

# **DYLAN REVIEW, WINTER 2019**

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## REVIEWS

**Otiono, Nduka and Josh Tosh, editors. *Polyvocal Bob Dylan: Music, Performance, Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. vii + 212 pp. \$109.99**

REVIEW BY Christopher Rollason, Independent scholar, Luxembourg

There are now two periods in Dylan studies, pre- and post-Nobel, and this new edited collection inscribes itself from the start as a product of the 2016 Nobel watershed. It also reflects the curious circumstance that, while the Swedish Academy's award was the final act of the gradual, decades-long process of conferral of literary respectability on the Dylan oeuvre, that same award has also, perhaps paradoxically, generated a passionate defense in some quarters of the primacy of performance over text in Dylan's work. Examples may be found in Andrew Muir's recent book-length study of Dylan and Shakespeare, and among the contributions to the 2019 international Dylan conference in Tulsa. The present volume may be considered as aligned primarily with this tendency. Regarding the prioritizing of performance (and thus of song over text), one might wish here to recall the words of France's prestigious poet—as namechecked by Dylan on *Blood on the Tracks*—Paul Verlaine: "De la musique avant toute chose . . . et tout le reste est littérature" ("Music above all . . . and all the rest is literature"). From such a perspective, (performed) music comes first and literature second.

The collective volume is the work of eleven contributors (eight male and three female) from the academic milieu, including the two editors, based variously in Canada (both editors, including Nigerian-born creative writer and academic Nduka Otiono), the United States (eight) and Germany (one). The component texts consist of an introduction co-signed by the editors and eight chapters, one of them (chapter 8) co-authored. The book spans a wide range of perspectives, for the most part anchored in Dylan's performance orientation, while not neglecting close lyric analysis and with reference back to the Nobel a recurring trope. The title not only points to the multiplicity of Dylan's selves but also,

by signaling in the term "polyvocal" his many voices, anticipates the book's alignment with performance, of which voice is so vital a part.

The introduction (chapter 1), co-signed by the editors, argues that despite the Swedish Academy's "justifying of [Dylan's work] as readable text," "awarding Dylan the Nobel in literature is not the same as awarding it to Yeats or Eliot" (1). This is not to undermine the award as such, but to avow that Dylan's presence on the Nobel roster forces a redefinition of "literature," since "we cannot simply 'read' the vast bulk of Dylan's work": the musical and performance dimension is always there. Dylan's Nobel, the editors suggest, has provoked in the literary world "a sense of unease that is readily comparable to the unease sparked by the rise of the novel at the close of the eighteenth century" (4). They conclude that his oeuvre "is literary only insofar as it is musical" and "readable only insofar as it must also be heard" (5), stressing the multiplicity of Dylan's voices and underpinning the notion of a "polyvocal Dylan" with the key concept of polyphony, deriving from literary theory via the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. The chapters that follow, they affirm, "develop our understanding of Dylan and place his textual and performative art within a larger context of cultural and literary studies" (11).

Chapter 2, by Damian A. Carpenter, is entitled "Restless Epitaphs: Revenance and Dramatic Tension in Bob Dylan's Early Narratives," and it lays its main emphasis on Dylan's ambivalent relationship with certain of his poetic predecessors (T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost), regarding not so much their actual poems as their concept of literature (Eliot's "historical sense," Frost's "sound of sense"). Carpenter sees Dylan as a "poetic songwriter," one who combines criteria of both poetry and song and creates a new paradigm from their fusion: "he would need to not simply imitate the traditional structure [of poetry or song] but also reorder it, speak to his present" (37). The author follows up his theoretical considerations with a close lyric analysis of "Ballad of Hollis Brown" and "North Country Blues," which succeeds in illuminating and expounding the sense of two somewhat undervalued early-Dylan triumphs.

Chapter 3, by Charles O. Hartman, confronts the (non-academic) reader with a title that may appear a shade forbidding—"Dylan's Deixis." The author defines the linguistic term as an aspect of language whereby certain words (notably pronouns) "take on referential meaning within the context of a situation shared by speaker and listener" (55), resulting in not always predictable shifts in meaning. Armed with this theoretical apparatus, Hartman invokes songs such as "I Want You" or "Mama, You've Been on My Mind," or, as he puts it, "most famously," "Tangled Up in Blue" and Dylan's "vacillations" around that song's lyric, in order to point up the shifting, unstable nature of words as apparently basic as "I," "you" or "he" in Dylan's writing (57). A highlight of the chapter is a closely argued interrogation of the pronominal complexities in that great neglected song, "Up to Me" (58): all in all, the initial conceptual difficulty of this chapter is compensated for by the quality of the lyric analyses.

In Chapter 4, "Not Just Literature: Exploring the Performative Dimensions of Bob Dylan's Work," Keith Nainby, implicitly pursuing a Verlainean "music above all" line, takes up the cudgels for the prioritizing of performance, writing: "for Dylan, songs are living, and only ever fully present in the moment of expression" (80). He affirms that in Dylan's work, "poetry depends not merely on the words themselves but on how they are engaged through his performing artistry as a vocalist" (68), and stresses Dylan's status as "performer of his own compositions" (69). He effectively treats Dylan's studio recordings themselves as performances; thus, Nainby notes how in the *Blood on the Tracks* version of "Idiot Wind" a deliberately "poor" articulation reflects and reinforces the despairing sentiments of the stanzas' end-words (75), and explicates how in "Most of the Time" Dylan's "weak voicing of the halting promise to 'endure' even as the sound of the word itself cannot" (79). For Nainby, Dylan's vocals exhibit "the paradox of articulation—its capacity to both join and confound" (78).

Astrid Franke's Chapter 5, entitled "The Complexities of Freedom and Dylan's Notion of the Listener," reads the polyvocal in Dylan as an expression of "individual

freedom" and "self-determination" (88), and of—using Raymond Williams' term—a "structure of feeling" in the form of an "impetus to start anew" (91). She further finds a tension in Dylan's songwriting between individuality and the urge, present in many of his love songs, to achieve the "merging of one's personality with that of another being," stressing here the initiatic role of the addressed female "you" as indicated by the titles in such songs as "Precious Angel," "Covenant Woman" or "Oh, Sister" (92). Regarding performance, the author argues that by radically reinterpreting his classics on stage, "Dylan attempts to free the songs themselves of their past and thus urges his old fans (and also his critics) to discover the songs anew, freeing them, too, of their listening habits" (93). She concludes that "to have [someone like Dylan] around so long" in an activity of constant reinvention is "a gift to [our] culture" (97).

Katherine Weiss, in her chapter 6, "'Blowin' in the Wind': Bob Dylan, Sam Shepard and the Question of American Identity," offers the volume's first more specialized case study, tracing the interaction between Bob Dylan and the celebrated dramatist and film scriptwriter Sam Shepard. The author traces out the Dylan/Shepard story through three main sources: Shepard's participation in the Rolling Thunder Revue; their songwriting collaboration, in the shape of the outstanding co-written song "Brownsville Girl"; and Shepard's one-act play of 1987, *True Dylan*. Weiss identifies as a common thread Shepard's pursuit of Dylan's masks, a search stretched out over time and by its nature never-ending. If Shepard argues that "Dylan has invented himself," Weiss adds that the former repeatedly "comes back to the philosophical question of who Dylan is" (103). She considers that for both artists "identity is a performative act" (105) and that both "reflect upon the fluidity of American identity and the need for and destabilization of the myths that help to form what it means to be American" (102).

Chapter 7, John McCombe's "Bob Dylan's 'Westerns': Border Crossings and the Flight from 'the Domestic'," reads as less concerned with performance than with identity, pushing that issue into the area of genre. Starting out from certain

tropes of the celebrated (mostly cinematic) "Western" genre, the author identifies in Dylan's work, on the one hand, notions of the rebel outlaw hero and, on the other, the converse temptation of domesticity. Scoured for these themes are both the Dylan film canon (his participation in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*) and such "Western"-themed songs as "John Wesley Harding," "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts," or "Isis"—the latter being considered as "Western" despite its "pyramids embedded in ice," that image being seen as a proxy for the hills of Wyoming (134-135). The author contends that "Dylan's westerns regularly conform to, and occasionally subvert, gender-based binaries that distinguish the classical Hollywood western" (122).

Chapter 8, co-written by Emily O. Wittman and Paul R. Wright, is entitled "'I Don't Do Sketches from Memory': Bob Dylan and Autobiography" and, taking its cue from the line from "Highlands" quoted in the title, examines Dylan's attitude to life-writing, as reflected in the songs and in *Chronicles*, foregrounding what the authors call "a defiant interiority unmoored from temporality" (142). Like Chapter 7, this study explores Dylan's work more from the vantage point of identity than from that of performance. "Highlands" is analyzed, with the focus on the exchange with the Boston waitress who requests a sketch, as a song that embodies the "tension between the visual and the verbal arts" (144), potentially forming a bridge between Dylan's core activity as musician and his forays into visual art. Songs defined as autobiographical, including "My Back Pages" and "Idiot Wind" (the latter seen as "raging with the power of King Lear on the heath" (53)), are analyzed as exhibiting a contradiction between "self-presentation and self-obfuscation," while *Chronicles* is characterized as an exercise in autobiography that is "explicit (yet highly evasive)." In his memoir, Dylan is seen as rejecting the generic model derived from Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, grounded in "chronological coherence," instead following in the footsteps of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in his *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (*Reveries of a Solitary Walker*) reconstitutes the past "without . . . linear narrative, as a means

to think through the present" (158). The authors affirm that Dylan's memoir has the impact of "rethinking and reworking the very genre of autobiography itself" (155)—and that "his songs are autobiographical, but you will be thwarted if you try to figure him out" (166). Once again, it is a many-faced Dylan that emerges from this chapter's analysis.

The ninth and last chapter, by co-editor Nduka Otiono, strikes a visibly different note from its predecessors, and some will certainly find it the most immediately readable. Entitled "Beyond Genre: Lyrics, Literature and the Influence of Bob Dylan's Transgressive Creative Imagination," it charts the history of Dylan's influence in Nigeria, thus forming a valuable addition to a sub-corpus of Dylanology (reception studies) whose enrichment is always desirable insofar as it helps correct the conscious or unconscious U.S.-centric slant that characterizes the majority of Dylan studies. Otiono starts out from the Nobel and the general issue it raises of Dylan's literariness, moving on to the very specific "case study" of his reception in the Nigerian literary world. He shows how his music "cast a spell" on a group of Nigerian writers, including Otiono himself—and this despite the fact that "Bob Dylan has never played a concert" in any African country; Nduka Otiono was nonetheless entranced by the image of "African trees" in "Man in the Long Black Coat" (174). He compares Dylan's appeal to that of Fela Kuti, the "Afrobeat King" and doyen of Nigerian music (179, 181), and recalls how, for himself and his creative group in Lagos, Dylan was, to quote his fellow writer Afam Akeh, "one of our significant presiding spirits" (184), and, in Otiono's own words, "a quintessential example of the composite artist who straddles our polyvocal creative aspirations" (187). Dylan's multiplicity is thus received with open arms by artists in and from a culture far from similar to his own.

Many are those whose work has posed the no-doubt unanswerable question: "Who is Bob Dylan?" This volume may be seen as an accumulation of partial answers to that question, predicated on the awareness that there can never be one single or definitive take on the matter. Its multiplicity of perspectives

is given a certain unity by the recurring themes of identity, performance, and the Nobel. The emphasis on performance over text is clear throughout, whether implicitly or explicitly, and at one point studio recording too is subsumed into performance. The various lyric analyses, while often dense and detailed, tend to emphasize the "how" of the songs rather than the "what." Such an approach is evidently laudable and necessary insofar as it corresponds to a vital set of facets of Dylan's work, recalling also that his creative oeuvre is not confined to songwriting and that he is an artist practicing in diverse other media.

The text-orientated tradition, however, has been a key aspect of Dylan studies ever since the first edition of Michael Gray's *Song and Dance Man* hit the bookshops in 1972, and has borne fruit over the years in essential analyses by Greil Marcus, Aidan Day, Christopher Ricks, Stephen Scobie, Richard Thomas and more. The last word has not been said—and never will be said—on any number of superb lyrics from the Dylan canon, and it is to be hoped that the post-Nobel reality will also stimulate new and fascinating analyses of Dylan's lyrics on the page, coming from the other side of the ongoing performance/text divide.

**Andrew Muir. *The True Performing of It: Bob Dylan and William Shakespeare*. Red Planet Music Books: 2019. Pp. 368. Paperback UK £15.99. US \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-9127-3395-8.**

REVIEW BY Stuart Hampton-Reeves, University of Warwick

At one time it was fashionable to compare Dylan to John Keats, so it is a measure of how Dylan's stature in Western culture has grown over the decades that he is now more likely to be compared to the greatest of all Western writers, William Shakespeare. What links a sixteenth-century Warwickshire playwright to a twentieth-century Minnesotan singer-songwriter? The answer, of course, is virtually nothing, and neither writer benefits particularly from the comparison. Dylan's work owes more to Ginsberg, Eliot and Pound than it does to either Shakespeare or Keats. There is something mischievous in the way that the question tends to be posited. In the days of "Dylan and Keats", the conjuring of names was meant as a way of starting a conversation about poetic excellence: quite simply, was Dylan as good a poet as Keats? "Dylan and Shakespeare," on the other hand, tugs in a different direction. This comparison is more about cultural status: will future generations see Dylan as important as Shakespeare? Ennobled by a clutch of literary prizes, and possibly at the end of his career as a songwriter, Dylan may be our culture's best offering to the ages.

I prefer "Dylan and Shakespeare." Although as different as they can be as writers, they do share a similar place in their prevailing culture. Both started their careers as performers rather than writers—Shakespeare as an actor, Dylan as a folksinger. When they wrote, they were fiercely conscious of the live audiences they would be performing to. Although many of us encounter Shakespeare in books, he always wrote with performance in mind. Dylan never just sings his songs, he performs them, and he strives to find some new angle that makes the song unique to that moment. Bob and William share an investment in popular culture; they both care about their audiences enough to give them something of what they want. Yet while respecting and admiring popular entertainment, they both

transcend it. In Shakespeare's case, he started writing straight-forward plays and enjoyed a parallel career as a poet. His poem "Venus and Adonis" was the big hit of his early career, his "Blowin' in the Wind." At some point around 1595, perhaps less than five years into his writing career, Shakespeare seems to have had some kind of epiphany, because he starts bringing poetic language into his plays. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its companion play, *Romeo and Juliet*, have a poetic intensity missing from earlier plays, as if Shakespeare had decided to bring his skills as a poet to the then somewhat disreputable form of the common play. This is the closest Shakespeare came to "going electric."

Andrew Muir's *The True Performing of It: Bob Dylan and William Shakespeare* is an admirably exhaustive study of the two writers. The ordering of the names on the title page suggests that Dylan has some kind of precedence, although Muir's previous work was a fine study of Shakespeare and Cambridge. Muir and I share an admiration for the Cambridge schoolteacher H. Caldwell Cook, who is a central character in *Shakespeare in Cambridge* (Amberly Publishing, 2015), and who makes a somewhat implausible cameo in this study of Shakespeare and Dylan. Cook's appearance is indicative of the level of detail that Muir marshals in his forensic, side-by-side dissection of the two corpses. As Muir himself notes, "it is not difficult to build correspondences between any two artists" (9), particularly when their body of work is so large. Muir is acutely aware of the dissimilarities between Dylan and Shakespeare, but he does not want to write about those: instead, his interest is in the intersections between their "working practices."

Indeed, this is where the comparison starts to get interesting. Few writers in history have been accused of plagiarism as much as Dylan and Shakespeare. Many of Dylan's tunes are borrowed from folk songs, there are whole websites devoted to his selective "quoting" of (for example) Henry Timrod, and even his Nobel prize acceptance speech has since been exposed as riddled with "similarities" to other texts. Shakespeare, too, was an adapter. Despite what one may have seen in the film *Shakespeare in Love*, he did not invent the plot of

*Romeo and Juliet* (he based it on a popular poem by Arthur Brookes). He drew heavily on Plutarch and Holinshed for his Roman and History plays, sometimes word-for-word; he raided Cinthio for *Othello*, Boccaccio for *Cymbeline*, Chaucer for *Troilus and Cressida*—and so on. There are few truly original plays in Shakespeare's canon. As Muir points out, both the legal and cultural context for authorship was very different in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Adaptation and imitation were a respected part of the creative process in Shakespeare's time, whereas Dylan has faced greater scrutiny and even mockery for his many borrowings. Here, it is useful to call Shakespeare as a witness for the defense. If Shakespeare can create great art that is a creative and transformative assemblage of other writers, then why not Dylan? Part of the way both writers have been able to create such a rich and diverse canon is through their extensive assimilation of other writers. The young Dylan was notorious for spending hours in listening booths absorbing hundreds of folk songs which he had an uncanny ability to pick up after only a few hearings. Shakespeare too seems to have been something of a cultural sponge, absorbing, recycling and recreating classical and contemporary sources and turning them into remarkable works which transcend their origins.

Muir is also interested in the social and cultural contexts for his chosen subjects. Chapters on religion and political contexts bring into focus the way that writing and music interact with the world around them, and occasionally have an impact on the way people think. It is a valuable exercise to put Dylan and Shakespeare into context, especially as we are now at a point where we have enough distance to start to see Dylan as a figure of history rather than as a contemporary. However, Muir is on noticeably thinner ground here than elsewhere in the book, as contexts tend to separate artists out rather than flatten the distance between them. Shakespeare lived in the fraught aftermath of a tremendous religious schism. Born in 1564, Shakespeare would have been old enough to have remembered the old morality and mystery plays which were later

banned by Elizabeth's government, nervous of the potential those plays had to incite religious division. Shakespeare was effectively banned from writing about religion and contemporary politics, and when he did so, he did it in allusive and subtle ways, which means scholars are still arguing about Shakespeare's religious and political beliefs centuries later. Dylan has lived through some interesting times and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helps to mitigate some of his less politically acceptable speeches during his "born again" phase in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Shakespeare is a natural reference point for any writer, especially one whose cultural knowledge is as expansive as Dylan's. Dressed in a jester's outfit and talking to a French girl in an Alabaman alley, Shakespeare is a character in "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again." His own characters also appear from time to time in Dylan's work: Ophelia sits beneath a window peering into Desolation Row; in "Po' Boy," Desdemona gives Othello poisoned wine in an odd conflation of *Othello* and the denouement to *Hamlet*, an image which Muir intriguingly links to carnival burlesques and minstrel shows Dylan recalls seeing as a boy. Muir's chapter on "Shakespeare in Dylan" may prove to be the last word on the subject, for Muir offers many examples of ways in which Dylan has quoted, reshaped, or simply reflected Shakespeare. Sometimes he over-reaches. Metrical similarities between Feste's song in *Twelfth Night* and "Percy's Song" may simply be the result of both drawing on the ballad tradition. I'm not overly convinced that the "painted face on a trip down Suicide Road" is Ophelia, but I accept that this is the sort of creative and subtle borrowing that Dylan is good at. In a witty move that I suspect both Dylan and Shakespeare would approve of, Muir follows this with a chapter on "Dylan in Shakespeare," which reminds us that, because Shakespeare's plays are constantly being performed and filmed, he exists very much in the present as a contemporary writer. For example, Michael Almereyda's 2000 film *Hamlet* includes an excerpt from "All Along the Watchtower" in its soundtrack, and the man who digs Ophelia's grave also sings the song. Muir goes

on to discuss Dylan references in Almereyda's 2014 film *Cymbeline* and Robert Icke's 2017 theater production of *Hamlet*.

Muir's survey of Dylan and Shakespeare is so broad that there are, inevitably, mistakes and misconceptions. For example, he misleadingly compares Shakespeare's collaboration with Thomas Middleton to Dylan's collaboration with U2 on the track "Love Rescue Me." Although we know very little about how Shakespeare collaborated, few if any scholars believe that he and Middleton sat down together to compose plays: more likely, Middleton was asked to dust down plays Shakespeare had already written for fresh performance, possibly years after Shakespeare had written them, which makes Middleton more of a script editor than a co-writer. I am not sure that it can be said that Shakespeare did not care about the printing of his plays given that almost half of them appeared in print during his lifetime (Muir's claim that "Shakespeare's plays in quarto format had nothing to do with him" (29) is unprovable and seems unlikely). Shakespeare's early retirement from the stage suggests otherwise—it seems likely that he was spending at least some of his time in Stratford preparing his works for publication, as several of the ones that appeared in his posthumous complete works, known to the ages as the "First Folio" and published in 1623, were so long that they would have been unlikely to have been performed in the "two hours traffic" of the early modern stage. Muir is on better ground with Dylan, although I am not sure I can agree with his claim that "it's not dark yet, but it's getting there" has entered the English language as a commonplace.

Dylan has almost written Muir's conclusion for him by titling his 2012 album *Tempest*. As many newspapers were quick to notice, the title appears to be a reference to Shakespeare's last play (at least, the last that he wrote solo), *The Tempest*, which is arguably about the "magic" of theater and poetry, and ends with the magician breaking his staff and abjuring his magic. The temptation to see Prospero as a cipher for Shakespeare has proved irresistible to even the most cynical scholars. Could *Tempest* be Dylan's last album? Dylan's people were

quick to refute that suggestion, but as we enter into 2020 (at the time of writing), with no new material from Dylan for the best part of a decade, one begins to wonder if *Tempest* will prove to be his final artistic statement. The dark is drawing closer: Dylan does not have long to capstone his career with new work. Muir's finale, then, is a spirited comparative analysis of *The Tempest* and *Tempest* with some nice observations about the way Ovid and Homer influence both.

What, then, is to be gained from over three hundred pages of side-by-side comparison between the two Bards? Perhaps very little in truth: the book serves to remind us how different Shakespeare and Dylan are, both as men and as writers. The book is at its most persuasive when it uses one to frame the other: that they are both performers who write for performance seems to me to be a useful way of de-mythologizing both of them. The contexts of their work were both highly charged politically and socially, but in very different ways. That Dylan was influenced by Shakespeare is hardly surprising, since all writers in English are whether they know it or not—if anything, Muir's study here highlights how infrequently Dylan has turned to the other bard for inspiration over his long career. And one might have expected a cultural figure as influential as Dylan to have intruded on modern performances of Shakespeare many more times than the three somewhat obscure examples that Muir finds. None of this detracts from the book's achievement. Muir has synthesized an impressive amount of detail which he marshals in an intriguing way. As the "long twentieth century" draws to a close and we look at the cultural achievements which our times offer up to the centuries, it may well be that Bob Dylan's work is one of those, but only time will tell if the people of the twenty-fourth century revere his work as much as we do the plays of William Shakespeare.

**Timothy Hampton. *Bob Dylan's Poetics: How the Songs Work*. Zone Books. New York: 2019. 285 pages. ISBN 978-1-942130-15-4. \$29.95.**

REVIEW BY Robert Reginio, Alfred University

*Bob Dylan's Poetics*, the main title of Timothy Hampton's excellent exploration of *form*, suggests that the study will detail a theoretically informed analysis of Dylan's corpus in an attempt to make an argument about the philosophy of poetic language underpinning the artist's experiments. The subtitle, *How the Songs Work*, tamps down one's expectation for such a speculative study, connoting a strictly formalist approach to the songs. Neither the main title nor the subtitle gives one a sense of the study that follows.

What Hampton provides the scholar and critic is a model of theoretical and methodological diversity perfectly suited for the present moment of Dylan Studies. Attuned to literary genealogy, the forms of popular music that make up the texture of Dylan's art, and the implications for listeners excited by the uncanny strangeness of even Dylan's most popular tunes, Hampton is uninterested in stabilizing this moving target.

In Hampton's study, Dylan is paradoxically both a curator and an iconoclast, oftentimes in the very same song. For example, in Hampton's first chapter "Containing Multitudes: Modern Folk Song and the Search for Style," he pays close attention to the dialects and idioms Dylan strategically uses in the song "With God On Our Side":

The "hobo" language of "I's taught and brought up there" immediately gives way to the old-fashioned sounding phrase "the laws to abide" which is semantically vague [it could mean either "to tolerate" or "to obey"] . . . the phrase generates an alienating effect, as if the singer knew something about grammar that we don't, as if this phrase actually "worked" grammatically in some sociolect somewhere, in some local tongue that we would recognize if we knew what the singer knows. (37)

Hampton links the singer's alienation from the history he has inherited and his concomitant solitude to the way Dylan places Guthriesque "hobo" language against the "old-fashioned" language of law and tradition. The drama of the singer's disillusionment unfolds in our ear. As careful curator, Hampton implies, Dylan incorporates, even in his early compositions, a wide variety of phrases, idioms, and dialects. As Hampton insists, this "collage" of discourses creates an aural environment that is strangely familiar. But the spark of familiarity fades quickly, and as listeners we are uprooted from those discursive communities that lend us a sense of being at home. As an iconoclast, especially in "With God On Our Side," Dylan employs this "collage" of discourses to question the primacy of any dominant narrative. Hampton's study moves chronologically through Dylan's recorded work. Dylan's songs are shown to recover and to reanimate an ever-increasing range of citations. The tensile way in which these citations are curated in the songs oftentimes serves iconoclastic ends.

As Hampton argues in the following chapter, "Ramblin' Boy: 'Protest' and the Art of Adaptation," Dylan invents a new type of Guthrie/hobo figure to inhabit. This figure stands between the world of his primary listeners (white, college-educated members of the folk revival) and that of his sources (Hampton singles out African-American blues). Dylan deploys a kind of semantic wandering in fashioning this "rambling" figure. "[T]he invention of a new type of hobo," writes Hampton, "is linked to the collage style of writing":

Indeed, the two phenomena—the performing identity and the style of the lyric—are two sides of the same coin. The rambling boy is the thematic embodiment of the poetic technique shaping Dylan's lyric style. Dylan's composite lyricism, drawing on both working-class American idioms and "exotic" imported song forms, is the manifestation, at the level of form, of his mercurial persona, and vice versa. It is impossible to say which one generates the other. (50-51)

His songs (that is, the words and the music) offer performative sites where affect

can be mapped, historical perspectives can be challenged, and literature can make urgent demands upon an engaged listener. The method of Dylan's "composite" poetics produces lyrical and musical fragments. The result of his songs' interrogation of their own coming-into-being is a dedicated iconoclasm.

"Someone else is speakin' with my mouth," Dylan sings on 1983's *Infidels*. The line figures as a typical pronouncement of the doubled nature of language and performance in Dylan's allusive art, suggesting anything from the *echt*-Romantic trope of the artist as merely the Aeolian harp the Muse(s) might deign to plug into the PA system, to the eyeball-and-cigarette Cubist-portraiture smoked and punched into place by the railroad man in "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again." This disfiguration aligns with that song's lament about the artist's existence as one filled with endlessly unspooling tape reels onto which he repeats refrains and echoes and reconfigures words.

For this reader, the most important implication of Hampton's formal study is the theoretical argument it implies. Hampton clearly describes the remarkable way marshalling only a few echoes from folk songs or literary traditions allows Dylan to create a compelling series of personae. Performing in the guise of a constructed persona has always been at the center of Dylan's art, and these performances have allowed him to fashion a voice replete with overlapping discursive echoes. And yet, however much a few scraps of previously shaped (or stolen) language can express the self, this process simultaneously undoes the stasis of self-identity. In exploring how Dylan's songs work, therefore, Hampton presents the reader with a compelling narrative of an artist reinforcing *and* undoing the notion that an individual identity draws its strength from tradition.

On *Infidels*, the refrain of "I and I" focuses on just this sort of self-reflective poetics: "I and I / In creation where one's nature neither honors nor forgives." The disorienting moment of self-reflection ("I and I"), of self-undoing, and the moment of "creation" seem linked in Dylan's art: this is the implicit thesis of Hampton's study, making *Bob Dylan's Poetics* quite timely as scholars begin unearthing what

the Bob Dylan Archive may tell us about how the songs work. In addition, Hampton is refreshingly polemical. Hampton insists, for example, that “Dylan’s own art, from its very first manifestations, has consistently questioned, taken apart, and criticized every feature of the very culture that made it possible” (13). In this statement, Hampton argues that a turn to sources is a critical act for Dylan. It is a recursive gesture, neither a recovery of the past nor an establishment of a link to the past that secures the singer’s sense of his place within a historical continuum.

Dylan expresses his fidelity to his sources by recreating, through allusion, the essentially *disruptive* effect those sources had upon him. Hampton’s framing of Dylan’s project in this way runs counter to critics who may read the performances’ multifarious cultural and historical contexts as grounding Dylan’s work in a variety of traditions. For Hampton, even Dylan’s earliest songs remain uncanny echo chambers. A tall order, then, for the twenty-first-century critic of Dylan’s art: one must carefully listen to the songs reverberate in the “memory palace” that makes Dylan’s art possible while attending to the cracks and fissures in the cultural foundations produced by the songs’ reverberations.

The resonant phrase “I and I” is lifted without attribution from Rastafarian theology and twisted from its original theological emphasis on unity. Moreover, “I and I” is only a step away from Rimbaud’s infamous “Je est un autre” (“I is an other”). Hampton forcefully argues that for Dylan, informed by Rimbaud’s poetics of disintegration and visionary profusion, “[l]anguage . . . works through resonance, as much as through reference” (91). In a discussion of the visionary mode of Dylan’s mid-1960s work, Hampton steps beyond the by-now clichéd invocation of Rimbaud to illuminate the confusing, synesthetic labyrinths of epics like “Visions of Johanna” or “Chimes of Freedom.” He establishes Rimbaud as a writer for whom the dissolution of the cultural foundations of poetry energizes the act of creation.

One of the most valuable interventions offered by Hampton’s book occurs when the context offered by Rimbaud’s poetics is expanded to include the

tradition of modernist poetics. Less interested in delineating precise lines of influence, Hampton identifies “the technical discoveries of modernist art” as the proper context for Dylan’s poetics (26-7). The most salient discoveries for his analyses of Dylan’s songs are:

the fragmentation of time and space, the vexed worrying about the past, about tradition and originality, the idea of culture as ruin, [and] the emphasis on artificial or invented objects and moments as bearers of peak or authentic experience within an increasingly unreal ‘real world.’ (27)

While one can sense the paradoxes to come in identifying “authentic experience” as the result of an encounter with the “artificial,” Hampton’s sketch of modernist art’s preoccupations supports his assertion that we read Dylan in the light of this specific literary tradition. Dylan’s recursive exploration of American popular music—from rock and roll to folk revivalism and back to rock again—is reflected in the powerful performance of the songs.

For example, when reading “Tangled Up in Blue” as concerned with “the problem of generational identity as a problem of collective illusion” (i.e., as a fragmented, critical return to a time when “revolution was in the air”), Hampton argues that the song’s propulsive form inaugurates “the theme of performance,” a thematic concern that casts “his own song as a special type of illusion, as fragmented lyric insight, self-conscious, oblique, even difficult” (140). As the forms of Dylan’s 1960s “vision music” settled into a kind of mannerism, Hampton argues Dylan turned to the contrapuntal structure of the sonnet (as defined by Petrarch) to occupy, as performer, this oblique relation to the past. Hampton’s formal analysis of “Tangled Up in Blue” remains consistently linked to his figuration of Dylan as a modernist: “Dylan’s response [to stylistic mannerism] is to turn to older forms of representation, archaic models that can help power an ironic break with the recent past” (141). This gesture, of course, is a modernist one: in this quote Hampton could be describing the poetic theories of Ezra Pound, his infamous

injunction to “make it new” invigorated by a fixation on the power of the fragments of Sappho to break the back of decorative Victorian verse.

Indeed, according to Hampton, Dylan is alive to Rimbaud’s provocations and the modernist poetry that followed, even in his earliest compositions. Dylan’s citation from Woody Guthrie’s “Pastures of Plenty” in “Song for Woody” (“Here’s to the hearts and the hands of the men / Who come with the dust and are gone with the wind”) is, Hampton insists, a complex gesture. “Dylan cites these lines to evoke not the life of the migrant worker,” he explains, “but the wandering (and well-known) folk singers who were Guthrie’s friends” (55). Teasing out the implications of such a layered allusion, Hampton argues “at the very moment that Dylan cites Guthrie’s account of migratory labor experience, he turns that citation against itself. Those who wander nowadays are folksingers” (56). For a young Dylan introduced to Rimbaud’s poetics, “I is another” denotes perhaps his recognition of himself in the French provocateur. That would also be a doubled moment: in it, the artist discovers a resonant lineage while also realizing that he is (as we all are under the conditions of modernity) belated. The question thereby remains: how does it feel?

In terms of the songs’ powerful effects on how we feel, one must consider Hampton’s augmentation of his brilliant lyrical analyses with his exemplary musicological description. Like Alex Ross, Hampton remains scrupulously detailed in registering the changes in key and chord structure that undergird Dylan’s songs without discouraging a reader unfamiliar with musicological nomenclature. A riveting moment comes in Chapter Three: “Absolutely Modern: Electric Music and Visionary Song.” As he tells the story of Dylan’s development from *Blonde on Blonde* to *John Wesley Harding*, Hampton’s analysis of the musical structure of “All Along the Watchtower” sheds light on Dylan’s commitment to a thoroughgoing questioning of identity. “The density of figuration” (a wonderful phrase that could be applied to many songs on the album) in “All Along the Watchtower” is a result of the fact that “no narrative mediation links the Joker and the Thief” to the song’s

“two riders.” Joker (an artist figure) and Thief (a marauder) “exist in equipoise,” thereby frustrating an attempt to pin down the artist as a marauder engaged in acts of love and theft (116). Hampton then explains that this “density of figuration” can be heard in the musical structure of the song. He notes that the chords which make up the harmony of the tune are “very close in sound” and “the only break in this dense structure is the one-beat passing chord, a B major, which, like a swimmer emerging for an instant to grab a breath renders perceptible the otherwise murky alternation” of the two linked chords that make up the basis of the tune (116). We hear, in this description, the song’s ability to suggest an apocalyptic conclusion while flashes of individual histories (like the conversation of Joker and Thief) break the surface. Even a reader unfamiliar with the technical language of musical notation can follow along, grasping the precipitous soundscape that links the fate of Joker and Thief. As Hampton’s analysis reveals, however, “All Along the Watchtower” contains a fleeting, energized interruption that tugs at the ear. This subtle inflection essentially questions the notion of fate. Such an effect underscores the song’s ambiguous conclusion. *Blonde on Blonde*’s phantasmagoric indeterminacies are pared back on *John Wesley Harding*, but Hampton uses his musicological analysis to nail down the essential continuities between these albums.

And yet, the scrupulous analyses of both lyric and music in this book seem hampered by a need on the author’s part to ground any speculative poetic theorizing on definitive sources (e.g., he assures us all too often about the relevance of Rimbaud’s proto-modernist poetics by alluding to Dylan’s own allusions to the French rebel in interviews and liner notes). Such strict bookkeeping cannot at all be faulted—this is an exceedingly erudite book in which every endnote counts, in which every proposition is slotted aptly into an apposite critical conversation, sometimes far afield of Dylan Studies. Hampton’s book registers that the most beautiful aspect of the music is when, inside these museums that make up Dylan’s songs, echoes sound familiar *and* estranged in the same moment. His

study satisfies in the way that it offers several schemas for reading Dylan's work, and he proves most adept at utilizing the work of writers known for their determined arguments about poetics (Rimbaud and Brecht, for example). But he leaves no schema in a fixed central position. This rhetorical move strengthens the book.

On the other hand, at times Hampton seems beholden to language used as a vehicle for moral argument. In such moments we lose sight of Dylan the iconoclast. For example, Hampton sometimes explains that Dylan's songs "mediate" between phenomena. In commenting on *Infidels'* critique of neoliberal capitalism, Hampton writes that the song "Jokerman," because of its allegorical nature, "works to mediate between private experience and the public experience that was being retooled for the full onset of neoliberalism" (186, my emphasis). The verb "to mediate" is vague. It suggests there is a role the song plays between its affective power over its listener (its status as an artwork) and the social surround (the history it reflects). The vagueness of the verb holds back a potentially radical reading of literature itself. Rather than "mediator," is it not that a song like "Jokerman," in its ironic subversion of the putative ends of allegory, stands as (or in) the gap between commodifiable cultural products and history itself? Hampton gives voice to this potentiality when he writes of this song's "self-consuming dimension," how all the virtue imbued in the figure of the "Jokerman" "is revealed by the last lines to have been an illusion." Hampton continues, "[t]he album may be full of infidels and idolaters, but we may be the biggest infidels of them all if we believed Jokerman could fix things" (185). Hampton's insight can be brought to bear upon the song's own enunciation of its various intertexts in a leveling list: "the Book of Leviticus and Deuteronomy / The law of the jungle and the sea are your only teachers." We begin with the Jewish scriptural roots of Dylan's Christianity when he invokes some of the most proscriptive texts in the Torah. We then hear the everyday excuse for apathy in the face of exploitation ("it's the [natural] law of the jungle"). "[T]he sea" suggests a kind of generic

“poetic” setting. Listing—as it was for Joyce, and more corrosively for Beckett—is a de-essentializing, satiric gesture. Hampton’s arguments therefore shed light on the difficult “fixity” of the Dylan text when they stray from the tendency to see the songs as “mediators” of our experience in a history already mediated by texts and scriptures.

It is a testament to Hampton’s sensitive, critical connection to his subject that the various forms of interpretation Dylan’s work has yielded are felt at every moment in his text. But it makes for a crowded book. Hampton seems prepared for a full-length study of Dylan’s work from 1997 to the present. For example, his chapter on “Late Style and the Politics of Citation” is a brilliant exploration of what Hampton insists has *always* been present in Dylan’s work: a radically leveling reincorporation of distinct discursive modes and traditions into new patterns of expression. His argument thereby steps beyond the commanding formal analyses of Christopher Ricks and their relative silence on the problem of history. Early on, Hampton argues

Dylan was able to seize [the] empty space in the structure of the folk music world, presenting himself as “authentic” yet not “traditional.” He was shrewd enough not to try to reinsert traditional songs back into their now distant contexts . . . [r]ather, he would invent the fiction of a new cultural space beyond the mainstream. (31)

The loaded distinction between “authentic” and “traditional” in this passage (i.e., between a cultural expression steeped in its past and one aware of the terminal nostalgia of “traditional” recreations) is incisive. Recognizing this distinction sets Hampton up to describe Dylan as aware of the patterning of the self through discursive streams whose sources remain counter-voices to the “homogeneous empty time” of modernity. As he insists about Dylan’s work: “The voices of the past are violently available to the imagination at any time. They ring through the present. A body on the street in Manhattan could be from Gettysburg. If Dylan is anything, he is a historical poet” (34). The adverb “violently” in this quotation

carries with it a clear-eyed and convincing sense that Dylan's borrowings, as much as they exploit textual indeterminacy to open up a space of expressive freedom, nevertheless carry with them a political and ethical charge.

This foundational definition of Dylan's poetics as eminently *historical*, while not only furthering the argument that Dylan may be placed in a modernist context, establishes a theoretical leitmotif in the book that sheds new light on Dylan's most recent compositions. Rather than trucking in universal categories of morality and judgment, Dylan is preoccupied with violence. On the one hand, he is drawn to the figurative violence of disruptive modernist poetics. These strategies can be found in Dylan's meta-awareness of his audience in his mid-1960s work, which also comments on the violence of modernity's appropriating cultural industries. On the other hand, Hampton insists Dylan is responsive to the traumas of historical violence and how these traumas define the American landscape.

Coming full-circle in the book's later chapters, Hampton argues that Dylan's work after *Oh Mercy* explores "the processes of cultural memory and the isolation of the individual cut off from past and community. . . . The answer to desolation seems to be self-conscious performance and the circulation of bits of cultural information [based on] a rhetoric of the fragment" (218). Perhaps one of the central questions of modernist poetics—is a fragment a recovery of a part of the past, a suturing of present and past in the name of justice, or an untimely presence testifying, in unending echo, to loss?—lingers over Hampton's stunning analysis of "Workingman's Blues #2." Rather than figuring Dylan as an artist in exile, *on his own* among his storehouse of memories, Hampton uses the song's Ovidian allusions to think deeply about exile itself. For Hampton, exile is *not* a transhistorical, existential fate for the poet cast from the realm of power, nor is it expressive of an artist's contrarian agency, as it may be in the voluntary exile of James Joyce from the fair north country of Ireland. In the lives of Guthrie's wandering hobos, as well as in Dylan's early ruminations on the dark side of "wanderin'" in songs like "Boots of Spanish Leather," "Don't Think Twice," and "One Too Many Mornings," exile is

a felt phenomenon. Hampton, however, makes a crucial distinction: “Whereas Guthrie sings about the rambling forced on him by the Dust Bowl, Dylan’s persona rambles to get songs that he can then sing . . . about his rambling to get songs” (46, ellipsis in the original). A footnote in Hampton’s text takes in Walter Benjamin’s theorization of the *flâneur* and Peter Doyle’s study of Jimmie Rodgers’ invention of the wandering American cowboy singer. The intersection of the footnote and Hampton’s reading of Dylan’s Guthrie persona spark manifold possibilities for reading Dylan as invested in the perpetuation of a series of stylized personae that simultaneously reflect and undermine an understanding of modernity as that which threatens authentic identifications. Both of the cityscape and removed from it, Benjamin’s *flâneur* is not so distinct from Jimmie Rodgers’ own “wandering” persona. Hampton’s critical survey of Dylan’s self-fashioning has the virtue, therefore, of remaining steadfastly equivocal on the status of popular culture and the cultural products we designate as “art.” While this mixing of high and low culture is a well-worn feature of most accounts of Dylan’s work, Hampton indicates avenues of critical speculation where Dylan doesn’t simply “mediate” between “high” and “low” culture. Rather, as in Benjamin, Dylan intermixes ways of reading “proper” to high culture with those affects that are “simply” the province of mass culture’s consumable products. To shift between these ways of reading leaves a listener informed by Hampton’s study in a virtual state of exile.

Hampton’s culminating reading of “Workingman’s Blues #2” exemplifies the study’s productive methodology. In his analysis, Hampton strategically unpicks the citational threads in the opening verse of the song. The reference to “the Proletariat” brings us back to Guthrie’s crowded union halls, while the line “They say low wages are a reality” sounds like a snippet of punditry echoing from a TV set. As Hampton argues, the line “is a secondhand thought, something picked up, perhaps, at a tavern like the one celebrated by [Merle] Haggard’s well-employed hero” (219). If there is a constant, Hampton argues, it is that exploitation, a founding aspect of neoliberal capitalism, has the power to surround us with a

plethora of consumable goods, but its historical working out leaves us with *only* those (in this song, now scarce) products. Disconnection and dispersal, interwoven in the song's lyrics, leaves us achingly nostalgic and empty. Moving from the song's references to Ovid and his exile, Hampton argues that the entire point of this song "is that, in the world of globalized capital, *everyone* is an exile. Even if you are home, you are not at home" (220, emphasis in the original). Sensitive to the different registers of discourse juxtaposed in the opening verse, Hampton notes that "the break in history that I have highlighted throughout Dylan's late work, the split between an empty present and some earlier moment of plenitude and meaning, is here intensified through the Ovid reference. Not even Ovid had it this bad" (220).

For Hampton, Dylan investigates the effects of formal experimentation. His experimentation—informed by the modernist preoccupation with the problem of history and the recursive play of citation against expression—takes us from "the dynamic blends of idioms that characterizes the early songs . . . to [the mid 1960's] collage of images, names, and cultural references" (97). The literary equivalent of guitar feedback, his songs become "mosaics of cultural noise" (97). Dylan's late style retains a fidelity to such restless innovation. For Hampton, Dylan's allusive late style does not serve to veil an essential self: his late style presses blues lyricism (and the poetics of the resonant fragment) against the narrative coherence of the traditional ballad. "[T]he structural looseness of the late style dovetails with the conventions of the most archaic of forms, which lends itself perfectly to the disjointed postmodern world being painted," Hampton writes. (204). We thereby find in Dylan's art an unblinking focus on *form* as a means through which we can feel our own being in history: a time out of joint, a time out of mind.

## **Martin Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* (2019)**

REVIEW BY William Luhr, Saint Peter's University

### **Re-Invention**

I

Martin Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* (2019) celebrates the Rolling Thunder Revue concert tour of 1975-76. It centers on performance and backstage footage, featuring Dylan and other participants, including Joan Baez, Patti Smith, Joni Mitchell, T Bone Burnett, Scarlet Rivera, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. The film situates the tour within a cultural/historical context, referencing nationally resonant touchstones of the mid-1970s such as the American Bicentennial, the resignation in disgrace of President Richard M. Nixon, the end of the Vietnam War, the attempted assassination of President Gerald Ford by a member of the notorious Manson family, and the popularity as well as political influence of the American evangelist, Billy Graham. Echoing this complex temporal interface, the film presents a prophetic image of the iconic Twin Towers of New York City's World Trade Center. At the time of the tour, the buildings had recently (in 1973) been completed with great fanfare; but prior to the making of this film, they had been obliterated in a 2001 terrorist attack and their image has subsequently become associated with dark threats to America. While invoking diverse perspectives upon the American Dream, the film celebrates the vitality of a musical community and of small town American life. Dylan drives the bus.

Mixing archival footage and interviews from the tour itself (including outtakes from Dylan's 1978 film, *Renaldo and Clara*), footage shot forty years later for this film, and footage gathered from the intervening decades, the movie presents Dylan's ragtag group as the counter-culture at its most vital. With Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man" on the soundtrack registering a yearning to follow a charismatic musician ("Hey! Mr. Tambourine man, play a song for me / In the jingle jangle morning I'll come following you / Take me on a trip . . ."), the group radiates a sense of carefree troubadours embracing the romance of the open road. Yet

not all participants are musicians. The poet Allen Ginsberg declares that they started out on the tour trying to discover America but ended up discovering themselves. Described in the film's credits as "The Oracle of Delphi," he evokes the memory of the then (1969) recently deceased Jack Kerouac, most famous for his 1957 novel *On the Road*, which celebrates road travel as a way of discovering not only one's self but also America. Kerouac's book, which includes characters based on himself as well as Ginsberg and other Beat Generation figures, became something of a Bible for the counter-culture, and in the film we see Dylan and Ginsberg reverentially visit Kerouac's grave. The playwright and screenwriter Sam Shepard, whose works explore mythic resonances of the American West, discusses his involvement, as does singer/actress Ronee Blakley who describes how Ginsberg and fellow poet, Peter Orlovsky, gradually became so marginalized during the tour that they were relegated to little more than baggage handlers. Sharon Stone also describes her experiences on the tour.

#### *Sharon Stone?*

The movie appeared in 2019 when a number of events coalesced around Dylan's public image, including:

- The release of a 14-CD box set of material from the tour as well as the November 2019 release of the three-CD package, *Bob Dylan (Featuring Johnny Cash) — Travelin' Thru, 1967–1969: The Bootleg Series Vol. 15*.
- The October 2016 announcement of the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Dylan, which became a complicated event that outraged some when Dylan, citing his touring schedule, announced that he would not appear at the awards ceremony, although he did accept the award at a private ceremony in April 2017 and, that June, posted his Nobel Lecture in order to qualify for the \$900,000 stipend.

- The opening of the Bob Dylan exhibition at the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in conjunction with a symposium on Dylan's work, along with the official Bob Dylan Archive at the University of Tulsa's Helmerich Center for American Research at the Gilcrease Museum.
- The August 2019 death of the prestigious documentary filmmaker D. A. Pennebaker, whose obituaries noted his influential 1967 *Don't Look Back*, which chronicled Dylan's 1965 tour of England.
- The high-profile announcement of the 2020 Broadway premiere of the musical, *Girl from the North Country*, written and directed by the award-winning Irish playwright Conor McPherson and featuring Dylan's music.
- The announcement that Dylan's 2019 tour would conclude with a ten-night run at New York City's Beacon Theater, making it his longest stand at a New York venue since 1962 when he played at folk clubs like Gerde's Folk City for weeks at a time.

The movie toggles between tour footage and more recent commentary. While doing so, the film often reconceptualizes the nature and significance of the decades-old events, broaching the question of what continuity might exist between the two eras. Both Dylan and Scorsese, in their distinctive and inventive ways, interrogate the meaning of America. The film pursues this interrogation while engaging some avant-garde and transgressive recent trends in narration, representation, and genre.

## II

Martin Scorsese is a prolific and innovative American filmmaker who, in addition to his widely respected feature films, has long been involved with music documentaries, going back to his work as an editor on *Woodstock* (1970). He has also made movies with and about Dylan: *The Last Waltz* (1978) which chronicles The Band's final concert and includes Dylan, and the 2005 American Masters TV

documentary, *No Direction Home*, about Dylan's development between 1961 and 1966.

Scorsese is best known for his gritty, violent features dealing with twentieth-century urban, criminal American life. They include *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967), *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Raging Bull* (1980), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), *The Departed* (2006), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), and *The Irishman* (2019). His *Gangs of New York* (2002) depicts nineteenth-century national and ethnic conflicts that underpin the development of modern Manhattan. But his output is extensive and diverse. He explored an independent woman's struggle in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974); he made *New York, New York* (1977) about post World War II musicians, *Raging Bull* (1980) which is a biopic about the boxer Jake LaMotta, and grimly comic films like *The King of Comedy* (1982) and *After Hours* (1985). Some of his movies have courted dialogue with earlier films and filmmakers, such as *The Hustler* sequel, *The Color of Money* (1986); a remake of *Cape Fear* (1991); and his Howard Hughes biopic, *The Aviator* (2004). He has made films engaging religious topics like *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *Kundun* (1997), and *Silence* (2010). When some critics expressed surprise at the gentility of his *The Age of Innocence* (1993), a nuanced study of the privileged classes in Gilded Age America, Scorsese responded that he did not see it as a deviation at all, that he considered all of his films to be studies of manners among social groups, whether about violent conflicts among Italian American gangsters or the behaviors of the moneyed elite of the late nineteenth century. He has also devoted considerable energy to film preservation projects.

Scorsese's projects often challenge normative practices of the film industry. In *Shutter Island* (2010), the protagonist, Teddy Daniels, is a United States Marshall hunting a demented killer. Daniels' search leads him to Boston's Shutter Island Ashecliffe Hospital for the criminally insane. Ultimately, he turns out to be the demented killer that he has been ostensibly hunting, destabilizing the reliability of his narrative perspective. At the end, Daniels appears to cooperate with his own

imminent lobotomization, in effect erasing the very source of the film's narration.

The 2019 releases of both *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* and *The Irishman* represent similar subversions of film genre. *The Irishman* generated considerable controversy even before its release, since it was largely financed by Netflix and runs three hours and 29 minutes long, generally considered an unmarketable length for a feature film. Although it was featured at the prestigious New York Film Festival and received largely rave reviews, it created a battle within the industry at a time when the very nature of film is undergoing fundamental change. Most movies are no longer shot and distributed on film but by means of digital technologies. Powerful streaming services like Netflix, which has also entered production, are challenging traditional studios and distribution outlets and often winning those battles. As a way of ensuring revenue, theater owners have traditionally demanded a roughly three-month window between a film's theatrical opening and its airing on television, cable, or streaming services, after which the theatrical revenues have generally declined precipitously. *The Irishman* had a window of less than a month. Furthermore, much of that film is told in flashback and, like *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story*, it challenges the reliability of memory.

From the outset, Scorsese establishes *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* as more than simply a documentary record of a concert tour but as a film with its own cinematic integrity. Even though it was honored with the 2019 Visionaries Tribute Lifetime Achievement Award by DOC NYC, America's largest documentary festival, the movie never describes itself as a documentary. Scorsese opens by invoking the origins of cinema itself, showing scenes from Georges Melies's 1896 *The Vanishing Lady*. That film concerns magic and illusion, which was the focus of much of Melies's work with the then-new medium. (In fact, Melies appears as a major character played by Ben Kingsley in Scorsese's 2011 3-D feature, *Hugo*). But what does a nineteenth-century trick film showcasing cinema's ability to deceive and dazzle the spectator with illusions have to do with

a twenty-first Century film about a concert tour?

### III

Although at first *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* seems to present itself as an entertaining depiction of the tour, some things don't add up. Since one target audience for this film is Dylan fans and obsessives, and since information about the Rolling Thunder Revue has been available to them for decades, they are likely to come to this movie expecting a fuller, more polished record of the tour than previously available. But from the outset, they are likely to notice inconsistencies in the film's timeline. For instance, Sharon Stone nostalgically describes her experiences as a 19-year old invited to join the tour, and particularly her jubilation when Dylan tells her that he wrote a song about her. Later, however, the musician T Bone Burnett informs her that she could not have been the inspiration for the song, since it was a decade old at the time. A cute story about a young woman's naivete, when in reality, Stone was 17 and not 19 at the time, and there is no record that she was ever on the tour at all. Her amusing recollections are entirely and demonstrably fabricated—in what appears to be a documentary! Fabrications within fabrications. Why did Scorsese include this whimsical material in his celebration of the tour? Why did he expend the effort to create, script, and film it for this project?

More central to the narration are interviews with “Stefan von Dorp,” the filmmaker presented as responsible for much of the tour footage. But no such person ever existed—he is entirely invented, and played onscreen by Martin von Haselberg, a performance artist married to Bette Midler.

Jim Gianopulos, the CEO of Paramount Pictures, describes his challenges in promoting the tour, but Gianopulos never promoted the tour at all. He was in law school at the time.

Michigan Congressman Jack Tanner recounts how President Jimmy Carter got him into a performance of the Rolling Thunder Revue. But Tanner never existed

and the event never happened. He is a fictional character played by the actor Michael Murphy, who appeared as Tanner in Robert Altman's 1988 television campaign mockumentary, *Tanner '88*, written by Garry Trudeau.

The fabrications are so numerous that in the very month of the film's release, on June 12, 2019, Andy Green published an article enumerating many of them in *Rolling Stone* entitled, "A Guide to What's Fake in *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story*."

#### *What is happening here?*

Traditional notions of documentary posit a genre that strives for an accurate, unmediated recording and recounting of the film's topic, be it the life of an individual, the significance of an event, the historical plight of a people, or the development of a socio-cultural moment. At least from the 1920s on, the genre has often been associated with political activism and with the presentation of evidence documenting real-world injustice and arguments for social change. However, many contrasting schools of documentary filmmaking have emerged, often with different ideological stances involving the integrity of the image, the soundtrack, the narration, and the authorial presence or absence of the filmmaker. Some documentarians reject voice-over narration as intervening with the "truth" of the depicted events; comparably, many consider recreations of events to be betrayals of an implicit promise of unmediated "truth." Furthermore, the very nature of the documentary has recently undergone widespread and extensive reformulation, particularly with the advent of digital technologies, and many works currently presenting themselves as documentaries bear little relation to past iterations of the genre.

Presumptions about venues have also changed. Traditionally, documentaries were shown in theaters or in auditoriums. After World War II, television became a major new venue. Currently, much of the energy in the field has shifted to art museums and various video installations, and these new venues have brought with them fundamental changes in narrational practices. Where

many traditional documentaries presented closed narratives—a beginning, an end, a clearly focused argument—more recently many have presented open-ended, ongoing, multi-perspectives on their topics. Some of these films seek to immerse the spectator in a new kind of documentary experience, which can be “live” and constantly changing, as with live video feeds simultaneously showing war-torn areas. Those feeds depict what is happening at the very moment that the spectator is observing them and present a constantly changing NOW. Some manifest as “walk through” installations and, rather than presenting a fixed narrational experience, presume a mobile spectator who can focus on whatever they find compelling. Hence the same spectator can experience the “same” documentary presenting different data on successive days.

This disengagement from long-held notions of fixed narration also relates to current practices challenging traditional presumptions about the integrity of the cinematic image—about what we can believe about what we see. Traditional codes of representation are shifting, not only in the documentary genre, but also in fictional films. Dramatic examples appear in recent films by Quentin Tarantino such as *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) and *Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood* (2019). Each is set in an identifiable historical time and place—the first in World War II Europe and the second in 1960s Los Angeles. It is nothing new to set films in past eras and present a mix of historical and fictional characters, but the convention has largely been to stick with what popular audiences know about history. In *Inglorious Basterds*, however, Tarantino depicts the slaughter of Adolf Hitler and his staff in a French movie theater a year before Hitler's actual death in Germany. In *Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood*, the infamous Manson family prepares to murder Sharon Tate and friends but, contrary to the historical record, the murder is averted.

These more recent examples differ from the common practice of altering character structure or the sequence of events in films engaging historical figures. John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) deals with Wyatt Earp and the O.K.

Corral gunfight. Ford knew the historical Earp but his depiction of the fight differs wildly from the historical record. The actual fight lasted roughly half a minute but in Ford's film it goes on for fifteen. Doc Holliday is killed although the historical character survived. When Ford made the film, those events had occurred in a previous century and were not well known. He tailored them to his notion for the film. But the Tarantino films engage widely known, relatively recent events. Most audience members are likely to see that something is off.

In *Rolling Thunder Revue*, Scorsese utilizes these new trends in filmmaking, and those trends pair well with many of the narrative strategies Dylan has employed throughout his career. Among these strategies is Dylan's history of attracting and even encouraging diverse and contradictory perspectives about himself. Dylan speaks of the importance of masks in the interview portion of the film, saying, "We didn't have *enough* masks on that tour. . . . When someone's wearing a mask, he's gonna tell you the truth." On the tour, when not wearing a mask, Dylan generally performed in whiteface. In the film, Joan Baez recounts how she once dressed in whiteface to imitate him, and no surprise, the film goes to lengths to suggest Dylan borrowed the idea from the rock band Kiss, who had yet to even adopt that practice at the time. Even before 1962, when he legally changed his name from Robert Allen Zimmerman to Bob Dylan, Dylan had used numerous pseudonyms while performing and recording, and has continued to do so. The pseudonyms include Elston Gunn, Tedham Porterhouse, Blind Boy Grunt, Bob Landy, as well as Lucky Wilbury and Boo Wilbury on the *Traveling Wilburys* albums. His character in the 1973 Sam Peckinpah film, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, calls himself "Alias."

Dylan's history of using pseudonyms and celebrating masks mirrors his career-long pattern of exploring new modes of creativity and even identity, whether shifting from traditional folk music to rock, or causing a stir within the industry by "going electric," or embracing Judaism or Christianity. He has, in effect, repeatedly invented new Bob Dylans.

Dylan's invocation of masks, of multiple and changeable personae, is also consonant with the image that many have of him as an American bard, a poet of the common folk attuned to the multifaceted spirit of their nation. Historically, bards have been associated with epic poetry and song as well as the creation and celebration of national myths. Their works, written in the vernacular and hence accessible to everyone, have functioned to celebrate a nation's vitality and provide a collective sense of identity. The dominant recent tradition comes largely from Celtic-Anglo-Irish-Scottish-Welsh culture, but draws upon earlier traditions. While the stories bards tell may have some factual basis, what is important for them is how they fashion their content into nationally resonant myths. Whether or not Homer accurately portrayed the historical Trojan War is less significant than the image of it he presented in his epic poems. Shakespeare, likewise, has been called the Bard of Avon. In his poetry and songs, Robert Burns, who was called the Bard of Ayrshire, defiantly used the Scottish dialect instead of the standard eighteenth-century English of his era to celebrate the vitality of Scotland's disenfranchised classes. In the refashioning of factual data, accuracy is not nearly as significant to these bards as how the work coheres into a resonant myth that evokes a national identity.

A fountainhead figure in American letters for this kind of endeavor is the poet Walt Whitman, who called himself "The Bard of Democracy." His *Song of Myself* (1892) celebrates his own individuality hand-in-hand with that of the "self" of America at large. Asserting solidarity between himself and the reader under the umbrella of "America," he opens the poem, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." In Part 51 of the poem, Whitman directly and unashamedly addresses the notion of his self-depiction as being so expansive as to contain contradictions. "Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" With Whitman and Dylan, contradictions are no big deal; issues of self and national identity are at stake.

Dylan has long acknowledged his debt to the folk artists who preceded him, particularly Woody Guthrie. Upon agreeing to establish his archives at the Helmerich Center for American Research, alongside Woody Guthrie's, Dylan said, "I'm glad that my archives, which have been collected all these years, have finally found a home and are to be included with the works of Woody Guthrie and especially alongside all the valuable artifacts from the Native American Nations. To me it makes a lot of sense and it's a great honor."

The figures cited above—Guthrie, Whitman, Kerouac, Dylan, and Ginsberg—as artists who present themselves as emblematic of the spirit of America, all continue the bardic tradition. These artists have also given diverse and at times contradictory accounts of themselves, with little concern about such contradictions being particularly significant in light of the breadth, ambition, and social agenda of their endeavors.

Todd Haynes's 2007 film, *I'm Not There*, provides a gloss on Dylan's various public selves. A highly unusual, quasi-biopic in which six actors play diverse personae based on aspects of Dylan's life, the film describes itself as "inspired by the music and many lives of Bob Dylan." Dylan himself only appears briefly in concert footage at the end, but manifests in fictional characters at various crossroads and metamorphic moments of personal development. The film's very notion of character is fluid. Indifferent to traditional boundaries of gender, age, and race, the personae include a woman, a blues-singing African American child, and a burned-out cowboy. The actors include Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett, Heath Ledger, Marcus Carl Franklin, and Richard Gere (who plays Billy McCarty or Billy the Kid, who rides a boxcar and finds Woody Guthrie's guitar). Kris Kristofferson narrates the film and Bale's character is presented as the son of Ramblin' Jack Elliott, who was a part of the *Rolling Thunder Revue*.

Despite his roots as the son of a Jewish doctor from Brooklyn, Elliott cultivated the image of a folksy, down home country boy and was known for telling rambling stories. One of his better known performances is "Pretty Boy Floyd"

on his 1960 album *Jack Elliott Sings the Songs of Woody Guthrie*, which presents Floyd as a Depression-Era Robin Hood character in solidarity with the common folk of the land, such as farmers. The song invokes the American fascination with freedom-loving outlaw figures like Floyd and Billy the Kid.

Elliott was a protege of Woody Guthrie. His mastery of Guthrie's work strongly influenced Dylan's early career, and the two developed an abiding friendship. In concert, Elliott has even referred to Dylan as "my son." A useful referent for Todd Haynes's splintered characterization strategies appears in Kris Kristofferson's introduction to his 1971 song, "The Pilgrim," which Kristofferson declares as being in part about Ramblin' Jack Elliott: "He's a walkin' contradiction, partly fact and partly fiction." This applies to depictions of Dylan as well.

#### IV

Dylan's celebration of outlaw figures extends beyond romanticized historical criminals. It includes contemporaneous victims of injustice like the Native Americans Dylan visits and plays for on the Tuscarora Reservation in New York, as well as the boxer, Ruben "Hurricane" Carter. While the film often employs a cavalier mix of fact-based and invented figures and events, it also foregrounds the bracing engagement of an actual, contemporaneous case of social injustice. Dylan performs his 1975 song, "Hurricane," in concert, and the film also shows recent footage of Ruben "Hurricane" Carter himself expressing gratitude for Dylan's role in overturning his murder charges after nearly 20 years in prison. Abruptly, then, in the midst of the film's fabricated and often whimsical stories, Dylan verifiably reengages his protest roots for real-world effect. This sequence comprises part of the whirling narrative mix that incorporates the film's diverse, often contradictory, approaches to its subject.

Even so, Scorsese's film does not aspire to present a documentary record of the tour. So what is it up to? A useful model for approaching that complex

question comes from what lies at the very center of the film—music and performance. Many of the songs in the film are ones that Dylan and the others have performed hundreds of times. Each time they sing those songs they bring them to life once again, for the present moment. And the present-ness, the very NOW-ness of that performative moment, of necessity changes from concert to concert, and over the decades. The same song performed by the same artist can take on different meanings in different contexts. The artist, who is always performing in the present moment, in the audience's NOW, knows that he or she needs to make the performance feel new each time, with each activation. Musical performance is neither archeology nor documentary but must always be a present-tense activity. The song might be decades or even centuries old, but each time an artist performs it, it must exist and resonate within and for that moment. That perspective is pertinent to the film's evocation of the tour.

A further perspective is evident in Scorsese's engagement with the question of cinematic "truth." In engaging what appears to be a traditional type of film, a record of a concert tour, he employs a number of avant garde and cutting-edge filmmaking strategies. He presents what appears to be a revival of an old tour in ways attuned to the latest media practices.

*Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* never declares itself to be a documentary record, although many might come to it expecting one. Its notion of what it is, is much more fluid and cued by its unabashed use of blatant fabrications. It is not presenting us with settled "fact" but rather creating its own reality for its own NOW, underscored at the outset by the footage of Dylan declaring that the tour "happened so long ago, I wasn't even born." What did he mean? On one level, of course, he was simply joking—the film provides abundant evidence of his presence on the tour. But seen from a different perspective, that presence was one from decades in the past, and in the intervening years Dylan has assumed many different masks, different personae as his way of re-inventing himself for changing times and ever-shifting socio-cultural

environments. In effect, the film is giving a contemporaneous riff on the long-ago tour, less concerned with traditional presumptions about “accuracy” than with a celebration of the idea of the tour, filtered through memory and the desire to celebrate its legacy (which at times includes impulses toward hagiography).

If Dylan and Scorsese place such little value in factual recreation, why should we? They present compelling performances in a mythic recreation of a past event, one whose significance is retooled for 2019 and beyond. While the tour itself has been described as a financial bust, it has developed a mythic stature, one linked at the film's end with Dylan's ongoing touring life, his “Never Ending Tour” since 1988. And he is still touring! The closing credits list his subsequent tours up to 2018—more than 3,000 shows over a 40-year period. They imply that the Rolling Thunder Revue is ongoing and is inseparable from Dylan himself, the artist, his many masks, and their place in the ever-changing myth of America.

## THE DYLANISTA

Right now, in the fury of the moment, it would take Linnaeus to untangle and classify the infinite variety of Dylan scholars. We could spend an amusing afternoon paging through a *Species hominum litteris Dylani eruditorum*, identifying familiar, not so familiar, and positively bizarre kinds. But a taxonomy alone, regardless of its categorizing properties (and its entertainment value), wouldn't give us any idea of the future course of Dylan scholarship. In fact, ironically, by tracing, grouping, listing, and labeling all the extant types, while maybe resolving confusion on one hand, would, on the other, create a mystery all its own: that is, which species of *homo litteris Dylani eruditus*, what particular kind of Dylan scholar, will survive?

Once upon a time, or so we're told, people would perform Sortes to predict the future. They would choose a sacred book or a literary classic like *The Aeneid* and open it to a random page. Then they'd toss a talismanic object like, say, a skeleton key, onto the open page. The exact passage where the key landed was considered prophetic, revealing the future of the key-tosser. An unlikely legend has it the Emperor Constantine used *Sortes Vergilianae* to make decisions about military strategy. And in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene tries *Sortes Bibliae* to choose between two suitors for her hand (and we know where that got her).

But still, maybe trying Sortes would be apt for predicting the fate of Jack Fate scholarship. We could toss a D# Blues Harp onto a randomly opened page of our new *Species* and reveal the future Dylan scholar where the harmonica lands. Would it be the Obsessive Encyclopedist? Or the Eschewer of Footnotes, a Harold Bloom of Dylan critics? Or perhaps the key would land on the page containing that rare thing, the Performance Historian? Or would it be the Indefatigable Biographical Interpreter? The New Hermeneuticist? Or maybe the Musicologist, also an inexplicably rare specimen in Dylan studies? Or, *mirabile dictu*, would the Prosodist finally emerge from the shadows?

I don't mean to be glib—or not just glib—and I realize that all the above categories can be combined, in whole or in part. Nevertheless, a Silver Age of scholarship seems increasingly to be replacing what will no doubt be regarded as the Golden Age of Dylan studies: according to Ovid, there was no law or punishment, and there were no judges, in the Golden Age. But with the Silver Age, technology came into the world, along with rules and hardship (“the oxen struggled”).

As eyewitnesses fade away and the fan base shifts to those who can legitimately say “I wasn't there,” archivists and researchers increase in value. There have always been hoarders, collectors, and secret traders of Dylanalia. But the systematic gathering and cataloguing of collections only recently began—the reviewing of Dylan's notebooks and scribbled songs, unseen photographs, matchbook rhymes, unreleased recordings, cached draft lyrics, letters, postcards, and pen-and-ink doodles. This systematizing is the harbinger of Silver-Age technology. It's a new morning, and, predictably, the locusts are singing (or swarming). New legal strictures have appeared. And, with the imprimatur of academic affiliation, the judges of peer-review have all but replaced the lawless brilliance of Golden Age authors. The newly entitled scholarly community has developed a distinct skepticism for what Walter Pater called “appreciations.”

On one hand, this is all to the good. I am, after all, writing this column for the *Dylan Review*, a journal manifestly, and by credo, scholarly. And, presumably without coercion, you've chosen to read this new journal committed to Silver-Age peer-reviewing and the technologies inseparable from erudition, research, and scholarly writing on Bob Dylan.

On the other hand, however—if I can argue briefly *in utramque partem*—is this progress? I wonder. I wonder if there'll be a price to pay for going through things twice. Consider the case of the visual arts. The Golden Age of connoisseurship in art criticism—more learned perhaps than the Dylan *Siglo de oro*—was nonetheless pushed aside by the arrival of pedigreed art historians

flaunting PhDs. The museums' notorious infinity-salvation problem fell into the tight grip of academic scholarship. "Appreciations" and essayistic forays, written by now-controversial connoisseurs, soon disappeared from learned journals. The times were different, but I wonder: is this a cautionary tale for Dylan studies?

A Yeats poem, "The Scholars," comes to mind:

Bald heads forgetful of their sins  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love's despair  
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;  
All wear the carpet with their shoes;  
All think what other people think;  
All know the man their neighbour knows.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

What would we say, as scholars, should *our* Catullus walk our way? And how would we say it? Yeats, a poet, sees little hope for closing the gap between poetry and scholarship. He mocks the old scholars: their staid respectability owes everything, paradoxically, to young men tossing on their beds "in love's despair." He laughs at their uniformity and purblind annotations. Something is happening, but they don't know what it is.

Yeats's scenario reminds me of Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*. The guilt-ridden, embittered Charlie Citrine is asked by an eager graduate student what he thought about his late friend, the poet Von Humboldt Fleisher (a thinly disguised Delmore Schwartz). Citrine replies mercilessly, "I think the dead owe us a living."

But do they? Or is it the other way around? I think Yeats is half-wrong and Charlie Citrine has inverted the question. It isn't what they owe us—dead or alive—but what we, as critics, owe them. Scholars might need a biographical reality-check from time to time, as Yeats too-scornfully reminds us, but the *work* is the thing. Critical tact and scholarly detachment defeat familiarity, sad as that might seem to all of us who feel a personal connection to Dylan's voice and songs. But our ongoing debt is to Dylan's oeuvre, his collected work, regardless of how broadly we define that work. The ideal Dylan scholar won't "think what other people think," I hope, but won't fall into the flesh-and-blood trap either. I hope, instead, she'll combine critical erudition and learned speculation with a hint of Golden-Age vision.

Imagine if the D# Blues Harp landed on a scholar like that in the *Species*.

RF

## ARTICLES

### **Beacon and Black Hole: Suze Rotolo, Bob Dylan and Two Songs of Parting**

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**Abstract:** This article examines Suze Rotolo's account in her autobiography of her early life and relationship with Dylan. It takes note of her provocative suggestion that some of his songs were self-interested, one-sided accounts designed to take their place in an ongoing dialogue with both Rotolo herself and those close to her. The article looks closely at "Boots of Spanish Leather" and "Ballad in Plain D" to determine how "interested" the songs are and how fully they constitute examples of Dylan's complex revisions of traditional ballad form. It makes an evaluative judgement about their merits, proposing that Dylan's true strengths as writer and singer were never likely to reside in any "confessional" form but always to take their place as essentially "modernist" modes of dramatized obliquity; and it takes stock of variant performances.

**Keywords:** Rotolo, ballad, confessional, modernist, performance.

Bob Dylan's one-time girlfriend Suze Rotolo published her autobiography, *A Freewheelin' Time*, in 2008, three years before her death; and, although generally admired, it wasn't really given its due in the reviews. Although it doesn't quite equal them in quality, it's one of those books, like Joe LeSueur's *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara* and Dave Van Ronk's *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, in which the writer's close but secondary status in relation to a figure of genius provides a revelatory foil to the object on display. The book strongly suggests why Dylan would have been fascinated by Rotolo, beyond her unconventional, warm beauty, which he celebrates in his own quasi-autobiography, *Chronicles* (2004). As much is obvious from the famous cover of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963), where photographer Don Hunstein shows the pair huddled against the winter on Jones Street in New York City. From an Italian-American communist background in New York, Rotolo describes her escape,

while still a teenager, from an alcoholic widowed mother and a coercive sister. Living alone in Greenwich Village at the age of seventeen, she meets Dylan, then twenty, in the summer of 1961. They stayed together for three years, more or less, those of his earliest, intensely productive creativity and first fame.

Rotolo is fascinating for her background and her ambivalent break with it, and she describes in some depth the range of her political interests and affiliations. These include a trip to Cuba reported in the national press (and, we have learned recently in *Truthout*, scrutinized in the file kept on her by the FBI). But the book focuses, as its title implies, on her relationship with Dylan and its context in the cultural life of the Village, in which she was a keen participant. She writes spiritedly, her style taking a particular edge from her acerbic detailing of what seems the reflex misogyny of the time. Her feminism is at first instinctive, and then principled, as she educates herself in the ways in which women were conditioned by men in the bohemian New York of the 1960s; her self-education is the real theme of her book. She regrets her lack of formal tertiary education, a consequence of the unavailability of funding. We must speculate on what her attitude might have been toward the middle-class Dylan's own casual abandonment of opportunity when, still in his freshman year, he quit the University of Minnesota for the streets and folk clubs of New York City.

Recalling the difficulties of her life with Dylan, Rotolo is reticent and unspecific, and the book offers few opportunities to the prurient; but she still makes it plain that she was lied to and manipulated, sometimes with the connivance of male friends or hangers-on. She remains resilient, however, rather than vengeful, and she testifies to her continued admiration for Dylan's genius and staying power. Citing Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, she acknowledges the relativity of truth and therefore the partiality of her own position; this self-critical misgiving is one of the reasons her book does in the main ring true.

Even so, it seems there's another story inscribed between the lines of the one Rotolo tells. It surfaces when she describes her creativity in theater, clothes

design, painting and book-making in the 1960s and thereafter. Although we don't doubt her talents, we might wonder whether their relative lack of recognition would have made it especially difficult for her to experience the dynamo of immediately celebrated creativity that Dylan was almost as soon as he started off in New York. It surfaces, too, when she says that she once changed her name to "Justine" after the eponymous heroine of the first volume of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*; then, she discovers in the title and subject of a Picasso collage, *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, which names a French liqueur, the replacement for what she considered the dull birth name "Susan." Although Rotolo doesn't say so, both of these instances parallel Dylan's own change from his native "Zimmerman" which, to her humiliation, Rotolo discovers only accidentally. And the occluded narrative surfaces when she insists on the political and cultural benefits she brought him:

Growing up in a politically conscious home during the Cold War and under McCarthyism, I had struggled through the issues of Communism, socialism, and the American way. I threw those interests out to Bob. I was exposed to a lot more than a kid from Hibbing, Minnesota, was, especially with my upbringing amid books and music and interesting, albeit difficult, people. And I was also from New York City. No contest there. (*Freewheelin' Time* 137)

Well, maybe not; but the metropolitan condescension suggests there was a contest somewhere. "You sound like a hillbilly, we want folksingers here," this passage seems to say, as Dylan's Greenwich Village nightclub owner berates the singer in "Talkin' New York," Dylan's sardonic account of his early days in the city. It's not self-evident that growing up in Hibbing, Minnesota automatically cuts one off from books and music and interesting, albeit difficult people. The impact of New York City—and of Rotolo herself—on Dylan is undeniable; but still, Robert Zimmerman was able to pluck a great deal from the Minnesotan air—literally, since much of it came to him from the numerous local radio stations which he

could tune in to on the Midwestern airwaves. The resentment implies that Rotolo was discontented with her secondary status. Rotolo displays an unrelaxed, even prickly edginess, and her account of emotional and psychological damage places the blame, in at least one respect, on Dylan's art as well as his behavior.

The core of *A Freewheelin' Time* is Rotolo's account of her protracted split with Dylan and her consequent nervous breakdown. On her first attempt to leave him, in June 1962, she went to Perugia and stayed several months studying art history, funded by her mother's new partner in what was, she believed, a mutual attempt to extricate her from Dylan's grasp. She tells us that she watched Dylan watching her as her ship left New York and, tantalizingly, that elements of his letters to her contained what later became song lyrics. As soon as she got to Perugia she read—twice—Francoise Gilot's recently published *Life with Picasso*:

I expected to learn about Picasso, an artist I loved, but instead the book turned into something entirely different. It made me think about Bob. . . . I felt I was reading a book of revelations, lessons, warnings. Even though Picasso was a much older man than Bob and had experienced a lot more, their personalities were so similar it was astounding. . . . Picasso did as he pleased, not worrying about the consequences for the people around him or the effect his actions had on them. He took no responsibility, clarified nothing, came to no decisions and did nothing that would have made it possible or easier for the various women he was involved with to leave him and get on with their lives. He was a magnet, and the force field surrounding him was so strong it was not easy to pull away. . . . His art was the main function of his life. At the end of his arm was a brush. (*Freewheelin' Time* 181-82)

At the end of Dylan's arm, we must assume, was a pen or a typewriter—and, no doubt, a guitar, that more sociable and erotically advantageous instrument of creativity. Dylan bewildered Rotolo, she says, by being “a beacon, a lighthouse

[and] also a black hole." Having said so much, she need hardly say more, but she does say one other thing. She says that some of the songs he wrote and performed at the time were vehicles of recrimination, soliciting sympathy as the rejected lover while evading culpability. This made life extremely difficult for her when she did return to the Village and, for a while, to Dylan. Dylan's art at this time, she claims, is directed to a coterie and *interested*. It doesn't just make a lover's complaint; it pursues a campaign.

There's something she doesn't say, though, or says so late into her book that it's easy to miss unless you already know it. In Perugia she met the man she was to marry some years later, Enzo Bartoccioli. Rotolo doesn't name him, and her married life forms no part of her book, but we know that Dylan knew about him because one of the "poems" in the version of the sequence "Some Other Kinds of Songs," which forms the liner notes to the American issue of *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), reprinted as late as 1973 in his collection *Writings and Drawings*, tells us so in terms so vehement as to make its past-habitual tense suspect:

i used t' hate enzo  
i used t' hate him  
so much that i could've killed him ...  
my beloved one met him  
in a far-off land  
an' she stayed longer there  
because of him (*Writings and Drawings* 146)

The anger, in lines that have none of the poetry of the songs, is matched by envy—"I wanted t' be like him so much / that I ached"—and both make Dylan appear vulnerable. His knowledge of Bartoccioli doesn't excuse his interested use of his own work, but it does cast it in a different light. Jealousy is not an equable emotion; and being the agent of it in others, as Dylan undoubtedly was, is no prophylactic against being the victim of it oneself.

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This is all of interest, but particularly so because “Boots of Spanish Leather” on *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, released in 1963, and the fascinating but flawed “Ballad in Plain D” on the album which succeeded it a year later, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, both derive from the prolonged ending of the relationship. Both are contemporary variations on traditional ballad form, which has been sustaining for Dylan across his career; both reveal things about the ways experience becomes song in Dylan; and they contrast in their registers of interest as well as in their degrees of success, while also reminding us how many of Dylan’s most complex songs about personal relationships are songs of parting, of the pathos of the hapless and the unavailing.

The first-person narrative of “Ballad in Plain D” recounts the course of a relationship now gone irretrievably wrong—largely because of the jealous interference of the lover’s mother and elder “parasite” sister. The singer’s considerable venom is directed especially against the sister whose motive appears to be her own emotional insufficiency. The song climaxes, once the “tombstones of damage” have been raised in the graveyard of the affair, with a vicious shouting match between narrator and sister “beneath a bare lightbulb”—a harsh light surely figurative as well as literal, as what appears to be a Greenwich Village apartment becomes also a form of hell on earth. After this episode, the narrator runs into the night “leaving all of love’s ashes behind [him].” The extreme emotional intensity of the song then culminates in two final verses of contemplation and valediction.

These circumstances directly reflect the biographical details Rotolo offers in *A Freewheelin’ Time*. Even so, the song is indebted to an Anglo-Scots ballad dating probably to the late seventeenth century. Dylan’s first line (“I once loved a girl, her skin it was bronze”) and the song’s narrative structure echo those of the ballad sometimes known as “The False Bride.” Written in the person of a jilted lover, the song appeared in the 1960s repertoires of both Ewan McColl and Pete Seeger, which is almost certainly how Dylan first heard it:

I once loved a lass and I loved her so well  
I hated all others that spoke of her ill  
And now she's rewarded me well for my love  
She's gone to be wed to another.

Dylan transposes his own experience into the ballad's terms. *He's* the one spoken of "ill"—not by "all others" or by the "lass," but by her mother and sister. The vitriol directed against them is accompanied, though, by self-reproach and what seems like—and in Dylan's superb rendition sounds like—genuinely heartfelt lament for the loss. Dylan doesn't often do apology, but he gets close here when he sings, "The words to say I'm sorry, I haven't found yet." If he hasn't yet found the words, he's at least found the words to say he hasn't yet found the words, which acknowledges both guilt and the obligation to avoid cliché.

The song's regret, sorrow and tenderness are piercing, but in other respects its linguistic and emotional registers are insecure. With the original ballad no doubt haunting his ear, Dylan attempts to meld archaic and contemporary usage, but elevated expressions like "I courted her proudly" consort oddly with the vernacular of the sister's shrill "'Leave her alone, God damn you, get out!'" The opening analogies for the lover—"With the innocence of a lamb, she was gentle like a fawn"—are infantilizing: two cute baby animals make one analogizing line into a condescending menagerie. Some metaphors, notably that of the sixth verse ("With unseen consciousness, I possessed in my grip / A magnificent mantelpiece, though its heart being chipped"), are inept, even juvenile; and so is a certain melodramatic heightening of the situation—as when the lovers are perceived as "the king and the queen," who "tumble all down into pieces," as parts of a chess set: but the metaphor isn't sustained sufficiently to carry much expressive weight. And when the singer regards the lover as "the constant scapegoat," we wonder whether Dylan misread the word "scapegoat" when he came across it in his bible—although the more generous among us may credit him with a neologistically punning acknowledgement that Rotolo had been

scraped or scarred by the experience, as she certainly had. (The various editions of Dylan's published lyrics, however, consistently print "scapegoat" until the *Simon and Schuster* Ricks-Nemrow-Nemrow collection, *The Lyrics* (2014), prints what we hear on the record. This edition is the source for my quotations from Dylan's lyrics in this essay.)

"The False Bride" includes a hauntingly enigmatic verse:

The men of yon forest they askit of me  
How many strawberries grow in the salt sea?  
I askit them back with a tear in my ee  
How many ships sail through the forest?

At the end of "Ballad in Plain D," in a coda following a harmonica break, Dylan transforms this verse in an attempt to resolve the song's unsettled emotions by removing them to another, ineffable plane:

Ah, my friends from the prison, they ask unto me  
"How good, how good does it feel to be free?"  
And I answer them most mysteriously,  
"Are birds free from the chains of the skyway?"

Dylan sings this wonderfully, his vocal timbre a kind of weary sigh, as the affair being consigned to the past is also being consigned to the permanence of memory—and of writing and performance. His melancholy almost redeems the non-contemporary "unto me" (which echoes usages in the *King James Bible*) for an elevating rhetorical pointing, and the rhymes of the first three lines are themselves further pointed by the additional internal rhyme in the final line. This makes the song's final syllable, "way," a sadly echoing pararhyme, a diminishment, complementing the falling cadence of the melody. However, although this transformation of the original ballad is ingenious, Dylan's verse seems, as the original does not, portentous. Claiming to have "friends" in the prison, even if only a figurative gesture, is coyly ingratiating, given Dylan's first audience at the time, the liberal-left of the East Coast folksong community; and

the rhetorical question is more self-approving than cryptic. The conundrum, advertising its mystery, diminishes the genuinely potent mystery of the original and is in fact less mysterious than vacuous, because it can be easily explained. That is: birds suffer the limitations of the sky just as prisoners suffer the limitations of their cells; but strawberries do not grow in the sea, nor do ships sail through the forest (except in so far as they are made from the wood that grows there).

Despite Dylan's persuasive performance, the traditional ballad is now, for this writer, at least for the time being, a form exhausted beyond effectiveness, exploding in self-contradiction. Such exacerbations as "Ballad in Plain D" exhibits demand an alternative kind of expression, and they were about to get it from this songwriter—no longer by balladic narrative recollection but by the abruptness and turmoil of immediate second-person address and the street vernacular heard only from the despised sister in "Ballad in Plain D" but now articulate on the singer's own tongue, where it carries taunt and recrimination: "You got a lot o' nerve to say you are my friend" in "Positively Fourth Street"; "Hey, please crawl out your window" in "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?"; "How does it feel?" in "Like a Rolling Stone." This confrontational and abrasive art propels Dylan's realism towards the distortions of the surreal, the phantasmagorical, the electric and the chemical. "The changes I was going through can't even be used," he sings in "Ballad in Plain D"—meaning, in one sense, to make songs, to further the art. But paradoxically, this very song is of such use. It seems a necessary failure, a *felix culpa*, a station on the road to an unpredictably radical development. And when Dylan does return to ballad form, he makes it new all over again by converting it to different purposes: to the allegories and parables of *John Wesley Harding* (1967), for instance, or to the fictive collages of *Tempest* (2012).

The value of "Ballad in Plain D" lies, then, in its marking a major stage in Dylan's development. Although flawed, it's captivating too in that it's one of the very few songs in which Dylan writes in confessional mode. The title self-reflexively encodes this confession if it intimates that the song gives us "plain Dylan" as well

as, or rather than, merely declaring key or chording. Dylan's life is in his songs, in several senses, but usually deflected into fiction, mythology, persona, mask—all the diversionary ploys of the modernist moment. “A poem is a naked person” say the liner notes to *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965): but no, it's not, and certainly not in this poet, even as he makes the claim. The ill-handled confessionalism of “Ballad in Plain D” strongly suggests how right was Dylan's instinct to abjure creative confessionalism subsequently. It was prompted, I suspect, by the *interest*, by both the angry or malign urge to blame and the benign urge to make a plea and a kind of reparation. But Dylan shows an awareness of his own failure, which he appears to regard as ethical as well as aesthetic, in the fascinating, extensive interview with Cameron Crowe published as part of his first major retrospective collection, *Biograph*, in 1985. He wishes he hadn't written or recorded the song, he tells Crowe, without actually identifying it by name, but “it overtook my mind.” This implies both his passivity before his own perturbations and his failure in self-critical alertness, while also suggesting that this material had an obsessive hold over him. If he never in fact got around to saying sorry to Rotolo—and nowhere in *A Freewheelin' Time* does she tell us that he did—then this comment may be read as a form of belated public apology.

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But if “Boots of Spanish Leather” was also one of the songs Dylan attempted to use as an instrument of blame, the song itself refuses instrumentality by being so securely located in and enabled by the ballad tradition and its impersonality. The song's re-creative intensity permanently casts it clear of the contingencies of its origins. Its narrative opens as a dialogue in which a lover departing on a voyage to Spain—not Italy, and so a first step away from biography—attempts to cajole the one left behind into accepting the offer of a promised gift by insinuating that the absence will be longer than the other anticipates. The reluctance to accept the gift derives from the knowledge that to do so will be to admit the end of the relationship. Only when a letter is eventually received implying that the return may

in fact never happen at all does capitulation come, in the shape of the specific request for the boots of the song's title. The verse which reports the letter's receipt is the only one in which the song moves out of the present and into the past tense; and the final three verses of the song are then "spoken" by the abandoned one alone. As dialogue segues into monologue, "Boots of Spanish Leather" witnesses the psychology of disabused acceptance and recovery, the emotions attendant on admitting to the status of the less deceived.

The song shares a partly archaic language with "Ballad in Plain D," but now the archaisms are expressively coherent. The phrasing "my own true love" in the opening line ("Oh, I'm sailing away my own true love") is tenderly formal, inheriting a long tradition of address in English ballad and folksong, and the faltering relationship exhibited by the song is carried partly by the way the phrase reduces to the less archaic "my love" in the penultimate verse, where the second speaker's change of mind and heart occurs ("If you, my love, must think that-a-way. . ."). The locution "something fine / Made of silver or of golden" in the third verse, to suggest the nature of the proffered gift, is a form of archaic-sounding coinage, since you can't really say "of golden" in English. Dylan's metrical need of the extra syllable and his invention of a brilliant slant-rhyme or assonance for "Barcelona," which is where the gift might be sent from, presumably generate the phrase; but it seems enchantingly opulent, the extra syllable making the gold appear even richer and more generous (more "golden") as a potential gift, and therefore formulated to induce the longing this speaker wishes to create in the addressee. Dylan's voice caresses the words as it leaps up in delight from the first to the second syllable of "golden" and then languorously draws out the syllables of "Bar-ce-lona" (for which the rhyme isn't really just the word "golden" but the whole glorious phrase, "or of golden," in which the word "or" puts "ore" within aural reach too, silver ore becoming gold). The language of stars and diamonds compared adversely to the lover's kisses in the fourth verse derives ultimately from a long tradition of *amour courtois* in medieval French and in the early Italian and

English Elizabethan sonnet. And the final verse's "take heed, take heed of the western wind" combines Elizabethan diction (Friar Laurence says, "take heed, take heed" to Romeo), medieval English lyric ("Western wind, when wilt thou blow / The small rain down can rain?" which Dylan transposes in his early song, "Tomorrow Is a Long Time"), and a cadence from the ballad "Sir Patrick Spens," the tale of a shipwreck ("Make haste, make haste, my merry men all / Our good ship sails the morn").

How deeply versed in any of these sources Dylan actually was is undiscoverable, but his absorptive and transformative capacity, his unerring instinct for exactly what was required, is breathtaking, as it often is subsequently in his work too, but perhaps never again with such intense, magpie command as at this early stage. He inhabits the traditions he shapes anew, bringing folk materials into sophisticated contemporary form and relevance without any hint of pastiche, just as Lorca does in his appropriations and reinventions of Spanish folk materials in his "gypsy ballads" of the 1920s. Whereas "Ballad in Plain D" too interestedly derives from experience, leading Dylan to miscalculate how a ballad can express a contemporary narrative and psychology, "Boots of Spanish Leather" writes experience into traditional form by a process of osmosis and diffusion, because Dylan is thinking intensively about what a ballad actually is. His eye, and ear, are on that, not on himself. So "Boots of Spanish Leather" seems almost to aspire to the anonymity of traditional balladry—making it, in Ezra Pound's phrase, "of present use." The song may have depended for its inception on its author's original experience of his lover's escape to Italy, but it revels in the eventfulness of songwriting itself. It makes writing into a new experience and a new event—"event" in the sense both of happening and of outcome.

There's one thing, though, that "Boots of Spanish Leather" doesn't do that traditional Anglo-Scottish ballad usually does: it doesn't use masculine rhyme in the abcb (or abab) pattern, and, indeed, only the sixth and ninth verses of the song carry full rhymes, but feminine ones— "sorrow" with "tomorrow" and

“weather” with “leather.” Apart from these, the closing words of lines which would usually carry masculine rhymes are scarcely rhymes at all, but they are all feminine in cadence, moving from a stressed to an unstressed syllable—“morning” / “landing”; “ownin’” / “ocean”; “golden” / “Barcelona”; “ocean” / “ownin’”; “askin’” / “passin’”; “a-sailin’” / “a-feelin’”; “roamin’” / “goin’”—which we might describe as variously assonating, resonating, interweaving and repeating.

Not all traditional ballads employ masculine rhyme though. One exception is the widely collected and performed “Barbara Allen,” in which the eponymous heroine’s name prompts rhymes such as “failin’,” “drinkin’,” and “dealin’.” It’s also a song about an abandoned lover; and, although it doesn’t maintain a dialogue between a male and a female voice like “Boots of Spanish Leather,” it includes one. Dylan probably heard it in the clubs and would have known recorded versions by Jean Ritchie and Joan Baez. His adopted name “Dylan” also makes a feminine rhyme with “Allen,” as he might well have noticed, and his original forenames were Robert Allen, the latter spelled exactly as the surname of “Barbara” is, as he could hardly have failed to notice. Whether prompted by such coincidences or not, he was singing a lengthy, non-standard version in the clubs in 1962. In *A Freewheelin’ Time* Rotolo says that the recording of this, now available on *Live at the Gaslight 1962* (2005), “tears at the heartstrings” (*Freewheelin’ Time* 183), and few will disagree. That the song has continued to haunt Dylan is clear from *Tempest*, where it figures once more as an element in one of the collage songs, “Scarlet Town,” for which it also supplies the title.

“Barbara Allen” can’t really be regarded as a “source” for “Boots of Spanish Leather,” but it is a resource. It acts as a watermark in the paper Dylan’s song is written on. In both, the palpable effect of the feminine rhymes is a sense of dissonant non-relation, an at-variance; and the feminine cadence sounds like a falling-off or a falling-away. In “Boots of Spanish Leather” this is subtly and appropriately expressive. It formally enacts the disentanglement which is the song’s emotional pivot, as the second speaker in the dialogue realizes that the

lover really is leaving, that the offer of the gift has become suspiciously importunate, and that it might as well, therefore, be accepted. Those full rhymes—"sorrow" / "tomorrow" and "weather" / "leather"—set the seal on that recognition.

The feminine rhymes are appropriate too in a song about relations between the sexes, which opens in a kind of gender confusion. On first hearing, we assume that the male singer, engaged in the traditionally male activity of leaving a lover, is voicing a male character when he sings the opening verse—particularly since this singer is Bob Dylan, who has already portrayed himself in that role with self-justification and misgiving in "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right." But, as we learn only in the seventh verse of this nine-verse song, with its change from first- and second-person to third-person ("Oh but I got a letter on a lonesome day, / It was from her ship a-sailin'"), the apparently callous letter of dismissal comes from "her." Therefore the "I"—that is, of the song's second, not its first, speaker—becomes indisputably male, at least in the heterosexual dispensation. Even so, it could be that the remarkable word "unspoiled" in the second verse, as he asks her "Just to carry yourself back to me unspoiled / From across that lonesome ocean," is a sure signal of the speaker's masculinity. The OED gives as an obsolete sense of "spoil," "to ravish or violate (a woman)" and cites a 1694 translation of Rabelais: "He has spoiled me. I am undone." By strange coincidence, "Ballad in Plain D" has "she was easily undone / By the jealousy of others around her"; and in *A Freewheelin' Time* Rotolo, perhaps echoing Dylan, says that she was "undone" by the breakdown she suffered in the wake of both an abortion and the end of the relationship (*Freewheelin' Time* 280).

To my knowledge, Dylan sings as a woman in only two other collected songs: the traditional "House of the Rising Sun" on *Bob Dylan* (1962), voiced for an apparently captive New Orleans prostitute, and "North Country Blues" on *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, voiced for a single mother suffering near-destitution as the iron-ore mines which have traditionally sustained her community are shut

down. Plaintiveness and censure inhere in the Dylan voice in these songs of female complaint. In the former, what begins as controlled self-containment mounts to outraged intensity as Dylan shouts the later verses against a pounding guitar figure, making it seem that the only thing that can survive such damage is a howl of abject self-affirmation. In the latter, the voice, stark against a spare guitar accompaniment, appears to be inflected with Dylan's uncondescending, even appreciative, deployment of a North Country accent (most obviously, "mah sklin" for "my schooling," but also "whatched," "whun" and "whaited" for "watched," "one" and "waited"), bringing deprivation and barely manageable responsibility alive as locally vocalized personality.

The only song of Dylan's to be written in both male and female voices, though, "Boots of Spanish Leather," redeploys attributes traditionally thought "female" to the male voice, a redeployment prompted or enabled in large part by the song's withholding of gender categorization until so late in its course. This withholding attaches particularly to the tone in which the final request for the boots is made ("And yes, there's something you can send back to me, / Spanish boots of Spanish leather"). Is this jaunty defiance, sorrowful acceptance, or opportunistic demand? (That the requested gift should be Spanish boots may also derive from traditional ballad: from the one Dylan calls "Blackjack Davey" on *Good As I Been to You* (1992), in which the eponymous hero asks the "pretty little miss," preparatory to riding off with her, to "Pull off, pull off them high-heeled shoes / Made of Spanish leather.")

When he sang "Boots of Spanish Leather" as a demo for his music publishing company shortly after writing it—the version available on *The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964* (2010)—Dylan introduced it to someone in the studio by saying, "This imposes a real problem. 'Imposes,' is that the right word? Or *supposes* a real problem." "Real problem" seems to point to the actual circumstances from which the song's beautiful and aching fiction derives; and the song may both impose and suppose this problem. But its plot just *poses* one, which may be the word

Dylan was actually seeking. What is the problem though? Is it to do with scruple? To ask for the gift or not to ask? To recognize when exactly the moment has come to ask? What kind of gift to ask for? When Dylan sang it in concert at the Town Hall, New York in April 1963, he introduced it oddly: "This is eh . . . [a long pause] . . . I used to be quite romantic and eh . . . [another long pause] . . . this song's called 'Boots of Spanish Leather' and eh . . . [a further pause while Dylan eases into the guitar figure which opens the song]." (This performance, but without the introduction, can be heard on *Bob Dylan Live 1962-1966* (2018); the version with the introduction is available online). Clearly, he was about to say something further, three times, but refused himself permission, possibly even remembering that you should probably not say in a concert hall what you might permit yourself to say in the greater intimacy of a club. This suggests a still smarting emotional investment in the song and implies that the circumstances behind it are his reason for being no longer "romantic."

But if "Boots of Spanish Leather" quells this form of romanticism in its writer, it's the notable expression of a sentiment endemic to Romanticism itself. The song is deeply imbued with yearning. It's this yearning that makes the tone in which the gift is finally requested not just ambivalent but beguilingly so. On the Witmark demo Dylan sings the word "there's" in the phrase "And yes there's something you can send back to me" almost, but not quite, as though he's stretching it more emphatically into "there is": "Yes, there is something you can send back to me," which sounds more self-assertive than the recorded version. And in the New York concert the lines which name the gift are: "And yes, there's something you can send back to me, / Send me boots of Spanish leather," where the imperative also sounds more forceful than the recorded version. It's replaced there by the word "Spanish," so that the word now figures twice in the five-word line that ends the song, as an adjective identifying both national origin and material of manufacture: "Spanish boots of Spanish leather."

I feel about this variation as T. S. Eliot does about some phrases in

Shakespeare, such as Charmian's "Ah, soldier!" after her mistress's death in *Antony and Cleopatra*. "I could not myself put into words," he says, "the difference I feel between the passage if these two words were omitted and with them. But I know there is a difference, and that only Shakespeare could have made it." I'm not sure that I can myself put into words the difference I feel between these versions of the song's final lines, but I know there is a difference, and that only Bob Dylan could have made it. As close as I can put it into words, the difference has to do with the quality of its yearning, which the repetition underwrites. It's an unnecessary repetition, since what are Spanish boots likely to be made of, after all, but Spanish leather? It's surplus, as the abandoned lover is too as he exits the song alone; but it also makes the boots seem more lavishly alluring, perhaps even in a fetishistic way—matching, it may be, the attempted allure of the lover's "of golden" earlier in the song. It's as surplus as the interruptive breath Dylan takes when he sings the second "Spanish" on the album: "Spanish boots of Spa- / -nish leather." He doesn't do this on the Witmark demo, and it's not as though he needs the air. It's therefore an elected performance, if one spontaneously elected before the studio microphone. It sounds wholly untheatrical, nevertheless it is dramatically expressive. It's a catch in the breath, as reality is finally accepted, but it's something else too. It's as if Dylan is stepping further inside himself, withdrawing into a private elsewhere which the song has opened for him—"with all of his intelligence and consciousness focused on his breath," as Allen Ginsberg says of him more generally in Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* (2005). This melancholy space of interiority, or self-recollection, seems tacitly to criticize the various forms of masculine performance which might otherwise have inhered in the request. The Bob Dylan who opens the song in the voice and person of a woman, now in the voice and person of a man, subdues customary forms of masculine bitterness and recrimination to something more poignant, absorbed, and self-estranged.

Even so, there's a hint in the specificity of the request that it's not

spontaneous but has been long meditated. Made neither of silver nor of golden, the proposed gift has less pecuniary value than the one offered, which perhaps criticizes her insinuation that value might lie, for him, in financial worth. So at least the shadow of a subtly resistant irony passes across these lines. He cannot choose her, since she refuses to choose him, but he can still choose *something* for himself; and what he chooses is designed specifically to get him back on his feet again, and to let her know it. Dylan's expressive singing of the song's final line in fact makes for *two* protracted pauses: in the middle of the word "Spanish," but also after the word "of." These delay the final full clinching rhyme of "leather" with "weather," compelling us to wait for it. Given the ambiguities of the verse, this wait seems neither defiant nor self-assertive, but it does make the closure, of both the song and the affair, appear, in a phrase Dylan uses more than once elsewhere in his work, a "final end."

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There are several moments in *A Freewheelin' Time* when you feel that, for Rotolo, things were never finally settled with Bob Dylan, despite the spirited and independent resilience on display in her fine book. She even tells us that there are certain early Dylan songs that she can't listen to because they bring so much back to her. This is hardly surprising. Living the fleeting life that becomes the basis of permanent art, especially such popular and well-known art, exacts a heavy price if you are the one written about rather than the one writing, however well you cope with the end of the affair. But, given its performance of unsettled masculinity, it may be that "Boots of Spanish Leather" was one early Dylan song that Suze Rotolo was in fact able to continue listening to, whatever else it was liable to bring back home.

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## **SONG CORNER**

*Dylan Review* seeks scholarly essays on individual songs. Essays should focus on only one song and should be 3,000 – 7,000 words. Please include the appropriate scholarly apparatus.

## INTERVIEWS

Christopher Ricks spoke to DR about *The Lyrics*, co-edited in 2014 with Lisa Nemrow and Julie Nemrow of Un-Gyve Press.

**DR:** The book is a large, hefty, pricey object. It's over 1,000 pages and weighs nearly 15 pounds. The printer actually had to hand-bind each copy. So whose idea was it to make the book so imposing, and so impressive?

**CR:** The creation of the book was very much the work of the sisters Lisa Nemrow and Julie Nemrow who are alumnae of Boston University. I taught Lisa many years ago, and I met Julie subsequently. They are businesswomen, and one of their enterprises has been to create a publishing house of their own called Un-Gyve. They have long loved Dylan and when we started discussing this venture, there came into play very promptly their interest in creating beautiful books. So the design of the book was very much theirs. It's quite unlike physically any book that they have published.

**DR:** You've accrued many accolades in your career, written many works of critical analysis, including 2003's *Dylan's Visions of Sin*. So why, in the scope of your career, was it time to tackle this collection of Dylan's lyrics?

**CR:** The time in a career has to do with, hmm, when one's going to die, quite honestly. It's a little bit like Frederick Wiseman, the great documentary filmmaker, wisely making when he did his six-hour film, *Near Death*, which takes place at the Beth Israel Intensive Care Unit. There was a moment in Fred's life when he could make that film. If he'd left it much longer, it wasn't so much that he would be dead, he's still alive, and in January he'll be 90 and still producing really first-rate documentary films—but there's a moment where he was perhaps near enough to imagining incipient death, and yet not so near to it as to find perhaps that he couldn't get purchase on it. So just as I had long hoped to write a book about Dylan, and took some time to do that, after *Dylan's Visions of Sin* I became even more aware of what I felt were unnecessary sacrifices in the previous printing of

the lyrics. And so the three of us tried to set out in this book the principles and the practice. It wasn't anything as grand as a theory, but there are principles about how a song might best be set, and there are principles about what you do about the fact that the printed text is at no point a platonic or definitive version of a song. One knows that very clearly. There are great American traditions of pretending that the printed page is a performing art, so Whitman goes on and on revising, and Henry James goes on and on.

**DR:** It brings to mind Dylan's revisions. We've seen from the archives page after page of rewrites and revisions.

**CR:** Yes, well you'll remember that he had earlier editions, first of all *Writings and Drawings*, and then *Lyrics (1961-2012)*. He had permitted the printing occasionally of an alternative version. So we do have two or three—we have “Down Along the Cove” in more than one version, we have “Tight Connection,” as well as “Someone's Gotta Hold of My Heart.” Of course *Highway 61 Revisited* is a good joke about Wordsworth and people who write such poems, you know, as “Yarrow Revisited.” It's a great tradition. At the same time, to revisit a song is different from revisiting a poem. But yes, part of the case for doing the edition was to have some record, though not a complete record, of printed variants, and to have some record of sung variants. You could presumably do every bit of it electronically—though in fact what we always find out is that an electronic world is a nightmare as soon as it becomes really big.

So the printed variants selection, you'll remember, was that the other instances in which we quoted Dylan's wording should all be from official releases by him. We didn't go to what are sometimes very interesting changes but which he hasn't endorsed as among his choices as to what he would like to be remembered by.

**DR:** Why was it time to put this collection together in terms of Dylan's career?

**CR:** I don't have a good answer to that at all. I was born in 1933. He's born in 1941. There are a few years when he and I are in the same decade, and I really like

that. I'm looking forward to his being in his 80s and my being in my 80s too, before I hit 90. It's very attractive to me the way in which, you know, he has aged. The process of aging in him has been really very important, and very wisely conducted by him. There's been none of that sort of Robert Redford good-natured pretense that you're still young. Which Redford sometimes turns to an advantage in his acting but which is a terrible peril in the performing world. In terms of the edition, the absolutely key figure in all of this is Jeff Rosen, somebody about whom Dylan people disagree but who has always been extremely generous and kind and clear in any dealings with me, with us. I had talked with Lisa and Julie, and we had met to talk to Jeff Rosen about some such work. It was I think literally the day before the lights all went out in New York. Dylan had to cancel. Jeff Rosen said at a certain point, "I'll talk to . . ." the person he calls Bob and I don't: "I'll talk to Bob about this tomorrow." The idea was about an edition which did these things: had more alternate versions, had some variants printed and sung, and—this gradually developed—represented on the page the rhyme schemes, the stanza schemes which are what Dylan in the Rome interview talks about as a grid.

**DR:** What's this grid?

**CR:** It's the grid, perhaps, that Hopkins had or Herbert had in the writing of poems. There's a sense of a shape—better than a shape because it's active, this grid. Dylan's word "grid" comes at a certain time in his thinking, had become a very important notion for him. And you can see that there's a grid, that "Just Like a Woman" is two lines followed by three lines, followed by a line that bides its time, which then has four rhyming lines and comes back and picks up the line that was biding its time. So it's not that it's numerological in the sense of the significance of the number three or seven or nine. It's not metaphysically numerological, but it is terrifically aware of numbers, and the way in which, you know, the word for a poem in the old days would've been "numbers." "I lisped in numbers," Pope says. So "Just Like a Woman" should be set on the page so that the eye, in looking at

it, sees what a very different shape it has from any other song by Dylan.

He loves doing things with more lines than you might've expected rhyming, fewer lines than you might've expected rhyming, the bridge—the eye should see that the bridge is a bridge. And the eye, in the case of “Tempest”—the eye should see that there is no bridge. It's part of the tragedy of the story of the *Titanic*. That there's the bridge on which the captain tries desperately to save the ship, but there's no bridge from the ship to anywhere else. It's as if there's a deep pun on what do we mean by a bridge? This feeling of the extraordinary stepping stone that a bridge can be, to change the metaphor.

**DR:** You've mentioned “Just Like a Woman” and “Tempest” as songs that reveal something by the way they're laid out on the page, which the indentions of the rhymes. . .

**CR:** Yes, it's the stanza shape, or the stanza grid, and “reveals something” is both the right and not the right way of putting it. That is, the stanza layout brings things up into consciousness, with the gains and losses of bringing things up into consciousness. It's not so much, I think, that on the page something is “revealed,” as that something which one had not been able to understand why it worked as it did, you've got some insight into how it managed to do this. Now that's very different from its doing it for you. And we do sacrifice something when we learn how it was done. It's the old thing that you can't have at the same time on the trees the fruits of autumn and the blossoms of spring—one or the other. I think there are things to learn from looking at the song on the page, especially as to how very beautiful and varied the rhyming is and the stanza shape is. This way in which a line will have to wait for a while before it finds its brother or sister or husband or wife in another rhyme. This lovely feeling—Dylan is very patient. I mean, he's living in the most impatient society that's ever existed—probably. Things are very speeded up; to have to wait five microseconds for your machine to answer is intolerable. The songs are very patient. They're often about patience: “Eternal Circle.”

**DR:** Are there any songs that you hadn't looked at very closely in your career, in your listening to Bob Dylan, that jumped out at you as more beautiful or more complex than you realized when you set them on the page?

**CR:** I mean, I both approve and then have a reservation about your moving so quickly from "beautiful" to "more complex." The extraordinary thing about some great lines, whether in prose or in poetry, is how simple they are. "If Not for You" is a triumph of simplicity. "If not for you," I couldn't do this, I couldn't do that. In fact, if not for you, I couldn't do anything. I couldn't see the floor. It's open. As soon as it becomes a list of things, you imagine a quarrel, you should imagine a quarrel in which somebody, since lovers fall out all the time and a lot in Dylan is about falling out "as lovers often will," the falling out would be something like this: You couldn't hear the robin sing, but you could hear the ostrich, or you could hear the raven. It's beautiful, the song, the refrain, because it simplifies it down to: oh, as I feel about you now, everything in the universe could be in my list, but I have to stop the list at some point. That's then a matter of the rhymes. Because in the last stanza of "If Not for You," the rhyme scheme changes. You have a little ribbon that plaits it: "But anyway it wouldn't ring true." Both "ring" and "true" rhyme in the stanza, and it's the only stanza where that happens. "Ring" rhymes with "spring." "True" rhymes with "if not for you." So as it's coming to a close, it has this little signing off. Very beautiful.

**DR:** And is this something that you in your studies and your writing had realized about the song "If Not for You" before setting it on the page? Or was setting it on the page key to developing a greater appreciation?

**CR:** The trouble ordinarily with very simple things is that you feel, often wrongly, that everything about them is used up at the first reading—or hearing. It's not that the more times you need to read or see or hear something the better it is, but it is true that very simple music may be used up earlier than something that is in some ways more subtle. The valuable pun may not be exactly *subtle* at all. "When she died it came to me"—is that a bequest or is that a thought? It's not actually

complex, it's just beautifully saying really that everything that comes to you is a kind of bequest. "I can't help it if I'm lucky." Isn't that wonderful?

**DR:** Your book is bookmarked to a particular page [opens the book]. "I'd Hate To Be You on That Dreadful Day."

**CR:** Pure fluke. [Looks at the page.] And this, of course, is of the utmost simplicity. The important thing here is that it's couplets, but they're different couplets, because "Hey hey," is tinier than "Hey hey hey." It's the difference between saying it twice and saying it thrice. I don't understand people who say, "Come on, that doesn't mean anything," and I don't understand other people who say, "Sorry, it goes two, three, two, two, three," and so on. Dylan is doing something with the difference between saying it three times and saying it twice. But that's the rhyme—"hey" "day"—which gives you this word, "heyday." It doesn't actually say "heyday." It says "dreadful day." But "heyday" is the opposite of "dreadful day." So this is looking forward to the time when you could be done for. Anybody who on their dying day says, "Hey, this is my heyday." Samuel Beckett thinking, "It's better to be dead than alive, best of all never to have been born." And you can say that the heyday is when you say, "Buster, enough. I'm out of here." Anyway, among the ones I love going for are "Black Diamond Bay" [flipping through the book].

**DR:** Okay!

**CR:** "Out on the white veranda / She wears a necktie and a." So *that's* the rhyme! "Panama hat" is waiting for "she looks nothing like that." Our page indents it so the first two rhymes are aligned. Then "Panama hat" is indented a bit and will be aligned with what it rhymes with. Then "Face" / "place," and so on. You spill on down the page like this, indenting a little bit more always, and then the refrain of course. The refrain is a triplet: "away" / "sway" / "bay" [points down the page]. "S'il vous plait?" So you know where you are with the rhyme. "S'il vous plait" is a bit like "veranda," the comedy in the rhyme. There's that interview with Jacques Levy in which he talks about the fun that they had with rhymes. There's a shape

all the way through. Sometimes one sort of guesses at it. Sometimes it's not altogether clear. Is "were" and "soldier" and "corner" a rhyme? Well, at that point, "liffing" is simply an assonance with "is" and an assonance with "quickly," so those three rhymes don't exactly rhyme but they've got a sound link in them that they've all got the short i. It's assonance instead of rhyme. We're helped to see that, I think, by the way in which at that point in other stanzas it is a triplet rhyme. There's a remark by Norman Mailer when he says about writing and about boxing that the successful thing is rhythm, but being just off the rhythm. And there's a lot of Dylan which I think is like that. Is "laugh" and "aftermath" a rhyme? "Hand" and "grand" is clearly a rhyme. "Tough" and "enough" is fully a rhyme. "Bags" is an assonance with "aftermath." It doesn't *rhyme* with it. So some of this is certainly up for argument.

**DR:** What is it about being just off the rhyme? That it adds more texture, more nuance?

**CR:** It's a counterpoint. It's a little bit like what you get in those paintings where, what's it called when your knee is bent? Contrapposto? It's famously important with Michelangelo and his *David*. There's something about the tiny tilt which is given by having one of the legs slightly off-balance. It gives you the feeling of incipient movement. It's as if it's about to move.

**DR:** So what do you do with a song like "You Angel You," from *Planet Waves*?

**CR:** Yes. I love it.

**DR:** Where Dylan said in an interview once, Those sound like dummy lyrics that I just made up on the spot at the microphone. What do you do with a song like that?

**CR:** Well, what weight do you give to what authors say about their work? It's very tricky. Popular art has a particular temptation to make out that it's not intellectual, or cerebral—it comes as naturally as the leaves to a tree. So "You Angel You": "You're as fine as anything's fine / The way you talk and the way you walk." And when he sings, "I swear I could almost sing," he's taking up a famous complaint,

isn't he? That he's very good, but he can't *sing*. I think we should never discount what an artist says, but what weight we give to it as a piece of evidence—love that remark of Dylan's that you've got to program your brain so that it doesn't get in the way.

**DR:** It's like in the introduction to the edition, you mention "Negative Capability."

**CR:** That's the Keatsian notion. Yes I do. That is, being in doubt, uncertainties, mysteries without any irritability reaching after fact and reason. It's not that you shouldn't be interested in fact and reason, but there can be a point when your reaching for them can be irritable. The poem is a cooperation between things you can reason about and things you can't reason about, things which will remain mysterious.

**DR:** Even to the author.

**CR:** Yes, even to the author. There are very beautiful remarks by all of the great writers, and I think also by the great musicians, but Dylan is in line with Keats in saying that it's afterwards confirmed in a dozen features of propriety. There are a dozen ways in which I used exactly the right word, though I didn't have them in mind when I wrote it. That is, I look at it, and it's as if I can't have written it myself. All that from Keats. And Dylan speaks like that, doesn't he? He often speaks as if the song is somehow *out there*. He doesn't speak as if it's a *séance* and it's being somehow channeled from some great unknown. But this feeling that you couldn't have said in advance why that was altogether right.

**DR:** This plays into the question of genius. You've often said that Dylan is a genius, and in fact a "fascinating and extraordinary genius of a certain kind." And in the introduction to this edition of the lyrics, you also claim that "genius is free to do what it chooses." So, what is Dylan's kind of genius and how do we understand it as "free to do what it chooses"?

**CR:** Some of it is the traditional sort of definition of what the highest imagination is. That is, where do we locate it, the extraordinary imagination that this man has? Now, it's an imagination fortunately that is always braced against things which

are not imagination, but which are matters of fact. That is, he is rightly at liberty to take certain liberties with the facts. He's not allowed to make up somebody who hits over the head a woman with a cane and she dies. Or rather he's not at liberty to make that up and call this person William Zanzinger. He's at liberty to spell Zanzinger's name differently (from Zantzinger). And there's that tiny change that it makes to have it not be exactly the court case. Strange how that works. And of course, as he sings it, you don't see the spelling.

The great account is by Coleridge. It isn't a *definition* of, it's a *characterization* of imagination as the "balance" and sustenance "of opposite or discordant qualities." That the great thing to do is be able to have a more than usual state of order with more than usual emotion. A more than usual sense that it is exactly fitting, with a more than usual sense of how surprising that is. "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." So there's tension. These are opposites. If it was often thought, surely it must've been expressed perfectly well already. So there's this feeling, the combination of that which is new, with that which is true. It's easy to say something new if you don't care whether it's true, and it's easy to say something true if you don't care whether it's new. But to have this extraordinary combination of the new and the true, which is there for me in such a line as "Take what you have gathered from coincidence." Where "gathered" is partly a thing in the head ("I gather from what you said. . .") and partly it's the accruing of things that aren't just something you understand, but are really gathered, pieces of knowledge, pieces of information.

*Tarantula* is evidence of things about Dylan. It's less good than the songs for lots of reasons. But the letters in it are terrifically good. Everything about the butter sculptor, everything about the professor who says, "Don't forget to bring your eraser." All those things are very good. Anyway a lot of it is evidence. "April or so is a cruel month," is not quite the very the best thing that Dylan ever does with Eliot, but It's a lovely thing to have done with Eliot—even if it's not as good, as deep, as "Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot fighting in the captain's tower." The great

thing is the depth with which Eliot is apprehended. “April or so is a cruel month” is witty—I wish I had thought of it myself.

The genius is partly the general case for extraordinary powers of imagination, as the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities, that includes the discord between the words and the music. There are quite different ways in which he sings the words, “It ain’t me babe,” because there are moments within that when he can’t not be resentful and angry about the misrepresentation of the relationship that supposes that it is me, the person you want. When he sings it sometimes, he can’t conquer resentment and irritability and it’s very, very dramatic like a Donne poem: “For God’s sake hold your tongue, and let me love.” And some of Dylan’s exchanges with people are saying, “For God’s sake hold your tongue,” and others of them are saying, “Hey Mr. Tambourine Man, sing a song for me.” I’ve spent all my time singing songs for people, sing a song for me. I won’t fall asleep and I’ll really listen to it.

Then of course it’s the particular kind of genius you need to have if you’re in a performing art. You need especially not to long for the definitive. Artists tend to think, “It’s perfect, it’s consummated, it’s a well-wrought urn.” There’s nothing to do to it, be careful not to break it. Dylan’s feeling is all the time that as you get older, “Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command.” That means a different thing to the singer. And as his audience ages, it means a different thing to his audience.

**DR:** This brings me to the question of setting the lyrics apart from the music and the voice, which you’ve spoken of as well. You’ve called it a “danger” in “privileging the words.”

**CR:** I hope I don’t say “privileging.”

**DR:** I have it right here. You say “privileging the words.” This is in *The Telegraph* in 2016, after the Nobel win.

**CR:** Maybe I said it in a sneering, sarcastic way<sup>1</sup>. It was really, “What you trendy

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<sup>1</sup> Not said, but written, I now realize, and put in italics by me. – CR

people call 'privilege'." The argument about whether they're poems or not seems to me idle. A song is a combination of words and of a voice, or of different voices, and of music. No one of those, as I've tried to spell out, is more important than the others, because it is in the nature of a compound that all the things that are in it are indispensable. It'd be like saying, are the wings more important than the tail of an airplane? They had better be organically related. So I try to set that aside. They're not poems but this is because their medium is not words alone. And it's not true that the medium is the message—the medium changes the message. I don't think Dylan ever thought, with the editions of the lyrics, that people would read the words instead of hearing the songs. I can't imagine anybody wanting this book instead of wanting the songs. I suppose I would, if I were thinking about what I said to the *Telegraph*—I'd probably want to drop "danger" and "risk," and I'd certainly want to drop "privilege."

**DR:** Okay.

**CR:** Although it meant something in those days. The thing is, there's a price that's paid for doing things. There's a price that's paid for every decision anybody ever takes. The reason why great art isn't sentimental is that it repeatedly knows it's sacrificing something. The translator always knows he's sacrificing. This kind of creation is a sort of translation. When Dylan re-sings "Just Like a Woman," he's translating the song so that it becomes another song. It's impossible for there ever to be translations without sacrifice. I mean, only somebody who would want his or her head seen to would suppose that *The Lyrics* is offered as a substitute for listening to the songs. What this will sometimes do is give, I think, a good account of what the words probably are that he is singing—not indisputably, because there are occasions when he either hasn't or doesn't want to be absolutely clear.

**DR:** So there's something that's going to be lost by putting it on the page.

**CR:** Yes, but there's something that's been lost if you were to scorn the idea that you never try to find out what the words were.

**DR:** Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**CR:** I'm glad that you haven't made central to this interview the question of what exactly are the words that Dylan sings at this point, that point, and the other point. Lisa, Julie, and I have done our best to be fully responsible about it. Lisa and Julie are American and repeatedly hear correctly that which I don't hear correctly, and that's often that an idiom escapes me. I remember the first time I heard "Hurricane," I just didn't know what the phrase was, what it alluded to. We don't for instance in England have anything called "out-of-state plates." It's a funny little phrase and sung with a certain kind of speed. I just couldn't hear what it was. Lisa and Julie were extremely good at hearing. I think they in no way disapproved of my saying in the introduction that this edition isn't definitive. Sometimes it's not definitive because what do you do about "freeze" versus "frieze"? Dylan might prefer the printed text to be e-e-z-e, but "wallflower" goes so well with "wallpaper," with what a "frieze" is, as to have that float in. Knocking about near the words of the song there are these other words. That's a perpetual question, but it isn't actually a question that is very valuable. Dylan rightly doesn't want to discuss it.

## **LETTERS**

The editors invite letters and comments for future issues. As much as possible, please confine commentary to topics raised in articles or interviews in the *DR*, at least as a starting place for your remarks. The editors encourage lively discussion but will not tolerate or publish language or images we consider offensive.

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**Stuart Hampton-Reeves** is the author of several books on Shakespeare, including *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Peter Hall* (Bloomsbury 2019). He was the Head of the British Shakespeare Association from 2011-2016. He's spent most of his academic career at the University of Central Lancashire and in 2020, he will be taking a new role as Professor and Head of School at the University of Warwick, UK.

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**Robert Reginio** is a Professor of English at Alfred University in New York and is a member of the editorial board of the *Dylan Review*. He teaches classes in the modern novel, modernist poetry and modern and contemporary drama. He is currently at work exploring contemporary musical adaptations of the texts of Samuel Beckett and on the unique poetics of *John Wesley Harding*.

**Christopher Rollason** is an independent scholar living in Luxembourg. He graduated in English from Trinity College, Cambridge and obtained his Ph.D from the University of York, with a thesis on Edgar Allan Poe. He is a former lecturer in English at the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and has a large number of

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## **BOOKS RECEIVED**

Jim Curtis. *Decoding Dylan: Making Sense of the Songs That Changed Modern Culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019.

Luca Grossi. *Bob Dylan in Hell: Songs in Dialogue with Dante--part 1*. Rome: Arcana, 2018.

Patrick Webster. *A Wanderer by Trade: Gender in the Songs of Bob Dylan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2019.