
from *Inside A Prune*

Hello again folks and welcome to issue 7. Seasons come and seasons go, years pass, decades even; a millennium date change has even happened by and still the not-to-be-called-never-ending-tour, never ending tour rolls by. When this issue hits your door-mats Bob will be mid-European tour. We at *Judas!* central are off to see two shows in Sweden and participate in the Stockholm convention - and hope to see as many of you there as possible - before the UK tour starts, a set of dates made much more attractive by the later additions of Hammersmith and Brixton. Ah, what memories to be rekindled and hopefully new ones to savour too.

Inside these pages we bring you another collection of articles that we trust you will enjoy. Again we have aimed for a balance between well known names and newcomers or relative newcomers. This is something we can only maintain if new writers keep coming forward. There's a plea elsewhere in these pages for photographs, the same goes for new material. A few out there (you know who you are) have started articles, please keep at them, the more new writing blood in the Dylan fanzine world the better as far as I am concerned.

Issue Eight will hopefully feature one or more of these, plus articles by established names. Manuel Vardavas's bootleg column will be back again (presuming something worthy of discussion is released, that is) and it is quite likely we will be taking an in-depth look at SACD and bootleg DVDs from a 'technology-and-its-impact-on-your-Dylan-entertainment' standpoint. In addition the (just arrived here) book *Chimes Of Freedom* by Mike Marqusee looks like it is going to be worthy of a detailed review and interview with the author. Even a chapter or so into it I feel I can wholeheartedly recommend it already. Go to www.judasmagazine.com for more about it.

That's all for the future, however, for now enjoy Michael Gray on Christopher Ricks's *Dylan's Visions of Sin*, enjoy the fruits of Nick Hawthorne's labour on Dylan and Marlon Brando (incidentally Nick says that he wants to 'thank Raymond Landry, Peter Vincent and our esteemed editor for their invaluable assistance on this one') and all our other contributors for whom I give my own thanks for their sparkling offerings to this latest issue.

Enjoy your Bob, wherever you are; if you happen to be in Europe perhaps we'll meet somewhere on the road.

Andrew Muir

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'Tangled Up in Blue': Getting It Together

by John Hinchey

At the beginning of the 1970s, Dylan's star seemed to be fading fast. *Self Portrait*, an often charmingly off-the-wall collection of folk and pop covers and Dylan's own scraps, may or may not, as Dylan later claimed, have been contrived to puncture the myth of his invincibility, but it certainly had that effect. *New Morning*, with its bracing restlessness, restored some of his lost luster, but as a songwriter Dylan still seemed more than a little lost, grasping every which way at straws of inspiration and purpose. Then, after four years of virtual silence, *Planet Waves* (1974) broke genuinely new ground. Dylan's voice had changed, not so much in the way it sounded as in the way it registered. There was a quaking in it, almost impalpable yet omnipresent, something rooted in the way the lyrics, in their diction and in their movement, seemed always to be reaching beyond their own capacity to sustain, as if recklessly crossing boundaries, or even flouting taboo.

Then in early 1975, *Blood on the Tracks* arrived. I put the needle down on the first track, and suddenly, the way it always does when summoned by great art, the whole world seemed to align itself with the moment of listening:

*Early one mornin' the sun was shinin',
I was layin' in bed
Wond'rin' if she'd changed at all
If her hair was still red.
Her folks they said our lives together
Sure was gonna be rough
They never did like Mama's homemade dress
Papa's bankbook wasn't big enough.
I was standin' on the side of the road
Rain fallin' on my shoes
Heading out for the old East Coast
Lord knows I've paid some dues gettin' through,
Tangled up in blue.*

Here was the same quaking I heard in the lyrics of *Planet Waves*, except now it was a delicate shudder, and now, most astonishingly, Dylan's voice was fully equal to it. Indeed, it was hard to believe, even as I was listening to them, that their could be any words to sustain the shuddering rush of that voice.

But there are, and we are listening to them. The first thing I noticed is that just as Dylan's voice sounded different than any voice of his I had heard before, so did these words sound different than the words in earlier Dylan songs. These words are carried forward on a wave of sound and sense that is at once more articulate - more minutely articulated - and somehow more present, or more alive, than ever before.

II

The key to the unique sound of the songs on *Blood on the Tracks* derives from the combined effect of two things. First, the caesuras - the hitches in cadence that divide the lines into two parts - are unusually strong and unusually regular in their placement: there is rarely any enjambment. The result is a relentless regularity in rhythmic bedding of the lyric that leaves a singer little wiggle room. Indeed, in singing this song, Dylan has never been able to find a way to inflect its mood with any variety of feeling except by quickening or slowing the tempo or, tellingly, as in performances during the latter part of the American leg of his 1978 world tour, by interpolating additional verbal phrases that opened up the rhythmic possibilities of the second half of several lines.

The other strikingly unDylan-esque feature in the sound of this lyric is its quietness, its sweetness even. Dylan's signature sound is a rhythmic vigor hammered out by the clatter and clamor of strong consonants. But the consonantal vigor that lent his most characteristic 60's songs their edge gives way here to a delicate, shimmering tracery of vowel patternings, patternings far subtler and richer - and again, less willfully insistent - than the assonances Dylan favored in the 60s.

Consider, for example, the first two pairs of half lines that commence 'Tangled Up in Blue.' A good deal of the feeling these lines convey is tied up in the verbal melody created by the patterning of their long vowels (morning, shining, I, laying, changed). This pattern largely coincides with the patterning of stressed vowels in the meter - half-line trimeters with an often barely perceptible iambic base - resulting in what approaches a kind of quantitative verse, one based, that is, as much on vowel lengths as on stress.

This sort of lyric has more air, more breathing space in its sound than Dylan's previous work, and along with that, less - or more subtly managed - body English. That is, the consonants are either almost vestigial, felt mainly as modulations of the music of the vowels, like the soft consonants (r, s, l, m, n, etc.) that predominate in the opening verse of 'Tangled' quoted above; or when the old consonantal clatter reappears, it resurfaces as a kind of bullying ('Papa's bank book wasn't big enough'), or a brittle impatience ('I used a little too much force'), or some other malignancy. Or we can get, at the begin-

ning of the fourth verse, the wonderfully nuanced syllabic music whose most prominent features include the central metamorphic series that runs from 'topless' to 'stopped' to 'spotlight,' the menacing echoing of 'was working' by the more insistent 'kept looking,' and the way 'clear' gives the lie to its rhyme, 'beer,' which is a transparent (if unconscious) dodge, even in its sound, since 'peer' is the phoneme the song's verbal music is clearly looking for.

This is a verbal music that is more directly introspective - more 'sensitive,' in the jargon of the era - than Dylan's writing in the 60s, where self-awareness was largely and most effectively rendered indirectly, through engagement with 'you,' his audience. I think this change derives ultimately from a change in his relation to the mythic 'you' at the core of his imagination - a matter I will address later - but I would first note that Dylan has always seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the verbal music - and concomitant mood - he came up with for *Blood on the Tracks*. Dylan rarely tinkers with the lyrics of his best songs after he releases them on record, but from the start he has almost constantly rewritten 'Tangled' and other *Blood on the Tracks* songs when performing them live, and he almost always rewrote them in ways that shook them up and made them sound more like his 'normal' self. As indicated above, the 1978 rewrite took one approach to restoring the rhythmic variety and edge his singing likes to hang itself onto, and the massive 1984 rewrite of 'Tangled' achieved the same end via a different means: a number of entirely new

lines restored much of the old consonantal clatter in their sound even as they restored much of his discomfiting prophetic thunder in their sense. The result in both cases was to make the song more spirited and willful - the essence of the Dylanesque - and less soulful and emotional.

III

The mood of 'Tangled Up in Blue' is the heart and soul of the song, and it is profoundly self-contradictory. On the one hand, the entire lyric is a tissue of images of desire as an irreparable wounding. That is, as every listener must know, the song is all about emotional vulnerability. Yet, at the same time, the entire song - at least until the final verse - is a reverie, one that repossesses wounded desire within its own enchantments, so that desire is felt in some way as its own and only fulfillment. My own experience is that the contradictoriness of this mood is initially perceived not simultaneously but successively, as an oscillation, or as I figured it above, a shuddering. The lyric moves so fast that it's impossible to tell where the wounding ends and the reverie begins, or vice versa.

Furthermore, the speed of the lyric - which even the languorous tempo of Dylan's 1978 torch-song arrangement could not undo - is driven by both elements of its complex mood. Hungry desire propels the self forward, engendering change and time, while the mind in reverie - the creative force that shapes the song - chases time down with its peremptory healing power. Even as it is hurtled through time, the singer's consciousness sees itself reflected with equal fullness

every moment along the way. This double-edged sense of time - as a sundering and a ripening, a curse and a blessing - is the most distinguishing feature of *Blood on the Tracks*.

These effects are easiest to examine in the opening verse, where the movement through time is at its most breathtakingly precipitous. It begins like the opening of a movie, a straightforward shot - of a morning sky brightening with the sun - that zooms in, as through a window, to the narrator lying in bed. This line also reads like a pastoral revision of the formulaic 'woke up this morning' that opens so many blues. Dylan's line stretches out the characteristic blues cadence - as in the 'woke up this morning, feel 'round for my shoes' that opens Robert Johnson's 'Walkin' Blues' - replacing the urgency of the blues with a contemplative languor. (Opening the song with 'early one morning' rather than 'early this morning' contributes to the same effect.)

This navel-gazing complacency doesn't last long. The second line begins with a slight tensing, as 'wond'ring' both describes what we might read on the narrator's face as the camera closes in on it and takes us inside his mind, where the pace of change abruptly quickens. Suddenly there's an unidentified 'she,' and then the first real shudder occurs on that word 'changed,' a shudder that's partly absorbed and partly extended by 'at all.' The word 'changed' leaps out in part as a sonic alarm - an explosive cap to what had been a quietly accelerating intensity of the metrically long vowels - but it's the very idea of change that sustains this shudder.

It's an idea that both threatens the sanctuary of the reverie and aptly identifies the underlying flavor that will characterize it, a brisk succession of cinematic shots dissolving one into the other. Change is both friend and enemy, the agent of loss and of restitution.

The reverie renews itself, as it will over and over throughout the song, paradoxically absorbing and even nourishing itself with its very disruptions and dislocations. The second half of the second line thus evokes both the memory of a girl unchanged, her hair still red, and by way of the archetypal association of red hair with the wild and untamable, the inevitability of change. (There's also a quietly joking acknowledgment that women are always changing the color of their hair.) This hint is picked up in the next couplet, where her parents' dissatisfaction with his pedigree lends their commitment to each other a romantically heroic aura that augurs its doom. The next couplet absorbs this tension in the image of the narrator standing by the roadside, presumably thumbing a ride, the rain filling his shoes and fueling his urge to move on. This scene may be set after the breakup of the narrator's relationship with her, or long before it, perhaps even before he had ever met her. It doesn't matter: The narrator seems *always* to have possessed 'her' (whoever she is) as a memory, but as a moving memory that keeps him moving, in search of her. He seems always both to have lost her and to be unable to get away from her.

This realization - that he has always possessed and been possessed by her -

dawns upon us right about here, with this image of the singer standing in the rain, 'heading out for the old East Coast,' presumably in quixotic pursuit of her. That is why this couplet strikes a note not just of pathos but also of the numinous, carrying the sense that he is never more with her, nor she with him, than just here, in such circumstances, on the road in pursuit of her. Indeed, it is almost unbearably numinous, for its sublimity cannot be separated from the very pathos that clouds it. The shudder of this double consciousness seems for to catch up with the narrator the first time in a mixed cry of pain and pride - 'Lord knows I've paid some dues' - whose residual tension is fully absorbed only in the double echo of the final rhyme - 'gettin' through/Tangled up in blue' - that concludes the verse.

Dylan seems to have invented this climactic prosodic flourish right here, almost involuntarily, even as in the verse's final phrase he found the unsurpassable name not just of his song but of the inner weather his song is discovering, or perhaps inventing. 'Entangled in Blue,' for instance, just wouldn't get it done. The placement of 'up,' exactly where it is, is required to tinge 'blue' with the color of the sky and as well of the blues. The singer's mood is inextricably both uplifted into the aether and down in the dumps, at once transcendent and doomed.

IV

The rest of the song can be seen as a ripening of the implications of the first verse, tracing the singer's double pursuit of 'her' and of his own mind, which 'she'

has at once somehow both stolen and shaped.

'She' is the figure Dylan's poetry pursues as 'you,' the imagined listener. With Dylan, as I argued in *Like a Complete Unknown*, this listener is variously and often simultaneously his public audience and a private female, or, more properly, his fictions of them both. Dylan's poetic relationship to this figure is different in the 70s than it was in the 60s because his relation to both his public and his private muse has changed. He is no longer in a position to court - or retreat from - either of them. They are a part of him now. His private muse - who may or may not be Sara Dylan - has been a wife since the last two songs on *John Wesley Harding*. His public muse, meanwhile, had been languishing in a creative limbo, a ghostly presence that wouldn't go away but couldn't make itself felt either. Thus the retreat, from *Nashville Skyline* through *Planet Waves*, to a smaller, more exclusively private voice and the uncharacteristic uncertainty of tone whenever Dylan reached for something larger.

Dylan returned to the stage at the beginning of 1974, following an almost eight-year sabbatical, for a commercially triumphant cross-country comeback tour with the Band. Dylan sounded determined but dazed, as if he really did have what he later called 'amnesia.' [fn 1] But his audience greeted him with open arms, as if he were an errant spouse or lost sibling at long last come home. His public audience, too, was now, willy-nilly, both wife and sister. Suddenly, he was not the Kid anymore, but a man with a past - even if he couldn't remember it!

Blood on the Tracks was written after Dylan had had a few months to absorb all this, and listening even just to the first verse of 'Tangled,' it's apparent he was going to make the most of it. The 'she' who appears at the outset of his reverie is his muse, in both her private and public aspects, as an intimate presence in his own consciousness, as wife or sister, or as the sister-wife Dylan himself, a year later on *Desire*, explicitly invokes in 'Oh Sister' and names in 'Isis.' And in so positioning his muse, Dylan implicitly assumes the voice of her brother-husband Osiris, the Egyptian god who precedes Christ (in history as in Dylan's poetry) as a divine conqueror of time.

The figures of Isis and Osiris shadow a number of *Blood on the Tracks* songs, but 'Tangled Up in Blue' is the only one that addresses the myth of their uncanny intimacy. It is a myth of resurrection, of the attainment of eternal life; that is, of life outside of time. The core of this myth is the complementary role that both Isis and Osiris play, through the use of word magic, in resurrecting Osiris's spiritual body, first after his death at the hands of their jealous brother Set and then again after his dismemberment by an enraged Set.

I don't think Dylan has any interest in this tale as a myth of the afterlife, which is the role it played in Egyptian religion. Certainly that is not an issue in 'Tangled.' Rather, Dylan exploits it as a myth of spiritual regeneration through the mastery of memory and desire.

Desire is Isis, or, in the language of this song, 'she.' This 'she' is another of Dylan's

aboriginal pronouns, a 'she' whose putatively antecedent proper nouns are in fact derivative; in the literal sense, mere nominal identities. Many of the songs on *Blood on the Tracks* feel like they are addressed to Sara Dylan, the Isis of Dylan's real life, but the narrative that 'Tangled' sketches has always struck me as polyamorous. 'She' is one, but her avatars are many. This remains essentially true even if we decide the song is in fact about one woman. No woman, after all, is really just one person, any more than a man is. But this is a man's song, and a man, like a woman, is always singular in his own mind, so here as in any man's song about the working out of the Isis myth in his life, the story is always as William Carlos Williams formulated it: one man, many women. [fn 2].

My own experience is that the most satisfying way to take the song is to assume that 'she' is a different woman in each scene and absorb the narrative under the spell of that assumption. Then, when you've finished, pretend someone were to reveal to you that 'she' is always the same woman. Then listen to the song while that double sense of it is fresh in your mind.

'She' makes her presence felt in 'Tangled' in two ways, which loosely correspond - rather surprisingly - to the two ways Isis acts in the myth, first briefly reviving Osiris (and conceiving their son Horus by him) and then regathering thirteen (all but the penis) of the fourteen pieces into which an angry Set had subsequently torn his body. In the song, 'she' keeps the singer coming and going, and yet she pulls him back together, too. In

each of the remembered fragments of his life that constitute the song's narrative, her presence (or her absence) both draws him in and propels him forward - in paradoxical pursuit of her. Yet, his sense of his connection to her - of her presence or absence - is what enables him to recognize the person in each of these scenes as himself. She recalls him to himself.

Re-calling him to himself is, in fact, literally what she does in the song. She inhabits the song merely as a figment of the singer's anxieties until the end of the second verse, where, as they are 'splitting up' - apparently for the first time - he hears her 'call over my shoulder/'We'll meet again someday.'" He doesn't respond, but there's a sense of fatality in the air; his doom is living with the echo of her promise in his heart. The third verse tells of his efforts to escape it - in the Great North Woods, in Delacroix - but 'she never 'scaped my mind.' The underlying sense, of course, is that he could not escape his memory of and abiding desire for her, but the overt sense is true as well: 'She' is a treasure he both possesses and is possessed by.

Next we find him on that 'someday,' where he comes across her, apparently onstage, in a 'topless place.' Or does he? He 'keeps lookin' at the side of her face,' just as later in the same verse she 'studied the lines on my face.' They seem not to recognize each other, and her question to him - 'don't I know your name?' (not even 'don't I know you?') - suggests she thinks she might know only who he is. Of course, she might just be teasing him - 'don't I know your name?' then would be the

equivalent of the playful 'hello, stranger.' But however we novelize this poetic fiction, the very obliquity with which her question grazes those that surely haunt his mind - 'are *you* really the one who knows me' and if she is, '*am I* the one you know' - can only exacerbate the tensed anxiety with which he withholds himself from her greeting, 'mutter[ing] something underneath my breath.' Finally she makes a real move:

*I must admit I felt a little uneasy
When she bent down to tie the laces
of my shoe,
Tangled up in blue.*

The singer's anxiety seems to be that, 'when she went down,' she might be making some sexual advance. But his anxiety (and pent-up sexual energy) is transformed into a kind of spiritual ecstasy whose force is revealed in the semi-orgasmic cry that extends the word 'laces' across the caesura. (Thus his 'uneasiness' could also reflect an anxiety, once he recognizes what she is doing, over whether he will be equal to such a sublime moment.) She reveals herself here as the Magdalene in Isis, tending his feet as Mary Magdalene did Christ's, and indeed here the singer is something of a Christ, redeeming the whore from the fleshpots of sin. But he is still also - and primarily - an Osiris, spiritually revived by the graces of this notwhore, rescued not so much from enslavement to desire as from weakening of his faith - in himself as well as in her.

The girl in the topless place may or may not be the same woman who 'lit a burner on the stove and offered me a pipe' in the next verse, but this verse feels like

the immediate imaginative aftermath of her self-revelation as Isis/Magdalene. The flavor of this scene - the climax of the song - is both post-coital and coital. It is the spiritual intercourse possibly only when sex has been left behind. (Isis retrieves everything of Osiris, remember, except the penis, which is no longer needed.) The scene is climactic because this time she succeeds in fully recalling him to himself, handing this 'silent type' a 'book of poems' that awakens his own voice:

*And every one of them words rang true
And glowed like burnin' coal
Pourin' off of every page
Like it was written in my soul
from me to you,
Tangled up in blue.*

The 'dying embers,' as Shelley termed them, of words on the page are revived as 'burning coals' by the creative act of reading them. But the creativity of reading reaches fruition only when his voice itself becomes a burning coal, as it does in startling shift to direct address: 'from me to you.'

This, as I argued in my earlier book, is the quintessential Dylan move, but there is something new about it here. In the 60s, when Dylan's singer shifted from third-person narrative to direct address, he seemed to be entering his own narrative, so that the shift to direct address seemed to announce his discovery of a place for his spirit in his world - and that place was in 'you.' Here the singer's voice seems to leap out of a remembered scene he had silently been inhabiting. That is, 'from me to you' does not strike us as something the singer is remembering having said to her

in this scene from the past, or even something that he, the singer, is saying to us, his listeners, right now. No, it's as if that remembered self - that dead self - is speaking these words to us right now.

The singer's past and present selves mingle and merge, or even switch places. I've described the illusion as that of the past self turning from the woman to the present self's listener, but you could as easily say that the singer at this moment stops telling his story - speaking to us listeners - and speaks directly - across time - to her. In this climactic moment Dylan's singer has truly overthrown time and dissolved space.

But such an ecstasy seems less to sanctify the scene that has engendered it than to desolate it. Our attention is not drawn to any experience of mutual recognition - which is nonetheless taken for granted, as something that goes without saying - but to a residual hunger for some final revelation, for the physical body to dissolve wholly into the spiritual body. For the singer, as both lover and performer, the ecstasy of this climax seems to be balanced - if not in fact overshadowed - by its implicit disappointments, still 'tangled up in blue.'

In the next verse, the singer, in his guise as remembered lover, seems to have collapsed under the strain of this tension. The narrative shifts here into the third person, so that it might take us a while to realize that the 'he' who 'started into dealing with slaves' is an alter-ego of the 'I' who 'became withdrawn.' This was more readily apparent in the original version of the song - one take of which was released

on the *Bootleg Series, Vol. 1-3*. There the first three verses are presented in the third person, and the protagonist does not emerge as 'I' until the central two verses in which she draws him out. Thus, in this early version of the lyric, when 'he' reappears in the sixth verse, we are more likely to recognize him.

I would identify this 'he,' mythologically, as Set, the evil twin brother who murdered Osiris. The 'something inside of him [that] died' is his better self, Dylan's 'I,' whose withdrawal into himself later in the verse is a kind of interment. And it should be noted that this 'he' has shadowed both the song's 'I' throughout the song. In the first three verses, Osiris and Set, I and he, were entangled in each other - that's why Dylan could write (and still sometimes sings) these verses in the third person. When the song begins, both in the singer and in his remembered self, vulnerability mixes with anxiety, desire with self-absorption. The same self-absorbed impatience - a reflection of his lack of real faith either in her or himself - that finds him 'dealing in slaves' in verse six was also evinced - in a milder form - in the 'little too much force' with which in verse two he/I hastened along her divorce and 'drove that car as far as we could.' (Three guesses who did all the driving!) Indeed, the mood in which his reverie itself begins is dangerously close to solipsism. Its aim seems to be to tame her as a private possession - as a slave - of his memory. In the beginning of the song, the singer is still an innocent, a moral child who does not realize that the woman of his dreams is not simply a creature of those dreams. That is the realiza-

tion that fully hit him at the end of the fifth verse and that underwrites the pathos of his cry, 'from me to you.'

As I said, his consciousness seems initially to collapse under the weight of that realization, but 'she' revives him once more. The song's last verse - set finally in the present, the reverie dissolved - finds him 'going on back again,' resuming his endless quest ('goin' on) for what he already has ('back again'). There is no guarantee that when he finds her, he won't betray her again, but he does seem to understand that their encounters will always be partial and fleeting - at 'another joint' - and that the best he can hope for is not to get but to 'get to' an Isis who will forever remain at least partially veiled from him. All he needs to do is to find a way to meet her in good faith.

Easier said than done.

V

This spiritual drama, which involves the centrality of faith to human relationships, looms large not only in 'Tangled Up in Blue' but in Dylan's poetry throughout the 70s, from *New Morning* through *Saved*. This drama takes place, often simultaneously, on two axes: the singer's fidelity with his implied listener - the 'I and you' nexus that dominated Dylan's poetry in the 60s and whose presence in 'Tangled Up in Blue' I have been examining - and the singer's fidelity to himself - something, to borrow the title of the 1983 song, we might call the 'I and I' nexus. So far I've largely ignored this element in 'Tangled,' but it's even more central to the song's uncanny power and unique flavour

than the 'shaggy dog story' [fn 3] of his relationship to Isis. So I turn now to the question of what Dylan's Osiris does for himself. This is the aspect of the song Dylan himself emphasized when, in a series of 1978 interviews, he spoke of having found a way, on *Blood on the Tracks*, to write songs that 'stop time.'

We've already come across this element of the song in the startling transition to direct address at the end of the fifth verse. But this moment is the climax of the lyric only because it brings to the surface elements implicit in the narrative all along. At the simplest level, the narrative dissolves time in the way it collapses together the singer's sense of himself in the past and in the present. For instance, nothing in the narrative enables us to determine if his judgment, in the second stanza, that he 'used a little too much force' is a remembrance of how he felt or an expression of how he feels now - or both. The same could be said about his awareness of ('I must admit') his uneasiness about the topless dancer's advances, or his realization that 'every one of them words rang true.' Indeed, in the song's opening line, the song's narrator, in his narrating, *is* 'laying' [sic] *here* 'wondering,' even as he inform us he *was* laying *there* doing the same thing on that morning he is now contemplating.

This is not the main fashion in which the collapse of time makes itself felt. Indeed, such overt temporal indeterminacy is relatively rare in the lyric. The narrator is indeed 'the silent type;' he show his hand sparingly. But the dissolution of temporal categories is subtler and

more pervasive than these instances. It is embedded in the very texture of the narrative, in its freewheeling fictiveness.

'Tangled' is not necessarily an autobiographical song - its persona may be partly or even largely constructed out of the lives of people Dylan knew or simply imagined. Indeed, I often find myself hearing it as an archetypal coming-of-age tale of the 60s generation. Nonetheless, most listeners - myself included - instinctively (and naively) regard it as some sort of autobiography. Yet we are not at all surprised that none of the incidents reported in the song - except in incidental detail (e.g., 'soon to be divorced') - turn up in any of Dylan's biographies. We can tell by the feel of it that Dylan - or his fictitious singer - is making it up: real life is never this casually resonant. The song is a spiritual autobiography in which the facts of personal history have been replaced by a fiction that illuminates that history. The agency of memory of is not reportorial but creative, or re-creative.

What this means is that although none of the song's images - 'her folks,' 'that car,' 'a topless place,' or even the elusive 'poet of the 13th century' - are necessarily factual, they are all 'true.' What is true in 'Tangled Up in Blue' is, to return to language of the song's climactic epiphany, whatever *rings* true, whatever establishes a connection between this and that - specifically, whatever connects present and past selves. The narrative becomes a tissue of recognitions. The conditions of time wither and disappear, exposed as the dismembered corpse of a here-and-now the singer recovers in making his song recollect not who he was but who he is.

Several commentators, most notably Aidan Day, [fn 4] have noted the way the song's narrative dislocates the sense of chronology upon which, as narrative, it necessarily depends. But this is not the half of it. The song's narrative structure does not dislocate our sense of temporal order so much as it subverts any sense of the temporality of experience. This is no garden variety cubism, the sort that affords essentially spatial perspectives on time without challenging the essential temporality of all narrative. The narrative 'Tangled' rehearses is not presented as a succession of events - not even a fractured succession of events - but as an associative series of pulsations.

This is true not only of the felt relationship between its discrete episodes but, more startlingly, in the narrative flavor of the longer episodes. Listen again to the fourth verse:

*She was workin' in a topless place
 And I stopped in for a beer,
 I just kept lookin' at the side of her face
 In the spotlight so clear.
 And later on as the crowd thinned out
 I's just about to do the same,
 She was standing there in back of my
 chair
 Said to me, 'Don't I know your name?'
 I muttered somethin' underneath my
 breath,
 She studied the lines in my face.
 I must admit I felt a little uneasy
 When she bent down to tie the laces of
 my shoe,
 Tangled up in blue.*

Technically, this episode is recounted in chronological order, but it is a chronology

purged of the dynamic texture of time. The singer either visited the topless place knowing he would find her there, or he just happened to stumble onto her. But the 'and' - substituting for a 'so' or a 'where' - which connects him and her blithely finesses these questions of motivation. The remainder of the verse proceeds in a similar fashion, so that the incident it recounts seems not so much to unfold in time as unveil itself in all its multifacetedness. Our sense of cause and effect is at best vestigial. That 'later on' is a paradoxically detemporalizing marker of time; it dissolves rather than articulates the psychological transition between what precedes and what follows it. The singer's (remembered) present makes itself felt not as a moment suspended between where it's coming from and where it's heading - between past and future - but as a moment complete in itself - and thus a moment out of time.

The more closely we listen to this song, the less driven - and the less resistant to the harrying of time - the singer sounds. We begin to hear the sound of a man simply digging himself. Time, in short, is gradually disclosed as an illusion, one that forever shadows our truest sense of ourselves, but an illusion nonetheless. Masquerading as a time-bound narrative, 'Tangled Up in Blue' is at bottom a Whitmanesque catalogue of a manifold 'I am' recouping itself from its divisions in time.

VI

In discussing the final verse of 'Tangled Up in Blue' earlier, I addressed it in terms of the way it resolves - by leaving in a state of permanent irresolution - the

merry-go-round romance that provides the song with its overt subject. Now I want to look at it in the context of the aspect of the song I am now examining, the singer's struggle to recover himself. This verse is my favorite in the song: it never fails to give me an exhilarating kick, and even though I know it's coming, the exhilaration of it almost always catches me by surprise.

Before going any further, I would note that this verse seems to do the same thing for Dylan. In live performance, Dylan often sleepwalks through this lyric - not that it matters all that much; the tension between the rush of time and the clarifying stillness of the mind is so deeply embedded in the verbal DNA of the lyric that the song sometimes seems to sing itself. But he always - OK, almost always - wakes up for the final verse. Even the harmonica or guitar choruses he invariably sandwiches around his vocal are rarely less than inspired.

This verse has this effect, on both singer and listener, because it is an awakening cry. 'Tangled Up in Blue' is the signature song of Dylan's work of the 70s, and like its 60s counterpart, it resolves itself in an ecstatic 'now.' The 'now' that resolves 'Like a Rolling Stone' is a prospective reality, an opportunity thrown out for Miss Lonely to embrace, but the 'now' that kicks off this final verse announces the singer's arrival as himself. This 'now,' which has been gathering itself throughout the long six-verse reverie, is a recovery of the past as a thing of the present. 'Goin' on' [fn 5] picks up the 'keepin' on' that concludes that reverie,

even as it translates it from past ('was to keep on keepin' on') to present tense. And 'back again' implicitly acknowledges that the plenipotentiary present of this 'now' is a re-creation from the past, even as that 'now' is soon - as soon in fact as the singer falls silent - to become itself in turn a thing of the past that, along with all the other parts of himself abandoned in the course of time, must be rolled back up to re-create 'now' again. Dylan's 'now' is in this sense literally a transience, a coming-and-going that sustains itself only in never ceasing to change.

But he is here now, and he fills the long moment this verse sustains with the fullness of his sense of himself. In dismissing the 'people we used to know' as 'illusions to me now,' the singer both trumpets his own self-recovery ('me now') and slyly questions whether 'she' (the other half of that 'we') has also returned herself from her past. And while 'she' is mainly felt in this song as a woman, or series of women, here I think our sense of 'her' as a figure for the singer's love affair with his audience comes to the fore. 'I'm here now singing,' he seems to be saying, 'but are you here now listening, or are you still just the person you used to be when I was the guy you used to know?'

But whether his audience is here or not, the singer is forced to acknowledge that although he knows something about them, he doesn't (yet) know them - 'I don't know what they're doing with their lives' - and that, in one sense, he does not know himself either: 'I don't know how it all got started' - or, it is implied, where it's all heading. This recognition proves

profoundly humbling, and the 'me' that opens the next line - 'Me, I'm still on the road' - is somehow aching, if glancingly, poignant, and funny, too. 'It's just little ole me,' the god Osiris observes, 'just one of the guys.'

But wait. Since when was there more than one guy in this song, or the world of possibility it projects? The singer's sense of himself and of his relations is undergoing a profound metamorphosis, one that at last raises both him and her out of the underworld of memory and desire in which until now his consciousness - like his song - has held them both captive. And it does so even as it insists that the old underworld of memory and desire persists as the vital link that connects them. This transformation reaches culmination in the second and final invocation of 'we' that closes the song.

*But me, I'm still on the road
Headin' for another joint
We always did feel the same,
We just saw it from a different point
of view,
Tangled up in blue.*

Here he seems to be addressing 'her' (and/or his audience) not only as the beloved Isis but also - and even primarily - as a fellow quester for love, as an Osiris. He suddenly imagines himself singing for her as well as to her, telling a story (of the endless quest for the beloved) and enacting a struggle (of self-mastery) that is her story and her struggle, too. [fn 6]

In the last analysis, then, 'she' is not Isis but, like the singer, one of the guys. (Or one of the girls, take your pick; sex is moot here.) This discovery of companion-

ability seems to take the song by surprise, and it certainly feels more than a little tenuous, as if the singer were getting ahead of himself. The singer's orientation - toward his listener, toward himself - changes so quickly that you slightly distrust your own ears - and wonder if he even notices what is happening himself.

But this companionability, I would suggest, is paradoxically the deepest form of his fidelity to himself: the circle of companionship is the human form of 'I and I.' And as surprising as it may seem and tenuous as it may be, this enriched sense of self affords the singer's voice its breathing space within the alternating current of ecstasy and desolation that sustains his life, where he remains 'tangled up in blue.'

I-he later called 'amnesia.' Dylan first offered this self-assessment in a series of remarkable 1978 interviews, including a 2-part *Rolling Stone* (January 26 & November 16) interview with Jonathan Cott and interviews with journalists Karen Hughes and Matt Damsker reprinted in 1984 in Gavin Diddle's *Talkin' Bob Dylan ... 1978*. Anyone familiar with these interviews will recognize that I have pillaged them for some of the key analytic concepts I use in this essay: time as an illusion, the power of art to 'stop time,' and the transformation of unconscious creative processes into conscious ones. But while I appropriate some of Dylan's vocabulary, I can't say with any confidence that I appropriate his meanings, for the simple reason that I'm not always sure what he means. Dylan's critical pronouncements - and not just on his own work - commonly possess an oracular opacity that is penetrable only if you already know what he means. In this case, I think I might know, but I wouldn't put any money on that. Moreover, these interviews were undertaken as part of Dylan's effort to promote his commercially ill-fated film, *Renaldo and Clara*, and frankly, his observations about *Blood on the Tracks* strike me as rather more on-target with respect to the film than to the album.

2-one man, many women. The reference is to Williams's epic poem *Paterson*, in which the pairing of 'only one man, like a city' with 'innumerable women, each like a flower' is a major motif.

3-'shaggy dog story' Robert Christgau used this term in his 'Consumer Guide' blurb for *Greatest Hits. Vol. 3*, which is archived online at:

robertchristgau.com/get_artist.phpname=bob+dylan

4-most notably Aidan Day Aidan Day, *Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan* (Blackwell, 1988), pp. 51-66.

5-'Goin' on' The original lyric is 'Goin' back again,' but Dylan changed it to 'goin' on back again' when he first began performing the song live during the Rolling Thunder Revue in the fall of 1975, and he has sung it that way ever since.

6-her struggle, too. The 1984 rewrite of this song changes 'we just saw it from a different point of view' to 'we just saw her from a different point of view.' This change strikes me as unfortunate because it excludes the fruitful ambivalence of the original, and it does so in two ways. It removes the possibility that this final we includes a private address to 'her' as well as a public address to his audience, and it eliminates the possibility that he is addressing this 'we' as a lover as well as a friend. On the other hand, I must admit I have my own nagging doubts about whether those ambivalences are anything more than my own hallucination. But every time I decide to ignore them, the song whacks me upside the head and insists I take them seriously.



TROUBADOUR

by Andrew Muir

Troubadour is a mixture of brand new essays and updated versions of articles that have appeared in a variety of fanzines. These latter have all been reworked for the book. Their changes ranging from corrections and revisions to the completely rewritten, like the restructured chapter on "Love And Theft"; unrecognizable and some five times larger than the reviews already published.

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*'I'll Know My Song Well
Before I Start Singing':*
Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney
and the Ownership of Song

by Toby Richards-Carpenter

Earlier this afternoon, I was driving along with a compilation tape of Bob's 1995 European tour playing on the car stereo. I was enjoying the notes washing over me, but wasn't paying them any great attention. But my ears pricked up when I heard Bob pick up the harp during the intro to 'If You See Her Say Hello'. It was the version from Brixton, 30 March 1995, and it caught my attention because the harmonica intro reminded me strongly of the version I heard live, and have since revisited on countless occasions, at Augusta, Maine on 4 August 2002.

If Bob plays a good harmonica intro to a song, it can build the anticipation for the first sung line, often to unbearable levels, and this was the effect at Augusta with 'If You See Her Say Hello'. The harmonica soared and swirled, enveloping the audience until the crowd's raucousness deferred to close attention. The first line, when Bob finally arrived there, felt like an anti-climax. The 'If you see her say hel...' bit was fine, but then came the vault skywards with the '...lo', another example of the vocal mannerism so tediously characteristic of many of the mid-2002 acoustic performances. On this occasion he fooled me; far from it being an anti-climax Bob turned in a magnificent performance, full of simmering passion and occasional release, making full emotional sense of the vocal vaulting technique. No matter. The point is that, while I was listening to the intro of the Brixton '95 performance, I was mentally replaying the Augusta 2002 version of which it seemed so reminiscent, and waiting for the point at which the two would diverge.

That point came with the ‘...lo’ to which I just referred, the final syllable of the first line. In Brixton Bob followed the word through dead-pan, with no gymnastics, though perhaps with a slight downturn that hinted at the sombre nature of the forthcoming vocal. The effect, through this differing nuance of a single syllable, was that this ‘If You See Her Say Hello’ suddenly seemed a very different song to the one I heard at Augusta in 2002. It was now being sung differently, and its meaning had become different too. This is when a fairly obvious point came back to me in stark clarity. Bob Dylan owns these songs. Let me explain.

The performance of ‘If You See Her Say Hello’ from Brixton 30 March 1995 does not doff its cap to any previous version; it stands alone. More specifically, it is not indebted to the original recorded version that appeared on *Blood on the Tracks* in 1975. The Brixton performance unfolds in the moment; it could go in any one of a thousand different ways, and Bob chose its course according to his mood at the time. I emphasise this because it represents such a fundamental difference between Bob Dylan and almost any other recording artist you care to name.

Albums, not live performances, become icons; they become sacred. *Blood on the Tracks* is as good an example as any. But even though he revisits its songs dozens of times each year, Bob Dylan is not a slave to this album, nor to the performances on it. Paul McCartney, by contrast, is a slave to the original studio recording of ‘Hey Jude’. Every time he plays it live, the arrangement, the vocal

mannerisms, the piano parts and everything must at least make reference to, or perhaps even imitate, the version he recorded with the Beatles. It’s what the audience expects, and now people feel that’s what the song deserves. McCartney could never give it a radical re-arrangement, or strip it down and take out the ‘Na Na Na’ sing-along ending, for example. It probably wouldn’t occur to him to do so.

When this happens to a piece of work like ‘Hey Jude’, in a sense the song itself ceases to exist. A song, unlike a novel, does not exist on the page - it only exists in the moment of performance. So if a song stops being available for re-interpretation, and it stops being a vehicle for expression, it stops being a song. All that exists is a version of a song – in this case the *version* McCartney recorded with The Beatles – and that *version* can be repeated and copied and re-iterated every night, but it will no longer be a song. The proof of this is that when someone mentions ‘Hey Jude’ to you, you instantly think not of the song as an independent entity, but only of the Beatles’ version of it. It has become simply a set-piece, like a painting. There’s only one Mona Lisa, though thousands of prints exist that look exactly the same, and there’s only one ‘Hey Jude’, and many copies of that exist too. But unlike a painting, a song should not remain the same; it is there to be re-drawn, re-sung, renewed as many times as it is performed.

Rather than owning ‘Hey Jude’ as a song and doing as he pleases with it, Paul McCartney has himself come to be owned by its original recorded version. Bob

Dylan, on the other hand, owns his songs. The proof of this is that, if you mention 'If You See Her Say Hello' to me, I might indeed think of the version from *Blood on the Tracks*... but I might not. I might instead think of the version from Brixton 30 March 1995, or from Augusta 4 August 2002, or any one of maybe twenty versions that at some point have impacted on me. This is because the moment Bob calls on a song such as 'If You See Her Say Hello', the song is going to work for him; Bob is calling the tune, and he won't dance to any existing demands the song might make of him. The songs are his tools and he will use them as he likes. Paul McCartney, on the other hand, is the tool that 'Hey Jude' uses in order to get heard.

The audacity, the bloody-mindedness, the creative inspiration, call it what you

will, that Bob brings to his songs is his gift. Of course, you already know this; you're reading a Dylan fanzine after all. It's a central point, and maybe I should have taken for granted that you understood it. But sometimes it's important to be reminded of the central points, so that when we're rummaging around amongst all the set-lists and band changes and venues and upgrades and trades, and newsgroups and lyric fluffs and early and late sets and bootlegs and incense and new arrangements, and all the other baggage and detail that comes with being a fan of Bob Dylan's art, we never lose sight of why we're doing all this in the first place. Today I was reminded, unexpectedly, though a harmonica break and a down-turned syllable, of Bob's genius. So I thought I'd remind you too.

Your Magazine Needs You!

Duncan Hume's sterling efforts as staff photographer and John Hume's generous contributions notwithstanding, *Judas!* is always in need of good quality, high resolution Dylan photographs. Old and new, from any decade, all are welcome. We are as keen to bring you more photographs as you all are to see them – it is getting our hands on the pesky critters that is proving the stumbling block – so please help if you can!

The Ghosts of Minneapolis

by Leonard Scott

Minneapolis.

The word alone carries undeniable weight with Dylan fans.

Dinkytown.

The 10 O'Clock Scholar.

The Purple Onion.

Those familiar with the city, or long-time residents, may feel nothing special when they walk along University Avenue or drive down (Positively) 4th Street.

But Dylan fans know better.

I know better.

In less than a year around the University of Minnesota, Dylan got his performing sea legs at the 10 O'Clock Scholar in Dinkytown, lived in a variety of apartments on and near campus, and ventured out to the twin city of St. Paul to play at The Purple Onion.

Thanks to the Internet, plotting a course of action during my first visit didn't require as much guessing and investigation as it would have a decade ago.

There's no map at the hotel lobby, or Grayline bus, that can take you on a 'Dylan on Campus' tour.

That's where Mapquest.com comes in handy.

The destinations are easily plotted.

One-point-three miles from the hotel to Dylan's apartment on Fifteenth Avenue.

One-point-one miles from the hotel to the old Gray's Drugstore, above which Dylan lived for a short while.

Seven-point-two miles into St. Paul to Ginkgo's Coffeeshop, previously known as The Purple Onion.

It all seemed so finite, mathematical almost, and error-free. But once out of Cyberspace and on the ground, it becomes something else entirely.

It's hard, at times, to imagine what Minneapolis looked like when Dylan arrived in the fall of 1959.

There are the obvious changes.

The modern architecture. The parking lots. The Starbucks.

But what used to be?

For that you have to dig out the 30-year-old biographies - and a sense of direction.

It doesn't take long to find yourself going back in time. Just a few feet away from the hotel, walking toward the heart of Dinkytown, the architecture begins to look familiar from pictures and descriptions.



The fraternity houses, academic buildings, and crumbling bungalows all were certainly around 45 years ago.

Did Dylan walk these streets?

What was he thinking?

The first stop, in the 700 block of North Fifteenth Avenue, is an apartment Dylan shared with Hugh Brown and Dirty Max.

Depending on which source you believe, Dylan either lived on 711 (Toby Thompson's *Positively Main Street*) or 714 (Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home*).

Along the way, the odds of successfully finding the old home place seem high.

There are rows and rows of dilapidated homes, many converted into apartments. All look like conceivable crash pads.

The pace quickens as the addresses get closer to the target. Fourteenth Street, Fifteenth Street, Fifth, Sixth, and then finally Seventh Street.

His block. Dylan lived on this block.

But where's the house?

703 is there and so is 707 and 709.

No 711.

It's gone (if it were ever there) replaced by a football field.

All hope is not lost. There, across the street, stands 714. A gray row house, it fits

the description in Thompson's book. Could it have been Dylan's house? Absent a confirming source, it's hard to know for sure.

The next stop is more certain.

The 10 O'Clock Scholar is long gone, that much is fact.

It burned down in 1969 and was replaced by a Burger King, which had a date with a bulldozer about 10 years ago. Now a Hollywood Video stands on the lot.

So there's low expectations.

From where his apartment used to be, the Scholar is only a few blocks away toward campus. Easily walkable. It's between Fourth and Fifth on University.

To Dylan fans the 10 O'Clock Scholar is a historic place.

It was there, as the story goes, that he first introduced himself as, and scored billing under the name, Dylan. He read Woody Guthrie's "Bound for Glory" there, and probably dreamed of following in his early idol's footsteps.

He honed his craft at the Scholar. He hung out there.

It was the place to see Dylan before Gerde's, before Greenwich Village, before anything.

Now it's a video store.

There's no historic marker, no bits of rubble, nothing that would give anyone even a hint of what used to be.

But the careful observer can still get goose bumps.

Standing across the street, outside a used bookstore hawking its wares on the sidewalk, you can imagine the chubby kid from Hibbing passing his time with friends at the Scholar.



You can see him heading a block down and across the street to his apartment above Gray's Drugstore. He lived there in the winter of 1960.

The drugstore is gone. But unlike the Scholar, it hasn't been razed. Instead it's been converted to a pasta bar.

Thankfully the drugstore sign was salvaged, as were the upstairs brick windows out of which Dylan could have seen the Scholar, McCosh's bookstore (now a coffeeshop called, confusingly, The Purple Onion) and the university campus.

Channeling the ghosts in Dinkytown takes effort and energy.

Not so with the original Purple Onion.

On Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, the traffic screams by at a dizzying pace. A record store on the right; a sewing store on the left.

At first hidden, it then appears - Ginkgo Coffeehouse.

Previously known as The Purple Onion.

You have to want to get there to see it, but it's worth the effort. About seven miles from Dinkytown in St. Paul,

Ginkgo's looks a lot like it probably did when Dylan played there.

The wood floor, with its three-inch wide slats, may have been painted a couple of times the past four decades, but that's about it.

The tin ceiling, with exposed plumbing, has a similar sandy tan shade.

It's big for a coffeehouse. There are 10 tables, two booths and two couches, with plenty of room for even more.

A circular sale rack hawking gift cards and a couple displays of kitschy nick-knacks monopolize floor space.

All the requisite coffees - espresso, latte, mocha - are available, along with smoothies, root beer floats and sandwiches.

No pizza though. When Dylan played here that was what The Purple Onion dished out of the kitchen, not veggie wraps or bran muffins.

It's a forgivable change.

Windows run along the front reveal Snelling's traffic.

Performers stand with their backs to the windows, facing the audience.

There's a piano and a stool, but nothing else.

It's hard to imagine a more prototypical coffeehouse.

In *No Direction Home*, Gretel Hoffman, the wife of David Whitaker, described the Purple Onion in 1960 like this: '(It was) a Calypso sort of place that was just like every other restaurant in St. Paul.'

Now it's totally unlike any other restaurant in St. Paul, thanks to a few months in 1960 and a young kid until only recently known as Dylan.

Dylan earned \$5 to \$6 a night playing here, in the shadow of Hamline University.

It's easy to imagine Dylan setting up, tuning his guitar, adjusting his cap, and entertaining the regulars.

People probably a lot like the crowd on this August night.

There's the student with her notes and textbooks, the single guy reading a paperback on a couch, a couple sitting on a loveseat sharing the local paper, and an employee on break chatting with her boyfriend.

What would the reaction have been to the unwashed Dylan here 43 years ago? Did they listen? Did they care? How did it feel?



It's hard to know for sure. Karen Wallace and her sister talked about seeing Dylan at the Onion regularly in the spring and into the summer of 1960 and greatly enjoying his songs. Unfortunately, no tapes survive capturing Dylan on that stage.

One uncirculating recording that reportedly comes from either the Onion or another bar called The Bastille includes such standards as 'House of the Rising Sun' and 'Man of Constant Sorrow.'

Just Dylan and his acoustic guitar, no harmonica. Unpolished, certainly, but on his way.

Like all the other spots around town, there is no visible reference to Dylan anywhere in Ginkgo's/The Purple Onion. No plaque, no pictures, nothing.

Maybe because he spent so little time in the city - less than a year - it makes sense there's so little official recognition of the historic spots.

It's not like he returned to Minneapolis in any significant sense later, either physically or artistically. He didn't become famous here. That happened in New York. He didn't leave his heart here, he didn't build his Graceland here, he doesn't come back to shop at the Mall of America.

Dylan's a long time gone from Minneapolis, as are many of the places that played key roles in his career before he took the Herculean leaps in Gotham.

But walking the streets of the Twin Cities, using a little imagination, you can ignore the McDonald's, Starbucks and Hollywood Videos and still feel the ghosts.

It's electric.

Sense of Humanity: The Intertextuality of 'Not Dark Yet'

by D. A. Carpenter

I. Dylan Among the Poets

*You've been through all of
F. Scott Fitzgerald's books
You're very well read
It's well known (Ballad of a Thin Man 46-49).*

There's no doubt that he has been through all of F. Scott Fitzgerald's books and then some. Bob Dylan's lyrics have demonstrated an extensive literary influence since the very beginning of his career. But, even though Dylan has proven himself time and again to be a master lyricist and has remained at the forefront as an important modern poet, his work has yet to be truly accepted as a part of the American literary tradition.

Shadows of literary masters are constantly silhouetted in the background of his lyrics. Whether these shadows are extremely obvious or they just flicker in the lyrics, they are never contrived and always handled with a delicacy and mastery that parallels the likes of Eliot. The American tradition maintained throughout his nearly forty year career echoes ideas found in Whitman, and his lyrical prowess and sense of imagery is painted with the same romantic paintbrush as Keats and Wordsworth. While Dylan has brought sophistication to American popular culture through song much in the same way that Shakespeare gave the lower classes a glimpse of unparalleled drama, he has still been excluded from modern literature studies. This raises a question as to why this is so. The most common answer is that because his words are set to music. Except for very early examples of poetics, traditionally literature has been considered a completely different medium to lyrics combined with music.

If there has ever been a case to combat this belief it is Bob Dylan. In Dylan there is a transcendence of these clear cut mediums; he was the first person to really push the lyric genre, and has continued to do so with his extensive literary and culturally driven writing. Dylanologists and prominent literary critics who've jumped on the Dylan band wagon often take note of Dylan's poetic achievements, some considering him as 'valid as Keats,' but they often shy away from questions as to Dylan's validity in the academic realm. It seems that difficulties arise when people attempt to assess Dylan's work in a purely academic way. Most often, comparisons are made of Dylan and past literary masters, but are never deeply explored and take the place of serious attention to the lyrics. Hannah Betts also cites this as a problem in an article written on the occasion of Dylan's sixtieth birthday:

[T]oo much of the 'Dylan the master poet' school relies upon the establishment of an entirely meaningless system of analogy - a trainspotter's critique in which this bit of Bob is related to that bit of Eng. Lit., and the entire song is found to be artfully reminiscent of some minor aesthetic moment (1).

This type of critiquing can pose a problem when trying to prove validity for acceptance of Dylan into the literary canon, for it does place Dylan among the poets but does not explicitly state why. Surely his lyrics have more value and quality than what could be considered literary name-dropping. No one would base appreciation of Eliot solely on his ability to allude to past

works, nor should anyone do the same with Dylan. It is important, still, to recognize the intertextuality of Dylan's lyrics, not to merely name drop, but to recognize how the lyrics work in relation to the whole existing order of literature. This is an idea expressed in Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead (1093).

In this way, it is inevitable to draw comparisons between past literary masters and the well-read Dylan, but many stop at superficial comparisons. This is most likely due to the fact that Dylan works in a seemingly different medium than Literature. There are rarely any protestations in exploring how Dylan works with past musical traditions, but when discussion crosses the medium into Literature people become apprehensive and sometimes indignant. Apprehensive, because they find it exhaustingly difficult to successfully tread the gray waters of Dylan's classifications of both poet and singer-songwriter. Indignant, because some feel that a purely literary approach destroys the essence of Dylan's work, applying, knowingly or not, Wordsworth's familiar phrase 'murder to dissect.' These two views are valid to a certain point. What is needed is a way to appreciate both the literary and musical qualities, without hindering but instead combining the two.

II. 'Curtain Risin' On a New Stage'

Dylan has claimed himself to be a poet at one instance and nothing of the sort in another. It is clear that first and foremost he thinks of himself as a musician, but this does not mean that he cannot be viewed as a poet. To fully appreciate the depth of Dylan's work a new approach must be taken. The approach I will be taking somewhat hinges upon what Dylan says of the interplay of sound and words in a 1977 interview with *Playboy* magazine:

Yeah, it's the sound and the words. Words don't interfere with it. They-they-punctuate it. You know, they give it purpose. [Pause] And all the ideas for my songs, all the influences, all come out of that. All the influences, all the feelings, all the ideas come from that. I'm not doing it to see how good I can sound, or how perfect the melody can be, or how intricate the details can be woven or how perfectly written something can be. I don't care about those things (Rosenbaum).

A song may not be considered Literature because it is part of a different medium, but maybe the technological accomplishments made in the twentieth century make it time to reassess what is truly literary. Dylan's work demonstrates that words and music can work harmoniously to add depth to interpretation and make it possible for writing to become even more recursive than it had been in the past. His songs have constantly been reworked musically and lyrically, showing how the author can be given more of a voice than he or she has ever had before.

In Dylan's own words above he acknowledges that it is both the words *and* music which create the meaning and feeling he is trying to express. French opera critic Catherine Clement, as pointed out by Stephen Scobie, has explored the harmonious duality of lyric and music. In *Alias Bob Dylan* Scobie quotes Clement:

A double, inseparable scene: the words give rise to the music and the music develops the language, gives it dialect, envelops it, thwarts or reinforces it. Conscious and unconscious: the words are aligned with the legible rational side of a conscious discourse, and the music is the unconscious of the text, that which gives it depth of field and relief, that which attributes a past to the text, a memory, one perceptible not to the listener's consciousness but to his enchanted unconsciousness (qtd. in Scobie 5).

Because Dylan has the means to add dimension to his words with the aid of music, or conversely his music with the aid of words, he is able to employ both the conscious and unconscious in his work. His songs could be compared to Literature as sculptures to paintings or photos; it is the same principle of dimensionality. This is not to say that Dylan's lyrics cannot stand triumphantly on their own without the aid of music, because they most certainly can, but they would be missing a dimension. Literature has its own aspects of conscious and unconscious realms, especially when viewing it in terms of its intertextuality, something that Dylan's work certainly demonstrates. What is being suggested is that a new literary genre

has come to the surface, in which, because of recording technology, a new dimension can be added to Literature. This is to say that the sound sense of the music and words working together can be preserved by the artist in a way which brings the ear into play and conveys a deeper look into the work as a whole, conscious and unconscious. A new stage has been built, it's time for everyone to turn their heads, open their eyes, and their ears.

III. 'My trip hasn't been a pleasant one And my time it isn't long...'

A song is spatial; it occupies a space and Time. The concept of Time has been something prevalent in Dylan's work. As Robert Forryan suggests, 'Dylan appears to be a Time-obsessed or Time-haunted man; at least, if we can judge this from his lyrics' (51). Dylan's treatment of Time has evolved over the years. The young Dylan addressed Time with rebellious indignation, exemplified in 'Restless Farewell,' from his 1964 album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*.

*Oh a false clock tries to tick out my
time
To disgrace, distract and bother me.
And the dirt of gossip blows into my face,
And the dust of rumors covers me.
But if the arrow is straight,
And the point is slick,
It can pierce through dust no matter
how thick.
So I'll make my stand
And remain as I am
And bid farewell and not give a damn*
(Restless Farewell 40-49).

The young Dylan is taking a stand against decaying Time and its appendages. This contrasts what Time has become to the fifty-six year old Dylan in 1997. The mature Dylan has seen it all, and perhaps realizes that Time's course is unalterable; Death is the inevitable destination no matter what detour anyone takes. It seems Dylan is now concerned with the journey that takes place when that no-longer-false clock does indeed tick out his time. As he states:

*I been all around the world, boys
Now I'm trying to get to heaven before
they close the door*

(Tryin' to Get to Heaven 31-32).

This brings us to the subject of Dylan's 'Not Dark Yet', and its seeming resignation to the course Time dictates for existence. For the purposes of explicating this masterpiece the literary qualities and prosody of the song will be primarily focused upon, because it is the intertextuality of the song which places Dylan among the poets and, as Eliot said, 'set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.' The actual sound of Dylan's vocal performance and the song's musical arrangement will also be called into play when appropriate, because the idea of Time in 'Not Dark Yet' is expressed by both the lyrics and music. In this case the officially released version of the song on Dylan's 1997 album *Time Out of Mind* will be considered.

'Not Dark Yet' is a song so it could be considered as a lyric poem. Because the lyric is a performed song, the only way to do it justice is to consider it as having a quantitative meter. The music underneath the lyrics provides a rhythmic beat, which

is the actual meter of the song. Dylan's vocals also suggest this because of the emphasis put on certain words with prolonged or shortened vowel sounds. They work with and against the constant meter of the music to accentuate words which strengthen the theme of the song. For instance, sustaining the long vowel sounds of the last word of every line signifies the progression of Time. And it is time that is the essence of this song.

The song opens by placing the speaker alone in the shadow of late afternoon:

*Shadows are falling and I've been here
all day
It's too hot to sleep and time is running
away*

On the surface it seems that the speaker has been in one place for the entire day, uncomfortably so, due to the heat. The concept of time is immediately invoked by placing the narrator in a 'day' and further referring to Time itself. An interesting fact recognized by Christopher Ricks is that there are twenty-four lines to this song, which symbolizes the twenty-four hour time period of day. It becomes apparent from the beginning that Time will play an important role in the unfolding of the song. The placid musical accompaniment at the opening of the song, which continues at nearly the same pace throughout, seems to suggest the speaker is in a mood of contemplation, with an air of resignation. Dylan's vocals place a caesura approximately at the halfway point of every line, which demonstrates the mood of contemplation. At the same time these aural effects reinforce a feeling that time is passing at its own pace,

out of the speaker's control. For the speaker 'time is running away,' 'ticking out his time.' Forryan points out the similarity of Dylan's opening lines and Marvell's:

*But at my back I alwaies hear
Time's winged Charriot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lye
Deserts of vast Eternity (52).*

These lines are strikingly similar; even though time is 'running away' in Dylan's and 'hurrying near' in Marvell's, they express the same idea of time coming to an end, an idea which can be seen in even greater detail as the song progresses. At first glance it appears that the speaker is merely contemplating his life, but, although it remains on the individual level, the song starts to hint at something on a much grander scale in the next three lines.

*Feel like my soul has turned into steel
I've still got the scars that the sun didn't
heal
There's not even room enough to be
anywhere*

The internal rhyme of 'feel' and 'steel' in line 3 isolates the speaker's soul, which has hardened to steel, perhaps to life's pleasures or failures. This effect identifies the speaker as feeling alienated from the rest of the humanity he mentions in the following verse. At this point the focus is still on the individual. The same technique of internal rhyme can be seen in line 5, where 'room' is boxed in by 'there' and 'anywhere,' which also conveys isolation while at the same time showing the helplessness of the speaker to move or act upon whatever he sees as impending. Also, the phrase 'not

even room enough' suggests that there is not 'time enough;' it appears that the speaker is immanently close to some fore-gone conclusion. Both lines 3 and 5 build with observation and a slight tempo change in the music and vocal emphasis, as if the speaker believes he has a way to maybe understand and break free from the situation, but inevitably he fails. He is brought back to reality with lines 4 and 6, where the rhythm returns to normal and he concedes in defeat. This technique occurs in all four verses, constantly reminding the speaker that he is indeed trapped. In line 4 he sees that he is still hindered by his past, or 'scars' and cannot possibly change. Line 6 defeats all hope due to its inevitability:

It's not dark yet, but it's getting there

This line is the refrain of the song and comes at the end of each verse. Although it is a refrain, it has more meaning to it than just a usual characteristic of a song. It says the end isn't here, but it IS coming. The fact that this line reoccurs after every verse emphasizes the fact that it WILL get there. This is what is truly plaguing the speaker and what propels his thoughts, just as it propels the song and represents the constancy of Time.

The word 'scars' in line 4 opens another door to interpretation that is built upon in the following verses. Dylan has used the word 'scars' five different times in other songs, four of which embody an alienation similar to that of the speaker's. In one instance Dylan writes:

*If you don't believe there's a price for
this sweet paradise, remind me to show
you the scars*

(Where Are You Tonight? 32)

Using this line as a reference we can see a biblical allusion come to surface in line 4, since 'paradise' alludes to the Garden of Eden and is associated with 'scars' in 'Where Are You Tonight?' Man being expelled from Eden certainly calls into play the speaker's feeling of isolation and the dejection which is apparent in the next verse. Also, 'the sun' did not heal his 'scars.' Punning on 'sun' with 'Son' carries this allusion even further, where Jesus was not able to fully heal the 'scars' or sinful nature of mankind. With the beginning of the next verse we see that the speaker is not merely implicating himself in his thoughts. Humanity comes into consideration:

*Well my sense of humanity has gone
down the drain*

*Behind every beautiful thing there's
been some kind of pain*

Indeed, humanity does become implicated in his contemplation, but in terms of his own view of humanity. It is apparent that this is not a flattering view, after all his sense or feelings of humanity have gone down the drain. Once again alienation is felt in the speaker's tone because he is setting himself apart from humanity with his statement. The speaker continues in line 8, seemingly indicting humanity for having a darker side, which is covered up by beautiful things. This parallels the speaker's soul turning into steel, because humanity's covering up of pain seems to suggest that humanity's soul has also become hardened or corrupted. The contrast between pain and beauty can be felt in the speaker's tone, for he is a part of the humanity he is indicting. This line can

be considered an aphorism, making it even more relevant in calling into question the state of humanity, since an aphorism is usually considered to be a general truth. Even though a shift from the individual to the human race can be seen, the next two lines are ambiguously distant from the preceding lines due to the introduction of another individual.

She wrote me a letter and she wrote it so kind

She put down in writing what was in her mind

On the surface it is apparent that 'she' is someone who has disappointed or hurt the speaker, possibly setting in train this nihilistic thought process where he sees pain behind 'every beautiful thing.' Even though the speaker seems hurt he does not have any hard feelings towards this woman. He recognizes that what she wrote was kind, and absolves her from blame because all she did was write 'what was in her mind.' Perhaps we have an Eve to consider with the Adam-like speaker. Interpretation in this matter would make the lines thematically fit a bit more into the scheme of humanity. In the first verse we are introduced to a man, who in the second verse is accompanied by a woman, with the backdrop of all humanity. Speculation as to what the letter says becomes irrelevant primarily because there are no clues and the speaker himself states in the next two lines:

*I just don't see why I should even care
It's not dark yet, but it's getting there*

The letter means nothing, the speaker doesn't see why he should even care because 'It's not dark yet but it's getting

there.' There is something much more foreboding for the speaker, which overshadows any importance of the letter. It is apparent that the speaker sees himself, the woman, and humanity heading for a fall, a judgment that pales everything in comparison. As is seen in the next verse it is the past actions of individuals, including the speaker's, which become important, but it is the speaker that embodies this individual emphasis for others:

Well I've been to London and I've been to Gay Paree

I've followed the river and I got to the sea

I've been down on the bottom of a world full of lies

I ain't looking for nothing in anyone's eyes

Here the speaker's past experiences are mentioned, but they move from a small to large perspective. Lines 13 and 14 suggest movement or traveling, but the more specific destinations of London and Paris progress to the less specific route of an unnamed river traveled to the destination of an unnamed sea. Line 15 further widens the scope, as the speaker states that he's been 'down on the bottom of a world full of lies.' At this point in the song there is a feeling that, even though the speaker is primarily speaking in first person, there are larger implications for the state and future of humanity, which is represented by the 'world full of lies.'

In fact, every line in the third verse contains 'I,' as if the individual is somewhat representing the whole, which could be considered an example of synecdoche, although it is important to remember that

the speaker is setting himself apart from the whole because he is an observer. Interestingly, these 'I's' correspond with 'lies' and 'eyes,' where the subjective 'I's' become part of the whole since 'eyes' and 'lies' refer to other people. It is obvious that the speaker has seen and done many things, but refuses to look for approval from anyone, especially in a world full of lies. An almost righteous tone begins to make its way into the song. The speaker basically states this himself in the next two lines:

*Sometimes my burden is more than I
can bear*

It's not dark yet, but it's getting there

It seems the 'burden' the speaker must 'bear' is his observations and the righteousness he feels when making these observations. There were hints of this tone in the previous verses, but now it becomes more apparent, especially considering the obvious biblical source for the words in the third verse. We are reminded once again in line 18 that time is progressing and that there is an end in sight for the speaker. In terms of the biblical allusion, it is the setting of the sun, humanity's final judgment, which is the end.

The biblical source for these words comes from chapter one of Ecclesiastes, which could be considered the main source for the song. There were hints of this tone in the previous verses, but now it becomes more apparent, especially considering the obvious biblical derivation of the words in the third verse. Line 14 corresponds to:

*All rivers run into the sea; yet the sea
is not full; unto the place from whence*

*the rivers come thither (The Bible
Eccles. 1:7).*

And lines 15 and 16 correspond to:
*All things are full of labour; man
cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied
with seeing, nor the ear filled with
seeing (The Bible Eccles. 1:8).*

Both of these lines are observations much like those made by the speaker who feels burdened by them, which also corresponds to the speaker of the biblical passage who has done his own observations:

*And I gave my heart to seek and search
out by wisdom concerning all things
that are done under heaven: this sore
travail hath God given to the sons of
man to be exercised therewith.*

*I have seen all the works that are done
under the sun; and behold, all is vanity
and vexation of spirit (The Bible Eccles.
1:13-14).*

And finally we see the pain of the burden on the speaker as is expressed in Ecclesiastes:

*For in much wisdom is much grief: and
he that increaseth knowledge increaseth
sorrow (The Bible Eccles. 1:18).*

The fact that 'sun' is used in verse one of 'Not Dark Yet' also reinforces the allusion to Ecclesiastes:

*The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth
down, and hasteth to his place where he
arose (The Bible Eccles. 1:5)*

This quote also embodies what we can now see as the speaker's conception of time. It continues with or without him, which is something that pains him to understand. This is why 'it's not dark yet,' but the speaker acknowledges that it will

'get there.' He will die at some point and there is nothing he can do about it. The idea of time continuing without him is symbolized after this verse by approximately a full minute of instrumental interlude. What's important is to notice that the rhythm of the music does not change and follows the same chord progression; Time merely continuing at its own pace without the presence of the speaker. This is not the end, yet. The speaker steps back into time for one more verse:

I was born here and I'll die here against my will

I know it looks like I'm moving, but I'm standing still

Every nerve in my body is so vacant and numb

I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from

It seems the speaker has finally come to terms with the inevitability of his death. He realizes that he is unable to progress. In fact, the entire song has shown the speaker in stasis. The only movements have been in the past. His senses have numbed as if they all went down the drain along with humanity, and his memory has left him. He is left alone trapped in the present, just as his soul was in the first verse. The extreme length, as compared to the length of all the other lines of the song, of line 22, 'I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from' suggests the passage of time and the inevitability of the speaker's life because no matter how long the line is he cannot 'get away' from it. This line also parallels a line in Ecclesiastes:

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any

remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after (The Bible Eccles. 1:11).

Another religious allusion comes to the surface in this last verse, but it is not Christian, but Jewish. The allusion is from the Talmud, Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:29, which the line 'I was born here and I'll die here against my will' parallels very closely:

And not let your evil inclination assure you that the grave will be a place of refuge for you - for against your will you were created,

against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give an

account before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He (qtd. in Ølstrem).

In the last verse final judgment is at hand for the speaker. However, it is not just the speaker who is implicated, but humanity. This can be considered because there have been allusions from two different religions, which seemingly lumps together everyone, no matter what their faith is. The final lines of the song suggest that a very bad end is in store for humanity:

Don't even hear the murmur of a prayer

It's not dark yet, but it's getting there.

The speaker cannot hear any repentance from mankind, much less a 'murmur of a prayer.' He could be making a statement on the loss of religious belief or simply stating that people are ignorant of the path that has been taken by

humanity. They see that it is not dark, but do not look further to realize that an end will come. For the speaker there is an end, or perhaps the end has come in the speaker's world. This is signified by the period following the last line. It is the only period in the entire song. The words of the speaker have ceased and the finality of mankind is fittingly represented by a mere dot on a page. Even though the words have stopped Time rolls on with the placid constancy of the musical accompaniment, much like the interlude between verses three and four. Again the music goes uninterrupted for approximately a minute, but this time the speaker does not step back into time. He is gone.

The track on the album may stop after a minute, but there is a feeling that the music still continues whether we hear it or not because, as it is said in Ecclesiastes, 'neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after.' The music/Time is always there but the new speaker who will take the place of the last will not have any remembrance of it until the end. One final structural note to the song is its progressive rhyme scheme. This scheme progresses by rhyming couplets, of which none are repeated except for the final two lines of each verse. This signifies once again the passage of time. Once one rhyming pair has expired it is no more; the song continues to progress without any thought to this. The rhyme that does reoccur aids in reminding us that 'it's not dark yet, but it's getting there.' The reoccurring rhyme parallels the effect that the reoccurring line at the end of each verse creates.

IV. 'He examines the nightingale's code...'

Christopher Ricks does not go into an in depth explication of 'Not Dark Yet,' but, during a radio program celebrating Dylan's sixtieth birthday, points out the similarities the song shares with Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Ricks has been a long time Dylan admirer and sparked the debate over Keats vs. Dylan approximately thirty years ago. While Ricks doesn't believe that Keats' ode is expressively alluded to he does believe 'Not Dark Yet' shows remnants of the ode:

I believe that Dylan who's 'very well read it's well known,' knows the famous anthology piece and that he had it in mind, even if not consciously in mind when he created his own re-creation of so much of it. After all he did once rhyme the line 'he examines the nightingale's code' with 'owed.'

Ricks goes on further to point out the similarities in rhyme and phrases. There are approximately twenty instances of word related similarity between the two. Three of the more prominent ones are:

Keats: 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/ My sense' (1-2)

Dylan: 'Every nerve in my body is so vacant and numb' (21)

Keats: 'Shadows numberless' (9)

Dylan: 'Shadows are falling' (1)

Keats: 'Over the still stream' (76) and 'One minute past and Lethe-wards had sunk:'(4)

Dylan: 'I followed the river and I got to the sea' (14)

The last similarity shown above is interesting when considering Dylan's use of 'river' and Keats' 'Lethe-wards.' Reading Dylan's 'river' in light of Keats adds even more foreboding of death to 'Not Dark Yet' and can also work with the fact that Dylan's speaker cannot remember what he was trying to get away from, since the River Lethe causes memory loss.

While these are striking similarities between the words, there are also similarities between Keats' style and Dylan's in 'Not Dark Yet.' Keats' idea of 'negative capability' is demonstrated in this song. This term is defined by Keats as:

That is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason (889)

'Not Dark Yet' demonstrates a very objective poet in Dylan. While the speaker of the song is making his observations, he does so unforcibly. The witness is not told what to think by Dylan. The speaker isn't even forcing his views on us, he even says to himself 'I just don't see why I should even care.' Dylan is in the midst of the ultimate 'Mystery' in the song, yet he does not appear irritable in searching for reason. Even the music suggests a type of serenity in the face of such a large question. It's as if the older Dylan is as indifferent as the pre-Born Again Dylan who said:

*If dogs run free, then what must be,
Must be, and that is all.* (If Dogs Run Free 17-18)

To Keats this type of indifference, this stepping away from the work, not letting

the writer's thoughts and feelings hinder the work is what makes a true poet. It is true that Dylan does include much of his personal life and beliefs in his work but it rarely interferes with the work itself, it strengthens it. One last interesting thing Ricks points out is that 'Ode to a Nightingale' begins with the phrase 'My heart aches,' which is uncannily foreboding of the heart disease that struck Dylan after the release of *Time Out Of Mind*.

V. 'I got new eyes...'

'Not Dark Yet' has been played live approximately 102 times since its release in 1997. When looking at Dylan's work from a critical view we must remember that we are only looking at one representation of the work. Not only does Dylan revamp the musical arrangement of every song night after night, but he also changes the structure and sometimes words of the actual lyrics. His text is ever changing, which means interpretation can also change. It is important though not to feel as though we cannot proceed in an academic interpretation of his work. Of the 102 performances, it is most likely that every one is available in one form or another. The opportunities for study are endless. My Interpretation of 'Not Dark Yet' is only a part of what can be studied in regards to this song, and only a miniscule piece of a puzzle that should be scrutinized not just by loyal fans but everyone, including the academic realm. 'Not Dark Yet' is one of Dylan's masterpieces, but there are so many more. It would be hard

to deny that these works are deserving of consideration when, just looking at this particular song, a wealth of meaningful interpretation can arise. It would be wrong to deny this interpretation on the basis that the work is of a medium other than literature. Forms of literature have changed drastically over the years. Why

not consider Dylan's unique form of literature as part of this tradition. To put it in Keatsian terms:

'Literature is music, music literature,'
- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

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Liepzig
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Expecting All the Gifts That Wise Men Bring

by John Doran

My last Never Ending Tour concert was nearly two years ago - Kilkenny 15.07.01. I didn't enjoy it all that much. I was there with some family and friends, of whom some had never seen Bob before and some hadn't seen him for years. They all thought it was great. On the way out of the concert I was complaining to one of my friends (who had last seen Bob on the '86 tour with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers) about the song selection – the most recent song he played was 'Knocking on Heaven's Door'. Apart from that song everything was from the sixties - 'a greatest hits collection' I said with disdain. This was unusual - normally Bob played a much greater cross-section of material. I was annoyed. My friend wondered what I was complaining about. Bob was singing really well, the songs were great songs, the band was great - what was my problem?

Later another friend remarked on how she really loved the version he did of 'It Ain't Me, Babe'. Now, if you're familiar only with the version of that song that Bob recorded in 1964, the version that's on *Greatest Hits*, then I can imagine that you might well be in Kilkenny that night and be amazed at the rearrangement of the song - it really is true what they say, Dylan never does a song the same way twice! On the other hand if you've heard lots and lots of live versions of that song over decades of performance, and loved many of them, and you know that this NET arrangement of the song reached its peak years ago, then on that night in July 2001 you would probably sigh at this performance - I did. I thought it was on the mediocre side, routine at best.

That night in Kilkenny listening to my friends talking about the gig it hit me with some force (and not for the first time) that Bob really was not playing these NET concerts for the likes of me. He was playing it for them, the casual fans, and I wouldn't blame him. Not an original thought - I know. But it made me sigh to myself. Driving home later 'I Want You' came on the radio. Then the DJ came on: 'well it never was about the singing, really, was it?' she said, smugly. 'Oh God' I said, turning off the radio. I sighed again. That's a lot of sighing for one night. Does the NET make you sigh a lot too?

So much of the NET is ordinary. And some of it is truly wonderful. But it takes so much time to keep up with it. (It remains an ambition of mine to get every show on CD. To listen to them all? Wouldn't that be mad? Wouldn't it? That's more than 3000 CDs!) And is it really worth keeping up with it? You ask yourself that question, although you know there's no point because you're going to keep on collecting the discs.

What is an NET show like? Some shows are mundane. Occasionally a show is outstanding, those nights where Bob really engages and almost every song rises above the ordinary. But the average show has one or two, maybe three, notable performances, not necessarily brilliant performances, but notable ones. And then it has lots of songs where the performance is forgettable and some that you really feel like you don't want to hear anymore. So listening to the average show is pretty frustrating. Something great may happen soon - but the chances aren't good. And if something great does happen then you'll be moving on to the next show soon anyway and you may not be back to this one - there just isn't time. Eventually you get around to realising that you'd better start making a note of those song performances that are worth coming back to. So I started making notes when listening to shows.

The idea (another unoriginal thought) was to compile the best of the NET - *john's favourite never ending tour performances vols. 1...* - that would build into my own definitive document of the NET. Something that I could always turn to,

where every performance was unforgettable. Something to listen to when you didn't want your listening to have an element of work or duty associated with it. Something that I could give to Sony records and say 'here is what you need for your multi-CD box set retrospective of the Never Ending Tour. Prepared with love, hard work and excellent taste'.

My initial method of track selection is flawed, naturally - noting down the tracks that stand out as special on first listen. Some shows you listen to a lot more than once, perhaps because of some particular recommendation that made you look more closely. Perhaps because there was a time when you didn't have that big a collection and you listened to the same discs over and over. Perhaps because you got stranded somewhere (like on holidays) with a small selection of discs and you got to find things that you wouldn't have found on first listen, or perhaps, most significantly of all, you were present at a particular show and your memory of the event makes you listen over and over to see if you can make what's on the discs match with your memory of the show. This last one happens a lot. But mostly you listen just once or twice and probably, therefore, miss a lot of good things. So after selecting a lengthy list of performances, compiling them, and listening to them over and over I've shortened the list down to a double CD's worth. Here it is:

Disc One

1. This World Can't Stand Long - Omiya 25th February 2001
2. Hallelujah - Montreal 1st August 1988
3. Señor - Innsbruck 23rd April 2002

4. Has Anybody Seen My Love -
New York 17th November 1993
5. Mr. Tambourine Man -
Dublin 11th April 1995
6. It's All Over Now, Baby Blue -
Marseilles 29th June 1993
7. The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll -
Marseilles 29th June 1993
8. Born in Time - Toulouse 30th June 1993
9. Knockin' on Heaven's Door -
Cardiff 6th May 2002
10. A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall -
New York 19th November 2001
11. If Dogs Run Free -
Münster 1st October 2000
12. Trying To Get To Heaven -
Bournemouth 25th September 2000

Disc Two

1. Song to Woody -
Santa Cruz 16th March 2000
2. San Francisco Bay Blues -
Berkeley 10th June 1988
3. One Too Many Mornings -
Stratford Upon Avon 14th July 1995
4. I'm Not Supposed To Care -
Anaheim 23rd May 1998
5. Po' Boy -
Grand Rapids 6th November 2001
6. Highlands -
Santa Cruz 16th March 2000
7. Drifter's Escape -
Santa Cruz 15th March 2000
8. Queen Jane Approximately -
New York 16th November 1993
9. Desolation Row -
Birmingham 2nd April 1995
10. Summer Days -
Fairfax 22nd November 2002
11. A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall -
Nara 22nd May 1994

The final paragraph of Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home* has stuck in my mind. I read it in 1987, a year after it was published. Speaking of Bob in 1986, Shelton said:

He may get off the plateau he's on, or he may not... he may follow Yeats's route of more seeking and more finding and even greater creativity toward old age.¹

At the time it seemed to me unlikely that Bob would go on to find even greater creativity toward old age than he had found earlier in life. But the comment about Yeats has stayed on in my mind. Now it's sixteen years later. Bob is moving fairly close to old age. In those sixteen years his major artistic artefact is the NET. What does it amount to?

Many critics have complained about the NET, their complaints often focussing on the bands that Bob has used. It is true that Bob has used his bands on the NET in a different way to before. He hasn't let them have the same expressive freedom. This has been at the expense of the music, and you could say that it is a denial by Bob of one of his own greatest performance gifts - that of being somehow able to play his band as an extension of himself. But what he has really done here is not simply deny this ability, but control it, be more sparing with it.

Bob has been quoted as saying that he had a realisation, a moment of clarity, when he could see that he had to believe in the music again and see where it took him. This realisation came to him in 1987 in Locarno, Switzerland:

It's almost like I heard it as a voice. It wasn't like it was even me thinking it.

*'I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not.' And all of a sudden everything just exploded... After that is when I sort of knew: I've got to go out and play these songs. That's just what I must do.'*²

So Bob went on the road - made it a way of life. Isn't that what he's always wanted? He'll play night after night in small halls or medium sized halls, or football stadiums, whatever. Isn't that what his heroes did? The bluesmen. The troubadours. Woody Guthrie. BB King still does it. They went from town to town. That was their way of life, and now he'll make it his. And so the NET started.

It's not as if the idea of going on the road was new to Bob. But he must have realised that if he wanted to sustain it as a way of life as he approached old age he would have to do something differently to before. Bouts of intensive touring in the past had taken a toll. After the 1965-66 touring, which literally almost killed him, he went into years of semi-seclusion. His marriage didn't survive the 74-76 touring. The marathon touring of 1978 was followed by another dramatic upheaval in his life - the born again Christian period. Then the period of gospel touring from late 79-81 was followed by a drought of activity. The pattern here is pretty clear. When you go on the road and commit to performance in the way that Bob had done on most of the above tours it takes a toll on your life. Changes it in a pretty big way. And all of that activity led to Bob in the eighties, tired, lacking in inspiration, energy, confidence.

So on the NET Bob realised that he couldn't push himself in the way he had

before. He couldn't have a band on stage with him pushing him too much either. Now, Bob knows better than anyone what it takes to make a great band performance, but he had to be more measured. Don't let the musicians loose. Well let them loose now and then. Maybe once or twice a night. Maybe all night some nights, when the mood hits - that should be sustainable.

What about the reputation? It's in tatters anyway.

What about the audience? You're doing this for you. But you'll keep it a little fresh for them with changes. Not dramatic changes - had enough of those - but small changes, like new arrangements and new songs.

How will it stand up to the past? What about the past? - what about the future?

So maybe Bob made a decision to approach live performance differently, to sacrifice something in favour of longevity. I wouldn't suggest that Bob did this consciously right at the start of the NET, but that this general approach came about quite quickly over a year or two.

So we have to be reasonable when approaching the NET. Give the guy a break. He's given us a few, and he keeps on doing it. OK, so you're fed up hearing 'Tangled Up in Blue'. OK so you reach in panic for the forward button on your CD player when the latest live version of 'Like a Rolling Stone' starts up. It seems like a disaster, but it's not really.

Given the amount of pre-NET material, and the extraordinary quality and variety of so much of it, I am constantly struck by the amount of time I devote to listening to the NET these days and how

relatively little to the pre-NET stuff. Why? Because it's relatively easy to keep a steady stream of NET discs flowing through your letter box? Because you're afraid that something is happening and you don't know what it is? Because you've invested so much time in it that you can't stop now? Because it's good for your knowledge of geography? Because you need reassurance? Reassurance that Bob can still do it? Don't stop too long to think about what it means that you need these reassurances so badly. (I picture myself at some time in the future having a breakthrough in obsession therapy... 'Yes. I see clearly now. Bob has lost it. He can no longer do it. God, this is refreshing. I feel like a great weight has lifted. Let's face it, Bob is shit. Has been for a long time really. Oh God, why didn't I do this years ago.') Because there is absolutely nobody else like Bob. You have searched, hard, and you've found that nobody comes close, even when Bob's on a bad night, or a bad year. Paul Williams, has put his finger on it (as usual) in issue 4 of *Judas!*:

*Because something happens... at moments during the shows that one can't get enough of, something that is worth chasing after... River of music. River of human (and holy) creative energy.*³

So after lots of chasing these moments I made my purely-for-pleasure compilation of some of them. A live album of the NET. What would you want from such a thing? There will be such a thing some day and surely it will be the thing that sums up a big section of Bob's career for the vast majority of people out there, so it's important. Do

you want it to be *representative* of the NET? Definitely not - then it would probably have 'Tangled Up in Blue' on it and 'Rainy Day Women'. Surely it would be better to present the best of the tour even if it were completely unrepresentative. Then you could use it to convince the doubters, and yourself, that the body of work represented by the NET really did stand up to comparison with earlier parts of Bob's career. Genius does not need to be sustained, it merely need appear occasionally. To compare a typical full NET show with a typical full show from 1964 or 1966 or 1975 or 1976 or 1979-80 is not reasonable. Those standards are just too high. Let's not concentrate on the mediocre stuff that is certainly there. Let's accentuate the positive. Wouldn't Bob agree with that - well he would have once.

The Songs

Leonard Cohen said in 1985:

*Dylan, to my way of thinking is the Picasso of song. People came up to me when he put out his Christian record and said this guy's finished - he can't speak to us anymore... When you're talking about a man like Dylan, you can never write him off. He's always going to come up with something beautiful.*⁴

Sincerely, L. Cohen. 'The Picasso of song' - I love that phrase. Over the years in conversation I've found that it has sent so many critics of Bob's singing into reverse. I'd just say 'well, people who think Bob Dylan can't sing are the type of person who thinks Picasso couldn't paint'. Somehow people are very nervous about dismissing Picasso. Even if they don't 'get' his painting, or like it, they tend to be

nervous about being seen to dismiss him. It is curious that they feel much safer dismissing Bob's singing.

Some of the great examples of his Picassoesque singing are on certain cover versions. There's two here from 1988 - Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' and Jesse Fuller's 'San Francisco Bay Blues'. The performance of both of these songs is just unbelievably good and they are both quintessential Bob Dylan performances. So many people have done versions of 'Hallelujah', and some of them are pretty good. But you could never imagine anybody else performing the song in the way Bob does here, in this first of the two times he performed the song. He sings it with the snarling, urgent, voice he had in 1988. He bends the words and the melody in a way that is so characteristic of him and yet so fresh, no matter how often you listen to it. The singing is as good as you'll hear, reaching a peak in the way he sings the repeated word 'hallelujah' in the third chorus. He sings 'hallelujah', meaning 'praise Jehovah', with a voice that's filled with anguish, and maybe some joy. He gets inside the song in a way that is hard to write about. This performance illuminates the phrase 'interpretation of song' better than anything I know; to take a song of immense beauty and depth and to show us what it can become. Bob chooses the songs that he lives in with care. One can say similar things about the 'San Francisco Bay Blues' performance. The backing is a driving acoustic guitar, simply strummed, but the singing is sublime. It was *always* about the singing.

In some of the less rewarding sections of the NET cover versions have played an important role. This is certainly true for the serious listener who may trawl through many uninspired discs and suddenly find a cover version to make things interesting. These cover versions must also be very important for Bob. Take an example - Madison, 5th November 1991. The opening section of this show strikes me as being very poor indeed. Bob seems to be way off form. Then he plays the traditional 'Trail of the Buffalo' and it's an absolutely amazing transformation. Suddenly there is a performer with purpose and confidence doing a fantastic version of this song. Before that there was a performer who didn't seem to be playing with much purpose, who didn't really know exactly what he wanted to do with the songs that he's played so often before. He was short on inspiration. The very fact of throwing in a new cover version or an old traditional meant that he had some idea about what he wanted to do with the song. He was inspired by it to some degree, in a way that he was not by his own songs. After 'Trail of the Buffalo' the level of the whole show went up a few notches. The cover version was an important catalyst in the overall performance.

Neither 'Hallelujah' nor 'San Francisco Bay Blues' falls into that category - they both come from good shows on the first great stretch of the NET. The performance of Gordon Lightfoot's 'I'm Not Supposed To Care' is from a year which is just okay, the competent but dull 1998. It's a nice song with an opening section that reminds me of John Lennon.

Bob's performance of it is tender and gentle. It's as if he views the song as a beautiful but delicate creature and he's taking great care with it.

I was at a concert in Great Woods, Mansfield, Massachusetts on 8th July 1986. At some point during the concert Bob said to the crowd (I'm paraphrasing from memory since I haven't managed to get a copy of that show) 'Hey, just to let you know, I'm not going to play 'Mr. Tambourine Man' tonight'. The crowd groaned. Bob laughed and said 'well if you'd played it a thousand times you wouldn't want to play it either.' I'm glad he changed his mind about that. Imagine if we didn't have those recordings of the song from the European spring tour of 1995.

I tell myself that it is silly to try to write about the spring 1995 performances of this song. They speak so powerfully for themselves. Some of my friends told me that I was silly to go to all of the UK and Ireland dates on that tour. I'm glad I did. The song is so fresh, so unbelievably fresh. It's like a new song. At the time of hearing these performances live I found it hard to believe that such a definitive version of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' was coming at this late date. Hard to believe that the masterful performances of this song from England 1966 were being matched, again in England, nearly twenty years later. These performances are the best live moments that I've found in concert. It was spellbinding.

What about the singing, the phrasing? It is tender, incredibly strong, effortless. A voice filled with experience, love and

regret. A lifetime of singing and experience was necessary to make this singing possible. I love the way his voice trembles slightly in the final word of each line 'free', 'me', 'waves'. And the harmonica playing is powerful. The pied piper has thrown away his pipe and got a harmonica. There is such a sense here of Bob as the pied piper. Calm. The audience in his hand. I would have followed him anywhere. I remember the security staff in the Brixton Academy. They were completely indifferent to Bob most of the time, but each night they were transfixed by this song. Such an unusual set of performances. Bob without his guitar, holding the microphone in one hand and the microphone cord in the other hand, stroking the smoky air on the stage. Doing shadow-boxing moves: it's a shadow you're seeing that he's chasing.

All the performances of this song that I've heard from this tour are superb, but I chose the performance from Dublin. This song, this year, is a great reinterpretation by Bob of one of his own songs. The tune is only subtly altered from the famous original version, but the real magic is the way the timing is altered. The ends of the lines are speeded up. This night as the Irish audience sing along they are caught out. Forced to listen. Bob reacts to the audience. He realizes that the song they have in their head is slightly different to the one he's singing. He enjoys it, and it pushes him just that tiny fraction further.

'Mr Tambourine Man' is about letting go of the things that we know. Being open to the possibility of things that we don't know yet, but may have sensed. And this

meaning is felt in the song as much as implied in the lyrics. 'Take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind'. In these performances, as he most notably did in 1966, Dylan opens himself to his own song's meaning, allows himself to be taken somewhere. And he brings his audience with him. 'A trip upon a magic swirling ship'. Really this song is an extraordinary invocation of the value of song itself. A thing which can transform, for a moment, the reality of the listener, as well as that of the singer. Of course, only the great singers can do this. It is what makes them great. This is the supreme song. Song is the supreme fiction.

One of the things that's interesting about these performances of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' in early 1995 is that Bob didn't play guitar. Bob's guitar playing has been a curious feature of recent years. Over the years of the NET he has brought his own 'lead' guitar playing to a much more prominent position within the sound of the band, in both the electric and acoustic sections of the shows. The results have ranged from the truly effective (occasionally) to the strange (more often). I wonder if he has been driven to some extent to create an identifiable 'lead' guitar style of his own in the way that Neil Young has. 'Mr. Tambourine Man' in early 1995 benefited from not having his acoustic guitar playing on it. J.J. Jackson's acoustic guitar and Bucky Baxter's dobro were just right.

Later in the year, in America, he slowed this song down about by 20% from the European performances and it didn't work nearly as well. But everything in

those early 1995 shows was great, especially in the three song acoustic section in the middle of the shows. The performance of 'Desolation Row' from Birmingham is typical of the controlled, energetic and yet tender playing that our songster and band were churning out at that time. Sometimes listening to the recording of a performance afterwards can be a disappointment compared to the live experience. This is one where that did not happen for me.

When Michael Gray gave his *Bob Dylan and the History of Rock & Roll* talk in Dublin last year I went along. I chatted briefly with him afterwards and asked him what was the best Dylan gig he'd been to. Without hesitation he said 'Liverpool 1966.' 'Naturally,' I replied, 'dumb question.' So I asked 'has any other time you've seen him even come close?' 'Well not in terms of impact' he said, 'in terms of nothing being the same again afterwards,' 'What about musically?' I persisted. 'Oh yes' he said, 'the Hammersmith run of 1993 was great, taken as a whole, and of 1990.'

I was delighted to hear him saying this about 1993. To me it was a really good year of the NET, one of the best. It's the summer of that year that stands out for me most. People have tended to be negative about this year, particularly the very long versions of songs with long instrumental passages that didn't seem to go anywhere. That is true for some of the performances, but there are also some extraordinary performances. Take 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' and 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', both from

Marseilles, 29 June. Bob's singing in the summer of '93 is not very good in the normal sense. His voice was relatively weak (two years later his voice was much stronger) but he used it to great effect. These performances have a floating, dreamlike quality that is common to so much of Bob's best live work. Perhaps because of his voice being weak, there is a very strong focus on the music as opposed to the singing. There is somehow a lot of space in the music, and this space is filled sequentially by guitar, harmonica, mandolin on 'Baby Blue' and dobro on 'Hattie Carroll'. There is a magical moment at 6:53 of 'Hattie Carroll' where Bob is 82 seconds into a harmonica solo and Bucky decides to come in on the dobro. A little burst of harmonica comes from Bob to let him know that he's not finished. Bucky backs down gracefully and they carry on. This is purposeful music. The performances are each over nine minutes long. It's a pity they had to end so soon.

The very next night in Toulouse Bob hit again with 'Born in Time'. This is one of Bob's great NET era songs. It's a pity he hasn't played it more often live. There is a curious contrast between some of Bob's later songs and 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. In 'Tambourine Man' he sang of: 'the ancient empty streets too dead for dreaming', 'my senses have been stripped', 'my toes too numb to step'. There is a sense of being in a state that is slightly removed from the normal, and it is a good thing. Contrast those lyrics with: 'I'm walking through streets that are dead', 'The air is getting hotter... I've been wading through the

high muddy water, with the heat rising in my eyes', 'I've been walking through the middle of nowhere', all from *Time Out Of Mind*, and with 'I'll walk along through the shaky street, listening to my heart beat, in the record breaking heat, where we were born in time' (as sung in 1993). The ancient empty street has become a shaky street, and it is usually uncomfortably hot. The dreamlike state is still there but it's a different dream.

The playing of summer 1993 suited 'Born in Time' very well. The opening plucked notes of this performance and the soupy steel guitar that punctuates evoke that dream. This is an example of where Bob's guitar playing is crucial to a performance. You start to notice his curious little runs of notes after about three minutes. Soon the performance almost unravels but Bob rescues it by singing the next verse. The real magic of this performance starts to build at around 5:00 minutes. John Jackson's smooth guitar and Bob's characteristic guitar runs (not smooth) play exquisitely against each other. Clinton Heylin in his book *The Great White Wonders* says:

Bootleg punters are looking for something that is locked into the wellspring of inspiration, and the beauty of the musical interplay that rock music allows is that such a moment can sneak up on you real quick and unexpected - and just as quickly be gone.⁵

The passage of play between 5:00 and at 7:19 (song's end) draws deeply from this wellspring. Bob's guitar playing makes a lot of sense here, as it does in the performance of 'One Too Many Mornings' from

summer 1995. A delicious repeated guitar slide, and an example of the delights that can show up unexpectedly in the middle of an otherwise dull show.

So 1993 was an excellent year, and to crown it Bob played the Supper Club gigs in November, one of the highlights of the NET. I'd always liked 'Has Anybody Seen My Love' but didn't realise how good it was until I heard this performance from the final of the four Supper Club shows. It bristles. His singing is so energised in these shows. He must have been actually hurting his voice when he sang 'Queen Jane Approximately' in the first gig, especially when he sings '...convince you of your pain', but it sounds great. A smouldering performance which gets its power from the way he sings the six words remain/jane/pain/jane/complain/jane.

A few weeks ago I was at one of the Neil Young solo *Greendale* gigs. The opening hour and fifty minutes were Neil playing new, unheard, songs from the upcoming *Greendale* album, with long between-song monologues about the fictitious characters of the songs. It was risky, and brave. The new songs sounded pretty good to me and Neil's acoustic guitar playing was superb and he was almost three hours on stage by himself. I couldn't help wishing that Bob would also do something risky, really challenge his audience.

At one point, in 2000, I thought there was just a slight flicker of hope that he would start doing a complete show of jazzy rewrites of his own songs (it was just the slightest flicker!). Just his choosing to play the most unlikely 'If Dogs Run Free' seemed to signify that he might be looking

to freshen things up after twelve years of the NET. The band sounded good playing this jazzy song. I love the delight you can hear in the crowd in Münster when they realise what he's playing, the debut of this song after thirty years. On the same tour there was the somewhat jazzy arrangement of 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven'. Robert Forryan in *Judas!* 4 says, while discussing the lyrics of 'To Ramona':

*I don't believe you if you tell me that in another 30 years many people will be quoting lyrics from, say, Time Out Of Mind with such easy familiarity.*⁶

No, but that's not because the later songs don't contain brilliant lines, but because Bob is never going to be as popular as he was thirty years ago. I love the contrast between this old voice, filled with regret and resignation, as he sings 'when you think you've lost everything, you find out you can always lose a little more' from 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven' in Bournemouth with the young sneering voice singing 'when you got nothing, you got nothing to lose' from 'Like a Rolling Stone'. Anyway the jazz revival didn't happen, a pity.

Sometimes great performances are just that. There's not that much to say about them. Like the straightforward 'This World Can't Stand Long' from Omiya 2001 or 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door' from Cardiff 2002 which is good because of the harmony singing by the band. Or the simple yet stately 'Song to Woody' from Santa Cruz 2000 or 'Po' Boy' from Grand Rapids 2001, just because it's such a fantastic song, or 'Señor' from Innsbruck 2002. There is probably a lot

that can be said about any performance of 'Highlands', but the performance from Santa Cruz 2000 is memorable because Bob is obviously having so much fun with it, as he was with everything that night. The humour in this song about the difficulty of proper communication between man and woman or between artist and audience is communicated most effectively by Bob's singing. The 'restaurant scene' is the highlight of this song and of this performance. What a good band Bob had in these later years of the NET. They do the simple things so well. Like on 'Drifter's Escape', also from Santa Cruz 2000. I love Charlie Sexton's playing, both acoustic and electric. There's something about the way he strums. He sets up a pulsing guitar sound that has been the basis of many fine performances, including this one.

Undoubtedly the highlights of the NET have been the acoustic performances, which have been more down-tempo than the electric sections of the shows. The shows over the years have always been balanced in terms of up-tempo and down-tempo songs. The up-tempo songs, while usually great in concert, have lacked the high quality of the slower acoustic performances. There aren't really all that many songs that have acted as rave-up numbers. I haven't done analysis on it but it strikes me that he has relied heavily on 'Highway 61 Revisited', 'Tombstone Blues', 'Watching The River Flow', 'Silvio', and for a while 'Everything Is Broken' and 'Cat's in the Well'. A lot of Bob's NET era songs have been an attempt to generate more up-tempo candidates. 'Million

Miles', 'Can't Wait', 'Cold Irons Bound' and "'Til I Fell In Love With You' were the weaker songs on *Time Out Of Mind* and had some limited success in concert. "*Love And Theft*" was more successful in this respect, as in all other respects, with 'Cry Awhile', 'Lonesome Day Blues' and 'Honest With Me'. But the big success was 'Summer Days', especially in late 2002. What a set of shows from the USA in autumn! 'High Water', Warren Zevon's 'Mutineer' and 'Summer Days' were a purple patch at these shows and a purple patch of the NET. Bob at piano in this performance of 'Summer Days' from Fairfax must have felt like he was playing with The Golden Chords again or at the Hibbing High's Jacket Jamboree Talent Festival in 1958.

It's interesting to look how the major Bob Dylan songs have fared in the NET years. Certain major pre-NET songs have not fared well at all. 'Tangled Up in Blue' is surely one of them. I'm not saying that there have been no good performances of this song on the NET, but overall it's been a drag. The same is true of 'Like a Rolling Stone'. So often the performance of both of these songs sounds perfunctory and they frequently don't inspire Bob. The NET has brought little new from these songs. Others, like 'Don't Think Twice, It's Alright', 'It Ain't Me, Babe', 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue', 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' and many more have fared spectacularly well at times, while sometimes becoming stale. The two songs that have been consistently impressive are 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'. Performances of these songs

are *always* worth hearing. 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' seems to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Bob, year after year. The performance from New York 2001 is typical of recent years. The music is deceptively simple. A pulsing rhythm like gentle waves washing over the listener, each carrying a fragment of the apocalyptic vision. The voice has become ragged but is used to great effect in the singing, especially in the verses.

Some would say that the Great Music Experience in Nara, Japan in 1994 was not a part of the NET at all. That doesn't make sense to me, but it doesn't really matter. What can one say about the performance of 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' on 22 May 1994? One could talk about the inspired spine-tingling singing, which (in the final verse and chorus especially) is the best you will ever hear, *ever*. One could talk about the unique circumstances of Bob being backed by an orchestra. But it would be easier to simply ask: Don't you find this an utterly beautiful performance? If not, please listen to it again.

Of course even a collection of your favourite NET performances on CD doesn't come anywhere close to being at a concert, even an ordinary one. What a privilege to be around to attend some of these shows. OK, so there are many shows that are mostly ordinary. OK, so looking for the truly memorable performances might seem like being in a world of fibreglass searching for a gem, or like looking for a diamond in a mountain of rocks (oh sorry, that's a Meatloaf quote, not a Bob quote). But Bob has managed to tour consistently for fifteen years and most of it

has been pretty good. Some of it has been extraordinary. Has he followed 'Yeats's route of more seeking and more finding and even greater creativity toward old age'? Absolutely, and he's done it in a manner that he can sustain. Even greater creativity than when he was younger? In performance, maybe. Some of the performances I've mentioned here he could never have done in his younger life. So there haven't been all that many shows where an extraordinary level of performance was maintained throughout - so what. That would be to expect too much. That would be to be like the banker's nieces, seeking perfection, expecting all the gifts that wise men bring.

1 Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home - The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, p.581 (Ballantine, 1987)

2 Andrew Muir, *Razor's Edge* p. 22 (Helter Skelter, 2001)

3 Paul Williams, *Judas!* No. 4, p.89 (2003)

4 John Bauldie (ed.) *Wanted Man - In Search of Bob Dylan*, p. 155 (Penguin, 1992)

5 Clinton Heylin, *The Great White Wonders (A History of Rock Bootlegs)* p.411 (Viking, 1994)

6 Robert Forryan, *Judas!* No. 4, p.44 (2003)

by Stephen Scobie

Female Rambling Sailor

In 1992, in one of his rare responses to requests from the crowd, Bob Dylan told an audience: 'This one's got all that stuff in it. You'll see - all that and more!' But what 'this one' turned out to be was not one of his own songs, but a traditional ballad called 'Golden Vanity.' And 'all that stuff' was pure emotion - love, death, betrayal, sacrifice - and pure poetry.

Throughout the 1990s, Dylan sprinkled his concerts with other people's songs - ballads, blues, gospel, bluegrass - providing his fans with a veritable history of musical tradition. Back in the 60s, he had himself done more than any other performer to change the image of the 'folksinger' from someone who performed traditional songs to someone who felt obliged to write his own compositions: the 'singer-songwriter.' In the 90s, Dylan seemed intent on righting that balance.

Among the traditional broadside ballads, Dylan in the early 90s showed a small but marked interest in the sub-genre often referred to as 'trouser songs': that is, ballads about women who dress up as men and go off to sea, often to follow their lovers. (For a scholarly study, see Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850*. University of

Chicago Press, 1996.) Songs of this type show up on both the albums of traditional songs which Dylan issued at this time: 'Canadee-i-o' on *Good As I Been To You* (1992) and 'Jack-A-Roe' on *World Gone Wrong* (1993). But perhaps the most interesting of these trouser songs is 'Female Rambling Sailor,' which Dylan performed six times in concert in 1992, but has never recorded.

'Female Rambling Sailor' is of British origin. The place names - Gravesend, the River Thames - seem to be English, though Dianne Dugaw speculates that the song may in fact come from Ireland. There is a surviving broadside text from the 1820s, which even features a 'before-and-after' illustration of the female rambling sailor. The song has also been collected in Australia, and it may well be there that Dylan learned it.

Most trouser songs work towards a happy ending. In 'Jack-A-Roe,' the young woman successfully disguises herself, follows her departed lover, finds him wounded in a battle, heals him, and marries him. In 'Canadee-i-o,' the woman is abandoned by the man she originally followed, but ends up married to the ship's captain instead!

‘Female Rambling Sailor,’ however, briskly dismisses any such possibility:

*Her true love he was pressed away
And drowned in some foreign sea
Which caused this fair maid to say
I’ll be a rambling sailor*

The lover is killed off at the beginning of the song; there is never any question of her finding him and bringing him back. Indeed, it is the knowledge of his death which *causes* this woman to go to sea. It is the sea itself, the life of a sailor, which becomes her ‘heart’s delight.’ (As opposed to the lover who was ‘pressed away’: that is, he was an involuntary conscript, not someone who chose to be a sailor.) The song repeatedly stresses her courage, and her competence: ‘No sailor there could her excel.’ The romantic plot, which normally works to recuperate the protagonist back into a conventional woman’s role, is here very firmly refused.

She does die, however. The song can’t quite let such a drastic transgression of gender propriety go unpunished. She dies by accident, in a fall, and we are then given a nicely comic recognition scene:

*When her lily white breast in sight it came
It appeared to be a female’s frame
Rebecca Young it was the name
Of the female rambling sailor*

Given Bob Dylan’s whole fascination with the proper name and the alias, it will come as no surprise when I say that “Rebecca Young” interests me greatly, and that I suspect that at some level Dylan also was taken by this detail (as well as by the song’s lovely and intricate tune).

Most obviously, what is going on here is the recuperation of the heroine into a properly female role. The ‘lily white breast’ and the name go together; both are signals of traditional gender. In death, the woman is returned to her female body, and to her ‘proper’ name. The name is the grounding of the woman’s reality which she had attempted to escape but by which she is now reclaimed.

But the song continues to subvert this recuperation. For one thing, the name itself, in its *improper* sense, restores her to life and vigour: young. Perhaps even ‘forever young.’ And having given us the proper name, just this once, the song proceeds to ignore it: in all the succeeding verses, up to and including the last line of the song, the protagonist is again referred to only as ‘female rambling sailor.’ This is, after all, the name she has *chosen* for herself. Her identity. Her alias.

Note: I am indebted to Eric Debeck for his diligent research on this song. This brief article is excerpted from my forthcoming book, *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*, which will be published by Red Deer Press in November 2003.

Masked & Anonymous

A Personal View

by Stephen Scobie

I went to a midday show at a multiplex cinema in Vancouver. I was, quite literally, the only person in the audience. Big screen, big sound. (A few scratches, already, on the print: bugs on the windshield.) Nothing to interfere, here: just me and Bob, one on one. Would I have preferred to see it with a general audience? Or would I have been too defensive against their (inevitable) derision? (Even if in-built defence against derision is not a leading feature in the film itself.)

It wasn't quite as bad as I'd feared, but it was pretty bad. Good things first: the music is great, and the footage of Dylan and his band in concert is, hopefully, preserved somewhere in full, unedited form. For this is the best visual record in years of what late Dylan looks like on stage. And it is just priceless to see this kind of documentation of what a weird physical character Dylan has become. The way he walks is so odd, yet somehow endearing. He has never succeeded (at least on camera) in looking at home in his own body. The face no longer even attempts expression. (In the one scene in which he is required to weep, you can almost see the eye-dropper being applied before the shot begins.) The camera is not quite the enemy, but it's not yet a friend.

And I certainly don't agree with criticisms that the film is disjointed, incoherent, or too 'experimental.' My problem is quite the opposite: it isn't nearly disjointed, incoherent, or experimental **enough!** It's as if *Renaldo and Clara* had been re-edited into a coherent narrative: who the fuck wants that?! Because narrative always normalizes: and ideas which may achieve unique expression in Dylan's songs often seem merely banal in the melodramatic plot contexts of 'M&A'.

Take, as one example, the long speech delivered by the Animal Wrangler (played by Val Kilmer). It is arbitrary, isolated, in no way related to the plot of the movie, completely irrelevant, a featured 'turn' for a famous guest-star. None of which I would object to at all, as long as the speech actually had anything original or interesting to say about animals. But it doesn't. Nothing in the speech has anything to say about animals that hasn't been said a thousand times before. The apparent 'unconventionality' of having a long speech from a minor character who has nothing to do with the plot relapses into the utter conventionality of what he actually says. And none of the quirky mannerisms of Kilmer's performance can transcend the banality of the writing.

If - and I repeat, 'if' - one is tempted to see the film as a realist narrative, the implausibilities abound. The so-called 'charity benefit' never achieves any semblance of an audience. Charisma is, ahem, missing in action. The idea that this 'Jack Fate' could generate millions of dollars is, to put it mildly, unresolved. So all kinds of ideas are introduced, and then left hanging, undeveloped. There is a good joke in having Fate's concert supported by actors representing Pope Jean-Paul and

Gandhi, but nothing is done with this idea beyond their mere presence. (Neither one is given a line of dialogue.)

Centrally, what seems to be at stake is the tension between 'Jack Fate' as a fictional character and 'Bob Dylan' as a figure in cultural history. This tension works splendidly in *Renaldo and Clara*, in which he pays lip service, but very little more, to the identity of Renaldo and Bob. You always see the identity between Renaldo and Bob, yet the discrepancy is



always available as a narrative strategy. In 'M&A,' the same ideas fall flat and unconvincing, as in the excruciating scene in which a young child sings for 'Jack' a note-perfect but somehow lifeless version of 'Times They Are a-Changin', and Jack/Bob has nothing at all to say in response. This incongruity could just have worked in the multiple juxtapositions of *Renaldo and Clara*; here, in the enforced continuities of 'M&A,' it seems merely embarrassing. Again, the film is not daring enough. What should have been a productively ambiguous tension between actor and character, between the career of the real-life Bob Dylan and that of the fictional Jack Fate, falls flat. All of the film's many comments on Jack Fate as a failure, a has-been artist whom no one remembers, someone fit to inhabit the hotel room in which Nixon wrote his 'you won't have me to kick around any more' speech: all this remains unproductive. In a way that it wasn't in *Renaldo and Clara*.

In so many ways, 'M&A' is the terrible film that 'R&C' might have been but wasn't. The radical editing style of 'R&C' retained an edge to that film which 'M&A' always loses through its misguided attempts to achieve narrative coherence. The narrative contrivances merely detract from the film, giving it a spurious unity.

Yet, at the same time, there is **too** much unity: a unity of tone which turns from scepticism into nihilism, an ultimate statement that nothing makes sense, that all political claims resolve into the ideological assertion of naked power, that a 'world gone wrong' is simply unredeemable. Is this a responsible political

position, or is it just the sour grapes of an irascible old man? At what point does the prophet begin preaching only to himself?

At this stage, it's interesting to compare the released version of 'M&A' with the version of the script leaked onto the internet many months ago. Interesting to see that the script fails to anticipate the marvellous musical versions of 'Diamond Joe' and 'Dixie.' (Imagine the apoplectic fury of 1963 Civil Rights fans of Bob Dylan ever even conceivably imagining him singing 'Dixie'!) I miss some of the sharper jokes on the script version, yet I am glad to see omitted the gratuitous attack on Mapplethorpe. The long speech on Freud, perhaps the most interesting section of the original script, is also missing from the released version. I was utterly dismayed by the script when I read it, yet, going through it again after seeing the released version, I think that many of the best portions have been omitted.

Again, the released film seems to pull its punches. The problem with 'M&A' is not that it's too outrageous, but that it's not nearly outrageous enough. 'R&C' was, in its editing style, a serious challenge to the norms of cinema; 'M&A' challenges nothing. All it gives us is some wonderful footage of Dylan in concert, and some wonderful line readings by an actor in some badly written scenes. 'All'!! Isn't that enough?!! 'M&A' is a total mess, but it's still more interesting and compelling than any of the more accomplished releases in the past twenty years - since, that is, *Renaldo and Clara*.

PS: I reserve the right to change my mind completely when I see the film again!

Philosophical Reflections

by Martin van Hees

'Ballad of a Thin Man': Reducing Complexities

'In your first interviews always indicate that your work resists classification or comparisons, state that it is unique and adamantly refuse to let it be pigeonholed or stereotyped in the usual ways.' If there were a manual for the beginning artist, this piece of advice would surely be in it. But although it is such a cliché, it undoubtedly is a heartfelt truth for many artists. Why is this so? Why does an artist, or for that matter, almost any human being, refuse to allow his work or himself to be categorised?

One answer is to say that any classification, definition, or comparison entails a partial reduction and distortion of reality. A physician making a diagnosis of a patient is certainly doing a useful thing, but by labelling the pains, the shivers, the chills, the anxieties and the feelings of helplessness of the patient as 'the flu'¹ he reduces a complex state of being of a particular individual to a trivial phenomenon. In other words, by applying our

concepts and definitions, we arrive at some understanding of that world, and the human beings in it, but that understanding has its price: it ignores or distorts important aspects of reality.

Indeed, some philosophers have therefore argued that we should try to drop our analytical modes of thinking and go back to what we might call our 'pre-reflective' or 'a-theoretic' understanding of the world. This sounds awfully vague, and it is. This vagueness is however inevitable: we cannot *explain* what that understanding exactly amounts to - it would not only contradict the position itself but may in fact undermine that understanding. It is like trying to say in words what makes a novel of Coetzee so gripping, a song of Dylan so exhilarating or a movie of Tarantino so unsettling. Such attempts inevitably entail the danger of losing the quality that made the work so special and so overwhelming the first time you read, heard or saw it.

Be this as it may, it need not be the entire answer to the question as to why we resist categorisations. A second reason has

to do with a rejection of the reasons why people sometimes feel the need to reduce complexities. A complex state of affairs can be frightening and intimidating not because it *is* frightening or intimidating but only because its complexity make it *seem* so. Like a tourist clinging on to his road-map, we try to break down the barriers of fear that the unknown elicits in us, by resorting to the usual devices of explanation, definition or description: removing the uncertainty surrounding us makes the world less frightening. Now this may still be seen as a rather innocent distortion of reality. After all, just like the tourist who is reducing the unfamiliar surroundings to the little marks on his map, we often do simply want to feel more comfortable. However, it can become a quite harmful attitude, especially when we apply the methods of reduction to other human beings. When other human beings are no longer seen as people like ourselves but are reduced to stereotypes or objects, we deny that they exist in the same way as we do.

If it's thus fear indeed that forms the underlying motive, then the resistance to categorisation and explanation may well be a form of contempt. Contempt for those who are too weak (that is, too afraid) to see things as they are. 'Ballad of a Thin Man' obviously is an expression of such contempt. (Incidentally, it is a misnomer to talk about the 'hate-songs' of Dylan. They are songs of contempt rather than hate.) However, the song is true to its own theme in that it does not describe or explain but makes us *feel* - pre-reflectively as it were - the effects of any such reduc-

tion. Moreover, it makes us feel and share the scorn that the singer expresses towards Jones, that is, we share the singer's contempt for Jones's fruitless attempts ('pencil in your hands') to get a grasp on reality. Thus the song is a genuine testimony to what art can do and what philosophy seems incapable of doing: to make clear at the level of the pre-reflective that we should abandon our quest for categorisations.

But if this were all, it would not yet make the song the classic that it is. Apart from making us feel the contempt for explanatory reductions based on fear, it also makes us experience the strength of the drive towards such reductions. Again, it is doing so on a pre-reflective level - we unknowingly glide into it. By sharing the judgement about Jones and by sharing the narrator's contempt, we are doing what we condemn Jones for: we reduce the complexity of our world by viewing another person as a stereotype and an abstract category. Indeed, by seeing him as an object rather than a human being, we drift into the dangerous mechanisms to which such reductions can lead (and express for instance that 'there ought to be a law against you coming around'). Thus, in the end, we not only reject the Mr. Joneses of the world, but have ourselves become one. It is for this reason that the title of the song is so aptly ambiguous: it not only is a ballad *about* a thin man, but also *from* a thin man.

I. Influenza in 1918 killed more people than the entire First World War! Flu is not trivial. Maybe 'a head cold'?

Christopher Ricks' *Dylan's Visions of Sin*

Penguin Books, 25 September 2003

by Michael Gray

For years there was very little critical writing on Bob Dylan's work, and when you found some, you seized upon it gratefully and with relish - if you could see the point of criticism at all.

Things have changed. Now there is a huge amount of it, and some of it well worth reading, even if I no longer seize upon it so much as advance toward it as into a hole that may contain fresh water or may be a pit of snakes. Where there is criticism there is often much hissing and venom. Worse, poor critical writing is plentiful and can strangle up your mind.

I still feel gratitude for the good stuff, and this magazine seems to be shaping up as one of the places you might expect to find it. Issue 6 ran a fine piece by young Alan Davis (I assume he's young, and mention it, because his main fault is being a bit wide-eyed: easily forgiven in the young, even as it discomforts the rest of us by rebuke); and there was a scarily good reworked lecture by John Gibbens - a piece so alert and sensitive to the nuance and detail of poetic effect that I almost wanted to give up using words myself, on the page or the public platform.

And now - at long last, it must be said, and after almost as many delays as Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home* - the real heavyweight lit.crit. professor steps into the ring, 69-year-old Christopher Ricks (yes, another British critic on this American artist), with *Dylan's Visions of Sin*.

The surprise is that this is Ricks' fattest critical work. I'd expected a slimmer volume than he has accorded Tennyson, Milton, or T.S.Eliot. His first book was *Milton's Grand Style*, 1963; among others there has also been *Keats and Embarrassment*, 1974; *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice*, 1988; *Tennyson*, 1989; and more recently *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, described by the *New Yorker* as 'the best book ever written on T.S. Eliot'. What does it tell us that Ricks devotes more pages to Bob Dylan than any of the rest?

If your hunch is that it means he has finally come out and writ large his conviction that Dylan is up there, you're right - though it's one of the many attractions of the book that he rarely makes those value-judgments we're so easily tempted into, most of us, as to how great an artist A is, or how much better than B. So there's no 'Dylan is better than Browning'; there's only the playful reference to Shakespeare as Dylanesque.

Before elaborating on the book's other attractions, I have to say that its amplitude is not entirely a blessing. Ricks indulges as never before in his remorseless, grinding wordplay, and his eminence precludes anyone else having taken to it the editorial red pencil he might have been expected to use himself.

You can hardly read beyond the first two pages without wishing he'd ease up on the compulsive punning - and after an hour's immersion you find yourself having to resist the same bad habit of mind. In this sense it's like reading Oscar Wilde: before long you find yourself reaching for aphorisms every time you open your mouth. The difference being that Oscar's aphorisms beguile and last, and Ricks' puns besmirch and aggravate:

"True Love Tends to Forget", aware that rhyming depends on memory, has "forget" begin in the arms of regret, and end, far out, in "Tibet". The Dylai Lama.' Later, Bob's 'Dyligent'. Discussing whether Dylan's songs end, as he once claimed, by wishing you good luck, Ricks writes of 'Positively 4th Street' that it does not end 'with "Good Luck" to its inter-luckitor.' On 'Lay Lady Lay' wordplay on

OED definitions of 'lalia' runs via 'erotolalia' into 'Try erotolayladylaylia. The chatter might be just the thing for a chatter-up of someone.' I wouldn't bet on it.

In the middle of discussing, brilliantly, 'Like a Rolling Stone', Ricks can't resist snatching 'paw' from the lyric and, regurgitating its use in another song, writing 'That word "paw" may hold a grudge, yes, but then if you were a grudge, wouldn't you like to be held?' Or, using 'Highlands' as his platform: 'if you fail to recognize that you are in Robert Burns country you must be a sad-eared laddy of the lowlands.'

There is much else you may find ill-judged. A couplet is footnoted like this: 'Samuel Butler, "Hudibras", since you ask.' Does he think no-one else has thought of this fey, 'cheeky' snappishness? They've thought better of it. Quoting another's adverse comment on him, Ricks retorts: 'I bridle slightly at that "fetishizing-a-recording" bit. (What, me? All the world knows that it is women's shoes that I am into.)' Another bad ego moment, followed by a particularly wearisome bout of punning, consumes 'Country Pie'.

My point here is not to invite a wincing at the worst bits but to deplore the way this irksome parade of its own cleverness recurs so often through the book. Where is the restraint with words that Ricks so admires in Dylan?

Perhaps I tire easily, but I tire also of prose *about* Dylan that reprocesses his own lines and phrases. Anyone can resort to it, and many do, yet what could be

more subject to the law of diminishing returns? In *Dylan's Visions of Sin* I'd already had too much of it by the time I reached, on page 28 of the typed manuscript: 'Nor do I think of myself as at all denying Dylan's license to expand his songs. (Who's going to take away his license to expand?)' Certainly no Penguin editor took away Ricks'.

There are at least a hundred currently fashionable, sub-Adam Phillips sentences like this, which may have something to say but mostly want to say Look At Me: 'We shouldn't take this from Dylan unless we take it as seizing a double-take.' See how you feel when you've encountered the other 99.

Further, there is the false note sounded sometimes when Ricks aims to express in prose what he believes is the thrust of a Dylan lyric. Here is Ricks' imaginary blokeish chat, supposedly relaying the sentiments of 'All the Tired Horses':

'...the second line... is nothing but a fatigued remonstrance. "How'm I s'posed to get any riding done". I ask you. Not that you need take the trouble to answer. It is in vain for any of us to kick against the pricks - and anyway kicking would be more of an effort than I'm prepared to make, I don't mind telling you. Forget it. But don't forget the song, even though *Lyrics* does.'

Claiming to echo the lyric's meaning, he wholly misrepresents its tone - and since we know from another eminent professor that style is inseparable from content, this is to misrepresent the song's meaning too. Yet this is offered as the culminating flash bang wallop of four

pages of this most catherine-wheel-minded critic's radiant rap about two and a half lines of lyric.

At times like these, and there are many of them, you feel that here is a book about an English critic and his compulsive brainy wordgames, and while it vividly evokes his distinguished yet intellectually playful milieu - Cambridge, Boston, Eng. Lit. student precocity - it barely seems to be looking at Bob Dylan at all.

All this is trebly wasteful. First, Ricks is better qualified than most to know how valuable - how economical and revealing - an alert, apposite pun can be; he knows, similarly, how serious, useful and concentrating can be the sparing use of wordplay. In writing about Dylan, the same goes for throwing in reprocessed quotes from the songs.

Second, Ricks pins down his own ailment. In the section on 'Like a Rolling Stone' he refers to 'the vacuum that is flippancy' and later gives his own verdict on extravagance of self-regard: 'This is like kissing yourself in the mirror, full on the lips, the only place you can kiss yourself in the mirror, and yet somehow not as satisfying as one had hoped, don't you find?'

Since you ask, I find myself remembering what F.R. Leavis said of C.P. Snow's lecture on 'the Two Cultures': 'The peculiar quality of [his] assurance expresses itself in a pervasive tone: a tone of which one can say that, while only genius could justify it, one cannot readily think of genius adopting it.'

But the most provoking, the most damaging, upshot of Ricks' self-indulgence is that it so gets in the way of the

incomparable light his gifts can and sometimes still do shine on the work of the incomparable Bob Dylan.

How bright a light *can* he shine, and on what aspects of Dylan's work? I've heard it suggested, from several sources, that Ricks concentrates too exclusively on the lyrics and says virtually nothing about music, performance, politics or the times Dylan has been writing about. I don't agree. Early on, he contributes cogently to the weighing of 'straight' literary criticism as against 'say, music criticism or art criticism', and of the artist and how conscious he is of 'all the subtle effects of wording and timing'; the citing of Philip Larkin's feelings about the merits of reading poetry on the page and the inherent faults with reading it aloud leads into a fine discussion of Dylan's re-performances and what is gained and lost. Similarly a very attentive critique of Larkin's poem 'Love Songs In Age' returns us, over several pages, to the discussion of print v. performance. He often mentions the effects achieved by the voice; he mentions, if not regularly, effects too made by specifics on guitar or harmonica. And for me, anyway, it's refreshing to find songs from *Oh Mercy* and *Time Out Of Mind* discussed without mention of Lanois or his atmospheric. Yet the book ends not with some summation of the literary side of life but with rumination on Dylan's dilemmas as a performer.

Ricks also has the courage and curiosity to raise the rarely discussed but significant question of 'Faith in Dylan... Was that weird wording of his a slip of the lip or was it his speaking in tongues? Did he make a dextrous move, or am I - when

I exclaim at how intriguing some turn of phrase is - just going through the critical motions? The choice can be stark.'

But it *is* the words that Ricks can best illuminate, and there is plenty here to stimulate and to teach. There's some terrific stuff on 'Blind Willie McTell', told with a direct enthusiasm, and where allusions are real bricks on the path, not distractions or confessions of distractedness: especially the discussion of blindness that takes us from McTell, via Dylan Thomas, and ends up illuminating specifics in 'Under the Red Sky' and 'High Water (For Charley Patton)'.

He's good on putting 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' and 'Mr. Tambourine Man' alongside each other, and at his most alert best in pinning down, here, what we may never quite have noticed for ourselves but immediately recognise that we have felt: that the 'Yes,' in 'Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky...' is in itself exultant. Similarly, he's very acute on 'Boots of Spanish Leather', and never more so than showing how, here, Dylan's repeated 'No' is affirmative - is hanging on to the ideals of love - while only at the end, when he sings that 'yes' ('And yes, there's something you can send back to me') is he being negative, negating something larger.

Ricks on 'Hattie Carroll' remains wondrously good - it raises itself above the rest as Ricks argues that Dylan's song does. He's riveting, unbeatable, on 'Seven Curses' (where the pun about the judge's eyes, 'Bed-rheumy eyes', works - there's a point to it - and where it is almost the only pun in the essay, which is all the better for its plain speaking).

He achieves elegant, thoughtful writing about songs to God, the eye and the ear, the achievement of humility without falsity or archness, while scrutinising 'Saving Grace', starting with a most rewarding scrutiny of the phrase 'saving grace' itself. There's a fine, very different piece on the darkness of 'What Was It You Wanted?' and - ironically - he's very human, within it, on the power of wordlessness, as against Dylan's getting in, with this song, 'the first word, the last word, and every word along the way.' He's excellent too on 'One Too Many Mornings' and (when he gets down to it) on 'Only a Pawn in Their Game'.

He's better still on 'Like a Rolling Stone': a major piece to fit a major song, from micro to macro comment. Giving us a savvy observation in a pungent phrase, he quotes 'Threw the bums a dime, in your prime' and notes 'its evocation of small-minded largesse', while in dealing with the song's whole sweep he argues adeptly that it is the lyric's 'misgivings' that save it from being '- in all its vituperative exhilaration - even more damnably proud than the person it damns.' And his exposition of why it is exultant, not gloating, and how it carries, by its end, greater recognition of 'her' feelings than it seemed aware of at its outset, its recognition that there are *mixed* feelings as well as *more* feelings at stake: all this is great critical work.

I feel this too: it's an attractive feature of the book that Ricks seems so at ease with the entire Dylan oeuvre, not least by bringing in frequently (surprisingly so for a critic so insistent on the artist being

unbeholden to the man) many interview answers from Dylan from across the whole stretch of decades, from 2001 as well as 1966, quotes from 1963 and 1997 alike, and a healthy drawing upon *Tarantula*.

I like, equally, the readiness to bring in Gerard Manley Hopkins, Tennyson, Eliot, Milton, Matthew Arnold, Keats and Larkin (if I were Ricks I'd have to say there's an awful lot of Larkin about), and that his capacious readiness to do so is one of his great strengths *when writing about Dylan*. Not because it elevates Dylan when he's put in their company - for the truth is that he puts himself there, by his work - but because the reader is thus recurrently rubbed up against pithy, rigorous-minded comment and eloquence (pertinently, too: his quoting of Eliot on Goldsmith, allowing another's critical light to shine on Bob, helps say something of what's fine about 'One Too Many Mornings'). This rigour, this assemblage of great minds, does Dylan more favours than he usually gets within the narrow walls of rock writing, where perspectives on his work rarely roam further than from Woody Guthrie to the Rolling Stones.

In the end, then, what to say? Hardboiled Michael Gray says: pity to have over-egged a fine pudding.

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Judas! Interview With Penguin Books' Editor Tony Lacey

AM: Tell us about yourself in your role as a book editor and your 'Dylan history'.

TL: My Dylan history pre-dates Christopher Ricks's if Bryan Appleyard's profile of Ricks is to be believed. I was given the first album as a 13 or 14 year old at the beginning of the 60s and fell in love with it immediately. I've bought every commercially available album since - yes, even *Knocked Out Loaded* - and have about 30 or 40 bootlegs. Which means, I suppose, that I'm a true believer but not a compulsive collector. I tend to go to a couple of concerts every time he comes to the UK, which means I've notched up quite a number over the years, but I've never seen him abroad. I'm most proud of the fact that my two kids (in their 20s) are almost as keen as I am.

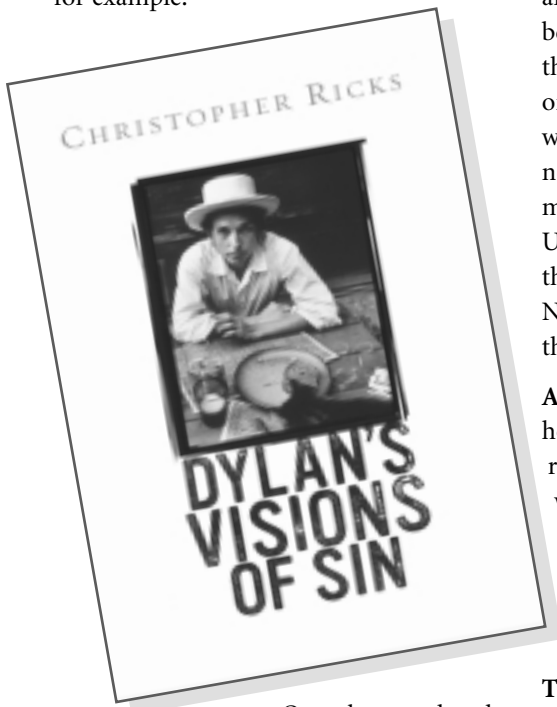
Professionally, I've published Clinton Heylin's biography (two editions), his book on the recording sessions, John Bauldie's collection of essays and now of course Christopher Ricks's critical appreciation. During my (long) time at Penguin

we've also published a few other Dylan or Dylan-related titles (Robert Shelton, of course, and Sam Shepard's *Rolling Thunder Logbook*) but I wasn't personally involved in them. I've actually become a bit wary of Dylan books - I feel I've done my share now and somebody else can take up the baton. Having said that, it's a publishing cliché that no Dylan book ever entirely fails. And of course I'd love to publish the Complete Lyrics. And then there's the Autobiography...

AM: You must have found a marked difference in dealing with Clinton Heylin and Christopher Ricks? Before getting on to Ricks's book, tell us more about your role in *Behind The Shades*.

TL: About *Behind the Shades*: Clinton originally wrote to me out of the blue proposing a new biography. We had the Shelton on the list at that time, but, excellent though it is in many ways, there was obviously room for a book which covered the later years fully. I was a subscriber to *The Telegraph* so I knew a bit about

Clinton's work but I'd never met him. We did meet then, and I took the book on. It was quite a success - we sold US rights to Summit, part of Simon and Schuster, for example.



Over the next decade I did a few more books with Clinton, including his extremely useful book on Dylan's recording sessions, then he had the idea of doing a second edition of the biography to coincide with Dylan's 60th birthday. Again, quite a success - Harper Collins this time the US publishers. Dealing with him is pretty easy because he's a very conscientious writer - always meets his deadline for example, despite the enormous length of the books. And very good about backing up the writing with evidence - tapes of interviews etc. His knowledge is remarkable: I remember

once showing him as a potential cover what I thought was an obscure photo (ie I'd never seen it) of Dylan on stage, and Clinton immediately identified the date and venue - and the time of day too because it was clearly a sound check! I think he won't mind my saying that the only difficulties we have are when dealing with the lawyers. He fights tooth and nail not to change anything. In my experience most authors are so intimidated by the UK's ludicrously severe libel laws that they'll go along with all legal suggestions. Not Clinton! We've had our run-ins over the years...

AM: The Ricks's book has been a bit of a holy grail amongst Dylan fans - long rumoured but never appearing (much as we expect the *Chronicles* saga to develop) yet here it now is after about two decades worth of rumours, postponements and disappointments. How did you pull it off?

TL: The publishing story of Christopher Ricks' book is that I contracted it in the mid 80s. No money passed hands because even then he wasn't sure when he'd be able to get down to it: the signing of the contract was more a declaration of intent on both sides, I suppose. Christopher had taught me at Bristol so of course I knew of his interest in Dylan, and I'd attended a couple of lectures he'd given there and at Cambridge on 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll'. He didn't write the book, but we didn't bother to cancel the contract because there was no pressure from him to do so, and I had a vague hope that one day he might still do it. In all truth though,

I'd more or less given up on it when I bumped into a friend, Paul Keegan, the poetry editor at Faber, at a party in spring 2002 who told me that he'd seen Christopher in Boston recently, and it seemed likely that he was now going to write the Dylan book. So much had I put the book to the back of my mind that I said 'For whom?' 'For you, I think,' said a plainly bemused Keegan. Sure enough, a few weeks later Christopher rang to say that he was in London and could we meet. He'd come up with a structure (sins and virtues) and produced a small list of songs that he might write about. In the summer of 2002 he showed me some early pieces of writing, but the real work was done when he got back to the States - through the autumn and winter of 2002/3. The book finished up much longer than I had anticipated in the summer: more songs were written about than originally planned. Though never enough of course - one longs to read Ricks on 'Jokerman' and 'Sweetheart Like You' and 'Visions of Johanna'.

AM: What are your own impressions of the book?

TL: The book is a tour de force. It's filled with those detailed analyses of effects which Ricks does so brilliantly. You can know a song extremely well, appreciate its beauty, and still be amazed by something Ricks points out to you which then seems glaringly obvious. He's so good on some of the less well-known songs too - like 'Handy Dandy' and 'Day of the Locusts'. And of course the range of reference is formidable: the book had the slightly

unexpected effect on me of not only making me want to go back to hear the songs again - though certainly that - but to read other things too. I never thought I'd want to read Swinburne again but the piece on 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' led me back to him. I suppose the great thing about Ricks is that he's an enthusiast at heart.

AM: Many thanks for your time and insights.

Bob Dylan and 'The Nature of Gothic'

by Alan Davis

What I'm attempting in this article is odd enough to need some explanation of how it came about. I don't often work on two writing projects at the same time, but a few months ago it happened that I was doing just that. I was preparing a paper on John Ruskin's architectural etchings for a conference on Nineteenth Century Venice, and during the same period I was working on the article 'Series of Dreams', now published in *Judas!* Issue 6. During the same day I often worked on both of them, one after the other, so that Dylan was often hovering around at the back of my mind while I was writing the Ruskin paper, and vice-versa.

Now the gist of my Ruskin paper was this: that some of the key principles that Ruskin describes in his writings about Gothic Architecture could be applied equally well to the abstract qualities of his own etchings - etchings which he'd made specifically to illustrate the architecture (see Appendix). In other words, the critical principles he was developing were more wide-ranging and helpful than one might expect: intended to help his reader understand the truth and power of fine architecture, they turn out to be equally illuminating when applied to his own etchings, and go a long way towards explaining why his etchings are so successful as works of art in their own right. I started to wonder whether, if these ideas of Ruskin's can help us to enjoy and understand not just architecture but etchings as well, they might also be helpful when applied to other art forms. In my paper I tried tentatively to show how they might be applied to certain types of 20th century abstract art, but what began to strike me quite resoundingly was the possibility that they might - yes I know it sounds absurd - produce a helpful way of looking at the performance art of Bob Dylan. Before you dismiss the idea as daft, just think about it: think how fascinating it would be to examine the critical writings of the greatest art critic of the nineteenth century, and discover that they are still valid today; to show that they were of value not just in their time, but rested on principles which are of significance so universal that they can illuminate the art of Bob Dylan a hundred and fifty years later. Knowing from past experience how helpful some of Ruskin's ideas have been to me in so many different areas, I couldn't resist trying to see if it would work.

The bit of Ruskin's critical writing I want to use for my experiment is one of his most famous: it's the central chapter of *The Stones of Venice* (published in three volumes between 1851 and 1853) and it's called 'The Nature of Gothic'.¹ Its fame is deserved: William Morris called it 'one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century', and it's hard to argue with him. As so often with Ruskin, you start by supposing that you're reading about one thing, only to discover that the road has many more diverging paths than you supposed; and, true to type, this chapter about architecture turns out really to be about a vision of society. However, for the present we really are concerned with architecture, specifically Gothic architecture, and with Ruskin's identification of 'the characteristic or moral elements of Gothic'. There are six of them, and he lists them as follows:

1. Savageness
2. Changefulness
3. Naturalism
4. Grotesqueness
5. Rigidity
6. Redundance

The last two of these won't concern us. It's hard to see how they can be applied to anything other than architecture - 'Rigidity' referring to the implied elasticity, energy and strength in the structure of Gothic vaults and traceries, and 'Redundance' referring to the effect which multiplicity of ornament has on an architectural scale. But the first four are definitely worth a look.

Savageness

Ruskin defines the first characteristic of Gothic architecture as 'savageness', and insists that 'the rudeness or imperfection which at first rendered the term 'Gothic' one of reproach is indeed, when rightly understood, one of the most noble characters of Christian architecture, and not only a noble but an *essential* one'. This may seem strange. Why should we expect roughness and imperfection to be attributes of the finest architecture? Ruskin continues his explanation with a powerful insight into the nature of art, and in doing so he challenges our preconceptions about what art is: '*the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art*'. In Ruskin's scheme of things, great art is made by great artists; and the truly great artist will always stretch his art to its limits: 'no great man ever stops working till he has reached his point of failure', he writes. And therefore 'neither architecture nor any other noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect'.

The true artist, then, must accept the inevitability of a certain kind of failure almost from the outset, because it's inherent in the nature of the activity he's engaged in. The abstract painter Pierre Soulage made a similarly penetrating and helpful comment when he spoke of the difference between the artist and the craftsman:

*The artist is looking for something. He doesn't know what path will lead him to his goal. The artisan takes the path he knows, to reach a goal which he also knows.*²



Figure 1

And Bob Dylan? If ever there were an artist with failure fused into his working methods at a fundamental level, it must surely be Dylan. We all know the risks he runs in performance. Here, for example, is a description I wrote of a Dylan performance long before I ever considered any possible link with Ruskin's ideas.³ It was at Newcastle, England, in 2000, and it illustrates, as well as anything else I can think of, the 'savageness' principle in action at a Dylan show. I was listening to a pretty poor performance of 'Tangled up in Blue' that, thankfully, was coming to an end:

I was in the process of trying to guess what song would come next when I noticed an

excited agitation among the people close to the stage. Dylan was choosing a harmonica. Oh no, give it up, Bob, I thought. The song is dead in the water, let it just die and move on. Start again with a new song. But no.

Crouching in a semi-foetal position at the back of the stage, almost out of sight behind a speaker from where I was sitting, Dylan began to play a simple series of very unpromising notes, quietly, over and over again, making slight changes as though searching for something. It seemed to be going nowhere; I was even beginning to feel a little embarrassed for him, when something indefinable changed. It was a small thing at first - but the band, ever sensitive, picked it up, and responded; and Dylan caught the moment, responded yet again; and something astonishing - something completely outside anything in my experience - grew and grew until the whole world dissolved into a tremendous crescendo of wailing harmonica and blazing guitars. I sat utterly transfixed, the hair prickling on the back of my neck, knowing that to be here, now, witnessing this, was simply the most important thing that I could be doing at this moment. And this trying, and failing, and nearly giving up, but trying again with all the odds stacked against him; and his willingness to do this here, now, sharing the high risk of disaster and the slim chance of triumph with all of us; and his finally succeeding in creating, for a moment, something which seems to transcend our expectations of what music is and can do; these are the signs of

a rare genius, probing at the limits of human experience.

I expect that everyone reading this will have similar examples they could recount of Dylan-on-the-edge; of Dylan performing on the brink of failure, with no guarantee of a successful outcome. In one sense success was impossible in the case of the Newcastle ‘Tangled up in Blue’. The song was already a wreck long before he reached for the harmonica, but it was an inspiring performance nonetheless; remember, ‘*the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art*’.

And after all, it’s worth remembering that we are talking about the performance art of the man who wrote:

*...there’s no success like failure
and ... failure’s no success at all.*

Changefulness

The second characteristic of Gothic architecture is ‘changefulness’, or variety, which Ruskin opposes to repetition, or order:

The vital principle is not the love of Knowledge, but the love of Change. It is that strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit that is its greatness.

Don’t let’s fall into the trap, Ruskin writes, of thinking ‘that love of order is love of art’. Great art ‘does *not* say the same thing over and over again’. It isn’t predictable, or repeatable. There’s no formula.

This concept fits Dylan like a glove. It typifies his natural attitude in the recording studio (remember Emmylou Harris’s discomfiture at realising that ‘you

just don’t overdub on a Dylan album’, as she recalled that ‘we did most of [the songs on *Desire*] in one or two takes’.⁴). And of course it’s central to Dylan’s whole approach to live performance. As he said himself in 1989:

*There’s always new things to discover when you’re playing live. No two shows are the same. It might be the same song, but you find different things to do within that song which you didn’t think about the night before.*⁵

And again, ten years later:

*Once the architecture is in place, a song can be done in an endless amount of ways. That’s what keeps my current live shows unadulterated.*⁶

‘Changefulness’, then, is unquestionably one of the defining characteristics of Bob Dylan’s art.

Naturalism

By ‘Naturalism’, Ruskin refers to that ‘tendency of the Gothic to the expression of vegetative life’. Similar comments are found almost everywhere in Ruskin’s writings. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*: ‘whatever is in architecture fair or beautiful, is imitated from natural forms’. Again, in *The Two Paths*: ‘The law which it has been my effort chiefly to illustrate is the dependence of all noble design, in any kind, on the sculpture or painting of Organic Form’.

At first I felt that this term couldn’t be applied to Dylan’s art, simply because I’ve never detected any sign that Dylan’s music was imitating or inspired by natural sounds. But then I realised that I was following the letter of Ruskin’s thought

rather than its spirit. Ruskin's point is that natural forms exhibit certain unifying and universal principles of 'design' that are also found in the greatest art. There is a pre-existing, vital organicism in Nature which the artist can draw inspiration from, and the degree to which he does so will be a critical factor determining the power of his art.

If the curves, shapes, textures and colours of the natural world are the fundamental source of the finest visual, sculptural, and architectural designs, then what's the equivalent for the art of song? Not, surely, the twittering of birds, or the bleating of sheep. I think the closest equivalent is the folk tradition. Folk song is organic, growing like a tree with ever-diverging branches down through the centuries, fed from a deep and vital tap-root. Folk song is so multi-authored that it's effectively authorless: 'it's like nobody really wrote those songs. They just get passed down'.⁷ The folk tradition presents an ever-changing, ever-vital source of inspiration to the would-be songwriter. It's *already there*, waiting for the songwriter/performer to draw upon it just as the natural world is constantly there as inspirational background for the architect or painter.

If this equivalence is acceptable (and I'm aware that I may not carry everyone with me in this), then Bob Dylan's art, insofar as it's steeped in the folk tradition, could be described as 'naturalistic' in the spirit of Ruskin's use of the term. Dylan knows it keeps him on track: 'My influences have not changed - and any time they have done, the music goes off to a

wrong place'.⁸ 'If you can sing those [folk] songs, if you can understand those songs and can perform them well, then there's nowhere you *can't* go'.⁹

Grotesqueness

The fourth of the characteristics of the Gothic imagination is 'the tendency to delight in fantastic and ludicrous, as well as in sublime, images'. Apart from defining it, Ruskin has little to say about grotesqueness in 'The Nature of Gothic', choosing instead to devote an entire chapter to the subject in the third volume of *The Stones of Venice*. Associating the term with both playfulness and fear, he



Figure 2

draws a sharp distinction between 'noble' and 'ignoble' grotesque:

The master of the noble grotesque knows the depth of all at which he seeks to mock, and would feel it at another time, or feel it in a certain undercurrent of thought even while he jests with it; but the workman of the ignoble grotesque can feel and understand nothing, and mocks at all things with the laughter of the idiot and the cretin.

For the true master of the grotesque, it's 'because the dreadfulness of the universe around him weighs upon his heart that his work is wild', and Ruskin believes that to some extent the grotesque or sublime images that present themselves to him are ungovernable. They have 'something of the character of dreams; so that the vision, of whatever kind, comes uncalled, and will not submit itself to the seer, but conquers him, and forces him to speak as a prophet'.

There are so many ways in which this can be seen as an accurate description of Dylan's art that it's hard to know where to begin to document it. Grotesque images abound in his work, from the ludicrous:

Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood;
and the playful:

*Yes I received your letter yesterday
(About the time the doorknob broke);*
to the terrible:

They're selling postcards of the hanging;
and the mocking:

*Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mister Jones?*

Finally, Dylan's grotesque is unquestionably 'noble', in Ruskin's sense. Is there

a performer/writer with a stronger sense of 'the dreadfulness of the universe around him' than Bob Dylan? I doubt it. His vision 'comes uncalled, and will not submit itself to the seer' ('Series of Dreams') 'but conquers him, and forces him to speak as a prophet' ('Ring Them Bells').

'Savageness', 'Changefulness', 'Naturalism', and 'Grotesqueness': all identified by Ruskin as essential characteristics of Gothic architecture, and all clearly discernible as essential characteristics of the art of Bob Dylan. So what? Is it just an intellectual curiosity, mildly interesting but ultimately of little importance? I don't think so. But to appreciate its significance I think we need to look at the context in which Ruskin makes his remarks about the Nature of Gothic. He isn't discussing Gothic in isolation; everywhere he's contrasting it with Renaissance architecture whose basis lies in classicism. He's engaging in a debate which is centuries old, and which in its broadest manifestations permeates the whole of human thought. Where Ruskin's Gothic artist draws inspiration *from* nature, the Classicist imposes order *upon* it. For the Gothic artist, beauty and truth lie in imperfect but natural forms, curves, shapes and lines: his designs are inspired instinctively by the arcing branch of a tree, the sweep of a bird's wing, or the flow-line of water over a fall. The Classicist bases his concept of beauty on perfection and order: on geometry, mathematics, and proportion. In the Greek temple and the Palladian Villa, the Golden Section rules.

It's surely enormously significant that

everywhere you look in the development of human thought you tend to find the same kind of bifurcation. In the East, the Taoist goes with the natural flow of things, the *Tao* - the 'Way' - in contrast with Confucianism which stresses the need for an orderly structure of rules underpinning society. William Blake's prophetic poems mythologise the difference, with his archetypal figure 'Los', who personifies the imagination, contrasting with 'Urizen' - the rigid, order-imposing law-maker. If you like, we can bring in the ideas of the right and left brains: instinct contrasting with logic. We're dealing with a fundamental division here.

So in discovering that Bob Dylan's art fits in so well with Ruskin's suggested characteristics of great Gothic art, we're really reminding ourselves that Dylan stands very strongly on one side of a fence that has divided human thought for as long as you care to trace it back. Savage, changeful, naturalistic and grotesque, the essential character of Bob Dylan's art is a lot older than we might think.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Daphne for her help with this.

Notes

1. In the Ruskin literature, quotations are usually referred to the 39-volume Library Edition of his works which readers of *Judas!* are unlikely to have readily to hand, and since there are so many different editions of *The Stones of Venice*, it's quite pointless to give page references otherwise. I've decided, therefore, not to refer-

ence each quotation, since nearly all of them are easily found within a few pages of each other either in the chapters 'The Nature of Gothic' (volume II) or 'Grotesque Renaissance' (volume III).

2. Dan Franck, *The Bohemians* (London: Wedenfield & Nicholson, 2001), p.xiii.

3. Alan Davis, 'A Tangled Tale', *Isis* 95 (February-March 2001), pp.32-33.

4. Clinton Heylin, *Behind the Shades, Take 2* (London: Viking, 2000), p.402

5. *Ibid.* p.682

6. *Ibid.* p.682

7. *Ibid.* p.673

8. *Ibid.* p.670

9. *Ibid.* p.671

Appendix

Those unfamiliar with Ruskin's architectural etchings in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* may find in Figures 1 and 2 an interesting visual parallel between Ruskin and Dylan. Figure 1 is Ruskin's etching of a gothic capital, full of dark vigour and a wonderful example, itself, of 'savageness' in a work of art. These etchings were badly received when published in 1849, and for the second edition of the book in 1855 they were replaced by copies made by a professional engraver (see figure 2). The result is much more neat and tidy, but lacks all the savage power of Ruskin's original. It's like comparing Peter, Paul and Mary's version of 'Blowin' in the Wind' with Dylan's. You could say that no one etches Ruskin like Ruskin...

HOLDING A MIRROR UP TO NATURE: BOB DYLAN AND MARLON BRANDO

by Nick Hawthorne

Marlon Brando - No actor of my generation possesses greater natural gifts; but none other has transported intellectual falsity to higher levels of hilarious pretension. Except, perhaps, Bob Dylan: sophisticated musical con-man pretending to be a simple-hearted revolutionary but sentimental hillbilly.

- Truman Capote

I have only met a few people who have real magic. And I can name them: Marlon Brando, James Dean and Bob Dylan. They are the only men I have met who can make people be quiet just by walking into a room, and if they go to the next room, everyone follows. Marlon Brando, James Dean and Bob Dylan

- Dennis Hopper

Comparisons are generally useless things and often provide nothing more than an easy escape for a lazy mind. Certainly when it comes to Bob Dylan, not only is there really no need to compare him with any of his contemporaries, there simply aren't many people to compare Dylan with. Comparison with Dylan is odious because Bob Dylan is, to quote 'Po' Boy', 'up on another level'. Call it genius if you will.

But there *is* one contemporary artist that can justifiably be compared to Dylan. If you were looking to use that kind of tag, the person that can be compared to Bob Dylan, in terms of artistic approach and achievement, and in terms of true heart and soul, is Marlon Brando.

In many ways Bob Dylan was very much 'the new Brando', or 'the Marlon Brando of music'. Brando, like Dylan, works on a different level. He possesses that otherworldly quality that is so captivating, and the careers and lives of the two men have remarkable and fascinating similarities as a result. Here we have two men worthy of comparison, in terms of how they revolutionised their art, and in terms of how they coped with their advancing age in the shadow of the great art they left in their wake.

Before we really delve into things have a look at the two quotes at the start of this article, and keep them in mind as you read on. These two legendary men stand accused of bringing their art to the height of fake pretension on one hand, and of being two of the most magical souls imaginable on the other. Of course, it would be possible to be both these things. Aren't con men indeed charming and captivating by their very nature? But behind those quotes are two accusations of extremes. One accuses them of fakery, of conning their audience, and the other declares them absolutely real. Which is it? And why do they draw such polarised opinions?

To make things personal for a moment, I can tell you that Dylan was not a slow burner for me. I suspect that is true for the vast majority of people reading this. Dylan hit me square between the eyes when I first heard his voice. I had never heard anything like it, and the sound of the voice, and the words that the voice was singing, just floored me, like a jolt of electricity surging through me. It literally made me giddy. Bruce Springsteen expressed this better than anyone when he said:

The first time I heard Bob Dylan, I was in a car with my mother and we were listening to, I think, WMCA, and on came that snare shot that sounded like somebody had kicked open the door to your mind... 'Like a Rolling Stone'.

Clichéd as it might seem, it is the truth (that's what makes clichés clichés after all). It was like someone kicking open the door to my mind.

The next time I experienced that degree of feeling, that instant knowledge

that I was experiencing something so very special, was the first time I saw Marlon Brando act. I could not keep my eyes off him. I had never seen another actor like him, never witnessed anyone that had that kind of presence. Never seen any man so beautiful, captivating and powerful. It is like tunnel vision, art and the artist is all that surrounds you.

Marlon Brando and Bob Dylan. There was something about the two of them, without knowing anything really of their backgrounds, history and careers at that point, that had reeled me in, and something in the two of them which reminded me of each other. It was an abstract feeling, a feeling of senses and emotion, but I was sure I was drawn to two men cut from the same cloth with more in common than simply my attraction to them both (after all I love Tony Hancock and Diego Maradona, and *they* don't have that much in common). And what a magnificent cloth it was, multi-coloured, finely textured and densely woven. If they were taking their respective art forms to the heights of pretension and pulling off some masterly con trick, then they sure had done their homework and fooled me. Both of them.

And I was not the only one that was knocked over by Marlon Brando and fooled by him, if he is indeed a fake. Growing up, Brando made a huge impact on the young Robert Zimmerman that cannot be dismissed when looking at Dylan's influences, and the images that shaped him during his formative years. In an interview from 1986, the power of Brando in the 1950's was still very vivid to Dylan:

The only thing I remember that kept everybody going, that I know, in the 50s was maybe a few films that Marlon Brando made.

As so often, Dylan's choice of words is what immediately draws the attention. 'The only thing... that kept everybody going'. Dylan clearly believed in the films he is speaking about, and I would suggest that they were landmark films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *On The Waterfront*, *Viva Zapata* and *The Wild One*. The influences of Dylan's youth are well documented, people such as Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, Buddy Holly, Little Richard and Elvis Presley. And Marlon Brando and James Dean were the figures that were affecting the youth of America and the world at the time. It cannot be over-stressed just how powerful these images of American manhood and freedom were. Brando, with films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Wild One*, and James Dean, with *East of Eden*, had a devastating impact on disaffected youth.

The time was right, post-war, and the image was right. These men represented something tremendously exciting, something that teenagers and younger people would later hear in Bob Dylan songs like 'The Times They Are A-Changin'. These films were speaking straight to them. They weren't playing by the rules, because the rules were changing. These films were questioning everything that had been taught, everything that had been considered as normal. Dean would be dead by the time his next film *Rebel Without a Cause* was released, heightening the whole

'live fast, die young' rebellious image that was sweeping America. An image that both Dean and to a lesser extent Brando had, unwittingly maybe, perpetrated. In the Cameron Crowe interviews that made up the extensive notes for the 'Biograph' collection, Dylan demonstrated how lasting these cultural images of his youth had been:

People like to talk about the new image of America but to me it's still the old one - Marlon Brando, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, it's not computers, cocaine and David Letterman.

Dylan has on many occasions made his feelings perfectly clear on exactly how highly he regards Brando, such as in this quote from the Murray Engleheart interview from 1998:

Q: Is Brando one of those people with whom you have felt some affinity, throughout the years?

Dylan: Oh yes, of course. I think that he is a brave man, intrepid, somebody that is not afraid. Totally. He is one of the modern heroes.

Interesting choices of words again from Dylan there, 'brave', 'intrepid', a 'modern hero'. And to 'feel affinity' with someone, you surely see something of yourself in them and vice-versa. Somebody worthy of comparison. Dylan has said that Bruce Springsteen is 'like a brother to me'. But with Brando he feels affinity. Someone to believe in you would think. Someone to put your money on.

There is a notion that the idea of image over substance is something new, something unique to today's society, but back then, it was much the same. Just look at

the world of film and the exploitative music industry. The fakes always seemed to prosper over the real deals. But when image and substance combined you had something hugely powerful, almost revolutionary, socially revolutionary certainly. I find it impossible to watch Brando in *The Wild One* and not immediately think of that image of Dylan, cooler than cool, from the front cover of *Highway 61 Revisited*. Watching Brando spit out his famous retort to the question 'What are you rebelling against?', 'Whaddaya Got?', my mind automatically spins to 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' and 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and all Dylan's anti-authority teenage calls to arms. By the time *Highway 61 Revisited* was released, Dylan was a hero and villain in many senses and to many people.

The folk purist lefties felt betrayed and thought Dylan a sell-out, felt conned, felt he had turned out as just another let down, another faker. A Judas. But there is no doubt that he had written key anthems that young people identified with, building on the release the fifties offered, the post war explosion of rock 'n' roll and Marlon Brando and James Dean and anti-authoritarian feeling. It was Dylan that had become the 60s disaffected youth de facto leader, delighting them with lines such as:

Don't follow leaders

and...

*Come mothers and fathers throughout
the land/And don't criticize what you
can't understand/Your sons and your
daughters are beyond your
command/The old road is rapidly*

*agin'/Please get out of the new one if
you can't lend your hand/For the times
they are a' changin'*

and

How does it feel?

and so on. But Dylan moved too fast. As with Brando, people were usually catching up to him as he was leaving town. You had to be quick or end up several steps behind. And it is clear that after Dylan began to move on from his heavily Guthrie stylised reverent folk/blues period to the mid 60s drug fuelled whirlwind of dazzling language and dazzling cool the influence of Brando was still looming large. Dylan had neither the time nor the inclination to sit down and explain what he was doing to his audiences, he had to do it his way and hoped people got it. He knew, I suspect, that he was creating something that would stand the test of time, so people would have time to work it out later.

Brando was the same. Brando's performances in the fifties were remarkable, inherently exciting, earthy and brutal. A real physical presence. I always think you can feel Brando when you are watching him, just as you can feel Dylan when you listen to him. The early parts of their careers are remarkably similar as are, in many ways, their upbringings. Separated by a generation, they are both from the mid-west, both seemed closer to their mothers than their fathers, both left their homes for Greenwich Village, New York, in search of success in their calling.

After a successful stint on Broadway in the late forties, particularly in the Broadway production of *A Streetcar*

Named Desire, Brando turned his attention to Hollywood, seeking fame and fortune in film, and made his debut in 1950 in *The Men*. It appears a somewhat old-fashioned film now, and certainly was no more than a prelude to the havoc Brando was about to wreak on film, but it showed him immersed in The Method, cast as a wheelchair-bound serviceman. It was a performance full of study, talent and potential. The Method is a fascinating thing when considering Brando's career, but we'll come back to that and The Method versus technique later on. Brando then went on to reprise his Broadway part of Stanley in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The film version saw him alongside an equally brilliant cast. Vivian Leigh was perfect as Blanche and the film continues to be one of the most memorable to come out of the fifties. Brando's performance was devastating, and things were destined to never be quite the same again.

He went on to star in a string of hugely successful landmark films, *The Wild One*, *Julius Caesar*, *Viva Zapata* and *On The Waterfront*. In these films Brando had hit after hit, critically and commercially, and changed the direction of film acting forever. Never before had such a leading man been seen. On screen he was not only physically captivating (and not just in a handsome, or pretty boy slick way, à la Leonardo DiCaprio), he dominated the screen with his presence. You couldn't take your eyes off him, you daren't. He was totally brilliant. The range in his parts was awesome, from the savage brute Stanley in *Streetcar* to Mark Anthony to

his devastating Oscar-winning portrayal of Terry Malloy in *On The Waterfront*.

In his style of acting, his presence, the way he made you feel when you saw him, he opened the door for hundreds of film actors that were to follow him. He influenced a generation of young actors and beyond. He was aped and imitated, mocked and derided, but never bettered. He was an innovator. A genius in his field because he found his way to that elusive element in all art, profound truth.

The similarities here with Dylan's early career are remarkable. Bob Dylan released his self-titled first album in 1962. He had, like Brando, been honing his craft for a couple of years before he was opened up to a wider audience, and like Brando his debut now seems a little dated, an album of its time certainly, a debut that was a precursor of what was to come. An album that makes much more sense now than it probably did at the time.

Listening to it I get the same feeling as I do when I watch *The Men*. The excitement of watching/hearing a budding talent, just setting his suitcase down before he went to work. And with this under his belt, and his position a little more assured, Dylan, like Brando before him, unleashed a string of masterpieces, a collection of work in such a short space of time that changed the course of music history for ever. Dylan matched *Streetcar*, *Waterfront*, *Julius Caesar*, *Zapata* and *The Wild One* with *Freewheelin'*, *Another Side*, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*. These two men had, between them, changed the course of the 20th century's two most popular art

forms, film and music, before they were 30.

So then what? Did the brilliant fire of youth burn out, leaving them to wrestle with the demons and failures of middle age? Is genius, that true creative fire, confined only to youth? Dylan's brilliance is always charted up until his mythic motorcycle accident in 1966. He had released some of music's most enduring, original and dazzling work. However, it is pure folly to end with the motorcycle accident. It creates an edit point of convenience and is just lazy. The accident is a good story and very useful as a cut-off point to say, 'Bob was great, then he had the crash, then he went into hiding and was never as good again'.

I am being facetious, of course, but for good reason as that is still an opinion trotted out by people who don't know the truth, and a myth perpetuated by the media. After the accident he made *The Basement Tapes* which are utterly brilliant, full of his characteristic visionary writing, unfettered by publicity or the weight of expectation. With songs such as 'Tears of Rage', 'This Wheel's on Fire' and 'I'm Not There (1956)' his creative muse was firing very much on all cylinders. And his first released album after the accident was another masterwork, in the shape of *John Wesley Harding*.

After this Dylan did begin to react to his career and life to date and the things his genius had brought him, introducing vast changes in style and approach, self-deprecating, mocking, a step away from the intensity of genius. Although the accident is when it happened in public

perception, it was at this point that Dylan began to slip into a more perceivable commercial and artistic decline, certainly a decline in perceivable credibility, in 'cool', something both men, much probably to their joint eternal chagrin, had done much to invent,

For Brando, again things aren't clear cut. He made films such as *Desiree*, *Sayonara*, *Teahouse of the August Moon* and *Guys and Dolls* in the 1950s, among the universally accepted 'great' works. All had a degree of success and popularity and all continued to demonstrate his versatility as an actor, although they were watered down Brando, films of little substance. His earlier performances had shown us a man burning with demons, with the potential for performances of huge dramatic magnitude, and that is what we craved.

But there was no reason with these films to think the slide had begun. Brando was the hottest property in Hollywood. However, after *The Young Lions*, and as he moved into the 1960s, Brando starred in a string of unremarkable films, dogged by problems and long since forgotten by most. He too lost his 'cool', his credibility. The audience moved on, found someone new. His impact seemingly made, he was floundering somewhat and lost in an increasing contempt for how he made his living.

Films such as *The Ugly American* and *Bedtime Story* (which also starred Francine York, who was later to appear with Bob Dylan in *Love, Theft and Poker*, the promo video for Dylan's "Love And Theft" album in 2001) were competent enough, one

overly serious, self-important and dull, the other frothy and light and without a great deal of merit, but Brando had already slipped into a period of underachievement. He had created a body of work in the early 1950s that cast a huge shadow over him, one that he could not move on from.

Testament to this is the great work he did produce in what are seen, by the world at large, to be fallow years. Films such as *The Chase* and my own personal favourite Brando film of all time, *Reflection in a Golden Eye*, in which his portrayal of a repressed homosexual US army major is devastating in its realism. But these great works seem to count for nothing, if surrounded by poorer work, if not afforded either critical or commercial success in the widest sense. And this is something that all genius must face, and must wrestle with, and may be the very thing that makes the vast majority of them such unsettled and unsatisfied people. I think it was Rod Steiger who commented on Brando that:

Marlon could have done anything he wanted to, but he chose to do nothing

and this is a widely held conception about Brando, that he simply wasted his genius. Whilst writing a review for NME of Dylan's concert at Stirling Castle in Scotland in 2001, Paul McNamee observed:

It is said that Marlon Brando got fat because he got bored. There was nothing that could stretch him so he laid down and set about making an unrecognisable monster of himself, attempting to challenge conventional

wisdom of how great men should be. And so it was for Bob Dylan. So complete and utter was his influence and so complete were his songs, that for more than two decades he toured the world deconstructing his tracks to the point where they were rendered unrecognisable.

And this sums up the crux of the matter very well. Can genius fire for a lifetime? And if so, does it depend on how long that lifetime is? Dean died in his youth and is forever preserved as that figure from *Rebel Without a Cause*, forever cool. The same can be said for the dozens of musical idols that fell by the wayside years before they reached middle or old age, from Hank Williams to Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison to Gram Parsons and Kurt Cobain.

Not for Brando or Dylan, though. These two men, who had such a massive impact and created such peerless art, lived on past middle age and into old age. And what happens if the muse dries up? Or if you can't allow yourself, for the sake of your own survival, to surrender to it anymore? If you start to re-create consciously what once you did unconsciously, if technique and craft replace the natural spontaneity of pure genius? I always hear the opening lines in Dylan's 2001, bitter, unsettling song 'Sugar Baby' as describing the feeling of standing in the shadow of a greatness of your own creation:

*I've got my back to the sun cause' the light is too intense
I can see what everybody in the world is up against*

It also connects up in my mind with a line from the Bruce Springsteen song 'It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City':

*I'm gonna walk like Brando right into
the sun*

and a comment made about Brando by a film producer:

*I'm sure that if Marlon Brando walked
in front of the sun....he would not cast
any shadow*

when pressed as to what exactly he means by this, he explains, even more mysteriously:

*I mean...I'm not sure there is anybody
there*

I am not saying that this is the only interpretation of those lines from 'Sugar Baby', or even the most obvious one, but nevertheless it is one I heard the very first time I heard the song. Aside from the use of one of Dylan's favourite puns on Sun/Son, I have always thought that the 'Sun' in this instance could represent the power of Dylan's own muse, his own genius, of all the great work he created at such a young age, that was to bind him as much as it was to free him, especially when we consider the next lines from 'Sugar Baby':

*Can't turn back, you can't come back
Sometimes you push too far
One day, we'll open up our eyes and
We'll see where we are*

and later on:

*Some of these memories you can learn
to live with
And some of 'em you can't*

Then again, this is on the same album as the song 'Summer Days', in which Dylan gleefully declares:

*She says, 'You can't repeat the past'. I
say, 'You can't? What do you mean,
you can't? Of course you can.'*

What we can be sure of is that on albums such as "Love And Theft" and *Time Out Of Mind*, Dylan deals with the themes of 'the past' and 'memory' and the regret and pain that go along with getting older. And what we also know is that these two albums are written in a totally different way than his work in the 60's and 70's. For Dylan and Brando, the weight of their genius has appeared heavy at times, something Dylan has acknowledged in one way or another many times over. Dylan and Brando both had to turn their backs to the sun, and stand in the shadows of themselves and their creations. Dylan also opened his 1997 masterpiece 'Not Dark Yet', the ultimate song of getting older and the terrifying culmination of these themes, with the line:

Shadows are falling...

In what is a song of reflection, dissatisfaction, regret and despair, those opening three words are telling. And this is where the major similarities and differences between Brando and Dylan become crystal clear to us, in terms of how they coped with their staggering success, and their own otherworldly talent. With what they did in the shadows. Brando had quickly become utterly dismissive of what he did for a living. He would become known for it. He said that acting was the most contemptible profession in the world. It was witness of the self loathing that would go some way to destroying him. He did not regard acting as an art, simply a job, a trade. It came naturally to

him. He was a gifted liar and mimic, and this was all acting amounted to. It brought him fame and riches beyond his wildest dreams, and therefore was the easiest way for him to make a living.

Something must have been driving him, some demon spirit pushing this contrary man forward, but he only ever admitted to working for money. His place in history was confirmed with his first unforgettable burst of genius, but something drove him back to the top and in the early 70's he rose like a phoenix to challenge his past, to challenge his own place in history. Two years later Bob Dylan did something similar. Likewise his place in history was safe and sound. His story could have ended in 1972, petering out. But these are not ordinary men we are dealing with here. Dylan had enjoyed a few much-heralded returns to form, such as *New Morning*, which has aged very well and is a fine album, and *Planet Waves*, recorded with The Band. That album gave me a sense of Dylan going through the motions a little (and I know many of you will be screaming at me at this point!) The album has much to admire, certainly, but lacked something, as did the hugely successful US tour of 1974, also with The Band.

This smacked of Dylan serving up what was expected of him, taking the easy option. His appeal had not diminished, but could he truly match the work he had created in the early to mid 60s? Could he create something truly new and vibrant to rival that work? Yes he could. Dylan, from a point where he had been written off after releasing work such as *Self Portrait*,

released a collection of songs that would ultimately stand as his very best. *Blood on the Tracks* was hugely acclaimed. The music world had its poet genius back, but on another level, again in a form that hadn't been seen before. It was a remarkable achievement, to come out of the shadow of his early work, to negotiate through a period of uncertainty, re-assessment and re-finding his confidence, and throw the gauntlet firmly down again.

He went on to cement this new dawn with the wonderful Rolling Thunder tour, a piece of creative theatre unlike anything else he would do in his entire career, in total contrast to the tour of 74, and with *Renaldo and Clara*, a challenging, inventive and daring masterpiece, a four-hour film that explored his life's themes. Dylan was rolling again. But he had to look inside himself, inside his mercurial spirit, his own enigma to get there. He was already challenging his own myth. *Blood on the Tracks* was an album of such raw honesty, of such confrontation within himself. He was working in a place that wasn't comfortable and thus it was a huge risk. It did not have a commercial sound, it was something quite new. The Rolling Thunder tour continued Dylan's trip into the unknown, into himself. It had brilliant artistic results as he scaled new peaks, but what effect would it have on the rest of his career?

Dylan went to great pains to challenge people's interpretation of *Blood on the Tracks* as an autobiographical work, but it is very hard, in fact impossible, to separate those songs from the demons that were pursuing Dylan in his personal life. In

Hollywood, Brando was known by the beginning of the 1970's as 'burned out Brando'. His latest film *Burn!* had been a massive flop, even though Brando maintains that it is his personal favourite of all the films he appeared in, and that in which he produced his best acting. He may just be right, and the reaction this film received added to his hatred of a business he saw as just that, a business, orchestrated by people who wouldn't know a good film if it slapped them across the face.

Brando also had appeared in embarrassing films such as *Candy* (fine book, shame about the film), *Night of the Following Day* and *The Nightcomers*, directed by Michael Winner. There is truly little merit in these films or Brando's performances in them, and they confirmed in the public's eye, and in the eye of the people running the Hollywood film industry, that Brando was a spent force. He was, seemingly, finished, incapable of matching his heyday performances. The opposite of everything he used to represent, people were left to remember what he had been like in those halcyon days of the early fifties. And then, circumstance presented the ageing star with a comeback of epic proportions.

Despite huge opposition, and against the odds, he landed the lead role in *The Godfather*, surrounded by such wannabees as James Caan and Al Pacino, and won his second Oscar (the first was for *On The Waterfront*, 18 or so years earlier). The performance was a masterful lesson in character acting and in truly inhabiting a character. Brando was back, and he didn't

stop there, the world was his oyster in terms of film. He could pick and choose, he could string another series of masterpiece performances together to rival his work in the early 50's. But he had already committed to a project that would totally change the destiny of his career. His next film took him to that place Dylan was to visit on *Blood on the Tracks*. The darkest reaches of his own soul, face to face with his genius.

Last Tango in Paris was a film that would effectively be the centre point on which Brando's career would revolve. Think of his career as a see-saw with *Last Tango* in the middle. The pivot. It was a film in which he was challenged by the director, Bernardo Bertolucci, to improvise greatly, to effectively be himself. The character was called 'Paul' but it may as well have been called 'Marlon', because that is what Bertolucci was looking for.

During Brando's spellbinding performance, his mask slips for the first time in his career. We actually get to see glimpses of the real man, a part of the real man. Through tragically sad recollections of his childhood, to a heartbreaking monologue at the open coffin of his dead wife (who has recently committed suicide) that is full of rage and utter despair, the film has a hopelessness running throughout it. Brando reaches deep within himself and his 'performance' is the best of his remarkable career.

Blood on the Tracks and *Last Tango in Paris* are comparable works. For me they share many similarities. They both mark, to a degree, the rebirth of their protagonists, and they both took the art of the

men responsible to new heights. And to do it, they had to use themselves, their own experiences, mirror what was happening in their own lives, confront their genius and muse and merge that with reality. The worlds of artistic invention and the brutalities of everyday life, of living, rubbed uncomfortably against each other. And it mystified them both. When people talked of ‘enjoying’ *Blood on the Tracks* Dylan famously responded:

It’s hard for me to relate to that. I mean, you know, people enjoying the type of pain, you know

Even the repeated ‘you knows’ tell us that Dylan feels extremely uncomfortable about this. And Brando’s pain in *Last Tango* flowed off of the screen. Like a primal scream. Brando’s pain in *Last Tango...*, like Dylan’s in *Blood on the Tracks*, is so tangible that it is impossible for us to simply view it as art, as third person. We know this is autobiographical, we know this is happening to them. The outcome however of their phoenix-like return to form was to be very different. Both reacted to it, certainly. After Rolling Thunder, Dylan took some time to consider what he might do next. His marriage had fallen apart, he was advancing in years towards his forties, he was at another crossroads.

Maybe due to the amount of himself he had expended over recent years, when he reappeared with a new album and tour in 1978 the sound and act were quite different once again. He had reinvented himself to survive. In *Blood on the Tracks* Dylan’s mask, like Brando’s in *Last Tango*, had truly slipped. Which is why it was all

the more interesting that when he appeared in public on the Rolling Thunder tour he wore white face paint a lot of the time. Already perhaps trying to retreat again into his own enigma, conscious that he may have shown too much of himself to the public, and by 1978, the mask was back on. A new shtick, a new act, one that didn’t visit the depths that he had probed with *Blood on the Tracks*, *Renaldo and Clara*, Rolling Thunder and subsequently *Desire*.

As for Brando, *Last Tango in Paris* had a huge effect on the acting giant. For the first time, seemingly, what he liked to refer to as his craft had worked its way inside of him, and he was not happy about it. He was furious. He made his feelings clear to his director, the man who had been responsible, after the film had wrapped:

I will never make a film like this one again. I don’t like being an actor at the best of times but it’s never been this bad. I felt violated from the beginning to the end, every day and at every moment. I felt that my whole life, my most intimate feelings and even my children had been torn from within me

Years later, when Brando penned his fascinating autobiography, he would expand even further:

‘Last Tango’ left me depleted and exhausted, perhaps in part because I’d done what Bernardo asked and some of the pain I was experiencing was my very own. Thereafter I decided to make my living in a way that was less devastating emotionally. In subsequent pictures I stopped trying to experience the emotions of my characters as I had

always done before, and simply to act (sic) the part in a technical way.

Technique. And that is acting after all is it not? The opposite of The Method? It reminds me of that great story from the set of *Marathon Man*. Observing Dustin Hoffman running himself into the ground and going to the most extraordinary lengths to try to inhabit the part he was playing, Lawrence Olivier said something along the lines of:

Have you ever thought of acting, dear boy?

The Method is a great paradox to me. On the one hand it is supposed to be a total integration in the character, to the extent of actually becoming that person, doing things they would have done, living how they would have lived etc. On the other hand it is supposed to result in the ultimate in natural performance, so that there is total believability. Here we have the natural and the stylised knocking against each other. Does every performer have a 'method'?

Brando certainly was true to his word. He turned his back on what had come naturally to him, on what he did unconsciously. After *Last Tango* in 1972, Marlon Brando, the greatest actor of his generation, and one of the finest actors who ever lived, was only 48 years old. To date he has only made 12 further films. In 30 years. Many of these feature a part so small as to be hardly worth calling an appearance at all. The next time we saw him on screen after *Last Tango* was four years later in *The Missouri Breaks*. A fine film, immensely enjoyable and Brando is glorious, but not in terms of depth or real power. The

performance is technique, just acting. Hugely enjoyable, but a part he can sleep-walk through at no emotional expense to himself whatsoever. It is the same in many other films he has made recently, such as *Free Money* and *The Freshman*.

Only in *Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (as was *The Godfather*) does Brando challenge himself in any real way. Here he plays the crucial role of Colonel Kurtz to great dramatic effect, demonstrating his vast physical presence and, through his rambling monologues, his ability to hold your eye and your nerve completely. It was a great performance but all technique. And after this it was all downhill. *Superman* was a walk-through take the money and run cameo role, *A Dry White Season* another cameo role (albeit the best acting he has done since *Last Tango*), *Christopher Columbus* yet another (and the worst acting of his career). Some films had larger parts but were so embarrassing it defies belief (*The Island of Doctor Moreau*).

The vast majority of these films had one thing in common. They required 1% of the great man's vast talent. They were parts of little depth and no real emotional resonance whatsoever. The last film he made, in 2001, saw him paired with Robert De Niro for the first time. Master and pupil together on screen at last (after uniquely winning Oscars for playing the same part). Wow! What potential, a chance for Brando to go out on a high! A chance for us to be able to put a full stop on his career with some pride, at 77 years old!

Well... sadly not. They shouldn't have bothered. The film is an utterly forgettable waste of time and talent. At least in 1999's *Free Money* you saw Brando having a ball and hamming it up for all he was worth and dominating the screen time. It may not have been *On The Waterfront* but it was better than *The Score*. Whether that will stand as Brando's last ever film remains to be seen. But even if it does not, a return to the Brando of *Last Tango* or before seems impossible. Once studied technique has replaced the muse of true genius, can you ever return? Can you indeed repeat the past, or give a very good imitation at best? What is clear is that the terribly personal experience Brando suffered during the making of *Last Tango in Paris* drove him to effectively give up acting, or at least the kind of acting he specialised in, in which he inhabited every nuance of his character. He had to go deep within himself and he didn't like it. It was just too much.

Brando has always made it clear that he despised acting and actors, films and filmmakers. He takes every opportunity to run it into the ground. Dylan has never exactly gone to those lengths, but it has never been an easy road for him either. He has often said that he has no choice about what he does. That he feels compelled to do it. After his experiences with *Blood on the Tracks*, *Renaldo and Clara* and the Rolling Thunder Revue, where life and art were imitating each other, Dylan could have reacted in the way Brando did, and to an extent I believe he did. I certainly think there was a change of approach. After the mass activity of that mid 70s period, and

Dylan's divorce, his next album and tour saw him put on a different mask again.

On stage, it was far removed from both the drama and ragged glory that Rolling Thunder gave us. In 1978, Dylan gave us a tongue-in-cheek act, all smiles, introductions and big band arrangements. The audience was placed firmly back where it belonged. But the music was too important to him. He evolved. He did what he had to do to survive. The mask had slipped, so he looked for a new one that would enable him to carry on with what he needed to do. That tour in 1978 was something of a fake as he was finding his feet again. He had released a partly excellent new album in *Street-Legal*, in which he took the opportunity of the opening song, 'Changing of the Guards', to look back and acknowledge the very need to be a chameleon, to adapt and change to survive:

*'Gentlemen' he said 'I don't need your
organisation, I've shined your shoes
I've moved your mountains and
marked your cards
But Eden is burning, either get ready for
elimination
Or else your heart must have the
courage of the changing of the guards'*

This, one of Dylan's most memorable and powerful verses, clearly sets out the situation post *Blood on the Tracks*, post *Renaldo and Clara* and post Rolling Thunder. Change to survive. Dylan went on to have a born-again Christian experience, which took his career to a most unexpected but creatively rich area that yielded great albums and great tours alike, but again with a specific agenda. His

lexicon here was not the songs, so much as the message. The path from the darkest reaches of his soul, from the ultimate point of submitting to his genius muse, that led Brando to turn his back, had led Dylan to Christ. He needed saving, or felt he did, and found solace in belief in Jesus Christ as his own true saviour. Through his gifts as a writer and performer, he set out to communicate that to his audience. He was doing God's work.

In 1981, as Dylan had begun to seemingly question his new found faith, he ended a triumphant year of concert touring. It must have seemed like a whirlwind through all those years. But when he started touring again in 1984, he seemed very different. He seemed to have adopted a technique to some extent, in the same way Brando had done in latter film roles, to repeat what he once did naturally. The '84 tour had a Dylan that sounded different, that only had flashes of the genius that used to blaze away.

Both Marlon Brando and Bob Dylan are control freaks. They have both been dogged by negative comments about their treatment of others and their ability to form normal human relations. They both have had disastrous relationships with women, unable to remain faithful to any one woman at any one time. They both have many children and have been subject to the rumour and accusation of further children by different women. For both of them, in the early to mid 70s they momentarily lost the control that they feed off. In their attempts to climb back to the top of the mountain on which they once proudly stood, their only option was

to surrender to their muse. They were no longer dictating events, and it had a huge impact on them.

Because Dylan had no choice about what he does, luckily for us he has managed to keep a degree of his muse intact. Not to the extent it was up until 1976 certainly. But there are flashes of genius. The 1979-80 Christian tours had Dylan taking the control to the extreme, preaching to audiences. What better way to be in control than to firmly believe in a born-again Christian dogma and to go out and preach it to your bemused audience? After this his albums have been patchy. He is still capable of great, great writing. In the 1980s songs such as 'Angelina', 'Blind Willie McTell', 'Jokerman', 'Foot of Pride', 'Every Grain of Sand' and 'The Groom's Still Waiting At The Altar' stood alongside any of his greatest compositions.

But Dylan was a suspicious and paranoid man by this point. Many of his greatest songs were left off of albums. It was as though he didn't want to reveal himself to his audience, so we had to put up with a lot of lightweight, inferior songs and performances. It was OK, but nothing to compare to the heart and soul material. Like the hollow films Brando was making. I think we can consider ourselves lucky that Dylan did not end up the way Brando has in a career sense. Dylan was in for the long haul, and I for one cannot ever imagine him finishing. Not until he is dead.

He has released superb albums in recent years, albeit of a totally different nature to his work between 62-66 and 74-

76, such as *Oh Mercy*, the brilliant *Time Out Of Mind* and “*Love And Theft*”. These are works of craft, of effort, of submitting to his lexicon of music history, of turning to creating patchworks of music and lyric, references to his own past and music past that are so numerous they make you dizzy. Is this genius? Are TOOM and L&T works of genius?

I would say not. I would say they are superbly crafted albums from a man who knows that he now has his back to the sun, rather than standing staring straight into it. He is now lauded critically, and has discovered a new audience and that reverential sense of ‘cool’ that falls on some elder statesmen. He survived long enough and was gifted enough to reap the rewards. These are gifts we dare not have hoped for. That in his late fifties and early sixties he should be emotionally and physically capable of such work is a marvel. And now at approaching 62 he seems firmly in control again, and with his creative muse firing on, if not all cylinders, then as close to it as we could dare imagine. He is writing great songs (“*Love And Theft*”, “*Cross The Green Mountain*”), has just finished a tour of the US in Autumn 2002 which was full of wit and invention demonstrating his peerless talent as an interpreter of song, and we have the release of a new film to look forward to this year.

Ironically, it has the title *Masked and Anonymous*. It sounds dreadful, but oh how appropriate! Ironic on so many levels. Ironic that Dylan should be risking his newly found total idolatry and can-do-no-wrong public opinion with another

film (he hasn’t a great track record in Brando’s field of expertise... *Hearts of Fire* being the last debacle in 1986, but that’s not the point, he isn’t an actor in that sense). Ironic that it should have a title that could sum up the whole of Dylan’s career. He has been the masked man, the enigma for decades. Only not in 74-76 where he was laid bare.

So what is this? The ultimate power trip? The ultimate up yours to his audience? To the world? Or the final key to all that has gone before? Or a genuine attempt to explore his life’s work in a different way? Or just a way to pass the time? We shall see. Dylan’s career has survived because he is a chameleon. He changes to survive. Brando has a very similar nature in his heart. He adapts and can wear many masks. He is an expert liar and con man. But he has a self loathing that Dylan doesn’t seem to have. Brando has retreated to the security of his mansion home, retreating from the real world almost entirely, losing himself in his eccentricity. Dylan seeks solace in his seemingly never ending tour schedule. You get the feeling neither is content. Two men in late life in two self-inflicted prisons.

So where is Brando now? What is he doing at the age of 79? He seems to have become increasingly eccentric, another trait he shares with Dylan. Both are painfully private men, both very serious, gruff at times, yet both enjoy a childlike sense of humour, of stupid cracker gags and practical jokes. And both seem to view the world with the same weary scepticism. Well, earlier this year Brando started a

project called 'Lying For A Living', another very appropriate title! What has emerged from this latest mad venture couldn't be made up. Apparently Brando was giving acting masterclasses to the likes of Leonard DiCaprio, Elizabeth Taylor, Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Michael Jackson, Jon Voigt, the list is endless. The classes were filmed by *American History X* Director Tony Kaye for a documentary film entitled *Conversations with Marlon Brando* that would debut at a film festival later this year.

Reports from the classes were wild. Brando turning up in drag or dressed as a monk, then fighting with Tony Kaye and throwing him out of the production. Tony Kaye said of Brando:

Marlon Brando should be with the Taliban. I think he'd be very comfortable in that world, with a hundred wives, 14,000 children, no music and no one's allowed to speak

Brando himself offers little in defence, he has never been the kind of man to defend himself. Neither has Dylan. But amongst the wit and the outrageous comment, Brando utters a few words that perhaps get to the centre of his art, and Dylan's as well for that matter. After dismissing his profession for the umpteenth time:

Acting is the dumbest profession in the world

he goes on as he often does, in a verbal vomit of words and language, like a tornado. He moves to Shakespeare, and Brando is obsessed with Shakespeare, quoting huge passages in just about any interview you read:

There's a speech from 'Hamlet' that applies to all artists... 'To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.' To be natural.

He then goes on to recite the entire soliloquy, Act III, Scene 2, from memory:

*Let your own discretion be your tutor.
Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance,
that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.*

Not a bad memory for a 78-year-old man. I checked the quote and it is word for word spot on. And this sums up artistic expression so wonderfully well. To hold a mirror up, not to oneself, or to the audience, or to the world, but to nature itself. It is what Bob Dylan has managed for a lifetime. It is what Brando did fleetingly, before he found it a burden too bothersome to continue with in public. Bob Dylan sang:

Sometimes my burden is more than I can bear

But somehow he has remained a slave to it and managed to continue to carry it. Somehow he found a technique to almost match the genius. Brando didn't. He fell back on a technique that just got him through when it had to. He left early.

Reading interviews with Brando or articles about him is a joy because he is such an interesting man. The way he has of speaking, of expressing ideas, and the actual things he says are so very Dylanesque. Read the liner notes to *World Gone Wrong*, and an interview with

Brando in 1996 in French Magazine *Le Studio*, and you could be reading words from the same man. The detachment from modern life, from what might be considered normal life. The dismissal of modern culture, the longing for the past in one form or another, and not the recent past, but centuries gone by.

And watching Brando in the brilliant mid-60s short docu-film *Meet Marlon Brando* (an essential watch) is a very similar experience to watching Dylan in *Dont Look Back*. The images of the men are quite different. Dylan is young, cocksure, brash, confident, the waspish fop. Brando is older, the suave devil. But the manner in which they captivate you as you watch, in which they totally disarm their would-be interviewers, is uncannily similar. You cannot take your eyes off them.

Which takes us back to Dennis Hopper's quote at the beginning of this essay. The aura around them, the magic, is remarkable, and there are not too many people around who have command of such an aura. So what does Truman Capote know? Are these careers nothing more than pretences? These are surely two easy targets to accuse of pretension, because they dragged their respective fields into an area more challenging, less fearful, and weren't afraid to show their genius for the world to see. Brando's use of The Method was often derided, but in watching his performances, such derision can rarely be substantiated. Watch him in, say, *Apocalypse Now* and a case for pretension can be made, but not sustained, and other than that Capote's quote cannot be justified.

As for Dylan, again, the term 'con-man' is unjustifiable. Whom did he con, and how? Capote liked to pigeonhole. His dismissing of people who operated on another level is notable. After all, he said of Jack Kerouac - 'That's not writing, that's typing'. Of course I don't agree with him, but they are accusations which have been levelled against both men many times. Those of pretension, false intellectualism. Phoney heights of pretension. But it is others who have lifted Dylan and Brando to a place where they can stand accused of such things. And the critics have played a big part in this, fearful of dealing with film and music in academia.

Both men play down the impact they have had. Brando rubbishes his work. Dylan remains ever elusive, never one to blow his own trumpet until fairly recently. So Capote has this one wrong. Both men have challenged the very notion of intellectualism. Of academia. They took their respective arts in the search of truth. They took their audiences to where they had never been before. They truly held a mirror up to nature. Their work will stand as the reflection.

As a footnote, what have these two great men said of each other? Well, Dylan has had only praise for Brando, even during their meeting in 1965 concerning Pat Quinn. He was an idol for Dylan and he always referred to him as such. As for Brando, he is outspoken on many things, and the comments he made with regard to Dylan I think arose from Brando's dislike of anything that had come out of America in the past 150 years. He reveres Shakespeare, and historical figures he feels

made a genuine contribution to the world. As for artists, the last was Picasso. It is all part of the self-loathing he has always wallowed in. In the marvellous *Conversations With Brando* that Lawrence Grobel conducted in 1978, Brando said when asked about Dylan's merits as an artist:

There are people who aspire to be artists, but I don't think they are worthy of the calling...To some people Bob Dylan is a literary genius and he's every bit and more what Dylan Thomas was...

But when considering all of this it is probably best to remember Brando's very Dylanesque advice to Truman Capote:

Don't pay too much attention to anything I say. I may feel differently tomorrow.

Which is wonderfully Dylanesque. Maybe the best quote to remember from Brando on Dylan is his most famous one:

The two loudest things I ever heard in my life were a freight train going by and Bob Dylan and The Band.

Maybe the truest thing that will connect Brando and Dylan after they die will be the wind. The wind has been such a big part of Dylan's career. The word 'wind' carries with it a thousand memories and implications for Dylan. He started his career telling us 'the answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind' and by 2001, nearly 40 years later, he could hear the wind whispering and was desperately trying to hear its secrets. In the intervening years he had offered up the image of the wind in many guises, and all the time it seemed to contain and withhold the very essence of

truth, a truth that has proved elusive all of his life. As for Brando, Peter Manso concludes his 1994 biography by offering us the following magnificent Shakespearean image of Marlon Brando at 70:

One afternoon...during a freak afternoon thunderstorm, a friend of the actor was standing outside watching the lightning crack over the valley below Mulholland. He was surprised to see Brando emerge and stand barefoot, his arms across his chest, the wild wind blowing through his hair and whipping his kimono about his legs. The actor then walked into the storm, like Lear on the heath, and shouted above the thunder, 'I Love the wind! When I die, I'm going to be part of it!'. And as a bolt of lightning splintered the air, he turned and vanished into the house.

What a powerful image! And one that teases me, as seeing Brando play Lear is something I also dreamed of, but now will never see. Brando and Dylan are great creative men, and history will rightly preserve their work as a testament to that. Dylan's quote on Brando applies equally well to himself:

I think that he is a brave man, intrepid, somebody that is not afraid. Totally. He is one of the modern heroes.

Both are brave and intrepid men. Both modern heroes. Artistic heroes certainly, because they showed the world their talent, their artistic 'genius' for want of a better word, weathered the backlash and then came face to face with it. They then spent the rest of their lives dealing with it, and that, to me, is heroic indeed.