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Take What You Need:
Musical, Cultural, and Literary Influences on Bob Dylan

By Tim Long

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Arts
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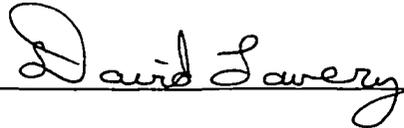
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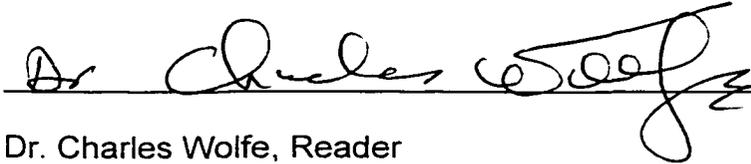
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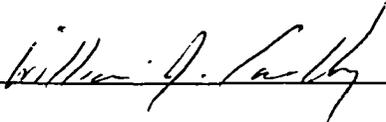
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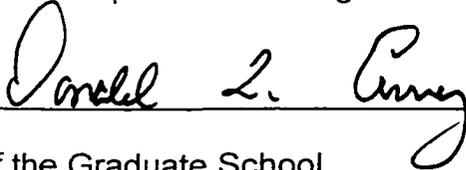
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Abstract

Take What You Need: Cultural, Musical,
and Literary Influences on Bob Dylan

By Tim L. Long

Musical Americana has a varied history that ranges from the traditional singers in the cotton fields of the deep South to the star-studded extravaganzas in Nashville or New York City. In that history one finds roots of gospel, country, blues, folk, and old-time rock and roll. All of these influences came together in the early sixties in the work of Bob Dylan. His music is a conglomeration of the singers Dylan listened to as a child and those he met in his early years as a performer. As Dylan became the voice of his generation, he carried with him the influences of those voices of America's musical past. In his work one finds echoes of Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, and a myriad of others who paved the road before him. Dylan surpassed his predecessors, evidence of his skill in assimilation and of his strength as a poet of original verse. These abilities have at their roots the men and women to whom Dylan looked for his own inspiration. His poetry reveals the guiding forces in his development as a social and musical icon. Dylan has made use of his extensive knowledge of folk history, literature, and the Bible to create his art. Scriptural references abound in his poetry, indicative of his knowledge of the scriptures and the lessons learned from them. Through his work Dylan brings all these influences into play and in so doing keeps his own artistry and the work of his predecessors forever young.

Acknowledgments

The road to writing a dissertation is sometimes difficult and would not be possible to travel without the help of determined supporters. I would certainly be remiss if I did not thank those who helped me so much in the effort.

My greatest supporter, proofreader, and eternal helpmeet has been my wife Charlene, without whom I could not have taken the first step onto a college campus. From the early years of working so that I could attend college in the first place to the final days of seeing this work come together, she has always been my greatest source of strength. There will never be enough words to express my gratitude for her undying support. Our children – Chris, Sarah, and LeeAnn – have been the source of pride and determination to succeed throughout my college years. They and their children have ever been our greatest joy and the fulfillment of our dreams.

Dr. David Lavery has been unbelievably patient in his guidance and assistance throughout the writing and editing process. From the very onset of the planning stages, he has been the ideal counselor and friend. A high point in my time at Middle Tennessee State University has been the time we spent together working on this dissertation. My second reader, Dr. Charles Wolfe, has been of invaluable assistance in supplying information on some of the more obscure performers mentioned in this work. His voluminous knowledge of the music world makes him a central figure in musical America. Thanks also to Dr. Larry Gentry

who helped me get started on this road and to Dr. Alan Hibbard who guided me through many rough spots.

Of course, a great debt is owed to Bob Dylan, not only for helping me discover the power of words, but for speaking for so many of my generation. His words remain forever young, his songs continue to flourish in changing times, and his influence is ever blowing in the wind.

Introduction

A Life in Stolen Moments

I never ever did take the time to find out why I took the time to do any of those things.¹

Bob Dylan, 1973

I “bought” my first Bob Dylan album in 1968 as part of an introductory offer to join the Columbia Music Record Club. I had never heard any of Dylan’s songs. Growing up, as I did, in the small town of Tompkinsville, Kentucky, the only music I heard offered on the local station was traditional country, and my father would never turn the station to anything more radical. So the only knowledge I had of Dylan was gleaned from conversations with my friends. I heard words like “genius” and “poet,” which caused my natural curiosity to kick in. So when I placed the album on my turntable I listened with great anticipation for what my comrades had called the voice of our generation.

The first cut on “Bob’s Dylan’s Greatest Hits” is “Rainy Day Women # 12 and 35.” With the blaring horns and raucous voices in the background, the song was like nothing I had ever heard before, but the main thing that struck this boy from Kentucky was the simple thought that “this boy can’t sing.” I felt I had been

¹ This quote is from *My Life in a Stolen Moment*, included in Dylan’s collection of poetry and prose, 1985’s *Lyrics: 1962-1985*. The writing is found on page 71 of that collection. All future references to Dylan’s work will be indicated by an *L* in parentheses with the page number on which the writing can be found in *Lyrics*.

deluded, deceived, and cheated of the money I had not paid for the album. I was ready to take the album off the turntable and scheme to sell it to a friend when a voice from the other side of the door saved me from a life of being among the totally unhip, the completely uninformed, the friend and companion of Dylan's own Mr. Jones. With the voice of all mothers, time without end, my dear mother demanded that I "turn that noise off!" Now, any one with any memory of having been a teenager knows that the cardinal rule in parent/child relationships is to never obey completely--to obey enough to save oneself but leave a little room for rebellion. So it was that, out of a simple, stubborn sense of disobedience, I turned the music down, way down, so that my ear was next to the tiny speaker. And thus it was that in such a posture I was forced to listen, really listen, to the words coming from that diminutive source. I listened as Mister Zimmerman spoke to me of the answer "Blowin' in the Wind," of times that were indeed "A'Changin'," and how we, everyone in my generation, were like rolling stones on a journey with Mr. Tambourine Man. God bless my dearly departed mother. Her parental dictate sent me on a pilgrimage which continues to this day. It seems as though Dylan and I (as well as so many of us who will admit it) have traveled together through four decades.[the phrase was included because it is the name of a Dylan song; I have no problem with omitting it]

And as I trace my journey back to the beginning, I think about the beginning for the one who has spoken so eloquently and forcibly for so many of us. Bob Dylan spoke the truth: as the times have changed so have each of us to

whom his music has meant so much. When the poet spoke of loss in 1997's "Not Dark Yet," this fan of four decades could feel the same in his life. And so it is true of every aging would-be hippy. I know how I began to value the words of this cultural icon, yet I knew little about Dylan's own personal journey.

This void is intentional on the poet's part. Dylan has always been and remains a reclusive artist. As Ellen Willis points out in her article titled simply, "Dylan," "Dylan's refusal to be known is not simply a celebrity's ploy, but a passion that has shaped his work" (219). The poet has never been the self-confessional artist who exposes every facet of his life to a curious public.

Through the years he has changed his musical style, his image, his religion, and even his appearance. One sometimes wonders who the real Bob Dylan is.

Journalist Peter Knobler tells the story of running into Dylan at Greenwich Village in 1964. Like the typical fan, Knobler ran after the poet explaining, "You're Bob Dylan!" Dylan's answer is the foundation upon which this study is based. The social poet of the sixties eyeballed Kobler and answered, "Yeah, man, sometimes" (109).

If Bob Dylan is Bob Dylan only sometimes, who is he the rest of the time? Is there any such thing as the "real Bob Dylan"? This is a question tangled up in blue, in large part because of Dylan's unwillingness to answer questions about his past. Dylan has always been recalcitrant with the media, to the point of outright deceptiveness. In trying to find information about Dylan I have found interviews, for the most part, almost useless. They have always been vehicles

for the poet's wit but of little benefit to the serious student. Dylan plays the interviewer like he plays the words to his songs, twisting meanings and approaches to fit his own agenda. For example, in a 1965 interview with Pearce Marchbank Dylan was asked about his real name. His response was, "My real name was Znezelvitz and I changed it to avoid obvious relatives that come up to you in different parts of the country and want tickets to concerts and stuff like that . . ." (Marchbank 19).

Time shift to 2000: a new millennium which still finds Bob Dylan as the epitome of the poet-singer-songwriter. By the time *Time Out of Mind* was released in 1997, Dylan's album sales had reached nearly 31 million (Hilburn 248). It was my privilege (with over 8500 fellow fans) to attend a Dylan concert in Nashville, Tennessee. *The Nashville Tennessean's* Jay Orr spoke of the evening as a "special, memorable interlude in Dylan's never-ending tour" (2B). Dylan continues to be the enigma of the rock world. The Joker man has managed to keep his dark shades on for over thirty years now. Some question how he hangs on year after year. Some wonder how he manages to physically survive his grueling never-ending tour. And just how did this whole incredible journey begin? How did Bob Dylan become Bob Dylan?

Chapter One

Nothing There To Hold Him: Life in Hibbing, Minnesota

Our blue-eyed son once said, "I'm only Bob Dylan when I want to be" (McKeen 287). The fact is that Dylan has always wanted to be anyone except the person who began life as he did. His original identity is one layer of skin he has spent his whole life shedding.

The child who would become the social poet of the 60's was born May 24, 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota to Abe and Beatty Zimmerman. Robert Allen Zimmerman was the progeny of immigration. The mother's forbears were from Lithuania and Latvia; his paternal grandparents came to America from the Ukraine. Years later when Dylan sang about the poor immigrant in *John Wesley Harding* he was singing about the hardships endured by his ancestors. The refugees of Dylan's past were a source of family strength, but the poet of later years would do all within his power to distance himself from them.

Robert Zimmerman was a performer long before he became Bob Dylan. In *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, Robert Shelton tells the stories of the youngster's early presentations. The child of three would delight to the sound of his own voice coming from the Dictaphone in his father's office at Standard Oil. At the age of four Robert sang for his grandmother at a Mother's Day celebration, but only after he had stamped his foot to get everyone's attention and demand that they be quiet. Already, little Bobby Zimmerman was

learning to love center stage. Abe summed up the child's relationship with his "audience":

People would laugh with delight at hearing him sing. He was, I would say, a very lovable, a very unusual child. People would go out of their way to handle him, to talk with him. I think we were the only ones who would not agree that he was going to be a very famous person some day. (Shelton 31)

The Zimmermans lived a typical Jewish-American life until fate presented a severe challenge in 1946, when Abe contracted polio. There was the need for outside help, which came in the form of Abe's brothers. To be closer to family during Abe's recuperation, the family moved to Hibbing, where Abe worked as he could as part of his two brothers' furniture and appliance business (32). Life for the Zimmermans in Hibbing took on a middle-class, normal existence. But for young Robert Zimmerman Hibbing came to represent everything from which he wished to escape.

Hibbing, Minnesota is known as "the world's largest open pit" (Spitz 19). As Robert grew up he saw all around him the results of man's efforts to strip the land for every ounce of profit it held. As described by Richard Williams, Hibbing is "a community of 17,000, mostly from eastern and southern Europe; the town had been ravaged first by lumbermen and then by open-cast mining, which tore huge chunks out of the country-side wherever ore was found close to the surface" (14). The young man who would later write about the downcast and wounded grew up

surrounded by the results of rampant strip-mining. The result was the childhood desire to leave such a place and never look back. In a conversation with Shelton in 1969, Dylan reflected to his biographer:

You've seen Hibbing . . . You've seen that great ugly hole in the ground, where that open-pit mine was. They actually think, up there, that it is beautiful. They think it is a scenery place . . . I don't need to be reminded of what it was like. I'll never forget it. (16)

The mask that would become Bob Dylan begins here. Shelton writes that the pit to which Dylan refers reached a final depth of 535 feet (26). A chasm such as that cannot be ignored; it created an abyss in the sensitive soul of a future poet. As Dylan entered his teen-age years he saw the mining boom end. The time came that in Hibbing, as Dylan wrote later in "North Country Blues, there was "nothing here now to hold them" (L 96). The boom ended and a local depression began in Hibbing, Minnesota. The developing poet saw the town physically move as different areas were mined when other parts of town were depleted. When Dylan wrote his "11 Outlined Epitaphs" in 1964 he wrote about his mother's school "left rottin' shiverin' but still living' / standin' cold an' lonesome" (L 107).

Once the mines petered out, there was little left to hold a young man in Hibbing. Certainly it was not the scenic atmosphere which would draw tourists. In *Bob Dylan: A Bio-Bibliography*, William McKeen writes, "The town . . . was circled

with craters, the residue of the mining, and looked like it had been bombed during a war” (5). Even as a youngster, Robert Zimmerman knew he had to escape his own, private desolation row. In 1966's *Tarantula*, Dylan reminisced on Hibbing:

where I live now, the only thing that keeps the area going is tradition—it doesn't count very much—everything around me rots. . . . i'll do anything to leave here . . . tho you might not take this the right way, I would even sign a chain with the devil. (109)

No doubt Dylan, either consciously or unconsciously, was making reference to the myth of Robert Johnson's deal with the devil to play guitar as he did.

(Johnson's influence will be considered in a later chapter.) How far would the young man go to escape? What would it take for a young Jewish, son of a merchant to take flight? In 1973's “My Life in a Stolen Moment,” Dylan wrote, “Hibbing's a good ol' town. I ran away from it when I was 10, 12, 13, 15, 15 ½, 17, an' 18. I been caught an' brought back all but once . . . ” (L 70).

In reality the youngster “ran away” from Hibbing only when he left for college, but as a teen he began to develop a personae that would have nothing to do with Hibbing, Minnesota. In later years the poet would do everything he could to distance himself from his hometown. The memories of Hibbing were just too harsh. They needed to be left behind for Bob Dylan to emerge from the ashes

of Robert Zimmerman's origins. In a 1964 interview with Nat Hentoff, Dylan stated, "My background's not all that important . . . It's what I am now that counts" (52). The fact is that as Dylan became more famous, his desire was to be known as anyone except the boy who grew up in the world's largest pit-mine. To young Robert Zimmerman it became obvious that a way had to be found to escape. The way out was through music.

Asked once about the oppressiveness of life in Hibbing, Dylan responded by saying that he remembered no specific hardships due to his escape mechanism, hearing Hank Williams and being introduced to the guitar through his music, "And once I had the guitar," Dylan recalls, "it was never a problem. Nothing else was ever a problem" (Loder 424). As a teen Dylan came to dream of escape to a larger world, a world of music and motion pictures, where he could shape himself to be whatever he wanted to become. Through these media he realized that there was a much larger, much more adventurous world beyond the open pits of Hibbing. His first source of escape into fantasy came in the form of motion pictures. Movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Blackboard Jungle* showed him the rebellious side of life, letting him realize that he was not the only young person resistant to his parents, that there were others who wished to be beyond their fathers' commands. Soon after *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), featuring James Dean, came to the Hibbing cinema in 1956, the fifteen year old Robert Zimmerman's walls were covered with pictures of the young actor (Williams 16). Robert began to see himself as a rebel, and there was reason in

his mind for such defiance. Even though the Zimmerman household was one which was solidly middle-class, the young man was often exposed to the poverty which had begun to eat away at Hibbing. According to Bob Spitz, Dylan's father Abe had the responsibility of collecting on delinquent bills for Zimmerman Electric and Furniture. Abe also made the decision from time to time to foreclose and repossess. Young Robert sometimes had to go along to help pick up furniture. The teen was greatly affected by what he saw on the faces of those who lost their furniture. Spitz comments, "He saw Abe as a kind of new-world Shylock extracting a pound of flesh from the backsides of impoverished laborers, sapping their pride" (61). While his own life may have been no worse than that of any typical teenager, he was bothered by the unemployment and financial loss of those around him. The young man could see in the eyes of those from whose houses he took former possessions the pain of the downtrodden he would one day champion in song. The more time the teen spent in Hibbing, helping his father or just observing the loss around him, the more sure he became that he had to find a way out.

Lying in the darkness of his room late at night, Dylan began to seek his escape. A much larger and more open world was to be found through the airwaves of radio. Lowered to the point where his parents could not hear (and who among us does not remember this same experience?) the radio in Dylan's room could be counted on to deliver the sounds of escape. Late at night the teen would tune his radio to bring in stations as far away as Mississippi, seeking out

anything other than the constant country music played on local station WMFG. This is not to say that Dylan did not also develop an enjoyment of some country music. Even country music could provide role models and heroes. One such hero was Hank Williams. In the liner notes Dylan wrote for the release of *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*, Dylan spoke of Hank Williams as his “first idol.” As will be discussed later, Williams was another model of the lonely drifter, anxious to escape. But young Dylan’s tastes went far beyond country. It was the mid-fifties, and Dylan began to develop an interest in the musical world beyond Hibbing. Late at night, when the clear airways made such possible, the future poet was introduced to a diverse world of musical influences from far away stations such as those in Shreveport, Little Rock, and beyond.

And the spectrum was wide indeed. The singer-songwriter who would later speak of Hank Williams as his first idol and Woody Guthrie as his last also had an early attraction for the music of Little Richard, writing in his yearbook of 1959 that his desire was “to join the band of Little Richard” (Shelton 39). The wild antics of Richard Penniman appealed to a youngster locked into the middle-class Jewish world of his parents. Blues music, country, hillbilly rock—all held an attraction to the young man surfing the radio waves. He listened; he hungered for more, and with every note coming through his radio he soaked in influences.

In those early years one disc jockey made a profound impression on the young man from Hibbing. “Jim Dandy” hosted a rhythm and blues program on Virginia’s WHLB which was syndicated into Duluth. This popular disc jockey was

a black man who spoke with a white voice as he introduced blues classics each evening. His real name was James Reese, and he introduced the young Dylan to a world of musical influences far beyond anything to be found in Hibbing, Minnesota. Jim Reese, Bob Spitz says, "introduced Bobby to an entirely new world of music, one that expanded his boy's already bountiful reach and helped him to define the roots of rock n' roll" (47). Young Zimmerman was so taken with the music that he and a friend, John Bucklen, traveled to Virginia to visit him and were amazed to find a black man. Reese welcomed them to his home where they were also amazed at his record collection. Bob, Jim Reese, and John Bucklen would sit endlessly listening to the likes of Big Bill Broonzy, Son House, Robert Johnson, Bukka White, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and Coleman Hawkins (Spitz 47). This music was from an entirely different world, but a world which the young man began to know he had to become a part of.

Along with the new music came a personae based upon the rebellion heard in the music and seen in the movies of James Dean and Marlon Brando. Young Zimmerman started dressing all in black and took to posturing in the defiant stance of characters seen in cinematic portrayals of nonconformists. Dylan wanted to be James Dean, Marlon Brando, or any mixture thereof. The key idea was to do anything and everything to be sure that he did not fit into anyone's expectations.

Dylan took his musical ambitions as far as he could in high school, playing at talent shows, PTA meetings, and other public forums when the local adults

would put up with his music. He formed such groups as The Golden Chords, The Shadow Blasters, and Elston Gunn, and the Rock Boopers. Their music was a mixture of country and rock, with Bob constantly pushing the envelope toward a more rocking sound. Each group split as time passed because no one could keep up Bob's vision of what the music should be.

The young man's desire to rebel also influenced his relationship with his parents. He listened to music of which they did not approve. He went to movies they did not select. He even dated the girl from the wrong side of the tracks, Echo Helstrom. Dylan met Echo in 1957 when he was seventeen and she was sixteen. He and Echo would stay up until all hours of the night listening to rhythm and blues on the airwaves from Shreveport, Louisiana. It was to Echo that Dylan penned his first attempts at love songs. She became his source of inspiration and constant support. No matter how poorly he was received when he played his music, Echo was always there to build up his flagging ego. As such, Echo stands as Dylan's first strong female influence. It was to Echo that Robert Zimmerman announced in 1958 that he had found the perfect name—"Bob Dillon" (Shelton 49). Much discussion has taken place over the years concerning Dylan's choice for this name. Dylan himself has adamantly denied having taken the name from Dylan Thomas. Shelton says that he took the name because he had an uncle with that name, and also because of the character Matt Dillon in the old western *Gunsmoke* (49). Stephen Scobie, in his *Alias Bob Dylan*, refutes any uncle as a source, stating, "genealogical research shows not a trace of any such person"

(47). It really doesn't matter. The significant thing is that Dylan chose another name. The name was just one more indication of a desire to leave the past behind. And the time even came to leave Echo behind. When they broke up in 1958, it was the first of many restless farewells for Bob Dylan.

Young "Bob Dillon" continued his teenage years listening to diverse music and gleaning from the performers. John Bucklen recalls, "Bob began to admire Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, two Chicago bluesmen up from the South, and white country stars who were into 'rockabilly'" (Shelton 53). Buddy Holly also emerged at this time and blew the music industry away. Shelton states the oft-stated opinion that "the vocal quality of many Dylan recordings shows his debt to Holly" (53). Holly probably did influence Dylan to the extent that the aspiring singer wanted to be on stage and admired like him, but one is hard pressed to actually think of a Dylan song that shows a strong reflection of Buddy Holly.

One very strong influence on Dylan came in the form of a high school graduation gift. Included in the stack of items given to the young man was a set of 78's by the blues artist Leadbelly. After listening to the set, Dylan was hooked. Young Zimmerman exclaimed to Bucklen, "You got to come over here! This is the thing, this is the thing!" (56).

In actuality, the "thing" that Dylan had discovered was that there was a whole wide world of musical influences beyond the world of Hibbing, Minnesota. With the passion for music in his heart, there was so much waiting for him to discover. To immerse himself in this world beyond, it was obvious that he had to

leave Hibbing--under the guise of attending college in Minneapolis. In truth, he never intended to be an academic scholar. He would be a student, and he would be very dedicated to his studies, but his school would be the world beyond the world's largest pit mine, where he could learn from every artist he intended to meet.

Bob Dylan left Hibbing and never looked back. In a 1978 *Rolling Stone* interview, Dylan recalled, "My childhood is so far away . . . it's like I don't even remember being a child. I think it was someone else who was a child" (Cott 44). This notion of Robert Zimmerman being someone else is very telling. In later years Dylan could never be trusted in interviews. He would fabricate stories, events, and people to fit his purpose of the time. This may have simply been an indication of a very dishonest person, or it could be an indication of a person willing to give away nothing. Above all, Bob Dylan had determined that when he left Hibbing he would become anyone except the boy who grew up in that pit mine. There was nothing there to hold him; it was time to move on.

Chapter Two

Song to Woody: Majoring in Woody Guthrie

I met him one day in the green pastures
of Harvard University

This line is from the introduction to “Baby Let Me Follow You Down,” found on *Bob Dylan*, the performer’s first album. There is no indication whatsoever that Dylan ever spent time at Harvard University, but he did eventually meet Eric Von Schmidt, who wrote the song and taught it to Dylan (a pattern often followed as the young Dylan developed his repertoire). He left Hibbing and picked up influences every step of the way to becoming a cultural icon. Ambling his way to Minneapolis included a stop-over in Central City, Colorado, where Dylan was able to charm his way into playing at a club called “The Gilded Garter” (Shelton 63). In the folk scene in Denver he discovered two early influences: Judy Collins and Jesse Fuller. Collins’ repertoire included “House of the Rising Sun” and “Maid of Constant Sorrow,” both of which were included in Dylan’s first album in 1960. From Fuller, Dylan picked up the use of the metal neck-brace to hold his harmonica (64). To any true Dylan fanatic a large part of the appeal of the artist is his ability to play the guitar and the harmonica at the same time, (I can remember being drawn to other artists--Steve Forbert, for example--because of

the same style of playing.), and it was from Jesse Fuller Dylan picked up a part of his appeal that made him distinctive.²

One thing in Minneapolis which did not influence Dylan was the University of Minnesota. After arriving in the Twin Cities, it did not take Dylan long to realize that college was not for him. In the liner notes to Dylan's first album, titled simply *Bob Dylan*, the poet recalls, "I didn't agree with school. . . . I flunked out. I read a lot, but not the required readings." Stacey Williams goes on to point out that everywhere Dylan went he nonetheless continued to "assimilate musical ideas from everyone he met, every record he heard."

While Dylan found that he did not fit into the college scene, he found a source of great musical growth in a place called "Dinkytown." Dinkytown was a bohemian enclave near the University of Minnesota, a magnet for those pulled in with dreams of musical success--what Sptiz called "the ideal matrix for someone about to become Bob Dylan . . . he could soak up the offbeat life-style and try on this new Dylan image" (71). Shelton puts it this way, "Although Dylan enrolled at the liberal arts college in September, 1959, within a few months he was really at the University of Dinkytown, majoring in music with advanced seminars in coffee

² In fact, the practice of playing the guitar and harmonica at the same time had been around long before Jesse Fuller. In *Tennessee Strings*, Dr. Charles Wolfe traces the performer playing the guitar and using some type of harmonica holder back to 1920's country singer Charlie Oaks (28). So Dylan, in learning this skill, was simply continuing his knack of taking things of days gone by and bringing this into newer times.

houses, minoring in radical life-styles, doing seminars in scene-making, preparing for graduate work in Woody Guthrie" (68). That "graduate work" would come later, when Dylan would finally meet the man who would bring all his previous lessons into focus.

After leaving his collegiate pretensions behind, Dylan moved in for a while with John Koerner and Harry Weber (a Ph.D candidate). Koerner was a great fan of the blues who loved Robert Johnson, Josh White, and Bukka White. Dylan listened to Koerner's record collection and learned to imitate the soul of the blues. Koerner said later, "He duplicated guitar phrasing and vocal inflections until it was difficult to distinguish his midwestern growl from the real thing" (Spitz 88). Dylan was hungrily soaking up and assimilating influences in every direction from the music scene surrounding him. Credit must be given to Dylan for an innate ability to recognize what to keep and what to discard. His mind was like a steel trap, but with a filter. Later in life there would be those who criticized the poet because of all the influences he discarded. The fact is that he discarded because he no longer needed the lessons. His growth as a songwriter was so rapid that it was natural that many who thought themselves friends would, of necessity, be left behind. His rapid evolution was incredible to consider, and many who saw that evolution were at Dinkytown.

In *All Along the Telegraph: A Bob Dylan Handbook*, Michael Gray quotes Ellen Baker, a Dylan acquaintance of the time:

“Dinkytown is the student neighborhood where not just Bob lived, but everyone he hung around with. The Scholar and The Bastille coffee-houses were in Dinkytown . . . 4th Street would represent all that to Bob: the social scene, the university crowd . . . the old folk people.” (41)

It was from these “old folk people” that Dylan learned the most. He would go to the open-mike nights, not just to perform, but to learn. And everything that he learned became the amalgamation which was his act. David Van Ronk, a performer who influenced Dylan with his version of “House of the Rising Sun,” recalls, “The part of Dylan that was the sponge could function on all eight cylinders. He gets what he can and then discards it” (Shelton 98).

This pattern of learn, use, and discard was a negative aspect of Dylan’s hunger to learn and evolve. Van Ronk is a typical example. Shelton states that “Bob’s debt to Dave was in style, perception, and interpretation. . . . Dylan picked up some of Dave’s guitar ideas, but a lot more of his special showmanship” (100). To see Dylan perform in the early days was to see someone who would be a carbon copy of the hottest act going metamorphosing into something completely original as the audience watched. He was a great comic, quipping and tossing his hat onto his head, becoming the ideal performer for the times. According to Paul Williams, Dylan was in Minneapolis from the fall of 1959 until the end of 1960, “playing at the Scholar . . . the Purple Onion in St. Paul . . . the Bastille . . . and at every party he managed to find out about” (12). Dylan became very popular with the bohemian set, pulling in good crowds and impressing the

traditionalists in the audience. He would continue this success when he later arrived in New York City, where he would go with two intentions: to become famous and to meet Woody Guthrie.

He continued his "lessons" in New York while garnering fame. When Robbie Woliver wrote *Bringing It All Back Home: Twenty-Five Years of American Music at Folk City*, he mentioned Dylan as among those who "came to see and learn from the traditionalists . . . the form and structure behind the time-honored chords and lyrics . . . [using] them as springboards for their own voices and styles" (27). Dylan loved to be on stage at the open mike nights; wherever there was a stage and an audience Dylan was sure to appear.

One place known for amateur "hootenannys" was Gerde's Folk City in Greenwich Village. Gerde's was managed by Mike Porco, an Italian immigrant who, in 1960, gave Dylan a two week gig sharing a bill with John Lee Hooker. Porco also put up the money for Dylan to join the American Federation of Musicians so that the poet could play at his club. Since Dylan was only nineteen at the time Porco also had to sign as his guardian. (Dylan had told him that his father and mother were "not around" [Shelton 96].) With this signing came the feeling that Robert Zimmerman had been left behind, and Bob Dylan was taking the first steps on a new road many others, including Woody Guthrie, had already taken.

On April 12, 1963, Bob Dylan performed a concert at the New York Town Hall. By this time he had traveled many roads on the way to fame. He had

learned many lessons and had already come to a point which few would reach in the folk world. This concert was an opportunity for the young poet to pay homage to those who had gone before but also to signal a need to move on. John Bauldie, in the booklet included with 1991's *Bootleg Series—Vol. 1-3*, speaks of this event as a time for the poet to “tip his hat to some of the influences that had brought him this far and to say some goodbyes” (26).

At the end of this concert Dylan read one of his poems, something he had never done before nor since. The poem was “Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie.” This homage to Dylan's last idol is a moving recitation of the hunger felt by anyone fighting the injustices around him. As the young poet laments all that is wrong in the world around him, he addresses the need to find hope amid the emptiness. The poem ends:

And where do you look for this hope that yer seekin'
Where do you look for this lamp that's a-burnin'
Where do you look for this oil well gushin'
Where do you look for this candle that's glowin'
Where do you look for this hope that you know is there . . .
You can either go to the church of your choice
Or you can go to Brooklyn State Hospital
You'll find God in the church of your choice
You'll find Woody Guthrie in Brooklyn State Hospital . . .

And though it's only my opinion
I may be right or wrong
You'll find them both
In the Grand Canyon
At Sundown. (L. 36)

The poem suggests the spirit of Woody Guthrie, existing as eternally and majestically as the Grand Canyon. The poem is touching; that evening's recitation moving. But Guthrie was not yet dead when the poem was recited. (He would not die until Oct. 3, 1967, after fighting Huntington's Disease for fifteen years.) In young Bob Dylan's mind, however, he was already an icon.

Dylan discovered Woody Guthrie while still in college after being encouraged by friends to read his autobiography, *Bound for Glory*. *Bound for Glory* told the story of Guthrie's ramblings around the country, singing for justice and living life to its fullest. Guthrie, who sang every one of his songs with all the indignity he could muster and carried a guitar with the logo "This machine fights Fascists," was, Dylan realized, the mold for the folk singer he wanted to be.

On the liner notes to 1976's "Woody Guthrie's 'We Ain't Down Yet,'" Judy Collins spoke of Guthrie's influence on not only Dylan but all folk singers:

Woody Guthrie was an inspiration to all of us who knew his music and the very deep struggle that he went through in his life to remain always aware

of his fellow human beings; his writing of the hopes and the anguishes and the joys of Americans has given us all courage to live and make music in the face of adversity, struggle and in rare times of calm.

Guthrie's songs were about the dust bowl and the poor dirt farmer, the misunderstood and the forsaken. His most famous songs include "This Train is Bound for Glory," "Pastures of Plenty," "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You," and (what has been called the American folk anthem) "This Land is Your Land." Shelton calls Guthrie "the voice of the disinherited Okies and Arkies . . . the bard of the Depression, a walking, singing, cussing, drinking father of the beats of the 1950's, the hippies of the 1960's, and some of the political activists of the 1970's (76).

Dylan became absolutely entranced by the life of the singer-poet. After reading *Bound for Glory*, Dylan lived and breathed Woody. Friend Harvey Abrams recalls the days after Dylan found Guthrie:

The book came as a real shock. For the next two years he patterned his life after what he had read. Bob started doing everything the way Guthrie did. For many months thereafter, everything Bob sang sounded like Guthrie. . . . It was phenomenal (75).

When Dylan found out that Guthrie was dying in Greystone Hospital in New Jersey, he was bound and determined to travel there to see the great man himself. When he finally made it to his idol's bedside, he found Guthrie ravaged

by disease, unable to even play his guitar, but eager to listen to the young man interpret his songs. Guthrie thought that while the youngster might never make it as a writer, he could surely make it as a singer. Woody told some friends after Dylan had visited him several times, "That boy's got a voice. Maybe he won't make it with his writing, but he can sing it. He can really sing it" (Jaffee 31). Of course, the reason Guthrie enjoyed hearing Dylan so much was that he was, in effect, hearing a reflection of himself.

The same could also be said of Dylan's speaking voice. The famous Dylan "nasal twang" is really Dylan doing his best trying to be Woody Guthrie. Some people were amazed at Dylan's melodic singing on 1969's *Nashville Skyline*. For a brief moment he had stepped out of his Guthrie personae and sang with his natural voice. Shelton points out that Dylan's speech patterns underwent a change around 1960, when he became "so engrossed in Guthrie that he changed to imitate him" (75). This Dylan himself denies, "His influence on me was never in inflection or in voice. What drew me to him was that hearing his voice I could tell he was very lonesome, very alone, and very lost out in his time. That's why I dug him" (356).

Finally meeting the frail, dying Guthrie was a pivotal point in Dylan's life. Meeting Guthrie also meant meeting others who would come to be with their mentor: Ramblin' Jack Eliot, Cisco Houston, and Pete Seeger. Time spent with Woody in the hospital was like time spent in a seminar on folk music. Dylan listened, sang along with, and learned from those surrounding Guthrie on his

death bed. The young poet soaked up material for the place in folk history that would one day be his. And meeting Woody Guthrie sent the young poet into full-fledged hero worship. After first visiting with Guthrie, Dylan wrote a postcard to his friend Dave Whitaker back in Dinkytown, "I know Woody . . . I know Woody and met him and saw him and sang to him. I know Woody—goddam.—Dylan" (Richard Williams 29).

It was Woody Guthrie who awoke in Dylan the topical poet. Wilfred Mellers makes the point that Dylan's debt is in Guthrie's "immediate relevance to and in Dylan's world. He made verses and music from firsthand experience" (119). Before Guthrie Dylan had performed songs written by others. His stage act was one of interpretation. Granted, his interpretation would transform the original greatly due to his personality and showmanship, but it was still a singer singing someone else's songs. When Dylan went to visit Guthrie in the hospital, he saw firsthand a man who had lived an incredible life and written about it all along the way. The thought began to focus in his mind that perhaps he too could live that kind of life and write about it.

The lessons learned from the others around Guthrie cannot be overlooked either. When Dylan went to see Guthrie he also saw Guthrie comrades Ramblin' Jack Eliot and Cisco Houston singing songs that the great man himself had written. The young man was exposed to another world he could seek to conquer. Eliot remembers the young Dylan when he first met the dying Guthrie, "He just sat there listening, absorbing everything he could" (Woliver 65). Part of what he

absorbed was the knowledge that there was a whole world out there in which he could ramble. Perhaps the seeds of Dylan's "Never-Ending Tour" were planted in the fields plowed by Woody Guthrie and his companions.

It was also through the influence of Woody Guthrie that Dylan began to see the power of topical songs. Guthrie wrote about the Great Depression and how it ruined lives and displaced families, a topic Dylan would later deal with in songs like "I Am a Lonesome Hobo," about a man who sees nothing better in his future than to "wander off in shame" (L. 260). Woody Guthrie wrote of "Pretty Boy Floyd," broke the law but helped the needy; Dylan would write of "Joey," the gangster who was "always caught between the mob and the men in blue" (L. 383). Guthrie wrote of the need for unions in the dust bowl years; Dylan would write of the corruption in unions in 1983's "Union Sundown." As Wilfrid Mellers states, "It was Guthrie who decisively awoke the young Dylan to the verities of an America alienated, persecuted and dispossessed . . ." (119). That Dylan became the social poet of the sixties is due in part to the influence of one Woody Guthrie.

The influence of the master teacher can be seen in Dylan's choice of subject matter and, in at least one case, the very melody of the song. One of Dylan's strongest indictments of social inequity, 1963's "The Ballad of Hollis Brown," has the same melody as Guthrie's "Pastures of Plenty." Other songs by Dylan indicate an obvious debt to his mentor. In "Talkin' New York," written by Dylan in 1961 and the first poem included in *Lyrics*, the complete collection of Dylan's writings up to 1985, the poet includes the line, "Now a very great man

once said / That some people rob you with a fountain pen" (L. 3). The reference is to a line in Guthrie's "Pretty Boy Floyd." Shelton points out that the models for "Talkin' New York" were Guthrie's "Talkin' Subway" and "New York Town" (119).³

Dylan has always freely accepted the debt he owes to Woody Guthrie. The liner notes to 1964's *The Times They Are A-Changin'* includes writings entitled "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs." The sixth of these includes the following homage to Guthrie:

Woody Guthrie was my last idol

he was the last idol

because he was the first idol

that taught me

face t' face

that men are men

shatterin' even himself

as an idol . . .

Woody never made me fear

and he didn't trample any hopes

for he just carried a book of Man

³ Of course, the appearance of such "talking blues" can be traced back further than Guthrie. A blues singer by the name of Chris Bouchillon recorded "Original Talking Blues" in the 1920's. Guthrie, just like his disciple, had learned from those who came before him.

an' gave it t' me t' read awhile
 an' from it I learned my greatest lesson
 you ask "how does it feel t' be an idol?"
 it'd be silly of me t' answer, wouldn't it . . . ? (L. 111)

In the text we can see the influence of Dylan's idol. The dropping of the ends of every "to" and "and" is an obvious echo of Guthrie's speech pattern. The whole of "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" is an attempt by Dylan to become more recognized as a poet rather than a singer of others' songs. Dylan's first original composition was 1961's "Song to Woody." Lines in this song also celebrate the link between the older and the younger poet:

Hey, Woody Guthrie, but I know that you know
 All the things that I'm a-sayin' an' a many times more.
 I'm a-singin' you the song, but I can't sing enough,
 'Cause there's not many men that done the things that you've done. (L. 6)

Again, the dropping of ending vowels, a pattern which has continued in Dylan's work through the years, represents a debt to Guthrie. On 1995's *Highway 61 Interactive* (another example of Dylan breaking new ground in a new medium), Dylan speaks of Woody Guthrie as "a link in a chain" for him.

And Dylan would recommend the university of Guthrie to anyone who would ask him the best way to proceed in the music business. In 1985's *Biograph* (a five-LP boxed set spanning his career), Dylan gave the following advice in the

accompanying brochure, "To the aspiring songwriter and singer I say disregard all the current stuff, forget it, you're better off, read John Keats, Melville, listen to Robert Johnson and Woody Guthrie." When the then-definitive-collection of his poetry, 1973's *Writings and Drawings*, was published, he dedicated the book to "the magnificent Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson." The debt to Woody Guthrie is obvious, in writing and in song.

In October of 1992 a four-hour celebration in song took place at Madison Square Garden as a tribute to Dylan's thirty years as a recording artist. The unique feature of this concert was that every performance was of a Dylan song. Sinéad O'Connor was the only exception. She had planned to perform "I Believe in You," but was roundly booed off the stage for her then recent destruction of a picture of the pope on "Saturday Night Live." Before she left she screamed out the lyrics of one of her own songs. The episode did not overshadow the tribute to the social poet of the sixties. It is remarkable to realize that one man could have written not only so many songs, but so many great songs. The performers ran the gamut from the Clancy Brothers to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, with a little Neil Young thrown in for good measure. Each performer did his or her best to upstage each other and honor Bob Dylan (as Neil Young's set began he welcomed one and all to "Bob fest"). To a fan such as myself it was a truly inspirational evening, seeing so much song-writing talent represented in one person. And, of course,

not every song in Dylan's catalog was performed. Each act built up to the long-awaited moment when Dylan himself would appear.

All watching were pretty sure that the evening would end with the all-inclusive "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," but the question in my mind was revolving around which song Dylan would use to begin his set. Had I been planning the evening my selection would have been the breakthrough songs like "Blowin' in the Wind" or "The Times They Are A-Changin'." But I had been to enough Dylan concerts to know that one can expect nothing and prepare for anything. When Dylan came on stage silence descended, followed by the roar of recognition when the crowd was sure that it was actually the great poet himself. Dylan sauntered to the mike and opened his set with "Song to Woody." The homage was touching, a fitting tribute to one who had helped him find his way as a poet-singer.

Chapter Three

Take What You Need: Other Musical Influences

In 1974, before the Rolling Thunder Revue Tour, Dylan and Rob Stoner were walking the streets of New York at 3 a.m. They began playing a familiar game - trying to stump each other by matching song titles to performers. Stoner soon realized he was in over his head. Stoner recalls, "He knew almost everything I threw at him . . . not just the titles but the entire lyric too. He'd go into a verse like he was singing it only a couple hours before. The extent of his knowledge was mind-boggling" (Spitz 477). As Stoner realized, and as all research reveals, Dylan is more than a student of those who came before; he is a scholar beyond compare of musical Americana.

As Dylan traveled Highway 61 out of Hibbing, as he worked his way into Dinkytown, and ambled into New York City, he became in his formative years an encyclopedia of music. As he learned he also developed a determination to remain true to the source. Harvey Abrams, part of Dylan's circle of friends at Dinkytown,⁴ recalls, "Dylan was the purest of the pure. He had to get the oldest record and, if possible, the Library of Congress record, or go find the original people who knew the original song" (Shelton 68). Such determination, especially apparent in his use of the Library of Congress, the official depository of original and authentic recordings, shows his dedication to the original. His appetite for

⁴ Any performers with whom the reader may not be familiar will be identified in the Appendix.

musical influences was boundless, and his ability to assimilate these influences was noted by those around him in those early years. Liam Clancy, of the folk-singing Clancy Brothers, presents the picture of a young man's voracious desire to absorb influences:

Do you know what Dylan was when he came to the village? He was a teenager, and the only thing I can compare him with was blotting paper. He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity; he was totally blank, and was ready to suck up everything that came within his range.
(Richard Williams 9)

Dylan was influenced by everyone he heard. He stands today as a walking, talking conglomeration of the American musical landscape. As Robert Christgau says, "His songs do seem to be derivative, but they don't derive from anyone in particular" (393). He is the blotting paper of Clancy's characterization, the assimilation of a wide range of American music.

The Blues

Dylan's interest in the blues started long before he reached either Dinkytown or New York. A friend from the poet's high school years, Jaharana Romney, tells of Dylan "borrowing" her record collection of blues singers for several years and borrowing, too, from that which he heard in the recordings. Romney recalls, "I

remember him listening to a Rabbit Brown song, and later incorporating one of its verses into a song of his own" (Wittman). Dylan was drawn to the blues because the background and history of the music appealed to him. The blues can be called the poor man's response to the world around him. A poor sharecropper, his ancestry steeped in the cotton fields of Mississippi or other parts of the deep South, could learn a few rudimentary notes on the guitar and pour out his heart in song. The blues deal with the hardships of life and the treacherous road of love. As a young man struggling to make it on his own, Dylan could relate to the pain inherent in such music.

Another thing about the blues which appealed to Dylan was the element of improvisation so central to its nature. One could play a few simple chords and tell a story, changing it around to fit the mood of the evening. This type of blues, called the "talking blues," is defined by Shelton as "speech delivered against simple guitar background" (118). The narrative of a talking blues song typically tells a wry story in near deadpan with each verse ending in a humorous observation about life. The "father of the talking blues" was a South Carolina singer by the name of Chris Bouchillon, who recorded *Original Talking Blues* in the 1920's (Shelton 119). Dylan used the form with hilarious results in "Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues" and "Talking New York," both recorded in 1962. That same year he also published "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues," which he refused to tone down for an appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, a stand which may have slowed down his progress as a star for a time, but went a

long way toward establishing his position as a young man willing to take a stand. The "talking blues" helped Dylan find his voice as a performer and established an important rapport between himself and his audience in the early years of his career.

Dylan remained a student of the blues when he became fortunate enough to sit in on recording sessions. His first professional recording job was in 1961 as a harmonica player at a Harry Belafonte recording session (Paul Williams 18). He also played harmonica on albums with Victoria Spivey (21). Included in many of those sessions was Big Joe Williams, a "folk-blues" and "country-blues" singer, whose first "guitar" was home-made with baling wire strapped to a piece of fence wood (407).

Dylan imitated this type of ingenuity in the early sixties, making music with whatever he could find laying around the studio or stage. Shelton tells how Dylan once used Suze Rotelo's lipstick holder as a bottleneck the way Delta blues men had used whiskey bottles "to get that slightly ringing sound" (120). When it came time for Dylan to make his first album he made good use of what he had learned from the blues. That first collection, 1962's *Bob Dylan*, was recorded in a matter of hours with a production cost of \$402.00 (Crowe 8). Though Dylan later considered the album not indicative of his growing capabilities, it is a clear reflection of his blues influences. The album includes "In My Time of Dying," a song which can be traced back to Blind Willie Johnson, a Texas musician known mostly for his guitar work, and "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean," a song

associated with Blind Lemon Jefferson (Richard Williams 41). Also found in the Spivey was one of the most beloved of all the blues singers. She is also the lady pictured with a very young Dylan on the back cover of 1972's *New Morning* album is the song "You're No Good," a tune first recorded by Jesse Fuller, who Dylan met in Denver and from whom he had learned the skill of singing while accompanying himself with both a guitar and harmonica. "You're No Good" is also an example, according to Wilfrid Mellers, of the influence of blues singer Sonny Terry (122). Shelton refers to other influences in *Bob Dylan*, commenting, "Dylan's excellent guitar work reflects his study of Robert Johnson and Rabbit Brown (120). Rabbit Brown was a country blues singer known in the streets of New Orleans and, of course, Robert Johnson was the blues singer whose guitar playing and singing were so passionate that the legend became that he had made a pact with Satan in exchange for his abilities. Also found on Dylan's first album is "Highway 51," credited to Curtis Jones, a Texas blues man of the 1930's (Shelton 121).

In a 1985 interview with Cameron Crowe, Dylan spoke of some of his blues heroes. About blues singer Lonnie Johnson, he told Crowe, "I was lucky to meet Lonnie Johnson at the same club I was working and I must say he greatly influenced me. You can hear it on that first record, I mean, 'Corrina, Corrina'. . . that's pretty much Johnson" (7). In that same interview the poet mentioned Victoria Spivey," . . . oh man, I loved her . . . I learned so much from her I could never put into words" (8). Dylan also told Crowe that his guitar playing style had

been influenced by Lonnie Johnson, Tampa Red, and Scrapper Blackwell. For his harmonica style he gave credit to Wayne Raney, Jimmy Reed, Sonny Terry, and 'Lil Junior Parker (7).

Lonnie Fuller held his harmonica and kazoo in front of his mouth with a metal neckbrace. This way he could play the guitar at the same time he played his harmonica. This type of playing has become a Dylan trademark over the years. Fans still look forward to the point in certain songs where he "cuts loose" playing his guitar and harmonica together.

As in the Crowe interview, from time to time Dylan has spoken openly of his blues heroes. Sometimes the homage comes in the placement of material in an album. On the liner notes to his second album, *The Free Wheelin' Bob Dylan*, he included the following:

The way I think about the blues comes for Big Joe Williams . . . what made the real blues singers so great is that they were able to state all the problems they had; but at the same time, they were standing outside of them and could look at them.

In 1965's "Tombstone Blues," Dylan recites a list including Beethoven, John the Baptist, Belle Starr, Jezebel, and Ma Rainey. Of the persons mentioned, all are known to just about every listener, except Ma Rainey. Dylan's inclusion of her may have been an attempt to bring her to the attention of a new generation. The

great and beloved Rainey was but one among so many of his blues heroes. One of the most beautiful surprises found in 1991's *The Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3* is an out-take from *Infidels* (released in 1984), "Blind Willie McTell." This tribute to the great blues singer presents Dylan as a practitioner of the art of blues himself. In the booklet included with this set John Bauldie refers to this song as presenting "Dylan as the great blues singer he's always suggested that he might become, given the time" (62). Though Dylan is singing his heart out in the song, he includes the admission in song that "nobody can sing the blues like Blind Willie McTell." On 2001's *Love and Theft* Dylan labels the song "High Water" "to Charley Patton." Such statements are indications of Dylan's strong debt to the blues style.

Traditional

When Dylan was at the University of Minnesota, he certainly did not shine as a student; he was more involved in honing his craft. In writing about that time, Bob Spitz relates, "Bob may have been a lousy college student, but he studied enough folk material to have earned a Ph.D. at any respectable university" (173). His knowledge of and love for traditional music has served him well over the years. In *A Darker Shade of Pale: A Backdrop to Bob Dylan*, Wilfrid Mellers speaks of Dylan's background sources, "His basic verbal source is the traditional folk ballad, both in British origins and in its American permutations" (112). In writing about Dylan's first album, specifically about the song, "Man of Constant

Sorrow," Mellers continues, "Dylan takes over from traditional mountain style the bleatingly sustained tones that echo across the valleys, the painful elongation of vowel sounds, and the quavery melismata on words like 'troubled'" (122). Dylan stands not just as an imitator of the traditional singers who came before him, but as one who brought their style, pronunciation, and passion to new generations of fans.

As one looks into the background of many of Dylan's early songs, the traditional influence is seen to be strong. The liner notes to *The Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3* are invaluable in revealing the traditional roots of many of Dylan's early songs. Here the listener can read that Dylan's "Quit Your Low Down Ways," recorded in 1962, has as a source "Milk Cow Blues," recorded in 1930 by Sleepy John Estes (Bauldie 13). The first two verses of Dylan's version are lifted directly from Kokomo Arnold's version of the same song in 1934 (13). "Walls of Red Wing," also on the same collection, has the same melody as an old Scottish folk song, "The Road and the Miles to Dundee" (18). "Moonshiner," a song which reveals Dylan's great strength as a stylist, is a traditional mountain ballad (22). "Kingsport Town" has origins in a Woody Guthrie song, itself based on a very old ballad, "The Lass of Roch Royal" (16). Some in modern time, bored by the constant "sampling" used by today's performers, may accuse Dylan of having done the same, stealing lines and tunes because he was not talented enough to create his own. The fact is that when Dylan mined these old songs, he was not doing anything unethical nor unusual for the times in which he began. Every folk

singer of the day borrowed for every other folk singer and from every traditional song he or she heard. Robbie Woliver speaks of this practice as seen in the early days of Gerde's Folk City, "Bob was siphoning off from everyone, but that came with the true folk tradition" (67). In making use of old songs and tunes he was simply bringing the music of old to a wider audience.

Robert Shelton has been front-row-center throughout Dylan's long career and has had occasion to ask him about the sources of many of his songs. The journalist has seen "likeness of his melodies" in "I Pity the Poor Immigrant" and "Ballad of Donald White" in two traditional songs, "Come All Ye Tramps and Hawkers" and "Peter Amberly." Shelton also compares "Maggie's Farm" to "Penny's Farm," a traditional song on Pete Seeger's first solo album (163). From the beginning, with Dylan's "Song to Woody" deriving from Guthrie's "1913 Massacre," Dylan has established ties between himself and earlier folk and traditional singers. The poet has always acknowledged his debt and recognized it as such. In a 1984 interview with Kurt Loder for Rolling Stone, Dylan states, "I was kinda combining elements of Southern mountain music with bluegrass stuff, English ballad stuff. I could hear a song once and know it. So when I came to New York, I could do a lot of different stuff" (424). The material from whom he had learned had roots in rock, blues, traditional, and even country.

Country

Among all the blues and traditional singers Dylan speaks of as influences, we also find country artists such as Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers, not to mention Jack Guthrie, cousin of Woody Guthrie and the originator of the classic "Oklahoma Hills." Of course, Hank Williams can be said to have influenced anyone who ever tried to write a song or live the life of the lonesome drifter. Dylan speaks of his debt to Hank Williams in the jacket notes to *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*:

. . . I learned t' choose my idols well
T' be my voice and tell my tale
An' help me fight my phantom brawl
An' my first idol was Hank Williams (L. 78).

Hank Williams was the hard-drinking, hard-living embodiment of country music. When he died in the back seat of his Cadillac on the way to a concert in 1953, he left behind an incredible body of work and unfulfilled promise of what could have been. Many young men dreaming of success in the music world were entranced by Hank Williams. Dylan told Shelton in 1978 (upon the occasion of the death of Elvis Presley), "If it wasn't for Elvis and Hank Williams, I wouldn't be doing what I do today" (40). Thus we see not only a nod to Williams, but even to Elvis Presley, who never wrote a song in his life.

The appeal of Jimmie Rodgers was the appeal of the common man singing the songs of the common people. As Baggelaar observes in *Folk Music: More Than a Song*, "His music was meant for everyone, and his audiences comprised farmers, coal miners, ranch hands, schoolteachers, and clergymen" (323). In the early years Dylan likewise longed to be a popular singer on the circuit. He became, on any given night, whatever the crowd wanted him to be. Bob Spitz makes the point that, "If the truth be told, Bob Dylan got involved with folk music because it was the only game in town" (79). While this may seem a bit harsh, it is worth noting that Dylan has changed through the years to fit any movement he found interesting at the time. An example of this is the somewhat disconcerting reggae version of "Knocking on Heaven's Door" found on 1984's *Real Live*. In Dylan's defense it must also be pointed out that at times he has dramatically gone against the wishes of his public, as shown in his going electric in 1965 or in embracing Christianity in 1978. But, as evidenced by many of the weaker albums, too often Dylan has simply been content to watch the river flow, seeking the smooth pathway found by the likes of Jimmie Rodgers.

Something Taken, Something Given Back

Bob Dylan would revisit his roots with two significant albums in the early 90's, 1992's *Good As I Been To You*, and *World Gone Wrong* in 1993. Writing credits on both albums are given to no one, with the simple reference on both, "All songs traditional." The song selection on *Good As I Been To You* includes the old

standards: “Frankie and Albert,” “Jim Jones,” “Blackjack Davey,” “Canadee-i-o,” “Sittin’ on top of the World,” “Little Maggie,” “Hard Times,” “Step It Up and Go,” “Tomorrow Night,” “Arthur McBride,” “You’re Gonna Quit Me,” “Diamond Joe,” and the child ballad “Froggie Went a Courtin’.” The songs on *World Gone Wrong* include the title tune, “Love Henry,” “Ragged and Dirty,” “Blood in My Eyes,” “Broke Down Engine,” “Delia,” “Stack A Lee,” “Two Soldiers,” “Jack-A-Roe,” and “Lone Pilgrim.”

Both these albums are honest efforts by Dylan to pay homage to those from whom he learned so much in his formative years. As Mikal Gilmore says in *Night Beat: A Shadow History of Rock and Roll*, “*Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong* are reminders of what (Dylan) got - and still gets - from American folk music’s timeless mysteries and depths” (67). These collections reveal a Dylan using songs of the past to address his fears of the future. Liner notes from *World Gone Wrong* give information concerning where Dylan first heard each song and, whenever possible, the original performer of the work. In typical Dylan style, the poet laments: “. . . technology to wipe out truth is now available. not everybody can afford it but it’s available. when the cost comes down look out! there won’t be songs like these anymore. factually there aren’t [sic] any now.” One can feel Dylan’s sense of loss at the passing of these great old songs. In his appreciation for these songs and singers, he shows his respect by holding true to the source. On *World Gone Wrong*, for example, Dylan uses the original title and hook, “Stack-A-Lee,” rather than the more modern “Stagger

Lee." Songs from *Good As I Been To You* are spoken of by Melinda Newman as "direct ties to Dylan's past" (12). Examples of these ties are found in two songs especially. "Sittin' On Top of the World" is found in a 1962 album, *Three Kings and a Queen*, recorded by Big Joe Williams and featuring a very young Bob Dylan on harmonica. "Diamond Joe" was on R.J. Elliot's self-titled 1964 album, on which Dylan played on at least one cut. Also on *Good As I Been To You* we find "Arthur McBride", a Celtic anti-recruitment song Dylan learned from Paul Brady (12). In a *Rolling Stone* interview with Kurt Loder in 1984, Dylan admits, ". . . I never would have written a song if I didn't play all them old songs first. I never would have thought to write a song" (425). As a further indication of his debt, he told David Gates in 1997, "I remember all those old guys I saw. They live in my head. I can't get rid of them" (66).

At the time these efforts came out, the supposition of many was simply that Dylan's well of creativity had run dry; there were no new songs so why not put out albums of traditional, blues-flavored music to cover his weakness? Such rumors were forcibly laid to rest with the release of the incredible *Time Out of Mind*, 1997's album of the year. Dylan wrote every song on that album, ripping into the heart of a man seemingly approaching the end. But even on *Time Out of Mind* there is the echo of a past born in the blues. One example is the memorable guitar line in the epic "Highlands," the song with which Dylan ends the album. This haunting, repetitious line is acknowledged by Dylan to be structured around a guitar line by Delta blues man Charley Patton (Hilburn 249).

Bob Dylan stands as the completion of a cycle. He has managed through the years to respect the old yet incorporate the new. And he has always recognized that while the performers change the music remains the same. Dylan offers his own summation in "Epitaph 8":

Yes, I am a thief of thoughts
not, I pray, a stealer of souls.
I have built an' rebuilt
upon what is waitin'
for the sand on the beaches
carves many castles
on what has been opened
before my time . . .
for all songs lead back t' the sea (L. 112).

Chapter Four

Like Verlaine and Rimbaud

By the early sixties Bob Dylan had been fully created; Robert Zimmerman belonged to a past which the poet wished desperately to leave behind. The personae of Dylan had been assembled from all those who had come from Dylan's past. Had the poet only been a simple conglomeration of these men and women he would have faded into the obscurity which was the fate of so many of his contemporaries. What would soon set Dylan light-years beyond his fellow performers was the fact that he was a genius as a poet. The "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" included with the album *The Times They Are A-Changin'* indicated an artist interested not only in selling records, but in having his voice heard. Even those who have disparaged Dylan's physical voice over the years have admitted to his brilliance as a writer. There is absolutely no one else in the rock world who has produced such a voluminous body of work. Each successive song by the young man from Hibbing, Minnesota, showed further proof of budding potential. The album which represented a quantum leap, however, was 1965's *Bringing It All Back Home*. The album's vivid imagery and symbolism reflect a new awareness in Dylan of his own power with words. It was at this time that the poet began to see himself as having the ability to write songs on more than one level. The selections in *Bringing It All Back Home* contained both surface and deeper, more symbolic meanings.

It was at this point that people began to listen to Dylan albums primarily for the words, seeking deeper meaning behind the lyrics. Writer and poet Kenneth Rexroth said of Dylan in 1966:

Probably the most important event in recent poetry is Bob Dylan . . . he is the American beginning of a tradition as old as civilization in France, and some of his stuff is surprisingly good read in hypercritical cold blood. This Dylan breakthrough is another great hope for poetry. (Shelton 227)

By the mid-sixties Dylan had developed a self-confidence in his ability to use words as an artist uses paint and canvas. He found that he could express that which so many others, chief among them the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891). On the *Biography* television special, "Bob Dylan: American Troubadour," Arts and Entertainment network's Harry Smith commented on the change in Dylan's writing in the mid-sixties, "Dylan's song-writing had changed, turning from the parables of his finger-pointing and love songs to a series of fragmented lyrical images reminiscent of the French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud." It is Rimbaud who is the point of reference in Dylan's "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go." One verse in the song relates, "Situations have ended sad / Relationships have all been bad / Mine've been like Verlaine's and Rimbaud" (L. 355).

The relationship between French writers Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) and Arthur Rimbaud was, like so many of Dylan's, one of tempestuous love, passion, and anger. Arthur Rimbaud wrote his major poems during a span of only five years and wrote no poems after the age of twenty. His works reveal a power and passion which influenced many poets who followed, including Bob Dylan. At the age of seventeen Rimbaud wrote "The Drunken Boat" and submitted the poem to the older poet Paul Verlaine. When Rimbaud arrived in Paris, Verlaine served as his sponsor. Their relationship became more than that of poet and sponsor. In *Rimbaud*, Wallace Fowlie:

The story of Verlaine and Rimbaud in London and Brussels is one of the literal epics of our age, in which the myth of the modern artist is related. It is the same story recast fifty years later by James Joyce in the Dublin odyssey of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. The two men, one older than the other, are really one man, and the dual search for love and knowledge is one search. . . . (127)

Verlaine left his wife to be with Rimbaud, beginning a turbulent and sometimes violent relationship. Robert Shelton speaks of the ultimate result of their tenuous bond: "On July 10, 1873, after various emotional storms, Verlaine shot Rimbaud. One bullet ran wild and the other hit Rimbaud's left wrist" (442). Rimbaud did not file a complaint, but the end result was that Verlaine was charged with attempted

manslaughter and spent eighteen months in prison. The scenario of the shooting is no doubt an influence on Dylan's line about "shooting in the dark" (L. 355). Rimbaud's most famous work, *A Season in Hell*, can be seen as an allegorical treatment of this tumultuous time in his life. *A Season in Hell* is a masterpiece of symbolic writing, filled with images of both horror and beauty.

Rimbaud was a poet who expressed emotions through the power of his images rather than the concrete meanings of words. Shelton calls Rimbaud "the first poet to create [. . .] a poetic cosmos whose extremes of horror and lost tenderness somehow match the hells and heavens of modern reality" (156). In Rimbaud's poetry one reads of his concept of the "voyant," a poet-prophet-visionary who practices a "long, immense and reasoned deranging of all his senses" in order to reach the perfect state of the complete poet. Rimbaud wrote in the "Lettre du voyant" of how the voyant would eventually destroy himself in his quest for perfect poetic knowledge (Rimbaud 7). Many will almost joyfully point out that Dylan has for years been stumbling down the pathway of self destruction, especially in the areas of relationships and substance abuse. Perhaps the poet has, consciously or unconsciously, simply been following Rimbaud's pattern.

That Dylan discovered Rimbaud can be credited to two sources. In Greenwich Village in 1961 Dave Van Ronk asked Dylan if he had ever heard of Rimbaud. Dylan replied, "Who?" Van Ronk explained to Dylan that Rimbaud was a French poet that he should read. Van Ronk said Dylan seemed to think about it

but said nothing in response. Much later Van Ronk was at Dylan's place and looked at his books. Van Ronk recalls, "On his shelf I discovered a book of translations of French symbolist poets that had obviously been thumbed through over a period of years! I think he probably knew Rimbaud backward and forward before I even mentioned him" (Shelton 100). The true source for Dylan's interest in the French poets was probably through Suze Rotolo, Dylan's girlfriend of the Greenwich Village years. (It is Suze Rotolo whose innocent, wholesome image graces the cover of *The Free-Wheelin' Bob Dylan*.) Carla Rotolo, Suze's sister, tells of Dylan staying with her at 129 Perry Street in 1961, listening to her records and reading her books of poetry. According to Carla, Dylan read "as much poetry as he could absorb," scribbling notes as he read (Shelton 134). Dylan himself gives more credit to Suze herself for turning his attention to the French poets (Crowe 5).

Whichever scenario may be the more accurate, Dylan began to feel in the mid-sixties a strong sense of connection to the French poets, especially Rimbaud. Like Rimbaud and other French poets, Dylan began to write for the sake of sound rather than literal meaning. In "Desolation Row," for example, one finds the lines: "Einstein disguised as Robin Hood / With his memories in a trunk / Passed this way an hour ago / With his friend a jealous monk" (L. 205). To strive to interpret the lyric is futile. How can Einstein be connected to Robin Hood? What is the significance of the reference to a monk, and why a jealous monk? There is no logic to the passage because logic has nothing to do with the sound

and the emotion at the core of Dylan's intention for the song. Like Rimbaud, Dylan often aspires to create a specific mood or develop an essence of emotion through inflection and fervor rather than establish a concrete meaning.

As translated by Nathaniel Wing, Rimbaud states in "Alchimie du verbe," "I got used to elementary hallucination: I could very precisely see a mosque instead of a factory, a drum corps of angels, horse carts on the highways of the sky. . . . And so I explained my magical sophistries by turning words into visions" (59). One cannot read Rimbaud's theory of writing without being reminded of so many of Dylan's greatest works in the mid-sixties. As early as 1963, with "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," Dylan wrote of "a highway of diamonds with nobody on it" (L. 59). "Tombstone Blues," written in 1965, contains a second verse reading, "The ghost of Belle Starr she hands down her wits / To Jezebel the nun she violently knits / A bald wig for Jack the Ripper who sits / At the head of the chamber of commerce" (L. 193). The pattern thus is set in Dylan's poetry. The words do not have to make sense; they fit a pattern and a mood according to the writer's intention. Readers of Dylan's poetry have learned to accept this. Quite often when there is an attempt to interpret Dylan's poetry it is done with the knowledge that no one (probably not even Dylan) really knows the entire meaning.

When Rimbaud wrote a poem, he wrote it to appeal to all the senses. The significance of each poem rested not on interpretation, but on the reader's response. Meaning became lost in sensation. In "Deliriums," from *A Season in*

Hell, Rimbaud writes, "I invented the color of the vowels!—A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green, - I established rules for the form and movement of each consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I flattered myself on devising a poetic language accessible, one day or another, to all the senses" (77). Thus, the specific words (suffering more sometimes due to translation) are never as important as the image for which Rimbaud was striving. Nathaniel Wing writes of Rimbaud in "The Poetics of Hallucination;":

There is no laborious examination of the protagonist's psyche; the marvelous is presented by concrete images, as such, a verbal sequence. In short, the poet never seeks to relate the vision to a rational explanation: the image creates reality (58).

Dylan has accepted the same view of a poet's reality. His songs are not meant to be analyzed to determine a specific, distinct meaning. Each listener or reader will arrive at his or her own conclusion, which may have nothing to do with what the poet had in mind when he wrote the words. Sometimes there will be no conclusion at all, just an appreciation for a given set of images or thoughts. Dylan has never pushed for any precise interpretation of his work. Asked by Pearce Marchbank in 1965 what kind of singer he was, Dylan responded, "a mathematical singer. I use words like most people use numbers. That's about the best I can do" (71). Encouraged by John Dolen in a 1995 interview to talk about

the meaning of the words in "Angelina," Dylan told him, "I never try to figure out what they're about. If you have to think about it, then it's not there" (229). Dylan would not want his fans to obsess over any specific line or meaning, but to appreciate the intent of each work. Even on his Grammy winning album, 1997's *Time Out of Mind*, Dylan continued his use of ambiguous lyrics. Journalist Robert Hilburn, wondering about one of the stanzas in "Highlands," was informed by Dylan, "It's anything you want it to be. I don't give too much thought to individual lines. If I thought about them in any kind of deep way, maybe I wouldn't use them because I'd always be second-guessing myself. I learned a long time ago to trust my intuition" (250). With so many artists in modern times taking themselves so seriously, it is refreshing to hear such candor in a poet of Dylan's caliber. If the sentiment is getting across, Dylan's mission has been accomplished. Whether or not the reader/listener is able to find specific meaning in every word in every verse is not important. In his introduction to *Arthur Rimbaud*, Harold Bloom states that "Rimbaud could tolerate no literary authority" (3). The same is true of Bob Dylan. If one cannot comprehend how the "curfew gull just glides / Upon four-legged forest clouds" (L. 175) in "Gates of Eden," that is of no significance to Dylan. The rhyme is in place. The rhythm fits. The feel is what Dylan was seeking.

As Dylan was reading Rimbaud and the other French writers and taking notes, he was also gleaning ideas for his own songs. Shelton calls characters such as "Einstein disguised as Robin Hood" from "Desolation Row" and

“Napoleon in rags” from “Like a Rolling Stone” “stepchildren of types of the vermin in Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” (267). Such reflections of Rimbaud and other poets can be seen clearly in Dylan’s catalog. Dylan’s admiration for Rimbaud has been obvious since the young Dylan discovered his predecessor. As early as Dylan’s second album the symbolism and dynamic use of language characteristic of Rimbaud became a part of Dylan’s poetry. William McKeen calls “Chimes of Freedom” from Dylan’s second album “an example of the growing influence of the poet Arthur Rimbaud on Dylan’s writing” (McKeen 91).

The opening lines of “Chimes of Freedom” indicate Rimbaud’s influence:

Far between sundown’s finish an’ midnight’s broken toll

We ducked inside the doorway, thunder crashing.

As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sounds,

Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing (L. 132).

It is obvious that somewhere between “Song to Woody” and “Chimes of Freedom” something has altered forever the writing of Bob Dylan. He had found a new hero in Arthur Rimbaud. Shelton sees in some of Dylan’s songs obvious references to Rimbaud’s poetry. Dylan’s 1974 album *Before the Flood*, he suggests, may have been inspired by the first of Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*, “After the Flood” (436). In 1976, when Dylan appeared in the television special “Hard Rain,” the on-screen credits included the statement, “thanks to Arthur Rimbaud”

(469). As a sort of summation point on the Rimbaud connection, Dylan told Jonathan Cott in a 1978 *Rolling Stone* interview that “my spirit passed through the same places as his did” (44).

Interestingly enough, Dylan continued this thought with the insistence that “I don’t try to adopt or imitate Rimbaud in my work. I’m not interested in imitation” (44). The fact of the matter is that Dylan has often adopted lines or phrases from Rimbaud. A few have already been mentioned. Others include a song from 1968’s *John Wesley Harding*. In “Frankie Lee and Judas Priest,” Frankie Lee is told that his friend Judas Priest could be found down the road at a place called “Eternity.” The song continues:

“Eternity?” said Frankie Lee,
 With a voice as cold as ice.
 “That’s right, said Judas Priest, “Eternity,
 Though you might call it ‘Paradise.’” (L. 253).

This exchange echoes Rimbaud’s seeker in “A Season in Hell,” who exclaims, “It is now found once more / What? eternity” (Rimbaud 8). The second stanza of a later song, “I and I” from 1983’s *Infidels*, reads: “I and I / In creation where ones nature neither honors nor forgives. / I and I / One says to the other, no man sees my face and lives” (L. 480). The final part of this stanza is a reference to the biblical idea that no man was ever allowed to look directly upon

God's face and live. Thus one sees the biblical background of Dylan. The influence of Rimbaud is seen in the duplication of a line from a letter written to Paul Demeny on the future of poetry, "For / is somebody else" (Rimbaud *Complete Works*, 102). Another example of Rimbaud's verse finding its way (intentionally or unintentionally) into Dylan's poetry is the line from "Season in Hell" in which Rimbaud's protagonist announces, "I am dying of weariness" (Rimbaud 65). In one of Dylan's most famous lines, in the second stanza of "Mr. Tambourine Man" (written in 1964) the song makes reference to the exhaustion of the speaker: "My weariness amazes me, I'm branded on my feet, / I have no one to meet / And the ancient empty street's too dead for dreaming" (L. 172). This type of weariness evokes that Rimbaud described: , the loss that is so often to be encountered in this life. Dylan, too, writes of this sense of loss and futility.

More examples of Rimbaud's influence are found in *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), thought by many to be Dylan's strongest work as a poet. Songs from this collection included "Just Like a Woman" and "Visions of Johanna." Dylan exhibits in these songs some of his most beautiful and poignant writing on the relationships between those who have loved and lost. Also included in *Blonde on Blonde* is the epic "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," which Dylan told Shelton he considered "the best song I ever wrote" (Shelton 324). This song took up an entire side of one album of the two album set. The album itself does stand as a work of art. Shelton spoke of the collection as being filled with "Rimbaud like visions of discontinuity, chaos, emptiness, (and) loss . . ." (321). "Visions of

Johanna” lasts seven and one-half minutes and is abundant in images reminiscent of Rimbaud. The listener hears of ladies playing blindman’s bluff with the key chain, the ghost of ‘lectricity, and infinity going up on trial, all images owing a debt to Rimbaud.

“Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” with its running time of eleven minutes and nineteen seconds, makes “Visions of Johanna” seem brief. A song of such length was far from the norm for that time and could never hope to find air play. But air play was not Dylan’s goal. The song is definitely a masterpiece with its ballad-like reference to the lowlands (an image revisited in 1997 with “Highlands”) and its Rimbaud-like imagery. The song begins with the haunting lines:

With your mercury mouth in the missionary times,
And your eyes like smoke and your prayers like rhymes,
And your silver cross, and your voice like chimes,
Oh, who among them do they think could bury you? (L. 239).

The characters populating this song could have come straight from Rimbaud’s notebook. Along with the sad-eyed lady with the mercury mouth, we read of the “kings of Tyrus with their convict list,” the “dead angels” and “the child of a hoodlum” (L. 240). The lyrics can stand alongside Rimbaud’s images of “Hesperidian suns” and tales of the king of Babylon (Rimbaud 79). Both poets

have delivered messages from their innermost souls, reflecting their deepest fears and pain.

Another of Rimbaud's lines reflecting his pain comes from "A Season in Hell," in which the poet, thinking back on his struggles, comments, "I could have died there" (Rimbaud 103). In "Slow Train," Dylan uses a very similar line, "You could die down here, be just another accident statistic" (L. 436). Both Rimbaud and Dylan present worlds of danger, pain, and loss. The pain behind Dylan's "Sad-eyed Lady of the Lowlands" Rimbaud would find familiar: love forever lost. Shelton reveals that the lady of the lowlands is actually Sara Lowndes, who married Dylan in November of 1965 (325). How sad that a later song, 1975's "Sara," every bit as passionate and beautiful, was a plea for Sara to stay. The touching last line, "Don't ever leave me, don't ever go" indicates the anguish in Dylan's life at this time. The couple divorced in June of 1977. The wound to Dylan was like the wound to Rimbaud in his stormy relationship with Verlaine. Any observant fan of Dylan's can see that the wound has never fully healed.

Through the years there have been other poets whom Dylan has admired and whose influence, though to a much lesser degree than that of Rimbaud, can be seen in his work. Regardless of what some have insinuated about his reading habits in college, Dylan had always been, and no doubt remains, an avid reader. His mother told Robert Shelton, "Bob was quietly becoming a writer for twelve years. He read every book there was [. . .] He bought only comics that had

some meaning, like 'Illustrated Classics.' He was in the library a lot" (Shelton 41). The fledgling poet mined the writings of others, seeking insights and ideas which would be useful in later years. Dylan's poetic influences, other than that of Rimbaud, are so scattered, however, that it is impossible to speak of one poet as more significant than other. Dylan's reading was as varied and esoteric as his imagination. In the eleventh of his "11 Outlined Epitaphs," Dylan speaks of the variation of voices he heard:

the sounds of Francois Villon
echoin' through my mad streets [. . .]
the hypnotic words
of A.L. Lloyd . . .
drownin' in the lungs of Edith Piaf . . .
the dead poems of Eddie Freeman
love songs of Allen Ginsberg
an' jail songs of Ray Bremser
the narrow tunes of Modigliani
an' the singin' plains of Harry Jackson
the cries of Charles Aznavour
with melodies of Yevtushenko
through the quiet fire of Miles Davis
above the bells of William Blake

an' beat visions of Johnny Cash

an' the saintliness of Pete Seeger (L. 115).

Is Dylan saying that all these varied poets and singers influenced him? That he simply enjoyed and was encouraged by their work? Or is he simply compiling an impressive list to convince others that he is well-read? There are few indications in his poetry to indicate a strong influence by any of these. Dylan, himself, as always, will never give a straight answer. As he told Pearce Marchbank in 1978, "Everybody has their own idea of what's a poet. Robert Frost, President Johnson, T. S. Eliot, Rudolf Valentino—they're all poets. I like to think of myself as the one who carried the light bulb" (63). (For a time Dylan actually carried a huge, mock light bulb. This made for conversation among the journalists who covered him, but also probably contained much more meaning for Dylan himself. Through the years he has carried on the tradition of the light of poetic expression earlier carried by those who came before.)

One poet mentioned in the interview with Marchbank is T. S. Eliot, one of the greatest poets of the first half of the twentieth century. It is T. S. Eliot fighting with Ezra Pound (one who actually influenced Eliot, helping to shape the *The Wasteland*) in what is probably Dylan's masterpiece, "Desolation Row" "Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot / Fighting in the captain's tower / While calypso singers laugh at them / And fishermen hold flowers / Between the windows of the sea /

Where lovely mermaids flow / And nobody has to think too much / About
Desolation Row" (L. 206).

"Desolation Row" is a complex song/poem clearly influenced by Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). *The Waste Land* is Eliot's reflection upon the dismal landscape of Western civilization in the post-War years. In "The Waste Land," the broken and devastated panorama mirrors the corruption and hopeless nature of the social and religious institutions of his day. The poem is bleak, stark in its imagery, with no positive view on the horizon. His perception of the world was one with "withered stumps of time," located in an "unreal city" where one would find both "The Hanged Man" and the "rats alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (Eliot 54-57). *The Waste Land* is populated by those who have lost hope, drinking (beyond closing time) in a vain effort to drown their myriad woes. To Eliot the modern, supposedly civilized world was one of broken dreams and shattered hopes.

Dylan's "Desolation Row" is likewise a cynical picture of the world he saw in 1965. As "the lady" and the narrator look out over the blasted landscape of Desolation Row, all the foibles and failings of America of the mid-sixties are brought into focus. The song explores the corruption found in politics as we read of the "blind commissioner," held captive by the trance of cash which he keeps checking. The politician is walking an extremely treacherous tight-rope himself, trying to give the appearance of serving those who put him in office while keeping his attention focused on the money going into his pocket. Dylan's song also

draws attention to the hypocrisy of religion in the sixties, with the “Good Samaritan [. . .] dressing [. . .] getting ready for the show” (L. 204). Dylan saw organized religion as a waste land, putting on a performance for the world to see as if religious services are carnivals. In Dylan’s imagination the priest is really “The Phantom of the Opera,” spoonfeeding those who would believe in love, either on the temporal or the eternal plain. “Desolation Row” depicts an America in which love is a sham, with Romeo informs Cinderella “You’re in the wrong place my friend / You’d better leave” (L. 204), and Ophelia is an old maid at the early age of twenty-two. While Eliot’s *The Waste Land* has the couple trying to drown their sorrows in drink, Dylan’s “Desolation Row” moves straight to the heart of the matter. If life becomes unbearable, one can call for a member of the superhuman crew, whose job it is to “round up everyone / That knows more than they do,” take them to “the factory;” and strap them to the “heart attack machine” (L. 206). Death in Dylan’s world is even more cruel than in Eliot’s. It is noteworthy that “Desolation Row” can even be seen as prophetic, harkening to the day in America when a real Dr. Filth, Dr. Kevorkian, would provide customers with the means and method to leave this desolated and barren waste land. When one reads in “Desolation Row” of the selling of “postcards of the hanging,” the reader cannot help but reflect upon modern America, in which supposed entertainment involves placing strangers in the worst possible circumstances in an effort to determine the true survivor, all in the name of entertainment.

When Dylan wrote "Desolation Row," he saw America as the Titanic, that "unsinkable ship," going down with Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot fighting in the captain's tower. Those who might have helped prevent the disaster, spend their time watching mermaids, listening to calypso singers, and ignoring the rapidly approaching end. Dylan's vision of doom is so strong in the song that the reader realizes that it would not matter whether Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot win the battle; all remain on the road leading to the Waste Land, traveling on Desolation Row.

LaStrada

Dylan has admired the French poets, but has not bound himself to any false sense of debt to them. He told Cameron Crowe that while Suzie Rotolo turned him on to the French poets, he moved on to "Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, and Ferlinghetti" (Crowe 5). This quote may simply be another example of Dylan's propensity for name-dropping. However, examples of other poetic influences can clearly be seen in the body of Dylan's work. For example, the title line of 1962's "With God on Our Side" can be traced back to the poetry of England's Robert Southey, whose poetry includes the line "The laws are with us and God's on our side" (Shelton 213). In 1963 Dylan penned "When the Ship Comes In," containing the line "For the chains of the sea /Will have busted in the night" (L. 100). This phrase could have been inspired by Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," with the line, "Though I sang, in my chains, like the sea" (Bauldie liner notes *The Bootleg Series*). Both of these could have been direct influences, or they could have been nothing more than half-remembered lines Dylan had read and

incorporated into his own work. Certainly Dylan would never admit to “sampling” a line from anyone, especially not Dylan Thomas. Of Thomas, Dylan once said, “I didn’t change my name in honor of Dylan Thomas. That’s just a story. I’ve done more for Dylan Thomas than he’s ever done for me. Look how many kids are probably reading his poetry now because they heard that story” (Marchbank 19). Such may be the case, but the fact remains that at some point in time Dylan read Dylan Thomas, among myriad other poets, and gleaned a thought of two to add to his poetry.

Dylan has also been a beneficiary of poetic influences from America. Shelton tells the story of Dylan’s decision in 1964 to travel across America, supposedly in an effort to meet William Faulkner. Dylan and three friends saw embattled miners in Kentucky, visited the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, and actually visited the home of Carl Sandburg in North Carolina. According to Shelton’s account, Sandburg told the young poet, “You certainly look like an intense young man” (242). No doubt this story is one of Dylan’s favorites. And Dylan was an intense young man, writing poetry as though he saw an imminent end to the fountain which would flow for decades.

As Dylan was watching the river of inspiration flow, he had to realize that it flowed backward as well as forward. William McKeen sees 1965’s “Gates of Eden” as “apparently inspired by William Blake” (93). Ellen Willis writes about 1963’s “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” as owing a great deal to “Allen Ginsberg’s

biblical rhetoric and declamatory style” (224). On the topic of Ginsberg, Dylan himself referred to the elder poet as “a great inspiration” (Hickey 152).

Regardless of what he may claim, it is obvious that Dylan has read a great deal and incorporated what he has read into his poetry. He simply has never been one to give credit where credit is due. One can read poetry randomly and come across what appears to be the source of a Dylan line. For example, in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet,” we read of “an old rag of bunting blowing in the wind” (Emerson 168). Is this the source of one of Dylan’s greatest lines or is there in truth only one source, the great muse whispering in the ear of every soulful poet? Dylan conclusively addresses the issue of inspiration in the final of his “11 Outlined Epitaphs”:

it's all endless
an' it's all songs
it's just one big world of songs
an' they're all on loan
if they're only turned loose t'sing. (L. 116)

To Dylan, a poet is inspired by all who came before him. The muse is the same; only the vessels of deliverance have changed. In writing his poems, Dylan has carried on the work of Rimbaud, who carried on the work of those before him.

Sometimes Dylan has chosen to simply watch the river flow, but more often he has taken the oars and taken poetry and song into new directions.

Chapter Five

Changin' Times

As the 1960's began, America was in a state of upheaval. The ugly specter of racism had reached a boiling point in 1956 with the bitter reaction to the integration of Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas. Young people were confused and their parents angry at the new situation forced upon them. Racial tension continued to make itself evident as 1959 rolled around, bringing with it the first "sit-in" at the "Whites only" soda center at Woolworth's in Nashville, TN. Animosity and distrust grew between the races while, half a world away, tensions grew in the tiny country of Vietnam, not yet on the American radar screen. The hope awakened with the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 was tempered with the increasing presence of American soldiers in that distant corner of the world. These strange days were times of alienation and anger between parents and young men and women facing an uncertain future. The war brought things into cold, sharp focus. Young men began to see the military not as an opportunity to prove oneself on a field of glory but as the agent of death in an alien country. The all-invasive "generation-gap" grew into an insurmountable chasm. Parents and children became alienated and bitter. Young men and women saw little need to even speak to their parents, for their parents could not understand their new belief systems. It was a time of confusion, of injustice and rancor so great that the average person found it impossible to form the words to express outrage. It

was a time which cried out for a new spokesperson. It was a time tailor-made for Bob Dylan.

Dylan had learned the value and power of the topical song in the shadow of Woody Guthrie. As Guthrie had written of the dust bowl and the struggles of the itinerant worker, so Dylan would write of the tribulation he saw around him. Dylan told Robert Shelton in 1984, "I came along at just the right time, and I understood the times I was in. If I was starting out right now, I don't know where I'd get the inspiration from, because you need to breathe the right air to make that creative process work" (490).

The poet breathed the turbulent air of the early 60's and wrote about the injustices and evils he saw. One of the most prevalent evils seen by the young poet was racism. America in the 1960's was a place where blacks and whites were segregated in ways both subtle and open for all to see. The South was permeated with eating establishments which catered to a white clientele only. Blacks who rode public transportation were relegated to the back seats. Other forms of discrimination were much more odious in that they were both violent and private in nature. One such case began as private abuse and became extremely public due to the extreme cruelty of both the crime and the subsequent "punishment" of the perpetrator. In February of 1963 a Boston socialite struck and killed a black maid named Hattie Carroll, whom he had hired to serve at a "society gathering." The injustice of the crime was compounded by the fact that Carroll's attacker received a light sentence due to the political connections of his

father. This crime inspired one of Dylan's strongest social commentaries, "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1963). The song stands as an indictment of both racial discrimination and the legal system then prevalent in America. The accusations of guilt and shame begin with the first stanza:

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger
At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'.
And the cops were called in and his weapon took from him
As they rode him in custody down to the station
And booked William Zanzinger for first-degree murder.
But you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears,
Take the rag away from your face.
Now ain't the time for your tears. (L. 102)

The song is almost a news report, giving the specifics of the case and using the names of those involved. The reader is reminded from the first that Zanzinger was wealthy and Hattie Carroll poor; that he was guilty yet privileged enough to walk away. Zanzinger's light sentence symbolized the gap between the privileged and the poor, the upper and the lower class, and the black and the white in America in the 60's. Following stanzas in the song relate the fact that Zanzinger had "rich, wealthy parents" and "high office relations in the politics of Maryland."

Hattie Carroll is spoken of as a fifty-one-year-old maid, the mother of ten children, who cleaned up the food, emptied the ashtrays, and “never done nothing to William Zanzinger.” Each of the first three stanzas ends with the same refrain—that the time for tears has not yet come. The proper time is revealed, however, in the last stanza of the song, set in a “courtroom of honor,” where the judge hands the defendant a six-month sentence. Dylan concludes, “Bury the rag deep in your face / For now’s the time for your tears” (L. 103). The song stands the test of time as a powerful indictment of the bigotry and racism which tainted the American legal system in the 50’s and 60’s. The song also is important as evidence of Dylan’s new strength as a songwriter. At this point he was ready to show the world that there was a new voice crying in the wilderness, speaking for those unable to form the words themselves. With songs like “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” Dylan was moving toward becoming the social poet of the 60’s and beyond.

Also written in 1963, “The Death of Emmett Till” tells the story of a black teenager from Chicago who was killed in Mississippi for whistling at a white girl. Dylan’s song retells the torture and beating death of the young man. The jury included men who had actually taken part in the abuse so “this trial was a mockery, but nobody seemed to mind” (L. 20). In the sixth stanza Dylan challenges the hearer to take a stand against such injustice:

If you can’t speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that’s so unjust,

Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt, your mind is filled with dust.

Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood it
must refuse to flow,

For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low! (L. 20)

The final stanza of the song, which includes a reference to "that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan," establishes the courage of the singer, a man who would not only speak out against injustice but would hold nothing back. Dylan's mission was to address the evil he saw, holding it up to the clear analysis of public view, where it could be exposed as the pure evil it was.

Another song dealing with prejudice in Dylan's "finger-pointing" years is 1963's "Oxford Town." The song tells the story of the uproar brought about when black student James Meredith enrolled in the all-white University of Mississippi in 1962. The simple point is presented by Dylan that "he couldn't get in / All because of the color of his skin" (L. 63). Later that same year, Dylan penned "Only a Pawn in Their Game" about the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers. Dylan's song not only presents the story but brings into focus the fact that Evers was killed in a cowardly fashion, "A bullet from the back of a bush took Medgar Evers blood" (L. 97). The racists of the sixties were revealed by Dylan's songs as cowards, ambushing a civil rights leader in the dead of night, hidden behind foliage as though their actions could be forever hidden. Dylan's song

demonstrates that blacks were not the only victims hurt by such crimes; the typical white male was also a victim of the racial prejudice of the time:

But the poor white man's used in the hands of them all like a tool.

He's taught in his school

From the start by the rule

That the laws are with him

To protect his white skin

To keep up his hate

So he never thinks straight

'Bout the shape that he's in

But it ain't him to blame

He's only a pawn in their game. (L. 97)

Songs such as these placed Dylan at the forefront of the growing civil rights movement. As such he was often a prominent part of efforts to make the public aware of the problems of racism and injustice around them. The July 7, 1963, edition of the *New York Times*, for example, featured the headline, "Northern Folk Singers Help Out at Negro Festival in Mississippi." The article tells of Dylan (erroneously called Bobby Dillon), Pete Seeger, and Theodore Bikel singing to a group of 250-300 at a festival intended to foster voter registration sponsored by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Greenwood,

Mississippi. The effort produced a now-famous picture of the three singing at the edge of a cotton field. While in Greenwood, Dylan saw water fountains marked "White" and "Black." He asked Bikel what he thought would happen if he decided to drink from the "Black" fountain (Shelton 170).

Actor-singer Bikel recalls, "I saw Bob observing everything down there" (179). As he did then, Dylan has spent his whole life observing unjust situations and writing about them. In 1974 he wrote "Hurricane," about what he considered to be the unjust imprisonment of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter for a triple murder Dylan was convinced he did not commit. Along with other activists, Dylan fought the conviction until it was finally overturned in 1995.

At the 1964 Newport Folk Festival emcee Ronnie Gilbert introduced Dylan as "a young man who grew out of a need" (Shelton 258). Asked by a *New York Daily News* reporter in October 1963 to comment on the then growing "protest song" movement, Dylan responded, "Why are we in the midst of a folk music boom? Because the times cry out for the truth" (Lachetta). Dylan's truth-telling from this period included such great works as "Blowin' In the Wind" and the song which became the anthem of the social protest movement, "The Times They Are A-Changin'." The latter presented the world of the sixties as a time of change, whether the older generation was prepared for it or not. In fact, Dylan admonished that one had "better start swimmin' / Or you'll sink like a stone / For the times they are a-changin'" (L. 91). His voice spoke of the battle raging outside and the need for the order to change. Of course, such news was not welcomed

by the older generation, whose lack of comprehension would be satirized in 1965's "Ballad of a Thin Man." In this song the poet focuses upon the growing generation gap with the refrain, "Because something is happening here / But you don't know what it is / Do you, Mister Jones?" (L.198).

"Blowin' In the Wind" was simple in its execution yet profound in its message and influence. The song addresses racism, the Vietnam War, and blind, unquestioned prejudice. The message is delivered in a series of basic questions, the answers to which, if people would only seek them, are "Blowin' In the Wind":

How many roads must a man walk down

Before you call him a man?

[. . .]

Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannon balls fly

Before they're forever banned?

. . .]

Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have

Before he can hear people cry?

Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows

That too many people have died?

. . .]

Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist

Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes,'n' how many times can a man turn his head,
Pretending he just doesn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
The answer is blowin' in the wind.(L. 53)

The song has become timeless. Hearing the lyric, one cannot help being moved by the still contemporary nature of the injustice the song describes. Songs such as "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and "Blowin' In the Wind" brought important messages to the masses. The latter song, as recorded by Peter, Paul, and Mary, became the fastest selling single in Warner Brothers history (Crowe 10). This success was the first of many in which other artists—the Turtles, Sonny and Cher, the Byrds--more acceptable to the popular taste would score hits by recording Dylan songs. . The Byrds became almost a cover band, delivering hit after hit based on Dylan's original songs. The group basically doubled the speed of the song, adding harmony and Roger McGuinn's 12-string guitar, and hit after hit ensued. The resulting success of these other artists also resulted in the acceptance of Dylan's writing by those who may not have been exposed to it otherwise.

Thus a new generation found the appeal of folk music forged with a new attitude in the personae of Bob Dylan. According to Dylan, it was this attitude

which made the difference. He told Cameron Crowe in 1985, "Actually attitude had more to do with it than technical ability and that's what the folk movement lacked. In other words, I played all the folk songs with a rock n' roll attitude" (10). This new attitude also exhibited a sense of righteous indignation, not only at racism but at any injustices seen by Dylan and others in the "protest" movement. Songs written about the ills and evils of society were referred to by Dylan as "finger-pointing" songs. As he told William McKeen in 1993, "The finger-pointing songs were perfectly married to the times" (22).

Dylan's ability as a songwriter moved him to the forefront of a movement, then led by prominent folk singer Pete Seeger, to write more "topical" songs (Shelton 140). Dylan, Seeger, and others launched a bulletin of topical songs called "Broadside," a small publication that became instrumental in the dissemination of songs with new power and meaning (139). It was this publication which first introduced Dylan's "Masters of War," an indictment of all who ever profited from the wholesale shedding of blood. It was unheard of for any one as young as Dylan to write such searing words. Especially strong in its conclusion, the song was filled with venom and anger aimed at the providers of weapons of war:

And I hope that you die
And your death'll come soon
I will follow your casket

In the pale afternoon
And I'll watch while you're lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I'll stand o'er your grave
'Til I'm sure that you're dead. (L. 56)

Based on a young man's idealism and sense of justice, these were strong words indeed. Seeger's work with Dylan and the power of Dylan's words caused the older performer to speak of Dylan, as Shelton recalls, as "the most important new songwriter of the time (140).

Dylan was writing about the world as he saw it, writing as though he were already weary of it. Around him he saw a world which needed changing, filled with inequality and corruption. One could either break down weeping or break out in sarcastic laughter. Writing as though he were already an old man, Dylan penned "Bob Dylan's Dream" in 1963, commenting on how he and his friends "longed for nothin' and were quite satisfied / Talkin' and a-jokin' about the world outside" (L. 62). The world outside, however, was no joking matter. But the issues and the turmoil created a perfect climate for a protest singer. Dylan made the comparison between the world of the sixties and the world of the eighties in an interview with Bernard Kleinman in 1984: "If I was to come along now, in this day, with the kind of people that are running record companies now, they would,

you know, bar the doors, I think. But you had people back then who were more entrenched in individuality” (34).

Some of Dylan’s most powerful writing, including “Masters of War,” deals with man’s violent nature. In the early sixties the Vietnam War was prominent in the mind of anyone with a social conscience. One of Dylan’s strongest statements against that conflict was “John Brown,” written in 1963. “John Brown” is the saga of a young man whose mother is filled with pride that her son is a soldier, going off to the fields of battle to return one day with medals and glory. Though the song does not specifically state it, the implication is that the son, too, looks forward to his opportunity to be a hero. As time passes, the mother stops receiving letters from her son, not knowing his fate until she gets a message for her to meet her son at the train station, where he will finally returning from a “good old-fashioned war.” When she sees her son, however, he is so horribly disfigured that she cannot even recognize him. Dylan uses this scenario to shatter all illusions about the glory and honor of warfare, as the son berates his mother about the delusions they both had about the war:

Oh, and I thought when I was there, God, what am I doing here?

I’m a-tryin’ to kill somebody or die tryin.’

But the thing that scared me most was when my enemy came close

And I saw that his face looked just like mine.

[. . . .]

And I couldn't help but think, through the thunder rolling and stink,
That I was just a puppet in a play.
And through the roar and smoke, this string is finally broke,
And a cannon ball blew my eyes away..
As he turned away to walk, his Ma was still in shock
At seein' the metal brace that helped him stand.
But as he turned to go, he called his mother close
And he dropped his medals down into her hand.

Such words of a young man to his mother are harsh, almost cruel, yet the song makes a strong impression. No number of medals would ever be worth the hurt and humiliation brought about by the Vietnam War.

The war is also a target of "Tombstone Blues," written in 1965. By this time Dylan's poetry was more symbolic and obscure, calling for interpretation of what sometimes seem to be meaningless lines. The tenth and eleventh stanzas of "Tombstone Blues," however, in their use of imagery and symbolism, are indicative of Dylan's growing maturity and yet still filled with the anger of earlier songs. In these stanzas Dylan casts blame upon both the leaders and the followers in the Vietnam conflict:

The king of the Philistines his soldiers to save
Put jawbones on their tombstones and flatters their graves

Puts the pied pipers in prison and fattens the slaves
Then sends them out to the jungle
Gypsy Davey with a blowtouch he burns out their camps
With his faithful slave Pedro behind him he tramps
With a fantastic collection of stamps
To win friends and influence his uncle. (L. 194)

When President Johnson sent the first battle troops into Vietnam in early 1965, he was acting as “the king of the Philistines,” waging war as is any king’s prerogative. Each soldier killed in Vietnam is “flattered” with a flag on his tombstone. The “piped pipers,” those opposing the war, are sent off to prison as those called into service are shipped to the jungles of a foreign land. “Gypsy Davey” is the soldier willing to serve the commander-in-chief without question or doubt, burning villages and villagers to impress Uncle Sam. This song makes it clear that in those tumultuous times Dylan wanted to be counted among those “in the streets / With the tombstone blues,” opposed to a war which created the need for so many death markers. One is reminded of Dylan’s earlier anti-war song, “With God on Our Side,” and its powerful conclusion that “If God’s on our side / He’ll stop the next war” (L. 93).

Dylan’s view of the changing times in which he became prominent was a bleak one. With the specter of war before him he wrote the compelling “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” in 1963. Included in Dylan’s second album, *The*

Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, the song paints a vivid picture of the ravages of war. Shelton calls this song “a landmark in topical, folk-based songwriting” (156). Coming on the heels of the Cuban missile crisis, the song develops the story of a “blue-eyed son” who has seen all the horrors of a violent world and the devastation of a world at war. The young man, representing all children who have to live with the result of war, has seen too much to have hope for the future. The damage done by war, as presented in Dylan’s poem, is “the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world” (L. 59). War is a “black branch with blood that kept drippin’” (L. 59). The point made by this line is that war is an unending process; there is never a shortage of young men to send to face death. Dylan’s vision is that of a crooked highway leading to “seven sad forests” where “ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard” is still not enough to cover the dead. It is with such topical and hard-hitting songs, describing the times in which Dylan became popular, with which the poet cemented his reputation as a song-writer with incredible promise.

The highpoint in Dylan's growth as a songwriter can arguably be said to be 1965's “Desolation Row.” Included in the *Highway 61 Revisited* album, this song is thought by many to be Dylan’s masterpiece. Shelton speaks of “Desolation Row” as “a near-sequel to ‘Hard Rain’” (282). “Desolation Row” is the work in which Dylan presents his reflections on the destruction brought about by a global war. Shelton further states that “Desolation Row” “belongs (as I have already indicated above) beside Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ and Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’

as one of the strongest expressions of apocalypse" (282). The poem is epic in scope, capturing all the confusion and fear which made up life in the sixties. The song begins:

They're selling postcards of the hanging
They're painting the passports brown
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
The circus is in town
Here comes the blind commissioner
They've got him in a trance
One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker
The other is in his pants
And the riot squad they're restless
They need somewhere to go
As Lady and I look out tonight
From Desolation Row. L. 204)

With lines such as these there could be no question that Dylan was coming into his own as a poet. The amazing thing is that the transformation had taken such a brief period of time. Dylan thrived on the atmosphere around him. The chaos of the sixties gave him focus and a reason to write more powerful poems.

"Desolation Row" is extremely focused and highly symbolic. The "blind

commissioner” is President Johnson, with one hand “tied to the tight-rope walker,” trying to balance himself on the precarious edge of Vietnam while the restless riot squad is ever-ready to go into the streets to do battle. In that Vietnam was an extremely unpopular and controversial war, riots in the street and turmoil became almost commonplace. Many city streets became literal interpretations of Dylan’s Desolation Row. Later on the Beatles would intone that “All You Need Is Love,” but Dylan had already pointed out that love could not resolve all the issues facing the world in the sixties. In the second stanza of the song the reader finds Romeo moaning to Cinderella, “You belong to me I believe,” but such romantic platitudes do not work in a decimated world. When Romeo is reminded that he would be better off to just leave, the stanza ends:

And the only sound that’s left
 After the ambulances go
 Is Cinderella sweeping up
 On Desolation Row. (L. 204)

Cinderella, the image of the perfect romance, is left sweeping up the remains of love. Such was the case of so many who lost so much in the disillusioning sixties.

In “Desolation Row” there are numerous “celebrities,” both real and fictional, who make up the populace of a place of ruin. In the verses one finds Einstein (“disguised as Robin Hood”), Doctor Filth, perhaps symbolic of

psychologists who wanted to blame all problems on sex, Casanova, and Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot ("fighting in the captain's tower"). All these characters, regardless of their real or literary reputations, are losers in Dylan's vision. Einstein is reduced to bumming cigarettes. Casanova is doomed to be killed by self-confidence after being poisoned with words of empty praise. Meanwhile, Pound and Eliot are being ridiculed by calypso singers as they do battle. As the band plays while the Titanic sinks (also mentioned in the song), so the calypso singers are on hand to greet the demise of all those who dwell on Desolation Row. Dylan concludes his masterpiece with words of pessimistic vision:

Yes, I received your letter yesterday
(About the time the door knob broke)
When you asked me how I was doing
Was that some kind of joke?
All these people that you mention
Yes, I know them, they're quite lame
I had to rearrange their faces
And give them all another name
Right now I can't read too good
Don't send me no more letters no
Not unless you mail them
From Desolation Row. (L. 206)

It is Dylan's intent for all his listeners to realize that the world of the sixties was headed for destruction. There would be no need to send messages, no need to knock on doors, and no need to even pretend that anyone cared for anyone else. In a world going full speed toward apocalypse, what need would there be to develop sham relationships and mimic concern? Unless warning were taken, the future was outlined in "Desolation Row."

Poetry like "Tombstone Blues" and "Desolation Row" in the sixties was global," but it also included poems with a personal flavor. Even in his early years Dylan had written about his personal experiences, both good and bad, and the sixties were, after all, a time of introspection. Those more familiar with his life and surroundings will see personal images in Dylan's songs. When Liam Clancy, of the Clancy Brothers, heard the line "my ancient empty street's too dead for dreaming" from "Mr. Tambourine Man," he recognized the source. Clancy recalls, "I knew it was Sullivan Street on a Sunday [. . .] I suddenly realized that this kid, who had bugged us so often, had emerged into a very major artist" (Gray 22). The growing artist in Dylan saw much around him about which he became disturbed. He was haunted by not only the realities of war and racism but also the harshness of poverty and injustice. Personal experiences added to his poetry a sense of outrage. In 1962 Dylan wrote "Man on the Street," an out-take from his first album which was later included on *The Bootleg Series: Vol. 1-3*. The

song is about a derelict who dies on the street with no one to care or take notice.⁵ The song is a poignant reminder of how far a person can fall in life. People seeing the “old man who never done wrong” simply “stopped ‘n’ stared ‘n’ walked their way” (L. 17). Even in the years of his youth, Dylan is speaking of the callous nature of those around him and how possible it is to suffer so much in silence. This is a theme to which he has returned quite often in his career. Other examples are “Hollis Brown,” in which desperation drives a man to slaughter his family, “Percy’s Song” and “Ballad of Donald White,” both dealing with lack of justice for the poor. Dylan presents a telling question in the last stanza of “Ballad of Donald White,” which reveals his disdain for the justice system of America in the sixties:

But there's just one question
 Before they kill me dead,
 I'm wondering just how much
 To you I really said
 Concerning all the boys that come
 Down a road like me,
 Are they enemies or victims
 Of your society? (L. 31)

⁵ According to Shelton, Dylan actually saw a policeman jab a dead man with his club in an effort to stir him (124).

From the obscure to the famous, many whose lives have been touched by tragedy or injustice have been immortalized in the poetry of Bob Dylan. These individuals were victims of the times in which they lived or the lifestyles they chose in order to survive. One such person was boxer Davey Moore, who suffered a knock-out at the hands of Sugar Ramos on March 23, 1963 and died two days later. When Dylan heard of this he commemorated the pugilist with "Who Killed Davey Moore?" The song asks the refrain over and over, casting guilt on first the referee, who defends himself in the second stanza by pointing out that had he stopped the bout, "the crowd would've booed, I'm sure, / At not getting' their money's worth. / It's too bad he had to go, / But there was a pressure on me too, you know" (L. 75). Each person at the bout is called upon to defend his or her actions, from the manager to the gambler to the crowd, and, finally, to Sugar Ramos himself. Ramos' response is that of many in the often brutal world of boxing, "I hit him, yes, it's true, / But that's what I am paid to do. / Don't say 'murder,' don't say 'kill.' / It was destiny, it was God's will" (L. 76). The answer to the question, "Who killed Davey Moore?" is left blowing in the wind. In the violence of the times he was but one more victim among those whom Dylan cataloged.

During the strange days of the sixties Dylan wrote even about those who wrote about him. Much speculation has focused through the years on the identity of the title character in 1965's "Ballad of a Thin Man." The protagonist is symbolic

of so many in Dylan's early years who simply could not comprehend what was going on. The title character has often been interpreted as symbolic of the older generation, unable to understand or cope with the changes taking place in a rapidly changing world. The confusion of the main character is obvious: "Because something is happening here / But you don't know what it is / Do you, Mister Jones?" (L. 198). The model for Mister Jones remains uncertain, but Michael Gray, in *All Across the Telegraph: A Bob Dylan Handbook*, refers to Dylan's response to questions about the character in 1978: "I wrote this for a reporter who was working for *Village Voice* in 1963. He's still working for them" (43). Jeffrey Jones, sent to Newport to do an article on the resurgence of the harmonica, met Dylan, around whom he was extremely nervous. Dylan saw him later and asked, "Gettin' it all down, Mr. Jones?" (44). The fact is that Jones was in Newport to write an article on harmonicas while the incredible revolution of Dylan and his music was occurring right under his nose and he could not see it. In this way he was like so many of the older generation, present but totally in the dark about the times which forged Bob Dylan.

The turbulent sixties also brought a change in the use of drugs by the younger generation. Drugs have been used and abused throughout history, but the sixties saw the misuse of drugs become much more prevalent and acceptable. While the older generation stayed mainly with the drug of choice, alcohol, the younger generation felt free to experiment with whatever was easily attainable. It has long been assumed that Dylan's drug use has been legendary,

though Dylan himself has seldom seen fit to elaborate on the issue. To many the assumption is simply that Dylan could not have written some of the songs he wrote without the assistance of drugs.

Bob Spitz commented in his biography on Dylan, "Acid had twisted his entire perspective. It pulled him so far inside his own head—into the darkest, moodiest, most gut-wrenching corridors of his psyche—that he eventually found the voice to unload his personal anger" (329). Spitz mentions songs such as "Ballad of a Thin Man," "Desolation Row," "Positively 4th Street," and "Like a Rolling Stone" to support his position (329). The thought is that since the average person could never write anything to approach the depth of a Dylan song, such accomplishments could only be achieved by the use of artificial substances. To assume such does not take into account Dylan's genius as a poet. Like so many in the sixties, Dylan certainly imbibed his share of pharmaceuticals, but drugs were never the driving force behind Dylan's incredible talent. When Robert Shelton was preparing his biography of Dylan, he asked the poet for a comment on his drug use. Dylan's response was, "I never had anything to do with glamorizing the drug thing. That was the beat thing, not me. [. . .] But you have to realize that junk is not the problem in and of itself. Junk is the symptom, not the problem. [. . .] as Dr. Freud would say" (16-17). Asked by *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner in 1969 if drugs had influenced songs such as "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," Dylan answered simply, "No, not the writing of them, but it did keep me up there to pump 'em out"

(Wenner 27). Of course, Dylan has used drugs, as have so many who are also part of the times of which he has ever been recognized a part. But the poetry produced by Dylan owes much more to intellect and perseverance than to pharmaceuticals.

The time came that Dylan wanted to step away from the protest songs so strongly tied to the sixties and the turbulent events of those days. He told Nat Hentoff in 1964:

Those records I've made, I'll stand behind them, but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard and a lot of it was because I didn't see anybody else doing that kind of thing. [. . .] Me, I don't want to write for people anymore. You know—I don't want to be a spokesman. [. . .] From now on, I want to write from inside me, and to do that I'm going to have to get back to writing like I used to when I was ten—having everything come out naturally” (47).

That which came forth from Dylan's pen in the sixties may not have seemed to the poet to have been natural, but his voice and his words said more than anyone else found possible to express about those troubled and tempestuous years. It will ever be Dylan's destiny to be recognized as the social poet of the sixties.

Chapter Six

Knockin' On Heaven's Door⁶

Contrary to popular opinion, Bob Dylan did not suddenly find God in the latter part of the 1970's. Certainly, 1979 was a pivotal point in his journey toward his own version of the truth, but his belief in God goes back much further. It was in 1979 that Dylan recorded *Slow Train Coming*, the album which included "Slow Train," the song which set the pace for the poet's evangelical period, and it was for that album that Dylan won his first Grammy Award in 1980. The songs for the album are marked with a furor and passion which many thought Dylan had left behind. To many the topic of discussion focused on how and to what extent Dylan had "found God," but in reality, Dylan has always been a religious person, though certainly not in any conventional way. Bob Dylan was a religious child when he was Robert Zimmerman, and a belief system has always been apparent in his work. From "With God on Our Side" in 1963 to "Tryin' To Get To Heaven" in 1997, the songs of Bob Dylan have been laced with biblical references. Bob Dylan knows the Bible and is usually right on target in his interpretation of the Scriptures.

The most commonly accepted version of Dylan's "conversion" is related by Richard Williams in his *Dylan: A Man Called Alias*. Williams tells of a crucifix being thrown on stage during a Dylan performance in San Diego on November 17, 1978. According to the legend, Dylan picked the crucifix up and pocketed it.

⁶ All biblical references in this chapter are to the King James version.

Two nights later he was in his hotel room feeling downcast about life when he put his hand in his pocket and felt the crucifix there. Dylan related the following event to Williams, "There was a presence in the room that couldn't have been anyone but Jesus. Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it.[. . .] I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up" (153).

After this experience, Dylan visited a born-again Christian community, The Vineyard Fellowship, to try to learn more about his new-found faith (Shelton 483). After accepting Christ, Dylan began to present Jesus to his audiences in an extremely uncompromising fashion. Shelton relates that "scoffers felt that Dylan had also abandoned the progressive, tolerant side of Christianity to espouse an uncompromising, unforgiving sort of gospel stance" (484). In concerts Dylan totally ignored his earlier body of work and focused only on the new, gospel-tinted songs. As Williams recalls, Dylan chose to emphasize his new beliefs "by delivering long, angry sermons between the songs" (Williams 156).

The drastic change in Dylan was that he had gone from Judaism to born-again Christianity, an extreme change, to say the least. It was the extreme nature of this change which caused many to doubt that the change was real. People thought that it was just another of Dylan's put-ons, a jest which he would reveal before too much damage was done. But Dylan's conversion was real, so real that he not only accepted Christ but felt compelled to convince everyone who would listen they must accept Christ as he did. Dylan told Shelton, "This is no Maharishi

trip with me. Jesus is definitely not that to me. When I walk around some of the towns we go to, however, I'm totally convinced people need Jesus" (486).

And so it was that Dylan did his best from 1979 through 1981 to make religion a big part of his concerts. The concerts were not well attended, and many felt that Dylan was finished as a poet with anything outside of the religious arena to say. As time went on Dylan himself accepted the need to go back to his earlier work. By 1981, the religious songs made up only one-third of each concert (487). By 1983, he was again exploring his Jewish roots, marking a change with the release of *Infidels*, with a photograph on the album back cover showing the poet on a mountain overlooking Jerusalem (487). By November of 1984, he was ready to look back on his time as an evangelical performer. He told Shelton, "maybe the time for me to say that has come and gone. It's time for me to do something else. Sometimes these things appear quickly and disappear. Jesus Himself only preached three years" (488).

So Dylan's evangelical stage came to an end, but it would not be the end of Dylan's interest in religious thought any more than 1979 had marked the beginning. In tracing Dylan's religious beliefs one is led back to his Jewish childhood. Reared in a Jewish household, Dylan was prepared for his bar mitzvah, the ritual marking every Jewish boy's coming of age, at Hibbing's Agudath Achim Synagogue (Shelton 36). When he was confirmed at the age of thirteen, Dylan chanted the appropriate Hebrew scripture, impressing the elders with his "tremendous" performance (36). On this occasion, according to Stephen

Pickering's *Bob Dylan Approximately: A Portrait of the Jewish Poet in Search of God*, the young man read from the Haftorah (a selection of readings from the prophets) and gave a talk on the moral responsibilities of a Jew (17). Pickering characterizes Dylan as a model Jew, speaking of the poet as "one of a succession of Jewish mystics" (11). It was to Pickering that Dylan confided, "I have never forgotten my roots. I am a Jew" (11).

To be a Jew in Hibbing, Minnesota, was to be in an extreme minority. A teacher in Hibbing told Robert Shelton, "In Hibbing, the Finns hated the Bohemians and the Bohemians hated the Finns. Nearly everyone hated the Jews" (Shelton 36). Growing up in such a religious atmosphere affected Dylan as a youngster and throughout his career. In holding up the downtrodden in his songs, Dylan is hearkening back to his childhood as one of the chosen, yet alienated, children of God. In the introduction to his book, *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective*, Craig McGregor speaks of the main strands of Dylan's work, including Dylan's Jewish background. "No one can come from a Jewish background without being profoundly influenced by it," McGregors comments, "whether the process is one of acceptance, compromise, or rejection" (11). At certain stages throughout his career, Dylan has done all three. At times he has been proud of his heritage as a Jew, though he has never gone out of his way to make an issue of it. Asked by Rabbi Yoso Rosenzweig in 1971 why he did not make a direct declaration of his Jewish faith, Dylan answered, "I'm a Jew. It touches my poetry, my life, in ways I can't describe. Why should I declare

something that should be so obvious?" (Shelton 413). At other times, most evident during his "Christian phase," Dylan has rejected Judaism in order to embrace the evangelical movement. At other times he has simply wavered somewhere between the two camps. Commenting on what he calls Dylan's "Christian period," William McKeen states, "Though Dylan never renounced Christianity, he apparently remained a Jew throughout the gospel years, seemingly able to find some accommodation between the faiths" (70). As Pickering puts it, Dylan "has never forgotten his heritage. You don't necessarily have to be a praying Jew to be a Jew. Bobby never lost his Jewish roots" (82). Dylan has ever remained true, despite pitfalls and diversions, to his Jewish roots and to his belief in God. The poet told Neil Hickey in 1976, "I can see God in a daisy. I can see God at night in the wind and rain. I see creation just about everywhere. The highest form of song is prayer, King David's, Solomon's, the wailing of a coyote, the rumble of the earth" (Hickey 153). This belief in the omnipresent nature of God is the focal point of Dylan's beautiful composition of 1981, "Every Grain of Sand." The song is a hymn to the creator, exemplifying Dylan's belief that God is ever aware of man's needs, concerns, and shortcomings. The final two stanzas seem to represent Dylan's own search for the truth, unable to find or accept it, but still bound to keep searching:

I have gone from rags to riches in the sorrow of the night
In the violence of a summer's dream, in the chill of a wintry light,

In the bitter dance of loneliness fading into space,
In the broken mirror of innocence on each forgotten face.
I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea
Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me.
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man
Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand. (l. 462)

The song is indicative of Dylan's belief in God and his knowledge of God's word. The scriptures illustrate that God is, above all, concerned and that He cares about each sparrow which falls. In Matthew 10:29, we read "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." As Dylan presents in his song, the message is that there is no problem with which God will not help man nor any point at which God will not care about man. The biblical text continues, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10: 30-31). "Every Grain of Sand" serves as an excellent example of Dylan's use of scripture in his songs. The biblical reference is included in the song, with the assumption that the listener will either know the reference or be willing to search for it. The fact is that Dylan knows the Bible and expects his listener to be able to recognize Biblical references.

The Bible is and always has been a focal point for Bob Dylan, a focal point for imagery and inspiration for the poet. In early 1977 a reporter for *The London*

Times Literary Supplement asked Dylan to give his opinion on the most underrated and overrated books of the century. His answer to both was “the Bible” (Shelton 15)—a telling response. Dylan has always accepted the validity of the Bible though he has never been one to strictly follow its teachings. He has embraced it while always trying to insulate himself from its control. This contradiction in belief systems has been evident in interviews. Discussing his conversion, Dylan told Robert Hilburn in 1980, “I had always read the Bible, but I only looked at it as literature” (Hilburn 164)—a very revealing statement in that it communicates Dylan’s stance on biblical truth. Prior to his conversion to Christianity, he found the Bible of value, even if only poetically. After and beyond his conversion, he seems to have grown into a more settled acceptance of biblical guidance. Even if he cannot always follow the scriptural pattern himself, Dylan has grown to believe that the scriptures hold the definitive pattern for one’s life. Dylan told Mikal Gilmore in 1986, “The only principles you can find are the principles in the Bible, I mean, Proverbs has got them all” (Gilmore 62). Looking back over his life, it is obvious that Dylan has always been a Bible student. Furthermore, his grasp of scripture is beyond that of the average person of his generation. His range of biblical knowledge can be seen in his use of biblical images and allusions .

Dylan’s Christian phase resulted in four albums from 1979 through 1983. These ranged from the totally religious *Slow Train Coming* to the mixed work, *Infidels*. Between these two Dylan recorded *Saved* and *Shot of Love*. Other than

Slow Train Coming, the albums did not do well and confused many long-time fans. Most did not realize that Dylan was on a journey, the end of which he could not even see himself. In actuality, the journey was a long time coming. The themes addressed in these albums had been points of concentration for Dylan prior to this period and still serve as strong points for the poet today.

Dylan had even recorded earlier another “religious album,” which could easily fit with the other four as a solid example of the poet’s spiritual essence. *John Wesley Harding*, released in 1968, was Dylan’s first album after his famous motorcycle accident in July of 1966. During his recovery rumors flew that he had been horribly disfigured, mentally impaired, or had emerged a mere shadow of his former self. The truth is that Dylan simply took advantage of an opportunity to recharge his spiritual batteries, reconnect with his family, and reevaluate his purpose as a writer.

John Wesley Harding is a masterpiece, indicative of Dylan’s deep spiritual nature and his talent with symbolic poetry. As always, the core of Dylan’s symbolism is the Bible, which had been so vital a part of his childhood. Using the legend of John Wesley Hardin (one wonders if the misspelling is intentional) as a springboard, Dylan presents colorful characters, each with a biblically based lesson to present. Dylan himself called *John Wesley Harding* “the first biblical rock album” (Shelton 389). The first cut on the album sets the stage for the symbolic structure of the whole. The title song begins, “John Wesley Harding / Was a friend to the poor, / He traveled with a gun in ev’ry hand. / All along this

countryside, / He opened a many a door, / But he was never known / To hurt an honest man" (l. 249). With this introduction, Harding is presented as a symbol of Christ, who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). The "gun in ev'ry hand" is a symbol of power, a representation of the approval of the Father above. In that Christ always obeyed his Father, He ever had His approval. At Christ's baptism, the Apostle Matthew records that a voice was heard proclaiming, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Harding, as a Christ figure, is one who "was always known / To lend a helping hand" (l. 249). Throughout the scriptures, Christ is one who helps all whom He meets along the way. As the song continues, we hear that when Harding was captured, "no charge held against him / Could they prove" (l. 249). In this we find another symbolic representation of Christ in that when He was brought forth for a predetermined "trail," it took the word of false witnesses to condemn Him (Matt. 26:60).

The motif of innocent sacrifice is continued in "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest," "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," and "Drifter's Escape." "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest" is the story of one man's search for contentment, striving to find the eternity he cannot understand, confusing Paradise with material wealth. When Frankie Lee dies toward the end of the song, we are told that "he died of thirst" (l.l. 255). The biblical account of the death of Jesus lists among the last words He spoke the simple statement of human suffering, "I thirst" (John 19:28). At the end of the song, the listener is

given the warning, "And don't go mistaking Paradise / For that home across the road" (l. 255). Often in His ministry, Jesus warned of the dangers of materialism, summing up the equation with the question, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). In this song, as in all others in *John Wesley Harding* and throughout his body of work, Dylan shows both a basic knowledge and comprehension of biblical truth.

In "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," the listener is made to feel the culpability each one holds in the death of Christ. The song is presented in the form of a remembered dream, often the mode of communication between God and man in biblical times. The final stanza of the song crystalizes Dylan's personal sense of sinfulness and remorse:

I dreamed I saw St. Augustine,
Alive with fiery breath,
And I dreamed I was amongst the ones
That put him out to death.
Oh, I awoke in anger,
So alone and terrified,
I put my fingers against the glass
And bowed my head and cried (l. 256).

Dylan's guilt is the guilt of all mankind. His thoughts in delivering this message may have been the same as the Apostle Paul's when he wrote to the younger preacher, Timothy, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). Dylan uses this song to illustrate his realization that he, like all mankind, is guilty of the sin for which Christ died. There is none who could answer for mankind except the Messiah. As Dylan states in the second stanza, "No martyr is among ye now / Whom you can call your own, / But go on your way accordingly / But know you're not alone" (l. 256). Dylan knows that no person can stand for mankind except Jesus. The poet is aware of the biblical principle set forth in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is [. . .] one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ." Perhaps the tears shed by the narrator are tears of regret, reflecting Dylan's own inability over the years to live up to the standards of the Word which he knows so well.

"Drifter's Escape" combines two of Dylan's passions, his admiration for Hank Williams and his respect for the Son of God. Hank Williams, known as "the drifter," was one who, like Jesus, left this world too soon. Dylan has never made a secret of the mingling of the secular and the spiritual in his influences. The poet even stated in one interview that he finds spiritual guidance, "not from religious leaders, but in the songs of Hank Williams" (*People* 54). Dylan's entire career has been a balancing act between his spiritual essence and the secular lifestyle of a rock star. As he states in another song in *John Wesley Harding*, "Dear

Landlord," "My burden is heavy, / My dreams are beyond control" (l. 259). Dylan, like Hank Williams before him, is a man who is good at heart, but ever falls victim to the temptations which surround him. "Drifter's Escape" is the depiction of a man, obviously innocent, railroaded into the mockery of a trial and wrongly convicted. This, again, is a reflection of the trial and conviction of Jesus. As the drifter is led from the courtroom he proclaims, "My trip hasn't been a pleasant one / And my time it isn't long, / And I still do not know / What it was that I've done wrong" (l. 258). Thus the drifter stands as a Christ figure. Jesus did good among men, yet was condemned by mankind. When the Savior stood before Pilate, the governor proclaimed, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4). As the Messiah was innocent of any wrongdoing, so there was no fault in the drifter. Man would not free him, so a higher power stepped in. The final stanza ends, "Just then a bolt of lightning / Struck the courthouse out of shape / And while ev'rybody knelt to pray / The drifter did escape" (l. 258). The lines are reminiscent of the chaos which ensued after the death of Christ on the cross. In Matthew 27:41, we are told that "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent." As the Messiah escaped by leaving this world behind, so the drifter escapes during the tumult brought by divine providence.

The aforementioned songs are but the most obvious biblically-based lyrics in *John Wesley Harding*, but the album has biblical references in every groove. In his article, "Dylan: Tangled Up In Jews," Larry Yudelson refers to sixty-nine

biblical references in *John Wesley Harding*. Each song contains a biblically-based message presented through the voice of a Dylan character. In "As I Went Out One Morning," for example, we find the connection made between wrongdoing and the necessity of repentance. The narrator speaks of the "fairest damsel / That ever did walk in chains" capturing his heart, giving him "no choice" but to love her. When Tom Paine, the owner of the slave, comes upon the two of them together, he speaks words of apology and regret for the damage done: "'I'm sorry, sir,' he said to me, / 'I'm sorry for what she's done'" (l. 250). The damage done, the way to forgiveness is presented as that of confession and penitence. According to scripture, any sin can be forgiven if repentance and confession are present. In *John Wesley Harding* Dylan also explores the dilemma of one who believes in the midst of a world of unbelievers. "Dear Landlord," "I Am a Lonesome Hobo," and "I Pity the Poor Immigrant" are all songs about alienation, the plight of the outsider in a world which does not understand him. In a way, these are songs about Dylan, a poet-singer who is never able to stop singing, performing on a never-ending tour because there is really nowhere he can call home other than the stage itself. "I Am a Lonesome Hobo" deals also with the quest for wealth at the expense of all else and the price which must be paid for such a lifestyle. In the second stanza the narrator tells what led him to his life of misery:

Well, once I was rather prosperous,

There was nothing I did lack.
I had fourteen-karat gold in my mouth
And silk upon my back.
But I did not trust my brother,
I carried him to blame,
Which led me to my fatal doom,
To wander off in shame (l. 260).

The narrator is obviously one who enjoys all which life has to offer materially, yet loses it all and winds up with nothing of any lasting value. The warning is given to the listener in the last stanza, "Stay free from petty jealousies, / Live by no man's code, / And hold your judgment for yourself / Lest you wind up on this road" (l. 260). The message Dylan presents is that we do not concern ourselves with the wealth of others but remain content to enjoy that with which we have been blessed. This is the same message as that given in Hebrews 13:5, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have [. . .]." Dylan's words serve to warn the listener that one should never trust wealth to replace faith and determination to serve a higher power.

John Wesley Harding also deals with another Dylan religious motif, that of a day of eternal judgment and the necessity for man to prepare for such. "All Along the Watchtower" and "The Wicked Messenger" are songs about impending doom and condemnation of those who refuse the voice of warning. In "The

Wicked Messenger” the main character is one sent from “Eli” with bad news and the revelation that “the soles of my feet, I swear they’re burning” (l. 262). Eli is the Old Testament prophet whose own sons profaned the temple by committing fornication at the very doors of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:22). The judgment upon them is harsh, both falling to the hand of death in the same day. The messenger from God is one whose feet are aflame as he walks through the inferno of God’s vengeance. The God of the Bible is, in Dylan’s view, a God of terrible vengeance, except for those who do His bidding. In the Old Testament such a message is delivered in Malachi 4:2-3, “But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.” This could well be the source for the burning feet of Dylan’s messenger in this song. Another statement found in the song is that one can be a messenger from God, yet still be “wicked,” just as Dylan himself could present the Word in his songs yet still be filled with self-doubt and trouble on the home front. Dylan’s life has been one marked with self-indulgence and marital strife. He has, again, known the basic principles of truth, yet found himself ever refusing to follow them.

The motif of a time of God’s retribution has long been a part of Dylan’s work, as early as 1963’s “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” and 1964’s “I’d Hate To Be You On That Dreadful Day.” “All Along the Watchtower,” made much more

famous by the Jimi Hendrix version, is an obvious allusion to the torments of hell. In the song a joker and a thief are trapped in circumstances from which they cannot escape at an unnamed location. The song begins:

“There must be some way out of here,” said the joker to the thief,
 “There’s too much confusion, I can’t get no relief.
 Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth,
 None of them along the line know what any of it is worth.” (l. 252)

The trap from which the men cannot escape is the pathway leading through life into eternal loss in Hell. Businessmen, farmers, all on this road do not realize that they are gaining a few things but losing the most important item of all, their immortal souls. The song ends, “Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl, / Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl” (l. 252). The unknown riders are those who will eventually claim all in judgment. In Revelation 6:8 the Scripture reads, “And I looked, and behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.” Dylan’s vision of loss could also have come, according to Pickering, from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. In the Old Testament reference the prophet is told of his responsibilities, “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of housemen [. . .] (Isaiah 21:6-7). Dylan, it seems, saw himself as The Old Testament watchman, one who watches for

danger and gives warning. This Dylan has done since the sixties, when he was dealing with social issues, and into modern times, when he has dealt with the issues of despair and loss. The poet has ever seen himself in the role of the watchman who, with all his own failings and weaknesses, still uses his songs to warn mankind of the slow train of God's judgment which is coming for all. The God represented in Dylan's poetry is one of both immeasurable love and unfathomable vengeance. In presenting both faces of God, Dylan is again following the biblical pattern. In Romans 11:22, the dual nature of God is revealed, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." In Dylan's view, we are all "hanging in the balance," dependent upon God's love. It is this God of love who is presented in 1970's "Father of Night." The song is only three stanzas, yet uses the term "Father" twenty-three times. The result is that of making the listener focus on the identity of the One who is the Father of all. The last stanza indicates that since He is the Father of all and the One to whom we owe all, He is to be worshipped:

Father of grain, Father of wheat,
Father of cold and Father of heat,
Father of air and Father of trees,
Who dwells in our hearts and our memories,
Father of minutes, Father of days,

Father of whom we most solemnly praise. (l. 297)

The song ends awkwardly, yet the point is made. The Father is the One who has done so much for man, simply because of His fatherly compassion and love. The epitome of this love is presented in what has been called the golden verse of the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It is this same God whom Dylan presents as a God of terrible vengeance in songs such as "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," "When He Returns," and "The Groom's Still Waiting At The Altar." "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" is an appropriate representation of Dylan's vision of a day of judgment. The song begins:

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?
I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains,
I've walked and I've crawled on six crooked highways,
I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests,
I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans,
I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard,
And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard,
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall. (l. 59)

The song, in which a newborn baby surrounded by wolves (in the second stanza) serves as a symbol of the innocent child born into a world filled with cruelty and evil, deals with the ruthless nature of the world. The "blue-eyed son" is a symbol of the Christ-child, who came to this world only to be destroyed by those He came to save. The speaker is ten thousand miles into a graveyard but is still only at the mouth, the beginning. Dylan saw, when he wrote the song in 1963, a world which had turned its back on God and was again headed into a war which would have no end of innocent bodies to claim. The last two lines of the first (and each following) stanza contain the refrain of "it's a hard" rain coming upon mankind. The "rain" envisioned by Dylan is one of total destruction, like the one which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. The biblical event Dylan used as a point of reference is found in Genesis 19:24, "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." The extent of the devastation is in verses 27 and 28 of the same chapter, "And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." Knowing the Old Testament as he does, Dylan uses an image of devastation of biblical proportions when man refuses to listen to God. The fact that man does not listen is presented in the song in the second and third stanzas. In the second stanza we find "I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken." In the third

stanza the line is phrased slightly differently but the image is the same: "ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin.'" An analogy in the Scriptures is that of the story of John the Baptist, one whose voice was heard crying in the wilderness, heard but unheeded by most. Since few heard John, few were ready for the coming of the Messiah. In Dylan's song, the Son of God comes to earth and sees nothing but despair and loss; the ten thousand voices unheard are also a scriptural reference. (The number ten thousand is used frequently in the Old Testament to indicate a large, unspecified number.) Dylan's continual reference in the song to the fact that "it's a hard" rain (the phrase is repeated twenty-five times in the song) evokes the biblical belief that God's judgment will be hard on a world which has ignored Him.

As has already been noted, Dylan was criticized during his "born again period" for his focus on the anger of God.. His tirades during his concerts and songs such as "Slow Train," "When You Gonna Wake Up," and "Dead Man, Dead Man" attest to this. In "Slow Train," Dylan speaks of the necessity of abandoning earthly possessions and ambitions to follow Christ. The focus in the song is not on following ministers or other agents of organized religion, represented in the song as "men-stealers talkin' in the name of religion" (l. 436). Rather, the focus is on individual reform and a reform that better take place or else. Dylan refers to a woman telling him in no uncertain terms, "Boy, without a doubt, have to quit your mess and straighten out, / You could die down here, be just another accident statistic" (l. 436). The obvious implication is that Dylan

finally realized that he needed to follow what he knew to be right before it was too late. (The only problem is that Dylan refers to a judgment day and a need to change without any guidance on how to escape the loss on the day of judgment.) In other words, the focus in "Slow Train," as well as other songs in the same vein, is God's anger rather than God's guidance.

The anger spilling over into Dylan's performances during his Christian years made them chore for old-time fans. Not only did Dylan refuse to play the old songs, he chided and preached to his audience in city after city. The "sermons" were filled with anger, the messages were harsh, and the combination was extremely hard to swallow. Dylan was telling the dead men to arise from sin and the mass of mankind to wake up, but their hearts were hardened by the tone of his delivery.

One of the main problems during the Christian performances was that Dylan's audiences simply did not know if his conversion was real or if Christianity was just another face he was trying on temporarily. Many of the poet's fans did not understand because they did not realize that Dylan had always been religious. Furthermore, his religious impulses have always been expressed with anger. "Hard Rain," for example, was written in 1963, long before his conversion. In fact, most all of Dylan's early theological musings have had the air of the indignant prophet. "I'd Hate To Be You On That Dreadful Day," written in 1964, is as strong an indictment of those not following the right pathway (according to Dylan) as anything written in the late 70's or early 80's. The "dreadful day" is, of

course, the day of judgment, and the song is an example of Dylan's depth of Bible knowledge even as a young man. The fourth stanza of the song begins with the admonition, "You're gonna have to walk naked / Can't ride in no car. / You're gonna let ev'rybody see / Just what you are" (l. 39). The idea that one day all will be revealed is based upon scriptural ideas. One verse supporting Dylan's stand is found in 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." The song ends with Dylan's assertion that there will be a time when it will be too late to change, "Shoulda listened when you heard the word down there" (l. 39).

The religiously indignant Dylan of the 80's was also evident in 1967's "Down in the Flood" and "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere." The flood of the first song is Dylan's reflection on the great flood of Genesis. Dylan speaks of the fact that in such a catastrophe it's every man for himself, "Now it's king for king, / Queen for queen, / It's gonna be the meanest flood / That anybody's seen" (l. 315). In "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" each stanza ends with the refrain, "Oh, oh, are we gonna fly / Down in the easy chair" (l. 317). The "easy chair" can be seen as the easy pathway followed by the majority of human kind.. The person seeking the right way will be willing to follow the more difficult pathway rather than that which sends the flood of mankind rushing into loss. Being one knowledgeable about the

Bible, Dylan places warnings in his songs about the need to seek the better way. These messages are powerful and definitely scripturally derived.

Songs written during Dylan's Christian years are certainly more blatant in their religious overtones, but earlier songs also indicate a real familiarity with the Bible. Early Dylan songs are colored with his Jewish upbringing and knowledge of the Scriptures. One song dealing with the day of reckoning is 1963's "The Ballad of Hollis Brown." This song uses the story of an individual facing his inner demons as a symbol of his own personal day of judgment. The protagonist is a man who has reached the end of his rope. Unable to cope with life, he kills his family and himself. The part of the song which gives it a religious tint is the fact that the number seven, a number symbolizing completeness in both Judaism and Christianity, is prevalent in the last two stanzas. There is reference to "seven breezes a-blowin,'" "seven shots" ringing out, "seven people dead" and "seven new people born" (l. 92). Hollis Brown kills his family because he feels it is the only solution, when in reality it is no solution at all. His family is gone but somewhere in the distance the cycle continues. Dylan's message is bleak yet hopeful if one will seek the right answer. The true answer was blowing in the wind which Dylan would feel with full force in later years.

Man's inability or unwillingness to follow the right way is an important part of the Bible and is, likewise, an element addressed in Dylan's poetry. In John 1:11, the statement is made that Jesus "came unto His own, and His own received Him not." An example of man's refusal to accept God's mercy is seen in

Dylan's "Whatcha Gonna Do" (1963). The challenge is presented in the song, "Tell me what you're gonna do / When the shadow comes under your door" (l. 73). Dylan alludes to the Egyptians given the opportunity to spare their first born by placing blood over the doorways. (This occasion, from which the Jewish Passover gets its name, was the chance given to those who had never accepted God to accept Him and be spared.) Of course, the Egyptians refused, as do the majority of those to whom Dylan addressed his biblically based messages. The harshness of God's judgment upon the Egyptians was cataclysmic, but, as always, God had given them warning. Dylan has always felt the need to give warning, realizing that such warning will probably not be taken. In Dylan's belief system, he has done his part if he has given warning. Each man must take upon himself the burden of acceptance or refusal.

In that Dylan speaks of the right path, he has often been disappointed in what he has seen in his fellow man. The hypocrisy and callous nature of man has often been addressed in his songs. Having the biblical background he does, Dylan has been aware of the extent to which man has fallen. The insensitive reaction of the average person to one in need is addressed in songs such as "Man on the Street," the aforementioned "Ballad of Hollis Brown" and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," and 1970's "Three Angels." The latter song deals with Christmas and all the rush and activity surrounding that holiday. The story line is that of "Three angels up above the street, / Each one playing a horn, / Dressed in green robes with wings that stick out, / They've been there since

Christmas morn" (l. 296). The rest of the song speaks of various individuals hurrying on their separate ways, too busy to even notice the angels above them. The song concludes, "The angels play on their songs all day, / The whole earth in progression seems to pass by. / But does anyone hear the music they play, / Does anyone even try?" (l. 296). Dylan's message is that man must never become so busy that he allows himself to forget God. (Dylan's question reminds one of the question presented in Jeremiah 2:32, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.")

Two beautiful songs concerning man's refusal to turn to God are 1965's "Gates of Eden" and 1980's "In the Garden." The latter song calls forth the image of that place of complete happiness, Eden. That is, happiness was complete in Eden until man listened to the wrong voice. In the fifth stanza of "Gates of Eden," the lament is made that so many seek kings while ignoring the one true king, "Relationships of ownership / They whisper in the wings / To those condemned to act accordingly / And wait for succeeding kings / And I try to harmonize with songs / The lonesome sparrow sings / There are no kings inside the gates of Eden" (l. 174). There are no "kings" because Dylan realizes that there is but one king. The lonesome sparrow in this song is symbolic of Christ, crying out but unheard by the common man. He is the king of all but is still unheard. Dylan is stating his belief in the biblical principle of the sovereignty of Christ as presented in Ephesians 1:22, where we are told that God has "put all things under his feet,

and gave him to be the head over all things to the church [. . .]” The final stanza of “Gates of Eden” presents Dylan’s conclusion that the only place to seek truth is through God: “At times I think there are no words / But these to tell what’s true / And there are no truths outside the Gates of Eden” (l. 175).

The same message is presented in “In the Garden” but with a much more bitter tone. Of course, the song is the product of Dylan’s angry prophet stage. The song is comprised of a series of questions, a method used so effectively in “Blowin’ in the Wind.” The questions begin each stanza and are repeated at the end of each stanza: “When they came for Him in the garden, did they know? [. . .] When He spoke to them in the city, did they hear? [. . .] When He healed the blind and crippled, did they see? [. . .] Did they speak out against Him, did they dare? [. . .] When He rose from the dead, did they believe?” (l. 448). With the use of these chains of thought, Dylan is making the point that people in modern times are no different from those who were actually contemporaries of Christ. The truth can be right in front of a person, yet he will not see it if he refuses to do so. Again, Dylan is basing his poetic expression on the bible. In Matthew 13:15, the scripture reads, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Dylan’s message through the decades, whether he himself followed it or not, is that one must turn one’s life over to God. In 1964’s “Paths of Victory,” the

poet reminds us, "The gravel road is bumpy, / It's a hard road to ride, / But there's a clearer road a-waitin' / With the cinders on the side" (l. 118). The student of the Bible in Dylan is simply reminding us that there are but two roads to travel, and we must choose the right one. Another example of the beauty of the right way, also written in 1964, is "Lay Down Your Weary Tune." Sung in a manner reminiscent of gospel standards, the song offers hope from the troubles of the world if one will but pause for a moment of reflection. It begins, "Lay down your weary tune, lay down, / Lay down the song you strum, / And rest yourself 'neath the strength of strings / No voice can hope to hum" (l. 120). The final line quoted reminds one of the new song to be sung in heaven, recorded in Revelation 14:3, "And they sang as it were a new song [. . .]"

The weariness alluded to in "Lay Down Your Weary Tune" is interesting in that it was written by such a young man (Dylan was only in his early twenties when he wrote this song). This same sense of world-weariness is found in "Mr Tambourine Man," with its line, "My weariness amazes me, I'm branded on my feet, / I have no one to meet / And the ancient empty street's too dead for dreaming" (l. 172). With all the years spanning the distance between, the prominent feature in Dylan's Grammy winning 1997 album *Time Out of Mine* is that same sense of weariness. It is with this album that Dylan reveals himself as the world-weary traveler he was imitating in the sixties. In 1973 the poet sang of "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." In 1997 he sang of being content simply "Tryin' To Get to Heaven" before they close the door. Perhaps the lack of hope found in the

collection of songs from *Time Out of Mind* is an indication of Dylan's floundering search for religious strength in modern times. In the late 70's and early 80's Dylan was sure that he had found the right way and was bound and determined to lead others to it. In an interview with David Gates of *Newsweek* in 1997, Dylan sealed the book on his thoughts on religion and poetry:

Here's the thing with me and the religion thing. This is the flat-out truth: I find the religiosity and philosophy in the music. I don't find it anywhere else. Songs like "Let Me Rest on a Peaceful Mountain" or "I Saw the Light"—that's my religion. I don't adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelists, all of that. I've learned more from the songs than I've learned from any of this kind of entity. The songs are my lexicon. I believe the songs. (64)

Chapter Seven

Things Have Changed

Bob Dylan has gone through many changes in his almost forty year career. In many ways he has come full circle. In the 1960's he imitated the grizzled old folk singer he longed to become. Now when he sings a song like an old man it is because he has, surprisingly enough, lived long enough to become one. In the second of his *Eleven Outlined Epitaphs* he speaks of someday returning to Hibbing, Minnesota, with "changed eyes." In the beautiful composition "Highlands," from 1997, he tells the listener, "I've got new eyes." Obviously, as an older man he now needs glasses (and actually has for some time now), but he has also developed a figurative new way of looking at things. He can look back over a career with dozens of albums to his credit and scores of recordings which others have made of his work. He has finally reached the level of those he once worshiped. In his self-penned liner notes to *The Free Wheelin' Bob Dylan*, written in 1963, Dylan says, "I don't carry myself yet the way that Big Joe Williams, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lightin' Hopkins have carried themselves. I hope to be able to someday." That day has long since arrived.

Yet Dylan is not content to dwell in the past. His Never Ending Tour still goes on, showing no signs of slowing down. He continues to record and write Grammy winning songs. One of the highlights to the soundtrack of the 2000 movie *Wonder Boys* is Dylan's "Things Have Changed." The title evokes, of course, song with which Dylan long ago burst upon the music scene, "The Times

They Are A-Changin.'" But it is much more than that. A masterpiece, it is a fit work to cap off Dylan's renewed prominence as a song writer. "Things Have Changed" is filled with references which are meaningful to those who belong to Dylan's generation:

A worried man with a worried mind,
No one in front of me and nothing behind.
There's a woman on my lap and she's drinking champagne.
Got white skin, got assassin's eyes.
I'm looking up into the sapphire tinted skies.
I'm well dressed, waiting on the last train..
Standing on the gallows with my head in a noose,
Any minute now I'm expecting all hell to break loose.
(Chorus)
People are crazy and times are strange.
I'm locked in tight, I'm out of range
I used to care, but things have changed.
This place ain't doing me any good.
I'm in the wrong town, I should be in Hollywood.
Just for a second there I thought I saw something move.
Gonna take dancing lessons, do the jitterbug rag.
Ain't no shortcuts, gonna dress in drag.

Only a fool in here would think he's got anything to prove.

Lot of water under the bridge, lot of other stuff too.

Don't get up gentlemen, I'm only passing through

(Chorus)

I've been walking forty miles of bad road.

If the Bible is right, the world will explode.

I've been trying to get as far away from myself as I can.

Some things are too hot to touch.

The human mind can only stand so much.

You can't win with a losing hand.

Feel like falling in love with the first woman I meet,

Putting her in a wheel barrow and wheeling her down the street.

(Chorus)

I hurt easy, I just don't show it.

You can hurt someone and not even know it.

The next sixty seconds could be like an eternity.

Gonna get low down, gonna fly high.

All the truth in the world adds up to one big lie

I'm in love with a woman who don't even appeal to me.

Mr. Jinx and Miss Lucy, they jumped in the lake.

I'm not that eager to make a mistake.

People are crazy and times are strange.

I'm locked in tight, I'm out of range.

I used to care, but things have changed.

With all its negativity and somber tone, the song is still evidence that Dylan continues to serve as the spokesman for his generation. The statement with which the chorus ends speaks to all those who grew up in the sixties, "I used to care, but things have changed." Many of us have reached the stage in life where we are simply waiting for that last, slow train coming, knowing the Bible speaks of the end and trying to distance ourselves from our mistakes. We think if we had made just one decision differently, we could have been in Hollywood, living the good life instead of waiting for all Hell to break loose. With our heads in the collective noose of mortality, many of us do foolish things (learning the jitterbug, dressing in drag?) and wonder what happened when it all catches up to us. Many of the sixties generation have "settled," feeling there is nothing left to prove or "falling in love" with those with whom they have nothing in common.

Much of the song is aimed at the generation of the sixties, but much of it is also reflective of truths about Dylan. There is absolutely no one in front of Bob Dylan and he has certainly left everything behind. There is no Robert Zimmerman anymore. There has not been for decades. In truth, Dylan has spent his career trying to get as far away from himself as he could. But in the same sense that there is no Robert Zimmerman, there is no Bob Dylan either. The personae known as Bob Dylan is a conglomeration of all who came before him.

Bob Dylan is, in essence, folk history come to life. He represented all who stood on a stage before him, but he is still able to grasp a sense of his place in the eternal scheme of things, "Don't get up gentlemen, I'm only passing through." In a conversation with Mikal Gilmore in 1986, Bob Dylan spoke of his place in folk and rock history, "I'm not gonna be around forever. That day's gonna come when there aren't gonna be any more records, and then people won't be able to say, 'Well, this one's not as good as the last one.' They're gonna have to look at it all" (Gilmore 60). When they look at it all they are going to see the poetry of a man who learned from everyone who came before him, added to it, and created an incredible body of work. With all of his influences behind him, with all of his talent intact, Bob Dylan stands as an icon in his own right. His music and words will stay forever young.

Appendix

A Listing of Persons with Whom the Average Reader May not be Familiar.

The following publications were of invaluable use in preparing this list:

The Encyclopedia of Popular Music. Ed by Colin Larkin. New York: MUZE, Inc. 1998.

Feather, Leonard. *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*. New York: Horizon Press, 1960.

Folk and Blues: The Encyclopedia. Ed Irwin and Lyndon Stambler. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.

Harris, Sheldon. *Blues Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Blues Singers*. New Rochelle, New York, 1979.

Wolfe, Charles K. *Tennessee Strings*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977.

Rabbit (Richard) Brown (1880-1937). - Nicknamed Rabbit because of his small stature, Brown played guitar which was a combination of flamenco, string snapping, and high speed bass runs.

Chris Bouchillon (1893-1968). - "The original talking blues man," Bouchillon was a popular recorded comedian of the 1920's. His most famous recording was "Talking Blues." His style of talking a story instead of singing it became a staple of Woody Guthrie and the early Bob Dylan.

Paul Brady (1947-). Brady began his musical career as a member of the Rhythm and Blues group The Kult. He became a folk singer with the Johnstons, who had a measure of success with a version of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now." Brady's main strength has been that of a songwriter.

Ray Bremser (1934-). Bremser was one of the original Beat poets. He wrote a collection entitled *Poems of Madness*. He is mentioned in the final group of Dylan's "11 Outlined Epitaphs" with reference to the "jail songs of Ray Bremser" (L. 115).

Judy Collins (1939-). Collins was one of the major female voices in the folk movement of the sixties. Her third album, *Judy Collins #3*, included Dylan's "Farewell." Her 1975 song, "Send in the Clowns," was an international hit.

Miles Davis (1926-1991). Davis was an innovative trumpet player known for his haunting solos and intensive mood while playing.

Ramblin' Jack Elliot (1931-). Ramblin' Jack was a close friend to Woody Guthrie, with whom he traveled and performed. His first album was *Jack Elliot Sings the Songs of Woody Guthrie*. Elliot remains a staple in the world of folk music.

Sleepy John Estes (1899-1977). Estes was the first blues singer to record the influential "Milk Cow Blues," a song which set a pattern followed by many in the "talking blues" genre. Estes performed with a blues trio at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival.

Jesse Fuller (1896-1976). Fuller was called the "Lone Cat." He was a one-man band, playing a six-string guitar (with his right foot), a combination kazoo, harmonica, and microphone fixed to a harness around his neck, a cymbal (played with his left foot), and a twelve-string guitar. His "San Francisco Bay Blues" has been recorded by Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Donovan, and Eric Clapton.

Allen Ginsberg (1921-1997). Ginsberg was a prominent American poet who recorded singles and albums of his works. At times the poems would be accompanied by music. He was highly associated with the American "beat" movement of the fifties and sixties.

Jack Guthrie (1915-1948). A cousin of Woody Guthrie, the singer started as a rodeo performer, later working clubs as "Oklahoma's Yodeling Cowboy." He became famous for "Oklahoma Hills," which spent six weeks as number one on the country charts in 1945.

Coleman Hawkins (1901-1969). The first to use the tenor saxophone as a dominant instrument, Hawkins's life work stretched across six decades.

Son House (1902-1988). House was known for open-tuned, bottleneck guitar playing. He played in "jook joints" on the blues circuit. Music archivist Alan Lomax recorded House playing a number of songs to be included in the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Music.

Cisco Houston (1918-1961). A member of Woody Guthrie's inner circle, Houston met the folk singer in the merchant marines where they performed

for their fellow seamen. After the war the two returned to New York and began touring together. Houston was commemorated in folk singer Tom Paxton's "Fare Thee Well Cisco."

Aunt Molly Jackson (1880-1960). Aunt Molly was the epitome of the woman who could sing the blues because she had lived them. Her mother died of starvation when the child was six; she was imprisoned at age eleven because of her family's union work to get better conditions for miners, and she was married at the age of fourteen. Both her husband and son were killed in mining accidents and her brother and father were blinded. She recorded "Kentucky Miner's Wife" in 1932. Using the melody of "Precious Memories" for "Dreadful Memories," she recorded a song about a child's starvation. The folk music revival of the fifties brought her to popularity; however, when she died in 1960 she was in poverty and relative obscurity.

Harry Jackson (1924-). An abstract expressionist who became a realist, Jackson is spoken of in Dylan's "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" with the phrase, "the singin' plains of Harry Jackson." Jackson is known for his realistic painting and sculptures of the Old West.

Blind Lemon Jefferson (1897-1929). Born blind or partially blind, Jefferson became one of the most influential rural blues singers. A traveling musician, he played in juke joints and at rural parties. Signed by Paramount Records in 1926, Jefferson had more than ninety tracks issued. He shared the

distinction with Ma Rainey of having a recording issued with his picture on the label.

Blind Willie Johnson (1902?-1949). Johnson was one of a group of singers known as "guitar evangelists." He sang only religious songs, using a style of playing which was unique in that he used a pocket knife for slide guitar playing.

Lonnie Johnson (1889-1970). Lonnie Johnson played guitar and violin in saloons in New Orleans, mostly in the red light district. He became a traveling musician after the deaths of his closest relatives in an influenza epidemic. Okeh Records signed him on as a house musician and issued one of his own recordings every six weeks or so. Johnson was equally adept at blues or jazz.

Robert Johnson (1911?-1938). Johnson is the performer around whom the legend formed that he had sold his soul to the devil at the "Crossroads" to become such a skilled guitarist. He excelled as an interpreter of the music of others, including Charley Patton and Son House. Robert Johnson was famous for his power and precision as a guitarist.

Leadbelly (1889-1949). Born Huddie William Ledbetter, Leadbelly played mandolin, accordion, piano, and harmonica. He was mainly known for his mastery of the twelve-string guitar. He served time in prison for, among other things, murder and attempted murder. While serving at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, he was discovered by folklorist John A. Lomax. Upon his

release he served as chauffeur and assistant to Lomax while also recording for the Library of Congress Archives. Leadbelly played and recorded with Sonny Terry and Woody Guthrie. His most famous recording is probably "Goodnight Irene."

A. L. Lloyd (1908-). A researcher who was one of the main forces behind the fifties folk revival in England, Lloyd collected five hundred songs by 1935 as he analyzed folk music. He published *The Singing Englishman* in 1940, which was a study of the folk music in that country.

Roger McGuinn (1942-). With Gene Clark, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, and Michael Clarke, McGuinn formed the seminal folk-rock band The Byrds in 1964. McGuinn is known for his distinctive twelve-string Rickenbacker guitar playing. The Byrds became famous with Dylan covers, starting a string of such with "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Modigliani (1884-1920). An Italian painter and sculptor, Modigliani lived a reckless life which destroyed his health. He is mentioned in Dylan's "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" with the line, "the narrow tunes of Modigliani."

Jelly Roll Morton (1890-1941). Morton played piano in brothels and other places around the seamy New Orleans scene. He eventually formed a big band with which he toured the east coast states. Strong on self-promotion, Morton billed himself as the "Originator of Jazz, Stomps, and Blues."

Charlie Oaks. Oaks was a blind musician who spent most of his life playing throughout eastern Tennessee, performing at train stations for loose change.

He performed with a guitar and a harmonica held around his neck in a holder the type of which would later become identified with Dylan. Oaks specialized in “event songs,” covering prominent news events of the time. One such song was “The Death of William Jennings Bryan.”

Odetta (1930-). A self-taught guitar player, Odetta has been a regular performer at the Newport Folk Festival. She backs her singing with her guitar, which she calls “Baby.” The singer recorded *Odetta Sings Dylan* in 1965. Her 1999 album, *Blues Everywhere I Go* received a Grammy nomination.

Charley Patton (1891-1934). At the time when he recorded in 1929, he was the most popular blues singer in Mississippi. Patton was an influence on Son House, Bukka White, and Big Joe Williams.

Charlie Parker (1920-1955). Famous for his alto saxophone, Parker was nicknamed “Yardbird” for his love of fried chicken; this was later shortened to “Bird.” Parker performed in bands with Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis. His solo performances made him famous.

‘Lil Junior Parker (1932-1971). As a child, Parker sang with gospel quartets in addition to singing for tips on the street. He toured with the Howlin’ Wolf Band in the South during the fifties and toured the United States from 1954-1961 as part of the Blues Consolidated Package show.

Edith Piaf (1915-1963). Piaf worked as a street and café singer in Paris until fame brought her into the spotlight. She was encouraged to sing in films by

French actor Maurice Chevalier. Dylan's "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" mentions "drownin' in the lungs of Edith Piaf."

Ma Rainey (1886-1939). Rainey was the first woman to incorporate blues into vaudeville, minstrel, and tent shows. Known as the "Mother of the Blues," Ma Rainey was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.

Wayne Raney (1921-1993). Known as a harmonica player, Raney recorded with the Delmore Brothers between 1946 and 1952. He had two top twenty country songs in 1948, "Lost John Boogie" and "Jack and Jill Boogie." "Why Don't You Haul Off And Love Me" became number one on the country charts and number twenty-two on the pop charts in 1949.

Tampa Red (1900-1981). Born Hudson Whittaker, Tampa Red was one of the most prolific blues accompanists, playing on around one hundred and fifty records.

Jimmy Reed (1925-1976). Reed had a series of hits in the fifties that made him the most successful blues singer of the era. Among these songs were "Bright Lights, Big City," "Honest I Do," and "Big Boss Man." Among those who have turned his songs into crossover successes have been the Grateful Dead, the Rolling Stones, and the Steve Miller Band.

Jimmie Rodgers (1897-1933). Rodgers may have been the one to give Dylan the idea of running away from home as a youngster. Rodgers purchased a touring tent, with his father's credit, at the age of twelve. Brought home by his father, he ran away with a traveling medicine show until his father again

found him. He worked as a brakeman for the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad and later as a switchman for the Southern Pacific. These jobs gave him the name of "The Singing Brakeman," as he sang anywhere and everywhere he could. Rodgers eventually became known as "America's Blue Yodeler." His "In the Jailhouse Now" has become a country classic.

Pete Seeger (1919-) . The son of a renowned musicologist, Seeger learned as a youngster to play banjo and ukulele. He was a member, with Woody Guthrie, of the folk group The Weavers from 1949 until 1958. He was blacklisted in 1948 and had to appear before the House of Un-American Activities Committee. In spite of this he became famous for songs like "Little Boxes," "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," and "We Shall Overcome."

Mississippi Sheiks. This group recorded more than eighty tracks between 1930 and 1935 for the "race" labels. A string band made up of members of the Chapman family, their work also appeared under the names the Mississippi Mud Steppers, the Down South Boys, and the Carter Brothers.

Victoria Spivey (1906-1976). The blues singer pictured with a young Bob Dylan on the back cover of *New Morning*, Spivey was among those who used the young man as an accompanist on her recordings. Spivey was a model for Dylan in one way in that she was continually performing. Spivey called herself "The Queen."

Sonny Terry (1911-1986). As a young man Terry concentrated on music due to his near blindness, which had been caused by two accidents. Terry worked

medicine shows with Blind Boy Fuller, with whom he made his recording debut as Fuller's harmonica player. Eventually Terry teamed up with Brownie McGhee. The two worked as sidemen for Woody Guthrie, which led them into what they called "folk-blues."

Dave Van Ronk (1936-). Van Ronk's first love was New Orleans jazz, and he did not become involved with folk until his work with Odetta in 1957. Van Ronk became a guru for Dylan in the early years.

Francois Villon (1431?-1463?). Villon is considered by many to be France's most outstanding lyric poet. He is among those mentioned in Dylan's "Eleven Outlined Epitaphs" with the lines "with the sounds of Francois Villon / echain' through my mad streets."

Eric Von Schmidt (1930-). Von Schmidt was part of the folk scene in Dinkytown. He is known mostly as a painter.

Muddy Waters (1915-1983). A performer of traditional black music, Waters recorded "Rolling Stone," which inspired the name of the rock group and Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone." Big hits for Waters included "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Got My Mojo Workin'." Waters was a big part of *The Last Waltz* in 1977, where he shared the stage with Dylan and Van Morrison.

Bukka White (1906-1977). Born Booker T. Washington White, the singer was a boxer and baseball pitcher in the mid-thirties. He recorded for Vocalion in 1937 and was given the misspelling of his name which stuck. By the time his

recording, "Shake Em' Down" became a hit he was in prison for assault. After prison his songs became much darker, focusing on hard life and hard living.

Josh White (1915-1969). White learned guitar while serving as a guide for blind street singers. He recording prolifically between 1932 and 1936. His songs demonstrate a great range of versatility, covering everything from blues to gospel to folk.

Big Joe Williams (1903-1982). Williams was the stereotypical country-blues singer. He made "cigar-box" instruments as a child and took to the road when his stepfather threw him out at age fifteen. He appeared in juke joints and lumber camps during the Depression as "Poor Joe."

Lester Young (1909-1959). Young was among those who played with Count Basie. He played many instruments as a youngster but finally settled on tenor saxophone. At various times during his career he was also privileged to play alongside Billie Holliday, Dizzy Gillespie, and Nat King Cole. Young developed his own use of words, supposedly originating the use of "bread" for money.

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