

*...all of a sudden the landscape of California, U.S.A., 1974 ebbed out and the landscape of Rome of the first century C.E. ebbed in. He experienced a superimposition of the two for a while, like techniques familiar in the movies.*

**Valis**, Phillip K. Dick<sup>i</sup>

*So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.  
For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

James 2:12-20 (**King James Version**)

*"In New Orleans you could almost see other dimensions...After a while you start to feel like a ghost from one of the tombs, like you're in a wax museum below crimson clouds."*

*"The past doesn't pass away so quickly here."*

Bob Dylan, **Chronicles**<sup>ii</sup>

This article is intended to provide a look at *Oh Mercy*, twenty years after it was released. The main thrust of the essay will provide an overview of what the album means to me; what thoughts and emotions it conjures up for this particular listener. There will be no contrasts between "now" and "then" involved here, though, because I view and rate it exactly the same now as I have done since my first few listens.

However, we have had twenty more years of Dylan as an artist since then and I will go on to look at the album's place in this now expanded oeuvre which will form Dylan's legacy and broaden things out to raise some questions about how that legacy may survive and be viewed in future times. We have had a chapter in Dylan's memoir, *Chronicles* on the making of the album too, but despite the fresh, entertaining and illuminating way he presents us with his view of his life in those pages; it leans so very far into the realm of fiction that one cannot use it as a basis for re-evaluating one's critical thinking. Not on *specific* examples of his art at any rate.

Prior to my proper beginning, I crave your indulgence for an introductory digression. All this looking back must have made me a little nostalgic and there are three people, all of whom were unknown to me when *Oh Mercy* hit the streets, but soon to be friends I communicated with pretty much every week or so, that I would like to mention before I start discussing the album itself.

### 'Back in the Day'

These three soon to be *amigos* were Paul Williams, Lucas Stensland and John Stokes (JRS) and they are all relevant to this article in one way or another.

I first came across Paul Williams as the driving force behind the Philip K. Dick society. 'Back in the day', tens of thousands of isolated souls across the globe were having their minds blown upon discovering the mercurial mind of Mr. Dick in the oft derided genre of Science Fiction writing. He was an unheralded maverick and it was a boon to discover via Paul's society that others recognised his talents and were moved by his visions. Philip K. Dick is the author of the quote which heads up this article, one that so neatly chimes with my views on *Oh Mercy*. This is only a tangential link but I wanted to put it here, firstly to remind myself that *Oh Mercy* came out before I joined the massed ranks of organized Dylan fandom and that my connection with Paul bridged those "before" and "after" areas of my life and secondly because back when I wrote this, Paul was still with us and I directed them to the website collecting donations to help in the fight for his medical upkeep. Paul Williams, as everyone reading this surely knows, passed away aged 64, in March 2013.

The next two names on this sidetrack of an introduction are directly involved in this article. One as the commissioner of it, step forth blushing Lucas Stensland who first wrote to me as a young man from America, one of the few (then) transatlantic subscribers to my first magazine, the much lamented **Homer**, *the Slut*.

This brings me to JRS, an early support and eternal stalwart for **Homer**, *the Slut*. After dipping my toe into Dylan fandom in 1990, I soon plunged headlong into the whole ocean of it and discovered previous fanzines, one of which, *Look Back* featured an article by 'my very own' JRS on *Oh Mercy* (see, I had not forgotten about it) that I responded strongly to because he, like me, clearly heard it as

simultaneously referring both to now and approximately two thousand years earlier.

In John's case he had specific parallels to Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Jesus Christ* in mind. So insightfully did John expound on these correspondences that the office of Martin Scorsese – who directed a film based on the book – requested a copy of the article from its publishers (*Look Back* magazine).

My own feeling on hearing the album from the second listen onward had been to hear every track as though overlaid with significance from the story of the Christian Messiah. I say second listen because when one first put it on and heard "Political World" and two tracks later "Everything is Broken" it seemed like a rather tired attempt by Dylan to re-ignite interest in his '60s protest persona in a bid to re-establish himself after a decade pock-marked with critical and commercial disasters.

However, after you've listened to the album as a whole, steeped as it is in the Bible and story of Jesus, you appreciate that the whole album is to be seen simultaneously in the light of both now and the time of Christ with, for this listener at least (and seemingly JRS as well), the latter dominating quite strongly.

### *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment*

You may have balked at my flat statement above "that the whole album is to be seen simultaneously in the light of both now and the time of Christ" so allow me to give my reasons for this assertion.

We can all agree that the album contains songs that quite clearly address important events and feature central characters from the story of Christ. I would go further though and say that this is the case in every song, albeit to varying degrees. Before we listened to the album a second time, we had just heard the closing song, "Shooting Star", for example. This beautiful number has three verses, the first and last set in the personal and our current time but the central bridge explicitly linking this time of fire trucks and radios with the Second Coming of Christ at the end of an album that has presented songs wholly or mainly concerned with His time on earth and His impending return.

So the "Political World" I heard on second listen was bathed in the light of that and all the Jesus references that had accrued during the first listen and to this day it conjures up more visions for me of the political world of Christ's time than our own. The dismally vapid "promo video" set in modern times did nothing to dissuade me from this view; quite the contrary, in fact. Not that the modern world is not there too, like the quote from Philip K. Dick, the time of Christ is superimposed on top of the current world. The use of microscope (albeit in an idiomatic sense) reminds us of this world just as other references keep a time when angels sang and people stepped into the flame shouting God's name in mind. In both eras peace is not welcomed and mercy walks the plank. Our fallen, secular, temporal world is described as being devoid of spiritual values. A place where love (and Love) is absent: "We live in a political world... "Love don't have any place."

Dylan, in a characteristic double-bind of a throwaway comment designed to make us scratch our heads, remarked that "just because it's called "Political World" doesn't mean it is a political song". Perhaps by this he was hinting that we should accord his seemingly simple song with graver import. In *Chronicles* he wrote that: *I had no interest in politics as an art form, so I don't think that is all there was to it. The song is too broad. The political world in the song is more of an underworld, not the world where men live, toil and die like men.*

Taking "Political World" this way explains away, too, Paul Williams's surprise at Dylan opening the album by directly addressing us:

*Is this the only Dylan album that opens with the word "we"? Yeah, and maybe the first Dylan song that does since "Tears of Rage." How surprising that Bob Dylan, who has an allergy to being thought of as the voice of any generation, in 1989 feels like making a statement about the human condition to his audience, whoever they are, using an inclusive personal pronoun, as if he really does feel like he's speaking for someone, an "us"!!!!*

Dylan does so because he is stating the condition of humanity in the temporal world, in this album the preacher is back perhaps not as gung ho hell-fire as the one of ten years previously, but very much a man cut from the same cloth.

If we do take the song in the sense I have outlined, it takes on an interesting hue by mixing the time of Jesus and the present day (indeed all human history in this Fallen World, outside the Gates of

Eden where Christ's Love has no place). Peace seems far away, but not for long, as it happens, as Dylan provides a beautiful contrast, musically and lyrically, as we move from this prison of a song to the release of the next where we can start anew and be "in Love and with kindness".

The transition to the heart-breaking fragility of "Where Teardrop Falls" instantly places track one into the fallen, temporal Earth life which stands in sharp contrast to the ethereal, spiritual world where teardrops of mercy are falling for mankind. Here, if the singer follows the teaching of this woman, he can start anew. She is like (or simply is) his 'Precious Angel' of a decade before, the one he will be thinking of when the sun comes once he has "rent his clothes" and "drained the cup" to quote two of the terms that place us firmly in a Biblical realm.

Even allowing that 'Everything Is Broken' is about End of All Days, the 'Armagiddyon' (sic) as Marley so memorably sang it and deals with the corruption of the world we interact with every day, falling apart and devoid of spiritual values hardly saves it from being a bit of a one-dimensional list song. Many seem to feel that it is a list song we could well do without.<sup>iv</sup> Notwithstanding this, it contains more examples of the technique that is prevalent throughout the album of Dylan including items from the ancient ("broken hands on broken ploughs") and the contemporary ("broken voices on broken phones") worlds one superimposed on the other, as in Philip K. Dick's vision, 'like techniques familiar in the movies'.

While the broken ploughs of "Everything Is Broken" are part of a litany that is mainly secular and modern, the majestic "Ring Them Bells" takes us to the Biblical world at the end of days when innocence has died and we are all called to account.

"Ring Them Bells" takes us into the same territory as *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved* had a decade or so earlier; Dylan not only leads us there but preaches from on high to us as we travel. Mercy is there, more evidently than previously, but judgment hangs heavy here too. The song is musically, vocally and lyrically appealing but nothing seems to have changed from the harsh days of "you've either got faith or you got unbelief"; there is not only no "neutral ground", there is no hiding place as Dylan opens with the frankly confrontational: "Ring them bells, ye heathen".

I suppose it is difficult for those who take the concept of Universal Original Sin literally to escape the awkward consequences holding such

a belief necessarily entails. Nonetheless it is depressing that one proposed way of escaping a dilemma it produces is in a sleight of hand trick with hugely damaging consequences- that is, the concept of the Elect, the Chosen Few.

“Ring them Bells” with its lines that draw on Biblical authority<sup>v</sup>:

*Ring them bells for the chosen few  
Who'll judge the many when the game is through*

is not the first time it rears its ugly head in Dylan. In his first flush of Salvation fever he exultantly declared that:

*I was blinded by the devil  
Born already ruined  
Stone-cold dead  
As I stepped out from the womb*

*But I've been saved (saved, saved, saved.....)  
Saved by the blood of the Lamb.*

Progressing from this he later enlarges upon the absurd notion of the preordination of the selected few and the many damned, a notion that has been satirised by a writer Dylan claims to admire.

Dylan recently nominated Robert Burns as his “inspiration” in the HMV series of that name. It is a pity he didn't pay more attention to one of the Scottish Bard's masterpieces because the absurdity of what Dylan propounds on *Saved* and in “Ring Them Bells” is devastatingly shown by Burns, in *Holy Wullie's Prayer*. In this poem Burns uses the kind of irony that Dylan was such an adept user of in his mid-Sixties glory days, to devastating effect:

*When from my mither's womb I fell,  
Thou might hae plunged me deep in hell,  
To gnash my gnooms, and weep, and wail  
In burning lakes,  
Whare damned devils roar and yell,  
Chained to their stakes.  
Yet I am here, a chosen sample,  
To show thy grace is great and ample.*

In a pitiful few lines from two songs on *Saved* that closely echo the unctuous Holy Wullie's, Dylan sets himself up as a target deserving of the same scorn:

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

. . .

*And You've chosen me to be among the few.*

Still, all this unpleasantness aside, "Ring Them Bells" contains the most exquisite marriage of the ancient and current worlds in the neatest of couplets:

*Oh it's rush hour now  
On the wheel and the plow*

"Man in the Long Black Coat" may not, on first listen, seem as Christian oriented as "Ring Them Bells", but it is totally rooted in the same concerns. "Man in a Long Black Coat" is now commonly taken to be a modern re-writing of the "House" Carpenter song from a different perspective. It seems so obvious once it is pointed out but it never occurred to me until I read it<sup>vi</sup>. Dylan scholars will be aware of the history of the "House Carpenter" song from reading Clinton Heylin's book *Daemon Lover*<sup>vii</sup> where he picks up on Morris's observation and concludes: *And he is right. "Man in the Long Black Coat" is exactly the song that would have been written by the house-carpenter.*

And what a story it tells, both the story of the song and the story the song tells, come to that. Being of Scottish parentage and upbringing I heard the song in various guises before I heard Dylan's extraordinary rendition of it and in all those guises it was clear that the song was a warning to those who were tempted by Satan (the exciting, maybe even sexy, but always clearly dangerous, stranger) to desert their duty to the carpenter (or Carpenter's Son, to be more exact). Sober, industrious, hard-working Presbyterian life dedicated to family, society and God or abandonment of all of these for wilful indulgence in personal pleasure was the choice she was presented with and the girl who left so callously, without 'even a note' made the mistake of giving in to temptation.

*There are no mistakes in life, some people say*

*And it's true sometimes, you could see it that way*

sings Dylan but as this song and the rest of the album (and nearly all his work, come to that) makes very clear: if you do see it that way you are blind to the truth.

He continues:

*People don't live or die, people just float  
She went with the man in a long black coat.*

People people may say that there are no mistakes and may seem to float, but reality tells a different story. In fact this is just a cover-up; we don't just float, we make choices and by those choices we are judged (by the Chosen Few ultimately, alas). She chose to go with the 'man in the long black coat' and she lost her eternal life as a consequence. She is snatched away by a hurricane of evil passion due to perhaps only a moment's weakness in the eternal fight of good versus evil.

If this all sound condemnatory I should stress that my response is more one of pity, one cannot help but hear in the song that the girl was hopelessly outmatched. It seems as though she stood no chance against this overwhelming force, but perhaps we are meant to think, "or did she?" After all the sexy allure of dust caked Man of Death was supposed to be faced by something as strong or stronger, faith in other words. Her faith proved to be not strong enough when it came to make this life changing choice; she plumped for letting things float, for letting go and seeing if she could find happiness with this shadowy outsider. Dylan had said in a mid 80s interview that life is not about happiness or unhappiness but about whether you choose to walk in the path of the blessed or unblessed.

This is the choice that has always faced the "she" of the song and she opts to leave with the 'daemon lover' here because he holds all the aces in the pack. However, originally in "House Carpenter" it was a more even fight between Christian virtue and duty versus devilish temptation; both had heavy artillery on their side. Now it seems that the former has grown weak and the latter is as powerful and glamorous and well armed as ever. Why should this be? Dylan seems to suggest it is because Man has no right to judge, born already ruined as we are, how can we judge? (Which is why there is such a desperate need for the "Chosen Few".) As Aidan Day put it:

*Preacher was a talkin' there's a sermon he gave,  
He said every man's conscience is vile and depraved,  
You cannot depend on it to be your guide  
When it's you who must keep it satisfied.*

*.. in these last two lines, where the last two isolate their discrimination of 't' sounds, is that there is no such thing as purity. No such thing as a reliable faculty of conscience for anyone. Conscience is, rather, complicit in the evil that it judges. It doesn't stand above the evil that one does. It depends instead on one doing wrong. It needs one to do wrong in order to exist.<sup>viii</sup>*

If our very conscience compels us to do wrong then it is little wonder that the fight is so uneven.. It explains too why it is so easy for us to repeatedly see a 'man of peace' when in fact we are looking Satan in the face.

Jumping ahead to the centre of side two, (we will return to "Most of the Time", anon) Dylan the Preacher re-emerges in full flow on "Disease of Conceit". A disease so deadly it can turn you from a human carrying a divine soul to a mere 'piece of meat'. It's a tour de force of a delivery and even better is his masterly performance on "What Was It You Wanted". Professor Ricks declares, with no hint of room for debate, that this is a song of about the love of women not the love of God. Difficult though it is to disagree with such a figure as the redoubtable Professor Ricks, I find it inconceivable that a wordsmith as talented, and as steeped in the Bible, as Dylan would not realize the implications of his lines:

*What was it you wanted  
When you were kissing my cheek?*

*Was there somebody looking  
When you give me that kiss  
Someone there in the shadows  
Someone that I might have missed?*

If he did not wish people to think this was Jesus speaking then he surely would have chosen different words. It seems an inescapable conclusion that it is Jesus talking at least in this part of the song, superimposed as so often on this album on Dylan himself<sup>x</sup>. If He is speaking here how do we know that He is not given voice at other times on the album? Indeed it is often difficult to tell in many of these songs if the singer's voice is meant to be portraying Christ himself or

Dylan as Everyman on the Christian journey. "What Good Am I"? is a perfect example of such a song.

A song of some depth and power at that and one that returns all the way to "Blowin' In The Wind" to comment on a perennial Dylan theme – that of the crime of turning away and "pretendin' not to see". In "Blowin' In the Wind" Dylan makes all his listeners party to the sins the song expounds unless his words make them confront the situation and act:

*Yes 'n', how many times can a man turn his head  
And pretend that he just doesn't see?*

This, the song tells us, is exactly why racism and war-mongering leaders succeed in spreading their evil across the world. Dylan said to Gil Turner, quite soon after writing "Blowin In The Wind", that:

*I still say that some of the biggest criminals are those that turn their heads away when they see wrong and know it's wrong. I'm only 21 years old and I know that there's been too many wars... You people over 21 should know better... 'cos after all, you're older and smarter.<sup>x</sup>*

The idea that evil and repression rely on silence and cowardly evasion and facelessness to prosper had clearly not left him, as, some 27 years later, in "What Good Am I" we hear:

*What good am I if Im like all the rest  
If I just turn away when I see how you're dressed  
If I shut myself off so I can't hear you cry  
What good am I?*

*What good am I if I know and don't do  
If I see and don't say, if I look right through you  
If I turn a deaf ear to the thunder in the sky  
What good am I?*

I would hardly be the first to note that this recalls James 2:15-20 from Dylan's much read King James Version:

<sup>15</sup>*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,*

<sup>16</sup>*And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

<sup>17</sup>*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

<sup>18</sup>*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

<sup>19</sup>*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

<sup>20</sup>*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

Dylan has never put it more clearly than in the question, which can be heard as coming from Dylan himself, all mankind but most aptly of from Christ himself of 'what good am I' if 'I just turn my back while you silently die'?

Interestingly enough, the preceding lines in the Bible are also relevant not only to this track but to the album as a whole:

<sup>12</sup>*So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

<sup>13</sup>*For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

<sup>14</sup>*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

Both "Most of the Time" and "Shooting Star" are love songs, it seems on first hearing. The latter is more than that, though, as the middle verse clearly proclaims and perhaps the former is too, as the line: "I can smile in the face of mankind" seems startlingly inappropriate if taken, as it nearly always seems to be, in the trivial sense of 'putting a brave face on things'. Surely "mankind" is the wrong register for this, sounding, as it does, of much greater import. JRS, in his article mentioned earlier, draws comparisons between the narrator of "Most of the Time" and Christ musing on 'what could have been' with Mary Magdalene.

This may be a stretch too far for most, but the song chimes uncannily accurately with the recently released Scorsese film. As JRS notes that in the film *Christ only makes love to Magdalene in the course of a dream, therefore he is never sure if he was ever with her or she was ever with him.*<sup>xi</sup>

Whatever one thinks of that, we cannot deny that the Apocalypse erupts into "Shooting Star" and for those who insist on seeing two thirds of that song and all of "Most of the Time" in an autobiographical light I can only counsel caution. Just because we know external facts

(and myths and lies and misinformation) concerning Dylan's life it does not mean we know anything of the private man and we are even further from having the slightest insight to the creative imagination of the artist. Yes, of course, I too thought of Sara when I heard these songs, I think I once wrote of "Most of the Time" that one could not help but think of her. Yet, I do not think that it is right to do so. It is presumptuous in the extreme and I fear by doing so we are heading for another finger wagging and tongue lashing from Dylan. And this time I could not argue with him.

Both songs are heartfelt, so we presume that it is some real woman in his actual past who he is singing about. Maybe it is, but you can't be sure. He can make you feel so with his delivery, but we have no idea who he is referring to, if indeed it is only one person or even one who has ever existed. You can feel the emotion, but you know not its source. Even if it was himself and an ex-lover he was singing about, you would still not know which one, you would not even know if it was someone you had ever heard of. The only woman who seems clearly linked with this album is his 'Covenant Woman', the 'Precious Angel' who he believes in "even on the morning after", "when the dawn is nearing" and "the night is disappearing"; someone we might say who, "in the shadows of moonlight" showed him "a new place to start".

Who else would be so apt a recipient for these lines?

*Seen a shooting star tonight and I thought of me  
If I was still the same, if I ever became what you wanted me to be  
Did I miss the mark, overstep the line that only you could see  
Seen a shooting star tonight and I thought of me*

She was either an instructress or fellow traveller from the days of the Vineyard, it would seem:

*Seen a shooting star tonight  
And I thought of you  
You were trying to break into another world  
A world I never knew  
I always kind of wondered if you ever made it through*

Then again, maybe not<sup>xii</sup>, but if for those who insist on there always being a biographically relevant person to search for, this would seem the place to start.

In any case the former lovers (if we so presume) of verses one and three are oblivious to the context in which they act out their personal drama. Superimposed on top of them, as throughout the whole album, is the time of Christ and the inescapable conclusion – as ever with Dylan – that now is the time just before the Second Coming. Dylan sings again of The End of Days in “Shooting Star’s” bridge, while naming items of the modern world (“fire trucks” and “radio”) that echo back through the imagery of the album. The imminent Second Coming is the backdrop to all our private worlds and the world at large.

To appreciate the album fully in other words, I feel you must apprehend the world and time of Christ omnipresent, layered behind our own age which awaits His Second Coming. In some tracks it is all we are talking about but in no track do I find it absent and would feel any of the album tracks much reduced were they to be heard without the ‘superimposition’ of Jesus infusing the listener’s awareness throughout the entire album.

### *Place in the oeuvre and history*

*Oh Mercy* seems increasingly to be claimed as a turning point in Dylan’s career. One which halted a drift along into oblivion and allowed his career to thenceforth rally and lead him into an ‘Indian summer’ of ‘magnificent late works’. This romantic notion (with a very small ‘r’) is enchanting but almost totally groundless and occurs mainly because we are in the midst of a period of blind critical acclaim for all Dylan does regardless of its worth. Like Wordsworth (and many others) before him, the world eventually caught up with the coruscating and era-defining brilliance of the earlier lyrics and showered the praise those deserved on the still active artists decades later.

The critical and commercial acclaim afforded the Dylan of today is surely a passing fad. If history is to judge later Dylan at all, it will not be as kindly as he is treated now. The irony is that the people who acclaim his current albums and shows so lavishly are exactly the same kind of ‘critics’ as those who decried him (and them) so vehemently when his performance and albums were worthy of the very praise they now are automatically and unthinkingly, it seems there is no other way, afforded.

[ed – Just a note to say this was written pre *Christmas in the Heart*, *Tempest* and the upturn in live performances. Which I am happy to say make me seem unnecessarily

gloomy back then and, therefore, I have taken out the original paragraphs from this part of the article.)

...In more general terms, it highlights the difficulties Dylan has now that the general populace that has moved so far from the album vinyl format that is such a bedrock of his work and of which *Oh Mercy* possibly stands as his last proper example. I do not just mean the lamentable introduction of CDs, because there time has all but gone; teenagers nowadays look upon CDs with the same risible scorn in which they behold a mobile phone too large to swallow with ease.

The world of portable, limitless, endlessly shuffle-able music on tap from something in your shirt pocket is here and pop has returned to what it was always meant to be – instantly accessible and instantly disposable.

These developments into CD and beyond changed albums forever, obliterated the landscape in which Dylan's art first flourished. *Oh Mercy* was not a harbinger of the future, rather it harks back to the past and the seismic events of the end of the previous decade when Dylan converted to Christianity. The album shows, very successfully, how his millennial Christian views have merged with his everyday experience.

Michael Gray describes it in his Bob Dylan Encyclopaedia as: 'an honourable minor work' and certainly it would not be near anyone's top half-dozen Bob Dylan albums but I rather think it would sneak into my top dozen and - although this may be stretching things too far – I could imagine a plausible case being made for it to challenge for the tail end spot in a "top ten". This would necessitate a number of "ifs and buts" and is maybe a bit far-fetched, but nonetheless it is the sole album of the last thirty years one can make such a claim about. Rather than the gateway to a golden Indian summer, it seems to have almost closed the book.

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<sup>i</sup> *Valis*, Phillip K. Dick 1981 Corgi Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Bob Dylan *Chronicles* Volume One Simon & Schuster 2004

<sup>iii</sup> Bob Dylan *Performing Artist 1986 – 1990 & beyond*. Paul Williams, Omnibus press 2004

<sup>iv</sup> However, it may please those critics who have recently been genuflecting in the face of "it's All Good" which somehow has managed to be treated as a towering example of mordant wit from a masterly songwriter's pen (or duo's pens); a veritable Swiftian satire that – deep breath needed – lists bad things and calls them good. Wowie, imagine that. It would appear that the age of irony isn't so much recently deceased as long extinct.

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<sup>v</sup> **Matthew, (chapter 19)** *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

**Luke, (chapter 22)** *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; / That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

<sup>vi</sup> Chris Morris, *LA Reader*, September 1989 is the first I know to have mentioned this.

<sup>vii</sup> *Dylan's Daemon Lover* Helter Skelter 1999.

<sup>viii</sup> *Looking For Nothing: Bob Dylan Now*: Aidan Day printed in *DO YOU MR JONES? BOB DYLAN WITH THE POETS AND PROFESSORS*, ed. Neil Corcoran Chatto & Windus, 2002.

<sup>ix</sup> *If you have ever been the object of curiosity, then you know what this song is about* wrote Dylan in *Chronicles*

<sup>x</sup> Gil Turner interview Oct.-Nov. 1962 issue of *Sing Out*, reprinted in liner notes for *Broadside* (*Broadside* 301; 1963)

<sup>xi</sup> *Oh Mercy: Songs of Temptation, Struggle and Victory*. John Stokes (JRS) *Look Back* magazine, various issues.

<sup>xii</sup> In another of his teasing interview remarks Dylan once spoke of basing a whole album on a selection of Chekhov short stories. This song always brings the close of Chekhov's elegant and profound story "The House With An Attic" to mind, especially in the David Magarshack translation (from *Lady With The Lapdog and Other Stories*, Penguin, 1964) Especially the following passages which share a dylanesque last line as well as the same crimson clouds from the *Chronicles* quote at the head of this article:

*It was very still outside: the village on the other side of the pond was already asleep; not a single light was to be seen, and on the pond there was only the faint reflection of the stars. ..*

*It was a melancholy August night—melancholy because it already smelled of the autumn: the moon rose under a crimson cloud faintly illuminating the road and the fields of winter corn on either side. Shooting stars fell frequently, Zhenya walked beside me along the road and tried not to look at the sky, so as to avoid seeing the shooting stars, which for some reason frightened her.*

*"I think you are right," she said, trembling in the evening chill. "If people could all unite in devoting themselves to spiritual activities, they would soon find out everything."*

*...The thought of being left alone, irritated and dissatisfied with myself and others, frightened me; and I, too, tried not to look at the shooting stars...*

*.. when I am overcome by loneliness and feeling sad, it all comes back to me rather vaguely and for some reason I begin to feel she, too, remembers me, that she is waiting for me, and that we shall meet one day....*

*Missie, where are you?*