

ARTICLES FROM BOB DYLAN CRITICAL CORNER: II - BOOK REVIEWS

Most of the reviews collected here, of books on or by Bob Dylan, appeared on the former site Bob Dylan Critical Corner, which was active from 1998 to 2016, at: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/6752/magazine.html> and subsequently: <http://nicolamenicacci.com/bdcc/>. Some of the material was previously published on the Usenet group rec.music.dylan.

I restored these articles' on-line presence on 2 May 2019, and have added two more recent reviews. Some articles have also had print publication and/or have appeared on my blog: details appear with the articles concerned. In these cases the most recent version has been used.

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

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REVIEWS FROM BOB DYLAN CRITICAL CORNER

'Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes', by Greil Marcus

'And Forget My Name: A Speculative Biography of Bob Dylan', a poem-sequence by Stephen Scobie

'Dylan's Daemon Lover: The Tangled Tale of a 450-Year Old Pop Ballad', a study of 'House Carpenter' by Clinton Heylin

'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan', by Michael Gray

'Razor's Edge: Bob Dylan and the Never Ending Tour', by Andrew Muir

'Alias Bob Dylan Revisited', by Stephen Scobie

'Lyrics 1962-2001', by Bob Dylan

'The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan', edited by Kevin J. Dettmar

LATER REVIEWS

'Why Dylan Matters', by Richard F. Thomas

'Always Other Voices: Writings on Bob Dylan in the 21st Century', by Stephen Scobie

A Tree With Roots: Greil Marcus' Invisible Republic and Dylan's Basementville

Review of: *Greil Marcus, 'Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes', New York: Henry Holt, 1997, hardback, xvi + 286 pp., ISBN 0-8050-3393-9*

Christopher Rollason

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'Strap yourself to the tree with roots'
(Bob Dylan, 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere')

A long, long time ago, back in 1975, Greil Marcus paid tribute, in a set of elegant and articulate sleevenotes, to the legendary set of semi-secret recordings made in 1967 by Bob Dylan and the Band in the basement of a farmhouse in up-country New York State, a selection from which had just been officially issued by Columbia as 'The Basement Tapes'. This was music, Marcus wrote, that spoke of 'an old, old sense of mystery': 'the quiet terror of a man seeking salvation who stares into a void that stares back ... the awesome, impenetrable fatalism that drives the timeless ballads first recorded in the twenties'. In the tracks laid down in that basement, in the strange intensity of the Band's playing and Dylan's singing ('as knowing as the old man of the mountains'), the critic discovered - recast in an apparently rock-and-roll idiom - the pure spirit of American traditional music, as embodied in the work of such little-known performers of an earlier vintage as Dock Boggs, or Clarence Ashley, or Bascom Lamar Lunsford.

Dylan and his comrades-in-music went on to make, respectively, 'John Wesley Harding' and 'The Band', classic albums that summoned the Woodstock generation out of its substance-induced daydream to contemplate the strangeness of a far older America. Marcus went on to write a classic book, 'Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock'n'Roll Music' (N.Y., Dutton, 1975; London: Omnibus Press, 1977), in which he linked up such exponents of twentieth-century popular music as Elvis Presley, Randy Newman and the Band themselves to broader and older trends in American culture - offering the connections he saw as 'a recognition of unities in the American imagination that already exist' ('Mystery Train', 1977 edn., p. xii). As the 1990s drew to a close, we witnessed a fresh return to roots by Bob Dylan, in his recordings of venerable folk and blues material on 'Good As I Been To You' and 'World Gone Wrong'; and then 1997 brought round Greil Marcus' own creative wheel full circle, with the appearance of his long-awaited opus, 'Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes'.

Marcus' book may be seen, from one angle, as the belated fruit of those sleevenotes he wrote 22 years before (and also of certain pages from his discussion of The Band in 'Mystery Train' - as Marcus admits himself, stating that 'in some ways this book is a sentence or a paragraph of that one, blown up' - 'Invisible Republic', p. 275). It attracted its fair share of attention on appearance, not all of it sympathetic. First, the objection was made that Marcus' title is misleading, as only about half of it is actually about Bob Dylan. Second, it was attacked in some quarters as being over-intellectual, pretentious, unreadable, etc. Press reviews tended to be at least largely favourable (in the US, in the 'Washington Post' and the 'San Francisco Chronicle'; in the UK, in the 'Independent' and the 'New Statesman'). In the specialist Dylan circles, Stephen Scobie, author of the 1991 study 'Alias Bob Dylan', published a highly

favourable appreciation ('One More Cup of Coffee: The Basement Tapes Revisited') in 'On The Tracks'; however, some of the reactions on the Usenet discussion group rec.music.dylan were all but vitriolic in their anti-intellectualism.

Greil Marcus has put himself on record often enough as believing that apparently obscure and fragmentary objects of popular culture (be they from traditional folk culture or from commercialised mass culture) can, at least in some cases and circumstances, fill in the cracks in the official versions of history and shed unexpected illumination on the destinies and choices of societies and peoples. In another recent book, 'The Dustbin of History' (Harvard: Cambridge U.P., 1995; London: Picador, 1996) - a volume of essays on discrete subjects, collected in 1995 but dating back as far as 1975 - Marcus argues that history is 'a force to be understood rather than a set of facts to be manipulated', that 'much of history finds its voice or bides its time in art works', and that the latter observation also applies to objects of 'vernacular art, or everyday art' ('The Dustbin of History', 1996 edn., pp. 27, 3, 142); and offers, among his examples of how artworks can crystallise and challenge history, closely appreciative studies of the music of Robert Johnson and of Bob Dylan's tribute to the blues, 'Blind Willie McTell' ('When You Walkin In The Room', 1991, pp. 141-154; 'Dylan as Historian', 1991, op. cit., pp. 80-87). Whether the kinds of American music discussed by Marcus, in 'Invisible Republic', 'Mystery Train' and 'The Dustbin of History', stand up to the detailed readings and cultural connections he makes, whether Robert Johnson can legitimately be mentioned in the same breath as Herman Melville or William Faulkner ('The Dustbin of History', p. 154), may ultimately be a matter of opinion, but I am one of those who believe he has provided persuasive evidence in favour of his position; readers of the present essay are, of course, free to judge for themselves.

On the reproach that 'Invisible Republic' is 'only half about Dylan', I would point out that 'Invisible Republic' is the title and 'Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes' the subtitle; the subtitle appears in much smaller type than the main title on both dust-jacket and spine, suggesting that this if is a book about Dylan it is also, about other, wider concerns. Besides, anyone who owns the 1975 double LP/CD of the Basement Tapes and has taken the trouble to reread Marcus' sleevenotes should understand that, from the beginning, the critic's reflections on the music do not stop with Dylan.

I would go further than this and state that in 'Invisible Republic' the discussion of Dylan, fascinating though it is, is ultimately a sounding-board for Greil Marcus' explorations of American culture past and present, its highways and byways, its quirks and contradictions and its state at the moment of writing. To say this is not in any way to detract from the importance of Dylan himself for the study of American culture, or to poke holes in Marcus' analyses as such. It is, rather, to suggest that to engage with Dylan's work is also, and necessarily, to engage with the paradoxes of the country that produced him; the organization of Marcus' book, with the argument fanning out fern-like away from Dylan only to bend over itself and return to him, in a process repeated many times over, could even prove exemplary as a method of structuring both Dylan studies and American studies.

What Marcus does have to say about Dylan is, in fact, valuable and concrete, though far from complete. The back of the book - something many reviewers strangely failed to notice - provides a meticulously compiled, 40-page discography, including, inter alia, recording details and comments for every single song recorded at the basement sessions. One or two minor facts are missing (e.g. Marcus forgets, when discussing 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere', to mention that when Dylan re-recorded the song in 1971, on 'More Greatest Hits', he also

rewrote the lyrics - p. 263); otherwise, however, this discography is a highly useful contribution to Dylan studies, and seems not to have received quite its due appreciation. As to Marcus' actual discussion of Dylan songs and performances, the first chapter offers a kind of prologue to the Basement Tapes, re-treading familiar ground (the Newport Folk Festival and the so-called 'electric sellout'); otherwise, the main substance lies in his close analysis of just four of the basement songs: 'Lo and Behold!' (pp. 45-48), 'Clothes Line Saga' (pp. 143-148), 'Tears of Rage' (pp. 204-207) and 'I'm Not There' (pp. 198-204; this song is not on the official 1975 release). For this handful of songs, his interpretations of the lyrics and evocation of the music arrest and convince. He reads the unfinished musical mosaic of 'I'm Not There' with remarkable tellingness ('Garth Hudson continues decorating the circle of the tune ... the muscle Rick Danko's bass puts behind every wail and moan of the singing demands that you not leave' - p. 201); for 'Tears of Rage', he envisions an Independence Day beach procession ('a party of elders carrying a child on a beach, to a naming ceremony' - p. 204), with a clarity that, at least for this reader, brings a new visual coherence to the song. All in all, still, Marcus' book probably contains less lyric analysis of the basement songs as a group than Michael Gray's early-70s study 'Song and Dance Man'; while if new interpretations are what's required, Marcus has blazed the trail but left most of the work for others to do.

That said, much of the book's pith is, indeed, not about Dylan. Instead, Marcus takes the reader on a tour of some of the obscurer and dustier backroads of American popular music. Those willing to follow the trail will discover, Tom Sawyer-like, a treasure-trove of obscure and fascinating information. We learn much about Harry Smith's 1952 'Anthology of American Folk Music' - a five-album set described by Marcus as 'the founding document of the American folk revival' (p. 87), which was re-released on six CDs later in 1997, a few months on from the appearance of 'Invisible Republic', with an adapted version of the book's fourth chapter featured in the copious album notes (Marcus, 'The Old, Weird America', in 'A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music, edited by Harry Smith', Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, pp. 5-25). We also learn about the chequered career of Dock Boggs, folk musician and sometime moonshiner and Pentecostalist, one of the performers featured in Smith's anthology, who 'made primitive-modernist music about death' (p. 153) and without whose 'presence in Bob Dylan's field of vision - less as a musical influence than a talisman' (p. 155), the profoundest of Dylan's basement recordings would have been impossible (it was also Boggs' tormented version of 'Pretty Polly' that gave Dylan the melody for his 'Ballad of Hollis Brown'). There is, conversely, a brief incursion into the world of the US charts, with an analysis of Bobbie Gentry's country/pop No 1 hit single of 1967, 'Ode to Billie Joe', to which Dylan's 'Clothes Line Saga' (originally titled 'Answer to " Ode "') would appear to be a riposte. While all this material is not ostensibly or directly about Dylan, it is hardly irrelevant to him either, if one views his work as one more manifestation, however individual, of a deep-rooted, authentically popular tradition.

Even so, when Marcus talks about Dylan or his precursors in the tradition, he is, at the same time, talking about something else. In his preface, he asserts that in the alchemy of the basement laboratory there is 'an undiscovered country, like the purloined letter in plain sight' (p. xvi). The reference (uncredited in text or index) is to Edgar Allan Poe's tale 'The Purloined Letter', where the detective Dupin tracks down the stolen letter in the purloiner's house, on open display but turned inside-out - visible yet invisible at one and the same time. This idea is repeated in Marcus' text, more than once: 'it's not conspicuous, but it's there'

(quoting Bruce Conner on the Harry Smith 'Anthology' - p. 95); 'they (i.e. the imaginary towns of the 'Anthology' and the basement recordings) match the unknown to the obvious' (p. 133). He is obviously talking about the 'invisible republic' - a presence at the very centre of America that is both there yet not there, ignored by the great majority yet beating at the deep heart's core. The purloined letter analogy suggests something which someone has stolen: I would guess that a vital word is absent, it may be deliberately, from Marcus' surface discourse, and I suggest that word is 'community' - a notion which may be uncovered, in multiple and contradictory manifestations, as we follow the twisting trail of his argument across the book's prairie.

Indeed, I would go further and argue that the presence of Bob Dylan in Marcus' book - on the inside or the outside ('come on, without/come on, within') - is central to the investigation of a quintessentially American question: what is the relationship between the individual and the community? That conundrum runs through US history and culture, through Walt Whitman and Mark Twain to today's conflicts over minority rights and campus free speech, and can scarcely be said to have been resolved today. Marcus quotes the famous address of John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, made on shipboard in 1630 even before his voyaging contingent of Puritans had reached the New World. The community they would found, said Winthrop, would be 'as a City upon a Hill'; these words, says Marcus, laid the foundations of 'the wish and the need for utopia in the American story' (p. 209). But in an ideal community, how much elbow-room is there for the dissident individual?

Puritanism pushed American society in the direction of conformity to communal values; the frontier and the Wild West pulled in the opposite direction, towards the unchecked, anarchic individualism of the outlaw. The radical movements of the 1960s - the student revolt, the anti-war protest movement, the folk revival itself - were, for all their desire to stop history in its tracks and create the perfect society tomorrow, not immune from the strains of that two-way pressure. Nor was the early songwriting of that movement's temporary icon and standard-bearer, Bob Dylan.

Marcus charts certain key moments of Dylan's trajectory over the decade - his public role as protest apostle, his perceived apostasy into rock'n'roll at Newport '65, his post-accident retreat from the rostrum into the basement. He does not, however, ostensibly offer an analysis of the communal/individualist conflict in Dylan's work over this period. Nonetheless, out of Marcus' comments both on Dylan and on the older tradition behind him, I believe such an analysis can be constructed, and this I shall now attempt.

The folk-protest movement of the early 60s dreamt of a ideal liberated community, and saw itself as a community too - it was not I or you, but we that was going to overcome. This was the movement that for a time co-opted Bob Dylan as its spokesman-in-chief, and then turned away in horror when he went electric (Marcus relates the anecdote, true or not, of Pete Seeger and Alan Lomax at Newport trying to cut through the power-cables with an axe - p. 12). Three decades on, Marcus is less than tender with the folk purists; for all their undoubted utopianism, and despite the great and necessary achievements of the civil rights campaigns, he sees the movement's revolutionary vision as ultimately conformist, a blueprint for a imaginary free society of identical, identikit liberated citizens: 'in the face of the objective good that was the Grail of the folk movement, there could be no such thing as subjectivity ... at bottom, the folk revival did not believe in art at all. Rather, life ... equalled

art, which ultimately meant that life replaced it' (p. 27). One may surmise that the 60s folk radicals, despite the libertarian aspects of their discourse, at bottom subscribed to a purified vision of the perfect society that bears at least a distant family resemblance to the rule-governed Salem of the Puritans or the repressively virtuous Boston captured by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 'The Scarlet Letter'; Marcus, indeed, at one point explicitly describes the self-styled guardians of folk as 'Puritans ... demanding purity before anything else' (p. 65).

Marcus believes that Dylan, in his avatar of folk troubadour, encapsulated those values more eloquently than anyone else - until he (quite soon) realized the limits of that vision, and moved on. He says of Dylan's early protest songs: 'they were pageants of righteousness ... there were armies and generations, heroes and villains ... there were almost no individuals ... these songs distilled the values of the folk revival better than any others' (p. 27). Marcus is, of course, talking about 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', and the rest; he runs through the titles, but does not stop to analyze the songs in detail. A return to the texts will, though, serve to confirm his point. Dylan is here singing out for (progressive) youth against (reactionary) age, in lines like 'your sons and your daughters are beyond your command' ('The Times ...'), or 'there's one thing I know/Though I'm younger than you/Even Jesus would never/Forgive what you do' ('Masters of War'), or in the very structure of 'Hard Rain', with its dialogue between the 'darling young one' and the elder whom he strives to enlighten.

In these songs, the individual scarcely exists: 'I' is subsumed into the revolutionary mass of 'we'. Examination of the use of pronouns in the most famous songs confirms this. 'Blowin' in the Wind' has no 'I's at all, with the prophetic vision expressed in impersonal language; the addressee of the refrain is 'my friend', but we do not know who 'I' is, other than a mouthpiece for the great change to come; 'The Times ...', similarly, avoids all first-person reference and targets various collective adversaries - politicians, parents - the system conceived as a plural 'you'. 'Masters of War' is in the first person, but the 'I' is throughout purely representative - as, again, the seeing, hearing and singing 'I' of 'Hard Rain' is little more than the mirror in which the visions of apocalypse are reflected. The most impersonal of all these songs, and perhaps therefore the one that best typifies the protest movement, is 'When The Ship Comes In': the enemy is 'they', the 'you' addressed is the listener, asked to engage imaginatively in the act of liberation, and there is no 'I' at all - the song concludes with the triumph of the radical masses, of 'we': 'we'll shout from the bow, " your days are numbered "/And like Pharaoh's tribe,/They'll be drowned in the tide/And like Goliath, they'll be conquered'. We may conclude that this group of songs does, indeed, also stand for the triumph of community over the individual.

This was a world where, to quote another song from this period, 'Bob Dylan's Dream', 'As easy it was to tell black from white,/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right'. That song itself, though, already sows the seeds of doubt, using the dream convention to challenge the durability of the folk-protest community: 'And our choices were few and the thought never hit/That the one road we ever travelled would ever shatter or split'. History offered more than one road, and more choices than the communitarian radicals imagined. According to Marcus, there was a truer, older American folk tradition, and the road back to it snaked through the bushes and briars of the untamed, anarchic, irreducible individualism of the pre-war likes of Dock Boggs.

Marcus, introducing this unsung singer-hero to a readership few of whom will have heard of him, places Boggs firmly under the banner of nonconformity. He quotes the man himself: 'I

felt that I'm just as good as the other person. We's all borned equal. Came into this world with nothin', we go out with nothin'. We all supposed to have the same chance, under our Constitution, in this world. And God give us that, too. Because some person has got a big bank account, fine home, and a lot of the world's goods, it don't make him no better than me, nary a bit better'n me' (p. 166). Marcus sees this stance as 'locked into a strain of American individualism', by which 'to be a citizen, Boggs had to stand for himself' (pp. 166-167). Individuality also, however, means the sensation of difference; and difference can mean both defiance and danger in a country where - and here Marcus quotes D.H. Lawrence on America - the individual knows 'they are free to lynch him the moment he shows he is not one of them' (p. 168).

If that voice of Dock Boggs from the 30s sounds familiar, it may be because his words and attitudes are echoed, consciously or otherwise, by the better-known voice of the mid-60s Dylan. On 'Another Side of Bob Dylan' and 'Bringing It All Back Home', we may chart Dylan's shift from communitarian radicalism ('equality, I spoke the word as if a wedding vow' - 'My Back Pages') to an anarchic individualism - democratic dignity now means less the collective liberation of 'we' than the freedom of everyone - of 'I' and 'you' - to be himself or herself, free from all constraints to conform. In 'All I Really Want To Do', the speaker insists: 'I ain't lookin' for you to see like me/Feel like me or be like me'; conversely, he implies, his listener is free to be her own unique self. The comforter of 'To Ramona' declares to his friend: 'I've heard you say many times that you're better than no-one and no-one is better than you/If you really believe that you know you have nothing to win and nothing to lose'; the sense of individuality is the surest defence against the conformists who would 'hype you and type you' and push the idea that 'you've gotta be just like them'. The disgruntled worker of 'Maggie's Farm' proclaims much the same message: 'Well, I try my best to be just like I am/But everybody wants you to be just like them'; and in 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' we are told that 'it is not he or she or them or it/That you belong to': you belong, first of all, to yourself. Marcus does not say so explicitly, but this is, surely, the homespun philosophy of Dock Boggs - I am as good as you, but I am also free to be myself. It is also the voice of another irreducible individualist, Mark Twain's Huck Finn, who declares rebelliously at the end of 'Tom Sawyer': 'I ain't everybody', and repeats the gesture of revolt at the end of his own titular novel, in his flat rejection of Aunt Sally's wish to 'civilize' him ('I been there before').

We inheritors of the 60s have been there too, and tried to escape: Dylan's individualist stand of 1964/65 marks a turning-away from community - a lighting-out for the territory, a making of tracks out towards the anarchic, frontier edge of the American tradition. As Marcus implies (p. 65), the Puritan made way for the pioneer. However, the story is not over yet - indeed, as far as Marcus' central argument is concerned it has scarcely begun. Come 1967, Dylan's retreat to the basement marked his return to what our author believes was the true American tradition, the wellspring fed by the likes of Dock Boggs and Rabbit Brown. This was, as we have seen, certainly far more individualist and less communitarian a tradition than that embodied by Pete Seeger. But - and here lies the paradox - down there in the basement, Dylan and the Band also remade themselves as a music-making community.

'Strap yourself to the tree with roots', Dylan advises in 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere'. A similar piece of folk wisdom appears in 'Open the Door, Richard': 'Take care of all of your memories'. Musical roots and memories are, precisely, what matters in the basement

recordings: this is particularly clear if one listens to the complete sessions, where the songs covered range right across the American tradition, white and black, from a folk ballad like 'Young But Daily Growing', through Johnny Cash and the Carter Family to Blind Lemon Jefferson and Curtis Mayfield. The Dylan originals reveal themselves as rooted in a much older lineage. This cheek-by-jowl neighbourliness between the songs implies a musical continuity, or community, in time; and, more than this, Dylan and the Band create their own musicians' community in space, in the here and now. The give-and-take and blending between Dylan's vocals and the Band's back-up harmonies and playing (Garth Hudson's sinuous organ above all) point up an undeniable intimacy: the group are far more than backing musicians, they are Dylan's co-conspirators. Marcus has shown in 'Mystery Train' how in their subsequent work, above all on the two classic first albums, the Band went on to create work in which 'community was ... a projection of comradeship' (p. 72) - and which was, at the same time, 'committed to the very idea of America: complicated, dangerous and alive' (p. 43). Those elements - the community, and the danger - were already there in the basement.

If we turn to the lyrics of Dylan's basement originals, what we find is, precisely, a community that has turned dangerous - a small town, most likely in the South (we know there's been a crash on the levee), where the apparently placid and neighbourly surface of things fissures, as in William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County (think of the story 'A Rose for Emily'), to reveal dark and destructive fears, unhealed traumas and half-whispered secrets. On the nature of life in this town, I broadly agree with Marcus, though the lines that follow are mostly my own attempt at synthesis. Marcus calls it 'Union' or 'Kill Devil Hills' (both after really existing communities); I prefer to call it Basementville.

The Basementville community apparently lives on clichés which conveniently mask reality ('Clothes Line Saga') or on an inherited wisdom that may not be usable in practice ('Open the Door, Richard'); if the dust is disturbed, festering secrets emerge, tales of betrayal ('Tears of Rage') and resentment ('Down In The Flood'). As Marcus perceptively shows, the crimes that spatter the history of this town are never named, never defined with any precision: 'in the town made by the basement tapes, no crime comes sufficiently into focus for it to become more than a rumor - or for justice to be done' (p. 130): even the prisoner in 'I Shall Be Released' seems not to know, or to want to know, why they 'put me here'. One might quote Dylan's much later song 'Political World': 'men commit crimes/And crime don't have a face'. Anyone poking in the dust will discover that this community is fatally flawed, and might erupt at any moment into violence (it is not inconceivable that the speakers of both 'This Wheel's on Fire' and 'Nothing Was Delivered' are planning or fantasizing, not just the settling of old scores, but the actual murder of their antagonists).

This tension in Basementville, the dark yearnings towards violence or betrayal, recalls the Arkansas one-horse towns through which Jim and Huck Finn pass, accompanied by the arch-tricksters the King and Duke. In one such town, a certain Colonel Sherburn shoots dead a drunk named - of all things - Boggs, who has challenged him: 'Come out and meet the man you've swindled!'. The mob try to lynch Sherburn, but he faces them down: 'Now the thing for you to do, is to droop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole ... Now leave - and take your half-a-man with you' (chapters 21 and 22). The language of Mark Twain's characters would not be out of place in Basementville; the Sherburn/Boggs episode is the kind of conflict that is implied, but only half-stated, in a song like 'Nothing Was Delivered' ('it's up to you to say/Just what you had in mind/When you made everybody pay') or 'Too Much of Nothing' ('when there's too much of nothing/It just makes a fella mean'). Through

Dylan's town too, there may stalk the arch-deceiver of Herman Melville's 'The Confidence-Man' - a novel mentioned in passing by Marcus (p. 47) - vendor of patent locks, quack medicines or salvation ('there's a certain way we all must swim/If we expect to live off the fat of the land' - 'Open the Door, Richard'). Dylan's basement world ain't goin' nowhere, and in this it replicates the darker visions of America's greatest writers. The only way out of Basementville may be individual defiance, the jaunty whimsicality of the comic songs like 'Million Dollar Bash', 'Quinn the Eskimo' or 'Lo And Behold!' ('get me out of here, my dear man!').

If we put together, and expand on, Marcus' examination of the individual vs. community tension in Dylan's work - in the collectivist stance of the protest phase, the unbridled individualism of 1964-65, or the flawed and dangerous community of Basementville - we may conclude that what he finds in Dylan is not the resolution of that tension but an continuous, ever-shifting exploration of it. That is, surely, historically inevitable; no writer can do more when confronted with the contradictions of the nation as it is. In his epic 'Song of Myself', Walt Whitman, revelled in his unique individuality ('I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious' - section 24), yet offered himself to the nation as an indissoluble part of it ('If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles' - section 52); had he tried solemnly to resolve the contradiction, he would not have become the quintessential poet of the New World. It fell to a lesser writer, Edward Bellamy, in his utopian novel of 1888, 'Looking Backward', to imagine a millennial America of the year 2000, a purified society of garden cities and universal credit cards where perfect equality had been reconciled with the development of the talents of all, thanks to 'the rise of the race to a new plane of existence with an illimitable vista of progress' (Penguin edition, p. 128). Bellamy's chosen route to utopia was, however, a form of socialism based on the nationalization of industry which, as the year 2000 actually approaches, is, as things stand, unlikely to win many followers.

At the end of 'Invisible Republic', Marcus gives himself over to a series of reflections (pp. 212-216) on community, or the lack of it, in today's America. Starting out from Dylan's 'Tears of Rage' and its drama of post-Independence Day betrayal, he scrutinizes the United States of 1997 and finds no abiding city, no sense of an authentic national community. Marcus does not actually mention the dread term 'political correctness', but it is clear that what he sees is only an agglomeration of discrete sectional communities that add up to neither a nation nor the dream of one. He quotes a professor from the University of North Carolina, who believes the idea of 'national experience' has been 'long since rendered useless by careful analyses of regional, gender, racial, class and occupational differences within the body politic' (p. 213); and, more disturbingly, Justice Clarence Thomas of the Supreme Court, who in a dissenting opinion of 1995 ('US Term Limits v. Thornton') - defeated by only one vote - not only argued in favour of states' rights over federal law, but effectively claimed that the federal entity does not exist: 'The ultimate source of the Constitution's authority is the consent of the people of each individual state, not the consent of the undifferentiated people of the nation as a whole' (ibid.). If this defence of states' rights seems at first sight innocuous, history might remind us that it was those rights that the Confederacy evoked against Lincoln; in Bellamy's utopia, curiously enough, the presidency remains but the states have been abolished altogether ('Looking Backward', p. 155). If there is no 'undifferentiated people', then all that exists is differentiation; there is no national community, only a set of separate communities. Marcus finds Thomas' view echoed on the

left, in the discourse of 'ethnic activists and multiculturalist academics' (p. 212), but also, and even more disturbingly, on the extreme right: 'Thomas's language', he says, 'was not altogether different from that spoken by white supremacist groups' such as the Freemen of Montana (pp. 213-214), who believe that all non-white groups are the spawn of Satan. In the decade of political correctness, it takes courage to equate the self-styled radicals and the forces of reaction: Marcus is unlikely to receive death-threats, but there is a note of desperation in his lament that 'if there is no national experience there can be no such thing as a national voice' (p. 213) - no such voice, then, as the one that Bob Dylan assumed in the basement back in 1967.

Still, Marcus is not bidding farewell to Governor Winthrop's chosen nation just yet; in the world gone wrong of the century's last gasp, he clearly does still want to believe in the vision of community, the city on a hill. He sees today's America as a battlefield of contending minorities, far removed from the ideals of the Founding Fathers - strangely echoing the concerns of intellectuals in India, another country that prides itself on its democracy and its unity-in-diversity, but which, even as it celebrates half a century of freedom, finds the vision of its own founding fathers, Gandhi and Nehru, fractured by sectarian and particularist tendencies, by what V.S. Naipaul has called 'a million mutinies now'. Nonetheless, against the fashionable claims of women's or African-American separatism, Marcus continues to affirm the unifying dreams of an Abraham Lincoln or a Martin Luther King (p. 207). In his Gettysburg address, Lincoln evoked 'the great task remaining before us ... that this nation ... shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth'; a century later, King declared: 'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed...that all men are created equal. (...) I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.'

Both Lincoln and King were fired by the vision of a republic of equality, a nation obliged to be more than the sum of its parts. This is, surely, a rather ampler perspective than today's narrow 'progressivism' of rule-governed behaviour and lexical absolutism. Indeed, looking through the archives of 'Time' magazine on CD-ROM ('The Time Almanac of the Twentieth Century'), I am struck by the fact that back then in the early 1960s, both King himself and the 'Time' journalists employed the now discredited term 'Negro', with no sense of negative connotation - and am also slightly surprised that no latter-day Winston Smith has been employed to replace every occurrence of the word with 'African-American' and rewrite the past in the image of today's fashion-bound, historically amnesiac epoch. Bob Dylan mentions both King and Lincoln, albeit in passing, on his 'Freewheelin'' album, which stands as a tribute to the dreams of a time when radicalism meant something else than a censorious obsession with rigid linguistic and behavioural codes.

Marcus' ideal of community, we may conclude, is rooted in a historical nostalgia - but nostalgia for what period? Is it for the 1960s, despite his recollections of the paradoxical conformism of the protest generation and its collectivist hopes? Or - more likely - is it for the vanished America represented by the older folk tradition, that wellspring into which Dylan dipped for the basement sessions? If it is the latter, the reader might object that such a tradition, for all its heroism and dignity, belongs to a world that is now gone for good.

On the other hand, Marcus might counter-argue that Bob Dylan is still alive in our midst. He elides the bulk of Dylan's post-basement career, jumping from 'John Wesley Harding', an

album that he sees as an austerer, 'black-and-white movie' continuation of the basement tapes, or 'the doomed sound of 1968' (p. 265) straight to the mid-1990s and to 'Good As I Been To You' and 'World Gone Wrong'. Dylan's conversion to Christianity and the religious albums of the late 70s/early 80s are not even discussed; we may presume that, despite Marcus' historical fascination with the puritans, religion plays no part in his vision of the future community, and he won't be boarding any slow train. Over Dylan's two acoustic albums of old folk and blues songs, however, he waxes lyrical to a degree that suggests that a book-length appreciation of this material could yet be in the can: 'Good As I Been To You' is seen as Dylan's 'version of the American legacy'; in 'World Gone Wrong', 'Dylan hurried the past forward as a critique of the present' (pp. 265-266). It would be fascinating to read Marcus one day on the history of these songs!

'Invisible Republic' comes over as a labour of love: the book works throughout as a highly impressive piece of research and interpretation. It is a tribute to Dylan and the folk tradition, but also to another vanished world, that of 1960s libertarianism ('So much of the basement tapes', Marcus declares in his final chapter, 'are the purest free speech' - p. 222: a brave affirmation to make in the epoch of campus and workplace censorship). It also marks a substantial contribution to both Dylan lore and American studies. The writing is taut, lucid, evocative - indeed, this is a better-written book than 'Mystery Train', its tone less vernacular but more organized, more disciplined. The connections made between American popular music and the high-cultural tradition - Winthrop, Melville, Lincoln and all the rest - are neither pretentious nor gauche: Marcus' work is the exact opposite of the 'dumbing-down process' which traditional intellectuals today deplore - as when a letter to 'Time' (18 August 1997 - p. 3) complains, justifiably enough, at the naming of rocks on Mars after cartoon characters. The type of analysis offered by Marcus will not work for all the products of non-official culture, but the point is, I suggest, that the non-elite artefacts which come out strongest from comparison and connection with the elite culture are those which - like the old folk songs, like the basement tapes - derive their sustenance from the ancient parallel tradition of popular creativity, rather than being mass-produced to 'demand-led' commercial formulas.

I have tried to show that the hidden thread, the purloined letter of 'Invisible Republic' is the idea of community. There is a crucial dimension here, however, that Marcus neglects, and that is the new kinds of community now being forged in cyberspace. The new frontier of the Internet is not without its links to the old 60s libertarianism; a direct line runs from the Grateful Dead to the Electronic Frontier Foundation. The Dylan community in cyberspace may not have received 'Invisible Republic' as well as it deserves, but negative cyber-reactions are still a manifestation of that 'purest free speech' which Marcus affirms. One musician, however gifted, will not create new forms of social being; nor will one musician's admirers, however devoted. But if we try to view cyberspace - especially in its Usenet manifestation - as a huge federation of communities, a network of networks, then we may begin to see our way forward to re-creating, in forms unimaginable only a few years ago, that lost sense of connection and togetherness that Marcus finds in the folk tradition, and mourns in today's fragmented America. For all we know, a new invisible republic for the next millennium may be taking shape right now, as I write and you read, right here on the electronic frontier.

Note: Marcus subsequently retitled his book, as from the edition of 2011, as *The Old, Weird America: the World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*.

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Poet on Poet

Review of *'And Forget My Name: A Speculative Biography of Bob Dylan'*, a poem-sequence by Stephen Scobie, Victoria (Canada): Ekstasis Editions, 1999, soft covers, 77 pp., ISBN 1-896860-51-6

Christopher Rollason, 1999

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'No-one else could play that tune - you know it was up to me'
(Bob Dylan, 1974)

On 24 May 1941, somewhere in the north-country distance of Duluth, Minnesota, a woman gave birth to a child, who was to be christened Robert Allen Zimmerman, but was to rename himself, twenty-one years later and by due process of law, as Bob Dylan - the name under which history was to make him world-famous. Bob Dylan is - despite the occasional misrepresentations of ill-informed journalists - the poet's legal, and therefore real name: but whether that name enfolds what we might, quoting his song of 1974 'Up To Me', call his 'real identity', is another question. Emulating his own characters the Joker and the Man in the Long Black Coat, Dylan has, over his long career, shed off layer after layer of skin, and hid his face behind mask after mask. Stephen Scobie's new poem-sequence, 'And Forget My Name', is an attempt to see behind the masks, to grasp something resembling the historical Dylan - even if, as the book's author would be the first to admit, the very act of constructing a history of this man may itself be the creation of yet another - necessary and inevitable - fiction.

Stephen Scobie is particularly well qualified for this task, as the author of numerous published volumes of poetry (and recipient of the Canadian Governor-General's Award in 1980). His collections of poems include 'Gospel' (1994), a poem-sequence reconstructing the life of another historical character, Jesus Christ (whose biography Dylan himself has condensed into song form, on the track 'In The Garden' on his album 'Saved'); 'Slowly Into Autumn' (1995), whose title comes from Dylan's 'Idiot Wind' and whose poems, each and every one, are Dylan acrostics, with the first word of each horizontal line vertically forming part of a Dylan quotation; and 'The City That Dreams' (1996), a volume dedicated to Paris which, again, takes its title from Dylan, this time from 'Ring Them Bells'. He is also - as a professional academic and faculty member of the University of Victoria - the author of a particularly reflective and acute critical study of Dylan as poet, 'Alias Bob Dylan' (Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1991; slated for reissue in an expanded version for the millennium) - in which he pays special attention to the whole question of Dylan's 'real identity', the multiple masks he hides behind and the interrogation across his work of the very notion of names and naming: the 'I' of Dylan's 'Tomorrow Is A Long Time' declares, like Lewis Carroll's Alice lost in the wood where things have no names, that he can't 'remember the sound of my own name', and, as Stephen Scobie puts it in his study, 'the simple strategy by which the young Robert Zimmerman attempted to make a name for himself (literally) has

turned into the lifelong core of his invention of himself' (p. 64). We may read 'And Forget My Name' as a poet's construction, out of the raw materials of fact and text, of another alias for Bob Dylan - an alias which is as provisional as any other, but is also offered as bearing at least a tangential relationship to that ever-elusive 'real identity'.

This new collection is made up of forty poems, which together trace, in approximately chronological order, the story of the foundation and growth of Hibbing, the 'little Minnesota town' where Dylan grew up and which may be recalled in his 'Went To See the Gypsy'; the family histories leading up to the marriage of Abraham Zimmerman and Beatrice Stone; and the birth, childhood and early youth of their son Robert. It culminates in the moment when young Bob seized control of his life and left Hibbing for good - to mark the rest of the century with his presence (as I write this, 'Time' magazine has just, in its 14 June 1999 issue, confirmed Bob Dylan as one of its '100 most influential people of the 20th century'). A number of the poems in the book have already been published, in various numbers of 'Parking Meter', the Austrian-based Dylan fanzine, but now all forty are offered to the world as a coherent sequence.

Some half of the poems take their titles from Dylan songs, and from the contents page the careful reader can already glean some idea of the sides of Bob Dylan which this book will focus on, by looking at the origins of the different lines quoted in these titles. There is a visible presence of the album 'Planet Waves', which itself supplies a poem title, as does its most famous song, 'Forever Young', while 'The Hills of Old Duluth' is from 'Something There Is About You', another 'Planet Waves' song. That album is closely related to the snow-clad north-country landscape of Dylan's childhood, and it is no surprise to find that another poem bears the title 'North Country Blues', from the song of that name about Minnesota miners on 'The Times They Are A-Changin''. Others of the songs quoted in the titles are about the vexed question of naming and identity ('One Too Many Mornings' supplies two titles, 'One Too Many' and 'Restless Hungry Feeling', and 'Tomorrow Is A Long Time' gives, in a phrase we have already mentioned above, 'The Sound of My Own Name'), or about the process of poetic creation ('Lay Down Your Weary Tune', one of Dylan's very finest songs, provides two titles, 'Sounds Before the Sun' and 'Strength of Strings'). It is clear, then, from the outset, that this poem-sequence will be an invitation to relive Dylan's early years and the formation of his artist's vocation.

Stephen Scobie clarifies his method and sources in his concluding notes, informing the reader: 'As far as possible, I have tried to keep the facts accurate, whenever they are known. Thus, most details of places, names, and specific events are true. Of course I have also exercised the poetic option of interpreting the facts, through selection and imagery, and of speculating on motives and emotions'. The factual raw material comes partly from his visit to Hibbing in 1990, partly from 'the standard Dylan biographies - Scaduto, Shelton, Heylin', and partly from a book of 1997 by Dave Engel, 'Just Like Bob Zimmerman's Blues: Dylan in Minnesota'. To those to whom such distinctions are not obvious, he makes it clear that the book is to be read as literature, not history: 'nothing in this poem should be taken as a definitive statement of " truth " about a life of which I have, of course, no direct knowledge'.

II

The poetic journey begins in the North Country: the reader is spirited out of his home, like L. Frank Baum's Dorothy blown out of Kansas, 'north to the home of the winds/ (the Canadian/ border fifty miles away)/ across the Iron Range' - to a harsh, austere land, 'a country where

even the breath/ inside your lungs is cold' - but a land which, it is already intimated, conceals under its snow-bound surface a mysterious potential for creativity: 'Words ride on the shoulders of wind/ Wind slides and cuts under the skin'. The winds hit heavy on the borderline; but in the north-country wind a message is blowing, which will later be articulated in the poet's song.

As the saga unfolds, various aspects of Hibbing appear in the foreground, illuminating different sides of Dylan's future work as they pass. The town's economy, we are reminded, was based on iron: 'iron under our feet/ iron under feet of snow'. Iron was, in fact, to become a recurring image in Dylan's work - from the literal 'red iron pits' of 'North Country Blues', through the 'dreams ... made of iron and steel' of 'Never Say Goodbye', to the 'idol with the iron head' of 'Jokerman' and the metaphoric 'iron waves' of 'Caribbean Wind'; those 'iron waves', indeed, later reappear in Scobie's pages ('Generations on the move/ crossing the Atlantic's iron waves'), and we may glimpse something of the process by which that real, literal iron of Dylan's childhood environment could sink into his soul and become an element in the growth of his mind.

We read on to learn how, when it was discovered that 'the best deposits of ore' ran 'under the corner of 2nd and Lincoln Streets', the town of Hibbing was bodily moved to the south: 'we can't move the mine/ we're just gonna have to/ move the town', in a remarkable act of physical displacement that may itself anticipate the 'restless hungry feeling' that was to fire Bob Dylan's own never-ending quest. Later, Scobie recalls a curious historical irony - it was in Hibbing, and later Duluth, that the celebrated Greyhound bus company started up: 'A local company/ with a couple of trucks/ Calls them buses:/ commutes to the mine/ expands to Duluth/ calls itself Greyhound'. Dylan evokes the Greyhound bus in "Get Your Rocks Off" and "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie", and it seems appropriate that he should have sprung from the places associated with that symbol of the unending highways of the Beat generation - which he knew, besides, from its appearance in the last stanza of Robert Johnson's 'Me and the Devil Blues', where it stands for incurable restlessness ('so my old evil spirit/ Can take a Greyhound bus and ride').

Later, we see Robert Zimmerman's grandfather, 'Zigman Zimmerman, born in Odessa/ in 1875', as he 'travels/ the immigrant road that narrows/ onto Duluth' (here, Scobie is surely thinking not only of the historical facts, but of Dylan's own song 'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'); he settles in Duluth, and becomes a shoemaker: "' Zimmerman ' means ' carpenter ' so perhaps/ It's a family joke when Zigman becomes a shoemaker '" (the reader may put two and two together and wonder whether this family history may not help account for Dylan's poetic mentions of both professions - the 'carpenters' wives' of 'Tangled Up In Blue', and the words from 'I and I', 'I've made shoes for everyone, even you').

III

1941 arrives, and the young Robert Zimmerman is born. We watch him growing up in Duluth - curiously, like another future poet, William Wordsworth, by a lakeside, living 'rainy days on the Great Lakes' (this is a direct quote from 'Something There Is About You'), in 'the sullen company of clouds'. It is an austerer landscape than Wordsworth's English Lake District, yet there is more than a trace, in Scobie's picture of the Zimmerman child, of that Wordsworthian sensation (as narrated in his great autobiographical poem of 1805, 'The Prelude') of the poet's mind being formed by the physical world around him and its images,

recollected in tranquillity years later. For Dylan, we may think of the lakes, the clouds, and 'the hills of old Duluth'.

When young Robert was six, the Zimmerman family quit Duluth with their chattels, and moved to Hibbing. Scobie's poem moves on, to chart his adolescence, pausing to record the influence of Reuben Meier, a rabbi ('so ancient/ he once met Leo Tolstoy'), who taught 'about war and peace and what it means/ to be a Jew' (the phrase 'war and peace' cunningly forms a link between Tolstoy's novel and the opening line of Dylan's 'Gates of Eden': 'Of war and peace the truth just twists'). The Zimmerman lad, young but daily growing, watches the gradual decline of the mines of Hibbing ('some mornings on Howard Street/ you can taste defeat/ on the edge of the wind'), in a sequence that anticipates and quotes his own future tribute to the old mining communities, 'North Country Blues' ('ain't nothing here now to hold them'). He draws sustenance from nature, in a passage that may recall Robert Frost's young 'swinger of birches' (in his poem 'Birches'): 'Evenings after school he likes to ramble/ gets to the edge of town (it isn't hard)/ watch the silver birch trees shivering/ touched by the fingers of Canadian wind' - till the moment comes when, perhaps inspired by a cold, hard natural image ('the grinding of ice floes/ massive on Superior'), he discovers his poetic vocation taking shape inside him: 'there was a sound that told him/ this is possible/ the world will change/ will, for a moment, shift its direction/ you can create that moment/ you can stop that time'.

But if this young man is going to wind up meeting us on our crossroads as a fully-fledged poet, it will be as a bard in demotic guise. Scobie's unfolding narrative charts him hanging round the movie house, imbibing the films of Marlon Brando and James Dean ('James Byron Dean, 1931-1955', 'dead like Lord Byron on the fields of Greece' - poetry springs up in unlikely places); and listening to the radio, to rock'n'roll, above all to Elvis Presley. Robert Zimmerman will be a visionary, but his visions will unfold within the rough, raw musical idiom being forged by a new kind of youth: 'He traces down a guitar riff/ With the precision of an archaeologist'. Charting the emergence of Dylan the musician, Scobie places the emphasis on the rock'n'roll element in his musical influences, showing him 'standing at the piano pounding/ so hard he breaks the pedal and his voice/ screaming Little Richard'. This side is stressed rather than the older, traditional side, the input from folk, blues and country; and yet even so, Scobie does also sketch an unforgettable vignette of the young Zimmerman savouring the feel of his first guitar in his hands: 'how it feels like something he has always held/ like this, in familiar arms/ time out of mind'. The last four words connect, of course, to Dylan's album of that name of 1997, in which he triumphantly restated his debt to old-time music; and, curiously, they also bind the budding poet to an older literary tradition, for the phrase 'time out of mind' was a favourite of the great American writers of the nineteenth century - it occurs in Melville's 'Moby-Dick', in many of Poe's tales, and, perhaps, most interestingly, in Walt Whitman's 'Song of the Broad-Axe', from 'Leaves of Grass': 'those who time out of mind made on the granite walls rough sketches of the sun, moon, stars, ships, ocean waves'.

We can imagine Robert Zimmerman illuminated by Walt Whitman's sun, or moon, or stars, as, with his guitar in his hand and his poetic vocation clear in his mind, he gazes back to the streets of Hibbing, the small town of his childhood, and bids them farewell for ever. His artist's destiny could no longer be contained within its limits: 'When Bobby goes he'll go for good/ Hibbing won't hold him', and 'certainly his name won't hold him'. The final poem of Stephen Scobie's sequence ends with a cameo shot of Robert Zimmerman in October 1959, in conversation with the manager of a folk club in downtown Minneapolis. The man asks him

what his name is, and the poem ends: 'The singer grins, his left leg suddenly/ twitching out a nervous rhythm/ glances for a moment somewhere north/ and lets the wind or the wind's echo/ speak his name'. The poem-sequence ends as its title does, on the word 'name', and now we realise that an old name is, indeed, about to be shed and forgotten. In the wind is blowing an unexpected answer to the stranger's question: the singer's name is no longer Robert Zimmerman. From now on it will be Bob Dylan, and the coming quest will not be his alone: about to begin is a new quest, one of tens of thousands across the planet - the search ('so many roads, so much at stake') to understand who or what might lie behind that new name, Bob Dylan.

IV

After closing Scobie's book on the pages and the text, the reader is left with a refreshed sense of the growth of Dylan's poet's mind - how his fortunes were moulded by the specific nature of a particular place, but also by the compelling need, in the end, to break with that same place. The poems should also send the reader back to listen with renewed attention to those parts of Dylan's production which bear the imprint of those early years - certain songs on 'Free-Wheelin'', 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and 'New Morning', and the entire 'Planet Waves' album (especially such tracks as 'Never Say Goodbye' and 'Something There Is About You').

Throughout the volume, the quality of Stephen Scobie's writing does justice to his subject. His style is based on the brief line, the taut phrase, the lucid and economical image (as in 'into the cracked and crystal air', or 'where the long lines/ of laden ore cars/ mime the horizon'). Dylan's voice is, as is to be expected, often present behind Scobie's; the marked presence of Dylan quotations in the poems' titles, as noted above, certainly does not, however, mean that the poems themselves resemble some kind of Dylan collage. There are echoes and recollections of Dylan's words across the pages, but the direct borrowings remain few and discreet, and the voice we hear is Stephen Scobie's own. Even so, the alert reader will identify the sources of such phrases as 'living/ outside the law' (taking up Dylan's 'to live outside the law you must be honest', from 'Absolutely Sweet Marie'), 'somebody got lucky' (from 'Pledging My Time'), or 'a country fair and unfair' (here, Scobie puns on Dylan's phrase 'north country fair' from 'Girl of the North Country', altering the meaning of 'fair' and transforming it from noun to adjective). The last example, indeed, testifies to how Stephen Scobie's writing transforms and mutates its materials (including the Dylan sources) within his own, personal creative process.

It may or may not be a coincidence that Scobie's book has appeared in the same year as another work of literature that mines the Dylan treasure-trove, namely Salman Rushdie's new novel 'The Ground Beneath Her Feet' (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999). Rushdie has made direct or indirect reference to Dylan in some of his earlier works, including the novels 'Grimus' and 'The Satanic Verses' (no less) and his collection of essays, 'Imaginary Homelands'. In this novel, he charts the career of Ormus Cama, an imaginary rock singer of Indian origin, aspects of whose story (e.g. a near-fatal accident) bear at least a passing resemblance to moments from Dylan's life. The text of Rushdie's novel also contains, alongside numerous other embedded lyric references, clear traces, indirect or direct (titles, quotations, near-quotations, puns), of at least ten Dylan songs, from 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' to 'Forever Young'. Dylan is mentioned by name three times in the book (pp. 402, 425, 435), even (in the first of those occurrences) showing up to play at an imaginary benefit concert for Ormus Cama. However - and here lies an essential difference with Stephen

Scobie - with one probable exception (what looks like a reference on p. 17 to Dylan's 1989 song 'Everything Is Broken'), Rushdie's Dylan quotations and references are all to the songwriter's earlier work, or at least to nothing later than 'Planet Waves'. Indeed, one might even argue, in more general terms, that the recent official issue of 'Live 1966' has not been altogether beneficial, as it has brought in its wake rather too many comments in the general press from amateur Dylan decline-theorists, lamenting the alleged falling-off in quality of a post-1966 or post-1975 production which they have almost certainly not bothered to listen to properly, if at all. Stephen Scobie, by contrast, does not neglect to give Dylan's later work its due, weaving into his tissue of quotation and allusion references not only to the early material but also to such later songs as 'In The Summertime' (1981) and 'Dark Eyes' (1985), and, as we have seen, to the album title 'Time Out Of Mind' (1997).

Going back in time, the alert reader may discern, behind both voices in this volume - Scobie's and Dylan's - the windborne echoes of an older voice: the tones of Walt Whitman. The influence, in part exerted through Woody Guthrie, of America's national poet on Dylan is well enough known; Allen Ginsberg, in his sleevenotes of 1975 to 'Desire', finds in Dylan's music 'enough Person revealed to make Whitman's whole nation weep', and describes how Dylan 'lets loose his long-vowel yowls and yawps over smalltowns' antennaed rooftops', in a clear evocation of the famous line from the end of Whitman's 'Song of Myself', 'I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world' (section 52). Scobie's typical line is briefer than Whitman's, but the clear lucidity of his imagery, with its concrete sense of place and detail, at times strongly recalls the older poet. As I read lines like these: 'daughter of Sam, fish-peddler, on the shores/ of sullen Lake Superior, under winter skies/ where the ice grinds ashore/ at the dark doors of Duluth', I relive, at the back of my mind the sharp-etched vision of Whitman - the Whitman of lines like 'I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff' ('Song of Myself', section 31); the Whitman who could claim to contain the entire North American landscape in himself: 'I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots' (ibid.) - including, we may imagine, the frozen lakes and iron-ore deposits of the North Country.

V

In the wake of Stephen Scobie's new volume, it is tempting to carry speculation a little further. In an essay of 1871, 'Democratic Vistas' (included in the Everyman edition of 'Leaves of Grass', 1912, repr. 1939, pp. 301-359), Whitman called for the emergence of a new kind of poet for a new epoch, the truly democratic poet of the Americas: 'there must, for future and democratic purposes, appear poets ... possessed of the religious fire and abandon of Isaiah, luxuriant in the epic talent of Homer, or for proud characters as in Shakespeare ... bards who will, now and ever, so link and tally the rational and physical being of man, with the ensembles of time and space, and with this vast and multiform show, Nature ... as to essentially harmonise, satisfy and put at rest' (p. 354). Whitman believed that these poets, or this poet, would be fundamentally different from all predecessors: this would be a democratic poet, whose visionary words - 'a poetry ... bold, modern, and all-surrounding' (p. 346); 'works, books, nobler than any hitherto known' (p. 353) - would also be accessible to the ordinary person, and would communicate the liberating message of 'the pulsations in all matter, all spirit', together with the certainty that 'death is not the ending' (ibid.).

Whitman no doubt hoped that his own work would be a contribution to that new democratic poetry, that he himself would be one of those bards. If so, posterity has borne him out; but it may not be too fanciful to suggest that Bob Dylan, too, may be seen as an embodiment of the

new poet, of and for the future, in Whitman's sense. In the passages from Whitman I have just quoted, there are curious anticipations of Dylan's own phraseology: the intransitive use of 'harmonise', in the context of nature, anticipates Dylan's line from 'Gates of Eden', 'I try to harmonise with songs the lonesome sparrow sings', while 'death is not the ending' points straight to Dylan's title 'Death Is Not The End'. Indeed, 'Democratic Vistas' even contains a critique of the cult of the unmediated visual: 'No useless attempt to repeat the material creation, by daguerreotyping the exact likeness by mortal mental means' (p. 352), which, I would dare suggest, signposts us across the years to one of the most perceptive of all Bob Dylan's lines, 'Dignity never been photographed'. Is it too far-fetched to see the young Robert Zimmerman, as Stephen Scobie imagines him, leaving Hibbing guitar in hand, as starting out on a journey on which he would become an avatar of that new democratic poet dreamed by Walt Whitman, making his gift of tongues accessible to those whom traditional poetry would never reach, by combining visionary words with the power of music, the whole within an idiom both popular and traditional?

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'Some are carpenter's wives': Dylan, Clinton Heylin and 'House Carpenter'

Review of Clinton Heylin, 'Dylan's Daemon Lover: The Tangled Tale of a 450-Year Old Pop Ballad', ISBN 1-900924-15-3, London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 1999, 188 pp.

Christopher Rollason, 1999

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I

'Here's a story about a ghost come back from out in the sea, come to take his bride away from the house carpenter'.

With those dramatic words, Bob Dylan introduces his version of the ancient ballad 'House Carpenter', recorded at the very beginning of his career and officially released three decades later, on 'The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3' in 1991. Ghost and bride, love and death, meet on one of Dylan's very earliest recordings, in a remarkable interpretation of a traditional song that dates back 'time out of mind'. In his new book, Clinton Heylin has pulled off the tour de force of devoting 188 pages to the discussion of that one song (plus some side-exploration of related material). Starting out from Dylan's version, he traces the history of 'House Carpenter' back through a seemingly endless sequence of versions, American, English, Scottish and even Manx, citing it under at least six other names (from 'The Daemon Lover' and 'James Harris' to the Manx 'Yn Graider Jouylagh'), and quoting it in full in a good nine different versions (Dylan's included) and in part in several dozen more. He then considers its themes in relation to those of two other ballads from the Anglo-Scottish tradition, and, finally, twists the thread back through the American folk and blues tradition to return the reader to Bob Dylan and the present day.

Heylin certainly has the credentials for such a task, as the author of a number of well-regarded books on Dylan - and of complete discographies of Richard Thompson and the late Sandy Denny, folk-rock icons whose work draws its sustenance from the British folk tradition. This is, in fact, not really a book on Dylan as such, despite the title and despite the familiar photo from the outer sleeve of Dylan's first album that stares out from the front cover. It should also be made clear from the outset that this is not a book about the music of 'House Carpenter': Heylin's interpretative analysis focuses entirely on the words of the various versions. It is, in its author's own words, 'a kind of literary detective story': a closely researched investigation of the history of 'the oldest song in the Dylan canon' and, ultimately, of 'the roots from which all Anglo-American traditional song has been cultivated' (p. 6). On the way, the reader encounters such figures as Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Graves - literary eminences whose presence testifies to the multiple and fruitful, if often ignored, cross-fusions that have occurred between official high culture and 'unrespectable' folk culture across history. That cross-fertilisation itself anticipates the similar marriage of elite and popular cultures to be found in the work of Bob Dylan - a creative space where, in the words of his 1965 song 'Tombstone Blues', 'Ma Rainey and Beethoven once unwrapped their bedroll'. Heylin's book is, simultaneously, a contribution to Dylan studies, to ballad studies and to the whole broad area of folk and popular-cultural studies.

It is also, in most aspects, a successful and stimulating contribution to those fields of study. This does not mean it is without its defects: there are rather too many typos, most of which could have been avoided by the simple expedient of running the spellchecker, and - as will be seen below - Heylin's transcript of Dylan's performance of 'House Carpenter' is not free of error. These are, however, minor cavils. As far as I know, the only previous review of Heylin's book is Stephen Scobie's (rec.music.dylan, July 1999; 'On The Tracks', Vol 7 No 2, Fall 1999, pp. 51-53). Professor Scobie's text is succinct, but makes a good number of salient points. The present study is intended as a more detailed and comprehensive exploration of both Heylin's book and the song 'House Carpenter'; and before the voyage is over, I hope to have travelled too, with the reader for company, through some other, wider and deeper waters, that remain uncharted by Heylin.

oOo

II

I shall start where Heylin does, with Bob Dylan's recording of the song: its history, and its text. The back-cover credits on 'The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3' date the recording at 19 March 1962 and identify it as an 'out-take from the album "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan"'; Heylin, however, gives an earlier date, 22 November 1961, thus making it an out-take from the sessions for Dylan's first album, 'Bob Dylan'. This re-dating of the session pushes the recording back earlier into Dylan's career, which somehow seems appropriate if this is in truth - as Heylin believes - the most venerable song he has ever laid down. Heylin, curiously, does not explicitly note the discrepancy; the 1961 date in his new book is the same as that given in his earlier book, 'Dylan Behind Closed Doors: The Recording Sessions [1960-1994]' (1995; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996 - pp. 7-9). 'The Bootleg Series' and Heylin both agree that the track was laid down at the Columbia company's recording studios in New York City. As to the recording date, the consensus among Dylanologists seems to be that Heylin is right and 'The Bootleg Series' is wrong. Dylan recorded the song one more time, on 4 March 1970 at the 'Self Portrait' sessions ('Behind Closed Doors', p. 78), but this version

seems never to have seen the light of day (*ibid.*, p. 80). Heylin does not mention any live performances, and, on the available evidence, there never have been any.

The 'Bootleg Series volume 1' CD itself credits 'House Carpenter' as one of the six titles on it which are 'traditional songs adapted and arranged by Bob Dylan'; the performance lasts 4:12 minutes. John Bauldie, in his sleeve notes to the box set, writes: "' House Carpenter " has claims to be one of the oldest songs that Bob Dylan has ever sung', but fails to pinpoint any precise musical or lyrical source for Dylan's version, stating: 'Dylan could have heard it anywhere but Joan Baez and Bob Gibson - among others - were regularly singing it in the [Greenwich] Village coffee-houses at the time' (p. 8; Baez in fact recorded the song on her 1963 album 'Joan Baez - In Concert, Part 1'). In 'Dylan's Daemon Lover', Heylin does not venture an exact source either, but puts forward a number of possibilities. One is the Brooklyn-born folk performer Dave van Ronk; the only extant van Ronk version of the song appears to have been recorded in 1964 (it was released on a 1969 album, 'Inside Dave van Ronk', and later reissued on a 1988 various artists CD called 'Blues In The Bottle'), but Heylin suggests that the older artist 'could have taught it to Dylan first-hand' in summer 1961 (p. 5; I shall discuss the Baez and van Ronk versions in section IX below). Another possible folksinger source is Paul Clayton, though Heylin says Dylan's version is substantially different from that recorded by Clayton on his 1957 album 'Cumberland Mountain Folksongs'. By contrast, he discards the ten-stanza version recorded by Clarence Ashley in 1930 and released on Harry Smith's 'Anthology of American Folk Music' (1952; reissued 1997). Ashley's version is certainly one of the better-known historic recordings of the song, but Heylin takes the view that Ashley's 'House Carpenter' 'is a quite different beast' from Dylan's (p. 3), and, indeed, transcription reveals major lyrical variations between the two.

In the end, Heylin plumps for a performance by Almeda Riddle, recorded in October 1959 in Heber Springs, Arkansas, issued in 1960 on a collection of field recordings masterminded by the celebrated folklorist Alan Lomax, and reissued in 1997 on a CD entitled 'Southern Journey Vol. 6 - Sheep, Sheep Don'tcha Know the Road', as part of Rounder Records' omnibus Lomax series (see the label's website at: <http://www.rounder.com>). Andrew L. Kaye's sleeve notes to the 1997 reissue vouch for the traditional roots of this version, claiming that 'with some local adaptations, [it] resembles several of Cecil Sharp's finds in North Carolina in 1916 and 1918'. Heylin comes to the rather strange conclusion that Dylan must have found the 'source for his lyrics' (though not for his tune) in this performance (p. 168) - strange, first, because the two final stanzas that he quotes from Riddle's version in his book (p. 178) are certainly not identical to the equivalent stanzas in the Dylan recording, and, second, because the act of listening to the Lomax CD itself, coupled with that of reading the lyrics thoughtfully transcribed in the sleeve notes, make it crystal-clear that Riddle's fifteen-stanza version is, in a whole host of textual elements, a far cry indeed from the tale as narrated by Bob Dylan. I shall return to the Almeda Riddle rendition below; for the moment, I shall submit that it would not be over-hazardous to conclude that there is, in reality, no one single source for Dylan's 'House Carpenter' - that his rendering of the song is, rather, one more chapter in a tale of constant rewriting and reinterpretation. That, surely, is the history of this ballad - and also the story of the ballad genre as such.

III

I shall now transcribe the lyrics of 'House Carpenter' as Dylan sings them, before going on to propose a provisional analysis of the song. The transcription I have made follows, in the main, Heylin's own, but with a few modifications where necessary, in line with what I am

sure I hear Dylan sing. Heylin's transcription is somewhat different from that existing in the lyrics database on the 'Highway 61 Interactive' CD-ROM, but is indubitably more accurate (Heylin's text is not word-perfect, but, as is well known, the CD-ROM, though useful in a rough-and-ready way, is very far from 100% reliable). Dylan accompanies himself on guitar; there is no harmonica. There are three instrumental breaks and an instrumental finale; I have noted these at the appropriate places.

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Here's a story about a ghost come back from out in the sea, come to take his bride away from the house carpenter

I

'Well met, well met, my own true love!'

*'Well met, well met!', cried she.**

'I've just returned from the salt, salt sea

And it's all for the love of thee.

II

'I could have married a king's daughter there,

She would have married me.

But I have forsaken my king's daughter there,

It's all for the love of thee.'

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK

III

'Well, if you could have married a king's daughter there

I'm sure you're the one to blame.

For I am married to a house carpenter

And I'm sure he's a fine young man.'

IV

'Forsake, forsake your house carpenter,

And come away with me.

I'll take you to where the green grass grows

On the shores of sunny Italy.'

V

So up she picked her babies three

And give them kisses, one, two, three,

Saying: 'Take good care of your daddy when I'm gone

And keep him good company'.

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK

VI

Well, they were sailing about two weeks,

I'm sure it was not three,

When the younger of the girls she came on deck

Saying [she] wants company.

VII

'Well, are you weeping for your house and home?

Or are you weeping for your fee?'

'Well, I'm not weeping for my house carpenter,

I'm weeping for my babies three.'

VIII

'Oh, what are those hills yonder, my love?

They look as white as snow.'

*'Those are the hills of heaven, my love,
Where you and I'll never know.'*

IX

'Oh what are those hills yonder, my love?

*They look as dark as night.'**

'Those are the hills of hellfire, my love,

Where you and I will unite.'

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK

X

Oh, twice around went the gallant ship,

I'm sure it was not three,

When the ship all of a sudden it sprung a leak

And it drifted to the bottom of the sea.

INSTRUMENTAL FINALE

o0o

I am obliged to point out that Heylin's transcription is at fault at the two points which I have asterisked. In stanza I, line 2, there is no doubt to my ears that Dylan sings not 'cried she', as Heylin would have it, but 'cried he' - a significant difference, for if it is the *_woman_* who cries 'well met', this increases her complicity right from the outset. In stanza IX, the hills of hellfire are most certainly 'dark', not 'black' - a small but (as we shall see) a subtle difference.

o0o

Dylan's 'House Carpenter' comes over as a strong, dramatic version of the old story, and his powerful vocal delivery is on a level with the drama. The instrumental breaks, too, come at key moments of the narrative, heightening the suspense and tension. At this point, we may ask: what is actually going on in this strange tale, as Bob Dylan sings it? I shall now propose at least a provisional interpretation of the story - for the moment, treating Dylan's performance as an autonomous text and making no reference to any other version (although we may find that *_after_* examination of some other versions we may wish to modify this initial reading).

o0o

The ten stanzas take the form of quatrains with an abcb rhyme-scheme, and consist, as is common with ballads, of a mixture of narrative and dialogue. The dialogue alternates between the woman and her lover, with stanzas VII, VIII and IX combining utterances from both; no words are put into the mouth of the house carpenter himself.

This structure indicates that, if the song is a variant on the well-worn 'eternal triangle' theme, the husband is pushed well into the background, and the crucial relationship is that between woman and lover. The carpenter never acts or intervenes directly - even though the title makes him the story's ostensible subject, and even though he is named in the text three times as the 'house carpenter', each mention coming emphatically at the end of a line (stanzas III, IV and VII), and once more as the children's 'daddy' (V). Dylan's spoken introduction is of interest here, for it is not entirely clear what is meant by 'his bride': if the ghost has 'come to take his bride away from the house carpenter', *_whose_* bride is the woman? Does she 'really' belong to the carpenter, or to the ghost?

Dylan's introduction identifies the lover as a supernatural visitant before the singer has even begun to sing the song. We may deduce that the visitant, or revenant, is the ghost of the woman's onetime lover: she had promised to marry him, but their relationship was cut tragically short when the man - a sailor? - disappeared, perhaps presumed drowned, at sea (this is suggested by Dylan's 'come back from out in the sea'). Now, he has returned from whatever otherworld he inhabits, with the mission of claiming her. From the outset, the listener knows that this is no human of flesh and blood - a piece of crucial information which is denied, at this stage, to the woman.

The song begins with the lovers' reunion ('well met'); the woman believes her lover has returned in the flesh (if ever she thought he was drowned, her senses now - deceptively - tell her he never died: he has been absent for years in foreign lands, and now he has come back for her). He seems to have returned from over 'there' (somewhere where the Old World monarchical order still exists) as a rich and prestigious man: 'I could have married a king's daughter there./She would have married me'. The woman at first tries to stay faithful to the safe, conventional world of her marriage (presumably in the US and on its eastern seaboard, perhaps in some small, austere, egalitarian Puritan settlement in New England) - to her husband, who is an artisan and a 'fine young man', and to her three children. But the stranger tempts her, we may guess, with the lure of the material wealth that must surely accompany a man who could have had a princess for his bride. He also tries to persuade the woman that her true loyalties should lie with him, not her husband: this is suggested by the repetition of the verb 'forsake' (in stanzas II and IV), implying that as he forsook the 'king's daughter' for her, so she should, in all symmetry and justice, forsake the house carpenter for him. Above all, he invites her to quit her familiar world for 'the shores of sunny Italy': this is, we may presume, not a reference to any Italian immigrant community in the US (the song is too old for that), but, rather, an evocation of a certain 'Europe' - alien and exotic to a puritanical American - where sensual and aesthetic pleasures reign.

And so, in stanza V, the woman takes the plunge, and chooses illicit love over marriage, aristocracy over democracy, Old World over New World. Dylan's guitar interlude at the end of that stanza comes sharp in the middle of the song, bisecting it like a knife and underscoring the total break the woman has made with her old, safe, respectable existence. She bids farewell to her children (but not to her husband!), and sails away, 'out in the sea' with her new-old lover.

The guitar break comes down like a curtain closing on the first act. When the second act opens, time has passed - 'about two weeks,/I'm sure it was not three' - and the ship is out in mid-ocean. At this point comes a detail in the narrative which seems, to say the least, strange (and does not seem to be paralleled in other versions). Heylin transcribes lines 3 and 4 of this stanza as: 'When the younger of the girls [sic], she came on deck,/Saying [she] wants company'. The 'sic' makes it clear he thinks something is not quite right here, a sensation confirmed by the square brackets he puts round 'she' - inserting a missing word and implying that Dylan's text may at this point be incomplete, misremembered or plain garbled. Inexplicably, though, Heylin does not take the matter up again, anywhere in his book! In my own transcription, I have retained Heylin's interpolated '[she]', as the best way of making sense of these lines, although there is another possibility, i.e.: 'Saying, " what's company? "': those latter words _may_ just be what Dylan actually sings, but they would make only the most tortuous sense.

As to what these lines are doing in the story, the listener has every right to wonder who ‘the younger of the girls’ might be, and even to speculate whether this character might not have strayed in from another ballad. However, the lines can be saved from meaninglessness if we suppose that two of the woman’s ‘babies three’ are girls, and that what is happening in this stanza is that, in a dream or supernatural visitation, the younger of the woman’s daughters appears on the ship out of nowhere, asking for her mother’s company. The word ‘company’, coming here at the end of Stanza VI, would then ironically reflect the appearance of the same word as the last in the *_previous_* stanza, when the woman asked her children to keep their forsaken father ‘good company’. Even so, the stanza remains problematic, and it is possible that Dylan might have omitted a preceding stanza from one of his source versions, which would have clarified the matter. Still, if we do accept the reading I suggest, then the ‘impossible’ irruption of the child in Stanza VI comes as the first sign to the woman that all is not well on this voyage.

The next three stanzas (VII to IX) consist of alternating dialogue between the woman and her lover. They may have been blissfully happy together till this moment, but now the storm-clouds are gathering. The lover challenges the woman to tell him the source of her anxiety - does she feel remorse for ‘house and home’, the conventional domestic life she has turned her back on, or is she longing for her ‘fee’? ‘Fee’, Heylin explains on p. 25, is here ‘an archaic expression’, meaning either inheritance or dowry; her lover seems to be asking her teasingly if she regrets making herself financially dependent on him - if she misses her old household and its conventional sources of income. The woman expresses remorse, *_not_* for abandoning her husband but for leaving her children behind: a reaction less guilt-stricken than ambivalent, as she does *_not_* say that she prefers husband to lover after all!

But even as they talk, the open seas give way to a glimpse of land, on two different sides of the ship. These are not shores from any map: on one side gleam the ‘hills of heaven’, on the other loom the ‘hills of hellfire’. The woman now at last realises (or comes to believe) that her companion is no living being, and that all along this has been a voyage to hell. The ship sinks and, in naturalistic terms at least, she is drowned.

This stark ending raises a number of problems, and the listener is left asking a long line of questions - to which the Dylan text on its own cannot, in all probability, provide the answers. Why do heaven and hell suddenly loom up in mid-Atlantic, when according to Christian convention one is above the earth and under it? If hell is under the earth’s surface, how can it have ‘hills’? Does the ship fall straight through the ‘bottom of the sea’ and into the awaiting fires of hell? Alternatively, why did the ship not land at Hellfire Docks, instead of sinking? And if this finale is the woman’s punishment, what is she being punished for? Who was it she betrayed - the legal husband whom she left, or the former lover to whom she had plighted her troth for evermore (remember that ambiguous ‘his bride’ in Dylan’s introduction)? If it *_is_* her demon lover she wants to be with, is she really being punished at all by going to ‘the hills of hellfire .../Where you and I will unite’? Is to ‘unite’ with him not what she wanted all along? The ‘hills of hellfire’ are ‘dark’ (not ‘black’ as Heylin would have it), but is that ‘dark’ the traditional darkness of Lucifer’s empire, or does it stand for the fascination of the unknown? Indeed, are the heaven and hell of this ballad the conventional, Christian heaven and hell at all, or some other kind of place altogether? Or, finally, do they exist at all?

oOo

The obvious, superficial reading of 'House Carpenter' is that the ghostly story is a moral warning to married women; adultery is punished by hellfire. The woman was seduced by the materialistic, aristocratic, Old World blandishments of the demon tempter, and fell away from the straight and narrow path of her austere, egalitarian, puritanical New World community. This is the conventional line taken in, for instance, the sleeve notes to the Almeda Riddle version collected by Alan Lomax, and validated by the performer herself: 'Appalled by the image of a mother abandoning her infant, Riddle remembered her " great satisfaction out of the thought that she got her just deserts " by drowning. Appropriate to Riddle's perspective, this song about temptation followed leads the adulterous couple to the black hills of Hell' (Andrew L. Kaye, notes to the 1997 Lomax reissue). This would certainly be the reading dictated by the 'pensée unique' of orthodox, conformist Christian values. However, the questions I have enumerated above suggest that such an interpretation fails to account for many of the song's details (it is true that, in almost all versions, the woman leaves her child, or children, but it is also true that, again in almost all versions, Riddle's included, she commends the child/children to her husband's care, rather than abandoning it/them outright; she might, after all, according to some value-systems have the right to other aspirations in the world than the conventional destiny of uncomplaining, martyred maternity). The Christian reading might, in the end, arguably appear as a rationalising, moralistic simplification of a tale that has its roots in a time and place far older and far deeper than the religion of Nazareth, with its dogmatic, authoritarian certitudes. As Shakespeare's Hamlet says after meeting his father's ghost, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (I-V, 166).

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IV

At this point I shall return to Clinton Heylin and his tortuous journey down the long and winding road of history, as he follows the tracks of the house carpenter into the remote past. On the way, he uncovers a seemingly endless number of textual variants: as we always find with folk ballads, no two versions are identical, and yet all are recognisably the same song, the same story. The ballad is a collective product, anonymous and unsigned, yet every variant bears the imprint of the individual who took it up and changed it, be it ever so slightly. Of the variants which Heylin quotes or cites, the most important are those published by Walter Scott ('The Daemon Lover', in his famous collection 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border', 1802-1803; later edition, 1833) and Francis James Child ('James Harris ['The Daemon Lover']', in his equally celebrated five-volume compilation, 'English and Scottish Popular Ballads', 1882-1898). The Scott text is a single, 'finished' version; Child's approach is less straightforward, for he offers the reader, under the heading 'Ballad 243', not a single text but no less than eight variants, numbered from A to H (one of which, F, to complicate things further, is actually Scott's text).

Heylin correctly points out that Scott's 'literary' version follows a tradition initiated by Bishop Thomas Percy in his trail-blazing collection of 1765, 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry'. Such versions differ from the rawer field transcriptions in that the compiler has availed himself of his literary prestige to polish the ballad text - tidying up loose ends, removing contradictions and, above all, producing a composite text by taking what he felt to be the 'best' stanzas and lines from a number of different versions. The 'Oxford Companion to English Literature' (1995 edition) states: 'The extent to which Scott himself altered and improved on the texts has been much discussed; it appears to vary from minor adjustments to

the insertion of whole lines and stanzas' (p. 665). A modern equivalent is offered by Robert Graves, in his collection of 1957, 'English and Scottish Ballads' (mentioned several times by Heylin), which is a series of quite avowedly composite texts, put together on principles similar to Scott's.

Heylin contrasts this approach to the more 'ethnographic' method of other collectors, such as Joseph Ritson ('A Select Collection of English Songs', 1783), who believed it was their duty to republish the 'authentic' ballad texts, warts and all. This dispute in ballad-collecting circles, between 'authenticity' and 'poetic effectiveness', had Ritson at daggers drawn with Bishop Percy two centuries ago, and it will, no doubt, run as long as the old ballads are read and sung. Against the scholastic demands of 'authenticity', some readers at least may prefer the quality of an expressive and coherent text. Heylin points out that the 'inauthentic' school has 'consistently provided for the more distinguished literary company' (p. 15); Percy and Scott are part of the annals of literature, while Ritson's name is dust to all but specialists. Besides, as Heylin shows convincingly, Scott's 'literary' version of 'The Daemon Lover' (included by Child as his 'F text') is, in its fifteen lucid stanzas, far more moving and powerful than the 'authentic' doggerel of 'James Harris' in the rambling, thirty-two-stanza broadside version of 1685 published by Child as his 'A text'. Few who have read the two (Heylin quotes both in full) will demur. The 1685 text includes such gems of the poetaster's art as: 'At last news came that he was dead/Within a foreign land,/And how that he was buried/She well did understand'; by contrast, Scott's concluding stanza - even if his own interpolation - is triumphantly memorable in its finality: 'he strack the tap-mast wi' his hand,/The fore-mast wi' his knee,/And he brake the gallant ship in twain,/And sank her in the sea'. (Heylin, pp. 39 and 93).

My own feeling is that writers of the stature of Scott and Graves, and collectors like Percy, all both of them amply acquainted with the folk tradition, were quite entitled to offer the reading public 'best-case' versions of the ballads, as one aim of any such compilation is surely to keep the ballad flame alive and win fresh readers for the old tales from a new generation. In a modern collection of a 'popular' rather than academic nature, Geoffrey Grigson's 'The Penguin Book of Ballads' (Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1975), the compiler, while drawing widely on Child, has, in the case of 'James Harris (The Demon Lover)', chosen Child's 'F text' - in other words, Walter Scott's supposedly 'inauthentic', 'literary' version, and not one of the more 'authentic' alternatives (on the Internet, the F text is also the one chosen to represent our ballad at a website offering some of the better-known texts from the Child collection, at: <http://www.siu.edu/~jvoller/Authors/child.html>). In any case, is what Scott and the rest do in their versions - that is, to offer up a 'new', individually retouched version of an already-existing collective creation - any different from what hundreds of anonymous singers had done before them and would do after them? And, indeed, is Bob Dylan's own strategy for this ballad not essentially the same as theirs?

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V

Through all of Heylin's painstaking research, and all of his multiple citations and quotations, there runs a single, vital strand. He clearly feels that the key to 'House Carpenter' (at least as sung by Dylan) lies in those two mysterious 'heaven' and 'hell' stanzas (VIII and IX); and so, in his journey through the song's multiple versions, the golden thread is supplied by the heaven-and-hell motif and its presence or absence in a given variant. Heylin points out that

the 'hills of heaven and hell' are relatively rare in American texts of the song (in an appendix, he quotes 32 US versions which do mention those topographical features - pp. 170-178; but he is at pains to stress in his text that these are only 32 out of 220-plus transatlantic variants known to him - p. 113). He ascribes their relative absence from the American versions to a tendency by US interpreters to rationalise the tale by stripping it of its supernatural elements - the aim being to domesticate the demon lover's story, to make it tamer and more respectable, more in keeping with American social orthodoxies - and, ultimately, to Christianise a narrative whose origins are pagan, pre-Christian and Celtic.

The heaven and hell motif, present in Dylan and absent from the great majority of transatlantic versions, is present in the most famous and influential of the Scottish versions, that of the Author of Waverley (Child 243F). Scott's stanzas XIII and XIV, which parallel Dylan's VIII and IX, read:

*'O what hills are yon pleasant hills
That the sun shines sweetly on?'
'O yon are the hills of heaven', he said,
'Where you will never win.'
'O whaten a mountain is yon', she said,
'All so dreary wi' frost and snow?'
'O yon is the mountain of hell', he cried,
'Where you and I will go'.*

The same imaginary landscape occurs, in a slightly different form, in another Scottish version which Heylin quotes in full, namely that collected by the Glaswegian William Motherwell in his 1827 volume 'Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern' and reproduced by Child as his 'E text':

*'O what a bright, bright hill is yon,
That shines so clear to see?'
'O, it is the hill of heaven', he said,
'Where you shall never be.'
'O what a black, dark hill is yon,
That looks so dark to me?'
'O, it is the hill of hell', he said,
'Where you and I shall be.'*

Scott's version is clearly the more accomplished, but the fantastic geography is the same; and both coincide in their essentials with Dylan. From all this (pp. 90-93), Heylin concludes that the hills of heaven and hell - which, indeed, in this context scarcely seem part of the Christian eschatology at all - belong to a much older, non-Christian, Celtic tradition. And at this point, he takes a tiger's leap deeper into the past, and asks the reader to make (or renew) acquaintance with a number of ballad characters of a rather different stamp.

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VI

'These daemonic elements', Heylin declares, 'have powerful antecedents that take us deep into the netherworld of tradition, to the fifteenth century and the very dawn of traditional ballad forms' (p. 96). In what is probably the most remarkable insight of his book, he links up the eerie topography of 'House Carpenter' with two other, even older, ballads that, taken

together, speak of heaven, of hell - and of fairyland. These ballads, both of them eminently Scottish and Celtic, are 'Thomas the Rhymer' and 'Tam Lin'; Child of course reproduces both - in the case of 'Tam Lin', in no less than fourteen versions, numbered 39A to M (all may be found on the remarkably complete Tam Lin Pages website: <http://tam-lin.org/tamlin1.html>). Heylin quotes no version of either ballad in full, but texts of both are printed in 'The Penguin Book of Ballads'. In that volume, Grigson reprints the Child 37A version of 'Thomas Rymer [sic]' and the Child 39A text of 'Tam Lin', commenting on the latter: 'Perhaps touched up by Robert Burns, by whom it was contributed to James Johnson's "The Scots Musical Museum" (1787-1803)' (p. 365). The Burns connection is confirmed by Heylin (pp. 124-125), and also by Iona and Peter Opie in their 'The Oxford Book of Narrative Verse' (Oxford: OUP, 1983), which reproduces the same version as Grigson's, word for word (see their note, p. 387). Another standard anthology, Helen Gardner's 'The New Oxford Book of English Verse' (Oxford: OUP, 1972), uses the same text, with minor variations.

Versions of both 'Thomas' and 'Tam Lin' also feature in Walter Scott's 'Minstrelsy'. Indeed, the great novelist devotes special attention to both, prefacing 'Tam Lin' (or 'The Tale of Tamlane') with a long and fascinating essay entitled 'On the Fairies of Popular Superstition', and accompanying 'Thomas' with copious notes and no less than two poetic sequels, both of his own authorship. Scott's version of 'Thomas' (Child 37C; a text not dissimilar to 37A, but with additional stanzas and some variations in detail) is reprinted in his '[Poetical] Works' (Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), in the section 'Contributions to Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border' - pp. 401-422; this volume of 'Works' does not include 'Tam Lin', but Scott's text ('The Tale of Tamlane', a.k.a. Child 39I) may be found at the Tam Lin Pages website. From the plethora of versions, what stands out is that this tale held the attention of both Scott and Burns, the two founders of modern Scottish literature!

Bob Dylan is not known to have recorded either of these ballads, but both are very much present in the contemporary British folk and folk-rock repertoire. Heylin notes the existence of a recording of 'Thomas the Rhymer' by Steeleye Span, as well as an earlier one by Ewan MacColl, from 1956 (p. 116). He does not mention any recordings of 'Tam Lin', but the ballad has been recorded by Anne Briggs (her version, entitled 'Young Tambling', originally appeared on her 1971 album 'Anne Briggs', and was reissued on the CD 'Classic Anne Briggs' in 1990); by - again - Steeleye Span, on their live album of 1992, 'Tonight's The Night'; and, unforgettably, by Fairport Convention on 'Liege and Lief', their landmark album of 1969. Heylin's failure to mention the Fairport version is a little strange, in view of that album's classic status and the fact that he has published himself on Richard Thompson and Sandy Denny, both of whom feature prominently on 'Tam Lin'.

A few words will be in order on some of these modern versions. Heylin gives no specific details for Steeleye Span's 'Thomas the Rhymer', and in fact the history of this group's version turns out to be rather complex. Steeleye recorded a 6.44 m interpretation of the ballad (eleven stanzas plus chorus) on their 1974 album 'Now We Are Six', and also, in the same year, a much shorter 45 rpm version (3.14 m, and only five stanzas plus chorus), intended for radio consumption. Both versions have subsequently appeared on one or another compilation of the group's work: the long 'Thomas' appears on the original two-disc vinyl version of their 1977 anthology 'Original Masters', but the CD avatar of the same collection has the short 'Thomas'; a 1999 CD compilation, 'Steeleye Span: A Rare Collection 1972-1996', however, offers the long version. The 1997 CD reissue of Steeleye's 1980 album 'Sails of Silver' includes, as a bonus track, a live performance of 'Thomas' (itself from 1997) by a somewhat

different line-up of the group: this CD helpfully includes the words (those lyrics, as well as the full discographical story, may also be found on a website dedicated to the group at: <http://www.informatik.uni-hamburg.de/~zierke/steeleye.span/>). As to Steeleye's 'Thomas' itself, the short version may have served to popularise the old ballad on the airwaves, but is otherwise so pared-down as to be best forgotten. The eleven-stanza 'Now We Are Six' version is, lyrically, mostly a condensed and slightly modernised version of the Scott/Child 37C text, with some input from Child 37A; musically, it is a shade abrasive in its insistent percussiveness, but the arrangement, with its crisp pacing and tempo changes, and strong lead vocals from Maddy Prior, displays a fine sense of drama and communicates a fair part of the tale's mystery. The live version, recorded over two decades later, is, if anything, better, showing a more pronounced lyricism in both vocals and arrangement, with Peter Knight's fiddle well to the fore.

Steeleye's live 'Tam Lin' also impresses, with a carefully paced arrangement and stately vocals, again courtesy of Maddy Prior. Of the other notable versions of the same song, Anne Briggs' 'Young Tambling', performed unaccompanied with mournful grace, has a decidedly 'authentic', ethnographic ring; while the Fairport rendition of 'Tam Lin - dramatically arranged by Dave Swarbrick and magnificently sung by Sandy Denny - is an acknowledged classic, one of the pinnacles of British folk-rock. The lyrics to all three versions are reproduced (alongside those of other modern folk renditions) on the Tam Lin Pages website. These three recordings of 'Tam Lin'/'Young Tambling' have certain common points - a female vocalist, a high degree of respect for the original, and substantial length (Briggs: 27 stanzas, 10.32 m; Fairport: 21 stanzas, 7.13 m; Steeleye: 23 stanzas, 10.44 m). Nonetheless, all three texts are different; Fairport alone stick close to the Child 39A (and Grigson/Opie/Gardner) text, using twenty-odd stanzas from that version with occasional lexical modernisations. It is, in all three cases, unmistakably the same story, yet the variations are striking: in Fairport/Child the female protagonist is called Janet; in Anne Briggs' performance she is Lady Margaret; and, curiously, in Steeleye's rendering she remains nameless throughout.

Heylin traces the tale of 'Thomas the Rhymer' back to a historical figure, the thirteenth-century Scottish seer, Thomas of Erceldoune (or, in Scott's spelling, Ercildoune - the modern locality of Earlston, in Berwickshire; Heylin, pp. 116-117; Scott, 'Works', p. 401-402). who was believed to have acquired prophetic powers from a sojourn among the fairies. On this, Heylin quotes Scott's explanation from his 'Minstrelsy': 'The popular tale bears, that Thomas was carried off, at an early age, to the Fairy Land, where he acquired all the knowledge, which made him afterwards so famous' (Heylin, p. 118; Scott, 'Works', p. 401). In Child 37A, 'True Thomas', as he lies resting on a grassy bank, is accosted by the Queen of Fair Elfland, who tells him that he is now her servant, and will be so for seven years, and takes him off with her to her magic realm. Thomas dwells there as her consort, until finally he manages to return to his 'ain countrie'. The ballad does not say how, but concludes: 'He has gotten a coat of the even cloth,/And a pair of shoes of velvet green,/And till seven years were past and gone/True Thomas on earth was never seen'.

What aligns 'Thomas the Rhymer' with 'House Carpenter', however, is an episode towards the end. This is the moment when Thomas finally realises the full import of his journey with the beautiful stranger. The Queen mounts with him atop a hill, from which he beholds three roads. She explains (again, I quote from Child 37A):

'O see ye not yon narrow road,

*So thick beset wi thorns and briers?
 That is the path of righteousness,
 Tho after it but few enquires.
 And see ye not that braid road,
 That lies across yon lillie leven?
 That is the path of wickedness,
 Tho some call it the road to heaven.
 And see not ye that bonny road,
 Which winds about the fernie brae?
 That is the road to fair Elfland,
 Where you and I this night maun gae.'*

The resemblance to the 'heaven and hell' stanzas of 'House Carpenter' is striking. Heylin quotes the relevant stanzas from a number of different versions of 'Thomas' (p. 120). He is surely right to insist on the connection, even to the point of suggesting that those lines in the tale of the demon lover may originally have strayed in from the tale of the faery's consort. In both ballads, we have one human and one otherworldly lover; and a journey to a strange 'other place' - 'fair Elfland' in one, 'the hills of hellfire' in the other - where the lovers are finally joined ('Where you and I this night maun gae', 'Where you and I will unite'). Nonetheless, the supernatural topography is not identical. In 'House Carpenter', the vision is of two possible destinations only, heaven and hell. Remarkably, 'Thomas the Rhymer' avoids this stark, black-and-white choice, by introducing a third place - 'fair Elfland', which is neither heaven nor hell. Instead of a binary opposition, we have a triad.

But the tale of True Thomas, it seems, does not stop here. Heylin argues, provocatively and controversially, that 'Tam Lin' is actually a sequel to 'Thomas the Rhymer'; and that, indeed, 'True Thomas was Tam Lin' (p. 123).

What happens in 'Tam Lin'? In Child 39A, Janet, the daughter of a wealthy lord in the Scottish Borders, is a young girl who wears a 'green kirtle'. She meets and falls in love with the mysterious young man Tam Lin, and becomes pregnant by him. Tam Lin has a strange secret: once an 'earthly knight', he is now an 'elfin gray', and has lived a double life between human and faery worlds, ever since the moment, seven years before to the day, when 'The Queen o Faeries she caught me,/In yon green hill to dwell'. Every seven years, the faeries are obliged to 'pay a tiend [tithe] to hell', and he fears that this time he himself will be handed over to the devil. Only the pure love of a mortal woman can rescue him. It is Hallowe'en, and that night, 'at the mirk and midnight hour', Tam Lin rides in a faery procession; but Janet, following his instructions, manages to rescue him, covers him with her 'green mantle', and restores him to full human status: the Queen of Faery's empire over him is over.

There are several arresting points of contact between 'Tam Lin' and 'Thomas the Rhymer': the relationship between the mortal man and the Queen of Faery, the seven-year term, the reference to hell, and even the colour green (Janet's 'green mantle' recalls Thomas' green shoes; green suggests contact with the faery folk, who, in 'Tam Lin', dwell in a 'green hill'). Both stories, too, at least in the best-known versions, are located in the same part of southern Scotland - 'Thomas' begins at Ercildoune (Earlston), 'Tam Lin' at Carterhaugh, near Selkirk: both places are in the Borders, long the home and preferred region of Walter Scott. We may indeed wish to follow Heylin (pp. 122-129) and conclude that Tam Lin is indeed Thomas the Rhymer, who after his seven-year sojourn in 'fair Elfland' was saved from the clutches of hell only by the love of Janet, who spirited him back to his 'ain countrie'. The two ballads,

Heylin argues, 'might even have been intended to be performed together, telling first the tale of Thomas' capture by the Queen of the Fairies ... and then his escape from Fairyland' (p. 126). He notes with some surprise that neither Child nor Graves speaks of any connection between the two ballads (pp. 123, 129); he could, though, have added in support of his contention that Grigson, curiously, places 'Thomas' immediately before 'Tam Lin' in his anthology.

The evidence from Walter Scott is ambivalent. His 'Tale of Tamlane' (Child 39I) includes one detail which would make it near-impossible for Tamlane to be Thomas, for the elfin protagonist tells Janet that the Queen of Fairies stole him away 'when I was a boy just turn'd of nine'; this detail is, however, not present in Child 39A, and may be an interpolation, by Scott or by an earlier hand - even, who knows, designed to obscure the connection of the two figures! Scott, as noted above, also, in his 'Minstrelsy', prints two sequels to 'Thomas the Rhymer': one offered as essentially his own handiwork but, he claims, in some details 'altered from ancient prophecies', and a second presented as entirely his own ('Works', pp. 403-407; both are in quatrains and imitate the ballad form and language). In the first sequel, Thomas the seer predicts events from the later history of Scotland, including the battles of Flodden and Bannockburn; in the second, after long years spent back in the world, he returns to 'Fairy Land', this time for ever - at the long-foreseen moment when 'a hart and a hind pace side by side' through the town of Ercildoune, the magic sign for him to quit the dwellings of humans: 'But ne'er in haunts of living men/Again was Thomas seen'. This denouement can scarcely be reconciled with Janet's once-for-all rescue of the hero in 'Tam Lin'.

On the other hand, a curious detail in Scott's commentary on his own first sequel eerily re-establishes a link. Scott says he is basing his imagined prophecies of the Rhymer on 'a response from Thomas of Ercildoune to a question from the heroic Countess of March, renowned for the defence of the Castle of Dunbar against the English' (p. 403). It so happens that in Scott's text of 'Tamlane' (Child 39I; a detail not present in Child 39A), the heroine Janet is identified, by Tamlane himself, as ... the daughter of 'Dunbar, Earl March'!!

Nor is another twist to the tale lacking, for the Child 39K text of 'Tam Lin' (republished on the Tam Lin Pages website, and mentioned briefly by Heylin on p. 128) turns out to have been, in Child's words, 'communicated to Scott [on] November 11, 1832 by Hugh Irvine, Dram, Aberdeenshire, as procured from the recitation of an old woman in Buchan'. This version - known, then, to Scott, though not reprinted in 'Minstrelsy' - follows the broad lines of the familiar story, except that Tam Lin is here not called Tam Lin at all, but ... True Thomas! He tells his lover how the Elf-Queen stole him away: 'When I was a boy of eleven years old/And much was made of me,/I went out to my father's garden/Fell asleep at yon apple tree/ The Queen of Elphan she came by,/And laid on her hands on me'. Here as in Scott's main text of 'Tam Lin', there is the disconcerting factor of the protagonist's extreme youth at the time of the abduction, but otherwise this account of how he came to the faery land is similar to the tale of Thomas the Rhymer, who, in Scott's version (Child 37C), spies 'a lady bright/Come riding down by the Eildon Tree'. Heylin makes surprisingly little of Child 39K, and yet it serves as strong evidence that his leap of intuition may indeed be more than a hunch!

Sir Walter's connection with the Rhymer does not end here, for the seer also makes a guest appearance in his novel of 1819, 'The Bride of Lammermoor' - itself a tale of doomed love in the Scottish Borders which could have made a perfect subject for a ballad. In Chapter 18, the ill-fated Laird of Ravenswood is told, by his ancient retainer Caleb Balderstone, of an

prophecy about the fate of his line, which the old servant attributes to none other than True Thomas: 'O, sir, (...) you would but laugh if I tauld it; but Thomas the Rhymer, whose tongue couldna be fause, spoke the word of your house that will e'en prove ower true if you go to Ravenswood this day - O, that it should e'er have been fulfilled in my time!' ('The Bride of Lammermoor', London: Dent [Everyman], 1906, repr. 1952, p. 177). Caleb goes on to recount the prophecy of Thomas: 'When the last Laird of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall ride,/And woo a dead maiden to be his bride,/He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's flow,/And his name shall be lost for evermore!' (p. 178). This is of course an invented prophecy, but in the novel's last chapter Ravenswood perishes in the 'Kelpie's flow' (the quicksand under his tower), exactly as predicted. It may be added that Scott's novel furnished Gaetano Donizetti with the story for his celebrated opera of 1835, 'Lucia di Lammermoor', thus exporting a piece of the Scottish ballad tradition to 'the shores of sunny Italy'

Later in the nineteenth century, Rudyard Kipling, another poet whose own oeuvre draws heavily on the ballad tradition, wrote another sequel to 'Thomas The Rhymer' ('The Last Rhyme of True Thomas', 1893; in 'Selected Poetry', Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), in which the bard's prophetic gifts are once more stressed. In this poem - written, like Scott's two sequels, in quatrains and in a pastiche of old Scots - the King comes to True Thomas, impressed with his fame and wanting to make him a knight; Thomas enthrals him with his harp and weaves him images of his innermost thoughts, but refuses the offer, preferring the magic realm of poetry to the sphere of secular power: 'I ha' harpit ye up to the Throne o' God/I ha' harpit your midmost soul in three./I ha' harpit ye down to the Hinges o' Hell/And - ye - would - make - a Knight - o' me!'. Both Scott's and Kipling's acts of producing sequels suggest that neither thought a second part of 'Thomas' already existed, or perceived any real, solid link between the Rhymer and Tam Lin. Heylin's position has, then, to be called controversial: but nor is it untenable, for, whatever the textual details of later versions, it remains more than possible that the original Tam Lin, back in the mists of time, was, indeed, True Thomas himself.

If we do follow Heylin and consider the two ballads as a related pair, Elfland itself acquires a curious status: it seems to be a 'third place', neither heaven nor hell (see that third road in 'Thomas'), yet not totally independent (remember that 'tithe to hell' in 'Tam Lin'). The land of the faery folk, we may surmise, represents an alternative to Christianity, but one which exists only on sufferance: it is tolerated by the two official worlds of heaven and hell, but only on condition that it recognises their overlordship (the tithe may be paid to hell rather than heaven on the grounds that the unrespectable faeries have more in common with the former). The ballads may thus be pointing symbolically to the continued survival of the old pagan belief-system under the hegemony of Christianity, but on society's margins - in remote areas like the Scottish Borders - and on the condition of accepting its own peripheral status. Robert Graves, in his introduction and notes to 'English and Scottish and Popular Ballads', has, as Heylin notes (pp. 128-129), eloquently stated the case for just such a survival of the 'Old Religion' in officially Christian Scotland. This state of affairs could, indeed, serve as a paradigm for alternative societies in general: the intentional communities, organic farms, urban communes, etc, that flourished in the 60s and 70s - the world of the 'basement down the stairs' of Dylan's own 'Tangled Up In Blue' - in the end only existed and survived (as some, like the Findhorn Foundation in north-east Scotland, do to this day), as it were, on sufferance from 'straight society', which obliged them to obey at least some of its rules, such as paying their electricity bills, or, might one say, their 'tithe to hell' ...

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VII

At this point we may leave 'fair Elfland' and return to 'House Carpenter', to speculate further on what those mysterious hills of heaven and hell might mean. Certainly, the most obvious or immediate reading of the tale is an orthodox Christian one: the demon lover tempts the woman away from her wedded husband and drags her down to hell. However, neither in Dylan's version nor in any other that I know does the song actually end with an unequivocal descent into the Christian inferno. The ship certainly sinks, but nothing tells us that it docks in at the devil's landing-stage. It is quite possible to brush the ghostly narrative against the grain and propose an alternative, non-Christian reading (Heylin is convinced that the original, unknown 'author of the " Daemon Lover " was ... conversant with " Thomas the Rhymer " or ... an ancient version of " Tam Lin "' (p. 129). Certainly, 'House Carpenter' names only two otherworlds, not three as in 'Thomas the Rhymer': but the daring reader may speculate that if the 'hills of heaven' do indeed represent the Christian universe, the 'hills of hell' - accessible, after all, by sea! - belong not to the Christian place of punishment at all, but form a glimpse of an alternative cultural space where Christian values simply do not apply - somewhere like the faery land of the two Scottish ballads, even though this 'other place' too may in the end exist only on the sufferance of Christianity, society's dominant ideology.

Such a reading of the song may be implicit in the penultimate stanza of the song as Dylan sings it: 'Those are the hills of hellfire, my love,/Where you and I will unite' . These hills loom 'dark as night', but their darkness may point not to punishment and pain, but to a pagan otherside of the soul denied by Christianity: the ghostly odyssey is a leap into the dark because it is a voyage into the unknown. The lovers are not separated, they 'unite'.

At this point, the reader may wish to venture into territory uncharted by Heylin. Stephen Scobie, in his review of Heylin's book, speculatively compares the destiny of Emily Brontë's Cathy and Heathcliff: 'over the years I have had a more Romantic interpretation. I never saw the wife " uniting " with her ex-lover in Hell as a punishment, but rather as a fulfilment. The point of the story, I thought, was that the two lovers were destined for each other, if only as ghosts - like Cathy and Heathcliff in " Wuthering Heights " - and that they would prefer being joined in Hell to being separated in Heaven' ('On The Tracks', 7-2, p. 51). Such a reading may be backed up from other sources in English Romantic literature (we may recall the importance of the old ballads, as revived by Percy and Scott, for that whole early nineteenth-century generation of writers). Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan' (1797; in 'Poetical Works', Oxford: OUP, 1911, repr. 1969) famously includes the image of a 'woman wailing for her demon lover', in an Oriental, pagan context of imperial splendours. In John Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1820; in 'Poetical Works', Oxford: OUP, 1905, repr. 1989), a poem steeped in ballad lore, the 'knight-at-arms', seduced by a 'faery's child', wakes up on the 'cold hill's side', in anguish and trembling in the aftermath of her vanished embrace: but the woman's very disappearance may actually be the consequence of his own limitations, his own inability to break out of his guilt-ridden Christian conditioning and fully embrace the liberating possibilities of faery. Keats' knight may, indeed, be a Thomas the Rhymer manqué, a flawed mortal who failed to rise to the elf-queen's expectations. More daringly still, Lord Byron, in his verse drama 'Heaven and Earth' (1822; in 'Poetical Works', Oxford: OUP, 1904, repr. 1989), starting out from Genesis 6:2 ('and the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair'), imagines how, against the backdrop of Noah's Flood, two women of the lineage of Cain become the lovers of two dissident angels, and finally fly away with them in search of 'some untroubled star'- 'a brighter world than this', where the

vengeful hand of Jehovah cannot reach them (I-III, 775, 822). This Byronic other place, neither heaven nor hell, stands for a possible alternative culture liberated from Judeo-Christian repression, and it is tempting to speculate that the carpenter's wife and her demon lover may also be heading for a similar destination. Their story may, indeed, be a 'Thomas the Rhymer' in reverse, with the demon lover as a male Queen of Elfland and the woman as a female True Thomas, true at last to her former vows.

The subversive listener may even wish to go back in time beyond Celtic paganism, to the Greco-Roman universe and the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (as revived by Salman Rushdie in his novel of 1999, 'The Ground Beneath Her Feet', whose rock-star protagonist is, in part at least, visibly a fictionalised Dylan). Orpheus travels to the realm of the dead to rescue Eurydice; the demon lover reverses this journey, as a spirit voyaging to the land of the living to take his bride back. Orpheus' attempt to reverse his wife's death fails, but after his own decease the couple are, at least in Ovid's version, blissfully reunited in the otherworld: 'The ghost of Orpheus passed beneath the earth; he recognised all the places he had seen before and, searching through the fields of the blessed, found his Eurydice, and clasped her in eager arms. There they stroll together, side by side' (Ovid, 'Metamorphoses', Book XI; Penguin Classics edition, 1955, p. 247). We may, perhaps, imagine the demon lover and his bride united, 'side by side', in a pagan-Celtic otherworld, another Orpheus and Eurydice joined in death.

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VIII

Such may be the ultimate sense of 'House Carpenter', at least for the New Age pagan revivalists and surviving 60s libertarians of our neo-conservative fin de siècle. However, if we are going to return the song to the present another aspect remains to be considered - namely, the presence and influence of this ancient ballad in the subsequent work of Bob Dylan. Here, Heylin throws out only a few clues. He mentions two other Dylan versions of traditional songs: 'Pretty Peggy-O', from the first album in 1962, which he identifies as 'a heavily-Americanised rendition of a fine eighteenth-century Scottish ballad, "The Bonnie Lass o' Fyvie"' (p. 3), and 'Love Henry', from 'World Gone Wrong' (1993), which, as he states, is an 'American form' of the old Scottish ballad 'Young Hunting' (pp. 13-14; the Child 68A text of 'Young Hunting' is in Grigson's anthology); both connections serve to underline the Scottishness of 'House Carpenter', and point to a perhaps surprising Celtic presence in the Judeo-Christian Dylan's work. As for the possible impact of the demon lover's tale on Dylan's own songwriting, the only suggestion Heylin makes concerns 'Man In The Long Black Coat', from 'Oh Mercy' (1989); he quotes a notice of that album from the 'L.A. Reader' of September 1989, in which the reviewer, Chris Morris, reads that track as 'a chilling song-story about a diabolical stranger that takes its inspiration from centuries-old English [sic] ballads about the Demon Lover', and goes on to argue that Dylan's narrative is, indeed, 'exactly the song that would have been written by the house-carpenter when he found his wife had left with a mysterious stranger' (p. 168). This insight is fascinating, though Heylin does not expand on it (I may, here, venture to point the reader towards my own reading of 'Man In The Long Black Coat' - also on this site - in which I examine, precisely, the possible 'diabolic' status of the stranger and read the song as a critical exploration of the Calvinist-Puritan mindset).

I would now like to put forward a number of other possible connections within the Dylan oeuvre, not mentioned by Heylin. The carpenter couple themselves point rather insistently to 'Tangled Up In Blue' and the 'carpenters' wives' reference in that song's last stanza (in the 1975 'Blood on the Tracks' version). As Stephen Scobie puts it in his review, 'the carpenter is ... the one who gets left behind. He represents safe, conventional married life: home, children, family, respectability'. Scobie also stresses that 'the name "Zimmerman" is German for "carpenter"' [the German spelling is actually "Zimmermann" with two 'n's]; he concludes from this that 'the carpenter is the one who is left behind - just as "Bob Dylan" left "Robert Zimmerman" behind in Hibbing to follow the demon lover of his art and career off to Minneapolis and New York' ('On The Tracks', 7-2, pp. 52-53). The connotations of the phrase 'carpenters' wives' in 'Tangled Up In Blue' are, indeed, multiple and highly complex (for a start, the most famous carpenter's wife in legend or history is not our demon lover's bride, but the Virgin Mary herself), and, again, I would refer the interested reader to my own essay on 'Tangled Up In Blue' (also on this site) for a more detailed discussion.

On a rather different tack, the Scottish/Celtic element in 'House Carpenter' signposts us, across all of 36 years, to the 'Time Out of Mind' album of 1997 and its closing track, 'Highlands'. In this song, Dylan takes as his starting-point the poem 'My heart's in the Highlands' - by Robert Burns, who appears in Heylin's book, as we have seen, in connection with 'Tam Lin' (pp. 128-129). We also discover from Heylin that one version of 'The Demon Lover', disguised under the title 'Lady Jane', hails from the county of Aberdeenshire - that 'collected by a Reverend [Robert] Scott in a remote parish near Aberdeen': Glenbuchat, 'on the hilly western borders of Aberdeenshire' (pp. 128-129). If 'House Carpenter' has a branch of its ancestry in Aberdeenshire, that throws an interesting light on Dylan's line in 'Highlands', 'where the Aberdeen waters flow'. The dream of the Highlands in that song would then become a longing to return to Celtic origins (not Dylan's own origins, of course - it's a long way from Odessa to Aberdeen! - but, still, those of an aspect of his music).

Other Dylan compositions which may also bear the imprint of 'House Carpenter' are 'Meet Me in the Morning' (on 'Blood on the Tracks', 1975) and 'Everything is Broken' (on 'Oh Mercy', 1989). The first-named song concludes with the image of a shipwreck: 'Look at the sun/Sinkin' like a ship/Ain't that just like my heart, babe,/When you kissed my lips?', which, appearing in the context of a love affair, recalls the finale of our maritime ballad. The second includes the phrase 'broken vows', which, though it does not occur in Dylan's version of 'House Carpenter', is central to the ballad's sense, and, as Heylin shows, is a recurrent notion across a whole long line of Old World versions (pp. 34-37; one American variant of our ballad has the lines: 'Oh hold your tongue of your former vows' - pp. 32-33). In 'Everything Is Broken', 'broken vows' appear as one more sign of impending cultural chaos in the Judeo-Christian universe ('broken hands on broken ploughs/broken treaties, broken vows'); if the phrase actually points back to an older, pagan order of things (as the carpenter's wife's vows to her former lover win out over her official marriage bond), it ends up reinforcing the sense of crisis in Dylan's song.

However, the work of Dylan's most thoroughly permeated by 'House Carpenter' looks to be a much earlier song, 'Boots of Spanish Leather', from his album of 1964, 'The Times They Are A-Changin''. This is another song which I have looked at in an article elsewhere on this site. As I show in that essay, it is a composition very much in the traditional mode, bearing a clear debt to the famous ballad 'Gypsy Davey' (also known as 'Black Jack Davey', and recorded by Dylan under that name on his 1992 album 'Good As I Been To You'). The input of 'Davey' into this song is undeniable, for the very phrase 'Spanish leather' comes straight

out of that ballad. But 'House Carpenter', too, is surely also present. Comparison of the two songs - 'Boots of Spanish Leather' and the Dylan 'House Carpenter' - reveals some striking parallels. Both are approximately the same length ('Boots' has nine stanzas to 'Carpenter's' ten), and both are made up of quatrains, with an abcb rhyme-scheme - though, admittedly, the rhymes in 'Boots' are in all cases disyllabic or polysyllabic, whereas in 'Carpenter' they are mostly monosyllabic (or, if not, monosyllabic/di- or polysyllabic, of the type: 'three'/'company' or 'night'/'unite'). Both texts are constructed as a mixture of narrative and dialogue, although the narrative portions are first-person in 'Boots' and third-person in 'Carpenter'. In both cases, it is the dialogue that predominates (in 'Carpenter', seven out of ten stanzas are in dialogue; in 'Boots', eight out of nine); and in both songs that dialogue is male/female, between a pair of lovers (in 'Boots' the story concerns only the couple; in 'House Carpenter' the plot does of course also include the third party of the title, but, as we know, his voice is never heard, though one of the narrative stanzas incorporates the woman's words to her children). The similarities are, besides, more than structural: Dylan's song opens with the line : 'Oh, I'm sailin' away, my own true love', which curiously echoes the first line of the ballad, 'Well met, well met, my own true love!'; 'my own true love' is of course a common enough phrase in folk songs, but it is significant that it should occur in exactly the same place in both songs. Finally, both 'Boots of Spanish Leather' and 'House Carpenter' are - allowing for their differences - songs of desire, betrayal and - perhaps - liberation. In Dylan's song the woman sails away to Spain alone, and writes to the man, ending the relationship, in mid-voyage; where the old ballad culminates with a shipwreck, the latter-day song concludes with a relationship metaphorically shipwrecked - broken off on the high seas, with their 'western winds' and 'stormy weather'. Dylan's narrator, the man slighted and left behind, stands in the house carpenter's shoes; and the woman abandons him, in a gesture which to him is betrayal but to her may feel an act of liberation.

It does appear then that, even if he has never performed it live, 'House Carpenter' has been an important song to Bob Dylan across his career, leaving its traces in his own songwriting at unexpected moments (after all, its title contains his own former surname in disguise!). Some of the influences are essentially textual, but 'Boots of Spanish Leather', with its ambivalent conclusion, also carries some of the double-edged, questioning energy of the ancient ballad. The Celtic and pagan origins of 'House Carpenter' also point to the presence of those same elements in Dylan's own work, as a counter-current to the more obvious Judeo-Christian current. Several of Dylan's most important compositions of the period 1975-1978 - 'Isis', 'Sara', 'Golden Loom', 'Changing of the Guards', and even 'Shelter From the Storm' - can, speculatively, be read as symbolic tributes to the 'pagan', pre-Christian Great Goddess, and the time-honoured tale of the demon lover, with its faery undertow, may appear as further evidence for such a strain of meaning in his work.

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IX

It may now prove interesting to develop the argument further and consider some pre-Dylan and (going beyond Heylin's brief) post-Dylan versions of 'House Carpenter'/'The Demon Lover', in the hope that they will cast fresh light on our ballad. None of the later performances is likely to have been directly influenced by Dylan's - which, after all, lay unreleased for three decades - but comparison can still illuminate. I shall look, in greater or lesser detail, at later interpretations of the song by seven recording acts - three American (Joan Baez, Dave van Ronk, and the duo Doug and Jack Wallin), three British (Steeleye

Span, Pentangle and Mr Fox) and one Irish (Sweeney's Men) - with some glances at two earlier recorded versions, the 1930 rendition by Clarence Ashley which Heylin dismisses out of hand, and the Almeda Riddle performance from 1959 (released in 1960) which he conversely claims to be Dylan's main source. I shall also consider a transcript - not available in a commercial recording - of a version sung by Lucy Quigley in Eureka Springs, Arkansas on September 2, 1958 (not mentioned by Heylin), available as No 204 of the Max Hunter Song Collection of the Southwest Missouri State University (website: <http://www.smsu.edu/folksong/maxhunter/index.html>).

The recordings by Joan Baez (1963) and Dave van Ronk (1964), as mentioned near the beginning of this article, were both released after Dylan's was recorded. Both are more similar to Dylan's version than to Clarence Ashley's; and both include the hills of heaven and hell, which Ashley does not - the sleeve notes to the Baez album point out, in this connection, that 'most American variants of the ballad lack the supernatural overtones of the original (except possibly in the two closing verses)'. Baez ends, climactically, with the vision of opposing hills - placed after the ship's sinking -, whereas Dylan and van Ronk both reverse the sequence. Her version is long (fifteen stanzas to Dylan's and Ashley's ten), and adds some stanzas that reinforce the factors of wealth and sensuality as part of the demon lover's temptation: 'Six ships, six ships, all out on the sea,/Seven more upon dry land,/One hundred and ten all brave sailing men,/Will be at your command'; 'And she putted on her rich attire,/So glorious to behold,/And as she travelled along the road/Shone like the glittering gold'. Baez has no 'shores of sunny Italy', replacing them by the non-specific 'banks of the salt, salt sea' (here she echoes Ashley, who has 'banks of the deep blue sea'); so there is no specific Old World location in her version, though there is still a 'king's daughter' beckoning in that direction. Van Ronk's eleven-stanza rendition does offer the 'banks of sweet Italy', as well as the female scion of royalty; and in both Baez and van Ronk, the celestial hills are 'fair and high', while their infernal counterparts are 'dark and low' - a contrast, if anything, more emphatic than Dylan's 'white as snow' versus 'dark as night'.

The Almeda Riddle version, collected by Alan Lomax in 1959 and recorded in 1960, contains a whole series of details which are absent not only from Dylan's version but also from Ashley, van Ronk and Baez. Formally it is idiosyncratic too, as it consists of (fifteen) five-line, not four-line stanzas, with the rhymescheme abcbb (rather than abcb); it is, indeed, the only example of the song I am aware of that uses this verse-form. It does, certainly, include the hills of heaven and hell: 'white as snow' and 'black as night', therefore imagined in terms very similar to Dylan's. However, strangely enough for an American version, it locates the woman's and carpenter's domicile 'on England's shore'. It also adds such curious elements as 'the banks of the sweet Willie' (where?!); a 'scarlet dress' and 'purple cloak' for the woman's garb, making her 'like a gypsy queen'; and a ship's crew consisting of 'a hundred and ten' - not, as in Baez, 'brave sailing men', but slaves - 'big [African-American] men' ('African-American' is, the reader is warned, not the word actually sung or reproduced in the booklet). When the vessel springs a leak in mid-voyage, we are told: 'And the ocean in did pour,/And the flames began to roar'. The narrative ends: '" Those are the hills of Hell ", he said, " Where you and I'll unite "' - a conclusion which certainly parallels Dylan's penultimate verse, but does not wipe away all the differences which have accumulated across the song's length. Almeda Riddle's keening, unaccompanied delivery is certainly impressive, but it is impossible to agree with Heylin that this rendition has to somehow be Dylan's main source.

A further American recording, by Doug and Jack Wallin - chronologically recent (from a 1995 album entitled 'Family Songs and Stories from the North Carolina Mountains'), but, with its austere ethnographic feel and Smithsonian sponsorship, presumably based on a much older model - has, like the Baez and Riddle performances, all of fifteen stanzas, and offers a new geographical twist by replacing the 'shores of sunny Italy' with the more specific (and surprising) 'banks of Sicily'; and, as in Riddle, lays stress on the temptation of luxury: 'I have three ships upon the sea,/All making for dry land,/I have three hundred jolly sailor boys,/You can have them at your own command'; 'Then she dressed up in a yellow robe/Most glorious to behold,/She walked the street all around and around/And shined like glittering gold'. The hills of heaven are, this time, 'fair as any snow' - much as in Dylan - while their diabolical opposites loom, not 'dark as night' but 'black as any crow'.

Of further major interest are some of the interpretations of the song thrown up across the Atlantic, by the British and Irish folk-rock movement; some of these, indeed, will lead us further away from Christianity and its rigid world-view than any of the rival US versions. These Old World renditions include performances by: Sweeney's Men (1967); Pentangle (1969 and 1998); Mr Fox (1971); and Steeleye Span, whom we have already encountered for 'Thomas The Rhymer' and 'Tam Lin'. Steeleye included 'Demon Lover' on their 1975 album 'Commoners' Crown'. The group offer a spirited interpretation including some picturesque details, not present in Dylan's version, which reinforce the tale's magical, supernatural status. The woman's 'husband dear' is not identified as a carpenter; the group have clearly chosen a British version, which overlaps at several points, fairly closely if not identically, with the Child F/Scott text. Much as in Scott (cf. section V above), the 'hills of heaven' are coupled with a forbidding 'mountain of hell' (Steeleye vary on Scott here with the line 'where evil winds do blow'). Earlier on, Steeleye reproduce, almost word for word, a stanza from Scott that heightens the magical element, well beyond anything in the Dylan text: 'She set her foot upon the ship,/No mariners could behold/The sails were of the shining silk/The masts of beaten gold'; and they even go one better than Sir Walter in replicating his climactic ending (cf. section IV above), but with the addition of a yet more melodramatic touch: 'He took her up to the topmast high/To see what he could see,/He sunk the ship in a flash of fire/To the bottom of the sea'. This version consists of eight stanzas proper, plus an innovation, in the shape of a refrain: the lines 'I'll show you where the white lilies grow/On the banks of Italy/I'll show you where the white fishes swim/At the bottom of the sea', familiar from other versions, are sung, twice over, four times. This device is only partially successful, however, as it lessens the element of surprise by giving away the ending, several times over and too early. Nonetheless, this Steeleye rendition is overall extremely powerful and dramatic: it is also similar to Dylan's in its judicious use of instrumentation at key moments (there is a guitar break between the 'hills of heaven' and 'mountain of hell' stanzas, heightening the suspense, and the recording concludes, like Dylan's, with an instrumental finale - this time in the form of a melancholy flute solo).

Of the other folk-rock versions from the British Isles, that by the short-lived but impressive group Mr Fox (on their 1971 album 'The Gypsy') offers remarkably fine instrumentation (with fiddle and tin whistle) and strong, piercing vocals from Carole Pegg, but no particularly distinctive textual variants in the eight stanzas sung (and no hills of heaven and hell either). Much the same may be said of the thirteen-stanza rendering by another formation that enjoyed only a brief existence, the Irish group Sweeney's Men. 'House Carpenter' appears on their eponymous album of 1967: the sleeve notes claim that this performance is based on the Clarence Ashley version, though actually the words are not that similar. Again, vocally and

instrumentally this is a very powerful interpretation, but the text chosen - here too, heaven-and-hell-less - adds nothing of particular note.

Quite another matter, however, are the two renditions by a rather better-known outfit, the Anglo-Scottish band Pentangle. 'House Carpenter' is featured on their 1969 album 'Basket of Light', and again, almost three decades later, on the 1998 CD 'Passe Avante'; the latter release is credited to 'Jacqui McShee's Pentangle', reflecting the personnel changes that have left McShee as the sole survivor from the original group. The arrangements on the two versions are substantially different (the first features banjo and sitar (!), the second is more jazz-tinged, with piano and saxophone), but the text used is identical. This version of 'House Carpenter' is very different from Dylan's, but has, like his, ten stanzas. On 'Basket of Light' McShee takes eight of these, while Bert Jansch sings stanzas II and VII; on 'Passe Avante', the vocals are Jacqui's alone. Her vocal delivery is fairly similar on both, despite the intervening years; she is, as her surname suggests, Scottish by birth, and if anything the Celtic tinge in the vocals is more marked on the 1998 recording. The text reproduced below corresponds to the lyrics printed in the CD booklet for 'Passe Avante' (no lyrics were provided for 'Basket of Light').

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TEXT OF PENTANGLE VERSION

oOo

I

*'Well, I once could have married the king's third son
And a fine young man was he.
But now I'm married to a house carpenter
And a nice young man is he.'*

II

*'But would you forsake your house carpenter,
And go along with me?
I'll take you to where the grass grows green
On the banks of the river Dee.'*

III

*'What will you have to maintain me upon,
To keep me from slavery?'
'I have seven ships, they will soon be at land,
And they at your command shall be.'*

IV

*She took her two babes by the hand,
And kisses gave them three,
Said: 'Stay at home, you darling little babes,
Keep your father sweet company'.*

V

*She dressed herself in her very best,
Like a high-born lady was she.
She shimmered and she shimmered and she proudly stepped,
As they walked by the banks of the sea.*

VI

*Well, they hadn't been gone but a short, short time,
Until she wept full sore:
'I would give all the gold and the silver too,*

Just to see my babes once more.'

VII

*'Well, if you had all the gold and the silver too
That ever did cross the sea,
You never would be on land any more
And your babes you would never more see.'*

VIII

*Well, they hadn't been sailing but a short, short time,
About two weeks, three or four,
When the ship sprang a leak and they were doomed,
And they were far away from the shore.*

IX

*'I see bright hills of heaven, my dear,
Where angels come and go -?
I see bright hills ...' - 'That's hell, my dear,
Where you and I must go!'*

X

*'Well, I wish I were back with my house carpenter,
I'm sure he would treat me well,
But here I am in the raging sea,
And my soul is bound for hell!'*

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The differences between this version and Dylan's are manifold, but three are particularly significant: the role-reversal by which the woman could have married the king's son; the replacement of 'sunny Italy' by the 'river Dee'; and the telescoping of the two hills-of-heaven-and-hell verses into a single stanza. The most curious thing about Pentangle's version is that none of the above elements appears in any of the versions quoted in Heylin's book, be they English, Scottish or American - certainly not in any of those he quotes he full, nor in any of the extracts he reprints from those that he quotes only in part. At the same time, these variants are all of remarkable interest for the 'Celtic-pagan' reading of 'House Carpenter'. Pentangle's 'House Carpenter' surely sets the lovers' reunion in America, for the song is known under that title only in the US, and the sleeve notes to the original vinyl issue of 'Basket of Light' identify the song as an American version of an old British ballad. In the first stanza, however, it is, strikingly, the woman, not the man, who confesses to a past amour with an offshoot of royalty. In the Dylan text, the man 'could have married a king's daughter there'; here, the woman 'once could have married the king's third son'. The Pentangle variant changes the picture altogether, for it places the woman under the sign of the Old World and its values. She can only have encountered the king's son in Europe, even if her later choice of the carpenter suggests that she afterwards opted for the New World and its demotic order. The demon lover can only be someone whom she knew in Europe before emigrating, whose wraith has now crossed the Atlantic to claim her - indeed, he may even be the ghost of the 'king's third son' himself. The song's European, Old World character is further strengthened by the substitution of 'banks of Italy' by the 'banks of the river Dee'. This river is in Scotland; indeed, it flows through Aberdeenshire and reaches the sea at the city of Aberdeen ('where the Aberdeen waters flow?'); and while both Italy and Scotland belong to the Old World, this variant clearly intensifies the Celtic character of the tale.

At least one precedent does exist for Pentangle's addition of a Scottish dimension. This is to be found in the Max Hunter collection mentioned at the beginning of this section, on which a

few brief words may be in order. This collection of folksong recordings from the Ozark Mountains, housed by the Southwest Missouri State University, includes seven versions of 'House Carpenter'. Of these, four are transcribed (with tunes) on the university's website, and the most interesting for our purposes is No 204, from 1958. This is a nine-stanza version of the song, which breaks off rather abruptly at the crying-for-her-babe juncture (so there are no hills of heaven and hell). What it does offer, however, is the variant: 'I'll take you down where the green grass grows/On the banks of the sweet Dundee'. There is in fact no river Dundee, but the river Tay meets the sea at the city of Dundee, and, for all the imprecision of this American reference to a half-remembered Scotland, it must be to Scottish shores that the lover is enticing the woman - both here and in Pentangle's version.

This is the only version I have managed to locate, other than Pentangle's, which contains a Scottish place-reference. Interestingly, however, the Scott/Child F text puts into the demon lover's mouth the rather cryptic lines 'I wad never hae trodden on Irish ground,/If it had not been for thee', which presumably mean that he spent part, at least, of his absence exiled in Ireland; Heylin thinks this detail is a 'Jacobite interpolation' (p. 94), and adds that the song 'has not been collected in Ireland' by any folklorist (p. 106) - although, of course, modern Irish recordings do exist, by Sweeney's Men (as seen above), and also by Daithi Sproule (1993).

To return to Pentangle, it is also surely significant that their version compresses the usual two 'heaven and hell' stanzas into one - something for which there is no precedent in any version cited by Heylin, the 32 US variants in his appendix included. Not only that, it introduces a strange interchangeability between the two sets of hills. In Dylan's, as in most other versions that mention the hills, they are contrasted as 'white as snow'/'dark as night'; other American texts have such variants as 'like glittering gold/black as any crow' or 'bright and green/rough and steep' (Heylin, pp. 171-173). In this version, by contrast, both sets of hills are perceived as 'bright', as if heaven were doubling hell. This strange equivalence may set the listener wondering whether the heaven/hell opposition exists anywhere but inside the mind, and may, indeed, serve in support of the 'pagan' reading of the song I have suggested above, which would make of the lovers' final destination, not the Christian hell at all, but an alternative ideological space - an 'other place' free of repressive social conditioning, which to those who believe in it can shine quite as bright as the conventional heaven of the Christians.

X - CONCLUSION

A close listening to Pentangle's two recordings suggestively returns 'House Carpenter' to its demonic origins in a pagan, pre-Christian Scotland, an intuitive and passionate universe far removed from the dogmatic certainties of American puritanism. Such a reading can only help confirm the conclusion that seems to be latent in Heylin's book, namely that Bob Dylan's visible debt, at the beginning of his career, to the traditional Anglo-Scottish ballads should serve as a pointer to the presence in his work, running just below the surface, of a Celtic and pagan undercurrent that draws its sustenance from older and deeper sources than the more obvious and familiar Judeo-Christian uppercurrent. Once upon a time, the Celtic culture was spread across all of Europe, as far as the shores of the Black Sea: would it be too fanciful to surmise that one day researchers may uncover a hidden Celtic presence at the heart of Bob Dylan's origins, in the remote Ukraine of Robert Zimmerman's Jewish ancestors?

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APPENDIX 1: SOURCES

My thanks to the following for supplying valuable information, by email or conventional mail: Alan Fraser, Michele Gilmore, Antonio Iriarte, Nicola Menicacci, Francesc X. Puerto, Stephen Scobie, Ben Taylor and Rainer Vesely.

The following websites were of great help for this article:

- the Tam Lin Pages: <http://tam-lin.org/tamlin1.html> (has the words of every Child version, as well as those of numerous recorded versions, including all those mentioned in this article; much of the material on this site is copyrighted by its webmistress, Abigail Kitaguchi);
- the Rounder Records site: <http://www.rounder.com> (for the Alan Lomax collection);
- the Max Hunter Song Collection, at South West Missouri State University: <http://www.smsu.edu/folksong/maxhunter/index.html> ('the Max Hunter Collection is an archive of almost 1600 Ozark Mountain folk songs, recorded between 1956 and 1976');
- a site dedicated to the Child ballads: <http://www.siue.edu/~jvoller/Authors/child.html> (has some versions of selected ballads, including the 243F 'James Harris', but not 'Thomas the Rhymer' or 'Tam Lin');
- a remarkably comprehensive site devoted to Steeleye Span: <http://www.informatik.uni-hamburg.de/~zierke/steeleye.span/> (has full recording details and lyrics for the group's work, including the songs discussed in this article).

Of the classic ballad collections, neither Percy nor Scott seems to be available on-line at present. The University of Glasgow apparently has a long-term project for putting *all* the Child collection on the Web.

Sources for the printed versions of the ballads quoted or cited in this essay are:

'James Harris or The Demon Lover' (Child 243F/Scott) - Geoffrey Grigson (ed.), 'The Penguin Book of Ballads'

'House Carpenter' (Max Harris 204) - Max Harris site

Other 'Demon Lover'/'House Carpenter' texts - Heylin

'Thomas the Rhymer' (Child 37A) - Grigson

'Thomas the Rhymer' (Child 37C/Scott) - Scott, '[Poetical] Works of Walter Scott'

'Tam Lin' (Child 39A/Burns) - Grigson

'Tam Lin' (Child 39I/Scott) - Tam Lin Pages site

'Tam Lin' (Child 39K; sent by Hugh Irvine to Scott) - Tam Lin Pages site

Sources for the words of the recorded versions quoted or cited are:

*'House Carpenter/Demon Lover':

a) Dylan - Heylin's book and the CD-ROM 'Highway 61 Interactive', corrected from my own transcript

b) Pentangle - CD booklet to 'Passe Avante'

c) Lomax/Riddle - CD booklet to 'Southern Journey Vol. 6'

d) Ashley, Baez, van Ronk, Wallin, Steeleye Span - my own transcriptions

*'Thomas the Rhymer'

Steeleye Span - CD booklet to 'Sails of Silver' (1997 reissue)

*'Tam Lin/Young Tambling'

Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span, Anne Briggs - words posted at Tam Lin Pages site

I have made transcriptions of eight versions of 'House Carpenter/Demon Lover' (in addition to the Dylan and Pentangle texts quoted in full in this article), namely:

Ashley, Riddle, Baez, van Ronk, Wallin, Steeleye Span, Sweeney's Men, Mr Fox,

and will gladly email them to anyone interested.

The Max Hunter site has transcriptions of words and music of three full versions of 'House Carpenter', as well as fragments of a fourth (see URL above).

Appendix 2 below consists of a provisional list of recordings of 'House Carpenter/The Demon Lover (etc)', garnered from a number of sources: Heylin's book; the notes to the 1997 reissue of Harry

Smith's 'Anthology of American Folk Music'; the CD Now website at www.cdnow.com; Michele Gilmore's researches; and my own record collection.

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APPENDIX 2: RECORDINGS OF 'HOUSE CARPENTER' / 'THE DEMON LOVER' (etc):

* = recordings which I have had the opportunity of hearing at time of writing

*Almeda Riddle (recorded 1959; released 1960 as part of Alan Lomax project; reissued 1997 on VA: 'Southern Journey Vol. 6: Sheep, Sheep Don'tcha Know the Road')

*Bob Dylan (recorded 1961; released 1991 on 'The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3')

Bradley Kincaid ('Favorite Ballads and Old Time Songs')

Buffy Sainte-Marie ('Little Wheel Spin & Span', 1966)

Carolina Tar Heels

*Clarence Ashley (recorded 1930; released 1952 on VA: 'Anthology of American Folk Music', compiled by Harry Smith; 'Anthology' reissued 1997)

Clay Walters (as 'The Ship Carpenter' - 'Child Ballads Traditional in the US, vol. 2' - Library of Congress)

Daithi Sproule ('Heart Made of Glass', 1993)

*Dave van Ronk (recorded 1964; on 'Inside Dave van Ronk', 1969; and VA: 'Blues in the Bottle', 1988)

*Doug and Jack Wallin ('Family Songs and Stories from the North Carolina Mountains', 1995)

Edward Flower ('Chords and Thyme')

Golden Delicious ('Cavity Search', 1998)

Grisman/Koblalka ('Common Chord', 1993; with Jerry Garcia)

Handsome Family ('Milk & Scissors', 1996)

Harvesters, The

Hedy West ('Pretty Saro and Other Appalachian Ballads', 1980)

Jean Ritchie and Doc Watson ('Jean Ritchie and Doc Watson at Folk City', 1990)

*Joan Baez ('Joan Baez - In Concert, Part 1', 1963)

Joan O'Bryant (as 'House Carpenter's Wife')

Kelly Joe Phelps ('Shine Eyed Mr Zen', 1999)

Lisa Moscatiello ('Innocent When You Dream')

Mark Humphrey ('Burning Love', 1997)

*Mr Fox ('The Gypsy', 1971)

Noah Saterstrom ('Thistle', 1998)

Paul Clayton ('Cumberland Mountain Folksongs', 1957)

Pearl Jacobs Borusky (as 'Well Met, Well Met' - 'Child Ballads Traditional in the US, vol. 2' - Library of Congress)

*Pentangle ('Basket of Light', 1969)

*Pentangle (as Jacqui McShee's Pentangle) ('Passe Avante', 1998; re-recording, but with same words as 1969 version)

Pete Seeger ('Folk Music of the World', 1991 compilation)

Pete Steele ('Banjo Tunes and Songs')

Richard Dyer-Bennett ('Songs')

Rick Lee (as 'The Daemon Lover' - 'Talk About a Fence', 1999)

Sarah Ogan Gunning ('The Silver Dagger')

Sheila Clark

*Steeleye Span (as 'Demon Lover' - 'Commoners' Crown', 1975)

*Sweeney's Men ('Sweeney's Men', 1967)

Tempest ('Tenth Anniversary Compilation')

Texas Gladden ('Anglo-American Ballads')

Tony Rice ('Church Street Blues', 1983)

Watson Family ('Doc Watson Family', 1963)

VA: 'Before the Blues Vol. 3: The Early Black American Music Scene'

VA: 'Mountain Music Collection Vol. 3: Pictures from Life's Other Side', 1994

VA: 'Rhythm of the Mountains', 1994

'It's All Been Written in The Book':

Review of **Michael Gray, 'Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan'** (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), ISBN 0-304-70588-8, soft covers, xxvi + 918 pp.

Christopher Rollason, 2000

I: A FUNNY OL' WORLD THAT'S A-COMIN' ALONG - THE DAWN OF DYLAN CRITICISM

Back in 1974, when I was a student of English literature at England's venerable Cambridge University, I remember encountering, in Heffers' bookshop in Trinity Street, a copy of the first edition of Michael Gray's 'Song and Dance Man', alongside Bob Dylan's own 'Writings and Drawings'. If my memory serves me well, there was something about the text of 'Spanish Harlem Incident' combined with Gray's analysis of that song that first turned me on in a serious fashion to the full power and depth of Bob Dylan's songwriting. Soon after, I acquired a copy of 'Another Side of Bob Dylan' at Andy's Records. My future as a 'Dylan person' was launched, and since then the message has always been: 'Don't Look Back'.

The first edition of Michael Gray's book ('Song and Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan', London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1972; London: Abacus [paperback], 1973; New York: Dutton, 1973) was, in the author's own words (p. xix of his preface to the new book), 'the first full-length study of Dylan's work'. If by this is meant ****critical study****, and if we stress the word 'work' (as opposed to life), there is no doubt: Gray's 1972 volume was the first book-length analysis to apply the methods and values of literary criticism to the lyrics of Bob Dylan. There was already more than abundant source material by then, if we recall that Dylan had been recording for ten years and that his latest release at the time was 'New Morning'. Gray's effort certainly gained its due recognition from the beginning: the back-cover blurb to the 1973 Abacus edition featured a tribute from Robert Shelton, author of the sleevenotes to the Hibbing exile's very first album, which declared: 'Michael Gray, as author and person, is a genuine Dylan scholar, impelled by fascination with the man's art ... Gray joins the select fraternity of Dylan students ... who are forming the basis for a body of scholarship that will one day illuminate our schools, colleges and streets with the importance of that song and dance man who has affected so many so deeply'.

Nine years later, Michael Gray came out with a second edition, retitled in reverse as 'The Art of Bob Dylan: Song and Dance Man' (London: Hamlyn, 1981 [simultaneous hardback and paperback]; New York: St Martin's Press, 1982 [simultaneous hardback and paperback]). This brought the discussion of Dylan's writing up to date as far as 'Saved' and, therefore, the crown-of-thorns conundrum of the Christian conversion. In 2000, after all of eighteen years, Gray returned to offer a third and much-expanded edition, taking in all of Dylan's songwriting up to 'Time Out Of Mind'. From now on in this review, I shall, where relevant, refer to the various editions as SDMI, SDMII and SDMIII.

II: THE CHANGES I WAS GOING THROUGH - 'SONG AND DANCE MAN' I, II AND III

The structure of this new third edition is rather curious. It begins with an ample swathe of introductory material - a long list of 'thanks and acknowledgements', a preface placing the new edition in the context of past and present, a note on the conventions used to identify recordings, and an 'album-by-album guide to Dylan's work' up to the 1998 release of 'Live 66'. After that the book proper begins, and we discover that Gray has chosen to reprint the seven chapters that made up SDMII, virtually 'as was' apart from usually minor corrections (he does, incidentally, correct the mistaken identification in the earlier editions of the traditional 'Belle Isle', included on 'Self Portrait', as a Dylan composition - p. 26n) - except that they are also ****not**** 'as was', since they are substantially amplified by a relentless battery of footnotes (in decidedly small print). These notes are, indeed, at many points so extensive that they all but transform the chapters they are appended to. The main text of these seven chapters, however, generally comes over as smooth and finished, as much of the SDMII text it is based on was, after all, a carefully rewritten and reconsidered version of SDMI (some of the more far-fetched interpretations in SDMI were dropped for the second edition).

This takes the reader up to p. 248. The rest of the main text, all the way up to p. 877 (the rest is bibliography and index), consists of 13 new chapters. As in SDMI and II, Gray concentrates on Dylan as ****songwriter****: readers should not expect any sustained commentary on Dylan's poems and prose-poems from album back covers, or on his prose work 'Tarantula', or on his excursions into film. There is, however, a chapter (No 20 and last) on Dylan as live performer. Parts of the 13 new chapters have previously been published in earlier versions, but the bulk clearly is genuinely new.

Gray's organisational strategy gives SDMIII a curiously uneven feel. The first seven chapters are polished enough, whereas much of the new material comes over as written in a torrent of enthusiasm - an outpouring of what Lord Byron once called 'the lava of the imagination' - but as, simultaneously, rather rough-hewn. The footnoting is often as heavy as in the earlier, revised chapters. All this makes for a long and unruly volume - in Gray's own words (Preface, p. xx), 'a benign kind of labyrinth'.

The bulk of my comments on SDMIII will be on the 13 new chapters, since the earlier material (footnotes apart) has been available long enough to have become an established part of the Dylan critical corpus. Gray's insistence on Dylan's multiple cultural sources - the complex ways in which his writing crosses and recrosses the accepted boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture - remains as convincing as ever. This should be clear from the titles of the first three chapters: 'Dylan and the Folk Tradition', 'Dylan and the Literary Tradition' and 'Dylan and Rock Music'. Meanwhile, before getting down to the new material I shall first make some specific comments to make on chapters 2 ('Dylan and the Literary Tradition') and 7 ('The Coming of the Slow Train').

III: THE BOOKS YOU'VE READ - DYLAN AND THE WORLD OF LITERATURE

The chapter entitled 'Dylan and the Literary Tradition' began life in SDMI as 'Dylan and the English Literary Tradition'; SDMII saw a welcome addition of comparisons with ****American**** writers and the removal of the limiting designation 'English'. Now as then, I can only applaud the connections which Gray weaves between Bob Dylan's poetic practice and the writing strategies of William Blake, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Robert Browning, T.S. Eliot and other figures of the official Anglo-American literary canon. The discussion of Dylan and Browning (p. 64-70), in particular, is spot-on. The Victorian poet's

great contribution to literature in English is his development of the form known as the dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue is a poem narrated by an imaginary 'I', a fictional or historical character who should ****not**** be confused by the reader with the poet as individual: the 'I' who writes is not the same as the 'I' who speaks on the page. In Gray's words, 'Browning mastered, as no one before him, this form - the dramatic monologue. Dylan has used it as no one else since' (p. 64). I would add, though, that while I entirely agree with Gray's identification of Dylan as a great practitioner of this form, I do feel that he fails at this point to mention a number of songs - 'With God On Our Side'; 'Idiot Wind'; 'Joey'; and arguably the entire 'Shot of Love' album - analysis of which could have clinched his point. If we read the songs as dramatic monologues, it should become crystal-clear that when Bob Dylan writes or sings 'I', that 'I' is not necessarily Bob Dylan. No-one would deny that the 'I' of 'North Country Blues' is a fictional miner's wife who cannot possibly be the song's male author; nor is anyone is going to confuse the Mexican fugitive of 'Romance in Durango' with the Jewish-American artist formerly known as Robert Allen Zimmerman. I would, however, want to go much further and maintain that 'Joey' is narrated not by Dylan at all but by an imagined member of Joey Gallo's gang, and, speculatively at least, that the 'Shot of Love' album is the monologue of an 'I' torn between belief and disbelief in Christianity, who exists only in and through the songs. I would like to have seen Gray develop this point further, and apply it to Dylan's later work.

Also, on the more concrete level of literary references in the songs, it seems a pity that Gray misses an obvious Browning allusion in 'Tombstone Blues' ('puts the pied pipers in prison'). Indeed, that same song also offers a reference to Longfellow ('the reincarnation of Paul Revere's horse') which Gray doesn't pick up either, even though he suggests the New England poet as a possible influence on Dylan (pp. 76-77). Similarly, he finds the pallid ghost of Edgar Allan Poe haunting Bob Dylan's mind (pp. 77-78), and compares the imagery of 'Sara' to that of the Boston-born writer's poem 'To Helen' - and yet doesn't mention Dylan's obvious reference to Poe's story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues', let alone the raven of 'Love Minus Zero', which has obviously flown out of Poe's poem named for that bird, or, indeed, the eminently Poesque opening of 'Not Dark Yet' ('Shadows are falling, and I've been here all day'), which could have come straight out of 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. Still, the subject of Dylan and literature is an immense one (think too of all the writers' names scattered across 'Tarantula'), and I have no desire to protest too much: Gray opened the door wide back in 1972, and has kept it open ever since.

IV: THE PERFECT FINISHED PLAN? - DYLAN AND CHRISTIANITY

In chapter 7 ('The Coming of the Slow Train'), Gray confronts one of the key problems of Dylan studies, namely how his listeners should relate to his evangelical Christian albums of the 'born-again' period. For the historical reasons alluded to above, this chapter concerns only the 'Slow Train Coming' and 'Saved' albums, and not 'Shot Of Love'.

The shock of Dylan's evangelical conversion has elicited various reactions, then and now, among those non-believing, liberal-to-radical listeners who, we may reasonably presume, make up his core audience (though we could also usefully remember that, as is clear from the periodic discussions on Dylan-and-Christianity on the rec.music.dylan Usenet newsgroup, the conversion did not only lose Dylan fans, but also actually ****gained**** him some in Christian milieux!). One possibility would of course be to drop Dylan altogether, as some do, from that moment; another, somewhat more rational given his return from 'Infidels' on (if not before) to his good old oblique-and-cryptic songwriting mode, would be to ignore the religious albums,

exclude them from one's Dylan collection, and concentrate on his secular work of before and after. A third option, however, is to accept the songs on 'Slow Train Coming' and 'Saved' as part and parcel of the Dylan canon (after all, 'Gotta Serve Somebody' and 'In The Garden' do still feature in his setlists), and make the effort to evaluate them as such, whether or not one likes what they say and whether or not one thinks they are qualitatively up to his usual level. This third strategy - in the end the only objective one for a serious Dylan student - is that chosen by Michael Gray, himself visibly no Christian believer.

The text of chapter 7 as it appears in SDMIII is effectively ****not**** the same as that of the equivalent chapter in SDMII, for the good reason that Gray has added a whole artillery of notes (some of them taking up to three-quarters of a page), which end up all but drowning out the text proper. These notes mostly concern Dylan's biblical references in his Christian songs, and so have the useful effect of strengthening the objectivity of Gray's analysis. Indeed, our critic has made the choice of reading Dylan's religious lyrics as essentially an exercise in biblical commentary. This is, in my view, an eminently sensible solution to the 'evangelical debacle' problem. From one viewpoint, the Bible is a text that straddles the divide between high and popular culture, and in the latter manifestation is - like the blues, the ballads or nursery rhyme - one of the multiple popular-cultural elements that make up the rich substratum to Bob Dylan's own songwriting. The Bible is also - whether one likes it or not, whether one is a believer or not - a founding text of Western culture, one of the 'things that remain' across time and history, and the words of the King James version (the only version Bob Dylan ever quotes from - no anodyne modern translations for our man!) have entered deep into the fabric of the English language. These characteristics of the Bible immediately set up comparisons with Dylan's own writing: his best-known songs - 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', etc - may or may not be his best, but they certainly played the role of founding texts for the radical and youth movements of the 1960s; and Dylan's words, like those of the King James Bible, have seeped into the language, with phrases like 'tangled up in blue' or 'forever young' still cropping up today in newspaper headlines. Meanwhile, those who hold up their hands in horror at Dylan's religious albums might usefully remember that he has in fact besprinkled his albums with scriptural quotations references ****throughout**** his career - all the way from the religious songs ('Gospel Plow', 'In My Time of Dying', etc) which he covered on his first album, or an early song like 'Masters of War' with its Jesus and Judas allusions, right through to his newest song (released since SDMIII appeared), 'Things Have Changed', which declares: 'If the Bible is right, the world will explode'.

In the light of all this, Gray opens his 'Slow Train' chapter with a brief discussion of the biblical presence across Dylan's work, before homing in on detail on 'Street-Legal', the oft-neglected album of 1978, which he brilliantly reads - with hindsight, of course - as anticipating many of the themes of 'Slow Train Coming' and paving the way for the apparent bombshell of the conversion. Particularly convincing is the analysis of 'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)' (pp. 228-230) and that song's scriptural allusions to 'St John', 'forbidden fruit', etc, although conversely Gray misses a crucial point when he fails to note that in 'Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)' the song's title keyword can in Spanish mean either 'sir' or 'the Lord'. This material is largely unchanged from SDMII; what follows, a close reading of 'Slow Train Coming' and 'Saved', has been massively expanded with notes on the songs' biblical sources, with the result that in this edition this commentary has effectively become a Bible reader's guide to the two albums. Gray has proved beyond doubt that, for instance, the chorus-line of 'Solid Rock' is grounded in such New Testament passages as I Peter 1:20 and John 17:24 (p. 236n) - and much, much more in the same vein.

This is all indispensable material for the Dylan student; to establish sources, however, is not necessarily to establish quality, and our critic does indeed dutifully grapple, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, with the great qualitative problem: did Dylan's Christian conversion affect his *writing* for the worse? This was a rather more acute problem in 1981, when Gray's original discussion appeared in SDMII, than in 2000, for in 1981 the 'Christian Dylan' was still a phenomenon of the present, and for all his still-loyal fans knew the next two decades might have been pregnant with two dozen more evangelical albums! The point was, and is, that while earlier albums like 'Highway 61 Revisited' and 'John Wesley Harding' are certainly studded with biblical references and are to that extent comparable with 'Slow Train Coming' and 'Saved', it does not by any means follow that the songs on the latter albums are as good as those on the former. Gray manages to find merit in some of the religious songs, seeing 'Pressing On' as 'an instant classic of a gospel song ... fresh yet well-grounded in traditional strengths' (p. 239n), and stressing how Dylan works into that song a multi-layered evocation to his past in the phrase 'don't look back', three words which, through their recalling of the 1964 song 'She Belongs to Me' and the 1965 Pennebaker film, become a 'self-reflexive text' (pp. 242-243n). He also rightly praises Dylan's use of shock tactics - as he wittily argues, 'like the serpent, subtle!' - in the last stanza of 'Man Gave Names To All The Animals', with the expected line (and rhyme) for 'snake' glaringly conspicuous in their absence (p. 232n). In the end, however, Gray cannot avoid recognising that much of the writing on these two albums *is* irremediably vitiated by the simplistic, black-and-white, either-you-got-faith-or-you-got-unbelief Christian belief-system that underlies them. As he admits at the end of the chapter (in terms carried over from SDMII), while there are quite undeniable continuities, in themes such as apocalypse, between these songs and some of Dylan's earlier secular masterpieces, 'the trouble is, of course, that there is no disguising the fact that "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" is an infinitely better song than "Are You Ready?" ... [Dylan] has been content, on these records, to assert and argue and declaim ... he has not created worlds here, he has only argued about them' (p. 247).

With those comments on 'Are You Ready?' - the last track on 'Saved' - Michael Gray gets off the slow train, and doesn't board it again. Chapter 7 is also the last chapter taken over from SDMII, and, thanks to the compositional scheme chosen for this new edition, we will find no analysis of the 'Shot of Love' album as a whole. Instead, one of its songs, 'Every Grain of Sand', is discussed in detail, as are three other compositions from the same period - 'Caribbean Wind' (later released on 'Biograph'), 'Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar' (left off the vinyl version of 'Shot of Love' but subsequently added to the CD release; also included on 'Biograph'), and the still-unreleased 'Yonder Comes Sin'. This means that we don't really get a systematic tracking of Dylan *out* of his Christian phase in the way that, moving through 'Street-Legal' to 'Slow Train Coming', Gray bravely accompanied him *in*. By the time we have reached 'Jokerman', Gray obviously wants the reader to assume, as indeed most listeners do, that Dylan is no longer writing evangelical songs - and that, whatever Dylan's private beliefs, the scriptural and religious references in the song texts from 'Infidels' on are, as in the earlier work, to be taken as one element of the complex cultural apparatus that underpins his writing, but not necessarily the central or determining element. This approach is implicit in Gray's reading of such later songs as 'Ring Them Bells' or 'Dignity'. Some readers might have preferred a more closely organised discussion of the religious element in Dylan's work, but what Gray has most certainly done across his book is to confront that undeniably difficult element head-on, rather than sweeping it under the carpet or taking refuge in sub-Marxist denunciation. Above all, he has done this by treating Dylan's songs as *texts* that speak in

dialogue with other texts - the key text in this case being none other than Western culture's founding text of texts ...

V: WITH THE PROFESSORS - DYLAN AND THE ACADEMY

The textual dimension foregrounded by Dylan's use of the Bible next leads Michael Gray, logically enough, to the subject of Dylan and his critics: and here we begin with the new material proper. Chapter 8 - the first of the 'new' chapters, and for many readers likely to be the most forbidding, at least on the surface - is entitled 'Well I Investigated All The Books in the Library ...'. In it, our author offers an overview of the state of Dylan criticism today. As Gray told the world in the preface to SDMI: 'I am [not] a professional academic' (SDMI, p. 15; that still holds true today); but the key critics whom he discusses in detail in this new chapter ****are**** precisely that. Gray briefly examines the various biographies, photobooks, performance logs, etc, and even gives a quick nod to the fanzines (paper ones only), but his chief interest visibly lies in two heavyweight volumes, namely the studies by Aidan Day ('Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan', Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) and Stephen Scobie ('Alias Bob Dylan', Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1991) [Greil Marcus' 'Invisible Republic', published in 1997, is mentioned on p. xx of the preface, but Gray presumably considered it too recent to include a discussion of it].

Aidan Day and Stephen Scobie are both professors of English, respectively at Edinburgh University, Scotland and Victoria University, Canada. Gray does them, and Dylan, the favour of treating their rigorous analyses with all the appropriate respect. He makes it clear that he does not share what he sees as being their postmodernist, deconstructionist critical stance - Gray is himself visibly the standard-bearer of a rather older school of criticism - and allows himself ironic asides of the type: 'Aidan Day is such a clean-cut kid about his critico-ideological position that he ****always**** writes "this lyric says"; you won't catch him writing "Dylan says"' (pp. 264-265). For the benefit of those who may not have read these books, Gray articulates Day's insistence on textual indeterminacy and the reader-listener's role in constructing the songs' meanings, and Scobie's emphasis on Dylan-as-text and the multiple senses of the 'I' (or 'eye') generated by the song-texts.

Gray's comments on Stephen Scobie's book prompted a reply by Scobie himself, in his review of SDMI published in the fanzine 'On The Tracks' (Vol. 8, No. 2, 2000, pp. 47-50). Scobie stresses that he writes 'as one of those other Dylan scholars with whom Gray engages in critical dialogue' (p. 47): what emerges is the interesting spectacle of, not just Gray on Dylan and Scobie on Dylan, but Gray on Scobie on Dylan, followed by Scobie on Gray on Scobie on Dylan... The less academic among Dylan fans might demur at this point, but my own feeling is that if this kind of 'critical dialogue' is valid for Shakespeare and Shelley, then it is also valid for Dylan, and the fact that such dialogue exists should be further evidence for the contention that Dylan's work deserves substantive academic attention, on the same terms as that of the officially consecrated poets. All in all, my only cavil over Gray's very useful account of Dylan criticism is its (predictable) Anglocentrism: there is not a word about the substantial body of work on Dylan existing in languages other than English, notably in German and Spanish (but then again one will look in vain for such information in almost any book on Dylan published in the English-speaking world ...); as Stephen Scobie acutely remarks, 'Gray's is a very ****English**** book' (Scobie, 'On The Tracks' review, p. 50n).

Related to chapter 8, and best discussed alongside it, is chapter 10, 'Closin' the Book on the Pages and the Text'. Here Gray deals briefly with the problem of establishing a definitive text

of the lyrics. Consciously following Stephen Scobie on this point (p. 383), he runs through the well-known peculiarities and deficiencies of the official volume 'Lyrics 1962-1985' - no variant texts, versions rewritten from what Dylan sings on record, etc - making, however, no mention of the fact that the same lyric texts plus more now also exist electronically, on the 'Highway 61 Interactive' CD-Rom and on the official website. He goes on to give short shrift to the theory, of poststructuralist inspiration and fashionable in some quarters, that the lyric changes made by Dylan in performance necessarily buttress the view that 'there is no finished text of any individual song' (p. 389). Gray's refusal of this 'never-ending-text theory', as being 'rather too convenient' (ibid.), anticipates his rather critical account of the Dylan-live phenomenon in his closing chapter.

VI: SO YOU KNOW WHERE HE'S COMING FROM - DYLAN'S SOURCES

The bulk of the new material in SDMIII is taken up with either or both of two kinds of analysis: close practical-critical readings of individual songs (or albums), and detailed consideration of the Dylan's sources. I shall take the latter aspect first. Source analysis was already present in the earlier editions (and earlier chapters of this edition), in Gray's mapping of Dylan's relations with folk music, rock'n'roll and literature, and in his tracing of the biblical roots of the religious period. In his new chapters, he considers, variously: Dylan's debt to the blues (chapters 9 and 15), his use of Hollywood motifs on 'Empire Burlesque' (part of chapter 16), his use of nursery rhyme on 'Under the Red Sky' (chapter 17), and his appropriation and transformation of folk and blues standards on the two albums of acoustic cover versions, 'Good As I Been To You' and 'World Gone Wrong' (chapter 18). This archaeological labour is comparable to Greil Marcus' explorations of Dylan's debt to the US rural tradition, in 'Invisible Republic'.

Of Gray's various source expositions, I personally find the 'Empire Burlesque' section the least interesting: he certainly proves that the songs on that album are replete with cinema quotations and allusions - he even notes that 'there were movie houses named Empire Burlesque', giving an example from a Philip Roth novel (p. 551 and note) - but to enumerate sources is not necessarily to prove merit or to redeem the unstructured, tossed-off character of most of the songs on the album, and Gray himself feels obliged to conclude that 'Empire Burlesque' is 'a strong contender for the ill distinction of being Bob Dylan's least admirable album' (p. 577 - but in that case why give it 30 pages?). Considerably more successful is his redemption job on 'Under the Red Sky', where he convincingly demonstrates how, in the songs on that album, Dylan takes lines and images from nursery-rhyme sources and constructs new, fresh material, immediately recognisable as being out of that tradition yet speaking to an adult audience. Here, Gray has established beyond doubt the depth of Dylan's knowledge of the material contained in such collections as the 'Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes', and the surprising creativity with which he uses it in songs like '10,000 Men' or 'Cat's in the Well': 'Bob Dylan is either inwardly familiar with, or has researched energetically into, a huge number of nursery rhymes and children's game-songs ... The evidence is scattered like a paperchase all across the lyrics of "Under The Red Sky"' (pp. 667-668).

The core of Gray's source analysis, however, concerns Dylan's appropriation of old-time folk and blues. For Dylan's actual covers of such material, on 'Good As I Been To You' and 'World Gone Wrong', he delves into the previous history of virtually every song, drawing where relevant on the classic Harry Smith 'Anthology of American Folk Music', and shows how Dylan makes an old or traditional song his own by subtly modifying it (as with the

Stanley Brothers' 'World Gone Wrong'), or else how his interpretation differs from others' (as with ballads like 'Frankie and Albert' or 'Love Henry'). This impetus continues into his account of a song like 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven' from 'Time Out of My Mind' which overflows with allusions to traditional songs, as lovingly teased out by Gray the researcher (pp. 825-827).

Bob Dylan's relationship to the blues in his own songwriting is documented twice over, first generally and then homing in on one song. Chapter 9, slyly titled 'Even Post-Structuralists Oughta Have the Pre-War Blues', is the longest in the book - indeed, with its 112 pages, it could stand as a book in its own right. Here Gray documents and footnotes Dylan's use of blues sources across his whole career (not just the later work), with a wealth of superbly-researched detail and a passionate feeling for the blues. No future Dylan student will be able to neglect the material Gray has unearthed here. We learn that the phrase 'midnight creep' from 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest' occurs in numbers sung by Blind Lemon Jefferson and Howlin' Wolf (p. 366); that the words 'shot of turpentine' from the title track of 'Shot of Love' hark back to Furry Lewis and Tampa Red (p. 368); that 'New Pony' reworks motifs from 'pony-blues' numbers by the likes of Arthur Crudup, Son House and Charley Patton (pp. 370-72); and much, much more, so much that it becomes quite impossible to disagree with Gray's conclusion that 'the more you know of the blues corpus, the more you'll appreciate Bob Dylan's extraordinary regenerative use of it' (p. 379). Further on in the book, a chapter devoted to 'Blind Willie McTell' offers a case-study in Dylan's use of the blues, retracing the career of Dylan's hero McTell and deftly untangling the blues roots (from McTell's own work and elsewhere) of the much-loved song in which the songwriter plays tribute to his great precursor. Gray doesn't quite answer the million-dollar question if Bob Dylan 'can sing the blues like Blind Willie McTell', but part of the fascination of that song is surely that it asks the question without supplying an answer, thus keeping alive that whole blues tradition in which Bob Dylan - as Gray most admirably shows - remains to this day a living and dynamic link.

VII: EVERY ONE OF THEM WORDS RANG TRUE - DYLAN'S SONG TEXTS

The Herculean labour which Gray has put into unearthing Dylan's sources is matched only by the extraordinary work he has invested in the detailed song analyses which punctuate the book. He is not the only critic to offer this kind of close literary-critical reading of Dylan's words-on-the-page (Scobie and Day also notably do so), but in quantitative terms there is surely more song analysis to be found in this book than in any other on Dylan, and qualitatively Gray's readings are every bit as good as those of his professional academic counterparts. Indeed, Stephen Scobie himself concludes in his review that 'the best parts of the book - and the sections which make it an indispensable part of any Dylan library - are those in which [Gray] offers extended, detailed readings of individual songs' (Scobie, 'On The Tracks' review, p. 49).

These 'readings of individual songs', occurring as they do in SDMIII's second, 'new' part, all - interestingly enough - concern 'later' Dylan songs ('later' here meaning not just post-'Blonde on Blonde', but post-'Blood on the Tracks' and, indeed, even post-'Saved'!!). The only 'earlier' song to get a comparable extended treatment is 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', which occupied nine pages and the core part of the then chapter 8 back in SDMI, and now accounts for the bulk of chapter 6. Gray offers track-by-track analyses of certain albums ('Oh Mercy', 'Time Out Of Mind'), but his preferred critical method is to focus on individual songs. So we get remarkably close, detailed readings of such songs as 'Every Grain of Sand', 'Caribbean

Wind', 'Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar', 'Angelina', 'Foot of Pride', 'Jokerman', 'Brownsville Girl', 'Ring Them Bells', 'Dignity', 'Series of Dreams' and 'Highlands'. Such a list, while rightly including some of our songwriter's most-admired songs from the last two decades, is most certainly not a roll-call of Bob Dylan's greatest hits as known to the general public, and non-hardcore readers (if they ever get near Gray's book) might dismiss the selection as wilfully obscure. As Scobie approvingly puts it, 'this care is lavished most extensively not on the well-known songs of the 1960s but on some of the more obscure and undervalued songs of the 1980s' (Scobie, 'On The Tracks' review, p. 49). Indeed, Gray has the courage to devote a whole chapter to 'Yonder Comes Sin', a composition from 1980 which is not only unreleased but unperformed, uncovered and unincluded in 'Lyrics' - a song which, whatever its merits, there have been few to know and very few to love.

Michael Gray subjects these songs to the critical magnifying-glass, with loving and relentless acuity. He reveals the fecund influence of William Blake on 'Every Grain of Sand' (thus linking back to his discussion of Dylan and literature in chapter 2), does a detailed compare-and-contrast workout on the three texts of 'Caribbean Wind' (which are, for those who didn't know, the version officially released on 'Biograph', the one extant live version and a studio draft), and explores the tensions between real and imagined geography in 'Highlands'. The nuts and bolts of Dylan's poetic practice - narrative strategies, alliteration, assonance, end-rhyme and internal rhyme, subversion of cliché - are exposed with an appreciative attention to detail which should (supposing they read it), in all fairness, convince the sceptical that Dylan's at his best ****does**** belong squarely within the precincts of what is traditionally called Literature. As reader and listener, I may not always agree with Gray's interpretations - for instance, where he concludes that 'Angelina' is a 'grand failure' which ultimately doesn't offer a clear articulation of theme (p. 444), I would myself want to push beyond the song's apparent indeterminacy and read it as a multidimensional allegory of a fallen America - but where he talks about Dylan's words-on-the-page/words-off-the-disc and how those words work and interact and 'glow like burning coal', creating endlessly resounding meanings, I have to throw in my hat and call his readings definitive.

To take 'Dignity' as an example, Gray's ten-page discussion of this song (pp. 616-626) brings out its richness and abundance of symbolism, through multiple and surprising insights. He shows how the sixteen verses 'divide between two different rhyme schemes' (ten are AAAB and four are AABC), how 'the difference of shape between the two kinds of verse is matched by quiet distinctions in their subject matter' (the first type focus on characters, the second on places), how 'somebody' and 'someone' become characters in their own right who end up threatening to fuse with the narrator, and much more. He throws light on minute textual details, as in the third line of verse twelve: 'Tryin' to read a note somebody wrote [About Dignity]', where 'out of nowhere, and to most pleasing effect, we suddenly get, for the first and only time, an extra rhyme, by means of an internal rhyme, on one of the AAA lines'; and, not content with this perspicuity, ****also**** points out how this nuance disappears from the song when Dylan performs it live: 'Regrettably, he has always revised this line in concert to eliminate the internal rhyme, altering it to the inferior "Tryin' to read a letter somebody wrote"' (p. 621). Gray fully demonstrates the power of Dylan's writing in this song of a 'journey of quest .. suiting our times, ... dancingly alert' (p. 625), and the same may be said for his expositions of a good dozen other Dylan songs of the 80s and 90s.

Gray's work of practical criticism on these later songs should also, surely, serve as the ultimate refutation of the 'Dylan decline theorists' - of those 'masters of the bluff and masters of the proposition' who (rarely in Dylan circles proper but very frequently in music-press and

mainstream press parlance) purvey the notion that Dylan's work ceases to be of any interest or merit after date x, y or z. The 'Dylan decline theory' is based on the idea that popular artists can only give of their best when young, and are doomed by the market, after a certain age, to sterile self-repetition or mindless commercialism. This theory is probably an extrapolation from the career of Elvis Presley ('raw genius destroyed by the US capitalist machine', etc), or, rather, from an ill-informed and stereotyped view of Presley's career which fails to take in the arguably very high quality of some of Elvis' final-period work (I am thinking of such masterly performances as 'If I Can Dream', 'In the Ghetto' or 'Kentucky Rain'). Applied to Dylan, the decline theory maintains that 'Dylan's work is no good after ...', with the blank variously filled in as 'after Newport '65', 'after the motorcycle accident', 'after "John Wesley Harding"', 'after "Blood on the Tracks"', 'after he found God', etc; thus, for instance, a whole quarter of a century back (!), the Spanish critic Mariano Antolín Rato could begin his book 'Bob Dylan 2', published by Ediciones Júcar of Madrid in 1975, with the blunt affirmation: 'After "Blonde on Blonde", Bob Dylan was never as good' (p. 7; my translation). A British critic, Ian Kearey, reviewing SDMIII in 'Folk Roots' magazine (No 201, March 2000, p. 72), declared rhetorically: 'Dylan's best work belongs to the 1960s, with a few honourable exceptions, and how can one justify so much sheer effort on lesser writings?' For some people, of course, it is of course always comforting to fall back on clichés and stereotypes and pigeon-hole Bob Dylan as 'spokesman of a generation', '60s troubadour', etc; meanwhile, to the likes of Kearey I can only suggest that the answer to his question might be to take a closer look at Michael Gray's dense analyses of those so-called 'lesser writings', and then pick up a pile of later-Dylan CDs, listen to them through with a copy of 'Lyrics' in hand, and then reflect again as to whether the 'early Dylan good, later Dylan bad' stereotype might not be just another case of 'lies that life is black and white' ...

VIII: COULD YOU KINDLY TELL ME, FRIEND, WHAT TIME THE SHOW BEGINS? - DYLAN LIVE

The twentieth and final chapter of Gray's book, 'There Is Only One Up Wing an' Down Wing', centres on a consideration of Bob Dylan's live performances in the 1990s. Here Michael Gray enters controversial territory, and makes proof of considerable courage. There can be little doubt that over the 90s the balance of interest within the worldwide Dylan community has shifted from Dylan-as-composer to Dylan-as-performer, across the series of concerts known as the Never-Ending Tour. Endless gruelling tour schedules have taken him all across the USA, from Poughkeepsie to Palo Alto, and all around the globe, from Guadalajara, Mexico to Ljubljana, Slovenia. In contrast to this ceaseless concert activity, the years since 'Under the Red Sky' in 1990 and 'The Bootleg Series vols. I-III' in 1991 have seen an unprecedented paucity of new Dylan-released originals (the eleven on 'Time Out Of Mind', plus the stray number 'Things Have Changed' which appeared too late for Gray's book; at a pinch one could add 'Dignity', released in 1994 but composed in 1989, and 'Mississippi', unrecorded by Dylan but covered by Sheryl Crow in 1998, and at that point - fourteen new songs - the barrel is well and truly scraped). It is therefore scarcely surprising if many of Dylan's admirers have displaced their focus of attention from the words and images of his songs to his on-stage interpretations of them. The attraction of the new is ensured in Dylan circles by the regular on-line release of concert setlists, with novelty raising its head when he exhumes a never-before-played song (as recently with 'Down Along the Cove' and 'If Dogs Run Free'), or adds a number like 'White Dove' or 'Blue Bonnet Girl' to his lengthening list of traditional live covers. Meanwhile, there has also been a quantum leap in the qualitative level of his concerts, thanks to his recruitment of a band of superlative musicians whose

professionalism and versatility are matched only by their feeling for the spirit of the songs: many believe that, musically speaking, Dylan's concerts are today at an all-time peak.

All this is fine, but when one talks of Dylan live there are still a number of questions blowing in the wind - and Michael Gray has bravely raised them. He takes on the 'Dylan live' question in the context of his own stated 'disquiets over aspects of what Dylan has done to himself and his art over these last years' (p. 835). Among these 'disquiets' Gray includes such controversial gestures as the concert in Bologna before a certain Karol Wojtyla and the use of 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' in a banking commercial (both actions others too could have done without, but surely not enough on their own to obliterate the value of 400-plus songs over 40 years). He also objects to more general recent practices, such as the way Dylan now has himself introduced on stage as 'Columbia recording artist Bob Dylan' (is this a contractual obligation?) and his tendency to refer to his performances as 'shows' (p. 845; one might add, though, that the word 'show' does occur, even if ironically, in such classic songs as 'Desolation Row' and 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts'). Phenomena like these, suggesting a certain commercialisation of Dylan's work or conventionalisation of his attitudes, are one thing; the quality of the performances themselves is another, and, one might argue, what really matters.

Here indeed, a fair contemporary verdict can only be mixed. Gray berates Dylan for a long line of substandard performances (among which he includes all of that subsequently released as the 'MTV Unplugged' album), conversely praises certain 'magnificent' and 'shining' live moments (pp. 861, 862), and, in what might be called an exercise in practical listening, takes the reader all the way through an audience tape of a sample concert, as it happened Dylan's 800th (Berkeley, California, 7 May 1992 - pp. 862-869) - from whose highs and lows he feels obliged to conclude that 'even when you're experiencing the reality of a run of ... inspired, acute performances, you don't any longer trust him to keep it up' (p. 866).

Gray's objections centre in particular on two aspects which it often seems taboo to raise in Dylan circles. These are Dylan's tendency to drop stanzas from his songs in performance, and his proneness to forget his own lyrics onstage. On the first part, Gray observes sourly that 'he always cuts out verses from long songs these days' (p. 855). 'Always' is an exaggeration, as there are longer songs like 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and 'Boots Of Spanish Leather' which he **does** perform in full as he did in the old days, but I can only agree with Gray that Dylan's frequent lumberjack operations on his own work do often leave a sense of 'short-changing of the audience' (ibid.). It is highly regrettable that a fine song like 'Tombstone Blues' should almost always be served up chopped in half; and it is disappointing to find even a recent composition like 'Cold Irons Bound' (performed with stanzas four and five telescoped into one) subjected to the same filleting procedure. In some cases, particular stanzas seem to have disappeared for ever, as seems to be the fate of the fourth stanza (of five) of each of 'Highway 61 Revisited', 'Visions of Johanna' and 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' - although in the last-named case one might argue that stanza four adds little to the song and that its dropping is actually an improvement. For other songs, like 'To Ramona' (sometimes stanza 3 goes out, sometimes stanza 4) and 'Like a Rolling Stone' (idem for 2 and 3), one cannot, at least, claim that a given stanza has been abolished outright; and although the ten-stanza 'Desolation Row' today never seems to exceed seven stanzas in performance, Dylan does ring the changes on which he includes, so that every listener's favourite one **might** turn up on a given evening. Still, there can be no doubt that arbitrarily dropping even one stanza can ruin the aesthetic effect of a song. 'Absolutely Sweet Marie' loses its circular character if amputated of the last stanza (which repeats the 'railroad' image from

stanza one), while by dropping (as he always seems to) the central stanza 3 from 'I and I' Dylan removes the extraordinary pun on 'eye and eye' that lies at the song's heart. Objective reasons do no doubt exist to 'justify' Dylan's scissors-work on his songs: audience fatigue, artist fatigue, the need for instrumental breaks to showcase the band, the commercial need to pack a certain number of songs into the 'show', etc. Some might recall that Shakespeare's plays are often performed cut, and would be performed far less if completeness were insisted on; others might dismiss Gray's (and my) objections as ungrateful pedantry. Even so, it is surely worth remembering that Dylan's audience do include people who have lived his songs as part of their lives, who know dozens of them by heart and who ****are**** going to notice - and, like Gray, feel 'short-changed' - if, say, a line like 'to live outside the law you must be honest' doesn't manifest in the expected place.

Dylan's lyrical amnesia is, too, surely a real blemish on many of his performances. All too often he stumbles over the words of those stanzas he does include, and Gray sees this syndrome as expressing a lack of professionalism or, worse, a barely disguised contempt for his audience. He points out that some critics justify Dylan's forgettings as further evidence of his work's status as open-ended text, but refutes such justifications as sophistry: 'however postmodernist you feel ... fluffing is, it isn't better than if he were sufficiently interested in the words to get them right' (p. 855). It is, surely, important to distinguish between a genuine change to a lyric (as in recent performances of 'Frankie Lee and Judas Priest' where 'that big house as bright as any sun' becomes 'that red house as bright as any sun') and mere unprofessional forgetting. As Gray stresses, it is mysterious indeed that the greatest songwriter of the twentieth century should have such difficulty remembering his own lyrics, while a lesser artist like Chuck Berry can 'get the words right. Every time' (p. 856). Of course amnesia doesn't always strike Dylan dumb, and Gray recalls such confound-the-critics occasions as when, one evening in 1988, Dylan triumphantly served up a 'never-sung-live-before, word-perfect version of the lengthy "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" from almost twenty-four years before' (p. 855). There are no doubt excuses: tiredness, mental blocks, painful associations of certain lines, the sheer quantity of songs Dylan has to remember, etc. However, when the cards are down I have to state that I would be happier if Dylan ****didn't**** forget his own words on stage, as I would also be happier if he didn't drop stanzas from classic songs, and I believe Michael Gray is to be saluted for raising these rather sensitive questions.

All artists have their temporary-like-Achilles vulnerabilities, and nothing in what Gray says about Dylan live should be taken as detracting from his ungainsayable admiration for Dylan the songwriter. Equally, the vast body of concert material quite obviously has to be taken into account in any complete assessment of Dylan's work - as Gray has recognised by including this final chapter. However, it seems clear that if forced to take sides on the 'Dylan live/Dylan on record' question, he would choose the recordings; and, despite the high quality of many recent concerts and the remarkable merits of the present band, I have to say that I would do the same - and, indeed, I suspect posterity will in the end remember and revere Bob Dylan as songwriter first and live performer second.

IX : IT AIN'T QUITE THE END - CONCLUSION

Whatever Michael Gray might think about yesterday's or tomorrow's concert, on page 877 he concludes his closing chapter with his enthusiasm undiminished, expressing the hope that Bob Dylan's old age will yield us 'extraordinary new songs ... performed with grace and wit and ardour' - a hope that all Dylan's admirers can but echo. However, Gray has, apparently,

said that there will not be a SDMIV. This does not though, surely, exclude a future SDMIIB which might tie up loose ends, remove repetitions and exclude errors. As I pointed out at the beginning, the circumstances of composition have resulted in a book which is far more polished in its earlier part, and whose later part could benefit from some degree of tidying-up. There are occasional repetitions, especially in the notes (for instance, complete details are given for the Harry Smith 'Anthology of Folk Music' in the notes to every one of the chapters which mention it, a redundancy which could helpfully be smoothed out). Factual errors are few, and Gray, one might claim, knows Dylan's songs rather better than Dylan seems to do himself, but I would nonetheless respectfully draw attention to one or two slips and typos: for instance, the name of the band 'Credence [sic] Clearwater Revival' mentioned on p. 97 is in fact ****Creedence**** Clearwater Revival; and Leysin, where Dylan played a festival in July 1992, is in Switzerland, not Sweden (p. 95n).

Such cavils are, of course, of minor import. What matters is the sheer usefulness of this labyrinthine book, coupled with the reading pleasure it gives. Michael Gray's book, in its sometimes rough-hewn glory, resembles an unfinished cathedral, like Antoni Gaudí's Sagrada Família in Barcelona: it lacks the sheen of completion, but it offers glories of detail at every turn. Its very complexity turns it into what might be called a simulacrum of Bob Dylan's own work, rich with a denseness, unpredictability and fascinating that mirror its subject's lifelong songbook. Long though this book is, it is one of those massive volumes - like Vikram Seth's epic novel 'A Suitable Boy', or 'The Arcades Project', Walter Benjamin's monumental study of Paris - that this reader would not have wished a page shorter. And, most important of all, it admirably fulfils its ultimate purpose by sending the reader back, with expanded knowledge and renewed enthusiasm, to listen once again to the ever-fecund words and music of Bob Dylan. After all, 'though the line is cut, it ain't quite the end' ...

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Dylan's Dusty Old Fairgrounds

Review of **Andrew Muir, 'Razor's Edge: Bob Dylan and the Never Ending Tour'**
(London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2001, ISBN 1-900924-13-7, soft covers, 224 pp.)

Christopher Rollason, 2001

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*'It's a-drag it on down by the deadline in the town,
Hit the old highway by the morning
And it's ride yourself blind for the next town on time
Following them fairgrounds a-calling'*
Bob Dylan, 1963

I

The Never Ending Tour, or NET - that is, to non-devotees, the ever-extending set of intensive concert tours which Bob Dylan has been offering his fans worldwide semi-continuously since 1988 - can only be described as a phenomenon in the annals of popular music. Andrew Muir's new volume fills a gap in the market: until now, the NET has had no book-length study devoted to it in English. On other language markets, there is Christof Graf's 'Bob Dylan: Man on the Road - The Never Ending Tour 1988-1999' (Echternach [Luxembourg]: Éditions Phi, 1999 - despite the title, mostly in German though with some sections in English), and, in a

more specialised context, Francisco García's 'Bob Dylan en España: Mapas de carretera para el alma' ['Bob Dylan in Spain: Road maps for the soul'] (Lleida/Lérida: Editorial Milenio, 2000), much of which consists of a blow-by-blow account of all of Dylan's NET concerts in Spain. There are also two important shorter English-language examinations of the NET: chapter 20 of Michael Gray's 'Song and Dance Man III' (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), and Stephen Scobie's article 'What Was It You Wanted?: Bob Dylan In Concert', in 'On The Tracks' No 21, Summer 2001 (pp. 35-43). Despite the existence of this significant body of the earlier material, 'Razor's Edge' is, for the moment, certainly the book which any NET aficionado will now want to put in the way of the sceptical and the uninformed, and Muir's treatment of the subject should therefore merit the committed Dylan fan's close attention.

Muir's approach is chronological. A first chapter on the genesis of the NET is followed by (roughly) one chapter per year from 1988 up to 2000: in other words, this is essentially a narrative of the NET, with little in the way of the kind of sustained across-the-tour analysis which Gray and Scobie, by contrast, both offer. The book includes eight pages of black-and-white photos, and a 17-page statistical appendix (compiled by Olof Björner).

II

Andrew Muir follows the conventional wisdom in tracing the seed of the NET idea to Dylan's 1987 tour with the Grateful Dead, when 'songs that Dylan fans would have never predicted came tumbling out ... Dylan was later to specifically credit the Dead with giving him back the idea of what touring was all about' (Muir, p. 20) and the follow-up tour of the same year with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, which saw the climactic moment in the Swiss-Italian lakeside resort of Locarno ('so many dead ends, I'm at the edge of the lake?') when, as Dylan told David Gates of 'Newsweek', "'It's almost like I heard a voice ...: I've got to go out and play those songs. That's just what I must do'" (p. 22). This version of the NET's origins may by now be received opinion, but it appears also to be true - as witness Dylan's own reiteration of both the Grateful Dead's influence and the Locarno '87 story in his post-'Love and Theft' interview with 'Rolling Stone' ('Bob Dylan', interview with Mikal Gilmore, RS, 22 November 2001, pp. 56-69). On the tour with the Dead and the Locarno incident, Dylan himself says: 'They [the Dead] wanted to play some of my songs that I hadn't played in years and years ... I really had some sort of epiphany then on how to do those songs again, using certain techniques that I had never thought about ... But then there was a show in Switzerland where the techniques failed me ... I was ... standing on a different foundation at that point, and I realised, "*I could do this*"' (ibid., pp. 65-66). In Gilmore's words, 'in that moment [Locarno], he realised that it was his vocation to rededicate himself to his music and its performance' (ibid., p. 58).

After taking the reader through these preliminaries, Muir embarks on the year-by-year chronology of the NET. Again, this mostly treads familiar ground, running through the changes over the years in musicians and in musical approaches (notably the almost total replacement, from 1993 on, of acoustic solo by acoustic-with-band), while occasionally branching out to take in such non-NET performances as the Sinatra 80th birthday rendezvous of 1995 and the controversial Bologna concert of 1997 in front of a certain Karel Wojtyła. Muir thus, almost as if incidentally, provides a potted biography of Dylan for the period 1988-2000, which is not without its uses.

One interesting aspect of the NET to which Muir gives deserved prominence throughout is the range and richness of Dylan's covers of traditional and old-time numbers, notably as set openers - a practice caught on an official CD by the rousing version of the traditional 'Somebody Touched Me' which kicks off the Japan-released compilation album 'Bob Dylan Live 1961-2000: Thirty-nine years of great concert performances'. The author comments: 'All these covers transformed by Dylan's interpretative powers year after year in the N.E.T. - somebody should gather them altogether [sic] and put them out as a multi-CD box set Despite my love of, and admiration for, Dylan's magnificent lyrics, he never had to write a single one of all his phenomenal words to be the most influential artist in my life. His voice reaches higher and speaks even more deeply than all those linguistic triumphs' (Muir, p. 176).

I can only applaud these sentiments. I am less happy, however, about another recurrent feature in this book, namely Muir's repeated tendency to put down Dylan's singer and songwriter peers, especially those with whom he has shared a stage platform in recent years. Thus we find comments like: 'The .. lyrics of [Robert Hunter's "Friend of the Devil"] tell a banal tale' (p. 147), or: 'Unfortunately, Bob brought Van Morrison along for some of the dates [in 1997]' (p. 166), or, again: 'More shocking were Bob's comments [in 1999] that implied he considered [Paul] Simon to be on an artistic par with himself' (p. 181). While I believe no less than Muir that Dylan is beyond doubt the greatest songwriter of the rock era, I do not feel a corresponding obligation to devalue the work of his many talented compeers, and we might usefully recall here that Dylan has, whether on record, live or both, covered songs composed by such artists as Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Gordon Lightfoot, Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen, and, indeed, Charles Aznavour - not to mention the fact that his live versions of 'Friend of the Devil' actually stick fairly closely to the Grateful Dead's original.

Music-making is, after all, about connections - a consideration which brings us to a dimension of the NET which Muir has certainly pointed up admirably: that is, its intimate and curious relationship with the Internet. By a strange coincidence, NET also spells Net, and, as our author puts it: 'With its swift dissemination of information and unparalleled global communication capability, the Net seemed tailor made for the N.E.T.' (p. 139). Many of the modes in which fans now keep up with the tour - the near-instantaneous publicisation of each and every setlist, or the rapid circulation of concert reviews - would be impossible without the Internet as we know it today, and it is gratifying to find Muir paying due credit to the rec.music.dylan newsgroup and to many of the key Dylan websites.

III

Statistics are, thanks partly to the Internet, now part of the bread-and-butter of any discussion of the NET. Andrew Muir's associate Olof feeds the fact-hungry with a variety of tables, including an alphabetical song listing with number of performances by year, the twenty most played songs, the ten most played covers, a list of all Dylan songs debuted live over the NET, and a full roll-call of all band members and guest musicians. I am, however, not totally happily with the way the song listing treats electric, acoustic-with-band and acoustic solo versions of as the same song as if they were different songs, giving separate totals for each variant. This seems unnecessary and confusing - surely 'She Belongs To Me' or 'Forever Young' is still the same Bob Dylan composition, however it is performed? A number of small errors have also crept into the tables. There are separate entries for 'Roving Gambler' (31 performances) and 'I'm a Rovin' Gambler' (29 performances), which are actually the same (traditional) song, with, therefore, 60 performances; this would bring the song into the list of

'ten most played covers' at No 7 and thus push 'Duncan and Brady', classed by Muir/Björner at No 10, out of the list. In the 'album statistics' section, it is claimed that only two songs from Dylan's first album have been performed over the NET, but in the song-list section I located no less than five ('Baby, Let Me Follow You Down', 'House of the Risin' Sun', 'Man of Constant Sorrow', 'Pretty Peggy-O' and 'Song to Woody'). Similarly, 'Self Portrait' is listed as supplying only one song, when in fact both 'The Boxer' and 'Early Morning Rain' have been performed. All in all, the statistics in this book seem to be, frankly, less reliable than the equivalent material in Christof Graf's volume. That having been said and allowing for all necessary caveats, it is of course still interesting to read that the NET's most-played song is 'All Along the Watchtower' (878 performances and all of them electric), that the most-played cover version is 'Not Fade Away' (124 performances), that 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' was never played live before the NET (Dylan, we are told, debuted it on 7 June 1988 at Concord, California) or that 'Oxford Town' was given its one and only live airing ever, all of 37 years after the song was first released, on 25 October 1990 at - Oxford, Mississippi. At all events, I would suggest that for any future edition of this book the statistics should be re-checked carefully, as there is surely no point in supplying this kind of information at all unless it's 100% accurate.

IV

The complexity and density of the NET phenomenon, and the sheer quantitative mass of concerts, make encapsulating its essence a near-impossible task. While parallel-economy tapes and CDs circulate profusely, there is still no official album of the Tour - no box set, and no sampler either. What little we have on official release consists of a sprinkling of tracks released on EPs or limited-edition CDs or placed on the official site www.bobdylan.com, plus part of the 'Live 1961-2000' album (the 'Unplugged' album does not qualify as part of the NET). Meanwhile, Muir's book, fascinating and enjoyable though it is, is certainly not the last word on the subject. Stephen Scobie, with his probing questions, and Michael Gray, with his iconoclastic doubts, both - in much less space and whatever one may think of their conclusions - manage to get closer to the heart of the matter than Muir.

The definitive book on the NET has yet to be written. However, a competent blow-by-blow narrative will always have its merited place, and to this task Andrew Muir brings not just journalistic skill but unbounded enthusiasm. At the end of his closing chapter, he praises Dylan's 'inherent understanding that the core of his art is the never ending challenge of the new performance, the nightly ritual' (p. 197). These are sentiments that I can fully endorse, and I would only add in the conclusion that there is something about the whole exhilarating NET experience that strikes a match in me, and sends me back to where it all began - to the atmosphere of our artist's very early days, and that carnival feeling unforgettably caught in perhaps the finest of all of his still-unreleased songs, when the young Bob Dylan sang of the joyous and seductive appeal, across the length and breadth of the land, of a showman's life on the road, 'following them dusty old fairgrounds a-calling'!

No Picture Frame

Review of *Stephen Scobie, 'Alias Bob Dylan Revisited'*

Calgary, Alberta (Canada): Red Deer Press, 2004. Soft covers; 350 pp.
ISBN: 0-88995-227-2. Revised and updated from 'Alias Bob Dylan',
Calgary, Alberta (Canada): Red Deer Press, 1991, 192 pp.

Christopher Rollason, 2005

Review published in *The Bridge* (Gateshead, UK), No. 22, Summer 2005, pp. 82-92

In Bob Dylan's universe, old worlds age and times and things change, and, accordingly, Stephen Scobie's classic study of the master's work now resurfaces in a new and transformed incarnation. Like Dylan's own 'Lyrics' or Michael Gray's 'Song and Dance Man III', 'Alias Bob Dylan Revisited' is a fresh, expanded edition of old material, though in this case the second rather than the third. With very substantial additions and most of the earlier text recast, this volume, almost twice the length of its predecessor, is essentially a new book. The appearance of 'Alias' in 2004 preceded the release of 'Chronicles Volume One' and the third 'Lyrics' later in the year, but Scobie has clearly made every effort to absorb all that Bob Dylan had done since the first edition. In this review, I shall, while making some reference to the 1991 edition, essentially treat 'Alias Bob Dylan Revisited' as a separate, autonomous work.

This book falls into that area of Dylan studies which may be called 'literary-critical' or 'academic', and should be filed on the same shelf as the volumes by Christopher Ricks, Aidan Day, Michael Gray and Greil Marcus. Like Ricks and Day and unlike Gray and Marcus, Stephen Scobie is a professional academic, recently retired from the University of Victoria on Canada's west coast; he is also an acclaimed and prolific poet, a winner (in 1980) of the Governor-General's Award for Poetry, and the subject of a substantial entry in the 'Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature'. He thus approaches Dylan with both a critic's and a poet's eye, and this powerful double vision is reflected in the fine-honed, energised quality of the prose throughout: this is beyond doubt one of the most readable of Dylan books, at the crucial level of 'the pages and the text'. Most of the material from Scobie's 1991 book has - as in Michael Gray's successive editions - been incorporated but subjected to major rehandling; the chapters have been mostly retitled, with brand-new ones added in between (the only section of the old book that has disappeared completely is the postscript on 'Under the Red Sky', then Dylan's recent album). User-friendliness is enhanced by an index (not supplied in the first edition).

Scobie's analysis is, for the most part, not biographical, and nor is it chronological: we are dealing with a primarily textual study. Nonetheless, like Gray and unlike Day or Ricks, Scobie also includes extra-textual and contextual material. The bulk of the volume consists of lyric analysis, both general (on themes) and specific (on individual songs), but there is also material on such other matters as Dylan's name(s) (from Robert Allen Zimmerman to Bob Dylan), his live performances, and - despite the book's declared anti-biographism - certain aspects of his life, both professional (his relations with Allen Ginsberg and Sam Shepard), and, to an extent, personal. There is some quite detailed material on Dylan's early Hibbing background - a subject earlier explored by Stephen Scobie in his excellent poem-sequence 'And Forget My Name: A Speculative Biography of Bob Dylan' (Victoria, Canada: Ekstasis Editions, 1999), which I reviewed some years back on [Bob Dylan Critical Corner](#) . Also

featured are detailed accounts of Dylan's film-acting ('Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid') and movie-making ('Renaldo and Clara') ('Masked and Anonymous' came too late). Scobie's study thus ventures, as Gray's does not, outside the world of Dylan's songwriting and performance to take account of his work in other genres (essentially cinema). There is, though, no extended analysis as such of 'Tarantula' (though Dylan's book is used as source material), and one might venture to suggest that, now we have two full-length prose works by Bob Dylan, a third edition of Scobie's book could usefully include a contrastive study of 'Tarantula' and 'Chronicles'. There is also no systematic or full-length discussion of songs covered by Dylan, whether on record or in performance, although there are interesting examinations of a couple of individual traditional songs ('House Carpenter', and the lesser-known 'Female Rambling Sailor', a song which Dylan performed six times in 1992). Scobie does not cover as much ground as Gray does in 'Song and Dance Man III', but then Gray had three times the length at his disposal, and thus far more room for very extended song analyses and for delving into such aspects as Dylan's appropriation of the blues, nursery rhymes or the Bible.

One arresting element of the book is its inclusion, in the Ginsberg section, of some absolutely new material based on extracts from the poet's unpublished journals, including some intriguing verse fragments from 1975 devoted by the admiring Allen to Dylan in performance. The detailed information on the 'Pat Garrett' film (not in the first edition) and on Sam Shepard's work and its links and parallels with Dylan (much expanded) will also be new to many. On a different tack, there is full and generous acknowledgment of the work in Dylan criticism of Stephen Scobie's predecessors and peers, not only the likes of Gray and Marcus (the latter's 'Invisible Republic' gets an extended analysis) but also those humbler fans who have, over the last decade, contributed their widow's mite to the endless and fertile discussions of the master's work on the Internet (notably on the Usenet group <rec.music.dylan>): and here, as co-editor of Bob Dylan Critical Corner, I am delighted to note the acknowledgment (314n and 316n) of two of my own articles from the site, concerning, respectively, ['Tangled Up In Blue'](#) and ['House Carpenter'](#).

As a professional literary critic, Stephen Scobie approaches Dylan's texts - indeed, the whole issue of text - from a consciously adopted theoretical perspective. The critical model deployed is a version of what is called deconstructionism and/or post-structuralism, and its high priest is the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Scobie quotes and expounds Derrida at some length at various points, and, though I have to admit that I find Scobie's explanations rather clearer than Derrida's own gnomic reflections, the general drift is perfectly clear. Derrida is certainly the biggest theoretical influence, though some of his fellows put in at least a guest appearance, notably - for the Greil Marcus/'Basement Tapes' section - Walter Benjamin, 'Arcades Project' in hand (the Arcades Tapes maybe?). For Stephen Scobie, as for Jacques Derrida, meaning and identity are not fixed and stable phenomena: they are, rather, endlessly mutable and shifting, undergoing constant displacement, splitting and multiplication across a text. These postmodern textual characteristics are located by Scobie in the song-texts of Bob Dylan, as also in his performances seen as text, and in Robert Allen Zimmerman's life as 'Bob Dylan', it too viewed as text ('The "author" becomes not so much the source of origin of his texts as another text' - 85).

The key images, figures and concepts examined include the mask, the mirror, the ghost, the double, the outlaw and the alias (hence the book's title). Dylan is seen as wearing a series of masks, both in the song texts and outside them, as one who can never be tracked or chained

down. He is always somewhere else, missing on the scene, the protagonist of an absent centre. This notion of a multiple, shifting self is arrestingly figured in the songs' many puns on 'eye' and 'I' ('give you delusions of grandeur/and the evil eye'), the song title 'I and I', and the name 'Alias', as assumed by Dylan in 'Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid' (with the fascinating gloss, as Scobie confides in us on page 234, that the historical Pat Garrett really did have a partner called Alias!). It is universally agreed that Dylan has assumed a multiplicity of successive roles over the years, again and again shedding off one more layer of skin as he keeps one step ahead of the persecutor within. These roles include: protest singer, hip rock star, country gentleman, born-again Christian, never-ending-tour showman, and, most recently, custodian of the folk-blues heritage. Behind roles and masks, Scobie discerns an underlying polarity. He sees Dylan as shifting backwards and forwards, across all his career, between two archetypal identities, seemingly opposed yet endlessly intertwining - the Prophet and the Trickster. All this is, certainly, a far more flexible and open-ended framework for reading Dylan's songs than the arbitrary schema (sins, virtues and graces) adopted by Ricks in 'Dylan's Visions of Sin', as a clothes-line to hang his neo-Leavisite practical criticism on. At the same time, Scobie insists on viewing Dylan's work, albums and performances, in and despite all its bewildering multiplicity, as a continuous whole: there is no question of airbrushing out, say, the entire 'Slow Train Coming/Saved/Shot of Love' period simply because the critic does not share Bob Dylan's then religious beliefs.

Armed with this theoretical weaponry, Scobie offers a series of close readings of Dylan's songs, essentially textual though also reaching out into the songs' intertext (that is, approximately, the sum of literary texts, song texts, historical information, etc, that is in one way or another related to the songs), and, occasionally, Dylan's life seen as text. Following Derrida (and earlier structuralist critics such as Roland Barthes), Stephen Scobie rejects the primacy of both biographical readings and authorial intention; the writer's life and intentions are seen as part of the intertext, offering interpretations which are certainly possible but are by no means to be privileged in any absolute sense. He refutes any notion that the 'I' of a given song can be unproblematically identified as the historical Bob Dylan (still less Robert Zimmerman), and has no time for reductive readings of the type "'When The Ship Comes In" is "only" about a quarrel in a hotel'. The problematisation of the songs' 'I' that Scobie proposes is especially salutary, coming as a necessary antidote to all who naively assume that as soon as Dylan opens his mouth he is singing solely and directly about himself. If no-one is going to confuse Dylan with such characters as 'the miner's widow who sings "North Country Blues" [or] the Mexican gunman who narrates "Romance In Durango"' (48), most will assume that 'Sara' is an unretouched collection of Dylan family snapshots - whereas for Scobie, the song is 'a textual construct that includes both ... biographical and ... biblical references' (87). It is worth pointing out here, on the general issue of Dylan methodology, that Stephen Scobie's chosen term to refer to the 'I' of the songs is 'the singer'. For my own part, I would prefer to use not that term, which risks confusion with Dylan the performer and raises problems over cover versions (when Dylan sings 'Early Morning Rain', is 'the singer' Dylan's 'I', Gordon Lightfoot's 'I', or neither?), but, rather, either 'the I' or 'the narrator' (on the grounds that all songs tell a story). However, this is not the place for methodological quibbles, and what matters is the explicative value of the song analyses that - as with Michael Gray's and Aidan Day's studies - form the essential core of Scobie's book.

The quality of those analyses is extremely high, certainly equalling those of Gray (which are unrivalled for detail, but then Gray starts with a column-inch advantage), more wide-ranging than the more textually focused discussions of Day - and far more illuminative, any day of the week, than the offerings of Ricks. I do not claim to agree with every single analysis - for

instance, where Scobie reads 'Señor' as being addressed to the Yankee visitor by his Mexican guide, I am convinced that it's the reverse that applies, with the American haranguing the Mexican - but that is scarcely the point, given Scobie's own position on the multiple interpretability of Dylan's texts. I shall now examine a selection of the many interesting discussions of individual songs (some but not all carried over from the first edition). For clarity's sake, I shall take them in chronological (recording) sequence, although Scobie's own order of discussion is thematic rather than time-bound. I shall in some cases add some takes of my own on the songs, too, as these were for the most part stimulated or enhanced by my reading of Stephen Scobie's chapters, and they are therefore testimony to how his insights felicitously incite further thought.

The first song I shall pick out here is one not written by Dylan, but covered by him early on and intimately related to the theme of identity. One of Scobie's most interesting perspectives relates to the original German-language significations of Bob Dylan's old surname. As he reminds us, in German 'Zimmermann' (with two 'n's) means 'carpenter', and 'Zimmer' means 'room'. The carpenter, or Zimmerman, is a figure associated with the safety and stability of homes and interiors; yet no less a figure than Jesus was a carpenter's son, and a carpenter himself to boot. These connections with Dylan's discarded surname are of course, as Scobie points out, of obvious interest for 'Tangled Up In Blue' and the reference in that song's last stanza to 'carpenters' wives' (these days itself discarded live in favour of 'truckdrivers' wives'); they are also tied up with 'House Carpenter', the ancient ballad recorded by Dylan in 1961 and released in 1991 on 'The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3'. On that recording, Dylan introduces the song as follows: 'Here's a story about a ghost come back from out in the sea, come back to take his bride away from the house carpenter'. Scobie arrestingly shows how the dead lover's ghost is an image of 'identity at one remove: the self, but the self altered, slipped, exceeded, doubled' (74) - and how Dylan's own characters in the songs are like multiple facets of his shifting self, 'riding in a taxi with Lenny Bruce, coming back like ghosts from out in the sea, to take their bride away from the house Zimmerman' (77).

'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' is given an interesting reading focused on the unresolved tension between the chorus's denial of the narrator's 'songs you strum', and the song's ongoing resistance to that denial ('the very existence of the song transcends the limitations set out in the lyrics' - 128). The song's twin themes - musical instruments and dawn seascape - are seen as embodying a counterpoint between 'natural objects' and 'cultural artefacts' (127) - though here Scobie does not mention an important part of the latter dimension, namely the strong Old Testament connotations of many of the instruments mentioned (trumpet, cymbals, harp). 'Mr Tambourine Man', discussed in conjunction with 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', is read as Dylan the poet's tribute to his (surprisingly) male-gendered muse, albeit the muse of a creative process that never comes to a clear end, continually rewound across 'vague traces of skippin' reels of rhyme': 'poetic inspiration is deferred, passed from one figure to another along a chain of substitutions, from the Tambourine Man to the singer to the clown to the shadow' (130-131).

The epic, twenty-page analysis of 'Visions of Johanna', which Stephen Scobie describes as his personal favourite among all Bob Dylan's songs, is probably the new book's pièce de résistance (it wasn't in the first edition). Scobie takes us through the song stanza by stanza, pointing up its multiple complexities and showing how Johanna, simultaneously absent and present, is repeatedly invoked as the locus of a salvation that is always elsewhere: 'The song describes the process by which the singer arrives at the point where the visions are all that remain, but the visions are, in turn, the condition for creating the song' (274). On the way, the

analysis shimmers with illuminative questions ("Voices echo this is what salvation must be alike after a while". What voices? Whose voices?" - 265) and intertextual references that open up the song further, as in the link made between the Mona Lisa stanza and Dylan's much later lines from 'Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight' about being 'stuck inside a painting/That's hanging in the Louvre' (266). Indeed, I found Scobie's analysis of 'Visions' taking me in unexpected directions, and I ended up making further comparisons within the Dylan oeuvre that he doesn't - with 'Outlaw Blues' ('Ain't gonna hang no picture/Ain't gonna hang no picture frame': the picture frame, like Mona Lisa's, as a deathlike constriction?); with 'Born in Time' (whose 'incomplete' line 'you came, you saw', has its missing verb, 'conquer[ed]', curiously supplied by the last line of 'Visions' first stanza); and, intriguingly, 'Down the Highway' (a song which is about the highway blues, mentions Da Vinci's Italy, and has a narrator with a suitcase in his hand which might recall the anecdote about Leonardo arriving in France with the Mona Lisa in his luggage). Nor does the intertextuality stop with Dylan: 'Visions' 'little boy lost' stanza, which Scobie finds the song's weakest, may, I suspect, take on another dimension if we recall, for the line 'to be so useless and all', that 'and all' is one of the favourite expressions of Holden Caulfield, the celebrated outsider-adolescent narrator of J.D. Salinger's 'The Catcher in the Rye' (a novel named by Dylan in 'Tarantula'), and read that stanza as if it were Bob Dylan speaking through a Holden Caulfield mask. Be that as it may, the pages on this song show Scobie at his very best, deftly weaving connections and stimulating the reader to make yet more.

'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' is read as a classic instance of Dylan's narrative indeterminacy, with the ever-elusive Jack of Hearts at the song's absent centre: 'On the scene and simultaneously missing, the Jack of Hearts is always there but not there ... perhaps the most fully realized trickster in any of Dylan's songs' - 159). 'Caribbean Wind', in similar vein, is seen as creating a 'landscape of unexpected symbols and bizarre juxtapositions' (178) in which 'the end is announced [but] also delayed' (179) - with the further complication of the existence of several hugely diverging texts of an apparently unfinishable song. Michael Gray has gone into massive and useful detail on the different versions, but Scobie's briefer approach has the advantage of illuminating the difficulties with flashes of insight that, indeed, burn like the song's own 'flames in the furnace of desire'. We are faced with the stark question whether that furnace is 'the fire of hell' or 'the refining and purifying fire' of divine love (181). From the same period, 'I and I', a song whose title echoes Dylan's favourite quote from Arthur Rimbaud, 'Je est un autre / I is another', is invoked as key evidence for Scobie's positions on identity in Dylan (this song is sometimes reductively claimed to be 'only' about Rastafarianism, a reading which Scobie correctly takes as part but only part of a far more complex picture). Noting such unsettling details as the pun in the third stanza on 'an eye for an eye' and the sudden, disorienting appearance of 'you' right at the end, he reads 'I and I' as 'the definitive image of the mask of the divided self' (181).

In a discussion expanded from the first edition, 'Brownsville Girl' is viewed, like 'Lily', as a textbook case of indeterminate narrative (with due attention, both textual and intertextual, to Sam Shepard's input, including interesting analogies with Shepard's screenplay for the Wim Wenders film 'Paris, Texas'): Henry Porter, of whom we know nothing except that 'his name wasn't Henry Porter' (as Bob Dylan's wasn't Bob Dylan?) is 'the absent father' or 'the God who has vanished from his creation' (292), in a song whose fragmented narrative with its circular movement 'breaks up the linear drive of story towards its ending, only to reinstate that drive ... across half a dozen sub-plots' (291). Another long narrative song, 'Highlands', is read as generating an unresolved contradiction between the grittily realist Boston setting with its episode of failed communication between narrator and waitress, and the impossibly

idealised and romanticised dream-landscape of a Highlands that have no reality outside the narrator's mind, 'that never truly existed in the first place' (302). Scobie perceptively shows how the language of the 'highlands' passages is, with its phrases like 'gentle and fair', 'slightly archaic' (303) - indeed, I myself would call it nineteenth-century, in a mode echoing other later-Dylan songs like 'Death Is Not The End'. He does, however, doubt whether Dylan knows the original Robert Burns poem at all, suggesting he may have 'simply picked it up from common songs' (338n). I suggest the issue is more complex - not only because Burns does get a namecheck in 'Tarantula', but because the Scottish bard, in rather Dylan-like fashion, actually based his poem on an older folk song (it later showed up in two different Walter Scott novels, 'Waverley' and 'Redgauntlet'); while the notion of re-writing Burns takes us back again to Salinger, whose title 'The Catcher in the Rye' is, like that of 'Highlands', drawn from a Burns poem. In other words, as Scobie frequently reminds us across his book, intertextuality tends to spin out of everyone's control, be it Dylan's, the critic's or the reader's.

The most chronologically recent Dylan composition analysed in the book is the 2003 version of 'Gonna Change My Way of Thinking', released as his contribution to the CD of cover versions, 'Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan'. What we actually got was Dylan not covering but rewriting himself, and Scobie arrestingly shows how the rewritten song puckishly subverts its own (and the whole album's) purported solemnity, first by interpolating a pastiche of an old Jimmie Rodgers/Carter Family skit, and then, extraordinarily, by winding up with two lines straight out of 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', a poem signed by, of all people, Oscar Wilde. The prophet morphs into the trickster: in Stephen Scobie's words, 'Only Bob Dylan the trickster could bring a whole album of gospel music to a close with a quotation from Oscar Wilde' (188).

We have now brought the discussion up almost to the present, and, indeed, Scobie's book concludes with a full engagement with the recent Dylan, through a chapter on 'Time Out Of Mind' (including the discussion of 'Highlands' we have just looked at) and a postscript on "'Love and Theft'". This nicely brings the eternal circle round again, as "'Love and Theft'" has been evoked at the beginning of the study, with Scobie declaring: 'In 2001 Dylan produced a new album, "'Love and Theft'", which is so remarkable that it immediately demands a retrospective thinking of [the] whole chronology' (26). This suggests that the closing sections are an invitation to strike another much and start anew, revaluing all of Dylan's work again. Be that as it may, we are offered an excellent overview of Dylan's two most recent albums, weaving connections between all of their songs and showing how both mark a new kind of Bob Dylan songwriting, a collage-like method creating astonishing new wholes out of pre-existing literary and musical quotations, fragments, scraps. Here there may lurk the ghost of Walter Benjamin, who wandered through the covered passages of Paris turning fragmentation into a principle of connection: probably, though, it is too early to predict what will prove the most fruitful critical method for the understanding of this, Bob Dylan's most recent creative phase.

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that Stephen Scobie's book has arrived at the right time, to shed light, from new and unexpected perspectives, on a Bob Dylan currently in full artistic flower. The vein tapped in 'Time Out Of Mind' and "'Love and Theft'" has now, of course, been further enriched by 'Chronicles Volume One', and 'Alias' will now merit re-reading with the benefit of the hindsight provided by Dylan's remarkable autobiographical text. Bob Dylan's extraordinary artistic career cannot be held within the picture-frame of any single book, but if, more realistically, I had to recommend three essential books to any serious student of his work, there as the peer of 'Invisible Republic' and 'Song and Dance Man III' the third would

most certainly be 'Alias Bob Dylan Revisited', as a rich and densely illuminative guide to Bob Dylan, prophet-trickster, and the multitude of his masks.

'I'll know my song well': Dylan's on-page lyrics, third time around

Review of *Bob Dylan, 'Lyrics 1962-2001'*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004, hard covers, 610 pp., ISBN 0-7432-2827-8

Christopher Rollason, 2005

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The volume released in late 2004 under the title 'Lyrics 1962-2001' is, as all Dylan followers know, the third such compilation, following in the footsteps of the earlier 'Writings and Drawings' (1973) and 'Lyrics 1962-1985' (1986). The first collection stopped just after 'New Morning', the second continued the story as far as 'Empire Burlesque', and the third now takes us all the way to "'Love and Theft'". As always in Dylan studies, not everything is as simple as it seems, and before entering on discussion of the new collection it is worth considering what its status might be vis-à-vis its two predecessors. 'Writings and Drawings', as its title correctly indicated, was a hybrid volume, bringing together lyrics, poems, prose pieces/sleevenotes and, illustrating some of the songs, a selection of the author's graphic work. By contrast, the title of 'Lyrics 1962-1985' was somewhat misleading, as it included all the material from the earlier book plus the 'new' lyrics and some new prose material: there were no new drawings, but the volume was certainly more than just lyrics. Now, however, 'Lyrics 1962-2001' appears compiled in a rather more spartan spirit, with a further infusion of 'new' songs but all the non-lyric material removed (albeit with tantalising photos of partial lyrics, work-in-progress as it emerged from Dylan's pen or typewriter - material which, however, I shall not be discussing here in view of its fragmentary nature). The book is thus shorter than it would otherwise have been (even if its title is more appropriate than 1986's), and raises questions about a possible collection to come of Dylan's occasional pieces: meantime, no-one would be advised to throw out their copy of the earlier 'Lyrics'. Also to be borne in mind the complicating factor of differences between the US and UK editions (I will discuss this at the relevant points, but will be basing my analysis on the US version).

Dylan's song texts appear once again with no factual or critical introduction, neither by Dylan nor anyone else, and no editorial apparatus other than an alphabetical index of songs (in a change no doubt reflecting the advent of more user-friendly, on-line modes of search, the extra 'keyword' entries from the two earlier volumes have been removed). Many have found fault with the new 'Lyrics' for reproducing the failings of its predecessors, and, certainly, not much has changed in the apparent criteria for the choice of song texts. Once again and with very few exceptions ('Down Along the Cove' and 'Gonna Change My Way of Thinking' are the new surprises here), the songs appear in only one text, even where officially-released alternative versions exist, and that text does not always correspond to what Dylan sings on the record. Nonetheless, the new 'Lyrics' is not a simple add-on job: the compilers have gone backwards in time and added, to certain sections from the previous edition ('Shot of Love', 'Infidels'), 'new' songs that surfaced only after that date. Also (and this is a major improvement) the track sequence of the albums is now respected throughout: gone are the arbitrary re-sequencings that had earlier, for, say, 'Blood on the Tracks', inexplicably

relocated 'Tangled Up in Blue' after 'You're A Big Girl Now'. Still uncorrected, however, is 1986's egregious misplacing of 'The Basement Tapes' after 'New Morning', which obeys neither recording nor release chronology.

There is also a further change on 1986 which arises from an objective difference: the new volume includes a considerable number of songs which were still in the 'file under rare or unreleased' box in 1986 and have now graduated to the 'officially released on a Dylan album' category. This is, in nearly all cases, thanks to the appearance in 1991 of 'The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3' ('Biograph' had already come out when 'Lyrics 1962-1985' was published; 'Unplugged' featured 'John Brown' for the first time on a Dylan album, and 'Live 1966' upgraded 'Tell Me, Momma' to officially released status). The 100% new material begins with 1986 and 'Knocked Out Loaded', ending with "'Love and Theft'" (so 'Waiting for You' is not there, nor, alas, is "Cross the Green Mountain'). All Dylan-penned songs from the post-'Empire Burlesque' albums are of course there, but not all co-penned numbers and not all songs recorded by others (for instance, there is no sign of 'Go Away Little Boy', the 'Empire Burlesque' outtake released in 1984 by Maria McKee's group Lone Justice, albeit few will shed too many tears of grief over that one). In addition, the policy of excluding prose pieces means that Dylan's two sleeve-note texts from this period - those for 'World Gone Wrong' (1993) and the various-artists album 'The Songs of Jimmie Rodgers: A Tribute' (1997) - still await print publication (as, indeed, do the 'Planet Waves' notes from 1974, which were left out in 1986).

It is worth going through the new volume and pointing out some of the key moments where it diverges from 1986, as well as some of the problems carried over unresolved from the earlier collection. I shall take an album-by-album approach, but will avoid a dull 'train-spotting' cataloguing of each and every variant by concentrating on those points which I feel are of the most interest to Dylan listeners. To simplify matters and, again, not to lapse into anorak mode, I shall for the most part confine discussion and comparison to: 1) the printed text(s) of 'Lyrics 1962-2001' and its two predecessors; 2) the songs as sung on Dylan's official albums; and 3) significant live variants. I shall therefore not be referring to any of the sheet music, or to the 'Highway 61 Interactive' CD-Rom of 1995, interesting though those phenomena may be; and, while I do take account of the lyric texts available on the official website at <www.bobdylan.com>, I shall, to avoid unnecessary confusion, mention them only at the end. Where I refer to an album as constituting a section in the book, I mean the entire section, typically consisting of the songs from the album proper plus the 'extra' songs from the period covered by that album.

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All the albums up to 'Blonde and Blonde' can be taken together, as for this early period there is little in the way of change from the two earlier volumes, other than the systematic deletion of the poems and prose pieces (even the poem 'Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie', which is available as a track on 'The Bootleg Series', has gone). There are no 'new' songs for this period ('Troubled and I Don't Know Why', which surfaced in 1993 in a Dylan-Baez duet on the Joan Baez box set 'Rare, Live & Classic', is not included). The most interesting change is the correction of the stanza order in 'Blowin' in the Wind': stanzas two and three are no longer reversed and at last appear as Dylan sings them on 'Freewheelin''. 'Chimes of Freedom' differs as before from the recorded version ('unpawnd painter' for 'poet and the painter'). 'Farewell Angelina' still appears in the version recorded by Joan Baez on her well-known album of the

same name, with no account taken of the substantially different text (with extra 'camouflaged parrot' verse) of Dylan's own rendition as finally released in 1991.

The first new material comes with 'John Wesley Harding' and page 234, which, startlingly, serves up a gourmet dish: the current live, rewritten six-stanza version of 'Down Along the Cove', tagged 'Alternate Version' and added after the standard JWH text. This is particularly surprising since the new version has never been released on record. It comes across as a pleasant piece of country blues pastiche, though, alas, the effect is somewhat spoiled by the crass transcription of 'the Jackson River Queen' as 'the Jacks and the River Queen' (whoever is responsible for this gibberish could easily have turned back to page 10 and found that steamboat correctly named in stanza three of 'Rambling Gambling Willie' ...).

There is a new, two-song section for 'Self Portrait', with 'Livin' the Blues' and 'Minstrel Boy' moved there from the 'Nashville Skyline' section. Under 'New Morning', 'When I Paint My Masterpiece' appears, as in 1986, in a hybrid of the Dylan ('Greatest Hits II'/More Greatest Hits') and Band ('Cahoots') versions, neither one variant nor the other (for that matter, nor does it correspond to what Dylan sings on the New Year's Eve 1971 live performance that showed up on the 2001 CD release of the Band's 'Rock of Ages'). The section for 'The Basement Tapes' - still in the wrong place chronologically - has been expanded to include 'Santa Fe'. The discrepancies from the officially released versions for such songs as 'Too Much of Nothing' and 'Tiny Montgomery' are still there, unrectified from 1986. 'Clothes Line' has been retitled 'Clothes Line Saga', bringing it into line with the record, but 'Open the Door, Richard' is still 'Open the Door, Homer' in both title and text, while 'You Ain't Goin' Nowhere' appears once again in the basement version rather than the 'Greatest Hits II/More Greatest Hits' rewrite (couldn't both have been included?). The divergences for many of the songs between the 'Lyrics' texts and those of the official 'Basement Tapes' release do, of course, reflect the existence of multiple studio versions of many of the basement songs, often with varying lyrics - a circumstance amply known to Dylan fans. For 'Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid', 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door' appears once again in the ultra-brief, two-stanza soundtrack version, with no attempt to chart the many live variants and additions. 'Planet Waves' still has 1986's non-album variants for 'You Angel You' (a substantially different text) and 'Never Say Goodbye' (an extra verse), while keeping 'Going, Going Gone' in the 1974 text, with no input from the rewritten 'Live at Budokan' version.

Next, of course, comes 'Blood on the Tracks', the album often cited by the detractors of 'Lyrics 1962-1985' as the test case for how that book might have been. Here, some things have changed and some haven't. 'Tangled Up In Blue' still appears in the BOTT version only, even down to 'carpenter's wives' in the last stanza, long since replaced live by 'truck-drivers' wives'; there is no trace of the outtake lyrics or of the multiple live variants, even though the 1984 'Real Live' re-write is surely different enough to have merited inclusion as an alternate version à la 'Down Along the Cove'. Similarly, 'Simple Twist of Fate' is printed as sung on BOTT, with no input from the 'Budokan' version; 'Idiot Wind' too is included in only one, the BOTT, text. 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' again has the extra stanza ('just another night in the life of the Jack of Hearts') from the (still unreleased) outtake, as also sung on the Baez cover version; 'Meet Me in the Morning' keeps its haunting extra 'birds are flyin' low' stanza; by contrast, 'Shelter From the Storm' still appears in the BOTT version, without the additional 'everlasting battle' stanza from the outtake that showed up on the UK/Europe release 'The Best of Bob Dylan' in 1997. 'Call Letter Blues' is added, but, in what looks suspiciously like a printer's error (has a page dropped out?), appears in a truncated four-stanza text, clipped of the last three stanzas from the recorded version. The big surprise,

though, is 'If You See Her, Say Hello', which (in the US edition only) appears in a recent live rewrite, quite substantially different from the BOTT text ('Her eyes were blue, her hair was too, her skin so sweet and soft').

'Desire' offers no novelties: 'Sara' appears in the album version, with no sign of the powerful alternate lines praising Sara for 'strength that belonged to the gods' that surfaced on 'Live 1975'. For 'Street Legal', 'New Pony' still has an unsung, shades-of-Robert-Johnson extra verse ('It was early in the mornin', I seen your shadow in the door'), and in 'Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)' the lines from the last stanza ('Let's disconnect these cables/Overturn these tables') are still in reverse order from the recorded version. Four of 'Street Legal's associated songs ('Coming From the Heart (The Road Is Long)', 'If I Don't Be There by Morning', 'Walk Out in the Rain' and 'Love You Too Much' - the first three written with Helena Springs, the fourth with her and Greg Lake) have for some reason been deleted, though few will mourn them.

For 'Slow Train Coming', 'Ye Shall Be Changed' has been added. 'Gotta Serve Somebody' appears again in the album version only, with no trace, alas, of the many live rewrites ('Your name might be Bono, your name might be Sting', etc); 'When You Gonna Wake Up', as before, has a close varying from the album ('Do you have any idea why or for who He died?'). A gratifying surprise comes with 'Gonna Change My Way of Thinking', which, like 'Down Along the Cove', is featured in two versions - the standard STC text, and then (again billed as 'Alternate Version') the rewrite which Dylan performed on the 2003 compilation 'Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan'. The reworked Oscar Wilde quote ('A brave man will kill you with a sword, a coward with a kiss') is there in all its glory; however, only the song proper is printed, so we don't get the 'Jimmie Rodgers visits the Carter Family' pastiche with Mavis Staples which appeared on the record between stanzas one and two. The 'Saved' section has one addition, namely 'City of Gold', the song covered by the Dixie Hummingbirds in 2003 on the 'Masked and Anonymous' soundtrack. This, incidentally, is the only completely 'new' song not officially recorded by Dylan himself to have made it into the book; the lyrics printed, however, are in the rewritten Hummingbirds version, and do not reflect the rather different song of Dylan's own 1980 concert performances.

It is with the 'Shot of Love' and 'Infidels' sections, though, that the new volume's enrichment process really becomes visible - incidentally giving the lie to the decline-theory pundits who, steeped in conventional clichés, insist on systematically doing down all of Dylan's later work. To take 'Shot of Love' first, the remarkable 'Angelina', surely of Bob's most powerful compositions ever, has been added (together with 'You Changed My Life'). 'Caribbean Wind', which, as Michael Gray has finely shown in 'Song and Dance Man III', is one of Dylan's most complexly rewritten songs ever, appears in a new version which is not that published in 'Lyrics 1962-1985'; to complicate matters further, nor is it the text performed on 'Biograph', and nor does it correspond to either of the two alternate versions transcribed alongside the 'Biograph' text by Gray. In the first stanza, the 'man who invented iron and disappeared so mysteriously' has become a 'man who danced on the roof of the embassy' (a character unknown to Michael Gray), and from then on alternate lines crowd on each other's heels across the song. It looks as if what's printed here will have to be added to a future edition of 'Song and Dance Man' as yet another variant of this intriguingly labile song. 'The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar' - the only song ever added as an extra track to later editions of a Dylan studio album - has been taken out of the 'additional' section and now assumes its rightful place as 'Shot of Love's track six, after 'Watered-Down Love'. Some of 1986's errors

have been rectified for 'Groom', but some have not: the refrain now correctly begins throughout as 'West of the Jordan, east of the Rock of Gibraltar', but still has variants ('burning of the stage/cage') that are not sung on the record; lines 3 and 4 of the first stanza still differ (deteriorating walls instead of a wild goose chase); and an irksome gremlin has crept into the last stanza, with Claudette described as 'respectfully [sic]' rather than 'respectably' married (an error not there in 1986). There is a 1980 live variant of 'Groom' with a greatly different, far more naturalistic refrain ('tell her that I still think she's neat') and Claudette located somewhere 'in the mountains or the prairies' as an alternative to the unfortunate outlet in Buenos Aires (superb rhyme!), but this is not taken into account. 'Need a Woman' appears in the same version as in 1986, a text which is, we now know from 'The Bootleg Series', not identical to the recorded version (there is no sign, sadly, of the 'tell-tale heart' image from Edgar Allan Poe as sung by Dylan). Of the original ten 'Shot of Love' songs, 'Heart of Mine' appears, as in 1986, in a five-verse text, longer than the four-verse SOL version which conflates stanzas three and four from this 'Lyrics' version, while 'Every Grain of Sand' is again printed with, in the closing stanza, 'reality of man', rather than 'perfect finished plan' as on 'The Bootleg Series' and in live performances.

The 'Infidels' section has no less than five songs added, all from 'The Bootleg Series', and two of them are major compositions which should help transform some folks' perceptions of this period. These are the universally acclaimed 'Blind Willie McTell', and the dense, complex and still underrated 'Foot of Pride'. Also new are the understated 'Tell Me', the tender 'Lord Protect My Child', and 'Someone's Got a Hold of My Heart' (billed, as on the record, as 'Early version of "Tight Connection to my Heart"'). 'Blind Willie McTell' follows the official recording, and so the first stanza has 'Jerusalem', not the live variant 'New Jerusalem'. 'Foot of Pride' is marred by a solecism and an unfortunate spelling error. In stanza two, the meaningless 'ya love me to the moon and the stranger' should surely be, as Michael Gray transcribes it in his book, 'your love-me-till-the-morning stranger'; and in stanza three, in the line which appears as 'Miss Delilah is his, a Phillistine [sic] is what she is', the misspelling of 'Philistine' suggests that the transcriber had failed to remember 'Tombstone Blues', a song which features both Delilah and the King of the Philistines, and had not looked back to page 170, where the name of that biblical ethnic group is, it so happens (!), correctly spelled. Of the eight songs from the album proper, 'Jokerman' is printed in the standard version with no input from the (unreleased) outtake variants (so no 'world that's been predetermined' and no Jokerman directing the traffic); conversely, 'Sweetheart Like You', as in 1986, has some lines that diverge from the released version (in stanza one, the boss leaves not 'in style' but, in more sinister fashion, 'after sundown'). We then move on to 'Empire Burlesque', which has no songs added and offers no changes from 1986; for 'When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky', the 'Bootleg Series' variant (with not an 'icy wind' but a 'whirlpool' in the woman's eye) goes unregistered.

'Empire Burlesque's closing track, 'Dark Eyes', was the last text printed in 'Lyrics 1962-1985', and now, from page 504 on, we enter totally new terrain. 'Knocked Out Loaded' contributes four songs, two of them co-written, and 'Down in the Groove' two; for the former album, the Dylan/Sam Shepard 'Brownsville Girl' appears as on the record, but there is no sign of its predecessor 'New Danville Girl', while the Dylan/Tom Petty 'Got My Mind Made Up' is for some reason omitted. 'Knocked Out Loaded' also features 'Band of the Hand' from the film of that name (with changed lyrics), and 'Down in the Groove' adds 'Night After Night' from the 'Hearts of Fire' soundtrack - two decidedly minor compositions included for the record, over which pens are unlikely to flow. The main new input into the Dylan canon begins in 1989 with 'Oh Mercy', the fine and powerful album that has hitherto been one of

Bob Dylan's best-kept secrets but is now likely to attract unexpected attention in the wake of the long section dedicated to it by its author in 'Chronicles Volume One'.

The set of ten songs that makes up 'Oh Mercy' is enriched by two more strong compositions, 'Series of Dreams' and 'Dignity'. 'Series of Dreams' appears in a text that differs from the 'Bootleg Series' version: instead of 'the surface was frozen' we find, in an intriguing elemental reverse, 'numbers were burning'. For the songs from the album proper, we have to note a transcription inconsistency, wavering between UK and US spellings, between 'Everything is Broken' ('broken ploughs') and 'Ring Them Bells' ('the wheel and the plow'). The big surprise comes with 'Man in the Long Black Coat'. Here, though (as with the rewritten 'If You See, Say Hello') in the US but not the UK edition, the text is not what Dylan sings on the album and has been recast to reflect recent changes in live performances: 'People don't live or die, people just float' has become 'I went down to the river, but I just missed the boat', and instead of 'a high crescent moon' we are asked to imagine 'blood on the moon'. More generally, though, those who have read the 'Oh Mercy' chapter of 'Chronicles Volume One' will note that 'Lyrics' takes no note at all of the multiple and interesting additional lines mentioned and, indeed, quoted there. Across that chapter, Dylan speaks of discarded portions of 'Political World', 'What Good Am I?', 'Disease of Conceit', 'What Was It You Wanted?', 'Everything is Broken' and 'Dignity': he actually quotes entire sample 'lost' stanzas from the first five, and for 'Dignity' gives, on page 169, an intriguing list of deleted characters: 'The Green Beret, The Sorceress, Virgin Mary, The Wrong Man, Big Ben, and The Cripple and The Honkey'. For 'Lyrics', though, all this remains what might have been.

The next bunch of songs is supplied by 'Under the Red Sky' and contains no surprises (and no additional songs), though we may note that 'Born in Time' appears in the album version, without reflecting later performance revisions (as on the 2001 Japanese release 'Live 1961-2000') - and I do also maintain, with Michael Gray, that in 'Cat's in the Well' 'the barn is full of bull' should be (listen to what Dylan sings) the rather more imaginative 'the barn is full of THE bull'. Afterwards (the seven-year gap goes unremarked) comes 'Time Out of Mind', enriched at the end with 'Things Have Changed'. 'Love Sick' and 'Million Miles' both have minor divergences from the album versions; in 'Highlands', 'bluebells' is for some unknown reason spelt 'bluebelles [sic]' (surely not a pun on Southern belles?), while TOOM's 'hard boiled eggs' have inexplicably metamorphosed into 'soft boiled eggs'. 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven' - in the US version of the book only - differs at two points from the album text: in stanza three 'I tried to give you everything/That your heart was longing for' replaces 'When you think that you've lost everything/You find out you can always lose a little more', but then the latter two lines reappear, slightly modified, in stanza five, substituting TOOM's 'Some trains don't pull no gamblers/No midnight ramblers like they did before'.

Finally, the "'Love and Theft'" songs, gracing the book's concluding section, should show the world that Bob Dylan the songwriter is still a lot more than the 'worn-out star' of that album's 'Summer' Days', and indeed the texts stand up extremely well on the page in vindication of their creator. The section is, though, marred by some eminently avoidable transcription errors. In 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum', the characters are throughout named 'Tweedle-dee Dum and Tweedle-dee Dee': this is absurd, as it corresponds neither to their names in the Lewis Carroll source or in general usage, nor to what Dylan sings - on the album, and live too, what we hear is 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dum' and 'Tweed-e-Lee-Dee', following the old LaVern Baker/Elvis Presley novelty number 'Tweedle Dee'. Another substandard transcription in the same song has 'They're taking a street car [sic] named Desire', when 'streetcar' is spelt as one word in the title of Tennessee Williams' play, as it is too in 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands'

on page 211 of 'Lyrics' (not to mention the New Orleans streetcar allusion on page 178 of 'Chronicles': 'St. Charles Avenue, a boulevard lined with enormous oaks where streetcars, olive green, run a thirteen-mile route'). There is a further solecism in the last stanza, whose second line, which as Dylan sings it is 'A noble truth is a sacred creed', is ludicrously travestied as 'A noble truth is a sacred dream' - has the transcriber never heard of the word 'creed', or is that dignitary totally impervious to the phenomenon of rhyme? In 'Moonlight', 'levee' is misspelt as 'levy', in defiance of the correct spelling that featured on page 290 ('crash on the levee') in 'Down in the Flood'. As if these errors were not enough, the transcription of 'Cry A While' contrives to name someone called 'Don Pasqualli' [sic], when the reference is obviously to Don Pasquale, the ageing suitor of Gaetano Donizetti's opera of that name from 1843. At all events, one song later with 'Sugar Baby' and page 598 the new 'Lyrics' finally reaches the end of the road - and, whatever the book's presentational imperfections, by then the fatigued reader can only gasp for breath in awestruck admiration at Bob Dylan's ever-diverse, inexhaustible creative power and the force with which he has sustained it over four decades.

'Lyrics 1962-2001' is certainly not perfect. The transcription errors are an annoying and unnecessary distraction that could have been avoided by such simple editorial strategies as running the spellchecker and proof-reading for internal coherence. The existence of significant inconsistencies between the US and UK editions in at least three song texts ('If You See Her, Say Hello', 'Man in the Long Black Coat' and 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven'; will some patient searcher discover more?) is bizarre, and has yet to receive an explanation. Meanwhile, as several critics have suggested in the past, there is a good case for complementing the basic collection with a Selected Works, on the one hand, and a Variorum Edition, on the other. Both such projects, were they to be realised, would encounter problems. Those compiling a selection could feel under commercial pressure to concentrate on the early, 'famous' songs and under-represent the later Dylan, while a variorum edition would - despite the attractions of listing every single variant for, say, 'Tangled Up In Blue' - have to be rigorously selective, as no-one is going to want a run-through of every fluffed forgotten lyric from Bob Dylan's less distinguished gigs. It is, meanwhile, tantalisingly curious that the 'Oh Mercy' chapter of 'Chronicles' should have set us part-way towards a variorum edition of that period's songs!

In addition, and confusingly, there is no consistency between 'Lyrics 1962-2001' and the official website. Of the variants and errors which I have mentioned in this article, some are reproduced at < www.bobdylan.com > and others are not. I do not claim to offer any kind of exhaustive comparison of book and site, but the checks I have made show they are no perfect match. Most of the mistranscriptions and misspellings that I have found in the book do not appear on the site, with the exceptions of 'bluebelles' in 'Highlands' and the bizarre 'Tweedle Dee / Tweedle Dee Dum'. On the site, 'Call Letter Blues' appears uncut; the text of 'Caribbean Wind' is the same as the one printed in the new 'Lyrics'; but, conversely, we get 'If You See Her, Say Hello' and 'Man in the Long Black Coat' in the 'old' versions. The site seems to be marginally more accurate than the book, but unaccountable discrepancies remain: something has been delivered, yes, but someone must explain.

Still and despite all, the new 'Lyrics' is the best tribute in print form that we have to its author's extraordinary talent. If we compare it with its predecessor, there is no doubt that, almost two decades on, it offers an enriched and even more fascinating corpus of songwriting. The 'new' songs, after all, include a whole litany of gems: at the very least, 'Angelina', 'Blind Willie McTell', 'Foot of Pride', 'Brownsville Girl', 'Ring Them Bells', 'Man

in the Long Black Coat', 'Shooting Star', 'Dignity', 'Series of Dreams', 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven', 'Not Dark Yet', 'Highlands', 'Things Have Changed', 'Moonlight', 'Floater (Too Much To Ask)', and 'Sugar Baby'. That is an awesome list. Whatever received opinions the kneejerk late-Dylan detractors may mouth, these songs are every blind bit as good as 'Visions of Johanna', or 'Desolation Row', or 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll': they mark a remarkable cumulative addition to the already superb canon of the earlier volume. Flawed though it may be, this collection will repay infinite revisiting, and the best tribute any admirer can offer the master is to re-read the texts, re-listen to the records, and be sure indeed, as Bob Dylan sang all those years ago on 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', to 'know the song well'. For the song deserves it.

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'Big universities to study in'

Review of

The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan, ed. Kevin J. Dettmar, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, soft covers, xvii + 185 pp., ISBN 978-0-521-71494-5

Christopher Rollason, 2009

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Bob Dylan allowed academia a brief look-in on his very first album, informing the world in his spoken intro to 'Baby, Let Me Follow You Down' that he first met the blues guitar-player Eric von Schmidt 'in the green pastures of Harvard University'; years later, in 'Foot of Pride', he berated those who 'like to take all this money from sin, / Build big universities to study in'. Dylan's relationship with the groves of academe is vexed but is also indisputable, as this multi-author volume now arrives to testify. The Cambridge Companions are an established series of study aids aimed in the first place at undergraduate students, covering a wide field of mostly literary subjects, ranging from Greek Tragedy through Ovid, Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe and Virginia Woolf all the way to Modern British Women Playwrights, even taking in the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. The arrival in 2009 of a Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan among this distinguished company is first and foremost further evidence, were it needed, of the ever-growing academic respectability of Dylan studies. However, the pretensions of such a volume are one thing, and the reality another, and my aim in this review will not to be question whether Dylan's work merits substantive academic attention (there is more than enough evidence for that by now), but to examine this particular study guide with a view to determining whether it is up to the job.

The volume, though published in the UK, is decidedly American in cast. The editor, Kevin J. Dettmar, is chair of the English Department at Pomona College, California. The contributors (nineteen, five of them women; two of the contributions have two authors) are almost entirely fellow Americans, either academics from departments of English or American Studies or professional writers, the one exception being Lee Marshall, senior lecturer in Sociology at Bristol University, England. Strikingly absent are the major names in Dylan criticism: there is nothing from Aidan Day, Michael Gray, Greil Marcus, Christopher Ricks or Stephen Scobie, though there is a piece by Eric Lott, the professor of American Studies from the University of

Virginia whose book on blackface minstrelsy, *Love and Theft*, famously supplied Dylan with an album title (Lott's contribution is, suitably enough, a discussion of ... "Love and Theft").

The book consists of: an editor's introduction; a Dylan chronology; nine general articles, all titled using the formula 'Bob Dylan and/as ...', grouped under 'Part I: Perspectives'; eight album studies grouped as 'Part II: Landmark Albums'; a bibliography; and an index. The general studies are on: Dylan and 'the Anglo-American tradition', 'Rolling Thunder', 'collaboration', 'gender politics', 'religion', and 'the Academy'; and Dylan as 'songwriter', 'performer', and 'cultural icon' (the room for overlap between some of these categories should at once be obvious). The eight albums allotted chapters are: *The Free-Wheelin'* Bob Dylan, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, *Blonde on Blonde*, *The Basement Tapes*, *Blood on the Tracks*, *Infidels* and "Love and Theft". Despite the 2009 publication date, the book is in fact up-to-date as far as *Modern Times*, coming too late for *Tell-Tale Signs* (listed in the chronology as 'announced') and *Together Through Life*. I should add that in this review I shall not list every contributor, but will name the author(s) on the first discussion as such of a given article. With a few exceptions, this volume has a rather strong 'house style', and it is not always easy to winnow out a particular contributor's perspective from what often comes over as a collective take on Dylan.

The introduction starts with the striking claim: 'No other figure from the world of American popular music, from this or any other era, has attracted the volume of critical attention ... that Bob Dylan has', adding that 'no popular-culture figure has ever been adopted into the curricula of college language and literature departments in the way Dylan has' (1). In this context, the editor offers the reader a volume which has, he says, been 'designed as a classroom text' (11). Of the book's purely informative parts, the chronology is adequate; the bibliography is a shade thin and not without omissions (e.g. it forgets the volume of academic studies *Do you, Mr Jones?*, edited by Neil Corcoran, nonetheless mentioned in the text on p. 101); and the index has some strange gaps, failing to pick up, for instance, the two references to Edgar Allan Poe or the two comparisons (one almost half a page) with Orson Welles. The volume is not free of errors: the introduction refers to 'six official live albums' (10) when in fact there are nine, or ten counting the Japanese release *Live 1961-2000*; Paterson, New Jersey, is spelt "Patterson" [sic] (32); Jimmie Rodgers is misnamed Jimmy Rogers (115). Perhaps more important, on the academically crucial issue of text all we get is a perfunctory 'Note on Dylan's lyrics' which summarises in a few words some of the textual problems (divergences between the Lyrics texts and the recordings) that bedevil rigorous Dylan studies. In a book like this, one would have expected more detailed discussion here, and, certainly, there is nothing like the perceptive consideration of the subject to be found in Stephen Scobie's *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*.

The eight album studies mostly disappoint. They do not follow a consistent template, and tend to more like fan appreciations than proper analyses. One only, that of *Bringing It All Back Home* (Jean Tamarin) takes the trouble to go through the album track by track, an approach a shade plodding but at least thorough. Eric Lott's impressions of "Love and Theft" are of course worth having, and are appreciative and generous but not specially systematic, though he does eloquently praise the album's 'incredible range, literary, musical and philosophical' (167). The pieces on *The Basement Tapes* (Alex Abramovich) and *Infidels* (Jonathan Lethem) both suffer from lack of definition of their object: Abramovich does not always make it clear whether he's talking about the original acetate, the official Robertson release or the full five-CD bootleg, while Lethem's digressions on the songs from the *Infidels* sessions which didn't make it to the album, 'Blind Willie McTell' and the rest, cannot be said

to advance the understanding of the released album. The most ambitious, and the best, of these analyses is that of *Blonde and Blonde* by Michael Coyle and Debra Rae Cohen, a deconstructionist take on the album that would not be out of place in Day's or Scobie's pages ('Dylan refers to the impossibility of presumptive knowledge ... pointing to taxonomic categories ... even while undercutting them' - 145), and which represents the volume's most (or only?) substantial contribution to the nuts and bolts of practical Dylan criticism.

The general chapters are, again, variable in nature and quality, and, again, disappoint more often than not. The piece on 'Dylan as performer' (Alan Light) lacks the detail and critical edge of Gray's major account of the subject in *Song and Dance Man III*, and is also methodologically inconsistent: it eschews bootlegs in order to give the released live albums their due, which is fair enough, and then fails to live up to its brief by omitting all mention of *MTV Unplugged* (an album loved by few, but which should be there if the equally undistinguished *Real Live* and *Dylan and the Dead* are). This chapter is overlapped thematically by that entitled 'Dylan and Rolling Thunder' (Michael Denning), which comes across as overly anecdotal and would have been best not included at all. The two chapters that aim to connect Dylan's work to the wider world, those on gender politics (Barbara O'Dair) and religion (Clifton Spargo and Anne K. Ream) are both on the thin side. It could be of interest to consider a 'feminist case against Dylan' and how it might be dealt with in a classroom situation, but O'Dair, again, fails to go much beyond the anecdotal; Spargo and Ream's account of the born-again period does not really address any of the three religious albums in detail, or tackle the key question of how far Dylan's then Christian certainties affected the quality of his songwriting. O'Dair also exhibits a frequent fault in this collection, what I would call the 'I and I' syndrome: the methodologically suspect confusion of text and autobiography, of the 'I' constructed by the song texts and the historical Bob Dylan. To describe 'Idiot Wind', even speculatively, as 'despicably blaming the victim' (83) is to give unnecessary floor-space to two untenable assumptions, namely that the song's 'I' is Bob Dylan and that it is addressed to a 'real' individual rather than a textually constructed 'you'.

Dylan's songwriting is examined in four overlapping chapters, those on 'the Anglo-American tradition' (David Yaffe), 'Dylan as songwriter' (Anthony Decurtis), 'collaboration' (Martin Jacobi) and 'Dylan as cultural icon' (David R. Shumway), and also in the related chapter 'Bob Dylan and the Academy' by Lee Marshall, which I will examine in more detail below. The first-named four all make some valid points, but none really goes into depth on how Dylan's songwriting actually works on a particular song or album: there is no equivalent to, and very little mention of, the hands-on practical criticism offered by Ricks, Gray, Day or Scobie, or to Gray's exhaustive exploration of Dylan's literary and musical sources (Lee Marshall, at least, does briefly enumerate those critics - 101). The authors' failure to come to terms with those acknowledged Dylan experts does, indeed, raise eyebrows, in a book packaged as a 'classroom text'. Indeed, Ricks - not a critic I would associate with either George W. Bush or Christian fundamentalism - is, bizarrely, described at one point as a 'right-wing culture warrior' (Shumway, 117). Nor is Dylan's annual candidacy for the literature Nobel - as defended in print by his nominator, Gordon Ball - given house-room, other than a brief mention in Dettmar's introduction (10). It should also be noted that, while it is, again, Marshall who makes the important point that with a couple of exceptions (Wilfred Mellers and Keith Negus) academic Dylan studies typically concentrate almost entirely on the words to the exclusion of the music, nothing in this volume actually redresses that balance by offering any kind of musicological analysis. What we do get about the words, while not valueless, suffers from a number of defects: a needless obsession with the (non-)issue of plagiarism (the Junichi Saga, Ovid and Henry Timrod cases all, predictably, surface - Yaffe

27, Decurtis 53-54, Jacobi 66-67), with no proper corrective invocation of intertextuality; an excessive concern with biography; and repeated lapses into what I have earlier called the 'I and I' syndrome.

Lee Marshall's chapter on 'Bob Dylan and the Academy' is the most valuable thing in this book. After pointing out how Dylan studies tend to be concentrated in English departments rather than departments of music, or popular culture, or cultural studies, Marshall goes on to break new Dylanological ground by trying to account for this phenomenon (as borne out, indeed, by the provenance of most of this book's contributors): 'How was it', he asks, that in the 1960s 'a writer of popular songs became (partially) accepted into the literary canon?' He points out that 'the 1960s were the heyday of the study of poetry in English departments', and suggests that at the time lecturers in the field, a shade opportunistically, brought Dylan into poetry class so as 'to appear hip to their students' (104) (though also, presumably, as a strategy for inducing a taste for poetry in general?) Marshall goes on to stress that since then there has been 'a great expansion of the study of popular culture in universities' - and that, paradoxically, 'cultural studies generally has paid very little attention to Dylan' (107). In other words, Dylan studies remain very much the province of academics who are, most of the time, high-cultural rather than mass-cultural specialists: a circumstance which might surprise the uninitiated but which empirical testing would no doubt amply confirm. Intriguingly, Marshall suggests that one crucial reason for this may be that Dylan's work is actually too like high culture for many of those who study mass culture - or: Dylan, even if alive and Jewish, is too like the 'dead, white, European males' notoriously execrated in certain academic circles. He goes on to argue in favour of a greater emphasis on issues of quality and evaluation in mass-cultural studies, and suggests Dylan's work as a useful signpost for ideological repositioning in that area (he does not, though, raise the possibility that Dylan may be best seen as a hybrid figure who belongs neither to high culture nor mass culture but to both, the exact nature of the mix depending on where one looks at his work from). At all events, Marshall's essay opens up a significant area for future debate in Dylan studies.

Since this is a study guide, it is also worth enumerating what is not there - what aspects are considered cursorily or not at all. There is no chapter on Dylan's prose works, though surely *Tarantula* (mentioned only once to be dismissed as 'unreadable' - Abramovich, 150) and *Chronicles Volume One* together provide enough material for one; no systematic discussion of Dylan and film; nothing on songs covered by Dylan (no nod to Derek Barker's excellent *The Songs He Didn't Write* from 2008) or Dylan songs covered by others; no detailed look at *Theme Time Radio Hour* and what that programme can tell us about Dylan's influences; nothing on Dylan and the charts; no chapter on Dylan and the blues (nor any mention of Gray's essential discussion of that vital aspect); no head-on engagement with the vexed issue of earlier-versus-later Dylan and whether or not there is a decline; no account of Dylan and the Internet and the on-line resources available today; no discussion of the Dylan fan community; and, as alas is almost always the case in Dylan books by monoglot Anglophones, not a word on the reception and influence of Bob Dylan's work in that rather large proportion of the world which does not speak English as a native language (even though, just for instance, it so happens that while I was writing this review a full-scale Dylan seminar was going on in, of all places, Cochabamba in Bolivia ...). Of course, a volume this size could not have taken on all the aspects I have just mentioned, but with more synthesising care and more avoidance of overlapping, I believe more dimensions could have been covered.

Marshall's insights on the academic reception of Dylan, alongside Lott's views on "Love and Theft" and Coyle and Cohen's stimulating take on *Blonde and Blonde*, together constitute

sufficient reason to justify purchase of this book by those interested in the academic side of Dylanology. Much of the volume is, however, marred by the anecdotal shading into the trivial and the judgmental into the dogmatic – features all too common, alas, in the contemporary journalism which has left its visible claw-marks on this book's contributors. Still, this collection is at least more useful for academic purposes than Corcoran's *Do you, Mr Jones?*, many of whose contributors seemed not actually to know that much about Dylan. What the Cambridge Companion will most certainly not do is in any way replace Michael Gray's still monumental *Song and Dance Man III*, which remains unrivalled as the reference point for the serious, detailed and rigorous study of Bob Dylan as songwriter, and, on the evidence of this latest offering, is likely to keep that pre-eminence for the foreseeable future.

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Green pastures and ancient footprints

Review of **Richard F. Thomas, *Why Dylan Matters*,**

London: William Collins, 2017, ISBN 978-0-00-824549-8, vi + 358 pp.

Published on my blog at: <https://rollason.wordpress.com/>

Christopher Rollason, 2017

Back in 1962 on his very first album, Bob Dylan spoke of 'the green pastures of Harvard University' (it was there, he says, that he met folksinger Eric Von Schmidt, who introduced him to the song 'Baby, Let Me Follow You Down'). Across the endlessly a-changing times, writers and critics have produced no lack of rigorous and serious studies focusing on Dylan's songwriting and poetic achievement: among the best are the successive editions of Michael Gray's *Song and Dance Man* and Stephen Scobie's *Alias Bob Dylan*, but neither has advanced beyond, respectively, their third and second avatar (Gray 2000, Scobie 2004). Much water has flowed under the Dylan bridge in recent years, but there has been a dearth of updated, textually oriented critical work that would take due account of more recent developments. That gap is now filled, by this excellent and wide-ranging volume signed by Richard F. Thomas, George Martin Lane Professor of the Classics at, appropriately, Harvard.

Apart from his teaching and research in ancient Greco-Roman literature, Richard Thomas also teaches, every four years and also at Harvard, a course for freshers on ... Bob Dylan. He believes the singer-songwriter is 'the genius of my lifetime in his artistic use of the English language' (15), and shows in this book an encyclopaedic knowledge of Dylan's work. In recent years – let us say since the late 1990s/early 2000s – Dylan's followers have had the task of assimilating a whole artillery of new developments: 'all that and more and then some', to quote Dylan from 2001, indeed! This includes: the publication in 2004 of *Chronicles, Volume One*, with all the reliability issues that memoir raises; the Theme Time Radio Hour programme that ran from 2006 to 2009 with Bob Dylan as DJ; the fixed (or all but fixed) setlist phenomenon that has characterised recent tours; the evidence of Dylan's composition methods revealed in the work-in-progress material on various Bootleg Series releases, and notably for 1965-1966 on the *Cutting Edge* set; the debate over the literary borrowings on "Love and Theft" and *Modern Times*; the creation in 2016 of the Bob Dylan archive at the University of Tulsa; the variorum volume of the lyrics prepared by Christopher Ricks in 2014; the unexpected retro turn to Great American Songbook covers starting with 2015's *Shadows in the Night*; and, last but not least, the award in 2016 of the Nobel Prize for Literature and the resultant polemic. There was indeed a pressing need for a new study that would take on board all this, and Richard Thomas has risen to the challenge. His study ranges

across Dylan's career from the first album to 2017's *Triplicate*, and includes discussion, to a greater or lesser extent, of each and every one of the 'new' Dylan facets I have enumerated.

Priority goes to the textual dimension – Dylan's songs as sung poetry, as words on the page but also words in performance – as is only fitting for one now a Nobel laureate. In that framework, it makes sense that the author, given his academic interests, should lay primary stress on Dylan's links with the classical Greco-Roman authors, though other literary connections are not ignored (the Bible, Shakespeare, the Anglo-Scottish ballads, and, in the 21st century, Dylan's controversial use of the till then obscure Junichi Saga, Japanese writer, and Henry Timrod, Confederate poet). Thomas has, rightly, little time for the plagiarism argument, placing his bets on intertextuality (and reminding us that Virgil too borrowed from Homer). As he puts it, 'plagiarism is about passing off as your own what belongs to others', while 'intertextuality [enriches] a work precisely because when the reader or listener notices the layered text and recognises what the artist is reusing, that recognition activates the content of the stolen object, thereby deepening meaning in the new text' (131-132). There is also a fascinating discussion of the sequence in *Chronicles* where Dylan inventories the library, real or imaginary, of the New York apartment of his acquaintances Ray Gooch and Chloe Kiel – a couple who 'some readers and reviewers believe are fictional' (101). In a task which needed doing, Thomas dissects this library in all its Borgesian complexity, clarifying which books actually exist and which (like, say, the 'lectures and letters' attributed by Dylan to the historian Tacitus) are non-existent titles, even if ascribed to real authors (110-116).

The Dylan songs examined in detail are for the most part either early-period (intertextuality and sources for 'Don't Think Twice, It's All Right' or 'Masters of War') or from the last two decades, i.e. from 1997's *Time out of Mind* on (close readings of the likes of 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven' or 'Early Roman Kings'). There is little on the intervening period, *Blood on the Tracks* apart – thus, nothing or virtually nothing on the basement tapes, or the religious period, or the underrated gem that is *Oh Mercy*. However, others have written up that material – as in, for instance, Michael Gray's masterly analyses in *Song and Dance Man III* of mid-period songs like 'Dignity' or 'Caribbean Wind' – and what Thomas concentrates on does have the advantage of broadly corresponding period-wise to the contents of Dylan's more recent setlists.

The core of this book consists of the material assembled by the classical scholar on Dylan's debt to the Greco-Roman world, and the evidence marshalled is indeed impressive. Notably and for Dylan's later work, Thomas' textual comparisons take in Virgil ('Lonesome Day Blues' from "Love and Theft", where the tenth stanza is a clear rewrite of lines from Book VI of the *Aeneid* (193-195)), Ovid (whose poems of exile, via multiple textual echoes, lie behind two songs from *Modern Times*, 'Ain't Talkin' and 'Workingman's Blues #2' (240-245)), and Homer, proven as present in various songs from *Tempest*, notably 'Tin Angel' (258-259). For these and other allusions, the author is also to be congratulated on identifying the translations Dylan has read (Robert Fagles for Homer, Peter Green for Ovid), thus pointing up the role of translation, alas often rendered invisible, in the intertextual process.

Going back in time, Thomas also registers Dylan's interest in things Roman from earlier in his career, as in the 1971 song 'When I Paint My Masterpiece', which begins: 'Oh, the streets of Rome / Are filled with rubble / Ancient footprints are everywhere'. Thomas meanwhile admits that Dylan's 'early Roman kings' have nothing to do with Rome and are an eminently American gang from the Bronx. His analysis misses some of Dylan's earlier classical references – the song titles 'Temporary Like Achilles' and 'Open the Door, Homer', the

mention of Nero in 'Desolation Row' – and for the later work, omits the possible Homeric allusions in the "Love and Theft" song 'Honest With Me', in which the song's 'stark naked' protagonist 'came ashore in the dead of the night', as if the shipwrecked Odysseus arriving among the Phaeacians. Even so, such absent references also serve to prove the author's general point and further underscore the presence of the classical in Dylan's songwriting.

The book's final chapter is devoted to the story of Bob Dylan's Nobel prize, and may be considered a highly useful, even definitive, account of the vicissitudes of that award. Thomas chronicles such key aspects as: the initial nomination back in 1996 by US academic Gordon Ball; Patti Smith's Stockholm performance, deputising for Dylan, of 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'; the address by Nobel grandee Horace Engdahl, in which he recalled that 'in a distant past, all poetry was sung' (295); and Dylan's own eleventh-hour Nobel lecture, in which he gloriously confirms the Harvard professor's argument by naming and evoking Homer's *Odyssey* as one of his three key books of all time.

For Richard Thomas, the 2016 award has finally validated the work of decades by Dylan scholars, himself included, striving, against the prejudice attaching to 'popular' genres, to secure official recognition for Bob Dylan's work as 'literature of the highest order' (295). The successful outcome of that process is wholly to be welcomed, and this book, with its argument stretching across time between the Greco-Roman classics and our own day, is both a vital work of Dylanological reference and an eminently valuable tribute to the timeless creative energy of Bob Dylan.

Note: Why Dylan Matters is the UK title. The US version (New York: Harper Collins, 2017), is entitled Why Bob Dylan Matters.

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Things have changed

Review of ***Stephen Scobie, Always Other Voices: Writings on Bob Dylan in the 21st century***, Gateshead (UK): Two Riders, 2018, 215 pp

Christopher Rollason, 2018

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Since the work of Bob Dylan, in so many ways an archetypal twentieth-century artist, entered the twenty-first century, things have changed – as he reminds us continually in the song thus titled which has in recent times become his permanent concert opener. Today's perspectives for informed commentary on Dylan now need to include a multitude of developments in the Dylan world since 2001. A non-exclusive list would include: the publication in 2004 of *Chronicles, Volume One*, with all the reliability issues that memoir raises; the Theme Time Radio Hour programme that ran from 2006 to 2009 with Bob Dylan as DJ; the fixed or near-fixed setlist phenomenon that has characterised recent tours; the evidence of Dylan's composition methods revealed in the work-in-progress material on various Bootleg Series releases; the debate over the literary borrowings on "*Love and Theft*" and *Modern Times*; the enigma of 2009's surprise Christmas album; the unexpected retro turn to Great American

Songbook covers starting with 2015's *Shadows in the Night*; and, last but not least, the award in 2016 of the Nobel Prize for Literature and the resultant polemic. All of these issues merit reference in Stephen Scobie's book.

There has indeed been a pressing need for new studies that would take on board all this and more. A major contribution to filling this gap occurred with the publication in 2017 of *Why Bob Dylan Matters* (US title; in the UK, *Why Dylan Matters*) by the Harvard classical scholar Richard Thomas, which took full account of Dylan in the 21st century. Stephen Scobie's new volume may be seen as playing a parallel role, in terms of Dylanological up-to-dateness and rigour, to that of the excellent Thomas study. I have reviewed Richard Thomas' volume at: <https://rollason.wordpress.com/2018/06/01/green-pastures-and-ancient-footsteps-review-of-richard-f-thomas-why-dylan-matters/>, and here note that there is a significant interplay and echoing of viewpoints between it and the book now under review, notably on such live-wire topics as plagiarism/intertextuality, Dylan live today and the Nobel award. At the same time, there is a significant methodological difference between the two works, as Thomas' book is a continuous narrative while Scobie's is a collection of (mostly) previously published material ranging for the most part (there are a pair of incursions into earlier times) from 2003 to the present day. The date of 2003 is significant as that year saw the second edition (*Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*) of Scobie's book-length study of Dylan, originally published in 1991 as *Alias Bob Dylan*: incidentally, I reviewed *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited* at the time, here in *The Bridge* (No. 22, Summer 2005, pp. 82-92).

If anyone is qualified to write on Dylan simultaneously from the viewpoints of academic and literary credentials and enthusiastic fandom, it is Stephen Scobie – on the one hand, a retired professor of English literature at the University of Victoria in Canada and an acclaimed poet and 1980 laureate of the Governor-General's Award for Poetry; and, on the other, a devotee of Bob Dylan (and Leonard Cohen too) across half a century, who can not only confess: "I have been listening to Bob Dylan for over 50 years now, and writing about him, and, whenever possible, going to his concerts" (p. 205), but also emotively declare: "Thank you, Bob, for the soundtrack album of my life" (p. 8).

The book consists of 20 chapters, all from the period 2003-2018 except for two from 1991 and 1998 respectively. The material comprises an interview with Andrew Muir from 2004, a concert review from 2017, three conference papers, and 15 straight articles. Three of the items are previously unpublished and one had appeared before in German but not in English. For the remainder, the organs of original publication range from conference proceedings to *Judas!*, *Hobo*, and, yes, *The Bridge*. Frequent cross-reference to *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited* makes it clear that in some ways at least, the author sees this volume as a kind of lengthy postscript to that book, albeit differently arranged.

Scobie sees in Dylan's work – here as in the two editions of *Alias* – a constant displacement of meaning and the endless creation of multiple selves: "All of Dylan's career, I have repeatedly argued throughout my writings, is saturated with this motif of the double: alias, mask, shadow ..." (p. 41): not in vain does Arthur Rimbaud's celebrated (and ungrammatical) pronouncement "Je est un autre" ("I is another") recur across this book's pages. At the same time, Scobie declares Bob Dylan's voice to be "the greatest expressive instrument of its age" (p. 121). Thus, the themes of this volume embrace, on the one hand, textuality – the generation of ever-new meanings through the written and sung word – and on the other, performance, be it in concert or on film.

The performance elements include, cinematically, reviews of or articles around three Dylan films - *Masked and Anonymous*, *No Direction Home* and *I'm Not There* - and an extended paper comparing Dylan's work with the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard; and concert-wise and the last chapter in the book, a vibrant review of Dylan live in Vancouver on 25 July 2017 – in which Scobie endeavours to get to grips with the fixed setlist phenomenon, speculating that “perhaps, in advanced age, he finds it easier to remember the same set every night” (p. 209), and turning the whole thing to Dylan's advantage by implying that concert and setlist become a work of art, that “this concert (like, I assume, many recent shows which I have not seen) [and which would have the same or almost the same setlist] presents in memorable form a summation of where Bob Dylan and his music now stand” (p. 206).

Dylan's literary dimension receives the requisite attention with two pieces on *Chronicles, Volume One* (one a straight review and the other written somewhat later, in the wake of the book's success), and a detailed (and necessary) essay on the Nobel which powerfully fuses the public and the personal. Scobie notes the particularities of *Chronicles*: not a conventional linear autobiography; brimful of textual and musical allusions; and brilliantly titled, between the biblical associations and the open-endedness suggested by “Volume One”. The two essays taken together form an eminently valuable explorer's guide to Dylan's inexhaustible memoir. *Chronicles* of course raises the more general issue of intertextuality versus plagiarism (as also do the vexed issues of “*Love and Theft*”/Junichi Saga and *Modern Times*/Henry Timrod and Ovid), and Scobie enters that debate – in the Godard piece and elsewhere - to come down (very much as Richard Thomas' analysis does) firmly on the side of intertextuality: “The borrowing enriches, rather than diminishes, his own text. Plagiarism attempts to steal credit; Dylan (...) [attempts] to incorporate and extend credit.” (p. 191) The theme of inter-authorial relations also inspires an intriguing piece comparing the art of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, from which we learn that if Dylan has covered Cohen (one song only: two performances of “Hallelujah” in 1988), Cohen in all his life never once covered anything by Dylan.

That did not prevent a Cohen soon to leave us from disinterestedly praising Dylan to the skies when he learnt that his rival had won the Nobel – and Scobie duly quotes Cohen's image of the award as “pinning a ribbon on Everest for being the highest mountain.” Scobie aligns himself unequivocally with the pro-Dylan cohort in the “did he deserve it?” debate, commenting on Cohen's comment: “In other words, something so overwhelmingly right and obvious that it brooks no disagreement: it is simply a force of nature.” (p. 203) The article on the Nobel is finely balanced across multiple perspectives. Scobie begins by telling us how he heard the news in the intervals of sleep and woke up to ask himself, “Had I dreamed it?” He goes on to give full credit to the long-standing Dylan-for-Nobel campaign and its protagonists – Allen Ginsberg, Gordon Ball and the Norwegians Reidar Indrebo and Gunnar Lunde – while also delightfully relating his own part in the nomination (a letter of support included in the official package). He goes on to narrate the by now well-known roller-coaster history of Dylan's response to the award, while not failing to take up the cudgels against those who would claim that song and performed verbal art cannot be literature (“Any definition of “literature” which excludes both Homer and Shakespeare is, to put it mildly, suspect.” - p. 199)

And then there are the songs. The serious study of Dylan began in 1972 with Michael Gray's *Song and Dance Man*, in other words with the detailed examination and appreciation of his mastery of language - literary close reading of sung text and text on the page - and it is only fitting that Scobie's book should also contain passages of such analysis. Not, be it added, of

the most obvious material: there is a detailed take on the early (and little-known) “Long Time Gone” and its biblical sources; a careful dissection of a single stanza of “Farewell Angelina”; an impressive exploration of the symbolism of the door in three songs, “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door,” “Tryin’ to Get to Heaven” and “Forgetful Heart”; and a probing account of “Scarlet Town,” considered by Scobie the best song on *Tempest*, which offers a valuable starting-point for the still-absent full analysis of what remains Dylan’s most recent album of originals (alas dismissed out of hand, for reasons never clarified, by someone as qualified to do it as Michael Gray ...). Finally, and on a more light-hearted note, the volume includes the only serious review I have seen of Dylan’s holiday album “Christmas in the Heart,” an album no doubt seen as infinitely forgettable by most but which does not lack its merits (and in some ways, we can now see, prefigures the “Sinatra albums”). It is certainly interesting to note that, in a link which Richard Thomas curiously does not make, Scobie should pause over Dylan singing in Latin on the carol “Adeste Fideles” (“O Come All Ye Faithful”), and make the connection with his youthful membership of Hibbing High School’s Latin Club (p. 147).

Walt Whitman wrote of himself: “I am large, I contain multitudes.” Shakespeare wrote of Cleopatra, “Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety.” Stephen Scobie’s new book pays homage to the tentacular reach of Bob Dylan’s artistic genius. What might appear eclectically diverse is in reality a tribute to the multitudinous nature of Bob Dylan’s world, and his admirers may receive *Always Other Voices* as a more than valid follow-up to Stephen Scobie’s two *Alias* books, and a multifaceted testimony to the infinite variety of Bob Dylan in the twenty-first century.