall into the same trap.

In the end, what we are listening to is the story of a mass-murder and suicide. It's the contrast between the two that makes an emotional response impossible. Which is why Dylan's monody is exactly appropriate. This poor white Hamlet has asked the suicide's question: to be or not to be? And has answered for six others as well as himself.

Speaking of suicide, Albert Camus said: 'An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art'. Boris Pasternak wrote: 'We have no conception of the inner torture which precedes suicide... A man who decides to commit suicide puts a full stop to his being. He turns his back on his past, he declares himself a bankrupt and his memories to be unreal. They can no longer help or save him, he has put himself beyond their reach. The continuity of his inner life is broken, his personality is at an end'. Who are we to judge?

It is of interest, then, that shortly after *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Bob Dylan seemed to become aware of the essential inner nature of life.

In Dante's *Inferno*, a place is reserved for suicides in the seventh circle of Hell. Al Alvarez describes it as 'a dark, pathless wood where the souls of suicides grow for eternity in the shape of warped poisonous thorns... the whole wood is full of the sound of lament. When Dante... breaks off a twig, the trunk turns dark with blood'.

*I saw a black branch with blood that  
kept dripping - Bob Dylan, 1962.*

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# The Judas! *Masked* And Anonymous Interview



Nigel Sinclair, along with Jeff Rosen, produced *Masked And Anonymous*. Nigel has a distinguished reputation in the film industry. He was a co-founder of the company, Intermedia, Los Angeles in 1996 and it grew to be one of the foremost independent international film finance and distribution companies. His roll call of honour as an executive producer includes films such as *Sliding Doors*, *Hilary and Jackie*, *Enigma*, *The Quiet American*, *Life Of David Gale*, *The Wedding Planner*, *K19*, *Kpax* and the eagerly anticipated *Terminator 3*. Nigel will also have executive producer duties on Harrison Ford's *Fred Cuny*. A forthcoming film based on the award-winning documentary 'The Lost American'.

He graciously agreed to an exclusive interview with Nigel Hinton for *Judas!* and we are extremely thankful that he made the time to give us his insights into the film and what it was like working with Bob Dylan.

**Nigel Hinton:** Could you lead us through the genesis of the project. At what point did you become involved?

**Nigel Sinclair:** A mutual friend drew my attention to this script, which Larry Charles and I drew to Bob Dylan's attention. At this point the script was well developed and unusual. Larry Charles and

Bob Dylan had been interested in working together on a feature film project, and this script provided them with an excellent opportunity.

This involvement began in the summer of 2001 when I first started discussing this project with Bob while he was on his summer 2001 European tour.

**Nigel Hinton:** What was your role as producer? What was the role of the other producers involved?

**Nigel Sinclair:** The film was produced by myself and Jeff Rosen. Together we raised the financing, budgeted the movie, and steered the film through to completion. We were very involved in helping cast the film, with Jeff taking particular responsibility for producing the film's superb music.

We had an excellent line producer, Marie Cantin, who ran the day to day logistical operation of producing the movie, and a number of executive producers who performed different roles - some creative, some financing.

**Nigel Hinton:** Where did the original idea of the story come from? Who wrote the screenplay? How many drafts did it go through?

**Nigel Sinclair:** As I understand it, the story is based on an original idea developed by the gentleman who is credited on

the screen - Enrique Morales - and was written by two unknown characters - Rene Fontaine and Sergei Petrov. I know that Larry was involved in advising on re-writes, and I am sure that Larry conferred with Bob.

**Nigel Hinton:** How long did it take to develop the idea, find the financial backing, assemble the cast and crew etc?

**Nigel Sinclair:** This question really has two aspects to it. With respect to how long it took to develop the idea, the answer is I do not really know. I was not involved in that process.

With respect to the financial backing, assembling the cast and crew, this took place quite quickly. In January 2002, it was ascertained that the Bob Dylan Band would have a hiatus in the touring schedule in the early summer, and that this was the time to make the film.

Larry Charles, Jeff Rosen and I worked on putting together a cast and a head of department 'team' over the next few months. I focused on raising the financial backing, and the film was financed initially by a combination of a co-production of BBC Films in the UK, and Spitfire Pictures [my company.] Subsequently, additional equity finance was introduced through a company called Marching Band Productions. Thus, you could say it took about three or four months to pull the whole package together - record time for an indie film of this kind. In particular, we had sixteen serious roles in this movie, including six leading cast members.

I would particularly single out our casting directors, Meg Lieberman and Irene Cagen, with whom we have worked

before, as undertaking an extraordinary task in corralling and bringing together all the cast members' schedules and availability.

Of course, the cast were strongly attracted both by the script and the director, and the chance to work with Bob Dylan. At the same time, given the large number of 'name cast', it was an extraordinary creative and logistical challenge to work everybody into this approximately six week schedule.

**Nigel Hinton:** How long did the filming take? How long was the post-production period?

**Nigel Sinclair:** Six weeks - six months.

**Nigel Hinton:** When the film was first shown at the Sundance Film Festival it was described as 'work in progress' - what work was subsequently done?

**Nigel Sinclair:** We are still working on the film with an intended release in early fall.

**Nigel Hinton:** Was Dylan involved solely as an actor/musician or was he involved in other elements of the production? If his contribution was more than simply a performer, could you tell us about it?

**Nigel Sinclair:** Bob was in many ways the inspiration and source of energy and creative juice, to use too many cumulative phrases, for the whole project, and his company, Grey Water Park Productions, was one of the two production companies on the film. Jeff Rosen works for Grey Water Park Productions and was, together with myself, the key driving force producer on the movie. Bob Dylan's contribution, beyond those specific items, was also that his extraordinary presence as an artist attracted the brightest and the

best that it was possible to have, in every aspect of this movie.

We had the best sound mixing people recording the music. We had top actors, just to list the leading cast of six - Bob Dylan, Jessica Lange, Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, Luke Wilson, Penelope Cruz. The supporting cast included Angela Bassett, Ed Harris, Val Kilmer, Christian Slater and Giovanni Ribisi. We had Pietro Scalia as editor, four times Academy nominated, two time Academy Award winner as editor. The movie was cast, as noted, by Meg Lieberman who is an acclaimed casting director, most recently casting the brilliantly cast Band of Brothers ensemble. Our Director of Photography was Rogier Stoffers who is a leading feature motion picture camera man [*Quills, John Q, Enough*].

The film had a wonderful campus atmosphere while we were shooting. Everybody was working for scale, as it is called in the film industry - i.e. union minimum. Bob and the other actors gave generously of their time and talents, sometimes doing twelve or fourteen hour days in the hot sun outside in downtown Los Angeles.

The effect this has on the crew and the so-called below the line people, is that everyone will work really long hours because it gives them a sense of purpose and belief in the artistic value of the project - if people such as Bob, John Goodman, Penelope Cruz, Jeff Bridges and Luke Wilson are prepared to be there and grind the hours.

I have worked on many passion projects over the years for superstars, but I have never seen artists, craftsmen, busi-

nessmen, and musicians rally around as on this project. It was extraordinary.

I should say for myself that it was the greatest privilege to work on this movie.

**Nigel Hinton:** Given the experience he gained working on *Eat The Document* and *Renaldo And Clara*, did Dylan get involved in post-production work - editing, producing the soundtrack etc. on *Masked And Anonymous*?

**Nigel Sinclair:** Because Bob had to go back on tour on previously committed obligations, the post production work on this film was run by Larry Charles with acclaimed editor Pietro Scalia. The soundtrack was produced by Jeff Rosen, although of course all the songs were written by Bob Dylan, and he performs a number of them live in the movie.

**Nigel Hinton:** As a musician, Dylan is famous for preferring spontaneity compared to over-rehearsal, did any of this ethos come in to play on the movie? Was any dialogue/action improvised? How loosely or tightly was the script followed?

**Nigel Sinclair:** Please remember that the film was directed by Larry Charles, who is an award winning television director in his own right, and has recently achieved particular standing through his episodes of the American HBO produced series *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is, of course, an improvisational comedy, based around themes.

Interestingly, this script was closely written, with a number of brilliant ideas and - if I may say so without sounding pretentious - almost Shakespearean word-play.

Many of the actors had to prepare for long soliloquies, some lasting two or three pages of the script. In the sense that you mean the question, there was very little improvisation of text in filming the project.

On the other hand, in post production, because we had so much material, Larry Charles was able to make choices and, for example, these long soliloquies were cleverly intercut with action and music to give them much greater dramatic effect.

The filming of this script was a highly disciplined and intellectually intense process for all of those reasons.

We were able to record four days of live music, covering some twenty songs, a half dozen of which will appear in the movie. These songs represent the very best of Bob Dylan and his band's current work and of course provide the greatest opportunity for the spontaneity that you are talking about.

**Nigel Hinton:** Dylan is obviously fascinated by movies and is very knowledgeable about them, did you get any idea, while working with him, of what he thinks he can express through movies that can't be expressed in his music?

**Nigel Sinclair:** I think you will have to put that question to Bob.

**Nigel Hinton:** What, in particular, do you think attracted Dylan to this project and what was he trying to express through it?

**Nigel Sinclair:** I don't think it is for me to say what attracted Bob Dylan. I can tell you what I, personally, experienced.

I think that the film deals with a lot of post-twentieth century humanitarian issues. I liked that these issues were being

explored by these characters in a way that was both touching and poignant in moments.

My generation - the baby boomers - have lived through the innocent altruism of our twenties, the coming of age of our thirties, the witnessing of extraordinary changes in communication and information technology - the information revolution in our forties, and we are left wondering what it is all about. For me, I think the film has two lessons. First of all, art and the artist remain the only truth. Other prosaic things can get moved, changed or repositioned depending on one's perspective. Secondly, everything is in the end existential. To quote the film, *'The way we look at the world is the way we really are. See it from a fair garden, everything looks cheerful. Climb to a higher mountain, and you see plunder and murder. Truth and beauty are in the eye of the beholder. I stopped trying to figure everything out a long time ago.'*

**Nigel Hinton:** Can you give us a personal assessment of Dylan's qualities as a movie performer and in particular of his performance in *Masked And Anonymous*?

**Nigel Sinclair:** I am the producer of the movie, and I don't think it is appropriate for me to make a subjective valuation of this kind. Suffice it to say that people who have viewed the film find Bob's performance alluring and mysterious and fascinating, and he uses the persona of Jack Fate very cleverly to add a counterpoint to the various moments when the movie takes positions, or characters 'give forth.'

**Nigel Hinton:** Many of the other actors made it clear that they became involved

because of the chance to work with Dylan. What was the atmosphere like on set between him and the other actors? Did he hang out with them off-set?

**Nigel Sinclair:** The atmosphere on the set was quite remarkable. For the first two weeks we shot in various moving locations in downtown Los Angeles, and that was intense because we had long days and a lot of material to cover on a tight schedule. Some of the actors were there throughout the shoot, such as John Goodman, but many (e.g. Giovanni Ribisi) were only there for a couple of days. All of the actors were working on this movie because of their love of the material and the opportunity to work with Bob and Larry. Accordingly, they turned up thoroughly prepared, and ready to throw themselves into a very unusual project with selflessness and flexibility.

When we moved to the soundstage - for a month - a campus like atmosphere developed which was quite special. All of the actors were spending time in and around the various trailers. I remember one night when we finished shooting seeing Charlie Sexton - guitarist in Bob's band - teaching Luke Wilson how to play guitar, with Jeff Bridges, who is a fine guitarist in his own right, watching. Penelope Cruz and Christian Slater, all of whom had finished work and were just hanging around on the set, joined in.

**Nigel Hinton:** Is it true that you are involved with an on-going TV/Video project about Dylan's career? If so, can you give us some details?

**Nigel Sinclair:** We are working on the forthcoming untitled Bob Dylan

Anthology Project, which will be the definitive story of Bob's life from his first work as an artist through to 1966, i.e. *Blonde On Blonde*.

**Nigel Hinton:** Were you a Dylan fan even before making the movie? Can you talk about what he means to you?

**Nigel Sinclair:** Bob Dylan's songs have touched my soul - as with so many millions of other people from all different cultures - since, say 1964, when I first bought *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. The chance to help put together a film, which we knew would be a very important part of his body of work, was a fantastic opportunity. When it came down to it, of course, you cannot think about that too much, and you just have to get on and do the job as best you can, as professionally as possible.

I should say that we should recognize the performances of the other actors in this movie, perhaps singling out John Goodman, who is in almost every frame of the film and worked for six weeks selflessly, turning in a performance of staggering power and force, mixed with humor and intimacy, which really drove the film on its through line. A personal favorite is the wonderful performance of Giovanni Ribisi, who plays a soldier on the bus, who is a lost figure from various internecine civil wars, who is unburdening his soul to Jack Fate. The original version of this ran for quite a few minutes more than appears in the film, and always used to reduce me to tears in the dailies. Perhaps Larry Charles will put the full version in the DVD, which we look forward to.



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# Lowdown and Disgusted: The Ballad of Jack Fate

by Nigel Hinton

There is a new Bob Dylan album, it is a film called *Masked And Anonymous*. And, like a new recording, the film is a statement from Dylan which those of us who love his work will wrestle with and probe and question and from which we will pick up new riches with each viewing.

An air of mystery surrounds the writing of the script - the two writers, Rene Fontaine and Sergei Petrov, are unknowns and the script is supposed to have been based on an unpublished short story by another unknown, Enrique Morales. However, when Jessica Lange was asked what attracted her to the project she replied that it was the chance to speak Bob Dylan's words. Whatever the truth is about the script, there can be no doubt that the concerns of this film are Dylan's concerns - concerns that he has been writing and singing about throughout his career.

This film shows us the world through Dylan's eyes as surely as certain songs - 'Highlands' for example - can take us inside his head and show us the intimate flow of his consciousness so that we know

what it's like to wander into a restaurant with him or look at young people in a park with him or think about how good it would be to have a full-length leather coat. In the same way, like 'Stuck Inside of Mobile' or 'Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum' or any of the dozens of songs in which Dylan gives us his take on this crazy world, this film tells us how he feels when he looks at the madness and perfidy and corruption of society.

In many ways the film actually operates like a song. Unlike the vast majority of movies which are mainly concerned with telling stories and showing character development, the plot of *Masked And Anonymous* is virtually non-existent and the characters are more like personages from a morality play with names which tell us what they represent or which are used ironically: Jack Fate, Uncle Sweetheart, Bobby Cupid, Tom Friend, Pagan Lace. This film does not, and is not meant to, operate like most films. It has other methods and other intentions and it needs to be viewed on its own terms - an audience that watches it wanting it to be

like the latest thriller or romance or comedy is going to hate it because it is none of those things. The films that it most recalls are Jean Luc-Godard's movies in the 1960s such as *Masculin Féminin* in which Godard used a kind of collage of 15 scenes or sketches to examine the mood of young people in France at that time, or Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* which built up a picture of the decadence of Italy through a series of loosely knit scenes. But what this film is most like is Dylan's songs.

Think of how we listen to 'Idiot Wind'. Think of how we let all those disparate images run through our brain and assemble themselves into a greater picture. What is it about? Love? Betrayal? America? Dylan? Us? It's about all of those things and more - and so is *Masked And Anonymous* if we let the words and the images run freely through our brain in the same way.

Think of 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest'. There's a vague sort of narrative there but what happens in the 'plot' isn't what the song is about. We pick up its meaning by letting all the pictures and ideas work on us. Footstool, plotted plain, roll of tens, cold eyes, Paradise, Eternity, passing stranger, gambler, deceased father, mouse, house/home, mission bells, faces in windows, four and twenty, soulful, bounding, guilt, foam, neighbour boy, moral. Nothing is revealed on the narrative level but we let all the elements of the song cohere into something which, on a whole other level, we understand entirely. And we understand *Masked And Anonymous* in the same way when we watch it in the same spirit. It is The Ballad of Jack Fate.

Of course, a film is a much bigger canvas than a song, so another way of looking at it is as a whole album. There again, we can't really say what albums are 'about'. What is *John Wesley Harding* about? Or *Highway 61 Revisited*? Or "Love And Theft"? Yet they, and all of Dylan's great albums, are not simply random collections of songs; each album has a unifying theme and tone which we recognise. The songs complement and inform each other and add up to something greater than the sum of their parts, and a song from one album would feel out of place on another album. In this way, it is impossible to say what *Masked And Anonymous* is 'about'. It is about everything that is on the screen - all the fragments, all the speeches, all the songs, all the images.

Most movies do not work like this. *The Great Escape* is not a movie about America, Germany, comradeship, motor-bikes, inhumanity, repression. All those elements can be seen, if one chooses, but they are incidental, subservient to the film's main intention - to tell an adventure story about men escaping from a prisoner of war camp. In *Masked And Anonymous* the elements are the point of the movie. The movie is all of the elements, explored, and brought together to add up to a coherent, overall statement.

-So, what are the elements? Religion. Faith. Politics. Revolution. Power. War. Music. Business. Music and Business. The Media. Humanity. Bob Dylan. Fame. Exploitation. They are familiar elements. They are the same elements that left Dylan 'standing there writing WHAAAT? on my

favourite wall'. They are what he summed up as 'a picture of what goes on round here sometimes, though I don't understand too well myself what's really happening'. In fact, reading the liner notes to *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* would be a good way of getting in to the right frame of mind for watching this film. When, in 1965, Dylan wrote '...we are singing today of the WIPE-OUT GANG - the WIPE-OUT GANG buys, owns and operates the Insanity Factory' he could have been writing of the world portrayed in *Masked And Anonymous*.

When Jack Fate is released from jail at the beginning of the film he finds himself plunged straight back in to the Insanity Factory, 'somewhere in America'. War and insurrection has gripped the nation that 'God has turned his back on.' The country is ruled by a dying President, who also happens to be Jack's alienated father. Various forces - the Army, rebels, counter-insurgents - are fighting while the ordinary people struggle with poverty and deprivation. Jack has been released at the instigation of Uncle Sweetheart (John Goodman) and Nina Veronica (Jessica Lange) a couple of chancers who are mounting a Benefit Concert. They have been unable to get 'Sting, Springsteen, McCartney, or Billy Joel' (!) and the old, has-been, Jack Fate, is the only singer they can get. The concert is to be broadcast on TV, ostensibly to help the victims of the violence but as Uncle Sweetheart admits - 'I will be siphoning the funds in to the kitty of the fattest cat around - 'me'. Meanwhile, a cynical journalist, Tom

Friend (Jeff Bridges) has been sent by his editor to investigate the concert and interview Jack Fate. It is within the framework of this skimpy plot that the film begins to explore the themes.

The viewer is required to be alert, to pick up the ideas as they come and go, weaving in and out of the action, creating the tapestry. The first theme, Religion and Faith, is stated right from the opening shots of natural disasters and man-made violence, over which a ranting voice declares that 'God does not have to be courageous...Human beings can be courageous or cowardly...Ask this question, people: Are you humble before God?' Throughout the movie this thread of Religion/Faith, like all the other threads, appears and disappears, emerging almost casually, easily missed - a bus driver comments that the rebels 'respect neither Jesus nor Judas'; the nation is referred to as 'Godforsaken'; a Dylan voiceover tells us: 'One thing is true - that the sacred is in the ordinary'; a woman is seen obsessively praying in her private shrine; a voice on a radio announces that scientists who are drilling a 30 mile deep hole in the earth have reported hearing the sounds of millions of souls in torment down there; the Animal Wrangler (Val Kilmer), when complimented on the beauty of the animals he owns, replies 'Well, thanks. But it is God who deserves the credit.'

All the themes come and go like this and they intertwine with each other, contrast with each other, argue with each other - the theme of Religion and Faith is inextricably linked to the themes of Power, and War and Revolution: as Nina

Veronica comments, 'Do the Hindus, The Muslims, the Jews, the Irish know what they are fighting about? They're all religious wars'. The film is rich and complex. Things happen fast. We have to pay attention - the building where the journalist works is called Midas Judas Building, the hotel where Jack Fate stays is the Whitman Hotel, an appropriate stop-over for a poet. Words pour out over the images, often punctuated by the sound of sirens or the whirr of helicopter gunships. And the words are not ordinary dialogue, but a kind of heightened language that often sound like lines from Dylan songs:

*'Some of us pursue perfection and virtue and if we're lucky we catch up with it. Happiness can't be pursued, it either comes to you or it doesn't.'*

*'You can't stay honest out there.'*

*'Once I was passing a cathedral and white dove flew out carrying a twig and dropped it at my feet.'*

*'For everything in life you do there is a price - you pay it up front, at the beginning, or you pay it at the back end.'*

*'Money is the mother's milk of politics.'*

*'You make so many things a crime it becomes impossible to live.'*

And, like the dialogue, the settings are not naturalistic. Much of the action takes place in an area that is a cross between a warehouse and a gypsy encampment, filled with trailers and tents. And moving around this area, acting as the background to the main events, is a motley group of characters who look as if they have just stepped off the cover of *The Basement Tapes*. Among them are impersonators

dressed as Pope John Paul the 2nd, Abraham Lincoln and Ghandi. These world figures are part of the circus and are not out of place in a film whose script is littered with reference to the famous and the infamous - among them, the Vanderbilts, Harry Houdini, Stackalee, Blind Lemon Jefferson. At one moment there is a passing reference to Generals Sherman and Lee, and it's up to the viewer to link these American Civil War generals to Dylan's subsequent singing of the rebel song, 'Dixie'. This is not the first time this 'Godforsaken nation' has torn itself apart. And, of course, all of the songs that Jack Fate/Dylan sings are a reinforcement of the various themes, or a comment on them - 'If you go down in the flood it's gonna be your fault.'

Everything in the film has significance and resonance. A man hits another man with a bird cage. The shot is held longer than necessary so that we see the bird fly off to freedom - a tiny reinforcement of the theme of freedom which has started when Jack is released from jail, muttering 'I haven't felt free in a long time'. The action sometimes stops for what seems an irrelevancy - for example, a couple of the lesser characters discussing a photo of a man with a bullwhip up his ass. This photo, one of the men tells us, became famous, was hung in a museum, and subsequently used by a lingerie company in an advert for underwear. It is, he says, 'a classic photo, a real artistic achievement' which became a *cause celebre* over which the Supreme Court made a ruling. But this is no irrelevant discussion. It's another one of the threads: what is Art and what is

its purpose? And this thread entwines with another: the ruthless exploitation of Art, especially music, by Business. And this thread entwines with another: the exploitation and corruption of human beings.

It is Humanity who, as the Animal Wrangler (Val Kilmer) tells us, is 'masked and anonymous - no one really knows him.' And the film examines human beings with a mixture of disgust and compassion. People are the victims, the pawns, in the power games being played round them - we get close-ups of the desolate and the destitute, we hear a young man describe how his idealism was exploited and corrupted so that he ended up helping to destroy his village. The suffering and poverty of mankind is a constant in the movie. Jack Fate comments, 'It ain't easy being human' and, on another occasion, 'Kinda like a curse, ain't it, being born?' People are exploited and lied to - the Boss of the TV Network admits that they bend the truth, and the newspaper editor tells his journalist to find a story or 'make it up'. The people at the top are "erasing collective memory, re-writing the history books".

Yet the exploitation is done by people who are ordinary human beings, too. And the film emphasises this fact: the man who takes over the Presidency was once an 'illegal', the son of an immigrant family who worked for the President. He has fought his way to the top and seized power and is now ready to dupe and further corrupt the people. He plans to increase the bombing of the jungle and, as a sop to all those who are always demanding

tougher treatment of criminals, he will take all the prisoners from the jails and put them in a football stadium where wild elephants can trample them to death. As his first Presidential Speech wryly concludes, '...It's a new day. God help you all.' No wonder the Animal Wrangler feels that 'Man is the lowest form of existence.'

And looking at all this, observing it with a face set in a mask of disdain and disillusionment, is Jack Fate/Bob Dylan. Jack Fate who for the sake of the plot is the jailbird son of the President, but who sings Bob Dylan songs with Bob Dylan's band and who clearly is Bob Dylan. The film is littered with cross references to Dylan's career including the corny jokes, blackface minstrelsy and Shakespearian characters (Prospero, Nestor) and quotations which recall "*Love And Theft*". And one of the major themes of the film is what it is like to be Bob Dylan, an old Bob Dylan who has seen it all. The promoter who wants him to play particular songs (in this case songs including 'Revolution', 'Street Fighting Man', 'Won't Get Fooled Again' and 'Jailhouse Rock'), the woman who comes up to tell him that she met him at a show once, all this must come straight from Dylan's experience. The sequence in which he is pursued by the journalist, Tom Friend, must have happened dozens of times to Dylan. It is a powerful and disturbing scene as Friend pushes up close, too close, harassing, prying, insinuating - 'what happened to your twin brother?', asking irrelevant questions, trying to put words in Fate's mouth, questioning his good faith and raking over old history - 'Why weren't you at Woodstock?'

And, unlike in *Don't Look Back* where he was the scourge of journalists, this older Dylan prefers to stay silent, embarrassed, moving awkwardly, waiting for the attack to finish.

When the world is split into two camps about Fate - one side thinking he's irrelevant, a has-been, the other thinking that he's a legend - Dylan knows this is how the world views him. 'Are his songs gonna be recognisable?' Nina demands, and we know that Dylan must have smiled at the line. Some of the characters debate the meaning of 'The Drifter's Escape' while he's actually singing it. One likes the fact that his songs are 'not precise' another thinks it's about 'trying to get to heaven' and a third thinks it's about 'doing good by manipulating the forces of evil'. All this, the world-weary Dylan is telling us, is a daily occurrence for him.

At the end of the film there is a long, long close up of Dylan's impassive face as he is driven away in a van (and incidentally, Dylan, though virtually impassive throughout the film, is totally mesmerising). A beautiful instrumental version of 'Angelina' is playing on the soundtrack and Dylan looks out at the passing world with eyes like two slits that would make any snake proud, and on the soundtrack he tells us:

*'I was always the singer and maybe no more than that... Things fall apart, especially all the neat order of rules and laws...'*

and his final line is,

*'I stopped trying to figure everything out a long time ago.'*

A defeated, despairing note on which to end.

And yet it isn't quite the end because the soundtrack slides into a live version of 'Blowin' in the Wind'. One of his earliest songs. And he's still out there, still singing it. The world might make him feel lowdown and disgusted but he's still singing. And earlier in the movie, in one of the few tender scenes, Dylan and his band watch, entranced and moved, as a young black girl sings 'The Times They Are A-Changin''. His music will go on, beyond him.

One of his other liner notes, his '11 Outlined Epitaphs', ends with a reference to one of the 60's French New Wave movies which he loves so much and which, in so many ways, his new movie resembles:

*there's a movie called  
'Shoot the Piano Player'  
the last line proclaimin  
'music, man, that's where it's at'  
it's a religious line*

Perhaps, despite all his disillusionment, that's what he still feels.

# He Had a Face Like a Mask or There Was a Movie I Seen One Time: Bob Dylan, Larry Charles and *Masked & Anonymous*

by Lucas Stensland

A lot has been written about *Masked And Anonymous* in the press and on the web. Scripts even appeared on the internet. Knowing plots outlines in advance has never been a smart way to preconceive or, worse yet, to judge a film, it will probably prove to be misleading.

Even access to a script will probably prove to be misleading. But still, one must admit, upon hearing that the film features Bob Dylan in a blonde wig playing a character named Jack Fate who tries to bring peace to an unnamed nation that is at once caught amidst a civil war and the rulings of a dictator-like president who is actually Jack Fate's father, one might get a little worried.

Well, having driven from L.A. to the Sundance Film Festival in Utah to see *Masked And Anonymous*, I am happy to report that some of the above is not true,

some of the above is true and none of the above gives any clear indication of what to expect from Larry Charles' film. The film does not take place in an unnamed country, but in America, ostensibly in the future, and is based around the movers and shakers of L.A.; Dylan does not wear a wig but does play Jack Fate, but more than likely it is his adopted stage name; and the benefit concert is not supposed to bring peace to the valley, but rather aid victims of the war, though no characters, including Fate, seem to believe this.

Uncle Sweetheart is Fate's former manager, a robust fast talking industry man who long ago challenged the first amendment and won a supreme court ruling, thus becoming a hero for freedom of expression. Shortly after that he had a downfall, began drinking and gambling, and in doing so acquired a massive debt to

the mob. To save his life, he talks television producer Nina Veronica (Jessica Lange) to stage a benefit concert that is supposed to aid victims of the war, but Sweetheart is planning on using this money to pay off his debt. Sweetheart's reputation is so lackluster that he is unable to secure McCartney, Sting or Springsteen. Much to Veronica's and the network's dismay, Sweetheart cooks up a scheme to turn the benefit concert also into a comeback special for Jack Fate, a reclusive figure missing from the public eye for years (imagine a J.D. Salinger of rock and roll).

Fate is inexplicably in prison, and how long he's been in stir is also not revealed. At first one is given the impression that he is in and out of prison quite frequently. But the way his character is so bogged down by the past, and the fact that he has not seen any of his familiars for years, leads the viewer to think that perhaps he's been in jail for decades. Intentional or not, this is never made very clear. Fate is bailed out on Sweetheart's buck under condition that he play the benefit, and Fate seems eager enough to do it.

Word spreads about Fate's resurrection, and angry and disillusioned journalist Tom Friend (Jeff Bridges) agrees to write a story on Fate, also in hopes of helping his own dwindling career. Friend carries a gun, like many of the characters in the film, that is in sharp contrast to his extremely pacifistic and pious girlfriend Pagan Lace (Penelope Cruz). He goes to the network studio, with Lace in tow, to interview Fate, but seems more dead set on accusations and unflattering comparisons of Fate to many

of his dead peers (Zappa, Hendrix, Joplin, etc.). The most mysterious relationship in the film is that between Fate and Bobby Cupid, a young man who may have been a roadie, may just be a friend, or quite possibly Fate's own son. There is an unspoken bond between these two. Cupid carries the guitar of Blind Lemon Johnson with him, and it has been discovered that Dylan's youngest daughter (who the media only discovered two years ago) is a descendent of that blues singer. Make of it as you will. Cupid is bartending in a hole in the wall to a truculent drunk when he receives a call from Fate asking him to come meet him. Cupid drops everything, including the drunk, and splits. The film never clearly states what Fate's and Cupid's relationship is, though they are quite protective of one another, and share a keen interest in pre-war music.

From prison to the soundstage, the film becomes a mini road film, a outsider's dystopian viewpoint of America (entirely shot downtown Los Angeles). And along the way he meets a desolate row of people: a man waiting for a bus who perceives little difference in the direction he travels; a former groupie who wants to bed down with him for a second time; the desk clerk at a hotel doubling as a pimp who has every kind of woman imaginable at his disposal but still insists he's a feminist; a half-crazed young man in the back of the bus who fought for the rebels but discovered the rebels were funded by the enemy government; and an animal keeper on the network's lot who delivers a speech, containing the film's title, about how humans are more likely to be defiled than

animals because simply animals are not cognizant of the fact of death.

The past seems to be on Fate's mind. He checks himself into the same hotel, into the same room where long ago he was caught with his father's mistress. There is a flashback (played by a young Bob Dylan look alike) as Fate remembers being beat up and thrown down the steps by his father's thugs. The past seems to always be hounding him. Besides music, the past is perhaps the only thing he will display an emotion over. Unlike the detached, observant tenor he displays toward the war-torn world he travels, Fate will explore the past, often in internal monologues layered atop black-and-white home-movie-like (or security camera-like) footage. Fate seems to want some release from his past. During the film he visits his mother's grave and his dying father's bedside. 'These memories I got can strangle a man,' Dylan sang on his last album "*Love And Theft*", a title that is borrowed from a cultural-history book on blackface minstrelsy. And while Fate goes without strangulation, he is visited on the soundstage by a memory (or a ghost) of a black-face minstrel who delivers a monologue to Fate regarding his once-famous variety television show (that was perhaps shot on that very soundstage) which was canceled by Fate's father because of its anti-presidential content.

This is a lot to absorb, yet the film never feels lost or out of control. In fact, the film is tightly structured, but with an unrushed natural pacing set down by Jack Fate's rhythm. There is time to chit-chat with a hotel desk clerk, time to hear out the guy sitting next to him on the bus,

time to ask a man about his pets, time to remember a mother and wonder about her inner life. And finally the viewer is surprised by how organically and effortlessly the film's resolutions come about.

In an interview Andrew Muir conducted with author Michael Gray in issue two of *Judas!* magazine, Muir professed his worry that this would be akin to an Elvis movie, to which Gray responded that he thought it would be more similar to Paul Simon's *One Trick Pony*. But Muir's greatest worry did prove true: *Masked And Anonymous* is a big fat Elvis movie. But thank god it is. *One Trick Pony* was a profoundly arrogant film about what an every-man Paul Simon is, what a great father figure Paul Simon is, how Paul Simon would sacrifice his entire career than ever give in to even the faintest commercialism.

Elvis flicks were low-budget, quirky, fun, hurriedly shot fan movies, and that's exactly what *Masked And Anonymous* is. Elvis films packaged many of the elements of his cultural persona: sexiness, toughness, self-confidence, warmness, rebellion and most importantly a musician. The same goes for *Masked And Anonymous*. The celluloid bow is tied neatly around the packaging of Dylan's persona: mysterious icon, transcendental cowboy, wanderer, observer of society, and most importantly a musician. The singers are posed in ways their fans want to see them.

Take for instance the scene where Fate first meets his new band, a cover band cleverly named Simple Twist of Fate (respectively Larry Campbell, Charlie Sexton, Tony Garnier and George Recelli).

Charles shoots part of the performance of 'Crash on the Levee' with a wide-angle lens, placing Dylan in front with the rest of the band blocked in the background in deep focus. Everybody's face can be seen, and they're all together making loud glorious music. This shot is not supposed to denote a true closeness between band members, and it is not advising the audience to keep an eye on the drummer. This shot is simply a cool new way of looking at Bob Dylan playing music. It's a fan flick.

People will undoubtedly compare *Masked And Anonymous* to another recent fan film *8 Mile*, a hugely popular semi-autobiographical portrait of another wordsmith, Eminem. Similarly to Dylan, Eminem was the central force given a taciturn role (though not nearly as taciturn as Dylan's). Both *Masked And Anonymous* and *8 Mile* are fan flicks but the difference is that *Masked And Anonymous* is a film that Dylan fans will flock to, and *8 Mile* was made to broaden Eminem's accessibility. Every possible opportunity is taken within the film to right every wrong of Eminem's public image. For example, Eminem's deadbeat dad image is negated as he plays older brother cum responsible loving parent who nightly sings his pseudo-daughter to sleep. Twice he negates his hugely homophobic persona, depicting him going out of his way to step in and defend the defenseless gays. The film settles any doubts about Eminem's acceptance amongst the black population: they worship him. On the other hand, *Masked And Anonymous* can be quite negative toward Fate/Dylan (just listen to

any of Friend's rants which cut close to Fate's bone). But in the end *8 Mile's* artificial 'street tough' realism was negated by the snake-oil fact that all could be better if only Eminem could out rap the evil champion rapper. The film switches from *On the Water Front* to *The Karate Kid* and ends up a bad *Saturday Night Fever*. In regards to fan flicks, *Masked And Anonymous* is again more like the Elvis films as it will satisfy a loyal fan base, though *Masked And Anonymous* is much more ambitious than any of the fan flicks I have mentioned. There is a great paradox between *8 Mile* and *Masked And Anonymous*. One would think that the wildly original, energized, subversive, daring film that made bold claims about the state of affairs in society, music and human politics would be from a young audacious artist, and the film that adhered to the safety of formula and looked romantically back on an artist's beginnings would be from an old hand.

It should be noted that Larry Charles, the film's director and co-writer, is a Bob Dylan fan. And he has made a singular, wildly creative, somehow flawed, somehow incredible little film. Charles is television director who has worked on the highly regarded *Seinfeld* and HBO's wonderful *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. His sense of direction seems to be highly embedded in 1970s cinema, with his penchant for improvisation, ensemble casts and a fascination with bringing everything together, sometimes quite unexpectedly, by the end. Though Charles did not allow improvisation in *Masked And Anonymous*, his other traits are

present. Like all the projects he directs, *Masked And Anonymous* is fanatical about presenting multiple points of views, and each standpoint is valid. Never does the film side with one character. But like sitcom characters, there is broadness to them, reaching almost a hyperbolic state, yet also like the characters in *Seinfeld* or *Curb Your Enthusiasm* they are still allowed nuance.

If one were to look at the outline of Uncle Sweetheart he might appear to be strictly villainous: carries a handgun, roughs up Lace, lies to everybody, exploits Fate, plans on stealing money from a benefit concert that purposes to aid children victims of the war. Yet the film shows Uncle Sweetheart as being corrupted by mitigating circumstances: if he doesn't take the money from the counterfeit benefit, he will be killed. There are a handful of truly charming scenes containing Sweetheart that truly humanize him, giving him an added dimension. The characters may be caricatures but they are never black and white. Charles wisely understands that it is hard for an audience to hate a character who is quick with a friendly jab or who spends a good deal of his time plainly hanging out, drinking, playing cards and discussing music. It is Charles' plurality of characterization and his adherence to an equality of point of view that ultimately makes *Masked And Anonymous* work. This is common sense to Charles and Dylan: the world is made of different view points, therefore, diverse view points should be depicted in a film that is about the state of the world.

From his television work Charles has definitely developed a sense of rules and guidelines, as stated above, but he has not ventured away from television carrying with him the expected appearances of cheap surfaces and plastics that are attributes of that medium, especially that of the sitcom. As long as the adage holds true that the director is the true author of a film, one could make the case that in *Masked And Anonymous*, much as it pains me to write this sentence, Charles has Dylan playing Jerry Seinfeld, the flattest character, the static but always present monolith, the non-actor who all the professional actors work around and yet all solely exist in a universe sculpted out of this monolith's vision. He has fully escaped both the *Seinfeld* world of shot-reverse-shots and unvarying medium shots, and the casually bouncy hand-held camera of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Instead Charles (along with director of photography Rogier Stoffers, most notable for *Character*) concocted a canvas of contradictory colorfulness and bleakness. To fully comprehend these contradictions, take for example a sequence of Fate merely walking down a street in downtown L.A. The scene has an array of bright colors (a lot of blues and yellows), and it is scored with a funky cadence that Fate seems to be marching to; yet the scene is depicting extreme homelessness and poverty in a literal police state. Newspapers and garbage are drifting in the wind past Fate, as well as a plethora of homeless and a surplus of storm trooper-like police holding gigantic guns. The viewer is at once entertainingly engaged by the vivid

colour and rhythmic soundtrack and dejected by the dismal societal depiction. These contradicting surfaces conjure a detachment from the melancholy environment, and yet enthusiastically engage the viewer with their colorful, crisp visuals. This dialectic is alive throughout the film, and in fact creates the universe within which *Masked And Anonymous* exists.

This very specific dialectic on contradictory surfaces has been seen before, and I would not be surprised in the slightest if Charles' dystopian, futuristic, Los Angeles-based film was visually inspired by two science-fiction, dystopian, Los Angeles-based films (all with strong penchants for discarded-newspaper-filled streets), John Carpenter's *They Live* and Alex Cox's *Repo Man*. Interestingly enough, both of these films have been called Reagan-era parables. The latter stars Harry Dean Stanton as an antiquated car repossessioner clinging to a disappearing code, and Emilio Estevez as a punk coming of age in an empty consumerist-obsessed society. And *They Live* tells the story of a homeless man's discovery that America's soulless yuppies are in fact evil aliens posing as humans (this brings to mind an interview with Dylan when he said, 'Sometimes you feel like you're walking around in that movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and you wonder if it's got you yet, if you're still one of the few or are you 'them' now. You never know, do you?'). All in all, *Repo Man* is perhaps most akin to *Masked And Anonymous* with its dynamic camera work and sense of self-irony, whereas *They Live* is a more

straightforward genre piece. But all three directors find something gratifying in their protagonists strutting through bleak L.A. streets flooded equally with sunshine and disarray. These contradicting surfaces of bright colour, steady rhythmic soundtracks teemed with a depiction of decadence and poverty at the expense of duplicitous superiors seems to fit nicely into this offbeat quasi-science-fiction milieu that *Masked And Anonymous* is now a part of.

Visually if *Masked And Anonymous* belongs to the subgenre stated above, then thematically it belongs to another equally narrow subgenre of the art and commerce films, or more specifically, films linked with both the music industry and sociology. In this regard the film beckons comparisons to the seminal 1970s masterwork Robert Altman's *Nashville* and the more obscure cult classic Alan Rudolph's *Welcome to L.A.*, considering these films are ensemble pieces - both cynical microcosms of American culture - framed around the staging of a concert (or in latter film, the recording of an album). *Welcome to L.A.*'s central theme concerns people compromising their lives (or in the case of the main character 'selling out' may be the better term) for things they think they want (e.g. staying in unhappy but convenient marriages). It is plotted around a songwriter (Keith Carradine) who is allowing his influential father to buy his way into the music business by hiring a famous singer to record an entire album of the son's songs. Besides the obvious connection to *Masked And Anonymous* of overpowering fathers, it

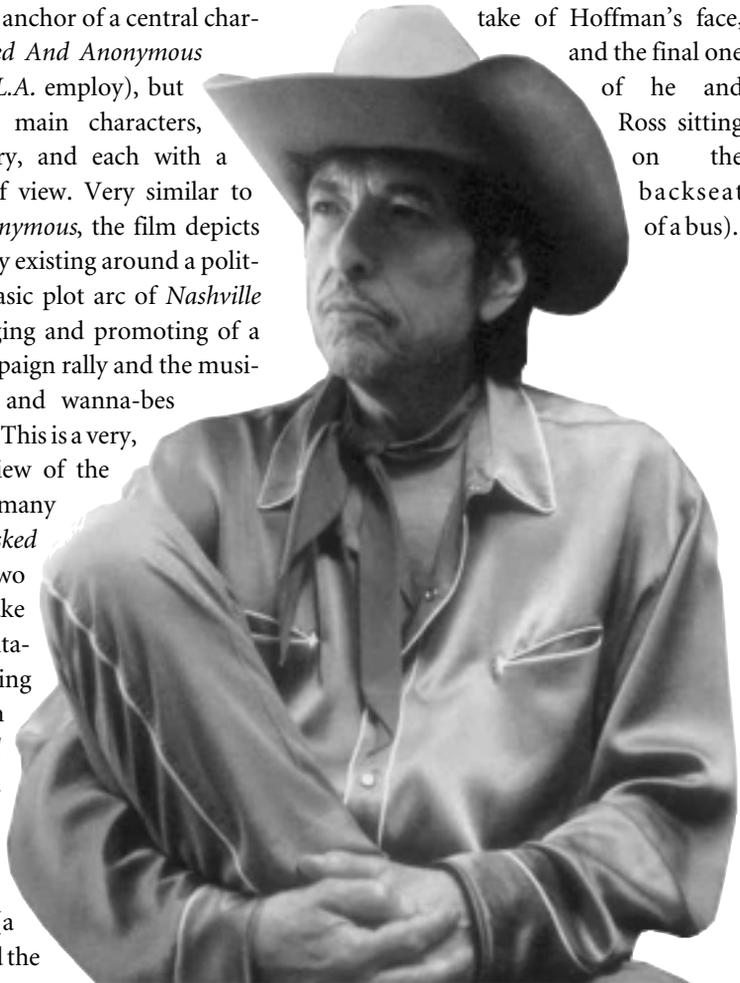
should also be noted that Carradine has an affair with his father's mistress. In addition, Jack Fate is also a sell-out, playing a bogus concert to promote his fading career and agreeing to set lists determined by network television executives (à la Bob Dylan's *MTV Unplugged* or his 30th Anniversary celebration?).

The themes of *Welcome to L.A.* seem quite narrow when compared to those swirling around the streets and clubs in *Nashville*. Altman's truly ensemble film does not have the anchor of a central character (like *Masked And Anonymous* and *Welcome to L.A.* employ), but has twenty-four main characters, each with a story, and each with a different point of view. Very similar to *Masked And Anonymous*, the film depicts the music industry existing around a political event. The basic plot arc of *Nashville* concerns the staging and promoting of a concert for a campaign rally and the musicians, managers and wanna-bes associated with it. This is a very, very simplistic view of the film, but of its many correlations to *Masked And Anonymous*, two in particular, make it an important citation. Without giving away too much plot, *Masked And Anonymous* and *Nashville* are both about the staging of a concert for a political reason (a political cause and the

promotion of a politician), and both juxtapose violence on the occasion of the concert at the film's finale.

Speaking of endings, perhaps the most referential shot in the film is the final one, an incredibly extended long-take of Jack Fate's mug while he sits on the backseat of a van. The first impression is to rush into comparisons with *The Graduate*, declaring the *Masked And Anonymous* scene to be a combination of that film's first and last

shots (the first a long-take of Hoffman's face, and the final one of he and Ross sitting on the backseat of a bus).



Then one is tempted to think of *Midnight Cowboy*'s final scene, again on the backseat of a bus, but this time depicting the death of one of two friends.

But I think neither film is an exact influence of the *Masked And Anonymous* scene. Both of those films' ending scenes were about reality setting in, about finally agreeing to be part of the regular world, but Jack Fate has long been in that real and compromised world. I believe the exact reference (or theft) is slightly more obscure and can be found in John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday*. In that film a mobster sits in the backseat of a car with a gun being pointed at him. He will surely die. But the steady shot is maintained for an extended amount of time, leaving the viewer, as well as the character, to ponder and reflect. There is no openness to the ensuing events in this scene, nor is there any in the final shot of *Masked And Anonymous*. We know exactly what will happen to both characters. Their 'Fate' is sealed.

The central performance by Dylan has been often compared (even by Charles) to two very different genres, those of film noir and spaghetti westerns. The latter one is of little surprise, with that genre's penchant (solidified by Sergio Leone) for taciturn lone wanderers who are so incredibly tight-lipped that it becomes almost ironic, making John Wayne look like Richard Simmons. The connection to spaghetti westerns seems even more intentional given Dylan's over-the-top cowboy getup, allowing him the appearance of a post-apocalyptic cowboy. Fate is one of the few characters who does not carry a gun, but a guitar case is almost always in his posses-

sion. This brings to mind *The Fastest Guitar Alive*, the fan flick of fellow Traveling Wilbury Roy Orbison.

The comparison of Jack Fate to the film noir detective seems more troubling, given that the detectives are commonly quite chatty, snoopy and, above all, highly engaged. Fate is the catalyst that puts the narrative into motion, but yet Fate remains coolly detached. While not the template for all noir films, this never the less is quite commonly found in the genre. Kevin Burton Smith, editor-in-chief of The Thrilling Detective Web Site, wrote the following to me in an email: 'Often...the detective is little more than an observer trying to make some sense out of a world that doesn't quite add up. And sometimes the private investigator is more a catalyst than anything. In other words, sometimes the detective calls the shots, but very often, the shots call him and all he can do is hold on for the ride.' Although the assimilation of Fate into the narrative is in some sense in the tradition of film noir, I would not say that it was overtly characteristic of that genre. With this in consideration, I would argue that the figure of Fate is more indebted to the character of the post-modern cowboy found in spaghetti westerns.

In brief it should be noted that in the film Dylan has a striking resemblance to Charlie Chaplin. This resemblance was noted frequently in the early days of Dylan's career, and with the emergence of Dylan's pusillanimous mustache, it has again been noted in recent years. Interestingly enough, this comparison seemed to have skipped Dylan's middle years all together. Chaplin and Dylan come across as men of similar

shape, size and colouring. To step off the toes of Chaplin enthusiasts, it should be said that I am not stating that Dylan is a genius of performance in terms of his acting ability, but that Dylan has an unintended resemblance to Chaplin in the way that his physicality seems peculiar no matter what he is doing.

As many will point out, there is a lot of Bob Dylan in Jack Fate. One can assume that Jack Fate is his stage name, seeing that nobody refers to his father as President Fate. Dylan's interests in aliases are longstanding. Dylan is not his real name. When he co-produced the albums *under the red sky*, *Time Out of Mind* and produced "*Love And Theft*" he did it as Jack Frost, yet another false name. Also, one of his most quoted lines from the 1980s is *'The only thing we knew for sure about Henry Porter is that his name wasn't really Henry Porter'* ('Brownsville Girl'). Fate is a performer who has a hard time living up to his early career. A security guard at the network, donning a gun, calls Jack washed up. Jack responds, 'I might have a few songs left in me.' It's an awkward scene that has nothing to do with the film. This is not a story about a has-been trying to overcome writer's block, and it's one of the few bits of cliché dialogue uttered in the movie. But yet this writer's block is something that Dylan seemed to personally wrestle with in his later years and is quite possibly an insecurity that he is attempting to exorcise. This theme is never returned to in the film and would be improved if edited out for the final release.

If my reading of the film is accurate, and that Fate had been imprisoned for all the years following his father's discovery of Jack's and the mistress' rendezvous, then this would have placed Fate in his late twenties (this is the approximate age of the actor playing Fate in the flashback). But this reading makes problems. If Fate were in jail for all those years then Cupid would be too young for Fate to have known on the outside. And if Fate was in prison under the president's order, then how could Sweetheart simply bail him out? Why didn't his fans bail him out sooner? But I think the film does not address these questions directly because it assumes a suspension of disbelief. It's supposed to be 'out there' and farcical. So, in the end, I think Fate was in jail for all those years, and this film is his reemergence into the world. Or perhaps this is Bob Dylan's sly way of pondering. What if Bob Dylan had never come out of hiding after that motorcycle accident? Or perhaps this is a pseudo-Christ parable, the stone rolled away after all those years, unleashed back to the changed and defiled world. Jack's dead mother is named Mary. His father is the ruler of the land.

There is a scene in which Fate/Dylan performs 'Drifter's Escape.' During his performance the other characters discuss their interpretations of the song. In true Dylan-fan form Pagan Lacey says that what she likes most about Fate's songs is how open to interpretation they are. But this isn't as narcissistic as it may sound. This approach to song holds true even for Fate/Dylan himself. Dylan interprets the bluegrass ballad 'Diamond Joe' (a

different song from the one found on *Good As I Been To You*) into a desperate drunken plea for Diamond Joe (a scoundrel in the other version) to come rescue the singer. But the seemingly most odd choice of song interpretation in the film is the southern anthem “Dixie.” A peculiar choice on first look, but when Dylan’s fondness for traditional music is considered, it’s a marvelous example of his analysis of that traditional form. It is the universal quality of folk music that attracts Dylan. Take for example the historical Mississippi prison lyric, *‘It ain’t but the one thing I done wrong/I stayed in Miss’ippi just a day too long.’* In Dylan’s ‘Mississippi’ he appropriates the lyric into, *‘Only one thing I’ve done wrong/Stayed in Mississippi a day too long.’* The narrator of the original lyric was lamenting over the fact that if he left Mississippi a day sooner he would not have been caught and landed in jail. The chorus to Dylan’s ‘Mississippi’ is less a lament than a declaration of love, meaning if only he left Mississippi for the big city sooner, he would have had a day more to love the addressee. Dylan’s revisits the lyric, hardly changing a word, and by putting his faith in the universal quality of traditional music, he gets a clear new meaning from the same statement.

His approach to ‘Dixie’ is not unlike this. True, the song is not radically changed, but Dylan’s interpretation of ‘Dixie’ is not interesting so much in the rewriting of it but in the way he bring it full circle. As some have discovered from Howard and Judy Sack’s book *Way Up North in Dixie* (a book as equally obscure

as Lott’s *Love and Theft*), ‘Dixie’ was composed by an African American family in Ohio and performed in Northern minstrel shows. A song that has been synonymous with Southern rebels who fought to secede from the progressive North (a war that has been simplified over time into anti-slavery vs. slavery) was indeed composed by African Americans for the exclusive purpose of entertainment. It’s easy to point out that Fate is playing a Civil War anthem during American’s next civil war, but I don’t think that is where the meaning rests. Fate refuses to take sides; he is not political in the least. Perhaps Fate was merely returning the song to its entertainment foundation.

It’s a quasi-post-apocalyptic drama. It’s a musical. It’s a farce. It borrows from spaghetti westerns. It’s entirely original. It’s quite referential. But more than anything, it is a fan flick, albeit a Dylan fan flick. It’s much more accessible than *Renaldo & Clara*, and perhaps it borrows from that film as well (*R&C* has no shortage of aliases and masks, and their titles are quite similar). And though Dylan gives more of an actual performance in the disastrous *Hearts of Fire* (the perfect example of a dreadful fan film), this new film says much more about Bob Dylan and who he is. Without a doubt this is quite a singular and intriguing film. A lot of the elements and themes we would expect from a good Dylan project are breathing here: death, religion, depiction of a world gone wrong, roots music, imagery, and most importantly, countless different ways of interpretation.

# A Look Back at *Don't Look Back*

by Dylan Dryden

A look at the relationships between Dylan and the media at the time of the documentary *Don't Look Back* and briefly the impact Dylan had on the established cultural polemic of the time.

*Don't Look Back was... somebody else's movie... I don't think it was accurate in terms of showing my formative years. It showed only one side. He made it seem like I wasn't doing anything but living in hotel rooms; playing the typewriter and holding press conferences for journalists. Throwing some bottles; there's something about that in the movie. Joan Baez is in it. All that is true, you know, but it's one-sided.*

-Bob Dylan, to Ron Rosenbaum,  
*Playboy* interview 1978

*I think in Don't Look Back, that Dylan's enacting his life - as he wishes to enact it, not necessarily as it 'is' and not necessarily as he wishes it were - but just as he wants to act it. Don't Look Back is a kind of fiction, but it's Dylan's fiction, not mine. He makes it up as he goes along.*

-D.A Pennebaker, interviewed by  
David Dalton, *Gadfly* April 1999

(both quoted, C.Heylin, *Behind The Shades Take Two* p.184)

This ninety minute cinema verite study covers approximately two weeks of the beginning of May 1965 in which Bob

Dylan arrives for the second time in England, only on this occasion to critical acclaim, and scrutiny, as he embarks on what was really only to be an eight-concert tour of the country. However, for Dylan, this was to be something of a miniature milestone in the making - and, without question, on show, was the extraordinary talent of a man who would go on to shape, seminally, much of the direction and thought of a post-modernising society in the late twentieth century.

The film is a remarkable account of the pressures of fame as they begin to affect a self-assured, gifted young singer-songwriter. Brought into some kind of focus is Dylan's relationship with the media of the day, the perception of Dylan as an artist, and privately his liaisons with personal friends, acquaintances and the like. One of those is former folk-mentor Joan Baez, whom it seems Dylan has outgrown and the obvious tensions between the two once intimately connected are seen as their relationship blatantly deteriorates on-screen. For Dylan, the self-styled journey-master, there is room for only himself on his personal odyssey into self-discovery and self-expression. As can clearly be seen, Dylan seems to be going through the beginnings of an epiphanal transition in terms of world-view and the direction of his own art.

The world in which this fast-rising star had arrived in was in fact a far cry from the one from which he'd come. Staunchly hegemonic, traditional and regimental, Britain at the time was still a place where the Queen's English was the official language of television and radio. Things such as interpretation of texts, of meaning, the idea of protest, strictly for the 'discontent'; as one reviewer puts it on seeing Dylan, for the 'Bearded boys and lank-haired girls, all in undertaker make-up.' Although this says little for the world-view of the individual, it betrays much of the purpose or 'accepted' consensual opinion of the time as if it were something that could be sanctioned in regard to validity and acceptance in terms of anything that could be deemed as 'normal.'

Popular entertainment at the time was subject to an English domination of the album charts. Since March 1963 when 'Please Please Me' first made it to number one there had only been six chart-topping albums; four by the Beatles and two by the Rolling Stones. Dylan's own acoustic catalogue had created the first dent in the English armour by going top twenty during the previous six months and *Another Side Of* and *The Times They Are A...* had re-entered the top ten on his arrival. Dylan was no longer a folk-singer but a 'star' and a tabloid-dominated British press hungry to dine on the great feast that celebrity-hood provided wasn't about to waste the chance of feeding on Dylan's new-found fame. Dylan himself was aware of this, didn't like it, and reacted accordingly. This is evident in his handling of the interview, and is understandable considering the rather

patronising and banal tones of the media representatives he faced. Maureen Cleave for example asks Dylan, 'Do your fans understand a word you sing, because they're quite complicated songs aren't they?'

Seeing Dylan in his true context, it is little wonder such child-like curiosity would have presented quite an affront toward the man and his art, the radical shift in consciousness he obviously represented, valid or not.

*'They ask the wrong questions, like, "What did you have for breakfast?" "What's your favourite colour?" - stuff like that... newspaper reporters, man, they're just hung-up writers, frustrated novelists, they don't hurt me none by putting fancy labels on me. They got all these preconceived ideas about me, so I just play up to them.'*

-Bob Dylan, 1965

(quoted in C. Heylin, *Behind The Shades Take Two*)

Such simple and slight examination has little value to critique other than its reflection of a then unused culture to large-scale broadcasting of notions such as post-structuralism, counter-culture, or the symbolism that Dylan was paramount in leading the way in ('It's Alright Ma', 'Love Minus Zero', 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'). All this at a time when such liberated and playful use of language was finding very shaky new ground amidst a stoic and patrimonial society through use of semi-sexual imagery, irony, and re-enactment of issues of class and common experience via a popular art form. Dylan,

however, represented something of an enigma on a level the cultural elite were accustomed to being in control of, hence, perhaps, the reviews written around the time along the lines of 'a poet and not a pop-act filling the venue-halls.'

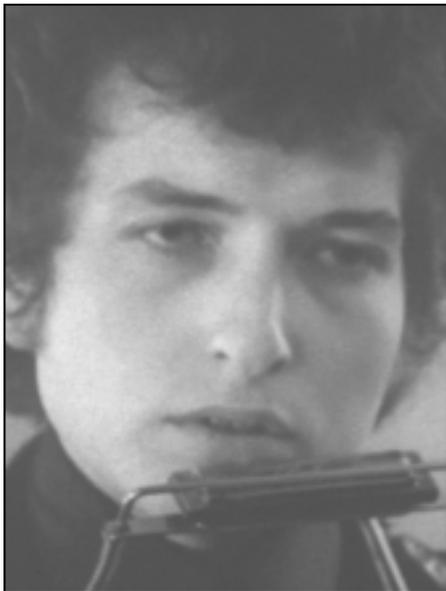
Dylan's quote, from around the same time, is suggestive of a man (despite the vernacular) sensing the 'changing of the guards' in regard to the acceptance of value and objectivity, truth and meaning itself in as much as he was aware of a set of preconceived and established value consensus amongst his interviewers and their irresistible temptation to label and conservative structural analysis. Dylan becomes the 'anarchist.'

It was this expectation and assumption that produced one of the most compelling and memorable moments of the film, aside from the documented performances themselves, whereby *Time* reporter Horace Judson finds all his journalistic assumptions and expectations challenged sharply in the face of the ultimate in value-freedom, of counter-cultural individualism. Judson, on film, seems to epitomise quite unintentionally what later research into the media by the Glasgow University Media Group (G.U.M.G for short) would bracket 'inherently and ideologically middle-class' - truth and objectivity therefore (this being something of the general gist of the argument as it unfolds) being not a neutral, impartial product of disinterested reporting, (Judson; 'Do you care about what you're saying?'). But instead reliant upon certain class related presuppositions (Dylan; 'It's a certain class of people read *Time Magazine*'). Dylan is

defying any attempt at definition, or even logical value-assumed supposition of any kind and so representing an entirely opposing theoretical position, something more along the lines of Sartre and Existentialism, if any attempt at 'deconstructing the abstract' is to be made.

Research carried out but the G.U.M.G would confirm Dylan's suspicions about the media if one was to take that side of the debate. Based on industrial dispute in the mid to late seventies, the group found selective reporting, sensationalism, and editing of material to make it more 'controversial and newsworthy'. Examples include one of a speech made by former Prime Minister H. Wilson in regard to tensions at British Leyland which, far from being the rather meditative one given, seemed to shift the blame squarely on to the workers. And the patronising and patriarchal representation of Falkland war spouses as being little more than 'vessels of emotion', nothing more than homemakers and weepy-housewives bearing up the home-front - nothing was asked of their social or political views.

All this would point to claims on truth being part of the hegemonic status-quo, reducing subordinate groups to a level described as the 'politics of interruption' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985 - *Understanding Media Cultures*:29) The G.U.M.G however are themselves open to criticism for their pessimistic lack of faith in the individual's own reasoning abilities, overlooking the diversity of media representation, (gender, ethnicity etc) overstating perhaps the cohesive power of ideology, and over-emphasising the relationship between



class-presuppositions and workplace culture. What about work ethic, and the efficacy placed on fast, on-the-spot accurate reporting? This begs the question, is Dylan himself guilty of over-generalisation and sweeping supposition; entrenched in his own increasingly weary and isolated position as counter-cultural 'anti-hero,' 'mythical trickster,' his 'Tambourine-Man' personified?

To get back to the film however, an evasive Dylan is successfully outmanoeuvring what we risk hazarding without too much of a stretch of imagination as another 'media stiff', *'Truth,'* says Dylan when asked, *'is just a plain picture - a tramp vomiting into the sewer, and next door to that Mr Rockefeller or C.W Jones going to work in the morning on the subway.'* At another point in the film Dylan is heard to say when asked about his religious beliefs 'that he doesn't see anything to believe in' - a view that would

radically alter some thirteen, fourteen years later. Dylan's viewpoint is not entirely pessimistic in opposition to Judson as supposedly representative of a conservative and seemingly exploitative media. Rather he is disinterested in the bourgeois and the presupposed 'rationale' that is thrown at him as advocate of the belief that the only belief worth having any real value is in the individual and the individual's own interpretive ability, reflection and honesty.

It is all too easy as an admirer of Dylan, his art and music, to fall into that category Dylan himself dismisses as being thoughtless, unquestioning, mediocre and say that where the film fails as an exposé of the form, of cinema verite, (perhaps an illusion in itself) - that that is of no consequence because here we are getting a slice, a genuine slice of the Dylan pie before it's even out the oven. And that the cool black and white tones, the dismantling of the pompous, the hip shades and condescending snarl that preludes some burst of genius, some searing witty insight into the real absurdity of so-called 'normality,' that that is enough. Not so, for it is in-between the hotel room and the concert-hall that the truth emerges, and we do not succumb ourselves to that glossy, celebrity-chic image, revolutionary or not, Dylan so despises and on which others capitalise. Nor does there emerge any clear sense of narrative, of right or wrong in the story unfolding before the camera. What does emerge, is a picture of a changing society, with Dylan at the forefront, ironically, asking us 'what are you so interested in me for, who the hell are YOU?

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# Some Notes on Bob Dylan *‘and the language that he used’*

by David Pichaske

*‘I’m North Dakota-Minnesota-Midwestern,’* Bob Dylan told Nat Hentoff in the famous *Playboy* interview of 1966; *‘I’m that color. I speak that way. I’m from someplace called Iron Range. My brains and feelings have come from there.’*<sup>1</sup> Three decades later, at an outdoor concert in Duluth, Minnesota, Dylan interrupted his set briefly to point up at the bluff above the park in which he was performing. *‘I grew up right on that hill there,’* he said. *‘My first girl friend was from up there, too.’* He paused briefly and added, *‘I think she still lives there.’* The implication was clearly that he had moved on - she had not.

The place in which we grow up influences in many ways our color, our speech, our brain and feelings. Bob Spitz opens his biography of Dylan with a quotation from Gertrude Stein: *‘After all, anybody is as their land and air is. It is that which makes them and the arts and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they learn and everything’.* An academic field of study still in its embryonic stage is ‘bioregionalism’ - the way in which geography and climate influence our hard and soft wiring. Hard-core bioregionalists make extreme claims for the relationship between place and personality, but the effect of place on language is obvious. For years sociolinguists have argued that parents and early peers contribute more to a person’s speech than teachers, reading or even television. If Sapir and Whorf are correct in arguing that language sets the parameters circumscribing our perception of the world, then place as language reinforces geography and experience to determine the way we think. Linguistic studies of dialect often drift - justifiably, it seems to me - from vocabulary, idiom, pronunciation and grammar into values, modes of perception, and attitudes.

On the other hand, we do sometimes move on. The author of this essay, for example, was born and raised in Buffalo, New York, spent his adolescence in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, lived eight college years in Ohio, and taught for ten years in Illinois. For more than two decades his legal residence has been the state of Minnesota, but a total of four of those years have been spent in Central Europe. What color is he? As he traveled west across the Appalachians in early 1961, he might have passed Bob Dylan heading in the opposite direction, to New York and the Fabled East, and thence to the world. Where, after a lifetime on the road, are Bob Dylan's brain and feelings? Is he still in any sense the color of Iron Range?

American literature is full of important writers whose special gift to the nation was the peculiar dialect and mindset of their native place (Twain and Faulkner among them), but it also offers spectacular examples of writers who gave us the language, feelings, and mentality of an adopted places. Robert Frost, preeminent spokesman for New England, and Dave Etter, poet of the Midwest village, were both born in California. What about Bob Dylan? I think a cogent argument could be made for the proposition that Bob Dylan's character is very much Minnesota-determined, even and especially in the largest sense, his role as folk-singer/prophet... that he as much as poet Robert Bly, anti-war Senators Eugene McCarthy and Paul Wellstone, or Populist governor Floyd Olson fulfills a prophecy recorded by Meridel Le Sueur in the early twentieth century: 'It will be from

here [the Upper Midwest] that the prophets come.'<sup>2</sup>

But my primary concern here is with language narrowly defined: with dialect as vocabulary, idiom, pronunciation, and grammar. And my argument is that Dylan's language retained significant vestiges of the Minnesota dialect, even after he arrived in New York, even when he was trying to imitate Woody Guthrie, even with the various stylistic and imagistic overlays he so quickly assimilated. I will argue that vestiges of the Minnesota dialect remain in later recordings. My plan is to define the Minnesota idiom - first in terms of vocabulary preferences and idioms, then in terms of grammar, and finally in terms of pronunciation - and then see how those characteristics play out in Dylan's songs. In identifying features of the dialect, I will rely on *The Linguistic Atlas of the Upper Midwest* (University of Minnesota Press, 1976), Herman and Herman's *American Dialects* (Theatre Arts Books, 1947), and some writers who seem to have that idiom down pretty well, including Howard Mohr (author of the book *How to Talk Minnesotan*, now in its 30th Penguin paperback printing) and radio host Garrison Keillor (author of the best seller *Lake Wobegon Days*). In examining Dylan's songs, I will use sound recordings, the lyrics published in *Writings and Drawings* (Knopf, 1973) and *Lyrics, 1962-1985* (Knopf, 1985), and the on-line Dylan concordance available at [www.bobdylan.com](http://www.bobdylan.com)... but not *Tarantula*, *Don't Look Back*, bootleg tapes and interviews, or a dozen other useful resources I just plain have not had time to examine.

Some minor problems present themselves. One is that Minnesotans speak a subdialect of Midwestern-Northern American, which is pretty much broadcast standard, the American equivalent of RP, and therefore not as recognizable as Boston, New Yuck, or New Jersey accents. 'More Americans use the Middle Western dialect speech, or a modification of it, than any other speech in America,' observe Herman and Herman, who track this dialect from the eastern boundary of Ohio to the Pacific coast of Washington and Oregon. However, subtle differences exist within this area: the dialect of the Upper Midwest - possibly because the Scandinavian (especially the Norwegian) influence is stronger here - sounds a little closer to Canadian than American English, especially in its broad vowel sounds. Minnesota English has its own preferences in vocabulary and idiom as well.

A second problem is that Dylan has always borrowed from other singers. Many of his most characteristic and most prominent pronunciations are not at all Minnesotan, including [ah] for 'I.' One of the most recognizable linguistic features of his early songs - the a- prefix attached to present participles, as in 'a-goin' back out' and 'hard rain's a-gonna fall' - is not at all used by Minnesotans; it is a usage Dylan (and fellow folksinger Phil 'I Ain't A-Marchin' Any More' Ochs) picked up mostly, I suspect, from Woody Guthrie.<sup>3</sup> Robert Shelton, in the famous 29 September 1961 *New York Times* article thought Dylan sounded not like a Minnesota Norwegian farmer, but like 'a Southern field hand.'

A third problem is that vocabulary choices may be dictated or influenced by rhyme and meter, and a vowel sound may be altered by the tempo of the line or song in which it appears - as in the case of the unnaturally lengthened vowel sounds of 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands.' This is not always the case, however: in the printed lyrics of *Writings and Drawings* the word 'forget' in the ninth stanza of 'It's Alright, Ma,' is printed 'fergit' (to rhyme with 'lit,' 'fit,' 'quit' and 'it'), but Dylan actually sings the word correctly - [g\_t], not [gIt].

A fourth problem is that Dylan's language changed as he matured - both his vocabulary and his pronunciation. As has the language of the author of this article.

A final problem is that, as Wallace Stegner observes,<sup>4</sup> the natural inclination of an artist born and raised in the hinterlands is usually away from his native dialect:

It [the division between high, European culture and low - American - culture] is a painful and sometimes fatal division, and the farther you are from Europe - that is, the farther you are out in the hinterlands of America - the more difficult it is. Contradictory voices tell you who you are. You grow up speaking one dialect and reading and writing another. During twenty-odd years of education and another thirty of literary practice you may learn to be nimble in the King's English; yet in moments of relaxation, crisis, or surprise you fall back into the corrupted lingo that is your native tongue. Nevertheless all the forces of culture and snobbery are against your writing by ear

and making contact with your own natural audience. Your natural audience, for one thing, doesn't read - it isn't an audience. You grow out of touch with your dialect because learning and literature lead you another way unless you consciously resist. It is only the occasional Mark Twain or Robert Frost who managed to get the authentic American tone of voice into his work.

In Dylan's case the forces of borrowed culture were both 'proper speech' and the language of folk music, which pulled him in opposite directions. Sometimes he drops from Minnesotan into a dialect as substandard as that of the Iron Range, as in the first song of the first album, 'You're No Good,' which sounds in point of honest fact very little like real Dylan. Often he rises to standard pronunciations, although in unguarded moments - often in mid-song - he slips. His language, as all fans know very well, is a mix, and an interesting study might be made of the various ways Dylan pronounces a single word - such as *I, or you, or forget* - all across his career. Despite the borrowings and deposits, however, the bedrock of Dylan's language is recognizably Minnesota-Midwest-North American, as I hope to demonstrate by specific references to specific words and phrases in specific songs on recordings both early and late.

Let us begin with vocabulary. The vocabulary preferences sampled in *The Linguistic Atlas of the upper Midwest* (which, for the purposes of comparison, were selected to conform to word lists in an atlas of Eastern American dialects) suggest more than anything else the

region's agrarian past, some of it more remote than Dylan's early songs. However, the *Atlas* lists many important vocabulary preferences that show up in both Dylan and the speech of residents of the Upper Midwest, and some preferences are unique to Minnesota-North Dakota. I have listed below clusters of synonyms, indicating inside parentheses the percentage of Upper Midwest preference; I have followed each option with citations from Dylan's songs and poems.

Cluster 1: a paved road: 'pavement' (37), Dylan 'I'm on the pavement, thinking about the government' ('Subterranean Homesick Blues'); 'concrete' (24), no relevant uses in Dylan; 'cement' (12%), in Dylan, one possible usage in 'prayed in the ghetto with my face in the cement' ('Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar').

Cluster 2: what the sun does in the morning/evening: 'rose'/'set' (80%), in Dylan, 'So I watched that sun come rising' ('Went to See the Gypsy Woman'), 'Where the sun never set' ('In the Summertime'), 'When the shadowy sun sets on the one' ('Only a Pawn in Their Game'); 'came up'/'went down' (21%, with 'greatest frequency in Minnesota and North Dakota' - *Atlas* I, 151); in Dylan, 'sun comes up' ('Where Teardrops Fall'), 'sun was coming up' ('Motorpsycho Nightmare'), 'sun is going down' ('Ring Them Bells'); 'sink' (no data), in Dylan, 'As I waited for the sun to go sinking' ('North Country Blues').

Cluster 3, noun form of the rising and setting of the sun: 'sundown' ('dominates in northern Minnesota' - *Atlas*, I, 152), in

Dylan, ‘candles of sundown’ (‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’), ‘sundown, yellow moon’ (‘If You See Her, Say Hello’), ‘well it’s sundown on the union’ (‘Union Sundown’), ‘But he sure left here after sundown’ (‘Sweetheart Like You’), ‘between sundown’s finish’ (‘Chimes of Freedom’), ‘At sundown’ (‘Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie’); ‘sunset’ is not used in the Upper Midwest and does not appear in Dylan; ‘sunrise’ (77%), in Dylan, ‘There’s beauty in the sunrise in the sky’ (‘Tomorrow Is a Long Time’); ‘sunup’ (23%), no uses in Dylan; ‘dawn’ (only 7 of 437 persons interviewed for the *Atlas* used the term ‘dawn,’ but those 7 include a Crookston farmer and a Duluth librarian); in Dylan, ‘right before the dawn’ (‘Meet Me in the Morning’), ‘Left town at dawn’ (‘Where Are You Tonight?’), ‘It was nearly dawn’ (‘Went to See the Gypsy Woman’), ‘when the dawn is nearing’ (‘I Believe in You’), ‘at the break of dawn’ (‘Don’t Think Twice,’ ‘Joey,’ ‘Heart’s in the Highlands’), ‘dealin’ cards ’til dawn’ (‘Billy’), ‘somebody’s eyes must meet the dawn’ (‘Restless Farewell’), ‘up past the dawn’ (‘Visions of Johanna’), ‘Titanic sails at dawn’ (‘Desolation Row’), ‘dawn came over the river bridge’ (‘Up to Me’), ‘chopped through the dawn’ (Isis), ‘against the drums of dawn’ (‘Lay Down Your Weary Tune’), ‘at dawn my lover comes to me’ (‘Gates of Eden’), ‘naked dawn’ and ‘no competition but the dawn’ (‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’) and ‘retreat by dawn’ (‘Alternatives to College’).

Cluster 4, to remove dirt or mess from a room: ‘clean up’ (36%), in Dylan, ‘cleaned up all the food from the table’

(‘Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’); ‘pick up’ (14%), in Dylan two usages that are not really applicable to this meaning in ‘poor boy, pickin’ up sticks’ (‘Po’ Boy’) and ‘pick up your money and pack your tent’ (‘You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere’); ‘straighten up’ (30%, ‘but ‘straighten’ up has a more northern correlation’ - *Atlas* I, 172), in Dylan, ‘the situation was all but straightened out’ (‘John Wesley Harding’) and ‘quit your mess and straighten out’ (‘Slow Train’); ‘tidy up’ (28%), no usages in Dylan.

Cluster 5, to close or shut the door (no preference in the Upper Midwest, but ‘close’ perceived as more polite’—*Atlas* I, 176); in Dylan, ‘shut all the doors’ (‘Clothes Line’) and ‘tryin’ to get to heaven before they shut the door’ (‘Tryin’ to Get to Heaven’); then ‘close the door’ (‘I’ll Be Your Baby Tonight’), ‘closed the door behind him’ (‘George Jackson’), ‘station doors are closed’ (‘Meet Me in the Morning’), ‘before doors close’ (‘Let’s Keep It Between Us’), and ‘you forgot to close the garage door’ (‘Leopardskin Pillbox Hat’).

Cluster 6, container for a liquid (no preference in the Upper Midwest between ‘pail’ and ‘bucket’); ‘pail’ in Dylan, ‘wiggle like a pail of milk’ (‘Wiggle, Wiggle’) and ‘playin’ with their pails in the sand’ (‘Sara’); ‘bucket’ in Dylan, ‘with their buckets to fill’ (‘Sara’), and ‘buckets of rain’ (‘Buckets of Rain’).

Cluster 7, a container for dry goods (Minnesota and North Dakota are alone among Upper Midwest states in preferring ‘bag’ over ‘sack’); in Dylan, ‘a bag full of sorrow’ (‘Handy Dandy’) and ‘two big

bags of dead man's bones' ('Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum'). Dylan uses 'sack' only once, 'like a pair of wet sacks,' in 'Arthur McBride' on the album *Good As I Been to You*.

Cluster 8, a window cover: 'shade' (85%); in Dylan, 'Shut the shade' ('I'll Be Your Baby Tonight'), 'light burst through a beat-up shade' ('Simple Twist of Fate'), 'he raised the shade' ('Foot of Pride'), and 'doctor who pulls down the shade' ('Tombstone Blues'); 'blind' (18%, although 'making inroads upon Northern territory in Minnesota' - *Atlas*, I, 167); in Dylan, 'through the blinds' ('Floater [Too Much to ask]')

Cluster 9, a male's outer garment, with legs and a zipper: 'pants' (85% usage); in Dylan, 'short pants, romance' ('Subterranean Homesick Blues'), 'with the drumstick in his pants' ('Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight'), 'the other is in his pants' ('Desolation Row'), 'as I pulled down my pants' ('Bob Dylan's 115th Dream'), and 'a couple pairs of pants' ('Clothesline'); 'trousers' and 'slacks' are not used by Dylan.

Cluster 10, low area with standing water: 'swamp' (74%); in Dylan, 'across the swamp of time' ('If Dogs Run Free'), 'swamp's a-gonna rise' ('Down in the Flood'), and 'I might be in the swamp' ('Motorpsycho Nightmare'); 'marsh' (54%) and 'slough' (45%) are not used by Dylan.

Cluster 11, running fresh water: 'creek' ('common designation in the UM' - *Atlas* I, 236; cf. 'creek was rerouted' - Mohr 111); in Dylan, 'Mink Muscle Creek' ('Get Your Rocks Off'), 'Cripple Creek'

('Rambling, Gambling Willie'), and 'where the creek used to rise' ('Isis'); 'brook' ('occurs in most of Minnesota' but not elsewhere in UM - *Atlas*, I 236); in Dylan, 'suckling brook' ('Apple Sucking Tree'); 'stream' ('occurs in most of Minnesota' but not elsewhere in UM - *Atlas* I, 236); in Dylan, 'Father who turneth the rivers and streams' ('Father of Night'), 'lakes and streams and mines so free' ('Ballad for a Friend'), 'wild fishes that float through the stream' ('Time Passes Slowly'), 'country stream' ('New Morning'), 'where the mountain streams flood' ('Let Me Die in my Footsteps'), 'righteous kind who wrote psalms beside moonlit streams' ('I and I'), and 'where the trout streams flow' ('Hurricane').

To these we might add some other Minnesota preferences, idioms and usages. Three Minnesota expressions leap out from Dylan's lyrics, they are so striking and so out of character for Dylan: 'holy mackerel' ('Alternatives to College' in *Writings and Drawings*, 214), 'paint myself into a corner' ('Mississippi') and 'one day late and a dollar short' ('Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum'). Dylan's use of the noun 'deal' (in Minnesota it's usually 'heckofa deal') reflects his North County roots: 'to deal with the dyin' ('Ramona'), 'my last deal gone down' ('Changing of the Guard'), and 'to make a deal' ('Like a Rolling Stone' and 'Sweetheart Like You'). 'Ice box' ('Motorpsycho Nightmare') is not a word that living Minnesotans use. The word 'parlor' ('Tryin to Get to Heaven') once had currency, of course, but is now archaic.

The lost 'of' in the phrase 'a couple of' is typically Minnesotan: in Howard Mohr's *How to Talk Minnesotan*, 'a couple more days' (73); in Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon Days*, 'a couple years' (16); in Dylan 'a couple pairs of pants' in 'Clothesline' (but 'a couple of friends' in 'Hurricane' and 'a couple of months' in 'Million Miles'). The word 'boat' in 'Rambling, Gambling Willie,' 'Apple Suckling Tree,' and 'Quinn the Eskimo' reflects an Upper Midwest usage. Iron Range Minnesotans, more than most Midwesterners, add an 's' to 'way' and 'where,' to form things like 'anywheres,' 'anyways,' and 'a long ways,' as in 'somewheres back' ('My Life in a Stolen Moment') and 'somewheres in the distance' ('Hollis Brown'); but 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere,' and 'what would I do with it anyway?' ('Highlands').

Minnesotans often use 'old' - sometimes reduced to 'ol' - as an affectionate or sarcastically affectionate filler adjective in front of nouns which are not necessarily old: in Mohr, 'Ol' Daryl caught a walleye' (23); in Dylan, 'Hibbing's a good ol' town' ('My Life in a Stolen Moment'), 'friendly old town' ('Hard Times in New York Town'), 'big old boat' ('Talking Bear Mountain'), 'old smokestack' ('Ballad for a Friend'), 'some old businessman' ('Summer Days'), 'same old page' ('Highlands'), 'dirty old mess hall' ('Walls of Red Wing'), 'dusty old fairgrounds' ('Dusty Old Fairgrounds'), 'that old sign on the cross' ('Sign on the Cross'), 'hills of old Duluth' ('Something There Is About You'), 'old Saxophone Joe' ('Country Pie'), 'the old Northwest' ('Ballad of

Donald White'), 'old Honolulu' ('You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome'), 'old Cheyenne' ('Gypsy Lou').

The verb in 'bum a ride' ('Standing on the Highway') is often heard in Minnesota, although it is not exclusively Minnesotan. Nor are double negative exclusively Minnesotan, although they are also common on the Iron Range, as in Dylan: 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere,' 'never done nothin' ('Masters of War'), 'never said nothing' ('Long Black Coat'), and 'don't make nothin' here no more' ('Union Sundown'). The use of 'at' in expressions like 'Where it's at' ('Like a Rolling Stone') and 'Where my pencil is at' ('Highlands') are common Upper Midwest usages that have become popular across the United States.

In referring to people, Minnesotans prefer 'that' to 'who,' and they use 'who' over 'whom,' even where 'whom' is grammatically correct (Herman 318, *Atlas II*. 55). Dylan's preference for 'that' showed up early in 'Song to Woody': 'not many men that done the things that you've done.' A search through the concordance produces only 9 instances of 'whom' in all Dylan, at least two of them ungrammatical: 'that man whom with his fingers cheats' ('I Pity the Poor Immigrant') and 'Father of whom we most solemnly praise' ('Father of Night'). The search produces 118 examples of 'who,' some of them ungrammatical: 'for who He died' ('When You Gonna Wake Up?') and 'who should I tell' ('Apple Suckling Tree'). The total for 'that' is too high to tabulate, although not all of them, of course, are pronouns referring to human beings.

Dylan's verb usage also reflects Iron Range preferences. 'Ain't,' which is common in Dylan, has a 39% acceptance rate in Minnesota (*Atlas II*, 40, as opposed to a 29% acceptance rate in the general Upper Midwest)<sup>5</sup>; the word appears 117 times in the on-line Dylan concordance. Keillor occasionally uses 'aint' in *Lake Wobegon Days* (201). The differences between 'lie' and 'lay' are lost on most Minnesotans: 'when you're layin' in bed' ('Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie'), 'lay right down and die' ('I'm in the Mood for You'), 'I'd lay awake all night' ('If Not for You'), 'layin' in a stack of hay' ('Rita May'), 'lay down and die' ('Neighborhood Bully'). The verbs 'set' and 'sit' are similarly confused, as in 'just set there' ('Goin' to Acapulco') and 'you set back and watch' ('Masters of War').

Dylan's preference for particle verbs (especially those involving 'up') is characteristically Minnesotan. Usages in Howard Mohr's *How to Talk Minnesotan* include 'Ralph cranked it up' (21) and 'Let's settle up' (108). Dylan's usages include 'Mixed Up Confusion,' 'tryin' to hold up' ('Standing on the Highway'), 'cover up the sky' ('Political World'), 'messed up' ('I Wanna Be Your Lover'), 'tearing up your mind' ('Blind Willie McTell'), 'tearing up my mind' ('Baby, Stop Crying'), 'strangled up my mind' ('Stuck Inside of Mobile'), 'wind up' ('Walls of Red Wing'), 'stand up' ('Walls of Red Wing'), and 'end up' ('Walls of Red Wing'). Also common is the expression 'head out' ('depart'), as in Mohr, 'We better head out,' and Dylan's 'heading out for the East Coast' ('Tangled Up in Blue').

On the subject of particle verbs, both the *Linguistic Atlas* and Herman and Herman report a preference for 'wake up' over 'arise' or 'awake,' a preference reflected in Dylan: 'arise'/'arose,' 'Arise, Arise, he cried so loud' ('I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine'); 'awake'/'awoke,' 'I awoke in anger' ('I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine'); but 'wake up'/'woke up,' 'I woke up, the room was bare' ('Simple Twist of Fate'), 'someone wakes up' ('Series of Dreams'), 'when you gonna wake up?' ('When You Gonna Wake Up?'), 'and never wake up' ('I'd Hate to Be You on that Dreadful Day'), 'when you wake up in the mornin'' ('Mama, You Been On My Mind'), 'too early to wake up' ('Million Dollar Bash'), 'before we wake up' ('Let's Keep It Between Us'), 'she wakes him up' ('Changing of the Guards'), 'I wake up in the morning' ('Maggie's Farm'), 'if she wakes up now' ('I and I'). Note also the expression 'get up'/'got up,' as in Dylan's 'wishin' I'd never got up that morn' ('Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues').

Minnesota usage prefers several *standard* past tense forms over forms found elsewhere in the US: 'dreamed' over 'dreamt,' as in 'I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine,' 'I dreamed a dream that made me sad' ('Bob Dylan's Dream'), 'after all my dreams are dreamed out' ('All Over You') and 'I dreamed romantic facts' ('My Back Pages')... but 'I dreamt I was walkin' into World War III' ('Talkin' World War III Blues') and 'last night I dreamt' ('11 Outlined Epitaphs'); 'blew' (9 usages in Dylan) over 'blowed' (3 usages); 'climbed' (2 usages) over 'clumb' (none) or 'clim'

(none); ‘drank’ (3 usages) over ‘drunk’ (none); ‘grew’ (3 usages) over ‘growed’ (none); and ‘threw’ (10 usages) over ‘threwed’ (none, but note ‘knewed’ in the Guthrie-influenced ‘Talkin’ John Birch Paranoid Blues’ and in ‘Don’t Think Twice’).

Minnesota prefers the following standard participle forms over non-standard forms used elsewhere in the country: ‘brought’ (4 usages in Dylan) over ‘brung’ (none), ‘eaten’ (one usage) over ‘ate’ (none), and ‘torn’ (11 usages) over ‘tore’ (none).

However, Minnesota idiom admits the following *ungrammatical or nonstandard* preterit verb forms, which can easily be found in Dylan’s songs: ‘come,’ ‘done’ (a 43% acceptance - *Atlas* II. 13), ‘run’ (46% acceptance - *Atlas* II. 24), and ‘seen’ (34% acceptance - *Atlas* II. 14). In *Lake Wobegon Days*, Keillor uses ‘don’t,’ ‘come,’ and ‘seen’ as preterit verbs (146, 184, 202). ‘Come’ as a past tense verb appears often in Dylan: ‘don’t even know why we come’ (‘Oxford Town’), ‘How is it you come to be this way?’ (‘John Brown’), ‘the policeman come’ (‘Man on the Street’), ‘I come into Pittsburgh’ (‘Lo and Behold’), ‘I know what you come here for’ (‘New Pony’), ‘your friends come by for you’ (‘Call Letter Blues’), ‘Mama come in and picked up a book’ (‘Clothesline’), ‘ ’til I come into New York town’ (‘Talkin’ New York’). ‘Done’ also appears often in Dylan as a preterit verb: ‘He never done no wrong’ (‘He Was a Friend of Mine’), ‘Who never done wrong’ (‘Man on the Street’), ‘that done the things that you’ve done’ (‘Song to Woody’), ‘the deeds that you

done’ (‘Ain’t No Man Righteous’), ‘I done it the way’ (‘I remember You’), ‘I done a whole lotta thinkin’ (‘Silent Weekend’), ‘he never done’ (‘Hurricane’), ‘what I done before’ (‘Most Likely You’ll Go Your Way’), ‘She never done nothing to William Zanzinger’ (‘Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll’), ‘You that never done nothing’ (‘Masters of War’), ‘see what you done’ (‘Sugar Baby’), ‘tell me what they done’ (‘John Brown’). Dylan regularly uses ‘seen’ as a preterit: ‘I seen a man’ (‘Talkin’ World War III Blues’), ‘I ever seen’ (‘I Shall Be Free’), ‘I never seen him before’ (‘Leopardskin Pillbox Hat’) ‘since I seen you there’ (‘Spanish Harlem Incident’), ‘Somebody seen him hanging around’ (‘Man in the Long Black Coat’), ‘Seen the arrow on the doorpost’ (‘Blind Willie McTell’), ‘I seen the whole country’ (‘Gypsy Lou’), ‘I seen you standin’ in the door’ (‘New Pony’), ‘since I seen her smile’ (‘Seven Days’), ‘I seen pretty people disappear like smoke’ (‘Buckets of Rain’), ‘I seen her on the stairs’ (‘Changing of the Guards’), among many others. ‘Run’ appears as a preterit verb in lines like ‘I run down most hurriedly’ (‘Talkin’ John Birch Paranoid Blues’).

According to the *Atlas* (34, 35, 40), 30% of Minnesotans use ‘we was’ (‘We was layin’ down around Mink Muscle Creek’ in ‘Get Your Rocks Off!’); 27% use ‘you was’ (‘you wasn’t there’ in ‘John Brown’); 35% use ‘they was’ (‘our hats was,’ ‘our chances really was’ in ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream,’ ‘They was hollerin’ at us’ in ‘Get Your Rocks Off!’); 45% use ‘he don’t’ (‘if he don’t expect to be caught housin’ flushes’ in ‘Open the Door, Homer’).

It is worth noting that some very Minnesota usages on which both Mohr and Keillor dwell at length do not appear in Dylan's work: 'whatever' in response to a dilemma, 'so... then' in asking a question ('So what's that all about, then?'), and 'you betcha.' One reason, perhaps, is that Dylan consciously avoids phrases that would be stereotypically Minnesotan to the point of being humorous; he is not Garrison Keillor or Howard Mohr. Another reason may be that while he might occasionally try to sound like a Depression drifter or a Southern farmer, he is not trying to sound like an Iron Ranger. Nevertheless, the more subtle preferences of vocabulary and idiom, which do not reduce to humor or stereotype, slip by unnoticed.

*Part Two of this fascinating article will appear in Judas! 6, dealing with pronunciation, and the consequences of Minnesotan speech, character and weather.*

### Footnotes

1. In this obviously off-hand comment, Dylan is accurate beyond his years in differentiating between the dialect of Minnesota and North Dakota and the dialect of the rest of the Upper Midwest. The *Linguistic Atlas of Upper Midwest* records consistent and significant distinctions between MN =ND and rest of Upper Midwest in matters of pronunciation, usage, and vocabulary. As I will show, where differences exist, Dylan's speech, vocabulary and usage consistently reflect Minnesota-North Dakota choices over Upper Midwest choices.
2. 'The Ancient People and the Newly Come' in Anderson, ed., *Growing Up in Minnesota* (University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. x.
3. Dylan may have borrowed from Guthrie—or from the southern radio stations he claims to have listened to as a youth—the [ɪ] pronunciation of 'the,' as in

the word 'thee,' as well as [ah] for 'I' and 'can't' to rhyme with 'ain't.' The R inserted into 'wash' to make 'warsh,' Dylan did not borrow. Guthrie often transforms the 'ow' at the end of 'fellow' into 'er' to make 'feller'; this also Dylan does not borrow. Guthrie often uses 'knowed' as the preterite of 'know,' a usage occasionally borrowed by Dylan. Minnesotans - and Dylan - share with Guthrie a number of dialectal features, including a fondness for double negatives, the frequent use of the adjective 'old,' and 'come' as a past tense of 'came,' 'done' as a past tense of 'do.' Remembering Dylan during his year at the University of Minnesota, Bonnie Beecher said, 'He was talking in the strangest Woody Guthrie-Oklahoma accent.' She remembers Dylan deliberately refusing to treat a bronchial cough because he thought the rougher his voice sounded, the more he'd sound like Guthrie (in Bauldie, *Wanted Man: In Search of Bob Dylan*, pp. 23, 25).

4. *Wolf Willow*. New York: Viking (1962), pp. 25-26.

5. Frederick James Furnival, an early editor of the Oxford English Dictionary and co-founder of the Early English Text Society, is reported to have used 'ain't' habitually (Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, 7 vols. [1909-49], V, 434).

6. Descriptions of Dylan's early recording session with John Hammond suggest that Dylan received, and accepted, instructions and corrections.



Dear Andy and Keith,

Congratulations on the first year of *Judas!* It is a truly excellent magazine, handsomely produced, with a very nice layout and appearance and extremely interesting, well-written and varied contents. I particularly appreciate your efforts to produce something *different* from the many other Dylan periodicals currently available, although, of course, you can hardly avoid there being many similarities in approach to the late John Bauldie's *Telegraph* - surely the best dylanazine ever - and, to a lesser degree, to its successor, *The Bridge*. But well, *nihil novo sub sole*. Anyway, what matters is that you have published many fine articles during this first year (Richard Jobes' excellent 'Po' Boy Dressed in Black' and Peter Doggett's 'Me and Mr. Jones. Bob Dylan and the Revolution' particularly come to mind, as do the extracts from Paul Williams' work in progress), and although I must confess that I belong to the minority who find the magazine's title simply appalling - no matter how cleverly you argue your choice, all things considered, I must declare that I do find *Judas!* excellent, and I have, of course, resubscribed.

I do have one complaint, though, or at least a (minor) critical comment to proffer after these first four issues: I simply cannot see the point of the unbearably tiresome 23 pages dedicated to reproducing the more or less articulate personal opinions of a dozen 'fans and critics' in issue #4. In my opinion, 'A Tale of Two Questions' raises the very same issues Glen Dundas' unfortunate 'On The Road Again' did in the first issue of *Judas!* As Toby Richards-Carpenter cleverly pointed out at the time ('Letters to the Editor', issue #2), this simply is *not* the way to escape the fanzine mentality, which I thought was one of the main reasons for creating the magazine in the first place. The sort of 'debate' represented by 'A Tale of Two Questions' may be agreeable to some people, I shan't attempt to deny it, and I will even go as far as to concede that most of us have occasionally indulged in this sort of witless speculation... Though usually at the local pub, preferably after a Dylan show, and assuredly after a couple of pints. Speaking only for myself now, if you'll let me put it this way, I simply couldn't care less for what any and all of the 'fans and critics' quoted in the article believe may be the grounds for Dylan's relentless touring, much less for what their personal reasons are for going see him perform. Surely this exercise is a bit puerile, not to say self-indulgent? Come on, now! There is something in the 'Net called 'Dylan Pool', I believe, where fans try to guess each concert's setlist in

advance, get graded according to their 'results', maybe obtain some sort of no-prize, and generally appear to have a lot of fun. Well, it's fine enough for those who want to take part in it, but I don't think you would like to run a column with that sort of inanities in *Judas!*, would you? I realize I may be stretching the point.

The crux of the matter is, do you want to know why I go see Dylan in concert as often and as many times I can? Not at all, why should you? Who am I that you should care? I'm not sure I am even interested in formulating it to myself: it's *that* kind of thing. The truth is I wouldn't have been surprised to read this article elsewhere (say in *Isis*), but I daresay I find it out of place *as an article in Judas!* (as a series of letters to the editor, maybe), and such a long one to boot, not to mention its taking up all of the issue's extra pages, and then some! And all this, without entering upon the far more hazardous questions of why *those* fans and critics, and not others, have been chosen to voice their opinion... Or of expressing a judgment on the value of some of the said 'opinions'. I am well aware that G. K. Chesterton once said, 'in defence of hobbies and amateurs and general duffers like himself - as he nicely put it, that 'If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly', yet surely the point is there is a place and a time for anything, and *Judas!* is not the place for this ineffable twaddle. Or at least, I thought it wasn't.

Best wishes for your second year,  
Keep on keeping on!

Antonio J. Iriarte  
Madrid, Spain

Hello Andrew

I'm still making my way through issue four of *Judas!* (too many other things to read, I'm afraid), but I have to say, from the articles I've read it seems like the best issue yet. I particularly enjoyed 'A Tale Of Two Questions', especially as the NET is very much the Dylan of my generation. Dylan's recent work has been met with some very mixed responses (sometimes with good reason), so it will always serve as an interesting debate amongst fans. I agree with Toby Richards-Carpenter that 'the coherent argument has yet to be heard.' It would be good to see articles that bring fresh insight into Dylan's live work from 88 - 03. *Razor's Edge* was the first major step in such a direction, and - without wishing to appear like a mindless kiss-ass - would like to see such an avenue further investigated. Best bit: Ben Clayton's response to 'Why do you keep going to see him?' - haven't laughed-out loud reading a Dylan mag for too long. P Doggett's piece was also exceptional.

Elaine Jackson's article was very interesting, and an area of considerable importance: a female response to Dylan's work. The Dylan world needs more of this, and I realise you are doing much to make this the case. Plus, great photographs in issue four, especially the shot from Berkeley 2002. It would be good to see more colour shots in *Judas!*, as in issue two.

Keep up the good work etc. etc.

Richard Jobses

Hi Keith

I've received *Judas!* 4 and it looks great. What I enjoy most about your publication is the intelligence of your authors. I am a 25 year old Dylan fan and subsequently have much catching up to do with regards to understanding Bob's music. I know I 'understand' it in the way of appreciating it at face value (which is worth a lot in itself), but the insight into the lyrics that your authors present is brilliant. I believe I am like many Dylan fans in that on occasion I start to doubt his excellence over the years, maybe he fluked it with every move he made. My mates don't understand the attraction and throw names of other excellent bands and artists at me, some of recent years who are truly unique and very talented. But I know little of these and can only try to explain something I don't really understand myself. What *Judas!* gives me is the words I am looking for when trying to explain to my peers (and myself) why I am so captivated with Bob Dylan's music, because we aren't all literary geniuses like Dylan. Lately though, I've started to believe, someday I will be. Thanks,

Steven Crosby  
Aberdare RCT

Hi Keith,

Thanks for the email...I actually received issue 4 about a week ago, and I want to let you know how incredibly excellent I think your magazine is...I also subscribe to *Isis*, and the two magazines really complement each other so well. *Judas!* is everything I could hope for in a Dylan magazine....thank you for your incredible work. (By the way, I was very happy to see that you are hoping to incorporate more female writers...I have forever been puzzled as to why so few women seem passionate about Dylan's music, and it would be terrific to hear from other women who are knowledgeable on the topic).

Many thanks,  
Kerry McIlvenna-Davis  
San Francisco

Dear Andrew,

I recently received issue four of *Judas!* and it continues to be a cracking read. The 'Why does Bob Dylan keep touring?' debate was fascinating - not least because their opinions gave revealing insights into the writers themselves!

Nick's review of 'Live 75' was excellent - very entertaining. This welcome release started me thinking about bootlegs - official and unofficial. Where would we be without them? I've followed and admired Dylan's work for forty years, but came only recently to bootlegs. (I know, where have I been etc.) How else can we attempt to keep up, especially now that Dylan increasingly resembles Prospero playing with the magic of his own creations. Very few can attend gigs regularly, but with bootlegs we can hear re-workings of at least some of our personal soundtracks.

Early critics suggested that the 'organised ambiguity' of many of the lyrics invited us to

## Judas!

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'fill in' with a personal interpretation and I'm sure this was accepted by many. The result is a highly individual experience and any enhancement of it is compelling indeed. This is all part of the Dylan alchemy! He has never accepted confines or restraint and neither, through his re-workings, need we. The treasures are taken out, imaginatively restored and offered to us again. Call me sad - and I know some will - but there's nothing like the anticipation of a new Dylan bootleg. I want them all! But let's not get into the realms of fantasy. I'll continue to gratefully take what I can, confident that I'll sometimes be surprised, frequently challenged, but never bored.

Sincerely  
Sheila Clarke  
Chester

Andrew

John Hinchey's article on Brownsville Girl was brilliant. One of the best pieces of Dylan criticism I've read. It was a song I'd always found both interesting and irritating. Now I begin to get it. 'This man has transformed my understanding' as mad photo-journalist Dennis Hopper says in *Apocalypse Now*. Nick Hawthorne gives a very enthusiastic reading of '75 Live, I don't agree with all of it but he does make you feel like this disc matters (which it does!).

The beginning of Elaine Jackson's piece was mesmerising. The opening words had me on the edge of my seat - until I realised I was in Millsandboonland. It was a spirited piece, though my nostrils sometimes caught a whiff of the dusty shelves of lit crit.

I liked Robert Forryan's piece a lot. It was very rich on the resonance of tears in all of Dylan's work. Like 'blood', tears is one of those elemental words that seems to bind his songs together. *Another Side Of* is not among my favourite Dylan albums but I've always found 'Ramona' very haunting. It's partly the melody, partly the tenderness of Dylan's voice - a contrast to the other songs laid down on that long day's night (9 June 1964) in the studio.

I've always loved the flip that comes with the final words (which Forryan doesn't comment on) - in the final seconds of the song everything the singer has offered is reversed. Having sung from the position of one offering strength & reassurance 'To Ramona', the singer suddenly becomes the one needing support & comfort in those last few words

*and someday maybe  
who knows, baby  
I'll come and be cryin' to you.*

It's like suddenly seeing the song through the other end of the telescope.

Mick Gold  
London

Response to Mick Gold and his Two Questions...

Dear Mick,

I was intrigued to read your article *A Tale of Two Questions (Judas! 4)*. I too, am fed up trying to justify to myself and others the answers to these two questions. Why even ask? If you do ask them you will find that none of us can answer the first, only Bob Dylan can and he might struggle to put it into words. As to the second, this can be very dangerous territory to enter. Do you go deep and find something about yourself you may not like? Or keep it light and simple, thereby keeping yourself happy and blissfully ignorant?

We tend to place Bob on a higher plane. It is rightly so. But I believe there are several parts to our continued following of his stage career. People usually mention the fact that many blues singers performed until they physically could not, often just to survive, but enjoying the act as well. But I'll bet not many people followed them around. Was it simply that people were ignorant to the greatness of the work they were witnessing? This following is a recent phenomenon and it is not simply Bob that inspires this hero-worship. A couple of weeks ago I happened to watch a television programme about the daily workings of an airport. I missed the title. At this airport there was a party of sixty people from a small part of Ireland. They were all aged in their sixties and seventies and each had paid three thousand pounds (GB) to go on a four-week trip to Australia to watch Daniel O'Donnell in concert. Think about it. It may put our efforts to shame. How many of us go to Australia to see Bob?

There is no doubt that spending power is the first answer. If we could not easily afford it we would not do it. We are rich. Sure, the mortgage might suffer, a holiday might be put back or we smoke a bit less, but we are rich. Many of you are now screaming 'I'm not rich' but you are. Just pop back a generation in your thoughts. My mother was in a workhouse as a child. She walked eight miles to work and the same back each day. Holidays were when the Church said you could have a day off, but you had to go to church three times instead of twice. No, I am not going into a Monty Python routine, these are facts. I am just saying that we have choices today that only rich people have. And we exercise them. Going to see Bob Dylan is one choice. Keeping going to see him, that might be something else. Sit down with any of your non-Bob Dylan friends, assuming you have any! I'll place a further bet. They cannot understand why you do it, and you cannot explain it to them, as much as you try.

The second is that because we are rich it frees us to expand our minds. We can do many things now in art, travel, relaxation, physical skills & prowess, pretty well anything. Maybe we cannot handle the choices? Why take one artist and continually follow him around? Surely it would be better to see as many and as varied artists working in many different art forms as possible? I think that the reason might be that once you have taken that step, gone to a few shows, it becomes safe. You get a cosy circle of friends, meet up and chat about a subject on which you are competent and therefore safe. No great pres-

sure of thought is required. It is like collecting stamps, matchboxes, teapots or dolls. Once you have started you become 'the teapot collector' or whatever to your friends and therefore have a unique, unchallenging place in your community. I told you, you might not like it down here. Do you also think that you are adding to his glory? Do you get a warm glow at the end of each show? I know I do in the middle. I will be tired out and may not enjoy it as much. The answer is to do what a more sensible friend is doing. He is missing out Perth, staying in Sydney for six days to chill out and see the sights. Even so, we are both fanatics. All of us are to a greater or lesser degree; it is only family, work and finance that restricts us.

The second question is '*Why do we keep going to see him?*' The question you are really asking is '*Is Bob Dylan today performing well enough for me to spend my time and money on him?*' Well, once again, that is down to each of us to decide. If you do not think he is, then stop going. It could be easier than you might think. If you are going simply to collect shows, because you think you *cannot* stop, or to save face with your like-minded friends, those are really bad reasons and you are guilty of making bad choices. As to me, I am still enjoying the shows. It *is* harder to get the miles in, but that is natural slowing down! But if he is performing and I can get there I will. I enjoy the current band, the songs being played, the moment of seeing Bob right in front of me and that is good enough for me. I have made my choice; one day I might make another.

Adrian Richardson  
Bedford

Andrew,

Just a few comments on *Judas!* 4:

'Brownsville Girl' John Hinchey - I really enjoyed this, made me go back to the song, I think that says it all! 'No success like failure' An excellent read with some controversial comments, bound to get a few reactions! 'You don't read women authors do you?' Elaine Jackson - A fascinating insight, I enjoyed reading it, but I don't really feel comfortable with it! I'm not sure why!!!

'To Ramona' Robert Forryan - I can see he is a good writer but didn't like this much, I love the song too though! 'Pretty good stuff' Manuel Vardavas - Yeah I always enjoy these types of articles, just reminds me of how behind I am with the amount and quality of recordings available now. Manuel obviously has a passion for them!!

Toby Richards-Carpenters 'Flesh on the bone' is an excellent follow up, again it got me going back to the songs always a good sign!

Mick Gold's 'A Tale of Two Questions' is a fascinating look at people's opinions, whether I agree with many is another matter. The contributors that responded produced plenty of interest, and humour to make it a fascinating read!

How about a regular series where these people are asked 2 questions? E.g. What did you think of "*Love and Theft*"? What is 'Desolation Row' really about?

'Witnesses and Mutineers' Stephen Scobie - A very interesting article, I didn't know who

Warren Zevon was. Even if I had, you had to enjoy something so well written!  
Always enjoy the letters!! Photos are Fantastic.  
All in all a great read, you sure you have something to do with it?

Andy Wright  
Retford

Hi Keith,

Don't worry I will re-suscribe to *Judas!* tomorrow, I have really enjoyed this fanzine, especially the last issue with Robert Forryan's article which helped me to re-listen to a song I was beginning to listen to by habit and which was a nice following to an article he published about his favourite album in Homer a few years ago (and it's a pleasure to find again some of the spirit of Homer, *the slut* even without the photocopying charms). And if, moreover, the new subscription give me access to a 'members only' area I would feel really important!

Cheers  
Jean-François

Hi Andy!

I have now read the first four issues of J\*\*\*s and am impressed. It has a similar quality to the late lamented *Telegraph*, probably because this is a similar labour of love and it's so obvious that there is a caring person behind the venture. A voice. There really have been so many worthwhile articles so far. Paul Williams pieces on 'Oh Mercy' obviously. The article about "Love and Theft" and blackface minstrelsy was brilliant. And many others. Living nowadays right next to the Globe Arena I still enjoyed the Michael Gray interview. Some may call him self-centered but I...I...errmmm, what was I saying again???

So, to the recent issue. In Nick Hawthorne's fine review of the 'Live 75' CD I still have to disagree strongly with his assessment of the 1966 version of 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. This view of Dylan in '66 as only interested in the electric portion of the shows, now perpetuated also by Mickey Jones, is not true. Can't be. These acoustic '66 sets are amazing and an art form in itself. Just the harmonica playing is out of this world and nobody, including Dylan, has ever played that instrument like that. This is not the work of a bored musician, not fiddling for the sake of fiddling. No way. Now I like several of the acoustic songs on the '75 CD, not least 'Love Minus Zero', but I would never put this T. man above the '66 version.

I must say that one thing that these issues of *Judas!* have shown me is what a fine writer Robert Forryan is. And his 'To Ramona' article was no exception. I love that song, but somehow it took me years until I realized that it begins and ends in tears. Anyway, this is one of my favourite Dylan songs, but one which has disappointed me so many times live. For the record I'd like to say that one of the finest versions I've heard is from the Seattle show last autumn. But the reason I've been disappointed so often isn't because I think it has to be sung by a young man. I understand what Robert is saying, but as an 'older man' I still don't agree. But I do agree about the importance of crying. In Dylan's

lyrics and in life on the whole. And I was immediately reminded of all the times I've cried at Dylan shows. Also at home, listening to Bob on the stereo, but mostly as an actual member of the audience. I won't list all the occasions, but maybe a few memorable ones. Like after ages of waiting in the hot afternoon, enduring innumerable support acts in Newcastle in 1984 and then finally Bob comes on in his long black coat, as it were, and starts with 'Highway 61 revisited', dancing in front of my eyes. Jesus, I wept during the first three songs. And this has happened to me so many times, the power of Dylan's music moving me to tears. Tears of joy. The last time I remember was during 'Mr. Tambourine man' in Sheffield in 2000. My goodness. So while crying may not be a subject that us strong men normally talk about it certainly for me is a very important aspect of this life. So, thank you, Robert! And as for the line 'as your senses will rise' I've always thought of that line as coming to terms with reality. As in 'coming to one's senses'. Is that totally wrong?

And, talking about tears, I was profoundly moved by the letter from Chris Bisciello. Nothing more to say than, thank you Chris!

On the other hand I was very disappointed with the article by Manuel Vardavas. Not by his assessment of these records, I love the early 1980 shows, but that he had to go and spoil it by trashing the NET boots, by Crystal Cat and others. Why is it necessary to knock one aspect of Dylan's art while raving about another aspect? Too bad that such a fine article had to end on such an unnecessarily sour note. Totally uncalled for.

As for the 'tale of two questions' I could probably write an entire letter on that subject, but I won't. Nor about the 'seedy Stockholm suburb', where I now reside. I just still react to expressions like 'Dylan's most faithful fans' (page 67) and 'trying the patience of his greatest fans' (page 68). By what definition? It's like these 'most faithful fans' have some sort of claim and should not have to be upset and subjected to less than perfect performances. They surely deserve better for their loyalty. What utter crap. Take what you have gathered from coincidence and if it doesn't suit you, big deal. Consider yourself lucky, as I think actually Christopher Ricks was the first to point out, to be alive at the same time as this particular artist. But never ever feel that he owes you anything or that you have any reason to feel that he 'tries your patience'. If anything it probably needs 'trying'.

Jörgen  
Stockholm

Hello there

You've excelled with *Judas!* - nice range of articles, some splendid writing, lovely production. You've developed the ideal format for a Bobzine. Congrats.

Avoiding silly idolatry, you've succeeded in capturing the elation of being a Bobfan at this time of Dylan's re-emergence as one of the greatest creative icons... one of the greatest writers, not only of popular song, and not only of the twentieth century. Bible... Shakespeare... Bob...

Gerry Smith

I have recently sent a cheque to renew my subscription to *Judas!* and have been meaning to write to you all through the last year to say how good I think the magazine is. I find many of the articles excellent and all of them well worth a read. I think your editorial priorities are right and I hope you can continue to attract this standard of contribution. I would echo the comments of one of your published correspondents about avoiding the 'in-group' behaviour that seems to arise among the enthusiasts and hope you can continue to avoid this. My only criticism would be some of the 'jokey' aspects of the editorial, especially its title and some of the contributors' 'bios'. Other than that I think you have a first class magazine, a worthy successor to *The Telegraph*, and I wish you all the very best with it.

Best wishes  
Andy Miller  
Nottingham

Dear Andrew,

I write to you again four issues after the first *Judas!* I bought. I wrote at that time that I thought you filled the gap that the much missed *Telegraph* had occupied.

Now four issues later I can confirm that in my opinion *Judas!* stands high among the Bob Dylan publications. It has been consistent in publishing top quality articles with great writing, and I think that in the future it will be compared with *The Telegraph* as one of the great commentaries on Bob's work.

So keep up the good work, you are doing a fantastic job. I enclose another year's subscription and as we say round these parts 'Keep The Faith' (those who support Leicester City Football Club would understand!).

All the best for the next four issues.

I look forward to reading them.

Rob Bostock  
Leicester

*You'll be pleased to know that regular contributor Robert Forryan is another LCFC sufferer, er I mean, supporter...*



# Prophesizing With Pens

by Alan Davis

*Come writers and critics  
Who prophesize with your pen  
And keep your eyes wide...*

‘Come writers and critics’: there has been no shortage of either during the thirty-odd years since Dylan issued the invitation, and it’s specifically the role of the critic that I’d like to take a look at here. Issue 2 of *Judas!* contained a sizeable share not only of critical comment, but even of *criticism* of critical comment, and although there’s a risk of disappearing in a convoluted puff of introspection in attempting it, I’d like to raise the issue of the role of criticism among the Dylan-listeners. What do we hope to gain from it? What could it, or even ought it, to be?

The use that critics make of their criticism isn’t a simple matter. To illustrate the diversity of approach, we need look no further than *Judas!* Issue 2. Andy Muir, for example, discussed the problem posed by a kind of criticism that perhaps doesn’t really qualify as criticism at all: where the only acceptable attitude to adopt is to ‘write in admiration of everything the man does’. A lack of discrimination of this type is both unhelpful to the reader, and disrespectful to Dylan, for it effectively devalues his finest achievements. At the very least, useful criticism should help us in our search for the best work; blanket praise clearly fails to do that, and so I think we can set this aside as a fundamentally misguided approach.

Often criticism itself becomes a source of contention between critics, and we saw an example in the letters section of the second issue of *Judas!* Clinton Heylin, enjoying but not agreeing with Nigel Hinton's review of "*Love and Theft*", concluded that Mr Hinton's 'critical faculties' were 'disturbingly awry'. There's an underlying assumption here that there exists some kind of absolute standard of critical right-thinking, according to which the Hinton view of things is somehow discredited. Which leaves us asking: is that so?

Then again, how far should we go when we're disappointed by the work of an artist? Michael Gray's infamous Stockholm review came up for discussion in the interview in *Judas!* Issue 2, and I found myself turning back to that review to remind myself of the tone of some of its comments:

*Dylan's face...seems reduced to a handful of clumsy, self-parodic grimaces...he plays safe and seems to have no reason to be there ...he doesn't care what the audience thinks because he thinks it's a gullible rabble... It surely has nothing to do with age and everything to do with sourness, an exhaustion of his resources.*

Would Bob Dylan find this insulting? Does it matter if he does?

Now clearly, in a magazine like *Judas!*, we can expect (and surely hope) to see a wide variety of views expressed; but there is huge scope for misunderstanding if the underlying critical assumptions aren't clear. Are there limits to the scorn that the disillusioned critic may pour upon the artist whose work has displeased him?

Should we dismiss the critical acumen of a fellow commentator whose views conflict with our own? And the most important question of all: what *really* counts - the art? Or our criticism of it? For the truth is that the fate of the critic through history is not a happy one. Fashions, as well as times, change. The criticism of those who violently attacked the paintings of the French Impressionists in the 1870s makes very pitiful reading today.

I'd like to put forward a different basis for criticism - one that may be more helpful to the reader (or listener), and more respectful to the artist, than the usual 'set 'em up and I'll knock 'em down' type of stuff. It isn't a new idea, and it isn't my own. It comes from a neglected little book by C.S. Lewis called *An Experiment in Criticism*, published in 1961. He's talking about literature, but the ideas are applicable to the enjoyment of any art form including listening to Bob Dylan:

*Literary criticism is traditionally employed in judging books. Any judgement it implies about men's reading of books is a corollary from its judgement on the books themselves. Bad taste is, as it were by definition, a taste for bad books. I want to find out what sort of picture we shall get by reversing the process. ...Let us try to discover how far it might be possible to define a good book as a book which is read in one way, and a bad book as a book which is read in another.*

I'd like to see if this idea could be useful to us in our Dylan listening. In other words, can we define a good performance as one that can be listened to

in one way, and a bad performance one that is listened to in another? The idea shifts the focus of critical attention in an interesting way, I think, homing in not exactly on the performance, but on the *kind of engagement* with it that the performance permits the listener to make. In his essay, C.S. Lewis distinguishes these two kinds of approach to art by talking of the difference between ‘receiving’ art and ‘using’ it. It’s worth looking more closely at what he means by these terms before we go any further, for I think they have a good deal to do with our Dylan-listening experiences.

When we ‘use’ a work of art (in Lewis’s sense), we use it primarily as a catalyst for **our own** imaginative and emotional activities. As Lewis says,

*you ‘do things with it’. You don’t lay yourself open to what it, by being in its totality precisely the thing it is, can do to you.*

In other words, we approach the work of art with a whole series of preconceived (and possibly unconsciously held) notions about what we want from it, and we judge the work against those preconceptions. In a sense, we are seeking out artists who share our own vision, and the outcome of finding one is merely to reinforce our own. Suppose, for instance, that I’m fascinated by that magical glow which bluebells tend to produce at dusk, in woodland, and that I try to seek out the portrayal of this effect in paintings. Perhaps I find an artist who (for me) evokes this ‘glowing bluebell’ impression in paint very well. I know what I wanted, and I’ve found it. I use his picture as a

kind of mirror of my own feelings. But when I do this, I behave, in Lewis’s words, like a man ‘who talks when he should listen, or gives when he should take’. No new windows have opened. My perception is unchanged. I neither know nor feel anything about the bluebell experience that I didn’t know or feel before. Incidentally (but importantly), we can deduce nothing about the intrinsic quality of the art from this kind of approach, since both ‘bad’ and ‘good’ art can be ‘used’ in this way.

Can’t we account for much of the history of the critical reception of Bob Dylan’s music in just these terms? The very title of this magazine is loaded with its implications. The electric transformation of 65/66 was dismissed by those acoustic enthusiasts who came to Dylan’s concerts with the preconceived notion that they wanted *acoustic* music. Much of Dylan’s more recent work is rejected by those who want him always to sing like he did on *Blood On The Tracks*. And so it goes on.

So what’s involved in the alternative approach - in Lewis’s concept of ‘receiving’ art rather than ‘using’ it? I can’t improve on Lewis’s own wonderful description, surely based on a lifetime’s experience of his own deep appreciation of literature; he’s talking here about looking at a picture, but the principle applies to the appreciation of any art:

*We must not let loose our own subjectivity upon the pictures and make them its vehicles. We must begin by laying aside as completely as we can all our own preconceptions, interests, and*

*associations. ...After the negative effort, the positive. We must look, and go on looking till we have certainly seen exactly what is there. We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way. (There is no good asking first whether the work before you deserves such a surrender, for until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.)*

This matches exactly with my own experience of engaging with art of all kinds over a period of many years, but the outcome is never guaranteed. What's involved is a kind of leap of faith - a willingness to trust the work of art, or artist, enough to persuade us to abandon or dismantle those personal filters and preferences which we all put in place. Sometimes, hardly any effort seems to be required - the art strikes through, under our guard; hits before we have time to erect all our barriers. I remember this happening to me the first time I saw a Rembrandt many years ago - I walked around a corner of Glasgow art gallery and was literally brought to a standstill by a painting of a man in armour. I didn't even know it was a Rembrandt. But my concept of what a painting could be and do was forever changed.

Usually, though, it's a more gradual process - at least, it is for me. It can be really difficult to remove those personal barriers, to try to open myself to what is **really** being said, sung, painted, or played.

It may even take years to bear fruit. And with an artist like Bob Dylan, who reinvents his art with astonishing frequency, the whole process has to be done over and over and over again: the dismantling of prejudice; the cleansing of the perceptive faculty; the making oneself ready to receive the new album, the new song, the new performance. It's hard work being a Dylan fan. (But hey, someone's got to do it.)

These, then, are the two kinds of engagement with art that Lewis describes: the closed, 'using', approach, and the open, 'receiving', approach. How do they help us in our quest to improve the value of our Dylan criticism? Well, the first approach - the 'using' approach - isn't really an engagement with the **art** at all. The listener is trying to use the art to help him engage with his own, already established and fondly held ideas, feelings, or other personal requirements. There's nothing *wrong* with doing this of course. We're quite at liberty to use *Nashville Skyline* as foot-tapping background music while we struggle with the crossword puzzle; or to grapple with *Time Out Of Mind* while wishing all along that he was still singing the way he did on *Desire*. But in neither case would our 'criticism' be of value to anyone but ourselves. And most particularly, we can safely ignore any critical comment which follows the line of 'If only he could have done so-and-so instead...' That's a complete giveaway that the critic has been attempting to 'use' the art rather than 'receive' it; that he hasn't sufficiently cleared away his preconceptions.

By contrast, a successful ‘reception’ will bring about a transformation in the listener who exposes himself to truly great art. Lewis talks of such experiences as ‘so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison’. These experiences will bring about a change in consciousness. Most readers of *Judas!* will have had these kind of experiences listening to Dylan; I doubt if you’d be subscribing to *Judas!* if you hadn’t. When we have this kind of experience we **know** we’re in the presence of great art. New windows of perception are slamming open. We’re transfixed. Our attention is focused on every nuance of sound, the way every word is enunciated, the way the words wrap themselves around the musical line. And this brings us to the chief point of this article: we know this is great art, because **bad art simply can’t sustain this level or intensity of attention**. Once we’ve had this level of transformative experience from a Dylan performance (or any other work of art), it doesn’t matter how many critics tell us it was a poor performance, or a bad song. We **know** they are wrong. We know they’re still outside, looking in. From the inside (once you are in) everything is different.

So if we really want to know whether Dylan’s performance of ‘It’s All Over Now Baby Blue’ in Brixton 1995 is a great performance, we need to ask how, exactly, it’s been listened to by those who praise it. Can it sustain their full attention? Can it do so on repeated listenings or do they, having heard it once or twice, move on to

something else and never return to it? What kind of experience do they describe when they talk about it? If favourable answers are forthcoming, then the performance very probably does have great merit. In fact it’s relatively easy to settle on the ‘good’ performances. It’s much more difficult to decide on the ‘bad’ ones. As Lewis graphically points out (speaking of books, though the parallels are exact):

*A negative proposition is harder to establish than a positive. One glance may enable us to say there is a spider in the room; we should need a spring-cleaning (at least) before we could say with certainty that there wasn’t. ...In order to pronounce a book bad it is not enough to discover that it elicits no good response from ourselves, for that might be our fault. ...Always, there may be something in it that we can’t see. The prima facie probability that anything which has ever been truly read and obstinately loved by any reader has some virtue in it is overwhelming.*

In other words, in Lewis’s critical model, a decision about a ‘bad’ performance can never be final in the way that a decision about a ‘good’ performance can. It’s always provisional. It’s always possible that the merits of the performance are eluding us, that our perceptions are not yet clear enough for us to receive accurately what the artist is attempting. This difficulty in defining the ‘bad’ performance seems to me to be no bad thing. It’s a very serious matter to rubbish an artist’s creative effort; and any critic who has absorbed Lewis’s ideas will surely proceed

with extra caution and humility. Evaluative critics in general are too ready to point the accusing finger at any artist - not just Dylan - whose work has failed to 'speak' to them for some reason (very possibly due to an unacknowledged limitation in the critic's perceptions). I don't deny that the disenchanted critic has the right to give vent to his disillusionment and anger in print if he wishes (and if he can find someone willing to print it); we may even get an odd kind of pleasure from reading it. But which, truly, is the most helpful criticism? Mr X who says that he failed to find anything of merit in a performance? (So what?) Or Mr Y who says he was able to engage with it on a deep level, and considers it to be a source of wonder? (Aha! Sounds like there's gold of some sort to be found here!)

Above all, I think this approach of Lewis's is worth considering because it puts the real focus of criticism back exactly where it belongs: with the intimate and

deeply personal relationship between the listener and the music. Sometimes, I get the impression that many critics (though I suspect they wouldn't admit to it) see the art as just so much fodder for their critical theories. But the purpose of art is to enable a very special kind of relationship - a special kind of communication - between the listener (or observer, or reader) and the artist. That's why artists make art. And the primary purpose of criticism (we lose sight of this at our peril) is to multiply or intensify or otherwise enrich those moments of communication: those deep engagements that expose us to the transformative power of the astonishing art of Bob Dylan.

#### Acknowledgements

As usual, I'm indebted to Ben Clayton, Andy Muir, and to Daphne, for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

### *John Green Day*

*The Third Annual John Green Day is to be held on Saturday 17 May 2003 at the Moat House Hotel, Northampton. We hope to see you there; you can pose questions to your beloved editor during the 'Question and Answer' session and if you attend his talk you may even have a small auditory treat in store, all being well.*

# BOOK REVIEWS

by Andrew Muir

*Do You Mr. Jones?*

*Bob Dylan with the Poets and Professors*

Edited by Neil Corcoran

Chatto & Windus, UK



So few books treat Dylan seriously that we have to be grateful when ones that do come along. I do not think that it is right to be overly so, though, just on the basis of it happening. This review is going to concentrate on questions this book raises but does not fully answer, and so will come over as mainly negative in tone. Therefore I had better say upfront that it is a book I would expect most Judas! readers to find a place on their shelf for. Like this magazine it is writing that treats Dylan as a serious artist.

Given that guiding principle there is naturally much in these pages to allow me to recommend the book, including as it does a solid essay on Dylan and Emerson by Mark Ford and an interesting contribu-

tion entitled 'Death's Honesty' by the collection's editor, Neil Corcoran, Professor of English at the UK's third most esteemed University, St. Andrews. The collection is subtitled 'Bob Dylan with the Poets and the Professors' and is a mainly academic collection that promises 'specially commissioned essays' that are 'rigorous and challenging'.

Academia dealing with anything brings with it the problem of a deliberate policy of communicating in a language understandable only to those schooled in it. This seems particularly galling in the case of a popular artist who manages to communicate with great effect to a mass, non-specialised audience.

Very few Dylan fans enjoyed Aidan Day's book *Jokerman*, a book that was written - as are some passages here - in this specialised language. The great pity of this is that Mr. Day's book contained more insights and illuminating hypotheses than most books on Dylan. It is noteworthy that for his essay here he drops that approach, making his thoughts accessible to all. (As it happens it is a slighter piece that appears here - presumably because of the essay format compared to a book-length in-depth study - though it is still well worth reading.)

It is certainly not the case that academic criticism is only worthwhile when it is difficult to read - in fact the opposite should be the case. If academics have something worthwhile to say they should not need to hide behind such specialised language. It is their thoughts that should be important, not the dressing up. On the other hand, as in any occupation, peer pressure and acceptance play a much larger role than is healthy.

In this volume there is some academic jargon, at times risibly so but at least it is not all encompassing as it was in *Jokerman*. Then again there is not as much insight either, the compilation of essays from different sources producing a broader and therefore shallower approach. The compensatory bonus is that a compilation allows a wide spectrum of views.

In addition, some topics are best suited to this length. The essay on Dylan and Emerson springs to mind. There is not enough subject matter here to demand a book but, especially in light of a growing awareness of relationships between the writings of Whitman and the songs of Dylan, there was certainly a need for the topic to be addressed somewhere in the library of writings on Dylan.

These kind of essays, concentrated and enlightening on a narrow topic range, only succeed if the writer is really on top of her or his game. The overall feeling from this collection is that they seem either to be playing at it or slightly embarrassed by their subject matter.

The rigour promised on the flyleaf seems to me to be conspicuous by its

absence, much of the time. We read, for example, of the poet Simon Armitage's trips to see the band Sweet in concert before he allowed Dylan into his life. Would an equivalent book, edited by the University of St. Andrew's Professor of English Literature, on George Eliot have an article beginning with the author saying how he or she used to get off on Enid Blyton? I think not.

Another thing about this half academic approach, this neither one thing nor another, is that it results in errors that could easily have been checked. On page 219 we read (twice) that Dylan sings in "*Love And Theft*" of a place called 'Ducktown'. Compare this with how an academic would check and recheck the most abstruse Eliot or Pound reference to 'The Great Tradition'. It would be unthinkable to get so wrong an allusion of theirs to their tradition.

Again there is a misplaced arrogance here, why were no official lyrics checked? If none were available why not check with a friend? The book came out over a year after the album so official lyrics were certainly available long before it was printed. So no-one copy-editing the book was familiar with the official lyrics to Dylan's latest album. You can't see the same thing happening with a book on W.B. Yeats or any other respected poet. Given that this is a production with the full backing of academia and the resources of a top publisher to call on, it should not happen.

This example is symptomatic of a looseness of intent and execution. I suppose there is a benefit of approachability in this,

it can be seen as a good thing in getting away from dry academia. Yet I cannot help but feel that it comes from the attitude of 'here are serious academic minds let loose on a fun thing'. The lack of academic rigour, in lieu of name checks to 'accepted serious artists' and the odd mixture of academic words and normal text, can lead to embarrassment. Worse still, it is an embarrassment for Dylan's reputation in the media. The awkward marriage of academic jargon and popular singer makes it an easy target for downmarket versions of *Private Eye's* 'pseud's corner'. When people are prompted to laugh it is in a way that ridicules the idea of Dylan being worthy of serious attention. It is Dylan they are laughing at, not any failings of these critics.

Not that this collection is only filled with failings; some of the strengths of the academic approach are also present. The Emerson-Dylan essay I mentioned earlier is an example of the kind of thing academia can bring to Dylan studies. Such linking to tradition and placing in the canon is important to academia, it is what syllabuses are based on.

You may think this is irrelevant to worth, and you may well be correct, but nonetheless it affects everything to do with an artist's standing in the academic world, and therefore, her or his legacy; with the respect and attention she or he is accorded in the future. Dylan shares all artists' distaste for academics and critics and most Dylan fans would share his feelings on the matter. Clearly it must be that the artist is right and dry old academia is irrelevant. Yet there is also a craving for recognition of Dylan's worth which may

be subconsciously or otherwise influenced by the fact that what the academic critics deem worthy tends to be what survives. Would the Victorian poet Clough be read at all today without academia? Would much poetry at all in fact? Academics are not always the 'baddies' in the story.

Were it not for academics the works of Blake may hardly be known at all, at the very least they would not be nearly as well known. Instead they are extremely well known and hugely influential. Blake's poetry and art have influenced Dylan's to some inarguable if indefinable extent; both directly and only slight indirectly via the Blake-drenched Ginsberg. Without academic critics they wouldn't necessarily have had the same effect. Ginsberg is unimaginable without Blake, the Beat movement would have been different and so Dylan would be different. So, one of the reasons we have the Dylan we all love may be down to academics recognising Blake's worth and 'spreading the word'. That's only one example and is full of imponderables.

Another, more certain one, would be a poet who we know has been read and appreciated by Dylan - John Donne. One of the finest poets in the English language, Donne languished mostly unread and unheralded for centuries until the academic H.J.C. Grierson two volume edition came out two years before the outbreak of World War One.<sup>1</sup> His influence since has been well nigh incalculable.

Dylan's legacy in the years to come may well reside in academic circles. Popular poet of late 19th Century, Robert Browning, is read today by whom (mainly)

and why? Popular poet of late 20th Century, Bob Dylan, 100 years from now will be listened to by whom and why? Dylan has brought this up in interview. He has thought about it - on some level it concerns him.

So, like it or not academic acceptance, understanding and support is central in determining to what degree Dylan will be listened to in the future, whether his songs are part of the future's cultural heritage or whether he is merely a historical figure connected to the social history of the sixties (and what a depressing thought that is). If Dylan is to stand a chance of gaining a proper standing in the academic canon he needs to be approached properly.

Dylan's standing - or, rather existence - in the canon has been debated on before but always in the cretinous form of the 'Dylan v. Keats' argument. This was something this book could have nailed forever. Everybody now refers to that debate as tedious, but the vast majority do not mean they think it is a pointless exercise because it does not compare like with like. They - writers outside the Dylan or popular music fields - mean that there is no point in comparing Dylan with a renowned poet because he is not worthy of such a comparison.

It is not a point that is going away either. Sebastian Faulks writing in *The Times* this February patronisingly wrote:

*'Logic makes a monkey...of those poor souls who engaged in the "Is Keats a better poet than Dylan" knockabout a few years ago. They pointed out, embarrassingly, that you could not logically prove it, as though truth and logic were one. But we know the truth.'*<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding that I have to recommend this collection for the reasons I opened with, it is annoying that it fails to answer this attitude once and for all. That it is an opportunity lost is especially frustrating as Simon Armitage in his contribution, 'Rock Of Ages' opened up the debate again:

*'Tangled Up In Blue' is a great song. But peering in to it like this tells us that it's something of a mess, or that literary criticism is the wrong tool when it comes to the analysis of song lyrics. There are moments in the textual life of 'Tangled Up In Blue' that are pure poetry ... But for every highlight there is a contrived rhyme, a cornball cliché, an embarrassing tautology, a redundant syllable, a tired simile, a lame comment and a cheesy pun.*

We've read this kind of thing for years - quarter of a century ago I remember reading Ellen Willis writing similarly about other classic songs in *The Rolling Stone Book Of Rock*. It is ridiculous that we are still talking about it at all. The introduction to this collection plays about with an answer to this but never comes out and states the obvious. Which is that Armitage's point defies all common sense, it only is a point at all if one pretends the song is only text and literary criticism is the only tool one is using. Why anyone would pretend this is beyond me. As a song 'Tangled Up In Blue' is the opposite of cheesy, lame and clichéd. Why talk about it as something it is not? His comments are only possible because he posits the idea of the song as a poem, divorced from music and performance.

As this book does not deal with such questions with any rigour it means the next one will have to. This could have been the first meaningful academic book published on Dylan - but it's a chance wasted, a small step toward that volume still to come.

All Mr. Armitage is actually proving is that song lyrics and poems are not the same thing. And we all know 'Tangled Up In Blue' is a song so there's no need to treat it in any other way. Elements of 'the tool' of literary criticism can be used to enlightening effect if wielded with an awareness that one is dealing with a song not a poem. It is also obvious that there are many crossovers between poetic verse and the lyric verse of this and other songs. It is clear in the commentary of Christopher Ricks', for example, on Dylan's words. Ricks shows even an extreme literary critical point of view is still highly beneficial in increasing appreciation for the Dylan listener. It has been proven at every talk the man has given that this is a useful tool - when used with common sense and without the half-hearted, almost embarrassed tone to this collection's underlying approach.

It works splendidly well, too, for John Hinchey in *Like A Complete Unknown*.

1. Grierson was building upon the work of two late 19th Century editions also produced by academics.
2. Sebastain Faulks, 'The Classics: an open and shut case', *The Times*, February 17th 2003.

***Like A Complete Unknown  
The Poetry of Bob Dylan's Songs,  
1962-1969***

John Hinchey,  
Stealinghome Press



Writing in non-specialised, almost jargon free, prose Mr. Hinchey tells us what Dylan's 1960's songs say to him and how he believes they achieve this effect. The ideas here are presented with insight, rigour and understanding of Dylan's art.

A convincing thesis is laid out clearly, following on from a main theme set forth in the introduction:

*'My theme is this: the most distinctive feature of Dylan's poetry is the way it is implicitly shaped by the changes (as Dylan imagines them) that are induced in his listener in response to the song as it unfolds. That is, when Dylan addresses "you" in his songs, he means it and acts like he means it. As the lyric unfolds, "you" are changed by what "you" hear, and anticipating these changes in the "you" he is addressing, Dylan's perception of and attitude toward "you" changes correspondingly. Moreover, these changes in his perception of "you" provoke in turn adjustments in his perception of and attitude toward himself. Dylan's characteristic song is a duet for solo voice.'*

*Let me suggest a simple way to look at this difference, at least as it applies to Dylan's poetry. Ordinarily, when we listen to a song, we identify with the point of view of the singer or of the person or persons he is addressing. Or our identification might flip back and forth between these points of view, as if we were listening to a play. But Dylan's most characteristic songs require us to identify simultaneously both with the singer and with his implied listener; we experience ourselves as both "I" and "you." To what purpose he does this is a complex matter, but, at bottom, his way with words - as a poet and as a singer - is sustained by his deepest sense of his own psyche as a conversation, as the meeting (and mating) ground of an "I" and a "you" who are, audaciously enough, at once both objective (self and other) and subjective (spirit and soul).'*

If this sounds heavy stuff it both is and isn't that. It is in as much as it gets to the core of Bob Dylan's most successful mid-sixties lyrics and you can't get 'heavier' than that. On the other hand it isn't in the sense that Mr. Hinchey explores the implications of his theme with wit and clarity. Wherever possible his touch is light enough to allow him to put his interpretations across in an entertaining manner. And you don't have to agree with all the interpretations to still get a lot out of them. Having said that I can rarely have found myself in such agreement over so many song analyses.

As Dylan's songs become more complex moving toward the middle of the 1960s so Mr. Hinchey's theme reveals its

strength and purpose in an ever increasing manner. This makes the reading of *Like A Complete Unknown* a pleasant as well as instructive event.

I am not quite saying that I find the book completely flawless. There are a couple of things that I found off-putting. One is very trivial and that is an over-reliance on the word, 'trope'. It is used more times in some pages than is usual in entire books and some paragraphs become so filled with it that it becomes distracting. As I say this is trivial and does not interfere with my enjoyment of the book to any great degree.

The second thing I have a problem with does so a bit more in the *Blonde On Blonde* chapters, although it is far from crucial as there is so much more to enjoy in them. Anyway, my quibble is over what I see as an over-emphasis on 'mercury' and all that word entails.

Mr. Hinchey maintains that: '*He has often spoken of trying to recapture this album's "thin wild mercury sound,"*'

I'm not sure that he has. I can only recall it being attributed to him once and the last time it was quoted to him he was very dismissive of it. Not only couldn't he remember saying it, but he distanced himself from it as being not the kind of thing he would ever seriously say. Of course taking anything Dylan says in interview at face value is a risky business and maybe his denial is a typical evasion.

Whatever the truth of the matter I feel Mr. Hinchey makes too much of 'the god Mercury' and his usually incisive writing descends into impressionistic and unconvincing purple prose:

'Blonde On Blonde is flooded with tropes-lines more than images-that seem-thrillingly-to outrace their context in this way. Dylan seems to have invented this mode of poetic thought for this album-and abandoned it soon after. He has often spoken of trying to recapture this album's "thin wild mercury sound," and he is often accused of imitating it-most notably on its two sibling albums, Street-Legal (1978) and Empire Burlesque (1986). But I can find no evidence that he has even really tried. The poetic line in Street-Legal, for instance, normally functions as a sort of kamikaze trope, one that by culminating its context seeks to make that context-and itself along with it - disappear into oblivion. The poetic music of Street-Legal belongs to the god Mercury as magician and healer, as that of Empire Burlesque, belongs to Mercury as psychopomp, the conductors of souls to the after-life. Blonde On Blonde is governed by Mercury in his brightest, lightest forms, as the fleet-footed trickster or thief. Here he is the "thin, wild' Mercury, and he is present mostly in the music of thought the lyrics project. Their numinous aura is Mercury's signature.'

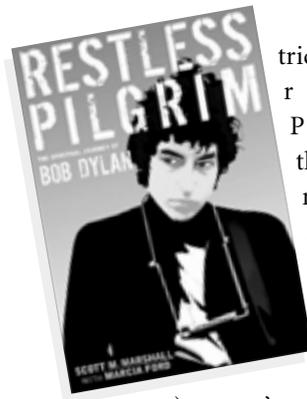
Still it is a bit odd to have to enumerate all (i.e. both) things I found fault with just to attempt to produce a 'balanced' review. On real balance and simply put, this is one of the best books I've read on Dylan. The above paragraph is firmly *atypical* of this clear, insightful guide into what Bob Dylan songs say to John Hinchey and how they achieve that.

It will be interesting, to put it mildly, to see how future volumes will deal with the changing style and nature of Dylan's song-writing.

**Restless Pilgrim**

**The Spiritual Journey of Bob Dylan**

Scott Marshall with Marcia Ford  
Relevant Books, USA



This is a very tricky book to review. Presuming that one of the main points in reviewing a book is to recommend it (or not to do

so) to one's readers, this is the first challenging one for me. For different reasons the previous two books reviewed demanded to be recommended. This one makes demands to be so too, but at the same times puts up barriers to it. Lets start with the positives of which there are many.

The first pleasing thing is the good, clear introduction by Marcia Ford (of whom more later). Then it soon becomes apparent that one of the core strengths of the book is the background work Mr. Marshall has put in. He has interviewed all the right people and in the beginning chapters of the book he weaves their recollections into an entertaining and compelling tale. Brightly told, the 1979-81

period of this book reads very well (as does some later commentary, particularly on 1984) and is a fine addition to your bookshelf.

As long, that is, as you accept the central viewpoint that Dylan's conversion to Christianity is a good thing. The book is written from that perspective and the only pity for the author is that Dylan didn't fall for a more cuddly-sunny type of Christ. Why Dylan (predictably) went for exactly the kind of narrow-minded, judgemental Christianity propounding the absurd theory of the (undeserving) elect is not discussed. Such awkward issues are mainly avoided, this means the accompanying homophobia is mentioned almost in passing. It means too that the rants about 'Gog' and 'Magog' are ignored and the racist sounding comments on *Slow Train Coming* are not exactly highlighted.

Dylan's own lack of humility would surely also have been a very apt subject for discussion, but despite a key on-stage quote of a man seriously ill with the disease of conceit, this is left out too. Drug and drink abuse and how this may or may not relate to strength of religious belief - or of how intense religious belief can be a substitute for same - isn't gone into either.

What Mr. Marshall does cover though, he does very well. The whole question of Messianic Jews is tackled with insight and explained clearly for those who need it explained to them. I was one of those and am thankful for his teaching. 'Jews for Jesus' was previously only a glib phrase to me, now I know to what it really refers.

It is, though, impossible to read the book as a non-believer and not be taken

aback/repelled by the 'propaganda' element of the book. This reaches a crescendo in the epilogue and in previous mentions of fans being 'changed' by the Dylan religious concert experience. Mr. Marshall is not a propagandist in a simple, perjorative sense, I should hasten to add, he quotes musician and well known Dylan fan, Pete Stone Brown talking of the 'demonic air' surrounding tract pushing Christians before a show. It is just that, given his beliefs, the author cannot see anything but good in the following, which I cannot but see as disturbing:

*"I have not been in the middle of anything quite like this before or since," [Larry] Myers said of the electrically charged atmosphere at the Warfield Theater in 1979 when Dylan first came "out" as a Christian in concert. "Here was a man who was so highly revered, whose gifting and charisma were so strong, that many in those audiences would be forever changed by what they were seeing and hearing. What a profound honor and responsibility Bob and others like him have."*

This would have been a good time to bring out the contrast between the free thinking song-writer who told us not to follow leaders with the man now saying (and this is quoted more than once in the book):

*"I told you 'The Times They Are A-Changin,' and they did. I said the answer was Blowin' in the Wind,' and it was. I'm telling you now Jesus is coming back, and He is. And there is no other way of salvation..."*

*There's only one way to believe, there's only one Way, the Truth and the Life. It took a long time to figure that out before it did come to me, and I hope it doesn't take you that long."*

Instead we get that quote presented - indeed, highlighted - as though it was some unchallengeable truth. The indoctrination aspect is paramount as the book's epilogue makes clear. Jim Keltner is quoted as saying:

*'I know, from being out there with him, and talking with certain people, that a lot of people's lives were changed forever. In the Christian world, they say "saved." I know for a fact that happened to a lot of people.'*

The following paragraph, reads:

*'Regina Havis, one of Dylan's singers, was also there every step of the way during the tours of 1979-1981. She confirmed Keltner's account about people's lives being changed forever. "Some people that were there [at the concerts] came in high, ready to just rock 'n' roll, and they ended up being saved," remembered Havis...'*

I felt at this point as though I was reading the plot of a Zombie B-movie or some tale of political indoctrination by an oppressive regime. It is a disturbing image of free thinking, music and Dylan loving people being taken over by...by..? Well exactly which brand of Christianity they were indoctrinated into conforming to is not made clear. If they were listening properly they would not be transformed into a happy bunch of 'Jesus is Cool, His is The Way, It'll all be alright in the happy

commune in the sky' Christians but rather the 'I'm saved and you're not, so damn you for all eternity especially if you wear nose rings or are a homosexual or are having sex out of wedlock' Bob-style Christianity.

Many of the above 'problems' come from my non-believer's stance and that is perhaps not Scott Marshall's or Relevant Books' concern. Another book from the same stable is *The Gospel According To Tony Soprano*, I kid you not. It comes replete with a cover drawing of the TV gangster carrying a Bible and wearing a gun.

Now Scott Marshall and the people I have dealt with at Relevant Books (they market their books with dedicated enthusiasm) have all come across as delightful people but they hold such differing world-views to my own that it has to come across as negative when I tell you what it is like for me reading something written from their perspective. In the interests of fair play, you will see at the foot of this section a way in which you can write a review from a different perspective. Either way though, believer or non-believer, brings its problems.

The heartfelt dedication to the book makes it clear how Mr. Marshall views life and, given this is how he sees reality, he can hardly write any other way. Similarly those who do not see reality this way would find it difficult to write about this whole subject properly either. I would very much, though, have liked to see an investigation into how his song-writing changed during the immediate post-conversion years - particularly the resultant lack of ambiguity and mystery in his lyrics.

Perhaps it is time to remind you that there are many plus points about the book too. Mr. Marshall has done his research well and extensively and writes clearly and engagingly. His knowledge of the period of the conversion is detailed and helpful and he covers areas not yet seen in previous books on Dylan.

There is one rather bewildering aspect to the book, unrelated to faith, that strikes the reader. We are told that 'Marcia Ford...took a 1,000 page nightmare and performed some major surgery on it'. Things like the isolated little paragraph on page 98 are perhaps remnants of the 1,000 page version. Yet the 'bewildering' aspect of this is that the book is put together as though it were a 100 page manuscript stretched out, not a 1,000 page one reduced.

The opening chapters are strong and full and then as the story changes the 'chapters' descend into ones covering 1994 in 3 paragraphs, for example. Now, I realise that there is not much in 1994 relevant to Mr. Marshall's thesis but it is they way these chapters are presented as space fillers that surprises: 1996 consists of two paragraphs then big block quotes.

Speaking of quotes there are instances of repeated quotes that seem unnecessary. Obviously at times a quote can be repeated to save a reader turning back the pages or because it is going to be discussed in a new way but sometimes here they are simply reprinted.

Lots of things combine to make the book look padded out rather than condensed. The pity of this is that clearly the interviews Mr. Marshall conducted

provided him with lots of material we would all be eager to read and hear his commentary on. It is as though the 1,000 pages was reduced to 100 and then built up again, rather haphazardly.

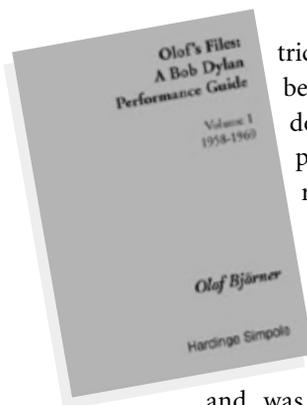
You feel that, albeit only from a pro-Christian perspective, a more heavyweight contender was present in that '1,000 page nightmare' than we have ended up getting. More from your interviews and more from yourself, Mr. Marshall would have filled the same pages if the padding and repetition had been omitted. Or go for a full blown everything included version. I would be more than willing to buy a new edition that carried on in the vein of the first chapters here for as many pages as you could muster.

### *Olof's Files*

#### *A Bob Dylan Performance Guide*

Olof Björner

Hardinge Simpole, UK



This is even trickier to review because I really don't get the point of these releases, which will run to at least twelve volumes.

Olof is a great guy and was a wonderful support to *Razor's Edge* and I would dearly like to be positive here, but I cannot be. It is not that I don't value his work, I use his

website all the time. It is eminently searchable, flexible, takes up no space and costs nothing.

The printed equivalent is bulky on the shelf, terribly expensive and nowhere near as 'user friendly' as the online version. If you don't have an online connection you can save it to disk, or get a friend to. If you have no access to a computer at all you may think buying the books is your only option but you could get a second hand computer for less.

I understand the need for the cost as it must be very expensive to produce but for that money you would be looking for deluxe quality paper and so forth. I may be missing something but this seems only for the completist or those with more money and bookshelf space than they know what to do with.

I hope I am wrong though and you can write and tell me I am at our new subscribers only section of the website at [www.judasmagazine.com](http://www.judasmagazine.com) Not long after this issue is out these reviews will go up there and you can write in and agree or disagree or submit your own reviews. Olof and Scott, come on there and tell me where I am wrong in the above.

Christopher Ricks has often pointed out the lack of writing on Dylan's 'voice and voicing'. Well David Pichaske redresses one side of that gap in *Judas!* issues 5 and 6, while a book called *The Four Voices of Bob Dylan* by Mick Daley examines Dylan's vocal performances between 1960-1966. All we need now is someone qualified to review his thesis-based book. Volunteers, please!

### **A Note for US Subscribers**

Currency conversion - it has been brought to our attention that some US customers have suffered a discrepancy between our projected cost and what has appeared on their credit card statements. I'd like to assure everyone that we do not charge any surcharges for use of credit cards, we absorb that cost into the charge we advertise. What has happened has solely been down to the fluctuating currency conversion between the pound and the dollar. Sometimes it has worked slightly in our favour, sometimes not but has until recently been so negligible it has not really had any affect. Now it has and we are aware of the problem we are working to rectify the situation and bring about a consistent and clear process. We apologise for any inconvenience that has been caused; by the time you read this the new process will be in place.

by Andrew Davies

# Skippin' Reels of Rhyme

Professor Christopher Ricks, in his 2000 lecture at Boston University (recently available on [expectingrain.com](http://expectingrain.com)), drew attention to Dylan's excitement when Allen Ginsberg picked up on the 'head' connection of 'skull' and 'capitol' in 'Idiot Wind':

*Idiot wind, blowing like a circle around my skull,  
From the Grand Coulee Dam to the Capitol.*

Apparently, it was Ginsberg's understanding of this reference that prompted Dylan to invite him onto The Rolling Thunder Revue. It does, at the very least, offer the suggestion that Dylan does, at times, very consciously make latent and subversive links in his narratives for the eager-minded to spot. There is an interesting example of this in 'Floater (Too Much To Ask)' from "Love And Theft":

*A summer breeze is blowing  
A squall is settin' in  
Sometimes it's just plain stupid  
To get into any kind of wind*

In this verse, an all-encompassing glance at the words written on the page seems to clearly suggest one thing: 'Blowin' In The Wind'. This Dylan standard subtly hidden away in the text could, quite reasonably, be a coincidence but Dylan is so precise as an artist that this is perhaps unlikely. Especially as the last line is a tad nonsensical if taken literally, why on earth is it just plain stupid to get into any kind of wind? If he means 'wind' as in 'argument', then there are surely other words he could have used to make the point other than 'wind'. The name checking of 'Blowin' In The Wind' seems deliberate because, as we shall see, the final lines and words of Dylan verses are often tailored either in turn of phrase or performance to make a point. In Dylan's song structure, the phrasing of the rhyming word is often altered so that it actually does its job and completes the rhyme. The word 'wind' does not do this on the page, as it does not rhyme with 'in'. As I will go on to discuss, Dylan uses this technique a lot.

However, the difference in ‘Floater’, though the rhyming effect can be achieved in performance by removing the sound of the final ‘d’ in ‘wind’, is that the rhyming of the two lines is not Dylan’s only objective. If that were the case, then it would be an easy task for him to find a word that rhymes with ‘in’ that would probably have resulted in a stronger stanza. If ‘wind’ as in ‘argument’, ‘hot-air’ etc is the meaning, then wouldn’t something like ‘din’ be a far more obvious word to use? It would rhyme and perhaps make the point of the verse more clearly; but it would not then, of course, have put ‘Blowin’ In The Wind’ in the mind of the listener (or, for that matter, the reader). When the listener hears, or the reader examines, the words ‘blowing’, ‘in’ and ‘wind’ together in such close proximity, it is difficult not to make the connection. It is likely that Dylan is fully aware of this because, as he pointed out in his Rome press conference in 2001, he knows that his songs have structure and form. One assumes that this is something that Dylan the lyricist takes very seriously.

Changing the way words are spoken and sung to make them rhyme and fit into the required frame is something that Dylan is very interested in and a skill that he has undoubtedly mastered. This is something that can be successfully executed by the performer in song or recital but is not always evident, however, on the printed page. This technique is especially useful when the words Dylan wants to use do not quite rhyme; this is when he takes artistic liberties with words. For example, in the opening verse

of ‘Tight Connection To My Heart’, the words ‘neck’ and ‘expect’ do not rhyme, but they will if the final ‘t’ sound in ‘expect’ is not sounded. This simple but effective trick is in the alteration of the rhyming word to fit in with its context and the leading word that has gone before. In this case, amending the sound of ‘expect’ so it rhymes with ‘neck’. Incidentally, this is far more difficult to detect in the 1993 live Supper Club version than it is on *Empire Burlesque*, emphasising further Dylan’s ability to bury such modification in performance. Once again, I turn back to ‘Floater’ for another example of Dylan cutting the ending of a word to make it rhyme:

*The old men ‘round here, sometimes  
they get*

*On bad terms with the younger men  
But old, young, age don’t carry weight  
It doesn’t matter in the end*

In this example, the ‘d’ sound in the stanza’s final word is omitted in order for it to rhyme with the word ‘men’. Dylan is not the only person who has done this, of course. When trying to think of a modern pop example of this technique, I came up with Catatonia and their song ‘Dead From the Waste Down’. The opening verse finds the band trying to rhyme ‘California’ with ‘hay’. Unable to do so, the word ‘California’ is transformed into a Beach Boys endorsed ‘Californ-I-A’. As if by magic, the two words suddenly rhyme and the song can progress. Back to “*Love And Theft*”, ‘Po’ Boy’ is also an interesting song to look at with this in mind:

*My mother was a daughter of a wealthy  
farmer*

*My father was a traveling salesman, I  
never met him*

*When my mother died, my uncle took  
me in - he ran a funeral parlor*

*He did a lot of nice things for me and I  
won't forget 'em*

The above is how I have always heard 'Po' Boy' and what I have always perceived the lyrics to be, picked up by ear and without the aid of any published transcriptions. Again, this verse features the trick of artistic word alteration. The final word in the verse is an adaptation of the word 'them', tailored and modified to rhyme with 'him'. Once more, as written poetry, this sits uneasily because the word 'them' (or, 'em' for that matter) does not rhyme with 'him' from line two. However, in performance, Dylan is able to make the words sound like they actually do rhyme by tailoring his performance and pronunciation of the words accordingly. But, this is only how I have always heard 'Po' Boy'; on [www.bobdylan.com](http://www.bobdylan.com), the verse is written as:

*My mother was a daughter of a wealthy  
farmer*

*My father was a traveling salesman, I  
never met him*

*When my mother died, my uncle took me  
in - he ran a funeral parlor*

*He did a lot of nice things for me and I  
won't forget him*

As to whether the lyrics on the website are actually directly supplied by Dylan or are transcribed by another party for publication, I am unsure; but I sincerely hope that the latter is the case because, even

though the difference may be subtle, it is immensely important because it greatly affects the quality of the stanza as a written verse. The reason for this is the rhyming of 'him' with 'him', opening up the great debate about what is both the most perfect rhyme and anti-rhyme: the same word. There are examples of this throughout musical history, Bowie, for example, in 'Kooks' rhymes 'dry' with 'dry' and Lou Reed in 'Walk On The Wild Side' tells us that the backroom girl who was everybody's darling never lost her 'head', 'even when she was giving head', but these rhymes only work if the word used is able to offer fresh connotations the second time around. In the case of 'Po' Boy', the word 'him' in the fourth line has exactly the same meaning and implication as the word 'him' in the second line, and does not offer the reader any new ideas.

Christopher Ricks, again during the lecture at Boston University, rightly says that 'One Too Many Mornings' is 'a great song with something wrong with it' for this precise reason. In that particular instance, the offending occurrence is the repetition of the word 'good' in the second stanza. However, in the case of 'Po' Boy', I am inclined to stick with my original understanding of the words and give Dylan the benefit of the doubt, blaming the confusion on the aforementioned third party. An inclination supported, I think, by the fact that the lot of nice things that Dylan won't forget are a 'them' and not a 'him'. The 'him' in the verse is the uncle, of course, but it is not the uncle that Dylan is telling us about in the final line but the nice things done by the uncle.

The final word of a stanza, the word that often completes the rhyme, is not always the one that Dylan alters to make the verse work. Sometimes, he does it the other way round and slightly modifies the word that sets up the rhyme in the first place. For example, in the hook of 'Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again', it is not the word that completes the rhyme that is clipped but the one that sets it up:

*Oh mama can this really be the end  
To be stuck inside of Mobile with the  
Memphis blues again*

Here, unlike the previous examples, for the sake of basic rhyme, it's the word 'end' that is modified and not 'again'. Once more, the two words are allowed to rhyme because the final letter of the word 'end' is ignored so that it rhymes with 'again'. Although this action is essential for the couplet to work as a fundamental rhyme, the word 'end' is not clipped in performance here because it is not necessary for Dylan to do so. The reason for this is that the word 'end' is followed by the word 'to'. The 'd' as the last sound of the word 'end' is very similar sounding to the 't' at the start of the word 'to'; it is, in essence, a wonderfully clever and beautifully executed poetic con.

Also a factor in all of this is personal accent, dialect, voice sound, vocal range and delivery. Dylan is able to bend his notes and sneer any examples of non-rhyme out of his performances by changing the tone of his voice at the appropriate time. By doing this, he manages to get plausible rhymes out of

words that certainly do not rhyme on the page:

*I once loved a girl, her skin it was  
bronze.  
With the innocence of a lamb, she was  
gentle like a fawn.  
I courted her proudly but now she is  
gone,  
Gone as the season she's taken.*

'Ballad In Plain D' is an interesting example because this stanza, the first, is out of synch with the rest of the verses. In all subsequent verses, the first three lines of the song all have a common rhyme: 'away', 'stay' and 'day' in verse two; 'young', 'one', 'undone' in verse three and 'respect', 'protect' and 'reflect' in verse four etc. This means that Dylan intended the first three lines of each verse to rhyme and the song is structured with this in mind. However, in the first stanza, they do not: 'bronze', 'fawn' and 'gone' are not obvious rhymes but the verse does not sound odd because Dylan's delivery of them makes them sound like they do, in fact, rhyme.

Theoretically, if a performance is suitably tailored, all kinds of irregular and anomalous words can rhyme. Again, this depends on the personal accent and/or singing voice of the performer. A version of 'Ballad In Plain D' by someone with a clearer, more succinct voice than Dylan (Joan Baez, for example) may not be as successful because a straight delivery might highlight the lack of rhyme. In my own accent, for example, the word 'heading' doesn't rhyme with 'Armageddon', but it will in many other accents, Dylan's included.

## Judas!

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Even so, the two words are close enough that if I was slightly to distort one or other or both of the words, I could make them sound like they rhyme. Obviously, this would sound odd if I dropped it into conversation but I could get away with it in song. For this fraud to be accomplished, both the words them-

selves and my natural way of pronouncing them would have to slightly change, but it is usually sufficient to amend just one of these factors to achieve the aim of poetic compatibility. As a footnote, I would like to assure music lovers that I have no immediate plans to record my own version of 'Señor'.

*Cardiff May 6th 2002  
Picture by Duncan Hume*

