

Joe Dolce

Ain't Gonna Work On Bob Dylan's Farm No More

Denzel Washington. He must have been a fan of mine. . . . years later he would play the boxer, Hurricane Carter, someone else I wrote a song about. I wondered if Denzel could play Woody Guthrie. In my dimension of reality, he certainly could have.

Bob Dylan, Chronicles - Volume One

Yeah, Bob, and you could play Martin Luther King Jr. Denzel playing Woody. Let's pitch that idea to Mel Gibson! That's probably a film that Gibson ought to produce as penance for his recent dog's breakfast behaviour. But who would play Dylan? Maybe Russell Crowe. He could sing the songs himself. And Oprah Winfrey as Joan Baez. See, in my dimension of reality, all that would be possible, too - but it still don't make it right!

I made myself a New Year's Resolution, after the last Bob Dylan album, that I would never buy another one - no matter how much the mindless music parrots of the media gushed about it. I have stuck to my guns. I have refused on principle to buy **Modern Times**. After reading through the lyrics to the songs, I know I made the correct decision.

As for Dylan's, **Chronicles - Volume One**, of his autobiography? I said, 'No way I'm paying twenty-five bucks for Volume One. Then next year, it's another twenty-five bucks for Volume Two? What is this - the serialisation of Bob Dylan's life? Some publisher is trying to bilk me out of my hard earned cash. Do they think I'm *stupidissimo*? Why doesn't the old man write his autobiography down properly- and then publish it in one book: one twenty-five dollar price tag. Then *this* old man can buy it. I can wait for that. So I refused - on principle - even though I was interested in reading it. Because after all Dylan has been famous for not talking or talking in Riddlesville - so of course I wanted to hear him talk like a normal person for a change.

Well someone gave me the bloody book for Christmas. So I started reading it. Then I stopped. I don't believe a word he says about anything anymore. Dylan is the LAST person that can tell me what happened during that magic time when he WAS an authentic genius. He doesn't know. If he knew he would be able to still do it now. He'd be writing more masterpieces. That's right. More songs like *Mr Tambourine Man* and *Like a Rolling Stone*. The idea

is: if you are a genius when you're young than you have an obligation to improve it by becoming a master craftsman, of course (which he has – as a performer) - but more geniusier as you grow older - not lose the genius part, stupid. Study Beethoven. Study Bach. Picasso. Gaudi. Rodin. Sylvia Plath. They improved as they grew matured, as their technique and their experience improved - not degenerated.

So the time for glorifying mediocrity is *All Over Now, Baby Blue*.

Bob Dylan has set the bar so low in songwriting these days that even YOU can write a better song than he can. I defy any thinking person out there to tell me WHAT the almighty vision is that is contained in Dylan's latest album, *Modern Times*- an album that has topped the charts like no other Dylan album before it; an album that the slavering pantheon of Elmer Fudd music critic-ically ill critics are calling his best work since well, probably since the last collection of his they slavered over.

Dylan, today, is so insincere, so cliché-ridden, and so BAD at putting language together that I can barely pick up my pencil to make notes. I really tried. I wanted to be fair. But it's useless because the man himself is cheatin'. I started on *'Thunder on the Mountain.'* I put my pencil down when I reached the line, *'I want some real good woman to do just what I say.'* (A red flag went up: what is this waffle doing in my Bob Dylan song?) Further down, he says, *'Gonna raise me an army, some tough sons of bitches, I'll recruit my army from the orphanages, I've been to St Herman's church, said my religious vows, I've sucked the milk out of a thousand cows.'* That verse made me laugh out loud. I actually liked that . . . in a perverse sort of way. I could visualize him sucking down there under the cow. (*Ok - I didn't like it that much.*) Sounds more to me like he's been sucking the pig crap out of a thousand SOWS. Is this the same mind that wrote, *'In a soldier's stance, I aimed my hand, at the mongrel dogs who teach, fearing not that I'd become my enemy, In the instant that I preach.'* - *My Back Pages?* Please . . . anyone . . . just read the lyrics to *My Back Pages* and tell me a iPod Person hasn't taken over Bob Dylan's body, with burrowing tentacles into his spine and grey matter, moving his lips and fingers. Bob Dylan has gone back to Stupid School - and been kept back a year.

The next couple of songs that I looked at - desperate to write some kind of empowering comment for counter-balance - were so boring and filled with nothingness, that I just kept turning the pages until this corker stopped me dead: *I got troubles so hard, I can't stand the strain, some young lazy slut has charmed away my brains.* Gag. Disgusting and pathetic. (But probably true. Not Woody Guthrie, alas, but et tu Woody Allen?) That little literary jewel of misogyny was festering there in the middle of a verse of his song, *Rolling and Tumbling*. The first line goes, *I rolled and I tumbled, I cried the whole night long.* Sound familiar? It should: it is plagiarized word-for-word directly from Muddy Waters' great classic, *Rolling and Tumbling*. So . . . did Dylan copy the

title AND key images from Muddy's song for a REASON? To serve some larger PURPOSE? Read it over. There is no reason. There is no larger purpose. Just plain laziness and bad writing - and the fool thinks he can get away with it on account a he's Bob Dylan. WELL, HE AINT BOB DYLAN NO MORE. *AND I AIN'T GONNA WORK ON BOB DYLAN'S FARM NO MORE.* He's a husk of a shell of a vapour of a whiff of someone who shook the little finger of Bob Dylan. At least the Bob Dylan I was influenced by. So what's the opposite of influence? Outfluence. That's what this scrabble posing as song poetry does to me. Now it is outfluencing me.

There is a chapter in Bob Dylan's autobiography, *Chronicles - Volume 1* that seems to shed some light on the 'Bob Dylan Method' of songwriting that goes a long way to explain why Dylan's been an egg short of a chicken-crossing-the-road these days with the quality of his material. When Dylan teams up with the remarkable Daniel Lanois who produced one of his albums for him, he arrived at the session with a bunch of lyrics. Lanois asked him if any of his new songs were like '*With God On My Side*' which Lanois liked. Dylan said, 'Not much.' They spent all day working on '*Political World*'. Trying different rhythms. Melodies. By nightfall, Dylan left and took a tape home with him. He wasn't happy. The next morning, Lanois played for him what he had done to the song after Dylan had left. His trademark atmospheric and funky stuff. Dylan told him, 'I think we missed it.'

What this little chapter tells me is that Dylan has not only lost the Plot but misplaced the Book. He wants to be in a band, not write songs. He's become a performer and a vocal stylist. Like Frank Sinatra. That's the walk he's walking. A true in-the-present artistic writing genius has something called VISION. They do not ask a producer to determine the course of their vision. They steer. Hell, they PRODUCE it themselves! There is no '*we missed*' anything. There is only '*I missed*', and man, you should know if you missed it BEFORE you even get to the studio and leave those '*missed*' things back at home. Once you HAVE the song, then you can't miss, if you BELIEVE in what you've written - if it is important - if it has to be heard - if you HAVE to record it. It's just a matter of going into the studio and simply telling the story. Everything else is a rich man's wank. Dylan does not have the songs. He has a voice but he no longer has a vision. He doesn't believe either. Therefore, he distracts himself with a continually changing array of gifted producers and fresh sounds and hopes that someone else can fix his problem for him. In that case, I would suggest his next producer should be Doctor Phil. Dylan is sitting on a thousand stories that really *do* need telling - but no clear way for him to reach them. I suggest it's about time he retired from the Mindless Tour Syndrome, like the Beatles were insightful enough to do, and get to work on his REAL life and some real

relationships. Maybe then he'll have something worth writing about. Until then, put a cork in it and stick it down in the cellar.

" . . . in the long run, it's merely a record. Lyrics go by quick."
Bob Dylan, Rolling Stone Interview, Sept 7, 2006

I acknowledge Dylan's cultural importance and have personally been influenced beyond measure by his music, knowing many of his best songs by heart, having performed them in concert myself. Many of my own songs couldn't have been written without Bob Dylan's influence. Many will say that this article is filled with venomous, bile, bitter, mean-spirited and immodest comments, forgetting that Bob Dylan, in his PRIME as a songwriter, was also venomous, bile, bitter, mean-spirited AND immodest. I'm sure you have forgotten the following typical exchanges like this one between Dylan and journalist AJ Weberman in the 70s:

Dylan reveals a strong animosity toward Roger McGuinn [of the **Byrds**, who through their Number One hit recording of Mr Tambourine Man actually brought Dylan to mainstream attention]: "F*ck him. You can put that in [your article] twice." In another amusing exchange Dylan asks rhetorically who writes better songs than he does and Weberman replies, "I can name you a hundred" to which Dylan replies "Bullsh*t!". Weberman proceeds to name some pretty lame songwriters along with some good ones and Dylan gives his opinions, mostly negative. John Lennon: "Never!" Creedence Clearwater: "Bullsh*t!" George Harrison: ". . . Maybe". . . . Dylan insist(s) that Weberman . . . leave mention of his children out of any article Weberman has planned and says if they are included " . . . My wife will hit me, man". from *AJ Weberman vs Bob Dylan*.

Over the years there has been every conceivable kind of criticism levelled at Dylan's music. Much of what I find fault with him today, isn't really new news at all. In fact, Dylan came under similar criticism - that of remaining mute on the Iraq War and US warmongering in general - during the Vietnam War, as anti-war activists then, too, thought he should have taken a more outspoken stand because of his respected position and celebrity. So none of this is surprising.

There is a very strange collection of people floating around out there in Dylanland, almost as strange as the ones in Elvistown. Way back in the 70s, there was the above mentioned journalist, AJ Weberman and the '*Dylan Liberation Front*', who claimed Dylan had sold out and been brainwashed by Albert Grossman and the Record Company mafia. They wore badges that said, '*Free Bob Dylan*' (much like the '*Free Katie Holmes*' folks today).

Weberman pioneered the lovely practice of '*garbology*' - the forerunner of modern papparrazism - by probing through Dylan's garbage to find out details about his personal life. Weberman was even beaten up by him when he refused to cease and desist: " 'I'd agreed not to hassle Dylan anymore, but I was a publicity-hungry motherf*cker I went to MacDougal Street, and Dylan's wife comes out and starts screaming about me going through the garbage. Dylan said if I ever f*cked with his wife, he'd beat the sh*t out of me. A couple of days later, I'm on Elizabeth Street and someone jumps me, starts punching me. I turn around and it's like -- Dylan. I'm thinking, 'Can you believe this? I'm getting the crap beat out of me by Bob Dylan!' I said, 'Hey, man, how you doin?'" But he keeps knocking my head against the sidewalk. He's little, but he's strong. He works out. I wouldn't fight back, you know, because I knew I was wrong. He gets up, rips off my 'Free Bob Dylan' button and walks away. Never says a word. The Bowery bums were coming over, asking, 'How much he get?' Like I got rolled. . . . I guess you got to hand it to Dylan, coming over himself, not sending some f*cking lawyer."

Many of the people reading this weren't even born when Dylan was singing the very songs that influenced me the most and they have only really known the *Modern Bob* so to speak. So there are a few Bob Dylans out there, just like there are several Davie Bowies, and it is easy to be misunderstood when talking about just one.

The Dylan that influenced me does not exist anymore. R.I.P. There is another one out there performing. One who's convinced he's an old Americana bluesman.

I commented on how I thought Dylan should be producing his own albums instead of letting other producers steer his vision? Well, that's not entirely true. He actually produced Modern Times under the pseudonym "Jack Frost." Asked why he chose to do this one himself:

" I don't like to make records . . . I do it reluctantly . . . I feel like I've always produced my own records, anyway, except I just had someone there in the way. (*my emphasis*)" **Bob Dylan**, Rolling Stone Interview, Sept 7, 2006.

The illustrious pantheon of producers he has worked with on his 31 albums must love that quote. Dylan considers that they were merely in the way.

Alexis Petridis, of The Guardian, was the first major critic to ridicule the hype of 'Modern Times' - which he called a "competition to see who can slather Bob Dylan's 32nd studio album with the most deranged praise known to man." Jim DeRogatis of The Chicago Sun-Times was particularly critical of the ballads, writing that " Dylan disappoints with...[his]

inexplicable fondness for smarmy '30s and '40s balladry." The title of the album is the same as one of Charlie Chaplin's most noted films, Modern Times. The cover photo "*Taxi, New York at Night*", 1947, is by Ted Croner and has been already used as a cover by the defunct band Luna for their 1997 Single "Hedgehog/23 Minutes in Brussels"!

" I don't listen to any of my records. When you're inside of it all, all you're listening to is a replica." Bob Dylan

The last person I remember saying they never listened to their own records was **Frank Sinatra**, the icon of my parent's generation. I never forgot that because I thought . . . *'how odd not to like listening to your own music'*. All of us young aspiring musos looked forward to the day when we could actually record an album of our own and couldn't imagine not wanting to listen to them once we had one!

Well, if all one was listening to was a replica, then they would call them '*replicas*', not '*records*'. Use your words, Bob.

What a record is, is precisely that. A record. Of what happened in the studio.

If Dylan isn't interested in listening to what he does during his recording sessions, why should I? Fair enough?

I wonder if Stradivarius ever played his own violins for enjoyment after he made them? Did Van Gogh drift off in his own finished paintings on many a drunken night for satisfaction?

In my experience, the only reason an artist doesn't like listening to their own recordings is because either the recording goes so off track or becomes compromised from the original vision that it doesn't represent the songs, or the artist, correctly - or else nothing happened in the studio that surprises; no miracles, nothing that escapes your control and becomes BIGGER than yourselves. To me, those are the real goals of recording. To prepare and perform and prepare and perform and prepare. Until you know your onions. And then go into the studio and not just make a musical documentary but allow MAGIC to happen. And record it.

I would think any artist who succeeded in those goals would like to be reminded of it.

"I've had a rough time recording. I've managed to come up with songs, but I've had a rough time recording. But maybe it should be that way. Because other stuff which sounds incredible, that can move you to tears -- for all those who were knocked off our feet by listening to music from yesteryear,

how many of those songs are really good? Or was it just the record that was great? Well, the record was great. The record was an art form. And you know, when all's said and done, maybe I was never part of that art form, because my records really weren't artistic at all. They were just documentation. Maybe bad players playing bad changes, but still something coming through." **Bob Dylan**

Probably true, most of the time. But he got it right enough times that he ought to know the difference and say so.

But this is the key to why I think Dylan has chosen to remain steadfastly uncritical of himself:

" Puncturing myths, **boycotting analysis** (*my emphasis*) and ignoring chronology are likely part of a long and lately quite successful campaign not to be incarcerated within his own legend. Dylan's greatest accomplishment since his Sixties apotheosis may simply be that he has claimed his story as his own." JONATHAN LETHEM

Fair enough. After all who amongst us can truly understand the pressure these goldfish bowl icons have had to live with their whole lives.

"Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Lord Acton

The cul-de-sac of pop artists peaking out early is one of the main reasons I shifted to the classical composers like Beethoven, and Schubert for songwriting and performing inspiration. Success was slow coming. They NEVER seemed to peak out. All through my fragile youth, fellow musical influences were either killing themselves, overdosing, or burning out. Maybe it was too much fame and fortune at an early age. Who knows? I just knew I didn't want to follow them that far. I probably was lucky NOT to be successful during those days. Probably why I am still alive. **The Beatles** were one of my lifelines through the mighty shipwrecks of **Janis Joplin**, **Jim Morrison**, **Jimi Hendrix**, and even poet, **Sylvia Plath**, all incredibly strong influences on me. When **The Beatles** finally short-circuited, I even clung to the shirttails of their producer, George Martin, which led me to the mystical harbours of JS Bach, the Composer de tutti Composers who figured out the most important lesson of all: how to integrate and balance your personal genius with your everyday life – not sacrifice one for the other.)

Up until Liam Gallagher, of Oasis, came along, Dylan held the unofficial record for the rudest intellectual bully in music history for his power trips on media, women and the general public, especially back in the late 60s. Just watch **Don't Look Back** and Martin Scorsese's documentary, and cringe at

the way he takes advantage of the unaware, the unconscious, the wide-eyed and the vulnerable from his position of celebrity. Has he changed? His people skills have much improved but he still capable of dumping a bucket: " I don't know anybody who's made a record that sounds decent in the past twenty years, really. You listen to these modern records, they're atrocious, they have sound all over them. There's no definition of nothing, no vocal, no nothing, just like . . . static. . . . I remember when that Napster guy came up across, it was like, 'Everybody's getting music for free' I was like, 'Well, why not? It ain't WORTH nothing anyway." Bob Dylan, Rolling Stone Interview, Sept 7, 2006.

Now I would like all my fellow musicians and recording artists who fawn after Dylan uncritically to pay particular attention to the above last quote. He has basically said that probably anything YOU also have recorded in the past twenty years he would consider crap. People who continue to admire those who put them down are called masochists.

Let's take one of Dylan's recent songs and try to figure out what he wants to say and what he actually has said. There has been quite a bit of praise for the song *High Water*, off of *Love and Theft*. It is a good song, but spoiled by several things:

Name dropping. And Dylan's habit, lately, of using colourful but superficial imagery, and lines lifted from other people's songs for no good reason. He mentions quite a few people by name in *High Water* but does not develop their characters within the body of the song. This would not fly in a film script and it doesn't fly in a song lyric. He is assuming we either know who these people or will go find out. He never used to write with this kind of 'go figure it out yourself' attitude. His best songs tell you everything you need to know within the songs. He mentions Charley Patton, Big Joe Turner, Bertha Mason, George Lewis and someone called Fat Nancy. Fat Nancy is the only one I am familiar with. She's the one down at the Commonwealth bank that wouldn't give me a loan for a new weed-eater. Who are these people?

1. Charley Patton (father of delta blues). Ok - this is the dedication - so it is acceptable to me. We don't really have to know anything except Dylan admires him. But if you are interested, long before Jimi Hendrix , in 1900, Patton was the entertainer's entertainer with dazzling showmanship, often playing guitar on his knees and behind his head, as well as behind his back. Although Patton was a small man at about 5 foot 5 and 135 pounds, the sound of his whiskey- and cigarette-scarred voice was rumored to have carried for over 500 yards without amplification.

2. Big Joe Turner was a blues shouter who wrote *Shake Rattle & Roll*, and *Corrina Corinna*, the latter recorded by Dylan on *Freewheelin'*. So why doesn't

he tell us something about this in the song? Or at least say, 'Go look it uuuuuuuupppp on Wikipeeeeeeeedia!'

3. Bertha Mason was a character in the novel, *Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Brontë. Rochester's clandestine wife, Bertha is a formerly beautiful and wealthy Creole woman who has become insane, violent, and bestial. She lives locked in a secret room on the third story of Thornfield and is guarded by Grace Poole, whose occasional bouts of inebriation sometimes enable Bertha to escape. Bertha eventually burns down Thornfield, plunging to her death in the flames. . . others have seen her as a symbolic representation of the "trapped" Victorian wife, who is expected never to travel or work outside the house and becomes ever more frenzied as she finds no outlet for her frustration and anxiety. But if Brontë had wanted to speak out in the name of the oppressed slaves of Jamaica, she would have cast Bertha Mason in a better light. Bertha is the most obvious character used to represent colonialism in the Caribbean. But Bertha Mason has NOTHING to do with Dylan's song theme even if he had told us something about her, which he hasn't.

4. George Lewis was a jazz clarinetist from New Orleans. Everyone knows that. (???)

5. Fat Nancy, of course, as I mentioned before, is the Loan officer at the Commonwealth Bank, in Melbourne. She should be fired from the bank - and the song.

Meanwhile:

"The Cuckoo is a pretty bird" is pinched from an old traditional song for no good reason.

"I believe I'll dust my broom" is pinched from a Robert Johnson song. No context for it to be in Dylan's song.

"I'm no pig without a wig" is probably just some slang he heard somewhere. It just jars here and distracts.

Then, what about this B-grade throw-back verse to *Highway 61?*:

"Well, George Lewis told the Englishman, the Italian and the Jew
"You can't open your mind, boys to every conceivable point of view."
They got Charles Darwin trapped out there on Highway Five
Judge says to the High Sheriff, "I want him dead or alive,
Either one, I don't care."
High Water everywhere.

Notice the jerky tone when he brings back in the High Water theme? Cut and paste. As though someone were imitating writing a Dylan lyric. This verse should have either been rewritten to actually say something or omitted. The first couplet has no message worth learning - and the second couplet has no meaning worth extracting, no matter how long you ponder over it. You can READ meanings into lyrics, of course, just like you can 'hear' the voice of Satan if you play Beatle songs backwards.

"I asked Fat Nancy for something to eat, she said, "Take it off the shelf
- As great as you are a man, you'll never be greater than yourself."
I told her I didn't really care,
High water everywhere."

Another bit of woof woof. The second line is like a Mobius Strip of meaninglessness. It sort of goes around in circles back in on it self but says nothing.

Why does Dylan RUIN such a good atmospheric song idea as this one is - by including all this lazy writing mixed in with all this good writing? He doesn't seem to have the judgment any longer to know one from the other.)

There is an entire generation out there who have discovered the *modern* performaholic Dylan and have no idea about the Dylan who protested racial injustice, the Dylan who wrote *Masters of War* and *With God on our Side*. Dylan was wrong to stay out of the Vietnam War resistance movement and he was wrong to stay out of the Iraq War resistance as well. His hero, Woody Guthrie, would have been singing about it, 'from the New York Island'.)

One of the errors of art comparison is employing terms like: Greatest, Next-Greatest, Third-Greatest and Last-Greatest when referring to music or poetry. The reality is this: it is about Uniqueness of Vision, not the Cosmic Top Forty.

Let me give an example.

Who was the *greatest* guitar player of the past century? Jimi Hendrix, Robert Johnson, or BB King? Albert King, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton or Django Reinhart?

It is impossible to answer that question because each guitarist mapped out some different area.

Who was a greater poet? Sylvia Plath, or Walt Whitman? You can't measure by sheer volume of works either. Whitman wrote hundreds of things. Plath wrote a couple dozen.

Who was the greater recording artist? Bob Dylan or Slim Dusty? Dylan has recorded 32 albums. Slim recorded 100. All this comparison of meat pies to mojo hands is a futile exercise.

The one thing that geniuses do share is this: Uniqueness of Vision and Voice. They all create an untouchable space of their own. Their work is beyond comparison with each other. But not within their own body of work. It is quite possible to contrast good and poor poetry and songwriting, mature work and juvenilia within the career of the same artist. Certainly Dylan is way up there in songwriting Nirvana for all time, but so is John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Gordon Lightfoot, Buffy St Marie, Donovan, Van Morrison, not to mention Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Pete Townsend, Robert Johnson, Memphis Minnie and thousands of others nameless souls who have left us the world's great song repository. One day Dylan may be just another *anon* like so many lost writers in the mists of history.

Is '*Imagine*' a greater song than '*Like a Rolling Stone*'?

Is '*Satisfaction*' a greater song than '*Just Like a Woman*'?

Is '*Blowing in the Wind*' a better song than '*Johnny B Good*'?

How do you measure Uniqueness of Vision? You don't. Dylan still has a Voice but he's lost the Vision - or, at least, 'he's got the wrong glasses on', as songwriter Kath Tait might say.

The artist has to be brave enough to construct, and de-construct, their own work, with an almighty amount of focused consciousness, as well as intuition, in order to improve.

" If I've got any kind of attitude about me - or about what I do, what I perform, what I sing, on any level, my attitude is, compare it to somebody else! Don't compare it to me. Are you going to compare Neil Young to Neil Young? Compare it to somebody else, compare it to Beck - which I like - or whoever else is on his level. This record should be compared to the artists who are working on the same ground. I'll take it any way it comes, but compare it to that." Bob Dylan

But this is dead wrong as that is precisely what has to be done. You cannot compare Dylan to Beck just like you can't compare *Imagine* to *Like a Rolling Stone*. Self-growth is really about personal best so, in fact, you have to compare it to other work in the artist's own catalogue. And that is my point:

when you do that, Dylan's contemporary work pales in comparison with his best work. He is on a descending path. He performs hard - but he writes . . . too easy.

So why isn't Dylan capable of transcending that early stuff? Who knows? Why did JS Bach create fifty solid years of ascending white hot masterpieces that only ceased with his death? Who knows? How could Beethoven create the Ninth Choral Symphony - the key work that influenced all of Wagner's work - at the END of his life, when he was DEAF? Who knows? Some folks keep going, some explode, some implode and some fade away. Dylan is on the slow fade. I've been holding my breath for a decade hoping for another real masterpiece from Bob, but I think its time to exhale.

As far as the enormous role played in shaping and influencing popular music, well, it is exactly the same for Elvis and Frank Sinatra. Elvis, another young genius, morphed into a pill-poppin' fatso in a white jumpsuit flashing a phoney FBI badge in Las Vegas and Frank Sinatra, the good looking young stringbean in a suit, with the awesome vocal phrasing, who first made girls swoon and scream in their seats, ended up preferring gangsters to poets, and probably had interests in the very Las Vegas casinos Elvis played in. Must we hold our tongues about criticizing Elvis and Frankie, too, because of their vital contribution to popular culture? I think it is one of the responsibilities of the artist to shine some light on this process of disintegration which we see happening before our very eyes, over and over again. There is something much greater at stake here other than popular culture.

I respect the emotional connection people have with Dylan. I have one too, in a different way. But do you remember what Hitler said once, *"I reserve emotion for the masses and reason for the few."* That almost sounds like a Dylan line. What do you think Hitler meant by that remark? Of course, Dylan was one of the greatest song writing geniuses - but in his early years - no argument there - and a MIGHTY icebreaker for the rest of us, same as Elvis. We can remember fondly and be inspired by their best work - but let's also learn from their mistakes.

Perhaps it is appropriate to end with Bob Dylan's actual words on the subject of his early masterpieces, from a **Sixty Minutes** interview:

Interviewer: do you ever look at music that you've written and look back at it and say 'whoa!' that surprised me?

Dylan: I used to. I don't do that anymore. I don't know how I got to write those songs.

Interviewer: What do you mean you don't know how?

Dylan:

Well, those early songs were almost like magically written . .

'darkness at the break of noon
shadows even the silver spoon
hand-made blade the child's balloon
eclipse both the sun and moon
to understand you know too soon
there is no sense in trying . .'

Interviewer: This Dylan classic *It's All Right Ma* was written in 1964...

Dylan:

'.. the hollow horn
plays wasted words that proves to warn
that he not busy being born
is busy dying . .'

well, try to sit down and write something like that – there's a magic to that and it's not *Siegfried and Roy* kind of magic you know it's a different kind of a penetrating magic and you know I did it at one time.

Interviewer: you don't think you can do it today?

Dylan: No.

Interviewer: does that disappoint you?

Dylan: well, you can't do something forever and I did it once and I can do other things now but I can't do that.

So we agree in the end. Pace.

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