If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

"I wanted just a song to sing, and there came a point where I couldn't sing anything. I had to write what I wanted to sing 'cos what I wanted to sing, nobody else was writing."

Bob Dylan, 1964

"The world don't need any more songs. They've got enough. They've got way too many. As a matter of fact, if nobody wrote any songs from this day on, the world ain't gonna suffer for it."

Bob Dylan, 1991

"There's nobody that's going to kill traditional music. All these songs about roses growing out of people's brains and lovers who are really geese and swans that turn into angels — they're not going to die."

Bob Dylan, 1966

Part One

Traditional music will not die, just so long as there are people to keep it alive. And to be truly alive, the traditions have to grow. Bob Dylan is one (and maybe the greatest) of those musicians who absorbed the old traditions, kept them alive, and extended them. This series will cover an admittedly incomplete list of songs written by Dylan for which he took inspiration from other songs, traditional or otherwise. The amount of "inspiration" varies from song to song — it might be a tune, barely altered, or just a fragment from a tune; it might be a verse or a couplet, or just a distinctive turn of phrase. The borrowing might have been unknowing, a conscious tribute, or occasionally plain, outright theft.

There is no (well, not much) intent to cast judgment on these matters here. In art, if not in law, the ends can often be said to justify the means.

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The following survey of songs presents: the original song that formed the basis for a particular Dylan composition, with the writer of the song in parentheses; then the Dylan song in question, with the date of composition (as near as can be ascertained) in parentheses after the title.

Original song: **1913 Massacre (Woody Guthrie)**
Dylan song: **Song to Woody (February 1961)**

Dylan arrived in New York City on January 24, 1961, at the age of 19. His first major composition was written on February 14, barely three weeks later. "I just thought about

Woody," he commented a few years ago, looking back on the writing of this song. "I wondered about him, thought harder and wondered harder. I wrote this song in about five minutes."

The tune of ***'Song to Woody'*** is taken from Woody Guthrie's ***'1913 Massacre'*** — but this appropriation is clearly an intentional one, intended as a tribute to his hero. On one of Dylan's visits to Guthrie in the hospital the older singer is said to have told his disciple: "The words are the important thing. Don't worry about tunes. Take a tune — sing high when they sing low, sing fast when they sing slow, and you've got a new tune." (Quoted from memory — I can't find the original. Help, anyone?)

As for the lyrics themselves, there is one couplet which has been adapted from Guthrie's ***'Pastures of Plenty':***

Every state in this union, us migrants has been
We come with the dust and we go with the wind.
Pastures of Plenty

Here's to the hearts and the hands of the men
That come with the dust and are gone with the wind.
Song to Woody

It is worth noting that Dylan casts the second line in the past: unlike most of the folk community at this time, he realized that the world was now drastically different from the dustbowl and depression years that Guthrie had known, and it was going to need drastically different songs to change it.

If this was one of the few direct borrowings from Guthrie's work, then the general debt Dylan owed him was immense. He said himself that he was a "walking Woody Guthrie jukebox" at this time, and he has performed a sizable number of Guthrie songs over the years: ***'Car Car,' 'Come See,' 'Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,' 'Deportees (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos),' 'Don't You Push Me Down,' 'Goin' Down the Road Feelin' Bad,' 'Grand Coulee Dam,' 'The Great Divide,' 'The Great Historical Bum,' 'Hangknot, Slipknot,' 'Hard Traveling,' 'Howdido,' 'I Ain't Got No Home,' 'I Want It Now,' 'Jesus Christ,' '1913 Massacre,' 'Pastures of Plenty,' 'Pretty Boy Floyd,' 'Ramblin' Through the World,' 'Ramblin' Round,' 'Ranger's Command,' 'Sally Girl,' 'Talkin; Columbia,' 'Talkin' Fish Blues,' 'Talkin' Merchant Marine,' 'This Land Is Your Land,' 'VD Blues,' 'VD City,' 'VD Gunner's Blues'*** and ***'VD Waltz,'*** as well as a great many more traditional songs such as ***'Buffalo Skinners'*** that were in Guthrie's repertoire and are occasionally credited to him.

Original song: **Penny's Farm (The Bently Boys)**
Dylan song: **Hard Times in New York (November 1961)**
The words and music of this song are based on ***'Down on Penny's Farm'*** (a regionalized reworking of a still older traditional song, ***'Hard Times')*** by The Bently Boys, and originally recorded in 1929. It was included in Harry Smith's seminal ***"Anthology of American Folk Music"*** (Folkways, 1952; recently reissued as a 6CD boxed set by

Smithsonian/Folkways) and has been recorded by (among others) Happy and Artie Traum on their fine album ***'Hard Times in the Country."***

Original song: **Honey Just Allow Me One More Chance (Henry Thomas)**
Dylan song: **Honey Just Allow Me One More Chance (April 1962)**
'Honey Just Allow Me One More Chance' is a rewrite of a song by late-19th century singer Henry Thomas. On ***'The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan,"*** the song is credited jointly to Thomas and Dylan. In fact, almost all the words to Dylan's version except for the title are different to Thomas' (which is released on the Yazoo label). The new words were presumably written by Dylan, and the tune has also undergone some modifications, so Dylan more than earned his joint credit. Thomas' version includes an introductory verse, something traditional songs seldom have, a clear indication that this is a "composed" as opposed to a "folk" song.

Thomas was born in 1874 or 1875 (he died in 1930), possibly in Big Sandy, Texas, and although he was not among the first blues singers to record, he is probably the oldest "professional" blues singer to have been captured on disc. Like many such singers, he was actually a songster (note 2), blues being just one of many styles that he performed.

Original song: **Corrina Corrine (trad)**
Dylan song: **Corrina Corrina (April 1962)**
'Corrina Corrine' (also known as ***'Corrina Corrina')*** is a black American folk song that was often played by Mississippi John Hurt, Mance Lipscomb, Sleepy John Estes and others. However, Dylan's version is more than just an "arrangement," the melody and whole mood of the song being totally different — from a happy-go-lucky jug band song, it becomes a wistful evocation of the memory of a woman.

The first version of this song Dylan heard was quite possibly by Big Joe Turner, who had a hit with an R&B arrangement of it as ***'Corrine Corrina'*** in 1956. Incidentally, the verse beginning: "I have a bird to whistle…" is actually adapted from Robert Johnson's "Stones in My Passway."

Original song: **No More Auction Blues (trad)**
Dylan song: **Blowin' in the Wind (April 1962)**
The tune of ***'Blowin' in the Wind'*** was (according to Dylan) based loosely on the traditional "No More Auction Blues," found on ***'The Bootleg Series 1-3."*** The guitar part is certainly very similar, though I had listened to both songs many times without noticing the resemblance.

The song, also known as ***'Many Thousands Gone,'*** originated in Canada, where many blacks fled after Britain abolished slavery there in 1833, 30 years ahead of the United States. Dylan probably learned this one from Odetta, who sang it on her live Carnegie Hall album which was recorded on April 8, 1960. Paul Robson also recorded it in 1958.

Original song: **O Western Wind (trad)**
Dylan song: **Tomorrow is a Long Time (August 1962)**
There is a definite connection between the chorus of Dylan's **'Tomorrow Is a Long Time'** and ***'Westron Winde' (Western Wind),*** circa 1530.

Westron winde, when will thou blow
The smalle raine downe can raine
Christ, if my love were in my armes
And I in my bed againe

Westron Winde

Yes, and only if my own true love was waitin',
Yes, and if I could hear her heart a-softly poundin',
Only if she was lyin' by me,
Then I'd lie in my bed once again.

Tomorrow Is a Long Time

According to Timothy J. Lundgren, "This is one of the most famous early English lyrics. It is usually dated as 'early 16th century' although these things are notoriously difficult to date with much confidence. This poem is widely anthologized, and it is not too surprising that Dylan ran across it."

Original song: Lord Randal (trad)
Dylan song: A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall (September 1962)
The lyrical structure of ***'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall'*** was based on ***'Lord Randal'*** (Child ballad No. 12) (note 3) which I always assumed he'd learnt from Martin Carthy. (For more on Carthy, see below.) However, Carthy said that he was already singing ***'Hard Rain'*** on his first visit to the UK, so he must have come across ***'Lord Randal'*** while still in the States.

"Oh, where ha' you been, Lord Randal my son?
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?"
"I ha' been at the greenwood, mother, make my bed soon
For I'm wearied wi' hunting, and fain was lie down."

Lord Randal

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
And where have you been, my darling young one?

A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

There are many versions of this song (15 alone collected in Child's ***"English and Scottish Popular Ballads"),*** **but** all follow the same basic question/answer structure.

The surrealistic flood of images that makes up the "blue-eyed" son's reply to the inquiry has no connection to ***'Lord Randal.'*** In fact, it probably owes more to Allen Ginsberg's ***'Howl'*** than to anything that might be found in song.

Original song: Scarlet Ribbons For Her Hair (trad), Who's Goin' Buy You Ribbons When I'm Gone (Paul Clayton)
Dylan song: Don't Think Twice, It's Alright (October 1962)
Paul Clayton based his own composition on the traditional ***songs 'Scarlet Ribbons For Her Hair,'*** and ***'Who's Gonna Buy Your Chickens When I'm Gone'*** and Dylan's song

could have been based on either of those, on Clayton's, or maybe influenced by all of them. Clayton obviously felt that his song was where Dylan had got it (and Barry Kornfiled agrees, quoting Dylan as saying after hearing Clayton's: "Hey, man, that's a great song. I'm going to use that song"), and had his lawyers make inquiries. According to Robert Shelton, "Clayton and Dylan had an amicable legal tiff, settling without rancor out of court." ***("No Direction Home"*** by Robert Shelton, page 156).

Johnny Cash's ***'Understand Your Man'*** is sometimes cited as an influence on ***'Don't Think Twice,'*** but actually that song was also based on ***'Scarlet Ribbons For Her Hair,'*** hence the similarities.

It ain't no use to sit and sigh now, darlin,
And it ain't no use to sit and cry now,
T'ain't no use to sit and wonder why, darlin,
Just wonder who's gonna buy you ribbons when I'm gone.
Who's Goin' Buy You Ribbons When I'm Gone?

It ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe
It don't matter, anyhow
An' it ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe
If you don't know by now
Don't Think Twice, It's Alright

So I'm walkin' down that long, lonesome road,
You're the one that made me travel on,
But still-I-can't-help wonderin' on my way,
Who's gonna buy you ribbons when I'm gone?
Who's Goin' Buy You Ribbons When I'm Gone?

I'm walkin' down that long, lonesome road, babe
Where I'm bound, I can't tell
But good-bye's too good a word, gal
So I'll just say fare thee well
Don't Think Twice, It's Alright

While Dylan's debt is clear here, the actual achievement of ***'Don't Think Twice, It's Alright'*** far outstrips its precursors. This is one of the finest examples of the kind of song in which the narrator is lying to himself and unknowingly telling far more of his emotional struggles than he himself is aware of. Other notable examples of this type of song would include Hoagy Carmichael's ***'I Get Along Without You Very Well (Except Sometimes),'*** Louden Waiwright III's ***'I'm Alright,'*** Dylan's own ***'Most of the Time,'*** and almost the entire output of Randy Newman.

Original song: **Scarborough Fair (trad. arr. Ewan McColl/Peggy Seeger)**
Dylan song: **Girl From the North Country (January 1963)**
Dylan mentioned Martin Carthy in the sleeve notes to ***"The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan,"*** and also said in 1984: "Martin Carthy's incredible. I learned a lot of stuff from Martin. ***'Girl From the North Country'*** is based on a song I learned from him."

The song that ***'Girl From the North Country'*** was based on ***is 'Scarborough Fair,'*** and Martin Carthy's version is found on his eponymous debut album (recently re-released on CD). Carthy found the song in a collection of traditional songs called ***"The Singing Island"*** edited by Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, and he added a guitar part which Simon gratefully appropriated. Although Carthy has expressed understandable bitterness about this since Simon failed to acknowledge or credit Carthy for the arrangement, he's shown none towards Dylan for his more "creative" adaptation.

I had the opportunity to talk to Martin Carthy when he and Dave Swarbrick visited Tokyo in 1995, and he spoke about Paul Simon's appropriation — Simon had even gone so far as to release ***'Scarborough Fair'*** with words and music credited to himself at one point. The song has been credited in various places as either "words and music by Paul Simon" or "traditional, arranged by Paul Simon," but never a mention of Carthy. More wounding would be the fact that, as far as I know, Simon has never acknowledged his debt to Carthy or any traditional source in any way.

Concerning the similarity between ***'Scarborough Fair'*** and Dylan's ***'Girl From the North Country,'*** Carthy stated: "That was completely different, completely legitimate. Bob never hid anything. And he made his own song from it. That's what folk music is all about. He'd always be asking me, 'Martin, play ***'Scarborough Fair,'*** play ***'Scarborough Fair.'*** He was in England to appear in a TV play, ***"Madhouse On Castle Street,"*** for the BBC, and he was over for a few months, I think. He went over to Portugal or somewhere for a few days, and when he came back he said he had a new song. He played me this thing, and when he got to 'She was once a true friend of mine,' he burst into laughter and said something like, 'Oh I can't do that one in front of you!' and then he started playing something else."

The song grew out of ***'The Elfin Knight,'*** (Child ballad #2) which exists in many versions:

Did ye ever travel twixt Berwick and Lyne?
Sober and grave grows merry in time
There ye'll meet wi a handsome young dame,
Ance she was a true love of mine.
The Elfin Knight

For more on Carthy, seek out the documentary (available on video) ***"Acoustic Routes,"*** which is mainly on the great Scottish guitarist Bert Janch (who talks a little about showing Bob around London back in the early 1960s), but also has a fair bit about Carthy and other fine musicians from that era. At one point, Carthy reminisces on his "meeting" with Paul Simon: "All right, I'm human," Carthy says about the affair. "Cut me and I bleed."

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"I mean, I don't copy guys who are under 50 years old..."
Bob Dylan, 1985

Part Two

This continuing survey of songs presents: the original song that formed the basis for a particular Dylan composition, with the writer of the song in parentheses; then the Dylan song in question, with the date of composition (as near as can be ascertained) in parentheses after the title. The songs are listed chronologically, but the chronology overlaps from installment to installment, giving me the chance to step back in time and fill in gaps.

Original song: **Brennan on the Moor (trad)**
Dylan song: **Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie (January 1962)**
'Brennan on the Moor' is a traditional Irish song that Dylan probably learned from the Clancy Brothers, though it was also sung by Burl Ives. Dylan took the tune, but the words are all his — though you can see from the first verses that he also borrowed much of the spirit. Willie Brennan lived in County Cork in the late 18th century and was regarded as something of a Robin Hood figure.

'Tis of a brave young highwayman this story I will tell
His name was Willie Brennan and in Ireland he did dwell
It was on the Kilwood Mountain he commenced his wild career
And many a wealthy nobleman before him shook with fear

It was Brennan on the moor
Brennan on the moor
Bold, brave and undaunted was young Brennan on the moor

Brennan on the Moor

Come around you rovin' gamblers and a story I will tell
About the greatest gambler, you all should know him well.
His name was Will O'Conley and he gambled all his life,
He had twenty-seven children, yet he never had a wife.

And it's ride, Willie, ride
Roll, Willie, roll

Wherever you're a-gamblin' now, nobody really knows.
Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie

Original song: **Nottamun Town (trad)**
Dylan song: **Masters of War (January 1963)**

The tune of ***'Masters of War'*** is based on the traditional ***'Nottamun Town,'*** believed to be an old magic song from an English mummers' play. Jean Ritchie, a great folk singer from Kentucky, affixed the copyright of her Geordie Music Publishing Company on ***'Nottamun Town'*** in 1964. Geordie made claims against Dylan for use of the melody but he successfully maintained that his variant and his totally original words made a new song.

Dylan most likely adapted the tune from Black (Puerto Rican) folksinger Jackie Washington (Landron)'s version. It appears on Washington's first Vanguard album which also featured ***'Babe, It Ain't No Lie,' 'Moonshiner'*** and ***'The Girl I Left Behind.'***

Jackie Washington was also contacted by George Pickow (Jean Ritchie's husband) to join their claims against Dylan. He declined, even though he maintains that it was his version rather than Ritchie's that provided the tune for ***'Masters of War.'***

Although Dylan used none of the words of ***'Nottamun Town'*** in ***'Masters of War,'*** or in any other song for that matter, it's worth giving them a look since they have a dark, absurdist nature in which one can see the roots of ***'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,' 'Desolation Row'*** and many others — the last line, in particular. When, in 1965, Dylan said, "Traditional music is based on hexagrams" he was certainly thinking about stuff like this:

In fair Nottamun town, not a soul would look up
Not a soul would look up, not a soul would look down
Not a soul would look up, not a soul would look down
To show me the way to fair Nottamun town

I rode a grey horse, a mule roany mare
Grey mane and grey tail, a green stripe down her back
Grey mane and grey tail, a green stripe down her back
There wa'nt a hair on her be-what was coal black

She stood so still, she threw me to the dirt
She tore a' my hide and she bruiséd my shirt
From saddle to stirrup I mounted again
And on my ten toes I rode over the plain

Met the King and the Queen and a company more
A-riding behind and a-marching before
Came a stark naked drummer a-beating a drum
With his heels in his bosom come marching along

They laughed and they smiled, not a soul did look gay
They talked all the while, not a word they did say

I bought me a quart to drive gladness away
And to stifle the dust, for it rained the whole day

Sat down on a hard, hot cold frozen stone
Ten thousand stood round me and yet I's alone
Took my hat in my hand for to keep my head warm
Ten thousand got drownded that never was born

'Nottamun Town' is found on Fairport Convention's second album, ***"What We Did On Our Holidays,"*** which also includes a cover of Dylan's ***'I'll Keep It With Mine.'*** Other Dylan spottings in their catalogue: 'Jack O'Diamonds' on their first, eponymous album (which also included an original song called ***'It's Alright Ma, It's Only Witchcraft'), 'Million Dollar Bash,' 'Percy's Song'*** and ***'If You Gotta Go, Go Now'*** (in French, as ***'Si Tu Dois Partir'!)*** on ***"Unhalfbricking,"*** and more recently, ***'Country Pie'*** (on ***"Moat on the Ledge,"*** 1982), ***'Forever Young'*** (on ***"A.T.,"*** 1983), ***'Open The Door, Homer'*** (***on "Red & Gold,"*** 1989), ***'Girl From the North Country'*** from ***their "25th Anniversary Concert"*** in 1992, with Robert Plant on vocals. This last one also includes a rewritten ***'Million Dollar Bash'*** and ***'Si Tu Dois Partir.'*** These two songs also appear on ***"The Cropredy Box,"*** a 3CD souvenir of their 30th anniversary in 1997.

On ***'Nottamun Town,'*** Sandy Denny is the lead singer and a 19-year-old Thompson the guitarist. Denny also brought out a number of excellent solo albums (with a few Dylan covers) before her untimely death in 1977. The box-set, ***"Who Knows Where The Time Goes,"*** is definitive (and includes ***'Tomorrow Is a Long Time,' 'Gypsy Davey,'*** and ***'Knockin' on Heaven's Door')***.

Original song: **Lord Franklin (trad)**
Dylan song: **Bob Dylan's Dream (February 1963)**

The tune and words of 'Bob Dylan's Dream' come from ***'Lord Franklin'*** (AKA ***'Franklin the Brave'*** and ***'Lady Franklin's Lament'),*** another song which he learnt from Carthy during his first visit to England. The tune seems to be a variant of ***'The Croppy Boy,'*** recorded among others by the Clancy Brothers.

Dylan had been brought over from the U.S. by the BBC to sing a few songs and have a bit part in ***"Madhouse On Castle Street,"*** a TV play that unfortunately was not preserved, BBC having a bad habit of wiping historically invaluable tape. (They also wiped the two 1965 performances that Albert Grossman can be seen negotiating in the documentary Don't Look Back.) Dylan sang his own ***'Blowin' in the Wind,'*** as well as the traditional songs ***'Ballad of the Gliding Swan,' 'Hang Me, Oh Hang Me,' 'Cuckoo Bird'*** and an untitled instrumental. Only the first two of these are known to exist on audio tape.

In ***"Baby, Let Me Follow You Down,"*** Eric Von Schmidt reminisced: "We played at some folk club one night and heard a good singer and guitar player, Martin Carthy, do a folksong called ***'The Franklin.'*** It was about a boat that explored Antarctica or something. It was a totally lovely song. Dylan got Martin to show him all the chords and put the melody right in that amazing head of his. Next record he puts out there is. "As I was riding on a western train..."

In fact, the song is about Sir John Franklin's 1845 expedition to Northern Greenland (in search of the Northwest passage) from which he never returned. In 1848, the British government sent out an unsuccessful search expedition for Franklin and his men, led by Sir J. C. Ross. Lady Franklin, on her own, offered a reward of 200 Pounds Sterling to whalers for finding her husband.

Original song: **Who Killed Cock Robin (trad)**
Dylan song: **Who Killed Davey Moore (April 1963)**
'Who Killed Cock Robin' is a haunting children's song that can be found in many versions stretching back to antiquity. Dylan directly adapted the structure for this song on the death of Davey Moore, a boxer who was knocked out by Sugar Ramos on March 23, 1963 and died two days later without having regained consciousness. Dylan's first performance of this song was on April 12, just 18 days later.

Original song: **The Wind and the Rain/The Two Sisters (trad)**
Dylan song: **Percy's Song (August 1963)**
According to Dylan, the beautiful melody line of this song came from Paul Clayton. The arrangement that Clayton played was, according to Martin Carthy, taken from Kilby Snow, an autoharp player whose work can be found on a Folkways anthology.

"Paul was just an incredible songwriter and singer," said Dylan in 1985. "He must have known a thousand songs. I learned ***'Pay Day at Coal Creek'*** and a bunch of other songs from him. We played on the same circuit and I traveled with him part of the time. When you're listening to songs night after night, some of them rub off on you. ***'Don't Think Twice'*** was a riff that Paul had. And so was ***'Percy's Song.'*** Something I might have written might have been a take off on ***'Hiram Hubbard,'*** a civil war song he used to sing, but I don't know. A song like that would come to me because people were talking about the incident. A lot of folk songs are written from a character's point of view. ***'House of the Rising Sun'*** is actually from a woman's point of view. A lot of Irish ballads would be the same thing. A song like ***'Percy's Song,'*** you'd just assume another character's point of view. I did a few like that."

As for the words, Dylan has clearly borrowed the structure from ***'The Wind and the Rain' (***also known as ***'Two Sisters'),*** though the stories in the two songs are unrelated. The first verses of the two songs share a similar refrain:

Two loving sisters was a-walking side by side,
Oh the wind and rain.
One pushed the other off in the waters, waters deep.
And she cried, "The dreadful wind and rain."
The Wind and the Rain

Bad news, bad news come to me where I sleep,
Turn, turn, turn again.
Sayin' one of your friends is in trouble deep,
Turn, turn to the rain and the wind.
Percy's Song

while the final verses are even more closely related:

The only tune that my fiddle would play,
Was, "Oh, the wind and the rain."
The only tune that my fiddle would play, was
Was, "The dreadful wind and rain."
The Wind and the Rain

And I played my guitar through the night to the day,
Turn, turn, turn again.
And the only tune my guitar could play
Was, "Oh the cruel rain and the wind."
Percy's Song

Original song: Anathea (words: Neil Roth, music: Lydia Wood)
Dylan song: Seven Curses (August 1963)
The song ***'Anathea'*** tells a similar story to ***'Seven Curses.'*** To quote the late John Bauldie: "The song's story is as old as the hills — the tale used by Shakespeare for ***'Measure for Measure'*** is an obvious variant — and it's been told in folk song many times down the years, under such titles as ***'The Prickley Bush,' 'The Briery Bush,'*** and ***'The Prickle Holly Bush.'*** Perhaps the earliest version is the Child Ballad number 95, ***'The Maid Freed From the Gallows,' but*** it seems likely that Dylan's direct source was a song called ***'Anathea,'*** often performed by Judy Collins, whom Dylan knew well at this time." (From Bauldie's notes for ***"The Bootleg Series, Vols. 1-3")***

When asked about this, Judy Collins agreed:

"Absolutely, the seven curses are related to ***'Anathea.'*** There are old themes, world themes, centuries' old dramas that get worked out in the creative process by artist after artist. I see what Dylan has always done is to connect with this inner, subterranean river of the subconscious."

The song is originally of Hungarian origin and was called ***'Anna Feher.'*** It was originally translated into English by A.L. (Bert) Lloyd, one of the most important figures of the folk revival in the UK. An excellent selection of his singing is available on ***"Traditional Songs"*** (Fellside FECD98), with Lloyd accompanied by Alf Edwards on concertina and Dave Swarbrick on fiddle.

Original song: The Parting Glass (trad)
Dylan song: Restless Farewell (October 1963)
The tune and lyrics to ***'Restless Farewell'*** were both based on ***'The Parting Glass,'*** a traditional Irish song that he probably learnt from The Clancy Brothers.

O, all the money e'er I had
I spent it in good company
And all the harm I've ever done
Alas! it was to none but me.
The Parting Glass

Oh all the money that in my whole life I did spend,
Be it mine right or wrongfully,
I let it slip gladly past the hands of my friends
To tie up the time most forcefully.

Restless Farewell

Dylan reportedly wrote this song hastily in the studio as a suitable closer to his 1964 album, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" album and did not perform it again until 1995 when Frank Sinatra requested it as the closing song in his 80th Birthday Concert. Although some of the lines are clumsy (particularly when compared to the graceful original), it still made for a far more touching declaration of independence than 'My Way.'

Another interesting connection has been suggested by Manfred Helfert. He writes: *"**['Restless Farewell']*** also bears a striking resemblance to a poem by French poet/songwriter Jacques Prevert, ***'The Concert Was Not a Success,'*** which was translated into English by Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti in the late 1950s. I'm pretty sure that Dylan knew Prevert's poems in Ferlinghetti's translations — ***'The Times They Are A-Changin''*** is also close to another Prevert poem."

Comrades of hard times
I'll wish you good night
And be on my way.
The take was poor
It's all my fault
All the mistakes are mine
I should have listened to you
I should have played poodle-dog
That's a catchy tune
But I did as I pleased
And now I'm through.
When you play wire-haired
You have to watch your pitch
People don't come to a concert
To hear a death-rattle
And that song about the Pound
was the worst mistake of all.
Comrades of hard times
I'll wish you good night
Sleep now
Dream now
I'll take my cap
And a couple of cigarettes from the pack
And be on my way.
Comrades of hard times
Think of me later on
Sometimes...

When you wake in the morning Think of one, sometimes
Who played smoked salmon and sea-perch
At evening by the shore
And who goes on with search
For a decent meal
And something to drink...
Comrades of hard times
I'll wish you good night
Sleep now
Dream now
I'm on my way.

Original song: **Jack O'Diamonds (Mance Lipscomb)**
Dylan song: **Jack O'Diamonds (1964)**

'Jack O'Diamonds' was one of the "some other kind of songs" poems printed on the sleeve of ***"Another Side of Bob Dylan."*** The music was written by Ben Carruthers, an actor who (in Simon Nicol's words) dabbled in music. It was issued as a single by Ben Carruthers and the Deep in 1965 (at least, this was the UK release on Parlophone), and it was also featured in ***"Man Without Papers,"*** a BBC Play For Today (remember them?), which Carruthers had a part in.

The song also appeared on Fairport Convention's eponymous first album in 1967, probably the only place where it's now readily available.

Mance Lipscomb is often credited with ***'Baby, Let Me Follow You Down'*** (also known as ***'Baby, Let Me Lay It on You')*** which Dylan sang on his debut album. Lipscomb claims to have taught the song to Dylan while Dylan states (in a spoken introduction on the album) that he learnt it from Rick von Schmidt.

For more information on Mance Lipscomb, go to his marvellous autobiography (published by Norton) ***"I Say Me For A Parable,"*** or to any of his recordings released on CD by Arhoolie.

Thanks are due to many people for this series of articles: to Seth Kulick, Maureen LeBlanc, Timothy J. Lundgren, Ron Mura, Ben Taylor, Ed Wierenga, Catherine Yronwode, Patricia Jungwirth, John Evans, Takeshi Mogi, Martin Carthy, Simon Nicol and Ashley Hutchings. Most of all, I'd like to thank Manfred Halbert, for corrections, suggestions and for allowing me access to his extensive research on the roots of Dylan's music. To check out Manfred's work, visit http://members.xoom.com/~elstonngunn/ and browse his web page.

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

"I never introduced a song: 'Here's the song I've stole the melody from, someplace.' For me it wasn't that important. Still isn't that important."

Bob Dylan, 1965

Part Three

When I started writing this survey a few years back, it was just a list pointing out songs on which Dylan had based some of his own compositions, put together to go with a tape I was making for myself and friends. I posted the list on a Dylan newsgroup on the web, and after getting a handful of suggestions concerning songs I'd missed, I did a second version. Well, it's gone through a number of different editions since then, and I'm beginning to understand what astronomers must feel like: the more I turn up, the more I find there is out there waiting to be discovered.

I had intended this column to embark on Dylan's electric work, but instead it's going to be given over to a cleaning up operation of the early years. Maybe I'll be able to kick off with "Subterranean Homesick Blues" in the next issue. Then again, I'm past making any promises with this thing.

As usual, the original song that formed the basis for a particular Dylan composition is identified, with the writer of the song in parentheses; then the Dylan song in question, with the date of composition (as near as can be ascertained) in parentheses after the title.

Original song: **He Was A Friend Of Mine (trad)**
Dylan song: **He Was A Friend Of Mine (September 1961)**

According to ***"The Bootleg Series, 1-3,"*** Dylan says that he adapted this from something he heard sung by a Chicago street singer named Blind Arvella Gray. "The source [says John Bauldie in his notes] of ***'He Was A Friend Of Mine'*** is a traditional Southern Prison Song entitled ***'Shorty George,'*** which had been recorded by Leadbelly in 1935 and by several penitentiary singers for the Library Of Congress archive recordings." The first version of this song that Dylan heard was probably an adaptation by Eric Von Schmidt.

Original song: **Peter Emberly (trad)**
Dylan song: **Ballad of Donald White (February 1962)**

A probable influence of Dylan's rather stodgy ***'Ballad of Donald White'*** is ***'Peter Emberly,'*** found in the late Edith Fowke's ***"Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs."*** As well as sharing a similar speech-on-the-gallows structure, there is:

There's danger on the ocean where the waves roll mountain high,
There's danger on the battlefield where the angry bullets fly.

There's danger in the lumber woods, for death lurks sullen there,
And I have fell a victim into that monstrous snare.
Peter Emberly

And there's danger on the ocean where the salt sea waves split high,
And there's danger on the battlefield where the shells of bullets fly,
And there's danger in this open world where men strive to be free,
And for me the greatest danger was in society.
Ballad of Donald White

Original song: Milk Cow Blues (Kokomo Arnold)
Dylan song: Quit Your Low Down Ways (July 1962)
As John Bauldie pointed out in the ***"Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3"*** notes, much of this song derives from Kokomo Arnold's 1934 recording of ***'Milk Cow Blues,'*** which itself was derived from Sleepy John Estes' 1930 recording of the same name. (Dylan's ***'From a Buick 6'*** comes directly from this Estes song. More of that next issue.) Other well-known versions of this song include recordings by Robert Johnson and Elvis Presley, both of which Dylan would surely have been familiar with.

Now you can read out your hymn book, read out your Bible
Fall down on your knees and pray for the good Lord to help you
Cos you're gonna need, you're gonna need my help someday
Mama, if you can't quit your sinnin', please quit your low down ways.
Milk Cow Blues

Oh, you can read out your Bible
You can fall down on your knees, pretty mama,
And pray to the Lord
But it ain't gonna do no good.

You're gonna need
You're gonna need my help someday
Well, if you can't quit your sinnin'
Please quit your low down ways.
Quit Your Low Down Ways

Original song: Mrs. McGrath (trad)
Dylan song: John Brown (October 1962)
I found ***'Mrs. McGrath'*** in William Cole's collection*:* ***"Folk Songs of England, Ireland, Scotland & Wales,"*** and Manfred Halbert also informs me that a recording of it by Lori Holland can be found on ***"124 Folk Songs As Recorded On Folkways Records by Famous Folk Song Singers"*** (Folkways FG 3518.

Although there are no specific lines of ***'Mrs. McGrath'*** that appear in ***'John Brown,'*** the tale is the same, Mrs. McGrath happily packing her son Ted off to do battle against Napoleon and then recoiling in shock when her legless son returns. "Yer two fine legs were yer mammy's pride," she declares, a more striking line than anything in Dylan's rather ham-fisted song.

Original song: **We Shall Be Free (trad)**
Dylan song: **I Shall Be Free (December 1962)**
Dylan based the tune of the verses of this on ***'We Shall Be Free'*** by Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly. Their recording can be found on ***"Folkways: The Original Vision."*** I seem to remember there was a song by an early bluesman entitled ***'I Shall Be Free.'*** I thought it was Frank Stokes, but on checking his complete recordings, I found that I was wrong. Any ideas anyone?

Original song: **The Leaving of Liverpool (trad)**
Dylan song: **Farewell (January 1963)**
According to Martin Carthy, Dylan learnt this song from folksinger Louis Killen during his first trip to the UK. In Heylin's ***"Behind the Shades,"*** Carthy is quoted as having said that Dylan often asked Nigel Denver to play ***'Liverpool,'*** but when I called Carthy to clarify this point, he was certain that Killen was the source. He said that Killen got the song from an anthology published in the US by William (?) Doerflinger *entitled* ***"Shantymen and Shanty Boys."*** Dylan's song is so similar in tune and many of the words that it should be considered more as an adaptation than an original song. A number of performances by Dylan of this song exist, but it has never been officially released.

I'm bound off for California
By the way of stormy Cape Horn
And I'm bound to write you a letter, love
When I am homeward bound
So fare thee well, my own true love
When I return united we will be
It's not the leaving of Liverpool that's grieving me
But my darling when I think of thee
The Leaving of Liverpool

Oh it's fare thee well my darlin' true,
I'm leavin' in the first hour of the morn.
I'm bound off for the bay of Mexico
Or maybe the coast of Californ.
So it's fare thee well my own true love,
We'll meet another day, another time.
It ain't the leavin' that's a-grievin' me
But my true love who's bound to stay behind.
Farewell

Incidentally, in an update on Carthy's own releases, it's great to report that he's got his first solo album in a decade coming out later this year, probably in November. It's found, as always, on Topic Records, and is called, fittingly enough, ***"Signs of Life."*** There is also a new Brass Monkey album entitled ***"Sound and Rumour"*** out on Topic this month and an eponymously titled album in the can by Carthy with Chris Wood and Roger Wilson on Ruf Records. Finally, Carthy's wife, Norma Waterson has completed her second (as yet untitled) solo album which should see release around Christmas.

Original song: **Only a Miner Killed (John Wallace Crawford)**

Dylan song: **Only a Hobo (February 1963)**

Manfred Helfert writes: "This seems to be the oldest variant of the ***'Only A Miner'*** song family. One of its variants (most likely John Greenway's rendition of Aunt Molly Jackson's ***'Poor Miner's Farewell'*** on ***"The Songs and Stories of Aunt Molly Jackson."*** Folkways FH 5457; ca. Feb. 1961) seems to have served as a model for Bob Dylan's own ***'Only A Hobo.'"***

Crawford (known as Captain Jack) was a Scottish immigrant who became something of a frontier hero. As well as being a young Civil War volunteer, an army scout, prospector for gold in Alaska and member of a Wild West Show, he also found time to be something of a poet and playwright. ***'Only a Miner Killed'*** was published as a poem in his first book ***"The Poet Scout"*** in 1879, and emerged as a song a decade later.

Only a miner killed — oh! is that all?
One of the timbers caved, great was the fall,
Cruising another one shaped like his God.
Only a miner lad — under the sod.
Only a Miner Killed

Only a hobo, but one more is gone
Leavin' nobody to sing his sad song
Leavin' nobody to carry him home
Only a hobo, but one more is gone
Only a Hobo

Original song: **The Patriot Game (words: Dominic Behan, music: trad)**
Dylan song: **With God on Our Side (April 1963)**

Talking about the genesis of this song on a radio broadcast some years ago, Liam Clancy (of The Clancy Brothers) said: ***"'The Patriot Game'*** was written by Dominic Behan, but it was originally a song from the Appalachian Mountains *(**'The Merry Month Of May'**).* Then it became a popular song, slightly adapted by a popular singer of the day named Joe Stafford who called it the… What was it called? ***'The Bold Grenadier,'*** or something. And it was from that popular recording that Dominic Behan took the tune and he made it into ***'The Patriot Game.'*** And of course we used to sing this with great passion at the folk clubs in the (Greenwich) Village. And among the patrons was a young singer/songwriter who came into town named Bob Dylan. And he transformed it, of course, into ***'With God on Our Side.'"***

Actually Dominic Behan chided Dylan publicly for lifting Behan's melody until he was reminded that he himself had "borrowed" the tune. As for the phrase "God on our side," it might have come from Robert Southey ("The laws are with us and God's on our side") or from George Bernard Shaw's play **"Saint Joan."**

Original song: **Where Is My Sailor Boy? (Charlie Monroe)**
Dylan song: **Troubled and I Don't Know Why (January 1963)**

The only known performance of ***'Troubled and I Don't Know Why'*** was by Dylan and Baez at Forest Hills, NYC, on 17 Aug. 1963. The tune is a variant of this Monroe Brothers song, ***'Where Is My Sailor Boy?'*** (also known as ***'What Does The Deep Sea Say?'**),* and one verse shows a definite debt to the older song's chorus.

Oh, what does the deep sea say?
What does the deep sea say?
It moans, it groans, it splashes and it foams,
And it rolls on its weary way.
Where Is My Sailor Boy?

Oh, what did the mornin' say?
What did the mornin' say?
When it rolled from the night with a dark, dreary light,
Saying, 'Another old weary day.'
Troubled and I Don't Know Why

'Where Is My Sailor Boy?' was originally recorded by Bill and Charlie Monroe in 1936. Other notable recordings were made by Bill Monroe and Doc Watson in 1963 (available on the Smithsonian collection of their live recordings — Smithsonian Folkways SF CD 40064) and by Doc Watson in 1967.

Original song: The Miner (?)
Dylan song: North Country Blues (August 1963)
Patricia Jungwirth wrote*:* ***"'North Country Blues'*** has the same tune as an Australian goldrush song called ***'The Miner,'*** which may probably be based on an older British ballad. Does anyone else know anything about the history of this song? I sent Matthew Z a tape of a group called Paradiddle performing this, so perhaps Matthew has investigated further and it will be in the *Isis* article?"

Well, Matthew Z has tried to investigate further, but as yet to no avail. The tune is indeed identical to ***'North Country Blues'*** and the subject matter is similar. To my ears though, it doesn't sound like a traditional song. More likely one written in the 1940s or so.

Original song: The Black Freighter (Bertold Brecht)
Dylan song: When the Ship Comes In (August 1963)
In his notes to ***"The Bootleg Series, Vols. 1-3,"*** John Bauldie wrote: "This hastily written song draws closely on Biblical allusion — in the verse which combines the drowning of Pharaoh's tribe and the defeat of Goliath, and in the reference to chapter seven of Revelation which speaks of the stopping of the winds on Judgment Day before the rising of the saved and the torture of the lost souls commences. It's possible he also uses a Brechtian source, the song ***'The Black Freighter,'*** Pirate Jenny's fantasy of revenge. And just for good literary measure, it's conceivable that Dylan drew his 'chains of the sea' image from Dylan Thomas' poem ***'Fern Hill,'*** which ends: 'Though I sang, in my chains, like the sea.'"

Original song: Because all Men Are Brothers (Tom Glazer)
Dylan song: Chimes of Freedom (January 1964)
The connection here is one turned up by Manfred Halbert while he was perusing the lyrics of Tom Glazer's ***'Because all Men Are Brothers,'*** which was written in 1948.

The second and third verses of this song go:

My brothers are all others, forever hand in hand,
Where chimes the bell of freedom, there is my native land.
My brothers' fears are my fears, yellow, white or brown.
My brothers tears are my tears, the whole wide world around.

Let every voice be thunder, let every heart be strong
Until all tyrants perish our work will not be done.
Let every pain be token, the lost years shall be found.
Let slavery's chains be broken, the whole wide world around.

The melody of ***'Because All Men Are Brothers'*** (which both The Weavers and Peter, Paul and Mary have recorded) is based on the famous Passion Chorale tune of J. S. Bach, who borrowed it himself from H. L. Hassler's ***'Mein Gmüth ist mir verwirret'*** in ***"Venusgärtlein,"*** Nuremberg, 1613.

Original song: **Once I Had a Sweetheart (trad)**
Dylan song: **Ballad in Plain D (June 1964)**

This is the only song, as far as I know, that Dylan has publicly regretted writing. In an interview in 1985, Bill Flanagan asked him about the song, and Dylan replied: "That one I look back at and I say, 'I must have been a real schmuck to write that.' I look back at that particular one and say, of all the songs I've written, maybe I could have left that alone." And in the notes to ***"Biograph"*** he said (in reference to his not writing "confessional" songs): "Well, actually I did write one once and it wasn't very good — back there somewhere on maybe my third or fourth album."

For all that, the tune and first two lines are enchanting, though this is certainly due to the fact that both come from ***'Once I Had a Sweetheart,'*** also known as ***'The False Bride.'***

I once loved a fair maid both handsome and gay
I hated all people who against her did say
But now she's rewarded me ill for my pains
For she's gone to be wed to another
Once I Had a Sweetheart

I once loved a girl, her skin it was bronze.
With the innocence of a lamb, she was gentle like a fawn.
I courted her proudly but now she is gone,
Gone as the season she's taken.
Ballad in Plain D

Back in the first installment of Original Thoughts, I wrote: "On one of Dylan's visits to Guthrie in the hospital the older singer is said to have told his disciple: 'The words are the important thing. Don't worry about tunes. Take a tune — sing high when they sing low, sing fast when they sing slow, and you've got a new tune.' (Quoted from memory — I can't find the original. Help, anyone?)"

Well, help was at hand. Michael O'Shea in Belgium tracked it down on page 80 of the Scadato biography: "Woody had told him, 'Just write. Don't worry where the tune

comes from. I just pick up tunes I heard before and change them around and make them mine. Put in a couple of fast notes for one slow one, sing a harmony note 'stead of melody, or a low note for a high one, or juggle the rests and pauses — and you got a melody of your own. I do it all the time."

Many thanks to Michael for that one. Thanks are also due to the usual suspects: Seth Kulick, Maureen LeBlanc, Ben Taylor, Catherine Yronwode, Patricia Jungwirth, John Evans, Takeshi Mogi, Martin Carthy, and especially Manfred Halbert. And don't forget to check out Manfred's excellent web page (http://members.xoom.com/~elstongunn/).

Thanks also to Clinton Heylin (whose amusing letter is found elsewhere in this issue) for reminding me about Dylan's May 1960 recording of ***'Two Sisters'*** *in* St. Paul, Minnesota. As he pointed out, Dylan's version is wind- and rain-less, but he was clearly familiar with at least one version of the song even before going to New York. As for Heylin's other comments, I would have expected no less from a man seemingly so insecure in himself that he finds it necessary to label any perceived competitor — even the likes of Michael Krogsgaard — as a LDA (Lesser Dylan Authority).

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

Lot of the first songs, there were, like, "Hey, Woody Guthrie I wrote you a song" was definitely influenced by Woody Guthrie. Uh, you know, ***'Highway 51'*** *on that first record was definitely influenced by the Everly Brothers and, uh, Charlie Pickett. On the second record you can still see the influences, you know, of stuff like that. Like, uh, the first record, there was Muddy Waters influence on it...*

But now there aren't any influences really?

No, the influence is all sort of mashed up, you know, like the influence isn't in its given form any more

Bob Dylan, 1965

Part Four

I had intended part four of this series of articles to kick of with a burst of electricity in the form of ***'Subterranean Homesick Blues.'*** *However, something has come along to spoil this neatness in the form an interview I recently did with Martin Carthy (which will be appearing in a subsequent* ***ISIS****). Still I can't really see why I should be neat in this column when my life is so damn messy in every other way.*

As usual, the original song that formed the basis for a particular Dylan composition is identified, with the writer or arranger of the song (if any) in parentheses; then the Dylan song in question, with the date of composition (as near as can be ascertained) in parentheses after the title.

Original song: **Nottamun Town (trad)**
Dylan song: **Masters of War (? 1962)**

In issue 81 of ***ISIS,*** I didn't think Clinton Heylin's comments about this column and myself warranted much of a reply. He gave two examples of my *"meandering about the lower strata of Dylan scholarship,"* one of which — my failing to mention that Dylan sang a version of ***'Two Sisters'*** back in 1960 — he was quite right about and which I thanked him for. However, the other omission he mentions is my ignoring to state the fact that "...Dylan wrote ***'Masters of War'*** after hearing a British singer [sing] ***'Nottamun Town'****."* In ***"Behind the Shades,"*** Heylin says that ***'Masters of War'*** may well have been based on Bob Davenport's rendition of ***'Nottamun Town.'*** However, some information came my way that would seem to make this unlikely.

I did a lengthy interview with Martin Carthy a couple of days ago and he was sure that Dylan had already written the song before coming to England since he sang it the first

time they met in December 1962, and a number of times after that. I had previously thought this song was composed in January 1963 (as did John Bauldie who listed it as such in his ***"Oh No! Not Another Bob Dylan Book"*** discography), but he evidently wrote it some months earlier. Carthy was adamant that Dylan would have learned the song from Jean Richie, or from someone else in the US who'd got it from her.

This assumption on the part of Carthy transpired to be absolutely spot on, as further investigations prove. See Jackie Washington talking in ***"Baby Let Me Follow You Down"*** by Eric Von Schmidt & Jim Rooney. P. 219.

"I found a song of Jean Ritchie's called ***'Nottamun Town.'*** *It's sung in a minor key against a major like a lot of the mountain songs. It sounds nice, but I just couldn't do it, so I changed the tune to minor and made a sort of drone sound with the guitar. Dylan loved this. I was playing at Gerde's and he would come in every night and ask me to sing it. He went over to Vanguard* (Washington's record label) *and Maynard* (Washington's manager) *gave him a copy of my record. The next time I heard MY tune — which was MY tune — it was* ***'Masters of War'****."*

(For more on this, refer to issue 80 of ***ISIS****.)*

Original song: **Too Much Monkey Business (Chuck Berry)**
Dylan song: **Subterranean Homesick Blues (January 1965)**

By 1965, Dylan had absorbed an enormous amount of traditional and quasi-traditional material, along with an equally large quantity of blues and country songs. It is from this time, however, that we see more clearly the influence of more contemporary works. At the same time, straightforward adaptations of traditional material become much less common. As Dylan stated in the quote above, "the influence isn't in its given form any more." From this point on, many of the connections that I make between a Dylan composition and a previously existing song are much more tenuous. But no less fun.

Chuck Berry has, with good reason, been called the first poet of rock and roll, and his ***'Too Much Monkey Business'*** (1957) is a perfect example of his mastery of colloquial American English. Dylan takes Berry's rapid-fire approach to the language and ups the stakes:

Workin' in the fillin' station
Too many tasks
Wipe the windows
Check the tires
Check the oil
Dollar gas!
'Too Much Monkey Business'

Ah get born, keep warm,
Short pants, romance.
Learn to dance, get dressed, get blessed
Try to be a success.

Please her, please him, buy gifts
Don't steal, don't lift —
Twenty years of schoolin'
And they put you on the day shift…
'Subterranean Homesick Blues'

Original song: **Nine Below Zero (Sonny Boy Williamson)**
Dylan song: **Outlaw Blues (January 1965)**
The only direct connection here is the phrase "nine below zero," but Dylan almost certainly got this from Williamson. Why? Listen to what else he got from him. Although the tune to ***'Pledging My Time'*** is related (as noted below) to Robert Johnson's ***'Come On In My Kitchen,'*** the *feel* of it (and of many of Dylan's electric blues songs) definitely comes from ***'Nine Below Zero,'*** and other songs recorded by Williamson from the early 1950s to 1963.

Although Sonny Boy Williamson is most famous for his harmonica playing, his influence on Dylan was as much connected with his songwriting and band-sound that he achieved in his 1955-63 Chess/Checker recordings. Williamson's origins are a bit cloudy and most references turn up a number of birth dates (1897, 1899, 1907) and names (Aleck Ford, Alex Ford, Willie Miller, Rice Miller, Little Boy Blue), but it's fairly certain that he was born in Glendora, Mississippi around the turn of the century and died in Helena, Arkansas in 1965 (after recently having played with The Hawks, as Robbie Robertson memorably recounted in ***"The Last Waltz."***)

He took the name Sonny Boy Williamson (made famous by the younger and then more famous John Lee Williamson) when in the early 1940s he got a radio show — one of the first regular blues shows — King Biscuit Time. After his move to Chicago in 1955, he recorded extensively for Chess Records (and their Checker imprint), including such classics as ***'Eyesight to the Blind,' 'One Way Out,' 'Help Me,' Keep Your Hand Out of My Pocket,' Nine Below Zero,' 'Your Funeral and My Trial'*** and ***'Bring It on Home.'*** Dylan did a remarkable rendition of Sonny Boy's ***'Don't Start Me to Talkin''*** on the David Letterman Show in 1984, the performance being notable not only for its excellence but also for Dylan's complete lack of concern at not being able to recall more than two or three lines of the song.

Original song: **Baby Blue (Gene Vincent)**
Dylan song: **It's All Over Now, Baby Blue (January 1965)**
"I had carried that song around in my head for a long time," said Dylan in the ***"Biograph"*** notes, "and I remember that when I was writing it, I'd remembered a Gene Vincent song. It had always been one of my favorites, ***'Baby Blue'***... 'when first I met my baby, she said how do you do, she looked into my eyes and said... my name is Baby Blue.' It was one of the songs I used to sing back in High School. Of course, I was singing about a different Baby Blue."

Apart from the inspiration that the song might have given to Dylan, there is no apparent relationship between the songs beyond the name, Baby Blue.

Original song: **Down on Penny's Farm (The Bently Boys)**

Dylan song: **Maggie's Farm (January 1965)**

The connection here is fairly notional, although Jeff Place cites ***'Maggie's Farm'*** as a related song in his notes that accompanied the reissued ***"Anthology of American Folk Music,"*** released as a 6CD boxed set by Smithsonian/Folkways last year (and unreservedly recommended). The connection is not much more than the catalogue of hardships on a farm, but Dylan has talked about the influence that this anthology had on him so he's sure to have heard it. For a more direct connection with ***'Down on Penny's Farm,'*** see my notes to ***'Hard Times in New York'*** in issue 79 of ***ISIS.***

Original song: **That's All Right, Mama (Arthur Crudup)**
Dylan song: **Maggie's Farm (January 1965)**

Now the influence here might seem not so much tenuous as non-existent, at least, regarding the recordings by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup (the song's composer) or Elvis Presley. But if you give a listen to Dylan's unreleased recording of ***'That's All Right, Mama'*** from the October 1962 Freewheelin' sessions and then play the ***"Bringing It All Back Home"*** version of ***'Maggie's Farm,'*** you'll find that the introductions are the same. Not just similar but identical. The common link here is probably Bruce Langhorne, who plays guitar in both sessions.

Original songs: **La Bamba (trad. arr. Richie Valens), Rolling Stone (Muddy Waters), Lost Highway (Leon Payne)**
Dylan song: **Like a Rolling Stone (June 1965)**

Dylan can be seen singing ***'Lost Highway'*** — which begins "I'm a rolling stone..." — in the documentary ***"Don't Look Back"*** on May 3rd or 4th, 1965, only weeks before writing ***'Like a Rolling Stone.'*** (Although ***'Lost Highway'*** is always associated with Hank Williams, it was actually written by Leon Payne.) Dylan has said that he *based* ***'Like a Rolling Stone'*** on ***'La Bamba'*** (a hit for Richie Valens, who Dylan would have seen live in Minnesota back in 1959, just days before the young singer's death in the plane crash that also claimed the lives of Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper) and you can certainly feel it in the chorus. Muddy Waters' ***'Rolling Stone'*** may or may not have been an influence on ***'Like a Rolling Stone,'*** but when you listen to ***'Lost Highway'*** and ***'La Bamba'*** back to back to back, you really can hear ***'Like a Rolling Stone'*** emerging.

In 1991, the first take of ***'Like a Rolling Stone'*** was issued on ***"The Bootleg Series, Vol. 1-3,"*** and is was rather a surprise to hear that the song was originally in waltz time. This version bore hardly any resemblance to ***'La Bamba,'*** so any influence from the song must have either appeared in the studio the next day or in hindsight.

'La Bamba' is a lot older than Valens, who had a hit with a rocking arrangement of the tune in 1958. It is a traditional Mexican dance tune that has been around for centuries. It is probably heard to best effect (in electric and acoustic versions) on ***"Papa's Dream"*** (1995), a marvellous children's album put out by Los Lobos and Lalo Guerrero on Music for Little People. Los Lobos's earlier recording (made for the 1987 Richie Valens biopic ***"La Bamba")*** is also excellent.

Original song: **Milk Cow Blues (Sleepy John Estes)**
Dylan song: **From A Buick 6 (June 1965)**

'From A Buick 6' takes its tune and rhythmic feel from ***'Milk Cow Blues,'*** recorded by Sleepy John Estes in 1930 (and also as ***'Milkcow Blues Boogie'*** by Elvis Presley at Sun Studios in 1955). The first verse contains the phrase "keep it hid," which also appears in the Dylan song. Estes recorded an impressive version of ***'Broken-Hearted, Ragged and Dirty Too'*** — which Dylan recorded as ***'Ragged and Dirty'*** on ***"World Gone Wrong"*** — back in 1929.

Original song: **Poor Me (Charlie Patton), Milkcow Blues (Kokomo Arnold)**
Dylan song: **It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry (July 1965)**

Interestingly, another ***"Highway 61 Revisited"*** song could have been influenced by another bovine blues **—** ***'It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry,'*** from one of Kokomo Arnold's many versions of ***'Milkcow Blues,'*** though the couplet in question first appeared on Charlie Patton's ***'Poor Me'*** in 1934: "Don't the moon look pretty shinin' down through the tree."

Dylan is undoubtedly familiar with both singers. In 1985, an interviewer asked Dylan if his comparatively modern-sounding ***"Empire Burlesque"*** was an attempt to keep up with the times, and he answered (quote taken from memory; anyone got the exact words?): "What do I know about keeping up with the times? I still listen to Charlie Patton."

Incidentally, Patton's given name is usually spelt "Charley" but according to ***"King of the Delta Blues,"*** a biography of Patton by Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardlow (published by Rock Chapel Press in 1988), the man himself always spelt it "Charlie." Since it seems that this was possibly one of only two words he could spell (the other being "Patton"), it would be churlish not to do the same.

Original song: **I Believe to My Soul (Ray Charles)**
Dylan song: **Ballad of a Thin Man (July 1965)**

'I Believe to My Soul' by Ray Charles contributed only the piano phrase between verses to ***'Ballad of a Thin Man,'*** the two songs themselves being completely different. However, the phrase is distinctive enough to be a definite link between the two songs.

Original song: **Norwegian Wood (Lennon/McCartney)**
Dylan song: **4th Time Around (February 1966)**

The first obviously Dylan-influenced song that John Lennon wrote was ***'I'm a Loser'*** in the summer of 1964. With the following year's ***'You've Got to Hide Your Love Away'*** and ***'Ticket to Ride,'*** the influence was even more apparent, and by the end of the year, Lennon was composing (with a little help from McCartney) the Dylan-drenched wordplay of ***'Norwegian Wood'*** — and being teased about it by the other Beatles, if Alan Price of The Animals can be believed.

The song is credited to Lennon and McCartney, as were all their songs that they recorded in The Beatles, even ***'Ballad of John and Yoko.'*** They were first thought to have been a true songwriting team, but after Lennon's bitter ***"Rolling Stone"*** interview in 1971, it was then assumed that they each wrote their own songs with very little collaboration. The truth was far more complex — there were real collaborations (particularly in the early

years), solo compositions later credited to both, and ones like ***'Norwegian Wood'*** which was written mainly by one of them (in this case Lennon) but strengthened by a few ideas from the other (McCartney, in this case, provided the bridge melody and the idea of the house burning down).

Just two months after the song's release, Dylan wrote ***'4th Time Around,'*** setting Lennon's distinctive melody to a convoluted love story that was even more impenetrable than the original. Lennon is supposed to have been more than a little "paranoid" about the song's intentions. Was it a playful compliment or an ironic insult? With Dylan's closing couplet — "I never asked for your crutch, now don't ask for mine" — it could be taken either way.

Original song: **Automobile Blues (Lightnin' Hopkins)**
Dylan song: **Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat (February 1966)**

I saw you riding 'round in your brand new automobile
Yes I saw you ridin' around, babe, in your brand new automobile
You was sitting there happy
With your handsome driver at the wheel
In your brand new automobile
'Automobile Blues'

Well, I see you got your brand new leopard-skin pill-box hat
Yes, I see you got your brand new leopard-skin pill-box hat
Well, you must tell me, baby
How your head feels under somethin' like that
Under your brand new leopard-skin pill-box hat
'Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat'

The connection between the two songs is clear. The sly humour that Dylan employs is a distinctive feature of many of Hopkins' songs. Sam 'Lightnin'' Hopkins (1912-82) was an amazing Texas bluesman who lived and performed in and around Houston for almost all his life. His laconic singing, fluid guitar style (with a delightful disregard for bar length — a 14 1/2-bar verse would be just as common as a 12-bar) and unparalleled storytelling skills were simply marvellous. His best recordings were made for Aladdin and Gold Star in the 1940s and 50s, but almost anything of his is worth getting, and he did some excellent recordings for Arhoolie in the 1960s.

'Automobile Blues' was recorded in 1949 for Gold Star (with Lightnin' on organ). It can be found on a complete collection of the Gold Star recordings released by Arhoolie (and P-Vine in Japan) and also on ***'Mojo Hand,'*** a2-CD career overview put out by Rhino. Interestingly, the version on 'Mojo Hand' is listed as the same one, with Hopkins on organ, but in fact it has him playing it on guitar. Presumably this is an alternate take.

Original song: **Come on in My Kitchen (Robert Johnson)**
Dylan song: **Pledging My Time (March 1966)**

Blues melodies tend to be so formulaic that it's often difficult to say that one particular song came from another. However, ***'Pledging My Time'*** is very similar to ***'Come On In My Kitchen.'*** Dylan is known to be a big Robert Johnson fan, and the two songs also share one other striking similarity in their lyrics, both lines being sung to the same melodic phrase:

Some joker got lucky, stole her back again.
'Come On in My Kitchen'

Somebody got lucky, but it was an accident.
'Pledging My Time'

Dylan dedicated ***"Writings and Drawings,"*** his 1971 collection of (then) complete lyrics to (among others) "the magnificent Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson," and as time passes, the Johnson connection seems a more profound influence on his work than his legendary idolizing of Guthrie. Robert Johnson (1910-38) was arguably the greatest of all pre-war blues singers and an enormous influence on post-war blues, folk and rock.

The first collection of Johnson songs to appear on LP was ***"King of the Delta Blues Singers"*** which was released by Columbia in 1961. This was the collection that would have captivated Dylan and his contemporaries, and in fact the album jacket can be seen on the cover of ***"Bringing It All Back Home."*** In 1970, Columbia released a second Johnson album with all his remaining songs and some alternate takes. In 1990, the 2CD ***"The Complete Recordings"*** was released and amazingly hit the charts and is reported to have sold over a million copies. In 1997, the set was remastered (much better sound, it is reported) and I also hear that a further alternate take has been discovered and will be added to future sets.

Over they years, Dylan has sung Johnson's ***'Kindhearted Woman Blues,' 'Ramblin' on My Mind,' '(I Believe I'll) Dust My Broom'*** and ***'I'm a Steady Rollin' Man.'*** Heylin's ***"The Recording Sessions: 1960-1994"*** also lists Johnson's ***'32.20'*** as a ***"World Gone Wrong"*** outtake though this has yet to surface.

* * *

Thanks are, as always, due to a great many people. Rather than come out with a fragmented collection of names at the end of every installment, I'll try to list everyone who's helped me at the end of the last of these columns. Those of you with internet access should not forget to check out Manfred's excellent web page (http://members.xoom.com/~elstongunn/).

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

The difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is: the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great deal. The Good one Really Does Copy a Great deal.

William Blake

I was working on a variation of ***'Byker Hill'*** *— I really sat up late one night working on it, which is something I do when I'm under pressure. And he* [Dave Swarbrick] *came into the room and I said, "Is it all right to do this?" and he just looked at me and grinned and said: "You can do anything to music. It doesn't mind."*

Martin Carthy

I knew growing up that I wanted to do something different than anybody else. I wanted to do something that no one else did or could do, and I wanted to do it better than anyone else had. I didn't know where that was going to lead me, but where it did lead me was to folk music at a time when it was totally off the radar screen. Maybe there were 12 people in all of America who even heard of Woody Guthrie, Roscoe Holcomb, the Carter Family, Leadbelly — at least 12 people my age. They were free spirits who took chances, and I never wished to annul any of that spirit.

Bob Dylan 1997

Part Five

Once again, we kick off with a fair bit of back-tracking before getting to where we left off in the last issue. There are plenty of very speculative connections here and a number of detours that I hope are of interest. As always, corrections and suggestions are welcome. Send them to the Isis address or contact me directly at 13 Audley Grove, Bath BA1 3BS or by email to zook@globalnet.co.uk. One error I made a few installments ago was when I said that Dylan did not sing ***'Restless Farewell'*** *between the recording of it on October 31, 1963 and the performance in 1995 at the Frank Sinatra 80th Birthday Tribute. Actually, he did do it on the Canadian TV show* ***"Quest"*** *on February 1, 1964 and at the Royal Festival Hall in London on May 17, 1964, and Peter Stone Brown is pretty sure he sang it in November 1963 in Newark, NJ, the first Dylan performance that Peter attended. From this, I'd imagine that he did it a number of times during that year. Also, in my discussion of* ***'With God on Our Side,'*** *I quoted Liam Clancy talking about a singer named Joe Stafford. Actually, I got the sex wrong here and this should have been Jo Stafford. Thanks to Peter Goodsell for the correction.*

Incidentally, I chose the quotes from William Blake and Martin Carthy to lead off this installment for a reason. Occasionally, I come across a comment or two about this series which seems to think (or suppose that I think) the borrowing of words, melodies or ideas from traditional sources is somehow wrong. On the contrary, I could think of

nothing sadder than for traditional music to be some giant museum piece to be preserved and admired but not meddled with. As Dave Swarbrick said: "You can do anything to music. It doesn't mind."

Original song: **Pretty Polly (traditional)**
Dylan song: **Ballad of Hollis Brown (September 1962)**

The tune of ***'Ballad of Hollis Brown'*** is taken from ***'Pretty Polly,'*** a traditional song with roots in the British Isles or, according to Carl Sandburg, Scandinavia. The Stanley Brothers (Ralph and Carter) learnt the song from their father and it is quite possibly their version that Dylan first heard. The song was recently re-recorded by Ralph Stanley in duet with Patty Loveless on ***"Clinch Mountain Country,"*** a lovely album which also features a duet between Ralph and Bob singing ***'The Lonesome River.'*** (The highpoint of Bob's career, he said at the time.) There is no specific lyrical connection between ***'Pretty Polly'*** and ***'Hollis Brown.'*** In his essay ***'I Know My Song Well Before I Start Singing'*** *[**"The Telegraph"** 21, Autumn 1985],* Rod MacBeth writes: ***"'Pretty Polly'*** ... comes from a 30-stanza English ballad, according to [Alan] Lomax, by the name of ***'Gosport Tragedy,'*** first published in 1750. Carl Sandburgh reckons it comes from a Scottish song called ***'Mary Calvin,'*** published in 1776. He also lists variants as ***'The Old Beau,' 'The Outlandish Knight,' 'False Sir John'*** [and] ***'May Coleen,'*** and believes the original song to be a Scandinavian ballad telling how a man drowned six women, but was pushed into the sea by his seventh bride. Lomax gives an American variant, originally from Britain, called ***'Lady Isobel and the Elf Knight.'"***

Rod MacBeth goes on to quote a song called ***'Pore Man,'*** recorded by the Louisiana Honeydrippers in 1961 and credited to Dave Rankin, as an influence on the lyrics.

Walk the floor and scratch your head, pore man
Walk the floor and scratch your head, pore man
Walk the floor and scratch your head
Ten little young uns got to be fed, pore man

You got no shells for your gun, pore man
You got no shells for your gun, pore man
You got no shells for your gun
Your hound's so hungry he can't run, pore man
'Pore Man'

You looked for work and money
And you walked a rugged mile
You looked for work and money
And you walked a rugged mile
Your children are so hungry
That they don't know how to smile
'Ballad of Hollis Brown'

Original song: **James Alley Blues (Richard "Rabbit" Brown)**

Dylan song: I Shall Be Free (December 1962) Black Crow Blues (June 1964) Down in the Flood (between April and October 1967)

There are recordings of Dylan singing this song at Bonnie Beecher's apartment in Minneapolis in May 1961 and at the home of Eve and Mac MacKenzie in New York in September 1962. A number of lines in the song seem to have interested Dylan, and they have surfaced in three of his compositions. The earliest is:

I done seen better days, but I'm puttin' up with these
'James Alley Blues'

which could be the origin of:

I see better days and I do better things
'I Shall Be Free'

Next,

Sometimes I think that you're too sweet to die
Then other times I think you oughta be buried alive
'James Alley Blues'

by Brown might be a distant relative of Dylan's

Sometimes I'm thinkin' I'm too high to fall
Other times I'm thinkin' I'm so low I don't know
If I can come up at all
'Black Crow Blues'

The third song is ***'Down in the Flood,'*** and the connection here is much closer:

I been giving sugar for sugar, let you get salt for salt
And if you can't get along with me, well, it's your own fault
'James Alley Blues'

Well, it's sugar for sugar, and salt for salt,
If you go down in the flood, it's gonna be your own fault.
'Down in the Flood'

The "sugar for sugar, salt for salt" phrase is certainly distinctive enough to be a match here. Richard "Rabbit" Brown was born in New Orleans in 1880 and died there in 1937. In his early years, he used to sing on the streets of Storyville, and he frequently worked as a singing boatman on Lake Pontchartrain. There aren't any CDs devoted solely to Brown (he recorded just five or six sides for Victor on March 11, 1927), but he can be found (usually represented by this song, an incredible performance and by far the best of his recordings) on various anthologies, including ***"The Anthology of American Folk Music."*** Five of these recordings are available on volume 4 of the Pea Vine series ***"Kings of the Blues",*** (a Japanese release) along with all 13 of Mississippi John Hurt's 1928 recordings and six made by Hambone Willie Newbern in 1929.

Incidentally, Storyville was the notorious red lights district of New Orleans; it was shut down in 1917, but not before it managed — arguably — to give rise to jazz, and — unarguably — to give birth to the most influential musician of the 20th century, Louis Armstrong. Armstrong was born in James Alley, and he describes it thus in his fascinating memoir of his early years, ***"My Life in New Orleans":***

"James Alley — not Jane Alley as some people call it — lies at the very heart of what is called The Battlefield because the toughest characters in town used to live there, and would shoot and fight so much. In that one block between Gravier and Perdido Streets more people were crowded than you ever saw in your life. There were churchpeople, gamblers, hustlers, cheap pimps, thieves, prostitutes and lots of children. There were bars, honky-tonks and saloons, and lots of women walking the streets for tricks to take to their 'pads,' as they called their rooms."

"My Life in New Orleans" by Louis Armstrong
(1954 Prentice-Hall/Da Capo)

Despite what Armstrong says, the notes to ***"The Anthology of American Folk Music"*** aver that the street actually was called Jane's Alley, so the choice is yours.

And while on the subject of ***'James Alley Blues,'*** I must take this opportunity to show you this verse, unrelated to any of Dylan's songs, but worthy of the man at his best:

Now you want me to love you, and you treat me mean
How do you want me to love you if you keep a-treatin' me mean?
You're my daily thought and my nightly dream.
'James Alley Blues'

Original song: **The Miner (traditional)**
Dylan song: **North Country Blues (August 1963)**

A few installments ago, I said that o my ears, the words of ***'The Miner'*** didn't sound like a traditional song, and I suggested that it might have been written in the 1940s or so. Well, Peter Goodsell wrote to me and supplied the following information: "I have the Australian LP ***"Man of the Earth"*** which features the song ***'The Miner'*** from whence Dylan took the melody and word spirit of the song for his (also) mining song ***'North Country Blues.'*** The song is here performed by Warren Fakey and Tony Suttors. According to the very extensive sleeve notes, this is a song that has been collected in several versions throughout Australia and the UK. Mary Jean Officer and Norm O'Connor collected a version from a lady who herself learnt it as a child in a Victorian [the state not the era] gold mining town. American folklorist George Korson prints a version similar to a version by UK collector A.L. Lloyd in his (Korson) book ***"Minstrels for the Mine Patch."*** (Publisher was Folklore Associates.) All my readings lead me to a strong belief that the song was truly traditional and not written in the 1940s."

Original song: **Down on Penny's Farm (The Bently Boys)**
Dylan song: **Maggie's Farm (January 1965)**

Some extra information came my way via Alan Fraser concerning the title of this song. According to Alan: "The name is a reference to Silas McGee's Negro work farm in Greenwood, Mississippi, where Bob performed ***'Only A Pawn In Their Game'*** at a Civil Rights Rally on 6th July, 1963. [Footage of this can be seen in ***"Don't Look Back."]"***

Original song: **I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground (traditional)**
Dylan song: **Stuck Inside of Mobile (February 1966)**

Bascom Lamar Lunsford said that he learnt this song in 1901 from Fred Moody, a North Carolina singer. Lunsford's 1928 recording was included in ***"The Anthology of American Folk Music,"*** along with his rendition of ***'Dry Bones.'***

I don't like a railroad man
No, I don't like a railroad man
'Cause a railroad man will kill you when he can
And drink up your blood like wine
'I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground'

Mona tried to tell me
To stay away from the train line.
She said that all the railroad men
Just drink up your blood like wine.
'Stuck Inside of Mobile'

Bascom Lamar Lunsford (1882-1973) was a banjo player and fiddler who was known as "The Minstrel of the Appalachians," and was musically active right up to his death. (Incidentally, Lunsford sang a version of ***'Down on Penny's Farm'*** — the model for ***'Hard Times in New York'*** and a possible influence on ***'Maggie's Farm'*** — called ***'Robert's Farm.')*** According to the notes to ***"The Anthology of American Folk Music,"*** Lunsford was a lawyer and an avid collector of Appalachian folk songs. Some people have thought he might be the "Cold Black Bascom" mentioned at the beginning of ***'Tell Me Mamma,'*** but this is unlikely since (a) Lunsford was white, and (b) despite what it says in the official transcription, what Dylan probably sings is: "Cold black glass don't make no mirror…"

An interesting — and just maybe relevant — observation concerning ***'Stuck Inside of Mobile'*** came from an internet posting from a John Brown where he observed that the chorus of ***'O Suzannah'*** matches the rhythms of ***'Mobile'*** perfectly:

Oh, Suzannah, don't you cry for me
'Cause I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee
'O Suzannah'

Oh, Mama, can this really be the end
To be stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues again
'Stuck Inside of Mobile'

Coincidence? Probably, but if ***'Mobile'*** had been written at Big Pink the following year, I'd have had no hesitation in believing the connection. And after the inevitable corrections and back-tracking, Big Pink is where we'll be heading in the next issue.

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

Oh, I sing modern songs as well. There's some very, very nice modern songs, but I don't think they hit you quite so deep inside, because a lot of songs today are just made up from out of the wind.

Phoebe Smith

Part Six

As usual, the original song that formed the basis for a particular Dylan composition is identified, with the writer of the song in parentheses; then the Dylan song in question, with the date of composition (as near as can be ascertained) in parentheses after the title.

Original song: **Ould Triangle (Brendan Behan)**
Dylan song: **Mr. Tambourine Man (May 1964)**

Brendan Behan's play ***"The Quare Fellow"*** (first performed in 1954) opens with the song ***'Ould Triangle'*** (also known as ***'The Royal Canal')***. The song is sung by a prisoner and concerns the deadening crush of solitude and routine upon his soul.

And to begin the morning, the warders bawling
"Ah, get up you bowsey and clean out your cell!"

And the ould triangle, it went jingle jangle
All along the banks of the Royal Canal.
'Ould Triangle'

Dylan may or may not have taken the "jingle jangle" of ***'Mr. Tambourine Man'*** from this song (he knew it, and sang it - wonderfully - in 1967 up in Woodstock), but it does give a very different spin to what the "jingle jangle morning" in his own song might mean. In ***"Invisible Republic,"*** Greil Marcus says that "jingle jangle" is the sound of the triangle that rouses the prisoners each morning, and he may well be right. I had taken the triangle to be the exercise yard of the prison and the "jingle jangle" to be the sound the prisoners made as they shuffled around, chains clinking around their ankles, doing their daily exercise. Either way, any such "jingle jangle morning" would be a dark affair and not the carefree romp that the song — in particular, the Byrds' version — often suggests.

There is another song called ***'Never Let Your Braces Dangle'*** that would seem to be an earlier (traditional?) composition on which Behan based ***'Ould Triangle.'*** Does anyone know anything about this one?

Original song: **Open the Door, Richard (Jack McVea, John Mason, Don Howell)**
Dylan song: **Open the Door, Homer (between April and October 1967)**

There are no connections, either musical or lyrical, between these two songs, beyond the fact that Dylan sings "Open the door, *Richard,"* and not "Homer." That would seem to be enough, though, to indicate that Dylan did have the older song in mind.

'Open The Door, Richard' was first recorded by Jack McVea, a tenor sax player born in 1914 and still alive as of last year. (The song is credited to McVea, John Mason and Don Howell, but Howell didn't actually exist. It seems he was an invention of the publisher who wanted to get an extra slice of the royalties.)

The following is from the entry for McVea in Donald Clarke's excellent ***"Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music"*** (for my money the best single-volume reference work on popular music): "[McVea] gradually followed public taste from swing through the 'jump band' era to R&B. He recorded in Hollywood '45 with Slim Gaillard and an unusual lineup: Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gillespie, Bam Brown on bass, New Orleans veteran Zutty Singleton on drums; Gaillard wanted a re-make of his '38 novelty hit ***'Flat Foot Floogie,'*** Parker and Gillespie made up ***'Dizzy Boogie,'*** while Gaillard's ***'Popity Pop'*** was about a motorcycle, and laid-back novelty ***'Slim's Jam'*** included solos for horns and plenty of Gaillard's jive: as he introduces McVea, the latter knocks and says ***'Open the door, Richard,'*** reference to a routine by black vaudeville comic Dusty Fletcher in which the comic has come home late and wants to get in while Richard is occupied in something he is loath to interrupt. McVea began performing a riff based on the routine with his combo; Ralph Bass recorded it for the LA Black & White label; McVea also performed it in the film ***'Sarge Goes to College'*** 1947; by then it had taken the country by storm, the biggest hit of the year, until the riff was so familiar that WOR in NYC banned it, along with the Richard jokes. ... McVea and Fletcher shared composer credit with John Mason, from whom Fletcher had learnt it, and Don Howell, who didn't exist (the publisher got an extra slice). McVea made flop follow-up ***'The Key's in the Mailbox'*** by Jack McVea and His Door Openers."

Me again. ***'Open the Door, Richard'*** has since been recorded by Count Basie, Louis Jordan, the Three Flames, the Pied Pipers, Hank Penny, Hot Lips Page (not a porno star but a great Armstrong-influenced trumpeter), Sid Catlett (after Jo Jones, perhaps the greatest drummer of the time), and many others. No doubt Dylan and the members of The Band grew up hearing this song on the radio. Dylan is said to have sung ***'Accentuate the Positive'*** for his grandmother on Mother's Day when he was around five (his first public performance — read about it in Sheldon's biography); he learnt it from the radio, so we can be pretty sure that he would also have heard ***'Open the Door, Richard'*** and that it would have been a favourite of a 4-year-old boy, which is how old he was when it was first released (or of a 6-year old, which Bob was when Basie had a hit with it in 1947). Also, since the song was covered successfully by so many people, it would have been on the radio through the 1940s and early 1950s. ***'Homer'*** might have replaced ***'Richard'*** in the title for copyright reasons (but also for the incongruity!). For what it's worth, Louis Jordan's version is my favourite.

I have heard it said that Homer was the nickname of Richard Farina, Joan Baez's brother, and if this is true, there might have been an in-joke going on here as well.

Original song: **The Waste Land (T.S. Eliot)**
Dylan song: **Too Much of Nothing (between April and October 1967)**
There is an interesting aside (not part of the scope of this series, but what the hell) concerning the chorus to this song:

Say hello to Valerie, say hello to Vivien
Send them all my salary on the waters of oblivion.

Vivien Haigh-Wood was the first wife of T.S. Eliot whom he married in 1915. The couple formally separated in 1932 and he married Valerie Fletcher in 1947. Coincidence? Probably not. I am no Eliot scholar, but "too much of nothing" is a fair precis of a poem described by the ***"Oxford Companion to English Literature"*** as "a statement of the post-war [WWI, that is] sense of depression and futility" and by Eliot himself as "a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life."

What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?
Nothing again nothing.

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?'

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'
'The Waste Land' 1922

Original song: **All I Have to Do Is Dream (Felice & Boudleaux Bryant)**
Dylan song: **All I Have to Do Is Dream (November 1967)**
There are a number of Basement Tape songs which are either parodies or pastiches of other songs, and there are also a few original songs which just seem to have taken a well-known title as a starting point for a completely new song. This one was a hit for the Everly Brothers in 1958. (I've gone on at great length on matters only tenuously concerned with Dylan, so I think I'd better be brief with these even more flimsy connections.)

Original song: **Froggie Went A-Courtin' (trad)**
Dylan song: **Apple Suckling Tree (November 1967)**
Dylan recorded ***'Froggie Went A-Courtin''*** on ***"Good As I Been To You,"*** and he also used the tune for ***'Apple Suckling Tree.'*** The song appeared in ***"The Anthology of American Folk Music"*** under the title ***'King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Me-O'*** (sung by Chubby Parker) and also in the book ***"Eighty English Folk Songs"*** collected by Cecil Sharpe and Maud Carpeles as ***'The Frog and the Mouse.'***

Original song: **One for My Baby (And One More for the Road (Johnny Mercer & Harold Arlen)**

Dylan song: **One for the Road (November 1967)**
As with ***'All I Have to Do Is Dream,'*** just the title has been lifted for a brand new song. The Mercer/Arlen composition is the one immortalized by Sinatra and Nelson Riddle.

Original song: **See You Later Alligator (Bobby Charles)**
Dylan song: **See You Later Allen Ginsberg (November 1967)**
They started out trying to do the old Bobby Charles but kind of got side-tracked. song The song was a hit for Bill Haley and the Comets back in 1956.

Original song: **Tupelo (John Lee Hooker)**
Dylan song: **The Big Flood (November 1967)**
An affectionate parody of the Hooker song which appears on the Vanguard collection ***"Great Bluesmen at Newport."***

Original song: **Tramps and Hawkers (trad)**
Dylan song: **I Pity the Poor Immigrant (November 1967)**
Dylan may have adapted the tune of ***'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'*** from a traditional Scottish ballad entitled ***'Tramps and Hawkers.'*** The Scottish song has been recorded by Hamish Imlach and also by the Dubliners. There is no lyrical connection between the two songs. Other songs with similar tunes (but also no lyrical connection) are ***'Paddy West'*** (recorded by Lou Killen), ***'The Lakes of Pontchartrain'*** and ***'The Ballad of Peter Emberley.'*** (Thanks to Peter Stone Brown for pointing out these last two.) As noted in a previous installment, Dylan's ***'Ballad of Donald White'*** used the melody of ***'Peter Emberley,'*** so this may well have been the source. However, the Hamish Imlach recording of ***'Tramps and Hawkers'*** seems a little closer to my ears.

Lyrically, Dylan has clearly been very influenced in this song by the book of Leviticus from the Old Testament.

And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.
'Leviticus 26.20'

I pity the poor immigrant
Whose strength is spent in vain
'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'

And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass.
Leviticus 26.19

Whose heaven is like Ironsides,
Whose tears are like rain,
'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'

And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.

Leviticus 26.26

Who eats but is not satisfied

'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

"The thing about rock 'n' roll is that for me anyway it wasn't enough. **'Tutti Frutti'** *and* **'Blue Suede Shoes'** *were great catchphrases and driving pulse rhythms and you could get high on that energy but they weren't serious or didn't reflect life in a serious way. I knew that when I got into folk music, it was more of a serious type of thing. The songs are filled with more despair, more sadness, more triumph, more faith in the supernatural, much deeper feelings…* **'My Bonnie Love Is Lang A'Growing,' 'Go Down Ye Bloody Red Roses,'** *even* **'Jesse James'** *or* **'Down by the Willow Garden.'** *Definitely not pussy stuff. There is more real life in one line than there was in all the rock 'n' roll themes."*

From ***the "Biograph"*** booklet, 1985

"I don't copy guys that are under 50 years old."

From the ***"Biograph"*** booklet, 1985

Part Seven

Bob Dylan's songwriting career can — for the purposes of these articles, at least — be divided into three stages. In the first few years of his career, Dylan would often rework traditional songs in such a way that the originals were clearly visible. (Or should that be audible?) Then from the mid-sixties, in Dylan's words, "the influence is all sort of mashed up, you know, like the influence isn't in its given form any more." This stage could be said to stretch from around 1964 to the present, with one notable exception. In the first few years of this stage, the antecedents are still quite easy to pinpoint, but they become progressively less so, and the next two installments of **'Original Thoughts'** *just notes some of the more apparent influences. This is a very spotty selection, making no pretences at any nod towards completism here. Apologies in advance.*

And then there's **"Time Out of Mind,"** *a virtual mosaic of traditional phrases and images. The final installment will be given over to tracing some of these. Since there are so many quotes from so many different songs, there's no way I'm going to catch them all, so I'd like to ask anyone who has spotted any connections concerning* **"Time Out of Mind"** *to send them either to me or to the main Isis address. (See below for addresses)*

Original source: **Isaiah; Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (T.S. Eliot)**
Dylan song: **All Along the Watchtower (November 1967)**

In ***'Dealing With Fear'*** (Isis 77 and 78, February-May 1998), I wrote at length about the influence of the Old Testament's Book of Isaiah on ***'All Along the Watchtower,'*** and I

don't want to reprint all of that again. However, there are three extracts from Isaiah that really do have to be mentioned in relation to this song. This is from the King James version of the Old Testament:

> *And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.*
>
> Isaiah 61.5

> *The Lord hath sworn by his right hand and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured...*
>
> Isaiah 62.8

> *Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: And he cried A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: And behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.*
>
> Isaiah 21.5-9

There is also a line in the third verse ("All the women came and went…") which has clear echoes of T.S. Eliot. Rather than just quote the line, let me give you a passage from one of my favourite novels, Raymond Chandler's ***"The Long Goodbye,"*** private detective Philip Marlowe being engaged in conversation by a cab driver:

> *"'I grow old... I grow old... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.' What does that mean, Mr. Marlowe?"*
>
> *"Not a bloody thing. It just sounds good."*
>
> *He smiled. "That is from the 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' Here's another one. 'In the room women come and go / Talking of Michael Angelo.' Does that suggest anything to you, sir?"*
>
> *"Yeah — it suggests to me that the guy didn't know very much about women."*
>
> ***"The Long Goodbye"***
> ***by Raymond Chandler***

There are also echoes of a few other poems that may not be just my fancy. These include Yeats' ***'The Second Coming'*** ("...somewhere in sands of the desert / A shape with lion body and the head of a man... And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"), and Federico Garcia Lorca's ***'Romance of the Moon, the Moon'*** ("Drumming the plain, the horseman is coming.")

Original song: **Steppenwolf (Hermann Hesse)**
Dylan song: **Tangled Up in Blue (September 1974)**

The late John Bauldie noticed a couple of interesting influences on this song. To quote from an email by John:

"The episode with the shoes in ***'Tangled Up In Blue'*** is a direct parallel of the scene in Hermann Hesse's ***"Steppenwolf"*** when suicidal Harry Haller calls in to The Black Eagle and the pretty and pale dancing girl takes him in hand. Her immediate attention is given to Harry's shoes — she tells him off about them being so dirty, as if he's walked all the way from Paris. At the start of the Dylan song, the narrator is on the road, rain falling on his shoes, which clearly must be in a bad state by the time he reaches the topless place… Interested parties may explore further parallels in the encounter and the song for themselves.

And here's a very strange parallel. A song by David Blue***, 'Train To Anaheim,'*** on his ***"Nice Baby & The Angel"*** album, which predates ***'Tangled Up In Blue'*** by at least three years, presents a relationship, a basement flat, lots of rain, and concludes with the exclamation "Me I'm still on the road…"

Original song: **Pony Blues (Charlie Patton, Son House)**
Dylan song: **New Pony (April 1978)**
Both Charlie Patton (1892-36) and Son House (1902-89) were famous for ***'Pony Blues.'*** Though he didn't get to record it until 1929, Patton is said to have been singing this song as early as 1910. He also rerecorded the song as 'Stone Pony Blues' in 1934, a few months before his death. There's an excellent discussion of Patton's song in ***"King of the Delta Blues: The Life and Music of Charlie Patton"*** by Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardlow, published by Rock Chapel Press.

In 1941, Alan Lomax recorded Son House for the Library of Congress, and House did his own version of the Patton song as ***'Shetland Pony Blues.'*** (The recording was made in a barn next to the Pea Vine train line, and at one point you can hear the train steaming by, drowning out the music.) A year later, Lomax returned and he rerecorded it as ***'Pony Blues.'*** Both versions are available, along with 13 other cuts, on ***"Delta Blues: The Original Library of Congress Sessions,"*** released on Biograph.

Both Charlie Patton and Son House were blues singers who were convinced that blues was the "Devil's music." At certain times during their lives, they both gave up blues singing to become lay preachers — though they also both backslid and returned to the blues (among other unpreacherly activities). In his later performances, Son House is said always to have been careful to include at least one gospel number amid the blues songs to "sanctify" proceedings.

You know, the horse that I'm riding, he can fox-trot, lope and pace
Hmm, he can fox-trot and lope and pace
Y'know, a horse with [that many gaits] y'know, booked to win that race.
'Pony Blues' *(Son House)*

I got a new pony, she knows how to fox-trot, lope and pace
Well, I got a new pony, she knows how to fox-trot, lope and pace
She got great big hind legs and long black shaggy hair hanging in her face
'New Pony'

'New Pony' explores this ambiguous relationship, contrasting the deep blues of the song with the gospel chant of "How much longer?" Dylan's song is based on Son House's version, not Patton's. House was rediscovered in the early 1960s and appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, so Dylan is sure to have been familiar with him. Incidentally, House's ***"Father of the Delta Blues"*** (1965) was produced by John Hammond. Dylan would also be familiar with Patton's version. In 1985, he was presumably having belated second thoughts about his brush with modern technology in ***"Empire Burlesque"*** when he commented: "What do I know about keeping up with the times? I still listen to Charlie Patton."

Original song: **Little Black Train (Woody Guthrie)**
Dylan song: **Gotta Serve Somebody (April 1979)**

After Dylan's first major work, ***'Song to Woody,'*** there has been remarkably little direct influence from Guthrie's songs on Dylan's own compositions. Apart from 'Danville Girl,' a song associated with Guthrie which provided the title and not much else for ***'New Danville Girl,' 'Little Black Train'*** may be the only one to show a clear connection.

You may be a bar-room gambler
And cheat your way through life
But you can't cheat that little black train
Or beat this final ride

Get ready for your savior
And fix your business right
You've gotta ride that little black train
To make your final ride

'Little Black Train'

You may be an ambassador to England or France,
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

'Gotta Serve Somebody'

The train imagery of Guthrie's song does not appear in Dylan's, but the album on which ***'Gotta Serve Somebody'*** appears is ***"Slow Train Coming,"*** the train of the title serving a similar metaphorical purpose to the one in Guthrie's song.

* * *

Finally, a reminder that I'm interested to hear any additions or corrections that might occur to you, in particular, in relation to ***"Time Out of Mind."*** (But not concerning the

origins of the title. That discussion has been bouncing around the internet for ages, and it would probably be hard to find a writer who hasn't used the phrase at some point.) Send any comments to: Isis, P.O. Box 1182, Bedworth, Warwickshire CV12 0AZ or me at 13 Audley Grove, Bath BA1 3BS or email us at ISIS@netcomuk.co.uk or m.zuckerman@which.net.

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

"I don't carry myself yet the way that Big Joe Williams, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lightnin' Hopkins have carried themselves. I hope to be able to someday, but they're older people. I sometimes am able to do it, but it happens, when it happens, unconsciously. You see, in time, with those older singers, music was a tool — a way to live more, a way to make themselves feel better at certain points. ... What made the real blues singers so great is that they were able to state all the problems they had; but at the same time, they were standing outside of them and could look at them. And in that way, they had them beat. What's depressing today is that many young singers are trying to get ***inside*** *the blues, forgetting that those older singers used them to get* ***outside*** *their problems."*

Bob Dylan, 1963

Part Eight

First off, apologies for not getting this installment ready for the last issue. During the heavy rains, my office got flooded and salvage operations took precedence over everything else. In fact, it got flooded three times before the cause — a tennis ball lodged deep in a pipe — could be located.

Up till now, I've been content in this series to point out a song or two that might have influenced a particular Dylan composition, but with the songs contained on ***"Time Out of Mind"*** *a different approach is needed. Almost every composition is a mosaic stitched together from the fabric of traditional song, and there is rarely a single model to point at.*

Many commentators have been mightily impressed by this approach of Dylan's, while others have found it wanting, if not in conception then certainly in practice. In this series of articles, I have generally avoided voicing my own judgments on artistic matters, and I don't intend to get into a debate about the merits of ***"Time Out of Mind"*** *here. Suffice it to say that I fall very firmly in the former category, and find that to my ears the album gets better every time I revisit it.*

"Time Out of Mind" is a journey made up of songs, eleven by Bob Dylan and countless others from a great variety of sources. Almost every song starts with the singer walking, always alone except for the ghosts of his past.

I'm walking through streets that are dead
Gonna walk down that dirt road until my eyes begin to bleed
The light in this place is so bad making me sick in the head
I'm drifting in and out of dreamless sleep
I've been wading through the high muddy water
With the heat rising in my eyes

Boys in the street beginning to play
Girls like birds, flying away
Shadows are falling and I've been here all day
It's too hot to sleep and time is running away
I'm waist deep, waist deep in the mist
It's almost like, almost like, I don't exist
I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue
I'd go crawling down the avenue
Skies are gray, I'm looking for anything that will bring a happy glow
Night or day, it doesn't matter where I go anymore, I just go
The sun is beginning to shine on me
But it's not like the sun that used to be

Love Sick

Back in the summer of 1997 when I first played the hissy, pre-release tape of ***"Time Out of Mind"*** on my daughter's tiny cassette deck (my audio equipment being in storage at the time) and I first heard the opening bars of ***'Love Sick,'*** I was immediately struck by its relationship to Screamin' Jay Hawkins' ***'I Put a Spell on You'*** — in the same way that Dylan identified The Police's ***'Every Breath You Take'*** as a descendant of ***'Stand By Me.'*** In fact, a subtitle of ***'Love Sick'*** could be ***'You Put a Spell on Me.'***

I haven't noticed any particular lyrical connections between ***'Love Sick'*** and any other songs, but it (and the whole album, come to that) reminds me strongly of the song cycle ***"Winterreise"*** by Schubert (the music) and Wilhelm Müller (the words). This series of twenty-four songs tells the tale of a man broken by love walking through a winter landscape, observing the world from a distance and "talking to himself in a monologue." In the first song, ***'Good Night,'*** the singer asks:

Why should I stay any longer until I am driven away?
Leave stray dogs to howl in front of their master's house.
Love loves to rove —
God made it so —
From one to another;
Dear love, good night.

'Good Night'

Every song in ***"Winterreise"*** could have come from ***"TOOM,"*** or visa versa.

Frozen tears are falling from my cheeks.
Did I not notice that I was weeping?

'Frozen Tears'

The chill wind blew straight in my face;
My hat flew off my head.
I did not turn back.

'The Lime Tree'

It is burning hot under my two feet, although I am walking on ice and snow.

I do not want to breath again…

'Retrospect'

On and on through every song, the singer tramps through a silent and desolate world, seeing futility, broken love and Godlessness on every branch and signpost.

I see one signpost standing there,
Steadfast before my gaze.
There is one road that I must take
Which no one has ever travelled back.

'The Signpost'

Finally, he espies an organ grinder, a figure strongly reminiscent of a tambourine-wielding man from Dylan's past.

There beyond the village stands an organ grinder,
And with numb fingers he grinds as best he can.

Strange old fellow, shall I go with you?
To my singing, will you grind your organ?

'The Organ Grinder'

Is the similarity of theme and treatment between ***"Winterreise"*** and ***"TOOM"*** a coincidence? Quite possibly. There are no exact musical or lyrical connections and I have never heard anything about Dylan having an interest in Schubert or lieder. (In fact, when a BBC interviewer mentioned Schubert in a talk with Dylan during the shooting of ***"Hearts of Fire,"*** he showed no particular spark of interest.) All the same, it would not surprise me in the slightest to find that he is familiar with this work, or even that he wrote ***"TOOM"*** under the influence of it. If ***"Blood on the Tracks"*** can be seen as a descendant of Petrach (the Italian poet from — almost — the 13th century), then ***"TOOM"*** can certainly be viewed as a descendant of Schubert and Müller.

Incidentally, there are many fine versions of ***"Winterreise"*** in the catalogue. Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten recorded a much loved version in 1963 and Dietrich Fischer-Diskau recorded it masterfully a number of times. My favourite, however, is a 1954 recording on EMI by German baritone/bass Hans Hotter, with the great Gerald Moore on piano.

Dirt Road Blues

This is a song that at first listen would seem the most likely candidate to be a patchwork of old songs, but none of the words actually strike any such bells in my mind. The title, however, is a clear evocation of Charlie Patton and countless other country blues singers. Patton recorded ***'Down the Dirt Road Blues'*** in 1929 and Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup recorded an unrelated song entitled ***'Dirt Road Blues'*** in 1945, and there are countless versions of many other similarly titled songs: ***'Dusty Road,' 'Big Road Blues,'*** and so on. Even more songs include the phrase "down the dirt road" — Bobby Grant's ***'Lonesome Atlanta Blues,'*** for example: "I'm gonna walk down that dirt road till someone lets me ride."

Musically, the song sounds like a meeting between Carl Perkins and the deep Mississippi blues, as if Charlie Patton had lived long enough to make it to Sam Philips' Sun Studios in Memphis in the early 1950s.

Standing in the Doorway

"Standing in the doorway cryin'…"
Though it bears no lyrical or musical connection (except for the title), there is an old blues song called ***'Standing in the Doorway Cryin'.'*** I'm pretty sure I used to have it on an anthology many years ago, but I'm damned if I can remember who sang it. (If anyone knows it, please jog my memory.) Every time I try to play the song in my head, it keeps segueing into ***'Standing Around Cryin''*** by Muddy Waters. There is also a wonderful song by William Harris recorded in 1928 called ***'Bullfrog Blues'*** which contains the line: "I left you standin' here in your back door cryin'."

"Don't know if I saw you, if I'd kiss you or kill you…"
The dichotomy between love and hate is well documented in song, and this line brings Dock Boggs' ***'Pretty Polly'*** to mind:

'She threw her arms around him and trembled with fear
How can you kill the poor girl that loves you so dear.'
'Pretty Polly'

"I'm strummin' on my gay guitar, smokin' a cheap cigar…"
Another Dock Boggs song, ***'Danville Girl,'*** shows its influence in a number of songs, including Jimmie Rodgers' ***'Waiting for a Train'*** and Dylan's ***'New Danville Girl'/'Brownville Girl.'*** The second verse of the song could be the origin of that cheap cigar Dylan is smoking:

'I was standing on the platform
Smoking a cheap cigar
Listening for that next freight train
To carry an empty car.'
'Danville Girl'

As for the "gay guitar," one version of 'The Gypsie Laddie' (originally collected by Francis James Child, Child ballad #200) runs:

'Of a rich young lady I'm going to tell,
Who lov'd a gipsy young laddy well;
While she was playing on her gay guitar,
The young gipsy laddy, the young gipsy laddy did her tender heart ensnare.'
'The Gypsie Laddie'

However, it may be a "Gay" and not a "gay" guitar that Dylan is playing. According to guitarist Ed Gerhardt, Gay guitars were rather flashy instruments favoured by certain country singers in the 1950s. As he recalled, they were not particularly pricey — or good,

for that matter — though they certainly looked the piece slung over a Nudie suit in a honky tonk. Another informant said that they never really caught on because they had an unfortunate tendency to fall apart. So by the sound of it, a Gay guitar would go very well with a cheap cigar.

'I eat when I'm hungry, drink when I'm dry and live my life on the square'
Back in 1963, Dylan recorded ***'Moonshiner'*** during the ***"Times They Are A-Changin'"*** sessions. The last verse contains a close relative of the above line, and the song is strongly reminiscent in mood to ***'Standing in the Doorway,'*** and indeed the whole of ***"TOOM."***

'Let me eat when I'm hungry
Let me drink when I'm dry
Dollars when I'm hard-up
Religion when I die
The whole world's a bottle
And life's but a dram
When the bottle gets empty
It sure ain't worth a damn'

'Moonshiner'

"When the last rays of daylight go down, Buddy, you'll roll no more…"
This is another line that has many echoes in traditional song, one example being:

'Hey Buddy, won't you roll down the line…"

"Roll Down the Line"

It's probably just a coincidence that in his Grammy acceptance speech, Dylan mentioned that he felt the spirit of Buddy Holly looking down on the sessions. Or maybe serendipity is a better word.

"You left me standing in the doorway crying,
Blues wrapped around my head."
This is yet another line that can be found in similar form in many a blues song, though I don't recall "wrapped" being used in such a context before. Here's one example, by Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee:

'Woke up this mornin', woke up this mornin',
Blues all around my head, Lord lordy…'

East Coast Blues

* * *

All the translations of ***"Winterreise"*** *are by William Mann, copyright* 1986. *Many thanks to the people who wrote in with suggestions. Next month, I'll be continuing the discussion of the songs that make up* ***"Time Out of Mind"*** *and the following issue will be a mopping up affair, covering some of the many connections I've missed. As always, comments and corrections are welcome. Write to:* ***Isis, P.O. Box 1182, Bedworth, Warwickshire CV12***

*0AZ or me at **13 Audley Grove, Bath BA1 3BS** or email us at **ISIS@netcomuk.co.uk** or **m.zuckerman@which.net.***

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

*The producers of prose do not play scales or improvise their skills by repeating passages of De Quincey or Sir Thomas Browne, although that might be a good idea. They do not work at "*Miss iss ip pi*" until they get it right.*

"The Music of Prose" William H. Glass

"His [Dylan's] singing like jazz, only their third chorus is his first."

"Dylan Down Under" Lenny Kaye

Part Nine

With this installment, I am going to look at the remaining eight songs from ***"Time Out of Mind,"*** with next issue's part ten flitting back to fill in a few of the many holes I've left. Contact addresses are at the end of the article: any corrections or additions will be gratefully received. In part eight of this series, I touched on the probably coincidental similarity between ***"Time Out of Mind"*** and ***"Winterraise,"*** a song cycle by Franz Schubert and Wilhelm Müller. An interesting aside to this is that Müller is not thought of as a first — or even second — rate poet. The words to ***"Winterraise"*** do not amount to great poetry, but the song cycle as a whole is certainly a powerful work of art. It's worth keeping this in mind when discussing the lyrics to ***"TOOM."*** The few dissenting voices among the choruses of praise for the album have focussed on the seeming lack of originality and sophistication in the lyrics, and while I can certainly agree with much of what they have said, none of it has reduced the album in my mind from what it has always seemed to be – a powerful work of art. As Dylan said back in 1968: "It's the difference between the words on the paper and the song. The song disappears in the air, the paper stays. They have little in common. A great poet, like Wallace Stevens, doesn't necessarily make a great singer. But a great singer always – like Billie Holiday – makes a great poet."

Million Miles

This is a smoky blues with a loping beat, strongly reminiscent of many others (particularly Robert Johnson's ***'Stop Breaking Down Blues,'*** though with a decided Tom Waits feel to it), without throwing up any specific models. There are hints of many different songs though, some probably intended, some not.

At two points in the song, Dylan sings 'That's all right, mama,' which is a song by Arthur Cruddup that Dylan himself recorded during the ***"Freewheelin'"*** sessions. The most famous version, of course, was by Elvis Presley in 1954, released along ***with 'Blue Moon of Kentucky'*** as his first single. Another song title that crops up in the song is ***'Rock Me, Baby'*** by B.B. King.

And that's not forgetting:

'I'm just one too many mornings an a thousand miles behind.'
'One Too Many Mornings'

'I'm trying to get closer but I'm still a million miles from you.'
'Million Miles'

Trying To Get to Heaven

Alan Lomax's 1960 collection ***"Folk Songs of North America"*** includes a song called **'The Old Ark's A-Moverin''** which contains the lines:

'Look at that sister comin' 'long slow
She's tryin' to get to heaven fo' they close the do''

'Trying to Get to Heaven' is another song which is almost a mosaic of traditional lines. Mike Daley was reading the above mentioned Lomax collection a while ago and found that song on page 248. He started thumbing through the book and unearthed a number of other lines that appear in the song:

'Seal up your book, John, and don't write any more'
'John the Revelator' (page 252)

'This train don't pull no gamblers, no midnight ramblers, this train!'
'This Train' (page 255)

'Ridin' in the buggy, Miss Mary Jane...Sally got a house in Baltimo''
'Miss Mary Jane' (page 259)

'I wanted sugah very much, I went to Sugah town
I climbed up in that sugah tree an' I shook that sugah down'
'Buck-eye Rabbit' (page 266)

Without wanting to start sounding like a certain AJ, it may be worth noting that these five quotes almost appear in the same order in the song as in the book. It's probably not unreasonable to imagine that Dylan might have spent a night or two thumbing through this volume himself. (The "train don't pull no gamblers" line also appears in Curtis Mayfield's ***"People Get Ready,"*** a song Dylan has recorded three times over the years.)

Another clear correlation comes from ***'I Will Turn Your Money Green,'*** recorded by Furry Lewis on August 28, 1928:

'When I was in Missouri, would not let me be
When I was in Missouri, would not let me be
Wouldn't rest contented 'til I came to Tennessee'
'I Will Turn Your Money Green'

Other possible connections with this song are a little less obvious, but there are many songs containing references to "going down to New Orleans," such as this one, collected from Rufus Crisp in Kentucky in 1953:

'Take my knapsack on my back
Rifle on my shoulder.
Goin' down to New Orleans
Goin' to be a soldier'

'Rocky Mountain'

Till I Fell in Love With You

This is another blues that, like ***'Million Miles,'*** is strongly reminiscent of many songs without throwing up any specific models. Some people have been disappointed at the number of 12-bar blues songs on the album and the absence of "tunes," a point of view I find bemusing. But then, I love the blues and don't see such things as album filler or easy options.

Interestingly, the song that this most reminds me of is not a blues at all. It is ***'Crying,'*** a beautiful number by the late Roy Orbison.

'I was all right for a while, I could smile for a while
Then I saw you last night, you held my hand so tight
When you stopped to say hello
You were wishing me well, you couldn't tell
That I'd been crying over you
Crying over you
And you said "So long"
And left me standing all alone
Alone and crying…'

'Crying'

Not Dark Yet

She wrote me a letter and she wrote it so kind…

A letter from a loved one features in countless folk and blues songs – far more often, for some reason, than they appear in pop or rock songs. Maybe the presence of the telephone has made the arrival of the letter less of an event. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee's ***'East Coast Blues'*** not only has a reference to a letter and what was in the writer's mind, it also – as mentioned in part eight – contains a connection with the last line of ***'Standing in the Doorway.'***

Woke up this mornin', woke up this mornin'
Blues all around my head, Lord lordy,
Woke up this mornin', blues all around my head.
Well I dreamed last night, the girl I loved was dead.

You can read my letter, you can read my letter
You sure can't read my mind, Lord lordy,
You can read my letter, you sure can't read my mind.
Well when you see me laughin', I'm laughin' just to keep from cryin'

'East Coast Blues'

However, the source of this quote was surely Slim Critchlow's "Girl From the Red River Shore," collected in "American Ballads & Folk Songs" by John A. Lomax & Alan Lomax. The fourth verse goes:

'She wrote me a letter, and she wrote it so kind,
And in this letter, these words you could find:
"Come back to me, darling. You're the one I adore,
You're the one I would marry on Red River shore."'

'Girl From the Red River Shore'

A song of the same name has been rumoured as an outtake from "TOOM," but it has generally been referred to as an original composition. While that is possible, this is most probably the song that was recorded, the original sources of the rumour having been unaware that it was a traditional song.

"I can't even hear the murmur of a prayer" is a phrase that must feature in many places, but 'Somebody's Darling' by Marie Ravenal de la Coste and John Hill Hewitt has a turn of phrase that somehow sounds very familiar:

'Give him a kiss, but for Somebody's sake,
Murmur a prayer for him, soft and low'

'Somebody's Darling'

Cold Irons Bound

The most striking thing about this song is certainly the title, a phrase that conjures up a number of images and meanings without being pinned down by one – is he bound *by* or *for* cold irons? Again, there is an echo of many songs, if no specific model, one such being ***'The Fields Have Turned Brown'*** (quoted in the first line of the song) by the Stanley Brothers and another being the traditional Irish ballad, ***'The Constant Farmer's Son.'***

'The brothers they were taken, and sent away to jail,
Bound down for by strong irons, their sins for to prevail,
The jury found them guilty, and the Judge to them did say,
For the murdering of young Willie, your lives in forfeit pay.'

'The Constant Farmer's Son'

Then there is a song by Dave Swarbrick and Richard Thompson that appeared as the b-side of a Fairport Convention single back in 1970 that went:

'When the fire is grown too fierce to breathe
In burning irons I'll be bound
Fiercest fire weary to the sound upon the wheel'

'Now Be Thankful'

I'd be surprised if Dylan has ever heard that one, but he would surely be familiar with the traditional song ***'Loving Hannah'*** which goes:

'I went to church last Sunday
My true love passed me by
I could see her mind was a changing
By the roving of her eye'

'Loving Hannah'

To Make You Feel My Love

Somehow, it doesn't seem a fruitful enterprise to hunt for songs that contain sentiments such as "I could hold you for a million years" or "I could make you happy, make your dreams come true." Perhaps the most striking achievement of this song is its avoiding the "moon" and "June" rhyme – though the one time Dylan did employ this hoary cliché, it was in the striking "They're not showing any lights tonight and there's no moon / There's just a hot-blooded singer singing 'Memphis in June'." The phrase "winds of change" will always – in the UK, at least – be associated with Harold MacMillan's famous speech in Cape Town in 1960 ("The wind of change is blowing through this continent…"), but it is hard to conceive of this being on Dylan's mind when he wrote the piece.

Most people find it hard to understand why such a bland song made the cut, elbowing out the reportedly excellent ***'Mississippi'*** and ***'Girl From the Red River Shore,'*** but, as a friend of mine observed, this one works much better if you view it through your David Lynch glasses. Seen in this way, "I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue, I'd go crawling down the avenue" does not sound quite so insipid.

Can't Wait

'Can't Wait' is – like ***'Million Miles'*** and ***'Til I Fell in Love With You'*** – the kind of mid-paced blues that seems to bore some listeners if there's more than one per album, but it's one that certainly warms my soul. This is the only song on the album that has changed drastically in live performance, the sprightly rhythm of the stage version changing the mood from despair to sardonic anger. The studio version has a hypnotic groove that is strongly reminiscent, to these ears, of Howlin' Wolf's early recordings**…** ***'Smokestack Lightnin''*** or ***'Evil,'*** for example. There are expressions that jab at the memory – "trying to walk the line," "I'm your man," "the sweet love we knew," "night or day," "rolling through stormy weather," "graveyard of my mind" – that suggest other songs (such as – "No, no, ma'ma, I can't wait…"from the Mississippi Sheiks' ***'Blood in My Eyes'),*** but few specific models.

One thought that came to me after listening to ***"TOOM"*** was that ***"Blonde on Blonde," "Blood on the Tracks"*** and ***"Time Out of Mind"*** make a striking triptych – the same deeply romantic sensibility in youth, middle- and old-age, toiling through a surreal landscape that always tends toward the apocalyptic. When Dylan sings, "I'm breathing hard, standing at the gate," it immediately suggests another gate, the one he was standing outside in ***'Absolutely Sweet Marie'*** three decades before, back when he was only half- and not utterly sick.

Highlands

Some people have pointed out that William Saroyan wrote a play entitled ***"My Heart's in the Highlands,"*** and also that Jack Kerouac mentioned the play in his book ***"Vanity of Dulouz."*** While Dylan could well be conversant with these works, the clear model for the song is ***'My Heart's in the Highlands'*** by Robert Burns. Since Burns died over 200 years ago and all his writings are long since out of copyright, I can print the poem in full:

My Heart's in the Highlands

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer,
Chasing the wild deer, and following the row –
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,
The birth-place of valour, the country of worth!
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands forever I love.

Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow,
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below,
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods,
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods!

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer,
Chasing the wild deer, and following the row –
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.

Robert Burns (1756-1796)

This Scottish connection explains the "Aberdeen waters," of course, though there is an Aberdeen in Mississippi which was sung about by Bukka White.

The most striking scene in the song is the conversation with the waitress, in particular the exchange in which she guesses that he doesn't read women writers and he counters that he's read Erica Jong. He evidently has, too. In ***"Any Woman's Blues,"*** published in 1990, Jong wrote:

"I am looking now at one of the paintings I painted to his design (he had scribbled a rough sketch on a napkin; I, of course, had painted it), and there's no denying that it's an abortion. Not my style at all."

"Any Woman's Blues"

And Jong is certainly aware of Dylan, too. In her ***"Inventing Memory,"*** published in 1997, the same year as ***"Time Out of Mind,"*** she talks at one point about the funeral of a rock star named Sally Sky, mentioning:

"…a very rambling Dylan, who allowed as how much he had loved Sally, how he wished he could have saved her, how she was always her muse."

'Inventing Memory'

One last possible connection with this song, suggested to me by Pete Oppel, is the song ***'The Beautiful Waitress'*** by Terry Allen in 1978. The last (spoken) part of the song goes:

'A waitress asked me what I did.
I told her I tried to make art.
She asked me if I made any money.
I said no… I have to teach to do that.
She asked me what I taught and where.
I told her.
She told me she liked art, but that she
couldn't draw a straight line.
I told her if she could reach for something
and pick it up, she could draw a line that
was straight enough.
She said she wasn't interested in that kind
of drawing… but had always liked horses.
I said I did too, but they are hard to draw.
She said yes that was very true… said she
could do the body okay, but never get the
head, tail or legs.
I told her she was drawing sausages… not horse.
She said no… they were horses.

As for the musical influences on this song, Dylan has said that the riff is taken from a Charlie Patton song. It certainly sounds like one, but after having worked my way through every song that Patton recorded, I haven't found an exact match. Many of the songs come close though, and ***'Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues'*** or ***'Down the Dirt Road Blues'*** could well have been on his mind when he came up with the riff.

Mississippi

This is the one outtake from the ***"TOOM"*** sessions that we know about, from the recording by Sheryl Crow that is included on her new album. The words fit nicely with the rest of the album, and it is good to note that Dylan has kept up his amazing record of

dealing his albums a sucker punch after all the hard work has been done. (Do we *really* wish that he'd included ***'Blind Willie McTell'*** instead of ***'Union Sundown'*** on ***"Infidels"****?* I for one get much masochistic pleasure from fretting about what might have been.)

Back in 1947, Alan Lomax (who's name is cropping up very frequently in the discussion of ***"TOOM"***... is it just a coincidence that Rounder launched an enormous reissue programme of many of Lomax's recordings in 1997? Probably, since the songs on ***"TOOM"*** would have been written before that, but Dylan is undoubtedly familiar with much of Lomax's work.) visited Parchman Farm and recorded many of the inmates. ***On "Prison Songs, Vol. 2: Don'tcha Hear Poor Mother Calling,"*** there is a recording of a chain gang swinging their axes and singing ***'O Rosie.'*** The chorus of this song is the exact same line as the chorus to ***'Mississippi':***

'Just one thing that I did wrong
I stayed in Mississippi a day too long'

There is also an old freedom song, ***'Keep your Eyes on the Prize'*** which contains the lines:

'The only thing that we did wrong
Is stayed in the wilderness a day too long'

I would imagine that the prison song is a later variant of this. The Alan Lomax Collection on Rounder now runs to many volumes, and when it's completed, it will include over 100 CDs. For information on all the releases, go to this page on Rounder's website:

* * *

Next month, I'll be concluding this series with a mopping up operation, covering some of the many connections I've missed. As always, comments and corrections are welcome. Write to: ***Isis, P.O. Box 1182, Bedworth, Warwickshire CV12 0AZ*** *or me at* ***13 Audley Grove, Bath BA1 3BS*** *or email us at* ***ISIS@netcomuk.co.uk*** *or (note the new email address)* ***m.zuckerman@cwcom.net.***

If There's An Original Thought Out There, I Could Use It Right Now

The Folk Roots of Bob Dylan

by Matthew Zuckerman

"It's a proven fact: most people who say 'I love you' don't mean it. Doctors have proved that. So love generates a lot of songs. Probably more than a lot. Now it's not my intention to have love influence my songs. Any more than it influenced Chuck Berry's songs or Woody Guthrie's or Hank Williams'. Hank Williams, they're not love songs. You're degrading them calling them love songs. Those are songs from the Tree of Life. There's no love on the Tree of Life. Love is on the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Good and Evil. So we have a lot of songs in popular music about love. Who needs them? Not you, not me."

Bob Dylan, 1991

Part Ten

Since the previous installment of ***'Original Thoughts,'*** *Michael Gray's third edition of* ***"Song & Dance Man"*** *has appeared, and it includes some marvellous chapters on various sources of Dylan's songs, from the blues and the Bible to nursery rhymes. It is tempting to recycle many of his observations here, but rather than do that, I recommend that anyone who hasn't already done so go out and buy a copy now.*

This final chapter is a mopping up exercise, dealing with a handful of songs that I missed earlier. ***'Original Thoughts'*** *started by my pointing out to someone on the web that no, Dylan did not rip off the words of a Paul Simon song when he wrote* ***'Girl From the North Country.'*** *It then became a short list of traditional songs he had used as a basis for new songs, then a longer list, then a tape, then an essay in a college journal, and finally this series of articles. It has stretched out now to almost 25,000 words. If I'd known how much time it was going to take, I never would have started. But then, I guess that goes for most things in life. One day, if I ever have the energy and time, I might go back and do it properly. Then again, probably not. Anyway, many thanks for all the comments, suggestions and corrections. I've tried to include all the names of the people who have helped at the end of this column, but apologies and thanks to anyone whose name may have got lost. If you saw the state of my office, you'd understand.*

Original song: **Rough Alley Blues (Blind Willie McTell)**
Dylan song: **Lay Lady Lay (1969)**

I've heard a number of people over the years comment on the sexist nature of ***'Lay Lady Lay,'*** so it was interesting to hear Ruth Mary Willis in a duet with Blind Willie McTell singing:

'I'll take you to my room and lay you 'cross my big brass bed'
'Rough Alley Blues'

She sings this twice in the first eight bars of the verse, and in the last line, McTell replies with (as far as I can decipher) the delightful:

'I guess, I believe I'll see your navel turn cherry red'

which in turn brings Dylan's ***'Standing in the Doorway'*** to mind. Incidentally, ***'Rough Alley Blues'*** was recorded on 23 October, 1931, the same day that (as Blind Sammie) he recorded ***'Broke Down Engine Blues,'*** a song that Dylan covered on ***"World Gone Wrong."*** Both these songs (and 39 others) are available on ***"The Definitive Blind Willie McTell"*** on Sony's Roots 'n' Blues label.

Original song: **Talmudic Blessing (trad)**
Dylan song: **Forever Young (1973)**
In a recent posting on the internet, Seth Kulick made the following comment:

"I attended a genital mutilation (sic) service yesterday morning, and one of the readings that was done was a ***'Talmudic Blessing' (Brachot 17a)*** that seemed quite similar in structure to ***'Forever Young.'*** This is probably a stretch, but what the heck, it might be of interest."

'May you live to see your world fulfilled
May your destiny be for worlds still to come,
And may you trust in generations past and yet to be.
May your heart be filled with intuition
and your words filled with insight.
May songs of praise ever be on your tongue
and your vision be on a straight path before you
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words
and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens
May your lips speak wisdom
and your fulfillment be in righteousness
even as you ever yearn to hear the words
of the Holy Ancient One of Old'

Original song: **See See Ryder (Mississippi John Hurt)**
Dylan song: **Buckets of Rain (1974)**
Back in 1963, Dylan appeared at the Newport Folk Festival, and it is hilarious now to hear him belting out ***'Blowin' in the Wind'*** with a cast that included Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Judy Collins and heaven knows who else trying in vain to harmonize behind him. Songs performed at the festival and issued on Vanguard's album ***"The Evening Concerts"*** include ***'Stagolee'***(by Mississippi John Hurt), ***'Diamond Joe'*** (Jack Elliott), ***'Wagoner's Lad'*** (Joan Baez), ***'Candy Man'*** (Dave Von Ronk), and ***'This Land Is Your Land'*** (by Seeger and the whole cast). Also on the bill was Mississippi John Hurt who did a version of the traditional ***'See See Rider'*** which has a guitar arrangement very reminiscent of the guitar part to ***'Buckets of Rain.'***

Original song: **Mother Earth (Memphis Slim)**
Dylan song: **Gotta Serve Somebody (April 1979)**

In part seven of this series, I suggested Woody Guthrie's ***'Little Black Train'*** as an influence on ***'Gotta Serve Somebody.'*** Another possible source which has been pointed out to me is Memphis Slim's ***'Mother Earth'*** which goes:

'You may own half a city, even diamonds and pearls,
You may buy a plane baby and fly all over the earth,
Don't care how great you are,
Don't care what you're worth,
When it all is up you got to go back to mother earth.'
'Mother Earth'

Original song: **St. James Infirmary (trad); Dying Crapshooter (trad); The Unfortunate Rake (trad)**
Dylan song: **Blind Willie McTell (April 1983)**

Much has been written about the sources of this song, most notably by Michael Gray in ***"Song & Dance Man."*** It is based on the ***'Unfortunate Rake'*** family of songs, versions of which are to be found on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1960, Folkways released an album entitled ***"The Unfortunate Rake: A Study in the Evolution of a Ballad,"*** including 18 variants sung by A.L. Lloyd, Ewan MacColl, Harry Cox, Alan Lomax, Dave Van Ronk and others. Smithsonian Folkways has not yet, I believe, released this album on CD, but it is available on tape, with a photocopy of the sleeve notes. To order a copy, call 1-202-287-3262 or write to the Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, 955 l'Enfant Plaza 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC 20560, USA.

One of the variants of this song is ***'St. James Infirmary'*** (also known as ***'St. James Hospital'),*** and in ***'Blind Willie McTell,'*** Dylan sings: "I'm staring out the window / Of the old St. James Hotel…". I read somewhere that there really is a St. James Hotel – by all accounts a marvellous old building in Minnesota that looks out on Highway 61, a road that leads down to New Orleans where the infirmary is to be found. This is the only lyrical connection between ***'Blind Willie McTell'*** and this family of songs, but the musical relationship is unmistakable.

Blind Willie McTell (the singer, not the song) recorded his version of the song as ***'Dying Crapshooter Blues'*** for Alan Lomax in 1940, and it is to be found on a Biograph collection of his Library of Congress recordings. He also re-recorded the song in 1949 and 1956.

The most famous recording of any of the ***'Unfortunate Rake'*** variants is Louis Armstrong's 1928 version of ***'St. James Infirmary.'*** Armstrong's 1928 recordings (with Earl Hines on piano) are among the greatest in all recorded music, and are strongly recommended to anyone of whatever musical persuasion. These sessions are out of copyright and therefore available on many labels. Columbia owns the masters and should have released the definitive version, but their CDs boast miserable sound. The best is a 4CD boxed set by JSP that has recently been issued at a budget price, and I can think of no better way of being separated from £20 than purchasing it.

Original song: **Danville Girl (trad)**
Dylan song: **New Danville Girl (March 1989)**

'New Danville Girl' is the original version of what became ***'Brownsville Girl,'*** and it owes its title to the songs ***'Danville Girl'*** and ***'Danville Girl No. 2,'*** recorded by Dock Boggs and Woody Guthrie respectively.

One variant has a verse which is clearly a source for the chorus of the Dylan/Sam Shepherd song:

'I got off at Danville
Got stuck on a Danville girl
You can bet your life she was a pearl
She wore that Danville curl'

'Danville Girl'

Incidentally, as well as being an influence on the Dylan song, ***'Danville Girl'*** gave rise to another composition, Jimmie Rodgers' classic ***'Waiting for a Train.'*** Also, as I observed a couple of installments ago, there is at least one version of the song which has the singer smoking a cheap cigar, as Dylan does in ***'Standing in the Doorway.'***

Original song: **Junko Partner (trad)**
Dylan song: **Under Your Spell (March 1989)**

'Junko Partner' is a traditional New Orleans song which has been recorded a number of times by Dr John, among others. Although very different in every detail to ***'Under Your Spell,'*** it does prove to be the source of the distinctive phrase that appears in the song and that Dylan chose as the title of the album on which it appears.

'Down the road, down the road
I spied my junko partner
He was loaded as can be;
He was knocked out –
Knocked out loaded,
He was loaded with misery'

'Junko Partner'

Original song: **The Unfortunate Rake (trad)**
Dylan song: **Where Teardrops Fall (March 1989)**

Although there is no other connection, the line "We banged the drum slowly and played the fife lowly…" from ***'Where Teardrops Fall'*** is a floating' line found in similar form in numerous variants of the ***'The Unfortunate Rake'*** song family. See the entry above on ***'Blind Willie McTell'*** for a discussion of this song.

The words refer, of course, to death – and often specifically to funerals. ***'Streets of Laredo'*** (also known as ***'The Cowboy's Lament')*** is one of the best known of this family. In the song, a dying cowboy tells his comrades:

'O, beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly,
Play the dead march as they carry me along,
Put bunches of roses all over my coffin,
Roses to deaden the clods as they fall…'

'Streets of Laredo'

In closing, there's a delightful parody of this song on the Folkways anthology ***"The Unfortunate Rake"*** that goes:

'Oh beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly,
Play the death march as you carry me along;
Take me back to fair Kansas, there lay the sod o'er me
For I'm a professor and I know I've done wrong.

Get six happy colleagues to carry my coffin,
Six pretty coeds, short, medium and tall;
Put acres of bluebooks all over my coffin,
Bluebooks to deaden the sods as they fall.'

'The Professor's Lament'

There's a lot more I could write – about the similarity in the melodies *of* ***'Lay Down Your Weary Tune'*** and ***'O Waly Waly' ('The Water Is Wide'),*** or the debt the lyrics might owe to Shakespeare's ***"Tempest"*** ("The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder, that deep and dreadful organ-pipe pronounc'd…"), or… – but it's four in the morning, and I've promised Tracy that this will be waiting for her on her computer screen when she wakes up. When all these 'borrowings' from other songs are pointed out, there are some who surmise from it that Dylan is not the great original talent that he is said to be. But all of us have access to the same songs and – as long as we stay the right side of the lawsuits – we could all have taken as much. But what would the results have been? Let me end with a quote from William Blake that I used some months back and that T.S. Eliot, ah, borrowed for a famous quote of his own:

The difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is: the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great deal. The Good one Really Does Copy a Great deal.

* * *

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