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—Jim Marshall.

Bob Dylan in California—“It is difficult to imagine . . . any poet more capable of speaking to his given time than is Dylan. . . .” (At left, Pete Seeger.)

BOB DYLAN AND THE POETRY OF SALVATION

by STEVEN GOLDBERG

We don't have many wise men left, you know. We have seen our incredible confidence and our surfeit of intelligence lead us only to loneliness and rationalization. We are able to be so much, yet we are so little able to understand what it is we are supposed to be. We are learning to run faster and faster. Into the abyss. And we are leaving behind the few who might give us a hint of what to do when we get there.

Like the rest of us, Bob Dylan faces a universe that science discovers to be more and more a deterministic unity no part of which has meaning without

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reference to every other part. To the dispossessed this universe seems to be inhabited not by free agents in a world of free will, but by the living, irrelevant effects of an infinite number of causes. To a man who yearns for meaning, the thought that life is merely playing out directions imprinted before birth, or given in childhood, or decreed by an alien society, is intolerable unless it is a part of a master plan. The songs of Bob Dylan, a few of them, speak of such a master plan.

Bob Dylan is a mystic. His importance lies not in the perversion of his words into a politicized he ridicules as irrelevant or in the symbols that once filled the lesser social protest songs of his late adolescence. His only relevance is that, in a world which has lost faith that it is infused with godliness, he sings of a transcendent reality that makes it all make sense again.

The mystical experience is, by its

very nature, indescribable. Dylan's genius is that he is able to give us some clues. I can merely attempt to state a few of the implications of mysticism in an effort to indicate the basic underpinning of Dylan's songs.

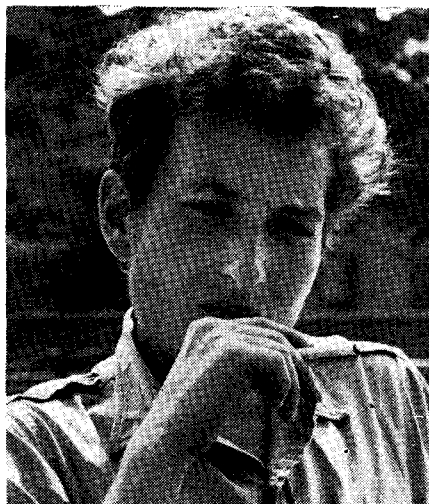
The mystic has always seen what science is now beginning to see: All distinction is illusory. Man's mental dissection of reality into different things, even the very separation of his mind into thoughts, results from his viewing only an artificial division of the One. With this in mind, one can appreciate that the mystical truth that "life is pain" is not in the slightest nihilistic, but an acknowledgment that all the separate joys that this world has to offer contain the basic pain of our seeming separation from the One. Only the mystical experience, an experience which I believe pervades all that Dylan has written in the past six years, can overcome that basic pain. Only in the

life that is illuminated by the afterglow of this experience is there the possibility of salvation.

Salvation means many things in Dylan's songs. On one level it is the conquest of guilt, ambition, impatience, and all the other obsessive states of egotistic confusion in which we set ourselves apart from the natural flow of things. On another it is the supremely free flight of the will. On still another it is faith, an acceptance of a transcendent, omnipresent godhead without which we are lost.

This is why Dylan merits our most serious attention. For he stands at the vortex: When the philosophical, psychological, and scientific lines of thought are followed to the point where each becomes a cul-de-sac, as logic without faith eventually must, Dylan is there to sing his songs. Perhaps it is only at a time like ours that anyone will listen. For a man who sees his life as satisfactorily defined by the terms of his society will have no need to roam that border area which, while it does hold his salvation, also threatens him with madness. The cynic and the atheist, who see such a need as escapist rationalization, fail to see that necessity is also the mother of discovery. We have all always been out on the street, but it is only at a time like this that any great number of us are sufficiently troubled to realize it.

The Dylan songs that are most commonly discussed are the early ruminations such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'," whose simple-mindedness allows instant comprehension. It was not until 1964, when he wrote "Lay Down Your Weary Tune" and "My Back Pages," that Dylan gave indication that he was about ready to discard the security which one can find in symbols. Where he had formerly seen his own identity in the terms of the civil rights strug-



—David Gahr.

The Young Dylan (1963).

gle, he now ridicules professors who taught that "liberty is just equality in school."

It was at this point that Dylan was preparing to become an artist in the Zen sense; he was searching for the courage to release his grasp on all the layers of distinctions that give us meaning, but, by virtue of their inevitably setting us apart from the life-flow, preclude our salvation. All such distinctions, from petty jealousies and arbitrary cultural values to the massive, but ultimately irrelevant, confusions engendered by psychological problems, all the endless repetitions that those without faith grasp in order to avoid their own existence—all of these had to be released. The strength, the faith, necessary for this release was to be a major theme of Dylan's for the next three years. In "Mr. Tambourine Man," an invocation to his muse, he seeks the last bit of will necessary for such strength.

In "Gates of Eden" Dylan is well into his own parade. He has found his mystical fixed point and is attempting to illuminate it. As is the case with the other songs on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan's vision has developed at a far more rapid rate than has his talent. As a result, his cosmology is stated more concretely (if not as poetically) than in his later songs. In "Gates of Eden" Dylan's kinship to Blake becomes apparent. Like Blake, Dylan relegates experience to eternal subordination to innocence:

The kingdoms of experience
In the precious winds they rot, . . .
And the princess and the prince
discuss
What's real and what is not.
It doesn't matter inside The Gates of
Eden.

(© M. Witmark and Sons, 1965.)

It is interesting to compare this to Blake's "Auguries of Innocence":

We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro' the Eye
Which was Born in a Night to perish
in a Night
When the soul Slept in Beams of
Light.
God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in
Night,
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day.

Dylan's conception of a transcendence that flows through man is similar to Blake's, and the compassion it generates is later to suffice Dylan's work with a humanity it lacks at this point. For now Dylan is struggling to express his newly discovered Oceanus. D. T. Suzuki has written:

Our consciousness is nothing but an insignificant floating piece of island in the Oceanus encircling the earth. But it is through this little fragment of land that we can look out to the immense expanse of the unconscious itself; the feeling of it is all that we can have, but this feeling is not a small thing, because it is by means of this feeling that we can realize that our fragmentary existence gains its full significance, and thus that we can rest assured that we are not living in vain.

(*"Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis"* by Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard De Martino, Harper and Row, 1960.)

This is the Eden of which Dylan sings. It is, of course, possible that even those readers who accept all that has been said thus far will conclude that Dylan does indeed speak of a godhead, yet is no more a poet than are the many philosophers who have spoken of being and existence in such an excruciatingly unpoetic way that descriptions of the unfathomable are rendered virtually unreadable. Those who are particularly concerned with a separation of form and content are most likely to look unfavorably upon Dylan's poetry. It is difficult to imagine, however, any poet more capable of speaking to his given time than is Dylan, or a time more in need of someone capable of speaking to it.

With respect to form, Dylan faces the same problems that face all artists. His creations must give form and order to apparent chaos. In an attempt to catch the tune of a universal melody, mere awareness of the melody is not enough. For we all possess the potential to hear the tune; many of us do hear it, but are incapable of communicating even a hint of its beauty. Only a supreme talent can hope to translate the experience into art. It is not enough for the poet or the composer merely to relay random sounds, for such sounds have beauty only in their universal context. The artist must create a new form on a smaller scale than, if it will not mirror the holy chord, will at least provide harmony for it. Dylan is like the chess grand master; there is *one* correct way to play chess, but this way is far too complicated for any person or computer to comprehend. So the master does not attempt merely to extract a few moves from a plan he can know but cannot understand; he creates his own imperfect strategy with its own imperfect form in order to suggest a chord that can only be sensed.

Dylan does not teach, neither does he proselytize. At most he merely affirms the existence of The Way. His effect is limited, of course, by the inherent inadequacy of words that inevitably

prohibits communication of the mystical experience. It is further limited by the fact that, while we are all capable of salvation, it is a relatively rare man who is an embodiment of the particular complex of psyche, intelligence, sensitivity, courage, and coincidence from which the mystical experience and salvation can erupt. Dylan can effect only the last; "take what you have gathered from coincidence," he tells Baby Blue. At most all that any artist or prophet can hope for is to ignite our faith. Dylan, perhaps more than any other contemporary poet, is capable of the words that can ignite this faith. If language's impotence is in its inability to convey the melody of the universe, its strength is its power to reproduce the harmonics at least of that infinitely beautiful melody.

By the time Dylan wrote the songs that were to appear on his next album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, his talent was rapidly achieving parity with his vision. He now felt more at home with that vision and was less obsessed with detailing its every aspect. This enabled him to return partially to the subject of man. About the only redeeming virtue of Dylan's pre-visionary songs had been an attractive empathy toward the outsider. While Dylan was not to achieve the complete suffusion of vision with compassion until *John Wesley Harding*, in *Highway 61 Revisited* he did begin to feel that the eternally incommunicable nature of the religious experience did not render human contact irrelevant. If his attentions were not loving, at least he was attempting to reconcile man's existence with his vision. In "Like a Rolling Stone" he developed a conceit that had appeared in seminal form in "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue." "Like a Rolling Stone," which is probably Dylan's finest song and most certainly his quintessential work, is addressed to a victim who has spent a lifetime being successfully seduced by the temptations that enable one to avoid facing his own existence. Dylan plays the fool, the "juggler," the "clown," "Napoleon in rags," who—like numerous literary fools before him—is discovered by the mocking victim to be the bearer of truth. To the Oriental, the fool is easily discernible as the Master whose path to truth is paved with riddle and paradox. Perhaps the Occidental most comparable to the fool is the psychoanalyst whose maddening silence is well known to the victims who come to him. In any case, the victim, imprisoned in the ego strait jacket that has been his only source of meaning, is not quick to release his protective ball and chain:

You said you'd never compromise
With the mystery tramp,
But now you realize

He's not selling any alibis
As you stare into the vacuum of his
eyes
And say "do you want to
Make a deal?"

("Like a Rolling Stone,"
© M. Witmark and Sons, 1965.)

There are no deals. Standing naked, knowing that all that came before is irrelevant, Miss Lonely is still not capable of the ultimate honesty which is required for her salvation. She cannot be honest because she lacks the courage to manifest the will to discard the rationalizations that imprison her and the diversions that allow her to avoid the knowledge of her imprisonment. Dylan later will write, "to live outside the law you must be honest." It is with perhaps a bit too much bitterness, a bitterness which is to plague Dylan in his search for peace, that he ridicules Miss Lonely.

Bitterness surfaced in all its virulence in "Positively 4th Street," a song written at this time but excluded from the album. On one level this song may have been an attack on a critic who decried Dylan's dismissal of the relevance of politics. More importantly, I think that Dylan's bitterness arose from his having to face the most basic spiritual conflict: Having seen the vision, how does one either live a life which flows naturally from that vision or resign himself to the impossibility of such a life? This song is not all bitterness, however; Dylan's refusal to accept another man's problems is not lack of compassion, but a reiteration of the ultimately irrelevant nature of those problems and the impossibility of any man's being the source of another's courage.

There is more of brilliance on *Highway 61 Revisited*. In "Ballad of the Thin Man" Dylan lays aside his usual reticence about the use of sexual imagery (he once derided obscenity on the grounds that all propaganda is phony) when he utilizes a homosexual encounter in order to deal with man's search for realization. "Desolation Row" is a denunciation of intellectual word-mongering as a road to salvation. It is this song's cornucopia of imagery that is primarily responsible for what is, I believe, the common misconception that Dylan is a symbolist. Words are already symbols; to force Dylan's phrases of rough-hewn delicacy further into the stultifying context of symbolism is to render them totally incapable of bridging the gap between word and essence.

It is only when one realizes he has been out on the street that the faith which precedes salvation becomes necessary and possible. The journey home to peace can begin only in the cob-



—David Gahr.

Mid-Dylan (1965) with Joan Baez.

webbed room of suicidal meaninglessness that is Desolation Row.

Dylan's poetic talents are at their zenith in *Blond On Blond*. Vision overwhelms him less than before, and he concentrates on finding peace through the kinds of women he has always loved: women of silent wisdom, women who are artists of life, women who neither argue nor judge, but accept the flow of things.

Dylan had suggested the premise of this album in "Queen Jane Approximately" on *Highway 61 Revisited*. As in many of the songs on *Blond On Blond*, here one finds not only Dylan's ever-present sense of irony and humor, but also his use of overlapping levels of meanings. As one enters this song more and more deeply he becomes aware first of its concern with the fashionable ennui that periodically affects us all, then its representation of disgust with oneself and the games he thinks he must play, and—finally—its subtle description of the endless repetition to which so many of us chain ourselves.

"Visions of Johanna," an incandescently beautiful song, and "Memphis Blues Again," which is also on *Blond On Blond*, fuse all the themes we have discussed so far and indicate Dylan's imminent discovery that the mystical experience must give way to a life infused with mysticism and compassion lest even the mystical experience be perverted into an excuse for evasion.

There are no "messages" in Dylan's songs, neither is there ideology. The flight of a supreme imagination, the ability to tap into the highest levels of truth, preclude the artist's accepting the simplistic artificiality that is necessary for ideology's goal of widespread acceptance. If an artist is capable of no greater vision than the rest of us, then of what value is he? By imprisoning Dylan's songs in a context of political ideology we play the barbarian

as surely as if we were to hammer Rodin's *Thinker* into a huge metal peace symbol. Dylan may well be upset by contemporary America; on one level "Tears of Rage" would seem to indicate this. Much of Dylan's anger, however, is directed not at any political entity (politics must forever play a secondary role in his universe) but at the young themselves—many of whom have used his words to avoid fighting the battles of their own existences. It is ironic, but not surprising, that Weatherman, a group of individuals who channel their own confusions into violence, take their name from the song of a man who ridicules all forms of escape through symbol and evasion.

In itself, Dylan's political philosophy is irrelevant; he sees both philosophy and politics as evasive concern with the repetition of cause and effect that can never lead one to the Light which shines within him. Indeed, Dylan ridicules all codes and moralities that claim holy sanction. His vision concerns the God within and without. Society is left to shift for itself.

It is quite conceivable, therefore, that, when he bothers with politics at all, Dylan's political outlook is conservative. His emphasis on personal, as opposed to societal, salvation could very possibly leave him feeling most at home with a political philosophy that emphasizes the individual's right to be left alone to his own search for God. *John Wesley Harding* appeared at a time when the indescribable revulsion felt by the young toward Lyndon Johnson was at its zenith; yet, in a time of ornate, kaleidoscopic record covers, *John Wesley Harding* had an Americana cover. Dylan's declaration

(Continued on page 57)

Vienna in ¾ Time, With Lehár, Stolz, and Strauss

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

The hundredth anniversary of Franz Lehár's birth is an occasion not to be taken lightly in Central Europe. The Munich National Theatre commemorated the date (April 30, 1970) with a gala performance of *The Merry Widow*, as did Budapest's Municipal Operetta Theater, which currently features the work in its repertoire. But it was Vienna—not surprisingly—that went all out in honoring its beloved adopted son in the most becoming style: *The Land of Smiles* in the indestructible Volksoper, a lavish "Lehár-Abend" in the Theater an der Wien (with Lucia Popp and Nicolai Gedda singing the evergreen melodies), to say nothing of the old Raimund Theater, which offered *Paganini* during the entire week. I opted for the Theater an der Wien, after which the Lehár Room of the famed old Kranz-Ambassador Hotel, with his pictures and manuscripts decorating the red velvet walls, seemed an unusually fitting background for exchanging reminiscences with friends in a city where operetta is still not gone and far from forgotten.

Additional proof of this came the following day, May 1, a holiday for labor, when Vienna's generally non-frantic activities are further moderated. The place was a cozy villa in Grinzing, high on the appropriately named Himmelstrasse, with a heavenly view over the meadows and smaller hills below. There, sitting literally and figuratively on top of Vienna's musical world, is Robert Stolz, the last living link in the chain of the city's great operetta tradition, doing what has been coming naturally for more than sixty years. This amazing man will be ninety on August 25, and still maintains an incredible activity. His thirty-year-old operetta, *Venus in Seide*, enjoys a successful revival at the Volksoper; he has written three "musicals" in recent years, and has created new music for Vienna's Ice Review for every one of its past nineteen seasons. Stolz, who had spent the war years in New York and Hollywood, returned to the city of his greatest triumphs immediately after the war. Vienna was bleak and cheerless then, and the composer of "Zwei Herzen im Dreivierteltakt" witnessed its triumphant rejuvenation—as well as his own. Now, enjoying his immense popularity and the many honors coming his way (including the issuing of a special postage

stamp dedicated to him, an honor not usually granted to living persons other than heads of the Austrian state), he prefers the Grinzing villa to his comfortable home in the inner city, because its purer air and picturesque qualities are more conducive to creative work.

"Operettas will live forever for the worthy music that is in them," asserts Stolz. And he adds, "Besides, operettas make money here." He notes, with some satisfaction, that *Hair*, so successful in other parts of Europe, seems to have mystified the Viennese and ultimately failed here. "How much more pleasant a 'trip' is the one we take around here with a bottle of good local wine," chimed in Frau "Einzi" Stolz, a genial vision in dirndl—a fabulous combination of Viennese charm and American-style organizational efficiency.

Descending into the mundane world from the hospitable slopes of Grinzing would normally have been an anticlimax. Fortunately, in this instance the road led straight to the Staatsoper for a gala *Rosenkavalier*, celebrating the 25th anniversary of Sena Jurinac's Viennese debut. It was a war-torn Vienna that welcomed her on May 1, 1945 (as Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, with Josef Krips conducting), and, in the years that followed, the Croatian soprano developed into one of the Staatsoper's most beloved idols. Octavian was one of the roles instrumental in building the career of "Die Sena," and her progression toward the Marschallin followed in the footsteps of several distinguished predecessors. She looked and sounded beautiful on this gala occasion, her characterization stressing the womanly side of the role and understating its aristocratic aloofness. Her acting was a composite of graceful bearing, telling expression, and small, meaningful gestures. In all, she revealed an artistry that makes all the more regrettable the several attempts, none of them successful, to bring her to the Metropolitan.

Otherwise, this was a good if unsensational *Rosenkavalier*, with several performers familiar to audiophiles: Manfred Jungwirth as an expert, flavorful Ochs; Lucia Popp as a Sophie who looked charming and sang extremely well; and Gertrude Jahn, whose Octavian was too feminine and dramatically unconvincing, although her singing was satisfactory. Silvio Varviso conducted. —GEORGE JELLINEK.

WIT TWISTER #166

Edited by ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

To speed the _ _ _ _ _
 _ _ knight to war,
 The priest his argument _ _ _ _
 _ _ _ _ _ switches.
 He pleads _ _ _ _ _
 _ _ of God no more,
 But plays upon the knight's desire for riches.

—A.S.

(Answer on page 56)