Professor Christopher Ricks isn’t the only who has managed to get a cat onto the front cover of a Dylan publication. In fact this months Freewheelin cover has gone one better than the cover of the Professors new book ‘Dylan’s Visions of Sin’, for we have two cats.

First of all there is the big, snarling cat that Dylan wears on his chest underneath that leopard skin bomber jacket. Then there is ‘Fifi’, the kitten with the mischievous eyes, who is a new addition to our family.

All this cat imagery takes place in front of the painting ‘Day Dream’ by the artist Dante Gabrielle Rosetti (1830 –1894). Rosetti helped to establish a company of cool cats in the mid nineteenth century which came to be known as The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and it is this period of art that is currently the subject of an exhibition at The Royal Academy. The entire collection at the Royal Academy is owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber who was able to purchase a number of the exhibits from the proceeds of his musical ‘Cats’.

And just to complete this feline madness, the first encore song that Dylan has performed at the opening few shows of his European tour is ‘Cats In The Well’. Which is quite apt really for an autumn show. When he gets over here the leaves will certainly have started to fall!
Freewheelin-on-line take nineteen
(freewheelin’ 217)

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A bit of a mixed bag of press coverage this month, with one definite personal highlight. But before we get to that, eyes down and look in for this lot.

Firstly, the July 14th 2002 issue of *L.A. Weekly* carried an interview with Paul Williams by Alec Hanley Bemis. Much of the surrounding text concentrates on the history of *Crawdaddy!*

But, when discussing his own approach to appreciating music, Williams states what should be pretty obvious to all of us but, unfortunately, sometimes isn’t; “…There is a very famous old line: ‘I don’t know anything about art, but I know what I like. ‘ The greatness of art ultimately has to do with subjectivity. Anything else is, to a large extent, an illusion that there are right answers to the question.”

The Autumn 2002 American tour – Dylan’s most adventurous since slightly just before the Big Bang – brought forth a glut of mainly positive reviews. Here’s a few of them; *The Seattle Times*’ Patrick MacDonald trooped off to the opening show at the Key Arena, where he discovered that Dylan’s voice – sometimes “just short of a falsetto” – “made you hear the songs anew and listen closely to his poetic, mysterious, wise and humourous lyrics.”

Gene Stout of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* was also impressed; “…Bob Dylan was introduced as “the poet laureate of rock ‘n’ roll”, but that’s far too tame a description for the wild haired guy who set Key Arena on fire. Backed by his phenomenal four – piece road band, he kicked off his fall tour in Seattle with two hours of high-spirited, crowd-inspiring music that spanned more than four decades of songwriting and recording.”

Ryan Bomheimer and Aaron Shakra of the *Oregon Daily Emerald* both attended Eugene’s McArthur Court gig and witnessed “a comfortably subdued and surprise-free performance”, which makes you wonder just what Dylan has to do for some people that constitutes a “surprise”. Presumably playing half the show on keyboards and including covers by Warren Zevon and The Stones in the set (as well as – praise be! – dropping Tangled Up In Blue) was exactly what they were expecting. Anyway, according to these two bozos, “Ultimately, the show was not amazing, but let’s face it – it’s Dylan, and that’s enough.”

At the Same venue, *Counter Punch’s* David Vest saw a totally different show; “…It feels strange to write of an artist who emerged in the Sixties that the strongest moments (in both performance and crowd response) of his current show are provided by songs released in the year of 2001…You wonder, almost if the day will come when people complain about Dylan singing so many of his old songs (they already do, David. They already do.) People around me were hoping he would play Things Have Changed”. *The Orion’s* Mike Witherow caught Dylan at Red Bluff’s Pauline Davis Pavillion; a dirt-floored venue usually home to livestock sales. He found Dylan’s take on Brown Sugar to be an early highlight and reports that one
audience member was so overcome that he passed out on his back twice before finally being carried out by his friends.

*The Sacramento Bee’s* David Barton was at the Memorial Auditorium, where he appreciated a timely stab at Don Henley’s *The End Of Innocence* as well as Bob’s newest material; “…The intensity of Summer Days even made the encore of Dylan’s three biggest signature songs – *Rolling Stone*, *Heaven’s Door* and *Watchtower* – pale by comparison. They’re great songs, but Dylan’s creative energy is elsewhere, because he is still creating exciting music that can really grab an audience. That’s something that neither McCartney, nor the Who, nor even the mighty Stones, can claim.”

Old favourite Robert Hilburn, reviewing for the *L.A. Times’ Calender magazine*, witnessed Dylan open the refurbished Wiltern Theatre with a show “blessed with both thrilling music and a generous spirit”. “Dylan will always be known primarily as a man of words, “he concludes, “But he put such passion and joy into the playing that the show took on an added, cleansing edge. By the end, the audience’s mood was jubilant – not just in awe of an artist’s legacy, but of his ability on this night to touch us so gloriously anew.”

Away from the rigours of the road, the *Duluth News Tribune’s* Jane Brissett reported of Hibbing Library’s somewhat belated yet quietly growing Dylan archive. Librarians Roberta Maki and Nancy Riesgraf are spear-heading the operation which began in 1993 with a few posters. Nowadays, it boasts almost 2,000 magazine articles, most of the official vinyl albums and singles, books, publicity photos, sheet music and scripts and even a 1959 Hibbing High School Yearbook that’s kept locked in a vault. The plan is to have a full-blown Dylan Museum in the library by Dylan’s 65th birthday. They’d like him to attend to cut the cake but he’ll probably be playing a concert somewhere or other at the time. And – just think – by then the Neverending Tour will be 18 years old.

*Rolling Stone’s* David Fricke reported on the release of Mickey Jones’ 1966 home movie, which will also feature some 1964 footage of the Beatles. “But I did this project because I know Bob Dylan fans are starved,” Jones admits, “We should share this” Meanwhile, several newspapers revealed that Dylan, Billy Joel and James Taylor have filed a joint lawsuit against website MP3.com for making their music available to download without their permission. Firstly though, they’d better have a word with the head honcho at their record company, since Sony has apparently given the website all the permission it needs.

November’s *Uncut* magazine became the first magazine that I felt compelled to buy two copies of in a very long time. Firstly, Stephen Dalton’s piece on British T.V. comedy The Office (easily the funniest thing on the box by miles with the notable exception of I’m Alan Partridge) reveals that the show’s creator and star Ricky Gervais cites Bob Dylan as his musical hero; “The coolest man who ever lived from beginning to end”.

Further along is a five star review of The Last Waltz – finally released in the UK on DVD – which reckons that it’s indispensable, other than the Neil Diamond footage, and includes a nice colour photo of Dylan at the event; a presence so great that he simply eclipsed everybody else who trod the boards that night.

An interview with Harry Dean Stanton by Damien Love includes his thoughts on several of his most memorable movies, and these include Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid. He wasn’t happy with his role and reckons that “Pekinpah was sort of a madman. Just a raving maniac”. He did meet Dylan for the first time, though; “…I’ve always been a singer, and I sang a Mexican song. He was very impressed. We hit it off real good. Later, I did his film Renaldo And Clara, just one big, grand, improvised, uh, happening. He’s an unusual guy.”
The real reason for treasuring this particular issue of this particular magazine, however, are the six extracts from Larry Sloman’s republished On The Road With Bob Dylan (easily the best Bob Dylan Book In The World – Ever!). The text is good enough, but of course you need to read (even if it’s for the umpteenth time) the whole book, not just these tasty morsels, though the real icing on the cake are the array of Ken Regan photos throughout the 20-page article. Having expected the same familiar ’75 RTR photos to be used as decoration, imagine my surprise and delight when – as best as I can tell – I discovered a full dozen shots that were new to me. These include both pics at the rehearsals and onstage and offstage shots. As someone who still firmly believes that 1975 was Dylan’s finest year and that October to December were the finest months of that finest of years, this is undoubtedly the greatest item that will adorn my 2002 cutting folder. However good Dylan might periodically be nowadays, he’ll never hold a candle to 1975. There’s no point disagreeing with me, because it’s true. Live with it.

A lengthy article in America’s The Common Review takes a well written look at some of the many books that have been written about Dylan of late, whilst also acknowledging Dylan’s recent ability to do no wrong by the critics as he gets older. It’s a subject that we’ve all read before – especially in the fanzines – and it’s certainly not a subject that will give us any food for thought, but this accomplishes what it sets out to do admirably.

Finally, the November issue of Mojo featured Sinead O’Connor extolling the virtues of Slow Train Coming; an album that she reckons she’s worked through 15 copies of; “...What I find tragic is that he didn’t stand by the record; that he couldn’t see how brilliant it was. Obviously it’s a brave thing to start writing songs about Jesus, but I think he allowed other people to dictate what he should feel about the record later on. But I’m quite in love with God and I’m sure old Bob is, too.” This is a nice piece to end on and, for once, the old ex-chrome dome makes some sense.

And that’s it for another month. I’ll be back with more of the same next time, and that’s the only warning you’re going to get.

THANKS TO: GRAHAM A.. BRYAN G, MUM & DAD
The Whole Wide World is watching

The best of the web by Martin Stein
(With thanks to Expecting Rain)

With the European Tour well under way and the UK dates fast approaching, here’s last month revisited.

1. *Here Comes The (continued) Story Of The Hurricane* - Rubin "The Hurricane" Carter has received an honorary doctorate in law at a Brisbane university. Griffith University was honouring the man once sentenced to life for murder for his work on helping to overturn wrongful convictions.

2. *I Was Young When I Left Home* – Images relating to Dylan’s early years in Minnesota can be found at [www.music.indiana.edu/som/courses/rock/dylan.html](http://www.music.indiana.edu/som/courses/rock/dylan.html)

3. *I Replay The Past* – Dylan’s remastered hybrid SACDs are selling well, shifting close to 60,000 copies since their release in early October. 3,000 copies of the boxed-set containing all fifteen discs also have been sold.


6. *Political World* – This Post-Iraq War world allows Mike Marqusee to highlight his book Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan’s Art in a short article covering the impact of Dylan’s songs written between January 1962 and November 1963. [www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,1070831,00.htm](http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,1070831,00.htm)

7. *Alias* - An 1853 photograph of labourers working on the Crystal Palace reveals a surprising Bob look-a-like! And I thought this kind of stuff died out with the JWH album cover! [www.knowdrama.com/articles/photos.html](http://www.knowdrama.com/articles/photos.html)

8. *House Of The Rising Sun* - Mojo readers have voted Dylan’s appearance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival as the second most important rock music event, behind Elvis Presley recording his debut single at Sun Records in 1954.

Bloody hell! It's those two again!

Sad Dylan Fans

It's the Dylan filler meeting

So your wife was okay about you coming to the theatre tonight?

Hi, I'm your wife and this is your son. Do you remember us?

I haven't seen her. I came straight back from the Brussels Record Fair yesterday and went to work. Then I left off this evening and came straight to your place. She'll be fine though. I left her a message on the answer machine.

I'll get the beers, you go on up and get two seats with a good view of the video screen!
In this final part of my polemic I want to begin by looking at the position of music and the musician within culture and society from the viewpoint of what has become known as ‘Folk’.

For argument’s sake and taking as a starting point the Middle Ages, we can say that there have always been ‘professional’ musicians, be they Bards, bagpipers or balladeers, who made their living through performing music. In order to earn a livelihood they would have to be attached to a patron (The Church, the Royal Court), or, itinerant, that is to say – Buskers. Alongside such ‘professionals’ we will also find the ‘amateurs’, that is people with (or without!) some degree of musical talent who performed within their local community on specific occasions, be they ceremonial or social. Again, for the sake of argument, let’s say that it was around this time that we can begin to clearly see the emergence of class divisions in the forms of music being played – As musical notation began to emerge as a unified entity, less reliance was placed on ‘memory’ and the handing down of tunes by rote disappeared from the Court musician’s repertoire to be replaced by a more formulated and strictly structured set of pieces. This also enabled the ‘composition’ of musical pieces to be played by the ‘orchestra’ and we see the first musical manuscripts with composers’ names on. Class divisions also developed in the choice of instrumentation. For instance the pipe and tabor (a three holed pipe played with one hand and a small drum (tabor) fastened round the waist and played with the other was relegated to the non-courtly musician. The shawm and bombarde (reed instruments) mutated into clarinet and oboe. The rebec gave way to the violin (first sighted officially in 1523) and the bagpipes (of which there are many regional variations, Lancashire long-pipes, Northumbrian, etc) were no longer deemed appropriate for courtly music. This jockeying for position amongst the instruments, the end result of which we can see in the formation of what we might begin to recognise as a modern orchestra, was an organic as well as a social process that took place over several centuries.

To summarise – By the middle of the 16th century, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1st, there co-existed in this country, two (I’m ignoring Ecclesiastical music in this piece) forms of music – Court music, and what I will call Popular music instead of the usually used sobriquet ‘Folk’. Court music, at this point, still interacted with Popular music to a degree, but the Tudors were about to introduce legislation that changed all that and made the demarcation between ‘High’ and ‘Low’ culture a potentially painful one (especially for musicians!). Before I go further into that area I need to insert the following bit of information
– The Elizabethan era saw a remarkable rise in literacy. This was presumably because it was undergoing a remarkable rise in the numbers of its middle-class. Due to this it was a period in British history that witnessed an explosion in educational standards. The children of the bourgeoisie needed to be taught how to run the enterprises and infrastructures that were springing up and the empire that was being founded. Although grammar school education was confined to boys only, girls benefited from home tuition and EP Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Classes* claimed that there were, per capita, more literate people in 1590 than there were in 1800.

The Elizabethan age was one of paranoia and eternal struggle against internal and external forces. Elizabeth was involved in military campaigns against Spain, and France was always on the horizon as a potential threat. Mary Queen of Scots was plotting furiously. Catholics and Protestants, each had their own agenda. The head of Elizabeth’s intelligence services was Lord Walsingham. Together, he and the Queen came up with a number of devises for maintaining control of the country. One of Walsingham’s secret agents was Royal astrologer and magician, Dr John Dee. His number in the secret service was 007. During the Second World War, Ian Fleming was in the secret service. He was given the job of interrogating Rudolph Hess. His report to Churchill said that only one man in the country was capable of getting any sense from Hess and that man was Aleister Crowley, the so-called ‘Great Beast 666’. Crowley practised ‘Enochian Magick’. This was the form of Necromancy used by Dee in the 1590s. Churchill refused to let Crowley anywhere near Hess, and Fleming went on to write the ‘007’ James Bond books. His code name during the War? – John Dee.

The rise in literacy went hand in hand with the popularisation of a musical/literary form known as ‘The Broadside Ballad’. And when Walsingham saw how popular they were becoming the first official state censorship apparatus was put into place to control their dissemination. Broadsides were usually a single sheet of paper with the words of a song printed on it. Occasionally there would be an illustration with a scene from the ballad. The broadside texts dealt with all sorts of happenings and events such as, celebrations of victories, the exploits of notorious criminals, and bizarre creatures like the Lampton Worm. Because the broadsides consisted of words and words were potentially dangerous in terms of fomenting dissent the authorities passed legislation making it illegal to publish them without a licence. The official body governing the publication of ballads, plays and books was the London Stationers Company. Between 1557 and 1709, we know that 3000 ballads were registered there. Taking into account the two decade long hiatus of the Cromwellian Commonwealth when entertainment of any kind was virtually forbidden, the figures represent a thriving ballad industry. And not all ballads were licensed, some publishers took a gamble and released material that hadn’t been cleared by the authorities, usually what are known as ‘Bawdy Ballads’, earthy songs about coupling and bodily functions, though occasionally political ballads emerged as well. If prosecuted (and indeed, some were) these publishers faced not just a fine, but the severing of a hand that was then burnt in front of the miscreant, followed by a spell in the pillory.

At the same time draconian measures were introduced to curb itinerant musicians. Getting busted for busking in 1580 wasn’t like it is nowadays. Instead of a “Move along now, or you’re nicked”, from a police officer, and the possibility of a small fine if you don’t, the Elizabethans had a whole string of punishments designed to curb musical enterprise of a private nature. These ranged from being whipped through town tied to the back of a cart, to having a hole bored through your earlobe with a red hot poker, and when all else failed, cutting off your nose. When out shopping in Manchester city centre on a Saturday afternoon and I find myself being aurally assaulted by some of the huskers around today, I freely admit to looking back at these practices wistfully, but I guess we have to move with the times.
Not just musicians were threatened by this law, unaccompanied singing and ballad selling was also illegal, but widely practised. The barbarous Tudor punishments gave way to imprisonment or fines – Here’s an edict from Birmingham in 1794 –

“The officers of this town give this Public notice, that they are come to a determined resolution to apprehend all strolling beggars, Ballad singers, and other vagrants within this parish”

But the popularity of the ballad as (one aspect of) ‘The People’s Music’ grew and grew. They were sold at fairs, in the streets of most towns, in public houses and market places, until eventually the edicts and restrictions placed upon the balladeers and their mongers fell into disuse. By the early 19th century there were hundreds of thousands of titles available. Ballad writers were paid a shilling a song by the publishers, other company’s titles were bootlegged as fast as they could be printed. Undoubtedly, songs from the oral tradition were impressed into service as broadsides, muddying the waters of ‘authenticity’ for contemporary academics. Compared with the sales figures for CD singles in the present day (it is now possible to have a number one hit in the UK with sales of less than 25,000!) broadside ballads were huge hits. Catnach of London, a broadside publisher, sold over two and a half million copies each of two ballads in 1848 and 1849. Both were about convicted murderers. The broadsides were the Pop music of their day.

We’ve already seen how music evolved along the lines of Class demarcation. By reading the works of Victorian proto-sociologists like Mayhew’s *London Labour & The London Poor*, or modern historians such as EP Thompson, we can observe how the musician operated within his, or her, social and cultural milieu. By the mid 19th century the mass migration of people from the countryside to the towns meant that the majority of the population now lived in the cities. They undoubtedly took their cultural practices with them – The Irish immigrants brought set dancing. This mixed with English country dancing. Hybrids were born, flourished or died. Two examples will serve to demonstrate cross-fertilisation – The waltz originated in the Austrian Royal court towards the end of the 18th century and by the mid 19th century was the most popular dance form of Europe and America, its aristocratic origins being largely forgotten. The reverse is true of the Tango. It came from the slums of Argentina in the early 20th century and eventually developed in to a specialist art form. Strangely it’s now the most popular dance in Finland.

Broadside ballads were produced at the rate of a dozen or so a week. Most were abandoned in favour of newer material in the affections of most people. This is an immutable Law of Pop. Some of the songs became classic standards and are still around to the present day. Instrumental dance music consisted of material known to, and by, the dancers and musicians. Some of it was traditional and some of it was contemporary. Just because people moved to the cities for work doesn’t mean that they ‘lost’ their ‘traditional’ tunes. You only have to look at the experience of Jimmy Miller (Ewan MacColl), Salford born and raised, but with parents who sang him their Scottish songs, to see how the tradition was still maintained even within an urban environment. The one thing that unifies all of this music is that it was/is ‘popular’.

When the Revivalists began collecting in the late 19th century, Harker and Trubshaw (see bibliography) have both pointed out how Sharp and Co pointedly ignored urban conurbations that might be classified as ‘towns’ or ‘cities’. Their romantic nationalism, or vision of a pastoral idyll made hunting trips for tunes in areas like that ideologically unsound. It did not fit their theories. It was the same with their choice of recordable material. Anything popular
was unsound and therefore discarded. Consequently the concept of ‘The Folk’ that was filtered through their distorted lenses was carried through to the second revival mid-way through the 20th century.

And it wasn’t just the revivalists who were part of the delusional tactics. Performers too were prepared to play their part in ‘La Grande Illusione’. Fred Jordan, born 1922, was a farm labourer from Ludlow in Shropshire. At the weekends he sang in local pubs like The Feathers and The Bull. In 1952 Alan Lomax arrived in town and after recording him for posterity, passed his name on to the EFDSS. They invited him to London to sing for them. Karl Dallas, in his 2002 obituary of Fred noted –

“He turned up at his first public engagement in dark suit and stiff collar and tie (exactly the clothes he would wear for performing in Ludlow), but, after observing the al fresco dishabille of your average young folkie, he then turned up in his working clothes, a cloth cap perched precariously on the back of his head, great boots upon his feet, cords tied around the bottom of his trousers.”

He then went on to add –
“He claimed to have obtained most of his songs from his mother, though he was quite prepared to supplement his lyrics from print, most notably The Dark Eyed Sailor, some of the words of which he copied out from the Farmer & Stockbreeder Magazine”.

And, if you want my opinion, who could blame him? If that’s what the punters expected, that’s what the punters would get. He was only fulfilling their fantasies. Throw into the mix the fact that he also sang songs from the music hall, which in the second revival were becoming ‘acceptable’, and the circle is completed.

Let’s go back now to the pre-article for this series. The one about my first ever visit to a ‘Folk Club’ in 1964. I was actually lucky in that the Ladybarn club was dubbed ‘contemporary’. I went to other ones in Manchester city centre that were ‘traditional’ though I wasn’t really aware of the differences in those days. There was one discernible theme that ran through all the different clubs though and it was one of nostalgia. A nostalgia for an imagined past that we viewed through rose-tinted spectacles. The prevailing air was one of clogs and shawls, and gas-light and ‘knockers up’, we were a city club after all. But there was an overriding atmosphere of ‘the countryside’ at many of the gigs I attended, a feeling that somehow, singing songs about farming and gathering in the harvest was more ‘right’. This was reflected in the appalling impositions of MacColl such as telling Shirley Collins not to wear nail varnish, or the preponderance of Aran sweaters at gigs.

All the music I heard in there (and in later years) was called ‘Folk’. There was an unwritten understanding of what that meant. Up until 1965 that also included Bob Dylan, though by strict standards of definition, only his first album meets the criteria of the traditionalists. The concept of the singer/songwriter was only encouraged during the revival if the new material was ‘political’ in nature, hence Dylan’s acceptance up to Times, then the downward spiral into ‘betrayal’ via the dreaded ‘commercialisation’ of the post ‘Protest’ albums. ‘Folk’ had become a restrictive phrase, trapping what had been a vibrant cultural tapestry in a mess of musical blind-alleys, and the band of iron that wrapped it so tightly was that word – ‘Folk’ – Cecil Sharp’s definition of what he thought of as politically correct.

The result of this ‘genrefication’, the side-lining of so much potential talent, the pseudo-musicological ramblings of Ashley Hutchings, the pathetic demands for ‘authenticity’, the curt dismissal of ‘Pop’, has left our cultural practitioners trapped in the ghettos of ‘Folk On
Four’, or the dark little bit of HMV’s basement next to ‘Soundtrack Albums’ and ‘Novelty Recordings’. The state of play at the moment is that there appears to be hope for the future, that not all is lost. A significant number of young people are looking around for music that is against the grain of the mass-manufactured Pap that the music industry is trying to foist onto the public. Two examples –

Our 22 year old lad nearly gave me a heart attack the other week. His musical tastes have always been his own, his favourite form for a long time now has been Hip Hop and Rap. Over on a visit for Sunday dinner, he casually stunned me by asking if I had any bag-pipe music, or ‘anything Irish?’ – After they’d picked me up from the floor he explained that he wanted to hear something which was ‘real’, something ‘where you know that the musicians are enjoying playing it’. He went on to add that he’d been listening to Badly Drawn Boy and David Gray and that he liked the fact that they wrote their own music and played it too. I’ve seen both those musicians described as ‘Folk’ artists, which is absurd because they’re patently not. They’re just simply – musicians, but because they write and perform their own stuff the press are reduced to describing them in such archaic terms.

The second example came from a chance visit to a local bar. Turned out it was ‘Acoustic Night’. The place was packed, and so many musicians had turned up they were literally queuing out of the door. Eventually the organiser gave everybody a two number limit and I sat back and watched as, in ones and twos, a succession of young performers got up and played. Some were shite, some were really good, all of them, and the audience too, were thoroughly enjoying themselves. Every single number I saw performed that night was original. Not one cover, not one ‘Folk’ song. I got talking to one of the musicians and told him I didn’t know ‘Folk’ was so popular in Manchester. He looked at me in a slightly puzzled way and said – “This isn’t folk. This is acoustic.” And he was right. If it had been billed as ‘Folk’ I doubt whether any of the musicians or audience would have turned up because that dreaded word has so many negative connotations.

So it does look like the tradition carries on. Certainly not in the conventionally perceived way that the Olde-Garde would want it, but in a new and potentially exciting way where the performers and audience are interchangeable, and where the music is a celebration of community and culture. Welcome to the world of ‘Poplore’. 
Last month we (well me actually) considered some of the influences that produced this great film. I said at the end there are more, and indeed, this will be true never fear. I have decided though to digress a little first. The more I look at the influences on this film the more I find myself referring to various scenes. Before I go on with the influences then I will test your endurance by giving you Part 1 of the film, broken into scenes.

In may ways this was started by Patrick Webster in the long out-of-print booklet Red Rose & The Briar. Since this was written many more scenes have been thoroughly documented so I am able to expand on that booklet. I have used the same format for this work. What follows is the film up to the stated intermission, this is assuming that you are watching the full four hour version. There are a surprisingly similar number of scenes in each half, though the second half is notably longer than the first. In fact as the first part weights in at about 95 minutes and the second as a little more than 2 hours it can be seen very much as two movies. The first one dealing more with travel and touring. The second half with the political issues of Hurricane and public awareness. Of course both halves are linked by the saga of Renaldo and Clara, and the many members of their entourage, and their personal relationships.

But hey, I said we’d do more on influences later. For your delight here is Part 1 of the scenes, you will find my comments developed in greater depth with the corresponding scene.

Till next time…
RENALDO AND CLARA - The Scenes

PART 1

Scene 1  When I Paint My Masterpiece (filmed at Plymouth 31 Oct 1975)

The Opening title plays over the group performing the song. Dylan is wearing a see thru plastic Nixon mask. Neuwrith is wearing sunglasses.

The obvious question here for me is why exactly is this the first scene. This was the opening song of Dylan’s set so chronologically it is in the right place. However it is also making a statement in it’s title. Is Bob telling us that this is THE one? He also is appearing at the start in a mask so we see him as someone else, and of course he will not be Bob Dylan in the film. However the mask he is wearing is see thru, which also suggests that if he is hiding the real self he is aware that he is not doing so very thoroughly. You have to remember that shooting had started prior to this, certainly some scenes in the film were done almost a week before, so the chronology is not adhered to in other ways. In a radio interview Ginsberg has said that Dylan listed the scenes on cards and then arranged them into several difference sequences, after which he merged those versions after into one. Finally is there any significance to the fact that the whole screen is blue tinted with the exception of Bob’s guitar.

Scene 2  Hotel Lobby Worcester, Massachusetts Nov 19th 1975

Barry Imhoff and Larry Sloman are arguing in a hotel lobby. Sloman is complaining that he cannot get access to people. In the background are Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Roger McGuinn, watching the scene. At one point Sloman asks Roger “you’re my friend, right? But I haven’t been able to speak to you for days”. As Joni did not join the tour till the start of December this scene is clearly not in chronological order.

Scene 3

David Blue, wearing sunglasses, is playing a pinball machine (Big Valley) next to a swimming pool, probably in a hotel. He talks about the Gaslight, “passing the basket” at impromptu performances. Of reading poetry he mentions reading “Bibleland” and that the author would get dramatic and moody “to raise the interest and make more money” He also talks about becoming an actor. He then talks about Beat Poets and how he met Dylan. At which point the scene cuts to:

Scene 4  Gas Station, Augustus Nov 27th, 1975

Dylan is in a workshop playing guitar. There’s a close up of his hands, with a lot of dirt under his fingernails.(does this mean he can’t lie?) He seems to be kissing Helena Kallianiotes. A Mechanic (Sam Shepard) enters “Any man that’s trading a T Bird for a cheap bike must be in a hurry. What’s the matter, are you running from the law?” Dylan answers “ I am the law”

Scene 5  (Oct 23, 1975 Gerdes)

Bob Neuwrith is onstage at Gerdes wearing a loan ranger mask and calling himself “The Masked Tortilla” He’s reading the poetry of a black man in the crowd called Tony Curtis. As he finishes Phil Ochs takes the stage and asks to borrow Neuwriths guitar and hat. David Mansfield is with him.
Scene 6  October 25th or 26th 1975

This scene begins with a close up of a similar hat, this time sitting on a coffee table in the office of Walter Yetnikoff, where Dylan is discussing the planned release of Hurricane. Walter is trying to explain to Dylan that they need exposure for the single, and is suggesting they try to get it played on radio. Presumably talking about Hurricane, and certainly as mentioned elsewhere one of the reasons for the tour to take place.

Scene 7  Toronto Dec 1st, 1975

Helena Kallioniotes is chasing Dylan up a flight of stairs, he opens a door at the top and is backstage, talking with Scarlet Rivera. As they run up the staircase, possibly a fire escape you see a lorry outside with an Indian logo on the side. In the background we can here Kaw-Liga playing, which of course is also about an Indian brave.

Scene 8  Early November

We cut to a lorry driving in bad weather. There is an Indian logo on the door we hear a DJ is announcing the Rolling Thunder Revue will be playing Providence Rhode Island. This places this scene before November 4th.

Scene 9  Toronto Dec 1st, 1975

Sara Dylan and Helena Kallioniotes sitting in a diner and talking about traveling. There is a red flower in front of all of them. A truck driver (Jack Baran) offers one of them a lift. When quizzed if he can be trusted he asks “don’t I have an honest face?” The truck driver offers to take Helena to Vermont her previously announced destination. Sara asks the driver if he also going to Arizona. He tells her no, but suggests she asks another trucker. This is slightly at odds as at the start of the scene Helena is stating that Sara already has a lift, and that it is only she who requires one. As she gets up to leave with Baran she takes the red flower with her.

Scene 10  ISIS                (Montreal Dec 4, 1975)

The first line we hear Dylan sing is “We set out that night for the cold in the North” Followed shortly of course by the line “We’ll be back by the 4th” doubly significant: In a previous scene Dylan was advertised as soon to be appearing in Providence on November 4th! Add to that the fact that this recording was made in Montreal (a town in the north) on December 4th. Dylan and Guam perform this authoritative version. Dylan’s face is covered in white greasepaint. He is rolling his eyes and waving his hands as he sings, Bob Neuwrith at one point moves to bite his hand (the hand that feeds them?) The red flower is now in Dylan’s hat, as well as one in Scarlet Rivera’s.

Scene 11  Toronto Dec 1st, 1975

After the song we cut back to the diner. Sara is at a table with the red flower she gets up to leave and as she does she ALSO takes the flower with her.

Scene 12  A Hotel, Toronto  Dec 1st, 1975

Sheila Shotton (A tv reporter) is in a lobby wearing a dress with red flowers in the fabric. She grabs Sloman as he enters and asks if he is Dylan. He tells her she will know Dylan as he
is wearing a hat. Ronnie Hawkins arrives with a hat on, she assumes this is Dylan. Though Sloman does actually tell her it isn’t Bob. Ronnie however says that he is Bob Dylan. Shelia asks him “Who is the true, real Bob Dylan?” Hawkins replies “A hero of the highest order!” Shelia “Why do you say that about yourself?”

OK question time again. Is this scene totally planned? If it is then we have some excellent improvised acting here. Again Ginsberg has stated that the actors were simply handed crib-sheets, a rough outline of what a scene would be about was given to the actors who then improvised around that. So here we may have a key scene. Did Shelia Shotton go along with this as an act? I doubt that very much, she was a well established TV presenter in the 70’s and 80’s and was not a part of the cast for this film. So, maybe Dylan planned it this way, to show us how Ronnie “became” Dylan for the movie. In that case Dylan must have had the film well planned in advance. I personally think that spontaneity is what this film is about. Maybe this scene went down for real, after which Dylan developed the Ronnie Hawkins is Dylan idea. Again it’s only guess work, but the scene is so graphically instant that it is hard to imagine it being that methodically planned. (If anyone knows where Shelia Shotton is now, ask her for me will you?)

Scene 13 A Hotel, Toronto Dec 2nd, 1975

Ronnie Hawkins who has a red “berries pattern” stitched to the front of his hat, is trying to get Ruth Tyrangiel to go on the road with him, She’s dressed in white, and appears very virginal. She is unsure what to say she asks Ronnie to stay on the farm but he tells her “Rock n roll is the answer baby” When she says she wants to die in God’s country Ronnie tells her “God owns it all”. Finally she says she needs her fathers approval to which Ronnie quips“I never had a daddy agree with me in my life”. (in the background we can hear Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata) Now, if Ronnie is now in character, that is, is now Bob Dylan. Here we have him acting out a scene that may well have happened for real. Ruth is certainly on record as saying she was the real Dylan’s girlfriend (See her biog in the previous Fw) so here we have a classic example of Dylan revealing the real man behind the mask, though he still cannot resist cleverly hiding his own tracks. Hawkins ends the scene telling Ruth that “God wouldn’t put what’s in my mind now” Then cuts to..

Scene 14

A preachers is sermonizing in the street he says “The whole world is seeking love” which of course connects with the previous scene. He tells us that marriages go wrong! He also states that he “speaks for God” and that it is an honour to speak for God.

Scene 16 A Delicatesen

A man who appears to be Larry Sloman is talking with some friends and the diners owner. One one of them asks “What do you think God’s work is?” The owner starts to say “Maybe Dylan.” But is cut off by other chatter. The guy mentions different breeds of people and rounds it off with “whatever you’re doing, it’s part of God’s work, the way in which you do it sheds light.”

Scene 17 Toronto Dec 1st, 1975

Dylan is seen walking through the streets, in a parody of the Freewheelin’ Album cover, whilst we hear Gordon Lightfoot sing Ballad In Plain D. Dylan seems to leave from a building with the address Ste Geneviec 5 above the door, there is also a red light there,
Gordon reaches the line “beneath a bare lightbulb” Of course Ballad in Plain D can we understand to be about the breakdown of one of Dylan’s relationships.

**Scene 18  Chant Auteuil, Quebec  Nov 29th 1975**

Dylan peers into a diner and then enters, He sits at a table, as he does so a woman made up to look like Sara, but who is not Sara is seen in close up as she leaves, Dylan notices her also and is engaged in conversation by Andre Bernard Tremblay who talks about the relationship he has with his ex-wife. He explains to Dylan that they can remain friends, even though their relationship is over. Ruth T is sitting behind him talking to another man. As she leaves she comes over and kisses “Renaldo” on the cheek. She says “everytime I look at you it seems like you are avoiding me.”

**Scene 19**

A man and Sara Dylan (Clara) are discussing Jack Daniels. You’re not going to have nothing to drink either. Sara tells him he can take it, but he’s not going to have anything to drink, and he’s not going to have her either.

**Scene 20  Chant Auteuil, Quebec  Nov 29th 1975**

Ruth T and Dylan are back at the Diner, Ruth is exclaiming “There’s no where to go, just stand and bear yourself like the cross, and I’ll just receive you. “ Is this a phallic or a religious statement? Is Dylan about to reveal himself too us?

**Scene 21  (Lowell Nov 2nd, 1975)**

Scene starts with a cross whilst Ronnie Hawkins sings about a Black Girl. In The Pines

**Scene 22**

David Blue’s playing pinball machine (again) (A Black Pussycat) and talking about Dylan and Gil Turner and the debut of Blowin’ In The Wind.

**Scene 23  Seacrest Motel, Falmouth  Oct 29th 1975**

A group of middle aged Jewish ladies are watching a belly dancer who seems to be part of their group.

**Scene 24**

Ronnie Hawkins is acting a scene with Mick Ronson. Ronnie is trying to get into a venue, Mick is a bouncer and refusing to let him in. Ronnie “God won’t hold me back” Mick “Off you pop”

**Scene 25  Seacrest Motel, Falmouth  Oct 29th 1975**

Back with those Jewish ladies, the belly dancer ends and the cabaret singer (Barry Gibb, not a Bee Gee) is singing “Cabaret”.

18
**Scene 26**

The same preacher as before is talking, a second speaker joins him on the top of his van as they chant “We have Jesus”. Standing by a plaque to George Washington a man heckles the preacher when he says the preacher is lying the preacher gets off the van with the words “By George” as the man gets pushed against it. He shouts at him “he’s not fit to go to hell” after which he climbs back on the van up there he again starts sermonizing “whatever you say to a man of God you say directly to God.”

**Scene 27  A Hard Rains A-Gonna-Fall (filmed at Montreal December 4th 1975)**

Dylan on stage, again with a red flower in his hat, and greasepaint on his face. When he sings is he referring to the previous scenes? The lies certainly fit the apparent disparity that we hear between the preacher(s) and the crowd. This is, of course a fast and very dynamic version of this tour staple. We also see Shepard and Elliott both watching the performance from the wings.

**Scene 28  Dreamaway Lounge, Springfield Nov 7th 1975**

People in a bar talking, one says that he has seen Dylan once before in 1966 with the band in Philadelphia. Sloman says he once “got a great suit from an old Jewish guy for ten dollars there”. Not deterred than man embarks on a very Dylan-esque ramble. At the end of the monologue he says the girl is wearing a sweater with the word “Greeniol” on it which means clown. Sloman said he thought it meant “speaks truth” to which the other guy says, “well if you follow Bob long enough you can maybe translate these things.

**Scene 29  Probably Toronto, Dec 1st, 1975**

Sara buys a cup of coffee at a Railway Station newsstand, she has a copy of Playgirl under her arm. As she walks away she passes Dylan who’s standing in a corner. For a short time they look at each other, then she walks away.

**Scene 30  October 29, 1975 Seacrest Motel, North Dakota**

Ginsberg’s reading poetry. The compere who has introduced Ginsberg as “a very interesting and clever personality” sings a dire version of WILKOMMEN with the line “everythings coming up roses”.

**Scene 31**

David Blue is talking again, this time about Ginsberg. And about how he learned to talk hip in the Village. “I wanted to be a beatnik, man, I read it in Life magazine.” He ends with “Life is just a cookie” and we cut to.

**Scene 32  Nov 16, 1975 Tuscora Indian Reservation**

Dylan and the revue are fed by Mad Bear and Rolling Thunder at the Community center on the reservation. Mad Bear tells the group to keep the children quiet.
Scene 33  October 23, 1975  Gerdes Folk City

Ginsberg is on the small stage singing “Songs Of Innocence” “Now let us play for it is yet day” the wallpaper behind him has red flowers on it.

Scene 34  On a Train Going to Montreal Dec 3rd, 1975

Bob Neuwrith is walking thru a train, he stops the conductor (Howard Alk), who is sitting with the passengers and asks him when the train will stop, saying he has been on the train six days. The conductor points out they have only been traveling an hour or two. And that they are going to “Possibly the largest city in the East”  Neuwrith says he is on his way to a wedding.

Scene 35  October 23, 1975  Gerdes Folk City or Pilgrims Party Oct 31, 1975 Plymouth

Back at Gerdes “The Masked Tortilla”(Neuwrith) is with a group of people in period costume, he is talking with Steve Goodman who tells Neuwrith that he also writes poems. Neuwrith quips “you write faster than you shoot?” Goodman retorts, I don’t aim to be fast. I just aim to be accurate” The Masked Tortilla is talking to some Indians and invites a female to take his scalp and hang it on her friends belt. When her friend turns out to be her son Neuwrith tells them “I have just put both my feet in my hideous mouth”

Scene 36  Nov 16, 1975 Tuscora Indian Reservation

Back at the Indian party Chief Mad Bear is telling us the history of the Tuscarora Indians. He tells of the three books he is preparing. We see food being ready for the guests, at this point Joan Baez (with a red flower on her coat) is standing next to Mad Bear. Joni Mitchell is kneeling in the foreground. Finally Dylan arrives, they are greeted warmly by the Indians, while in the background we hear Dylan singing “People Get Ready”. Dylan walks along the group like a politician, at one point he stoops to kiss and elderly Indian lady. You see how some of the crowd are clearly impressed to meet Bob whilst many seem quite indifferent. As the song playing get to the line “diesels a humming” we cut too.

Scene 37

A view of the lorries on the road.

Scene 38

Cut to Neuwrith asleep in a coach, on a train. With Helena Kallianotes sitting nearby

Scene 39

Backstage the instruments and equipment are being unloaded and set up on the stage of a large concert hall. A roadie is playing a Chopin waltz on the piano. The backdrop for the stage has a large red flower on it. If you want to follow this to the nth degree the seats are red also!
Scene 40

Ronee Blakley and Steve Soles in a dressing room, Steve is putting on his make up. One of the film crew asks him about his secrets, to which he responds:”I have many secrets you know, I’m a scorpio, we don’t tend to reveal that much.”

Scene 41

Dylan is driving a camper van. Jack Elliott is sitting next to him. Dylan says “yes, we are going to see the gypsy”. In the background you hear Dylan singing I WANT YOU. Starting with the line “the gypsy undertaker” they over a car transporter with a Red Van on the back. The leaves on a lot of trees are red, for some time they seem to be following a cyclist with a red T shirt on.

Elliott says “I’m about ready for some answers” to which Bob replies “she doesn’t have answers, she has a rooming, a sporting house” They don’t appear to arrive, instead we cut to

Scene 42

Several coaches driving to a Motel, they stop and the group disembarks

Scene 43  A Hotel Bathroom

In a hotel room Ronee is putting on her makeup while Steve Soles is trying to get her to hurry up, Ronee is wearing a red hat. When she asks Steve why he is getting uptight it turns out that he is jealous. Saying that her new lover “doesn’t give a shit” she attacks him in a rage shouting “you have not fucked me in three years.” To which Steve delivers the classic statement “I don’t know what’s so fucking important about fucking!”

Scene 44   One of the Concerts

Ronee on stage singing A NEW SUN RISING very passionately. There are flashes of red colour by the side of her head at two points in the song. I have always wondered if this was a deliberate thing, or a fault in the processing, or maybe just a problem with Channel Fours copy?? (You see how silly this can all get?)

Scene 45

A Card the King Of Hearts is used as advertising on a restaurant wall next to a red book. A view of the kitchen as we hear Elliott sing SALT PORK, WEST VIRGINIA with the line “I picked up the Ace I had won her. “ There is further correlation, as the camera enters the bar area where the people are we hear Elliott sing “ he opened the door to the kitchen, you won her Goddam it” when the woman says”the last time I saw you, you looked a little tired” he replies “well I’d just got married”

Scene 46  Dreamaway Lounge, Springfield Nov 7, 1975

Mama Maria Frasca is singing to Joan MAMAS LAMENT whilst Rob Stoner plays mandolin. Mama has a red rose in her hair, Joan leans back and listens attentively.

Scene 47 Quebec Nov 28th, 1975

Baez and Sara, both dressed like prostitutes are talking while Joan is filing her fingernails. Joan is talking with a heavy Mexican accent and wearing a red dressing gown with a red
flower in her hair. She talks about finding something real. Sara asks if she means getting married.

**Scene 48** Dreamaway Lounge, Springfield  Nov 7, 1975
Mama is now singing GOD AND MAMA to Joan. Someone (?) Elliott is stroking a dog there is a red dish on the table and red ornament in Mama’s hair.

**Scene 49** Dreamaway Lounge, Springfield  Nov 7, 1975
Ronee Blakely is talking to an embarrassed Dylan in a bar “I like tough, nice men. Strong men who are also very sweet,” Dylan “Yeah?” Ronee “with a broad smile, “Yeah, I’ll take you.”

**Scene 50** Dreamaway Lounge, Springfield  Nov 7, 1975
Arlo Guthrie is now playing the mandolin. When Mama sings the line “pray Jesus” the scene cuts to Joan Baez in a bedroom with a picture of Jesus on the wall. Joan is once again dressed in her stage gear and is looking at the wedding dress which is lying on the bed. She picks it up and holds it against herself. She then rejoins Mama waering the dress who leads her to the back of the restaurant and in front of an upright piano.

**Scene 51** Lowell, Massachusetts  Nov 3rd, 1975
Views of the cemetery in Lowell, Massachusetts

**Scene 52** Quebec Nov 28th, 1975
At the bordello, David Mansfield, dressed as a cherub, is playing violin. The three whores, Joan Baez, Denise Mercedes and Linda Thomases, are standing around him smiling. When he stops playing and leaves the room he looks into the camera with an embarrassed smile. He is followed by Linda Thomases

**Scene 53** Seacrest Motel, Falmouth  Oct 29th 1975
Jack Elliott is on stage singing SALT PORK, WEST VIRGINIA

**Scene 54** Falmouth 28th or 29th October, 1975
At the Cafeteria Dominic Paulo is talking to Larry Sloman Paulo;” I got a famous saying in life, that if the world was like music, the world would be beautiful, because music is beautiful.”

**Scene 55** Seacrest Motel, Falmouth  Oct 29th 1975
Jack Elliott, this time alone on stage is singing MULESKINNER BLUES./ He has a red heart painted on his cheek.

**Scene 56** Vermont
At the seaside Dylan, Ginsberg and others are questioned by a woman about their way of traveling. Ginsberg offers to teach her to meditate, when she accepts this offer they all start dancing around singing “yeah yeah yeah, go go baby, cha cha cha do wha diddy diddy” Dylan is holding a trumpet.
Scene 57

David Blue is again playing pinball, but this time says nothing.

Scene 58

Dylan riding on a bus, we see the two preachers back on top of their micro bus from scene 14 he sees a man on the street, gets off the bus and starts chasing him. In the background Dylan is singing WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN JESUS COMES

Scene 59  Toronto Streets December 1st, 1975

Whilst Dylan walks up and down the streets we hear Anne Waldman recite her poem FAST TALKING WOMAN

Scene 60  Champlin Area of Montreal, December 4th or 5th 1975

Dylan catches up with the man (Harry Dean Stanton) and gives him a note. The man denies he’s the man Dylan is looking for saying, “Not pour moi, monsieur, c’est pas pour moi, c’est ette une mistake.” But he takes the note and disappears through some revolving doors. Dylan waits outside the warehouse for him but doesn’t notice him leaving, now minus his raincoat. Dylan continues to look lost and wanders about. As the poem reaches the line with the words Rolling Thunder ,Dylan hold out his hand to a passer by like a beggar.

Scene 61  Falmouth 28th or 29th October, 1975

Back in the Cafeteria Sloman is again talking with Dominic Paulo. Paulo says she said “she waited an hour” Sloman “you couldn’t hold her?” Paulo “I couldn’t hold her, she says, ‘well tell him I love him anyway’”

Scene 62  IT AIN’T ME BABE  (filmed at Cambridge Nov 20th 1975)

Dylan again has the red flower in his hat. There are shots of the audience superimposed upside down over the band. This is an almost leisurely, country version of the song. Dylan appears to be denying the lover that Paulo was talking about in the previous scene. We cut to a view of Ronnee who early has said she would “take him” as Dylan sings “No No No” . Interestingly as Ronson takes the end solo we see scenes of the crowd upside down superimposed over the concert footage.

Scene 63  Probably Emmett Grogans House, Montreal Dec 6th 1975

In front of a large building we see a woman rising in a horse-drawn carriage. She’s dressed in white and holds a carnation. It sure looks like Sara.

--------------------------------INTERMISSION----------------------------------
June 1984: The rehearsals for the planned Dylan/Baez duets on Dylan's European tour never really stood a chance.

"C'mon, Bob, work with me on this... Let's try again... The answer, my friend, is Blowing in the Wind. The answer is blow ya fancy a quick screw, Joan... Just for old times sake?"
To continue: in the penultimate verse of the song the narrator and Isis have a short, surreal conversation in which the narrator, somewhat unconvincingly it must be said, agrees he will stay and seal his commitment to Isis:

She said, ‘Where ya been?’ I said, ‘No place special.’
She said, ‘You look different.’ I said ‘Well I guess’.
She said, ‘You been gone.’ I said, ‘It’s only natural.
She said, ‘You gonna stay?’ I said, ‘If you want me to, yes.’

The narrator’s final quoted word in the performed version of the lyric is a life-affirming, Joycean: ‘yes,’ which offers the song a further intertextual resonance. The narrator of the song, like Leopold Bloom, has returned to his beginning, and, after a period of wandering, has found no answer, no solution, no meaning with which to confront the sense of futility, frustration and loneliness he had had before he left. Furthermore, Isis, like Molly Bloom, has remained at home waiting for the man to return, as she knew he would. Both Dylan’s unnamed narrator and Leopold Bloom are, in a sense, subjugated by the women they are involved with. There is a sense that both Isis and Molly Bloom have a greater understanding to men’s fears and desires and that, as women, they know how to use this power.

Isis’s lover and Bloom may possess the universal male signifier, they may travel in the world as women cannot, but for all of this they ultimately seem dependent on the female presence and are continually drawn back to them.

The tomb was empty, the journey made by the narrator could thus be seen as an allegorical account of a search which ultimately leads only to the place where the journey had begun. John Herdman has commented that the narrator of ‘Isis’ has ...

... been through hell and back again, has gained nothing and learned nothing, and now finds himself once more in the very situation which drove him forth. We can visualise a nightmare-like eternal recurrence of this cyclic movement.

Dylan’s hero has found no solution, no meaning, and his only option would seem to be to return and to attempt to find some meaning in life via woman’s love. This, I would argue, is the underlying contradiction of the construct of masculinity in this text and also elsewhere in Dylan’s work.
Aidan Day, one of the few critics of Dylan to have discussed the implications of masculinity within the song in any detail, notes that the narrator’s return ‘with the sun in his eyes’ plays upon the association of Isis with the moon:

‘In the speaker’s return to Isis is imaged again, as in the opening of the lyric, a sacramental conjunction of sun and moon: a creative union of masculine and female principles. As a parable of a psychic split, the speaker’s journey away from Isis exposes the inadequacies of too one-sided a development of the conventionally masculine aspects of identity. The much prized attributes of the heroic ego - all will and active self-determination - are stripped to expose an aggressive, imaginatively barren and ultimately life-denying acquisitiveness.’

Thus the song could be read as an allegorical construct encircling the impossibility of ever reconciling gender differences, the impossibility of man and woman ever fully comprehending one another. The question the song appears to ask is whether Isis, and her reckless, masculine lover, can ever live happily ever after, or indeed, can any man and woman ever truly live happily ever after? The song derives from an album called *Desire*, and there would seem to be a desire to achieve a union between the masculine and feminine universes. But whether this can ever be achieved within the performative construct of gender in this song, and many others in Dylan’s canon, remains uncertain.

In the thirteenth and final verse we get this summing up:

*Isis, oh, Isis, you mystical child  
What drives me to you is what drives me insane.  
I still can remember the way that you smiled,  
On the fifth day of May in the drizzling rain.*

The narrator, forced back into a feminine domain, recalls the contradiction of needing Isis and not needing her, and of risking his life and possibly his sanity in the process of doing this. Thus the song ends, in a completely circular fashion, on the fifth day of May in the drizzling rain.

To be continued ...
My title comes from Jimmy McDonough’s spelling of what seems to be Neil Young’s favourite word. It crops up again and again in the long ongoing interview that binds McDonough’s Neil Young biography “Shakey” together. Even without the bibliography, source notes and index it is a massive 740 pages long. But well worth it. I used to think that it must be hard working for Dylan but I’m sure he is easy compared to Young.

Dylan makes a number of appearances in the book. He is obviously one of the few artists that Young has respect and admiration for. In 1991 Dylan went to all 6 shows that Young gave at the Beacon Theatre in New York and afterwards could be seen in Neil’s tour bus. Young has no illusions about where he stands. “I’m, like, a B student of this fuckin’ guy – he’s the real thing.”

Elliot Roberts has managed both Dylan and Young. “They’re both very flighty. They have the exact same road habits, they prepare the same way. They’re very, very similar in what satisfies them – good shows, bad shows. There’s some huge dissimilarities. Bob likes to have his families in place and go to them. He’s on the move, doesn’t like to stay in one place long. Neil will stay in one place forever, given the opportunity.

“Neil’s eccentric with a purpose – Bob’s eccentric with a purpose, but I’m not quite sure what that purpose is, and the only person who knows what that purpose is may be Bob,” said tour manager Richard Fernandez, who’s worked for both of them. “Everybody else is speculating.”

Telling his biographer when he first heard Dylan, Young says it was back in Winnipeg. “I liked Bob’s voice when I first heard it. I just said, ‘Hey, there’s a guy who sounds different doin’ this thing, too – I really like this guy. I can write songs’.

To find out more about his early days Young suggested that McDonough should talk to Ray Dee, “a local legend in Thunder Bay”. For a while Young and his band the Squires lived on Spam and crackers in Thunder Bay’s Sea View Motel. When Ray Dee spoke to McDonough he claimed, “We threw Bob Dylan out of the radio station. He walked over the border, guitar on his back, wanted to sing on the radio. Producer told him, ‘We don’t do that here.’ “

There’s plenty more Dylan in the book as well as an illuminating account of some of what Neil Young is all about. Buy it or borrow it and your time will be repaid. I’ll leave the last word to Young, “Dylan’s so funny. In Europe the first time we shared a concert bill, not a benefit. He’d just done a great fuckin’ set. They just slammed. Bob came over and whispered – ‘Well I warmed them up for ya ....Oh God, I like him. He’s brutally honest guy. He loves to tell the truth, heh heh. He even enjoys it!’”
IT WAS WHAT U WANTED

By Jim Gillan

Whilst Dylan himself is famously dismissive of attempts to understand him and explain his art, the fact remains that such is the complexity and audacity of his work that he, and it, have been subjected to an examination so relentless, so searching that it makes the Inquisition look careless and the electron microscope seem crude. Over the years, a steady stream of slender pamphlets, weighty tomes and, more recently, ephemeral postings on a promiscuously accommodating Internet have attempted to shed light, though many authors seem to have been unable to locate the switch. Bob of course simply can’t be doing with any of it.

Here be Christopher Ricks, author of *Dylan’s Visions Of Sin*, which offers a detailed look at Bob, the poet. BIG subject, which is why I suspect he excludes virtually everything else. It’s a decision of his that will doubtless get a good savaging – as ever, the opportunity to learn anything being lost because people are too busy bickering. For once it’s not a Bob thing; humanity being demonstrably incapable of acting sensibly anywhere. Back to Ricks, who as Warren Professor of the Humanities, and Co-director of the Editorial Institute, at Boston University, can claim an authority associated (not always deservedly) with office. But there is more. Chris is also a member of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics and was formerly Professor of English at the universities of Bristol and Cambridge. He is also the author of a number of critical works on poetry, including the efforts of your man, T S Eliot, a name that crops up with the inevitability of a spelling mistake in a first draft of anything written about Bob. All of which might mean that as an acclaimed academic (rather than a disdained polemicist), he is better equipped than most to offer that rarest of things, real insight.

His book has already attracted mixed reviews. At over 500 pages, *Dylan’s Visions Of Sin* is a substantial work that clearly requires careful reading, something that takes a lot of time. The truly serious (and/or utterly deranged) may also want to follow up its many references in order to check context, interpretation and relevance, though a lifetime might not be sufficient. All of which might imply that (a) few, if any, of those critics who have rushed in with an opinion can have read it in any depth. Paddled maybe, totally immersed, probably not. And (b) it’s a book that might daunt those many who whilst hooked on Dylan’s music, are selective about which, if any, commentaries they might read. Obsessives, scholars and ‘world authorities’ on Dylan, especially those who get a mention and/or have a work in progress, will buy *Dylan’s Visions Of Sin*, and many will doubtless rush with an opinion on it’s merits, or, more likely, the lack of them.

Are you going to buy it? Did you read the reviews in *The Observer* and elsewhere? Have you trawled the web and listened hard to Radio 3 and BBC 2 arts programmes? Next stop the
bookshop, and a possible purchase. But as with anything that has some inherent appeal, it still needs to be weighed up before parting with the cash. Everyone has their own way of doing this, but an admittedly cursory evaluation might involve a read of the dust jacket, a look at the chapter headings, a quick glance at the Introduction to see what it’s all about and a dip in at a couple of places to assess its readability. How long have you got? Five minutes? Fifteen? More? What’s your £25 worth to you? Which is what it will cost if you want to take it home with you. Join me in Waterstones.

The dust jacket sports a photo of Bob at his home in Woodstock, taken in 1968. One of a series by Elliott Landy that captured Dylan hiding from the insanity of it all. Maybe it’s a picture of a young family man with too many memories. A man yearning for simplicity and a time of innocence. Is this photograph supposed to convey anything in the context of the title, *Dylan’s Visions Of Sin*, and the six extracts of lyrics that all include ‘sin’ on the back? Does it offer a clue to something profound or is it a red herring? Once Dylan said something to the effect that “the most important part of the record is the cover,” so perhaps Ricks and/or the publisher are paying homage to that, or maybe trying to convey some of the contradictions, ambiguities and playful deceptions that have always been characteristic of Bob. No photos, other than that on the dust jacket. But academic works are often sniffy about pictures.

Now to the Contents page. Ah! No Introduction, at least not of the usual form, instead there are a couple of short preambles. Then three main sections: ‘The Sins’ (seven of); ‘The Virtues’ (four of); ‘The Heavenly Graces’ (three of). 129 pages, 100 pages and 114 pages respectively. So, a symmetry of sorts, indicating perhaps that Ricks has given equal weight to all parts of the book. How odd! It’s usually the case that 90% of the space is devoted to the sixties and the rest to the next thirty-plus years. I exaggerate, but not by much.

Time for a flick through the back bits. Nine pages of Acknowledgements, mostly of Dylan’s songs, though Housman, Yeats, Empson and T S Eliot (what a surprise) get a mention. On to the General Index, where those four have LOADS of entries. Matthew Arnold, Samuel Beckett, the Bible, Keats, Philip Larkin, Tennyson, Shakespeare and Wordsworth also feature, so the good and the great are in. But what of the goo and the grate? Michael Gray gets a goodly sprinkling of references. Robert Shelton not so many, but numbers add up to nothing. Wilfred Mellers, he’s in. As is Paul Williams. But no Andrew Muir. Nor is Clinton Heylin. No John Gibbens, someone who Ricks is said to admire, though I disremember who by. Robin Witting, Ken Brooks? Assuredly not.

Nor has Ricks bothered much with those who contributed to that other recent(ish) professorial foray, Neil Corcoran’s *Do You Mr Jones: Bob Dylan With The Poets And Professors*. So then: Lots of food for thought, not least in respect of who Ricks has included and who he has left out. Some scribblers will doubtless be offended, but so it goes. Life isn’t the only thing that is precious.

The Introduction tells me less than the jacket inner, so it’s time to delve deeper. Turn at random to page 114, ‘Sloth’. This opens with: ‘If some particular sin – sloth, say (no longer sayable, “sloth”, too old-world a word) - isn’t for you, good for you.’ And later (p118) ‘Houseman’s is a stoically doleful challenge.’ I feel a furrowed brow and a deep breath…Skip the pages, eye falls here, eye falls there. Skim read. Skip some more. Courage, mon brave! Go back and try again…

This won’t do, it needs a more disciplined approach. This time it’s page 329 and a bit on ‘Fortitude’. How apt. ‘A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall’ is the focus and fifteen pages are devoted to it. I read them propped up against the bookshelf, until a bored assistant invites me
to sit on one of the easy chairs thoughtfully provided by the shop. An hour later I’m still there and running late. Time for a decision.

Christopher Ricks isn’t an immediately accessible writer, though he is arguably relatively easier to read than many others who write about Dylan. With a big book this is a major consideration. He expresses himself with authority, his somewhat pedantic style occasionally relieved by the kind of witticisms you might expect to find in the Senior Common Room. He writes as one who is very familiar with his quoted sources and what must be a considerable body of related material. He has the confidence of one certain that he is making the proper connections, reaching rigorous conclusions, offering vigorous and unimpeachable argument. He lectures, rather than converses, but with a book, the reader can interrupt and disagree as often as she/he likes without risking ire. Is he spot on, or off the wall? Do I understand the questions, the propositions, the links? Does Ricks? I find myself more distracted than engaged by the structure Ricks has adopted for the book, unconvinced that it’s really anything other than a clever, but ultimately superficial, contrivance. Why not ‘Faith’, ‘Hope’, ‘Charity’?

Key question: Will reading *Dylan’s Visions Of Sin* add anything to what I get from listening to the CD’s and watching Dylan in performance? Maybe, but it’s way too early to tell.

*Dylan’s Visions Of Sin* is a book that will probably reward and infuriate in equal measure. It might stimulate new lines of thought, but could close down others. It’s one to digest over time, rather than try to swallow whole. Recommended on an initial, inevitably limited, acquaintance. Come back in a year or two for a more considered take.
Starting and Ending Well
A Review of *Dylan's Visions of Sin*
by Christopher Ricks

by Paula K.V. Radice

Well, the long-awaited Dylan opus from Professor Christopher Ricks has finally arrived; a 500-page-plus beauty of a book, too. Many have been looking forward to reading it since the late 1960s, when Ricks first declared his literary love (and maybe more, according to the tongue-in-cheek, or rather, just cheeky interview he gave in *The Sunday Times* recently) for Dylan: I have only been waiting for it since I heard him lecture at the Royal Geographical Society a year or two back - a fabulous lecture which centred on *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* - but my wait has been no less impatient. Professor Ricks is not, of course, the only academic to have "come out" on Dylan's side, as it were, but he is unique in the loftiness of his stature in the groves of academe, and has long been the most prominent of the heads which have raised themselves over the risky parapet of the "Is Dylan a real poet?" debate.

That it *is* still a risky parapet has been more than amply demonstrated by the critical ferocity with which *Dylan's Visions of Sins* has been received, at least in the British press. Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate - who has more than a slight vested interest as another highly visible pro-Dylan lobbyist - has been just about the only positive reviewer of the book (his review appearing in *The Guardian*). Although many of the negative reviews have acknowledged the weight of Ricks' authority (for example, John Sutherland in *The Independent* allowed that Ricks is "the best reader of English poetry we have") all have found more in the book to object to than to praise.

So what is it they don't like? Their objections seem to fall into three categories: one, that Ricks' verbal trickery dazzles and astounds, but is more style than substance; two, that Ricks is clearly unable to be objective about Dylan - there is nothing, apparently, in Dylan's work that Ricks doesn't like - and that this therefore rules him somehow unfit to carry out critical analysis; and three (and this is much less overt in some reviews, but I think is central to the negative barrage that has met the book), Dylan is not a "proper" subject for a "real" intellectual to be enthusing about in the first place, and therefore the whole basis of the work is compromised.

*And they are wrong on all three counts.*

*Dylan's Visions of Sins* is, I think, the most insightful, entertaining and worthwhile critique of Bob Dylan's writing ever published (note that I said Dylan's *writing*; nobody has yet to top Paul Williams for understanding Dylan as a *performer*) and I cannot recommend it highly enough to anyone who wants to access a new perceptiveness about Dylan's *words.*
Dylan is a master user of language, who loves turning it about in his hands (and his mouth), loves turning it upside-down, inside-out, twisting different layers of meaning from hoary old clichés, making us and himself laugh out loud with double entendres, puns, slapstick linguistic silliness. And so does Ricks, and that is why he can do Dylan more justice than other writers: he understands and shares Dylan's impulse to play with the words. It should be fun, and not po-faced. How many literary reviews have you ever read that make you laugh out loud, not just occasionally, but as a matter of course? What some reviewers have chosen to see as "Tricky Ricks-iness" is instead just a very Dylanesque appreciation of language as plaything. What Andrew Motion calls the "shimmer and scintillation" of Ricks' writing style stamps his own personality on every line; he does not maintain a steady critical distance from Dylan, but enters with him into his light-footed dance of praise to the English language. It's all a game, he says; enjoy it, revel in it.

For all Ricks' erudition, this is an easy book to read, not full of technical poet-jargon, but brimming over with little lightnesses of touch. "Brownsville Girl starts Well", for example. (It does. It starts, "Well, there was this movie I seen one time...". This review starts Well, too). Just a daft, deft little touch, but endearing. Here's another of my favourites: during his appreciation of Blind Willie McTell, Ricks throws in the phrase "to wit the owl, and the maidens to woo". Dylan would love to have written that, wouldn't he? It reminded me of some of my Dad's jokes: often you can't decide whether to laugh or groan, but they're entertaining, and a crucial part of who he is. Certainly, there are "dazzling fireworks" of "cleverness", as one reviewer scornfully put it (about Ricks, not my father), implying that the linguistic dazzle substitutes for substance: but fireworks are beautifully illuminating. Sean O'Hagan's conclusion, in The Observer, that "Ricks seems unable, or unwilling, to write clearly and concisely for the benefit of the common, or indeed informed, reader" simply baffles me.

Much of the writing is just lovely, and brings an instant sense of recognition. Of Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands, for example, Ricks says "it enters a mythological once-upon-a-time where the clock doesn't tick". Yes, it does, we nod. Of Blind Willie McTell, "we arrive at this conclusion, art's being a glory of man that does not wither". Absolutely right. There's no tricksiness there, just a getting to the heart of things, clearly and beautifully. The whole exploration of Blind Willie McTell is lovely, actually. I didn't think anyone would be able to get as close to the real heart of the song - "this lucid, mysterious song", as Ricks terms it - as John Bauldie did, but Ricks does. For example:

The refrain is perfectly pitched and poised. And even the form that the magnuminous praise takes...is one that very humanly and decently combines the utmost praise with a somewhat different inflection, one that emphasizes McTell's uniqueness, not simply or solely his superiority...Perfectly judged, and determined to do justice to McTell.

Anybody bewildered by that? There are many less profound examples of Ricks' felicity with words working to throw light. Under the Red Sky is full of "cursery rhymes", he says. How could anyone not love that phrase? It perfectly sums up the album.

Perhaps the reviewers missed the point because they didn't know their Dylan well enough? There are so many Dylan in-jokes that perhaps we should all have volunteered to act as interpreters for the uninitiated. Ricks talks, for example, of
...songs that stroll and songs that stride, those that prance and those that saunter. Amble or gambol, meander and maunder. Foxtrot, lope and pace.

Uncredited Dylan lyrics pop up all through the book, tossed into the mix. We will pick them out and appreciate their resonances, but I suspect many of the reviewers didn't. Perhaps it wasn't Ricks' fireworks but Bob's that confused them.

Which brings us to the second point. Does being an unashamed "fan" of someone's work rule you out of meaningful criticism? One reviewer concluded scornfully, "The writing of this book was, I'm told, a labour of love..." Should Ricks have included more discussion of the weaker points of Dylan's writing, to give a better balance and objectivity to the book? Or is it simply not just natural that, faced with the challenge of decanting Dylan's ten-gallon-sized output over the last forty years into a pint-pot of 500 pages, Ricks should choose the songs he values highest, and cares most about, to discuss?

None of us, even the least sane (amongst whose number I count myself), would argue that Dylan's corpus is of a wholly consistent quality. Whose work would be, over a forty year period? It's just consistently better than everyone else's, that's all.

We all, I hope, accept that some (slight) criticisms might conceivably be made of songs like Wiggle, Wiggle and To Make You Feel My Love. But why should Ricks waste pages on them? This book has been a long time a-coming; he wants every page to count, and who can blame him? He has said himself in interview that he wanted to include only songs to which he felt he could bring some original appreciation - thus ruling out even some very central songs, like Visions of Johanna. And I know that Ricks can be objective about even songs universally acknowledged as great Dylan works. In the lecture I referred to earlier, for example, he criticised one of the verses of One Too Many Mornings as being significantly weaker poetically than the others. So it's not that he can't be objective, it's just that he chooses not to be, not in this book, anyway. He's waited a long time to gush about Bob. It's a very natural, normal instinct.

So what about the third point? I can sense in nearly all of the negative reviews (with the exception of Sean O'Hagan's piece in The Observer) an underlying resistance to the idea that the work of a mere songwriter, a popstar for God's sake, can be treated with the reverence due to "real" literary figures. It's much easier to ridicule the academic who has lowered himself to popular culture. This is clearly the line taken, for instance, in the - admittedly very funny - pastiche in last week's issue of Private Eye, a Ricksian dissection of Cliff Richard's "Congratulations". Of course, it's funny that Cliff Richard is compared to Blake and Eliot. But it's not incongruous that Dylan should be, and it's rather disappointing that this battle still feels like it needs fighting.

Still, if there are some that remain to be convinced of Bob's legitimacy in the literary canon, Dylan couldn't wish for a more able or committed advocate than Christopher Ricks. Anyone who can describe the Bard of Avon as "that Dylanesque writer William Shakespeare" must be A Good Thing, don't you think? If the literary establishment doesn't like Dylan's Visions of Sin, I know a lot of fellow Dylan fans who will enjoy every page, and feel that here is a writer who connects with Dylan in the same way as themselves, but is able to bring a unique perspective and expertise to the quality of the connection. Dylan's Visions of Sin does Dylan justice, nothing more, nothing less. It does what it has to do, and it does it well.
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Like Ice, Like Fire
(Addressing The Night in ‘Visions of Johanna’)
Part 23 And In The End

You know, sometimes the thrill of the journey exceeds the joy of the arrival. The ‘journey’ in this instance is my hankering after the arrival of the book ‘Dylan’s Visions of Sin’ by Christopher Ricks, a book that has been anticipated for some considerable time by not only me, but probably by most everyone reading this. What leant some speed to my hankering was in that very title: ‘Dylan’s Visions of Sin’. No, let me go faster, in those very words ‘Visions of...’ for in this foolhardy head of a drifter off to see the world, I connected the title of the book ‘Dylan’s Visions of Sin’ to Dylan’s ‘Visions of Johanna’. After all, they both have that same word ‘Visions’ in the title and therefore I quite naturally assumed that the good Professor would, in his book, devote some large measure of attention to the song to which I have devoted some extra large measure of my life over the last couple of years. I was ready and willing, but not yet able, to be enlightened.

The first sign of derailment came in an article by Brian Appleyard that was published in the ‘Culture’ supplement to the Sunday Times in August 2003. Although the somewhat less than inspired title of the article: ‘Blood On The Tract’ could have indicated a red signal, from the following introduction I only saw green: ‘After 20 years of trying, the critic Christopher Ricks has finally written the definitive book on Bob Dylan’s lyrics’. Wow. That sentence alone equalled in me the wonderful feeling of delight no doubt enjoyed by all those passing my window on their way home from church that sunny Sunday morning.

The article centred on an interview between the journalist and Christopher Ricks concerning the impending publication of Ricks’ book. Before Ricks comments on the work, Appleyard provided some historical information: ‘The book on Dylan should have been inevitable, but, somehow it kept getting put off. He agreed to do it 20 years ago. Bits, like his superb essay on The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll, were in circulation, and he was gradually forming unique assessments of every song. Then, finally, last year, he began to write it. It is 500 pages long and analyses hundreds of songs in intricate detail. Why not, I ask him, make it even longer and cover all the songs?’ (153)

Then, in Ricks’ reply, came my near derailment: it was certainly an amber light.

‘Well, yes. I mean there is, for example, one terrible omission. I think ‘Visions of Johanna’ is the greatest song ever written by anybody, but I had nothing whatsoever to say about it. It’s like Henry James – I read him all the time, but I have nothing original to say about him. And there’s no point in saying things that other people have thought out for themselves’. (154)
Whaaat? Nothing to say about ‘Visions of Johanna’? Nothing to say that hasn’t already been said? My God, I am just completing about 65,000 words on this very song and the Professor has nothing at all to say about it? My bright Sunday mood changed and, needless to say, I didn’t look out for anyone returning from Evensong.

Then came the day of arrival: at last the ‘Ricks’ book. Super Elliott Landy Woodstock-with-pussy-cat-and-plate photograph on the cover. What happened next? Did the cat go for the glass of milk or was it about to lick the plate? The white expanse of the cover, which matches Dylan’s hat and shirt, is a superb contrary to the black of the sin that has a connotation with that word and is used to define the word on the cover. A dip into the text is a delight but an examination of the index sees journey end on my ‘Visions’ trip. Just three minor entries on ‘Visions of Johanna’ and, in the text, no more than just a few words about ‘the greatest song ever written by anybody’. And here is me with my 65,000! This has all left something of a hole in my perception of the Christopher Ricks book but the proof will no doubt be in the reading and the joy may very well be in the remainder.

In the meantime, I must set out to complete my own task and finish what I started now rather than in 20 years time. I suppose it is with some relief that I can sense the end is near but hopefully there will be more than just relief when I do come to face that final curtain. It is a journey that started out in Freewheelin’ number 189, that is 28 issues ago: 2 years and four months worth of time. If my exploration of the song can indeed be equated with another kind of journey then, with the many places that I have visited along the way, you could say that, with regard to ‘Visions of Johanna’, I have travelled each and every highway. But with the somewhat confusing notion of turning it all into a pictorial study of the song, I can safely say that more, much more than the mere journey and the 65,000 words, I really did do it my way!

One thing that has been a constant companion with me throughout the entirety of the trip is the title ‘Like Ice, Like Fire’, with its sub-title (Addressing the Night in ‘Visions of Johanna’). Whilst my sub-title is just a play on words relating to my constant theme of ambiguity of gender (a dress in the knight), the main title consists of the two elements that have been inherent in my interpretation of the song. I have dwelt in depth and at length on all aspects of ice and fire both in connection with the song and also relating to the main character that, to me, shines through the words and the music of ‘Visions of Johanna’. Remaining with these images to the last stroke, there are just two more faces that I want to add into the picture. And to balance things up, these faces are both male and female although, having said that, their images have been gender confused on occasions. I am old fashioned enough to say ‘ladies first’, so just let me say ladies first and introduce the lady.

7. Enter Patti Smith

On the back cover of the first biography of Patti Smith, written by Victor Bockris, (155) she is described as ‘a poet, a punk prophet, a feminist icon and a living work of art’. Now that all may very well be true, but I prefer the description of her provided by Clinton Heylin as ‘New York’s latest and most androgynous new Dylan’. (156) Clinton was describing the Patti Smith of 1975 when she and Dylan set up some kind of acquaintanceship at New York’s Other End club in the summer of that year. Indeed
avid icon watchers will immediately bring to mind the Dylan/Patti cuddle from backstage at The Other End Club as captured by the photographer Danny Fields where Patti is wearing a Keith Richards T-shirt and Dylan is wearing a leather jacket over a striped vest, the kind of vest that French sailors used to wear.

Before that meeting in 1975, Patti Smith, who was then aged 28 years, had been acquainted with Dylan’s work for some considerable time. Along with certain other artists and historical characters, he was a major influence towards her art. Before she released her first album – *Horses* – in 1975, she had already published four books of poetry and it is her first book – *Seventh Heaven*, published in 1972, that is of concern to me here for it draws together not only the two main players in my exploration of ‘Visions of Johanna’, but it also takes further the elements that, as I have said, are inherent in my interpretation of the song. Concentrating on that first book of poems then, *Seventh Heaven* was written shortly after the demise of Patti’s passionate affair with the playwright Sam Shepard. Victor Bockris provides some background information:

‘Rather than dwell on her loss and write a lachrymose book about Sam, she penned a series of celebrations of her heroes and heroines from whose composite characters she now set out to construct the new Patti Smith, the one who would no longer place herself under a man’s thumb but would shine as her own individual star.’ (157)

So *Seventh Heaven* became something of an autobiographical androgyne in print. It merged the male and female in the poet by reference to her heroes and provided, for this purpose, male and female counterparts. Victor Bokris again:

‘Her first book represents her most cut-and-dried self portrait in the mirror images of her male and female heroes. Having straddled the gender barrier all her life, she comes down on both sides of it. Her female models, Marianne Faithful, Anita Pallenberg, Joan of Arc, Amelia Earhart and Edie Sedgewick have in common that they gambled with their lives to achieve distinction and for the most part lost. The same can be said of their male counterparts: Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Keith Richard and Bob Dylan.’ (158)

Now you may have recognised the names of all of those male and female counterparts but, for the purpose of my study, two characters jump from the text and land on my pallette: Joan of Arc and Bob Dylan, side by side. To take this juxtaposition one stage further, the chronological sequence of the poems as presented in the book also put these counterparts side by side, or, to be more precise, one after the other. Unlike my old fashioned approach, Patti decided to put the gentleman before the lady and the first poem in the sequence is ‘Dog Dream’.

```
have you seen
dylan’s dog
it got wings
it can fly
if you speak
of it to him
it’s the only
time Dylan
can’t look you in the eye
```
have you held
dylan's snake
it rattles like a toy
it sleeps in the grass
it coils in his hand
it hums and it strikes out
when dylan cries out
when dylan cries out

have you pressed
to your face
dylan’s bird
dylan's bird
it lies on dylan's hip
trembles inside of him
it drops upon the ground
it rolls with dylan round
it’s the only one
who comes
when dylan comes

have you seen
dylan's dog
it got wings
it can fly
when it lands
like a clown
he’s the only
thing allowed
to look dylan in the eye

Then, following Dylan’s dog, comes ‘Jeanne d’Arc’

I feel like
I feel like shit
I need a
I need a drink
and not vinegar neither
I don’t want to die
I feel like a freak
don’t let me cut out
I wasn’t cut out
to go out virgin
I want my cherry
squashed man
hammer armour
love me
live me
hour to death
what the hell
hour to death
am I doing here
am I ending here
hour of death
and I feel so free
feel like fucking
feel so free
fell like running
got no hair
weighing me
cut so close
scalp is nicked
look like shit
hour of darkness
and I look like shit
hour to death and I feel so free
hour to death and I feel so free
turnkey turnkey
play with my pussy
lick my little
scull bait head
get it get it
get it in
get the guard to
beg the guard to
need a guard to
lay me
get all the guards to lay me
if all the guards would lay me
if one guard would lay me
if one guard would lay me
if one god would lay me
if one
god

Apart from their chronological sequence, what enjoins these poems is their obvious sexual references and metaphors. Whilst the poet hides behind a phallic metaphor in ‘dog dream’, she is far more explicit in the poem ‘jeanne d’arc’. It is a poem of colourful sexual language and its construction is explained in an interview between Victor Bokris and Patti Smith that concludes the formers biography of the latter. Responding to a question about ‘the poetry of performance’ Patti, maintaining her use of colourful sexual language, explains:

‘The Joan of Arc poem is almost total rhythm masturbation but it puts Joan of Arc in a new light, it puts her forth as a virgin with a hot pussy who realises that she’s gonna get knocked off before she gets the chance to come. So there is a concept there that made the rhythm worth of being frozen.’ (159)
These poems and this explanation underscore my reason for bringing Patti Smith into the picture. Besides the coincidental placing of my main characters, it comes down to this matter of ice and fire for, although the poet may be explaining that written words are ‘frozen’ on the page compared to them being spoken in live performance, she is also referring to the matter of virginity being a ‘frozen’ physical state. As I have propounded in previous articles in this series, to Joan of Arc, her state of virginity, her ‘frozen’ state was of massive importance and supremacy yet Patti Smith refers to her as having a ‘hot pussy’. A wonderful example of the theme captured by my title of ‘Like Ice, Like Fire’.

Before I melt away into the background and let my finished portrait do the talking, there is that final image to be coloured in. The man that comes after the woman. He really needs no introduction so I will give him none. Let me just say:

8. Enter Bob Dylan

Now here you may expect me to be writing about Dylan with a direct reference to ‘Visions of Johanna’. That expectation will however come to nothing I am afraid because I am here just putting the final touches to my work and concentrating on the use of those two elements – ice and fire – in my title and how they tie in to the main characters contained in my pictorial study of the song. I have I think already said enough about Dylan with a direct reference to ‘Visions of Johanna’ and, if you doubt me on this, then go back to my beginning and start again. If you have the time and the energy that is. If not, then just trust me.

It is not then from the album ‘Blonde on Blonde’ that I want to refer to here but to another song from another album. The song is from the album ‘Infidels’, recorded and released in 1983, but before I come to that particular song, I want to mention a yet further song from the same album which many critics (160) have linked to ‘Visions of Johanna’. This third song is ‘Don’t Fall Apart On Me Tonight’ and the link is that, in the song from 1966, Dylan refers to the Mona Lisa and, in the song written some 17 years later Dylan sings:

‘But its like I’m stuck inside a painting
That’s hanging in the Louvre,
My throat starts to tickle and my nose itches
But I know that I can’t move’.

Now you don’t have to be a great lawyer or scholar who is able to distinguish between a leper and a crook to realise that the Mona Lisa is a painting that is stuck inside the Louvre, so it is perfectly permissible to bridge that impossible 17 year age gap and draw these two songs together. Indeed I have already done so myself in building the background to my study. But if you think about Dylan’s physical state in those lines and indeed the state of the Mona Lisa as she was caught on canvas 500 years ago, you could say that they are both ‘frozen’ to the spot where they are represented. Both motionless, stiff, hard-set, rigid, frozen. Like ice.

The first take of the song ‘Don’t Fall Apart On Me Tonight’, which was recorded at the Power Station Studios New York in the spring of 1983 was discarded and it was
the second take that made it on to the album ‘Infidels’. Recorded at the same sessions were just two takes of another song and again the first take was discarded and it was the second take that was included on the album. The song is ‘Jokerman’ and although there were other lyric changes between the two takes of the song, it is in the change of lyrics in the final verse that becomes relevant to my picture of the song. Dealing with the second take first, this is the verse that made it on to the album:

‘It's a shadowy world, skies are slippery grey
A woman just gave birth to a prince today
An' dressed him in scarlet.
He'll put the priest in his pocket, put the blade to the heat
Take the motherless children off the street
An' place them at the feet of a harlot.’

If you are trying to trace a signifier of what I about here, it is in that word ‘heat’ in the fourth line, a word which denotes the by product of flame. Like fire.

This then is that final verse from the first take:

‘It's a shadowy world, skies are slippery grey
A woman just gave birth to a prince today
An' she's dressed in scarlet.
He'll turn priests into pimps and make old men bark
Take a woman that could have been Joan of Arc
An' turn her into a harlot.’

So there we have a perfect circle from Bob Dylan to ‘Visions of Johanna', to ice, to fire to Joan of Arc and back to Bob Dylan. There is nothing too clever or very scientific about these signposts in the circle, they merely represent my final step back from the easel. And in taking that final step back, the entire, completed picture of ‘Visions of Johanna' comes into view. A final canvas with all its brush strokes of the characters portrayed correctly in place; with its images like ice like fire, which very words started the whole thing going and remained with me throughout, correctly in place; with the countless confused combinations of male and female in various depictions correctly in place and with that final coming together of my central characters namely Bob Dylan and Joan of Arc correctly in place. It is done. Frame it, forge it, fuck it or forget it. There is nothing more to do, or say.

Well actually there is. It is said that an artist should never try to explain his work: when it is completed let others make of it what they will. I am not really concerned about what others will get or take, or if indeed they get or take anything at all, from my study of ‘Visions of Johanna’ - my piece in the process of appreciation has finished. I do know however that it has changed the way that I think about many of Dylan’s songs, and in particular Dylan’s songs that are about, or relate to, women.

This change in my way of thinking was brought home to me when my mind was not entertaining any thoughts or ideas whatsoever about Bob Dylan or ‘Visions of Johanna’. I was reading Take 66 of ‘Uncut’ magazine which had a feature about the film director Sam Peckinpah, my actual interest in this feature arising from my recent viewing of the classic and controversial Peckinpah film ‘Straw Dogs’. For those with
no inclination towards movie history, Peckinpah was always regarded as the ultimate
misogynist for the way that he treated women in his films, and in particular in the film
‘Straw Dogs’. Indeed it was the way that the female lead was treated that caused this
movie to be dubbed the most notorious film in British movie history and the reason
for it being banned from public screening for 18 years. The feature in ‘Uncut’
included an interview between the film critic Stephen Dalton and Katy Haber,
Peckinpah’s former girlfriend and assistant on the film. Before Dalton probed the
matter of the infamous director and his relationships with women, he first set the
scene of the infamous director and his relationships with women, he first set the
scene of Straw Dogs.

‘Straw Dogs takes place in a primordial moral fog where men routinely hit women
and women get off on it. Since the director was given to violently jealous rages and
even screen-tested one of his many girlfriends, Joie Gould, for the role of Amy, the
film begins to feel like a tour of Peckinpah’s own dark places. The fact that he added
a rape to Williams’ novel (the screen play was taken from the Gordon Williams novel
The Siege at Trenchers Farm) only adds to the sense of unchecked misogyny’.

When Dalston put the observation about Peckinpah’s misogynistic traits to Katy
Haber, she retorted:

‘Sam loved women but he resented the need for them. He feared the control they had
over him’.

And that is when I realised the underlying force of my study of ‘Visions of Johanna’:
that the word ‘androgyny’, so often used, could merely be a flare to shed light on and
disclose a further word: misogyny. Because of the way Dylan has, in certain songs
during his career, referred to women, from the condescending ‘and she breaks just
like a little girl’ in ‘Just Like A Woman’ to the subservient ‘can you cook and sew
make flowers grow?’ in ‘Is You Love In Vain’ to the low down rude ‘There ain’t no
limit to the amount of trouble women bring’ in Sugar Baby, and by similar references
in other songs, Dylan has been accused of outright misogyny. Yet, the main character
that shines forth from my study of his most classic song was the first feminine icon, a
woman of great strength of mind and will, a woman endowed with the absolute power
of the ‘she’. Many of the characters that are included in my study had the driving
force of a dominant female, whether it be mother or lover, behind them. They did not
hate this driving force but accepted it and held it in great esteem. Could it be that in
these songs Dylan is not denigrating women but exalting them, knowing his need for
them and fully appreciating the control they have over him? An appreciation borne
out of a full acceptance of that need and control rather than a struggle against it. Is this
not really what Dylan is about in his love songs? An acceptance of the power of the
‘she’ as so exemplified by Joan of Arc? I believe so and thus the net result of all my
work on ‘Visions of Johanna’ is that it has changed my way of thinking.

If my pictorial study of the song and the above conclusion raise more questions than
answers then I can say that I am happy with what I have achieved in my 65,000 words
on ‘Visions of Johanna’. Art is meant to leave you restless so I hope that you don’t go
away from my painting perfectly satisfied. If you do, then you have surely missed
something!
'When I paint my masterpiece, I had better acknowledge that one day it may need to be restored. According to Visions of Johanna’, “Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues”, but the greens that are now highly visible in the painting are viewed with suspicion inside the museums-world. But then every restoration, whether political or painterly (the pristine Sistine?), goes up on trial. For history is like infinity with its Louvre doors. “If the doors of perception are were cleansed,” William Blake said, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.”

It is in an infinity of ways that ‘The Times They Are A-Changin’ has been restored by Dylan. Not that he has ever been stuck with a song, or stuck inside of one. (Maybe Maggies Farm, there for dear life, until the worm farm). The songs are on the move, although love-life, imagined within a song may be rather the reverse:

‘But its like I’m stuck inside a painting
That’s hanging in the Louvre,
My throat starts to tickle and my nose itches
But I know that I can’t move’.

(Don’t Fall Apart On Me Tonight)

Dylan, king of cats, majestically lets the songs lead their own ninety-nine lives.’

With its talk of painting masterpieces and colours and William Blake and cats in this short extract alone it could be that this book will be, for me, an eternal delight!
Oh no! You haven't seen them! It's the...

Oh no! There's a young girl on the counter, and a pretty one, too. It's no good. I can't go through with it.

Go on, you tart! Just ask!

Go on, just go in and ask. Get it over with!

Alright, I'm going. I'm going. Stop flapping.

Erm... Have you got a copy of the March 1978 edition of Playboy? I just want it for the Bob Dylan interview.

Of course, you do, sir!

The racist regime.

The racist regime.

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