

ARTICLES FROM BOB DYLAN CRITICAL CORNER: I) LYRIC ANALYSIS

The articles collected here appeared on the former site Bob Dylan Critical Corner (BDCC), which was active from 1998 to 2016, at: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/magazine.html> and subsequently: <http://nicolamenicacci.com/bdcc/>. Some had been published in earlier versions on the Usenet group rec.music.dylan.

I restored these articles' on-line presence on 2 May 2019. Some have had later print publication: details are given with the texts. Where relevant I have put up the later versions.

I have also uploaded to this site files collecting book reviews and concert reviews from BDCC and elsewhere.

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"Boots of Spanish Leather", "Black Jack Davey" and more
Christopher Rollason, 1998

I have been puzzled in the past by 'Boots of Spanish Leather' - why that strange detail in the title and in the song's last words? Why boots of Spanish leather, rather than castanets, or a wineskin, or a flamenco record, or a model of Gaudi's Sagrada Familia?

Perhaps the key can be found in another, much later, recording of Dylan's, namely 'Black Jack Davey'. On the version of this traditional song which Dylan performs on 'Good As I Been To You', he sings: 'Well, she pulled off them high-heeled shoes/Made of Spanish leather/Got behind him on his horse/And they rode off together'. The image of Spanish leather is associated with the idea of betrayal: the woman forsakes her husband, 'the boss', for

the charms of the gypsy, Black Jack Davey. 'Black Jack Davey' is actually better-known under a slightly different name, 'Gypsy Davey'.

I have heard the song performed live in this guise by Happy and Artie Traum, and also by June Tabor. There is a particularly fine version recorded by Sandy Denny and Fotheringay, and available on the Denny retrospective box set, 'Who Knows Where The Time Goes?'; the song was also recorded by none other than Woody Guthrie. Indeed, a rendition of 'Gypsy Davey' by Dylan himself exists on a very early tape ('The Gleason Tapes, East Orange, New Jersey', February 1961) - complete with a 'Spanish leather' reference (in this version, the woman wears 'buckskin gloves/Made of Spanish leather'). In both his 60s and 90s versions of the song, then, Dylan links objects made of Spanish leather to the notion of betrayal of a man by a woman. If 'Black Jack Davey'/'Gypsy Davey' is a song about betrayal, so too is 'Boots of Spanish Leather' - at least from the viewpoint of its male protagonist.

Its construction is hybrid: six verses of alternating dialogue between woman and man; a seventh verse narrated by the man, containing an extract from the woman's letter; and two final verses consisting of the man's monologue or return letter, addressed to the woman who may, by now, never hear or read him. The song is thus a mixture of dialogue and dramatic monologue: the man's viewpoint dominates structurally, although it is the woman's decision that prevails in the actual story. As we hear the story unfold from the man's viewpoint, the woman, at first apparently faithful, addressing him as 'my own true love', becomes progressively more distant from him as her ship sails further away, until she finally all but rejects him forever, in her final letter: 'I don't know when I'll be comin' back again,/It depends on how I'm a-feelin". The listener may, of course, choose to sympathize with either the man or the woman - to condemn her as unreliable and changeable, or applaud her for realizing with the objectivity of distance that she doesn't need this man (or any man?).

There is no reason to dismiss the song as misogynist: both viewpoints are there, and, as Dylan warns the listener on the same album (and in the context of a betrayal, too!), 'I can't think for you/You'll have to decide'. It may be added that two major cover versions of this song are both, significantly, performed by women: one by Joan Baez, no less, and the other by Nanci Griffith, with Dylan himself on harmonica - both suggesting an interesting role reversal! At all events, the image of the ship sailing further and further away beautifully symbolizes the man's sense of desperation and loss (justified or not).

This song also has some curiously archaic aspects - as the reference back to the folk ballads might suggest. First, the sailing-ship motif itself is, even for the 1960s, rather old-fashioned: surely by that decade, someone travelling from the US to Spain would normally have taken the plane, not gone by sea? Dylan later wrote: 'Time is a jet plane/It moves too fast', and sang Gordon Lightfoot's words: 'You can't jump a jet plane/Like you can a freight train'. The liner carries the listener to an older world - at the very least, back to the days when the ill-fated Titanic (of 'Desolation Row') was the acme of technology and, in all likelihood - as with the steamboat reference in 'Dear Landlord' - back into the nineteenth century. Second, the theme of betrayal-by-a-beloved-woman (whether today's listener approves or not) is itself a time-honoured literary topos, as classically exemplified by Helen of Troy, wife of Meleneaus and lover of Paris. In particular, Dylan's changeable woman recalls another female archetype from the 'tale of Troy', Cressida (or Criseyde), who, after a passionate love-affair with Troilus, leaves him for Diomedes. In Chaucer's version, 'Troilus and Criseyde', we are told how Criseyde, having left Troy in Diomedes' company, writes evasively to Troilus: 'Come I wole; but yet in swich disjoynte I stonde as now that what yer or what day That this shall be,

that kan I naught apoynte' ('I will come; but I am so confused at the moment that I really can't tell you what year or what day' - Book V, 1618-1620). Troilus, of course, now realizes that 'his lady nas no lenger on to triste' ('his lady was no longer to be trusted' - 1666). The message of 'Boots of Spanish Leather' is apparently that the man is authentic where the woman is fickle: this is implied by the man's recourse to poetic nature imagery: 'Oh, but if I had the stars from the darkest night/And the diamonds from the deepest ocean'; or, again: 'So take heed, take heed of the western wind/Take heed of the stormy weather'. This kind of language is not put into the woman's mouth. By contrast, when the man finally and desperately writes to the woman asking her to send him the famous pair of boots, he is not only accusing her of betrayal (via the 'Gypsy Davey' reference); he is suggesting that she lacks the imagination or the poetic sensitivity to choose anything but a concrete and banal material object. Feminist listeners (if they listen to Dylan at all) may, obviously, disagree - or, perhaps more tolerantly, point to a song like 'Tangled Up in Blue' where it is obviously the woman who wins and overwhelms, and who seems to have the greater creativity and poetic sensibility too ('and she opened up a book of poems ...').

My thanks to Michele Gilmore for her help on the 1961 version of 'Gypsy Davey'.

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'When I Paint My Masterpiece': Dylan, Europe and a wild goose chase?

Christopher Rollason, 1998

In 'When I Paint My Masterpiece', we find Dylan coming face-to-face, in an unusually direct way, with his European roots. No white American can ultimately escape his or her origins from the Old Continent and/or its offshore islands, and of course the purely musical European influence on Dylan, via the English/Scottish/Irish ballads, has been obvious from the beginning. The ambivalent weight of the European cultural heritage is visible enough in 'Desolation Row' or, say, the Mona Lisa reference in 'Visions of Johanna', but it is rare for Dylan actually to locate a song in Europe (the only other example that occurs to me is 'TV Talkin' Song', set in London). In 'Masterpiece', however, Dylan engages directly with the American-in-Europe theme, as present in American literature (Hawthorne's 'The Marble Faun', James' 'The Wings of the Dove' or 'The Aspern Papers') and cinema (Vincente Minnelli's 'An American in Paris').

This is also a song in which Dylan implicitly presents himself as an American artist, in the fictional disguise, not of a musician, but of a painter. A word on the text is required before proceeding with the analysis, as 'Masterpiece' is a song for which, in a sense, no definitive text exists. The first released version was not by Dylan but by the Band, on their 1971 album 'Cahoots'; Dylan's own version followed on 'More Greatest Hits', later in 1971. There are considerable lyrical differences between the two, and one cannot in this case automatically give Dylan's version precedence, since the Band's version came out first (it is also that version that has been re-covered twice since, by the reconstituted Band - or, perhaps more accurately, Danko, Helm, Hudson and friends - in 1993 on the 'Dylan 30th Anniversary Concert' album, and by Emmylou Harris on her 1996 box set 'Portraits'). The official Dylan lyric book does not solve the problem, as the text given is an eclectic combination from both recorded versions. The lyrical differences (I refer to the rival versions as 'Band' and 'Dylan') are as follows (five in all): the painter has a date with 'a pretty little girl from Greece' in 'Band', but with 'Botticelli's niece' in 'Dylan'; the line in 'Band' 'when I ran on the hilltop following a pack of wild geese' becomes 'as the daylight hours do retreat' in 'Dylan'; the two-

line 'gondola/Coca-Cola' bridge does not appear in 'Dylan'; the painter arrives in Brussels in 'Band' 'on a plane-ride so bumpy that I almost cried', but in 'Dylan' 'with a picture of a tall tree by my side'; and, finally, we have: 'everyone was there to greet me when I stepped inside' ('Band'); but: 'everyone was there and nobody tried to hide' ('Dylan'). In the absence of an authoritative single text, I shall use both versions for my analysis, identifying them as appropriate.

It may be added that live performances of the song (whether from the Rolling Thunder period in 1975 or of more recent date - the song has featured on setlists in 1987, 1991, 1992, 1995 and 1996) have generally been closer to the 'Band' version than the 'Dylan' version. Nonetheless, the 'Dylan' version, if inferior in some respects (e.g. in leaving out the brilliant 'wild geese' image - see below), does not deserve to be discarded altogether, as it does, for instance, put more stress on the narrator's role as painter ('Botticelli's niece', 'picture of a tall tree').

The narrator is obviously an American, as is made clear by the bridge ('Band' only): 'Sailin' round the world in a dirty gondola/Oh to be back in the land of Coca-Cola'. These two lines might seem throwaway on first hearing, but the comic rhyme 'gondola/'Coca-Cola' (perhaps worthy of Byron, of whom more later) in fact points up a crucial Old World/New World contrast: our American painter, it may be, had at least hoped to find in Europe authenticity and tradition, as symbolized by the gondola, rather than the brash Stateside commercialism and materialism all-too-well represented by a certain Atlanta beverage.

The song presents the narrator's experiences in two European capitals, Rome (stanzas 1 and 2) and Brussels (stanza 3). The choice of cities is surely more than casual: the former capital of a great European empire is contrasted with the administrative capital of today's European Union (or European Economic Community, as it was back in 1971); one may also presume an ironic contrast, within Europe itself, between the ancient (the Rome of the Coliseum) and modern (Brussels' not-very-aesthetic Zaventem airport). Further dimensions of the European cultural heritage are introduced: in 'Band', Venice (the gondola) and Greece ('a pretty little girl from Greece'); in 'Dylan', the Florentine Renaissance ('Botticelli's niece', or a modern Italian woman beautiful enough to have stepped out of the 'Birth of Venus' in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence). In the 'girl from Greece' variant, the image of the painter's encounter with a young Hellene in a Rome hotel room implies a synthesis of Europe's two ancient classical cultures, of what another American, Edgar Allan Poe, called, in his poem 'To Helen', 'the glory that was Greece/and the grandeur that was Rome'; the Botticelli variant, by contrast, suggests the continuity between ancient Rome and the Italian Renaissance, presenting the European heritage as an age-old but linear tradition.

The city of Rome occurs quite frequently in Dylan's work, although 'Masterpiece' offers the most detailed picture. Ancient Rome appears via 'Nero's Neptune' in 'Desolation Row', as the 'City of Seven Hills' in 'Caribbean Wind', and as the epitome of empire (alongside Egypt and Babylon) in 'Neighbourhood Bully'; Renaissance/Baroque Rome is present in 'Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight' with the 'palace of the Pope' - St Peter's, which was, of course, decorated by Michelangelo, who appears in 'Jokerman'; and modern Rome is implied in the allusions in 'Motorpsycho Nitemare' and 'I Shall Be Free' (Anita Ekberg) to Fellini's film 'La Dolce Vita' (with its famous Trevi Fountain sequence). In 'Masterpiece', the topography of the city evoked by the painter includes both the ancient (the Coliseum and its lions) and the relatively modern (the eighteenth-century Spanish Stairs in Piazza di Spagna); in 'Band' (only), there is a further ancient reference, in the line 'when I ran on the hilltop following a

pack of wild geese', which, as I will show below, recalls a legend from early Roman history. This imposing cultural and artistic heritage is, of course, not all sweetness and light: the Coliseum was a theatre of cruel death for the early Christians, a point not without significance if we are talking about Dylan.

What, then, does Dylan's painter seek in Rome, and what does he find? At this point it may be useful to recall another visitor to Rome a century and a half before, namely Lord Byron. Dylan's narrator may, indeed, be following not only in the 'ancient footprints' of the Caesars, but also in the Romantic footsteps of the English poet-in-exile. In the fourth canto of 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' (1818), Byron contemplates the ruins of ancient Rome and finds nothing but chaos - broken dreams and relics of ancient cruelty. In the Coliseum, he imagines a dying gladiator - from Dacia, on the fringes of the empire (today's Romania) - 'butcher'd to make a Roman holiday' (CXLI), and juxtaposes the ancient 'bloody Circus' (CXXXIX) with the 'enormous skeleton' of the modern ruin (CXLIII). Byron perceives the city as a whole as a space strewn with fragments and debris, visible signs of decayed power testifying to the vanity of human aspirations: 'Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul! The orphans of the heart must turn to thee, Lone mother of dead empires! ... Come and see The cypress, hear the owl, and plod your way O'er steps of broken thrones and temples' (LXXVII). In this empire of the dead, the visitor's hopes of finding transcendence or absolute meaning are momentarily raised, only to be dashed to pieces: 'But Rome is as the desert, where we steer Stumbling over recollections; now we clap Our hands, and cry " Eureka " - it is clear - When but some false mirage of ruin rises near' (LXXXI). Dylan's narrator meets a curiously similar fate in his pilgrimage to Rome (I refer to 'Dylan's narrator', rather than Dylan himself; it is true that Dylan himself paints, as we know from a number of Dylan and Band album covers and the Highway 61 CD-ROM, but painting is not his primary means of artistic expression, and I believe the protagonist of 'Masterpiece' is best seen as a fictional American painter who nonetheless bears some traces of his historical creator, Bob Dylan).

We may presume that the narrator has come to Europe and Rome in search of artistic fulfilment, hoping that with ancient scenes around him he will achieve the vision that will enable him finally to 'paint his masterpiece'. The creation of the perfect painting is imaged in both pictorial and musical terms (again suggesting convergence, but not identity, with the artistic project of Dylan himself): 'Some day everything is gonna be smooth like a rhapsody/When I paint my masterpiece'. The 'rhapsody' image is striking, evoking as it does both the Hellenistic tradition (the word is originally Greek) and - a rare reference in Dylan - the lineage of western classical music (as in Brahms' 'Alto Rhapsody' and Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsodies'). The painter is, then, aiming high - indeed, he may have epic traditions (the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'rhapsode' as a 'reciter of epic poems, esp. those of Homer in ancient Greece' - 'open the door, Homer?'). At the same time, the narrator links artistic with sexual fulfilment by imagining that erotic climax with his lover met in Rome (Greek or Italian, depending on the version) will coincide with his high peak of artistic creation ('She promised that she'd be right there with me/When I paint my masterpiece').

But if the painter has come to Rome hoping to find the empire of the imagination, what he discovers there, following in the tracks of Byron, is heaps of fragments, perceptual distortion and emotional confusion. He finds 'the streets of Rome are filled with rubble', as if the famous ruins - Byron's 'broken thrones and temples' - were no more than blind heaps of stone; the 'ancient footsteps ... everywhere' can be imagined criss-crossing randomly in all directions, going nowhere; staying out 'on a cold dark night' - like the nocturnal pilgrim Byron, listening to the owl - he feels his perceptions becoming deceptive and hallucinatory:

'you could almost think that you're seeing double'. The Coliseum throws up images of lions, placing the dreamer in the vulnerable position of the Christian martyrs, about to be devoured: 'oh those mighty kings of the jungle, I could hardly stand to see'em' (the man-eating lion will recur in a later song, 'Foot of Pride'): the whole scene suggests not imperial dignity but cruelty, uncertainty and, ultimately, absurdity ('Coliseum' and 'see'em' form another anticlimactic rhyme-pair in the style of Byron's own 'Don Juan').

Things are no better when the painter explores the Capitol. Haunted by his past ('train-wheels runnin' through the back of my memory'), he is unable to escape from it: 'I ran on the hilltop following a pack of wild geese'. In a remarkable linguistic tour de force, Dylan's writing here combines into one ancient legend (the geese that saved the Capitol) and familiar phrase (a wild goose chase - a stock expression that will recur in 'Groom's Still Waiting At the Altar'). According to Plutarch ('Life of Camillus'), the sacred geese of the temple of Juno on the Capitol miraculously preserved Rome from a nocturnal invasion by the Gauls, by waking up the garrison in the nick of time with their cries. However, in Dylan's song, these heroic creatures become absurd and meaningless, ironically subsumed into the notion of a wild goose chase, a pointless search for a non-existent will-o'-the-wisp. It seems that the quest for meaning that brought the painter to Rome has become illusory; as in 'Childe Harold', a brief cry of 'Eureka' dissolves into chilly confrontation with 'some false mirage of ruin'.

Having failed to find what he sought in Rome, the narrator takes the plane to Brussels - the Belgian metropolis which is today, in a sense like ancient Rome, the capital of Europe, and which was another of Byron's staging-posts in 'Childe Harold' (it is also the city where, in 1873, Paul Verlaine shot his fellow-poet Arthur Rimbaud, in an episode recalled by Dylan in 'You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go'). In the 'Dylan' version, the narrator arrives carrying a canvas - 'a picture of a tall tree' - which may be his own work, but is obviously not the masterpiece itself. There is no sign of the Greek/Italian maiden, either: clearly he is alone again. The crowd that welcomes him ('everyone was there to greet me', in the 'Band' version; the narrator is, whether or not Dylan himself, visibly some kind of celebrity) is perceived as grotesquely comic: pompous 'clergymen in uniform' (a very long way away from the Christian martyrs); 'young girls pulling muscles' (Rubens-style, fleshly Flemish women, the 'flamandes' ironically celebrated in song by Jacques Brel - no doubt a far cry from Botticellian grace; there may even be a comic pun on 'mussels', the typical dish of Brussels); intrusive paparazzi - 'newspapermen ... held down by big police'. The whole airport scene suggests a modern world whose unaesthetic chaos scarcely seems superior to the dreamlike ruins of Rome.

We may conclude that the painter will return to the US without having painted his masterpiece: Rome and Brussels, Europe ancient and modern, have failed to yield up the imaginative freedom he sought. The whole song is ironic, fragmentary, yet strangely haunting: the listener is left with the impression that, despite everything, the narrator's visit to Europe has been necessary, and has put him back in contact with his European roots - even if the experience was not what he had expected. In other words, American-European dialogue may be a salutary, if not crucial, encounter for the US artist - the American in Paris, or Rome, or Brussels. Indeed, if we do finally choose to identify the song's painter with Dylan himself, we may conclude that 'back in the land of Coca-Cola' he did finally manage to paint that masterpiece. It was, after all, not so long after he wrote this song that, at the end of 1974, Dylan produced 'Blood on the Tracks', the album which many believe to be ... his masterpiece - with, in some versions of the vinyl and CD releases, a Bob Dylan painting on the back cover, as if in concrete pictorial proof!

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'Dignity', the Grail and Avalon

Christopher Rollason, 1998

'Dignity' is, I believe, a fine and important song, which is given special prominence as the only 'new' song to appear on 'Greatest Hits III' (1994), and then again, in a live version, on 'Unplugged' (1995) (although, according to the sleeve notes to the latter album, it was actually written in 1989 and is therefore from the 'Oh Mercy' period). The song is the dramatic monologue of an unnamed individual who traverses the world in the hope of finding someone or something answering to the name of Dignity.

One of the many places where Dignity is sought is in 'every masterpiece of literature'; and one literary masterpiece with which the song has been linked (for instance, by Rob Zorn, writing on [rec.music.dylan - rmd](http://rec.music.dylan-rmd.com)) is T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Eliot's poem famously abounds with images of cultural chaos and fragmentation ('empty cisterns and exhausted wells', 'this decayed hole among the mountains'), and ends with the sharp vignette of the Fisher King: 'I sat upon the shore/Fishing, with the arid plain behind me'. Indeed in many ways the dream landscape of 'Dignity' seems a veritable wasteland: 'chilly wind sharp as a razor blade', 'down where the vultures feed', 'the valley of dry bone dreams', 'the border towns of despair' (John Henry, another rmd contributor, has connected the 'hollow man' image with another apocalyptic poem by Eliot, 'The Hollow Men'). The wasteland aspect suggests a further possibility.

The narrator seems to me to be a manifestation of an archetype, namely the Seeker (as too Dylan's Jokerman is). It is noteworthy here that in the Who's song 'The Seeker' (released as a single in 1970, and available on the 1996 compilation 'My Generation: The Very Best of the Who'), the quester ('a seeker, a really desperate man') confesses: 'I asked Bobby Dylan' (!!). The song's refrain is: 'they call me the seeker/I've been searching low and high', and we may, curiously, compare the similar phrase in 'Dignity': 'searching high, searching low'.

In this context of seeking, the quest for Dignity could actually be a version of the search for the Holy Grail. As in the medieval/Arthurian quest, Dylan's seeker knows he is but one of many in the endeavour. Some of the fellow-seekers he describes: the fat man, the thin man, the hollow man and so on. Others of them he meets on the road: these are, at least, people who claim some knowledge or experience of Dignity (Mary Lou, Prince Philip). In the Grail myth - the versions vary - the chalice is revealed, either to one knight only (the Grail Knight, or Parsifal), or, at best, to a select few (in Sir Thomas Malory's version, to three knights - Perceval, Bors and Galahad - of whom Galahad alone is seen as the Grail Knight per se). Will Dylan's seeker ever find Dignity? Is he one of the chosen few, or not? It is curious that in this song Dylan uses the time-honoured literary technique of personification (treatment of an abstract concept as a person) - a device which recalls the medieval morality plays or eighteenth-century English poetry (a period from whose foremost poet, Alexander Pope, Dylan actually quotes in 'Jokerman': 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'). Dignity at first seems to be a person ('they say Dignity was the first to leave'; 'have you seen Dignity?'), but by the end the seeker seems persuaded that it is nothing so tangible or concrete. Dignity is certainly not an image: 'Someone showed me a picture and I just laughed: Dignity never been photographed'. Dylan here seems, as in 'TV Talkin' Song', to be rejecting the late C20 tyranny of the image, and suggesting that, whatever the visual media may try to tell us, truth

is not to be found on the surface. Dignity is surely not a mere abstraction either: the Englishman may not find it 'within', but perhaps his stiff-upper-lip attitude ('bites the bullet') was completely the wrong approach in the first place. One can also discount Prince Philip's claim to have been 'abused' by Dignity - whoever the prince is, be he the real dweller in Buckingham Palace or not, he must be one of those seekers who have not understood Dignity's true nature, and who will therefore, like Lancelot or Gawain in Malory, never find the Grail. In the end, is Dignity not - as the Sufi mystics would say - hidden within the heart? By the end, the narrator has traversed the length and breadth of the wasteland - a territory which may extend over the whole earth. He has been to the 'land of the midnight sun' and found no illumination; experienced wealth and poverty ('the red' and 'the black') and met the enlightened and the secular (heard 'the tongues of angels and the tongues of men'), both those who claim to be saved and those content to be damned (the sons of darkness and light).

If Dignity exists at all - if the Grail is ever to be found - it may be at the moment when the song ends. The seeker may at first sight appear desperate ('so many roads', 'so many dead ends'); but perhaps he is at last walking down the road which will, as in 'Blowin' in the Wind', make him 'a man', a truly realized human being of whatever gender. He may himself now be the 'blind man breakin' out of a trance', at last managing to decipher the 'note somebody wrote about Dignity' - able to feel beyond the 'blackheart wind', and to get out of the dark Calvinist world explored in 'Man in the Long Black Coat' where 'not even a note' is left in explanation of anything.

We leave the seeker standing 'at the edge of the lake'. Here as in 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' or 'In the Summertime', an expanse of water conceals a revelation. The lake image connects once again with the Grail and Arthurian themes. It was by a lakeside that the dying King Arthur awaited the boat that was to bear him to the magic realm of Avalon, and the lake of Glastonbury, England (today disappeared) was believed to be the lake of Avalon itself. The legend says Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail to Glastonbury, and now at last, after all the 'dead ends', it will not be long before Dylan's quester finds the grail of dignity. 'What it's gonna take' to find it is, I suggest, integrity: dignity is that truth of the heart, that fidelity to one's own potential, one's own inner being which Dylan spoke of long ago, in 'To Ramona': 'Everything passes, everything changes - just do what you think you should do'.

Black Coat and Black Veil: Dylan, Hawthorne and Puritanism

Christopher Rollason, 1996

The title of Dylan's 'Oh Mercy' album suggests a cry for help, as if from someone about to go under in a dark and threatening universe - a world of social and ideological chaos, as evoked in the opening song, 'Political World', with its line 'where mercy walks the plank'. One of the most memorably enigmatic songs on this album is 'Man in the Long Black Coat', which, I will suggest in this article, may be read as an anguished exploration of American Puritanism - a dark world that can be illuminated by reference to its prime fictional explicator, the nineteenth-century writer Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The Puritans who reached New England in the seventeenth century and proceeded to set up a stern theocracy wore black: in his novel 'The Scarlet Letter' (1850), Hawthorne describes one of his own ancestors, William Hathorne, who emigrated to America in 1630, as 'invested ... with a dim and dusky grandeur', one of the 'stern and black-browed Puritans', and, in his physical appearance, 'grave, bearded, sable-cloaked and steeple-crowned' (chapter 1;

Hawthorne, 'The Scarlet Letter and Selected Tales', Penguin (1970), pp. 40, 41). As a magistrate in Salem, Massachusetts, Hawthorne was an implacable judge, a renowned persecutor of 'heretical' Quakers, and, according to a biographer, ever 'more exacting in his determination to compel the people to live godly lives' (quoted in introduction to Penguin edition, p. 7). The Puritans were Calvinists, in the tradition of the Geneva-based French theologian Jean Calvin and his later disciples, who taught that humanity is irrevocably divided into sheep and goats, a tiny number of 'elect' or 'saved' and a vast multitude of damned. The damned had been predestined to hellfire since before they were born, by a stern and unforgiving God. No-one but God himself could know for certain who was saved and who was damned, but no actions in this life could make any difference to one's predetermined fate. The social expression of this stress on innate human evil was a rigid system of rules and prohibitions governing personal behaviour, aimed at imposing the maximum discipline on a community most of whose members were in any case already pre-consigned to hellfire. It was also only a short step from believing in predestined, near-universal human evil to acting as if that evil were absolutely universal.

Three centuries on, in the late 1980s, Dylan's 'Man in the Long Black Coat' conjures up a dark, closed community similar to those Puritan towns of New England. The song is obviously set in an American small town: there is little to identify the region, but the Puritan inheritance seems to be clearly there. This is a world where gossip dominates - 'Somebody seen him ...', 'Somebody said ...' - and the social centre, leaving aside the probably risqué 'old dance hall on the outskirts of town', is the church, where hellfire sermons are preached: 'Preacher was a-talkin', there's a sermon he gave, He said every man's conscience is vile and depraved - You cannot depend on it to be your guide, When it's you who must keep it satisfied'. This is a dark and disturbing message indeed ('it ain't easy to swallow, it sticks in the throat'). The preacher is taking the theme of the evil heart even further than Calvin himself, by declaring everyone to be depraved.

No-one, he says, can be guided by their conscience, because it is a manifestation of an inherently corrupted self. This means there is no room for individual opinion, no place for dissent, no right to swim against the tide: and that in turn suggests a community where conformism is absolute and no difference whatever is tolerated. As if that were not bad enough, the song also raises the idea of predestination: 'there are no mistakes in life, some people say'. If nothing comes by mistake, then every single human action has been predestined; and so 'people don't live or die, people just float', sad, ghost-like shadows drifting through a melancholy limbo, already half-dead, until their physical death and their final destination in hell.

However, in the dark universe of this Puritan town, one day something actually happens, and that is what the song is about. The narrative opens on a summer's day ('crickets are chirping, the water is high'), with a hurricane blowing and bending the trees over backwards; it ends in the same place, at night ('neath the high crescent moon'), probably in autumn ('smoke on the water, it's been there since June'), after the gales have done their worst and left the landscape desolate ('tree-trunks uprooted'). Between those two snapshot moments, a human event has played itself out. Somebody used to live in a house by that stretch of water: a woman who, in the first verse, left a tell-tale sign of her presence, 'a soft cotton dress on the line hangin' dry'. By the end, she has disappeared, and the house is deserted. We know that the woman met a mysterious stranger at the dance-hall; we know she has left with him, and the image of the 'soft cotton dress' suggests she probably removed her clothing to offer him her body, along with the 'heart' that we are explicitly told she has given him. A relationship has been created,

for which the woman has cut her links with her community: 'she went with the man in the long black coat'. As for the stranger himself, we are told very little about him. The main impressions are of his physical appearance and the colour black - the refrain 'man in the long black coat' comes at the end of each of the five stanzas, creating an atmosphere of oppression and gloom that is thickened even more by the nocturnal smoke in the last stanza.

Apart from his coat, which is apparently covered with 'dust', we learn that he 'had a face like a mask' - either he wore a literal mask (at a masked ball?), probably black, or else his face was rigid and expressionless. Either way, he is scarcely a figure to inspire confidence. The only other thing we know about him is that 'somebody said from the Bible he'd quote'. This biblical reference is not necessarily reassuring, for, in Shakespeare's words, 'the devil can cite scripture for his purpose', or as Dylan himself has said elsewhere, 'sometimes Satan comes as a man of peace'. We do not know what he quoted from the holy book, or why. One thing alone is certain: silently, invisibly, she left town with him ('not a word of goodbye, not even a note').

Dylan's song bears some curious similarities to a story published by Hawthorne in 1836, 'The Minister's Black Veil' (reprinted in the Penguin 'Scarlet Letter and other tales', pp. 299-313). In this tale, which the author claims in a note to be part-founded on an actual case in Maine, the young parson of a small New England town, the Reverend Hooper, appears one day before his congregation wearing a black veil, consisting of 'two folds of crape' and showing only his mouth and chin, which he refuses to remove under any circumstances. He grows old, still wearing the veil and still preaching behind it, and clings to its protection even in the moment of death. The first time he appears in church behind the veil, 'the sermon which he now delivered ... was tinged, rather more darkly than usual, with ... gloom' (p. 301). He lectures his parishioners on 'secret sin', making them feel 'as if the preacher had crept upon them, behind his awful veil, and discovered their hoarded iniquity of deed or thought' (p. 302). Finally, at the moment of death, he declares that the black veil is a symbol of the universal sinfulness of the human heart: 'I look around me, and lo! on every visage a Black Veil!' (p. 312).

Hawthorne's parson is, surely, strikingly similar to Dylan's preacher, with his sermon on human vileness and depravity. Both push the predestinarian obsession with evil to the point of believing in the absolute, universal corruption of the heart. Yet, at the same time, Hawthorne's preacher also resembles the Man in the Long Black Coat, who quotes from the Bible, has a 'face like a mask' and whose whole being seems dominated, as much as the Reverend Hooper's, by the colour black. These parallels themselves suggest a further parallel, this time within Dylan's song: between its two male protagonists, the Man in the Coat and the Preacher. Here too, Hawthorne may aid our understanding of Dylan. There is also a mysterious woman in 'The Minister's Black Veil': the Reverend Hooper dons his veil on the very same day as the burial, at which he officiates, of a 'young lady' - and a mourner has the fantasy that 'the minister and the maiden's spirit were walking hand in hand' (p. 304). No tangible link is ever established between the minister and the deceased, though there are those who believe that 'Mr

Hooper's conscience tortured him for some great crime', obscurely symbolized by the veil (p. 309). Edgar Allan Poe, in an 1842 article on Hawthorne's tales, suggested openly that 'a crime of dark dye (having reference to the " young lady ") has been committed' (Poe, 'Poems and Essays', Everyman edition, 1927, repr. 1972, p. 191); and what is only hinted at in 'the

Minister's Black Veil' becomes explicit fourteen years later, in the novel generally regarded as Hawthorne's masterpiece, 'The Scarlet Letter'.

In this novel, set in seventeenth-century Boston, Hester Prynne, a married woman whose relationship has broken down, is condemned for bearing a child out of wedlock, and is forced to wear the scarlet letter 'A' (for 'Adultery') on her breast for life. Her secret lover is revealed to the reader as the young priest Arthur Dimmesdale. At the end of the novel, the two make plans to escape together; but the minister, after a last passionate address to his nervous flock, dies of nervous exhaustion. It seems clear from Hawthorne's narrative that the rigidity of Puritan society was such that escape could not be a serious option for those brought up in it; the only way out for the transgressing minister is death, after he has revealed his sufferings as 'God's judgment on a sinner' (p. 268). Hawthorne's two narratives, taken together, can shed light into the dark corners of Dylan's song. In both prose fictions, there is a forbidden relationship, whether hinted at or made explicit, between a Puritan priest and a woman; and in both, there is no happy ending or easy way out.

Building on this, I would even suggest that in Dylan's song the preacher and the Man in the Long Black Coat may actually be one and the same: the man who preaches hellfire sermons, dressed in black in the pulpit, is also the masked man in black who breaks society's rules with the woman in the act of quoting the Bible. The close resemblance of the two is undeniable: they may, of course, be read as each other's double or alter ego, but I would go so far as to claim their literal identity. If this is so, then the man and woman escape the town at the end, but for an uncertain future, most likely a dead end. The song's imagery - dust, smoke, mask, hurricane, uprooted trees - does not imply that they will be happy together, that the relationship will last or that they will create any kind of guilt-free utopia. It is more likely that the dogmatic upbringing both have had will smother any attempts at communication. Certainly the town they have left will not change.

In the final, disturbing image of the last stanza, we hear: 'the pulse and vibration and the rumbling force/Somebody is out there beating on a dead horse'. Dylan here reanimates the stereotype phrase 'flogging a dead horse', bringing it to life and asking us to imagine someone physically doing exactly that. The image stands for a whole community flogging a dead horse, stuck in a narrow, obsessive, repetitive groove from which it can imagine no way out. This song portrays a dark, life-denying Puritan society and an equally dark, negative flight into the void. The woman has said nothing to anyone about her plans - 'she never said nothing, there was nothing she wrote' - and her implied degree of inarticulacy is such that she and the Man may prove to have nothing to say to each other either.

Puritanism may have destroyed the spirit to the point that even revolt can only be negative. One may compare 'Man in the Long Black Coat' with some of the other dark songs on 'Oh Mercy'. 'Ring Them Bells' seems also to contain Calvinist notions, with its image of the judgment day and the division into saved and damned ('ring them bells/for the chosen few/who will judge the many/when the game is through'), and to imply that the vast majority of humanity is damned ('ring them bells, ye heathen, from the city that dreams'). In 'Disease of Conceit', Dylan confronts the ungodly, once again in terms suggesting they are the great mass of humans ('There's a whole lot of people suffering tonight/From the disease of conceit'), for whom salvation is impossible ('Conceit is a disease/But the doctors got no cure'). Even so, if one takes in the album as a whole it does not follow that this harsh eschatological vision represents Dylan's final position, or what he wants the listener to feel. The last song, 'Shooting Star', does not suggest that Dylan is identifying wholeheartedly with

his hellfire preacher or with the 'iron hand' of 'Ring Them Bells': those songs may, rather, be explorations of the Calvinist position, attempts to get inside it and understand it but not, finally, to recommend it. In 'Shooting Star', the man and woman have been separated, and apocalypse looms; but the speaker's reflections - 'Guess it's too late to say the things to you that you needed to hear me say' - point to someone thinking independently and ruefully trying to make sense of his life - not someone accepting the preacher's attack on the individual conscience from the earlier song. Indeed, the reference to the 'sermon on the Mount' suggests a more compassionate alternative to that other sermon of 'Man in the Long Black Coat'.

'Shooting Star' may be a warning of imminent apocalypse, as 'the last fire truck from Hell goes rolling by'; but I suspect that 'Oh Mercy' as a whole is offering the message that Calvinism/Puritanism is part of the rigid, dogmatic mindset that has brought humanity to the verge of chaos and extinction. Puritanism, whether in its seventeenth-century shape or in the modern form explored in 'Man in the Long Black Coat', is part of the problem, not the solution. If this is the message of 'Oh Mercy' - that puritanism is a belief-system that a society may need to live through for a time, but that must ultimately be banished - then it is surely one that should bear repeated listening in today's America.

At a time when both left and right in the US appear to be increasingly adopting rigid, rule-governed attitudes to day-to-day, few are the voices which suggest people could try learning from experience instead of resolving all problems by more and more rules and punishments. That is, I venture to claim, the still, small voice we can hear in a classic American writer like Hawthorne, and also when we listen to the constant process of questioning and exploring that we find across the work of Bob Dylan.

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"Tangled Up In Blue" and the Never-Ending Search

Christopher Rollason, 1998

'I'm out here a thousand miles from my home', sang Bob Dylan in 'Song to Woody', on his first album in 1962. That song went on: 'walkin' a road other men have gone down', and returned to the road theme in the last stanza, as the narrator announced his intention to disappear 'somewhere down the road some day'. The road, as symbol of freedom and of searching, has been a crucial theme in Dylan's songwriting from the beginning. 'Tangled Up In Blue' is one of the songs where this motif comes the most visibly to the fore: here as in 'Song to Woody', the text names the road in both first and last stanzas ('I was standin' on the side of the road'; 'me, I'm still on the road') - with an insistence that may recall the title of 'On the Road', Jack Kerouac's famous novel of 1957 which both summed up the credo of the Beat Generation and pointed forward to the broader libertarian currents of the 1960s.

'Tangled Up In Blue' (TUIB) is also a major song in the Dylan canon, which appears to be of particular importance both to Dylan himself and to a large part of his audience. It was first launched into the world on 20 January 1975 as the opening track on Dylan's classic album, 'Blood on the Tracks' (BOTT), but altogether it appears on six different Dylan albums, in three different versions. The (seven-stanza) BOTT version may also be heard on three compilation albums, namely 'Biograph' (1985), 'Greatest Hits Volume 3' (1994; again as the opening track) and 'The Best of Bob Dylan' (1997); this is also the version reprinted in the official lyrics book, 'Lyrics 1962-1985', and reproduced on the Dylan CD-ROM 'Highway 61 Interactive'. An earlier ('out-take') version, recorded in September 1974 - also in seven stanzas but with some substantial variations in the lyrics - appears on 'The Bootleg Series'

(1991); there is also a live version on 'Real Live' (1984). The 'Real Live' version deletes stanza 5 and makes numerous lyrical changes, most of which do not, in my opinion, improve the song; Dylan himself, in the sleeve notes to 'Biograph' (remastered CD version, booklet, p. 52), says he prefers this version to the BOTT original, but to my mind as a listener it is markedly inferior. This heavily rewritten variant did not, in any case, survive the 1984 tour (see information supplied by Les Kokay on the Usenet newsgroup rec.music.dylan (rmd), 3 May 1998). Recorded versions apart, TUIB is also one of the songs most frequently played by Dylan in concert: it was performed 397 times between 1988 and 1997 on Dylan's Never Ending Tour (statistics supplied by Gil Wilson for rmd, 4 May 1998). The live versions vary considerably: some are acoustic like the BOTT version, others electric; some are fast, others slow. Some reduce the song from seven stanzas to six, deleting either Stanza 5 or Stanza 6; others retain all seven stanzas. Dylan has also changed and re-changed parts of the lyrics in live performance, on numerous occasions over the years.

With this proliferation of versions, a number of questions have to be answered before analysis of the text can begin. We have to ask: can there be a definitive text of this song?; and if so, which version should we take? Stephen Scobie has written: 'For Dylan there is no definitive text. There is only a shifting body of work, in which the songs change with each performance and in which the printed text has a limited authority. Every time a critic quotes from a Dylan song, the quotation is in some way provisional, hedged around with qualifications' ('Alias Bob Dylan', 1991, Red Deer (Alberta): Red Deer College Press, p. 30). If there is no final text of a Dylan song in general, that is particularly true of an oft-performed and oft-modified song like TUIB. Those who see Dylan primarily as a live artist might indeed argue that there is no definitive text at all, or else that all that counts is the version Dylan performed yesterday or last week. I would contend, however, that the key text is still the BOTT version, since this is the one which is played most of the time on people's stereo systems, and which has surely, via BOTT itself and three other albums, been heard more often, by more people, than any individual live version. I also believe that of the three official recorded versions, the BOTT one is qualitatively by far the best; as I shall try to show below, where the BOTT words differ from those of the out-take or the 'Real Live' version they are in most cases substantially richer in connotation. In the commentary that follows, it should therefore be assumed that I am quoting from the BOTT version unless otherwise stated, though I shall also make some reference where relevant to the other two official versions and to various other changes made in performance.

One particular point is worth noting about the lyrical variants. The out-take version starts the narrative off in the third person ('he was layin' in bed'), maintaining that mode over three stanzas before shifting to the first person in stanza 4 ('I stopped in for a beer'); for the rest of the song, the narrator speaks in the first person. This narrative strategy is also followed in the 'Real Live' version, and in many, though not all, live performances. The BOTT version, by contrast, is in the first person throughout. The effect of the out-take strategy is interesting: for the first three stanzas, the narrator tries to distance himself from his own story by describing himself as 'he', as if the powerful emotions recollected might otherwise be too much for him to bear, and he shifts to the first person only at the recalled moment of triumph when he discovers the woman again. We may ask why Dylan abandons this technique on the BOTT version in favour of a homogeneous first-person narrative. The most likely explanation is that by the time he cast the BOTT songs into final form, he had written 'Simple Twist of Fate' (for which there seems to be no out-take version, and which was therefore presumably written after TUIB and others on the album) - a narrative song in which he employs the same strategy (it begins in the third person and changes to first person in the final stanza); Dylan

probably concluded that, even on aesthetic grounds, to use the same narrative device on two songs on the same album would be excessive (this consideration, of course, does not have to apply to live performances).

A dimension which needs consideration before embarking on detailed analysis is the rather vexed question of *_autobiography versus fiction_*. TUIB is - like the whole BOTT album - customarily linked to Dylan's stormy relationship with his then wife, Sarah Dylan née Lowndes, and the women in the various songs are often seen as, to a greater or lesser degree, representations of Sarah.

While this personal background most certainly cannot be denied, it is vital to stress that TUIB is *_not_* a slice of untransformed autobiography. After all, as far as we know, Bob Dylan has never worked as a cook or a fisherman!!! In other words, the autobiographical elements are only one component among others in what is essentially a *_fictional_* narrative. This point might appear obvious - thus, Paul Williams suggests, sensibly enough, that TUIB 'is (and, cleverly, isn't) about Dylan's marriage to Sara' ('Dylan - What Happened?', Glen Ellen, California: Entwhistle/South Bend, Indiana: And Books, 1980, p. 41). Alas, some listeners seem not to have grasped it at all. As soon as the narrator of a poem or song says 'I', all too many people immediately suppose that this 'I' *_must_* be the author, that there is a 100% coincidence between the two, and that we are being served up a hunk of unmediated, off-the-hook autobiography or confession. A moment's reflection ought to make it clear that Mr Bob Dylan is *_not_*, let us say, the miner's wife of 'North Country Blues', the fascist militant of 'Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues', the juvenile delinquent of 'Walls of Red Wing', or the Mexican outlaw of 'Romance in Durango'. All these, however, are first-person songs; and from the indisputable non-coincidence of their narrators with Bob Dylan it might seem a reasonable deduction that in *_any_* song where Dylan sings 'I', there is not necessarily any kind of perfect overlap between the ideas and emotions of character and creator. Years ago, Michael Gray argued convincingly that Dylan is a master of the 'dramatic monologue' form, as developed in the last century by Robert Browning - which is based, precisely, on the ironic non-convergence of character and author: 'Browning mastered, as no one before him, this form, the dramatic monologue. Dylan has used it as no one else since' ('Song and Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan, 1972; London: Sphere (Abacus), 1973; p. 96). Even an apparently transparent 'autobiographical' song like 'Sara' may not by any means be relaying unproblematic 'truths' about the historical characters Bob and Sara Dylan. I wish, therefore, to make it clear that I shall *_not_* be identifying the narrator of TUIB with Bob Dylan, and that - with the exception of one single piece of biographical speculation concerning stanza 7 - I shall be reading the song throughout as a piece of *_fiction_*.

In the BOTT version, this fiction takes the form of a first-person narrative. Like some of Dylan's other major story-songs - 'Isis', or 'Brownsville Girl', or, on BOTT itself, 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' - it has some quite strongly visual, indeed cinematic features. TUIB is not a straightforward linear narrative; as Aidan Day suggests, it is more of a 'montage' ('Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan', Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 54). There are gaps in the sequence; flashbacks; close-ups homing in on details ('her face/In the spotlight so clear); and sudden focussings on physical position or movement ('she turned around to look at me', 'she was standin' there in back of my chair'). Dylan himself, in his sleeve-note comments for 'Biograph' (loc. cit.) compared the song to a painting: 'I was just trying to make it like a painting where you can see the different parts but then you also see the whole of it.'. This would suggest that TUIB is made up of parts whose connection is not obvious or immediate: the listeners have to work on the song to understand the whole, or else

hope the total picture will reveal itself in a flash of insight. Given these complications, I believe it will prove helpful to analyze the song in sequential fashion, stanza by stanza, so as to establish exactly what is going on (and with whom, and where) - so that we may then place those imaginary events in the various contexts of the song as a whole, of Dylan's other works, and of the whole social and cultural ferment of the 1960s.

A word may be in order on the song's title. The phrase 'Tangled Up In Blue' is, in fact, not only the title but the refrain, occurring at the end of each of the seven stanzas: its role must be in some way to summarize the situation of the narrator across his story. One might have expected 'tangled up in (the) blues', rather than 'in blue': blues references are common enough in Dylan titles, all the way from 'Bob Dylan's Blues' in 1963 to 'Dirt Road Blues' in 1997. However, the choice of 'blue' suggests a metaphor of a more concrete kind; if blue is the colour of melancholy and misfortune, we may picture the narrator, and the other characters, tied up in a confusion of blue ribbon or ticker-tape: an image which may finally be as much comic as tragic. The adjective 'tangled' no doubt points to the complex, intricate and baffling nature of the relationships that link the characters (in a later song, 'We Better Talk This Over', we find: 'we'll hang ourselves on all this tangled rope'). The title suggests from the outset that the ties that bind in this song are not going to be simple - but they are likely to prove inextricable.

We may now embark on the stanza-by-stanza analysis.

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Stanza 1

Early one mornin' the sun was shinin',
I was layin' in bed
Wond'rin' if she'd changed at all
If her hair was still red.
Her folks they said our lives together
Sure was gonna be rough
They never did like Mama's home-made dress
Papa's bank-book wasn't big enough.
And I was standin' on the side of the road
Rain fallin' on my shoes
Heading out for the East Coast
Lord knows I've paid some dues gettin' through,
Tangled up in blue.

The song opens with the narrator remembering himself alone, at a moment when the woman already belonged to the past: the first couplet already establishes that the narrative will be about 'me' and 'her' (or, in the alternate versions, 'him' and 'her'). The woman is recollected as mutable, multifaceted, and endlessly fascinating. Has she changed?, her ex-lover asks himself: is her hair still red, or has she dyed it some other colour? The hair-dye motif connects with two other songs on BOTT - 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' ('Lily had already taken all of the dye out of her hair') and 'You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go' ('crimson hair across your face'), and suggests, as in those two songs, women's capacity to perplex and confuse men.

In the second couplet, the narrator takes us back into the past, to the days before the two split up: we are told something about the ex-couple's respective families ('her folks' and his 'mama and papa'), and learn that they came from different social class backgrounds: at a guess, his

parents were lower middle-class while hers were closer to elite circles (_his_ father's bank account 'wasn't big enough'). These family and class references will contrast with the new, radical and experimental lifestyles that will be evoked later in the narrative; we may suppose that the narrator started out in the safe, conventional world of the 50s, only to find himself taken over by history, adrift on the troubled waters of 60s radicalism.

The third couplet zigzags back to the couple's separation, probably to the moment soon after the narrator found himself 'layin' in bed' without her. We may imagine him checking out of a 'strange hotel' (as in 'Simple Twist of Fate'), and walking to the edge of town - let us say of the small town where the bust-up happened the night before - until he reaches the highway, where he sticks out his thumb. A shower drenches him, and the rain - here as in 'You're A Big Girl Now' ('I'm back in the rain/And you are on dry land') or, indeed, the earlier 'Just Like A Woman' ('tonight as I stand inside the rain') - symbolizes the confusion, the disorientation and the sense of loss of the male lover who has just been upstaged by an elusive woman. He is trying to hitch-hike to the East Coast; we learn in stanza 2 that the lovers had abandoned their car 'out West'. The narrator is forced to trade the security of love for the freedom of the road, and the goal of his existence is now to traverse the breadth of the United States - perhaps to make it all the way 'from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Statue of Liberty', to quote an earlier road song, 'Down the Highway' - in search of that unforgettable woman.

Stanza 2

She was married when we first met
Soon to be divorced
I helped her out of a jam, I guess,
But I used a little too much force.
We drove that car as far as we could
Abandoned it out West
Split up on a dark sad night
Both agreeing it was best.
She turned around to look at me
As I was walkin' away
I heard her say over my shoulder,
" We'll meet again someday on the avenue ",
Tangled up in blue.

The first couplet returns us to the theme of the family, this time in a context of divorce and unstable relationships which immediately suggests that the venerable institution is in crisis. We are already in the world of the 60s, with a new emphasis on serial monogamy rather than compulsory lifetime marriage - on the relationship that lasts only as long as its internal dynamic persists (a notion developed by Wilhelm Reich, author of 'The Sexual Revolution' (1936) and the actual coiner of that crucial 60s term, whom Dylan was later to cite himself in 'Joey'); just round the corner is that amorphous, anarchic culture of experimental relationships and 'non-jealousy', as memorably chronicled by Dylan's fellow 60s troubadour Leonard Cohen, in such songs as 'Last Year's Man' and 'Paper Thin Hotel'. Reich had written: 'The essence of sex-economic regulation lies in the avoidance of any absolute norms or precepts and in the regulation of the will to life and pleasure in living as the regulators of social life' ('The Sexual Revolution', London: Vision Press, 1951, repr. 1972, p. 28). This was the climate - experimentation and the rejection of 'absolute norms' - that set the scene for the world of our song.

The narrator replaced the woman's husband in her affections, but only for a while. In the second couplet, the image of the two lovers driving until their car breaks down symbolizes an intense, full-speed-ahead passion that eventually runs out of steam, grinds to a halt and ends: finally, they agree to 'abandon' both vehicle and relationship. Dylan was later to re-use this image in 'Brownsville Girl': 'We're goin' all the way till the wheels fall off and burn'. It is a highly visual, indeed cinematic motif, and one may recall Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider, locked in a doomed relationship, driving together across southern Spain in Michelangelo Antonioni's near-contemporaneous film 'The Passenger' (1975).

The break-up does, however, seem to be by mutual consent (to quote Reich again, 'No decent man will take love which is not given freely' - op. cit., p. 29): the lovers separate, 'both agreeing it was best'. This scenario has occurred before in Dylan: in 'One Too Many Mornings', the narrator apostrophizes his absent ex-lover: 'everything I'm a-sayin', you can say it just as good/You're right from your side and I'm right from mine'. In TUIB, the narrator seems to have been prepared to take the matter stoically; but it is the woman who, 'as I was walkin' away', suddenly darts out a ray of hope, turning round to look at him and promising: " we'll meet again someday " (in the out-take version, she even tantalizingly declares: " this can't be the end ").

Stanza 3

I had a job in the Great North Woods
Working as a cook for a spell
But I never did like it all that much
And one day the axe just fell.
So I drifted down to New Orleans
Where I was lucky to be employed
Workin' for a while on a fishin' boat
Right outside of Delacroix.
But all the while I was alone
The past was close behind,
I seen a lot of women
But she never escaped my mind, and I just grew
Tangled up in blue.

The narrator embraces his new avatar of drifter and itinerant worker, and once again crosses the entire United States, this time not from west to east but from north to south. In the BOTT version, he moves up to the Great North Woods, then down to Louisiana (in the out-take version, the movement is different: north and then west, from the 'old North Woods' to L.A.). The BOTT text, significantly, has him migrate southwards following the course of the Mississippi, in a trajectory that may in part recall how, in Mark Twain's 'Huckleberry Finn', Huck and Jim literally 'drift' down the Big Muddy, from Missouri down into Arkansas, on their celebrated raft. The Mississippi - to which river Dylan was to pay direct tribute in 1997, in the out-take from 'Time Out of Mind' that bears the mighty watercourse's name and was covered by Sheryl Crow - has its headwaters in Dylan's native northern Minnesota (land of the Great North Woods), winds through St Louis (a city rich in blues tradition of blues music), and reaches the sea in New Orleans.

There is, too, a curious analogy in stanza 3 with what happens in an old folk ballad called 'The Rich Old Farmer': the similarity is close enough for one verse of this song to be considered a possible source for Dylan's stanza 3. It is, indeed, itself the third verse of the version performed by Pearl Borusky (originally from Kentucky) and recorded by Charles Draves in Antigo, Wisconsin in 1941 - released in 1942, under the auspices of the indefatigable folk collector Alan Lomax, on 78 rpm in the Library of Congress series 'Folk Music of the United States', and reissued on the collection 'Anglo-American Ballads, Volume One', on vinyl in 1956 and again on CD (by Rounder Records) in 1999. The booklet notes to the CD reissue state: 'The ballad is an adaptation of an eighteenth-century British broadside piece, better known as "The Girl I Left Behind Me"'. The narrative logic of the song is not that similar to that of Dylan's tale (the faithful male narrator eventually loses his beloved, 'married to another man' - Dylan's sequence is the reverse of this), but the whole of its verse 3 still bears quoting (the song's words are reprinted in the CD booklet):

'Straightway to old Missouri,
To Pikesville I did go,
Where work and money were plentiful
And the whiskey it did flow,
Where work and money was plentiful
And the girls all treated me kind;
But the girl I left behind me
Was always on my mind.'

The Dylan parallels should be clear enough: the old ballad speaks of the world of work; it brandishes the sonority of place-names (Missouri, Pikesville; Dylan has the Great North Woods, New Orleans and Delacroix - and, in the out-take, L.A.); and the last three lines uncannily prefigure Dylan's 'But all the while I was alone/The past was close behind,/I seen a lot of women/But she never escaped my mind' - not to mention also anticipating that ironic earlier Dylan line from 'Memphis Blues Again', 'And the ladies treat me kindly' ... The young Dylan, says Michael Gray in the third edition of his 'Song and Dance Man', performed 'The Girl I Left Behind' on a New York City radio session (WYNC Radio) on 29 October 1961 (Gray, 'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan', London: Cassell, 2000, p. 765n); and, I am further informed by Burkhard Schleser, that performance has him singing lines which - much as in 'The Rich Old Farmer' - run:

'Where work and money was plentiful
And the girls treated me kind;
But the only girl I thought about
Was the girl I left behind.'

Meantime, comparison with a song written by Dylan himself, namely 'Girl From the North Country' from 1963, suggests that the northern state (Dylan's native Minnesota?) where the narrator of 'Tangled Up In Blue' works as a cook among the lumberjacks is a place of physical and emotional coldness, where 'the rivers freeze and summer ends', far removed from the warmth of his memories of the woman. This may be why he 'never did like it all that much': and so, perhaps not unnaturally, he heads south, for the sunnier and more sensual climes of Louisiana. We may note in passing a certain witty playfulness in the writing here. As Robert Shelton points out ('No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan', 1986; Penguin, 1987; p. 441), Dylan punningly breathes fresh life into the dead metaphor 'the axe just fell' by linking it to the literal tree-and-axe world of the Great North Woods; and in the

next couplet the verb 'drifted' leads us to 'fishing boat' by association, perhaps, with fishermen's drift-nets.

New Orleans has long been a place of potent signification in the American musical tradition: it is a melting-pot of traditions, black and white - jazz, blues, cajun and zydeco - and is, of course, the scenario of the celebrated traditional lament 'House of the Rising Sun', as covered by Dylan on his first album. Dylan revisits the city in a number of his own songs, from the early, still-unreleased 'Bob Dylan's New Orleans Rag', through 'Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie', 'Brownsville Girl' (the 'French Quarter' reference) and 'Blind Willie McTell', down to its recent appearance on 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven', on 'Time Out Of Mind' ('I'm goin' down my river/Down to New Orleans'). In several of these occurrences, New Orleans has a connotation which is heavily erotic, referring quite plainly to the milieu of commercial sex. 'House of the Rising Sun', in particular, is the threnody of a New Orleans prostitute (the ill-famed brothel of that song also lends its name, with a change of spelling, to a similar establishment, the House of the Rising Son, in Salman Rushdie's novel of 1977, 'Grimus'). In TUIB, the narrator's attraction to New Orleans is, as we shall see, certainly not innocent of a somewhat ambiguous erotic charge.

However, his Louisiana experience begins in the world of work: he gets a job 'on a fishing boat right outside of Delacroix' (a town on an island some 50 km from New Orleans - near enough for fisheries workers to be picked up in New Orleans in the early morning and dropped back in the big city after work). At this point, strangely enough, a dimension appears which had not previously raised its head in the narrative - and it is not the carnal, but, paradoxically enough, the spiritual. Delacroix means 'of-the-cross' in French, and the careful listener may wonder whether this is not a hidden evocation of Jesus (in a later song, 'Caribbean Wind', Dylan quite explicitly refers to 'the place of the cross', in a context suggesting Jerusalem, while 'Blind Willie McTell' offers the cryptic line 'All the way from New Orleans to Jerusalem'). Given this, the fishing boat itself could conceal another Biblical reference - to the fishermen-turned-disciples Simon Peter and Andrew, and Jesus' injunction to them to become 'fishers of men' (Matthew 5, 18-20). While he fishes, the narrator continues to think of the woman ('she never escaped my mind'): for him, it may be, she has become a symbol of salvation, perhaps a latter-day Virgin - or, alternatively, he may see himself as a suffering Christ-figure, and New Orleans as the Jerusalem of his emotional martyrdom.

There are also possible ethnic and musical connotations of a different kind: Delacroix, it turns out, is home to a minority community of Spanish origin. A double CD issued in 1998 by Smithsonian Folkways with the title 'River of Song: A Musical Journey Down the Mississippi' includes a track called 'La Vida de un Jaibero' ('The Crab Fisherman's Song'), 'recorded on a small boat near the mouth of the Mississippi' in 1997 and performed by Irvan Pérez, 'a retired trapper, fisherman, and carver of wooden duck decoys', whose father wrote the song back in the 1930s. The booklet notes explain: 'Out on Delacroix Island, in the swampy ground where the Mississippi breaks up and flows out into the Gulf of Mexico, a group of immigrants from the Canary Islands have preserved a pocket of Spanish culture for almost two centuries. The Isleños still sing a cappella ballads that hark back to the Middle Ages, as well as newer songs about local pursuits like shrimping and muskrat-trapping' (notes by Elijah Wald, CD booklet p. 37). This unexpected, submerged Spanish/Latin connection suggests that by ending up at Delacroix Dylan's narrator has found himself right on the edge of American society, in the territory of a tiny and unrecognised minority: the Spanish connotation here may have a similar function to the more explicit Spanish/Latin references in

a number of other Dylan songs, which suggest the existence of creative and regenerative possibilities on the margins of society. We may think of the woman in 'Spanish Harlem Incident', with her 'flaming feet' and 'rattling drums', or, indeed, of another character from 'Blood on the Tracks' - the mysterious, liberating Jack of Hearts, whose face his impending victim, Big Jim, believes he may have seen before, 'maybe down in Mexico'.

At all events, the second couplet is charged with a dense symbolic significance - and the New Orleans location of the BOTT version is certainly a major improvement on the earlier, less reverberative setting of L.A. (where, in the out-take version, the narrator works 'on an airplane plant loadin' cargo on to a truck'). It is, we may believe, in the heady Latin atmosphere of the city of the Mardi Gras that our drifter finally catches up again with his elusive muse.

Stanza 4

She was workin' in a topless place
And I stopped in for a beer,
I just kept lookin' at the side of her face
In the spotlight so clear.
And later on as the crowd thinned out
I's just about to do the same,
She was standing there in back of my chair
Said to me, " Don't I know your name? "
I muttered somethin' underneath my breath,
She studied the lines on my face.
I must admit I felt a little uneasy
When she bent down to tie the laces of my shoe,
Tangled up in blue.

Out of the blue, the narrator discovers the woman of his search - in, of all a places, a topless bar. On my reading, in this stanza and in the two that follow we are still in New Orleans; the location would fit, and we may imagine our lover, exhausted after a hard day's work on the fishing boat, stopping in on his way home at the bar for a quick beer and, no doubt, some visual stimulation. The song suddenly and surprisingly confronts us with the world of the sex industry: commercial sex of a highly visible nature, representing the sinister underbelly of the much-trumpeted sexual revolution. Such a reference is fairly unusual for Dylan, whose songs relatively rarely deal explicitly in sex or in sexually charged nudity ('naked' in Dylan, by contrast to the more erotically expansive Cohen, is more likely to signify either honesty or vulnerability, as in 'naked under unknowing eyes' - 'Restless Farewell', or 'the naked truth is still taboo' - 'Dirge'; 'Blonde on Blonde', in particular, is an album which is heavily loaded with eroticism, but whose sexual content mostly takes the form of suggestion and symbolism). Here in TUIB, though, we seem to have strayed into the sleazy, late-night bar-room world of a very different songwriter, Tom Waits (with his titles like 'Pasties and a G-String' and, indeed, 'I Wish I Was In New Orleans'), whose career was just under way when BOTT came out.

Meanwhile TUIB, written in 1974, is obviously enough dealing with the 1960s, in other words notwith a historical period when, for however brief a space, both sex and nudity were felt by large numbers of people to be 'good' rather than 'bad', and when experimentation and libertarian attitudes were positively encouraged in large sections of the media (it may be

added that in 1984 the 'Real Live' version, perhaps in a concession to changed times, removed the 'topless' reference and replaced it by the more innocuous 'she was working in the blinding light', although later live versions have gone back to the original words). There was, of course, a contradiction in the period between the prevalent libertarian attitudes and the increasingly visible commercial exploitation of sex; and indeed, as we shall see later, TUIB, taken as a whole, impels the listener a fair way into the heart of that very contradiction.

The male narrator appears to see nothing wrong in 'stopping in' to while away the time in such a bar. Equally, we may presume the woman sees nothing wrong in working there; there is no evidence that she has been forced into it by the new lover who will be mentioned in stanza 6, and, given her outgoing character and the self-confidence that she displays across the song, we may conclude that if she is working there it is her choice. Here one may compare a more recent fictional exploration of the sex business, in a sequence in Vikram Chandra's acclaimed novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, where an American sex worker, Kyrie, tells her story: 'So I started there. I don't want to tell you that it was all pleasant: there was booze on the floor, women working to feed kids and others, drunks in the bathrooms, all those men sitting in the darkness, their eyes, knifings now and then, cruising cops, bad money from the Families and all that. But three nights a week I went down to Joyland and did my thing. Why, you ask. Who knows? It did good to me. I would have done it anywhere, I think, on the street or on a bus, but at Joyland it was all set up and I could do it, so I did.' (Faber, 1995, repr. 1996, p. 384).

We may imagine Dylan's narrator as one of those 'men sitting in the darkness', his eyes fixed on the woman 'in the spotlight' as she performs her routine. After the show is over, it is she who takes the initiative and catches him as he is about to slip off: 'she was standing there in back of my chair/Said to me, " don't I know your name? "'. The first-time listener must surely be struck by the strangeness, the surprising nature of this reunion. The strangeness is such that the meeting becomes - however paradoxically in such a place - a moment of revelation, an epiphany. The Christ references of the previous stanza (De-la-croix, fishers of men) are, we may believe, taken a stage forward as the woman approaches her ex-lover from the back and then bends down at his feet to touch his shoes ('back of my chair', 'bent down to tie the laces of my shoe'). At this moment, we may recall the words of John the Baptist: 'There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose' (Mark 1, 7); as well as the episode in which Mary Magdalene washes the feet of Jesus (Luke 7, 36-50): 'And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner ... brought an alabaster box of ointment/and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head ...' (37-38). Years later, Dylan's enigmatic Jokerman will, Christ-like, be called a 'friend to the woman of shame'; here in the New Orleans bar, we may briefly imagine this woman as a penitent Magdalene, and her ex-lover as, once again, a suffering Christ-figure. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene: 'Thy faith has saved thee' (50): Dylan's odd couple make up, at this moment, an image of salvation, of redemption appearing, as if in a Graham Greene novel, in the most squalid and unpropitious circumstances. Interestingly enough, the name 'Delacroix' from stanza 3 may suggest, not only the Christian cross, but also the nineteenth-century French painter Eugène Delacroix, whose famous canvas of 1830, *Liberty Guiding The People* ('a painting that's hanging in the Louvre') represents the spirit of Liberty as a half-naked woman brandishing a tricolour - and so, it may be, the cross, the French quarter, and a bare-breasted woman converge in a new, secularised vision of salvation-as-freedom.

Stanza 5

She lit a burner on the stove and offered me a pipe
" I thought you'd never say hello, " she said
" You look like the silent type. "
Then she opened up a book of poems
And handed it to me
Written by an Italian poet
From the thirteenth century.
And every one of them words rang true
And glowed like burnin' coal
Pourin' off of every page
Like it was written in my soul from me to you,
Tangled up in blue.

The scene has now changed, but it cannot be long after the encounter in the bar. On my reading, the woman has taken her ex-lover home to the basement apartment which - as we will learn in stanza 6 - she now shares with her current partner. Suddenly and unexpectedly - coming straight after the shady dive of stanza 5 - a flame of creative energy flares up between her guest and her. Fire imagery appears, first naturalistically - 'she lit a burner ... offered me a pipe' - and then symbolically, as the words in the book 'glowed like burnin' coal'. The book which the woman hands the narrator - for him to read, either to himself or out loud to her - is, in both out-take and BOTT versions, 'written by an Italian poet from the thirteenth century' (the 'Real Live' version deletes the stanza altogether). Commentators have variously identified the 'Italian poet' as either Dante (1265-1321) or Petrarch (1304-1374). If we suppose that Dylan has got the century right, then it should be Dante (who is favoured by both Robert Shelton - loc. cit. - and Aidan Day - op. cit., p. 62), although either poet would fit the stanza's atmosphere, since the ideal women of both - Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura - represent the ideal beloved. As the critic Harold Bloom has said, 'Petrarch ... invented ... poetic idolatry in regard to his beloved Laura, but what ... restrains us from seeing Dante's worship of Beatrice as the most poetic of all idolatries?' ('The Western Canon', 1994; Macmillan, 1995, pp. 90-91). Dylan, in fact, refers to Dante fairly transparently in 'Caribbean Wind' ('the theatre of divine comedy'), and in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' the 'black branch with blood that kept dripping' seems to have been plucked straight from the Wood of the Suicides in Canto XIII of the 'Inferno'. The Florentine poet dedicated a poem-sequence to his Beatrice under the title 'La Vita Nuova' ('The New Life'), and it seems that Dylan's narrator too feels a new life stirring in him as he sits next to his own ideal woman.

We can imagine that among the glowing words which he discovered in the pages of the 'Italian poet', he may have read these lines:

'She is the sum of nature's universe/To her perfection all of beauty tends/Forth from her eyes, where'er her gaze she bends/Come spirits flaming with the power of love' ('ella è quanto di ben pò far natura;/per essempro di lei bieltà si prova/De li occhi suoi, come ch'ella li mova,/escon spirti d'amore inflammati' ('La Vita Nuova', XIX; trans. Barbara Reynolds, Penguin edition).

As he reads, every word on the page comes alive, 'pourin' off of every page like it was written in my soul'. The word 'soul' in Dylan usually implies authenticity (as in 'Dear Landlord': 'please don't put a price on my soul'); here, through the act of reading, the narrator - albeit for a fleeting moment - realizes his full, authentic potential and becomes truly himself. The text

itself stresses the phenomena of language, writing reading: 'book', 'poems', 'written', 'poet', 'words', 'page'. Dylan's character is brought face to face with the transforming power of language, of which Leonard Cohen was to write in similar terms (in 'Hallelujah', a song covered live by Dylan years later, in 1988): 'there's a blaze of light in every word'. We may also recall the passage in Edgar Allan Poe's story 'Ligeia', where the two lovers read together: 'Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed', and the letters on the page glow 'lambent and golden' in 'the radiant lustre of her eyes' (Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings', Penguin edition, p. 115).

The glowing words of the Italian poet, we are told, seem to be 'written in my soul, from me to you'. The 'me' is here probably less the narrator than the voice of Dylan himself breaking through, not in autobiographical confessional mode, but as writer and singer; by the same token, the 'you' would be neither the woman nor some imaginary confidant, but the real-world listener, directly confronted by Dylan - if only for an instant - with the healing energy of the word. To quote Leonard Cohen again ('Light As The Breeze'): 'for something like a second/I was cured and my heart was at ease'.

A number of live performances in 1978 totally changed the textual reference in this stanza. On one evening - 15 November 1978, Inglewood, California - Dylan replaced the 'Italian poet' by 'Charles Baudelaire'. The nineteenth-century French symbolist and author of 'Les Fleurs du Mal' ('Flowers of Evil') is mentioned by Dylan in his (now suppressed) sleevenotes to 'Planet Waves', and he is certainly not out of place here in TUIB. In poems such as 'Harmonie du Soir' ('Evening Harmony') and 'Le Flambeau Vivant' ('The Living Torch') Baudelaire addresses an idealized, angelic woman in terms that emulate Dante or Petrarch, and indeed, anticipate Dylan's own 'you're the lamp of my soul' in 'Precious Angel': the first-named poem ends, quasi-blasphemously: 'Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!' ('Your memory in me gleams like a monstrance!'). Even more curiously, in a series of variants from 26 November 1978 in Houston onwards, Dylan substituted the 'book of poems' by no other a text than the Bible. The Houston performance had: 'She opened up the Bible, and started quoting it to me/The Gospel according to Matthew, Verse 3, Chapter 33.' Another performance offered: 'Then she opened up the Bible/And she started quoting it to me/Jeremiah, Chapter 36/Verses 21 and 33' (15 December 1978, Lakeland, Florida). Other nights gave the audience other chapter-and-verse references; but more often than not the diligent listener would discover, on returning home and checking, that no such verse(s) exists in the holy book: Jeremiah 36 has a verse 21 but no verse 33, while Matthew 33 does not exist at all (information supplied by Ben Taylor, 24 December 1995 and Ombodhi Thoren St John on 14 April 1996, both on rmd; cf. Clinton Heylin, 'Bob Dylan: Behind The Shades - A Biography', New York: Summit Books, 1991, p. 317). Was there a hoax going on, or was Dylan simply announcing his impending born-again period to the audience? If we take the altered lines as a re-writing of the song, we may conclude that the biblical reference is not actually so orthodox. Rather, the apotheosis of the woman has reached a new height: she is now more than a biblical heroine, greater than the Virgin Mary or the Magdalene, embodying a creative power that overflows and transcends the Bible, pushing beyond revelation. Hence, perhaps, the references to non-existent verses - the woman is beyond the bounds of mere factual knowledge, even of the Bible: 'she's got everything she needs, she's an artist, she don't look back!' In more recent years, Dylan's performances have restored the 'Italian poet', but even as Dante's Beatrice the woman is placed at the very heart of the universe, the image of perfection in this world and the poet's guide and guardian in the next.

Stanza 6

I lived with them on Montague Street
In a basement down the stairs,
There was music in the cafés at night
And revolution in the air.
Then he started into dealing with slaves
And something inside of him died.
She had to sell everything she owned
And froze up inside.
And when finally the bottom fell out
I became withdrawn,
The only thing I knew how to do
Was to keep on keepin' on like a bird that flew,
Tangled up in blue.

The poetic instant of salvation proves fleeting indeed: as stanza 6 begins, the narrator is still hanging around the woman, but in circumstances which will soon turn not just prosaic but sinister. No Montague Street has been identified in New Orleans (a debate on rmd in 1996 threw up real streets of that name in Brooklyn, Providence and Charleston). Even so, on my reading we are still in that city, which is most certainly a metropolis of music, even if the street-name is fictional. Indeed, the name 'Montague' is that of Romeo's family in Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', a play referred to by Dylan in 'Desolation Row', and the street may therefore have the connotation of star-crossed love: our narrator may be back within the woman's energy field, but the new set-up, whatever it is, is certainly not going to last. As it stands, we may conclude that the woman has accepted her ex-lover into her new home: but he has to share her with her current official partner.

In the BOTT version, the stanza begins: 'I lived with them on Montague Street' (the out-take version, as will be seen below, is different). This may very well be a 'ménage à trois', for the characters have obviously plunged deep into the vortex of the post-1968 counter-culture: we have come a very, very long way indeed from the conservative, kinship- and family-oriented world of the first two stanzas. 'I lived with them', the narrator declares cryptically; we may decipher this, as in the more explicit David Crosby song of 1967 'Triad', with its plea: 'why can't we go on as three?', as an experiment, typical of the period, in 'open couples' or 'multiple relationships' (phenomena which are in our day, once again, known by more conventional names). As late as 1980, the alternative therapist Sondra Ray, who began her career in the milieu of the late-60s Californian therapy known as 'est', could write quite unselfconsciously, in a book called 'Loving Relationships': "There is no "right" answer as to whether it is better to have a monogamous or an open relationship ... Here are some common opinions: 1. Primary relationship, closed sexually (monogamous); 2. Primary relationship, open sexually; 3. Multiple partners; 4. Group marriage' (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, pp. 55-56). In this heady climate, archaic as it may seem in the neo-conservative 90s, for a brief while it seemed that anything was possible.

This is a time not only of sexual experimentation but of social, political and cultural ferment: 'music in the cafés at night' (probably protest song) and 'revolution in the air'. The threesome live, significantly enough, in 'a basement down the stairs'; this recalls the counter-cultural

world of Dylan's 1965 song 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' ('Johnny's in the basement/Mixing up the medicine/I'm on the pavement/Thinking about the government'), as well as the title of Dylan and the Band's famous 'Basement Tapes', with its connotations of communal living, rock-and-roll celebration and, indeed, bootleg circulation outside the limits of the 'system'. Indeed, the basement as physical space here symbolizes the entire 'underground' movement of the 60s.

However, this magnificently alternative scene does not last. As early as 'Bob Dylan's Dream', on his second album in 1963, Dylan had strikingly and disturbingly anticipated the death of the 60s - as if, to quote the even earlier 'Song to Woody', that whole brave new world were 'a-dyin' and it's hardly been born'. In 'Bob Dylan's Dream', the narrator mourns the break-up of a group of radical friends, in words that show the young visionary's gaze piercing right through the dreams of his decade: 'As easy it was to tell black from white/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right/And our choices were few and the thought never hit/That the one road we travelled would ever shatter or split'.

As for TUIB, Clinton Heylin has called it 'an attempt to come to terms with all the water that had passed under the bridge in the sixties ... confronting that decade as a survivor' (op. cit., p. 241). The utopian dream lasted scarcely half a decade after the barricades of Paris, and in 1974 - the very year Dylan composed the songs of 'Blood On The Tracks' - the OPEC oil price shock sent the house of cards tumbling down. The one road shattered and split: flower-power idealism and internationalism gave way to the narrow, aggressive and particularist dogmas of punk and its successor movements. In this stanza of TUIB (again, following the BOTT version, not the out-take), we can watch the utopia disintegrate from within. The woman's partner, we are told, 'started into dealing with slaves': this strongly suggests a highly exploitative involvement in the sex industry - especially if we are still in the New Orleans of the Rising Sun, as if the man had gone down a road of 'hippy capitalism' which swiftly degenerated into something far worse. If in stanza 4 the woman was working in the sex industry by choice, this is certainly not the case for the 'slaves' of stanza 6. This shady business venture may involve both 'him' and 'her', and lacks even the virtue of being successful: 'she had to sell everything she owned'. Both partners lose their faith and their integrity: 'something inside of him died'; 'she ... froze up inside': the poetry, the visionary gleam of stanza 5 is gone for ever. The whole disaster is no doubt partly the characters' own fault, and partly due to historical forces beyond their control; but what is dying and freezing in these lines is not just two individual destinies, but the very spirit of an expiring era. In the end, 'the bottom fell out' - or, as the out-take and 'Real Live' versions, as well as later live performances have it, 'it all came crashing down': the hopes of a whole generation collapse into smithereens.

There is no doubt that the substantial changes in this stanza in the BOTT version mark a major improvement on the out-take version, which has, for the first eight lines: 'He was always in a hurry/Too busy or too stoned/And everything that she ever planned/Just had to be postponed/He thought they were successful/She thought they were blest/With objects and material things/But I never was impressed'. This version focuses on the 60s at their fag-end, with the erstwhile revolutionaries losing their bearings and alternating between substance-induced indolence and hippy capitalism. The BOTT version, by contrast, goes further back in time, to when there was 'revolution in the air', and, with a marvellous economy, encapsulates, in a few memorable lines, both the apogee and the fall of the whole counter-culture (the 'Real Live' version is far less historically concrete, replacing 'music in the cafés at night' by 'there

was snow all winter and no heat': there is no doubt in my mind that the BOTT version is here by far the most powerful of the three in its historical and cultural reverberations).

The bottom falls out of the 60s dream, and out of the narrator's world too. He loses, at least for a time, his capacity to communicate: 'I became withdrawn'. It is the survival instinct that keeps him going: 'the only thing I knew how to do/Was to keep on keepin' on like a bird that flew'. We may presume that he leaves New Orleans, hits the road again, and begins the painful process of reconstructing his life in a world of reduced hopes and expectations - like Robert Frost's *Oven Bird*, he has to work out 'what to make of a diminished thing'.

Stanza 7 and last

So now I'm goin' back again,
I got to get to her somehow.
All the people we used to know
They're an illusion to me now.
Some are mathematicians
Some are carpenters' wives.
Don't know how it all got started,
I don't know what they're doin' with their lives.
But me, I'm still on the road
Headin' for another joint
We always did feel the same,
We just saw it from a different point of view,
Tangled up in blue.

The song ends with the narrator still very much alive, and indeed 'still on the road': the narrative comes round full circle, as we recall him 'standin' on the side of the road' in the very first stanza. The death of the 60s is reiterated in the lines: 'All the people we used to know/They're an illusion to me now'; the reference is surely to the 'beautiful people' that 'we' (the narrator, the woman and her partner) knew in their countercultural days in New Orleans, not to the conservative folk whom he and she knew back in the family-dominated world of the first stanzas. Again we are reminded of 'Bob Dylan's *Dream*': 'I wish, I wish, I wish in vain/That we could sit simply in that room again'.

What has become of these people? 'Ubi sunt'? (a question still asked of the '68 generation today). The BOTT version tells us that 'some are mathematicians' and 'some are carpenters' wives'; instead of the latter, the out-take version has 'doctors' wives', while live versions today almost invariably have 'truck-drivers' wives'. These alternative destinies are all worthy of comment.

To take the 'mathematicians' first, this suggests, at least to me, the triumph of cold rationalism - of a technician and functionalist view of the world, as opposed to the poetic view celebrated in stanza 5 (we may also recall the rather unflattering 'Galileo's mathbook' image in 'Tombstone Blues', or the 'compasses' in the 'Bootleg Series' version of 'It Takes A Lot To Laugh'). I am reminded of the lines in which William Blake condemns the scientific world-view:

'The atoms of Democritus
And Newton's particles of light

Are sands upon the Red Sea Shore
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.'

Some, at least, of those 'people we used to know' have become devotees of Blake's cruel god Urizen, exponents and victims of a cold, mathematical ideology of analysis and dissection. Others, though, have gone down a different path - at least in the BOTT version, where the phrase 'carpenters' wives' marks a major improvement on 'doctors' wives', which seems simply to be repeating the point made with 'mathematicians' (I will argue below that it is also superior to today's variant of 'truck-drivers' wives').

The two words 'carpenters' wives' turn out to have a remarkable number of connotations. The contrast with 'mathematicians' harks back - as 'doctors' wives' doesn't - to the theme of social class divisions of stanza 1. There may also, still in the context of class, be a reference to the famous 60s song by Tim Hardin, 'If I Were a Carpenter' (covered, if not by Dylan, certainly by Joan Baez, on her 1967 album 'Joan'; Tim Hardin was, besides, a descendant of the nineteenth-century John Wesley Harding - historically Hardin - as celebrated by Dylan on the song and album that bear his name). Hardin's speaker asks his beloved: 'If I were a carpenter/And you were a lady/Would you marry me anyway?/Would you have my baby?'; this is an appeal to love across class divisions, and so if the 'Hardin' interpretation is taken, 'carpenters' wives' may point to those who remained faithful to 60s ideals, and chose love and authentic 'relating' above class and social convention.

However, 'carpenters' wives' could also be pointing back to the traditional ballad 'House Carpenter', Dylan's version of which may be found on 'The Bootleg Series'. In this song - a variant on the 'demon lover' theme, also covered by Clarence Ashley, Dave Van Ronk, Joan Baez and the Pentangle - a woman leaves her carpenter husband for the blandishments of an apparently monied lover who turns out to be the devil in disguise, and finally drags her down to hell ('Forsake, forsake your house carpenter/And come along with me', sings the demon lover in Dylan's version). A 'carpenter's wife' would in this case be a woman in an unhappy marriage who seeks to get out of it - which takes us right back to stanza 2 ('she was married when we first met ...'), but with dark undertones pertaining to traditional morality, rather than the 60s experimentalism of stanza 6: in other words, revolt, instead of being embraced for itself, brings guilt, anxiety and possible punishment. On this reading, those who became 'carpenter's wives' would, in the end, be quite as much part of a general return to conservatism in society as those who ended up as 'mathematicians'.

From a post-60s perspective, then, the 'carpenters' wives' could either have turned into conservatives ('House Carpenter') or, against the odds, remained radicals ('If I Were a Carpenter'). There is, however, still another possible reading: after all, the most famous carpenter's wife in history or legend is none other than the Virgin Mary, the consort of Joseph. This would connect with the earlier New Testament allusions which I have suggested are present in the song (Delacroix, 'fishers of men', John the Baptist, etc.), as well as with the similar references in 'Shelter From the Storm', also on BOTT ('gambled for my clothes', 'my crown of thorns', 'God and her were born'). The point, it should be stressed, is not that the woman herself is being compared to the mother of Christ: the narrator is obviously talking about one or more of 'the people we' - and therefore she - 'used to know'. However, if one of her old associates is, on a symbolic level, being equated with the Virgin Mary, perhaps the woman herself may be identified with another Mary, namely the Magdalene (as was already suggested, on my reading, when she bent down to the narrator's feet in stanza 4). In this case, the possibility of salvation suggested earlier in the song would still remain open.

If the symbolic possibilities of 'carpenters' wives' are so rich, though, why, we may ask, has Dylan systematically repudiated the phrase for years now, in favour of the less resonant 'truck-drivers' wives'? The latter phrase is still interesting - a truck-driver's wife could be seen as a widow in all but name, as by the nature of her husband's work she will see him only rarely - and it connects with the road theme, as well as stressing the social class element (by contrast with 'mathematicians'); but it still lacks the density of connotation of the phrase it has replaced. At this point, a brief foray into biographical criticism may be legitimate, since it has backing from the text. It so happens that the German word for carpenter is no other than ... Zimmermann, in other words Bob Dylan's original surname (allowing for a slight variation in spelling: Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman, as later recalled in the line from 'Gotta Serve Somebody': 'You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy'). The phrase 'Zimmerman's wife' could, when TUIB was written, still suggest Sara, to whom Bob Dylan was still married at the time (though he had legally changed his surname to Dylan back in 1962, long before their union). It is highly unlikely that the song is actually comparing Sara Dylan to the Virgin Mary, but the suggestion of such a link, if only on the level of connotation, may have been too much for Dylan to handle in later, post-divorce years. He must surely be aware of the German meaning of his former surname, and the replacement of 'carpenters' wives' by a more innocuous formulation may, even if on an unconscious level, be related to the multiple, and personally disturbing, symbolic senses of the original phrase.

Still, as the song ends, whatever may have happened to 'the people we used to know', Dylan's narrator is still alive: the 60s may be dead, but his thirst for meaning remains unquenched. He is 'still on the road', still questing - still searching for the woman, who is, despite everything, still enshrined in his heart as his own private Holy Grail. He has found her, lost her, re-found her and lost her again. Now he declares: 'I've got to get to her somehow', still hoping that all their differences can finally be resolved in some utopian meltdown of identities: 'we always did feel the same/We just saw it from a different point of view'. We leave him with the sensation that from now on he will be endlessly on the road, crossing the United States from one side to another and back, constantly seeking the woman and, like a Holy Fool, eternally convinced that sooner or later his quest for salvation will be crowned with success.

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A few points may now be made in synthesis. TUIB is a song which operates on a number of dimensions. On the social and political level, it is a song about the 1960s, bringing out the contradictions and, indeed, the tangles of the decade. The idealism of the 'book of poems' sequence is betrayed by the cynicism of stanza 6; the promise of sexual liberation degenerates into the commercialism of the sex industry, which appears ambivalently in the 'topless bar' incident and in full exploitative guise in the 'dealing with slaves' episode; and in the end, the question may be asked whether the whole libertarian edifice was not simply a by-product of prosperity, liable to collapse at the slightest hint of economic crisis ('she had to sell everything she owned/And froze up inside').

It is also the song of a man's love for a woman - in a sense universal (as the reference to the thirteenth-century poet suggests), but also tinged by the values of its period. The woman appears throughout as more confident and self-sufficient than the man. The narrator is rather self-critical, indeed self-effacing ('I used a little too much force', 'as the crowd thinned out/I was about to do the same', 'I became withdrawn'); he allows his destiny to be formed by circumstances, rather than trying to control it itself ('gettin' through', 'the axe just fell', 'I drifted down', 'I was lucky to be employed', 'like a bird that flew'). The woman is also the

more articulate one: of the three pieces of direct speech quoted in the song - 'We'll meet again someday on the avenue', 'Don't I know your name?', 'I thought you'd never say hello - you look like the silent type' - all come from her. She also appears to need men less than they need her: by the end, she has lived through relationships with at least three partners (her husband; the narrator; and the partner of stanzas 5-6), while the narrator has stayed fixated on her image ('I seen a lot of women, but she never escaped my mind'). This picture of a strong, self-confident woman, mistress of the situation and in control of her own emotional life, is in keeping with the values of sexual liberation and gender equality of the period, although in an anarchic and libertarian context which clearly predates latter-day feminist dogmas.

The woman, however, represents more than herself - she is also the manifestation of the narrator's ideal. As it unfolds, his search celebrates the creative power of language (with the help of the Italian poet), and transforms the woman into a quasi-religious figure - perhaps a latter-day Mary Magdalene, perhaps the embodiment of a qualitatively new energy, beyond the limits of any belief-system. The seeker crosses the length and breadth of the United States, from north to south, from west to east, looking for the salvation symbolized by his beloved. We may compare his journey with Dylan's own Never-Ending Tour, for the narrator's is a never-ending search ('me, I'm still on the road'). The song itself, too, endlessly re-performed and rewritten by its author, may be seen as never-ending. 'Tangled Up In Blue' recounts the rise and fall of a libertarian culture; yet, even if society at large may have gone back to conservatism, the song affirms, through the image of the endless road and the power of words that glow 'like burning coal', the continued value and necessity of the quest for freedom. In 1974 Peter Hamill wrote, in his sleeve-notes to 'Blood on the Tracks': 'Early on, he warned us, he gave many of us voice, he told us about the hard rain that was going to fall, and how it would carry plague. In the teargas in 1968 Chicago, they hurled Dylan at the walls of the great hotels, where the infected drew the blinds, and their butlers ordered up the bayonets. Most of them are gone now. Dylan remains.' 1968 is now not six but thirty years behind us; it is 1998, and ... Dylan remains. In the end, the human thirst for liberty is unquenchable, and in the adventures and misadventures of Dylan's incorrigibly hopeful survivor we may glimpse a ray of hope. In the challenge sent out to the world at the end of 'Tangled Up In Blue', an attentive ear may catch the echo of the eloquent defiance of another great poetic survivor, Lord Byron ('Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, 1818, stanza 98):

'Yet, Freedom! yet, thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunder-storm _against_ the wind!'

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NOTE: A German-language version of this article was published under the title "Tangled Up In Blue" und die niemals endene Suche', in Parking Meter: Das deutschsprachige Dylan-Magazin (Vienna, Austria), No 6, Jan 1999, pp. 3-13, translation by Rainer Vesely and Burkhard Schleser.

Dylan, the Everly Brothers and 'Roving Gambler'

'I had got used to staking everything on a single throw of the dice'
(Dostoyevsky, 'The Gambler' - 1866; Penguin edition, p. 143)

Dylan's acoustic rendition of the traditional ballad 'Roving Gambler', recorded in December 1997, is one of the highlights of 'Love Sick CD 2', the second of the pair of four-track CD

singles released in Europe in 1998, containing, between them, seven previously unissued live tracks plus the already-released studio version of 'Love Sick' (the seven live tracks were subsequently released in Australia as the second CD of a special double-disc reissue of 'Time Out Of Mind'; and in Japan, all eight tracks were issued as a double CD single simply entitled 'Love Sick'). It is gratifying that the samples chosen for these official releases from the Never Ending Tour include two covers of traditional songs (the other being 'Cocaine Blues', on 'Love Sick CD 1'), which those who appreciate Dylan as folk performer can file alongside 'Good As I Been To You', 'World Gone Wrong', and, of course, the first album. Christof Graf, in his book 'Bob Dylan: Man on the Road - The Never Ending Tour 1988-1999' (Echternach, Luxembourg: Éditions Phi, 1999), lists a total of 34 Dylan performances of 'Roving Gambler': once in 1991, all of 24 times in 1997, six times in 1998 and three times in 1999 (up to the date covered by his statistics, i.e. 31 July). To these may now be added 5 November 1999 in Pittsburgh, when Dylan chose the song as his opener. These 35 performances, then, are all from the 1990s: it seems that Dylan had never performed the song in public in earlier times, and so the 6 November 1991 performance in South Bend, Indiana can be considered the first. He has, however, been familiar with the song from the very dawn of his career: a tape - though not from a public performance - exists with a version of it, laid down in May 1960 in St Paul, Minnesota (see Ben Taylor, rec.music.dylan, 26 July 1998, and remarks below on Taylor's transcript of this version).

Apart from the high quality of the 1997 live release, 'Roving Gambler' is also a song of special interest for Dylan's own songwriting. The gambler is an archetypal figure in literature: both universal, as in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel 'The Gambler' (1866), which recounts the misadventures of roulette-obsessed Russians in a German spa, and American, as in no less a masterpiece than Mark Twain's 'Huckleberry Finn' (1885 - Huck's Pap dies shot in the back after a cardgame: 'there was heaps of old greasy cards scattered around over the floor' - ch. 9, Penguin edition, p. 104), or in the tales of Bret Harte. The motif is also present, as a symbol of anarchic, frontier-honed and double-edged freedom, in numerous folk and blues songs - e.g. in 'Delia', covered by Dylan in 1993 on 'World Gone Wrong' ('Delia was a gambling girl'), and, most famously, in 'House of the Rising Sun' (to quote Dylan's version from 1962, 'the only thing a gambler needs/Is a suitcase and a trunk'). In the Dylan canon itself, there is a long line of gamblers and gambling references, all the way down from the early, still unreleased 'Dusty Old Fairgrounds', with its lines that recall the free-wheelin', trickster atmosphere of the 'king and duke' sequences in 'Huck Finn': 'It's a-many a friend that follows the bend/The jugglers, the hustlers, the gamblers'. A whole procession of songs yields up gamblers and gambling imagery: 'Down The Highway' ('I been gamblin' so long/Lord, I ain't got much more to lose'), 'Bob Dylan's Dream' ('many a gamble has been lost and won'), 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' ('the highway is for gamblers'), 'Frankie Lee and Judas Priest' ('Frankie Lee the gambler'), 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' ('the gambling wheel shut down'), 'Joey' ('some say they lived off gambling'), 'Black Diamond Bay' ('a loser in the gambling room/Lights up a candle, says: Open up another deck!'), and, most recently, 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven' ('some trains don't pull no gamblers'). In particular, there is 'Rambling, Gambling Willie', whose hero seems to have borrowed some traits from the Roving Gambler of the folk song. Dylan's Willie 'gambled in the White House and in the railroad yards', while, in Dylan's version (see transcript of lyrics below), his precursor has 'gambled up in Washington/ Gambled over in Spain'); and, indeed, both the first and the last stanzas of 'Willie' are addressed by the narrator, in circular fashion, to 'you rovin' gamblers'. And, above all, in the title song of 'Highway 61 Revisited', the Roving Gambler appears in person as a character - transformed into a sinister figure, a fate shared by

other folksong personages in the same song (Poor Howard) and album (Gypsy Davey in 'Tombstone Blues').

It will now be interesting to compare Dylan's version of 'Roving Gambler' with another interpretation of the song, released almost four decades before by the Everly Brothers. Other recordings of 'Roving Gambler' are legion (in Note 1 below I list versions by all of 43 acts, including Dylan - the majority of which I have heard); the quality of most of these interpretations, in whatever musical idiom - folk, blues, country, bluegrass, jazz and even classical 'art-song' - is remarkably high, a phenomenon which testifies to the staying-power of a song which, indeed, it seems it is rather difficult to make boring. Of all these versions, though, the one which offers the most attractive potential for comparison with Dylan's is, I feel, the Everlys' - a version which was, surely, known to the young folk performer. It is perhaps still not sufficiently known that Don and Phil Everly were not just rock'n'rollers and country balladeers, but also remarkable interpreters of traditional and old-time material. To this bears witness their extremely fine album 'Songs Our Daddy Taught Us' (1959; reissued on CD by Line Records in 1990), which includes their rendition of 'Roving Gambler'. This album did not make the US or UK charts, but remains as an impressive tribute to the influence on the future world superstars of the traditional harmonies of their native Kentucky and of the whole immemorial British-American ballad tradition. To quote the sleevenotes to the CD reissue, 'these are folk melodies that were sung over and over, and treasured and handed down from father to son for generations ... in some cases, for centuries ... " Roving Gambler " was first sung in the taverns and wayside inns of Henry the Eighth's England.'

There are a number of connections between Dylan and the Everly Brothers. 'Songs Our Daddy Taught Us' also includes the celebrated British ballad 'Barbara Allen', which Dylan sang a few years later at the Gaslight Café in New York (and also performed on the Never Ending Tour from 1988 to 1991 - see Gil Walker statistics cited above), while 'Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet?' has obvious similarities with 'Kingsport Town', included on 'The Bootleg Series vols. 1-3' (John Bauldie's notes to the 1991 Dylan collection make the parallel between the two songs, adding that 'Who's Gonna Shoe' was performed by Woody Guthrie and is 'itself based on a very old ballad' - p. 16). Dylan's performance of 'Highway 51 Blues' (by Curtis Jones) on his first album, is, according to the sleevenotes, 'of a type sung by the Everly Brothers', and Robert Shelton says in 'No Direction Home' (1986; Penguin, 1987) that 'the Everly Brothers did it as rockabilly' (p. 121 - though I have scoured the brothers' official website in vain for any sign of a recording). Two of the songs covered by Dylan on 'Self Portrait', 'Let It Be Me' and 'Take A Message to Mary', were made famous by the Kentucky siblings. In addition, the reunited Everlys have in more recent years recorded at least two Dylan songs, 'Lay Lady Lay' (on 'EB 84', 1984) and 'Abandoned Love' (on 'Born Yesterday', 1986; also on the compilation 'The Songs of Bob Dylan' - Start Records, 1989).

The two versions of 'Roving Gambler' - the Everlys' from the end of the 1950s and Dylan's from the late 1990s - have some arresting similarities, testifying no doubt to the perennial power of the ancient ballad. Both, be it noted, are acoustic recordings (Dylan's performance is acoustic guitar/no harmonica) and are as such immediately identifiable as 'folk music', not 'rock' or 'pop'. Dylan's delivery is, it is true, rather faster and more urgent than the Everlys'; their interpretation comes over as a gentle reflection, whereas Dylan's has much more dramatic tension. However, both are of similar length (Everlys: 3.37 minutes; Dylan: 3.52 minutes), and both have nine stanzas; while the words, though not identical (which two versions of a true folk song ever are?), are virtually the same in, at least, many of the stanzas.

The two versions ultimately diverge, though, and it may now be interesting to examine each in turn, starting with the Everlys’.

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EVERLY BROTHERS VERSION: TRANSCRIPT

1

I am a rovin’ gambler
I’ve gambled down in town
Wherever I meet with a deck of cards
I lay my money down

2

I had not been in Washington
Many more weeks than three
Till I fell in love with a pretty little girl
She fell in love with me

3

She took me in her parlour
She cooled me with her fan
She whispered low in her mama’s ear
I love that gamblin’ man

4

Daughter, oh dear daughter
How can you treat me so
To leave your dear old mother
And with the gambler go?

5

I’ve gambled down in Washington
I’ve gambled down in Spain
I’m goin’ down in Georgia
To gamble my last game

6

Mother, oh dear mother
You know I love you well
But the love I have for the gamblin’ man
No human tongue can tell

7

I hear that train a-comin’
Comin’ round the curve
A-whistlin’ and a-blowin’
Strainin’ every nerve

8

Mother, oh dear mother
I’ll tell you if I can
If you ever see me a-comin’ back
I’ll be with the gamblin’ man

9

I am a rovin’ gambler

I've gambled down in town
Wherever I meet with a deck of cards
I lay my money down

In this version, the song consists of nine stanzas (the first and last are identical): in stanzas 1 to 3, 5 and 9 the gambler speaks in the first person; stanza 4 is spoken by his lover's mother, and stanzas 6 and 8 by the girl herself; while stanza 7 ('I hear that train a-comin') could be spoken by either the gambler or his lover. The narrative thus creates a plurality of voices, and therefore of points of view. It is clear enough, however, that the gambler falls in love in Washington, and is tempted at least to modify his roving, rambling lifestyle for the 'pretty little girl'. The woman, for her part, falls for him completely and seems willing to follow him anywhere ('I'll be with the gambling man'). The 'train a-comin'' stanza could quite plausibly be spoken by her: the gambler is not willing to settle down with her to a conventional family life, but insists on hitting the road again ('I'm goin' down to Georgia'); in which case, she will take the train to Georgia with him. The possibility is there, nonetheless, that this may be his last journey: if he is going to 'gamble [his] last game' in Georgia, perhaps he will, indeed, establish himself with her there, away from her mother, and his last gamble may actually be the act of staking on all the relationship. The Everlys' version leaves the careful listener with the impression that this woman may, after all, have tamed and domesticated the seemingly ever-wandering Roving Gambler.

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Bob Dylan's 1997 version starts off in a similar vein to the Everlys', but in the end takes a very different tack.

DYLAN VERSION: TRANSCRIPT

1
I am a rovin' gambler
I've gambled all around
Wherever I meet with a deck of cards
I lay my money down
2
I've gambled up in Washington
Gambled over in Spain
I'm on my way to Frisco town
To knock down my last game
3
I hadn't been in Frisco
Many more days than three
I fell in love with a pretty little girl
And she fell in love with me
4
Took me in her parlour
Cooled me with her fan
She whispered low in her mama's ear
I love this gamblin' man
5
Daughter, oh dear daughter

How can you treat me so
Leave your dear old mother
And with the gambler go?

6

Mother, oh dear mother
I'll tell you if I can
If you ever see my face again
I'll be with the gamblin' man

7

I left her in Frisco
I went up to Maine
There I met with the gamblin' man
And we got into a poker game

8

We put some money in the pot
Passed the cards around
I saw him deal from the bottom of the deck
So I shot the gambler down

9

Now I'm down in prison
I got a number for a name
The warden says as he closed the door
You've gambled your last game

The two versions have several stanzas in common, allowing for small variations: Dylan's stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 correspond, more or less approximately to Don and Phil's 1, 5, 2, 3, 4 and 8. There are, however, also crucial divergences. The story is in a sense simplified in Dylan's version, as the narrative voices follow each other in neater sequential blocks: the gambler speaks in stanzas 1 to 4, the mother in 5, the daughter in 6, and the gambler again in 7 to 9. In Dylan's stanzas 2 and 3 the Everlys' Washington location becomes San Francisco, displacing the love-story from the safer terrain of the federal capital to the city of the 1849 gold-rush (and here we may recall Dylan's cover of 'Days of '49', on 'Self Portait'), and onetime mecca for ne'er-do-wells. Dylan's version thus comes over from the beginning as at least a touch more unrespectable.

The denouement turns out to be markedly different in the two versions. In the Everlys' rendition, as we have seen, the gambler seems to be at least partially tamed by the woman. In Dylan's stanza 7, by contrast, he abruptly breaks away from her: 'I left her in Frisco/I went up to Maine': in this avatar, the roving gambler appears unwilling to be chained down by anyone, and, as in a Dylan song like 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right', he leaves his woman for the freedom of the road - indeed, he traverses the entire breadth of the Union, from west to east coast (we might even say, from 'out west' to 'the old East coast'). Up East, in Maine, our hero encounters another gambler (the 'gamblin' man' here in stanza 7 is obviously a different character from the one of stanzas 4 and 6), and the story takes on a new twist that is totally absent from the Everlys' more discreet interpretation - Dylan's stanzas 7 to 9 having no equivalent in the earlier version.

Over these three last stanzas, a contrast is built up between the roving gambler and his adversary, until finally his career grinds to an abrupt halt. He gets into a poker game with his alter ego, the other gambler, who commits the unpardonable sin of cheating ('I saw him deal

from the bottom of the deck') - to which our hero can only respond by physically eliminating the sinner ('I shot the gambler down'). He no doubt perceives this story as a triumph of honesty over unrighteousness, but the result for him is imprisonment, depersonalisation ('I got a number for a name'), and, we may presume, the death penalty - in which case the whole tale, in Dylan's version, becomes the last confession of a condemned man, as in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Black Cat' or 'The Tell-Tale Heart'. The warden's comment: 'You've gambled your last game' dramatically closes Dylan's performance, coinciding with the last guitar chords, and those words have to be taken literally. This time the man really has gambled his last game, which wasn't the case in stanza 2: the gambler's last game has proved not to be the encounter with the woman in San Francisco, but the altercation with his foe in Maine. If in the Everlys' version the 'last game' may indeed be a gamble on a love-relationship and a rosy future, here as we listen to Dylan it is, by dark contrast, a sombre prelude to death.

It may be added here that, according to the provisional transcript posted by Ben Taylor on rmd on 26 July 1998, Dylan's 1960 version of the song is generally closer to the Everlys', and that, while adding some extra verses, it finishes as theirs does: in other words, in 1960 there is no mention of the gambler's further adventures in Maine, as in the last three stanzas of Dylan's 1997 version. It further emerges that Dylan has been 'in possession' of those three stanzas since at least 1991 (see lyrics transcript of his 1991 performance, as posted - again by Ben Taylor - on rmd on 28 July 1998).

The vast majority of the other versions that I have heard (i.e., to date, those by 32 of the 43 acts listed in Note 1 below) end as the Everlys' does, with gambler and woman leaving on the train (one example among many is Ramblin' Jack Elliott's version, which was transcribed in full by Paul Hayes on rec.music.dylan on 26 July 1998). It has, however, been suggested, at least tentatively, that the ultimate source for Dylan's variant may prove to be the Stanley Brothers' version (which I have not heard). The only versions that I have heard which conclude approximately as Dylan's does are five in number: one on a 1993 album, 'Carolina Blue' (by Lou Reid - no, no relation! -, Terry Baucom and bluegrass duo Carolina [Clay Jones and Marcus Smith]), another by Larry Sparks from his 1989 album 'Classic Bluegrass', another by Peter Rowan from 'Walls of Time' (1991), another by the Country Gentlemen from 'Country Songs Old and New' (a Folkways release from 1960), and a fifth - the only one by a well-known performer - by Jim Reeves, on 'A Legendary Performer' (1963). The Reeves version includes the following lyrics:

'The gamblers took their places,
The cards were dealt around.
I caught him dealin' from the bottom of the deck
And I shot that gambler down.

Here I am in prison,
Draggin' a ball and chain.
I can still hear that old judge say
" You've gambled your last game,
You've gambled your last game. "

This version, which was recorded, of all things, for the South African market, is also noteworthy for localising the place-names ('I've gambled down in Cape Town/Played cards in Bloemfontein/But I'm going back to Kimberley/To gamble my last game'), thus further manifesting the flexibility of this hardy annual of folksong. A further curiosity, and indirect

Dylan link, is provided by the version by British folk guitarist Martin Simpson, who offers no prison scenario, but does interpolate, as the equivalent of Dylan's stanza 3, a stanza from 'Danville Girl', the old song which provided Dylan with the starting-point for his own 'Brownsville Girl'; Simpson's Danville girl, complete with her 'Danville curl', becomes the woman who falls for the roving gambler.

As interpreted by Dylan, the gambler may be a martyr to integrity, an embodiment of the motto made famous by the counter-cultural troubadour of 1966: 'to live outside the law you must be honest'. There is also a visible link of parentage between the Roving Gambler and Dylan's own Rambling, Gambling Willie. In the traditional song, the honest gambler eliminates his cheating double - which may make him seem an emblem of integrity, yet at the same time we may ask why - in Dylan's version - he so abruptly left his 'pretty little girl' behind in San Francisco - if they were really so much in love with each other - and whether he ever intended to return to her. In Dylan's song, Willie in some ways seems the epitome of the honest outlaw, a paragon like Guthrie's Pretty Boy Floyd or Dylan's own later hero, John Wesley Harding ('But Willie had a heart of gold, and this I know is true ... He spread his money far and wide, to help the sick and poor'); yet a shadow of doubt also hovers in the air as to his complete honesty ('When you played your cards with Willie, you never really knew/Whether he was bluffin' or whether he was true'), and the chorus insistently puts it over to the listener to decide whether Willie's place is ultimately among the elect or the damned ('Wherever you are a-gamblin' now, nobody really knows'). In both songs, then, we have to conclude that the central figure comes over as heroic, yet curiously ambivalent.

In 'Roving Gambler' as in Dylan's own work, the gambler figure is far from being a one-dimensional personage - his wanderings serve, rather, to raise complex and disturbing questions. We may conclude that Dylan's fascination with the motif, across the body of his work, arises from this aspect of interrogation. The gambler is someone who walks a razor's edge, who is willing to stake his all at any moment on the fate the cards deal down to him - and who faces the twin prospects of riches and poverty with even-handed equanimity; but he could also lose his precious integrity at the drop of a card. The roving gambler's travels are one manifestation of that continual search for meaning and fulfilment which we find, again and again, in the work of Bob Dylan ('so many roads, so much at stake'); we may even wonder if in the figure of the gambler Dylan may not see something of himself as musical gambler, risking his audience again and again with his multiple, unexpected switches of genre, style and point of view. Meanwhile we may be grateful that in 1997, with the millennium looming and nearly twoscore years on from the Everly Brothers' classic version of 'Roving Gambler', Dylan should have seen fit to offer the world a remarkable, living-on-the-edge performance of an ancient song - and one performed by his younger self, so many years ago - which is still an eloquent testimony to his - and our - never-ending quest. Once again, a gift from Bob Dylan has become a part of us, and is cherished and saved.

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Note 1: Versions of 'Roving Gambler'

My own researches, plus the valuable input from email correspondents and rec.music.dylan contributors, have unearthed the existence of the following versions of 'Roving Gambler', by a total of 43 acts. Of these, I have heard 32; those still remaining unheard are marked *.

Arlo Guthrie ('Together Again in Concert' - retitled as 'Ramblin' Gamblin' Man')

Banjo Barons ('It's A Folk, Folk, Folk World'; instrumental version)

Bob Dylan ('Love Sick CD 2', 1997)

Bob Jones and the Range Hands ('Nashville's Fiddlin' Man')
 Brothers Four (1960; on 'Greatest Hits')
 Burl Ives ('Wayfarin' Stranger')
 Carolina, Lou Reid and Terry Baucom ('Carolina Blue', 1993)
 Cisco Houston (on collective album, 'American Folksay vol. I')
 Country Gentlemen ('Country Songs Old and New', 1959)
 *Crockett's Kentucky Mountaineers (78 rpm)
 *Dave Evans and River Bend ('Close to Home')
 Doug and Jack Wallin ('Family Songs and Stories From the North Carolina Mountains')
 Eddy Arnold ('Wanderin' with Eddy Arnold')
 *Elton Britt ('Best of Britt')
 Everly Brothers ('Songs Our Daddy Taught Us', 1959)
 Frankie Laine ('The Rovin' Gambler')
 George Hamilton IV ('Abilene plus More Great Folk Hits', 1997 compilation)
 *Gid Tanner and his Skillet Lickers (78 rpm)
 Glen Campbell ('The Artistry of Glen Campbell')
 *Hank Thompson ('Songs for Rounders')
 *Jack Clement ('All I Want to Do In Life')
 Jerry Reed ('Oh, What A Woman')
 Jim Reeves ('A Legendary Performer', 1963)
 Kingston Trio ('Once Upon A Time'; medley with 'This Train')
 Larry Sparks ('Classic Bluegrass', 1969)
 *Logan English
 Mac Wiseman ('20 Old-Time Country Favorites')
 Martin Simpson ('Collection'; includes an interpolated stanza from 'Danville Girl')
 *Marty Robbins ('Long Long Ago')
 *Marvin Rainwater ('Rockin' Rollin'')
 New Christy Minstrels ('New Christy Minstrels')
 Peter Case ('Peter Case Sings Like Hell', 1994)
 Peter Rowan ('Walls Of Time', 1991)
 Ramblin' Jack Elliott ('Kerouac's Last Dream', 'The Essential Jack Elliott')
 Richard Dyer-Bennett ('Songs of Ships, Seafaring Men, Watery Graves, Card Sharpers, a Giant Ram,
 an Indian Scalping and One Edible Rat', 1964; classical 'art-song')
 Robert Mitchum ('Tall Dark Stranger')
 Shady Oak Boys ('All Time Hits of the Hills'; instrumental version)
 Spider John Koerner ('Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Been')
 *Stanley Brothers
 Tennessee Ernie Ford ('Sixteen Tons', 'Greatest Hits')
 Thomas Stewart ('Songs of Gambling and the Sea and Other American Classics'; classical 'art-song')
 Walt Koken ('Hei-Wa Hoedown')
 *Welby Toomey (78 rpm)

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Note 2: Grateful acknowledgements

I posted the first draft of this essay on rec.music.dylan on 25 July 1998. This revised and expanded version could almost be considered a collective product, in the wake of the remarkable response to my ideas! Thanks to the following, whose postings on rmd and/or personal emails to me following that first draft, have provided me with useful information, clarification, details of other versions of the song, etc: Nicola Menicacci; Stephen Scobie; 'Shiphour'; Peter Stone Brown; 'Longview'; Ed Ricardo; Stephen D. Walter; 'Achilles' from Germany; Antonio Iriarte (for details of the 1991 performance); Paul Hayes (for transcribing Jack Elliott's version); Ben Taylor (for transcribing the 1960 and 1991 versions); and Michele Gilmore (for details and transcriptions of other versions, especially the 'Carolina Blue' and Jim Reeves interpretations, plus various connections and ideas).

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I will reply to all further constructive comments by email. If anyone knows whether the Everlys' recording of 'Highway 51 Blues' is available anywhere, I would be very grateful for the info. Further details of other artists' versions of 'Roving Gambler' would also be welcome, especially those starred * in the above list.

A possible source for 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts':

'The Shooting of Dan McGrew' by Robert W. Service

Christopher Rollason, 1998

A poem of 1907 by the Canadian writer Robert W. Service (1874-1958), 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew', turns out to throw some interesting light on Dylan's celebrated song from 'Blood on the Tracks' (1975), 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts'. I discovered this poem on 'World's Greatest Classic Books', a Corel CD-ROM stuffed with literary texts. The CD-ROM describes 'McGrew' as Service's 'best-known poem'; it appeared in his 'first and most popular collection', 'Songs of a Sourdough', later retitled 'The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses'. The poem is also available in: Robert W. Service, 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew and other poems' (Hancock House, Surrey (B.C., Canada), 1989).

There seems to be little doubt concerning Dylan's knowledge of this poem. It was recorded - or, rather, recited against a musical background -, under the title 'Dangerous Dan McGrew' and with fine expressiveness, by Service's fellow Canadian, the country singer Hank Snow, on his 1968 album 'Tales of the Yukon', which consists entirely of recitals of Service poems; and there are also two recordings by Lord Buckley, dating from 1959 and 1960 (the albums concerned are 'Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade' and 'Lord Buckley: Blowing His Mind (and yours too)'); the narrative is retitled 'The Ballad of Dan McGroo'). Buckley, of course, also recorded Joseph S. Newman's 'Black Cross', also known as 'Hezekiah Jones', a story-recitative brilliantly performed by Dylan in his early days (two recordings exist, from 1961 and 1962); and, indeed, a recent 'On the Tracks' article (Oliver Trager and David C. Barnett, 'Black Cross: Lord Buckley, Joseph S. Newman, and the Bob Dylan Connection', OTT No 15 Autumn 1998, pp. 18-25), goes so far as to declare that "'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts" is thought to have been partially influenced' by Buckley's version of 'Dan McGrew' (p. 24).

Service's original 'Dan McGrew' is a narrative poem in 10 stanzas whose length varies between 4, 6 and 8 lines. The elongated lines are not dissimilar to those of the Dylan song: e.g.: 'And I turned my head - and there watching him was the lady that's known as Lou' (compare, say: 'The cabaret was empty now, a sign said: "Closed for repair"'). It is set in the Yukon, Canada's very own Wild West, celebrated for its nineteenth-century gold-rush (Dylan, of course, sings of another gold-rush, in California, in his cover of 'Days of '49'), and, even today, still remote, sparsely populated, and a territory rather than a province. The poem has a first-person narrator, who is a spectator rather than a participant.

The poem begins: 'A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon'; Dylan's song has references to 'the boys' and 'the cabaret' in its first two lines. 'Back of the bar' are two figures, Dangerous Dan McGrew and 'his light-o-love, the lady that's known as Lou'. In the second stanza, a third, unidentified character enters the saloon: 'There was none could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves for a clue'. The scene is now set, with the three protagonists in play.

In the Service poem, we have Dan, Lou and the stranger. In Dylan's song, by contrast, the situation is more complex, with the triangle replaced by a foursome - Big Jim, Lily, Rosemary and the mysterious stranger, the Jack of Hearts. Dangerous Dan and Big Jim, however, are obviously similar dominating figures, while the indeterminacy that surrounds 'the lady that's known as Lou' (but is Lou her real name?) is replicated in Dylan's text for both Lily ('it was known all around that Lily had Jim's ring' - but did she?) and Rosemary ('playing the role of Big Jim's wife' - but was it only the role?).

Service's stranger is presented as a fascinating, magnetic figure: 'There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold them hard like a spell' (Dylan's Jack of Hearts has a similar inexplicable charisma: 'she'd never met anyone quite like the Jack of Hearts'). He walks up to the piano, and starts playing a ragtime tune; all listen, and the narrator comments: 'God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge, the lady that's known as Lou' (references to make-up and artificiality recur in the Dylan song, with the women in the 'dressing-room', Rosemary's 'false eyelashes', and the dye in Lily's hair).

The stranger stops playing, and confronts the whole saloon, declaring:
'Boys - he said - you don't know me, and none of you care a damn,
But I want to state, and my words are straight, and I'll bet my poke they're true,
That one of you is a hound of hell ... and that one is Dan McGrew'.
The inevitable result is a gunfight and two deaths:
'And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men lay stiff and stark;
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady that's known as Lou'.

There are obvious similarities between the two narratives. In Dylan's song, the Jack of Hearts is, almost certainly (as is made clear in the 'missing' verse recorded on the - still officially unreleased - out-take version and published in 'Lyrics'), Lily's former lover, 'the man that she dearly loved to touch'. As for Service's stranger, the narrator concludes: 'the woman that kissed him - and pinched his poke - was the lady that's known as Lou'. Both Dangerous Dan and Big Jim meet their come-uppance, while Lou and Lily survive. On the other hand, Dylan's Jack of Hearts lives to fight another day, where Service's stranger is eliminated; and the Service poem has no equivalent to the killer-martyr Rosemary (and no hanging judge either).

All this having been said, Dylan's song is far richer and more complex than the Service poem - as should be obvious from the quadrangular (not triangular) situation and the presence of extra characters like the hanging judge and the 'back-stage manager' - not to mention the additional plot element of the bank robbery, or, indeed the 'maybe down in Mexico' reference which suggests that the Jack of Hearts may not be a WASP at all (is he a Hispanic?). If Service's melodramatic poem is an influence, it is only one among several. Dylan has also, I believe, introduced material from other sources. There are plot elements in 'Lily' which suggest Mark Twain: Big Jim is 'killed by a penknife in the back', while in 'Huckleberry Finn' Pap Finn, Huck's wastrel father, also dies stabbed in the back; and Dylan's gang of robbers 'in the darkness by the river-bed' could hark back to the midnight grave-robbery scene in 'Tom Sawyer'. There are details, too, from Lewis Carroll - the figure of the Jack of Hearts, imagined as an animated playing-card ('Then he moved into the corner, face down like the Jack of Hearts'), recalls the card imagery of 'Alice in Wonderland', with its trial of the Knave of Hearts for stealing the Queen's tarts (Dylan's Jack also lives outside the law - at one point,

he appears to be just 'one more member' of the bank-robbing gang), and we may also remember Alice's final exclamation: 'you're nothing but a pack of cards!'. 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' is an enigmatic narrative of inexhaustible richness which cannot be reduced to a single source, any more than to a single meaning. It is nonetheless fascinating to discover, in Service's poem, a drama from the Canadian Wild West which sheds light on Dylan's denser and more substantial text and can help increase our appreciation of its complexities.

Notes: 1. Hank Snow is probably most famous as the composer of 'I'm Movin' On' (covered by, among others, none other than Emmylou Harris, on her live album of 1982, 'Last Date'). According to the 'Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music', Snow also made an album of Jimmie Rodgers songs, and would seem to have been one of the first to record 'A Fool Such As I' (covered by Dylan, on the 'Dylan' album and also at the Basement Tapes sessions). One of Snow's best-known recordings is of Jimmie Rodgers' 'Hobo Bill's Last Ride', which also appears in a version by Iris DeMent on the Dylan-masterminded collective opus of 1997, 'The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers - A Tribute'. So connections between Snow and Dylan are not lacking!

2. This is a revised version of an article that originally appeared on rec.music.dylan on 29 May 1997. My thanks to William Harwell, and, above all, to Michele Gilmore for her invaluable contributions. I would also point out that the first posting of this article on rmd appeared well before the 'On the Tracks' article that mentions a possible Service-'Lily' link!

'This Wheel's On Fire': unravelling the sailor's knot
Christopher Rollason, 1997

In his book of 1997, 'Invisible Republic', Greil Marcus argues that Dylan's 'Basement Tapes' songs tantalisingly, suggestively, half-raise the curtain on the dark secrets and concealed crimes of an imaginary small-town community: 'in the town made by the basement tapes no crime comes sufficiently into focus for it to become more than a rumour - or for justice to be done ... you can sense the whole town on the verge of a collective confession to a crime far greater than any simple murder' (p. 130).

On the same page, Marcus mentions 'This Wheel's on Fire', as one of the basement songs that create that sensation of impending 'confession'. However, in 'Invisible Republic' he does not really analyse the song, other than to suggest the narrator may be a demented preacher addressing a crowd (p. 133). It is doubtful whether this is the case, at least on the level of literal meaning: I find it difficult to visualise such a scene myself when I hear the song, which surely does not come over as an extended sermon. Marcus was closer to target, I suggest, when he wrote, in his 1975 sleevenotes to 'The Basement Tapes', of this song's 'slow, uncoiling menace'; to me, 'This Wheel's on Fire' seems to be about an anticipated, long-overdue settling of scores between two individuals, 'I' and 'you'.

However, Marcus' general idea of an unnamed crime does throw light on the song, and further illumination may be shed on it by - if our literary memory serves us well - unpacking the works of Edgar Allan Poe, America's great pioneer of detective and crime fiction. Formally, 'This Wheel's On Fire' is a dramatic monologue: in other words, right across the song, an imaginary character - the narrator, or 'I' - is addressing an unspecified 'you'. This 'you' may be physically present as the 'I' speaks, but is more likely to be absent - not there,

gone (long ago) and addressed only in the narrator's imagination. 'I' asks 'you' to ransack 'your' memory and own up to whatever it is that 'you' did way back in the past - in the days when the two of them were 'we'. They may have been friends, lovers, neighbours, or business partners; or else relatives: the chilling phrase in the chorus, 'Best notify my next of kin', could be addressed either by 'I' to 'you' or by 'I' to 'I', and it is far from impossible that 'you' may be one of the narrator's 'next of kin'. As in 'Tears of Rage' ('oh what dear daughter 'neath the sun/ Could treat a father so?'), one may dimly guess at a dark, long-buried family quarrel or scandal; the phrase 'next of kin' will recur bitterly, years later, in Dylan's 'In The Summertime', where an accusing finger is pointed at relatives who 'didn't want to know or see'. Plumbing the depths of memory is symbolized by the act of unpacking a suitcase (we may recall the image from 'Desolation Row' of Einstein 'with his memories in a trunk').

The narrator says he is going to 'unpack all my things': we may imagine him seated alone in a dusty, cobwebbed spare bedroom of his house (perhaps a Southern mansion, with magnolias blooming and hoot-owls moaning outside, as in 'Blind Willie McTell'), with all his old suitcases opened, the faded objects stashed in them years ago now returned to the light of day. But one of those cases was not his own - it is the property of the mysterious 'you', but still the narrator has stowed that case away for years in that room. Now he has unpacked that one too, and exposed the tell-tale object inside: something made of lace, belonging to 'you', which he 'confiscated', one day in the distant past, but hidden, not in any drawer or box of his own, but in that very case which he was holding on loan. The lace is a tell-tale sign of the bond, the complicity between the two: once 'you' sees it, there will be nowhere to hide, no going back on the past. It is not clear if it's an article of lace clothing, or, say, a lace doily or tablecloth. But whatever it is, 'I' has 'wrapped it up in a sailor's knot'. This knotted piece of lace must symbolize something that 'you' will have to own up to, but what?

Can the listener untie the knot and uncover the mystery? We may now open Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue' - his tale of 1841, generally considered the first detective story proper in literary history, and cited by Dylan in the address 'Rue Morgue Avenue' in 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' and, I believe, the Achilles-in-drag reference in 'Temporary Like Achilles' (the epigraph to Poe's tale, from the seventeenth-century English writer Sir Thomas Browne, raises the question of 'what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women' - according to the ancient Greek legend, on the island of Skyros, where the budding warrior was concealed, disguised as a girl, in a vain attempt to save him from the Trojan war that in the end proved his downfall). In Poe's story, the detective C. Auguste Dupin identifies a sailor, accessory to the murders, from a 'small piece of ribbon' left on the scene of the crime: 'this knot is one which few besides sailors can tie' (Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher and other stories', Penguin edition, p. 218). Poe's detective, then, connects a sailor's knot with the particularly horrendous murders of two women (committed, it turns out, by an escaped orang-outang belonging to the sailor). A detective slipping into Basementville might conclude that the 'sailor's knot' image is the song's tell-tale clue to the memory of a crime. Of course, things are rarely certain in the basement world, as Dylan's narrator admits: 'If I knew for sure that it was yours/ But it was oh so hard to tell.' Yet the 'I' of 'This Wheel's on Fire' seems to know one thing for sure, and that is that he and 'you' will meet again, for their final reckoning. We, listening from the outside, can't 'know for sure' if the crime was a murder or, let us imagine, an act of abandonment or betrayal. It is clear, though, as Dylan warned years later in 'Changing of the Guards', that 'wheels of fire/ (...) will offer no reward'. In that song, the fiery wheel suggests intransigence, an implacable refusal to compromise; and here, the 'I' who waits among the suitcases, rehearsing the final showdown, visibly has no intention of forgiving. It's king for king and queen for queen: the incandescent wheel will be no harbinger

of mercy, and it looks as if the unnamed 'you' will have a lot of explaining to do. It'll be quite a story, probably the last tale that person will have the chance to tell: indeed, the culminating crime may not have been committed - yet.

The sultry, overheated small-town world evoked by Dylan in 'This Wheel's on Fire' suggests not only the American South, but, more specifically, the dark, claustrophobic atmosphere of the novels and stories of that region's greatest twentieth-century writer, William Faulkner, the creator of Yoknapatawpha County and the imaginary town of Jefferson - whose real home town, Oxford, Mississippi, was of course visited by Dylan in song in his own 'Oxford Town'. In one of Faulkner's stories, 'A Rose for Emily' (1931), a reclusive spinster keeps a room in her mansion barred for four long decades: after her death, the door is broken down to reveal the skeleton of the lover she poisoned years before, lying in the bed, in the room where 'a thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to hang ... upon the valence curtains of faded rose colour, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal' ('The Viking Portable Faulkner', Penguin, 1977 reprint, p. 443). In such a musty, fusty bedchamber, with lace objects hidden inside an ancient suitcase, we can imagine, too, the menaced denouement of 'This Wheel's on Fire' taking place. In another tale of Faulkner's, 'An Odour of Verbena' (1938), the act of violence occurs in the open: Colonel Sartoris is killed in a duel by his aggrieved ex-business partner, Redmond. Immediately after, both the colonel's wife and his killer leave the town forever, by different trains: 'he walked through the middle of them ... saying no word, staring straight ahead and with his back to them, on to the station where the south-bound train was just in and got on it with no baggage, nothing, and went away from Jefferson and from Mississippi and never came back'; 'the whistle of the north-bound evening train sounded and the short broken puffs of starting where it had evidently stopped at our flag station ... " She's gone ", Aunt Jenny said, " She took the evening train. "' ('Viking Portable', pp. 189, 191-192). Both, then, decide to do what, in the 1984 version of 'Tangled Up in Blue', Dylan's narrator does - 'take that train and ride'. Here, the enigma takes the form of disappearance after the violent event: both survivors, it may be presumed, will be dominated by its memory for the rest of their lives - as is the colonel's son who narrates the story, years later. The themes that we find in Faulkner - destructive love, rivalry of ex-associates, obsessive memories and, almost literally, skeletons in the closet - suggest a possible backdrop for 'This Wheel's on Fire' and, indeed, many of the other 'Basement Tapes' songs; the Mississippi novelist too, with his persistent sense of the pressure and force of the past, could have resonated to the words 'if your memory serves you well'.

I would suggest, then, that the most likely reading of Dylan's song is that it is about a never-defined small-town scandal. However, Marcus' 'preacher' suggestion may not be without its relevance, even if only indirect (he may have been thinking of the demented 'teen preacher' of 'Memphis Blues Again', or the sinister, stalking 'preacherman' of 'Jokerman', or the hellfire 'preacher ... a-talkin' of 'Man in the Long Black Coat'). Dylan's fiery wheel may also suggest a celebrated biblical image, the wheel of Ezekiel. The Old Testament prophet tells of a mysterious wheel which he saw in a divinely-inspired vision: 'Now ... behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces (1-15). The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of beryl; and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel (16). When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went (17). As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four (18).'

This obscure and fearsome vision was to be recalled again by Dylan in a much later song, the overtly apocalyptic 'Angelina', with its terrifying 'angel with four faces'. In 'This Wheel's On

Fire', the fiery wheel, 'rolling down the road' and about to explode, may indeed have acquired some of its vague, intimidating strangeness from the vision of Ezekiel, his wheel-within-a-wheel - numinous, undefinable, ever-shifting, but beyond any doubt 'dreadful'. We may surmise that by recalling this biblical emblem Dylan's narrator is trying to enlist God on his side, implicitly terrorising his enemy and intended victim with an image of divine wrath and retribution (the book of Ezekiel elsewhere darkly threatens in fire imagery: 'Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee ... the flaming flame shall not be quenched' - 20-47). It is also worth recalling that this biblical wheel was memorably and fearsomely illustrated, in his watercolour 'Ezekiel's Vision', by none other than William Blake (1757-1827), whose poem 'Auguries of Innocence', with its celebrated line 'to see a world in a grain of sand', provided Dylan with the title and the starting-point for no less a masterpiece than 'Every Grain of Sand'.

A further link to the literary heritage may also be suggested if we recall Shakespeare's 'King Lear' - a work which was certainly present in Dylan's imagination when he composed such 'Basement Tapes' songs as 'Too Much of Nothing' and 'Nothing Was Delivered' (we need only remember Lear's 'Nothing will come of nothing' - I,1 - 92). A little before his death, the suffering king declares: 'I am bound/Upon a wheel of fire, that my own tears/Do scald like molten lead' (IV,7 - 46-48). This line - which may also connect 'This Wheel's on Fire' back to 'Tears of Rage', with its father-and-daughter theme - suggests that Dylan's own wheel of fire may symbolise not only the narrator's rage and fury, but his simultaneous feelings of anguish and guilt. He may, indeed, be full of irrevocable hate, yet also hate himself for hating.

In the lurid glow of all these fiery textual and cultural connections, we may, indeed, wish to read 'This Wheel's On Fire' as a sustained exercise in the world-view of hatred and vengeance. It is, as I have said, a dramatic monologue, with everything viewed through the narrating character's voice, and the hate is the narrator's, not necessarily Dylan's. It is the speaker, the 'I', who tells us the tale - a process emphasized by the insistent rhyming of 'tell' with 'well' in all three of the verses. That tale is finally for the listener to interpret, in the context of the basement recordings as a whole. The voice of 'This Wheel's on Fire' is but one of the contending voices that make up Basementville, and ultimately 'Tears of Rage' suggests the utopian possibility of forgiveness - 'come to me now, you know we're so alone and life is brief'. But that tell-tale sailor's knot is a warning that suitcasefuls of violence and mistreatment may have to be unpacked before that moment of forgiveness can dawn.

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A Book That No-one Can Write: 'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)'
Christopher Rollason, 1999

'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)' is a song that is probably familiar only to the more attentive and loyal of Dylan's listeners. The closing track on his 1978 album 'Street-Legal', it was performed by Dylan 33 times in that year, but he has never done it live since, nor do any cover versions appear to exist. Despite this relative obscurity, this song is an intricate, resonant and disturbing piece of writing; it is also one of those Dylan songs that on closer examination reveal themselves to be major cultural documents about the changing times we and he have had the fortune (or otherwise) to live through. It has, deservedly, received some degree of critical attention from the cognoscenti. Robert Shelton, in 'No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan' (1986; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), calls it a 'masterwork' and a 'song of anguish and prophecy' (p. 478). Stephen Scobie, in 'Alias Bob Dylan' (Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1991), devotes an appreciative page to the song, showing how it 'rises to a great emotional climax of cathartic

release' (p. 98). More recently, Antonio Iriarte, in his careful and reflective notes to his own Spanish translation of the 'Street-Legal' lyrics ('Bob Dylan - Street-Legal: Canciones de Amor y Redención', Masked Tortilla Productions, 1998; pages unnumbered; quotations translated into English by myself), stresses the difficult, non-linear nature of Dylan's narrative ('the song presents a succession of fragments of stories whose relationship is not immediately obvious'), and also brings out its dense complexity of reference, from Robert Johnson to the Bible.

'Where Are You Tonight?' seems to have been an important song to Dylan himself, even if he has not performed it since 1978. Shelton quotes Dylan as telling him in that same year, soon after the release of 'Street-Legal': 'It's true that a man is his own worst enemy, just as he is his own best friend ... It's all in those two verses of that last song' (p. 481); the double or split self is one of the song's key themes, as I shall suggest below.

This song may also appear more important if we consider it in the wider context of the Dylan canon as a whole. It is not just the last track on its album: seen in conjunction with other songs, it comes over as impregnated with the idea of *finality*. Jonathan D. Lauer, in his article 'Last Songs on Bob Dylan's Studio Albums, 1974-1993' ('On The Tracks', No 10, 1997, pp. 14-23), has suggested that 'Dylan is much concerned about his albums' song ... sequencing' (p. 14), and convincingly shows that, over the period he discusses, the last track on each studio album consistently has a special significance vis-à-vis the album as a whole. For 'Street-Legal', he argues that the importance of 'Where Are You Tonight?' is that it ends the album on a note anticipating Dylan's soon-to-come born-again conversion: 'The " long-distance train " is the Slow Train Coming.' (p. 17).

The word 'tonight' - the last word of the song's title proper, of each of the three stanzas and of the album - itself has obvious connotations of finality: the sun goes down, the day is getting dark, and something is irrevocably finished, shattered forever. Comparison with other 'last songs' on Dylan's (studio) albums reveals that no less than four other albums end with songs including the word 'tonight' - in their title, in their last verse, as their last word, or, indeed, all three. 'John Wesley Harding' ends with 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight', 'Nashville Skyline' with 'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You', 'Infidels' with 'Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight', and 'Oh Mercy' with 'Shooting Star' - final line: 'Seen a shooting star tonight slip away' -, and in the first- and third-named, 'tonight' is the last word of both song and album (Leonard Cohen, too, winds up his album 'Songs From a Room' with 'Tonight Will Be Fine'). The last-track Dylan songs mentioned all, like 'Where Are You Tonight?', centre on personal relationships, and we may also recall that the three studio albums immediately preceding 'Street-Legal' - 'Planet Waves', 'Blood on the Tracks' and 'Desire' - all conclude with songs ('Wedding Song', 'Buckets of Rain', 'Sara') focusing on that same theme.

There is something absolute in the finality of the line 'Where Are You Tonight?'. Night has come stepping in, the leaves are beginning to fall, and, in the words of Roy Orbison's celebrated lament, 'it's over'. What is over is the narrator's history with the woman, but it's also the end of more and greater things. For near on two decades now we have known, with the benefit of hindsight, that 'Where Are You Tonight?' stands at a crossroads in Dylan's personal and musical history. In terms of chronology and track sequencing (if we discount the 1978 live album), it is the *last* 'new' or 'substantive' song in the Dylan canon before 'Slow Train Coming' and, therefore, before his conversion to evangelical Christianity. If we take this circumstance into account, the reading by Lauer cited above seems, at the least, worthy of some attention. The very next song in the chronological sequence of Dylan's studio albums is 'Gotta Serve Somebody', and it is difficult to imagine a greater contrast: after the

anguished heart-searching and questioning of 'Where Are You Tonight' come a corpse-evangelist voice and a series of life-is-black-and-white certainties: 'it may be the devil or it may be the Lord/But you're still gonna have to serve somebody'.

It does appear that something had died between those two songs, something more than can be encapsulated in a relationship of one man and one woman. In an earlier article on this site, I have read Dylan's 'Tangled Up In Blue' (hereinafter TUIB) as narrating both the flowering and the death of the 1960s (after the heady, counter-cultural excitement of 'music in the cafés at night and revolution in the air', we find that the insurrectionary dream has failed to last: 'something inside of him died', 'she ... froze up inside', and all is destroyed: 'finally the bottom fell out'). 'Where Are You Tonight?' may be seen as marking a further milestone along the road of the decline of that decade's once impregnable-seeming radical values. As I shall show, there are clear connections between these two songs - even allowing for the radical difference that must, surely, underlie the contrast between what has been, in recent years, the most frequently self-performed of all Dylan's songs and another that he seems unwilling to sing at all to a live audience! Certainly, 'Where Are You Tonight?' points, in different ways, both backwards to 'Blood on the Tracks' and forwards to 'Slow Train Coming'.

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A close, stanza-by-stanza reading of the song is now in order. A few additional points are worth making, however, before we plunge into the first stanza. The text on which I shall be commenting is a transcription of what I hear Dylan sing on 'Street-Legal'; this differs at several points from that which appears in 'Lyrics' and on the 'Highway 61 Interactive' CD-ROM, and, though the divergences are relatively minor, some will be worth pointing out in the course of the analysis. Concerning the song's structure, it consists of three long stanzas, all ending in 'tonight', but with an element of variation: stanzas 1 and 3 conclude with 'Where are you tonight?', while stanza 2 ends 'If I could just find you tonight!'; the song ends repeating its own title, thus bringing itself around full circle. On the title, while I have already looked at the implications of the word 'tonight', it should also be remembered that the song has a subtitle, 'Journey Through Dark Heat', which suggests an unusually painful emotional experience, and may recall 'A Season In Hell' ('Une Saison en Enfer'), the sequence of tormented prose-poems written by Arthur Rimbaud, one of Dylan's poetic idols, in 1873 (elsewhere on 'Street-Legal', in 'True Love Tends To Forget', we hear the phrase 'this weekend in hell', which Iriarte quite rightly relates to the Rimbaud title).

I should also warn the reader that, here as with my earlier study of TUIB, I do not intend to offer a biographical reading. As in numerous other songs of this period, Dylan combines 'images and distorted facts': on to (modified) autobiographical material, the poet grafts other elements which are pure invention. As I pointed out for TUIB, Dylan has, as far as we know, never been a cook or a fisherman; nor, we may reasonably presume, has he 'worked as a postal clerk' ('Up To Me'), nor is anyone known to have accused him in the real world of shooting 'a man named Gray' and taking his wife to Italy ('Idiot Wind'). For 'Where Are You Tonight', Scobie makes the necessary point very clearly when he says that the song 'interweaves autobiographical references ... with openly fictional material (no one has ever suggested that Sara's father was " a full-blooded Cherokee ")' - loc. cit.). I shall be treating it, then, not as confession, testimony or self-vindication, but as text, on the grounds that we may reasonably assume that the narrator is not Bob Dylan as such, but a fictional character who nonetheless bears some traits of his creator.

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Stanza 1

There's a long-distance train rolling through the rain, tears on the letter that I write.
There's a woman I long to touch and I miss her so much but she's drifting like a satellite.
There's a neon light ablaze in this green smoky haze, laughter down on Elizabeth Street.
And a lonesome bell tone in that valley of stone where she bathed in a stream of pure heat.
Her father would emphasise you got to be more than street-wise, but he practised what he preached from the heart.
A full-blooded Cherokee, he predicted to me the time and the place we'd part.
There's a babe in the arms of a woman in a rage
And a long-time golden-haired stripper on stage
And she winds back the clock and she turns back the page
Of a book that no-one can write.
Oh, where are you tonight?

The song opens with a series of discrete, apparently fragmentary images, introduced by the impersonal 'there's' - a device which will recur across its length. Dylan uses this technique of serial images elsewhere - notably in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and, later, in 'Blind Willie McTell'; in this song, it creates an impression of disconnectedness, challenging the listener to make sense of the string of images and, by extension, of the chaotic world they reflect - a social universe where everything is broken.

The first image is of 'a long-distance train, rolling through the rain'. Lauer is quite right to connect this train forwards, to the Slow Train Coming - although it may be purely by way of contrast, for the train on Dylan's next album purports to make sense of the world, whereas this train seems to symbolise separation and the breakdown of communication. We can imagine that the woman has taken that train out of the city where she and the narrator lived together, for ever - as in 'Mystery Train', the famous Junior Parker/Elvis Presley song (also memorably covered by The Band, and analysed at length by Greil Marcus in his book of the same name): 'That long black train/Took my baby and gone'; and as in earlier Dylan songs like 'It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train to Cry' ('Don't say I never warned you/when your train gets lost') or 'Up To Me' ('The Union Central is pulling out'). The rain is an image of the man's sense of desolation without her, as in 'Just Like A Woman' ('tonight as I stand inside the rain') or 'You're A Big Girl Now' ('I'm back in the rain/While you are on dry land'). At the same time, the forward movement of the train - if we think back to Dylan's first album and his happy-go-lucky rendering of Roy Acuff's 'Freight Train Blues' - _also_ represents freedom - the freedom which the woman has, in recognisably late 70s fashion, claimed for herself: the freedom to live without a man, or, at least, without this man. The narrator is writing a letter, its pages stained with tears, whether of rage or of grief; it may be addressed to the woman, but there is nothing to suggest he will ever actually send it (assuming he has her address, which he probably doesn't), and even if he did, it would be pointless, for long since, we may imagine, an idiot wind has been blowing its blast of despair through 'the letters that we wrote'.

The woman is 'drifting like a satellite'; as Scobie points out, this is a strange image: 'A satellite does not normally " drift " but moves in a regular orbit around a fixed centre. The woman is something that has strayed from its appointed course.' (loc. cit.). She resembles a satellite that has come loose, and we may here recall the space station that falls out of its orbit in Stanley Kubrick's film '2001: A Space Odyssey' and, indeed, in its musical spin-off, David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' ('here am I floating in a tin-can/Far above the world/Planet

Earth is blue and there's nothing I can do'). The woman's drifting loose is felt by the man as a breakdown in the order of things: the times are out of joint. What she feels about her no doubt hard-won freedom is, of course, another matter, and not something the song tells us; but, then again, if a satellite is usually associated with communication, what this image forcibly suggests is the reverse - non-communication and mutual misunderstanding between the sexes.

The imagery now shifts from outer space to terra firma and the streets of New York City. We are given a concrete location: Elizabeth Street, a thoroughfare just a little way from both Broadway and Greenwich Village. This detail, like the earlier 'long-distance train', takes the listener back to the early 60s world of Dylan's first album, reminding the listener of 'Talkin' New York', track two on that record and, in album sequencing terms, the very first self-penned composition that Bob Dylan offered the world. But this time round, what we find there is not a footloose young minstrel cocking a defiant snook at the music business; the urban landscape of New York has turned dark and sinister, and those peals of 'laughter' are not innocent but menacing - mocking, derisive, perhaps even demonic. The 'neon light ablaze' may be one of the 'advertising signs that con' of 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)', or may be glaring above the door of the sex industry outlet that will appear at the end of the stanza. The words 'green smoky haze' cast a pall of unreality over this nocturnal cityscape, which may be one and the same as the 'valley of stone'; this is a dark geography of the mind, resembling the dead landscapes and cities of the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe (as in his 'Dream-Land' or 'The City in the Sea'). A 'lonesome bell' is tolling, perhaps from a New York church; but these are not the chimes of freedom flashing - this bell, more likely, is ringing out an anticipated requiem for the heedless inhabitants of the city that dreams, or, at the least, a memorial lament for the narrator's dead-and-buried relationship with his irrevocably lost lover. Only the memory of the woman remains, to light up the street and make some sense out of this dead universe, this city where once - whether literally or metaphorically - 'she bathed in a stream of pure heat'.

The narrator's thoughts now move to the woman's father - who, like the family of that other woman in TUIB ('her folks they said our lives together/Sure was going to be rough'), is recalled as never having believed in the relationship. He spoke the language of integrity ('he practised what he preached') and survival ('street-wise' recalls, here on its concluding track, the album title 'Street-Legal', and suggests a period where the watchword is harsh realism, not starry-eyed utopianism). However, in the father's view neither of these values was calculated to help his daughter's lover make a success of the relationship: he predicted its inevitable failure. What he predicted is, in the words actually sung by Dylan, 'the time and the place that we'd part', or, according to the 'Lyrics' text, 'the time and the place that the trouble would start'; the sense is not greatly different, but the sung version puts more emphasis on, once again, finality: her father predicted they would part, and - lo and behold, now they are sundered indeed.

The father is described as 'a full-blooded Cherokee', and this brings in a Native American element - something fairly rare in Dylan's work. Elsewhere in the songs, Native Americans appear as victims of WASP expansionism ('the cavalries charged, the Indians died' - 'With God on our Side'; 'let's start buying the place with beads' - 'Bob Dylan's 115th Dream'); while the medicine-man in 'Tombstone Blues' enters as the small-town white doctor's opposite number, but is still an ambivalent figure, by no means certainly any kind of liberator. Dylan did cover 'The Ballad of Ira Hayes', a song about a Native American written by another (Peter LaFarge), and has been closely associated with a part-Mohawk musical

collaborator (Robbie Robertson), but it would be stretching things rather to claim the pre-Columbian peoples and cultures of North America as a major thematic presence in his songwriting. There is, of course, a much stronger Mexican/Latin American element in the Dylan canon, and, indeed, on 'Street-Legal' the Cherokee father, with his power of seeing the future, may parallel the mysterious Mexican addressed in 'Señor', with his possible shamanic powers. Here in 'Where Are You Tonight?', the father's prophetic gifts suggest an ancient wisdom that may not be available to the narrator; the woman, by contrast, with her 'full-blooded Cherokee' father, must be at least a half-breed, and thus inherits something of the Native American destiny. This may mean she possesses a 'pure heat' of intuition which her ex-lover lacks; on a different tack, the song thus also associates her, with a degree of historical precocity, with the discourse of 'women and minorities' which was to become a warhead of the PC offensive of the 80s and 90s.

The next image points, indeed, not to the wisdom of earlier generations but to a conflictive future: 'there's a babe in the arms/Of a woman in a rage'. This is a far cry from the inter-generational harmony implied in 'Sara', the concluding song of Dylan's previous album. Now, the suggestion is one of angry women conditioning the coming generations against men: the battle-lines are drawn already for the gender wars of the next decades. Next, that 'woman in a rage' mutates into another female character - a denizen of the underworld, a sex-industry worker. As this woman is imagined on stage, we are once more drawn back to the world of TUIB (the sex-industry outlet of that song's fourth stanza and the 'dealing with slaves' insinuation of its sixth). I have examined some of the contradictions of the 60s notion of 'sexual liberation' that TUIB throws up, in my essay on that song; here in 'Where Are You Tonight?', any residual libertarian associations have disappeared, and the neon-light spectacle is overwhelmingly sinister.

The narrator imagines the performer winding back a clock and turning back the pages of a book. These are not routines normally associated with a sex-industry worker, and a symbolic interpretation is in order. The language ironically recalls certain moments from 'Blood on the Tracks', now relived as if in a dark mirror ('if I could only turn back the clock/To when God and her were born' - 'Shelter From the Storm'; 'then she opened up a book of poems' - TUIB). The commercial performer is acting out a ghastly parody of the erotic games which the narrator and his lover had shared in happier days; as she 'winds back the clock', she offers him a twisted and distorted reminder of the past, of what was and will return - nevermore. 'Nevermore' is the despairing refrain of Poe's famous poem 'The Raven', and, indeed, the apparently strange, arbitrary detail of the 'page/Of a book that no-one can write' may be illuminated by reference to the tortured Bostonian's writings. A book which no-one can write logically cannot be read either, and the image may thus seem to denote an impossibility (though dreams and nightmares can give shape to the impossible, as the sleep of reason brings forth monsters). However, in his collection of prose fragments known as 'Marginalia', Poe, writing in 1848, threw out a challenge to 'any ambitious man' to 'revolutionise ... the universal world of human thought': 'All that he has to do is to write and publish a very little book. Its title should be simple - a few plain words - " My Heart Laid Bare ". But - this little book must be true to its title.' Poe concluded: 'No man dare write it. No man ever will dare write it. No man could write it, even if he dared. The paper would shrivel and blaze at every touch of the fiery pen.' ('Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe', 17 vols., ed. James A. Harrison, 1902; repr. New York, AMS Press, 1965 - vol. XVI, p. 128). The challenge was, in fact, taken up by Poe's translator and admirer Charles Baudelaire (himself mentioned by Dylan in the sleeve notes to the original issue of 'Planet Waves', and in some live versions of TUIB), who entitled the private diary he kept from 1859 to 1866

'Mon coeur mis à nu', a literal rendering of 'My Heart Laid Bare'. Dylan's own song of 1982, 'Heart of Mine', could be seen as an attempt, in the wake of Poe's dark suggestion, to lay bare that tormented human heart, 'so malicious and so full of guile'. In 'Where Are You Tonight?', however, the idea seems to be either that the 'book that no-one can write' should never have been written, even if someone (the narrator?) did dare write it, or, alternatively, that such a book - laying bare a man's deepest feelings about a woman - could have been written in the old libertarian 60s, the golden age that has now ended, and could still be imagined as possible by anyone bold enough to 'turn back the page', but now, in an increasingly authoritarian and censorious age of iron, has become unwritable.

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Stanza 2

The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure, to live it you have to explode.
In that last hour of need, we entirely agreed, sacrifice was the code of the road.
I left town at dawn, with Marcel and St John, strong men belittled by doubt.
I couldn't tell her what my private thoughts were, but she had some way of finding them out.
He took dead-centre aim but he missed just the same, she was waiting, putting flowers on the shelf.
She could feel my despair as I climbed up her hair and discovered her invisible self.
There's a lion in the road, there's a demon escaped,
There's a million dreams gone, there's a landscape being raped,
As her beauty fades and I watch her undrape,
I won't, but then again, maybe I might.
Oh, if I could just find you tonight!

The second stanza begins with the narrator expressing a yearning for a communication which has become impossible. The 'profound' and 'pure' truth is something that can't be held on to; if you try to live it, it destroys you. The 'last hour of need' is a moment when an epoch is ending - the 60s are dying, libertarianism is at its last gasp, and all that remains is 'sacrifice', the desire for self-immolation as the sole means to survival. The 'million dreams gone' are the shattered dreams of the 60s: Jim Morrison's cry, 'We want the world and we want it now', the situationists' call for creativity in the streets, the 'music in the cafés at night and revolution in the air' that another Dylan narrator took into his heart for all too brief a space.

It is men who seem to lose out the most from the paradigm shift that suddenly imposes itself. The narrator's companions on a pointless quest, Marcel and St John, are called 'strong men belittled by doubt': they have lost all their bearings and end up 'belittled' and psychologically downsized. The St John figure is identified by Shelton as the 'St John of the Book of Revelation' (op. cit., p. 478), and Iriarte similarly supposes there is a reference to 'the author of the Apocalypse'. This would certainly connect with the apocalyptic elements elsewhere on 'Street-Legal', notably with the Armageddon and 'tail of the dragon' references in 'Señor'.

Communication between the sexes now seems difficult. The woman believes she has the right to pierce the narrator's intimacy: 'I couldn't tell her what my private thoughts were/But she had some way of finding them out'; and, conversely, the narrator invades her inner being ('I ... discovered her invisible self'). Neither likes what they find in the other's 'private thoughts' or 'invisible self': the moment of revelation only brings 'despair' to the narrator, and he knows well enough that the woman too 'could feel' that despair. Communication and sharing are replaced by mutual antagonism and hostility, the desire to break into the recesses of the other's being at whatever cost. The word 'despair' should alert us: we are witnessing a

spectacle of 'desperate men [and] desperate women divided', as in 'Street-Legal's' opening song, 'Changing of the Guards'.

Reliving his psychological struggle with the woman, the narrator declares, as if hyperbolically: 'I climbed up her hair'. This is actually a fairy-tale reference, in parallel to those in 'Changing of the Guards' (whose 'nightingale' and 'dog soldiers' may be traced back to Hans Andersen), but it is far from evoking a world of innocence - we are a long, long way from the family idyll of 'Sara', with the children 'playing leapfrog and hearing about Snow White'. The image of the man climbing up the woman's hair comes from 'Rapunzel', one of the old German folk-tales retold by the Brothers Grimm. Rapunzel is a damsel kept locked up in a tower by her guardian, an old witch. A prince, riding through the forest, spies her one day at her window, and Rapunzel lets down her long golden locks, allowing him to use them as a ladder. He mounts her tresses and enters the tower, and they become lovers. This goes on for a long time unbeknown to the witch; but finally she finds out, and sets the man a trap: she cuts off Rapunzel's hair and spreads it down the tower as usual. The prince climbs up, but this time to find, not his lover but a hideous old crone. In Dylan's song, we can imagine the narrator climbing up his lover's familiar tresses and entering her inner sanctum - only to find her transformed into a vengeful sorceress, the 'woman in a rage' of the first stanza or, perhaps, one of the 'treacherous young witches' of 'Changing of the Guards'.

The 'lion in the road' and the 'demon escaped' are images of aggressiveness and vengefulness. The demon suggests other satanic images from 'Street-Legal' - the 'weekend in hell' already mentioned, and the equine female called Lucifer in 'New Pony'. The demon has escaped, and all hell is let loose: the sexual liberation of the 60s has, ironically, left as its most visible legacy an abiding sense of rage, while the power and greed of global capitalism, led by the captains of American business, is destroying the planet. Dylan had warned in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' of ecological catastrophe in the third world - of poisoned waters in the heart of the 'deepest dark forest' (the consequence of the same 'Yankee power' in Latin America that he denounces in the subtitle of 'Señor'), and here we are forced to contemplate 'a landscape being raped' (a later song, 'Lord Protect My Child', laments 'a world that's been raped and defiled').

This stanza also introduces an unspecified 'he', whose presence may connect with the thrusting, male world of American capitalism. This 'he' is no doubt the woman's 'other kind of lover', the third party in the triangle. He may have won her for a time, but in the long run he seems no more likely to hold her than the aggrieved narrator: 'he took dead-centre aim but he missed just the same'. Like an archer, he aims for the woman's 'invisible self', but he misses the mark - the arrow flies off target, and while he may manage to seduce her, he cannot know her. This character is, no doubt, the same person as the arrogant 'boss', the 'man you were loving' of the third stanza.

The narrator, meanwhile, tries to compensate for his sensations of loss, fear and anger by turning back the page and reliving, in his imagination, the erotic moments he spent with the woman: 'as her beauty fades and I watch her undrape'. Stanza two thus ends, as stanza one did, with the image of a woman disrobing: but if the context the first time round was the hell of the commercial sex industry, here it is the opposite, the lost paradise of intimate and consensual eroticism. The one image both doubles and contradicts the other; desire is both darkness and light. The narrator knows the lost innocence of his encounters with the women will never recur: 'I won't, but then again, maybe I might' (he's kidding himself - it won't happen, ever again). The lament for the lost lover may also be a threnody for the lost

corporeal innocence of the 1960s and the summer of love, for the brief utopia played out by 'sexual liberation' _before_ women, and then men too, ate from the Tree of Knowledge of political correctness - when uninhibited youth was free to play Adam and Eve, and there were no sins inside the gates of Eden. We may recall the Leonard Cohen song already mentioned above, 'Tonight Will Be Fine': 'Sometimes I see her undressing for me/She's a soft naked lady like Love meant her to be/And she's moving her body so brave and so free/I've got to remember that's a fine memory'. Cohen ended his song on a warning note, aware, perhaps, that the 60s would not last for ever: 'Tonight will be fine - for a while'; Dylan's narrator cries: 'Oh, if I could just find you tonight!', knowing full well that his lover is gone, and that with her a million dreams, brave and free, have fled away too.

Ooo

Stanza 3

I fought with my twin, that enemy within, till both of us fell by the way.

Horseplay and disease is killing me by degrees, while the law looks the other way.

Your partners in crime hit me up for nickels and dimes, the man you were lovin' could never get clean.

It felt out of place, my foot in his face, but he should have stayed where his money was green.

I bit into the root of forbidden fruit with the juice running down my leg.

Then I dealt with your boss, who'd never known about loss and who always was too proud to beg.

There's a white diamond gloom on the dark side of this room, and a pathway that leads up to the stars.

If you don't believe there's a price for this sweet paradise, just remind me to show you the scars.

There's a new day at dawn and I've finally arrived.

If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived.

I can't believe it, I can't believe I'm alive,

But without you it just doesn't seem right.

Oh, where are you tonight?

Ooo

The last stanza opens with the narrator darkly contemplating his own divided self: 'I fought with my twin, that enemy within, till both of us fell by the way'. The Doppelgänger or double, symbolising a split-off part of the personality, is a frequent theme in Romantic and post-Romantic literature, appearing in the work of such major writers as E.T.A. Hoffmann ('The Devil's Elixirs'), Fyodor Dostoyevsky ('The Double') and Robert Louis Stevenson ('Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'). The theme is analysed extensively, from a psychoanalytic point of view, by Sigmund Freud's disciple Otto Rank, in his classic study of 1914, 'The Double'. Of particular interest here is Poe's treatment of the double theme, in his story of 1839, 'William Wilson'. The schoolboy Wilson is haunted by his double, who confronts him whenever he is about to commit a 'wrong' action; in adult life, he plunges into a career of crime, but is constantly pursued by the double. Finally, Wilson kills his strange pursuer, only to realise that by doing so he has in effect killed himself, becoming an outcast from society - 'dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope!' (Poe, 'The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings', Penguin edition, p. 178).

It may be claimed that Dylan has brilliantly summarised Poe's tale in one line: the fight between Wilson and his double means, in effect, that both of them 'fall by the way'. In Poe's story, Wilson's career - one of gambling, seduction and drunkenness - appears parodically

libertarian, but, equally, his double's attitude - vengefully puritanical and punitive - comes across as parodically authoritarian. Dylan has explored the notion of the divided self in other songs, before and since - 'The Man In Me', 'Jokerman' ('keeping one step ahead of the persecutor within') and, most notably, 'I and I'. The last-named song dramatises an inner conflict between libertarian and authoritarian selves ('in creation where one's nature neither honours nor forgives'/'one says to the other, " No man sees my face and lives "). In 'I and I', it is not clear which side of the personality wins; in 'Where Are You Tonight?', it seems that the two selves cancel each other out, and we may surmise that, in the world-being-born of post-60s ideology, with the two sexes no longer even trying to understand one another, men risk tearing themselves to pieces and falling by the wayside, impaled on the horns of their own contradictions.

This does not mean, however, that the 'liberated' American woman is precisely contradiction-free herself. Rather, she seems to have mixed herself up with those forces of US capitalism which she would, no doubt, profess to dismiss as inherently and negatively male. She is involved with 'partners in crime', and her 'other kind of lover' seems to be some kind of crook (Dylan sings on the album: 'The man you were lovin' could never get clean'; the 'Lyrics' text has: 'The guy you were lovin' couldn't stay clean'). Financial corruption is strongly suggested: the 'nickels and dimes' mentioned presumably stand, in a glorious understatement, for millions of greenbacks. The legal system shows the degree of objectivity we would expect to mark it in a Dylan song: 'the law looks the other way', proving no more reliable in this case than all those false-hearted judges holding grudges whom we know from such songs as 'Seven Curses', 'Percy's Song' or 'Drifter's Escape'. The character described a few lines later as the woman's 'boss' is most likely the same person as the earlier 'man you were lovin''. He may be a mafia 'boss'; or he may be the classic American businessman and perfect representative of the Reagan era, a mere three years away in time: 'your boss, who'd never known about loss and who always was too proud to beg' - arrogant, supremely self-confident and convinced that there's no success like - success. We will meet him again in later Dylan songs - in 'Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight': 'that millionaire/With the drumsticks in his pants'; in 'Foot of Pride': 'There's a retired businessman named Red/Cast down from heaven and he's out of his head/He feeds off of everyone that he can touch/He said he only deals in cash or sells tickets to a plane crash/He's not somebody that you play around with much/Miss Delilah is his, a Philistine is what she is'; and in 'Handy Dandy': 'If every bone in his body was broken he would never admit it/He got an all girl orchestra and when he says/" Strike up the band ", they hit it - Handy Dandy'. The narrator in 'Where Are You Tonight?' may be indulging in projection, gratifying his ire through false accusations against the woman and the company she keeps. However, the song may also imply a presentable case against the business leaders of the United States and some of the 'liberated' women associated with their milieux.

The woman may have been a Delilah to the narrator's Samson, but still he cannot just bury the traces of their intimate past. The 'forbidden fruit' image shows him recalling their lost moments of contact. The 'juice running down my leg' comes from Robert Johnson's 'Travellin' Riverside Blues' ('squeeze my lemon, baby, till the juice runs down my leg'), as Iriarte points out, and suggests a high degree of guilt and anguish over the relationship. The woman was once permitted fruit: times have changed, and she has become forbidden fruit. The gates of Eden have snapped shut, and the next time we hear Dylan evoke the paradise myth, it will be in 'Man Gave Names To All The Animals' and in a context of Christian orthodoxy. Meanwhile, the narrator is in his room - no doubt the room they once shared - imagining a strange presence, a 'white diamond gloom' illuminating its dark side. This detail

too may recall Edgar Allan Poe, and the spectral presence of the resurrected wife Ligeia in the tale of that name - imagined by her grieving husband returning from the dead - but in dark and destructive form - and heralded by 'a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect' (Penguin edition, p. 122). At the same time, Dylan's narrator sees in his mind's eye a 'pathway that leads up to the stars' - a promise of liberation from the past, recalling, as in 'Forever Young' ('a ladder to the stars'), the biblical legend of Jacob's ladder: 'And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.' (Genesis, 28:12). The man knows, however, that he is exiled from heaven, as he is from Eden: he challenges the absent woman with the claim that he is in possession of a 'sweet paradise', but he is being ironic in the extreme. He knows he's not in paradise: he has journeyed through the 'dark heat' of hell, and the best he can hope for is purgatory or limbo. Even so, his greatest triumph has been, quite simply, to come through it all in one piece and hang on in the land of the living: 'If I'm there in the morning, baby, you'll know I've survived'.

'Where Are You Tonight?' has some resemblances to 'Tangled Up In Blue', as we have seen earlier; both songs end with the man without the woman but proclaiming his survival. TUIB, however, ends on a more hopeful note: the narrator does more than just 'keep on keepin' on', he believes he can still 'get to her somehow'; in this song of 1978, by contrast, survival has become an end in itself. Whereas in the earlier song the spirit of the 60s is still flickering at the end, here the light seems to have gone out forever, and all the narrator can do is look back ruefully, pick up the pieces, and get on with his life as best he can in a completely different, diminished and illusion-free era.

On 'Street-Legal', 'Changing of the Guards' can be read as Dylan's dream-prediction of a conflict occurring in the future (as envisioned from 1978), between rival libertarian and authoritarian world-views - between the surviving energies of the 60s and the harsher values of the 80s and 90s. The captain and the 'ebony maid' fight for freedom in a world of 'desperate men [and] desperate women divided', of 'renegade priests and treacherous young witches'. In 'Where Are You Tonight?', we can speculate that Dylan is similarly, in some of the images, fast-forwarding to an oppressive future ('a woman in a rage', 'a lion in the road', 'a demon escaped'). The air of finality that pervades the whole song surely expresses the sensation, several years on from 'Blood on the Tracks', that the 60s and their 'million dreams' really are dead and buried.

In these circumstances, it should not seem entirely surprising that 'Where Are You Tonight?' should be followed in Dylan's chronological song sequence by 'Gotta Serve Somebody' - that, in the wake of the collapse of the libertarian dream, Dylan should, at least temporarily, should have 'set [him]self a new set of rules' and sought refuge in the authoritarian world-view of born-again Christianity ('there's only one authority, that's the authority on high'). The various parallels with the works of Edgar Allan Poe which I have suggested imply that, as the light of 60s ideals burnt out, Dylan's perception of the world stood in danger of becoming as dark and negative as that of the celebrated Gothic writer; in such circumstances, the temptation to cling tight to the 'solid rock' of a traditional and authoritative value-system may, understandably, have been immense.

However, Dylan's evangelical period did not actually last very long - the rigidity can already be seen melting on 'Shot of Love', and by 'Infidels' he was once again his old searching, questing self, certainly using religious imagery - as he always had from the beginning - but to

throw out questions to the world, not to provide prefabricated answers. Indeed, modern technology today allows the listener to press the 'repeat disc' button on the CD player, and follow up 'Where Are You Tonight?', not with 'Gotta Serve Somebody', but with 'Changing of the Guards' - and to hear that song come round again, with its message of ultimate release and the final triumph of the libertarian principle, when 'cruel death surrenders/With his pale ghost retreating between the king and the queen of swords'. When that day dawns, the 'book that no-one can write', the book of the history of man and woman, will be written anew, and will be read out aloud without fear, its words of liberation glowing like burning coal.

Note: Dylan has performed the song 33 times, all in 1978, the last performance being on 9 December in Columbia, South Carolina.

A German-language version, "'Mein entblößtes Herz:' 'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)'", trans. Rainer Vesely/Burkhard Schleser, was published in *Parking Meter: Das deutschsprachige Dylan-Magazin* (Vienna, Austria), No 9, Oct 1999, pp. 17-28.

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'Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)': a wasteland with no easy answers

Christopher Rollason, 1997, revised 1999

'Can you tell me where we're heading?': 'Señor' is a song full of questions, to which, as Dylan reminds us elsewhere, there are no easy answers. Political and religious readings are both possible, but, at least on first listening, this song propels the listener into a dark and desolate borderland world, where nothing can be taken on trust.

The song is one of the standout tracks from 'Street-Legal' (1978), and was also chosen to represent the album on the 'Biograph' box set. It has in recent years been a staple of Dylan's live shows, and there is now an official live recording (on the Japanese 'Not Dark Yet' CD single released in 1999).

The Mexican/Hispanic element is obvious enough, and can be confirmed from numerous other Dylan references to the theme, from 'Farewell' through 'Romance in Durango' to 'Caribbean Wind'. In Dylan, Mexico typically represents a world antithetical to the WASP culture of the USA - a way of being which may be more visceral and unrepressed than the rigid character-structure of the Puritans' descendants, but which is simultaneously sensed as threatening and potentially violent. In 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts', Big Jim thinks he has once before seen his rival and soon-to-be murderer, 'down in Mexico'; both 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' and 'Brownsville Girl' deal with ambivalent border experiences, respectively in Ciudad Juárez (opposite El Paso) and Brownsville, Texas (opposite Matamoros). Dylan presents Juárez as a place of seduction and corruption (that was back in 1966; today the city is, by all reports, chock-a-block with maquiladora sweatshops); as for the Brownsville Girl, she crosses over to the Mexican side and 'never came back'.

This is also the border territory whose darkness-on-the-edge-of-the-USA has recently, in the post-NAFTA era, been explored by Bruce Springsteen (following the bleeding tracks of Woody Guthrie) in 'The Ghost of Tom Joad'; we may here also invoke Allen Ginsberg's acerbic comments on NAFTA from 'Death and Fame', his very last volume of poems: 'Said the NAFTA skeleton/Get rich, Free Trade/Said the Maquiladora skeleton/Sweat shops, low paid'. The politico-economic dimension of Dylan's song should certainly not be excluded:

when 'Street-Legal' appeared in 1978, a Trotskyist publication hailed 'Señor' as 'anti-imperialist', and certainly the song's subtitle, 'Tales of Yankee Power', recalls some of Dylan's other denunciations of Uncle Sam's exploitative activities in Latin America ('it's much cheaper down in the South American towns/Where the miners work almost for nothing' - 'North Country Blues'; 'Well, the job that you used to have/They gave it to somebody down in El Salvador' - 'Union Sundown'). However, it should be stressed that 'Señor' is a complex composition, not a tract, and works on various levels at once.

The song is structured around a series of questions, directed by the narrator to his guide, who may be supposed to be a Mexican (the situation in some ways recalls Graham Greene's novel 'The Power and the Glory', where the fugitive priest is accompanied by a mestizo who is finally instrumental in his death). It is not entirely clear if the events are taking place on the US or the Mexican side of the border. However, I hazard a guess that the situation is as follows: the narrator is an American who has come down to Mexico, looking for a woman who has left him. At the moment when the song opens, he is still searching, guided by his Mexican companion, though with increasing desperation ('how long are we gonna be ridin'?), as they find themselves just under the US side, not far from Lincoln County, the south-westernmost county (at least in the nineteenth century) of New Mexico. The action proper happens in a cantina where they have stopped along the road; this location is implied in the song's topography: 'door', 'floor' and 'tables'. One may imagine the narrator sitting at a spartan wooden table, drinking beer or tequila with his guide, and meanwhile keeping his 'eyes glued to the door', just in case the woman really does show up after all.

He has probably come to Mexico by sea ('there's a wicked wind still blowin' on that upper deck'), and made a train journey into the interior before the final stage on horseback (as is clear from the verb 'ridin'' and the 'hard as leather' image, implying a saddle). The brief encounter with the woman ('she held me in her arms one time') raised in his mind a hope of transcendence or salvation which is, however, as the song opens, all but burnt out - indeed, a meeting in a 'vacant lot' can scarcely have offered much promise of plenitude.

From the beginning of the song, his hope of finding the woman ('do you know where she's hidin'?') is undercut by fears of apocalyptic disaster. He is unsure whether the road they are following leads to 'Lincoln County' (back to the USA) or to 'Armageddon'; indeed, there may not be much difference, if one recalls the 'Lincoln County War' of the 1880s, which involved Pat Garrett (the sheriff of Lincoln County) and Billy the Kid in a cycle of violence commemorated by Dylan himself in the film soundtrack that gave birth to 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door'. The name of Abraham Lincoln, the assassinated liberator, thus paradoxically only suggests, not reconciliation but yet more bloodshed. In the end, Lincoln County, or more generally the US, may actually be Armageddon, the site of the biblical last battle which Dylan was to evoke directly a few years later, in 'Are You Ready?', and again, more obliquely, in 'Angelina' ('in the valley of the giants/where the stars and stripes explode').

The hope of finding the woman, and embracing the salvation she represents, appears, then, to be illusory from the outset: the question 'will there be any comfort there, señor?' seems purely rhetorical, doomed to a negative answer. As the narrative develops, images of darkness and despair multiply: 'the tail of the dragon', suggesting fiery destruction, if not indeed the beast of the apocalypse; 'stripped and kneeled', implying masochistic humiliation (as in 'Dirge': 'man forever stripped/Acting out his folly/While his back is being whipped'); and the 'train-load of fools', symbolizing a whole society in the grip of illusion, with a

probable sly reference to the late-medieval institution of the 'ship of fools', or floating madhouse. The narrator may be in Mexico, but the epicentre of that insanity may be presumed to be in the US: the nightmare announced by the gipsy with his 'broken flag' (the Stars and Stripes?) - 'son, this ain't a dream no more, it's the real thing' - suggests a sardonic echo of the Coca-Cola song.

Yet even as the darkness encroaches, the careful listener may sense a change taking place in the narrator. At a certain point, his attitude mutates: from his initial tense halfway-house between passive acquiescence and clinging hope, he shifts towards angry revolt. The moment of change comes in the line - which at first hearing seems awkward, but reveals itself as dramatically necessary -: 'well, give me a minute, let me get it together'. At this point, the narrator can be heard suddenly gathering up all his strength ('just gotta pick myself up off the floor'), finally to confront his circumstances firmly and decidedly ('I'm ready when you are').

In the last stanza, he turns around to attack an environment he no longer has any faith in ('this place don't make sense to me no more'). We may still imagine him in the cantina, but now he no longer cares whether the woman shows up or not: he would rather smash the place up: 'Let's overturn these tables/Disconnect these cables'. This act of revolt may be read in religious terms (two critics, Aidan Day and Robert Shelton, have compared it to Christ overturning the tables of the money-changers, and Day also thinks the song anticipates Dylan's later 'Christian lyrics' - a suggestion also made by Clinton Heylin); or it may be interpreted politically, as a gesture against 'Yankee power'. On the latter point, Shelton sees the song is a 'rueful political statement' on 'American foreign policy'. I would add that the 'cables' could easily be telephone wires, and could point to the ITT company and its well-attested involvement in the CIA-backed 1973 coup in Chile (the reference in Dylan's 1981 song 'Trouble' to 'stadiums of the damned' has been interpreted as an allusion to the mass killings by the Pinochet forces in the Santiago stadium, among whose victims was the much-loved revolutionary poet and songwriter of genius, Víctor Jara; and it is interesting to note that on his 1998 tour of Latin America, Dylan included 'Señor' in the setlist on two occasions - in Buenos Aires on 5 April and, notably, in Santiago on 15 April).

Whatever exactly may be happening, the narrator is obviously rising up against his fate; self-realization through revolt now means far more to him than the lost woman. He has lost his bearings, in a wasteland that has become meaningless ('can you tell me what we're waiting for, señor?').

At this point, one may ask who this man's mysterious guide, the 'señor', actually is. Apparently a Mexican, he is a highly enigmatic figure: across the song, the narrator addresses a whole series of questions to him, without, as far as we know, receiving any answer ('is there any truth in that, señor?'; 'can you tell me who to contact here, señor?', etc.). Who is this silent companion? Heylin quotes Dylan himself (introducing 'Señor' on stage in 1978) on the genesis of the song: Dylan says he encountered an old man on a train in Mexico, 'just wearing a blanket' and looking 'a hundred and fifty years old', with fiery eyes and 'smoke coming out of his nostrils', and concluded: 'this is the man I want to talk to'. If this is how we are to imagine the 'señor', he seems hardly a realist personage at all, but some kind of dream-figure or archetype, gifted with shamanic powers (we may here also compare the 'full-blooded Cherokee' who predicts coming events in 'Where Are You Tonight?', on the same album, and the women in 'One More Cup of Coffee', on 'Desire', who '[see] the future').

By the end of the song, we may even wonder if the 'señor' exists at all in the material sense; if the narrator has not been talking all the way through to a phantom partner (in 'Every Grain of Sand', an elusive Other suggests a possible divine presence: 'sometimes I turn, there's someone there/Other times it's only me'). It is certainly significant that 'Street Legal' is the last album before Dylan's conversion and 'Christian period'. In Spanish, the word 'Señor', as well as meaning 'sir', is a form of addressing the Christian deity: could the 'señor', the narrator's imaginary companion, actually be God - a divinity sometimes present, sometimes absent, whom Dylan's traveller, as he fares onward on his journey, may believe in some of the time but not all of the time? It is just possible that the narrator may, like Graham Greene's priest, have discovered divine grace in the nick of time: this could be one reading of 'I'm ready when you are, señor' (the believer surrenders to divine grace, and to his destiny, at the moment when his God wills it). Alternatively, however, the answer to the final question - 'can you tell me what we're waiting for, señor?' - could be 'Armageddon'; and so the song would come around full circle, with the narrator staring at a bleak wasteland in renewed desperation, and the listener anxiously repeating: 'there must be some way out of here' ...

References:

- The Trotskyist publication was 'Socialist Challenge' (UK).
- The late-medieval phenomenon of the 'Ship of Fools' - 'boats that conveyed their insane cargo from town to town' - is described by Michel Foucault in 'Madness and Civilization' (1961, trans. 1967; Tavistock Publications, 1971, pp. 7-13; quote from p. 8). There is a Grateful Dead song 'Ship of Fools', on 'From the Mars Hotel' (1974), where the image seems to represent the insanity of 'straight society', as seen by the drugged eyes of 60s dissident culture.
- The Ginsberg quotation is from 'The Ballad of the Skeletons', in 'Death and Fame: Last Poems' (1993-1997), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999
- Aidan Day, 'Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan', Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1988, p. 95; Robert Shelton, 'No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan', 1986; Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987, p. 478; Clinton Heylin, 'Bob Dylan Behind the Shades: A Biography', New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991, p. 312.
- thanks also to Ben Taylor for his rmd posting of 5 October 1996, which confirms Heylin's account of the genesis of the song; and to Stephen Scobie for his posting of the same day, on the 'Lincoln County War'. More information on Lincoln County was supplied to me personally by Bob Cutrofello.
- I have commented on the official live version of 'Señor' in my review of the 'Not Dark Yet' maxi-single, also on this site.

This article first appeared on rec.music.dylan in 1997, and was later posted in the electronic magazine Lynx , No 2, <http://www.bath.ac.uk/~exxdgc/lynx.html> (also 1997). This revised version was further updated in August 1999.

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"Bob Dylan's Dream": Visions that shatter like the glass

Christopher Rollason, 2000 and 2016

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the song of 1963 "Bob Dylan's Dream", from the album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, claiming it as an important song that all but been neglected by Dylan criticism. Despite

appearing on an album that features some of Dylan's best-known protest anthems, this song paradoxically anticipates the artist's subsequent abandonment of protest, as more famously embodied in "My Back Pages" on his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, in 1964. "Bob Dylan's Dream" is viewed as a song containing significant contradictions, poised between the individual and the collective, narrating a dream that has little of the dreamlike about it, celebrating political radicalism yet distancing itself from it, and playing games with time (as Greil Marcus says of its youthful narrator, "suddenly he is an old man"). The song is also located in a broader intertextual context by being placed in relation to "Lord Franklin", the nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish ballad which Dylan learned from English folk singer Martin Carthy and on which its tune and structure are based, as well as to Martin Luther King's celebrated "I have a dream" speech, also from 1963. It is concluded that, despite Dylan's subsequent disavowal of protest as anticipated in its text, "Bob Dylan's Dream" nonetheless remains alive today as an expression of utopian aspirations channelled through art.

"I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours"
(Bob Dylan, "Talkin' World War III Blues", 1963)

To the despair of those who actually know his rich and diverse songbook, Bob Dylan is endlessly referred to in the general press worldwide through the distorting prism of a handful of clichés – "folk troubadour", "protest singer", "voice of 60s radicalism" – that apply only to his earliest years as a performer and his first few albums of originals. However, any protest singer surfacing somewhere on the planet in the global news is likely to be deceptively naturalised by the Western press as "the Chinese (or Vietnamese, or Senegalese ...) Bob Dylan". The "protest" cliché is in fact particularly inappropriate to a body of work that by now comprises 43 studio albums (plus compilations, live albums, archive releases, etc), by an artist whose officially released production in that genre, world-famous though some of it is, amounts at most to - a clutch of songs on his second and third albums; a two-song valedictory on his fourth album; a small amount of early material released years later; and a handful of one-off reprises of the genre from the 70s and 80s.¹

A protest song may be defined as either: 1) a song questioning the current state of society as a whole and calling for radical across-the-board change; or 2) a song narrating and (explicitly or implicitly) denouncing a particular situation or case of social injustice. Dylan's early work certainly contains unambiguous instances of both types. However, he did *not* actually begin his recording career as a protest artist: his first album, *Bob Dylan* (1962), despite its declared allegiance to his mentor Woody Guthrie, consisted mostly of cover versions, of which only the anonymous woman's lament "House of the Rising Sun" could be considered to verge on protest.² Of the thirteen tracks on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963), at most five could be called protest songs ("Blowin' in the Wind", "Masters of War" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" target society head-on; "Oxford Town" denounces race killings; and in "Talkin' World War III Blues", protest meets comedy). The following album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964), is the only Dylan album to contain a majority of protest songs (seven out of ten). There, Dylan takes on society as such in the title track and the utopian "When the Ship Comes In"; explores the interface between race and class in "The Lonesome Death of Hattie

¹ This category would include the single "George Jackson" (1970), "Hurricane" (on *Desire*, 1975) and the anti-war "License to Kill" (on *Infidels*, 1983).

² Among the recently released early-Dylan archive recordings, the *Minneapolis Party Tape* (recorded 1961, released 2011) features covers of certain Guthrie compositions – "Ramblin' Round", "Pastures of Plenty" - that could be described as protest songs, although of course relating to an earlier period.

Carroll” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game”; questions the official narrative of US history in “With God on Our Side”; and tells tales of dire straits among farmers (“Ballad of Hollis Brown”) and mining communities (“North Country Blues”). The period 1963-1964 also threw up a number of lesser protest songs that saw official release only much later, among them “Talkin’ John Birch Paranoid Blues”, “Let Me Die in My Footsteps” (both pulled from the final release of *Freewheelin’*), “Paths of Victory”, “John Brown”, and “The Death of Emmett Till”.³ However, when the fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, appeared in 1964, it featured a lone, somewhat impressionistic protest number (“Chimes of Freedom”) - and, to the eternal chagrin of Dylan’s politically orthodox followers, “My Back Pages”, the song commonly seen as marking its author’s farewell to protest.

In “My Back Pages”, certainly, Dylan denounces his own “self-ordained professor’s tongue / Too serious to fool”, and bids farewell to the time when, “using ideas as my maps”, he saw the world in terms of black-and-white simplicities, naive socio-political illusions that seemed “foundationed deep, somehow”. At the same time, he questions the very notion of linear time, ludically claiming that his new, more reflective self is actually younger – and so fresher and more optimistic – than the solemn, prematurely aged self that went before. The paradox is hammered home in the song’s celebrated refrain, “Ah, but I was so much older then / I’m younger than that now”.⁴ However, even before “My Back Pages”, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, the best-selling album released in May 1963, includes a prophetic song which finds Dylan projecting himself forward to a future beyond protest, and, here already, also playing games with time. That song is “Bob Dylan’s Dream”.

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For years, the recording which appeared on *Freewheelin’* was the only official version of *Bob Dylan’s Dream*. Today, however, there are two others: an alternate studio version recorded in April 1963, released in 2010 on the double CD *The Bootleg Series, vol. 9 - The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964*; and a live performance dated 10 May 1963, on the CD released in 2011, *Bob Dylan in Concert: Brandeis University 1963*. The Witmark variant is believed to have been recorded a day before the *Freewheelin’* version. The song has been performed live a total of 50 times, four times in 1963 and, in a surprising revival, 46 times on Dylan’s 1991 tour, following which it was dropped, never to reappear. It is thus very far from being a Dylan concert staple; nor is it a song that has been much covered (though there is an impressive version by Judy Collins).⁵ It has, however, certainly been listened to by large numbers of Dylan fans, given *Freewheelin’*’s considerable sales count over half a century: yet it has received only passing, if appreciative mention - flashes of insight, certainly, but of the briefest - from even such major Dylan critics as Michael Gray, Greil Marcus or Stephen Scobie.

“Bob Dylan’s Dream” is, decidedly, a very strange song. Michael Gray calls it “a song of great reflective eloquence about camaraderie, time and loss”⁶, and certainly it offers depths

³ The first three were officially released on *The Bootleg Series, vols. 1-3* (1991), the second two on *The Bootleg Series, vol. 9 - The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964* (2010); a live version of “John Brown” had appeared earlier on *MTV Unplugged* (1995).

⁴ Other than “Bob Dylan’s Dream” itself (cf. discussion of text below) and except where indicated otherwise, quotations from Dylan songs in this essay are taken from: Bob Dylan, *Lyrics 1962-2001*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004 (hereinafter referred to as *Lyrics*).

⁵ Collins’ version is on her album *Just Like A Woman: Judy Sings Dylan* (1993).

⁶ Michael Gray, sleeve notes to *Bob Dylan in Concert: Brandeis University 1963*, Columbia, 2011.

that belie its apparent simplicity. Its title suggests a uniquely personal experience (if it's Bob Dylan's dream, it's his and no-one else's), yet the tale it narrates is essentially collective. By the same token, the song seems to be claimed as Bob Dylan's creation and possession, but is actually based on an old folk ballad. It purports to be a dream, yet the events dreamed are perfectly credible from a realist perspective. It appears to be a young man's song, yet the tale it tells sounds far more like the recollections of a mature person. Stephen Scobie neatly encapsulates this paradox, referring to its "already-old youthful protagonist"⁷. The song, then, on closer inspection reveals a peculiar set of contradictions, and Greil Marcus captures its strangeness and ambiguities thus:

There he is, twenty-two, "riding on a train going west", dreaming of his true friends, his soul mates – and then suddenly he is an old man. He and his friends have long since vanished to each other ... How was it that, in 1963, his voice and guitar calling up a smoky, out-of-focus portrait, Bob Dylan was already looking back, from forty, fifty, sixty years later?⁸

However, as I shall endeavour to show, the contradictions are of a fertile nature, not breaking down into incoherence but, rather, generating a sense of the lost aspirations and shattered hopes of the 1960s.

As is well known, many of Dylan's early songs refer back musically and/or lyrically to older folk or blues compositions, usually anonymous, and on *Freewheelin'* alone there are multiple cases of such creative borrowing. "Blowin' in the Wind" derives from the freed slave's song "No More Auction Block", "Girl from the North Country" from the traditional English song "Scarborough Fair", "Bob Dylan's Blues" takes its tune from the blues standard "Stack-a-Lee", "Masters of War" reprises the English folk number "Nottamun Town", and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" revisits the ballad "Lord Randall". For its part, "Bob Dylan's Dream" has its source, as has been recognised from the beginning, in an anonymous nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish ballad, namely "Lord Franklin".

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This ballad, a first-person dramatic monologue, dates from the 1850s and tells of a real event, the ill-fated expedition by Rear Admiral Sir John Franklin (1786-1847; not actually a lord), who in 1845 led two vessels, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, in search of the North-West Passage in what are now Canadian waters. Franklin never returned: his ships were trapped in the ice. The history of the expedition is nostalgically relived in the song by the narrator, one of his sailors who lived to tell the tale. The ballad came on the scene too late to appear in the classic collections of Thomas Percy or Walter Scott, but in its language and narrative form stands firmly within the age-old tradition. Dylan learnt "Lord Franklin" (alongside "Scarborough Fair") from the English folk singer Martin Carthy, in the winter of 1962 in London. According to Nat Hentoff in his sleeve notes to *Freewheelin'*, "there he heard a singer (whose name he recalls as Martin Carthy) perform 'Lord Franklin', and that old melody found a new adapted home in 'Bob Dylan's Dream'"⁹. The singer, "whose name [Dylan recalled] as Martin Carthy" went on to become an elder statesman of the British folk world. He recorded the ballad somewhat later, on his *Second Album* in 1966: the same recording was reissued in

⁷ Stephen Scobie, *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*, Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 2004, 46.

⁸ Greil Marcus, "Hibbing High School and the 'Mystery' of Democracy", Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss (eds.). *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 3-14 (12).

⁹ Nat Hentoff, sleeve notes to *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, CBS, 1963.

1999 on a compilation CD, *A Collection*, with sleeve notes by Carthy himself on the songs, “Lord Franklin” included.¹⁰

The history of “Lord Franklin” has been unearthed in detail in a recent study by Jürgen Kloss, a German writer on folklore. His essay, published online in 2010, is entitled “‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ and ‘Lady Franklin’s Lament’”, but despite its title in fact says little about Dylan’s song, devoting most of its attention to the tangled history of the source ballad.¹¹ Kloss shows in loving detail how the song incarnated in different versions in both Scotland and northern England and was later collected under varying titles, among them “Lady Franklin’s Lament”, “Franklin’s Crew” and “The Sailor’s Dream”. He identifies a good four modern-day recordings before Carthy’s, all bunched around 1955-1956, the first being by the Canadian folk singer Wade Hemsworth in 1956, to be followed in the same year by Paul Clayton, Alan Mills and the well-known British folklorist A.L. Lloyd.

The text used here for “Lord Franklin” is that quoted in Kloss’s essay as corresponding to the Carthy recording of 1966¹². We cannot of course be sure exactly what the lyrics were that the British artist sang to Dylan, but they are unlikely to have been much different: as Kloss shows, Carthy’s version relies heavily on that of A.L. Lloyd, using five of its six stanzas (the deleted stanza evokes Lady Franklin mourning her husband, a detail which accounts for the variant title “Lady Franklin’s Lament”).

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If we now return to “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, we need in the first place to establish a default text. The song consists of seven stanzas of four lines each, with an AABB rhymescheme, thus employing the same stanza and rhyme format as “Lord Franklin”. The lyric text used as the basis for the analysis that follows is not the official text as published in successive print collections (most recently *Lyrics 1962-2001*), but the song as Dylan actually sings it on *Freewheelin’*. Effectively, there are four extant versions of the lyric: those performed on *Freewheelin’* and the Witmark and Brandeis albums, and that printed in *Lyrics*. If we take the sung *Freewheelin’* lyric as the default, a number of lyrical variants become apparent between that version and the other three. Most are very minor, but two deserve flagging. In stanza four line 1, on *Freewheelin’* and Brandeis Dylan sings “hungry hearts”, whereas Witmark and *Lyrics* have “haunted hearts”; and in stanza six line 3, *Freewheelin’* (only) has “many a first friend”, while all the other versions confine themselves to “many a friend”. The possible significance of these variants will be considered below.

The song’s title cries out for attention: this is one of the few Dylan songs - there are only three officially released ones - that actually bear a signature in their title. One of the other two, “Bob Dylan’s Blues”, is also on *Freewheelin’*; the third is “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream”,

¹⁰ Post-Carthy, there is a superb recording of the song by the Anglo-Scottish folk-rock group Pentangle, with lyrics very similar to those sung by Carthy, on their 1970 album *Cruel Sister*.

¹¹ Jürgen Kloss, “‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ & ‘Lady Franklin’s Lament’”, 2010, www.justanothertune.com/html/ladyfranklin.html (accessed 14 March 2013). The author writes: “It is well-known that Bob Dylan often has borrowed melodies and sometimes also ideas for the lyrics from so-called ‘old Folk songs’. A typical example is ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’. But in this case the story of the song that had served as the model is even more interesting and illuminating because it shows in detail how fragmentary relics of a half-forgotten broadside ballad from the 19th century can start a new life as a respected “old Folk song””.

¹² Online at: www.justanothertune.com/html/ladyfranklin.html (accessed 14 March 2013).

on *Bringing It All Back Home* from 1965.¹³ Paradoxically, if we consider that the song's structure comes from an earlier, anonymous source, the autograph signature in "Bob Dylan's Dream" reveals not a flamboyant individuality, but, rather, something more like a deliberate *unoriginality*. We may also wish to note that one of the alternate titles of "Lord Franklin" is "The Sailor's Dream". The sailor in the ballad is unnamed and scarcely individualised, and we may wonder if, in the transformation of "Lord Franklin"/ "The Sailor's Dream" into "Bob Dylan's Dream", Bob Dylan may not be making some kind of transindividual, even collective statement.

At all events, the title tells us that we are going to hear about Bob Dylan's dream, and the next question to ask is, what kind of dream is this? As it happens, the Dylan canon offers no lack of songs with the word 'dream' in their titles or texts - and, chronologically, "Bob Dylan's Dream" is the first, or at least first equal with "Talkin' World War III Blues", *Freewheelin's* other dream-song. Later, we find "Motorpsycho Nitemare", the already-mentioned "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", "Visions of Johanna", "I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine", "Series of Dreams" and "This Dream of You" - not to mention lines and phrases such as "At dawn my lover comes to me/And tells me of her dreams" ("Gates of Eden"), "Everybody's doin' somethin'/I heard it in a dream" ("Too Much Of Nothing"), "My dreams are beyond control" ("Dear Landlord"), "the violence of a summer's dream" ("Every Grain of Sand"), "you're a dream-twister" ("Jokerman"), or "Heaven blazing in my head/I dreamed a monstrous dream" ("Cross the Green Mountain"). A whole procession of major songs - "Desolation Row", "The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest", "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts", "Isis",¹⁴ "Changing of the Guards", "Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)", "Angelina", "Man in the Long Black Coat", "Dignity", "Red River Shore", "Ain't Talkin'" - unfold like dreams, with a non-naturalistic logic. Even very recently, in the title track of *Tempest* from 2012 we are told how the watchman uncannily "dreamed the *Titanic* was sinking", soon before dream morphed into reality.

And yet, the very mention of a song like "Desolation Row" or "Dignity" seems to fit uneasily with "Bob Dylan's Dream". The dream is introduced in the first stanza ("I dreamed a dream and it made me sad"), and appears to continue through four stanzas; the end of the dream is not signalled as such, but we can presume the last two stanzas to represent the dreamer's waking reflections. What, though, is going on in this dream? This song, inaugurating as it does that whole series-of-dreams across the Dylan canon, is in itself not specially dreamlike. We find little or nothing of the charged oneiric atmosphere of later dream-songs: there are no eerie lines like "we came to the pyramids all embedded in ice" ("Isis"), or "blood dryin' in my yellow hair as I go from shore to shore" ("Angelina"), or "There's smoke on the water, it's been there since June" ("Man in the Long Black Coat"). As for what the dreamer dreams of, it is, quite simply, a house and a room where he and his friends used to meet ("With half-damp eyes I stared to the room ..."). This is a perfectly plausible dream - a reliving of memories from the dreamer's past - but it remains completely within the limits of the naturalistic. Here - unlike in "Isis" or "Man in the Long Black Coat" - there is no sign of the complex distorting processes - condensation, displacement, symbolisation - which Sigmund Freud, in his monumental work of 1900, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, calls the "dream-

¹³ There is also the early, unreleased "Bob Dylan's New Orleans Rag". Inside Dylan's song texts, signature references are even fewer: Stephen Scobie identifies the line "You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy" from 'Gotta Serve Somebody' (1978), and the enigmatic phrase "slayin' Bob Dylan in my bed" from "Caribbean Wind" as performed in San Francisco on 12 November 1980 (words which do not appear in the released version) (Scobie 2004, 60-61).

¹⁴ Co-written with Jacques Levy.

work". It seems more appropriate to read this dream in terms of Aristotle's much older definition - as quoted by Freud at the beginning of his study - as "the mental activity of the sleeper".¹⁵

Meanwhile, though, who is dreaming? Superficially and from the title, the listener might presume that the dreamer is the historical individual Bob Dylan, the artist formerly known as Robert Allen Zimmerman. However, if we look again at stanza six: "Ah, many a year has passed and gone,/Many a gamble has been lost and won,/And many a road taken by many a first friend,/And each one I've never seen again", we have to conclude this cannot be the case: these are not the experiences or the sentiments of a young man in his very early twenties. The memories seem far, far away in the distant past; as Greil Marcus says, "suddenly he is an old man". The dreamer cannot be talking about his childhood: the lines: "As easy it was to tell black from white,/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right" suggest adult moral preoccupations, even if the beliefs signposted are simplistic. Nor do "weathered many a storm" or "till the early hours of the morn" point to a child's experience or habits. In addition, the significant variant "many a *first* friend", found only in the sung *Freewheelin'* text, has the effect of pushing the recollections further away from the vantage point in time of the dreamer.

The dream can only be that of a mature man – middle-aged or even older - recalling his days as a young adult. Nat Hentoff, in his sleevenotes, implies as much:

The song is a fond looking back at the easy camaraderie and idealism of the young when they were young. There is also in the Dream a wry but sad requiem for the friendships that have evaporated as different routes, geographical and otherwise, are taken¹⁶.

If this dream is Bob Dylan's dream, it is the dream of an older Bob Dylan in years to come, far removed from 1963; the historical Bob Dylan fast-forwards to create a future self, whom he then imagines re-creating the present Bob Dylan in a nostalgic, retrospective dream. The song, then, turns out to be Bob Dylan's fantasy about ... Bob Dylan dreaming about Bob Dylan!

Despite these onion-like layers of multiple selves, however, the dream is as much collective as it is individual: in the middle stanzas that describe the scenes dreamed, the dominant pronoun is not "I" but "we". The dreamer imagines himself surrounded by friends - part of a group, and, indeed, part of a movement. What is the nature of this collective experience? In stanzas two to four, the listener has the impression that it was essentially a light-hearted, non-serious way of life: "laughin' and singin' till the early hours of the morn", "jokin' and talkin' about the world outside", "we thought we could sit forever in fun". Laughter, joking, fun: such are the keywords of this part of the song. Nonetheless, the phrase "hungry hearts", in stanza four, hints at an undercurrent of seriousness, of unsatisfied and unsatisfiable yearning: it is "hungry" that Dylan sings in the *Freewheelin'* and Brandeis versions, not the more Gothic and Edgar Allan Poe-like "haunted" of the *Lyrics* and Witmark texts.¹⁷ The whole notion of joking is, in fact, highly ambivalent in Dylan's world, as a glance at the motif in some of the later songs shows. The Jokerman of the song of that name is not someone to be

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], trans. James Strachey, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, 59.

¹⁶ Hentoff (1963).

¹⁷ This intimation of restless, unsatisfied longing may have been taken up almost two decades later by Bruce Springsteen in his anthemic "Hungry Heart", on his album of 1980 *The River*.

trifled with (“You were born with a snake in both of your fists while a hurricane was blowing”); the grinning Jack of Hearts is an emissary of death; and the joker of “All Along the Watchtower” is a harbinger of chaos (“There’s too much confusion/I can’t get no relief”).

All this suggests that the laughing and joking of “Bob Dylan’s Dream” conceal something of much deeper import, and, indeed, stanza five takes the listener into quite different territory. The group of friends were not just fooling around; they were also talking about the state of the world, and they saw themselves as the standard-bearers for a whole new belief system. This is implied in the crucial lines: “As easy it was to tell black from white,/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right”. These people were idealists, with absolute faith in their utopian values and absolute certainty that they would triumph. This is the voice we hear in the prophetic tones of the early Dylan at his most portentous, as in some of the key songs on his next album: “Your old road is rapidly agein’/Please get out of the new one if you can’t lend your hand/For the times they are a-changin’” (“The Times They Are A-Changin’”), or: “And like Pharaoh’s tribe/They’ll be drowned in the tide/And like Goliath they’ll be conquered” (“When the Ship Comes In”). The message of those songs is crystal-clear: we, the New Left, the flower of revolutionary youth, are right; you, mothers and fathers, senators and congressmen, Pharaoh’s tribe, are wrong; and we are going to win!

As we know, by 1964 and *Another Side of Bob Dylan* that passionate certainty had begun to falter, and in “My Back Pages” on that album – the song which, as we saw above, is Dylan’s farewell to protest - we hear him effectively recant his early moral absolutism, declaring: “Lies that life is black and white/Spoke from my skull. I dreamed/Romantic facts of musketeers ...”. In those lines, the very word “dreamed” points back to “Bob Dylan’s Dream” and that song’s now-discarded black-and-white vision. The strange thing, however, is that in this song from *Freewheelin’* we already find Dylan, through the device of the dream, predicting the death of the movement he was, to all appearances, intensely and committedly a part of. On the same album, in “Blowin’ in the Wind”, Dylan asks rhetorically: “How many roads must a man walk down/Before you call him a man?”, implying that all those roads are part of the one road that humanity will walk down on its journey to liberation. In “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, the road returns, but strangely and deceptively. Stanza five nostalgically evokes “the one road we travelled”, but already threatens that it might one day “shatter or split”; and by the next stanza, that one road has become “many a road taken by many a first friend”. These are not the roads of “Blowin’ in the Wind”, many roads making up one; these roads are twisting, forking, pointing in a thousand contradictory directions. The group of friends splits up, each member takes a different path, “and each one I’ve never seen again”.

“Bob Dylan’s Dream”, then, seems to be anticipating the death of the 1960s, expressing the fear that the decade’s hopes of liberation would disintegrate even as they were being spun. To quote Dylan’s own lines from “Song to Woody” on his first album, “it looks like it’s a-dyin’ and it’s hardly been born”. Dylan’s dreamer bids farewell to his dream with a clear gesture of finality: “I’d give it all gladly if our lives could be like that”; the listener gets the feeling that it’s all over, the pretty people have disappeared like smoke, and things never will be “like that” again. The stark and disillusioned words of “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” - from *John Wesley Harding*, released five momentous years after *Freewheelin’* - may stand as an epitaph to the buried hopes of “Bob Dylan’s Dream”: in that later song, “visions in the final end/Must shatter like the glass”.

To illuminate “Bob Dylan’s Dream” further - and, especially, this dimension of frustrated aspirations and lost hopes – we may now look more closely at “Lord Franklin”, the ballad that underlies “Bob Dylan’s Dream” like a half-hidden, older substratum.

Dylan’s song quite visibly bases its first stanza on the opening of “Lord Franklin”. The ballad starts: “We were homeward bound one night on the deep/Swinging in my hammock I fell asleep”. Dylan transfers the scene from sea to land, and replaces the ship by a train: “While riding on a train goin’ west/I fell asleep for to take my rest”. The anonymous nineteenth-century sailor is replaced by an unidentified twentieth-century individual who, as we have seen, cannot be the barely adult Bob Dylan who wrote the song, but may represent Dylan’s future self. The song’s third and fourth lines closely follow the ballad: “I dreamed a dream and it made me sad/Concerning myself and the first few friends I ever had” / “I dreamed a dream and I thought it true,/Concerning Franklin and his gallant crew”.

Indeed, the oddly naturalistic nature of Dylan’s dream seems less strange when we realise that the dream in “Lord Franklin” is similarly undreamlike. The ballad’s narrator is an old sea-dog, a survivor from Franklin’s expedition of many years before. “Swinging in [his] hammock” in a quite different ship, he falls asleep, and relives his old experiences in dream. Here as in “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, what is dreamt is perfectly credible and possible - less dream than memory.

Stanzas two to four of “Lord Franklin” in the Carthy text correspond to stanzas two to six of “Bob Dylan’s Dream”: in the middle section of both, the narrator recounts and comments on the past. Each was a member of a group - but where in “Bob Dylan’s Dream” it was a band of equal friends, in the older song it was a crew of seamen, under the captainship of Franklin. Dylan’s source story thus has a clear hierarchical dimension which is absent from his reworking.

Despite this difference, the two songs have in common the elements of *aspiration* and *exploration*. The group of friends in “Bob Dylan’s Dream” are pre-1968 libertarians, exploring a world of joyous hedonism and collective sharing, and aspiring, with black-and-white naivety, to a better world. “Lord Franklin”, more concretely, is based on a literal, geographical project of exploration. The aim of Franklin’s voyage was to seek out the North-West Passage, the direct route from North America to Asia via the Polar Sea - a route no European had managed to navigate successfully. It is actually a complete failure: his ships are immobilised on “mountains of ice”, and Franklin and almost all his crew perish there in the “frozen ocean” (“the fate of Franklin no man may know”). Yet the narrator - a sailor who somehow lived to tell the tale - remains fascinated by Franklin’s doomed adventure, and even claims he would go through the whole thing again (“for my long-lost Franklin I would cross the main”). As the nineteenth-century voyagers explored the polar seas, so, we may surmise, the group of friends of “Bob Dylan’s Dream” explored a universe of ideas and sensations - until suddenly their world froze on them. Both songs come round full circle, with Dylan’s final stanza closely following that of “Lord Franklin”, in the rhyme of the first couplet (“vain/again” for “pain/main”) and the phrasing and emotions of the second (“Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat/I’d give it all gladly if our lives could be like that” / “Ten thousand pounds would I freely give,/To know on earth that my Franklin do live”).

There is, certainly, a sense of adventure and excitement in the ballad of Franklin. Yet the old tale also has a harsher side, for our sailor seems curiously fixated on *authority* and *power*. He is no doubt a person of quite ordinary origins, yet he is lost in admiration for his deceased

superior - whom he twice calls “my” Franklin, suggesting a quite high degree of identification.¹⁸ In addition, at some point in the ballad’s history somebody gave it the title “Lord Franklin”, thus deferentially and unhistorically elevating Sir John Franklin to a peerage which was never his. In reality - at least according to Martin Carthy’s sleevenotes to *A Collection* - Franklin’s handling of the voyage was less than competent:

What was completely unexpected, however, was that the lime juice stored in barrels became useless and half the crew of both ships died of scurvy ... The real tragedy was Franklin’s blunder in not allowing for such a contingency: he had taken along beautiful tea services, flags and dress uniforms for the celebrations when their mission was accomplished, instead of extra food supplies (Carthy 1999)¹⁹.

If the mission never was accomplished, part of the blame seems to lie with a captain not entirely worthy of the trust invested in him by his “gallant crew”. Today’s listener may also care to note certain details of Sir John Franklin’s previous career: he had served under Nelson in the battle of Trafalgar, had taken part in the naval bombardment of New Orleans in the British-American war of 1814,²⁰ and, from 1837 to 1844, had been governor of Van Diemen’s Land (today Tasmania), a colony best known as a loading-off point for transported offenders.²¹ In other words, Franklin was fully and directly identified with the British empire, and may be considered a living symbol of colonial power - of an imperial authority with which, we may speculate, the sailor-narrator of the ballad is somewhat uncritically identifying.

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Meanwhile, if “Bob Dylan’s Dream” is based on a ballad whose central adventure is grounded in what may be an undue respect for constituted authority and imperial power, we may have to conclude that the song’s early-60s utopia is seriously flawed. Dylan’s song certainly gives the impression of a lost golden time, when idealistic, hungry-hearted youth travelled joyously down “one road”. Indeed, some listeners may wish to recall an earlier revolutionary period, and William Wordsworth’s tribute, in *The Prelude*, his memoir in verse first drafted in 1805, to the heady days of the French Revolution in the first flush of the fall of the Bastille:

Bliss was in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law and statute took at once
The attraction of a country in romance! (...)
Not in Utopia, - subterraneous fields,
- Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world which is the world
Of all of us, - the place in which, in the end,

¹⁸ There may be a degree of conflation between the feelings of the crewman towards Franklin and those of Lady Franklin in the A.L. Lloyd text, despite her being edited out of the Carthy text.

¹⁹ Martin Carthy, sleevenotes to *Martin Carthy: A Collection*, Topic Records, 1999.

²⁰ That war has very recently been evoked by Dylan, on *Tempest* in the line from “Narrow Way”, “Ever since the British burned the White House down”.

²¹ Transportation from Britain to the Australian colonies was a frequent theme of nineteenth-century balladry, a notable example being “Jim Jones”, the tale of a convict exiled to Botany Bay in New South Wales, which Dylan would later record, on *Good As I Been To You* in 1992.

We find our happiness, or not at all!²²

2

However, Wordsworth had, by the end of his career, mutated into a convinced Tory and pillar of the Anglican church. Bob Dylan, as we know, soon distanced himself from the revolutionary utopian stance of his second and third albums; and in that year of years, 1968, he was taken up not with barricades and street-fighting but with the Bible-drenched metaphysics of *John Wesley Harding*. By 1975 and *Blood on the Tracks*, we find Dylan looking back on the 60s as an era that is gone for ever, as the narrator of “Tangled Up In Blue” recalls the decline and fall of his onetime counter-cultural associates, their hearts iced up like Franklin’s vessels in the polar wastes (“something inside of him died”; “she ... froze up inside”). It may be suggested, at least speculatively, that if the radical youth movement whose dynamic is implicit in “Bob Dylan’s Dream” was fated to burn itself out so fast, one of the reasons may be found by digging below the surface of that song and unearthing its substratum in “Lord Franklin”: no revolution will survive unless it comes to terms with the problem of authority. Nor will it survive unless it manages to deal with that authority, not as a purely outside force, but as a presence within - the other voice in that inner dialogue between authoritarian and libertarian selves which Dylan, years later on the *Infidels* album in 1983, was to dramatise memorably as “I and I”.

The visions of the 60s shattered like the glass; the one road shattered and split. Still, a few months after the release of *Freewheelin’* it was Martin Luther King who declared, on 28 August 1963: “I have a dream”. *Bob Dylan’s dream* in the generic sense – not the song, but the artist’s early vision - is, like King’s, a dream of utopia: a vision of universal liberation, of the breaking of bonds and barriers. In the words of King’s famous Lincoln Memorial speech: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places plains, and the crooked places will be made straight”²³.

It may be in the end that the dream is neither Bob Dylan’s nor Martin Luther King’s, but the collective waking dream of a brief yet pivotal moment in American and Western history - the memory-trace of a vision that appeared to sum up an era, and was not merely an illusion, for it bore concrete results in the real advances made in civil rights. King was assassinated; Dylan closed the book on his back pages. Dylan said “no” to protest, reclaiming his artistic freedom and aware that the heady utopian dream could not last. And yet, even so - back then, “to be young was very Heaven”, for however brief a time; and today’s listeners may even wish to conclude that one day, in their or their descendants’ lifetime, perhaps after all “our lives could be like that” once more. The dream remains that art and aspiration can remodel Wordsworth’s “very world which is the world of all of us” – perhaps less changing it through social revolution than remaking it through human creativity. Our words are told, our stories are sung: the old tales are retold, the old songs are sung afresh, and the series of dreams begins anew.

²² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text* [1805 and 1850], Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, 1805 text, lines 693-97 and 724-28.

²³ Martin Luther King, Jr., transcript of speech, Lincoln Memorial (Washington, DC), 28 August 1963, <http://www.analytictech.com/mb021/mlk.htm> (accessed 14 March 2013). Dylan mentions King by name on *Freewheelin’* (in “I Shall Be Free” - in the version actually sung on the album, though not that printed in *Lyrics*), and, years later, in his cover of Kris Kristofferson’s “They Killed Him”, on *Knocked Out Loaded* in 1986.

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Drifter's Escape: false-hearted judges and freedom flashing

Christopher Rollason, 2000

'Help me in my weakness': such is the opening cry of 'Drifter's Escape', released in 1968 as the closing track of side 1 of the 'John Wesley Harding' album (today it is track 6 on the CD). The three-stanza song - short, sharp and cutting - has had its share of live performances. It was first performed in Eugene, Oregon on 30 April 1992 (24 years after its release on record), then another eleven times that year, 25 times in 1995 and 20 times in 1996; it resurfaced in 2000). No official live version has been released; nor has the song ever been included on a Dylan compilation, although it did appear as the B-side of, at least, the UK version of the 1969 single release of 'I Threw It All Away'.

Those dramatic first words are spoken by the Drifter, the song's anonymous, eponymous protagonist, but, as we learn in line 2, they are narrated by an external observer, an unidentified 'I' who does not mention himself again in the song. This disjunction between observing 'I' and observed character is, in context, one more element in the narrative complexity that characterises the whole 'John Wesley Harding' album. Of the twelve songs, four are third-person narratives (the title track, 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest', 'All Along the Watchtower', 'The Wicked Messenger'). The other eight are narrated by a first-person 'I'; in six of these ('As I Went Out One Morning', 'I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine', 'Dear Landlord', 'I Am A Lonesome Hobo', 'Down Along The Cove', 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight'), the narrator is or becomes directly involved in the action, while in the remaining two ('I Pity the Poor Immigrant' and our present song) he is detached from it throughout, remaining an observer or commentator. We may also note that four of the songs include the pronoun 'I' in their title, while 'Dear Landlord' is, from beginning to end, the exploration of an 'I/you' relationship.

In 'Drifter's Escape', the circumstance that the 'I' makes no appearance after line 2 of stanza 1 suggests, indeed, that the whole story may be a dream, dreamed by that unspecified 'I'. Such a reading may be confirmed by reference to (obviously) 'I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine', and (arguably) 'Frankie Lee and Judas Priest', which, though narrated in the third person, unfolds like the most sinister of nightmares. 'As I Went Out One Morning' and 'The Wicked Messenger', too, can be read as darkly disturbing dreams. We may even wish to go further and read 'Drifter's Escape' as a nightmare vision of human relations (if they can be called that) in a totalitarian society - or, to qualify things somewhat, a vision of such a totalitarian world that paradoxically culminates in a stranger-than-fiction, last-ditch breakaway.

The Drifter is a man up against the law, and the song confronts the listener with all the appropriate legal lexicon: 'courtroom', 'judge', 'jury', 'trial', 'courthouse' - but also, ironically, with 'the crowd', an eminently extra-legal lynch-mob waiting outside the courthouse door. The courthouse is probably in some US small-town location, most likely in a southern or western state. The Arkansas locality in Mark Twain's 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' (1884), where, in chapters 21 and 22, a mob threatens a homicide with lynching, would fit the bill ('a man goes in the night, with a hundred masked cowards at his back, and lynches the rascal'; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 209); so too would the fictional Jefferson, Mississippi of William Faulkner's novels (the theme of lynching, actual or threatened, looms darkly in the 1949 Nobel-winner's 'Light in August' (1932) and 'Intruder in the Dust' (1948)).

The time-setting of Dylan's tale is somewhat indeterminate: analogy with other 'John Wesley Harding' songs (the title track, 'As I Went Out One Morning', or 'Dear Landlord' with its 'steamboat whistle') suggests that the Drifter's story may be set in the nineteenth century, although, as we shall see below, other factors point to the twentieth. Rather than seeking to locate Dylan's tale in a specific time and place, the listener may, however, prefer to take it as a fable of universal oppression.

Society's legal apparatus invariably comes in for a rough ride in Dylan's songs, and 'Drifter's Escape' is no exception. We may recall the 'false-hearted judges dying in the webs that they spin' of 'Jokerman', the stilt-walking judge who 'holds a grudge' of 'Most Likely You Go Your Way (and I'll Go Mine)', the judge of 'Percy's Song' who speaks 'out of the side of his mouth', the drunken hanging judge of 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts', the colour-prejudiced judges of 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' and 'Hurricane', or, possibly worst of the lot, the cynically exploitative judge of 'Seven Curses'. In 'Maggie's Farm', Maggie's exploitative Ma pontificates about 'Man and God and Law'; conversely, the narrator of 'Absolutely Sweet Marie' declares: 'To live outside the law you must be honest', implying that dishonesty belongs within the law. Worse than all this, in several key Dylan songs there is a clear perception that the whole crime-and-punishment system itself operates, in the last analysis, as a machine for crushing all dissent and difference. This dark view of society echoes in 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' ('If my thought-dreams could be seen/They'd probably put my head in a guillotine'), 'Desolation Row' ('At midnight all the agents/And the superhuman crew/Come out and round up everyone/That knows more than they do') and 'Dignity' ('Said she could get killed if she told me what she knew/'Bout Dignity'). Against such a backdrop, the tale of Dylan's drifter runs its course. At this point, we may begin to examine the song in detail, stanza by stanza.

Stanza 1

'Oh, help me in my weakness,'
I heard the drifter say,
As they carried him from the courtroom
And were taking him away.
'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.'

o0o

The drifter cries out in despair to someone, anyone, to help him escape from his terrible predicament. We may reasonably guess that he has been sentenced to death ('my time it isn't long'); and, even if the sentence were commuted, or an appeal might theoretically be possible, stanza 2 will introduce the blood-hungry crowd that will happily finish him off if the legal system doesn't. 'They' (probably the attendant and nurse of stanza 3) are 'taking him away', no doubt to a condemned cell on death row. He believes - and nothing in the song contradicts him - that he is the victim of a cruel, arbitrary and totalitarian system, in which the so-called rights of the defence are a sorry joke: 'I still do not know/What it was that I've done wrong'.

In totalitarian systems across history, and also in their literary representations, a constantly recurring motif is that of arrest and punishment for an unspecified crime, or at best a legal process in which the defendant's rights are kept to the absolute minimum. In the Portuguese-Indian colony of Goa, from 1560 to 1812, the Inquisition proceeded in the following devious fashion:

'Any Christian who was aware of any of these crimes [a list ranging from blasphemy through "reading forbidden books" to sodomy] was obliged, on pain of excommunication, to denounce the offence. The denunciation was secret, and, once it was confirmed by two witnesses who were sworn to silence, it was enough to have the suspect imprisoned: arrest usually came as a complete surprise to the unfortunate victims of the denunciation.'

(M.J. Gabriel de Saldanha, 'História de Goa (Política e Arqueológica)', 2 vols., Nova Goa [Panaji], Livraria Coelho, 1926, repr. Madras [Chennai], Asian Educational Services, 1990, vol. II, p. 155; my translation from Portuguese).

The inmates of the Goan dungeons appear to have been given some notion of the crime they was accused of, but they were never informed of the exact circumstances of their betrayal or told who had put them there ('they never knew the names of the witnesses who had deposed against them' - *ibid.*, p. 153); nor did they have the right to speak to a lawyer without an inquisitor present; and even if found innocent, they were not released until the date of the next auto-da-fé, or collective judgment, which might not be till two or three years later (p. 156).

The Guatemalan novelist and 1967 Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, in 'El Señor Presidente' (1946), a novel set in an imaginary Central American dictatorship, narrates how an opposition activist, imprisoned for 'sedition, rebellion and treason', is given his own death sentence to read at nightfall:

'He went on reading. He read in the light of a window looking on to a semi-open patio, there in the bare cell reserved for condemned prisoners. That night the Generals' War Council would meet to adopt the sentence, and they had left him there alone with a copy of the trial documents, to prepare his defence. But they had not given him the papers till the last minute. His body trembled. He read without taking it in, without pausing, tormented by the shadow eating up the manuscript, as if it were damp ash disintegrating slowly in his hands. He could scarcely read anything ... The last line, two words, a flourish, a date, the paper ... He tried in vain to see what number the page was; the night poured down on to the documents like a stain of black ink, and he collapsed exhausted on to the mass of papers, as if, instead of reading them, he had had a cord tied round his neck and been thrown into an abyss ... He tried to count and re-count the unread pages by touching them. Ninety-one. He ran the tips of his fingers over the thick folios, trying in his desperation to read like the blind ... The warders found him with the documents in his arms and the sickliness of damp streets in his mouth; they took away the papers and propelled him in silence into the meeting-room of the War Council.'

(Miguel Ángel Asturias, 'El Señor Presidente' [1946], Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1972, pp. 209-210; my translation from Spanish)

The classic twentieth-century evocation of such totalitarian practices is, of course, Franz Kafka's novel, 'The Trial' (first published posthumously in 1925), which dramatises a judicial nightmare that is arguably even worse than the practices of the Inquisition or of Latin American dictatorships, since the defendant is never told, from beginning to end, 'what it was

that he did wrong'. As many readers will recall, 'The Trial' begins: 'Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning' [my italics]. To his astonished question 'But what for?', one of the two men who arrest him in his home replies: 'We are not authorized to tell you that. Proceedings have been instituted against you, and you will be informed of everything in due course'. Needless to say, at no point in the trial that follows is K. 'informed of everything', or, indeed, of anything (Kafka, 'The Trial' ['Der Prozess', 1925], translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir, 1935; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953, repr. 1971, pp. 7, 9). A link between 'Drifter's Escape' and this novel is suggested by Robert Shelton, who, in 'No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan' (1986; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), makes the fleeting comment: 'The drifter is the Kafkaesque victim, offence unknown'; similarly, Robin Witting, in his study 'Isaiah for Guitar: A Guide to "John Wesley Harding"' (1991; rev. edn., Scunthorpe (England): Exploding Rooster Books, 1997), declares: 'As in Kafka's "Trial", ... the charge is never quite made clear: guilt precedes the offence' (p. 77).

One obvious factor that links Dylan and Kafka is Jewishness (Kafka grew up in Prague's Jewish community), and over Jewishness there hovers the shadow of the Shoah. Witting suggests a direct analogy, claiming the Drifter must be 'guilty of being born a Jew' (loc. cit.). However, I do not myself wish to suggest that 'Drifter's Escape' is actually an allegory of the Shoah (or, indeed, necessarily to privilege a 'Jewish' reading of Kafka) - among other things, because the Drifter does finally escape - though some, again, might wish to suggest an analogy between Dylan's Drifter and the legendary Wandering Jew. Still, the parallel with Josef K. is striking. Kafka's unfortunate protagonist never learns what the charges are against him - not even up to the final moment when he has his cut throat 'like a dog' ('The Trial', p. 251); Dylan's Drifter will escape at the last minute, but the legal apparatus which persecutes him seems scarcely preferable to that of Kafka's novel.

Other Dylan songs too may be connected to Kafka: Michael Gray notes possible links in some detail in a footnote to his discussion of 'Desolation Row' in 'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan' (London: Cassell, 2000), showing how Dylan calls up Franz Kafka's phantom in the eighth stanza of 'Desolation Row' ('And then the kerosene/Is brought down from the castles/By insurance men who go/Check to see that nobody is escaping/To Desolation Row'). As Gray points out, those sinister 'castles' suggest Kafka's unfinished but celebrated novel 'The Castle', first published in 1926 and best described as a bureaucratic nightmare, while the 'insurance men' recall the Prague insurance company where Kafka worked (p. 138n). To Gray's comments we may add that the key landmark of the city of Prague is the enormous, ramifying complex of buildings known as 'the Castle', and that in those lines from 'Desolation Row' the verb 'escaping' itself points forward to 'Drifter's Escape'; in addition, some have seen in the 'country doctor' of the fourth stanza of 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' a reference to a dark story of Kafka's entitled, precisely, 'The Country Doctor'. If Franz Kafka's writings stand for what Gray calls 'the powerlessness of the individual' (p. 138), the widely-held feeling of alienation and despair in the face of the impersonal systems of the twentieth century, then that Kafkaesque sensation is certainly present in 'Drifter's Escape'.

Stanza 2

Well, the judge, he cast his robe aside,
A tear came to his eye,

'You fail to understand,' he said,
'Why must you even try?'
Outside, the crowd was stirring,
You could hear it from the door.
Inside, the judge was stepping down,
While the jury cried for more.

o0o

Stanza 2 introduces the voice of the judge: the Drifter now falls silent, and will remain so up to the end. The judge has clearly already passed sentence on the hapless defendant, following the jury's verdict, and at first he seems simply to be summing things up. Throwing off his robe might perhaps be seen as a gesture confessing a common humanity, but it is more probably a sign that his day's business is over. The law has decided: to quote our judge's egregious colleague from 'Percy's Song', 'Too late, too late,/For his case it is sealed/.../His sentence is passed/And it cannot be repealed' - or, to quote the general-judge from Miguel Ángel Asturias' novel, 'There's nothing we can do. The legal delays are short, time is pressing and we're in a hurry' ('El Señor Presidente', p. 210).

And yet, for some reason, a tear comes to the judge's eye: is he crying tears of rage or tears of grief? Teardrops fall, too, in other songs on the 'John Wesley Harding' album: in 'I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine' the narrator says he 'put my fingers against the glass/And bowed my head and cried', while the Poor Immigrant's 'tears are like rain'. In both those instances, the characters are probably weeping from self-pity; here, the judge's tears may arise from the narcissistic, hurt sadness of the authority-figure whose rigid, ultra-conservative character-armour is momentarily shaken by the unfortunate existence of dissent. He chastises the Drifter like a finger-pointing headmaster: 'You fail to understand', 'Why must you even try?'. In an authoritarian social universe, to try to understand is itself a crime: the true conformist will 'understand' automatically, will passively ingest and reproduce all of society's received values, while the dissident's cardinal sin is to think about those values and begin questioning them. The judge's attitude to the Drifter may be disguised as condescending compassion, but under the surface it is that of the authorities in 'George Jackson', Dylan's protest song of 1972: 'Authorities, they hated him/Because he was just too real'.

Yet worse is to come. The judge steps down: this gesture may not be intended as an abdication of his authority, but it threatens to leave the stage free for forces even more authoritarian than himself. The jury starts to cry for 'more': suddenly not content with its own verdict, it rises in revolt. If we suppose that the Drifter has already been sentenced to death, what 'more' could the jury want? The answer is supplied by the sinister 'stirring' of the crowd outside: jury and crowd are not content with a mere judicial execution, with a state-sponsored killing validated by due process of law. They want blood: they want to lynch the drifter there and then.

The crowd cannot be seen from the courthouse, but it can be heard ('you could hear it from the door'), and everyone inside, judge, jury and accused, must surely be aware of what its 'stirring' portends. The menacing atmosphere called up by Dylan in two lines ('Outside, the crowd was stirring,/You could hear it from the door') may recall the scene in Faulkner's 'Intruder in the Dust' where a would-be lynch-mob gathers around the county jail in Jefferson, avid for the blood of a black man accused of killing a white male citizen:

'... he had got near enough to see the Square and then the mass of people lining the opposite side of the street in front of the jail ... the massed faces watching the blank brick front of the jail ... the ones which had crossed the street and even blocked it while they crowded around the sheriff's car ... patient biding and un pitying, neither to be hurried nor checked nor dispersed nor denied since theirs was the murdered and the murderer too ... theirs the right not just to mere justice but vengeance too to allot or withhold.'

(William Faulkner, 'Intruder in the Dust' [1948], London: Vintage, 1996, pp. 144-146)

Early in his career, Dylan told the sorry tale of a lynching in his (still unreleased) song 'The Death of Emmett Till', which recounts a (real) racially motivated killing in Mississippi: 'Some men they dragged him to a barn and there they beat him up/They said they had a reason, but I can't remember what/.../The reason that they killed him there, and I'm sure it ain't no lie,/Was just for the fun of killin' him and to watch him slowly die'. In 'Only A Pawn In Their Game', he showed how the Southern poor white is 'taught how to walk in a pack/To shoot in the back/... To hang and to lynch', and, indeed, 'to kill with no pain'. On 'John Wesley Harding', 'I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine' culminates in the (non-historical) lynching of the saint, in which the narrator himself becomes a participant: 'I dreamed I was amongst the ones/That put him out to death'. The crowd of 'Drifter's Escape' appear bent on short-circuiting the legal process (no appeal; no lengthy and expensive sojourn on death row) by putting their victim 'out to death', killing him 'with no pain'; and their fellow-citizens in the jury are on their side. As Stanza 2 comes to its sinister end, it seems that, indeed, the Drifter's 'time it isn't long'.

Stanza 3

'Oh, stop that cursed jury,'
Cried the attendant and the nurse,
'The trial was bad enough,
But this is ten times worse.'
Just then a bolt of lightning
Struck the courthouse out of shape,
And as everybody knelt to pray,
The drifter did escape.

oOo

Not a word more is heard from the judge; but against the tide of mass irrationality, two dissenters raise their voice - indeed, speak with one voice. The Drifter gains two unexpected allies in the attendant and the nurse, who were no doubt 'taking him away' in Stanza 1. They are peons of the legal apparatus: the nurse will remind listeners of her predecessor in 'Desolation Row', Dr Filth's nurse - 'some local loser ... in charge of the cyanide hole', a pliant functionary bound hand and foot to the system; yet it is they who speak out against the would-be lynchers when the judge remains silent. They call out to an undefined someone, 'Stop that cursed jury', though with little more prospect of success than for the Drifter's own anguished cry, 'Help me in my weakness'. Who will stop the jury and the lynch-mob? Who will help the Drifter?

If 'the trial was bad enough', the two functionaries complain, 'this is ten times worse'. It seems the scales have fallen from their eyes: they suddenly discover, not only the iniquity of the

organised legal system, but the far worse horrors of the law-of-the-jungle, summary and instant 'justice' of the lynch-mob. Dylan uses similar bad-to-worse turns of phrase in 'Tears of Rage' ('But oh, what kind of love is this/Which goes from bad to worse?'), and 'Up To Me' ('Everything went from bad to worse'). In 'Drifter's Escape', that sensation seems disturbingly prophetic. At this point in the song, civilisation itself seems to be trembling on the verge of the abyss: mob vengeance is about to take over from the legal system. One of the founding texts of Western civilisation, Aeschylus' great dramatic trilogy 'The Oresteia' (458 B.C.), narrates the process by which the endless logic of the blood-feud is supplanted by organised justice. Orestes' mother, Clytemnestra, kills his father Agamemnon; Orestes kills her in return and is pursued by the vengeful Furies, until in the final scene of the third play the goddess Athena puts an end to the cycle of violence and establishes the first court of law, the Areopagus in Athens. As the 21st century A.D. dawns nearly two-and-a-half millennia later, our present neo-conservative epoch contains within it the threat of the legal system, at least at its outer edges, breaking down once more and giving way to the atavistic, tribalist discourse of the blood-feud, as in an increasingly litigious United States (or Divided States?) victims call for direct confrontation with the accused and their relatives claim privileged status within the legal process, if not the right to watch the real or presumed offender frizzle before their eyes. The crowd of 'Drifter's Escape', a hate-filled mass clamouring for vengeance and abetted by a jury 'crying for more', may, indeed, be read in retrospect as darkly prefiguring the forces of authoritarian populism in today's America, obsessed with incarceration and the death penalty, to the point where Texas, if it were a country, would boast the highest percentage of inhabitants behind bars 'in the whole wide universe' ...

However, that last quotation was, deliberately, out of Dylan's 'Chimes of Freedom', from 1964 - a song which tells of those 'condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting' - and the crowning irony of 'Drifter's Escape' is that, for this drifter, in the end the chimes of freedom do flash. As in that earlier song ('As the echo of the wedding bells before the blowin' rain/Dissolved into the bells of the lightning'), lightning strikes to liberate. It takes the form of a literal bolt from the blue, a totally unexpected shock: 'Just then a bolt of lightning/Struck the courthouse out of shape'. The Drifter seizes the moment and disappears, while 'everybody' - that is, everyone else - kneels to pray.

That 'everybody' must encompass all the other collective and individual subjects of the tale: judge, attendant, nurse, jury and crowd. They must all, then, be praying to their god - presumably for protection from the forces of nature. Overcome by fear, all forget the Drifter - even the attendant and the nurse seem to have forgotten their momentary doubts, prodded back to orthodoxy by terror. But just who is the god they are praying to?

In a later song, 'New Pony' (1978), Dylan imagines a woman praying to a dark and destructive god: 'Oh, baby, that god you been prayin' to/Is gonna give you back what you're wishin' on someone else'. 'Angelina' (1981) offers an even more disturbing image of a man 'worshipping a god with the body of a woman well-endowed/And the head of a hyena'. Those acts of worship are individual, but in 'Shooting Star' (1989) we witness, as in 'Drifter's Escape', the collective worship of a fear-stricken crowd - 'Listen to the engine, listen to the bell/As the last firetruck from hell goes rollin' by/All good people are praying' - in a context of extreme ambivalence, as the words 'all good people' may easily be ironic, and there is no guarantee that it isn't a false god they are praying to.

From the Drifter's point of view at least, we may imagine that his adversaries are besotted with a false deity, while he himself is the solitary dissident, the one just man who alone

knows the truth. There is something miraculous in his escape: the 'bolt of lightning' that hits the courthouse may be the product of pure chance - but it may also suggest divine intervention (has his call for help, that cry which opened the song, been finally answered by some deity?). This strange event could even be read in a pagan or pre-Christian sense (the thunderbolt of Zeus); in the Bible-drenched atmosphere of 'John Wesley Harding', however, a more likely analogy is the moment in the Acts of the Apostles when the apostle Peter, incarcerated by King Herod, miraculously escapes his prison:

'And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.'

(Acts 12:7-11, King James Bible)

The light which 'shined in the prison' and Peter's deliverance 'out of the hand' of his enemies form a sequence paralleled in the finale of 'Drifter's Escape'. Later in the Dylan canon, we may note, 'In The Garden' includes an in-person appearance by Peter, while Herod is of course also the author of the Massacre of the Innocents, as mentioned in 'The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar' (in the recorded version, that is, not the 'Lyrics' text). The listener may wish to read the Drifter as the prototype of the persecuted Christians. However many Christians were martyred in the faith's early days, Christianity itself most certainly 'escaped', to become the formidable establishment force that it is today. The Drifter would then be the one true believer among a host of infidels, all fixated on false idols and bent on martyring the bearers of the light.

Nonetheless, there is also room for a more libertarian take on this song. The 'John Wesley Harding' album is most certainly pervaded with biblical language, imagery and reference; at the same time, it is not a collection of scriptural commentaries, nor is it a Christian tract. It is a work of art, and one of a highly dense and complex nature permitting multiple interpretations. Whatever kind of encounter with the world-views of the Old and New Testaments may have been going on in Dylan's mind as he recovered from the motorcycle accident, we should also remember that this album was released in, of all years, 1968, that year when there was 'revolution in the air' all across the Western world. Dylan may have pulled himself back from the edge of that revolution several years before, but it still did break out in full flame, in the year of 'John Wesley Harding'. There is no absolute reason why the Drifter's plight needs to be read as an exclusively Christian allegory: as we have seen above, his desperate straits suggest, in different ways, not only the persecution of the early Christians, but also the sufferings of the Jews in Nazi Germany or the blacks in the pre-Civil Rights American South. Equally, the song's atmosphere in some ways evokes the nineteenth century and in other ways the twentieth. It may make more sense, then, to read the Drifter's tale in universal rather than particular terms.

As we have already seen, the dramatic end of 'Drifter's Escape' powerfully recalls an earlier Dylan song of a markedly libertarian bent, namely 'Chimes of Freedom', his remarkable hymn to universal deliverance. That song is shot through by lightning, right from the beginning:

'Far between sundown's finish and midnight's broken toll
We ducked inside the doorway as thunder went crashing
As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sounds
Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing'

By the end of the song, it is clear that the repeated phrase 'the chimes of freedom flashing' has become an image of human liberation, a sign and token of hope for 'the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed', for 'the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones and worse', and, in a final inclusive gesture, for 'every hung-up person in the whole wide universe'. Dylan's Drifter of 1968, we may wish to believe, is one of those confused and accused victims of an cruel and uncomprehending society, who somehow, suddenly and miraculously, manages to escape from that society's grim clutches. The false god to whom 'everybody' prays then becomes the god of conservatism and convention, and the Drifter becomes the messenger - fragile, battered, yet ultimately resistant - of the libertarian spirit, the keeper of the flame of critical questioning. As he runs fleetfoot from the ruins of the courthouse, the only thing he knows how to do is to keep on keeping on; but when he looks back from a safe distance, at the clouds' white curtain and the flare of the lightning, he too, in relief and awe, will gaze upon the chimes of freedom flashing.

NOTE:

Performance information is from: Christof Graf, 'Bob Dylan: Man on the Road - The Never Ending Tour 1988-1999', Echternach (Luxembourg): Éditions Phi, 1999, p. 137; and: Michael Gray, 'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan', London: Cassell, 2000, pp. 864-865 and 864n (Gray describes a performance of the song in Berkeley, California, on 7 May 1992).

Of exile and integrity: 'All Along the Watchtower' and Dylan interpretation
Christopher Rollason, 2000

'If ye will inquire, inquire ye' (Isaiah 21:12)

I

'There is no new thing under the sun', declares the biblical author of Ecclesiastes (1:9), and in the Dylan community of today 'friends and other strangers' are not lacking to declare that all further interpretation of the master's texts is mere vanity.

'All Along the Watchtower' is a case in point. Not only is this one of Dylan's most familiar songs, performed live well over a thousand times, but it has long been orthodoxy in critical circles that it is essentially a biblical paraphrase, its themes and imagery taken straight out of Isaiah. If that is so, some may conclude that there is indeed 'no new thing' to say about this song.

I submit that the debate is not closed. Dylan's quintessential texts, his 'thought-dreams', are, I believe, not fixed and static; rather, they continue to generate a multiplicity of interpretations. One reason for this is that no Dylan text stands alone. Texts speak to other texts - songs connect with other songs and with other writings in the world outside: notably, and crucially for 'Watchtower' and the John Wesley Harding album in general, with the Bible, which is itself a book of books, an agglomeration of texts by multiple authors. I shall, then, propose a reading of 'Watchtower' that places Dylan's text in relation to a wider textual universe, inside and outside his own work (I shall quote the Bible in the King James version throughout). In so doing I also hope to suggest that the text of 'Watchtower' is still open today to fresh interpretations, and when we seek to understand Dylan it is not true - and with luck never will be true - that 'it's all been done before'.

II

'Watchtower' is usually sourced to Isaiah 21 and the prophet's vision of the destruction of Babylon. The first critic to popularise this reading was Anthony Scaduto (Bob Dylan; 1971; rev. edn., London: Abacus, 1973, pp. 252-253). It has since been recycled, with minor variations, by Robert Shelton (No Direction Home, 1986; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p. 393), Aidan Day (Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan, Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, pp. 132-133), and Clinton Heylin (Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, pp. 184-185). The consensus may be summarised in Heylin's words: 'The song's setting seems to be largely based on the section of Isaiah that deals with the fall of Babylon'. The 'Isaiah reading' has been further taken up by Robin Witting, who, in his booklet-length study *Isaiah for Guitar: A Guide to 'John Wesley Harding'* (1991; rev. edn., Scunthorpe (England): Exploding Rooster Books, 1997), declares that 'Watchtower' is 'a paraphrase of the Book of Isaiah in twelve lines' (pp. 59-60), but, while invoking other biblical passages in Isaiah and elsewhere, does not really go beyond an expansion of the basic Scaduto line.

Scaduto identifies the keywords and themes of Dylan's song which point back to Isaiah. The watchtower, the riders, the princes, the desert outside (with its wildcat and howling wind): all are present in chapter 21. The salient passages read: 'As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.' (21:1); 'Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes' (5); 'Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth' (6); 'behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen.' (9). This evidence seems, indeed, incontrovertible; it does strongly suggest that Dylan's song is a commentary on the dramatic words (ascribed by Scaduto to the rider) that conclude verse 9: 'And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.'. The song would then be a warning to a corrupt society (be it ancient Babylon or Dylan's USA) to mend its ways on pain of destruction; in the words of the biblical watchman, 'The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye' (21:12).

III

However, the listener may take these words in another sense, and ... inquire further. While there is no doubt that Isaiah 21 is indeed there behind the song, other biblical echoes prove to be present too. This is notably the case for line 3 of stanza 1 ('Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth'), on which I shall now concentrate in the belief that the origins of these images may illuminate a broader interpretation of the whole song.

The wine/earth (vineyards/ploughed land) collocation occurs several times in the Old Testament, typically in the context of the Great Exile of the inhabitants of Judah in Babylon, from Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem (586 BCE) to the return decreed by Cyrus (539 BCE). Much later in Isaiah, we read: 'strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowers and vinedressers.' (61:5; Witting [p. 56] notes this line, but does not relate it to the exile theme). Jeremiah, addressing the 'house of Israel', declares: 'And they shall eat up thine harvest ... they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees' (5:17), and again, more optimistically: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land'. (32:15). Amos, too, prophesying to that same 'house of Israel', offers the image of vineyards being expropriated ('ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.' - 5:11) and then repossessed ('and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof' - 9:14).

If we take all these references and consider their combined import, the parallels with 'Watchtower' appear striking. The Joker, who has lost the possession of his hereditary fields ('earth') and vineyards, seems to be one of the dispossessed Jews. Strangers (businessmen and plowmen, standing for the Babylonian invaders) are drinking his wine and digging his earth. The honest Thief in whom this serious Joker confides is no doubt a fellow Jew ('there are many here among us'), and their conversation takes place in Babylon itself, the alien city of princes (Jeremiah speaks of 'Babylon's princes' - 38:18 and 22) to which they have been deported.

And yet the same biblical context also offers the possibility of hope, of eventual return from exile (as in 'Shelter From The Storm': 'I'm livin' in a foreign country but I'm bound to cross the line'). Both Jeremiah and Amos evoke the vineyards of Judah to suggest their repossession as well as their loss. The message of 'Watchtower' may be that if the Jewish people (the Joker and Thief) put the past behind them and regain their integrity ('you and I, we've been through that ... let us not talk falsely now'), they may re-enter into their inheritance and return home. But first, Babylon itself must fall - and this, if we go back to Isaiah 21, is the message borne by the riders and the howling wind. It was, indeed, after the capture of Babylon by the Persians that Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (we may also note that years later, in 'Neighbourhood Bully' [1983], Dylan explicitly recalls the Jews' oppression at the hands of 'the great Babylon').

'Watchtower' need not be read purely as biblical commentary: the Joker and Thief (Jews) and princes and hangers-on (Babylonians) may also be interpreted more generally as being, respectively, those who lost their integrity in the past but may yet regain it, and those who have never had any integrity to lose (to quote 'Positively 4th Street', 'You had no faith to lose/And you know it'). Exile and loss of possessions would then symbolise the loss of integrity or faith.

Such a connection may be confirmed from elsewhere in the Dylan canon. The plowmen/businessmen alliance recalls 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands', where 'farmers' and 'businessmen', brandishing the spectre of 'dead angels', threaten the Lady's integrity. Loss of possessions is memorably linked with spiritual bankruptcy in both 'Tangled Up In Blue' ('She had to sell everything she owned/And froze up inside') and 'Angelina' ('Now her vengeance has been satisfied and her possessions have been sold'). The Joker and Thief, we may speculate, still have the freedom to choose, even if 'the hour is getting late'; a cataclysm is on the way, a great city will fall, but those who regain their old vision may yet recover their

inheritance. At this point, the listeners of 2000 might even want to wonder if this song - from 1968, of all years - might not have a message for those who, in today's epoch of triumphant global capitalism, still dimly recall the old lost ideals of the 1960s. But on that, of course, 'I can't think for you/You'll have to decide' ...

NOTE: A German-language version of this article was published under the title 'Über Exil und Integrität: "All Along the Watchtower" und die Dylan-Interpretation', in *Parking Meter: Das deutschsprachige Dylan-Magazin* (Vienna), No 13, Oct 2000, pp. 20-24, translation by Rainer Vesely and Burkhard Schleser.

'Shelter from the Storm' and 'Isis': Dylan's Pagan Perspective?

Christopher Rollason, 2000

Bob Dylan's all-too-well-known - and fortunately short-lived - conversion to fundamentalist Christianity in the late 70s and early 80s has tended to obscure the perhaps more interesting circumstance that a significant handful of the songs from the immediately preceding period (that covered by 'Blood on the Tracks', 'Desire', 'Street-Legal' and the associated outtakes) are marked, in their imagery, language and imaginative scope, by a very different world-view - a perspective on reality which has little to do with Christianity and is best taken as pre-Christian or, indeed, pagan. The songs of this period that are illuminated by such a reading include 'Golden Loom', 'One More Cup of Coffee', 'Changing of The Guards', and, in particular, the two that I shall discuss in this article, namely 'Shelter From the Storm' and 'Isis'.

In both cases, I shall, in the interests of clarity, confine my discussion to the 'standard' studio release of each song - i.e., for 'Shelter', the 'Blood on the Tracks' version (not the live versions released on 'Hard Rain' and 'Budokan', and not the outtake with the extra stanza issued years later on the 'Jerry McGuire' soundtrack and the first volume of the Europe/Australia 'Best of Bob Dylan' release); and, for 'Isis', the version released on 'Desire' (and not the live cut that appears on 'Biograph').

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'Shelter from the Storm' might on first hearing appear to be a Christian or proto-Christian piece of writing, with the encounter with the woman symbolising the saving grace of Christ; the 'hilltop', the 'crown of thorns' and the 'lethal dose' of 'salvation' all suggest such a reading, with the narrator occupying either the position of Christ himself or that of the believer saved by his Christian faith.

However, other elements in the song point to a very different interpretation, in terms which could be called pagan or pre-Christian. The crocodile image ('hunted like a crocodile, ravaged in the corn') is of particular interest here; the crocodile of the Nile was worshipped as a god by the ancient Egyptians. Dylan may be familiar with that animal's appearance in a classic work of English Romanticism, Thomas De Quincey's fictionalised autobiography of 1821, 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater'. De Quincey's narrator describes how, in his 'Oriental dreams', 'I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos ... I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles; and laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud' (Penguin

edition, 109). Something resembling this dream-experience of persecution and flight reappears in Dylan's lines: 'I was burnt out from exhaustion, buried in the hail/Poisoned in the bushes ... (etc)'; while the 'unutterable slimy things' may be ancestors of Dylan's 'creature void of form' traversing a road 'full of mud'. One may compare the line from 'True Love Tends to Forget', on 'Street-Legal': 'I was lying down in the reeds without any oxygen', which also suggests De Quincey's 'reeds and Nilotic mud'.

The crocodile, it may be, represents the animal within the human, the chaos that precedes creation in the history of both the universe and the individual. The Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade has argued, in his seminal work 'The Myth of the Eternal Return', that the new year ceremonies of 'archaic' or pre-Christian societies are re-runs of the primordial act of creation: rituals including animal figures are intended to reproduce the chaos that preceded creation, and the 'expulsion' of the animals symbolizes the banishment of the community's collective 'demons' and the renewed victory of creation over chaos: 'à la fin de l'année et dans l'attente du Nouvel An se répètent les moments mythiques du passage du Chaos à la cosmogonie ... cette expulsion peut se pratiquer sous la forme du renvoi rituel d'un animal [type 'bouc émissaire]' ('at the end of the year and in expectation of the New Year we find the repetition of the mythical moments of transition from chaos to cosmogony ... this expulsion may take the form of the ritual banishment of an animal "scapegoat"') ('Le mythe de l'éternel retour', Paris: Gallimard (Folio), 1969, 68, 69). In Romania today, the custom still exists of New Year revellers dressing as wolves, bears or stags. Meanwhile, Dylan's narrator may be evoking and exorcising the animal (here, the crocodile) within him, which was finally banished by the creative, saving presence of the woman.

The experience of salvation in 'Shelter from the Storm' is perceived as genuine, but not definitive or final. The narrator passes from chaos ('I came in from the wilderness/A creature void of form') to creation (symbolised by the woman 'with flowers in her hair' who 'walked up to [him] so gracefully'), and through this rebirth he enters a new life, moving from 'another lifetime' in the past to a new existence. Nonetheless, the new dispensation does not last: the narrator is remembering all the events as past occurrences ("Come in", she said ...), and the salvation offered by the woman is not permanent: 'Now there's a wall between us/Something has been lost'. At the end, he finds himself in exile once more - the 'wilderness' of the first stanza has reappeared as the 'foreign country' of the last - even though expresses the hope that he may one day rediscover the woman and the salvation he offers ('Beauty walks a razor's edge, some day I'll make it mine').

It seems, in fact, as if the narrator's experiences are not linear but circular - exile is followed by salvation, which is followed by another exile which may lead to a new salvation in the future (and so on ad infinitum?). This is, surely, not the Judeo-Christian notion of time as a straight line, with the Incarnation and Passion as part of a single chain of events, faith in which ultimately leads to salvation. As Eliade puts it, Christian time is linear where 'pagan' time is circular: for Christianity, 'le sens de (l')histoire est unique, parce que l'Incarnation est un fait unique' ('history is one-way, because the Incarnation is a single fact' - 160), whereas /for archaic societies history is 'un cycle qui se répète à l'infini ... [création, épuisement, destruction, récréation annuelle du Cosmos]' ('a cycle which repeats itself infinitely ... [creation, exhaustion, destruction, annual re-creation of the Cosmos]' - 125). It may of course be added here that, in our own day, the Hindu and Buddhist concepts of time remain far closer to this 'archaic' circular model, and thus sharply differentiate themselves from Judeo-Christian linear time.

Dylan's narrator seems to be living a non-linear cycle. He expresses the desire to 'turn back the clock to when God and her were born' - to return to communion with the woman, whose gift of love reproduced the divine act of creation in his own life; the listener may conclude that this may indeed happen, but the hands of the clock - whose dial is circular - will go on turning, and the wheel will come round again full circle. In this song, the universe is a continual succession of birth, decay, death and rebirth (from the 'one-eyed undertaker' and the 'old men with broken teeth' to the 'new-born babies wailing'). The storm will always be raging; the woman will periodically return to offer a provisional shelter, but only for a while.

Whether the linear or the cyclical conception of time offers more to humanity at this stage in its existence is a matter for each of us to decide. I do suggest, however, that in 'Shelter from the Storm', despite some Christian-derived imagery, Dylan is exploring the 'pagan' view of the universe, and is not anticipating the simplistically linear Christianity of his 'Slow Train Coming' period.

'Blood on the Tracks' was succeeded by 'Desire', an album with a very strong female presence - both musically (Emmylou Harris and Scarlet Rivera), and in the song texts ('Sara', 'Oh Sister', 'One More Cup of Coffee', 'Black Diamond Bay'). Indeed, there is on this album a certain counterpoint between 'male' and 'female' themes, with the 'typically' male figures of Hurricane [Carter] and Joey [Gallo], boxer and gangster, being played off against Isis and Sara, while all four dominate their eponymous songs.

'Isis' was, as we know, co-written by Dylan with Jacques Levy, but its close links in theme (woman) and imagery (jewels, mountains, snow) to the album's two songs penned without Levy's aid, 'Sara' and 'One More Cup of Coffee', should make it clear that what is essential in 'Isis' bears Dylan's own, unmistakable imprint. If 'Sara' is a eulogy of an elusive 'mystical wife' ('so hard to define'), 'Isis' expresses the hope that the 'mystical child', the archetypal female, may, if lost, be found again.

The narrator of 'Isis' seems to have difficulty in integrating and accepting his own female side, the creative force within symbolised by his wife Isis, who bears the name of an Egyptian goddess; and that is probably why he loses her ('I could not hold on to her'). The female protagonist is of course not literally Isis the resplendent goddess and consort of Osiris, but the ancient Egyptian associations of her name are reinforced by the dream-topography of 'pyramids' and the theme of fabulous hidden treasure. We may also recall the Nilotic crocodile of Thomas De Quincey's dreams, and, in Dylan's own work, the charismatic, Cleopatra-like female presence of 'She Belongs To Me' ('She wears an Egyptian ring, it sparkles before she speaks'). If the Isis of this song is a goddess, she is not so much the specific Isis of Egyptian mythology as the Great Goddess herself, the female deity who was worshipped under multiple names in pre-Hellenistic and classical times, before the 'three great monotheisms', with their male-centred world-view, came to dominate most of the world outside south and east Asia. In the words of Caitlin Matthews ('The Goddess', Element Books, 1991), 'The Goddess has dynamic strength and transformative wisdom as well as enfolding compassion. The Goddess stands at the heart of life, death and further existence' (24).

It is a tenet of contemporary neo-pagan thought that centuries of Judeo-Christian domination in the West have left the male subject in a torn and incomplete state, unable to communicate

on a deep level with the female principle within and without him. This is the state in which the narrator of 'Isis' finds himself as the story opens. He has lost his wife, thanks to some unexplained incompatibility whose source appears to lie in himself ('I could not hold on to her very long'). To get Isis back, he has to enter the strange, threatening dream-territory of the imagination. The landscape he traverses with his companion the body-snatcher is a winter wasteland, unfertile, unresponsive ('the cold in the north', 'the devilish cold', 'the pyramids all embedded in ice'; 'the wind it was a-howlin' and the snow was outrageous'): as in 'Girl from the North Country' ('where the winters freeze and summer ends'), the frozen north country is at the antipodes of love's warmth.

When the narrator accepts the body-snatcher's invitation, unbeknown to himself he is in fact taking the first step back to Isis. 'When I took up his offer', he says, 'I must have been mad', and yet at the end he realises that 'what drives (him) to (Isis) is what drives (him) insane': to regain Isis, he has to travel beyond the limits of what is conventionally known as reason. On the journey, the woman's symbolic presence is inescapable: the tomb, the casket and the imaginary jewels are all emblems of the female body (or, at least, Sigmund Freud would have interpreted them thus) - of that female body that he is unconsciously striving to understand and accept ('I was thinking about turquoise ... diamonds ... the world's biggest necklace').

Inside the tomb, he discovers that there are no material jewels ('no jewels, no nothing'), and no body either. He realises that the true jewel he seeks is Isis (as Sara too is a 'radiant jewel'), and that the body he is really 'trying to find' is no corpse, but the living corporeal presence of his lost-and-found wife. The empty casket shows him that his search has been misguided, but must still continue. After his companion's death he understands that it is Isis after all that he has been seeking all this time, and he now pursues her not in the cold wasteland but in a warm, sensual landscape ('in the meadow where the creek used to rise').

Having come through on the other side of his brush with death and emptiness, when they meet again he is at last able to accept both her and himself. The 'wild unknown country' of dream and the imagination has changed him ('you look different') beyond all recognition: that he's been 'no place special' is the wildest of understatements!. After the changes he has gone through, Isis too is now willing to accept him.

The narrator has crossed the 'dividing line' between life and death, light and darkness, and returned to tell the tale - and at last there is no dividing line between male and female either, no beast howling on the borderline that separates man and woman. At this moment, we may imagine that the newly enlightened husband perceives his wife Isis in all her splendour, as a living manifestation of the Goddess. Indeed, this reunion of Isis and her husband is one of the most climactic and memorable moments in all of Dylan's writing - one of those vital dream-moments, when as Dylan himself was soon to declare in 'Changing of the Guards', 'cruel Death surrenders/With his pale ghost retreating/Between the King and the Queen of swords'.

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'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum' - 'All that and more and then some'
Christopher Rollason, 2003

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"Love and Theft"¹ opens in provocative mode with Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum, a strange and disconcerting, but immediately memorable track. To some, it might sound a mere rockabilly roustabout², and one critic dismissed it on first hearing as 'self-parodic doggerel'³. By contrast, one contributor to rec.music.dylan has gone so far as to call it 'a power-based political song of the first degree - awesome in its presentation and music'⁴.

Initially, this song might indeed come over as a slice of slapstick or an exercise in nonsense verse; but with closer listening over time the disparate elements fall into place, and Dylan's weird tale takes on its true colours as a darkly powerful, questioning experience. The 1990 edition of the 'Concise Oxford Dictionary' (COD) has the following entry for the phrase 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee': 'a pair of persons or things that are virtually indistinguishable', and adds the explanatory note: 'after the stock names of rival musicians'. These two main senses are confirmed by its parent volume, the 'Oxford English Dictionary' (OED), which offers the following: 'the humorous phrase tweedledum and tweedledee, ... used in reference to two rival musicians'; 'tweedledee and tweedledum, two things or parties the difference between which is held to be insignificant'.

Denoting the names of two characters, the phrase 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee' occurs most famously, of course, in chapter 4 of the second of Lewis Carroll's two celebrated 'Alice' books, 'Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There' (1871). Michael Gray believes that Dylan drew earlier on Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' (1865) for the trial scene in Drifter's Escape⁵; and that book also has a chapter entitled 'The Pool of Tears', a phrase which recurs verbatim in Dylan's *Every Grain of Sand*. Carroll's Alice encounters the two brothers, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, in a 'cool and shady' wood⁶ ('They were standing around a tree, each with an arm around the other's neck'⁷), and the sylvan surroundings recur in Dylan's lines: 'They're throwin' knives into the tree', and 'They walk among the stately trees/They know the secrets of the breeze'. Carroll's Dum and Dee, who at first seem on good terms, end up on the verge of a fully-fledged battle before hurriedly breaking it off, and Dylan's Dee and Dum similarly move in and out of friendship and hostility. Carroll built his episode around a previously existing text, an anonymous nursery rhyme which, as he quotes it, runs:

Tweedledum and Tweedledee
Agreed to have a battle
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.
Just then flew down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar-barrel;
Which frightened both the heroes so,
They quite forgot their quarrel.

The Tweedles' story, however, goes back even further. Martin Gardner, a commentator on Carroll and editor of 'The Annotated Alice', traces our two heroes back to the eighteenth century, to a comic poem written in 1725 by John Byrom which lampoons the public rivalry between two composers. One of these was none other than George Frederick Handel; the other, rather less famous today, was Giovanni Battista Bononcini: Some say, compared to Bononcini

That Mynheer Handel's but a ninny.
Others aver that he to Handel

Is scarcely fit to hold a candle.
Strange all this difference should be
Twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee.⁸

Martin adds: 'No one knows whether the nursery rhyme about the Tweedle brothers originally had reference to this famous musical battle, or whether it was an older rhyme from which Byrom borrowed in the last line of his doggerel'⁹. Be that as it may, Byrom's lines confirm the COD reference to 'the stock names of rival musicians', and also supply the earliest example of the phrase given by the OED¹⁰. It is interesting to note additionally that Bononcini and the composer of 'The Messiah' were, like Dylan's Tweedle brothers, a pair of business partners who did not always see eye to eye: the 'Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music' tells us that 'in 1719 Handel, in association with Bononcini (...), was a musical director of the so-called Royal Academy of Music (not a college but a business venture to produce Italian opera' - which lasted eight years, finally closing in 1727 'because of lack of support'¹¹.

This musical connection is underscored by a concealed reference to another musician at least as celebrated as Handel, namely Elvis Presley. Dylan's pronunciation of the brothers' names, all the way through, is actually rather strange: on each occurrence he sings 'Tweed-e- Lee-Dee' and 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dum', instead of the more usual pronunciation (as given in the COD and, indeed, as in line with the spelling) 'Tweed-ul-Dee' and 'Tweed-ul-Dum'. Dylan's quattrosyllabic variant is simultaneously more comic and more 'musical', offering a triple and then a double assonance ('ee'-'/ee'-'ee' and 'ee'-'/ee') which are absent from the more orthodox pronunciation. This seemingly eccentric piece of wordplay has a history. 'The Hayride Sessions', an album of very early live Presley material from 1955¹², recorded for the Shreveport, Louisiana radio show 'Hayride', includes a song, composed by Winfield Scott, entitled 'Tweedle Dee'¹³. This minor Elvis number turns out to be a rockabilly workout, with lyrics best described as a harmless slice of amiable nonsense. Sample lines include: 'Tweedle tweedle tweedle dee/I'm as happy as can be/Jiminy cricket, jiminy jack/You make my heart go clickety-clack/Tweedle tweedle tweedle dee', and: 'Tweedle dum, tweedle do/Give that kiss to me before you go'. This recording's Shreveport origin merits mention in view of the Louisiana associations of Dylan's song, which we shall look at below (Shreveport is named in Wanted Man, the still-unreleased Dylan number best known as covered by another Southerner, Johnny Cash). What is of most interest, however, for our purposes, is that Elvis pronounces our two heroes' names as ... 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dee' and 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dum'!

This Elvis recording is surely one of the multiple influences, musical and literary, that bubble and boil under the surface of Dylan's song, and it is surely also the main source for 3 Dylan's pronunciation of the twin combatants' names. Back in 1990, in T.V. Talkin' Song, Dylan suggested, in a different context: 'Sometimes you gotta do like Elvis did', and here we find him doing just that! Further back again, in 1966, Dylan gave us, in Tombstone Blues, the remarkable image of Ma Rainey in bed with Beethoven in an arresting marriage of popular and classical music and 'low' and 'high' art - and now, in the sources that form the backdrop to this strange song of 2001, we find Handel, composer of 'The Messiah' and court musician to George I of England, rubbing shoulders with a King of a rather different kind. The Tweedle brothers à la Dylan may not be musicians themselves, but the song as a whole abounds with musical connotations and references, from Elvis through Robert Johnson ('I've got love for you, and it's all in vain'¹⁴) to Billie Holiday ('all that and more and then some'¹⁵); and all of that suggests that in the song's title Dylan may, indeed, be making an oblique reference to himself too, as a maker of music¹⁶.

Beyond all this, Dylan also, and daringly, evokes the biblical legend of the origins of music. A careful reading of the Book of Genesis yields the uncomfortable discovery that music is, for the Judeo-Christian tradition, an invention of the race of Cain. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, we read how Cain and his family took refuge in the Land of Nod. The King James Bible declares: 'And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden' (4:16)¹⁷. There they built the first city, to which Cain gave the name Enoch, and there too it was that Cain's descendant Jubal made the first musical instruments: 'and he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ' (4:21). The story of Cain is one of the founding myths of the Judeo-Christian world-view (it also appears, in a somewhat different form, in the Koran). The extreme complexity of the biblical narrative is, however, not always recognised. After killing his brother and thus bringing death into the world, Cain is punished, not with the eternal wandering ascribed to him in many later appropriations, but with a finite term of wandering ('a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth' - 4:12), which is followed by what appears to be divine authorisation to settle down with his kin and build a city. His descendants include the originators, not only of music but of certain practical arts: Jubal's brother Jabal is 'the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle', and his half-brother Tubal-Cain is 'an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron' (4:20, 22).

The race of Cain, in short, are the authors of civilisation, in its manifestations of stock-farming, industry, urban life, and - not least - music. A whole line of creative writers - among them Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, William Blake, Charles Baudelaire and Victor Hugo¹⁸ - have appropriated the Cain legend in their own writing. George Eliot, best known as the author of the epic novel 'Middlemarch', even rewrote the story of Jubal's invention of music, in her poem of 1869 'The Legend of Jubal'¹⁹ - and it may not be coincidence that George Henry Lewes, the radical philosopher closely associated with her, is one of the candidates for identification as the enigmatic George Lewis or Lewes on another "Love and Theft" song, High Water (For Charley Patton)²⁰.

Dylan too is one of that line of Cain-raising artists (which, incidentally, also includes his fellow songwriters Leonard Cohen and Bruce Springsteen²¹). In I Am A Lonesome Hobo, even if the characters are nameless, Dylan is visibly drawing on the biblical tale of the first murder ('I did not trust my brother/I carried him to blame/Which led me to my fatal doom/To wander off in shame'). In Not Dark Yet, the line: 'Sometimes my burden is more than I can bear' strongly recalls Cain's lament, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear' (4:13). Cain is, above all, explicitly named by Dylan in two of his very greatest songs, Desolation Row and Every Grain of Sand. In the 1965 song, the residents on Dylan's celebrated street include Cain and Abel, whom the narrator numbers among those who are not 'making love' or 'expecting rain': they are making war, not love, in an ironic reversal of the 1960s slogan. Sixteen years on, Every Grain of Sand offers the enigmatic lines: 'Like Cain, I now behold this chain/Of events which I must break'; the image of Cain breaking the chain could denote either the 'fury of the moment' when he kills Abel, or else the foundation of the city which ends his wanderings.

Cain has clearly been an important figure to Dylan at more than one stage of his career. Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum takes up the thread. The two brothers, Dylan tells us, are 'livin' in the Land of Nod/Trustin' their fate to the hands of God'. As inhabitants of Nod, they are, not Cain and Abel (the song ends with both still alive), but, rather, Cainites - dwellers in a world that is irrevocably fallen. At the same time, they seem to be continually haunted by

memories of their ancestors - of Cain and, before him, Adam, for both patriarchs suffered at 'the hands of God' yet had no choice but to go on 'trustin' their fate' to Jehovah. The Tweedles' woodland environment dimly recalls what Dylan, in an earlier song, called 'the trees of Eden'. As the two Cainites 'walk among the stately trees', their inner ears may hear, carried on the breeze, the voice of Jehovah as it resounded to their first ancestors: 'And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden' (Genesis 3:8). This fatal memory may help explain Dylan's otherwise puzzling line, "'His Master's Voice is calling me'". On the surface, these words of Tweedle Dum's might appear to point to the record company, His Master's Voice/HMV, and its famous symbol of a dog listening to an old-style gramophone. This would reinforce the element of musical reference in the song; and it would chime with the lines: 'Tweedle Dee is on his hands and his knees/Sayin', "Throw me something, Mister, please!"' (in a canine posture that recalls that earlier Dylan grotesque, Mr Jones - 'And you say "Impossible" as he hands you a bone'). However, as an alternative reading which makes more sense of the song, I suggest that the phrase 'His Master's Voice' can also be taken in the sense of 'the voice of the Master'. On this reading, 'master's' would be used adjectivally, to mean something like: 'His voice which sounds masterly because He is the Master'. This would tie in, via the Cain theme, with Every Grain of Sand and its lines: 'In the fury of the moment/I can see the Master's hand' (we may here think of the 'hands of God')²², and would mean that, here as in the 'stately trees' line, the ultimate reference is to Genesis 3:8 and 'the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden'.

As descendants of Adam and Cain, our two brothers seem condemned to a life of perpetual conflict, punctured only by brief, illusory periods of peace. In Stanza 3, Tweedle Dum tells Tweedle Dee: 'Your presence is obnoxious to me'; two stanzas later, the twain seem to be 'living in a happy harmony' as the best of business partners; but in the final stanza conflict raises its head once more ('Tweedle Dee is a low down sorry old man/Tweedle Dum he'll stab you where you stand/"I've had too much of your company,"/Said Tweedle Dum to Tweedle Dee'). Is this song saying that we, the hapless inhabitants of Enoch-in-Nod, are all of us condemned to a ceaseless cycle of fighting and violence? Is humanity's future dark as the shadow of Lewis Carroll's tar-barrel crow? Or, as Dylan might have put it in 1964, is America condemned to the black crow blues?

If Dylan's warring brothers are living in the Land of Nod on one plane, on another they are certainly folks from his own place and time, citizens of twenty-first-century America. The song, like the album as a whole, is steeped in the imagery of the USA's Southern states. Pecan pie is a typically Southern delicacy, and so too are brains served with garlic and olive oil²³. The words "'Throw me something, Mister, please!"' may suggest a dog, but they are also a verbatim reproduction of the traditional parade slogan from the Mardi Gras carnival in New Orleans (connecting with the 'parade permit' in the next stanza)²⁴.

Above all, the line 'They're takin' a streetcar named Desire' is a transparent reference to the celebrated play by Tennessee Williams. The great Southern dramatist was actually born in Columbus, Mississippi (that state gives its name to the second track on Dylan's album), as Thomas Lanier Williams, and 'Tennessee' was originally a nickname given to mark his 'Southernness' (Dylan, meanwhile, mentions the Tennessee river in Floater (Too Much To Ask)). Yet more connotations spiral around the 'streetcar' line. Desire is the title of Dylan's best-selling album of 1975, and also a key word in his song Caribbean Wind ('fanning the flames in the furnace of desire'²⁵); Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands speaks of 'streetcar visions'; and a passage in Tarantula offers up a 'bob dylan ... amazed to discover/ that he was

already/a streetcar'²⁶. Even more curiously, if Dylan names a streetcar named Desire, Williams' play mentions a hotel named Tarantula ('Tarantula was the name of it! I stayed at a hotel called the Tarantula Arms!')²⁷.

'A Streetcar Named Desire' (written in 1947 and premiered on Broadway the same year) is set in New Orleans, a location which made its debut in Dylan's work in his cover of House of the Risin' Sun on his first album, and to which his songwriting has returned many times²⁸. The city of the Mardi Gras and the French Quarter features in such major Dylan songs as Tangled Up In Blue, Blind Willie McTell, Brownsville Girl and Tryin' to Get to Heaven²⁹. In Williams' play, Blanche, the femme fatale and doomed outsider, arriving from Laurel, Mississippi, takes the symbolically named streetcar up from the outskirts of New Orleans and through the French Quarter ('that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter'³⁰), to her uptown destination: 'They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at - Elysian Fields!'³¹. Williams' stage directions identify Elysian Fields, with its mythological name ironically suggesting paradise, as 'a street which ... runs between the L & N tracks and the [Mississippi] river'³². The Desire line existed as part of New Orleans' streetcar network up to 1948, one year after the premiere of Williams' play³³. Dylan's arm-in-arm partners, however, take the tram in the opposite direction, down from city to countryside: 'Well, they're goin' to the country, they're goin' to retire./They're takin' a streetcar named Desire'. Their movement, then, is in the reverse direction to Blanche's, yet the echoes of Williams' drama are palpable. 'A Streetcar Named Desire' presents Southern (American?) society and family life as riven, under the placid surface, by unresolved and unending conflicts. The arrival of Blanche, with her dangerous, erotically charged past, in her relatives' household plunges everyone's lives into a chaos which is only, and artificially, resolved by her forced removal to a mental hospital - an event which, interestingly, her sister Stella describes in the following euphemistic terms: 'I - just told her that - we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country'³⁴.

In Dylan's song too, 'goin' to the country' leads to no rural utopia. Far from it: retreating to the country, our two friends bring the listener face to face with the contradictions of George W. Bush's America. Indeed, the song is shot through with barbs of social commentary that belie its seemingly farcical surface. Some have even tried to read it as an allegory of the Bush vs. Gore presidential election; so literal a party-political reading would be over-reductive and would fail to fit the song as a whole³⁵, but more general social, and indeed political, connotations are certainly there³⁶. In the first stanza, our heroic pair stagger on stage in the guise of two burnt-out workaholics ('two big bags of dead man's bones'), groaning under a burden of hard labour, as evoked in the rather Dickensian expression: 'got their noses to the grindstone'³⁷. This old-fashioned turn of phrase, suggesting obsessional hard work allied to tight-fisted meanness, does not lack contemporary relevance. Dylan's line can be read as a back-handed reference to the long working hours currently practised in the US, especially in the 'lean, mean and dynamic' private sector. In stanza two, the Tweedles are 'goin' to retire', but by stanza five they are working again: 'they run a brick and tile company'. This post-retirement activity chimes with conservative economists' dire predictions that Western societies can no longer afford their 'outdated', 'over-generous' pension arrangements, and the increasing calls from politicians for a higher retirement age (or even the abolition of retirement).

Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee choose to speculate in construction, always a possible field for a financial killing in a country where owneroccupation is king and the suburban lifestyle rules. They hope that the sweat of their brows and a thrifty lifestyle will rake in the profits

and let them join the business establishment: 'They're lyin' low and they're makin' hay,/They seem determined to go all the way'. Meanwhile, the country retreat they allegedly live in seems, despite the woods and the breeze, to be more like a semi-rural environment, studded with shopping malls devoted to the worship of the commodity ('Lookin' at a window with a pecan pie/Lot of things they'd like they would never buy'). The malls themselves can be seen as exploitative institutions which cynically manipulate consumer desire. For all the partners' efforts, their enterprise is no success. They acquire relations with authority which suggests they have - temporarily - become important enough to organise a parade back in town (New Orleans? for Mardi Gras?), and to need the security of official protection: 'They got a parade permit and a police escort'. Both parts of this line link the duo with the forces of law and order, as in US cities it is the police who issue parade permits. They seem, then, to be in cahoots with established power for a while (at Mardi Gras, the folks with parade permits are the elite who are organised into 'mystic krewes' or secret societies; the Tweedles' 'brick and tile company' could even have Masonic connotations)³⁸. Despite this, in their business career, rather than making it 'all the way' as they hope, they never quite get there: they wind up somewhere on the edge, 'one day older and a dollar short'. This line is a variant on the common American phrase 'a day late and a dollar short', which is used when speaking of failed business transactions - cases where - in the ultimate sin for the free-market religion - the competition got there first. Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee haven't really made it in their chosen line of business. We may even be tempted to ask: did they have to bribe the police, so as to get the escort they needed or cover up some kind of fraud? was that what burnt a hole in their pockets and left them 'a dollar short'?³⁹.

The entire song seems to have come out of a freebooting, dog-eat-dog economy where the weakest go to the wall and those who don't get eaten up by third parties end up eating each other. At the end, the partnership is snuffed out with a snarl: "'I've had too much of your company",/Said Tweedle Dum to Tweedle Dee'⁴⁰. If the long-suffering pair really did make a 'voyage to the Sun' (a journey into the heart of the US economic system?), they have, quite simply, been burnt up - financially, psychologically and spiritually.

Things hardly seem better if we turn from the two characters' sorry tale to the world of the unnamed narrator, who appears in the first person in stanzas four and six. The narrator's relationship with the Tweedles is never made explicit, but he may provisionally be identified with Dylan the artist sitting at home imagining the characters and writing the song, and appearing in person at the end, in much the same way as Leonard Cohen appears at the end of his song-narrative 'Ballad of the Absent Mare'⁴¹. The narrator's presence (in the album version with which we are dealing - in the compressed, five-stanza live version⁴² he has, curiously, been edited out⁴³.) injects an 'I' into the narrative and so adds a more personal dimension, dragging the listener closer into the tale through identification with that observing 'I'. This writer-narrator-observer, introduced as 'I' in stanza four, is in the kitchen of his house, with a spouse or partner. They seem to have a communication problem, for he declares: 'I got love for you, and it's all in vain', in, as we have seen, an ironic allusion to Robert Johnson. The image of boiling brains suggests not just a typical Southern dish, but, on another, darker level, a society where the intelligence is cooked out of existence and people are at serious risk of turning brain-dead. In the closing stanza, the narrator declares: 'My pretty baby, she's looking around/She's wearin' a multi-thousand dollar gown'. This is presumably the woman for whom his love was 'all in vain' in stanza four, and here she appears as a perfect image of the US consumer religion, decked out in a ludicrously expensive, 'multithousand dollar' outfit (will she be wearing it tonight to a million dollar bash?).

The song ends with the reek of decay. The overwhelming impression is that the America of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum is indeed the Land of Nod, the homeland of the fallen. Dylan's Nod is a condemned land, and here we can connect with another song that finds him locating apocalypse in the American South, namely Blind Willie McTell. That song begins: 'See the arrow on the doorpost/Saying this land is condemned/All the way from New Orleans/To Jerusalem', and ends with a dark vision of a universe where 'power and greed and corruptible seed/Seem to be all that there is'. At the end of Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum, the narrator declares: 'Well, a childish dream is a deathless need/And a noble truth is a sacred creed', as if all of America's cherished values, its supposed 'sacred creeds' and 'noble truths' (the Founding Fathers' 'self-evident' truths of 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness') were today mere illusions, the dreams of a child eternally chasing phantoms. Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum may be saying in comic language what Blind Willie McTell states in darker tones: the arrow on the doorpost points straight to the spiritual bankruptcy of an America whose inhabitants strut like 'bags of dead man's bones'. The two warring brothers seem only half-alive, condemned to a shadow-life of absurd and unending conflict.

The grotesque image of 'dead man's bones' seems comic on first hearing, but with repeated listenings it takes on an increasingly frightening colour. It recalls the desperate lines from T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (that founding text of the twentieth century which also underlies Dylan's own Desolation Row): 'I think we are in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones'⁴⁴. It also points back to the 'valley of dry bone dreams' of Dignity, with its dark recollections of the Old Testament, and Ezekiel's vision of the 'valley which was full of bones': The hand of the Lord was upon me, ... and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about; and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry./And he said to me, Son of man, how can these bones live? (Ezekiel 37:1-3). The question posed by "Love and Theft"'s opening song may, indeed, be just that: 'how can these bones live?'. And if there is an answer, it lies, it may be, in the force and energy of the 8 music that fires this rock'n'roll track with a strange, demonic power. The shades of Robert Johnson and Elvis Presley hover behind Dylan's words and delivery, and a paradoxical salvation, for the South and for America, is offered by music, the art invented by Jubal of the seed of Cain. Rock'n'roll and the blues may be the devil's music, but their rebellious energies may yet allow America to make sense of itself.

Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum comes as a timely wake-up call, re-running the message that nobody can sing the blues, and nobody can sing rock'n'roll, like Bob Dylan. At the same time, the wealth of meanings and associations generated by the complex lyrics - 'all that and more and then some' - operate as a vital reminder of the power and depth of Dylan's songwriting at its best.

Note: My thanks to all those with whom I have discussed this song in person or by email, and, especially, to David Frankel, Alan Fraser, Antonio Iriarte, Sharon Lee, Nicola Menicacci, Ed Ricardo, Stephen Scobie and 'VanGrod'.

Endnotes

1 For the album in general, see my earlier article, "'Love and Theft", or how Dylan's mind multiplies the smallest matter', in *The Bridge*, No. 14, Winter 2002, pp. 34-64.

2 Musically, Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum is to a large extent (tune, instrumental arrangement and guitar solos) based on 'Uncle John's Bongos', a number recorded in 1961 by the duo Johnnie & Jack (also spelt Johnny & Jack; they were Johnny Wright and Jack Anglin, brothers-in-law from Tennessee). This song appeared, credited to 'Blake-Colpepper-Evans', on a Decca single numbered 31289; it was reviewed in the 31 July 1961 issue of

Billboard. The same duo recorded Hummingbird and This World Can't Stand Long, both songs featured in recent Dylan setlists (see: www.bobdylan.com/performances/). They were also - like Elvis Presley - stars on the 'Louisiana Hayride' radio programme. See: <http://ubl.artistdirect.com/music/artist/bio/>, and the 'Penguin Encyclopaedia of Popular Music', ed. Donald Clarke, London: Viking, 1989, pp. 612-613. The structure of Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum is not completely identical to that of 'Uncle John's Bongos'. Dylan's song consists, in the album version, of six eight-line stanzas with the rhymescheme AABCCDD; the older number has three four-line stanzas (rhymescheme AABB) alternating with a chorus. The story-line of 'Uncle John's Bongos' features a fiddle player from the Anglins' native Tennessee: 'Where, oh where did Uncle John go?/He traded his fiddle for an old bongo/The story I've heard that's goin' around/Old Uncle John's in New York town'. Uncle John ends up drumming in Greenwich Village - a location which was, of course, later to be the backdrop of Bob Dylan's own nascent career, as narrated in his Talkin' New York. My thanks to Stephen Scobie and Antonio Iriarte for providing information on this connection.

3 Nick Coleman, Independent on Sunday (London), 16 September 2001, p. 14.

4 Ray Baldwin, on rec.music.dylan, 11 April 2002.

5 Michael Gray, 'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan' (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 70-71.

6 Lewis Carroll, 'Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There' [1871], in Carroll, ed. Martin Gardner, 'The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition' (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 186.

7 *ibid.*, p. 189.

8 Martin Gardner, commentary in Carroll, ed. Gardner, 'The Annotated Alice' (q.v.), p. 189n.; cf. also the OED entry.

9 *ibid.*

10 The OED adds that the phrase 'tweedledee and tweedledum' has a further sense referring to music rather than musicians, 'used to suggest the contrast or combination of the sounds of high- and low-pitched musical instruments' - and quotes an example from 1805: 'Two hours of tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee were too much for me' (from the writings of one A. Grant).

11 Michael Kennedy, 'The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music' (Oxford: OUP, 1980, repr. 1988), p. 282.

12 Elvis Presley, The Hayride Sessions [1955], released in 1999 as 'The Great Elvis Presley - Live - The Hayride Sessions' (LMC Music Limited [Portugal], GLD 63193). For the lyrics, see:

www.legendsofmusic.com/ElvisPresley/lyricst.html. Elvis' version of this song appears to have been closely modelled on that by LaVern Baker, who had a hit with it in 1955. A live performance by Baker, from the Alan Freed radio show, has been released on a various-artists double CD called 'The Encyclopaedia of Rock'n'Roll' (DejaVu Retro Collection/Recording Arts, 2001, R2CD 40-17): in this version, Baker pronounces the title phrase 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dee', just as Elvis and Dylan did later, and the same pronunciation is used by Freed in his spoken introduction to the song and singer. Presley's 'Tweedle Dee' is probably the more important influence on Dylan here, but it is interesting to note that Baker, an R & B singer, was a niece of Memphis Minnie, a blues artist much respected by Dylan, and also recorded Tomorrow Night (a song subsequently covered by both Elvis and, much later, Dylan), while Alan Freed himself is described by the 'Penguin Encyclopaedia of Popular Music' (cf. note 1; p. 436) as the 'DJ who gave rock'n'roll its name'. For LaVern Baker, see Diane Dees, 'Miss Lavern To The Rescue' (n.d.), <http://www.circlemagazine.com/misslaverne.html>

13 Winfield Scott also co-authored the rather better-known 'Return to Sender', a hit for Elvis in 1962. It is interesting - also in connection with Dylan's themes on "Love and Theft" - to note that Elvis' songsmith shares a name with a celebrated Union general from the Civil War (who hailed from Virginia, and had earlier stood and lost as the Whig Party candidate in the 1852 presidential election, won by the Democrat Franklin Pierce) (see: <http://www.clements.umich.edu/Webguides/Arlenes/S/Scott.html>).

14 Robert Johnson, 'Love in Vain' [1937], on 'King of the Delta Blues' (1997), Columbia 487444-2. Dylan's own song Is Your Love In Vain? appeared in 1978 on Street-Legal; he may also be alluding to his own album title of 1993, Good As I Been To You (which would make 'you' his audience).

15 'Tell Me More, and More and Then Some' is the title of a song composed by Billie Holiday. A version by Nina Simone, recorded in 1965, is available on a 1999 compilation called 'Ne me quitte pas' (Polygram 538 848-2, released on the French market).

16 Also of interest here is the musical theme of Dylan's 'source song', 'Uncle John's Bongos' (see note 1), with its titular fiddler-turned-drummer: 'He played the fiddle where he come from/But now he digs that crazy drum/He used to like it sweet and low/But now he beats that old bongo'. The musician swapping an old musical identity for a new one ('He fiddles no more in Tennessee/A beatnik he turned out to be') even bears some comic resemblance to a famous musical shape-changer named Bob Dylan. We may add that 'Uncle John's Bongos' was performed, if not quite by two Tweedle Dum and Dee brothers, at least by two musical brothers-in-law!

17 All biblical quotations in this article are from the King James Bible.

18 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Wanderings of Cain' (1798), in 'Poetical Works', Oxford: OUP, 1969; William Blake, 'The Ghost of Abel' (1822), in 'The Complete Poems', Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977; George Gordon, Lord Byron, 'Cain: A Mystery' (1821) and 'Heaven and Earth; A Mystery' (1822), in 'Poetical Works',

Oxford: OUP, 1970; Charles Baudelaire, 'Abel et Caïn' (in 'Les Fleurs du Mal' [1857], repr. in 'Oeuvres complètes', Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1961); Victor Hugo, 'La Conscience' (in 'La Légende des Siècles' [1859], Paris: Gallimard Pléiade), 1950).

19 George Eliot, 'The Legend of Jubal' (1869) in 'Jubal and other Poems' (1874), repr. in 'Silas Marner [etc]', London: Collins Classics, 1953, repr. 1965.

20 See Sean Wilentz, 'American Recordings: On "Love and Theft" and the Minstrel Boy' (2002 - www.bobdylan.com). Dylan mentions George Eliot's novel 'Silas Marner' in 'Tarantula: a minuses in the silas marners' (Dylan, 'Tarantula' [1966], New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, p. 70).

21 Leonard Cohen, 'Last Year's Man', on 'Songs of Love and Hate' (1971); Bruce Springsteen, 'Adam Raised A Cain', on 'Darkness on the Edge of Town' (1978).

22 The 'hands of God' image also recalls 'Somebody Touched Me', the traditional song which has featured latterly in Dylan's performance repertoire and was released officially in Japan as the opening track on the 2001 compilation 'Bob Dylan Live 1961-2000: Thirty-nine years of great concert performances' ('While I was praying, somebody touched me/Must have been the hand of the Lord'). We may also wish to remember the cover of 'Saved', with its giant hand pointing downwards.

23 My thanks to Sharon Lee of Georgia for clarification on this point.

24 My thanks to 'VanGroed' for putting me on to the Mardi Gras connection. One Mardi Gras website, at <http://www.holidays.net/mardigras/>, states: 'If you go to a parade, you are surely to go home with some of the famous catches. You can easily obtain any of the following by shouting the famous phrase, "Throw me something, mister!": [beads, doubloons, cups and trinkets]'.

25 Another Dylan album title resurfaced in a Dylan song when the phrase 'before the flood', the title of the live Dylan/Band album of 1974, reappeared in 'In the Summertime', on 'Shot of Love' (1983).

26 Dylan, 'Tarantula', p. 109.

27 Tennessee Williams, 'A Streetcar Named Desire' [1947], Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000, p. 204.

28 See the very interesting article by Scott Jordan, 'Drifter's Escape', published on 12 February 2002 on the website [bestofneworleans.com](http://www.bestofneworleans.com), at: http://www.bestofneworleans.com/dispatch/2002-02-12/cover_story.html. Jordan writes: 'For Dylan ... New Orleans and Louisiana have always offered safe haven.' He also identifies a further Dylan/Williams connection: 'On Dylan's 1986 tour, he frequently introduced the song 'Lenny Bruce' - a tribute to the late comedian - with a Williams quote. "Here's a song about recognition, or lack of recognition," Dylan said. "Tennessee Williams, it was he who said: 'I don't ask for your pity, just your understanding. Not even that, but just your recognition of me in you, and time, the enemy in us all.' Tennessee Williams led a pretty drastic life. He died all by himself in a New York hotel room without a friend in the world. Another man died like that. ..."'

29 In addition to the above, the Mardi Gras receives explicit mention in the out-take version of 'Idiot Wind' released on 'The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3', in the line: 'From the Grand Coulee Dam to the Mardi Gras'.

30 *ibid.*, p. 162.

31 *ibid.*, p. 117.

32 *ibid.*, p. 115. 'L & N' refers to the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. See Charles B. Castner, 'A Brief History of The Louisville & Nashville Railroad', <http://rrhistorical-2.com/lnhs/history.html>

33 'The Desire Line was originated by the New Orleans Railway and Light Co. in 1920. The original route was from Canal and Bourbon, down Bourbon, Esplanade, Decatur, Elysian Fields, Chartres, Desire, Tonti, France, and Royal to Canal. In 1923 the Desire Line was re-routed from Canal and Bourbon, down Bourbon, Pauger, Dauphine, Desire, Tonti, France, and Royal to Canal. Desire served the bar and nightclub section of the French Quarter along Bourbon Street, the shopping district along Royal Street and the residential districts today known as Bywater and Faubourg Marigny. The last Desire streetcar ran the line on May 30, 1948, to be replaced by a Bus Line also named Desire.' (see: <http://bywater.org/sttrcar.htm>)

34 *ibid.*, p. 217.

35 The 'Bush vs. Gore' allegorical reading has been proposed by several contributors to rec.music.dylan. It is true that Ralph Nader said during the 2000 campaign that he was 'giving voters a choice between [i.e. different from] the usual Tweedledum-Tweedledee options' (see Noam Chomsky, 'Propaganda and the Public Mind: Interviews with David Barsamian', London: Pluto Press, 2001, p. 136). However, it is difficult to see how two rival main party candidates could retire to the country together, or, indeed, why two such well-heeled individuals would be staring at a mall window looking at 'things they'd like they would never buy'. Political-allegorical readings of this type - another is the theory that 'Jokerman' is 'about' Ronald Reagan - never make sense of all of the song they purport to fit, and do not correspond to Dylan's usual songwriting practice ('Neighbourhood Bully' is an exception and no doubt is 'about' Israel, but few would list that composition among Dylan's best songs).

36 The OED quotes some interesting nineteenth-century examples of 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee' used in a political sense: 'The general public need have no special objection to half-pay officers and local Bumbles [i.e. petty bureaucrats] spending their superfluous time and money in Tweedledum and Tweedledee quarrels' ('Pall

Mall Gazette', 29 September 1886); 'the political instinct ... which leads Lord Randolph ... to discover a Tory Tweedledee for the Radical Tweedledum' ('Spectator', 14 December 1889).

37 cf. Charles Dickens, 'A Christmas Carol' (1843): 'Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone. Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!' (in 'The Christmas Books', Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994, p. 8). This description of Ebenezer Scrooge suggests that his ghost may also be hovering behind Dylan's line in the last stanza, 'Tweedle Dee is a low down sorry old man' .

38 For these suggestions, my thanks again to 'Van Grod'.

39 Interestingly, the OED cites 'tweedle' as a verb meaning to cheat: 'to counterfeit, swindle, practise a confidence trick on', and also as a noun meaning what might today more commonly be called a scam: 'a counterfeit ring; hence, a swindle (involving counterfeit goods); a "fiddle", "racket"'. Most of the examples given are from the twentieth century, and one is as recent as 1982.

40 My particular thanks for suggestions and clarifications to Stephen Scobie for the 'parade permit' line, to Sharon Lee for the 'dollar short' line, and to David Frankel for both.

41 Leonard Cohen, 'Ballad of the Absent Mare', on 'Recent Songs' (1979): 'But my darling says, "Leonard, just let it go by" ... And they're gone like the smoke, and they're gone like this song'.

42 Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum was debuted live on 5 October 2001 at Spokane, Washington. Dylan did the song live 20 times in 2001 and 30 times in 2002. He had performed it 16 times in 2003 when this article went to press (the most recent performance being 27 April), making a total of 66 live renditions to date. I am reliably informed (my thanks here to Antonio Iriarte) that the shorter, five-stanza version which I describe in the following note has been, at least up to the end of 2002, Dylan's standard performance version, with only occasional (and statistically relatively insignificant) variants.

43 The standard live version (I here take as my cue-sheet the 19 November 2001 performance at Madison Square Garden, New York City) compresses the song from six stanzas into five (with an instrumental break after stanza 3). Stanzas 1, 2 and 3 are unchanged; the new Stanza 4 consists of the original Stanza 5, lines 1-4, the original Stanza 4, lines 5-6 and the original Stanza 5, lines 7-8; the new Stanza 5 and last is made up of the original Stanza 6, lines 1-2, the original Stanza 5, lines 5-6 and the original Stanza 6, lines 5-6 (slightly modified) and 7-8. This compression does not seem to have been done at random, for the result is to remove all references to the

narrating 'I': out go 'I've got love for you', 'my pretty baby' with her luxury gown, and even the boiling brains in the kitchen. The effect of these changes is to make the song more objective and more distanced from the listener. Whether this is a gain or a loss is for concert attenders to judge; meanwhile, it goes without saying that my present analysis is of the full, six-stanza album version.

44 T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' [1922], II, 114-115 (in 'The Complete Poems and Plays', London: Faber and Faber, 1969).