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A Complete Unknown. Directed by James Mangold, Searchlight Pictures, 2024.

Reviewed by Jonathan Hodgers, Trinity College Dublin

> If you're lucky enough to be around this long, you prolong your career by talking about the past, and you use documentaries and books and films to remind people that you're here.[1]
>
> Robbie Williams

A Complete Unknown is a deft piece of propaganda about Bob Dylan, with some vivid recreations of his songs by diligent craftspeople. It achieves its modest aims of approximating Dylan's story and conveying it in a competent, accessible fashion, and does so in an entertaining and carefully calibrated way. Would one like something more insightful and creative? Absolutely.

The film traces Dylan's career from his arrival in New York until the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, with a lot of elisions, contractions, and embellishments along the way. How one responds to these alterations depends on their tolerance for deviations from reality and whether these creative liberties succeed in capturing the story's essence, revealing deep truths about the performer, or simply delivering an entertaining two-hour experience. On these levels, I feel it was a qualified success in two categories and a failure in one.

Entertainment Value

On the level of pure entertainment, the film worked for me – and apparently for the large-ish crowd in attendance on the opening weekend in my local cinema. The laugh lines landed, such as Dylan's crack about Baez's songwriting (I won't spoil it here). I remember feeling momentarily excited to walk in Dylan's shoes, to see a recreation of that corner of New York at that particular time. The coffee shops and supper clubs, the look of the streets – these

[1] *The Graham Norton Show*, season 32, New Years Eve show, "Robbie Williams Has a Message for His Critics," aired 31 December 2024, on BBC, video clip, https://youtu.be/WrQsBRU9u3I?si=ictMP_QJ-k4QmMGn.

were fun and interesting sojourns into historical ethnography. While I can't vouch for their accuracy, the verisimilitude was impressive. The film's depiction of the hospital where Woody Guthrie stayed – desolate and purgatorial – stood out, and given how faithfully other elements were recreated, I suspect it was accurate. It's fun to watch the actors navigate their real-life counterparts' affectations. Timothée Chalamet is never less than watchable and credible. Certain scenes are poignant; not least of all, those with Scoot McNairy's Guthrie, where we're exposed not only to the tragedy of Huntington's disease but also feel for an prodigious talent cruelly rendered inert, confined to being a spectator venerated by participants. And the film is moving in other ways. Edward Norton gives the most affecting performance. Seeger's reaction to his dreams becoming a reality, but not because of him, is sad and sympathetic. The most haunting shot of the film for me was Seeger clearing away chairs after Newport. Whether it's real or not, it captures the divide between stars and ordinary people who are famous. The menial tasks he voluntarily performs contrast strikingly with Dylan's actions, who, in this film, is above everyday altruism.

Fidelity to Dylan's Story

The film's attempts to capture Dylan's story – or at least one version of it – within a fairly narrow time frame, just about works. While it dramatizes some public events proficiently, it struggles to move beyond that, or even intimate that it wants to. This is the hardest pill to swallow: it's a kind of fantasy. It's not miles away from Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue* (2019), albeit it's not working within the documentary format, and is slyer in its various duplicities because it so accurately and obsessively works to get the accoutrements right.

The film's fastidiousness in recreating the world its characters inhabit is implicated in the unease I feel about its fictionality. On one hand, the dedication to getting the physics of the film right—the microphones, the jeans, the settings – is admirable. The other side of me distrusts and questions all the meticulousness because the film has overcompensated in this area for deficiencies elsewhere. It obsessively recreates up to a point, such as with the physical space the characters occupy, but is on much less sure footing in recreating other aspects of the characters' lives and how they interact with one another. The fact is, I don't believe much of it, whether or not any of us can ever truly know whether certain events happened the way the film suggests (what were Dylan and Suze Rotolo like as a couple behind closed doors? Or for that matter, Baez, beyond what both women shared publicly?). Certain other instances are openly, verifiably counterfactual – the break-up scene with "Sylvie" (Elle Fanning) at Newport,

and the argument with Baez (Monica Barbaro) on stage. All these scrupulous recreations of costumes, locations, and props are sleights of hand, aimed at distracting from some (very) fanciful digressions from reality. At its worst (for instance, the breakup at the ferry), it's hokum: easy, basic, unsubtle, and designed to telegraph narrative developments in the most transparent, unequivocal, unambiguous, and heavy-handed fashion possible.

This unfortunately drags the film into territory well-trodden by other biopics, not just musical ones. Obsessive recreations of physical spaces are used to serve cliched soap opera tropes – shopworn scenes of strife between romantic couples seem to take priority over everything else. These scenes are not only of questionable validity, but often fail to capture complexity even within that narrow focus. Dylan's personal life, despite the extensive screentime devoted to it, is not depicted with the nuance it actually possessed. This is partly due to Sara's absence (a shared trait with *Rolling Thunder Revue* and *No Direction Home*), likely omitted for privacy reasons or due to divorce settlement terms. Regardless, even this aspect of his life is oversimplified, streamlined into melodrama that obscures the richer, more dramatic reality. Often doubling down on the simplifications, many of the scenes, as written, manage to flatline on account of sheer heavy-handedness. Trusting nothing to chance, the filmmakers serve up blunt dialogue with a large dollop of symbolism (they just had to include the fence in the breakup scene, didn't they?). It doesn't matter that such overstatement is cliché enough to be mocked in music biopic parodies ("the '60s are an important and exciting time!").[2] The filmmakers still seem to believe it's more compelling than the other facets of Dylan's life that influenced his music. Yet there are no shortage of fascinating influences on Dylan's development. Blink and you'll miss Van Ronk. Izzy Young is nowhere to be found (though a stand-in for the Folklore Center appears), nor is Victor Maymudes; Eve and Mac McKenzie are similarly absent ... the list goes on. The point isn't to fact-check the film, but to illustrate that omitting so much weave from the Village tapestry has a way of distorting how Dylan became who he was over the time period covered by the film. The Village in *A Complete Unknown* is depicted as something to transcend – almost like an adversary, a Devouring Mother. However, that's an overly simplistic view and undermines the audience's understanding of the Village music scene and the path to artistic and professional ascension at the time. Never mind how Dylan himself eventually saw it – Rolling Thunder literature poignantly reveals how much Dylan tried to recreate that very Village in the mid-70s. As a

[2] As spoken in *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story* (2007), here: https://youtu.be/ukq-Zc7nGw8?si=Gtxo-Tmj9Gkztxh6.

result, too many gradations are missing – both regarding the protagonists and the broader Village ecosystem. Even though the film doggedly tries to convey as rich a sense of place as possible, it's done to shore up rather corny prevarications and a significantly simplified account of events.

Another byproduct of this anal retentiveness is the intimation of hard graft behind the scenes – the sense of studious dedication and reverence, but not joy. The film has done its homework, in the worst sense of the term. Boxes ticked, chores done, t's crossed, i's dotted – we feel the labour behind the film, the years of effort, all of which have been hammered into us by the PR. Dylan's music is joyous, in the moment, and delightfully cavalier at times (who cares if a musician made a mistake or Dylan fluffed a lyric?). That sensibility is not to be found here – just veneration, the same nagging fanboyishness that suffocates many comic book films and resurrections of older IPs. It feels like toil – arduous, painstaking even – all of which comes at the expense of spark.

The problem here is that real life as mediated to us in other media told us something more interesting and nuanced. A telling comparison is *Dont Look Back* (1967), which portrays Baez's marginalisation in a subtle, drawn-out manner rather than through a crude onstage confrontation. That documentary shows her sad exit through a hotel door, all but unnoticed except by Pennebaker's camera. In contrast, *A Complete Unknown* presents an assertive Joan Baez rejecting Dylan – another fabrication. Films, of course, must condense and dramatize events, but here, it lapses into the flaws of other biopics; it makes up conflicts and distorts the behaviour of real-life individuals in the process, leaving us, ironically, with *less* effective drama.

And the film does lack real drama in the form of suspense. There's never a sense of tension that Dylan is being pulled in two directions – no feeling that history might go awry. It feels rote. It presents what happened as if it was inevitable. There's no flicker of doubt, no pull of the metaverse, nothing that would call into question whether things always had to happen the way they did. In other words, it doesn't make us feel present in the moment when the future was uncertain. We never forget what happens, and never suspend our knowledge of how the story ends. Compare this with *No Direction Home* (2005), which, with great skill, managed to introduce a frisson of uncertainty – it's *exciting*, in a way this film isn't. In the scene with Seeger's teaspoon analogy, did Dylan ever look remotely like he would back out of going electric at Newport? There is conflict in the sense that the two characters have contrasting beliefs, but little inner conflict among either party (although Seeger's character does evolve more than that of Dylan's), which has a way of flattening them out as people, but also diluting

the suspense we might feel by witnessing 3D individuals having to think about their choices and figure things out in the present. (One recalls several expert scenes in Tarantino's films, where characters pause to really think about their circumstances and choices.) Uncertainty – the lack of detours, the fact that Guthrie liked his singing more than his writing, that Dylan mocked Cash initially, his trajectory as a songwriter for Leeds and then Witmark – it's not here; just Dylan's manifest destiny to be the person James Mangold and Jay Cocks (and, it has to be said, Bob Dylan), portray him as being.

Relatedly, I'm not sure the story-as-told is as strong as Mangold et al. thought. The events are dramatic, but the Dylan of the film (not the real-life Dylan) isn't an especially easy figure to identify or side with, and as a result, the conflict is robbed of some of its urgency. It's not always 100 per cent clear what Dylan wants or why, beyond a contrarian desire not to be what others want him to be. It's a touch negative, as if there was nothing positive to his actions. He seems to not especially enjoy music or its performance. Chalamet's Dylan is grumpier than what real life suggested, like a mix of the front covers of *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964) and *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965). The likes of the Halloween concert Dylan (*The Bootleg Series Vol. 6*) aren't to be found. The protagonist is a sort of amalgamation of Dylans: a summation of Dylan, assembled from multiple eras, and perhaps a vague cultural memory of how he was at the time. It's not easy to know what Dylan's thinking, which is par for the course, but Chalamet's Dylan is obtuse at times, gnomic and uncommunicative in a way that seems off versus *Dont Look Back*, which is near this film chronologically. Again though, we're reminded that we're witnessing a fantasy. The deep well of empathy that it's possible to feel for Dylan never quite emerges, and the film's various conflicts suffer as a result from a lack of a strong point of identification.

The inconsistent fidelity to the real people again conspires to rob the film of dramatic heft. It's normal and inevitable that critics have critiqued the various participants' portrayals: Suze/Sylvie, Baez, Grossman, Cash … it hardly matters in some way; they're reasonable simulacrums, low res and streamlined, like much else in the film. (Grossman, especially, has lost his real-life capacity to illicit discomfort.) Within these confines, however, the actors work hard. Chalamet mimics Dylan well – or at least some instantiations of him: the way he lowers his head and glowers out from underneath his eyebrows when he sings, the way he seems to put his sunglasses on with both hands … it's a not-insignificant achievement that he's not inadvertently silly (cf. Ben Whishaw and Christian Bale in 2007's *I'm Not There*). I'm not sure I ever fully embraced him, however. It's an impossible task in some ways, as with all major public figures one knows reasonably well from documentaries and interviews. One always

watches and judges how well the impression aligns with their memory of the person. The more familiar we are with the real person's body language, the harder it is to sink into the performance and see a character rather than an impression. In that way, it might have been helpful to have known Dylan less – the performance itself might have distracted less (Dylan neophytes obviously won't be bothered by this). However, the first time we hear Chalamet sing in the film with "Song to Woody," he certainly convinced me that he had done his homework.

The Question of Truth

How much should one care about the film's correspondence to reality? There seems to be an Overton window: complete distortions will be rejected, but some make-believe is tolerated if it serves an "emotional truth." But does *A Complete Unknown* get at something deeper about Dylan?

Emotional or spiritual truth is, to some extent, in the eye of the beholder. Praising the film for being emotionally true often just means that it aligns with the viewer's pre-formed impression of Dylan, or at least doesn't move the needle too much. By this metric, the filmmakers succeeded – they printed the legend. But much is lost in the process. If the film is "spiritually true," it has sacrificed an awful lot to get there.

Regardless of one's tolerance for falsehoods, the key question is whether those falsehoods were worth it. For all the cutting and pasting, I don't think the filmmakers access the spiritual or emotional truth they are striving for. I don't think, for instance, that there's a sequence here as good as the "I Want You" sequence in Haynes's *I'm Not There*. Unlike that exciting montage, *A Complete Unknown* doesn't seem to be able to tap into the thrill of striking out on one's own, of the cocktail of sex, poetry, motorbikes, and young love, although all are present, duller and flatter, in *A Complete Unknown*.

The film does, in places, pull one into a vicarious sense of Dylan's achievement. I did feel a spark of schadenfreude when Dylan performed "Like a Rolling Stone" at Newport – a giddiness at giving philistines that most thrilling middle finger in music history (albeit transplanted from Manchester), but that feeling was somewhat tempered by the fact that the film's Newport audience members are simple and somewhat shallow antagonists (or enough of them are anyway – Mangold does show some happy converts). In the aftermath of the film's festival, they dance to his music like it's "Louie Louie." It's edifying to see people won over by the power of his electric material, as it is to see small-mindedness and holier-than-thou attitudes attacked, but when those attitudes belong to a cartoonish, generalised audience, one

feels the spiritual truth is too disconnected from the actual truth. The Judas moment is here, for instance, conflating and blurring two very different crowds in the whole electric saga. In Tulsa's Dylan archive, the vox pops featuring the audiences reacting to the '66 gigs are remarkable for how articulate, varied, and revealing their responses are. It's easy to remember the freaks and obsessives ("he's making a pile out of it!"),[3] but there were (are?) a lot of normies out there with rational, understandable reasons for demurring at various facets of Dylan's evolution. You wouldn't know that from *A Complete Unknown*. They are Pavlov's dogs, vulgar as they come ("it's Bob fucking Dylan!"). It's all part and parcel with how the film sets up the conflict between Dylan-as-rebel and the gatekeepers of folk music, as well as narrow-minded acolytes and fans. Again, the simplifications of events and contracted timeline comprise the film's emotional and spiritual truth.

Creative Choices

Part of me is disappointed that this is where Dylan and film has gone. We get a conventional Hollywood narrative, working within a restricted bandwidth, with unobtrusive editing, dialogue, and a loose Oedipal trajectory that aims to work primarily on the emotions. Still, my issue isn't so much the choice of the classic Hollywood cinema paradigm for the telling of the story; it's more so that the film seems to lack much creative vision for the subject matter, and ultimately doesn't have all that much interesting to say about it or persuade the audience of beyond what's been established in multiple other media about Dylan: that he didn't like to be fenced in artistically, was something of a lyrical savant, and was not always an especially pleasant or considerate person, especially if he found you trite, prying, or square.

Compare Todd Haynes' thesis. This is no judgement on the quality of either film – just an observation that one takes a firmer stance than the other. In *I'm Not There*, the trajectory of a number of the Dylans – one thematic thread that unifies them – is the idea that Dylan fears, for want of a better term, the idea of being found out: specifically, the idea that he be exposed as somehow ordinary, or that his story – specifically, his control over his own story – be somehow taken away from him by either being known too well publicly, by getting too close to others, or by being sniffed out by nosy busybodies looking to dig up dirt on him or otherwise uncover and embarrass him. This affects the Woody (Marcus Carl Franklin), Jude (Cate

[3] From *Eat the Document* (1972), https://youtu.be/MGylr0S-yZ0?si=YYNNMLR6WEG-cwEv&t=1851.

Blanchett), Robbie (Heath Ledger), and Billy (Richard Gere) versions of the character (Woody is a runaway from a juvenile corrections center, Jude is a middle-class suburbanite, Robbie is boorish beneath the movie star veneer, and Billy is a wanted man). How disconcerting would it be to have one's self-delusion or self-presentation suddenly punctured, especially when the carefully crafted persona is so compelling? Haynes doesn't go much further than this riff on the theme of "Like a Rolling Stone," but it's a provocative perspective on Dylan that he might actually be hurt, wounded, or embarrassed by being revealed as banal or false, or might consider himself less-than without all the invention and role-playing – i.e., that he would respond as a human being would to being seen as an imposter. Compare how a similar idea plays out in *A Complete Unknown*. Baez calls Dylan out on his pretence, but he's utterly unmoved, despite being put on the spot. One might invoke *Renaldo and Clara* (1978) as a rejoinder, where Baez teases Dylan and he's visibly on the defensive. It's a human moment for both of them, but that's not what *A Complete Unknown* wants; it wants an inscrutable hero – dickish, but utterly sure of himself and without anything underneath. There's no fear of being found out or exposed; he seeks to be a sort of freak because plain people don't hold an audience's attention. Once again, *I'm Not There* provides more fallibility. Look at Robbie on the motorbike – more accurate, and more vulnerable. Look now at the pro speeding around the Village in *A Complete Unknown*.

It's the kind of film that I imagine satisfies the conservative, profit-oriented, Oscar-hungry impulse in the filmmakers' hearts: something like *Walk the Line* (2005) or *Elvis* (2022), a film that shows up at 9pm on terrestrial TV after a few months that most of the family can watch. It's a job *I'm Not There* didn't attempt, and it's filling a hole in Dylan's filmography, that of the conventional biopic aimed at mass consumption and designed to present a palatable, sanded-down version of the artist in question and a commensurate simplification of his role in history, with enough romances and bust-ups to keep sceptical or distracted viewers engaged. Its wheelhouse is an easily digestible cinematographic vernacular, designed to go unnoticed, with no hint of warring forces or transformative impulses within the film itself.

Conclusion

Speaking of that recent Robbie Williams biopic, I return to his quotation used as this review's epigraph: "If you're lucky enough to be around this long, you prolong your career by talking about the past, and you use documentaries and books and films to remind people that you're here." For better or worse, *A Complete Unknown* ultimately achieved what it aspired to

be: a reminder. Underlying Williams's comment, more importantly, is that need for *content*, which *A Complete Unknown*, I'm afraid, feels like to me at times. That it introduced young people to Dylan's music and drove up his Spotify streams[4] is a positive outcome for anyone who believes his work is valuable and that it should be as widely known as possible. I appreciate why people might praise the film for doing these things, but I wish the film could stand better on its own rather than as a means to an end. A viral TikTok video or strategically placed song in the likes of *Stranger Things* (2016–) might have achieved something similar. What we got was, again, propaganda, because it's a form of promotion in the service of an ideology: Dylan-as-enigma, Dylan-as-genius, Dylan-as-lightning rod, Dylan-as-sexy-revolutionary, packaged as part of a simple worldview depicting the individual artist battling against narrower minds and the inequities of a censorial, backwards looking folk world. If it was art, it wouldn't be so deferential, so eager to please, so in thrall to its central figure. It's compliant, which is probably the greatest stain on its artistic aspirations. That being said, it's clear the film worked for some fans and enticed some new ones into the fold. If it succeeds as a gateway drug for the real Dylan, that says something about the film's quality and its ability to effectively translate and dramatize a world, a series of conflicts, and a group of personalities in a way that resonates with present-day audiences. If it's somewhat dumbed down and disingenuous, it's no different than most musical biopics, and perhaps everyone's sin is no one's sin. Watch it if you haven't. I'm going to see it a second time.

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Bob Dylan and The Band. *The 1974 Live Recordings*. Columbia Records, 2024. CD.

Reviewed by Annie Burkhart, University of Northern Colorado

"Locating The Band in *The 1974 Live Recordings*"

> *Yeah the ole days are gone forever and the new ones aint far behind, the laughter is fading away…*
>
> —Bob Dylan, 1974, *Planet Waves* back cover

On January 3, 1974, 18,500 rock 'n' roll converts watched in awe as six men who had betrayed them eight years prior scrambled onto the Chicago Stadium stage. Never has ovation on top of ovation been so bizarrely repaid; without a word or even a gesture of acknowledgement, Bob Dylan and The Band broke into a number that *no one recognized*. Once Robbie Robertson teased the arena with a twangy false start on guitar, this electric ensemble delivered three-and-a-half minutes of rollicking roots rock, refusing to deliver "Hero Blues" as it was originally recorded. There would be no mistake about it. As in 1966, these behemoths of blues rock still answered to no one.

What transpired over the next six weeks, especially on a musical level, was aggressive, subversive, and defiant. These genre-defying musical giants would not be denied as they were, insisting on defining themselves not by but *against* their past selves – while also making no promises about who they'd be next time. Across forty shows in twenty-one cities on a tour that might have easily been dismissed as a nostalgia act, The Band and Bob Dylan played career-defining music at critical junctures for both acts. As of 2024, a compellingly curated collection of Tour '74 has been made (theoretically) available to the public in the form of *Bob Dylan and The Band's 1974 Live Recordings*.

Listening to the boxset, fans will hear loud and clear that The Band were holding themselves to an incredibly high standard in 1974, a year often overlooked completely in discussions of the group's legacy. When Band and Bob fans heard from me last, I was situating The Band's attitudes about their own legacy in 1974, and I, in essence, concluded – with the knowledge of how they sounded on both *Before the Flood* (1974) and a bootleg or two – that this tour marked the beginning of the end – a sentiment echoed by rock columnist Elizabeth

Nelson in her *1974 Live Recordings* liner notes. After listening to all 29 hours of this boxset, however, it's clear that there's more to the story. While The Band might have relished this opportunity to retreat into Bob Dylan's shadow as backing musicians, the magic they created on this tour *extended* their tenure as performers, rather than marking its imminent decline. You don't make fifty cumulative hours of music this good, this consistently masterful, in the space of six weeks if you've got one foot out the door. *The 1974 Live Recordings,* for The Band as well as Bob Dylan, show us that while the "good ole days" are indeed gone forever, the "new ones" are going to be a trip.

It's for all of these reasons that *The 1974 Live Recordings* has supplanted *Before the Flood* as the definitive artifact of Tour '74. While many fairly regard 1974 as a year of transition for Dylan and a period of uncertainty for The Band, they were making revolutionary music on this tour that allowed *them* – not critics, and not fans – to define their legacies. Nelson's liner notes remind us that "[t]he audience had gotten personal on the '66 tour . . . And this was the receipt." This boxset chronicles how one of the most cohesive, innovative, and self-aware bands in history cooked up fire and technical precision night after night as one of the most polarizing and influential artist of the prior decade stood center stage figuring out the future of music. As *MOJO Magazine* observed of Dylan in their October 2024 review of the *Recordings*, he was "gathering the sheaves of his past and setting them ablaze with old friends" (67). The Tour '74 bonfire rages in this boxset.

Their gutsy and impenitent performance of "Hero Blues" (a number that would be axed from the set fewer than two days later) drives home its lyrics in a way that Dylan's acoustic number had not. These six musicians attack every measure and every beat with a painstaking accuracy that has rather a violence to it. A period of unadulterated joy for fans of The Band hits around the 1:30 mark, and the group starts doing what they do best: breaking it all the way down. Robertson's wailing lead guitar slowly *crescendos* at 1:33, rising to the top as Bob yells to no one (yet everyone) "you need a different kind'a man, babe!" after which all but Bob and Levon Helm go quiet for a measure. Helm keeps driving home that backbeat while elegantly hitting a snare-bass flam and Bob announces who's replacing everyone's folk hero: "NAY-POH-lee-uhn BOH-nee-parte!" The bridge breakdown sees The Band performing as soundly and tightly as they have at any point in their career. Robertson and Garth Hudson trade and weave together soaring organ and lead guitar solos as Richard Manuel deftly drifts between lead and rhythm keyboard, hitting the backbeats one moment and the off-beats the next with a simple but confident artistry that's impressive for this point in his career. And when Rick Danko's bassline ascends to the top of the mix just before the two-minute mark, even my dog

starts paying attention. We'd be hard-pressed to find more gutsy bravado in any juke joint in America than we hear in these first three and a half minutes of Tour '74.

Candidly, I don't have the encyclopedic knowledge of Dylan's live performance history to discuss all 431 tracks of this collection. Instead, I'll briefly touch on the elephant in the room: that *The 1974 Live Recordings* was, above all else, a Sony copyright collection. As Sony doesn't own the rights to any of The Band's music, not a single recording of an original Band number made it into the boxset. That's an omission to the tune of 400 more tracks and thus approximately twenty-four more hours of music. Whatever Dylan partisans may say, The Band fans *do* need to hear all twenty-six performances of "The Shape I'm In." While The Band shone brightest on this tour when they were, perhaps counterintuitively, *not* caught in the spotlight, their sets are not an insignificant part of any tour stop. As we flesh out our complete portrait of Tour '74 with bits and pieces from the archives, we need to remember The Band.

Few of the acclaimed music critics who dropped in on Tour '74 entered the venue with fair, informed assumptions about The Band's role on what was principally thought of as a Dylan tour. Even Ralph J. Gleason, whose review of the Oakland shows initially celebrates The Band as having "never played better in person or on record" (86), ends up ultimately misrepresenting what this tour meant to Danko, Helm, Hudson, Manuel, and Robertson in what reads like a backhanded compliment. He opines, "The Band itself has done something only truly great musicians, secure in the knowledge of their own strengths, can do. They have sublimated [sic] themselves to their fellow artist" (89). Though I applaud his flattery in a general sense, I think he misses the point: that The Band *needed* this chance to stand in Dylan's shadow, this opportunity to make music in a way that complements their sensibilities both professionally and personally.

The Tour '74 stop that leaves this Band fan howling at the moon is the January 15th show in Largo, Maryland. The touch of master engineer Rob Frabroni – invited onto Starship One with the rest of the crew by Bob Dylan himself – turned Disc 9 of this boxset to gold. *MOJO Magazine*'s review admires how Frabroni "helped Dylan and The Band sound pretty mean" by maximizing their mix of the "constantly acerbic voice, the proto-punk wallop, the squealing guitars and psychedelic keyboards." The best mix of this boxset is, by default, likely to be a Band fan's favorite.

While it's hard to find a bad performance on this disc, the first full-group set at the Capital Center is something special. This was only the group's second test of beginning and ending a set with the same tune. The number they chose was, as Robertson describes it, a "ripping" version of "Most Likely You Go Your Way (And I'll Go Mine)" (*Testimony* 428).

The Band and Dylan effortlessly recapture their *Blonde on Blonde*-era energy for this performance. Pair this with Bob's vituperative shout-singing and the rhythm section's "tenterhooks urgency that verged on rage" (Nelson), and it becomes the anthem of Tour '74. As Danko plucks out a sometimes frantic staccato on electric bass, Helm drives this "hectic freight train" number along with deceptively intricate ride cymbal work and a snare pop that hits the tiniest fraction ahead of every beat.

The Band musically manifests the urgency of Dylan's song about parting ways. On one level, Dylan is singing about parting ways with the audience as they leave the arena after the encore. More deeply, he is singing about the audience parting ways with their idea of who Bob Dylan is. Robertson notes to Fong-Torres in a 1974 interview, "I don't remember him ever delivering what they believe he delivered, or what they think he's going to deliver [this time] . . . people have a fictitious past in mind about him" (24). By 1974, Bob and The Band had earned the privilege of revising their respective legacies. With Dylan's lone troubadour days behind him, The Band were there to set expectations. As British documentary filmmaker Mick Gold notes of The Band just after the conclusion of Tour '74 that they are "the only group who could warm up the crowd for Abraham Lincoln ... [T]hey sang about communities tied together by traditions of loyalty and deference." While I find that rock writers focus on The Band's personal humility a bit too enthusiastically in the mid seventies, "loyalty and deference" were certainly chief among their noblest qualities. The Band facilitate Bob's identity migration, just as they always have – they take a load off Bobby as he decides where to take music next.

If it wasn't already clear that Tour '74 was charting new territory for the group, the January 15 performance of "Lay Lady Lay" eliminates any shadow of a doubt. It's sultry; it's salacious; no listener is safe. All eyes and ears are on them before the number even starts, as Dylan gives tens of thousands a jump scare by saying a complete sentence (other than "we'll be right back") for the first time in twelve days of touring: "Thank you; it's great to be back in D.C." Robbie and Bob create a spicy back-and-forth between vocals and lead guitar. Both are feeling powerful and self-assured. Clearly, anyone who jumped on the recent "Bob Dylan is not sexy" train has never heard this performance. As Garth Hudson and the rhythm section issue standard-yet-tight-as-ever backbeats and flourishes, a good time is clearly had by all, and performers and spectators begin to feel at ease, if a tad overexcited.

If "Lay Lady Lay" is a moment of sexual delight, "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" is the morning after. The thrill is brief, and now it's time to blow this border town. The band settles on something unexpected here – they slow down. Coming down from their "Lay Lady

Lay" high, they take their time and devote over six minutes to this number alone. Author and Dylan devotee Paul Prescott drew up a to-die-for infographic for Dylan obsessives:

	Title	Track #	Duration	BPM	Lyrical Notes	Solo	Outro
2	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-04 Chicago]	2	4:46	94	Skipped "Housing Project Hill" verse	After "But left looking like a ghost"	4 measures
3	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-06 Afternoon Philadelphia]	3	5:06	85	Skipped "Now all the authorities" verse	After "And man they expect the same"	4 measures
4	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-06 Evening Philadelphia]	3	5:20	83	Skipped "Housing Project Hill" verse	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
5	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-07 Philadelphia]	3	5:27	94	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	7 measures
6	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-09 Toronto]	3	5:34	81	Skipped "Now all the authorities" verse	After "And man they expect the same"	8 measures
7	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-11 Montreal]	3	5:24	83	Skipped "Now all the authorities" verse	After "And man they expect the same"	8 measures
8	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-14 Boston]	3	5:51	92	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
9	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-15 Largo]	3	6:08	84	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
10	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-16 Largo]	3	5:55	87	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
11	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-17 Charlotte]	3	5:29	94	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
12	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-21 Atlanta]	3	5:16	100	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
13	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-22 Atlanta]	3	5:31	94	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
14	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-26 Afternoon Houston]	3	5:35	96	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
15	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-26 Evening Houston]	3	5:18	96	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
16	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-30 New York]	3	5:33	96	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
17	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-01-31 Evening New York]	3	5:32	94	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
18	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-02-09 Afternoon Seattle]	3	5:19	105	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
19	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-02-11 Evening Oakland]	3	5:09	103	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
20	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-02-13 Inglewood]	3	5:07	104	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
21	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-02-14 Afternoon Inglewood]	3	5:15	101	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures
22	Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues [1974-02-14 Evening Inglewood]	3	5:58	91	N/A	After "But left looking like a ghost"	8 measures

Every Tour '74 performance of "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" in ascending order of duration and notes on modifications.

Needless to say, If Prescott sees Dr. Annie, she'll tell him "thanks a lot." The January 15 tour stop is only the second time the group plays "Tom Thumb" in full and the only time they'd be this measured in tempo. After a barreling 94 bpm at The Spectrum in Philly on January 7 (another disc of unusually good sound quality), this is an interesting development. What's notable is that every review I've read about this tour notes that the group speeds up from show to show, and slowing this number down to one of the most plodding of its kind to close out the first third of the tour is rather remarkable. It's as if the wish fulfillment of "Lay Lady Lay" gives them permission to relax. Robertson's opening lick could be mistaken for rock-reggae, and when Bob sings "howling at the moon," Robbie howls back on lead guitar without missing a beat. However, this number ultimately belongs to our boys on the keys. In my mind's eye, I can see Hudson's spider fingers moving between consoles while Manuel complements his trills and ditties with his signature shoulder shimmy. Behind the colorful organ and piano stands, as always, the tight but funky support of Helm and Danko, driving this carefully timed number home. Dreams realized in the previous song give the musicians a moment to linger in Juarez before high-tailing it home.

Even as Tour '74 in the mind of most fans serves as a weigh station between more memorable milestones of these artists' careers, these roots-rock royalty are making sure we know who they are, where they've been, and where they're going. Their updated, straight-ahead interpretation of "I Don't Believe You (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)" clues us into the musicians' interior lives. Finding a sound reminiscent of "Loving You (Is Sweeter Than Ever)," a highlight of *Rock of Ages*-era Band sets, helps this number go down easy. "It Ain't Me, Babe," "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," and "Like a Rolling Stone" never get old, as

we get an ever-energetic Danko at his vocal best – thin, shouty, and unrestrained—in each chorus. To boot, there are few joys more profound than hearing Richard Manuel on drums, and we get that on "Ballad of Hollis Brown" – a real treat for any fan who adores The Band at their funkiest, which is more often than not The Band at their best.

We must bear in mind, however, that these men were playing a minimum of one show (28 songs) per day, most days over the course of six weeks, so anyone looking for career-defining solos from Danko, Manuel, and Helm are bound to be disappointed. After two years of almost no live gigs, Tour '74 demanded a lot of the group's co-lead vocalists – a reality (sadly) spotlighted in *Before the Flood*. However, for the typically unassuming members of The Band, notoriously bashful about their celebrity, it's easy to mistake the necessity of slowing down with bowing out and giving up. If we take anything from *The 1974 Live Recordings*, it should be that The Band did *neither*. Gold notes in the April 1974 edition of *Let It Rock* that their

> lack of new material might seem predictable after the anxiety of unanswered questions in *Cahoots*, but I don't feel their performances can be dismissed as a copout or a lack of nerve. Just as their early work contraindicated widely held views about rock being the music of radical dissent and continual innovation, their last two albums have subverted the idea that rock depends on constant production of significant responses to the present ... What The Band expressed ... was a faith in rock as a living tradition that can be invoked as well as added to. (5)

This is one of the most astute observations I've seen about The Band in the mid-seventies, but I think we do everyone involved an injustice to say that what The Band did in 1974 wasn't "significant." It *is* significant because it's a "response to the present" that demonstrates an attention to their personal needs as well as the public's complicated expectations of Bob Dylan. We can't say The Band sublimated themselves to Dylan on this tour. None of these six men saw himself as any more or less valuable than the others, and that's why this experiment worked. But The Band did something much more remarkable. They had the courage to stand still.

And why would they want anything more? They had created something beautiful and enduring. Indeed, by 1970, The Band had successfully reenlivened music addressing *fin de siècle* America to lionize the working class (laborers of color included). Gold captures their singular charm, noting that The Band's songs "went further than Dylan's by going beyond

metaphor and actually embodying the experiences they were about ... Where Dylan used the form and language of country music to mark out some firm ground after the amoral fragmentation of the electric albums, The Band actually enshrined the people and places they'd traveled through" (5). They didn't need to take it further; there was nowhere else to go. To say, then, that The Band were unremarkable after 1970 because they were deliberate about touring and measured in their output is to fundamentally misunderstand them; they had been like that since the beginning when they backed Ronnie Hawkins as The Hawks, then retreated to Big Pink. They never craved attention; they never chased acclaim – but they didn't rest on their laurels, either. In 1974, The Band were, quite simply, exactly where they needed to be.

For what it's worth, I'm not the only one who feels this way. In some glowing Tour '74 commentary, American historian Nat Hentoff gives The Band their flowers, as they were by his estimation, "far more stimulating than [Dylan]" (*Knockin'* 116). While it needn't be a competition, and I don't intend to make it one, every recognition of this still-rockin' group who made timeless music with Dylan in a Woodstock basement counts for a lot. In fact, the best remark I've turned up while writing this review is from someone whose name I may never know, in a thread about *The 1974 Live Recordings* on the Steve Hoffman Music Forums:

> Hearing these as just Dylan shows sharpens the focus. It's funny, because it's made me appreciate The Band much more for their instrumental ability. Most commentary on this thread has been about Dylan, how the setlist changed, how his vocal delivery developed. What I'm hearing are his call and response bits with Robbie, the timely Danko interjections, Manuel's bluesy barrelhouse piano, Garth's arsenal of sounds, and Levon's backwoods Keith Moon fills.

For me, this is what heaven looks like – conversations in which we give The Band their due *ad infinitum*. This is exactly the reaction I had hoped to read from fans drawn to The Band through *The 1974 Live Recording*, fearless remarks that locate The Band, steady and enduring, in moments when we're apt to lose them.

In loving memory of Eric Garth Hudson, maestro of mana, 1937–2025.

Barry J. Faulk and Brady Harrison, editors. *Teaching Bob Dylan*. NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024, xiii + 268 pp.

Reviewed by D. Quentin Miller, Suffolk University

I'm writing this review just after seeing *A Complete Unknown*, the biopic starring Timothée Chalamet about Dylan's formative years in the Greenwich Village folk scene. I'm wary of reading reviews prior to seeing films, partly because of spoilers and partly because I want to reduce the chance of external bias as I sit down with my popcorn, but in this case I had surveyed some critics because the movie was so hyped. The ones I read ran the gamut, from pans to raves. Now that I've seen it, I'll go back to them to deepen and sharpen my own responses, and maybe to see something I didn't fully grasp in the moment: in other words, to learn something.

I'll keep my movie review to myself because my job here is to review an important new book, *Teaching Bob Dylan*[1], but the film provides useful context for thinking about the topic of teaching Dylan as we enter the second quarter of the 21st century, more than fifty years after young Bobby's debut. I saw the movie with my elder son, a twenty-something who likes Dylan and who loves movies. We talked through our first impressions on the ride home, and he had some questions that I could answer (*which album was "It Ain't Me, Babe" on?*) and others that I couldn't (*who was his Black lover with the British accent in that one brief scene…or was she invented for the film*)? I had questions that he could answer, too, like where have I seen the actresses who played Suze (called Sylvie in the film upon Dylan's insistence) and Joan? Facts are checkable, but the discussion became truly interesting when we talked about the film's artistic choices and how they affected us as two representatives of the multigenerational audience. We agreed that the title *A Complete Unknown* was appropriate because you don't feel like you know Dylan any better by the end of the film than you did at the beginning. It's a matter of debate whether that's because he's unknowable even to himself or because he deliberately cultivated mystique as a shield against the fame he both courted and rejected. Whether we're looking at Dylan's performances, his lyrics, or his life, he can be regarded as a fascinating and complex classroom text.

The never-ending tension between what can be known and what must be interpreted is part of what makes higher education a joyous pursuit. Once my son and I dealt with the movie's

[1] As a contributor to this collection, *Dylan Review* editor Paul Haney recused himself from any involvement in the procuring and editing of this review.

factual inaccuracies – (*son, the infamous Judas exchange didn't happen at Newport*) – we were able to get to the topics that really engage the mind. This, too, is the tension that consumes anyone who has designed a course or course unit on Dylan, and who would thus benefit from a book like *Teaching Bob Dylan*.

Part of what explains the existence of the journal you're currently reading is that Dylan has produced so much art for so long that those who think they know him well will always have new contextual directions to take, or connections to make. And those who are just discovering him have a lot of catching up to do. The editors of *Teaching Bob Dylan* acknowledge this fact in a single-word subtitle: *"Multitudes."* This word rightly signals that the book cannot hope to contain Dylan's multitudes, but we should always be aware that they exist. There are many ways we can approach Dylan in the classroom, the word acknowledges, but no book nor any fourteen-week course of study will ever cover them all. Parallel to what we do with our students in any semester, the book merely introduces the multitudinous Dylan as a classroom subject and invites us to continue the pursuit as we are able. To return once more to the film's title, "unknown" is a given, but "complete" is impossible. Dylan's multitudes are fragments.

I asked a few questions as I started to read *Teaching Bob Dylan*, questions that I think would be useful for you, dear reader, as you decide if it's a book you want to add to your library. You've got an ever-increasing number of books about Bob to choose from, as well as the substantial content of this journal and, of course, articles in the popular press. My questions are: how useful is the book to instructors or would-be instructors? Are the contributors dedicated and innovative teachers? Could the book also be useful to Dylan scholars who are not necessarily interested in teaching a new course or changing the way they teach a current course? Is the volume well written and carefully edited? And finally, and most crucially, does the volume *inspire*?

Specialized books about pedagogy have a limited audience. That's a neutral observation, but I want to acknowledge from the get-go that this book is not designed for everyone. I would even argue that it's not a book for all teachers as I saw very little in these pages that would appeal to our valued colleagues who teach high school. The orientation is toward higher education, even specifically toward undergraduate education. Again, that's a neutral statement for the benefit of *Dylan Review* readers who teach secondary school or graduate courses and who might come looking for tips and tricks.

Given that set of caveats, for those of us who teach courses or units on Dylan to undergraduates, *Teaching Bob Dylan* is a valuable resource. For starters, the book features a

wide variety of contexts. I teach a course on Dylan and the Beat Generation, and I was gratified to read two separate and superb essays on that same topic as well as other subjects I might have anticipated (i.e. approaches involving the "old, weird America" and the social revolutions of the 1960s). No book of this type would be complete without those contexts, and they're covered intelligently and thoroughly. What I didn't expect were other frames of reference that expanded my way of thinking. I never would have considered teaching Dylan's gospel/Christian phase before I read Lauren Onkey's "Teaching the Gospel," but after reading her clear and persuasive essay, I can't imagine why I would have sidestepped it. Robert Hurd's "Romances with Durango: Teaching Dylan's Encounter with Mexican Culture" also blew my mind because it's not an obvious approach, but it's a highly relevant one. As soon as I read each of these essays, I wanted to register for my colleagues' classes. That's good teaching! I was also drawn to the section on "Dylan Beyond the Songs." Essays by Graley Herren ("Teaching *Chronicles*") and Leigh H. Edwards ("Bob Dylan and Documentary Film") made me want to include more of that content in my course. Like many instructors, I use excerpts from *Chronicles* and clips from a handful of documentaries, but Herren and Edwards provide valuable genre-based readings of these sources rather than treating them as mere framing devices for the songs.

In addition to the introduction, twelve essays, and afterword that comprise the volume, there are also two appendices, one consisting of syllabi provided by the contributors and one consisting of course materials. These appendices take up roughly one-fifth of the entire volume. At first, I thought this was a little excessive, but upon reflection I feel it was a wise decision because it keeps the volume's focus squarely on pedagogy (more on that later), and it is a treasure trove of possible materials for those who are eager for fresh ideas to revitalize our teaching. Plus, it's always valuable to see what choices other instructors have made, not only in terms of selection and organization, but in their presentation of material to students. In offering these documents, our colleagues are generously inviting us to steal ideas and lessons, and we should thank them.

It's evident that all the contributors to this volume are innovative, creative, thoughtful, and dedicated instructors. I applaud the editors for finding contributors whose experience covers the full range of the higher education landscape, from community colleges to Ivy League institutions. The variety of viewpoints speaks again to the "multitudes" of the subtitle. Not every approach will work for every set of students or every institutional setting, so the variety is necessary. There is also variety in the levels of engagement or granularity of detail. We encounter some sophisticated theory (such as "the cognitive-science theory of 'conceptual blending'" [35] in an essay by Michael Booth) as well as some screenshots of group exercises

an instructor worked on with students in class (a map of the Texas-Mexico border and a timeline in an essay by Robert Hurd [150]). Finally, there are significant differences in organization. In addition to the chronological approach many of us take when organizing a course, we see examples of instructors who creatively break that approach, such as Gayle Wald's nimble description of her course "The World of Bob Dylan" which (as the title indicates) moves around quite freely, or Robert Reginio's willingness to shuttle between early rock and roll and hip-hop as a way of reframing Dylan for a new generation.

I'm compelled to gush a little more here about the innovation I saw in these pages because I don't think faculty are rewarded enough for this dimension of our work except (occasionally) by our students. The thought we put into organizing and structuring our classes is often invisible labor. Also, a really good syllabus requires creative thinking and risk-taking despite institutional pressures to make all syllabi boring, quasi-legal documents. I was struck by Graley Herren's description of "vocation" at his institution. He reports that this concept must be introduced in a first-year seminar such as the one he teaches on Dylan, and that his institution conceives of it in a specific way, "as the intersection in each person's life where three roads meet: (1) what you love; (2) what you're good at; and (3) what others need from you" (167). Most instructors would not automatically reach for Dylan given that mandate, but Herren – a creative thinker – makes his case in a most convincing way. By the end of the essay, he interrupts his own analysis to say, "I'm only noticing this now, so I'm eager to get back into the classroom and try out this idea with my next group of FYS students" (174). Clearly this love of the subject – love being one of the three roads that intersect at vocation – is at play here, and it's the beating heart of this volume in general. As Richard F. Thomas puts it in his moving afterword, "Most [authors of the Classics] are interesting and important, but I don't feel for them the love I feel for Virgil, Horace, Tacitus – or Dylan – so I simply don't teach them" (193). This is not to say love need not be critical – this book is not hagiography, and the portrait of Dylan that emerges is definitely "warts and all" – but the contributors' passion for their subject is evident and infectious.

The question of whether this book is *only* for instructors is a little vexed. In their introduction (I assume co-authored by the editors, but it's not explicit) Faulk and Harrison play with an inherent pun in the volume's title: as instructors we teach courses on Dylan, but the title indicates that Dylan is himself a teacher, and he sometimes expresses "a teacherly frustration with unruly, uncaring students" (7) which might include not only pesky interviewers, but, well, us. By opening up this possibility, the editors suggest that academics – even ones who would claim to be Dylanologists – want to learn from Dylan, which leads us

down the road to interpretation as opposed to pure pedagogy. At the end of the book's "Acknowledgments," the editors admit, "We're all wondering what Bob Dylan would think of a book about teaching 'Bob Dylan'" (xiii). That's natural. But the volume takes as a given, and consistently reminds readers, that we could never get a straight answer from him: that's his schtick. That means we're in the realm of interpretation, which means the volume must spend some time trying to figure out its evasive subject rather than just presenting ways to present him in the classroom. The placing of "Bob Dylan" in quotation marks in the above quotation is a coy acknowledgement that the subject is about as easy to hold as a handful of rain. To return to my point about viewing the movie with my son, there are things we can solidly know but many more things we must argue for, based on the mess of contradictions and slippery evidence that has constituted Dylan's career.

Even seasoned instructors can't get away from interpretation, in other words, or the critical impulse; as the editors argue, "if Dylan had never existed, it might have been necessary for rock critics to invent him" (8). Note: not college instructors, but critics, but all of us who teach higher ed are both critics and teachers. Moreover, we get to know our subject better when we teach it, and the insights we arrive at *in* the classroom often supersede the ones we *bring to* the classroom. (Raise your hand if you ever assigned a book to students because you were hoping to understand it better, then to write about it). The volume is ostensibly about pedagogy, but some of the essays – you'll know them when you encounter them, which I hope you do – shade more to the scholarly article side with the practical pedagogy largely saved for the appendices. That's totally fine, except that I'm concerned that scholars might overlook this volume because they assume it is *only* designed as a teaching resource. It contains many gem-like insights for critics who do not necessarily teach Dylan to undergrads. In that sense, it may have even broader appeal than the title would indicate. Scholars who never teach Dylan will also benefit from it.

Readers might seek out individual essays in this collection based on their approach to the subject, but the collection also holds together as a coherent volume. I've edited a few essay collections and it's a simple fact that the writing within them will never be uniform. We all have different voices and styles and different relationships with our readers. Editors who aim for uniformity face frustration. That said, all the essays in the collection are strong and clearly written, and they hold together nicely. The organization of the volume, including the pages in the appendices, makes sense to me, although I might have suggested fewer subsections representing broader categories. Five sections for twelve essays seems a bit many, and the one called "Love and Theft" is more abstract and less descriptive than the others. I'm picking nits

here: the volume reflects a steady editorial hand but not an overly heavy one, and typos and redundancies are minimal.

What I really hoped for when I picked up this volume was to be inspired, and it certainly delivered on that level. I finished the volume not only with new ideas for my Dylan and the Beats course based on the superb essays by S.E. Gontarski and Paul Haney, but also with a ton of inspiration to develop a host of new courses. As Faulk and Harrison say, "Dylan is not having a cultural moment quite like, say, Taylor Swift," but he is in the midst of "a number of very good years" beginning with the Nobel Prize for Literature (3). When that award was announced in 2016, the whole world (including its recipient) seemed a bit taken aback, if not shocked. Enough time has passed to try to figure out what it means, not only for Dylan, but for cultural production more generally. Under the guidance of a smart book like *Teaching Bob Dylan,* and with the help of the younger generation who might register for any number of Dylan-themed courses, I think we'll figure it out.

Jeffrey Edward Green. *Bob Dylan: Prophet Without God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2024. 368 pp.

Reviewed by Barry J. Faulk, Florida State University.

Jeffrey Edward Green's new book, *Bob Dylan: Prophet Without God*, is a learned, carefully reasoned, and extensively researched study of Dylan's relationship to the figure of the prophet; it is sure to interest readers who already regard the singer to be something more than an entertainer. However, Green, a political philosopher, also wants to persuade readers (and listeners) unmoved by Dylan's songs, and skeptical of the claims that enthusiastic fans often make about the singer, that his life and work have had a transformative impact on contemporary thought as well as on contemporary life.

Green points to the "brilliance, poignancy, fecundity, uncanniness, arrestingness, and beauty" of Dylan's "transmission through words" as perhaps the most compelling reason to bestow the "prophet" label on the singer (3). He takes great care to place the singer's life and work in the context of earlier prophetic traditions, most notably the Hebrew prophets, who claimed to relay a divine message about redemption and justice to an errant people, and the principled civil disobedience advocated by Mahatmas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. That said, Green's book is built on the premise that Dylan represents a crucial difference in kind from these earlier prophetic leaders. Green's Dylan is a prophet of "diremption" and thus metaphorically a "prophet without God," as the subtitle claims. Unlike earlier prophets who claimed direct access to higher truths and who were identified by the singular message they proclaimed, Bob Dylan is a postmodern prophet who inspires us to reflect on the structures of meaning-making. Dylan's prophetic power lies in the unique ability of his words to illuminate the gaps between the various ideals--of faith, social justice, personal liberation – that we aspire to actualize. A prophet of diremption may speak on behalf of freedom and justice, but, as Green remarks, will "continually [insist], tragically, on the divergences and conflicts between these ideals"; such a prophet testifies to the absence of any court of appeals that might help us adjudicate the contest between incommensurate values (vii). Prophets of diremption speak for a hidden God, not a revealed one, and testify to God's absence in the world, even as they urge us to recognize the true and enact the good. As Green puts it, "Dylan makes the very conflicts between the grounds of normative authority ethically meaningful. He discloses the conflicts between incommensurate values of normative authority so that normative authority is no longer a stable unity or a foundation without cracks or fissures" (34). To recall the words of another

prophet, Green's Dylan comes not to bring peace, but a sword. And as Green also reminds us, the singer's vehement rejection of the prophet's role at crucial points in his career keeps faith with the venerable precedent set by the Hebrew prophets themselves, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos (12-13).

Green approaches the subject of Dylan and prophecy from the perspective of a political philosopher: besides situating the artist's life and work within the broader history of Western theological and philosophical thought, he wishes to examine what Dylan's popular audience might reveal to us about the persistence of belief in ideas about the good, the true, and the beautiful in modern secular democracies. Given their divergent starting points, there is an interesting convergence between Green's thesis and music writer Ian MacDonald's account of Bob Dylan's post-Newport transformation into a distinctly modern prophet, committed to "inoculate the world with disillusionment" by means of amplified sound: a role that, as MacDonald notes, Dylan "applied himself to … with perverse relish and, as audience resistance persisted, an increasing militance" (*The People's Music* 32). In this view, Dylan remains a man with a mission even as he rejected a leadership role in the folk music revival of the early 1960s. The message may have changed, the volume had gotten louder, but behind it all the prophetic stance and the presumption on the part of both the artist and audience that the singer's words reflected a higher wisdom and a more penetrating view of the nature of reality persists. That MacDonald builds his observation on a phase by bohemian writer Henry Miller suggests that what Green describes as Dylan's "prophetic" stance may be grounded in the history of art as much as theology, specifically in the notion of the artist-as-outsider that the singer might have learned from modernist literature.

In three chapters that demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the by-now voluminous scholarly literature analyzing and explicating Bob Dylan's life and music, and referencing a wide range of political philosophers from Niccolò Machiavelli to Hans Morgenthau – with insightful readings of the key concepts of Max Weber, William James, Charles Taylor, and Jurgen Habermas offered along the way – Green draws our attention to the rich commentary that Dylan has provided on his own ethical struggles at different stages of his career. For Green, the singer's extensive discourse on these internal conflicts constitutes his prophetic message. In Part I, "A Rebel Rebelling against the Rebellion," Green traces the history of Dylan's participation in the 1960s folk music revival and the shock waves created by the artist's very public disavowal of his popular audience. Dylan's music as well as his fateful career choices during these years challenged a cherished myth of political democracy, especially prominent in the Cold War era, that the ideals of individual liberty and communal belonging are easily

reconciled. Dramatized in songs like "My Back Pages" and enacted on stage during his 1966 concert tours with the Band, Dylan both articulated and embodied the conflict experienced by a generation that sought to simultaneously achieve personal fulfillment and enact revolutionary change. Greil Marcus's description of Dylan's Basement Tape recordings as "deserter's songs" could reasonably be applied to the whole of the singer's musical output after 1963, until the release of the Christian-inspired *Slow Train Coming* recording in 1979. Although the music styles may vary, most of the songs Dylan writes during this period locate happiness and self-fulfillment in moments of profound introspection or in personal relationships. As Green eloquently observes, the Prophetic Dylan of the 1960s bears witness "not to the resolution of competing ethical duties in a better-organized future world, but to the permanent moral chaos of the present, in which individuals such as himself will routinely turn their backs on causes they otherwise recognize as just out of a competing commitment to their own freedom" (39).

Dylan's conversion in the late 1970s initiated another ethical struggle, this time with the "self-reliant individuality" that was previously the hallmark of the singer's work and career (37). In Part II, "Never Could Learn to Drink that Blood, and Call It Wine," Green persuasively argues that Dylan's prophetic status represents a point of continuity amid change, and he challenges us to take a broader view of this dramatic turning point in Dylan's life and career. Green's analysis of Dylan's prophetic stance on religion provocatively includes not only the uncompromising declarations of faith in songs from the *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved* recordings, but the more muted, delicate Christian testimony of "Every Grain of Sand" from 1981's *Shot of Love*, as well as *Infidels* (1983) and *Empire Burlesqu*e (1985), recordings from the singer's putative "post-conversion" period, once again writing songs on non-religious topics. For Green, all these recordings represent different steps taken on the same path in a longer, more enduring faith journey.

Viewed as a totality, Green claims that Dylan's different modalities of faith represent a new manner of being religious in a secular age, more appropriate to a prophet of diremption. Green draws on the theories of postsecular democracy advanced by the social philosophers Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas to interpret the significance of Dylan's prophetic message on religion. The postsecular theory advanced by Taylor and Habermas asserts that, since the Fall of the Berlin Wall, governance in modern liberal democracies has evolved beyond hostility to religious belief to a more comprehensive view that treats, as Green puts it, "both religion and non-religion as standpoints of equal integrity, which each of us might adopt at any time" (xvi). While Taylor and Habermas advocate the postsecular ideal, Green regards Dylan to be "perhaps the greatest representative of a postsecular mentality": its

prophetic embodiment, in other words. As Green demonstrates in a detailed survey of Dylan's post-conversion interviews and in thoughtful close readings of song lyrics from the era, the singer clearly aimed his late 70s/early 80s musical ministry at a popular audience that he presumed was non- or anti-religious. Yet at the same time, Dylan's new gospel songs were rarely explicit declarations of faith. As Green establishes in his readings of "Covenant Woman" and "Precious Angel," Dylan's preferred mode of gospel song paid homage to his mentors, to those who inspired him by possessing a faith that he regarded to be far stronger than his own. Other Dylan songs from this period ("Property of Jesus," "Watered Down Love," "Slow Train Coming") are preoccupied with defending believers against the taunts of non-believers rather than with advancing religious doctrine, or indeed any specific claim about religion. Green interprets Dylan's post-1980s recordings as an effort to build a musical bridge among believers and non-believers, and he makes a bold assertion about the singer's success in this regard: "Dylan, almost uniquely in popular culture, has demonstrated for non-religious people the integrity, dignity, and plausibility of religiosity" (ix).

In Part III of *Prophet Without God*, "Strengthen the Things that Remain," Green analyzes Dylan's "prophetic pessimism," his belief that "the political world will never become the site of secular salvation," which, as Green documents, seems as informed by the singer's careful reading of Thucydides, Carl von Clausewitz, and various historical accounts of the American Civil War, as by the singer's religious convictions (253). Here, Green traces a by now familiar pattern, where the artist first inhabits an intellectual tradition and then rubs it against the grain. As Green demonstrates with copious textual examples, modern political realists such as Hobbes, Machiavelli, and more recently Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger often place great faith in a fantasy image of the Strong Leader, unafraid to commit any crime to maintain order and stability, and unconsciously bring to the fore the idealism they sought to eliminate from their positivist political science. Green first situates Dylan within a long-standing tradition of political realists who take it for granted that human institutions are imperfect, since they are built and operated by flawed humans. Then, referencing song lyrics from throughout Dylan's writing career, as well as an extensive range of contemporary interviews where Dylan has been uncharacteristically effusive about American politics and his reading of classic history texts, Green makes a compelling case that Dylan significantly alters the discourse of political realism by addressing his message not to "the Prince," or an elite, but "to a real constituency--ordinary, non-specially empowered individuals – [who are] typically overlooked by canonical political realists with their focus on leadership" (254). As Green details in an extended close reading of "Man of Peace," Dylan's prophetic stance on politics

focuses on practical matters of conduct: on how ordinary people can attain a clear-eyed view of political realities and still work to "strengthen the things that remain" ("When You Going to Wake Up").

One of Green's stated aims in writing the book is to illuminate the character of a people who would regard Bob Dylan to be a prophet: yet one can't help but notice a disconnect between Dylan's prophetic messaging as described by Green and the lived experience of the singer's popular audience, and doubtless of Dylan himself. The hope that a mutual respect and tolerance can still bind together those who hold opposing opinions in matters of faith or politics seems a very weak revenant in "Trump 2.0" America. The polarized discourse of social media seems light years away from the ideals of mutual respect between believers and nonbelievers that Green claims are at the heart of Dylan's prophetic message on religion. Digital algorithms leave little room for the idealized notions of dialogue and mutuality articulated by theorists of the public sphere. Social media is about profits, not prophets; its algorithms are meant to keep us engaged online, regardless of the content of our messaging. Trolling is not a "bug" of online life, it's a deliberate part of its functionality.

Still, as Green memorably puts it, prophetic testimony always presumes "the permanent moral chaos of the present moment": it presupposes this chaos (or diremption), even as the prophet exhorts us to act differently, and deliberately. In that sense, Dylan's exhortation to strengthen the things that remain may prove to be the artist's timeliest message, and Green has done us a considerable service in elucidating and contextualizing the nature of Dylan's prophetic communications.

Jonathan Hodgers. *Bob Dylan on Film: The Intersection of Music and Visuals*. London: Routledge. 2024. 252 pp.

Reviewed by Timothy Hampton, University of California, Berkeley

Lovers of classic Hollywood cinema will remember a feature of many films featuring the devastatingly handsome Cary Grant. Grant was a heart throb, but his films often made fun of his good looks. No matter how debonaire or brave Grant appeared to be, some part of his character was always standing back and casting an ironic eye on his own movie idol persona. This quirk of Grant's filmography is worth recalling when we consider Jonathan Hodgers' scrupulously researched and insightful account of Bob Dylan on film. Hodgers argues that there is a particular kind of "Dylan effect" that hovers around such films as *Dont Look Back, Renaldo and Clara* and even the more conventional *Masked and Anonymous*. Hodgers shows that all of Dylan's films explore the relationship between cinematic reality and some version of the "real" or non-cinematic world. Put differently, if handsome Cary Grant is never merely handsome, neither is Bob Dylan, on film, ever merely Bob Dylan (or not Bob Dylan). And the contrast between filmed Dylan and the Dylan who by his very presence shapes the film, Hodgers shows, is an important feature that links all of Dylan's films together. It's an impressive and productive thesis that lends Hodgers' book weight and intellectual cogency.

Hodgers pursues this feature of Dylan's history through an extended opening meditation on the question of the author or *auteur* in cinema. There is of course a sizable body of writing about the extent to which directors of films are their "authors," and about the history of the *auteur* film, which emerged out of the French New Wave in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Hodgers begins by distinguishing between filmic vehicles which repurpose Dylan's earlier music for some type of "re-creation" or "re-authoring" (xi), such as Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There* or Martin Scorcese's *Rolling Thunder Revue*, on the one hand, and films such as *Dont Look Back* or *Renaldo and Clara*, where the emphasis is on the more or less simultaneous emergence of a figure on screen and the creation of new musical performances. It is these latter films that interest Hodgers, and one of the goals of the book is to argue that there is a kind of dramatic and thematic consistency across a body of films that otherwise might seem to be quite diverse in genre and tone.

Hodgers devotes much of his analysis to Dylan's two 1960s films, *Dont Look Back* and *Eat the Document*. Both cover Dylan's tours of the UK during the time of his shift away from folk music to some sort of more impressionistic, often electric, music. Dylan's status as

counter-cultural hero, in his fancy clothes, wild hair and affected stage mannerisms is captured in these cinema-vérité productions, one by D.A. Pennebaker, and one worked up collaboratively by Dylan and Howard Alk (with, it would seem, some residual assistance from Pennebaker). Hodgers stresses the tension between the claims of cinema-vérité, to put us inside the action, watching real people in real time, and the avant-gardism of Pennebaker's narrative technique, which insists on rapid cuts, lack of context, and an insistence on the presence of the camera as part of the action. This, asserts Hodgers, is one of the reasons Dylan called the film "dishonest" in an interview. And, indeed, the film somewhat shockingly avoids uncut takes of single songs, choosing rather to break them up and generally to film Dylan only from the front. Both Dylan and Pennebaker were involved in putting the film together, however, and the multiplicity of voices generates a kind of confusion that makes the thematic arguments we might expect from a documentary difficult to discern. Though the film offers an "interpretation" of events, it does so not through narration or thematic material, but through "organization, editing, and arrangement" (22).

I would note, in addition, that it was certainly influenced by the Beatles film *A Hard Day's Night*, yet whereas that film had the advantage of offering four protagonists, joking and playing, here we have a single focus. This gives the film a curiously argumentative dimension, as if, in order to create social interest, Pennebaker and Dylan had to focus on scenes in which people are yelling at each other or trading insults. Dylan yells at people, reporters yell at Dylan, fans yell at Dylan and each other, and so on. Yet at the same time, *Dont Look Back* establishes a problem that will characterize much of Dylan's work – the problem of figuring out how much of what we see is a film of Bob Dylan, and how much is a film *by* Bob Dylan – influenced by his preferences, input, and suggestions.

For Hodgers, the problems visible in *Dont Look Back* are at least partially resolved in the hard-to-find Pennebaker work *Something Is Happening*, and then in the still officially unreleased *Eat the Document*. Dylan put *Eat the Document* together with help from Howard Alk and Pennebaker out of footage from his 1966 tour with The Hawks, who later became The Band. Here, the "surrealism" of the approach frees the film from the structures of chronology. *Eat the Document*'s disavowal of meaning or logic might be seen as a rebuke of *Dont Look Back*. Hodgers shows how *Eat the Document* works dialectically, setting up contrasts between images and scenes and using images to comment on lines in performance. Alk also records in color and ventures on stage, among the musicians, in a way that provides a more powerful cinematic experience.

Hodgers also uses his close analysis of these early films to set up a series of thematic oppositions that, he avers, are consistent across Dylan's work. There is often a "double" who stands over against the protagonist (for example, Donovan in *Dont Look Back*), often a plot involving Dylan's character and some mysterious or dangerous woman, often a tension between the heroic performer and "management" (corporate or, in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, legal), and usually the presence of some journalistic figure introduced to raise questions about the integrity of performances. Hodgers traces these thematic elements across Dylan's film work, adding as well a longer list of more abstract oppositions (youth-age, innocence-experience) of the kind we might expect in the work of a pop star.

Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* provides a greater challenge for Hodger's analysis, since Dylan didn't make the movie, and only had a small role as a minor character. However, Hodgers's analysis of the film does a good job of looping it into Dylan's camp by stressing the ways in which it is a film that, like much of Dylan's songwriting, draws obsessively on clichés and tropes from earlier art works: "All in all, Pat Garrett as a whole is deeply concerned with story, memory, and reminiscence. Into this intertextual milieu, Dylan brings abundant references from his own output" (75). And Hodgers goes on to detail the ways in which Dylan's music intervenes in certain moments of the plot, adding resonance to what is happening visually.

The centerpiece for any analysis of this kind would certainly have to be Dylan's 1977 self-directed film *Renaldo and Clara*. The film is long, a bit boring, and was a commercial and critical failure. However, Hodgers makes a strong case for the creativity of Dylan's approach, linking it back to two major inspirations, *Shoot the Piano Player* and *Children of Paradise* (both in different ways important documents in the emergence of the French *auteur* theory of cinema). Yet the film is also deeply influenced by a documentary tradition, which it both uses and upends, as we see multiple scenes where it is difficult to discern whether we are watching Dylan, or some version of Dylan playing another character. This confusion is highlighted, Hodgers shows, by the careful use of music, which fades in and out as a commentary on the action. Hodgers' careful account of the film, supplemented by his work in the Dylan archive on early versions, is an impressive contribution to our knowledge of the movie. It made me want to watch it again.

More challenging for Hodgers are Dylan's two Hollywood films, 1987's *Hearts of Fire* and 2003's *Masked and Anonymous*. *Hearts of Fire* is pretty bad, and Hodgers makes no attempt to defend the film. However, he does point out that Dylan's presence twists some of the representations. "Part of the film's interest … lies in the fact that Dylan plays himself with

a veneer of fiction" (144). Hodgers points out that Dylan "nudged" the script to correspond to his own cadences as a way of bringing his character closer to how he wanted to be seen. Or, one could add, to what he could do, given his limited acting chops.

Hodgers is on happier ground with *Masked and Anonymous*, where he traces the interactions between Dylan, who partly wrote the scenario, and director Larry Charles. He points out that the film draws heavily on references to Dylan's career, evoking songs and earlier moments, using musical performance in an effective way. Hodgers argues that the film might be seen in a kind of dialogue with Dylan's deeply citational album *"Love and Theft"* which came out around the time of filming. He points to the fact that Dylan was deeply involved in the early work on the film, before fading out, as he often seems to do in collaborations.

Bob Dylan on Film is a learned and insightful guide to an important feature of Dylan's career. By focusing on the histories of the various productions, Hodgers shows a rarely glimpsed aspect of Dylan's persona. It is a book that will appeal to students of cinema as well as to fans of Dylan's music, and it illuminates both areas of activity. Hodgers has wonderful insights into how Dylan's presence shapes (or, we might say, distorts) the cinematic enterprise. Whereas some other musical figures might just show up on the set, hit their marks, and strum their chords, Dylan's restlessness makes films about him into hybrid productions, never sure of their own status. In this way, we might say, the cinematic record of Dylan's career parallels much of his songwriting. It bends genres, redraws boundaries, and opens up new avenues for reflection.

The Dylanista

Dylan's Proper Names: Reason or Rhyme?

Think about all those names, all those all those cities, all those streets and small towns and all those people. How many of them mean something more than simply a proper name? How many proper names are *properly* proper names, rather than what one critic of onomastics identified as "the place names found in ballads and folksongs…regularly functioning as poetic devices"?[1] For example:

> I'll look for you in old Honolulu
> San Francisco, Ashtabula

Not only, on *Blood on the Tracks*, does Dylan manage to rhyme "Honolulu" with "Ashtabula," but, stunningly, he finds two four-syllable city names to end the lines, each name made up of two trochees and three separate, matching pitches. But is this reason or rhyme? That is, are the cities necessary to the meaning of the verse, or does Dylan choose their names for their prosodical fit, to satisfy the meter and rhyme? Compare this name:

> Crash on the levee, mama
> Water's gonna overflow
> Swamp's gonna rise
> No boat's gonna row
> Now, you can train on down
> To **Williams Point**
> You can bust your feet
> You can rock this joint

[1] David Atkinson, "Toponymy of the Child Ballads: Problems of Representation in Written and Oral Texts," *Folklore* 120 (December 2009): 254. Atkinson cites W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "'As I cam' in by Ythanside': On the Function of Place Names in the Greig–Duncan Folk Song Collection." In *Emily Lyle: The Persistent Scholar*, ed. Frances J. Fischer and Sigrid Rieuwerts BASIS, vol. 5 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), 231-40, 231.

The "point-joint" rhyme is perfect, as is the meter (not to mention the idiolectal use of "train" as a verb). But where *is* Williams Point? Or which Williams Point is the speaker referring to? The most likely one is in Virginia, at the tip of a peninsula in Currioman Bay (the other tip of the peninsula is Asparagus Point). But there are other places called Williams Point. In fact, there are two more in the vicinity – one near Ocean City, Maryland, and another near Chincoteague, Virginia. All these Williams Points are at low elevation and close enough to the water to need a levee.

These place names seem to be both representative toponyms–the names associated with particular topography–and realistic places in the songs. They are what might be called onomastic pointers. Onomastics is the study of proper names: their origins, transformations, corruptions, and meanings. So, while riding on a train going east, a traveler might pass through Williams Point after the levee crashed somewhere nearby, or, alternatively, she could have been in Williams Point when the levee crashed. But it's difficult to avoid the sense of an arbitrary toponym and a convenient rhyme. Still, how rigorously should we interrogate these names? Michel Grimaud (a scholar of onomastics), in a self-deprecating reflection on his (temporary) abandonment of the field of onomastics, suggests that "research in the potential symbolic meanings of literary names [is] unlikely to reflect the reader's experience of the text; [is] all too often facile; and ordinarily fail[s] to be central to a study of the major aspects of a literary text, i.e., those which, as critics, we ought to concentrate on first."[2] Although Grimaud reverses his negative opinion of onomastics, he first adds that "ways of arriving at the symbolic meaning of names [are] not only too easy, they [are] methodologically weak and unconvincing in most cases."

Songs are not literary texts, or not only literary texts. I think we can agree that unlocking the symbolic meaning of names in songs isn't always "too easy," and despite Grimaud's view, can be very revealing. When we hear "Tangled Up in Blue," the proper names not only melt into the narrative but underscore the meaning of that elusive speaker's journey:

> So I drifted down to New Orleans
> Where I happened to be employed
> Workin' for a while on a fishin' boat
> Right outside of Delacroix

[2] Michel Grimaud, "Whither Literary Onomastics? "Prufrock" Revisited," *Names* 41.1 (March 1993): 5-6.

The "employed-Delacroix" rhyme works well, slightly slanted, and the serendipity of a famous Louisiana port town adds color to the peripatetic narrative.[3] It's difficult to call this an arbitrary toponym when it fits the story so well. But I'm not sure we can reach the same conclusion about the opening lines to "If You See Her, Say Hello":

> If you see her, say hello, she might be in Tangier
> She left here last early spring, is livin' there, I hear.[4]

There is a temptation to resort to biography, in this case, by suggesting that this couplet refers to Dylan's soon-to-be-ex-wife, Sara, who, for reasons unexplained in the song, was living in Tangier, Morocco. If that were the case, the casual idiomatic rhyme, "I hear," might seem appropriate. But, absent a definitive autobiographical voice, "Tangier" seems arbitrary and the rhyme somewhat facile – unless, perhaps, Dylan hopes listeners will augment the ruefulness of the verses with the remoteness and exoticism of a Moroccan escape. Even then, however, any supposedly exotic toponym might work: in Wallace Stevens's words, "An apple serves as well as any skull."[5]

Yet the use of "Tangier" is exactly what scholars of onomastics refer to as using a name to function connotatively, rather than denotatively, in a song, as, for example, part of "'the stylized limbo' of the ballad world."[6] Interpreting Dylan's names through the concept of a "ballad world" can be clarifying: what better than "stylized limbo" to describe lines like "When you're lost in the rain in Juarez / And it's Eastertime too," and "Don't put on any airs / When you're down on Rue Morgue Avenue." The names and places might seem arbitrary – denotatively – but there's nothing facile in them connotatively, nor is it too easy to interpret the names: they are indeed central to the listeners' experience of the song. At times, the ballad world overlaps with other mythical worlds, as in "Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)":

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[3] On *More Blood, More Tracks*: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 14, the song omits this passage: instead Dylan sings "So he drifted down to LA / Where he reckoned to try his luck / Workin' for a while in an airplane plant / Loading cargo onto a truck." I think the "employed-Delacroix" rhyme is stronger than the "luck-truck" rhyme, although the use of "LA" as a kind of spondee is interesting.

[4] Although the quoted lines are the most familiar, appearing on the original album and also on *More Blood, More Tracks, t*he Official Dylan website has these opening lines: "If you see her, say hello, she might be in Tangier / It's the city 'cross the water, not too far from here." Less personal, though more metaphorically suggestive.

[5] "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," stanza IV, line 5.

[6] Atkinson, 254, again citing Nicolaisen.

Señor, señor, do you know where we're headin'?
Lincoln County Road or Armageddon?

From the local present to the end-times, from the peaceful county road to the final battlefield, from tangible reality to the stylized limbo of myth. Dylan mixes the denotative name with the richly connotative one, a kind of onomastic polarization, The ballad world all but overwhelms the quotidian, except for the speaker's sense of repetition: "Seems like I been down this way before / Is there any truth in that, señor?"

Few Dylan listeners could fail to associate the feeling of repetition with this spectacularly famous stanza:

Now the bricks lay on Grand Street
Where the neon madmen climb
They all fall there so perfectly
It all seems so well timed
An' here I sit so patiently
Waiting to find out what price
You have to pay to get out of
Going through all these things twice
Oh, Mama, can this really be the end
To be stuck inside of Mobile
With the Memphis blues again

("Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again")

The world-weary frustration of "Waiting to find out what price / You have to pay to get out of / Going through all these things twice," which anticipates the line in "Señor," occurs in a frame of three names: Grand Street, Mobile, and Memphis. The proper names are known places – Grand Street in downtown Manhattan (SoHo) – and the two magical-mystery cities tying together Gulf Coast Alabama with Beale Street and Elvis Presley. Does the denotative meaning of these names preclude a connotative association? Dylan clearly hasn't chosen the names at random, and his manipulation of toponyms produces both a referential congruency and "demonstrate[es] persuasively how such names help to establish a mental ballad map that, albeit quite fictitious, maintains more than adequately the spatial relationships necessary to

sustain a narrative."[7] Before we've heard one note of the song, the title creates a mental ballad map and suggests the spatial relationships that will initiate a narrative. And, once again, Dylan uses names, *denotatively*, to polarize connotations:

> Oh, Mama, can this really be the end
> To be stuck inside of Mobile
> With the Memphis blues again

He even uses the word "end" at the end of the line, a nice bit of prosodical cheek. But the meaning of the lines is all about the names. David Atkinson has observed that "place names stripped at least in part of their denotative function can also serve as structural devices in ballad verse, creating sound patterns like…stanza endings … or providing refrain elements."[8] The speaker is trapped inside "Mobeel" with the Memphis blues, and as everyone knows, the Memphis blues are *either* a longing to be in Memphis *or* the actual blues music that historically came through Memphis, Tennessee, and is now caging the speaker.

In discussing the American folk song, Walter Allen Read notes that "the Child ballads, upon their transit to America, offer remarkable onomastic evidence." His example resonates for all Dylanistas: "In places where British names were retained," Read reflects, "even these would seem exotic enough. What is the 'North Countree' to an American – even to one living in the North Country"?[9] This is almost too perfect a question to ask lifetime listeners of "Girl from the North Country" and "North Country Blues." Until now I thought I knew very well where the North Country was:

> Well, if you're travelin' in the north country fair
> Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline

Minnesota, the "fair" north country, where the winds hit that mysterious borderline, that liminal place and uncrossable threshold blocking the past: "You can always come back, but you can't

[7] Atkinson, 255, who cites W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "'There Was a Lord in Ambertown': Fictitious Place Names in the Ballad Landscape." In *Narrative Folksong: New Directions, Essays in Appreciation of W. Edson Richmond,* ed. Carol L. Edwards and Kathleen E. B. Manley (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1985), 71-81..

[8] Atkinson, 254.

[9] Allen Walker Read, "The Onomastic World of the American Folksong," in *Names/ Northeast,* 1984, 1.

come back all the way," as Dylan puts it thirty years later in "Mississippi." But Read's "North Countree" observation adds a layer to Dylan's song. The genealogy of "north country" tracks back through the British Isles and the Child ballads: just when we thought we had an unproblematic definition and a biographically secure place name, the legacy of North Country adds new meaning to the borderline.

One of the tasks of onomastics in ballad study is to untangle the aliases of, for example, a particular Child number. Regarding "Lord Randal," for instance, W.F.H. Nicolaisen quotes Bertrand Bronson as calling the "variety of names for the protagonist 'kaleidoscopic' and [commenting] somewhat tongue-in-cheek that 'a page could be filled with his aliases.'"[10] The notion of a ballad hero's aliases, and Lord Randal's in particular, is irresistibly provocative when thinking about Dylan. As Stephen Scobie's superbly titled book *Alias Bob Dylan* implies, Dylan enjoys being an enigma where names are concerned–we could almost say *onomastically*. It's well known that his character in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is somewhat coyly named Alias. But Dylan began using aliases long before Rudy Wurlitzer's script. He changed his own name a couple of times as a young performer, and even after his establishment as Bob Dylan occasionally recorded using now familiar alter egos. But his most significant alias shattered the folk music world and reinvented lyrical language, adding brilliantly to the "kaleidoscopic" variety of Lord Randal's aliases. "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" replaces the pitifully doomed voice of the poisoned Scottish lover with a new, radically powerful "blue-eyed son." The extraordinary supersession of the folk idiom by a speaker entrenched in current social experience speaking with utterly new, poetically striving lyrical combinations, presented the listening world with a redoubtable alias. Countless critics have acknowledged the emancipatory character of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," from the lyrical innovations to the reworked ballad standard. But I wonder how many of us have recognized that onomastics contributed heavily to Dylan's revolutionizing folk music.

*

In his poem "To Larry Rivers," Frank O'Hara compares the poet's skills unfavorably to the painter's:

> And what poet ever sat down
> in front of a Titian, pulled out

[10] W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "The genealogy of 'Lord Randal'; Onomastic Evidence and Dissemination," *Lore and Language* 12 (1994): 159-72. He is quoting Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* Vol. I (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 191.

his verifying tablet and began
to drone? Don't complain, my dear,
You do what I can only name.

I don't doubt O'Hara wants to pay tribute to Rivers. Still I wonder, and I wonder. Even here, where O'Hara seems determined to subordinate poetic to painterly competence, the use of a proper name emerges with unexpected consequences. O'Hara was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, so his choice of an artist to cite as an example should carry some weight – which makes Titian an interesting choice, even if sixteenth-century painting would not have been on display at MoMA. O'Hara, who earned a Harvard degree in English after a stint in the Navy, was not trained as an art historian. Although he was renowned for his eye for modern and contemporary art, I expect he'd also have been aware of the historical controversy surrounding the identification of "true" Titians. Too many of the so-called "Titians" in circulation, though produced in Titian's Venetian workshop, were completed – or completely painted – by workshop assistants. In art history circles, the proper name "Titian" is almost a code word for "unnamable" – which gives special resonance to O'Hara's curious phrase "verifying tablet" to refer to the poet's notebook. The phrase strikes an odd note in a poem not apparently about verification and therefore seems to sow doubt. Maybe the act of copying a Titian and verifying one's model, because "a Titian" might not necessarily be by Titian, ultimately puts the painter on shakier ground even than the poet who "can only name." Maybe, O'Hara implies, it's all in the name, or naming.

A poet's use of proper names can puzzle or inspire, amuse or carry ominous portent. Poetry and onomastics can overlap in tandem with prosody and meaning. What seem serendipitous intersections often reveal poetic skills measured by the capacity to manipulate meter, rhyme effectively but not facilely, to augment meaning, and to give doggerel a wide berth. In "Mississippi" Dylan writes, "All my powers of expression and thoughts so sublime / Could never do you justice in reason or rhyme." The parallel between reason and rhyme is striking, as if the speaker (or Dylan) credits rhyme with the same authority as reason. Possibly, Dylan is remembering Shakespeare's *As You Like It* with these lines:

ORLANDO Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe
I love.
ROSALIND, ⌜ *as Ganymede* ⌝ Me believe it? You may as
soon make her that you love believe it, which I

warrant she is apter to do than to confess she does.
That is one of the points in the which women still
give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth,
are you he that hangs the verses on the trees
wherein Rosalind is so admired?
ORLANDO I swear to thee, youth, by the white hand of
Rosalind, I am that he, that unfortunate he.
ROSALIND, ⌜ *as Ganymede* ⌝ But are you so much in love
as your rhymes speak?
ORLANDO Neither rhyme nor reason can express how
much.[11]

Orlando speaks his line about "rhyme nor reason" to Rosalind disguised as Ganymede – in other words, to an alias. This sort of absent identity, a name that screens a name, might have piqued Dylan's interest if in fact his line in "Mississippi" recalls *As You Like It*. And the hidden "Rosalind" could be an important namesake in the song.

It remains counterintuitive to compare reason and rhyme metaphysically, unless we were to give rhyme the power of portent, of casting charms ("Double, double toil and trouble; / Fire burn, and cauldron bubble."[12]). Typically, reason, deductive thinking, and contemplation all represent a different kind or degree of rationality than rhyme, whose attributes have traditionally been aural/musical pleasure and memory aid. Yet the inference of the line in "Mississippi" is that there might be a flaw in that conventionally hierarchical division.

This possibility resonates in one of Dylan's meditations on naming later in the song, with another Shakespearean link.

Well, the devil's in the alley, mule's in the stall
Say anything you wanna, I have heard it all
I was thinkin' about the things that Rosie said
I was dreaming I was sleeping in Rosie's bed
Walking through the leaves, falling from the trees
Feeling like a stranger nobody sees

[11] *As You Like It*, 3.2. 392-406.
[12] *Macbeth*, 4.1, the three witches together.

Hidden in these extraordinary lines is a meditation on naming, joined to a *chapeau* to a literary precursor. Let's begin by thinking back and linking this alley, with the devil in it, to another alley containing the most famous poet of all time:

> Well, Shakespeare, he's in the alley
> With his pointed shoes and his bells
> Speaking to some French girl
> Who says she knows me well
>
> ("Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again")

The devil has replaced Shakespeare in the alley, and the unwelcome and *unnamed* French girl becomes, in the later song, Rosie, whose name is repeated twice in two lines: "I was thinkin' about the things that Rosie said / I was dreaming I was sleeping in Rosie's bed." The name Rosie at first seems arbitrary, as if any trochaic name would do, especially since Rosie doesn't play a further narrative role in the song. The speaker might have been "thinkin' about the things Annie said," or "dreaming about sleeping in Sara's bed." But I don't think Rosie is arbitrary. On the contrary, I think Dylan is making a subtle bid to engage Shakespeare's best-known onomastic remark, uttered by Juliet from her balcony: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.46-47). If we reach back to Shakespeare in the alley, "Rosie" becomes a kind of onomastic inevitability, standing for all women's names and none, challenging the value of naming in the very act of repurposing Shakespeare's rose.

And Rosie could also be a a nickname for Rosalind – either the invisible Rosalind from the "Neither reason nor rhyme" passage in *As You Like It* or the (also invisible) Rosaline who rejects Romeo at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet*. The loss of Rosaline causes Romeo to say, pertinently to a discussion of names, "Tut, I have lost myself. I am not here. / This is not Romeo." But I think we can go even further. The balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, or at least Juliet's speech, is predominantly about identity. She explains the family situation to Romeo and effectively un-names him:

> 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
> Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face. O, be some other name
Belonging to a man.
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And, for thy name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

Explaining that *his* name is *her* enemy, Juliet offers all of herself to a nameless "Romeo." But what is a nameless Romeo, a figure who has "doffed" his name, other than a figure Dylan imagines "Walking through the leaves, falling from the trees / Feeling like a stranger nobody sees"? The song corkscrews back from the devil to Shakespeare, from Rosie to that "other word" that would smell as sweet, from title to nameless lover, from identity to invisibility. The balcony scene continues into a kind of onomastic aporia: Romeo claims to be "new baptized" as someone who "never will be Romeo"; Juliet asks, reasonably, "What man art thou…bescreened at night?"; and Romeo responds "By a name / I know not how to tell thee who I am."

Shakespeare, being Shakespeare, one-ups everyone in the exploration of naming, and all within a few lines. From "a rose by any other word" to Romeo's namelessness, his "bescreened" identity, is effectively a clinic in onomastics. It is possible that Dylan senses this Shakespearean tour de force and uses the name Rosie before reducing his speaker to "a stranger nobody sees." Perhaps, if this is a tribute to the balcony scene, he hopes to sweep his own early writing ("Stuck Inside of Mobile") and the later "Mississippi" into an onomastic genealogy.

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In Dylan's songs, sometimes names really are denotative alone, meaning nothing more than they appear to mean. Other times the names seem haphazard, or unimportant *cum* names:

There's a note left in the bottle
You can give it to Estelle
She's the one you been wonderin' about

But there's really nothin' much to tell
We both heard voices for awhile
The rest is history
Somebody's got to cry some tears
I guess it must be up to me

Reason or rhyme? Is Estelle merely a metrical convenience, an iambic foot with an easy rhyme? Or is there more to her name? The note in the bottle could be a metaphor for the very idea of metaphor, a message "carried over" across the water from an unknown place that ends up with Estelle. But the enigma of the note seems to melt into the narrative itself. As in "Tangled Up in Blue," the speakers seem to shift from outside – "She's the one *you* been wonderin' about" – to inside – "*We* both heard voices" and "Somebody's got to cry some tears / I guess it must be up to me." The second-person singular dissolves into the first-person plural (a combination of the "I' narrator and Estelle?), which ends in the "up to me" refrain.

Yet, even while acting the narrative juggler, Dylan manages an onomastic coup, giving reason to believe that the name Estelle is more than just convenient prosody. It turns out that it isn't prosody but translation that leads to the turning of the key. "Estelle" derives from "star" in Latin and Italian (*stella*).[13] The name is an anglicized or faux French version of "star," which takes an alert listener back to the crucial second stanza of the song:

If I'd a' thought about it
I never woulda done it
I guess I woulda let it slide
If I'd a' paid attention
To what others were thinkin'
But I was just too stubborn
To ever be governed
By enforced insanity
Someone had to reach for the risin' star
I guess it was up to me.

[13] Vide, Philip Sidney's famous sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella* [Star-lover and Star]. I'm not suggesting Dylan knew Sidney's work – although critics have credited him with having read far obscurer works – I think the song supports his association of *stella* with Estelle.

The "risin' star" in stanza two is a proleptic reference to Estelle. It links the driven ambitious spirit of the song's opening narrative to the "star" who, after a dizzying spiral of episodes in the intervening stanzas, gets the message in the bottle. We must work out for ourselves what it means that reaching for the rising star leads to an enigma in a bottle, and, ultimately, to the tragedy or sad event for which "Somebody's got to cry some tears." But that's hermeneutics, not onomastics. The name "Estelle" in "Up to Me" does all a proper name can do in a song. It carries us into the stylized limbo of the narrative because when the "stubborn" speaker says, "The heart inside me woulda died," the hearts inside *us* live the ballad myth.

I must go on, I can't go on – to quote a phrase. Dylan's proper names seem to multiply geometrically as I think through the albums, the songs, the decades: *New York* town, *Kingsport Town*, *Santa Fe,* dear, dear, dear, dear, dear *Santa Fe*. These are real cities, and real topoi in the songs' narratives, but should we hear them connotatively as well as denotatively? Surely we experience "the stylized limbo of the ballad world" in each of these proper names as Dylan deploys them in the lyrics. Add to those such naming as "(Positively) *4th Street*," a song in which the street itself never appears, rendering the title part of a ballad myth. Similarly, think of "Spanish Harlem Incident" which begins "Gypsy gal, the hands of Harlem / Cannot hold you to its heat": again, the place is real enough, though in the early 60s Spanish Harlem, just south of Harlem on the east side of Manhattan, would have been a dangerous neighborhood and the "Gypsy gal" wouldn't have been a Roma "gal," but Dylan's romantic Hispanic "wildcat" (probably straight out of *West Side Story*). The entire atmosphere of the song is connotative. The song transforms the denotative "Spanish Harlem" itself into a toponym from a ballad world.

Inevitably, if we think about the Gypsy gal we recall that other, more important figure from "Went to See the Gypsy." Critical opinion seems to have settled on identifying the unnamed gypsy as Elvis Presley. There is no solid evidence for this in the song, except maybe the lines "He did it in Las Vegas / And he can do it here." But it's irresistible to speculate on a meeting in the "big hotel" of the two rock idols face to face – though in utterly unspectacular circumstances:

> His room was dark and crowded
> Lights were low and dim
> "How are you?" he said to me
> I said it back to him

No fireworks of recognition. But, while we might not be treated to an exciting meeting between the "Gypsy" and the enigmatic "I," the song ends with a tease:

> the gypsy was gone
> And that pretty dancing girl
> She could not be found
> So I watched the sun come rising
> From that little Minnesota town

Guess what town he's talking about. The absence of the name fills out the ballad myth: the "Minnesota town" doesn't provide a definite qualification so much as a plausible set of biographical or autobiographical identities. Again, it's all about the use and manipulation of proper names: Las Vegas, the Gypsy, Minnesota.

It's impossible to be exhaustive, but I hope these few examples will spark thinking about the sheer onomastic range in the songs, and moreover of Dylan's poetic aims in using names as often and as pointedly as he does. But don't let the question of whether his onomastic choices are meant as "reason or rhyme" keep you up all night leaning on the windowsill. Reason and rhyme, or rationality and mystical charm, are overlapping phenomena in the stylized limbo of the ballad world. The denotative meaning of proper names quickly develops a connotative meaning, deepening and expanding the narrative of every song until it's impossible to separate the name itself from the limbo of the myth. We live inside the myth of 4th Street to "know [positively] what a drag it is to see you," just as we believe rationally as believers inside the myth that "In Paterson that's just the way things go." But are 4th Street and Paterson toponyms, metaphors, or metonyms: places, analogies for those kinds of places, or contiguities substituting for the real name?

Raphael Falco

Poems

J. Randall Turner in "Anatomy of a Fight Song"

By Chuck Sweetman

[Mid-shot of J. Randall Turner, songwriter, in his private recording studio in front of a drum kit. He is in full guitar hero-stance: legs wide, head back, one hand thrusting a guitar pick at the ceiling, the other on the neck of a black Les Paul slung low. He windmills his arm once, striking a power-chord pose, and then holds the guitar up, wafting vibrato. A placard, pinned to his guitar strap reads ***"Motivation."****]*

Fight songs used to be about your high school
or college hailing victory and other such glories.
The Air Force Men of Note. The Allen Eagle Escadrille.
In the old movies, friends sing them, smoking
cigarettes around a piano. They got you pumped
up and made you feel you belonged and believed
in what you all represented. Corny as hell sometimes,
but who cares? That's how good it feels to *root,*
root, root for the home team. If they don't win. . . .

[Close-up]

Now? . . . I don't know. Fight songs today are more
about solo struggles. The push to overcome!
To overcome . . . some dire situation or bad actor.
Some dire situation thrust on you by said bad actor. . .
Probably best to be a bit vague writing a fight song.
Listeners can fill in the blanks. Motivation is what
we're after. If only the juice to take on the stationary
bike, the treadmill . . . the elliptical. . . .

[He strums, eyes closed.]

First thing a fight song needs is righteousness.

[He sings.]

I wanted to love and to belong, / but I let other voices . . .
drown! But I let other voices drown my song. / I've been
away from . . . home? . . . from . . . me too long. . .

[He flips a switch to sample some gospel piano.]

Soul stirring. This journey is hard but worthy.
So I'll start from scratch, / reach . . . come from
behind. / This is my . . . my walk on the glass? /
I've made up my mind. . . – But wait! Your journey
– no, worse – your belief *in* the journey is challenged.
. . . I don't really care if it's too much for you. /
Go ahead turn your back . . . walk away! /
Go ahead walk away. / It's what I've got to do. . .
Now we're cookin'. Let's add a refrain that raises
the roof: *Now's the time for second-winds and poker-fa*
– game faces. / It's not too late to dust off. . .
to dust off. . . It's not too late. . .

[Long-shot, Turner stands without guitar in the middle of his studio.]

Tell you the fight song I wish I would have written.
Might not seem like one. But it is. Carter Ready's
"The Distance." *Yeah the dis-is-tance is the har-dest thing.*
Remember? Starts with Carter's typical working-class
guy in love with a working-class girl. And how good
that feels. *Baby, I like how it is when you're so near. /*
Baby, you're the only one who calms my fears.

But when you get to the bridge you realize it's about
her. For reasons we don't know, his *girl* is the one
feeling the distance. And he's worried about her
and about what her struggles mean for him, too.
So he takes her hands, or as I imagine calls long-distance,
and says – pleads, *Oh, don't let them buy you, baby, /*
Don't let 'em spit on you. (And here they are – the bad actors.)
Don't let 'em drive you, baby, / Don't let 'em sit with you.
He's losing her to them. She's cracking. What's he
got that can help her in the real world? Double-quick!
No time for Kristofferson. Just say something!
I'll be your raging truck. / I'll be your mud bridge.
Don't get too far away. / Step back from the ledge!

[Mid-shot]

Only way this makes any sense is that he's desperate.
He's throwing out anything he can to prove his love.
Problem is, he's practically begging when he needs
to project confidence – competence. That's where
Bill Driscoll comes in on lead guitar. Saves him really.
Gives this inarticulate, grasping soul a voice
in a solo that thunders like a chorus of bagpipes!

[Turner assumes a wide-legged guitar-hero's stance and scats the solo in between singing, eyes closed, bending frets of an air guitar, which he keeps playing as he goes on.]

Reveille to her ambitions. An anthem to courage.
If only the courage yet to be born in her as he feels
it born in him as he reaches into the well-spring
of desperate hope. The same place where Dylan
and Springsteen reach when they need a street-fighter's
reply to nothing left to lose. Tramps like us, losers,
boxers, tambourine men. . . *Now's the time for second*

winds and game faces / It's not too late to dust off
and rise. / We'll . . . we'll catch the wind, run
our races. / It's our time now. Throw the dice.

[Randall lifts the neck of his air guitar high and strums quickly. He looks around as to gather the bass and drums in a big finale, then swings the guitar down in a flourish. Then, a bit out of breath, he turns back to the camera.]

It's a young person's genre – the fight song. . .
I like that about it.

[Fade]

Kindness II

After Naomi Shihab Nye's "Kindness"

By Thomas Palaima

When our evening suns leave gray
reminders we have been and gone,
we live in what we give away,
attention, caring, kindness.

Kindness keeps secure and close
much-loved and loyal companions,
making now fewer new friends
in these days of miracles
and wonders and fearsome news
fake and real, like God made man.

Steady streams of media,
antisocial vulgar
and designed
to make us
lose our minds,
ark flood our kindnesses
leaving nothing left to find.

The second great commandment
stands in Ozymandian ruins,
hopeless and forlorn.

We long since are become
algorithmic prisoners
handcuffed to handheld screens,
watching all the latest gossip,
hearing all the latest rhyme.
We drag our tired brains about,

put our better angels to sleep,
leave little room in our souls
for the saving grace of kindness.

Kindness waits and waits and waits.

Kindness is kind to us when
we forget to bring kindness along
in the lives we live mostly now
in bits, pieces, small moments
that will never make history
even from below.

Kindness,
like a bird on the horizon,
sings a clear and joyful
promise song
at his own expense:
“I am here and will be, too,
the next time and the next.”

“I have no date to expire.
I’m not like Pretty Peggy.
I’ll hear you call
through all that
shmatta shmatta shmatta.
I’ll bless and keep you always.
You’ll have no need of wishes.”

Your own kind acts will be
the residue of you.

Essays

"The Philosophy of Rough and Rowdy Ways World Wide Tour"

By Jack Walters

Ironically, the Rough and Rowdy Ways World Wide Tour was anything but rambunctious. Yet we should haven't expected anything different – it is the trickster in Dylan.[1] Ignoring the hell-bound blues numbers, including the stop-start Chicago riffs, one of the defining aspects of the tour – especially the spring and fall 2024 legs – was the pared-down arrangements. After the interlude of the *boisterous* Outlaw Tour in the summer of 2024, Dylan returned to the Rough and Rowdy Ways Tour in Europe; the latter half of the fall leg produced, to a certain extent, quieter and sparser arrangements in which silence and space were equally important as the words and the music.

Starting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on November 2, 2021, the Rough and Rowdy Ways World Wide Tour reached the Royal Albert Hall, London, on November 14, 2024. Throughout the three years, Dylan stuck with a heavily curated setlist, highlighting his 39th studio album, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, a record that pivots around music and art, inspiration and creativity, Greco-Roman and bardic traditions, Eastern and Western religions, divinity and immortality, time and timelessness. Within the live arrangements of the spring and fall legs were pauses and pockets of space, which, in Japanese music, is known as *ma*, and can be found in Western music, as well.[2] This created an audible lacunae that, paradoxically, filled the compositions. Theoretically, music is embedded into the bedrock of silence; the two are in a symbiotic relationship: music is born into the silence, which, in itself, does not emerge *ex nihilo*.[3]

Gisèle Brelet writes in her essay "Music and Silence," "That silence into which music is born is not pure nothingness: in it dwell an attentiveness and an expectation."[4] Certainly, attentiveness is crucial when attending a Dylan concert, as he makes the audience come to him, not vice versa. Yet, even to his usual standards, Dylan, in the 2024 spring and fall legs, challenged his audience in a way he hadn't before: making them attuned to silence. The silence became a counterpoint, a reference, a sound in itself. Donnie Herron, who had been in the

[1] For a reading of the role of the trickster in Dylan's personas/work, see Stephen Scobie, *Alias Bob Dylan: Revisited* (Red Deer Press, 2003), 31-34.

[2] Murakami, Haruki, & Ozawa, Seiji. *Absolutely on Music*. Vintage, 2017. 22.

[3] Brelet, Gisèle. "Music and Silence." *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art.* Brill, 2017. 31.

[4] Ibid.

band since 2005 on steel guitars, violin, and mandolin, played his final Dylan concert on April 6, 2024.[5] Yet even before the multi-instrumentalist's exit, Dylan had rendered the sound sparingly.

Silence, in music, can serve as a destructive and constructive force. For example, when we hear a silent interlude we attempt to fill it.[6] Occasionally, Dylan did not finish a lyric, an omission that created a dialectic between what was said and left unsaid. We, the seasoned audience, knew the omitted lyric. "A big part of songwriting, like all writing, is editing – distilling thought down to essentials," Dylan writes in 2022's *The Philosophy of Modern Song*. "Novice writers often hide behind filigree. In many cases the artistry is in what is unsaid."[7] Ernest Hemingway writes about the Iceberg theory, or the theory of omission, in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932):

> If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have the feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them.[8]

After playing "Key West (Philosopher Pirate)" in Liverpool on November 3, 2024, Dylan said, "Well, thank you. I wrote that song at Ernest Hemingway's house. I think there's a lot of him in that song. I don't know for sure, but I suspect it."[9] Perhaps the first significant use of omission in Dylan's writing was on *John Wesley Harding* (1967), which is likely a reference to the English poet and engraver William Blake, who apprehended that usually the potency of a work derives from ellipses.[10] Blake is, of course, referenced in "I Contain Multitudes," a track that, in part, shares with Blake's meaning of "eternity," which, on one level, is all of time – past, present, and future – exists.[11] In the fifth verse, in which he directly cites Blake, Dylan sings, "Everything's flowin' all at the same time," echoing this definition of eternity. Conversely,

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[5] *Expecting Rain*. https://expectingrain.com/dok/who/h/herrondon.shtml, accessed December 22, 2024.

[6] Bindeman, Steven L. *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*. Brill, 2017. 32.

[7] Dylan, Bob. *The Philosophy of Modern Song*. Simon & Schuster, 2022. 55.

[8] Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*, Jonathan Cape, 1958. 183.

[9] Hewitt, Harrison. *X* (November 04, 2024), https://x.com/harryhew/status/1853495196383953297, accessed December 22, 2024.

[10] Ackroyd, Peter. *Blake*. Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995. 191. The author made the connection when reading Ackroyd's analysis of omissions in Blake's poetry and art.

[11] Higgs, John. *William Blake vs the World* Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021. 278-94

Blake also saw "eternity" as an atemporal state, existing only in the present moment, an eternal now.[12]

Dylan is never linear and therefore there was a Janus-faced nature to the Rough and Rowdy European fall leg. On the one hand, there were vestiges of the rollicking Outlaw Tour; on the other, it was delicate to the point of stillness. The former aesthetic can partly be attributed to Jim Keltner who, replacing Jerry Pentecost for the Outlaw Tour, stayed on for the European leg. Keltner is a busier drummer than his antecedents Charley Drayton and Pentecost, respectively. Naturally, Dylan, at times, leaned into Keltner's larger sound, even perhaps selected songs due to Keltner's inclusion.[13] His forceful drumming could be heard in the live versions of "All Along the Watchtower" and "Desolation Row"; the latter, with the walloping rataplan of tom-toms and Doug Lancio's pulsive acoustic guitar, echoed the rhythm section of "Series of Dreams."

The feeling of the Rough and Rowdy European leg being a continuation of the Outlaw Tour is best exemplified on the first night of the Royal Albert Hall concerts, as Ray Padgett discerningly highlighted.[14] But the following night Dylan did a one-eighty: some of the arrangements were rendered bare, with him performing a near *a cappella* version of "My Own Version of You." There was a noticeable difference between the two versions, as well as the overall feel of the concerts. Therein lies the question: what did this shift mean? Simply a return to the muted sound first heard in spring and the latter half of fall due to a stylistic preference. However, this choice could have been influenced by theoretical ideas.

In art, silence can have multifarious meanings: salvation or void. Loud or quiet. And a way to represent a character torn from his "true self," others, or God.[15] Maimonides, a Torah scholar in the Middle Ages, postulated that "God's essential unknowability means that He has only negative attributes, then the only appropriate way of describing His nature is through silence, known as negative theology."[16] Due to the inadequacy of language, some writers have interpreted words as ineffectual in articulating the *qualia* (a quality or property as perceived or

[12] Ibid.

[13] Tenschert, Laura. "Slow coming home": Rough and Rowdy Ways Tour Finale (with Ray Padgett). *Definitely Dylan* (November 24, 2024), https://www.definitelydylan.com/listen/2024/11/24/slow-coming-home-rough-and-rowdy-ways-tour-finale-with-ray-padgett, accessed December 22, 2024.

[14] Padgett, Ray. "Last Night at the Royal Albert Hall." *Flagging Down the Double E's* (November 13, 2024), https://www.flaggingdown.com/p/last-night-at-the-royal-albert-hall, accessed December 22, 2024.

[15] Michalski, Przemysław. "The Significance of Silence in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." 2017. 73.

[16] Bindeman, Steven L. *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*. Brill, 2017. 35.

experienced by a person). Others, as misrepresenting the subjectivity of human experience.[17] Therefore, in circumspection, they put down their pen; they are, in other words, an "inactive artist." Of course, an "inactive artist" is not often an *active* choice. Although Dylan has never been an "inactive artist," Dylan addresses the idea of reticence in the opening couplet of 1971's "Watching the River Flow": "What's the matter with me / I don't have much to say." Preceding the writing of this, Dylan, in just under a year and a half, released *Nashville Skyline*, *Self Portrait*, and *New Morning*. Ergo it was not so much a question of activity as the *feeling* of having little to say. Or, more accurately, anything *new* to say artistically. And, thus, Dylan was perhaps enveloped by an artistic silence. Until the European 2024 fall leg, Dylan opened every concert of the Rough and Rowdy Ways Tour with "Watching the River Flow." Deadpan and cool, Dylan delivers the lyrics when he *now* has a lot to say – in fact, a whole concert of words.

The tension in "My Own Version of You" (Royal Albert Hall night two) was not the words; rather, the extensive pauses between the piano notes and vocals. The style of the rendition echoed its lyrical inspiration: the English novelist Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Drawing directly on *Frankenstein*, "My Own Version of You" is a metatextual track about the creative process – the narrator is *literally* building his creation like the young scientist Victor Frankenstein creating a monster:

> Looking for the necessary body parts
> Limbs and livers and brains and hearts
> I want to bring someone to life - is what I want to do
> I want to create my own version of you

There is a link between silence and creativity. In his book, *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*, Steven L. Bindeman writes:

If the experience of silence can provide us with a charged field of energy, then it would follow that silence also resonates with related issues regarding the origin of life and the animist belief that all things have a soul. Mary Shelley's novel of Dr. Frankenstein's dream, to create life out of lifeless matter, is similarly of deep mythological and psychological significance.[18]

[17] Michalski, Przemysław. "The Significance of Silence in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." 2017. 74.
[18] Bindeman, Steven L. *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*. Brill, 2017. 48.

Therefore, with these skeletal arrangements, Dylan reinforced his lyrical ideas through his musical approach. As a performer, Dylan, in theory, on stage is creating out of lifeless matter – a scientific experiment. Known for radically deconstructing his arrangements, Dylan can be seen as a Process artist in which the process of making art is in view. During the Japan leg of spring 2023, Dylan attempted Grateful Dead's "Brokedown Palace" three times, which included a version on April 16, 2023, that, fittingly, collapsed after one and a half minutes.

Perhaps no other song on the Rough and Rowdy Ways World Wide Tour showcased its lyrical content via its live arrangements better than "Key West," a metaphysical threnody, that echoes the modernist poet T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" (1936-1942), a tetralogy of poems in which mystical silences underpin the collection.[19] Eliot based "Little Gidding," the first poem of the "Four Quartets," on the town of Little Gidding, Huntingdonshire, England, after a visit, mesmerized by the supposed timelessness of the village.[20] Seemingly, the unadorned live versions of "Key West" were, through poetic silences, purposefully arranged to draw greater attention to the timelessness and mysticism of the composition.

The southernmost key, Key West is an island in the Straits of Florida, within the U.S. state of Florida, where the Gulf of Mexico meets the Atlantic Ocean. In the song, Key West is both a place and a place within, capturing the liminality of existence. Both Eliot and Dylan use a real-life location – "Little Gidding" and "Key West" – as a jumping-off point to explore time, salvation, and immortality. These themes became foregrounded on the second night of the Royal Albert Hall concerts when "Key West" oscillated between music and silence, with Dylan distinguishing between the two. Yet, simultaneously, he rendered the opposites obsolete, due to showing that there is music in silence. As established, there is a link between silence and creativity. Through the punctuated silences and the stripped-down arrangements, Dylan married music and lyric; by doing so, he foregrounded the theme of creativity in his concerts. Therefore creativity, through silence, was invoked upon most nights, specifically the spring and fall 2024 legs, as if it was a Greek Muse.

[19] Michalski, Przemysław. "The Significance of Silence in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot." 75.

[20] González. Pedro Blas. "Time and Permanence in T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets." *Russell Kirk Center* (October 27, 2014), https://kirkcenter.org/essays/time-permanence-eliot-four-quartets/, accessed December 22, 2024.

Interview

The Dylan Review *spoke to "Steady Rollin'" Bob Margolin, guitar player in Muddy Waters' band from 1973 to 1980, about the Last Waltz and his memories of meeting Bob Dylan in Greenwich Village. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

***Dylan Review*: When did you first hear Chicago blues music?**

Bob Margolin: In the mid-60s, around the time I started playing guitar, which was in 1964. I was really inspired by Chuck Berry, and then I followed the path of his inspiration back to Muddy Waters and deep Chicago blues. I fell in and I haven't crawled out yet.

Did you listen to the Stones, and the British blues bands growing up in Boston?

BM: Yeah, I saw the Stones in 1965 in Boston. And again in 1969.

***DR*: In Boston, you were part of what later became known as the "Bosstown" scene, in the psychedelic garage band The Freeborne. Did you prefer blues or psychedelic rock then?**

BM: Freeborne was mostly psychedelic. We started as 17 and 18 year olds. But, on an album that we did in 1968 [*Peak Impressions*], I had written one blues song. And that's where I was headed afterwards.

***DR*: I've read that Freeborne once opened for the Velvet Underground. Is that true?**

BM: Yes we did. It was interesting, because they were pretty progressive. They were doing a lot of things with feedback. I was torn about that gig because The Doors were playing in Boston that night and I had intended to go. And then this opening gig for the Velvet Underground came up. It was interesting to meet Lou Reed and watch the band and listen to them being "artistic."

***DR*: Did you encounter Van Morrison when he was living in Boston in 1967?**

BM: I didn't speak with him, but I do remember when he was in the area. It was around the time he was making that *Astral Weeks* album and I saw him play two or three times in the scene that we were in. But I first heard about him in the fall of 1966. A band I was in played a song by Them called "Mystic Eyes." That was before he was suddenly around the Boston area. I was very moved by his music. He's an exciting performer, and what a soulful voice.

***DR*: So how do you go from Boston's psychedelic scene to backing Muddy Waters, still in your early 20s?**

BM: Every band I was in after Freeborne was either a blues band or trying to be a blues band. So I went deeper and deeper into that style of music. There were many young musicians living in Boston that enjoyed blues. I learned from them about what was happening and I got to see a lot of musicians coming through. And by the early 70s I was in blues bands that opened up for Muddy Waters.

Muddy could see I was playing old school Chicago Blues. The band I was in was just smart enough not to play Muddy Waters songs in a gig opening for Muddy Waters. But he could see that I was playing Elmore James-style slide guitar, and Jimmy Reed songs. He liked that and encouraged me**.**

***DR*: Did you learn that slide guitar style by listening to records?**

BM: Mostly from records, but I saw people. Whenever Muddy was playing in town in the early 70s, I'd be right in front of him, at the front table trying to learn, taking it in with the deepest respect. It was the best music that I ever heard in my life.

***DR*: How did Muddy Waters ask you to join his band?**

BM: One night, in August of 1973, Muddy was playing in Boston and I was the first one in the club. I wanted to get a seat right in front of him and watch him. It was on a Tuesday night and the band was starting.

I saw George "Mojo Dreamy-Eyed Good-Lookin'" Buford, the harmonica player, and he asked me the fateful question: "got any reefer?" And I did, because that's what you do for a band on the road. So I gave him a bag. And then he said, "Oh wait, Muddy fired Sammy [Lawhorn] last night. Wait right here." Then Muddy came out of his dressing room, and said, "Come to my hotel room tomorrow and bring the guitar."

He presumed that I would take a chance to change the rest of my life, which I did. He was absolutely right. I saw the whole of my life right in front of my eyes, standing with him and nobody else in that club. I said, "If I can do this, hell yeah, I'm gonna do it." What better way to learn about this music that I love than from my favourite musician who created it? It was really obvious in one second.

The next day, I showed up at his hotel room. I did not have an acoustic guitar, but I brought a very small amplifier, which I still have, a Fender Tweed Deluxe. I set it up in the room and he said, "Play it." I knew he was going to ask that, so I played a Chicago style slow blues and he started singing along with what I was playing.

It's not that he thought I was great. He recognized that I was trying to play the old school style, and liked it. But it was more to him like a puppy doing a trick: "Oh wow, I found a great guitar player!" He called his girlfriend into the room, "Hey listen to this kid playing my shit." And, I did. So he said, "Let's give it a try."

Muddy then called his drummer into the room – Willie "Big Eyes" Smith – and told him I was going to be in the band. He gave me a big smile and held out his hand and said, "Welcome to the club." So that put me on the road.

***DR*: In 1975 you recorded *The Muddy Waters Woodstock Album* with members of The Band and Paul Butterfield. How did it compare to other albums you played on with Muddy?**

BM: The *Woodstock* album was a whole different thing. Instead of recording it in Chess Studios, in Chicago, we went to Woodstock and did it at Levon's home. He and Henry Glover produced it. Muddy brought me and [piano player] Pinetop Perkins so he would have something familiar behind him. But it was a thrill working with Levon Helm and Garth Hudson. I was already into their music pretty deep. I was happy to get to do that.

It was also a thrill to get to play with Paul Butterfield. He was a big deal to me ten years before the *Woodstock* album, when the Butterfield Blues Band broke out. I was very deeply influenced by them in 1965, 1966. I loved Mike Bloomfield's playing. It was over the top and in-your-face. Just amazingly powerful and very musical. It wasn't just a lot of shredding.

***DR*: Did you ever play with Mike Bloomfield?**

BM: No. But in March 1974, we both played on an educational TV special. The first couple of songs Muddy played with his band, and then guests joined him. Mike Bloomfield was going to borrow my amplifier.

He said, "I really like your playing. Look man, you got your guitar set up like Jimmy Rogers did. That's the old school stuff. You don't know how good you are, man." It was very intense. It was a thrill to meet him and have him be that nice to me.

***DR*: What was Muddy's relationship like with Levon Helm?**

BM: He enjoyed playing with Levon. He'd say, "I like this. This is going good, we'll have some fun." And they did! Levon just loved him. He really wanted to make it a great album, and I think he did.

***DR*: Later in 1975, you first met Bob Dylan at the Bottom Line club in New York, when he sat in for a Muddy Waters set. How did that happen?**

We were playing at the Bottom Line regularly, two or three days at a time. It was a showcase club in New York City. But on this night, somebody said that Bob Dylan was coming down.

I was in this tiny dressing room when Dylan entered with an entourage and sat down. He had a lot of people with him. And everybody was very excited because he wasn't out in public all that much at that particular time. The room was electric. Muddy could tell this guy must be a big deal, but I don't think he knew anything about him.

Dylan asked me a couple of questions about how Muddy set up his guitar; I told him it was kind of like an acoustic with heavy strings, except it's an electric guitar. That's the way he likes to play. He's got big strong hands and he hits the guitar like an acoustic. The way he learned in Mississippi. And I think Dylan found that interesting, but people kept coming up to him and wanting to talk to him and say thanks to him. Even if it was just so they could say, "Well I was talking to Bobby the other day…"

I said to Dylan that it was amazing to sit here and watch this whole scene around him. And he said "I wish *I* could just watch."

***DR*: Dylan eventually joined Muddy on stage, playing electric harmonica. Did you persuade him?**

I didn't persuade anybody! But I did ask Dylan if he wanted to sit in. I told Muddy, who said to bring him up after a couple of songs. And someone gave him a harp and an amp. There is a picture of [harmonica player] Paul Oscher, who had been in Muddy's band, but was not at the time. He had been sitting in earlier. There's a picture of him giving Dylan the microphone.

***DR*: What songs did you play together?**

BM: One that Muddy did called "Can't Get No Grindin'," which is a Memphis Minnie song that he had cut on an album in 1973, with a very exciting arrangement. I remember us playing that. I can't remember if we did more or not.

I do remember that when Muddy introduced Dylan, as he was bringing him up to the stage, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we've got a young man gonna come up and play some harmonica. Give a nice round of applause to John Dylan." I whispered to Muddy, "His name is *Bob* Dylan, like my name. *Bob*." And as though he was just repeating himself he added, "*Bob* Dylan." And the whole place goes apeshit. They just went crazy. And Dylan came up on the stage and played along.

And then Dylan brought some other people with him: a clarinet player named Perry, Scarlett Rivera, and probably one or two other people. Dave Brubeck opened the show. He had a band with his son, so Chris Brubeck was up there playing trombone. There's a picture of Muddy, Chris Brubeck and Dylan together.

***DR*: What was it like playing with Scarlett Rivera? I don't think I've heard violin on a Muddy Waters record.**

BM: Actually, there is violin on some of Muddy's very earliest records, [later compiled] on the album *Down On Stovall's Plantation*. He was playing with a violin player who was much older than him, named Son Sims. So it wasn't like we were breaking new ground. Though we didn't run into clarinets often.

***DR*: You met Phil Ochs that night too?**

BM: He was there with Dylan, and he seemed troubled. He was starting shit with people. He looked at me. I was wearing a suit that I bought that afternoon. I had gone window shopping in New York City and I saw a suit that I liked, so I bought it and I wore it that night.

Ochs said, "What are you doing wearing a suit, man? Bobby don't need to wear a suit." And I said, "Hey, there's Muddy Waters over there. Why don't you go and give him some shit about his suit. At which point he looked at Muddy and Muddy's friend, who was his driver and bodyguard from Mississippi. Muddy's friend looked at Ochs like he was somebody that was about to give Muddy some shit. This guy did not have white around his eyes. He had red around his eyes. He was one of the scariest looking people that I ever saw.

And Dylan saw this guy looking at Phil Ochs and he said, "Telephone call for Phil Ochs! Take it outside Phil." And that diffused the situation.

***DR*: I noticed in photographs that blues great Victoria Spivey was at the Bottom Line that night. Dylan played harmonica in the studio for Spivey in 1962.**

Dylan was clearly thrilled to see her. They weren't on stage at the same time, which I guess could have happened, but it didn't. I'm told that a bunch of them went back to her house afterwards and hung out all night. I wasn't there.

In this period, Dylan was recruiting acts for the Rolling Thunder Revue. Was there ever any question that Muddy might play one of those shows?

Nobody said anything like that. We did not see Dylan again until *The Last Waltz*.

***DR*: What are your memories of *The Last Waltz*?**

BM: We had made Muddy's *Woodstock* album in early 1975. It had already been recorded before the Bottom Line. But the next year, Levon arranged for Muddy to come to *The Last Waltz*. And again, Muddy brought me and Pinetop with him.

It came up very quickly. I didn't have the Stratocaster that I usually use. We'd been on the road playing in small clubs, and I had a big archtop guitar with me. And so I brought that to *The Last Waltz*.

We flew into a pretty interesting scene. All the other musicians knew who Muddy was. They were excited to see him and be around him. But he didn't know who they were. He didn't know the rock stars of the day. I don't think he was around Bob Dylan at all, but I was in dressing rooms with him before he played.

After the show, the musicians went back to the hotel and jammed, in a conference room that The Band used for rehearsals. I played "Hideaway" with Eric Clapton. Stephen Stills borrowed my guitar to play for a while. They all liked that archtop guitar. I'd been there for a few hours and I was packing up the guitar to leave, and Bob Dylan walked into the room and said, "I thought we were going to play together?"

I said, "I'll stay." So, he put together a blues jam that he led, with me on guitar, Eric Clapton and himself. And Dr. John on piano, Levon on drums, Paul Butterfield on the harp. Nobody was playing bass, so I said to Ron Wood, "I've seen you play bass with the Jeff Beck Group. Why don't you play bass?"

We played a few Robert Johnson songs. I remember him doing "Kind Hearted Woman Blues" in particular.

***DR*: It's funny that you mention your Gibson archtop guitar – I always notice it when I watch the film. Everyone else is playing Stratocasters. It really makes you stand out.**

BM: If I'd been able to do it deliberately, I would have brought a Strat' too – I had a 1956. But I think that archtop guitar impressed people. A lot of well-known musicians watched the rehearsal, the day before *The Last Waltz*. They saw me helping to arrange "Mannish Boy," telling the other musicians what Muddy wants. It wasn't complex or anything. But people were interested in me, and they seemed to appreciate that guitar.

I'll tell you a real quick story. I sold that guitar in 2016. I was making an album and needed all the money that I could get. And so, I sold that guitar to a nice young man from New York City.

Later, in 2022, I was playing a *Last Waltz* [tribute] show in St. Petersburg, Florida, and he brought the guitar so I could play it again for the night.

It was wonderful to be with that guitar. I owned it from 1975 to 2016. I was really familiar with it and it meant a lot to get to play it again. At the end of the night, I packed it up in a bag and thanked him.

I went out to the bus to go back to the hotel, and I got a call from the promoter. He said, "Bob, can you come back?"

Two of the musicians on that *Last Waltz* show bought the guitar back from the guy and gave it to me for a present. We're talking about a lot of money. But they had the kindness to do that. I have it in the room I'm in right now. I made a whole album with it called *Thanks*. I was so happy to have it back.

***DR*: Muddy's performance in *The Last Waltz* really steals the show. Do you remember seeing the film in the theater?**

BM: Yes, I saw it in Brookline, Massachusetts, at the theater I've been going to since I was a little kid.

Something I've noticed about *The Last Waltz* is that it's meant to be seen in a theater, with the interviews loud enough to hear but then the actual music *extremely* loud. If I watch *The Last Waltz* now, I have to keep my hand on the volume control the whole time. Because if you want to hear what they're saying in the interviews, you have to turn it down as fast as you possibly can when the music comes in. And that's the way they chose to present it, but it was being mixed and presented in movie theatres. Not home video.

***DR*: Is it correct that there's no overdubs on the performance of "Mannish Boy?," unlike some of the other performances in the film?**

BM: Probably not. Muddy didn't need to do it and I didn't need to do it. None, as far as I know. What you see is what happened on stage.

***DR*: Shortly before *The Last Waltz,* Muddy recorded the album *Hard Again* with Johnny Winters. Was that album as enjoyable to make as it is to listen to?**

BM: It was a band in a room having fun, and Johnny Winter very deliberately captured that. He knew how to make that happen. He used a lot of room mics – mics suspended near the ceilings to pick up the ambience of the room, which was a warm-sounding large wooden room. Johnny Winters used the sound of those mics more than most producers would, so it sounds like exactly what it was. We were all sitting there having fun, playing and enjoying it. And you can hear it. It comes through. People love the sound of that album and all credit to Johnny Winters.

I got to produce a reissue of *Hard Again* and there was no way we were going to change his mix and that sound, maybe just remaster it for a touch more clarity. That's all.

***DR*: You've covered Bob Dylan several times on your solo albums, including "Not Dark Yet," "I Shall Be Released," and "Tears of Rage." Why did you choose to record these songs, rather than Dylan's more traditional twelve-bar blues songs?**

BM: These are the songs that moved me, and I just play the way I play them. Honestly, when I heard the song, "It's not dark yet / but it's getting there," I loved the song. But I did not like the production of it. It seemed very amorphous. Little guitar parts were just emerging for a second and then falling back into this really soupy mix. Maybe Dylan liked that, I don't know. But I sure didn't.

So I just made the song clear when I recorded it. I started with one guitar, adding a second acoustic guitar and bass. Each verse, I'd add something to it. That's the musical approach I take.

***DR*: How did you come up with the arrangement for "Tears of Rage?" You play a beautiful Muddy Waters-style slide guitar. It takes it in a different direction from The Band's version, and it works brilliantly.**

BM: It was just an idea I had to punctuate my vocals, while playing an acoustic guitar part behind it.

***DR*: Your new album is called *Thanks*. Besides your returned archtop guitar, what else inspired you to be thankful?**

BM: While it's a thanks to that specific guitar that came to be mine again, it's also a thanks to Muddy Waters, and all the wonderful musicians that I met through him. And definitely thanks to The Band for their music, and the small part I got to play in it. And the friendship that I had with Levon Helm over many years, and the rest of The Band.

I last saw Robbie Robertson when I played a *Last Waltz* show in Nashville in 2019, and he was a guest. He came down a day early to rehearse, and he came over to me and said "we don't look like *that* anymore." And that was certainly true!

We talked about the performance at *The Last Waltz*, and the rehearsals for it. Robbie remembered a lot of things that I didn't remember. He was talking about Paul Butterfield's harp on "Mannish Boy," a part that he played way behind Muddy. Instead of just playing the riff that Muddy sings, *bah-bah-bah-dah-bah*, he would go *bah-bah-bah-dah-bah-wowww!* He would keep this warble going.

He would use circular breathing to do that. So it would sustain like an organ. Muddy always loved the way Paul Butterfield played. He'd say, "That holds up my voice. I really like that." But Robbie remembered that circular breathing part, which I didn't.

That night in 2019, I played "Mannish Boy" and Robbie came out for the encore. It was amazing to be standing on stage with Robbie, looking over to see him playing "The Weight" and "I Shall Be Released.

Bob Dylan – Questions on Masculinity

"Gender Performance in Dylan's *The Philosophy of Modern Song*"

By Graley Herren, Xavier University

The Philosophy of Modern Song chronicles how young Bobby Zimmerman used music and pop culture to transform himself into Bob Dylan. The novelist Ralph Ellison pointed out that "while one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's 'ancestors'" (140). Dylan's book is a tribute to his chosen ancestors. He assembles an eclectic group of 66 songs and imagines his way into them through idiosyncratic riffs and commentaries. The book's title implies that if you listen to these songs and read Dylan's reflections, you'll get a mosaic self-portrait of his "philosophy of modern song." In the process, you can also learn a lot about his philosophy of masculinity and gender performance. *The Philosophy of Modern Song* chronicles his education from several groundbreaking artists in the 1950s. These mentors and chosen ancestors taught him to question, resist, and reimagine gender, rejecting a rigid, narrow, stable essence of masculinity in favor of shifting performances across a spectrum.

You couldn't find a better image for communicating these concerns than the cover photo. Pictured on the left is pioneering rocker and queer icon Little Richard; in the middle is Alis Leslie, nicknamed "the female Elvis"; and on the right is rockabilly star Eddie Cochran. Think of the cover like a radio dial of gender, with Dylan at the knob, moving back and forth from station to station throughout the book. In this article I'd like to tune into some of the strongest frequencies for young Bobby in the fifties, as rebroadcast by old Dylan in 2022.

Marlon Brando & James Dean

In her book *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*, feminist philosopher Susan Bordo recalls Dylan's influence on the young men of her generation.

> Among popular entertainers, the only one whose style of masculinity they consciously emulated was that of folk singer Bob Dylan, who combined poetry, domestic rebellion, and anti-establishment passion with lousy posture, a Salvation Army wardrobe, a voice that defied convention, and a sense of indifference to his audience, even when

> bellowing lyrics of protest. My friends slouched like Dylan, they mumbled like Dylan, they scoured the Newark thrift stores in search of Dylan-like clothing. (132)

Bordo points out that Dylan's 60s persona was an amalgamation of 50s trailblazers: "What most of them didn't know, however, was that young Robert Zimmerman, and many other singers and public politicos of the sixties, just slightly older than the boys I knew, had gotten their inspiration from two movie stars of the fifties: Marlon Brando and James Dean" (132).

Brando first achieved recognition in 1947 for his brutish but irresistible performance as Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. But it was his volcanic eruption in Elia Kazan's 1951 film adaptation that turned Brando into a celebrity. Two years later, in his starring role as Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One*, the leather-clad Brando astride his Triumph motorcycle became the face, voice, pouting lips, and rippling chest of youth rebellion. In his commentary on The Who's "My Generation" for *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, Dylan credits Brando with sounding a clarion call for his generation:

> Marlon Brando, like Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and the first wave of rockers, fell somewhere between the greatest generation ever and the baby boomers; too young to fight against the Nazis, too old to go to Woodstock. Yet when Brando replied, "Whaddaya got?" when a local girl asked him what he was rebelling against in the movie *The Wild One*, it set the stage for the sixties and the rebellion against the picture-perfect prefab communities the boys came home from the war to build. (43-44)

It wasn't just the communities that were picture-perfect and prefabricated, it was the boys themselves. One of the main things Brando rebelled against was the era's smothering codification of correct masculinity.

In his book *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando and Dean*, Graham McCann observes, "Brando's character [in *The Wild One*] epitomized an entire subculture that was fast spreading in America at that time – the drifting gang. Johnny inspired many young men in search of a role model, including Dylan, Presley and Dean. The cool, self-confident pose adopted by Johnny disguises a person who is actually profoundly insecure and confused" (106). The insecurity behind the tough-guy front would later become a hallmark of Dylan's songs and performances, as it was for Brando, who combined irrepressible sexual vitality with the neediness and fragility of a child. In the case of Brando's Johnny, the character's rebellion and confusion wasn't just existential: it was also gendered. Graham McCann asserts, "From his

first appearance, leading the swarm of motorcycles, this man/boy lone ranger is established as a figure of considerable force. Johnny appeals to men and women alike, and while this is never openly expressed by the character himself, there are unmistakable signs that he needs the adoration of both sexes" (106). Though young Bobby Zimmerman could scarcely have imagined it when he was hanging with his gang at Camp Herzl or playing sparsely attended gigs with the Golden Chords, Dylan would soon find himself surrounded by an adoring entourage and exalted as an object of obsessive adoration like Johnny, and like Brando himself.

One man who obsessively adored Brando was James Dean. He only appeared in three films before his life was cut short by a car crash at age 24, but his performances in *East of Eden, Rebel Without a Cause,* and *Giant,* the latter two released after his death, were enough to secure his mythological status for Bobby Zimmerman's generation. The screen icon's influence was readily apparent in Dylan's mannerisms, mumbles, and clothing, later immortalized by Don McLean in his verse about Dylan for "American Pie": "The jester sang for the king and queen / In a coat he borrowed from James Dean / And a voice that came from you and me." Dean broke just like a little boy, and that raw emotion spoke urgently to fifties teens like Bobby Zimmerman. The predominant gender training of post-WWII America stressed physical strength, psychological toughness, and emotional repression as the pillars of proper masculinity. Dean offered an alternate model of gender non-conformity, like some beautiful and vulnerable combination of his *Rebel* co-stars Natalie Wood and Sal Mineo.

Dylan's most extensive treatment of Dean in *The Philosophy of Modern Song* comes in the chapter on Vic Damone's "On the Street Where You Live." He writes of Dean's heartbreak when Pier Angeli, the love of his life, suddenly dumped him to marry Vic Damone. Dylan describes Dean stalking his ex after their breakup, including a story "that he waited across the street on his motorcycle on Pier Angeli's wedding day" (135). The passage conjures up images of Johnny Strabler, inviting comparison to Dean's other abiding obsession for Brando. In a published 1957 conversation with Truman Capote, Brando complained about being stalked by Dean, who mimicked his every move, followed him around, and repeatedly left messages with his answering service. Brando eventually confronted Dean, told him he was sick, and recommended professional help. In essence, go away from my window, it ain't me you're lookin' for, babe. Brando told Capote that Dean was no hero but "a very lost boy trying to find himself" (qtd. Colavito).

Dylan includes pictures of Dean and Angeli in *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, but in the present context I'm more intrigued by the few available photos of Dean and Brando. For instance, navigate your way to Pinterest and check out their meeting, arranged by director Elia

Kazan, on the set of *East of Eden*.[1] While you're browsing Pinterest, fetch your eyes on the party photo where Dean has Angeli on his arm but only has eyes for Brando.[2] Patricia Quinn claims that Dylan felt the same way about Brando. Quinn, who dated both men, said in an interview that Dylan "'adored, idolized [and] was terribly attracted to Marlon'" (qtd. Bordo 133). Point your browser away from Pinterest and toward Reddit, and you can find the gaze redirected from Brando to Dylan in their photo with Patricia Quinn.[3] The plot thickens, and the web of interconnections becomes more tangled, when you factor in the rumored sexual encounter between Dylan and Brando in the mid-sixties.[4]

I've written elsewhere about Dylan's signature approach in *The Philosophy of Modern Song* as "the art of the unsaid," and the "On the Street Where You Live" chapter provides yet another example.[5] Overtly, Dylan writes about Dean's adoration of Pier Angeli. But between the lines and behind the pictures, he gestures toward other obsessions, implying the love that dare not speak its name from the celluloid closet of fifties America.

Little Richard

In his book *Sissy Insurgencies: A Racial Anatomy of Unfit Manliness*, Marlon B. Ross studies men of color who infiltrated white heteronormative society and challenged predominant attitudes toward masculinity. According to Ross, "Little Richard's snarling, popping, screeching erotic noise announces the arrival of the black sissy not exactly as a credit to the race, but as a flaunting presence whose racialized homoeroticism cannot be totally shamed or purged" (214). The pink-tinted book cover features Little Richard in all his magnificence, with hair, makeup, and clothes all perfectly on point. "Little Richard's marcelled hairstyle goes a

[1] See photo of Marlon Brando with James Dean on the set of East of Eden (1954), posted by Metek09 on Pinterest, https://www.pinterest.com/pin/379780181074869901/.

[2] See photo of Brando, Dean, and Angeli at a party in 1955, posted by Verena Carelle on Pinterest, https://www.pinterest.com/pin/275704808416690053/.

[3] See photo of Brando, Quinn, and Dylan in 1966, posted by naveargenta on the r/bobdylan Reddit page, https://www.reddit.com/r/bobdylan/comments/15s0wwi/marlon_brando_patricia_quinn_and_bob_1966/.

[4] I had never heard this rumor until Laura Tenschert brought it up at the Odense symposium. The evidence stems from a recorded conversation between Dylan and Allen Ginsberg in 1965. Listen and judge for yourself: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtVgAnH_ucM.

[5] For example, see my article "The Art of the Unsaid in Dylan's *The Philosophy of Modern Song*" on my Substack newsletter *Shadow Chasing*. There I have additional profiles on other fifties icons who influenced Dylan's views on gender performance, including Johnnie Ray, Ricky Nelson, and Gorgeous George.

couple of steps beyond the style worn by black men of the time. The ring of curls sits atop his head like a crown, and his carefully groomed eyebrows and moustache emphasize his self-presentation as a pretty, sissified man, one not afraid to broadcast it to the world" (Ross 214). Bobby Zimmerman's pompadour in high school wasn't quite as wild, but it was probably as close as he could get away with at Hibbing High in 1959. Remember that his yearbook also declared his post-graduation aspiration "to join Little Richard."

Little Richard gained notoriety following several chart-topping hits in the mid-fifties. He first cultivated his talent for titillating audiences in carnivals, revival meetings, and even minstrel shows. As he told biographer Charles White, "Sugarfoot Sam from Alabam was a minstrel show – the old vaudeville type of show. It was quite something. That was the first time I performed in a dress. One of the girls was missing one night and they put me in a red evening gown. I was the biggest mess you ever saw. They called me Princess Lavonne" (24). Although his background in drag was not widely known among his white teen fan base, it was obvious that Little Richard's gender ambiguity was as subversive as it was sexy. The performer told his biographer, "We were breaking through the racial barrier. The white kids had to hide my records cos they daren't let their parents know they had them in the house. We decided that my image should be crazy and way-out so that the adults would think I was harmless" (White 65-66).

Dylan devotes two chapters of *The Philosophy of Modern Song* to his hero, beginning with "Tutti Frutti." He identifies Little Richard's gospel roots as the source of his powerful singing: "A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-wop-bam-boom. Little Richard was speaking in tongues across the airwaves long before anybody knew what was happening. He took speaking in tongues right out of the sweaty canvas tent and put it on the mainstream radio, even screamed it like a holy preacher – which is what he was" (29). Dylan returns to this point at the end of the entry: "Little Richard was anything but little. He's saying that something is happening. The world's gonna fall apart. He's a preacher. 'Tutti Frutti' is sounding the alarm" (30). Voices and bodies long relegated to the shadows were coming out into the spotlight and would no longer be ignored.

Dylan offers an interesting queer reading of "Tutti Frutti": "Little Richard is a master of the double entendre. 'Tutti Frutti' is a good example. A fruit, a male homosexual, and 'tutti frutti' is 'all fruit'" (29). He supplements this interpretation with a full-page photo of Carmen Miranda (28). The image illustrates her burlesque performance of exaggerated sexuality. Even better is the 1962 photo he includes of Jet Harris, Little Richard, Gene Vincent, and Sam Cooke, taken during a UK tour. Flip your copy of the book open to page 31 and give that photo a good

long look. I love Little Richard's exaggerated wink. Here's a dude who knows just what to do and is eager to prove it. You know something's happening here but you don't know what it is, do you, Jet Harris? Then check out Gene Vincent and Sam Cooke. Cooke is one cool daddy, a total charmer, the king of soul, down for whatever with whomever – bring it on home to me! This photo captures so much about the transgressive, crossover appeal of early rock & roll to its largest audience of white middle-class consumers like Bobby Zimmerman. The new music is hip, dangerous, alluring, and liberating. It's an initiation and an exodus, out of bourgeois repression and conformity, into taboo realms of sexual freedom.

Ironically, the *shortest* entry of the book is the one-paragraph chapter on "Long Tall Sally" by Little Richard. Dylan makes some ludicrous connections between the title character and the giants of Samaria and Nephilim described in the Bible. You think the whole entry is going to be no more than a piss-take – and there are plenty of those in this often irreverent book – but then Dylan closes with a razor-sharp observation: "Little Richard is a giant of a different kind, but so as not to freak anybody out he refers to himself as little, so as not to scare anybody" (263). We know from Little Richard's own comments to his biographer that this diagnosis is spot on.

Since Dylan opts out of commenting on the lyrics to "Long Tall Sally," I'll let Rip Lhamon fill in some gaps. In his book *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s*, Lhamon decodes several references. "Traditional black folk figures scamper through this song in scandalous antics. Uncle John is a stock figure in black lore from the 'John cycle' of tales about a slave who outwits the authorities" (95). And what about the title figure? "It's Long Tall Sally, 'built for speed,' who 'got everything that Uncle John need.' But where did Sally come from? Nightmare to every Aunt Mary, Sally is the newly noticed, old, subtraditional freak. Not only long, tall, and speedy, she's 'bald-headed'" (95). Lhamon adds this drag reading of Sally:

> In the transvestite shows of Little Richard's apprenticeship, baldheadedness was preparation for one's wigs. Clearly Sally is a freak, the same term the singer had applied to his own incarnation as Princess Lavonne. Long Tall Sally, in addition to her other meanings, is therefore a transvestite fantasy figure slipping and sliding through life's niches. […] She bears variant and deviant fantasies. She is as new as rock 'n' roll. She is as old as the oral tradition. (95)

As for Dylan, he lets his accompanying picture do most of the interpretive work. Get a load of the striking vintage comic from the fifties on the facing page of the "Long Tall Sally" entry. Three couples pair off, wearing generic wardrobe from the era, walking down the street in white-bred bliss. A solitary woman towers over them all, gazing with envy and shedding a tear. Her thought bubble reads: "How lucky those girls are! I'll never know the meaning of romance! Men don't like women who tower over them…as I do!" (262). It's a blatant example of the rigidity of gender expectations and the cruel consequences of failing to conform to them. On one hand, this old-fashioned picture of a vanilla world seems hilariously out of place in contrast to the raunchy exuberance of "Long Tall Sally." On the other hand, there's more than one way to feel like a freak.

This is a perfect illustration for the chapter, because it shows how someone from the fifties white middle class – the tall woman in the picture, or a Jewish kid from Hibbing, Minnesota – might identify with Little Richard as a misfit and outcast. Shortly after Little Richard's death, Dylan offered this tribute to his chosen ancestor:

> He was my shining star and guiding light back when I was only a little boy. His was the original spirit that moved me to do everything I would do. I played some shows with him in Europe in the early nineties and got to hang out in his dressing room a lot. […] In his presence he was always the same Little Richard that I first heard and was awed by growing up and I always was the same little boy. Of course, he'll live forever. But it's like a part of your life is gone. (Bob Dylan Facebook post, 9 May 2020)

Early rock music was liberating for listeners like Bobby Zimmerman who didn't fit into the society they were inheriting. Swishing, border-crossing performers like Little Richard offered an alternative by celebrating the rebellious, the freakish, and the queer, turning social stigmas into badges of honor, pride, and solidarity.

Elvis Presley

The first face you see on the cover of *The Philosophy of Modern Song* is Little Richard from 1957, when Bobby Zimmerman was a 16-year-old high school sophomore. Then you open the book, and the first figure you encounter is a full-length Elvis Presley, also from 1957. Elvis is in a record store staring at an album display, and if you look closely you can see albums by Elvis, Little Richard, and even James Dean. For Bobby Zimmerman in the fifties, the record

store was a sacred space. The picture is a sort of analogue for Dylan's book: both are repositories of song, archives of the preserved and curated past, warehouses of the mind, memory palaces.

More 1950s songs are included in *The Philosophy of Modern Song* than any other decade by far, and Elvis is the most frequently referenced musician in the book. If you want further confirmation of Elvis's exalted importance to young Bobby Zimmerman, consider his testimonial in *US Magazine* commemorating the tenth anniversary of Presley's death:

> When I first heard Elvis's voice I just knew that I wasn't going to work for anybody; and nobody was going to be my boss. He is the deity supreme of rock & roll religion as it exists in today's form. Hearing him for the first time was like busting out of jail. I think for a long time that freedom to me was Elvis singing "Blue Moon of Kentucky." I thank God for Elvis. (1046)

It is difficult for those of us who didn't live through the fifties to appreciate just what a radical effect Elvis had on young people back then – and what a threat he posed to the older gatekeepers of morality, conventional gender roles, and racial segregation. Whatever "Elvis the Pelvis" had going down below his waist was deemed so dangerous that the TV public had to be shielded from it, as when "The Ed Sullivan Show" famously decided to only frame Elvis from the waist up. When he appeared for the first and last time on the Grand Ole Opry stage in 1954, the audience was more shocked by Elvis from the neck up, with his coifed hair and makeup. In her book *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*,[6] Marjorie Garber offers this vivid description of Elvis's subversive appeal:

> Race, class, and gender: Elvis's appearance violated or disrupted them all. His created "identity" as the boy who crossed over, who could take a song like "Hound Dog" from Big Mama Thornton or the onstage raving – and the pompadour, mascara, and pink and black clothing – from Little Richard, made of Elvis, in the popular imagination, a cultural mulatto, the oxymoronic "Hillbilly Cat," a living category crisis. (367)

[6] My thanks to Rob Reginio for suggesting this source. Rob's paper from the 2016 Comparative Drama Conference, "No Prophet's Son: Bob Dylan's Musical Fathers," was an early inspiration for my Odense paper.

That's pretty good: Elvis as "living category crisis." Or, we could distill it down further, using Little Richard's preferred term, and simply say that Elvis was a *freak.*

In his memoir *Chronicles: Volume One* and the documentary *No Direction Home,* Dylan talks about the lasting impression traveling circuses made on him as a child, and in his mid-sixties rock trilogy he makes several references to carnivals and freak shows. The best example is "Ballad of a Thin Man" on the album *Highway 61 Revisited:*

> You hand in your ticket
> And you go watch the geek
> Who immediately walks up to you
> When he hears you speak
> And says, "How does it feel
> To be such a freak?"
> And you say, "Impossible!"
> As he hands you a bone
> Because something is happening here
> But you don't know what it is
> Do you, Mister Jones?

The freaks in this song are the Long Tall Sally variety, as Dylan makes clear in this thinly veiled reference to a blowjob from a drag queen:

> Well, the sword swallower, he comes up to you
> And then he kneels
> He crosses himself
> And then he clicks his high heels
> And without further notice
> He asks you how it feels
> And he says, "Here is your throat back
> Thanks for the loan"
> And you know something is happening here
> But you don't know what it is
> Do you, Mister Jones?

The freaks control the world of this song, and for once it's the button-down square who feels confused and out of place. Freak shows could be a place for egregious exploitation by unscrupulous profiteers, yes, but these spaces also functioned as playgrounds for taboo behavior. They served as sanctuaries and communities for the marginalized and demonized.

I stress this carnivalesque context because Dylan himself makes an extended circus analogy in his commentary on Elvis's "Viva Las Vegas":

> Among a certain cadre of fans, Colonel Tom Parker is equally reviled for squandering Elvis's talents in increasingly substandard movies and holding him in stasis in Las Vegas by allowing the Hilton a sweetheart deal to help offset the manager's staggering gambling debt. Famously, Elvis's health and performance spiraled downward but still, he was paraded out night after night. The spectacle began to resemble something out of P. T. Barnum, who would promote a star attraction well past their prime as a curiosity just to get people into the tent. In this case Elvis was that curiosity and the tent was Vegas, and if people were ultimately disappointed by the star's dissolution there were plenty of other distractions to take their minds off it. And to take their money. All lessons the Colonel learned somewhere between the Netherlands of his birth and the carnivals where he was truly born. (309)

Parker as Barnum and Elvis as circus freak is one thing. But in depicting Elvis as a carnal commodity to be auctioned off to pay his boss's debts, and by referencing the other distractions notoriously available in Vegas, as well as the Netherlands of Parker's youth (think of the bordellos and burlesque shows in Amsterdam's red-light district), Dylan is also implying that Parker was Elvis's pimp.

Dylan relates personally to these various subversive forms of gender performance: the freak, the stripper, the prostitute. He had a greedy and manipulative Colonel Parker of his own, Albert Grossman, who drove him so hard in the mid-sixties that it nearly killed him. But Dylan's sense of being in the burlesque business extends well beyond the Grossman years. In his 1997 *Newsweek* interview, he told David Gates: "I don't think of myself in the high falutin' area. I'm in the burlesque area" (1196). That same year at a London press conference, he observed: "Performing's all the same. When you're up on stage, and you're looking at a crowd and you see them looking back at you, you can't help but feel like you're in a burlesque show" (1201). He was still singing this tune at the 2001 Rome press conference, but by then he was stressing not only exploitation but also the thrill of burlesque: "The stage is the only place

where I'm happy. It's the only place you can be what you want to be. When you're up there and you look at the audience and they look back then you have the feeling of being in a burlesque. But there's a certain part of you that becomes addicted to a live performance" (1259). Start searching for subversive forms of gender performance in Dylan and you'll find them everywhere, beginning in the fifties and stretching forward into his most recent work.

Cher

My favorite expression of Dylan's identification with burlesque, and one of his most intriguing gender performances, appears in *The Philosophy of Modern Song* in his chapter about Cher's "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves." In this song she assumes the role of a young woman born on the road. Her mother is a stripper, and her father is part revival tent preacher and part medicine show charlatan. The implication is that the father pimps out his wife on the side, and his daughter is eventually drafted into the family business. At the age of sixteen, she gets pregnant by an older man who soon abandons her. Like her mother before her, she becomes a sex worker to support her young daughter, repeating the generational cycle. As they roam from place to place, these carnies are denounced by the townsfolk as "gypsies, tramps and thieves"; but come nightfall, the local men slink into the tent to indulge forbidden desires.

"This song takes place on the dividing line between the old culture and the new," writes Dylan (235). It takes place on the old dividing line of binary genders, too, and Dylan crosses over. He imagines his way into the experience of this young burlesque performer. He dances in her heels and sees through her eye shadow. Using the pronoun "you," located in the shadowland between I and they, Dylan conjures the scene under the tent: "Strip yourself bare and dance the sword dance, buck naked inside of a canvas tent, fenced in, where the town royalty, the top brass and leading citizens, bald as eggs throw their money down, sometimes their entire bankroll" (232). This is Dylan in drag, channeling his inner Cher and passing as Princess Lavonne. This is Dylan as stone-cold diva and charcoal maiden strutting his feathers well.

Dylan identifies closely with this burlesque dancer, seeing his own reflection when he looks into her mirror. Describing her relationship with the audience, he observes, "you know how to make them see wonderful things, and you can make music that drives them mad. You've got the character of Saturn and the spirit of Venus. Passion and desire, you give it to them under the counter" (232). Dylan shares the dancer's wanderlust, waking up every day with a chance to reinvent yourself on stage every night. She is his twin sister: "Your philosophy of life is wait

and see. You make anybody who sets their eyes on you feel like they're falling in love, you've got a long lineage – and you go everywhere at all times. This-a-way, that-a-way, over the hill, around the mountain, up the road and down the road, can you go past the cutoff point – sure, go where you like" (233). Dylan can relate to being a commodified sex object who is sold to line the pockets of greedy profiteers and bought to feed the audience's desires. But he also relates to the paradoxical freedoms and pleasures afforded by life on the road, unencumbered by the drudgery that chain normies like us to our mundane lives. Her home and her identity are unfixed: she performs herself into existence over and over again.

I'll close with an interesting comment from Dylan in a 1986 radio interview in Australia. Reflecting upon his most formative decade, he recalled,

> The '50s were rough. Everybody romanticizes the '50s but that was a very rough time. … The only thing I remember that kept everybody going that I know in the '50s was maybe a few films that Marlon Brando made, or James Dean, or the rockabilly music, and rhythm and blues, and that was it. That music, it called out to you, and very few people were onto it. And it was almost like a life raft thrown to people who were different back then. (EON-FM 936)

Bobby Zimmerman never made it out of Minnesota, but Bob Dylan did. He climbed aboard that life raft and fled the restrictive values that defined and confined him in 1950s America. He sailed that life raft to New York and performed new selves into existence in the decades that followed. In *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, Dylan reconstructs the escape route on his journey to freedom and self-expression. He celebrates the artists, revolutionaries, and chosen ancestors who taught him a new philosophy, showing him a different way to create and survive.

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"Wanted Men: Bob Dylan and the Vulnerability of Brotherhood"

By Court Carney, Stephen F. Austin State University

In June 2023, in a concert in Barcelona, Spain, Bob Dylan deviated from his established setlist. Right before what has become the closing salvo of the Rough and Rowdy Ways Tour of "Mother of Muses," "Goodbye Jimmy Reed," and "Every Grain of Sand," Dylan inserted the Grateful Dead's "Stella Blue." The song stayed in regular rotation throughout the end of the tour, with twenty-five performances between Spain and Buffalo, New York, in September 2024. The song, written by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter, dates to the early 1970s. The Grateful Dead first played it on stage at the Hollywood Bowl in June 1972, which also happened to coincide with Ron "Pigpen" McKernan leaving the band. Soon after its introduction, "Stella Blue" became a mainstay of the deep second set for the band: a late "Jerry Ballad" respite among the cosmic storm-cloud denouement. A song tinged in sadness about never quite matching one's potential, "Stella Blue" vacillated between mournful and blissed out. "Stella Blue" meant something to Garcia and, decades later, clearly signified something to Dylan.

In 2023, when Dylan brought it into his own, the song was over fifty years old, making it a larger time gap between origin and performance than many of the "traditional" songs that he recorded for his debut record in late 1961.[1] Although the song tends not to unveil its narrative secrets, the lyrics allude to a workaday musician, far from fame, who continues to step up to the microphone. A life defined by cheap hotels and rusted strings. In tone and sentiment, "Stella Blue" relates closely to another song that Dylan brought into the Rough and Rowdy stage: Merle Haggard's "Footlights." I saw Dylan sing this song in Port Chester, NY, in 2023 (one of the two times he played the song). At that moment, I was struck by Haggard's line of a 41-year-old singer hiding his age as he climbs back onto the stage as sung by Dylan, then 82, twice as old as the song's composer. Haggard's song chronicles a musician past their popular prime who is coiling their energy to perform for another audience who "goes nearly wild." The title relates to the singer threatening to "kick the footlights again," a reference at least in part to Johnny Cash's infamous destruction of the stage lights at the Grand Ole Opry (which led to a temporary ban from that stage). However, Haggard strikes an ambiguous tone, and the kicking

[1]Most of his traditional songs are based on records from the early half of the twentieth century. They might date back much further, of course, but their recorded versions mostly came from earlier in the twentieth century.

out of the footlights reads both as an act of rebellion and frustration and a hint of being expected to play out the iconoclasm of youth.

Dylan's trajectory, of course, far exceeds the working bar-band melancholy of either "Stella Blue" or "Footlights." Still, there remains a suggestion that life on the road plays out in similar emotional ways regardless of success. The inclusion of "Stella Blue" (and, however briefly, "Footlights") into his generally static setlists of this past tour points to a fascinating undercurrent of vulnerability. The emotional openness of these songs is often fused with Dylan's idiosyncratic take on masculinity, which I was considering historically when I first heard of this proposed conference. I have thought a lot about vulnerability within the context of Dylan and, relatedly, within the context of *listening* to Dylan as I try to decode the complicated ways emotion fuses the musician to the listener. The announcement of the theme of this meeting prompted an immediate and profound reflection on the significance of vulnerability and masculinity within the context of music and memory. Initially, I envisioned a discussion centered on brotherhood and the connections between influential male artists such as Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, and Garcia. This exploration aimed to illuminate themes of manhood, masculinity, and the bonds of brotherhood through selected songs and pivotal moments. However, I soon realized that my interest extended beyond these concepts. As I transitioned between projects – specifically, my ongoing work on Civil War memory – I recognized a desire to explore Bob Dylan's music and its significance to me within the context of my life.

The thorny notion of masculinity plays a role here, too, especially as it pertains to Dylan's perpetually fluid play on manliness. As much as Dylan can use the mask of masculinity to create distance between himself and others (personally or professionally), we should also consider it less as a signifier of machismo – ironic or otherwise – but perhaps more as an avenue of vulnerability. A look, then, at his male relationships could provide a counterpoint to any superficial read on these connections. A strong thread within the narrative of Bob Dylan's career relates to perceptions of cruelty within his romantic and platonic relationships. Friends and acquaintances get tossed aside, especially in the reckless early New York City years, which bridged anonymity and fame. One gets, perhaps uncharitably depending on the source, the impression of a challenging artist magpieing through concentric circles of friend groups reaching for that next rung. And yet, looking back on his early career from the vantage point of longevity and endurance, another theme develops out of the thorns: male friendship, however defined, and a sense of vulnerability.

At the center of this conversation stand Johnny Cash and Jerry Garcia, two men who have intersected with Dylan off and on throughout his career (sometimes openly, sometimes quietly). These relationships also intersect with significant times in Dylan's career: Cash, when Dylan had drifted away from the spotlight in the late 1960s; Garcia, when Dylan had lost the map in the mid-1980s. More generally, Dylan's relationship with men remains a particularly neglected topic, and this paper places these masculine friendships at the center of a more extensive discussion of how manhood and masculinity inform Dylan's music and career. The idea of vulnerability, a quality often so foreign to the Dylan conversation, if not his music, especially for someone who invented the modern conception of masking within a pop context and whose early career was nothing if not a highly choreographed dance of put-ons, abstractions, inventions, half-truths, non-truths, anti-truths.[2] By focusing on Dylan's relationships with men like Jerry Garcia and Johnny Cash (as well as his larger fraternal circle of friends and associates), I argue that a new, under-explored narrative of male vulnerability and openness emerges.

I began carving out this essay by trying to determine a taxonomy of brotherhood, which quickly became a fool's errand. The questions tended to devolve and unravel rapidly. Who counts as a brother? How are we defining brother? What about a mentor? Can a mentor be a brother? What about a peer? Interestingly, Dylan's own brother is a bit of an asterisk here. He plays several vital roles within the Dylan narrative, especially in the 1970s, at perhaps Bob's most openly *vulnerable* moments. I want to be clear that the concept of "brother" is purposefully vague and has much more to do with drawing circles around various relationships to clarify larger groups of connections rather than creating some dogmatic series of diagrams. I am less interested, in other words, in the pedantic restructuring of fraternities than I am in how Dylan responds so clearly and so profoundly to certain specific men at various times in his life. At the heart of this discussion lies the more significant idea that Dylan resonates primally with people like Johnny Cash and Jerry Garcia because of a shared sense of historicism. The vulnerability we see, feel, and respond to is rooted in this historical understanding. In other words, with people like Johnny Cash and (especially) Jerry Garcia, there is a shared understanding of how history is rooted in music.

[2]My point here relates to the framing of Dylan more than his actual music. Dylan, the songwriter, wrote a number of key songs during this early period that showcased acute sensitivity and awareness. It is present in his first major piece of writing, "Song to Woody," appears even at his most surrealistic and experimental, "Visions of Johanna," and culminates (in the first half of his career at least) with *Blood on the Tracks*. I am arguing here not that Dylan rejects vulnerability but that the conventional narrative/historiography of his work tends to shy away from this emotional framework.

Thus, an invented map of brotherhood in terms of the early years of Dylan's career:

MENTORS	GUNSLINGERS	BROTHERS
Woody Guthrie	Victor Maymudes	David Zimmerman
Dave Van Ronk	Bob Neuwirth	George Harrison
Mike Seeger	Mike Bloomfield	Johnny Cash
Ramblin'Jack Elliot	Robbie Robertson	Jerry Garcia
Paul Clayton		
Allen Ginsberg		
Tony Glover		
Gordon Lightfoot		

It all breaks down, of course, as individuals drift through categories. Still, I think this map does ultimately serve a few purposes, especially in terms of ages and timelines; not least is the fact that everyone has passed on, except for Ramblin' Jack and David – a mapping of friendship, mentorship, and brotherhood in Dylan's career.

The connection between Dylan and Cash is at once public and enigmatic. Dylan knew and revered Cash's singles for Sun Records, and Cash openly praised Dylan's *Freewheelin'* record. The two men corresponded sporadically, and Cash, for his part, wrote a letter to the influential magazine *BROADSIDE* defending Dylan against the attacks made by several key folk music writers who were dismayed with the young songwriter's lack of allegiance to various folk dogmas. Dylan and Cash met at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964 and remained in touch throughout the decade. The public aspect of their relationship culminated in a series of joint appearances in 1969 when Cash guested on Dylan's *Nashville Skyline,* and Dylan performed on Cash's television show. Their relationship afterward is sketchier, but within this Nashville moment, a legitimate friendship materializes.

One song that came out of these Tennessee sessions that I want to comment on here is "Wanted Man," a Dylan song that Cash admired. The song is a travelogue, an outlaw's tale, a hustler's beat. I keep returning to this song, title, image, and performance – especially the humor and camaraderie of the outtakes. The directions go west (naturally), east, midwest, southeast, and southwest. "Wherever you look tonight," Cash sings, "you might see this wanted man." But each verse features these wonderful deep bits as the singer dips past the surface tension of Western pastiche to dwell in the deeper waters of wants and needs. "But I've had all

that I've wanted of a lot of things I had," he sings, "and a lot more than I needed of some things that turned out bad." Dylan's complex use of *wanted* works exceedingly well here. At first glance, an outlaw is on the run, but then something much more enigmatic transpires. We are in the west–California or Cheyenne–and the song is all a blatant setup. But then, the meaning shifts, and it is wanted, as in chosen and desired by Lucy Watson, Jeannie Brown, Nellie Johnson (later Juanita). The names of the women change, but they also all sound the same: Lucy/Jeannie/Nellie, Watson/Johnson, and then Juanita, with a nice internal rhyme with "wanted." The singer is everywhere and then nowhere – a vapor. But at the same time, he is made physical and sought after, desired, tracked, followed, and pursued. Later, as sung by Johnny Cash to prisoners at San Quentin, it is a song about being on the lam.[3] But in an earlier, spontaneous moment, right at the moment when the song is being called into existence, Cash adlibs truth into the fiction. Cash is following Dylan's lead, learning the words and the tune. Still, he insists on bringing the two singers into the song by rattling off the towns and places of their childhoods: Duluth, Hibbing, Dyess. They are, Cash implies, the actors in the song, too.

Returning to the recurrent theme of transitional mentors, we have Jerry Garcia. The connection between Dylan and Garcia seems at once evident and weighty, with two of the most historically minded singers also saturated in the reverberations of American music.[4] From their first meeting at a Grateful Dead show in 1972 until Garcia died in 1995, their paths crisscrossed on stage and off. The connection to Garcia (and the Grateful Dead, more generally) had deep emotional resonance for Dylan. Dylan famously writes about this transformative experience in *Chronicles, Volume One.* Dylan joins the band at their rehearsal space in San Rafael, CA, but soon feels uncomfortable with his own material. "I had no feelings for any of those songs," Dylan writes, "and didn't know how I could sing them with any intent." Feeling like a "goon," Dylan bolted. He starts walking in the rain and enters a jazz club where a small combo is playing standards. "All of a sudden," Dylan writes of hearing the jazz singer, "I understood

[3]We also have wanted as "wanting," as in less than insufficient. This definition takes us to another pairing with Bob and Cash: "Belshazzar." One of Cash's first songwriting attempts, "Belshazzar" was the last single Sun Records released after Cash left for Columbia Records, relying on lightly syncopated verses surrounding a biblical chorus warning: "he was weighed in the balance and found wanting." Borrowing the song's basic structure, Dylan transformed "Belshazzar" during the Basement sessions into a musical guidepost outlining his journey into symbolism and allegory: Woodstock and modern America via the Book of Daniel. Belshazzar's "Paradise" is sung just like in "Frankie Lee and Judas Priest." A mirror, an echo.

[4]Tyler Wilcox provides a good overview of their friendship: https://doomandgloomfromthetomb.tumblr.com/post/177555446892/the-ballad-of-spike-jerry-bob-dylan-jerry.

something faster than I ever did before." He returns to the Dead "as if nothing had happened" and begins to sing his older songs within this post-epiphanic haze. "[N]ow I knew," Dylan writes, "I could perform any of these songs without them having to be restricted to the world of words." Of course, what on the surface seems straightforward – working with the Grateful Dead led Dylan to reexamine his connection with his own material – actually emerges as murkier and more mysterious upon closer reading. Dylan's written tale is both vague and otherworldly. And yet the anecdote, we must assume, contains some truth.[5]

A parallel to the left turn(s) of *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline,* two folk records bridge the tumult of the 80s with the *Time Out of Mind* 1990s. Dylan released the first one, *Good as I Been to You*, in late 1992, marking a comeback of sorts in Dylan's never-ending comeback narrative. The second "traditional" record, *World Gone Wrong*, came out a year later and offered a darker, more fascinating clutch of songs. Buried in the middle of Side Two sits "Two Soldiers," a 19th-century ballad often alleged to date to the early years of the American Civil War. The song focuses on two northern soldiers who promise each other to write their respective loved ones before a big battle. Spoiler: the letters are never sent.

This song represents a connection with Garcia. As Dylan notes in the liner notes, "Jerry Garcia showed me TWO SOLDIERS (Hazel & Alice do it pretty similar) a battle song extraordinaire."[6] The Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard parenthetical aside refers to their self-titled record released on Rounder in 1973, which featured the song. Gerrard, a singer and scholar of bluegrass and old-time music, had married Mike Seeger in 1970. Seeger (one of our *brothers* mentioned above), in turn, had recorded a version of "Two Soldiers" back in 1964, and this record is centered partly on this performance; Dylan would go on to play the song two dozen times in concert. In his liner notes, Dylan summarizes his discussion of the song: "learning to go forward by turning back the clock, stopping the mind from thinking in hours, firing a few random shots at the face of time." In Dylan's hands, "Delia" emerges as a Civil War ballad turned cosmic harbinger of the death of meaning itself.

The nexus of "Wanted Man" and "Two Soldiers" provides a glimpse into how these men impacted Dylan, and ultimately, we can look at Cash and Garcia and their relationship to Dylan as analogs in various ways. Cash, steeped in music history and the living embodiment of so much of the beauty and terror framed by the first decades of what became known as country music, connected with Dylan on a musical level and in a much more emotionally

[5]Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 149-151.
[6]"Liner Notes," Bob Dylan, *World Gone Wrong* (Columbia Records, 1993)

reflective way. Cash covers a lot of musical ground, but he also represents the fraught duality of family and escape. As Dylan sought refuge in Woodstock away from fame, pills, and touring, what Cash represented (in life, in song) seemed to offer a way out. Just carve out another path, Cash's music proposed, until escape instinctively calls again. Similarly, Jerry Garcia offered Dylan another form of escape: a tethered rope to the past, this time via folk music and bluegrass. During a period of deadening confusion in the early 1980s, Dylan saw a way out of musical stagnation. Cash and Garcia stood as history-obsessed, history-soaked musicians using the past to create some future sound, something already very much in Dylan's purview. One of the foundational stories in Dylan's memoir relates to the young singer reading Civil War-era newspapers in the New York public library, absorbing the language, stories, and people that defined the central conflict of American history. Cash, with his fundamental connection to the origins of country music, Garcia, with his scholarly understanding of the roots of folk music, represented to Dylan brotherhood, perhaps on one level, but also iterations of what music and history could provide. This music refashioned the past into a template, as fate, as rumor, as something to defend, something to defile. But there remains a brotherly vulnerability here that reaches out across the few stories we have.

On August 9, 1995, Jerry Garcia died from a heart attack while staying in a rehabilitation center in California. Dylan attended his funeral four days later, but two public pronouncements helped illustrate his feelings for his departed friend. On September 21st, *Rolling Stone* published Dylan's eulogy for Garcia, which, in a few sentences, seems to sum up the deep connection between the two men. "He's the very spirit personified of whatever is Muddy River country at its core and screams up into the spheres," Dylan remarked. "He really had no equal." Curiously, Dylan argues that the younger Garcia "was more like a big brother who taught and showed me more than he'll ever know." The tribute turned toward the infinite as he compared Garcia to the country, rock 'n' roll, and modern jazz impulses that fueled both men. "There's a lot of spaces and advances between The Carter Family, Buddy Holly and, say, Ornette Coleman," Dylan writes, "a lot of universes, but he filled them all without being a member of any school." Dylan concludes, "There's no way to convey the loss. It just digs down really deep."[7]

Two days later, on the 23rd, Dylan began the fall leg of his tour in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The entire show was filled with cover songs (he opens with Van Morrison's "Real

[7]Bob Dylan, "Bob Dylan Remembers Jerry Garcia," *Rolling Stone,* September 21, 1995.

Real Gone") and one-off arrangements. The second song of the evening, however, was the Grateful Dead's "Friend of the Devil," followed later by "West L.A. Fadeaway." He ended the main set with a rare cover of "Key to the Highway," the second and last time he played this song made popular by Big Bill Broonzy. Garcia had played this song various times in his career, and it does not seem like too much of a stretch that the song with lines like "I got the key to the highway / And I'm billed out and bound to go" would serve as a statement of purpose for Dylan. Redolent of "Stella Blue" (and "Footlights), this song speaks to the commitment of the working musician obligated to continue playing on their version of the never-ending tour; another stage awaits. Eight years later, on September 12, 2003, Johnny Cash passed away, having lost his wife of thirty-five years, June Carter, just a handful of months earlier. As with Garcia, the death seemed to shake something loose in Dylan. "I was asked to give a statement on Johnny's passing," Dylan writes, "and thought about writing a piece instead called 'Cash Is King,' because that is the way I really feel." Returning to the spectral as he had with Garcia, Dylan referred back to the early 1960s when Cash advocated publicly for the younger songwriter:

> There wasn't much music media in the early *Sixties,* and *Sing Out!* was the magazine covering all things folk in character. The editors had published a letter chastising me for the direction my music was going. Johnny wrote the magazine back an open letter telling the editors to shut up and let me sing, that I knew what I was doing. This was before I had ever met him, and the letter meant the world to me. I've kept the magazine to this day.

The entire eulogy is a remarkable piece. Dylan moves from describing how "I Walk the Line" works as a composition to saying that "we can't define him anymore than we can define a fountain of truth, light and beauty." In tandem, the power of these two eulogies underscore both the interconnectedness of these men to Dylan as well as the vibrant sense of vulnerability Dylan tends to show in these remarks.[8]

A postscript emerged in 2023, decades after Cash and Garcia's deaths, as Dylan returned to his brothers during his Rough and Rowdy Ways tour. As we have seen, "Stella Blue" appeared, but throughout his spring 2023 jag through Japan, Dylan populated his setlists with various other Grateful Dead covers. "Truckin'" appeared in Tokyo on April 12, sticking

[8]Matt Diehl, "Remembering Johnny," *Rolling Stone,* October 16, 2003.

around for seven shows. A few nights later, "Brokedown Palace" had a similar arc. He also brought back "Not Fade Away," which brings his affection for Garcia and Buddy Holly together. Garcia and the Grateful Dead gave shape to this row of concerts and sparked a great deal of commentary from Dylan's online followers. Then, in March 2024, Dylan brought out Cash's "Big River," a song he had played as early as the Basement Tapes but had only been sporadically performed live (three times between 1988 and 2000). Across fourteen concerts, Dylan dug into the song with vigor and drive. Dylan writes about "Big River" in *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, where he notes that "the key element to this song is the chain-gang thump of the acoustic rhythm guitar. You can't really cover this song properly leaving that behind."[9] In concert, Dylan, ever the contrarian, drops the rhythm altogether, leaving behind the acoustic guitar, and bases the song around his piano. The song became a late-show highlight couched between "I've Made up My Mind to Give Myself to You" and "Mother of Muses." With "Big River" cresting once more and "Stella Blue" drifting into focus, the twin auras of Cash and Garcia underscore the power and depth of Bob Dylan's live performances.

I would like to end at the beginning – the inspiration for this essay and what compelled me to frame this talk around the rather ahistorical concept of vulnerability in the first place. On June 15, 1995, Dylan opened for the Grateful Dead in Highgate, Vermont. These shows were not particularly strong concerts for the Dead, and attendees have generally noted that Garcia seemed tired and unwell. Dylan, on the other hand, performed a series of high-energy shows that summer. Coming off stage in Vermont, Dylan approached Garcia, standing in the wings. In the two photos of this moment, Dylan approaches Garcia (with his wife, Deborah Koons, and Mickey Hart looking on). The first image shows a beaming Garcia going in for a hug as Dylan raises his arms, his face half-hidden, though one can intuit a smile. The photo telegraphs warmth. The second photo features Garcia bear hugging Dylan with both hands pressed into his back. We cannot see Dylan's face at all, his dark hair blurring into the darkness of the photo. These two photos project a vulnerability often dismissed or ignored in conversations about these two friends and performers. They transmit a tableau of brotherly affection – two soldiers

[9]"Johnny Cash is a gospel singer, or he thinks of himself as one. Somewhere along the line, he turns into Gargantua, Finn MacCool, Jigger Jones all in one. He could climb across rivers. He could lay track and take down greenhorns. He's a teller of tall tales—parts the clouds and drinks nitro. This is the real Johnny Cash, and "Big River" is his theme song." Bob Dylan, *The Philosophy of Modern Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2022), 218.

amid one final charge – and a heaviness only deepened by the loss of Garcia a few weeks later. "In the end," Garcia and Dylan sing in "Stella Blue," "there's just a song."

"Mixing Up the Medicine: Bob Dylan's Basement Carnival and Homosocial Masculinity"

By Erin C. Callahan, San Jacinto College

After returning from his grueling eighteen-month world tour in 1966, Bob Dylan used his motorcycle accident as an opportunity for a self-imposed hiatus from many of his professional responsibilities. In fact, in 1984, Dylan told Kurt Loder, "Then I had that motorcycle accident, which put me outta commission. Then, when I woke up and caught my senses, I realized I was just workin' for all these leeches. And I didn't want to do that. Plus, I had a family, and I just wanted to see my kids." Dylan's use of the word "leeches" does a lot of work here. It reveals that he felt both burnt out by the demands of fame and the conventions of the recording industry and that he perceived the people in it as parasitic. Prior to the motorcycle accident, Dylan's workload and productivity underscored a masculine identity characterized by mid-century industrial capitalism.

However, the period between the motorcycle accident and Dylan recording *John Wesley Harding* in Nashville signals a break from that performance of this wage earner identity. Paul Williams argues, "The first year of silence was the most dramatic, because it followed a period of fecundity" and that "the motorcycle accident was certainly more than an excuse. It was a turning point" (220). Because Dylan was adjusting to his new role as father and head of a growing family, being "put out of commission" allowed for an evolution of his gender performance. With a new wife and two young children, Dylan redirected his focus from the public sphere to the domestic sphere at his home in Bearsville, near Woodstock. While there, Dylan enjoyed the simplicity of fatherhood and domestic life and, in sequestration, seemed freed from what Greil Marcus called the "prison of his own career" (xv). However, to fulfill his lingering professional obligations, Dylan worked closely with members of the Band in a carnivalesque atmosphere in which they recorded *The Basement Tapes.* The homosocial bonds Dylan developed with Robbie Robertson, Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Richard Manuel, and Garth Hudson helped spark Dylan's creative growth during this period. This fraternity and Dylan's liberty are borne out sonically and lyrically on the bootlegs and, ultimately, the released album. More so, the time he spent convalescing and writing and recording with the Band was regenerative. It allowed him the time, space, and companionship he needed to reconnect with American roots music to redefine and renew his commitment to his recording career.

Prior to retreating to Woodstock for a brief respite before embarking on his fall 1966 tour, Dylan's gender performance could best be understood through the framework of industrial capitalist masculinity. Introduced by Ø. G. Holter in his chapter "Family Theory Reconsidered" from *Labour of Love: Beyond the Self-Evidence of Everyday Life*, this categorization of masculinity creates "an expression of the whole relationship between production and reproduction. Industrial capitalism itself 'engendered' its opposite, the world of domesticity as against the world of wage work, and women as the other of men" (102). R. W. Connell further explains, "Holter's 'social forms analysis' gives an account of gender, masculinity and femininity, as historically specific features of social life in modernity. They arise not from a timeless dichotomy of bodies but from the specific course of development of the large-scale structures of society" (22). Because mid-twentieth century America was arranged in a patriarchal gender schema, the binary of masculine associated with industry and wages and feminine with domesticity was the status quo. Under contract with Columbia Records, Dylan earned "wages" based on sales of his albums, ticket sales for live performances, or licensing his songs to other artists to record. From the time he arrived in New York City in January of 1961 through the accident in July of 1966, Dylan recorded seven albums, performed nearly two-hundred concerts, and sat for countless interviews and press conferences. This is the "period of fecundity" Williams refers to (220). Regardless of the shifts in performed identity Dylan engendered during the early stages of his career, he maintained a close connection to the creative process and modes of production of his work – composing, recording, and touring.

Early in his marriage to Sara, Dylan maintained his impressive workload and continued to perform within this schema. In July 1965, Dylan and Sara purchased their home in Bearsville. They moved into it in the late summer where Sara nested as Dylan continued to work. Prior to their November 22, 1965, wedding, Dylan played 51 shows, including one on November 21, and released *Bringing It All Back Home* in March and *Highway 61 Revisited* in August. Continuing this pace, Dylan returned to the studio in October to begin recording his seventh studio album, *Blonde on Blonde.* After taking only five days off, one of which was his wedding day, Dylan headed back out on the road. He then played thirteen shows from November 26 through December 19. In January 1966, Dylan took a brief break during which Sara gave birth to Jesse and he finalized *Blonde on Blonde.* He embarked on a world tour that began on February 4 in Louisville, Kentucky, traveled westward across the United States, around the world to Australia and New Zealand before ending in London on May 27, 1966. In this way, the Dylans performed traditional patriarchal gender roles: Sara tended to the children and the home, while Dylan went to work to provide financial support for the family.

After the accident, however, Dylan's hiatus from recording and touring alienated him from the labor process of creating and producing his work. Rather than actively recording new music and touring, Dylan was exclusively living off royalties for the first time in his career. Though he still provided the primary financial support for his family, he began to blur lines between work and what Holter recognized as the world of domesticity or the feminine in opposition to the world of work or the masculine (102). This is the period in which Dylan fully assimilated to his paternal role: meeting Maria at the school bus stop, going to parties, and attending to the children. Of that time, Dylan wrote,

> My family was my light and I was going to protect that light at all cost. That was where my dedication was, first, last and everything in between … For the public eye, I went into the bucolic and mundane as far as possible. In my real life, I got to do the things I loved best and that was all that mattered – the Little League games, birthday parties, taking my kids to school, camping trips, boating, rafting, canoeing … I was living on record royalties. (Dylan 123)

Domestic life with Sara and the children provided Dylan a break from the unrealistic pace and demands of his early career, but his contractual obligations required that he regularly submit new compositions.

As a result of Dylan's break from the recording studio, the year during which he wrote and recorded songs with the Band at Big Pink created a second life or Bakhtinian carnival separate from his previous work. This period of Dylan's career created a "temporary suspension," resulting in what Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argued as, "[t]his temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life" (687). The first significant change or inversion occurred when Dylan began living off royalties of sales from his previous work and from publishing rights. This came after the "period of fecundity" noted above which alienated Dylan from the modes of production of his creative work (Williams 220). The second inversion occurred in the freedom Dylan experienced in this period in his day-to-day life, his approach to work, and the relationships he formed with his family and friends. In *Invisible Republic*, Greil Marcus recalls Robbie Robertson telling him, "We went in with a sense of humor … It was all a goof. We were playing with absolute freedom" (xiv). The levity and ease with which Dylan and the Band approached the sessions translated to them capturing an unexpected sound and new pathway forward in their respective careers.

The sound they created – the simultaneous dissolving and expanding of musical genres – could only be realized through the six men's trust in and love for one another. The members of the Band shared a history and relationships that predated their association with Dylan. However, being on tour with each other from September 1965 through May 1966 laid the foundation for Dylan's and the members of the Band's fellowship and collaboration in Big Pink. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* Eve Sedgwick argues intimate homosocial male relationships promote the interests of men and support heteronormative gender schemas. Williams puts forth that working with the Band helped Dylan "rediscover[…] the joys of music – old songs, improvised songs, crafted songs, they all provided him with evident satisfaction and pleasure as he performed them" (225). Through these sessions, Dylan recovered from his injuries and from his professional and creative burn out. Renewing his "satisfaction" and pleasure" of writing, playing, and performing brought Dylan closer to returning to the studio or actively working as a "wage earner."

However, Sedgwick's theory also contends that it's challenging to understand Dylan's relationships with the members of the Band without considering his domestic relationship with Sara and how his identity is a product of it and in resistance to it (25). As much as we see a shift in Dylan's performance of his masculine identity, his relationship with Sara and her role in their heterosexual patriarchal marriage is key to fully understanding Dylan's progress. Sedgwick contends, "Heidi Hartman's definition of patriarchy in terms of 'relationships between men … , in making power relationships between men and women appear to be dependent on the power relationships between men and men, suggests large-scale social structures are congruent with male-male-female erotic triangles … '" (25). She continues, "We can go a step further than that to say that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence" (Sedgwick 25). Initially, Sara created the domestic sphere and a family for Dylan where he could retreat and convalesce while he provided financial stability for her. In terms of reproduction, Sara giving birth to four children in four years mirrored the creative fertility of Dylan's early career. This maintained a traditional heteronormative patriarchal schema. However, Dylan recognized the toll domestic life took on his creative life. In *Chronicles,* he writes,

> My outer image would have to be something a bit more confusing, a bit more humdrum. It's hard to live like this. It takes all your effort. The first thing that has to go is any

> form of artistic self-expression that's dear to you. Art is unimportant next to life, and you have no choice. Creativity has much to do with experience, observation, and imagination, and if any one of those key elements is missing, it doesn't work. It was impossible now for me to observe anything without being observed. (Dylan 121)

For Dylan, his home represented the space he had to escape when he went to the masculine or homosocial environment of Big Pink. While Sara was essential in this arrangement, it was also Sara and domestic life that he had to push back against to renew his connection to his creative work.

While Dylan was healing from his injuries, his contract with Columbia expired but he was still obligated to submit demos to music publisher Witmark through his manager Albert Grossman. To comply, he composed and recorded demos with the Band. Initially, they recorded in the Red Room of Dylan's Bearsville home, but by late spring, they removed themselves from Dylan's house and permanently moved to Big Pink in West Saugerties. In a 2014 article for *Rolling Stone,* interviewer David Browne spoke to Garth Hudson about the *Basement Tapes.* Brown writes, "But soon it became clear that they needed a place apart from Dylan's wife and children: "It was his house," Hudson says…It was only natural they gravitated to the cellar in Big Pink, where Dylan availed himself of the Hawks' gear." Calling the house, Big Pink, a "bachelor palace," Robbie Robertson is quoted in Sid Griffin's *Million Dollar Bash: Bob Dylan, The Band, and the Basement Tapes,* saying: "So Dylan would just come over, and it was like the clubhouse. Rick and Richard and Garth and later Levon all lived there. At one time, that is. Garth, Rick, and Richard moved into Big Pink but I moved to a different place because I had a girlfriend – and I didn't want her to see what happens" (69). The all-boys "clubhouse" in the basement at Big Pink provided a physical space for Dylan to escape domestic life. It is also where he developed intimate fraternal bonds with the members of the Band. The trust built through these kinship relationships provided a foundation for the men's creative growth and experimentation. Commenting on this, Sid Griffin writes, "These five – Rick Danko, Levon Helm, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel, and Robbie Robertson – become not Dylan's backup but his musical allies, his partners in crime" (79). Their collaboration led to one of the most productive writing and recording periods in Dylan's career, laying down nearly 150 songs, the majority of which were originals, and the rest covers of Dylan's favorite American roots music.

As a result of recording together, Dylan and the Band created something that transcended collaboration. Williams noted, "The Sound of the *Basement Tapes* songs is the

sound of the unconscious (musical, verbal) mind brought forward into the world of conscious, touchable reality in a very calm, aware, marvelously unselfconscious fashion with more than a touch of the collective unconscious – the group mind – thrown in to sweeten the sauce" (Williams 223). That sound, "the group mind," was the tangible, audible manifestation of the fraternal bonds the six men developed as they spent time, composed, played, and recorded together day in and day out. Not only were they "killing time" during the sessions, Robertson also notes Dylan gave them an education on traditional folk music (Marcus xiv). As a result of the collaboration born out of that mentorship Dylan and the Band discovered a "new idiom which to perform" (Griffin 82). Dylan would write the lyrics and then they'd all go down into the basement and compose the music together.

The unstructured and freewheeling sessions delineated a break from traditional or formal recording practices resulting in the carnivalesque sonic and lyrical atmosphere of the tracks. Of these sessions, Sid Griffin writes in *Million Dollar Bash: Bob Dylan, The Band, and the Basement Tapes*, "The informality of recording at Big Pink proved to be an antidote to the tense scheduling, the required formality, and the constant clock watching that came with recording at a major studio" (129). Free from schedules, budgets, and corporate demands, Dylan, Robertson, Helm, Danko, Manuel, and Hudson were free to experiment with roots music and innovate expressions of it through their play. The casual environment also shifted power dynamics within the group. The Band, who were on Dylan's payroll, were his employees. However, homosocial bonds of fraternal love transcended that. This forced Dylan out of the dominant position as boss. Everything flattened and equalized in the basement. Williams argues that one of Dylan's ambitions in the *Basement Tapes* was to "amuse and impress and be accepted by his new companions" (225). Dylan's vulnerability while they recorded *The Basement Tapes* sessions allowed him to learn from the band as much as they learned from him. In this environment Dylan experienced a sense of liberation from the corporate vices of the record industry and, in his basement hootenanny, created what Clinton Heylin describes as "perhaps his greatest collection of songs" (273).

What makes this collection of songs so "great" is precisely the aspect of carnival that separates it from everyday life and Dylan's studio work and affords Dylan a sense of liberation in his creative process. Of the sessions, Williams explains, "Dylan apparently would come over in the afternoon – every afternoon, week after week – and he and the Band would sit around making music together, and when the spirit moved them they'd record some of what they were doing" (222). Later in his analysis, Williams remarks, "The open-endedness of the Basement Tapes songs, this sense that Dylan isn't necessarily singing to anyone but the people he's

performing with … , so there's a purposefulness and freedom from purpose in his communication somewhat different than anything he'd done before" (229). This speaks to the experience of carnival which Bakhtin argues was, "opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense and immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, and undefined forms" (687). *The Basement Tapes* – free-form writing and collaborations, visions and revisions of the lyrics and music, both traditional songs and new compositions, and the camaraderie Dylan experienced with the members of the Band – allows Dylan to find his voice again. Further, the music Dylan and The Band played was a celebration of the abject, a representation of American culture. Dylan called them "[s]ongs about debauched bootleggers, mothers that drowned their own children … , floods, union hall fires, darkness and cadavers at the bottom of rivers" (*Chronicle*s 35) and Marcus presented them as "deep, fluid, perverse, and conflicted" (Trager 35). In this folk tradition, the carnival of Dylan's environment translates to the lyrics and music, most specifically with a focus on corporal elements of excess, laughter, and rebirth. The characters are fat-gutted, pus-filled, and sleep-deprived. They are lost, drunk, and violent, but they are generally having fun. The characters' celebration of the abject does not simply degrade or destroy. It signals a renewal or rebirth within and beyond the space of that "second life."

Bakhtinian carnival is also associated with a renewed or reinvented marketplace that created free and direct interaction and communication between Dylan or Dylan's music and the people who listen to it. *The Basement Tapes* achieves this in several ways. The first was the marketplace of ideas shared between Dylan and the Band. A new marketplace was also created through what the liner notes to Dylan's *Bootleg Series, Volume 11* called "the first bootleg of the modern rock'n'roll age" (Griffin). Lastly, not only did the sessions produce the first bootleg, they also created an entire "underground industry" that subverted conventions of record sales. In *Million Dollar Bash: Bob Dylan, The Band, and the Basement Tapes,* Sid Griffin notes, "no one knew until the bootleg tapes of the *Great White Wonder* LP bootleg hit the shops of Los Angeles that Dylan was going through this creative purple patch. But the *Basement Tapes* Era will probably go down as Dylan's most powerful period of sustained songwriting greatness" (64). The underground bootleg industry, though frustrating to Dylan and the Band, bypassed traditional distribution, allowing for direct distribution of the bootlegs or direct communication between the music and the people. When Dylan recorded *John Wesley Harding* in Nashville in October 1967, he renewed his previous performance of masculinity. Griffin calls *John Wesley Harding* Dylan's "belated return to the marketplace," language that reinforces Dylan as a wage earner (217).

Dylan's early career was fueled by ambition and a working-class work ethic aligned with patriarchal industrial capitalist masculinity. His self-imposed hiatus after his motorcycle accident through the recording of *John Wesley Harding* created a Bakhtinian "second life" or an "extraterritorial space" in his career. This shifted him out of his previous gender performance and into a more passive, domestic role. Through intimate homosocial bonds with members of the Band and the process of writing and recording *The Basement Tapes*, Dylan renewed his connection to his performance of patriarchal industrial capitalist masculinity. He returned to the recording studio and, eventually, returned to touring. The Bakhtinian extraterritorial space in Dylan's career enabled him to redefine his gender identity performance. He did so through an assertion of agency and power over the processes and modes of production and performance of his work. The legacy of *The Basement Tapes* sessions exists in Dylan's commitment to the folk idiom of preserving and renewing American roots music and history through the albums he's released from *John Wesley Harding* through *Rough and Rowdy Ways*. It's also evident in the bootleg series of outtakes and unreleased music Dylan periodically issues, self-produced Jack Frost albums, and his seemingly never-ending touring. Ultimately, the motorcycle accident and Dylan's withdrawal from public life after it allowed him the circumstances to redefine his gender identity performance that has guided the remainder of his career.

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"Dylan and the Divine Feminine"

By Rebecca Slaman

The Divine Feminine is a buzzword today, used to invoke a "secret power" women possess, one that has been lost under the patriarchy. It's been mostly appropriated into our hyper-individualist media landscape from non-Christian traditions under the embrace of white liberal feminism. But the Divine Feminine is actually an ancient concept that has been rekindled and reformed throughout many cultures and poetic traditions. Bob Dylan's songs often rely on a strong relationship to this powerful muse, informed by his songwriting, cultural, and personal influences. In turn, his relationship to this powerful divine muse can tell us of his own insecurities and identities as a songwriter and a man. In looking at this relationship, a few stock characters emerge: (1) magical, mystical women, (2) mythical women, and (3) religious (mostly Christian) women.

How can we find and define the divine feminine in Dylan's songs? Defining "the Divine Feminine" is tricky; we tend to think in binaries. The qualities of femininity have been contentious: we want to create a substantial definition of it and avoid Simone du Beauvoir's ire by not saying "anything other than man." But the qualities of contemporary divine femininity tend to be seen as sweet, soft, motherly, caring. This is just a version of western ideal womanhood: the wife, the mother, under another name. What one lacks, the other has. Dylan does tap into this definition a bit, but where he's coming from when speaking of these women is a more ancient context, as well as the context of his time.

Dylan came of age during Second-wave feminism, a period when these ideals of womanhood broadened. In this movement, "witchy" women represented a rejection of these ideals of beauty, of power, of relation to men. As Robin Morgan writes in her 1978 memoir, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*,

> In the late 1960s feminist political activists in the United States began to employ the witch as a symbol of frightening and "deviant" womanhood.Halloween 1968 marked the beginning of WITCH, an acronym for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. A group of New York women dressed up as witches and launched a full day's programme of dramatic political action at sites including the Federal Reserve Treasury, the New York Stock Exchange. One Chase Manhattan Plaza, massage

> parlours, a beauty parlour, a men-only bar, arestaurant frequented by sixties "beautiful people." (Morgan 1978:71-77)

They occupied a space that traditionally only men were allowed, or where women of a certain beauty standard were permitted only as accessories. WITCH was chosen as the group's name for its symbolic value: it grabbed people's attention and offered theatrical opportunities for protest activities.

It must be clarified: "The women were not interested in witchcraft for religious reasons, and performed rituals only as public performances because of the crowd-pulling attention they brought to political protests" (Rountree 1). Though they were not religious, this same movement did eventually birth the religious movement Wicca. The political became religious in the same way Dylan himself eventually did.

These political ideals were certainly being talked about in the circles Dylan ran in. The women in his life would have been influenced by this imagery and perhaps participated in its reclamation. Similarly "Goddess feminism," coming about in the late 60s, marked a difference between Dylan and his folk heroes, making him more contemporary to the social trends of the time. "Consciousness-raising" social events, where women would gather and debate the role of feminism in society going forward, employed these symbols of female power. Though perhaps idealistic, they needed these goddess figures as role models for women to feel comfortable taking power in work and relationships. This similarly turned into its own religious practice: priestesses of goddess feminism worshiped their own patron goddesses. In time, Dylan became a priestess himself.

For Dylan, a clearly foundational text – so foundational in fact that he lists it on his website – is *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves. Dylan mentions the book in *Chronicles, Volume One* when describing his first winter in New York: "Invoking the poetic muse was something I didn't know about yet. Didn't know enough to start trouble with it, anyway. In a few years' time I would meet Robert Graves himself in London … I wanted to ask him about some of the things in his book, but I couldn't remember much about it" (41). Dylan may be downplaying his engagement with the book, as many people cited him carrying it around everywhere like it was a religious text. It's the basis for more than just his relationship with women, but his identity as a songwriter.

The book is an exploration into the divine female muse as a longstanding figure in mostly Celtic cultures. Graves emphasizes the genuine magic of ancient poetry that has a relationship with the White Goddess, and thus, why it was suppressed by the patriarchal

religions. According to him, "the reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem, is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust – the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death" (Graves 20). The female muse's power is paramount to her, and she can be represented by any woman – Graves uses examples of John Keats: Fanny Brawne was a human inspiration to project the muse, but there was also a metaphorical inspiration, the threat of death Keats wrote under. Christian and classical tradition squashed the divine female muse in favor of patriarchy. Graves makes a distinction between poets who subscribe to patriarchy and those who rightly address the muse's power. "The Classical poet, however gifted and industrious, fails to pass the test because he claims to be the Goddess's master – she is his mistress only in the derogatory sense of one who lives in coquettish ease under his protection" (Graves 21).

This idea directly influences the muse in Dylan's early songs. In his famous *60 Minutes* interview in 2004, Dylan says "Those songs were almost magically written." Dylan romanticizes his own early songwriting by entering himself into this canon of "true" poets. He makes a similar distinction to Graves: "It's not a Siegfried and Roy kind of magic, it's a different kind of penetrating magic." It's not something constructed by humans, but something beyond. Both Dylan and Graves are talking about something real. Whether the muse was moving through him in a literal or metaphorical way, we do see his relationship with women change throughout his career. With this, he goes through phases of suppressing the muse. His songwriting moves from living in fear of her, to attempting to claim power over her. Eventually, the muse is under the power of the masculine God through the vessel of Dylan.

Take "My Back Pages" as an example of this early influence:

> Girls' faces formed the forward path
> From phony jealousy
> To memorizing politics of ancient history
> Flung down by corpse evangelists unthought of though, somehow

In this autobiographical song, Dylan is talking about his personal history of how he's come to love the humanities. He was motivated to impress girls, and his method was to seem smart. In the context of the song, he's admonishing himself for being foolish, dismissing the reason for him wanting to learn as childish. However, we do see women and love of history linked. He

compares women in his orbit to historical women in a positive light. We can also think of tales of women, Helen of Troy, for example, being a catalyst for major events in history, and the personal drama of the gods being the explanation for historical events. This is the history of storytelling. He implicates himself in this history by being a songwriter himself, and he often references the classics.

In other cases, Dylan uses the Divine Feminine in a positive context, saying a woman is like the muse. Notice the purely positive connotations: "And your saintlike face and ghostlike soul"; "Bow down to her on Sunday"; "You remind me of something that used to be / Somethin' crossed over from another century"; "You got me under your wing, the way you walk and the way you talk, I feel I could almost sing"; and lastly, about from *Chronicles* about Joan Baez: "she looked like a religious icon, like somebody you'd sacrifice yourself for and she sang in a voice straight to God."

In the contemporary religious sphere, the theme of sacrifice invokes Jesus, or the messiah. But Dylan is talking about sacrifice as an ancient religious rite. Bob is like the priestess of goddess feminism. "When I Paint my Masterpiece" likewise, is a great example of this: a mortal woman who represents the conduit for the muse. She'll be with him when he paints his masterpiece. Dylan associates her with a historical symbolism. In one version of the song, he uses the character of Botticelli's niece, another personal connection to ancient history.

Dylan doesn't always embrace this power the muse has over him. As he continues to write, the muse's power becomes a complicated feeling for him as a man. When he describes her in these examples, the power is simply a fact he's stating as the storyteller, like he is the victim of a spell could love or hate and it wouldn't matter. In "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You," Dylan sings:

> Is it really any wonder the love a stranger might receive
> You cast your spell and I went under
> I find it so difficult to leave

It doesn't sound like he particularly wants to leave, but the witch casting her spell would have ensnared him even if he did. He is like a willing servant to her.

In "Isis," Dylan plays with the power dynamic and seems to be in denial over the power he did have in the relationship. Throughout the epic story, he switches back and forth between claiming any fault in the relationship. At first, "I could not hold on to her very long" suggests her free will, more powerful than his. Then as we go on, we see it may have been his truancy

that led her to leave, not her power over him. "She thought I was so reckless" suggests his flightiness, therefore his own free will. "What drives me to you is what drives me insane" suggests forces even bigger than this literal goddess, such as the force of love itself. In playing with these ideas, Dylan no longer follows the literary pattern set by Graves. He takes the poetic tools that Graves has given him, and context that society has given him, and internalizes those to make mythic art about his experience in relationships with real human women.

When Bob Dylan converts to Born-Again Christianity, we see gender dynamics change from more Eastern and Celtic origin, as in the White Goddess, to Abrahamic, Patriarchal, and Classical. The shift in the female muse begins within "Wedding Song." First, the speaker aligns with the goddess figure:

> You breathed on me and made my life a richer one to live
> When I was deep in poverty you taught me how to give
> Dried the tears up from my dreams and pulled me from the hole
> Quenched my thirst and satisfied the burning in my soul

She has bestowed good fortune upon him; she has saved him. This idea of salvation intermingles the Abrahamic religions with this Celtic/Eastern concept of the goddess. But then, the speaker subverts her power later in the song when he begins talking about a higher power commanding them to be together.

> Oh, can't you see that you were born to stand by my side
> And I was born to be with you, you were born to be my bride

The hands of fate or a higher power are in charge, not this all-knowing goddess who can save him. Dylan has consistently given up the idea that he has power in these relationships, but now he insists that neither does she.

We can find many interesting parallels between the first half of "Wedding Song" and the concept of salvation in "Shelter from the Storm." Dylan mentions his "crown of thorns," the adornment that society has given him that is a burden to him. The thorns constitute his earthly struggles, but although he is invoking the Jesus metaphor for himself, she is the one who gives him salvation. She is an equal to God. In performance, his delivery of "lethal dose" has a cheeky tone to it, as if the goddess is so powerful she doesn't know her own strength.

When we get into the Christian era, we don't totally leave these ideas of divine womanhood behind. One of the most fire-and-brimstone songs is also a love song that invokes the Divine Feminine muse. "Precious Angel" describes a woman who delivers him to the grace of God. The speaker specifies this is a fate he wouldn't be able to come to himself. Interestingly, he uses witch imagery to admonish his non-Christian pals who has spent time with up until this point. "My so-called friends have fallen under a spell / They look me squarely in the eye and they say, 'All is well'. Curiously, the speaker doesn't claim he's not *also* under a spell, since he credits the addressee of the song as swaying him in the right direction. He also calls her a divine being, an "angel," which harkens back to "You Angel You" from *Planet Waves*, though the content of the song is different. Even when turning from any non-Christian mythology or religion, Dylan can't let go of the essence of the White Goddess.

Dylan leaves divine women behind after the Christian era. As the preaching fades, women take on much more earthly features. It seems the magical facade is really gone this time, with songs such as "Seeing the Real You at Last." It's hard to find anything positive about women for a period, let alone divine ones. This is until "Under Your Spell" on *Knocked out Loaded.* It's tricky to parse what happens in the song, which may be because it's co-written with Carole Bayer Sager. But it's back to basics with the power struggle with Dylan's speaker and the muse. He seems tired of the fact that this struggle is something he hasn't escaped, and maybe never will. The song describes the speaker as stuck in purgatory after a run-in with his lover.

> I'd like to help you but I'm in a bit of a jam
> I'll call you tomorrow if there's phones where I am
> Baby, caught between heaven and hell
> But I will be back, I will survive
> You'll never get rid of me as long as you're alive

The "fault" of the troubled relationship goes back and forth between the speaker and the subject, as in "Isis." If she's the one casting the spell, why does she need to get rid of him? It seems the speaker wants to seek vengeance on the deity that controls him in any way possible. This dynamic is representative of the vibes towards female subjects in this post-gospel era.

When Dylan starts looking back on his life and career in *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, the presence of women and the muse must have loomed large. When he returns to the muse, he has no more fight left in him. Rather than running or being unwillingly commanded, Dylan

embraces the muse and addresses her directly. He speaks to her as a force, rather than in the form of a woman. In doing so, he gives up the one power that he ever claimed to have, which was storytelling. In "Mother of Muses," Dylan sings,

> Show me your wisdom - tell me my fate
> Put me upright - make me walk straight
> Forge my identity from the inside out

He could tell their stories all day, but he asks the Muse to do it for him. She's bigger than the storyteller– she's the driving force of his whole life and identity. He lists the great men who have been influenced by her: Elvis, Martin Luther King Jr., historic military generals, and he does so with respect and acceptance of her power. The muse moves through their lives and then through himself to tell those stories.

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"Who Is That Man?: Identities, Space, and the Dylan Legacy"

By Andrew Fehribach, Radboud University

Introduction

Bob Dylan's legacy never seems to close. With every shift in genre or glanced over album by more casual listeners, Dylan manages to surprise the world with what he offers to his audience. His lasting appearance in cultural consciousness encourages people to determine what he represents to each generation that discovers him. The foundations of his celebrity identity continue to be the topic of study and intrigue, as most recently seen with the December 2024 release of the film in the United States covering Dylan's rise to stardom in the 1960s called *A Complete Unknown* starring Timothée Chalamet. Following this long held celebrity identity, his legacy more recently expanded into the age of Dylan as laureate. Since winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, Dylan's identity as a celebrity singer-songwriter intersects with this new identity. Reconciling the relationship of these two identities furthers the process of establishing Dylan's legacy for future fans and critics.

Contemporary interpretations of Dylan's legacy post-2016 include the 2022 public opening of the Bob Dylan Center museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma; the 2021 publication of the essay collection *The World of Bob Dylan*; and the 2023 publication of initial research into the archives with *Bob Dylan: Mixing Up the Medicine*. Each of these interpretations aim to promote and shape a particular narrative for Dylan's legacy, showing a vibrant discourse looking back at Dylan and his significance moving forward. Including the laureate identity in the Dylan legacy involves reflecting on the celebrity identity because of the importance of the 1960s on both his writing and his renown in popular culture.

In the case of this essay, I am interested in connecting these identities to the spaces that Dylan occupied during this time period and interpreting the impact of masculinity to the formation of the laureate and celebrity identities. To make this connection, I examine the gender dynamics of two influential spaces on Dylan's identities in the 1960s: the Beat Generation and the New York City folk scene. The spaces Dylan occupied between roughly 1962-1966 are particularly important to examine. Not only are these the years that Dylan achieved stardom, but this is also the time period that Nobel Prize committee cited by referencing his 1966 album, *Blonde on Blonde*, as a significant reason for him receiving the

prize: "[*Blonde on Blonde* is] an extraordinary example of his brilliant way of rhyming and putting together refrains and his pictorial thinking."[1] Studying these spaces as masculine explores how Dylan's own masculinity relates to the connection of the celebrity and laureate identities that his legacy simultaneously occupies. This in turn begins to interpret the direction the Dylan legacy could go as these two identities coexist while interpreting the consequences of historic masculine space on contemporary literature. For this essay, I use "celebrity" to signify Dylan's rise to popular cultural prominence and "laureate" to signify the eventual validation of his work at this time as literature by the Nobel Prize committee.

The Beat Generation

The Beat Generation praised the art of performance: fleeting moments of experience that romantically capture revelations for those on stage and in the audience. The opening lines of "Mr. Tambourine Man" recognize the intoxication and unsustainability of these occasions: "I know that evening's empire has returned into sand / Vanished from my hand."[2] People recall and retell of the "empire" that Dylan references in their own lives, creating the foundations for a literary movement that aggrandizes adrenaline as the muse. The Beat Generation weaves such momentous performances into their history. Studying gender in relation to those who performed and the impact of those performances on recollections of the Beat Generation shows how people reify these spaces in their retellings, which maintains not only the literary tradition, but also the masculine space. This process of reification then perpetuates to this masculine space that Dylan developed artistically from, tying masculinity to both of his identities.

Allen Ginsberg performing "Howl" at the 1955 Six Gallery reading in San Francisco became one of these storied performances. Six poets performed that night: Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, Philip Lamantia, Philip Whalen, and the master of ceremonies Kenneth Rexroth.[3] The website for the Beat Museum in San Francisco cites McClure as remembering that "when Allen read 'Howl,' we all knew a line had been crossed." Their website continues, "the impact of that first reading was so momentous that a re-creation of the event was organized

[1] Sara Danius, "Announcement of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2016," October 13, 2016, The Swedish Academy, video, 11:46, 9:47.

[2] Bob Dylan, "Mr. Tambourine Man," recorded January 1965, track 8 on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Columbia, Spotify.

[3] "October 7 - Anniversary of the Six Gallery Reading," The Allen Ginsberg Project online, October 7, 2015, https://allenginsberg.org/2015/10/october-7-anniversary-of-the-six-gallery-reading/.

in March of the following year."[4] In his 1958 semi-autobiographical novel, *The Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac recalls the conversations that night as relating "anarchistic ideas about how Americans don't know how to live."[5] To honor the famous event, a plaque sits outside the former venue, placed there in 2005. It states: "Presented to San Francisco on the 50th Anniversary of the first full-length public reading of HOWL at Six Gallery."[6] The recreation of the reading, Kerouac's account of the original reading, and the commemorative plaque of the event show that this event quickly and lastingly became a part of the history of the Beat Generation. Ginsberg himself unabashedly hyperbolizes and dramatizes the 1955 event in an essay from 1957, showing how its significance evidently grew with nostalgia and pride:

> A group of six unknown poets in San Francisco, in a moment of drunken enthusiasm, decided to defy the system of academic poetry, official reviews, New York publishing machinery, national sobriety and generally accepted standards to good taste, by giving a free reading of their poetry in a run down second rate experimental art gallery… The audience, expecting some Bohemian stupidity, was left stunned, and the poets were left with the realization that they were fated to make a permanent change in the literary firmament of the States.[7]

This quote signifies that moments like these are revelatory and lasting. People regenerate this space by telling these stories of profundity and triumph, which reinforces the conventions of the space from that time. This is not to suggest that the creation and perpetuation of masculine space was entirely exclusionary (more on that regarding Diane di Prima shortly), rather that this socialization indicates how space encouraged men disproportionately to women when cementing themselves in the literary traditions of the Beat Generation.

To better understand the role of masculine space in the Beat Generation, especially in the context of this event, *On The Road* by Jack Kerouac from 1957 details how gender factored into this community of writers. Considering this book is important when interpreting the Beat Generation because Kerouac earned an idolized reputation in the community for this novel,

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[4] "The Earliest 'Howl' Recordings," The Beat Museum online, October 5, 2020, https://www.kerouac.com/the-earliest-howl-recordings/.

[5] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, (United States: Viking, 2008), 149.

[6] "The Former Six Gallery, San Francisco," Retracing Jack Kerouac online, September 23, 2011, https://retracingjackkerouac.com/2011/09/23/the-former-six-gallery-san-francsico/.

[7] Allen Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952-1995*, (United Kingdom: Penguin, 2000), 239-240.

with Ginsberg even projecting the Walt Whitman poem called "Poets To Come" onto Kerouac, describing him as the "orator" that the poem predicts.[8] But Kerouac's representation of women in *On The Road* considers them as secondary in the masculine space that the novel exhibits, signified by the relationship he presents between the characters Sal Paradise (Kerouac's persona), and Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady). This masculine space is evident in such instances as an arrangement made by Sal and Dean to have Dean's partner, Marylou, "switch to [Sal] in Frisco." Sal understood that "Dean would go back to Camille [Dean's wife] in Frisco" and that would allow Sal to "have an affair with Marylou." Kerouac even acknowledges that he did not really know how Marylou felt about all of this: "What was on Marylou's mind I don't know."[9]

Beat writer Diane di Prima likewise recalls this type of masculine space in her 1969 book *Memoirs of a Beatnik*. Brenda Knight in her 1996 book *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution* notes that di Prima's book is a work of erotica that interested a major publishing house before her poetry did, further signifying the positionality of women in the Beat Generation as signifying sexuality more than poetic seriousness at this time.[10] Speaking from her own perspective of being a woman among the Beat Generation with multiple sexual partners, di Prima reflects positively on "being a chick to three men," stating that she "found it is usually a good thing to be the woman of many men at once."[11] Reflecting on the potential of this space, she considers a culture with a "social structure" of free and self-sufficient women and that this freedom alongside men signifies "one of the wildest magics this planet has ever witnessed."[12] This shows that while the masculine space for Kerouac focuses on how men use women, di Prima is an example of a woman using the space for her own agency: "Live with one man, and you begin to have a claim on him. Live with five, and have the same claim, but it is spread out, ambiguous, undefined."[13] Di Prima suggests here that masculine space is not indicative of complete containment for women, rather that the space can be wielded for one's own benefits within that dominant space to communal and even literary success. This affirms the space as masculine without negating the agency that women managed to exercise within it. Such representations of this masculine space indicates the type of environment that Ginsberg performed "Howl" in for the Six Gallery reading.

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[8] Ibid 287

[9] Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 129-135.

[10] Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution*, (United States: Conari Press, 1996), 2.

[11] Diane di Prima, *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, (United Kingdom: Marion Boyars, 2002), 77.

[12] Ibid 78.

[13] Ibid 79.

In *Women of the Beat Generation,* Knight confirms this agency within masculine space as it pertains to Beat literature: "The women of the Beat Generation, with rare exception, escaped the eye of the camera; they stayed underground, writing. They were instrumental in the literary legacy of the Beat Generation, however."[14] As with di Prima, Knight acknowledges that women engaged the space despite the lesser coverage of their work: "In many ways, women of the Beat were cut from the same cloth as the men: fearless, angry, high risk, too smart, restless, highly irregular. They took chances, made mistakes, made poetry, made love, made history. Women of the Beat weren't afraid to get dirty."[15] It is the stifled presence of women as literary figures in this community as a result of masculine space, however, that relates to the importance of this masculine space to Dylan's identities when interpreting his masculinity. Despite establishing a masculinity of challenging and reshaping conventions, so the story goes, the performers of Six Gallery and the Beat Generation community more broadly were less groundbreaking regarding gender roles in their spaces. No women performed at Six Gallery. Although Dylan was not involved in this particular performance, he certainly engaged with these traditions in his own time.

Steven Belletto remarks in his essay for *The World of Bob Dylan* called "The Beats" that "Dylan adapted the older writers' social postures and attitudes toward literary tradition to help him forge his own idiosyncratic vision."[16] Belletto continues, citing Sean Wilentz's 2010 book, *Dylan in America*, as saying that "Dylan's involvement with the writings of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and the rest of the Beat Generation is nearly as essential to Dylan's biography as his immersion in rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and then Woody Guthrie."[17] The 2019 documentary film directed by Martin Scorsese, *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story*, shows footage of Dylan and Ginsberg visiting Jack Kerouac's grave in Lowell, Massachusetts. They read lines from Kerouac's book *Mexico City Blues* with Dylan mentioning that he first received the book in 1959 and that "it just blew a hole in [his] mind."[18] "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Blowin' in the Wind" tie in heavily with the respective Ginsberg poems "Howl" and "America," further indicating the influence of the Beat Generation on

[14] Brenda Knight, *Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution,* (United States: Conari Press, 1996), 1.

[15] Ibid 3.

[16] Steven Belletto, "The Beats," *The World of Bob Dylan,* edited by Sean Latham, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 170.

[17] Ibid 170.

[18] *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story,* directed by Martin Scorsese, (2019; White Plains, NY: Grey Water Park Productions), Netflix, 01:05:33

Dylan's writing in the 1960s. Belletto observes the stream of questions that "Blowin' in the Wind" and "America" share and also the phrase "I saw" appearing in "Howl" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall."[19] In the 2005 documentary also directed by Scorsese, *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, Ginsberg commented that "Hard Rain" signifies "that the torch has been passed to another generation."[20]

There are several other examples in Dylan's recordings to showcase what he adapted from his time with the Beat Generation. For instance, Raymond Foye in his essay for *Mixing Up the Medicine* called "Reflections on 'Dirge'" states: "Although the album title *Planet Waves* has always been considered an allusion to Ginsberg's 1968 City Lights book *Planet News*, I couldn't help but think what was really on Dylan's mind was Ginsberg's next book, *The Fall of America: Poems of These States, 1965-1971*."[21] Another instance of Dylan drawing from the Beat Generation for his albums is his decision to keep the opening sounds of laughter on the studio recording for "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream," playing into the focus on performance that the Beat Generation admired.[22] In the context of Dylan growing as a lyricist, Belletto observes and Ginsberg confirms that Dylan earned recognition for his work alongside the Beat Generation. This community significantly shaped who he was as a lyricist, with Dylan even referencing them in his first post-Nobel Prize album of original material, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, on the song "Key West (Philosopher Pirate)": "I was born on the wrong side of the railroad tracks / Like Ginsberg, Corso, and Kerouac."[23] With such influence on Dylan's identities, interpreting representations of the masculine space of the Beat Generation explores the effects of such a space on its inhabitants.

An interpretation of the effects of the Beat Generation environment shows up in the 2007 movie *I'm Not There*. The character of Robbie (this version of Dylan is played by Heath Ledger) represents a family version of Dylan who is married and has children. Claire, representing Dylan's wife at the time, argues with Robbie about a remark he made to one of their friends about believing in the possibility of real social change being connected to

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[19] Steven Belletto, "The Beats," *The World of Bob Dylan,* edited by Sean Latham, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 173.

[20] *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, directed by Martin Scorsese, (2005; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures), Netflix, 01:21:27

[21] Raymond Foye, "Reflections on 'Dirge,'" Mark Davidson, Parker Fishel, *Bob Dylan: Mixing Up the Medicine,* (United States: Callaway Editions, Incorporated, 2023). 290.

[22] Bob Dylan, "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream," recorded January 1965, track 7 on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Columbia, Spotify.

[23] Bob Dylan, "Key West (Philosopher Pirate)," recorded January 2020, track 9 on *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, Columbia, Spotify.

femininity. He continues by saying that women "can never be poets" and lists off "Whitman, Rimbaud, [and] Shakespeare" as examples to dismiss Emily Dickinson.[24] Although likely hyperbolized for effect and not necessarily representing a genuine belief that Dylan held, this scene is an effective reminder of a version of Dylan's legacy in the masculine spaces that the Beat Generation helped cultivate as seen in part through the Six Gallery reading and in *On The Road*.

Dylan's lyrics during his time in the 1960s come at least in part from the world of the Beat Generation. As the celebrity identity developed in this space, so too did an eventual laureate identity develop. Another masculine space where such development occurred around this time for Dylan was the New York City folk scene.

The New York City Folk Scene

The New York City folk scene of the 1960s similarly represents a masculine space that Dylan developed his laureate and celebrity identities in. Like the Beat Generation's literary community, the folk scene had gendered spaces that situated women differently from men. Even Joan Baez, who represents an acclaimed woman in this space, became a supporting character in the Dylan chronology once his celebrity reached new heights throughout the 1960s. As with the Beat Generation, examining this masculine space and the relationship Dylan himself had with it reveals how masculinity influenced his artistic development, which eventually earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature. Also similar to the Beat Generation, the folk scene shows women with agency in masculine spaces. Dylan's own memoir, *Chronicles, Volume One,* Martin Scorsese's documentary *No Direction Home*, and the Coen Brothers' film *Inside Llewyn Davis* each convey representations of this masculine space. Other sources then confirm these representations.

Chronicles, published in 2004, gives us an account directly from Dylan of his perspective on his time in the New York City folk scene forty years later. It's a collection of names and faces that present new ways of living and thinking to Dylan during this time, introduced to him by Suze Rotolo. "New York City," Dylan writes, "the city that would come to shape my destiny."[25] He describes the iconic venue called the Gaslight as "a closed drawn circle that an unknown couldn't break into. There weren't any auditions. It was a club I wanted

[24] *I'm Not There*, directed by Todd Haynes, (2008; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures), Amazon Prime.
[25] Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster UK, 2005), 9.

to play, needed to." He continues: "I kept my sights on the Gaslight. How could I not? Compared to it, the rest of the places on the street were nameless and miserable, low-level basket houses or small coffeehouses where the performer passed the hat. But I began to play as many as I could. I had no choice."[26] The environment drew Dylan in and its acceptance of him provided him ample space to develop his craft. Looking back, Dylan still understands the people and music that made up that time in his life as irrevocably a part of his career.

The perspectives men had of women relate to Dylan with his reflection in *Chronicles* that having a woman on stage was a "trick" to bring in more money. In describing a waitress "who was good to the eye" that he'd have "take up collection," Dylan writes that she would "wear a funny little bonnet, heavy black mascara, low laced blouse – looked almost naked from the waist up under a capelike coat. I'd split the money with her later, but it was too much of a hassle to do it all the time. I still made more when she was with me than when I was working on my own."[27] *Chronicles,* while not being a reliable source of strict facts, does serve as an effective glimpse into Dylan's relationship with this space. The significance of this space to Dylan's identities then explains how masculinity relates to his legacy.

Corroborating Dylan's account is *My Greenwich Village: Dave, Bob, and Me* by Terri Thal from 2023, a memoir that explores the New York City folk scene at this time with firsthand accounts. Freddy Cristóbal Dominguez wrote a review of this book for the *Dylan Review* where he cites Thal as representing that "she was not an 'object' as so many women were… her story, which culminates with her arrival on the folk scene, is also a testament to the ways the strictures of patriarchy mitigate or partly subvert agency." Dominguez continues, noting that Thal insists that the folk scene was not infected with the grossest forms of misogyny – she says it was not a 'sexist scene.'" Despite indicating that the scene was not sexist, Thal does recognize that it was a masculine space. Dominguez cites another line from the book: "'there was sort of an assumption that there were factors distinguishing the female folk singers from one another in ways that were never considered for the men.'" He then adds: "Unlike male performers, women (Carolyn Hester, Judy Collins, Joan Baez) had to be pitted against each other." Thal also recounts a "personal experience about an encounter with Clarence Hood – a manager of The Gaslight – who had asked her 'to have a sexual interlude.'"[28] Such a

[26] Ibid 16.

[27] Ibid 17.

[28] Freddy Cristóbal Dominguez, "Review of *My Greenwich Village: Dave, Bob, and Me*," *The Dylan Review*, vol 5.2 Fall/Winter 2023-2024, *https://thedylanreview.org/2024/02/21/review-of-my-greenwich-village-dave-bob-and-me/*.

masculine space of men sexualizing Thal is further written about by Suze Rotolo in her own memoir from 2008 called *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties.* "There were not many females hanging out at their [Dave Van Ronk and Thal] flat," Rotolo writes, "it was mainly guys… who came and went, casually taking in Terri in her white underwear as she offered them things to eat or drink, and then sat down on the couch to join the conversation."[29] This review of Thal's book as a memoir of the folk scene that Dylan learned from and Rotolo's own account of spending time with Thal supports Dylan's account in *Chronicles* of this masculine space.

The influence of this space on Dylan during his rise situates its importance when interpreting the relationship of his two identities with each other. In *No Direction Home*, Dylan says he identified with the Woody Guthrie book, *Bound For Glory*, "more than [he] even did with *On The Road*." When speaking on folk music records, especially those recorded by Guthrie, Dylan describes himself as a "musical expeditionary" who would "just would have to immerse [himself] in them."[30] Even post-1960s tracks such as "Tryin' To Get To Heaven" (1997) and "Brownsville Girl" (1986) (previously titled "New Danville Girl" as labeled on the 2021 *Springtime in New York* bootleg series album) feature references to songs by Guthrie, showing the direct and lasting lyrical influence Guthrie had on Dylan: "Going Down the Road Feeling Bad" (a lifted line for Dylan's song) and "Danville Girl" respectively.

Taking in the New York City folk scene in the early 1960s, Dylan says in *No Direction Home* that "there was something in their eyes that would say 'I know something you don't know' and I wanted to be that kind of performer."[31] This sentiment is evident with his development as a songwriter by him using melodies and lyrics he learned at this time, which became a staple of his referential writing style. "Blowin' In The Wind," "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright," and "Chimes Of Freedom" to name a few songs that came from folk songs he likely heard and performed in connection to the New York City clubs: "No More Auction Block," "Who's Gonna Buy You Ribbons," and "Chimes Of Trinity" respectively. Suze Roloto also writes in *A Freewheelin' Time* about how Dave Van Ronk was "well known and well respected in the downtown music scene" and that those years were

[29] Suze Rotolo, *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties*, (United Kingdom: Crown, 2008), 114.

[30] *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, directed by Martin Scorsese, (2005; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures), Netflix, 00:29:38.

[31] Ibid 00:51:51.

> formative … and Dave did a lot of the forming and teaching. It was amazing how much that man knew … The Van Ronk apartment at 190 Waverly quickly became the living room of the new generation of bohemians … [Dylan] was intent on having me get to know the people he had become close to since coming to the city that winter, telling me how great they were and how much he wanted me to meet them.[32]

Dylan's association with the folk scene developed him artistically similar to his development from his ties with the Beat Generation.

With the impact on Dylan as an eventual laureate clear, the added dynamics of masculinity in this space becomes relevant. The 2013 film, *Inside Llewyn Davis*, the screenplay of which comes from Dave Van Ronk's 2005 memoir *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, follows the titular character Llewyn Davis through the New York City folk scene of the early 1960s. The film presents this scene as the environment that built the image of Dylan as an intellectual while maintaining shallow impressions on women. These representations reflect well the type of space that Dylan described in *Chronicles*.

In the film, Davis performs countless times in the Gaslight, meets Albert Grossman, but never finds his way as a folk singer. The end of the film features an actor portraying Bob Dylan from the early 1960s performing on the same stage. Men treat the women who appear on the stage in the movie with similar unserious indifference as the men in Kerouac's books treat women. One example of this is how men in the film discuss the character Jean Berkey, who is a woman featured performing during the movie. The club owner talks to Davis about the struggles of the folk music scene and that the biggest crowds they draw for performances are from men sexualizing Jean.[33] This film portrays gender on stage in this space as sexualizing and demeaning towards women and a type of misunderstood intellectualism among men.

The characters Jim Berkey and Al Cody prepare to perform a song with Davis called "Please Mr. Kennedy" that he does not respect, refusing royalties in favor of a $200 session fee in part out of desperation for money. Even the man who appears to be the producer said that the song was "not the most serious music we've recorded at this studio."[34] Later in the film, characters representing wealth and a higher social class mention hearing the song, calling

[32] Suze Rotolo, *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties*, (United Kingdom: Crown, 2008), 112-113.

[33] *Inside Llewyn Davis*, directed by Ethan and Joel Cohen, (2013; Issy-les-Moulineaux, France: StudioCanal), Paramount+, 01:28:40.

[34] Ibid 00:29:43.

it "hysterical" and that it would be "a hit." They continue by saying "I wish I was in your business. I mean, one hit could fix you up."[35]

By concluding the film with Dylan performing as part of the folk scene, and with the film's viewers knowing Dylan's eventual career, it suggests that it was Dylan who changed the perception of folk music and who began to bring in crowds from his talent and intellect. The Coen Brothers' depiction of this cultural shift effectively explores how gender related to this shift by presenting Dylan as simply another performer in contrast to the women and men before him. This representation matches the accounts of gender dynamics that Dylan provides in *Chronicles*. Masculinity within the film is about artistic integrity and assuming a Dean Moriarty-esque image of drifting around and traveling West, as invoked through the character Johnny Five, who Davis drives with to Chicago, as is the opening destination of Sal in *On The Road*.[36] Bob Dylan represents that folk singer ideal fulfilled, something that the film recognizes as occurring in a masculine space.

As with the Beat Generation, the New York City folk scene connects to Dylan's identities as both a celebrity and a laureate. This connection then provides insight into how masculinity relates to these identities. The significance of this past masculine space on the contemporary laureate identity emerges with the reification of this space in the act of writing literature.

Conclusion

Masculine spaces such as those cultivated by the Beat Generation and by the New York City folk scene are important to understand in order to better contextualize Dylan's Nobel Prize win alongside his masculinity and his legacy. This is because neglecting to consider such influences produces uncritical narratives that maintain the authority of the male dominance of these spaces over time. One such narrative appears in the 2023 book by Jann Wenner, co-founder of *Rolling Stone* magazine, called *The Masters: Conversations with Bono, Dylan, Garcia, Jagger, Lennon, Springsteen, Townshend*. Wenner's book is a compilation of interviews that he previously conducted with each of these musicians at different points in their respective careers. It is the title, the introduction, and the all-male selection of artists in particular that suggest the continuation of masculine spaces infiltrating contemporary

[35] Ibid 01:32:12.
[36] Ibid 00:47:55.

discourse. In the introduction for the book, Wenner writes: "To us, the artists were the moral compass of society, the gatekeepers of truth … I quoted the Lovin' Spoonful, saying that the magazine was for anyone who believed that rock and roll was 'the magic that can set you free.'"[37]

This act of honoring individuals by definitively ranking them recalls an idea that Virginia Woolf mentions in *A Room of One's Own* published in 1929: "That deep-seated desire," Woolf writes, "not so much that SHE shall be inferior as that HE shall be superior."[38] *The Masters* exhibiting this need to be superior through the term "masters" then advertises the Dylan legacy in terms of his artistic mastery and cultural influence. This framing of Dylan alongside the other men in the title indicates that the masculine spaces in the past reverberate into the representations of legacy in the future. Such a reinforcement of masculine space is evidence of the lasting effects of this space on artistic expression. Woolf explores this temporality pertaining to space and its significance further in her essay collection.

I reference Woolf in relation to *The Masters* because she writes in *A Room of One's Own* how the reverberations of spaces in the past affect the establishment of legacy in literature. This then, she argues, impacts who is likely to create literature in the future. For instance, Woolf references the end of the 18th century as a time when women began writing more, which enabled future writers to produce masterpieces of literature:

> Without those forerunners," Woolf contends, "Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind in a single voice.[39]

Jessica Gildersleeve, who wrote the introduction to the 2021 edition of *A Room of One's Own*, argues that having a room of one's own "signifies the feminist reimagination of the

[37] Jann Wenner, *The Masters: Conversations with Bono, Dylan, Garcia, Jagger, Lennon, Springsteen, Townshend,* (United States: Little, Brown, 2023), X.
[38] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own: The Feminist Classic* (United Kingdom: Capstone, 2021), 80.
[39] Ibid 97.

domestic space" because "men occupied the public sphere while women were confined to the private. They were expected to serve the interests of their home and family rather than their individual needs or desires."[40] This spatial reimagination that Gildersleeve interprets from Woolf regarding domestic space also applies when retrospectively considering masculine spaces. The reimagination of past masculine spaces is possible because, as seen through accounts including di Prima, Thal, and Dylan himself, women occupied these spaces. Wenner's use of the term "masters" and his assertion that these musicians were "the moral compass of society" ranks and divides artists without this reimagination of the spaces and contexts that influenced their work. As Woolf indicates, this creates a tradition that encourages certain groups to continue "thinking in common" while limiting other groups to produce work as "solitary births." After explaining in an interview why he didn't include artists such as Joni Mitchell and Stevie Wonder in his book, Wenner says that they didn't meet "that same historic standard."[41] Wenner later apologized "wholeheartedly" for these remarks.[42] Nevertheless, the sentiment from his original statement of needing to meet a "historic standard" further reinforces Woolf's notion of "solitary births" when interpreting the structure of his book. Reading *The Masters* through *A Room of One's Own* problematizes how Wenner develops a legacy for Dylan because Woolf shows that Wenner's book perpetuates the masculine space of the Beat Generation and the New York City folk scene. The celebrity identity in these spaces that greatly influenced Dylan's 1960s catalogue then significantly relates to how his masculinity connects to him as a laureate.

Examining the gendered relationships in these spaces recognizes the celebrity identity as being intertwined with the laureate identity. In relation to Dylan's masculinity, the connection between these identities signifies how the effects of space resonate through time and subsequently direct both his legacy and the eventual literary validation of his work by the Nobel Prize committee. This connection also scrutinizes the significance of the Nobel Prize win, which itself signifies perhaps the most dramatic shift in creating Dylan biographies and categorizing him since his rejection of being considered a "legacy artist," as evidenced by the success of *Time Out Of Mind* in 1997. As the Bob Dylan legacy changes in the context of his

[40] Ibid xi.

[41] David Marchese, "Jann Wenner Defends His Legacy, and His Generation's," *The New York Times*, last modified September 19, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/15/arts/jann-wenner-the-masters-interview.html.

[42] Edward Helmore, "Rolling Stone founder Jann Wenner apologizes for disparaging Black and female artists," *The Guardian*, last modified September 18, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/sep/18/jann-wenner -rolling-stone-apology-black-female-artists-interview

Nobel Prize for Literature award, it is important to emphasize the reasons he earned it, from the value of his writing itself to the spaces that encouraged an eventual laureate.

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