

Book Review:

Doing Dylan is a Trip Unto Itself

Anthony Scaduto

Grosset & Dunlap, \$7.95

They tell me that Bob Dylan lives out here near me. He apparently spooked a group of high school students some months ago by appearing unannounced in their classroom. Bob Dylan is a name that, like it or not, has captured a part of the essence of the 1960s.

The other evening, Barbra came home from the theatre where she works and told me that she had gotten Bob Zimmerman to write a note to our son Dylan. Our son was not named after Bob Dylan, but after Dylan Thomas. Yet, the mystique is real and the subject is certainly a vital part of our culture.

I attempted to contact Dylan through a school-teacher source, but apparently my note went astray because only Barbra has seen the man that is so poorly portrayed in Anthony Scaduto's book *Bob Dylan: A Biography*.

Scaduto's book is *New York Times*' computerized rehash. Even the *New York Daily News* got it on, with Lillian Roxan calling the book "a captivating and obsessive (sic) portrait of a genius." The rest of the reviews that I read, from *Penthouse* to *Creem* seem equally adulatory.

The book is a bummer. There is nothing new in it and nothing of importance emerges for the Dylanphiles. Scaduto is to Dylan what Irving was to Hughes. It is within this context that I shall attempt to infuse some information regarding the Dylan trip that I took.

Michael Ochs, Phil's brother, captures the essence of the Dylan trip when he wrote: "A lot of us grew up with Bob Dylan, and now that we are all searching for the next horizon, Dylan included, it's a real joy to relive those early years."

Enough lies exist in this universe. Scaduto might have dispelled a few, but instead he only added to the list. I feel it's time to set some facts straight. Jerry Rubin lied in his scatological study, *Do It!*, when he said that I went "skinny dipping" with Fidel Castro. Interesting as the thought might be, the reality states that neither I nor any of the early travel ban busters swam in the altogether with the head of the Cuban Communist government.

The same mythology is portrayed in Scaduto's book, but in my case it is conducted by omission. According to the book, Bob Dylan received the Tom Paine award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee "in behalf of James Foreman and SNCC." Modesty aside, the drunken Dylan scandal at the ECLC dinner began with his accepting the award in my name and for all "the people who went to Cuba."

It just so happens that I was at the banquet and have the transcript of the tapes taken there. Scaduto relies upon no less an authority than Nat Hentoff for his info on the ECLC banquet. Hentoff wasn't there and if he were he would hardly own up to the travesty that took place that night in the Americana Hotel. The New Left protects its innards—almost as carefully as the Old Left.

Envision a cold December night in New York City. Add to that, a posh hotel and a convention hall full of old and-or middle-aged veterans of the Long Island Communist Party or fellow-travelers

Great American Series

We would do better if professors would teach more Americanism and advocate change within the process of law.

Alderman Thomas E. Kean
Chicago

gathering to show off their furs and money in the presence of Corliss Lamont and the ECLC staff.

The whole thing was bizarre. I was obliged, being the Associate Editor of *Rights*, then the newsletter of the ECLC, to convey James Baldwin to the banquet. I would rather have picked up Bobby, but Gene Foreman was entrusted to that task and it proved near fatal. Albert Maher and I smuggled Mr. Baldwin down Central Park West to the Americana and were turned on by his whole being.

Baldwin, on the other hand, was neither interested in us nor in the whole of the ECLC banquet. As a matter of historical note, Mr. Baldwin was most straight and devoted to trying to cope with the white super-libs while worrying that the commies in the audience would not really relate to him.

The issue is (and Scaduto does do credit to the evening by noting that the description of the affair was Hentoff's and not Dylan's) what happened. A book about 'hat evening would be as popular as *Peyton Place*, except for the fact that most of the audience would rather forget it happened.

James Baldwin was the major thrust at the dinner and Dylan was supposed to receive the award and say a few words and be on his way. The way it happened was Dylan decided to spin a yarn, but the sun spots were obviously out of focus. He was either drunk or stoned: remember this was 1963 and most of the left was still ignorant about Dope.

But Albert Maher and his friends from Harvard had made it possible for a number of us to discover the Timothy Leary road a good bit before the Americana caper. I am not intimating that Dylan was doing acid then (that night) but I know he was smoking Dope with Gene and drinking an inordinate amount of Beaujolais wine.

My own position was compromised from the beginning, as I had to be Mr. "nice guy" to the old ladies and the bourgeois communists, while Dylan and Gene were wandering around like a couple of Bowery bums. Through it all, James Baldwin was cool.

To keep it short, Dylan blew the evening by giving a political dada speech while accepting the award. He not only insulted the age barrier by noting the bald heads, but had the audacity to note that we all had a bit of the Oswald in us. Remember who had just been shot. Gag, choke, burp...

The last thing the latent left-wing wanted to hear was some long-haired weirdo suddenly striking into their very private political parts. But Dylan went on to yet alienate what was left of the cocktail set. They just couldn't shut him up. Unfortunately, for the ECLC at least, is the fact that Dylan attempted to leave the ballroom prior to his award, but was stopped at the door by the very physical presence of Edith Tiger (now the super boss of the ECLC) because he "had to accept" the award.

Had time and grace had their sway, the whole evening might have been pulled off, but Dylan could not escape either through the doors or through the bottle. So, he accepted the award (in my name) and lost the ECLC at least \$10,000 in the process.

This whole Dylan episode had vast repercussions on the left. I was to speak before a front group of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee the next week and they demanded that I submit a copy of my remarks prior to speaking. The locusts were indeed loose in the land.

I insist upon correcting this point because I am tired of being confused with James Foreman. It's bad enough that the Red Chinese reprinted one of my poems and referred to me as a "leading Negro poet" without the Foreman episode. Even if we all do look alike...

The Scaduto book also abruptly overlooks the whole issue of Dope in the Dylan mythology. The New Left garbage collector (and heir apparent in the zippie movement), A.J. Webberman, is convinced that Dylan was using drugs at some point in his career because A.J. found some pieces of sterile cotton among the remains of garbage around Dylan's New York abode in 1969-70. So much for hogs.

Everyone in the Dylan assemblage of my time was doing some Dope. The 1963-64 period, which is the only time of which I have any knowledge of Dylan, was full of pot, hash, acid, and (may God spare us) Gene Foreman's heroin needle. I do not know that Dylan did H, but I do know that he did Dope.

Scaduto makes it a point to discredit Webberman by the roll up your sleeve trick. The only time that I did any

Dope with Dylan was one night with Peter Yarrow in the West Village and I ultimately had to be helped into a cab and sent back to my apartment in Hell's Kitchen.

There are at least two other deletions from what *Publishers Weekly* has called Scaduto's "superbly detailed and important biography." I shall attempt to deal with them, but you must excuse me if I get a bit catty.

1971 found the *New York Times* and Merle Miller coming out of the closet. In 1964, the whole band of Village freaks were intuned with Allen Ginsburg and his assemblage of people. If you have never had your ass patted by Peter Orlovsky (Ginsburg's lover of the period) then you have missed the significance of the numerous drunken late night suppers we all had at the Lion's Head.

Nowhere in the book is this whole bohemian interculture mentioned. Before the lawsuits, I am not intimating that Dylan was, to coin the phrase, coming out of the closet, but rather only that at this juncture within the circle of the Lion's Heads' magnificent Alsace-Lorraine chef's cuisine, lots of things were happening, but they had some style.

For those of you still titilated, I am afraid that I can only recall kissing Dylan once (tongue in cheek) at Clark Foreman's home (father of Gene and then the director of the ECLC and (*definitely not a communist*)), following a riot at New York's Town Hall where I had been among many speakers following our trip to Castroland and our first appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Because this "review" is more an attempt at filling in various segments of the era for posterity than in debating comma faults, allow me one last note on that era. Dylan was not at any time a communist or even a fellow traveler. We attempted to use him, but he held strong. I can recall a number of talks up at Corliss Lamont's own "private property" on the Palisades, the interchange falling between Joan Baez, Michael Knew (am I the only one around who will admit to Michael and his relationship with Joan?), Clark Foreman and his wife, Mari, Bob Dylan, Albert Maher, Ted Stuart, and myself. Albert and I were often trying to get both Joan and Bob into the violence trip of the Progressive Labor Party and they both rejected it completely. Dylan was a social anarchist at that time and almost apolitical when it came to left-wing agit-prop kinds of moving the masses.

I am at odds with my old friend Carl Oglesby when he notes in the Scaduto book that the New Left took Dylan to their political bosom — only because I am inclined to find it more rape than love. I cannot accept the pseudo-literary New York hell bent for intellectualism bent that ascribes all favorable facets of art to the left-wing simply because the left-wing so decides. In other words, I think that the left-wing used Dylan for what they could, when they wanted, and then simply oystered him into their super-hyped epistemology of the present in order to make it appear as if he were always one of them. Dylan today is ap-

parently much more in the New Left than he was during my acquaintanceship with him. The George Jackson dribble is agit-prop at its worst and it can only be hoped that in the relatively near future Dylan will again return to the individualism of Frank Meyer, whom he knew, rather than the jaded lyrics of the Left.

Dylan was an individual when I knew him and I was struck with the fact that he showed me a note from Johnny Cash in 1964 remarking that Cash was the immediate influence in his life. This at the very time that the left-wing was caught in its own dialectic about Dylan.

The influence of Cash in 1964 is especially important if we are to consider Dylan and his music outside of the collectivist culture trip we are subjected to by the mass media rock magazines and pundits. I am not intimating that Dylan was ever anything more than an individualist, but the sheer importance of that fact has often been covered over in the propaganda prose of the New Left

politico-rock-dopies in their quest to force Dylan into their very own mold of reality.

Consider for a moment the various stages of Dylan and the response of the New Left (let alone the Old Left). When he appeared at Newport and had the audacity to stop the contrite mimic of the thirties' syndicalism sound and came on with electric background, the Old Left went Stalinist and not only booed and booed, but were off Dylan and back to Seeger as if shot out of the Kremlin. When Dylan finally appeared on TV and did a record with the Cash-Nashville people, the New Left freaked and went into their paranoid anti-working class cowboy mentality. But, when Dylan does a disaster, like his rewriting of the shooting of George Jackson, the New Left flips over and once again bootlicks.

So much for politics and art. Dylan is an individual and a poet. My hope is that the future holds more hope for the biography of Bob Dylan than Mr. Scaduto.

Phillip Abbott Luce

Book Review:

Oh! Sex Education!

by Mary Breasted
Praeger, \$7.95

As everyone knows, a person who is against sex education in the public schools is typically a sputtering, stammering fanatic, who showers with a bathing suit on, and in whom the very mention of "sex" is apt to trigger whole systems of facial tics. In addition, it is a known fact that opposition to sex education correlates very highly with opposition to flouridation of water, the refusal to accept Federal Reserves notes as legal tender, and the belief that one's internal organs are under the control of the Communists.

But *might* it after all be the case that one can oppose tax-supported sex education without also having favored bombing Haiphong or supporting the mandatory death penalty for possession of marijuana? Is it *barely* possible that an intelligent, humane person, concerned with the welfare of young people and the dignity and self-determination of society at large, could reasonably reject the indoctrination of school children with the public school teachers' idea of "mature" and "constructive" sexual conduct?

The present book provides the opportunity for an assessment of the controversy. The author, Mary Breasted, has quite good liberal credentials, as these things go in journalism. A graduate of Radcliffe and of the Graduate School of Journalism of Columbia University, she is currently a reporter for *The Village Voice*. Moreover, her book shows her to be unusually intelligent and sensitive, and of an attractive cast of mind. (She is one of the few reporters for the *Voice* who looks outward and not inward when she is covering a story.) Given her background, it was natural that she began her investigations with something like the

stereotype outlined above, and much of the interest of her book consists in observing how empirical reality broke through the confines of her preconceptions.

She begins by discussing in detail the struggle over the Family Life and Sex Education course in the junior and senior high schools of Anaheim, California, culminating in the victory of the Antis in the school board election of April, 1969. This victory frightened sex education forces around the country (principally in the form of SIECUS — the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States), who had for a number of years been quietly propagandizing and lobbying to the point where, at the end of 1969, probably over half of the nation's public schools had such courses. Sadly but valiantly, they prepared to face and defeat the legions of ignorance and "hate" that so shockingly had risen up against their disinterested efforts at enlightenment.

The most illuminating parts of the book consist in Miss Breasted's analysis of the character and motives of those on the two sides of the controversy, which she bases largely on interviews and personal observation, as well as on their published work. It is here that we find the grain of truth in the conventional wisdom-Playboy Forum view of the problems, discussed earlier. There is a strange (libido-fed?) luridness about much of the Right's thinking on this issue. Stories of a "Satanic" plot linking SIECUS and the ADA; *Manchurian Candidate* fears revolving around hypnosis, Pavlovian psychology, and rock music; warnings about "socialists," Communists, and their "signs," are all, I suppose, rather terrifying to someone