

Truly Beyond Words



Dylan's interviews over the years have been part of his performance art. I remember when the invaluable *The fiddler now upspoke* books came out how important it was to get the accompanying cassettes (ask your parents, youngsters) and listen to them. So much is lost or misunderstood when you just read them as you cannot hear the irony, sarcasm, flippancy, needle, wit, humour and so forth in The Voice. Seeing is even better as so much of the communication is via body language, too.

All of this has been underlined in the contrast between Dylan delivering his

MusiCares speech and his letter to the Nobel Committee being read out by some else. One example is the following excerpt from the latter:

"These giants of literature whose works are taught in the schoolroom, housed in libraries around the world and spoken of in reverent tones have always made a deep impression. That I now join the names on such a list is **truly beyond words.**"

The emphasis here is mine which is a pity as it is what emphasis Dylan would or would not have placed there that is of interest. I would have loved to have heard what vocal spin Dylan would have given these words and what facial and body expressions might have accompanied them. That way one would know if he was making a point that his art is, unlike literature, "truly beyond words".

Triplicate

I note the furore in some quarters re *Triplicate*. Five successive albums of covers, which is in effect what he has now done, does seem a lot. Then again, it is characteristic of his entire career that Dylan, as he has recently noted himself, when he goes for something, goes for it one hundred percent.

It is also not as though he did not pre-warn us:

To me, somebody coming along now would definitely read what's out there if they're seriously concerned with being an artist who's going to still be an artist when they get to be Picasso's age. You're better off learning some music theory. You're just better off, yeah, if you want to write songs. Rather than just take a hillbilly twang, you know, and try to base it all on that. Even country music is more orchestrated than it used to be. You're better off having some feel for music that you don't have to carry in your head, that you can write down. To me those are the people who ... are serious about this craft. People who go about it that way. Not people who just want to pour out their insides and they got to get a big idea out and they want to tell the world about this, sure, you can do it through a song, you always could. You can use a song for anything, you know. The world don't need any more songs.

You don't think so?

No. They've got enough. They've got way too many. As a matter of fact, if nobody wrote any songs from this day on, the world ain't gonna suffer for it. Nobody cares. There's enough songs for people to listen to, if they want to listen to songs. For every man, woman and child on earth, they could be sent, probably, each of them, a hundred records, and never be repeated. There's enough songs. Unless someone's gonna come along with a pure heart and has something to say. That's a different story.

But as far as songwriting, any idiot could do it. If you see me do it, any idiot could do it. [Laughs] It's just not that difficult of a thing. Everybody writes a song just like everybody's got that one great novel in them. There aren't a lot of people like me. You just had your interview with Neil [Young], John Mellencamp ... Of course, most of my ilk that came along write their own songs and play them. It wouldn't matter if anybody ever made another record. They've got enough songs.

From: <https://americansongwriter.com/.../bob-dylan-the-paul-zoll.../3/>)

A Storm in a Tea Cup, Revisited

Triplicate will also, doubtless, increase speculation linking Dylan's *Tempest* to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* given the much held assumption that this was Shakespeare's last solo authored play. There is no hard evidence that *The Tempest* actually is that. We know little of the lost, later play *Cardenio* and some, albeit a minority of academics, proclaim the final play in the canon *Henry VIII (All is True)* to be solely the Bard's work. Perhaps more startlingly, given the so oft-repeated statements re *The Tempest*, there is no conclusive confirmation one way or the other over which came out first, *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*.¹

What neither *Tempest* nor *The Tempest* are, however, are the respective artists' final works, despite the (mis)leading question in the *Rolling Stone* interview below. Dylan, though, seems to go along with this widely-held assumption re *The Tempest*, here, while also dismissing the analogy between the works:

"Dylan's mention of Shakespeare raises a question. The playwright's final work was called *The Tempest*, and some have already asked: Is Dylan's *Tempest* intended as a last work by the now 71-year-old artist? Dylan is dismissive of the suggestion. "Shakespeare's last play was called *The Tempest*. It wasn't called just plain *Tempest*. The name of my record is just plain *Tempest*. It's two different titles."ⁱⁱ

Dylan is certainly correct that the use of the definite article makes it a different title. "The tempest" is not the same as "tempest" and nor would "a tempest" be so. Still, until he releases another original album, such talk is unlikely to go away.

Urban Myths

I enjoyed the TV series "Urban Myths" embellished take on the 'Dylan visiting the wrong house when trying to meet up with Dave Stewart' story. It was very sweetly done, with Eddie Marsan outstanding as Dylan. His walk reminded me of that wonderful video clip of the real Bob in Belfast in the early 90s wandering about at a bus stop and acting like someone out of a Beckett scene.

They also had many little touches just right and some cute dialogue, such as: Dave: "I was on a call," Bob: "I had a call once" Dave: "False alarm." Bob: "Mine too."

That was funny but somewhat misguided, (perhaps a piece of wish-fulfilment?), as Dylan has repeatedly made it very clear that he is still, as he put it with regards to the songs on *Christmas in the Heart*, "a true believer". On that note, I read an advance copy of Scott Marshall's *Bob Dylan: A Spiritual Life* which is coming out in four months and I will post a review nearer the time.

Tour



I am pleased that Dylan is playing the Palladium but wish that he had announced it with the other UK/European dates rather than it coming after a scramble for tickets for other shows. Since the decades of ripping us off with vastly over-priced CDs finally passed, live tickets have risen to 'compensate'. That has left many people with the dilemma of sticking with the tickets they originally bought or trying to sell those to fund ones for the 'Palladium residency', as it is rather grandly being dubbed.

Triplicate seems to have some people worried that the tour will feature lots of cover songs but to my mind covers have often been the stand-out performances in Dylan shows and most certainly were the last time he played the UK.

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ⁱ *The Tempest* is often most loudly claimed the "last sole authored work", unsurprisingly, by those who have invested a great deal in the rather reductive interpretation of Shakespeare-as-Prospero. The desperate need to force art into a biographical straitjacket which is forever presumptive, if not downright imaginary, even in cases where external biographical details are well known, compels many to believe the play 'must be' Shakespeare talking directly to us. This despite the idea of playwrights' lives and playwrights 'opening up to us' being unthought of back in the day.

ⁱⁱ August 16th, 2012 issue of Rolling Stone. Interview by Mikal Gilmore