

"Older Then, Younger Now": Bob Dylan through Late Style

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

This thesis will argue that Bob Dylan's art is one of renewal and recycling, one in which the very concept of originality and "an artistic career" is queried. The peculiar nature of Dylan's relationship with chronology was set as early as 1964 with the assertion of "My Back Pages" that "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now." Dylan's project has always been one of destabilising and productively representing the self (rather than himself), anticipating how his work is received and demolishing that reception.

I analyse the patterns of revisionary disruption within Dylan's work, at first using Edward Said's *On Late Style*. Necessarily, attention then shifts toward Said's precursor, Theodor Adorno. The study therefore contributes significantly to our understanding of Dylan, and in particular by focusing on areas of his work that have sometimes seen as aberrations (his Christmas album, his cover version of Sinatra, his much-derided *Self Portrait*), but it also adds to the discourse on late style by demonstrating how lateness is not a matter of age, but of decision and commitment on the part of an artist. It also questions Adorno's insistence that such matters are limited to the domain of classical forms of expression, and develops Perry Meisel's related conception of canonicity contra Adorno.

Dylan's late style disagrees with Said and Adorno on lateness, particularly in how they relate it to idea of biological aging. While the older Dylan may be seen to be in possession of a late style, the Dylan who arrived on the scene in the 1960s did so too. He has always disrupted how others might see him, and has always run the risk of destroying his own settled reputation. Dylan has always played Prospero, therefore, he is (and was) always late.

Introduction

On October 9, 2018, an exhibition of works by Bob Dylan opened at London's Halcyon Gallery entitled *Mondo Scripto*. It showcased framed sheets of headed paper upon which Dylan had written out in black ink the lyrics to sixty of his own songs, then adjoining each sheet (within its frame) was a pencil-drawing by Dylan which corresponded with to a particular image from the lyric. Paul Green of the Halcyon proclaimed *Mondo Scripto* as an unprecedented demonstration of Bob Dylan's mixed-media practices: "Dylan has for the first time fused together his artistic disciplines" (qtd. in "Bob Dylan, Mondo Scripto").¹ To give this a further aspect of the unprecedented and auratic, a modest collection of Dylan's earlier paintings was also displayed, while a sound-system kept his musical back-catalogue playing throughout. Undoubtedly, this offered the exhibition an unexpected vitality. Also juxtaposed throughout the gallery with the colourful paintings of Dylan's exhibit from 2016, *The Beaten Path*, these newer monochrome drawings appeared unfinished, as if they had been framed before the artist had an opportunity to complete them. Furthermore, given Dylan's decision to focus on one particular character or idea from a chosen song, the viewer's imagination was also inevitably drawn towards thinking of the surplus of images from the song which remain undrawn.² Compared to the song-texts, the sketches offer only a semblance of a line or word; a fraction of the work.

Re-inscribing the lyrics in ink, Dylan appears to offer the authentication of an autographed copy, authorizing his songs as literature. Yet portions of the rewritten lyrics do

¹ It should be added that the mixed-media concept behind *Mondo Scripto* was not unprecedented. *Self Portrait* (1970) and *Planet Waves* (1974) both possessed cover art that Dylan himself had drawn for the purposes of each album. Unlike the cover art on the earlier albums, however, these subsequent drawings were the product of Dylan's revisiting a number of earlier works.

² Although one exception exists in the panels for "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," where Dylan presents the song's protagonist using everything from his closed fists, a baseball bat, a pneumatic drill and a crucifix to knock on the door in question. This calls attention to Dylan's reluctance to experiment similarly when it came to other lyrics.

not necessarily correspond with the audio recordings being played simultaneously through the Gallery's speakers. Despite the fact that Dylan had written, recorded and consistently played these songs across the previous decades, an inescapable intrigue surrounds the errors in the text that appear throughout, the inconsistencies which might be read as faults in transcription or calculated disruptions. Such a quandary in many ways defines where the scholar of Dylan always ends up, second-guessing the man and the work, and above all pondering apparent inconsistencies. In her assessment of *Mondo Scripto*, Anne Margaret Daniel remarked that such inconsistencies feature across the broad spectrum of Dylan's contemporary work: "One thing is for certain sure: Dylan is still revising today, in performance, and in the texts he's just released publicly for his *Mondo Scripto* show. He's using words and phrases that might be brand new, or that he might have written ... decades ago" (29). Green's claim that *Mondo Scripto* was "bringing a new perspective to the music and lyrics" is somewhat accurate; but as Daniel demonstrates, it is also something which Dylan has always done, disrupting the foundations upon which his work might be understood and querying assumptions about reception and transmission. This could be defined as his artistic signature (even as he queries the idea of artistic signature).

Released within a month of the exhibition, the fourteenth edition in Dylan's bootleg series *More Blood, More Tracks* offered a similar cause for reassessing what is understood of Dylan's work. As Daniel notes: "Read his changed lyrics at the Halcyon Gallery, and listen to the versions on *More Blood, More Tracks*, to hear for yourself what is old, what's new, what might be borrowed, and a whole lot of blues" (29). This mammoth collection of demos, rehearsals, failed takes and previously unreleased songs came from the various strands of songs recorded during the sessions that culminated with Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* (1975). As an accompaniment to his *Mondo Scripto* show, it appears as if Dylan sought to link both projects from the outset. Of the changes made to his lyrics for the exhibition, it does not appear

coincidental that a large proportion of the most heavily altered songs originally appeared on *Blood on the Tracks*., and so “You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go” underwent wholesale revisions, Dylan opting to change all but the song’s title and connected refrain. Likewise, “Tangled Up In Blue,” “Simple Twist of Fate” and “Shelter From the Storm” were all deemed worthy of major modifications. Such rewritings are different from studio outtakes or other material that failed to make the album in question, at least physically. Yet as Daniel argues, both *More Blood, More Tracks* and *Mondo Scripto* serve to further complicate our understanding of what constitutes Dylan’s end product:

These days, when Dylan sings “Tangled Up In Blue” with the instruction “memorize these lines and remember these rhymes,” he’s grinning at you. As soon as you’ve gotten them set in your head, he’ll change them on you. Those songs you know by heart? He’s been knowing them longer, and has plenty more to put into them – lines he created in 1974, and lines he’s written some time since. He’s The Joker, The Riddler, both masks he loves to wear on stage. His lyrics for not just the songs in these notebooks, but for others, remain protean; he’s still revising and shifting. (29).

Returning to the miniaturist drawings presented in Dylan’s *Mondo Scripto*, this approach appears especially pertinent. Framed and hanging on a gallery wall, one is nevertheless uncertain as to whether or not Dylan intends to retrieve the pencilled sketching and carry on from where he has left off. How significant are these lyrics-in-a-box, for sale at mostly five figure prices? Are these objects of veneration, or examples of the artist capitalizing his reputation by cannibalizing his previous output? Are they for connoisseurs of fine art, or ludicrously well-heeled fans? Is Dylan exemplifying the workings of the culture industry or excoriating them? Is he for real?

Characterising Dylan’s “refusal to be categorised or canonised,” Daniel touches on an irreconcilability in these later works that tallies with Theodor Adorno’s assessment of

Beethoven's later years: "His late work still remains process, but not as development" (29; "Late Style in Beethoven" 567). Indicative of what Adorno termed Beethoven's late style, it is argued that the composer's late works "no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity"(567). This is in direct contrast to the mastery of the form Beethoven had evidenced throughout earlier periods of his life, and a calculated cause of some consternation. In his writing on lateness, Edward Said outlined the importance of Beethoven's late style as Adorno understood it:

For Adorno, far more than for anyone who has spoken of Beethoven's last works, those compositions that belong to what is known as the composer's third period ... constitute an event in the history of modern culture. ... What Adorno has to say about late Beethoven throughout his voluminous writings (Adorno died in 1969) is clearly a philosophical construction that served as a sort of beginning point for all his analyses of subsequent music (*On Late Style* 7-8).

Both *Mondo Scripto* and *More Blood, More Tracks* similarly open a space for exploring what can be regarded as Bob Dylan's late style. Destabilising the accepted idea of how certain songs ought to appear or sound, Dylan's revisionist approach to his own work mirrors what Said identified as the instigating factor behind Adorno's work on the late Beethoven: "What has evidently gripped Adorno in Beethoven's late work is its episodic character, its apparent disregard for its own continuity" (10). After encountering a certain number of the framed lyrics at *Mondo Scripto*, or listening to what Dylan chose to release by way of *More Blood, More Tracks*, who is to say what may be regarded as the actual version of a given song? Who can tell when one of Dylan's songs is said to be finished? With its sprawling list of unfinished demos and rehearsals, *More Blood, More Tracks*, in comparison to the album from which some semblance of order was wrought over forty years earlier, demonstrates a sense of upheaval and uncertainty the like of which Adorno locates in Beethoven.

Constructing a wider framework by which to measure the emergence of a late style in alternative artist's lives, Edward Said's *On Late Style* characterised the root of the contradiction: "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (8). Compromising the illusion of certainty surrounding his music, Dylan's behaviour toward his own work mirrors that which Adorno ascribes to the late Beethoven: "He tears them apart in time, in order, perhaps, to preserve them for the eternal" (567). Considering Dylan's relationship with his own "established social order," Daniel demonstrates the artist's willingness to upset this arrangement between artist and audience: "Self-proclaimed purists who love their favourite songs and gripe about Dylan's changes after concerts, beware: these might not, in fact, be "new," but might just be Dylan's initial ideas that he's decided, only now, to share with us" (29). Yet, as Daniel goes on to note: "[Dylan's] been revising forever, reworking his songs since they were "finished"" (29). "The disregard for continuity" which Said discusses has been a phenomenon in Dylan from the beginning, therefore he has always been "late". This is what this thesis will explore, how late style can be used as a lens for interpreting Dylan, but also how lateness is a presence in everything he has written or performed.

The revisiting and revising of earlier works, and not only his own, has consistently been of great importance to Dylan, whether re-making Woody Guthrie or Bing Crosby, whether it was in 1964 or 2016. The perpetual lateness of Dylan necessarily complicates the importance of chronology that both Adorno and Said afford to the emergence of an artist's late style. In one regard, Said notes the inescapable presence of the artist's "impending death" whilst creating his late style works (9). Furthermore, detailing the evident changes in Beethoven's third-period of creativity, Said highlights the important presence of a more technically accomplished period that preceded it:

If we compare a middle-period work, such as the *Eroica* with the opus 110 sonata, we will be struck with the totally cogent and integrative driven logic of the former and the somewhat distracted, often extremely careless and repetitive character of the latter. The opening theme in the thirty-first sonata is spaced very awkwardly, and when it moves on after the trill, its accompaniment – a studentlike, almost clumsy repetitive figure – is, Adorno correctly says, “unabashedly primitive.” And so it goes in the late works, massive polyphonic writing of the most abstruse and difficult sort alternating with what Adorno calls “conventions” that are often seemingly unmotivated rhetorical devices like trills, or appoggiaturas whose role in the work seems unintegrated into the structure (10).

Lateness here is a way of reacting against your earlier work, of unmaking your previous integrations and achievements, motivated by the terminal logic of oncoming death. Late style queries the myth of the artist’s progress that the artists themselves make, to the degree of creating regression and aggression, a late-life trashing of the idea of their canonical ascendancy. In the case of Dylan’s career, however, such a linear reading is not plausible. Of the artist’s numerous albums, it is not possible to determine where Dylan embodies the equivalent of Beethoven’s second-period. Dylan has phases, but maybe too many to settle into a progressive life-text. Is *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963) more representative of his technical proficiency than *Time out of Mind* (1997)? Does *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) signify an artistic high-point that could not have been said to have occurred with the release of *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) or *Blonde on Blonde* (1966)? In her assessment of *Mondo Scripto* and *More Blood, More Tracks*, Daniel’s understanding of the artist’s creativity rests on the notion that these characteristics typical of a late style have been evident throughout various stages of Dylan’s career: “He is a Nobel Laureate “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition,” and he’s keeping it new, or, in a Modernist directive, taking his own art and making it new” (29).

If we cannot adequately chart the development of Dylan's career in terms of an early, middle or late period of creativity, that is because Dylan has practically created a tricksterish, time-space continuum of his own, a zone wherein the pleasure of experiencing his work is always complemented by degrees of trepidation about intentionality, originality and taste. This trepidation is only added to when Dylan performs another gesture calculated to generate surprise, be it going electric or recording an advertisement for Victoria's Secret. Late style allows for Dylan's conventionally heroic achievements to be read in connection to apparently abject aberrations, a mode of understanding which might allow ultimately for a reading wherein the abject and the heroic might be seen not so much as opposites, but as things on the same page. This thesis seeks to embrace and understand such confusions.

Chapter One: Lateness and Greatness

Patty loved early summer in the north, it took her back to her first days in Hibbing with Walter. The crisp air and moist earth, the conifer smells, the morning of her life. She felt she'd never been younger than she'd been at twenty-one. It was as if her Westchester childhood, though chronologically prior, had somehow taken place in a later and more fallen time.

- Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom* (166)

Introducing Edward Said's posthumously published *On Late Style*, Michael Wood identified how "lateness doesn't name a single relation to time, but [instead] always brings time in its wake" (xi). Aware of an impending conclusion, being late ultimately determines that one is still being, still alive. It is in this inconclusive period that Said sought to root his investigation of the late works of great artists. Having previously considered "the whole notion of beginning [and] ... the exfoliation from a beginning," Said turned to lateness:

The last or late period of life, the decay of the body, the onset of ill health or other factors that even in a younger person bring on the possibility of an untimely end. I shall focus on great artists and how near the end of their lives their work and thought acquires a new idiom, what I shall be calling a late style (*On Late Style* 6-7).

Using Theodor Adorno as his theoretical model, Said identifies the phenomenon of lateness as a rationale for the intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction of great artists in the face of death. Lateness as a revisionary mode is what such artists experience, but it is also what they can identify in others. So in Jonathan Franzen's depiction in *Freedom* (2010), quoted above, of Patty in her house by the woods, from her holiday home in rural Minnesota, a married woman from New York State is brought back to the early days of her relationship with her Minnesotan husband in the nearby city of Hibbing. Convoluting her own sense of timeliness,

the childhood that “had somehow taken place in a later and more fallen time”, Patty’s life-text corresponds with the work of Bob Dylan. Raised in the same city of Hibbing, Minnesota, there is a certain resonance between Patty’s thoughts and Dylan’s own assessment of his relationship to time in “My Back Pages” on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*: “Ah, but I was so much older then / I’m younger than that now”.

Taken from a 1964 album that is therefore an early work in Dylan’s chronology, this line provides the refrain for each verse in the song, and expresses a tendency towards late disruption from his very beginning. Although it has been read as an imperfect demonstration of the new artistic direction Dylan sought for his work at the time, biographer Clinton Heylin nonetheless affords the song the purpose of making “this new vantage point plain” (*Revolution in the Air* 251). These words hint at Dylan’s desire for a progressive shift in his work, and further suggest that he wanted to alter the received perception of himself as a protest singer. In a discussion with Nat Hentoff during the recording of the album, we can appreciate the artist’s attempt at shunning the undesired attention and responsibilities of this role:

There aren’t any finger-pointing songs in here, either. Those records I’ve already made, I’ll stand behind them; but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard and a lot of it was because I didn’t see anybody else doing that kind of thing. Now a lot of people are doing finger-pointing songs. ... Me, I don’t want to write *for* people anymore. You know – be a spokesman. ... From now on, I want to write from inside me, and to do that I’m going to have to get back to writing like I used to when I was ten – having everything come out naturally (“The Crackin’, Shakin’, Breakin’, Sounds.” 15-16).

Severing ties with what Edward Said termed the “established social order,” Dylan’s backward-looking approach to progress invokes another line of his that would come in “*Love and Theft*”, almost forty years after *Another Side of Bob Dylan*: “She says, ‘You can’t repeat the past.’ I say, ‘You can’t? What do you mean, / you can’t? Of course you can’” (“Summer Days”). This

comes from a figure who in the same song finds himself referred to as “a worn-out star.” So lateness has consistently informed Dylan’s work, regardless of age. This would appear to raise questions regarding how one may identify his late style in the Saidian terms of resisting a previously-existing secure middle ground. If lateness permeates Dylan’s work across the entirety of his career, was he simply born late, creating work that is perennially afflicted by lateness? Can one accurately assess his output in light of Said’s time-sensitive theory? Said’s study of late style relies upon the premise of lateness as a precursor to death, yet lateness in Dylan’s work takes the form of vibrancy, mischief and chicanery.

A primary function of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate how Bob Dylan’s insistently convoluted sense of timeliness gives cause for a reconsideration of Said’s framework for late style. Considering various, often hopelessly undervalued and misrepresented periods of Dylan’s work, it is the contention of this study that Dylan’s work demonstrates Said’s theory in terms of style, but not in how that theory is chronologically-mapped. So with Dylan, late style ceases to be defined by ageing, instead taking on the appearance of a radical mode of self-critique which a serious artist can activate to necessarily reinvent their work, and in turn demand an aptly new and inventive form of critical reception.³ Contrary to the linearity of Said’s approach to the work of great artists in terms of early, middle and late, Dylan’s work cannot be read as a single progressive line of creativity reaching its climactic late style at the age-appropriate moment. Although such a reading takes a significant step away from Said’s approach, Karen Painter has outlined why such an alternative approach is feasible in her introductory essay to *Late Thoughts*:

³ The transition that was exemplified by “My Back Pages” was one of many that Dylan would undertake. Throughout the course of this opening chapter, attention will be drawn toward many similar instances of Dylan’s late style informing a radical creative shift in his artistry.

We are left with no compelling need, critically speaking, to demonstrate an artist's stylistic evolution from one phase to the next. Although academics may still tend to situate works within early, middle, and late periods, such practice is essentially a matter of pragmatism and pedagogy, not a sustained, critical project with deep roots in aesthetics or philosophy (5).

As shall be demonstrated throughout the following chapters, Dylan's work proves Painter's assertion. Having created what Heylin has described as "the most multi-faceted canon in twentieth-century popular song," Dylan has developed a reputation for radical artistic reinvention (*Revolution in the Air* 2). Biographer Ian Bell described how "for a brief while in the 1960s [Dylan] had seemed to alter daily, changing in manner, speech, style, sound and physical appearance almost as casually as most men changed their button-down shirts" (*Time Out of Mind* 9). Outlining Dylan's unexpected conversion to born-again Christianity in the late 1970s, Jon Bream further clarified Dylan's proclivity for change: "Throughout Dylan's career in the 1960s and 1970s, the one constant was unpredictable change. The shifts from protest songs to personal ones, from acoustic folk to electric rock, from folk-rock to country-rock – none were more that anyone saw coming" (120). So great is Dylan's reputation for change, that even the artist himself has taken to embracing the mythology surrounding his career. From a 2002 show in New York State onward, the following introduction would pre-empt Dylan's live performances:

Ladies and gentleman, please welcome the poet laureate of rock'n'roll. The voice of the promise of the '60s counter-culture. The guy who forced folk into bed with rock, who donned make-up in the '70s and disappeared into a haze of substance abuse, who emerged to find Jesus, who was written off as a has-been by the end of the '80s, and who suddenly shifted gears, releasing some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the late '90s. Ladies and gentleman, Bob Dylan! (qtd. in Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 439).

Taken “more or less wholesale” from an article in a Buffalo newspaper, Bell outlines that although it is a good joke, it is also “mostly true” (439). Dylan’s artistry represents a series of beginnings and endings, in no particular order. If this disrespect for chronology invalidates the usefulness of Said’s work, it does not do so entirely, not least as Dylan’s work nevertheless possesses a number of the characteristics that Said identifies as being particularly integral to late style. The premise of this thesis, therefore, is not to demonstrate an understanding of late style completely alien to Said’s theory, rather, in the same spirit as “Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now,” Dylan’s late style will be identified as a problem with time, rather than a fact of it.

I

In *Beginnings*, Edward Said identified the inescapable appeal of his topic:

Beginning is *making* or *producing difference*, but – and here is the great fascination in the subject – difference which is the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language. ... Beginnings confirm, rather than discourage, a radical severity and verify evidence of at least some innovation – of *having begun* (xxiii).

Later determining that “to identify a point as a beginning is to classify it after the fact,” the study of beginnings stands critically averse to his subsequent contemplation of lateness (29). Said identifies the presence of “the already-familiar” as being vital to the general fascination for beginnings. In terms of lateness, this factor complies with Painter’s reasoning for the interest which lateness arouses: “Our fascination with lateness arises from the fact that the decline through aging or sickness to death is a universal phenomenon” (1). Touching on various elements of the human experience, therefore, the act of beginning and the onset of lateness possess a natural, human appeal. Whereas the former can identify its relation to time, however,

determining when lateness begins is more problematic.⁴ In human terms, the beginning of a life has a few potential starting-points, each possessing a firm relation to time: conception, birth, language acquisition. Pinpointing the moment within a life where a person makes the transition from one stage to another is scarcely as straight-forward or complete, especially when we approach lateness. Once a human relationship with time begins, the certainty Said affords to beginnings becomes inevitably muddled when attention shifts toward lateness. As Wood argued in his introduction to *On Late Style*, therefore, lateness only guarantees the presence of an unquantifiable amount of time in its wake. Theoretically, lateness can then emerge as soon as one develops a relationship with time. This leaves us, however, with the question of how one can accurately establish when the artist's late style begins.

The few critics to have ventured an analysis of Dylan's late style have defined it temporally, as beginning with the 1997 release of *Time Out of Mind*, not least because of its title.⁵ As Dylan has continued to create and perform over the following twenty years, it has become harder to accept a reading which argues essentially that Dylan's album was written in the face of death, as a rigidly Saidian approach insists upon. In order to establish a critical framework that will better suit Dylan's career, therefore, the phenomenon of lateness must be contextualized differently. Charting the "shifting meanings of the word *late*," Wood's analysis of the term demonstrates the universality Painter alluded to in her assessment of the term. Furthermore, Wood opens up the possibility of investigating lateness not solely as a phenomenon of the chronologically later years, but life generally:

⁴ Attempts to overcome this difficulty can be identified in Painter's earlier dismissal of the academic temptation to situate works within convenient early, middle and late periods. If we consider the example of Beethoven (the artist both Said and Adorno devote much of their writing to), the beginning of his lateness, to borrow Said's phrasing on the former topic, is classified after it has occurred.

⁵ Only two studies located deal specifically with Dylan and Said's understanding of late style: Matsudo and Nicolay.

[Lateness ranges] from missed appointments through the cycles of nature to vanished life. Most frequently perhaps *late* just means “too late,” later than we should be, not on time. But late evenings, late blossoms, and late autumns are perfectly punctual – there isn’t another clock or calendar they are supposed to match. Dead persons have certainly got themselves beyond time, but then what difficult temporal longing lurks in calling them “late”? ... [Late] is a way of remembering time, whether it is missed or met or gone (xi).

Possessing no specific place in time, therefore, lateness disavows the convenience of an ending, whilst determining that there will be an ending, nonetheless. Although *On Late Style* determines that the ending in question is death, Wood’s examples demonstrate the repetition with which lateness is encountered before this ultimate end. Life becomes a series of endings and, more often than not, death is not what is being temporarily held at bay. Said posits that “lateness includes the idea that one cannot really go beyond lateness at all, cannot transcend or lift oneself out of lateness, but can only deepen the lateness” (13). This too is an assessment that Dylan will challenge. If one ceases to be late, they have reached an end-point. However, as Dylan’s work demonstrates, at that end-point exists the possibility of a new beginning, nevertheless.

A phenomenon ubiquitous to human experience, lateness as a subject of critical or artistic interest remains a relatively contemporary concept, at least in terms of its theorisation. That said, Painter suggests that there is “virtually no period in the history of the arts [that] has escaped the ascription of a late style”:

The special values ascribed to lateness are a product of the nineteenth century. Before the romantic period, when the concept of late style gained a foothold in aesthetics, the greatest praise one could bestow on an older artist’s output was to report no change – which is to say, no *decline* – in quality from earlier works. This correlated with the Enlightenment notion of

artistic perfection as an ideal to be achieved, rather than a path toward profundity and expressivity (2).

This is a critical differential. Dylan makes a bizarre virtue out of unevenness, to the degree that even his most adamant followers cannot tell if they are dealing with an aberration or a triumph of reinvention. One late style work that demonstrates this virtue perhaps clearer than any other is the 1970 album, *Self Portrait*. To be discussed in greater detail throughout a following chapter, the album went from being one of Dylan's most reviled works at the time of its release, to becoming one of his most intriguing and celebrated. Geoffrey Green highlighted the renewed interest in this work: "It's certainly a pivotal and quite revealing album into the seriousness of his art" (qtd. in Bream 73). Whereas the absence of any perceived downturn in the quality of an aging artist's output had once signalled their triumph over bodily decay, lateness now possesses the propensity for further innovation. Great artists are mutable; they change.

With the intention of investigating late style as a consequence of lateness, Said outlines two broad aspects of lateness upon which a late style is often justified, nature and history:

The important distinction therefore is that between the realm of nature on the one hand and secular human history on the other. The body, its health, its care, composition, functioning, and flourishing, its illnesses and demise, belong to the order of nature; what we *understand* of that nature, however, how we see and live it in our consciousness, how we create a sense of our life individually and collectively, subjectively as well as socially, how we divide it into periods, belongs roughly speaking to the order of history that when we reflect on it we can recall, analyse, and meditate on, constantly changing shape in the process (3).

Said's approach seeks to dissuade a unique reliance upon the biographical details and physiological well-being of the artist, demanding that nature and history be read in complex connection with each other. This analytical approach chimes with the fault Adorno found with

“studies of the very late Beethoven [that] seldom fail to make reference to biography and fate. ... Confronted with the dignity of human death,” Adorno dismisses those studies willing to rationalise the complexities of the composer’s late works by looking squarely at Beethoven’s physical demise and personal notebooks (“Late Style in Beethoven” 564). With Dylan, this historical aspect contributed significantly to a sense of objective lateness which theoretically informed his work to a point. Born a few months prior to America’s involvement in the second World War, Dylan’s subsequent experience of life during the Cold War unquestionably influenced his writing and thought formation. Although *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963) and *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (1964) contain almost all of Dylan’s fabled protest songs, individual experiences are not entirely omitted for the purposes of a wider cause. In the closing verse of “With God On Our Side,” it is telling that Dylan shifts the parameters of the refrain to reflect his personal experience:

I’ve learned to hate the Russians

All through my whole life

If another war comes

It’s them we must fight

To hate them and fear them

To run and to hide

And accept it all bravely

With God on my side. (*The Times They Are A-Changin’*).

Alongside other songs Dylan wrote throughout this period such as, “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”, “Masters of War” and “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, the impact of the Cold War on a certain strata of American lives is explored by the artist. Furthermore, if we consider “Oxford

Town”, “Ballad of Hollis Brown”, “Only a Pawn in Their Game” or, “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”, America’s Civil Rights question becomes an abiding theme throughout Dylan’s work. Although these songs have largely come to be regarded as the product of Dylan’s work as a protest singer, there is a clear correlation between Dylan’s artistry and the surrounding social narrative. Consider the quoted verse from “With God On Our Side” and we witness Dylan’s awareness of an unseen enemy, and possible death, from a very young age: “To hate them and fear them / To run and to hide”. Irrespective of the artist’s age as he created these works, they demonstrate both a subjective and objective experience with death not as a result of old-age, but as a consequence of indiscriminate, heedless slaughter. Historical calamity can make a young man feel old. Bell offers some insight into this pervading sense of fear:

Standing proud in a ruined world, America then seemed more or less content, or more or less complacent. By the [Second World War’s] end its money had bought a weapon, the biggest weapon of all, called simply ‘the Bomb’. That instrument was meant to keep Americans safe, but already it was making them a little afraid. They had seen the newsreels. The years of Dylan’s infancy, the years of bloody conflict, had reminded people that the world beyond their borders was a dangerous place (*Once Upon a Time* 48).

With greater appreciation for the works themselves and what Said called the “apparent disregard for its own continuity,” lateness is removed further still from the confines of time (10). Of his aforementioned conversion to born-again Christianity in the late 1970s, the most remarkable consequence of Dylan’s decision was the alteration it generated in terms of his work. Recording three successive albums of (largely covered) Christian-themed music, Bell nevertheless highlights the broader, historical criteria of Dylan’s decision once again:

Statistics tell one part of the modern story. In the course of the 1970s membership of the evangelical Southern Baptist Convention grew by 16 per cent, that of the Assemblies of God

by 70 per cent. In contrast, the established churches fell back. ... By 1980, the two dozen largest individual churches in the United States were evangelical in style or doctrine, with immense wealth and huge numbers of potential volunteers ready to further God's work through the right candidate (*Time Out of Mind* 189).

Surmising that "it is a mistake, then, to view Dylan's experiences only through the prism of Bob Dylan," this altogether unexpected change in terms of Dylan's work does not obscure the fact that his conversion "was entirely of its American place and time" (190). Without considering the surrounding information, one is susceptible to analysing Dylan's work in too narrow a manner.

Yet there are compelling counter-arguments, contra Said, for the exclusive consideration of biographical detail and, particularly, the physiological well-being of the artist. In his essay, "Disability and "Late Style" in Music," Joseph N. Straus focuses his study on the artist's "physical and mental condition" in the composition of late works:

A contextual factor more consistently correlated with late style than chronological age, proximity to death, or authorial belatedness is the physical and mental condition of the composer. Composers who write in what is recognised as a late style often have shared experiences of nonnormative bodily or mental function, of disability, or of impairments resulting from disease or other causes. ... In such cases, it may well be that the experience of living with a disability is a more potent impetus for late-style composition than age, foreknowledge of death, authorial belatedness, or a sense of historical lateness (6).

Executing this theory with the examples of four classical composers, Straus queries the idea that closeness to death – be it personal, or historical – is the definitive factor informing an artist's late style. Although this study of Dylan's late style concurs with Straus' argument that the actuality of near-death is not necessary in shaping late style, his suggestion that "external factors are unreliably correlated with a musical style that might be described as late" is

problematic. Although he is unquestionably correct that a mis-reading of external factors could also generate a false perception of late style, Straus' argument for the reliability of artist's own personal health and well-being is arguably more fraught with potential inaccuracies.

Considering Dylan's 1997 release, *Time out of Mind*, such issues were realised upon its initial release. In a review of the album for *Rolling Stone* magazine, it was surmised that the album originated at a point when Dylan had found himself "on the culture's fringe, confronting his advancing years and the prospects of failing health) he was hospitalised a few ago for a heart ailment) and irrelevance" (Kot). Whatever of his cultural standing and advancing years (he is still going strong over two decades later), it is the mention of Dylan's hospitalisation that intrigues. Writing of the album in his study of Dylan's late style, Koji Matsudo highlights "the lyrical images and sounds around death and retrospection" that characterise the album's major theme (7). Combined with initially loose knowledge of Dylan's hospitalisation, Bell documents how many critics added two and two together only to get five:

These songs 'about death' gave a lot of people the wrong idea. Some reviewers were certain Dylan has received his intimations of mortality, looked up the number for the King's celestial direct line, and recorded *Time out of Mind* as an acknowledgement of how fragile life can be. Who writes songs with titles such as 'Tryin' to Get to Heaven', 'Not Dark Yet' and 'Cold Irons Bound' if he hasn't had his interview with the Reaper? ... The coincidence of illness and songs of melancholic fatalism was arresting, but coincidence it remained (*Time Out of Mind* 371-72).

Although the issue surrounding the timing of the recording and Dylan's illness would be duly clarified, this example nevertheless highlights the primary issue with Straus' approach. A misunderstanding that occurred at a time when information regarding a public artist's life like Dylan's would have been relatively attainable, how advisable it is to pursue Straus' inevitably limited approach is uncertain. Is it possible to garner a true reading of the physiological well-being of artists when the means of extracting that information are likely contained within the

recorded notes of a few diffuse figures from the artist's lifetime? Furthermore, with reference to the importance Matsudo affords the thematic presence of "death and retrospection" in highlighting the apparent onset of Dylan's late style, this assessment chooses to overlook the consistent presence of such themes in Dylan's work throughout his career. Partially demonstrated with the quoted verse from "With God On Our Side", such themes have long been an influence on Dylan's song-writing. Describing Dylan's status as a star, Lee Marshall outlined his concerns for a critical overreliance on often subjective evidence:

Conventional biographies take a 'subjectivist' approach to their topic, concentrating on the life of the star by looking solely at biographical detail. ... This is problematic in a number of ways. Most significantly, it places too much power in the hands of the star – the star's career is seen as a result of decisions and actions taken by the star or her representatives. ... However, we are not the authors of our own lives, at least not totally. ... Similarly, even though stars may be extremely powerful agents, what a particular star means or achieves depends on factors outside of their control and may well happen 'behind their back' (3-4).

A similar problem emerges when we consider how open and truthful the subject in question actually is. Alternative examples of this difficulty are evidenced throughout moments of Dylan's career. To be discussed in greater detail shortly, his motorcycle-crash of 1966 continues to confound scholars due to the artist's vague explanation of events. In his memoir *Chronicles*, Dylan describes an unrelated later injury he sustained that profoundly impacted his ability to perform:

It was 1987 and my hand, which had been ungodly injured in a freak accident, was in a state of regeneration. It had been ripped and mangled to the bone and was still in the acute stage – it didn't feel like it was mine. ... With a hundred show dates scheduled for me starting in the spring it was uncertain that I would be able to perform. This was a sobering experience. It was only January but my hand was going to need plenty of time to heal and be rehabilitated. Staring

out French windows into an overgrown garden, with a cast on my hand that was nearly to my elbow, I realised that my playing days might well have faded out (145).

Affording a little less than one paragraph to a traumatic, career-threatening injury, it simply does not appear logical to limit one's investigation to the medical background of a solitary figure. Although there will undoubtedly be instances in which access to an artist's physiological state is vital, and the artist in focus is less ambiguous than Dylan, Said's historical approach is unquestionably more productive. In dealing with the artist's work primarily, and the surrounding events which may have informed it, a rounded depiction of Dylan's late style can be achieved.

Attention will shortly turn toward the term late style itself and the complexities surrounding its definition, but it is initially important to demonstrate the various reactions lateness can elicit. Most familiarly, lateness can be seen as a mode of autumnal achievement, something Said describes as "harmony and resolution" (7). Throughout *On Late Style*, Said documents instances where lateness manifests itself in this appropriate, expected manner:

We meet the accepted notion of age and wisdom in some last works that reflect a special maturity, a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity often expressed in terms of a miraculous transfiguration of common reality. In late plays such as *The Tempest* or *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare returns to forms of romance and parable; similarly, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, the aged hero is portrayed as having finally attained a remarkable holiness and sense of resolution (6).

Said similarly suggests that "each of us can readily supply evidence of how it is that late works crown a lifetime of aesthetic endeavour. Rembrandt and Matisse, Bach and Wagner" (7). Akin to his assessment of beginnings and their starting-point, classifying whether or not an artist has a late style is largely a matter of critical retrospection. What Said is drawn towards is those late artists who express lateness against that familiar grain, instead adopting late style as a process

of creation, perhaps as a strategy to counter the different lateness which might be affixed to them *post-mortem*. Yet the problem remains, why do some do this, and others not? If we are to heighten the importance of the historical narrative in shaping lateness, why will it inform the artistry of certain artists, and not others?

Considering two of Dylan's singer-songwriter contemporaries, it is possible to identify comparatively the characteristics of a late style in Dylan's work. Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) and Neil Young (1945-) are two singer-songwriters born either side of Dylan in 1941. Cohen's work never appeared to develop a late style, despite possessing a definitively late triumvirate of albums. With *Old Ideas* (2012), *Popular Problems* (2014) and *You Want It Darker* (2016), Cohen's later works sit chronologically apart, if not necessarily in terms of style.⁶ Unlike Dylan, Cohen's artistry upholds the linearity of an early, middle and late progression, and, akin to Said's description, possesses an acceptable, understandable ending. These are late works without even the hint of a late style. As the closing verse of "Leaving the Table" demonstrates, lateness fails to elicit a radical change in Cohen's outlook, rather it encourages a sense of acceptance and finality regarding the artist's death:

I don't need a reason

For what I became

I've got these excuses

They're tired and they're lame

I don't need a pardon, no no, no no, no

There's no one left to blame

⁶ Prior to the 2012 release of *Old Ideas*, Cohen's last album came eight years earlier with the 2004 release of *Dear Heather*.

I'm leaving the table

I'm out of the game

I'm leaving the table

I'm out of the game (*You Want It Darker*).

Whilst recording the last of these three albums, Cohen, at eighty-two years of age, was certainly aware of his own mortality, and the nearness of death.⁷ Although he may not have necessarily welcomed the idea, he is unquestionably willing to discuss it throughout; and generally seems to have accepted his lot. Over the course of his recording career, a keen authorial interest in Judeo-Christian themes influenced much of Cohen's writing. Akin to John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Cohen often appeared in conflict with that character's sensibilities toward the sacred and profane: "It is better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (14). Cohen's work demonstrated an insularity that was scarcely compromised by external events or circumstances. Considering the song "Steer Your Way", this sensation is extended to its natural, human conclusion; the sense of feeling unworthy:

They whisper still, the ancient stones

The blunted mountains weep

As he died to make men holy

Let us die to make things cheap

And say the *Mea Culpa* which you gradually forgot

Year by year

⁷ Although it would be facetious to claim that the artist categorically knew that these songs would be his last, a degenerative spinal injury had forced Cohen to carry out his recording in a home-made studio within his own living-room. Only a matter of weeks after the release of *You Want It Darker*, Cohen died.

Month by month

Day by day

Thought by thought (*You Want It Darker*).

It would be facetious to expect the experiences of two singer-songwriters born within a few years of each other, raised in the same religious tradition, to necessarily align with one another, but it is striking how differently their work develops.

Young's work cannot be read in the same progressive manner as Cohen's. With his 1975 album, *Tonight's the Night*, Young developed a style that satisfies numerous characteristics of lateness. Despite being in his late twenties at the time of recording, it is an album that stands at odds with his earlier, significant works: *After the Gold Rush* (1970) and *Harvest* (1972).⁸ Describing the circumstances in which the album was written and recorded in the documentary "Hotel California: LA from the Byrds to the Eagles", Young's then manager Ron Stone described what had pre-empted the artist's "most imperfect record": "There was a roadie, named Bruce Berry, and then there was Danny Whitten from Crazy Horse, both of whom overdosed in a short period of time from heroin" (Cooper). Acutely aware of his own strong standing in the commercial marketplace after successful release of *Harvest* a few years earlier, Young nonetheless used *Tonight's the Night* as a means of exorcising "all of his demons." As Young revealed in a rare 1975 interview with *Rolling Stone*, he felt personal responsibility for the death of Whitten particularly:

[Danny] couldn't remember anything. He was too out of it. Too far gone. I had to tell him to go back to L.A. "It's not happening, man. You're not together enough." He just said, "I've got nowhere else to go, man. How am I gonna tell my friends?" And he split. That *night* the coroner

⁸ *On The Beach* is one Young album from this time that certainly corresponds with the lateness that is prevalent on *Tonight's The Night*. However, although it was released in 1974, a year before *Tonight's The Night*, the latter was recorded in 1973.

called me from L.A. and he told me he'd ODeD. That blew my mind. Fucking blew my mind. I loved Danny. I felt responsible. And from there, I had to go right out on this huge tour of huge arenas. I was very nervous and ... insecure (Crowe, "The Rebellious Neil Young").

On an album that stood musically, lyrically and vocally apart from his back-catalogue to date, guitarist Nils Lofgren described how Young "was rebelling against production, and he said, 'I want to make a record not only that is live, but I want people to hear how it is before the band really knows what they're doing'" (Cooper). Offering the additional aspect of how this work played out when Young embarked upon a tour thereafter, Stone recalls Young's definitive movement against "the established social order" which Said described:

So we went on tour, and everyone suspected that he would play all the songs from *Harvest*, and the Eagles were the opening act, and they would come out and were just great. And then Neil came out, and he did the *Tonight's the Night* album from beginning to end, and he would say that if you stick with this, at the end I will play songs that you've heard before. And then at the end, he started the album over again ... and the place emptied out, pretty much every night (*On Late Style* 8; Cooper).

Once again, the nearness of death – if not necessarily Young's own – played a part in this distinctly different work, therefore. As Lofgren suggested, the artist's desire to forego traditional recording methods and specialised production techniques lend this work the aura of lateness. Not only was it at odds with Young's own prior work, *Tonight's The Night* was contrary to popular norms in the very manner of its creation. Probing the historical narrative which upholds Said's theory, Young's work came from within a creative environment that was itself in the process of being destroyed.⁹ These external factors were described in the closing scenes of "Hotel California: LA from the Byrds to the Eagles": "In less than a decade, collective

⁹ Alongside artists like Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Jackson Browne, etc, Young was one of many California-based musicians to enjoy tremendous critical and commercial success in the late 1960s and early 1970s with an acoustic, generally solo, singer-songwriter styling.

optimism had given way to a ruthlessly self-centred culture. In 1976, with an honesty typical of LA's singer-songwriters, the Eagles captured the mood with acerbic tribute to a city whose appeal had proven seductive long before the nineteen-seventies" (Cooper). Describing the song that had given the documentary its title, the astounding commercial success of the Eagles was read as the end of this hitherto off-beat era. The contributing factor of an increasingly menacing drug culture (the impact of which is alluded to in the deaths of Berry and Whitten) played no small part in this hasty conclusion: "The Eagles had evolved from a generation of artists whose determination to succeed had brought them to LA, and in the same year as "Hotel California," that ambition reached its ultimate peak when the Eagles released another record that marked the commercial climax of a ten-year journey" (Cooper). The album in question was the Eagles' *Their Greatest Hits (1971-1975)*. Released with only four albums of original material to call upon, it was, according to the founder of the band's record label David Geffen, a calculated risk to maximise upon the band's popularity. If this was a signal of what this Californian music scene had now transformed into, Young's *Tonight's the Night* was a complete and utter rejection of this transition. Yet, unlike Dylan, this rejection on Young's part ultimately signified his immersion into a kind of perpetual lateness. Working with the likes of Crazy Horse, The Shocking Pinks, The Bluenotes, Pearl Jam and Promise of the Real on a number of albums thereafter, Young, like Dylan, exemplified a convoluted sense of timeliness with his work. However, Dylan's lateness moves in and out of convention, while Young's always takes the path of the wilfully perverse. Periodically dipping in and out of the cultural mainstream, *Tonight's The Night* illustrated both late style, and the end of Young's subservience to artistic expectation altogether.

In terms of their artistry, therefore, Cohen and Young possess an unquestionable awareness of lateness, albeit at respectively expected and unexpected points in the artist's development. What differentiates Dylan's development not only comes down to his body of

work, but the manner in which he inhabits the role of popular artist. Whereas Young's *Tonight's the Night* represents a late style work, it also set the course for a body of anti-conventional work which became in itself a kind of progress; as he alluded to in that 1975 interview with *Rolling Stone*: "Every one of my records, to me, is like an ongoing autobiography" (Crowe, "The Rebellious Neil Young"). While he does suggest that he "would rather keep changing and lose a lot of people along the way" instead of perpetually creating the same kind of music, it is precisely this intention that has become the signature of Young's work. Striving to transmit "a complete portrait" of himself, Young's intransigence is normalised (Crowe, "The Rebellious Neil Young"). With Dylan, the development of his artistry becomes a series of new beginnings, and, often for his listeners, false dawns.

The term late style represents a very deliberate choice of language from Said. Although Painter suggested that no period of art had escaped the critical reach of late style, Said approaches it from a definitive critical standpoint: "Adorno used the phrase "late style" most memorably in an essay fragment entitled "Spätstil Beethovens," dated 1937" (*On Late Style* 7). Alternative understandings and applications of the term can be readily found also. Painter credits A. E. Brinckmann with "writing the first large-scale study of late style"; although appears to explore very little of his work thereafter (2). Helpfully listing a broad assessment of the term and its usage throughout his exploration of late style, Straus indicates numerous essays and articles that offer further interpretations of the term. While it would not be practical to explore each and every understanding of the term, Said's assessment is perhaps the most effective: "Late style is *in*, but oddly *apart* from the present" (24). Said argues that late style works "constitute a form of exile" for the artist (8); Adorno specified that "late style is what happens if art does not abdicate its rights in favour of reality" (*Late Style in Beethoven* 564). The overarching perception of late style, therefore, relies upon the premise that such works go against the grain of what is expected, and normal. Approaching Said's analysis of this term and

the work he carried out in *On Late Style*, focus is directed toward “great artists and how near the end of their lives their work and thought acquires a new idiom” (6).

Allowing for the broad critical understanding of this term, it is important to contextualize the generation of Said’s *On Late Style*, and how he arrived at formulating the most extensive definition of the term. In the Foreword, Said’s wife Mariam describes the book’s emergence: “Edward was in the process of writing this book when he passed away” (vii). Wood’s introductory essay goes on to claim that Said died “a little too early ... for real lateness” (xviii). Whether or not one adjudges *On Late Style* to be a product of Said’s late style (or whether Said possessed a late style at all), the text itself was left “unfinished” (Wood xviii). As the editor of *On Late Style*, Wood was left with the gargantuan task of compiling Said’s disparate writings on the topic into one collective whole. Resultantly, it would be inaccurate to consider this text any kind of comprehensive guidebook to late style. An exploration of the theory across a variety of artistic disciplines, the defining characteristics which Said’s opening chapter appears to lend to late style do not necessarily correspond with what comes thereafter. Akin to Dylan’s assessment of “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” in the liner notes of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, each definition within *On Late Style* “is actually the start of a whole song” (qtd. in Hentoff, “Liner Notes”). Rather than offering concrete meaning to the term, Said’s study encourages further exploration. While we cannot know whether he would have finished the book had he lived, Wood doubts regarding Said’s urgency to do so are worth considering:

And yet I find I can’t believe that he wanted to finish this book. Or rather, he wanted to finish it but was waiting for a time that would perhaps never have come. There would have been a time for this book about untimeliness, but this time was always: not quite yet. Completing the work would have been too much like writing the end of a life, closing the longer chapter about the making of the self that opened with Said’s book *Beginnings* (xvii).

Writing of the circumstances surrounding his chronologically late collection of poems, *Injury Time*, Clive James alluded to the temptation of an unfinished text: “When I locked up the final text of my previous volume of short poems, *Sentenced to Life*, I thought, rather grandly, that there would be no time left except perhaps for a long poem that might gain in poignancy by being left unfinished” (ix). Irrespective of Said’s late style then, the foundations of *On Late Style* possess a perennial sense of lateness, bringing “time in its wake,” but remaining obstinately unfinished (Wood xi).

Although *On Late Style* is not so fluid as to be appropriable to any critical approach, the open-endedness of the term is problematic. Writing with both *On Late Style* and *Late Thoughts* in mind, Frank Kermode considered that the possibility of “overdoing [the] elasticity [of lateness] might destroy what usefulness it has” (“Going Against”). Identifying the issue that many scholars of the term seemingly had with finding a solid basis for late style, Kermode’s concerns bear considering:

The odd thing is that most of the contributors to these books doubt whether it is possible to offer a clear and distinct idea of the subject under discussion. Indeed, Karen Painter, one of the editors of the Getty volume, says right out that ‘late style does not exist in any real sense.’ But she and her colleagues continue to search for distinguishing marks of lateness in the work of major artists in their last years, to ask whether they give evidence of failing powers, such as might in the ordinary course of things be expected: senescence; illness; the decay of the senses; the certainty that death, always feared at a distance but now in the room, is taking a hand. Will these afflictions be reflected in a style markedly different from those they used in the periods of early promise and full maturity? (“Going Against”).

Although it was not written in a dismissive manner, Kermode goes on to describe how most of the artists Said considers in *On Late Style* represent choices that are “easy enough for interpreters to discover or inset some version of lateness” (“Going Against”). Tarried with

Painter's concerns regarding the existence of late style in any real sense, investigating this theory requires careful consideration of its most common tenets. While Said's text will offer a basic framework for the argument this thesis intends to make, establishing a concise understanding of late style is more readily accomplished if consideration is directed toward Said's own foundational text for the subject, Theodor Adorno's "Late Style in Beethoven."

According to Kermode, Adorno's 1937 essay was "probably the strongest single intellectual influence" on Said's study ("Going Against"). Written with Beethoven's late works in mind, Adorno's exploration of late style is limited to the composer's works alone. However, in his descriptions of the composer's late works, Adorno's assessment becomes invaluable important to Said's later writings:

The maturity of the late works of significant artists does not resemble the kind one finds in fruit. They are, for the most part, not round, but furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation. They lack all the harmony that the classicist aesthetic is in the habit of demanding from works of art, and they show more traces of history than of growth ("Late Style in Beethoven" 564).

The disagreeability of late style is, therefore, of immense importance to Adorno, and, subsequently, Said. As shall be demonstrated in the following chapters, such disagreeability will emerge in a variety of ways throughout Dylan's career; sometimes it will be relative to his own body of work, at others the expectations of his audience, whether that be his fanbase or his critics, not to mention the musical choices of his contemporaries or perceptions of political correctness in a given moment.

One spectacular instance of Dylan's disagreeability in the public eye came during his performance at the Live Aid event in 1985. A trans-continental event designed to raise money for African aid, the shambolic nature of Dylan's performance with Ronnie Wood and Keith

Richards of the Rolling Stones began with the following remarks from Dylan: “I’d just like to say I hope that some of the money that’s raised for the people in Africa, maybe they could just take a little bit of it, maybe one or two million maybe, and use it, say, to pay the ... pay the mortgages on some of the farms ... the farmers here owe to the banks” (qtd. in Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 309). Described by Bell as the artist’s worst mistake of the many he made during this decade, Dylan’s comments were made in front of “a TV audience estimated at 1.9 billion” (308). Serving to leave Dylan appearing completely out of touch with reality, Bell suggests that his comments in Philadelphia’s JFK stadium strengthened what many already suspected regarding Dylan: “Bob Dylan was utterly redundant, a dismal and decadent joke.”(309) Yet the following year, Dylan’s suggestion would inspire the musician Willie Nelson to mount the Farm Aid concert, during which Dylan “would put in a near-sensational performance with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at that event” (309). Somewhat akin to the controversial comments he had made in 1963 whilst accepting the Tom Paine award from the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, Dylan’s ability to regularly alienate himself to a point from which he can return informs our understanding of his repetitive lateness. Although there is no suggestion that this disagreeability is necessarily part of a plan that the artist understands from beginning to end, it is nevertheless apparent that Dylan has the wherewithal to engender, or embrace, lateness.

Approaching Beethoven’s late style by way of “technical analysis of the works under consideration,” Adorno’s understanding of late style relies heavily upon “the role of conventions” (“Late Style in Beethoven” 565). Considering the genius of Beethoven’s work prior to the onset of a late style, the bond that commonly holds both periods together is the presence of certain musical conventions. However, whereas in what Adorno describes as Beethoven’s middle-period the composer could take these conventions and transform “them

according to his intention,” the later works of Beethoven do not as readily subscribe to this transformation:

Everywhere in his formal language, even where it avails itself of such a singular syntax as in the last five piano sonatas, one finds formulas and phrases of convention scattered about. ... Often convention appears in a form that is bald, undisguised, untransformed: the first theme of the Sonata op. 110 has an unabashedly primitive accompaniment in sixteenths that would scarcely have been tolerated in the middle style (565).

So the source of the consternation one may feel when approaching a late style work is revealed. With reference once again to Neil Young’s *Tonight’s the Night*, and Nils Lofgren’s assessment of Young’s intention, late style resembles the sound of music playing “before the band really knows what they’re doing,” Beethoven’s late style, and Adorno’s assessment of it, highlights the importance of an issue that has (and will) be discussed: the unsatisfying critical reliance upon the artist’s biography (Cooper). Disenchanted with the notion that the intransigence of late works is “psychologically motivated, the result of indifference to appearances,” Adorno suggests instead that “the content of art always consists in mere appearances” (566). Art, unlike human life, is not subjected to death. As such, death appears “in art only in a refracted mode, as allegory” (566). Affording the work itself critical prominence, the artist doesn’t become an afterthought, rather, he/she is a conduit through which the work can be explored further. Describing Beethoven’s late works generally, Adorno identifies how such a reading takes place:

No longer does he gather the landscape, deserted now and alienated, into an image. He lights it with rays from the fire that is ignited by subjectivity, which breaks out and throws itself against the walls of the work, true to the idea of its dynamism. His late work still remains process, but not as development; rather as a catching fire between extremes, which no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity. ... This sheds light on the nonsensical fact

that the very late Beethoven is called both subjective and objective. Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which – alone – it glows into life (567).

Stating Beethoven's resistance to the idea of illuminating a "harmonious synthesis," Adorno argues that late style prompts the tearing apart of foundations "to preserve them for the eternal" (567). It is in this manner that *On Late Style*, being unfinished, appears as a late work. It is with little irony that Adorno suggests, "in the history of art late works are the catastrophes" (567).

II

An astonishing amount of critical interest in Bob Dylan's career is nevertheless remarkably narrow in focus. With over fifty years of recorded music signifying the most impressive element of his diverse artistry, analysis tends to be reserved for the initial four years of his public life and work. Between 1962 and 1966, Dylan would exert a monumental influence on popular music, and, particularly the role of the singer-songwriter within it. Manifesting itself initially via the protest songs Dylan would write in accordance with the strife surrounding America's civil rights question and the widespread uncertainty surrounding the Cold War, he would nevertheless quickly disown this role of 'protest singer,' creating instead a collection of three albums largely considered to contain his greatest works: *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde On Blonde* (1966).¹⁰ Developing his artistry at a rate that quickly surpassed critical attempts to categorise it or the artist himself, the continued scholarly interest in these four years of Dylan's creativity suggests that this process

¹⁰ Describing this period of Dylan's creativity in his *Revolution in the Air*, Heylin outlined the magnitude of the artist's artistic achievements:

Superlatives fail and comparisons disappear in a blizzard of inspiration. The Dylan of 1965 was making the most direct, powerful, and artistically important song-statements of the twentieth century. At the absolute epicentre of popular culture for an eighteen-month period when he, and he alone, was in the unknown region, he returned with regular bulletins of prophetic perspicacity. The thirty songs recorded in those twelve months, even in stark isolation, would make him the single most important singer-songwriter of the post-war era. Going from 'Love Minus Zero' to 'Visions of Johanna' in eleven months, Dylan was travelling at the artistic equivalent of the speed of light (265).

of understanding is not yet complete. Perpetually aligned with a period he has long since moved beyond creatively, Dylan's career has resultantly developed a curious resistance to timeliness. As such, the idea of lateness becomes similarly convoluted when considering Dylan's work.

Exploring the timeline of the four-year stint in question, its conclusion has had a long-standing effect on the critical perception of Dylan. Creatively, it ended with the 1966 release of *Blonde on Blonde*. As a relatively extended series of recording sessions concluded in March of the same year, Dylan was already in the throes of a world tour that would span eleven countries and not finish for a further two months; roughly around the same time that his seventh studio album had had its first release.¹¹ *Blonde on Blonde* confirmed the artist's mastery of the dichotomy that kept what Adorno described as "first-rank art" away from the intensities of popstardom. (Subotnik 247). Why this album is understood to signal the conclusion of Dylan's first (and perhaps most impressive) period of creativity is largely determined by events thereafter. Having released six albums of original material in four years, it would take Dylan eighteen months to release his first post-*Blonde on Blonde* work.¹² The world tour that had finished in late May would be Dylan's last for an unimaginable eight years. Where he had once appeared relatively accessible to journalists and all manner of questions asked him, Dylan (not always successfully) attempted to embrace a life away from the public eye. Although he would continue to release albums on a near-annual basis after the subsequent release of *John Wesley Harding* (1967), the further removed these became from *Blonde on Blonde*, the more definitive it was that Dylan had left behind many of the stylings (whether musical, lyrical, aesthetic or political) of this earlier period. Running adjacent to these factors, however, is the intrigue surrounding what encouraged (or enforced) Dylan to stop in the first place. What had caused

¹¹ Incredibly, there remains a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the precise date that the album was released.

¹² Prior to these six albums of original material, Dylan's eponymous debut album must also be considered. Possessing only two original works, it nonetheless demonstrates the artist's industry throughout this period.

his abrupt halt amid such a fruitful period of creativity? In his study of Dylan's songwriting, Heylin affords the situation some clarity:

The legend of Dylan writing songs on airplanes, in motels, and even in the studio starts here. And even when the work was completed, the river of song was still flowing strong until he (literally) crashed and (metaphorically) burned on an upstate country road in late July – if one extrapolates from the tantalising evidence of two taped hotel-room sessions and reports of at least one other from the world tour, which concluded on May 27 in London (*Revolution in the Air* 342).

One of the many notable myths surrounding Dylan is that of his motorcycle crash in July 1966. Although much uncertainty clouds the severity of this accident and his injuries, it nevertheless signalled the conclusion of a period during which Heylin contests Dylan existed “at the absolute epicentre of popular culture” (*Revolution in the Air* 265). Partially akin to the crashes that resulted in the deaths of Buddy Holly or James Dean, Dylan's motorcycle crash offered the illusion of finality, without actually inducing death. In Bell's assessment of its importance, the crash brought his career “to a shuddering halt” (*Once Upon a Time* 463).

With the introductory notes to his extensive biography of Dylan, Clinton Heylin highlights how this incident has affected scholars attempting to analyse Dylan's life (and by extension, work): “Now Bob Dylan is seventy. It is forty-five years since he fell off his motorcycle in Woodstock. Yet the history of those forty-five years continues to remain in the shadow cast by those pre-accident years” (*Behind the Shades* viii).¹³ In Heylin's estimation, any work that comes after this period is ultimately always considered with this earlier era of creativity firmly in mind. For all the difference it will make to numerous objective analyses of

¹³ This has been similarly identified by critic, Greil Marcus: “No matter what Bob Dylan has done in the last forty-seven years ... his obituary has already been written. “Bob Dylan, best known as a protest singer from the 1960s, died yesterday ...”” (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 407-8).

Dylan, the motorcycle-crash may as well have been fatal in a literal sense, and not merely the figurative one that has influenced so much of the scholarship thereafter.¹⁴ With comparison to an assessment of Mozart which Painter alludes to in her introductory notes to *Late Thoughts*, Dylan too can be read as having “died in his most beautiful period of blooming” (2). Although it remains one of the most sustainably intriguing myths surrounding Dylan’s career, it is nevertheless only one of many. In Todd Haynes’ biopic of Dylan, *I’m Not There* (2007), the motorcycle-crash offers the film a starting-point from which Dylan is imagined as having died. Exploring elements of the artist’s life before and after the crash, Haynes touches at the same time explores upon a renewability and infinitude in Dylan’s work that this thesis will apply in terms of the artist’s lateness.

Casting six different actors to play out their own distinct imagining of a certain aspect inspired by Dylan’s life or work, the motorcycle-crash can be read as one of many repeated endings in Dylan’s career. Celebrated for his ability to seemingly alter his own artistic path at will, Haynes’ film demonstrates this widespread interest in an accessible manner. Writing of Dylan’s transformations in his *Light Come Shining*, Andrew McCarron describes the presence of, and issues surrounding, this theme, however:

Bob Dylan’s transformations from his early days on the folk scene in New York City to the present have been an object of fascination to the point of cliché and parody. He has been called the man who wasn’t there, a complete unknown, a mystery tramp, to name only a few monikers. ... The wiry, wild-haired mid-Sixties poet/prophet with his sunglasses and acoustic guitar was only one in a series of colourful personae through which Dylan has morphed over the years. It

¹⁴ While Dylan’s career has inevitably continued from this point and seen him remain an important, visible figure in popular music, the intense focus on images of the artist as a young man proliferate. When a celebratory mural of Dylan was presented in his native state of Minnesota in 2015, it was telling that two of the three images of Dylan selected came from the four-year period in question. Admittedly, the third of these images represented a more contemporary portrait of the artist. Yet, once again, the majority of his life and career was deemed secondary to those breakthrough years.

has been frustrating to him that who he was during those days has become a fixture of his legend (1-2).

The ensuing battle between what is current for Dylan and what is expected of him is highlighted in an example McCarron provides:

A 2012 concert review that appeared in the *Toronto Star* reflected on how Dylan cleared out the sparsely attended arena by “bloody mindedly played the crank and serving up an uncompromising mix of rambling recent numbers rendered in the jump-blues vein and thoroughly (read: almost unrecognizably) worked-over catalogue standards such as ‘A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall,’ ‘Blind Willie McTell,’ and a set-concluding grind on ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ (2).

Therefore, as much as Dylan has thrilled his listeners and live audiences, the concept of perpetual movement and transformation ultimately leaves certain figures disheartened after encountering Dylan not as they imagined or remembered him. Consulting Perry Meisel’s *The Myth of Popular Culture*, he asserts that such readings of Dylan’s development demonstrate evidence of the typological reasoning that is applied to Dylan’s perceived falls and resurrections:

Typology is a pervasive mode of thinking ... [that enables one] to find hope and solace in life when faced with its difficulties. A form of allegory called *figura*, typology comes from *typos*, or “prefiguration.” As a doctrine of interpretation, it regards events of the Hebrew Bible as prophesying or prefiguring their repetition and completion in other spheres of action in the Christian Bible. ... Typology, or *figura*, structures both Dylan’s popular reception and his critical interpretation. Its key trope emerges again and again: the trope of the Fall, which Dylan follows, or seems to follow, with exceeding regularity (155-56).

Dylan’s career is replete with such falls and resurrections. Alongside the aforementioned crash, an earlier example of this reading can be found with Dylan’s transition from folk to rock music

as a similar fall, with his performance at the nineteen-sixty-five Newport Folk Festival the location for the lapse.¹⁵ Perhaps more intriguing still was the recorded and released performance from Dylan's 1966 show in Manchester's Free Trade Hall. As Bell writes of this notorious night in Dylan folklore: "Someone has just used the name Judas. It is a shout, nothing more, in the protective darkness of a provincial English concert hall. ... The cry, two vowels stretched, is intended as a kind of remonstrance, a denunciation from the congregation" (*Once Upon a Time* 9).

Further on in his career, Dylan's embrace of born-again Christianity in the late 1970s also represents a fall (commercially and artistically, anyway) to many; the resurrection, appropriately enough, coming with the nineteen-eighty-three album, *Infidels*. Throughout the 1980s, Dylan is often thought to have been in complete creative free-fall; *Oh Mercy* (1989) offering a brief respite to his followers this time around. Although he would refute this popular perception in his writings, Heylin concedes that "the eighties had brought Dylan precious little recognition for his current work" (*Behind the Shades* 623). Caught in a cycle of concentrically circling narratives, Dylan's artistry cannot be read as any kind of progressive whole. Through the prism of his work, lateness thus becomes a style that can be read as a phenomenon of creativity rather than aging.

Said suggests that "late works constitute a form of exile" for the artist (*On Late Style* 8). It is an argument that encourages further questioning; What of the artist already in exile? Do artists in exile resultantly create nothing but late works? Is the exile Said references purely illusory, or, is an exilic state of mind (or being) a cause or the result of late works? Analysing

¹⁵ One of the most contentious and extensively studied periods of Dylan's career, the furore surrounding this performance hinges on Dylan's decision to play with an electrically amplified band. Also factoring in his aesthetic change of clothing and hair style, Meisel has argued that the sense of disbelief among Dylan's earlier, folk-enthused fans signifies Dylan's fall on this occasion. This will be explored further in the following chapter.

Said's personal recollections on exile, his 1999 memoir explores in detail the sensation of being exiled:

There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters. Whether this was because I constantly misread my part or because of some deep flaw in my being I could not tell for most of my early life. Sometimes I was intransigent, and proud of it. At other times I seemed to myself to be nearly devoid of any character at all, timid, uncertain, without will. Yet the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place (*Out of Place* 3).

Proceeding to discuss his difficulties with having “a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said,” one can draw certain similarities with Dylan's own upbringing and sense of being out of place (3). Regarding even a shared uncertainty with their names, of what importance is it that Dylan would go so far as to change his only a few years after leaving Minnesota? Citing the artist's opening monologue for *No Direction Home*, Dylan's experience tallies with that of the confused Said:

I had ambitions to set out and find an odyssey, going home somewhere, set out to find this home that I'd left a while back and couldn't remember exactly where it was, but I was on my way there, encountering what I encountered on the way was how I envisioned it all – I didn't really have any ambition at all. I was born very far from where I'm supposed to be, and so I'm on my way home (Scorsese).

Given the importance of exile to Said's theory of late style, it is intriguing that the quoted analysis of his own sense of exile resonates so closely with his descriptions of late style. Both rely on the principle that the figure in question stands at odds with their surroundings. Occasionally proud of their intransigence, but prone to appearing “devoid of any character at all,” it does not require a huge theoretical jump to identify the closeness of this detail to the plain aspect of convention in late style works; the appearance of no input on the artist's behalf whatsoever. It

could be argued then that an exilic state of mind (perhaps a lifetime's worth) precedes the development of an artist's late style. Furthermore, it enables one to contend that the perpetually exiled artist can theoretically create late works at any stage of their career. Exile in Said's case takes on a notable degree of permanence. When we consider Dylan's development, however, there is a constant sense of fluctuation between feeling in and out of place.

Said's sense of exile differs significantly from Dylan's.¹⁶ Yet as the son of two first-generation Jewish-Americans living as a minority community in the Minnesotan city of Duluth (and then Hibbing), there were aspects of his upbringing that certainly strike a chord with Said's reasoning for feeling out of place. Taken from an interview Heylin carried out for *Behind the Shades*, a figure from Dylan's childhood revealed how "the kids used to tease Bob, sometimes. They would call him Bobby Zimmerman because it was so difficult to produce Zimmerman. ... His feelings could be hurt easily. He often went home pouting" (9). Although the issue of Dylan's Jewish faith and anti-Semitism in a predominantly Christian community rarely arise in any consideration of the artist's upbringing, it is without question something that set him apart. Furthermore, there were many external factors that certainly appear to have shaped Dylan's sensation of being "born very far from where I'm supposed to be." Consulting Bell's description of Hibbing in Dylan's time there affirms this notion: "Yet even when the boy was growing Hibbing was notable, if notable, only because it seemed less remote than forgotten.

¹⁶ As he explains in *Out of Place*, Said's origins were far from simple:

"Edward" was principally the song, then the brother, then finally the boy who went to school and unsuccessfully tried to follow (or ignore and circumvent) all the rules. His creation was made necessary by the fact that his parents were themselves self-creations: two Palestinians with dramatically different backgrounds and temperaments living in colonial Cairo as members of a Christian minority within a large pond of minorities, with only each other for support, without any precedent for what they were doing except an odd combination of prewar Palestinian habit; American lore picked up at random in books and magazines and from my father's decade in the United States; the missionaries' influence; incompleting and hence eccentric schooling; British colonial attitudes that represented both the lords and the general run of "humankind" they ruled; and, finally, the style of life my parents perceived around them in Egypt and which they tried to adapt to their special circumstances. Could "Edward's" position ever be anything but out of place? (19).

Somehow it felt as though it didn't connect with anywhere, or anything" (*Once Upon a Time* 48).

As a knock-on effect of the end of the Second World War, Hibbing, hitherto a prominent mining area, "was coming to the end of its useful life" (48). Describing the harsh reality of Dylan's young life in such surroundings, Heylin's portrayal of events is striking: "Young Robert would grow up in a town where every industrial dispute, and there were several in the fifties, would bring the local economy to a standstill, and where every miner had a store of stories from the old days if anyone had a mind to listen" (*Behind the Shades* 8). Dylan's childhood then was spent in an area mired in its own pervading sense of lateness. Alluding to the kind of discord Dylan would channel into "North Country Blues" (1963), Heylin asserts that "listening was what Bobby already did best" (8). Recalling his own memoirs of this harsh economic reality, Dylan's *Chronicles* testify to the assertions of Bell and Heylin: "The upper Midwest was an extremely volatile, politically active area – with the Farmer Labour Party, Social Democrats, socialists, communists. They were hard crowds to please and not too much for Republicanism" (231). Living within a society that was struggling to survive, it is important to clarify that Dylan's own upbringing scarcely reflected the deprivation chronicled within "North Country Blues"; the childhood that is described throughout the many biographies of Dylan's life sounds relatively routine: "The things I did growing up were the things I thought everybody did – march in parade, have bike races, play ice hockey" (232). Yet, even within his own family, struggles were apparent: "Polio, which left [my father] with a pronounced limp, had forced him out of Duluth – he lost his job and that's how we got to the Iron Range, where my mother's family were from" (230). Amid all these circumstances, living in a town replete with "industrial disputes" as Heylin suggests, one is left wondering why Dylan retained a relative ambivalence toward the various public struggles and causes he would encounter in New York City only a few years later? While he may have contributed numerous songs that

had a tremendous effect on many involved, Bell illustrates the artist's reluctant approach to public action:

Dylan had just turned 22 with the release of his second album, but even in 1963 he was no one's fool. The skill he brought to the craft depended on a simple insight: the proselytiser must never resemble a propagandist. Anyone who heard the album in the spirit intended could easily spot Dylan on the side of the sane. Suze Rotolo would attest that he held all the correct beliefs, and held them sincerely. But actual politics? An ideological position? Even an idea of how the world works beyond good and evil, right and wrong, truth and deceit? If the singer harboured any of those thoughts, he kept them to himself. The uses to which his songs would be put, then and since, were another matter (*Once Upon a Time* 253).

Although Dylan may have absorbed all that was going on around him as Heylin suggests, the artist's essential memory of this time as captured in *Chronicles* tallies with the sentiments expressed within *No Direction Home*: "Mostly what I did growing up was bide my time. I always knew there was a bigger world out there" (232). As will become apparent throughout the following chapters, the closest Dylan comes to some understanding of repatriation is through music. As Meisel writes of the artist: "Dylan can find freedom only in tradition" (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 165). In this regard he finds the ability to encapsulate both rootedness and rootlessness. To whatever degree Dylan desired his escape from Hibbing, its lateness can be seen to have shaped Dylan's own artistic development; if even in this determination to remain exiled and journeying.

Given this analysis of Dylan's earlier years, it is important to once again consider the role of biography in determining late style. This issue takes on renewed importance when we come to consider Dylan's eventual status as an extremely popular, well-known artist. The relevance of this popularity with relation to studies regarding Dylan is outlined by Marshall in his *The Never Ending Star*:

Dylan is a singer, a songwriter, a live performer, but, more than anything else, Dylan is a star. His stardom is an essential feature of his existence. It is the lens through which everything in his life is understood, not just his creative achievements but inherently personal things like fatherhood and divorce. Because Bob Dylan is a star, his life has public meaning (3).

As we have previously explored, for Adorno, a critical reliance on such biographical details was a source of great consternation. Yet, as Said's study demonstrates (particularly in a case like his study of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and *The Leopard*), disregarding these details entirely is not possible. With regards to Dylan, it is an outright impossibility. For the reasons Marshall states above, and the added risk of the proliferation of unreliable details by scurrilous parties, the development of Dylan's life cannot be overlooked when we wish to explore his artistic late style. The sources of such information, are, as one would expect, plentiful. Dylan's own memoir will be a useful tool throughout (not least as a product of his creativity), yet, it is not the most reliant or detailed source for analysing Dylan's life objectively. As Bell notes of the artist: "Dylan is a public artist who keeps himself to himself" (*Once Upon a Time* 23).

With the works of Bell, Heylin, Anthony Scaduto, Robert Shelton and Howard Sounes, therefore, we are presented with a selection of writers who have taken on the task of chronicling Dylan's life, in spite of the artist's insularity. Throughout the course of this study, references will be primarily drawn from Bell's two-part biography of Dylan, and Heylin's extensive study. With both scholarly attempts, a necessary detachment between author and subject is maintained throughout. Affording extensive time to all aspects of Dylan's career, there is little or no call for sensationalising the details of the artist's life therein. Regarding the numerous remaining texts and their insufficiencies in terms of ultimately analysing Dylan's work, the problems range from a question of the biography being dated or overly subjective, to (particularly in Sounes' case) an authorial infatuation with gossip and hearsay; Heylin succinctly surmised Sounes' *Down the Highway* as the product of "a great deal of digging, [carried out] with the

blunt spade of ignorance” (*Behind the Shades* 736). Given his extensive career in the public eye, many notable contemporaries of Dylan have also contributed works that directly or indirectly deal with the artist. Occasionally offering an alternative take on an important moment in Dylan’s life, Dylan’s *Chronicles* assuredly demonstrates that much can be lost between the writing of a memoir and a biography. As such, the recollections of Suze Rotolo (*A Freewheelin’ Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties*) or Victor Maymudes (*Another Side of Bob Dylan*) are largely redundant for the purposes of this study.

For this consideration of the convoluted nature of timeliness found in Dylan’s work, therefore, a potential starting-point can be located within biographical detail. Yet to explore his late style in detail, attention must turn to his work. Although it is known that Dylan began writing from a young age, when he eventually did set off on his journey from Minnesota, he did so as a figure desperately trying to reinvent himself as another. Demonstrating traits of the dichotomised rootedness and rootlessness that would periodically appear throughout his career, Dylan’s departure from his family home can be read as a journey toward repatriation, rather than an entry into exile. Rooting himself in a creative heritage of which he would become a part, Dylan’s burgeoning relationship with the roots of American music would prove instrumental in reading the late varieties of his style thereafter.

This is a process that begins with the emergence of Dylan in New York City, and his near-immediate ascension into the role of a recording artist. Determined to fabricate his past, a discussion Dylan recounts in *Chronicles* with the head of publicity for Columbia records alluded to the singer-songwriter’s recent past in Illinois, a state Dylan is not known to have even visited at this stage. It does not take a significant leap to imagine that Dylan’s choice of Illinois tallies with the last destination Woody Guthrie reaches in his semi-autobiographical, *Bound for Glory*. An artist and book that Dylan was not only familiar with but appeared to be modelling his early artistic efforts on outright, it is not inconceivable that Dylan imagined

himself continuing Guthrie's journey onto New York City; even if traveling to this same city was partially inspired by Dylan's intention to visit the actual, hospitalised Guthrie in New Jersey. Although it is by no means rare that an aspiring artist will create such narratives, the approach that Dylan bought into only serves to heighten his convoluted relationship with timeliness. In contrast to Dylan's arrival in New York City by car, Guthrie's text reveals the less comfortable way he had arrived in Illinois:

The wind howled all around me. Rain blistered my skin. Beating down against the iron roof of the car, the sheets of rain sounded like some kind of a high-pressure fire hose trying to drill holes. The night was as pitch black as a night can get, and it was only when the bolts of lightning knocked holes in the clouds that you could see the square shape of the train rumbling along in the thunder (309).

One amongst many in the boxcar of a train, Guthrie symbolised the troubadour spirit and aesthetic that Dylan clung to when arriving in New York City. Distancing himself from a relatively routine upbringing in Minnesota, the timeliness of Dylan's adopted narrative was hopelessly out of date. As his own journey to this point testified, and texts such as Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* would confirm, the sheer idea of the freewheeling musician or hobo traveling the country in the boxcar of a train was mostly redundant. It is a realisation that even Dylan appears to have come to in the closing verse of his ode to Guthrie himself, "Song to Woody":

I'm a-leavin' tomorrow, but I could leave today

Somewhere down the road someday

The very last thing that I'd want to do

Is to say I've been hittin' some hard travelin' too (*Bob Dylan*).

In Haynes' *I'm Not There*, this transition is informed to Marcus Carl Franklin's Guthrie-esque portrayal of a young Dylan. Heightening the naivety and childishness of Dylan's actual infatuation with Guthrie, and the antiquated terms he used to describe his own life, Haynes cast a fourteen-year-old Franklin in a role that portrays a man of almost twenty-years. Bluntly, the ridiculousness of Franklin's character is revealed: "Tell you what I think, I think it's nineteen-fifty-nine and this boy is singing songs about the boxcar ... what's a boxcar going to mean to him? Right here, we got race riots, folks with no food, why ain't he out there singing about that? ... Live your own time child, sing about your own time" (Haynes). His attempts to model himself on Guthrie have been described by one of Heylin's interviewees as "allowing a greater Bob Dylan to come out" (*Behind the Shades* 47). Yet Haynes' description of this greater Dylan emerging initiates another line of questioning regarding Said's understanding of late style and its suitability for an artist the like of which Dylan was to become. Can a popular-artist, let alone a pop-star, possess a late style?

Although *On Late Style* considers a variety of artists and artistry throughout, Said's study runs largely along the classically Eurocentric lines of high culture. In his description of Adorno's own late style, Said's assessment of his late characteristics mirror those found in many of the figures he investigates:

Urban and urbane, deliberate, he was incredibly able to find interesting things to say about even so unassuming a thing as a semicolon or an exclamation mark. Along with these qualities goes the late style – that of an aging but mentally agile European man of culture who is absolutely not given to ascetic serenity or mellow maturity: there isn't much fumbling for references or footnotes or pedantic citations but always a very self-assured and well-brought up ability to talk equally well about Bach and his devotees, about society and sociology (22).

Said's theoretical emphasis on European culture is perhaps a strange choice, given his critical focus elsewhere on the oppressive influence of such forms. Yet given that his theoretical model

Adorno also appeared to exemplify the very same canonical values himself, investigating this shared vision of late style through the prism of a twentieth century American popular-artist such as Dylan could be viewed as problematic. How seriously Dylan's work is to be taken is not a query unique to this study. While many celebrated the decision of the Nobel academy to award him their prize for literature in 2016, Irvine Welsh (in his own inimitable fashion) emphasised what many felt was the inherent flaw in this latest attempt to merge Dylan's artistry with literature: "I'm a Dylan fan, but this is an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies" (Welsh). Touching on a wider assumption that Dylan's place within this academy was the result of his fans now occupying roles within prestigious institutions of learning, accolades such as the Nobel prize tended to highlight the perceived importance of one element (his songwriting) above the others (his voice, his musicality and his performances). Held in isolation, could Dylan's lyrics really be of outstanding literary worth?

Christopher Ricks argued in his *Dylan's Visions of Sin* that it is obvious "Dylan has always had a way with words" (11). Richard F. Thomas similarly outlined the importance he attributes to Dylan's song-writing in his *Why Dylan Matters*: "And with his 2016 award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, the world has recognised his literary merit – vindication for those who have long recognised the fact" (11). The isolated critical focus on the literary element of Dylan's work encourages further consideration regarding the artist's timeliness. As early as his 1964 song "I Shall Be Free No. 10", Dylan could be perceived as working against any reading that prioritised his use of words, or attempted to categorise him as a poet: "Yippee! I'm a poet, and I know it / Hope I don't blow it" (*Another Side of Bob Dylan*). Discussing the song in his *Revolution in the Air*, Heylin outlines how Dylan's flippant rhyming reflected the generally lackadaisical approach he was taking with this composition: "As with its numberless predecessor, "I Shall Be Free No. 10" appears to have been composed in stages, as the whim

took him” (242). In a televised interview the following year, Dylan similarly sought to make light of such attempts:

Questioner: Do you think of yourself primarily as a singer of a poet?

Bob Dylan: Oh, I think of myself more as a song and dance man, y’know.

Questioner: Why?

Bob Dylan: Oh, I don’t think we have enough time to really go into that (qtd. in *Dylan on Dylan*, 62).

Convoluting the matter further at a later point in the same interview, Dylan, when asked what poets he enjoys, offered an array of alternatives; “Rimbaud, I guess; W.C. Fields; the family, you know, the trapeze family in the circus; Smokey Robinson; Allen Ginsberg; Charlie Rich – he’s a good poet” (64). Across a selection of topics, Dylan’s approach to answering such questions was intriguingly captured in one particular exchange:

Questioner: What do you feel about the meaning of this kind of question and answer session?

Bob Dylan: I just know in my own mind that we all have a different idea of all the words we’re using – uh – y’know so I don’t really have too much – I really can’t take it too seriously because everything – like if I say the word “house” – like we’re both going to see a different house. If I just say the word – right? So we’re using all these other words like “mass production” and “move magazine” and we all have a different idea of these words too, so I don’t even know what we’re saying (67).

Amid consistent efforts to distance himself from poetic allusions, Dylan nevertheless demonstrates an astute awareness of the power words possess. Although this study will look to veer away from any analytical focus on Dylan’s words in isolation, the works of scholars such as Ricks and Thomas cannot be ignored entirely. Furthermore, if we are to entertain the

possibility that Dylan can be read as a poet, how significantly do the parameters surrounding his timeliness shift if what we are studying is poetry, and not songs?

With *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom explored “poetic influence, or the story of intra-poetic relationships” (5). Outlining his contention that each great poet creates their work as a result of a purposeful misreading of previous masters, Bloom’s primary concern is with the latecomer; the poet attempting to distance themselves from the anxiety of influence in their “fight to the end to have their initial chance alone” (8). Although Bloom’s study could scarcely be categorised as a treatise on the later works of great poets, his contention that great poets are inescapably late is worth considering here. Highlighting the struggle one poet faces in dealing with the influence of their notable forbearers, Bloom’s study outlines six revisionary ratios by which this relationship is managed: *Clinamen*, *Tessera*, *Kenosis*, *Daemonization*, *Askesis* and *Apophrades*. Conceding that the naming of these ratios was arbitrary, Bloom keeps it to six “because these seem to be minimal and essential to my understanding of how one poet deviates from another” (11). Determining that “poetic influence cannot be reduced to source-study, to the history of ideas, to the patterning of images,” it becomes instead an investigation “of the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet” (7). Furthermore, much like Said’s *On Late Style*, Bloom’s study focuses on “great” poets exclusively. Consider the studies that seek to highlight the poetic elements of Dylan’s artistry, and this proviso becomes problematic.

In the works of Ricks and Thomas, Dylan’s lyrics are read as a continuation of the poetic line Bloom defers to. In the case of Thomas’ study, Dylan’s lyricism is aligned with that of the ancient Greek and Roman poets: “From the beginning of his musical career, Bob Dylan has been working with artistic principles, and attitudes toward composition, revision, and performance, that bear many similarities to those of the ancients” (2). Aligning “Rome around the last century BC and the beginning of the first century AD and America in the second half of the twentieth,” *Why Dylan Matters* subscribes to a theory of poetic influence in direct

contrast to Bloom's, as quoted above (3). Accurately outlining that "Dylan's genius has long been informed by the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome," Thomas scarcely considers anything approaching Bloom's hypothesis of the suffering and struggles that Dylan, as one poet taking from another, ought to have battled with (17). Rather, Dylan's use (and, misuse) of classical material is seemingly read as a subtle nod and wink toward scholars such as Thomas himself.

Ricks' *Visions of Sin* does dwell on the "problem of *intention*" when contemplating Dylan's work: "I believe that an artist is someone more than usually blessed with a cooperative unconscious or subconscious, more than usually able to effect things with the help of instincts and intuitions of which he or she is not necessarily conscious" (7). Yet, as Christopher Hitchens critiqued in his assessment of the text, "Ricks spends almost no time on the influences that Dylan actually does affirm or the influences that we know about" ("America's Poet?"). Concurrently arguing that "Ricks essentially wants to argue that Dylan has always been swayed by the elders and that his verses consistently defer to the authorities," Hitchens' appraisal of Ricks' study would – if one wishes to consider Dylan a poet – appear to leave the subject looking rather ordinary. As Bloom argued: "Weaker talents idealize; figures capable of imagination appropriate for themselves" (5). Although Dylan is by no means a weaker talent, nor is there necessarily evidence to suggest that he is a "great" poet; Dylan's lyricism is of immense importance to his great art, but Ricks and Thomas have inadvertently demonstrated why it – more than any other facet of his artistry – should not be afforded any priority over additional factors; such as his singing and performing.

Paul Williams' *Performing Artist* series charts the development of Dylan's live performances from 1960 well into the 1990s. Across a series of essays and articles, collected anthologies like *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, *Bob Dylan and Philosophy*, *The Dylan Companion*, *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader* and *All Across The Telegraph: A Bob*

Dylan Handbook, further demonstrate the extent certain scholars have gone in exploring the minutiae of Dylan's career. Furthermore, selective studies such as Andrew McCarron's *Light Come Shining*, Elijah Wald's *Dylan Goes Electric* or Greil Marcus' *Invisible Republic, Like A Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads* and *Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus*, offer in-depth studies of isolated moments from Dylan's work. Yet, despite the unquestionable worth of a portion of this scholarship, Dylan is more than any one of these disparate elements. As Meisel writes in his *The Myth of Popular Culture*, concentrating on one element of Dylan's artistry instead of another leads one to "miss the full effect" (153). It is in a similar vein that he suggests "one way to read Dylan, then, is not directly – not at first, anyway – but through his critics, particularly through their lapses" (154). Problematically, this approach requires one to consider Dylan for what he primarily is; a popular-artist, a pop-star and a rock musician; none of which necessarily coincide with Said's (let alone Adorno's) theoretical approach to late style. As shall be demonstrated however, Dylan is also more than any of those things.

Neither Said nor Adorno stipulate in their writings on late style the extent to which the theory can be taken regarding the suitability of the artist under scrutiny. With the exception of Said's questionable claims that Glenn Gould "gripped the general imagination" with his work, there is little or no consideration of popular, mainstream artists (*On Late Style* 116). It's likely – particularly in the case of Adorno – that such an omission reflected the worth that Adorno and Said ascribed to such artists as these, and their art. The assumed differences between high and low, serious and popular music must be challenged, therefore. In Bob Dylan, we are presented with an artist that Meisel describes as the clearest summary of "popular culture" (*The Myth of Popular Culture* ix). Furthermore, Meisel credits Dylan with being the artistic force that "vividly erases the distinction between "high" and "low"" (ix). Albeit argued with another end in mind, Meisel has offered the clearest rationale for the suitability of Dylan's work in such

theoretical settings. Reference is drawn toward the crucial distinction Adorno erects between music that is worthwhile, and that which is not:

The higher music's relation to its historical form is dialectical. It catches fire on those forms, melts them down, makes them vanish and return in vanishing. Popular music, on the other hand, uses the types as empty cans into which the material is pressed without interacting with the forms. Unrelated to the forms, the substance withers and at the same time belies the forms which no longer serve for compositional organisation (*Introduction to the Sociology of Music* 26).

Adorno's dismissive approach toward popular music thus relies upon the notion that this form fails to integrate with its musical antecedents. Yet, countering the argument that this relationship "between the recognised and the new" is destroyed in popular music, Meisel demonstrates its occurrence on a miniaturised scale:

This dialectical transvaluation is also what pop does, although against a transistorized background. Pop's deviation from its backgrounds is more microscopic than is Beethoven's. Like modern art and sculpture, it is minimalist. It saves more of the past in less time and space than does "serious" music, different from it not in kind but in degree (46).

Enabling this "microscopic" dialectic between popular music and its antecedents becomes an acknowledged feature of Dylan's work. To the degree that Dylan has been accused of plagiarising the works of other artists, there are few artists of his importance who so widely engage this "dialectical transvaluation" as Dylan continues to do. With the 2006 release of *Modern Times*, Dylan's thirty-second studio album would incite mild outrage for the artist's apparent mistreatment of the nineteenth-century American poet, Henry Timrod. As Bell writes of Dylan's latest brush with such controversy, the artist "had built parts of some songs with recycled masonry" (*Time Out of Mind* 426). Furthermore, given that Timrod had died well over a century before, there was not even the chance that Dylan could be subjected to legal action.

Yet, as Dylan revealed in a later interview with Mikal Gilmore, there were no sinister motives on his part:

Who's been reading [Henry Timrod] lately? And who's pushed him to the forefront? Who's been making you read him? And ask his descendants what they think of the hoopla. And if you think it's so easy to quote him and it can help your work, do it yourself and see how far you can get. ... It's an old thing – it's part of the tradition (“Bob Dylan Unleashed”).

Throughout the course of his career, as shall be demonstrated throughout this study, the artist's awareness and indulgence of his creative forbearers has taken in an astounding range of influences and sources. In this regard, one may appreciate Meisel's assertion regarding Dylan's ability to alter the perceived limits of what Said and Adorno reckon to be appropriate for late style. More so than anyone else, it was Dylan who would dismantle Adorno's notion that popular music simply “withers”.

Questions pertaining to the perceived worth of Dylan's work encourage careful consideration of his ‘Americanness’ also. From the artist who would direct his scorn toward the American “Masters of War” in 1963, to he who would position a large American flag as the backdrop to his performances during a world tour three years later, Dylan's relationship with America is more than just a circumstance of birth. With the Canadian pianist Gould, Said presents his solitary consideration of a non-European artist's late style throughout his study. Yet, given that Said is primarily concerned with Gould's treatment of Bach, Gould's nationality becomes somewhat incidental; playing no part in Said's analysis. Although the collection *Late Thoughts* does consider North American figures such as Mark Rothko and Frank Gehry, even these reflections are somewhat exploratory when compared to the later consideration of more established figures; Mozart, Wagner, Strauss and Mahler dominating here. Late style is a province of high European culture. American artists simply lack the necessary heritage. Dylan's America may not have possessed centuries of cultural inheritance akin to Beethoven's

Europe, yet Meisel's finds it by no means deficient in dialectical potential. Furthermore, within the creative realm of rock music, Meisel highlights the to-ing and fro-ing between American and British culture and music that ultimately fostered the emergence of the genre as we understand it:

An anxiety about British culture motivates American culture as a whole and underwrites the historical creation of American pop from the canons of British art. When the British Invasion reverses this process in the early 1960s by canonising American pop, particularly the blues and rock and roll, this history comes full circle (*The Myth of Popular Culture* ix).

As David S. Reynolds writes of America in the age of Walt Whitman, a more collective, transparent dialectic between the arts can be identified. This alternative appears uninhibited by the kind of creative or social restrictions we would ascribe to the European alternative:

To assign Whitman's poetic patterns to a single performance mode, however, is delimiting and misses the social significance of his imagery and style. In antebellum America, boundaries between different performance genres and cultural levels were permeable. Popular singers borrowed directly from the opera and from oratory. Actors and lecturers cribbed from each other. Artists in various fields mingled the high and low. Whitman learned from them all. His verse enacted the permeability of modes. In one passage he could sound like an actor, in another like an orator, in another like a singer. The same was true in his daily life: he would by turns declaim, orate, sing. (192-93).

Dylan's creativity similarly hinges upon a multitude of various influences, rapidly gathered and acted upon. In his *Bob Dylan In America*, Sean Wilentz describes the importance of this context: "Anyone interested in appreciating Dylan's body of work must face the challenge of owning its paradoxical and unstable combination of tradition and defiance" (9). From his debut album, Dylan demonstrated an astounding awareness of various genres and influences; Wilentz has described this development in its appropriate grandeur:

For more than half a century, Bob Dylan has been absorbing, transmuting, and renewing and improving American art forms long thought to be trapped in formal conventions. He not only “put folk into bed with rock,” as Al Santos still announces before each concert; he took traditional folk music, the blues, rock and roll, country and western, black gospel, Tin Pan Alley, Tex-Mex borderlands music, Irish outlaw ballads, and more and bent them to his own poetic muse. At the start of the 1960s, influenced by the songs and milieu of the Popular Front-inspired folk revival, he turned them into something else, much as the Popular Front composer Aaron Copeland had turned folk songs into orchestral music. His imagination and his voice blasted open by Beat aesthetics, Dylan then pushed his own reinventions of folk music into realms that were every bit as mysterious and mythic as the old traditional music, but in a pop sensibility of his own time that shocked the folk purists. And then he turned away again, moving to Blakean and biblical parable, time-fractured songs of love and heartbreak, hellfire preaching, and onward, though he recovered and revised modern minstrelsy of the 1990s and after (334).

The American setting is a determining factor in the kind of “microscopic” dialectic that allows a pop-figure such as Dylan to generate a late style. Furthermore, with its own rapid development and extensive borrowings, the very question of timeliness is sufficiently skewed to allow a figure such as Dylan to thrive. Rooted and rootless, Dylan’s convoluted late style embodies something of what D. H. Lawrence went looking for “under the American bushes” in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*:

Oh American. No good chasing him over all the old continents, of course. But equally no good *asserting* him merely. Where *is* this new bird called the true American? Show us the homunculus of the new era. Go on, show us him. Because all that is visible to the naked European eye, in America, is a sort of recreant European. We want to see this missing link of the new era (3)

Chapter Two: Protest and Protesting Protest

...his obituary has already been written: “Bob Dylan, best known as a protest singer from the 1960s, died yesterday...”

- Greil Marcus, *Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus*

407-8

Advance obituaries, as detailed in Gay Talese’s “Mr. Bad News”, are generally composed when it is suspected that the subject’s “days are numbered...or their life’s work is finished” (112-16). Writing in 2006, Marcus’ advance obituary of Dylan demonstrates a wider critical infatuation with a brief period of creativity that has, nevertheless, influenced most considerations of Dylan’s work thereafter. If indeed Dylan’s essential work manifested itself while he was in his early twenties, the subsequent “astigmatism that afflicts many obituary writers” has similarly sterilised a portion of Dylan-related scholarship (Talese, *Frank Sinatra Has A Cold* 114). As Talese notes of obituary writers in general: “After they have written or read an advance obituary of someone, they come to think of that person as being dead in advance” (114). Bob Dylan, the protest singer, has then irredeemably come to shape the framework by which this artist’s work is interpreted. Although the emergence of Dylan as a protest singer coincided with his first real embrace of the popular mainstream, this chronological element does not explain why such longevity has been afforded to a relatively brief portion of his career. Some may argue that Dylan’s protest work was his most significant and, as a result, warrants the level of primacy Marcus affords it. Yet, in a career so vast and varied as Dylan’s would become, perhaps protest is simply the easiest way to describe him.

It is unlikely that Bob Dylan pre-empted the increasingly public role protest music was to play within the escalating crisis of civil rights in 1960s America. Speaking to Nat Hentoff in 1966, Dylan responded to the question as to whether it was pointless to dedicate oneself to the cause of peace and racial equality:

Not pointless to dedicate yourself to peace and racial equality, but rather, it's pointless to dedicate yourself to the *cause*: that's *really* pointless. That's very unknowing. To say "cause of peace" is just like saying "hunk of butter." I mean, how can you listen to anybody who wants you to believe he's dedicated to the hunk and not to the butter? ("Interview with Nat Hentoff" 105)

When we contemplate Dylan's relationship with protest music, it is his dedication to the music, rather than protest, that is most remarkable. Unlike some of his early contemporaries, Dylan's protest music was the result of geographical circumstance, a collective milieu in New York City's Greenwich Village. Combined with his passion and awareness of American folk music, there is a certain detachment in Dylan's later recollection of how such songs came into being:

If you sang "John Henry" as many times as me – "John Henry was a steel-driving man / Died with a hammer in his hand / John Henry said a man ain't nothin' but a man / Before I let that steam drill drive me down / I'll die with that hammer in my hand." If you had sung that song as many times as I did, you'd have written "How many roads must a man walk down?" too ("Read Bob Dylan's MusiCares Speech").

Dylan's protest songs nevertheless appeared to demonstrate the arrival of an artist capable of directing willing followers. It established the foundations of a narrative that appeared set to determine the artist's status and importance to American history. Although he arguably is one of a handful of musicians who have shaped twentieth-century popular culture, Marcus' obituary

also reflects a wider sense of regret about Dylan's unfulfilled potential.¹⁷ In taking his leave from "composing and singing anything that has either a reason to be written or a motive to be sung," Dylan appeared content to slip into a popular mainstream that would be equally eager to have him (Hentoff, "Interview with Nat Hentoff" 100). Mirroring Edward Said's assessment of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, while Dylan's artistry continued to excel and undoubtedly was "wonderful...the unsaid implication is that it is wasted" (*On Late Style* 52).

Numerous attempts at defining Dylan's career path have followed nevertheless.¹⁸ Set against perceived dips and rises in creative form, the 2006 release of *Modern Times* demonstrated for some the "crowning jewel in a roots trilogy" that also consisted of *Time out of Mind* (1997) and "Love & Theft" (2001) (Bream 195). Although Jon Bream goes on to say that Dylan himself "has said he didn't view the albums as such," the packaging of his work into such contrivances demonstrates a recurring critical inability to contemplate Dylan's work beyond the terms of cliché (195). Taken to be Dylan's last great creative period (it is no coincidence Marcus' remarks came shortly after the release of *Modern Times*), these three albums generated critical allusions toward finality and death that were hardly inhibited by the lyrical nature of the songs therein. While the subsequent emergence of *Together Through Life* (2009), *Christmas in the Heart* (2009), *Tempest* (2012), *Shadows in the Night* (2015), *Fallen Angels* (2016) and *Triplicate* (2017) has put to rest any notion that Dylan was wrapping up with this latest trilogy, lateness, and how it can be applied to Dylan, requires a more dedicated

¹⁷ Lee Marshall similarly identifies the degree of 'indifference' that Dylan's subsequent works have been held in due to what they are not; "It's not a wilful dismissal of Dylan, as though arguing he's overrated, more a sense of disappointment that he never lives up to the ideal" (148).

¹⁸ The question surrounding what a more 'satisfying' narrative may have meant for Dylan remains an intriguing 'what if' scenario. What may Dylan have become had he remained composing and singing songs for the appropriation of causes? A September 1965 edition of *Esquire* magazine relayed twenty-five figures in American life that were of greatest importance to its University students. Of the four people (Bob Dylan, John F. Kennedy, Fidel Castro and Malcolm X) whose segmented faces made up a combined whole on the magazine's cover, two had already been murdered and the other has by now become an almost comic example of stubborn resistance to numerous assassination attempts.

consideration. If there is to be a late Bob Dylan in the Saidian sense, one suspects it would be within these subsequent works that it could be located. Yet, to query Dylan's lateness within the confines of his late years alone would be a mistake. Chronology itself must come under consideration when probing Dylan's late style.

Unlike the great artists Said references within *On Late Style*, Dylan does not typically satisfy the early, middle and late models of style. Rather than pursuing an appreciable line of artistic growth or development, Dylan's work more clearly resembles points on a graph. Where one can locate certain strands of previous work in subsequent albums, it is rarely possible to document how or why Dylan embraced a certain style at a certain moment. With the 1964 release of *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, the "finger-pointing" protest songs Marcus alludes to simply cease to appear in any format that resembled their prior clarity and intensity.

Chronicles, Bob Dylan's 2004 memoir, was never likely to clarify the many curiosities surrounding Dylan's long-standing career, rather it became yet another component of Dylan's eclectically brilliant back-catalogue. Scant time is spent there on the "protest" years, instead *Chronicles* encourages brief consideration with Said's earlier study, *Beginnings*. Revealing the efforts Dylan's *Chronicles* would go to in retrospectively constructing "a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness" that sits comfortably with the idealised understanding of where Dylan believes he began (Said, *Beginnings* xxi). These particular insights are crucial in terms of destabilising the critical habit of beginning Dylan's story at the same point as that in Marcus' projected obituary. *Chronicles* chooses "not to abdicate its [artistic] rights in favour of reality" as we assume it to be (Said, *On Late Style* 8).

Recalling the fledgling years of his career as a musical entertainer, Dylan recreates a scene from the lobby of Duluth's National Guard Armory in the mid-1950s. A still unknown Dylan (performing that evening as a warm-up act with his most recently assembled band)

experiences an unforgettable encounter with that evening's main event, the wrestler Gorgeous George, notorious for his bombastic demeanour. Affording Dylan "all the recognition and encouragement [he] would need for years to come," the question as to why vindication from Gorgeous George left such a lasting influence should not be overlooked (*Chronicles* 44). Amidst the expected and delivered references to Woody Guthrie or Robert Johnson, the immediacy of Dylan's moment with Gorgeous George suggests a degree of normality in which the author recalls his susceptibility to the charms of a great, well-known entertainer. Muhammad Ali, another eminent figure of the nineteen-sixties, credits much of his subsequent showmanship to the experience of seeing the wrestler perform live. It is curious that in time both Ali and Dylan – irrespective of the degree to which they would master their respective fields – would receive condemnation for their apparent fulfilment of a populist agenda bereft of the integrity expected of their prodigious talents.

Akin to Gorgeous George before them, both Ali and Dylan took on the role of becoming the celebrity-driven heel one loves to hate. While *Chronicles* tends to generate scepticism amongst its readers, Ali's documentation of a similar experience lessens the likelihood of gimmickry in Dylan's admitted admiration of the wrestler. Yet, to what extent George, an entertainer plying his trade in a scripted environment, could really have impacted upon Dylan remains uncertain. Mirroring the relationship with violence that Ali (the boxer) and George (the professional wrestler) shared, Jacques Attali's *Noise* reasons how Dylan (the musician) may similarly share in this occupational violence, and elaborate the effect George may have had. Alluding to the idea of the scapegoat, *Noise* investigates the human tendency to offset external violence or terror with a sacrifice. Contemplating this development, Attali likens the process to the transition which renders music from noise. Being a "threat of death [and thus] a concern of power," Attali's stance on noise facilitates an understanding of music as both communicant with this "primordial, threatening" element, and the conduit through which such

anxiety and dissonance comes to resemble joy and harmony (27). That the distinction between making music and song-writing is not strictly addressed in Attali's study is not entirely surprising.

Akin to Said's *On Late Style*, Attali manoeuvres his theory along largely Eurocentric, "high-brow" lines. Along with its anthropological intrigue (music as a fundamental element of society's myth-making), Attali's perception of music limits itself by and large to the remit of classical European composition and its precursory forms and influences. Although this method does not confer an entirely satisfying conclusion to the study, there remains a fascinating delineation upon violence and music that retains relevance when slightly augmented to suit the later, American scenario from which Dylan emerged. Often overlooked as the actual starting point of Dylan's recording career, his eponymous debut album offers a precursory insight into Dylan's relationship with Attali's theory. Discussing *Bob Dylan*, Greil Marcus described it as "a collection of folk performances about frolic and death" (*Invisible Republic* xxi). Demonstrating Dylan's position as an interpreter rather than the prolific song-writer he would become, the album was largely composed of material from the standard repertoire of folk circles Dylan frequented. Stating in *Chronicles* how he felt "at home in [the] mythical realm made up not with individuals so much as archetypes," the violence within *Bob Dylan* parallels Attali's view of music (236).

Consider Attali's conclusions regarding the importance of music in the formation of myth and the manifestation of such a theory becomes plain in *Bob Dylan*.¹⁹ Contrary to Washington Irving's portrayal of the European possibility to escape "the commonplace realities of the present [into] the shadowy grandeurs of the past", Nathaniel Willis described the

¹⁹ "Fixin' to Die", "Man of Constant Sorrow", "House of the Risin' Sun" and "See that my Grave is kept Clean" are but a sample of the morbidity running through this debut album.

nineteenth century American equivalent as “perpetually reaching forward”; such was the unavailability of a similar heritage in these surroundings (qtd. in Fender 17-18). The songs Dylan would cover and release on his debut album constitute a broad sampling (gospel, folk, blues, country) of the music that emerged throughout this process of America’s myth-making that Willis references. Comparative to Attali’s rationale, violence plays a crucial role in how such music came into being. It was to have an extended importance for Dylan as he moved beyond interpretation and appropriation alone. Domestically and internationally, Dylan’s song-writing began within a society rapt with violence. Considering Said’s portrayal of Mozart as he composed *Così fan tutte*, and Peter Sellars’s subsequent production of that same work in 1980s America, a backdrop to Dylan’s nascent period of creativity can be imagined: “At a similar moment in [his] own time, with characters and settings that allude to the crumbling of the American empire as well as class deformations and personal histories that bear the marks of a society in crisis’ (*On Late Style* 49). *Bob Dylan* became a notably late first album.

Dylan described how “you could write twenty or more songs off that one melody by slightly altering it. That was ok; others did it all the time” (*Chronicles* 228). Although “Talkin’ New York” and “Song to Woody” hinted toward a degree of social dissatisfaction on the author’s behalf, they were equally consolidated in their generous dosage of humour, wit and mimicry.²⁰ Illustrative of Mikhail Bakhtin’s depiction of folk humour in *Rabelais and His World*, this pair of songs demonstrated the aspects of revival and renewal central to Bakhtin’s theory. Listening to Dylan’s recollection of the initial impression New York City made on him in “Talkin’ New York”, one can read a sense of manageability over this sprawling metropolis in his casual arrival and departure from it:

²⁰ “A lot of people don’t have much food on their table/ But they got a lot of forks ‘n’ knives/ And they gotta cut somethin’” (“Talkin’ New York”), “Hey, hey Woody Guthrie, I wrote you a song/ ‘Bout a funny ol’ world that’s a-comin’ along/ Seems sick an’ it’s hungry, it’s tired an’ it’s torn/ It looks like it’s a-dyin’ an’ it’s hardly been born.” (“Song to Woody”).

So one mornin' when the sun was warm

I rambled out of New York town

Pulled my cap down over my eyes

And headed out for the western skies

So long, New York

Howdy, East Orange (*Bob Dylan*).

Despite the vastness of this new place, “Talkin’ New York” reduces the city to proportions Dylan was more readily familiar with: “You can stand at one end of Hibbing on the main drag an’ see clear past the city limits on the other end” (Hentoff, “The Crackin’, Shakin’, Breakin’, Sounds” 20). Although he rarely discusses his origins with any degree of candour, in leaving one “dyin’ town” Dylan propels himself into a city full of people without “much food on their table” (20). Arriving as he did in what the “New York Times said was the coldest winter in seventeen years”, there is an absence, nevertheless, of what Bakhtin describes as the “bare negation [that] is completely alien to folk culture” (687). Dylan allows for hope. Although social issues alluded to throughout the song have not perhaps been remedied, he manages to create some respite with the rejuvenated sun. Yet Dylan’s folk humour would become more fleeting in the two albums that followed *Bob Dylan*. As soon as the artist began to apply that same music strewn from the mythologized America with the protest lyricism evident on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963) and *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (1964), the bare negation that Bakhtin spoke of as being alien to folk culture would become more manifest; no more so than in the song that was central to Marcus’ article in which he depicts Dylan’s obituary, “Masters of War”. Taking what Attali understood as an inherently violent source of music, Dylan’s lyrical accompaniment would often deliver a rebuke to the violent times he was living

through in a manner that occasionally offered little by way of revival or renewal. Protest music of this sort did not correspond with folk culture as Bakhtin understood it.

With “Masters of War” particularly, Dylan displayed his ability to enliven the “unshaped anger and rage, terror and fear” of a collective listenership and making it all appear real (Marcus, *Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 408). That “Masters of War” adopts the melody of “Nottamun Town”, a medieval English folk song thought to reference the “Feast of Fools”, only serves to heighten the conceptualised violence Attali particularly attached to music inspired within the realm of the carnivalesque.²¹ Yet with Dylan’s desire to see these warmongers die (“I hope that you die/ And your death will come soon”) comes an unnaturally fundamental outlook that betrayed the ultimate return to normality that awaited the conclusion of such feasts. Perhaps overly zealous in his efforts to gain attention, or arguably mirroring the contempt for life displayed by those determining the potential onset of a nuclear inspired obliteration, “Masters of War” is as Marcus estimated, “a bad song ... too sententious, too self-righteous – stilted” (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 406-09). “Masters of War” lacks ambiguity, incredibly so with regards to some of the work Dylan was producing. Delivering upon a desire for ruthless clarity did not appear to be Dylan’s creative intention.

Enter once more, Gorgeous George. Dylan would in time suggest that this period of protest was little more than a facilitation affording his music career a public stage upon which to develop. Given the time Dylan spent in the company of those who believed in the difference such music could make, this is perhaps an exaggeration on his behalf.²² It is accurate however

²¹ It has been suggested that “Nottamun Town” was in fact written as a response to the English civil war; Nottamun potentially serving as a bastardisation of Nottingham, the city from which Charles I of England raised his first army for the ensuing war at hand. Regardless of its original intention, violence nonetheless plays a pivotal role in either eventuality.

²² David Boucher’s introductory chapter to *The Political Art of Bob Dylan* demonstrates the enthusiasm Pete Seeger – a leading contemporary of Dylan’s in this period of protest music – possessed for the incorporating possibilities inherent in the collectivised sing-along.

that Dylan never truly embraced the daily dealings of a day-to-day, picket-line protester. Of the “song chemistry [factories]...on the other side of the cosmos,” Dylan admits feeling irredeemably (and gratefully) separate in his song-writing intentions throughout this protest period (*Chronicles* 227). One may assume that Dylan’s contribution to the protest movement was somewhat akin to a paying of dues before being licensed to pursue broader creative avenues.²³ In *Gorgeous George*, the authorised tyrant of professional wrestling, a duplicitous approach to reality and performance was carried out in a manner that appeared manageable and profitable.

Dylan’s protestations generated entertainment for an audience wishing to enjoy violence they could comprehend safe in the knowledge that nobody was really getting hurt. Considering Adorno’s cynicism about protest song, it may be assumed that Dylan also identified the flawed efforts of “taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumable...wringing something like consumption-qualities out of it” (“Theodor Adorno – Music and Protest”). In an interview with Hentoff, Dylan’s concern for those that his earlier protest songs were deemed to be aiding appears resolute, it is the medium he appears to have lost faith in. When questioned why he finally ceased to write such songs Dylan suggested: “Message songs, as everybody knows, are a drag” (“Interview with Nat Hentoff” 100). As the interview progresses Dylan clarifies his stance further: “When you don’t like your situation, you either leave it or else you overthrow it. You can’t just stand around and whine about it. People just get aware of your noise; they really don’t get aware of *you* ... I don’t believe songs can change people anyway” (104-5). Like *Gorgeous George*, Dylan knew how to put on a show

²³ This is not to suggest that Dylan’s “protest” albums are without such personality. Outright “protest” songs like “Masters of War” were a relative minority when one considers these albums in their entirety. Yet, their potential use was so great as to generally overshadow – publicly, anyway – songs such as “Don’t Think Twice, it’s All Right”, “Girl From The North Country” or “Boots of Spanish Leather”; each of which are but a sampling of the significant moves Dylan was making toward later albums.

when necessary. Contrary to the duplicitous mastery George possessed however, Dylan could not as easily distance himself from his actions on stage or on record. Once the wrestler left the ring, he could become George Wagner again. Dylan could not redeem his artistic or personal autonomy from the noise his protest music had generated. Increasingly viewed as a spokesman for an emerging, angry, disillusioned generation, Dylan's eventual reluctance to wholly submit his artistic efforts to socio-political causes engendered a period of pre-empted lateness.

While protest music shaped the way Dylan was publicly received, his obsessive interest in America's folk music tradition provided him with an abundance of material to dip into. Reviewing the 2014 release of Bob Dylan and The Band's complete *Basement Tapes* (originally recorded in 1967), Peter Aspden accurately surmised Dylan's grasp of the "Great American Songbook":

Dylan's reverence for America's musical history is clear. He and his group try their hands at sea shanties, antebellum saloon songs, Mississippi work songs, blues and country standards. They performed covers of songs by Hank Williams, Curtis Mayfield, Johnny Cash, Woody Guthrie, Patsy Cline, John Lee Hooker, Fats Domino and Pete Seeger. Dylan takes on Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues", perhaps just to try out the song's most chilling line for size: "But I shot a man in Reno, just to watch him dies" ("Bob Dylan's Legendary Basement Tapes").

Given his early status as a fascination of Greenwich Village cafes and east-coast University campuses, that Dylan took this broad appreciation for America's musical past and subsequently incarnated himself as a protest singer cornering those most evidently responsible for society's ills, only served to endear himself further to those who had initially latched on. Appearing simultaneously in touch with America's past and present, a great leap is not required to determine Dylan's importance in orchestrating the investigation of America's future, and the listener's role within it. A matter of months after the release of *Bob Dylan*, he had written and recorded a vast collection of contemporary, socially conscious songs that appeared willing to

be appropriated to whatever cause was deemed necessary.²⁴ His self-proclaimed destiny for success had appeared to manifest itself: “looking right at [him] and nobody else,” Bob Dylan had arrived (*Chronicles* 22).

Naturally, those that were tuning into Dylan as his music appeared to be – as Marcus noted earlier – giving shape to their innermost terror and fear, could not be aware of the artist’s future tendency to divest from what had appeared to be a vocational cause. Nor could they have been aware of the inherent pressure Dylan felt susceptible to at being distinctly individual within a community that relied heavily upon the idea of collective movement. The Bob Dylan they encountered would have initially appeared unencumbered by the issues that would shortly give reason for his departure from this scene. The notion that a songwriter’s worth was to be measured against the suitability of his message was a limitation Dylan appeared initially content to persevere with while the going was good. His growing reluctance to being “the lone folkie out there, strumming “Blowin’ in the Wind” for three hours every night” became more manifest as he imagined contributing something more substantial to “the musical background” (Heylin, *Beyond the Shades* 267). In a manner that almost appears to affirm Dylan’s intention to pursue in depth each of the genres he touched upon throughout *Bob Dylan*, his suitability to the folk-music/protest song environment of the early-nineteen-sixties was not to last. With “Subterranean Homesick Blues”, an electrified song taken from *Bringing It All Back Home* that would shortly thereafter find itself revised on film, Dylan’s late style emerges in full view.

²⁴ One telling example of such appropriation can be found in the 1962 composition, “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”. Leaning upon Ian Bell’s ‘context explains a lot’ rationale, a general understanding of the contemporary threat nuclear fallout (rain) posed in early 1960s America appeared to suggest a straight-forward subtlety in a notably distinct Dylan song. The apocalyptic nature of the work appeared to mirror a general dismay and terror in the face of the Cuban Missile Crisis particularly. However appropriate and poetic a response “A Hard Rain” could have been, according to Clinton Heylin’s scrupulous research the song was in fact written before the crisis. On top of this, however cagey one must be in approaching Dylan’s reflections upon his own work, the ‘hard rain’ in question has always been ‘just a hard rain. It’s not the fall-out rain. It isn’t that at all.’

Integral to Said's theory is the presence of a great artist. In first establishing one's place and importance in the "social order of which he is a part," only then can "a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" become manifest, thus invoking a sense of exile where late style may flourish (*On Late Style* 8). Although the heights that Dylan could wish to ascend were but speculative at this early stage, America's folk purists certainly appreciated Dylan's contribution to be great in a manner that meets Said's requirement. Discussing the general appeal of Dylan to this initial audience, Elijah Wald demonstrates the opinion in which Dylan was held: "He was already recognised as a mercurial genius, the ultimate outsider, compared to Woody Guthrie in *Bound for Glory*, Jack Kerouac in *On the Road*, Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye* ... James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*" (3). In an astonishingly short period of time Dylan had become for many the real-world embodiment of a restlessness that pervaded a sizeable portion of his own generation.

What then of Dylan's move away from a collective that vaunted his talents so definitively? Captured in Joan Didion's portrayal of another folk-music sensation, Joan Baez, Dylan openly discussed his dislike of Baez's seemingly remorseless perseverance with the same collection of well-versed ballads and songs ad infinitum (46). Perry Meisel has demonstrated what Dylan rendered capable in the seemingly prosaic world of pop music as a result:

Pop's deviation from its background is more microscopic than is Beethoven's. Like modern art and sculpture, it is minimalist. It saves more of the past in less time and space than does "serious" music, different from it not in kind but in degree. "It is precisely the relationship between the recognised and the new," Adorno say, "which is destroyed." In point of fact, it is precisely this relationship – a decidedly dialectical one – that pop heightens (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 46).

Revision took on a new-found prominence as Dylan sought to process the impact of his initial breakthrough. Adhering to the energies of his youth once more, the revitalisation of a moment in time when a teenage Dylan, “like a million others, [was] swept up by the tidal wave of rock and roll,” ensured that his departure from folk-music in a strict sense would sound blatantly different; it would be musically electrified (Bell, *Once Upon a Time* 80). Contrary to the acoustic authenticity Dylan engendered in attempting to fit in with the Greenwich Village folk scene of the early 1960s, the emergence of *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) signified a return to Dylan’s initial musical instincts.²⁵ As Meisel would similarly note with regards to Dylan’s “coming out” at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival: “Dylan was only returning to the wider theatre of rock and roll, which the folk mode had allowed him to reimagine as more porous musically and more amenable to lyrical prodding” (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 155).

Immediate suppositions regarding an ideological betrayal on Dylan’s part were, therefore, misguided. To those present at the festival itself, Meisel suggests that many would have understood the very act of “plugging in [to be] a fall from grace. The music had nothing to do with it. Neither did the lyrics” (155). With *Bringing It All Back Home* – the first album to demonstrate Dylan’s experimentation with an electrified backing band – already in general circulation for a number of months by the time the festival occurred, the furore takes on a degree of falsity. A new Dylan album at this stage would not have gone unnoticed. Any surprise on the part of the audience would likely have been feigned. This is not to suggest that the album itself was to be expected. Akin to the format his subsequent concert tours would establish, *Bringing It All Back Home* was one half electric with his band, one half acoustic and solo. Despite any expected familiarity, the sound of the album was simply not what one could possibly have expected. Reiterating Meisel’s earlier conclusion that in simply plugging in

²⁵ It is known now that Dylan was in possession of an electric guitar in the late 1950s, acquiring his acoustic alternative in a trade that required he left behind his electric option with the seller.

Dylan had gone over the acceptable edge, it is curious to consider the steadfast presence of Dylan's dissatisfaction with society that permeates *Bringing It All Back Home*, nonetheless. "Don't follow leaders / Watch the parkin' meters" ("Subterranean Homesick Blues") may not have reiterated standing over the graves of war-mongers to make sure they have really died, yet, "Better stay away from those / That carry around a fire hose", "Twenty years of schoolin' / And they put you on the day shift", "Keep a clean nose / Watch the plain clothes", all touch on Dylan's sustained awareness of a fight certain American youths were bound up in.

With the vocal performances throughout being delivered at a speed notably quicker than that which Dylan would usually perform, it is understandable that the concern he was demonstrating did not transmit to his audience with the usual clarity. Without reliance upon a "traditional ballad [to provide] this particular sample ("Subterranean Homesick Blues") with its underlying infrastructure," the alternative influence of Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business" would be similarly destabilising for those struggling to see the point in Dylan's latest release (Heylin, *Revolution in the Air* 268). Regardless of such confusion however, "Subterranean Homesick Blues" possessed something else altogether that was intriguing to an alternative band of potential followers. Although only just breaking into the U.S. Top 40 was not generally symptomatic of having a hit single, it was, nevertheless, Dylan's first experience of such acclaim. Clarifying the late qualities of this work however extend beyond these changes. Its treatment as a music video demonstrates this facet of the work in greater clarity.

Although this experiment was devoid of the commercial incentive that music videos would come to possess with relation to an artist's latest release, Dylan's visual experimentation with "Subterranean Homesick Blues" nevertheless carried a promotional agenda beyond the song itself. A creative afterthought, it was filmed with the intention of delivering the opening scene for *Don't Look Back*; a documentary covering Dylan's concert tour of England in 1965. While the results of this project would not to be revealed until the release of the film two years

later, this initial image of an isolated figure in the film's opening scene reflects a facet of Dylan's performances that would be no longer viable after the tour that this film documents; from now on he would be accompanied with a band on stage. It would perhaps be facetious, however, to assume that upon recording the music video Dylan anticipated the creative endeavours he would be attempting upon its eventual release two years later.

Latent within this music video and *Dont Look Back* are a series of curiosities that suggest Dylan's growing awareness of the expansiveness available to him. Within a year of recording the video in an alley at the back of London's Savoy Hotel, Dylan would release both *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*. He was in the process of ascending to the very peak of his creative powers. *Dont Look Back* successfully settles its remit regarding Dylan's fulfilment of his role – akin somewhat to The Beatles and their own 1964 film, *A Hard Day's Night* (albeit off the back of a rather different cinematic approach) – as a young, famous artist on the cusp of unimagined and barely manageable fame. However, delivering two subsequent albums of critically acclaimed material while still maintaining a rigorous touring schedule, Dylan cannot have had much time to consider the full effect of this work. In this regard, what we are witnessing is not the process of Dylan's late style in action; rather, it illustrates the meshed nature in which creation and reception give cause to varying differences with regards to the expectations of an artist and his audience.

Dont Look Back – through design or, more likely, lax production efforts – never truly fed the mania which surrounded Dylan as his fame began to globalise. Aware of what is to follow due to it having already occurred in the intervening period between filming and release, the film provides an image of the artist as he seeks to countenance both his past and present; with little apparent concern for what is yet to come. Attempting to generate publicity in what was yet still a rather fitful degree of interest for Dylan's work in the U.K., the European release of "The Times They Are A-Changin'" as a single came two years after the album's initial

American release. A necessary move in attempting to generate greater excitement for the eight shows he would perform, the nature in which Dylan's work arrived in the U.K. (whole, without necessary credence paid to the development of his career to this particular point) disturbed the notion of "who Bob Dylan was, or thought he was" (Bell, *Once Upon a Time* 396). The Dylan a British audience thus encountered bore little resemblance to expectation. That the Newport festival of 1965 was still a few weeks away as Dylan's tour of the U.K. took place only serves to demonstrate the issues one has in reading Dylan chronologically. Constantly in motion, it is difficult to pin-point which Dylan is in existence at any precise moment. Appearing satisfied to deal with journalists and publications that clamoured for some kind of explanation, this British tour offered a suitably vague background with regards to Dylan's past in which he could generate such a telling artistic side-step the like of which this music video suggests.

Without any precedent for what a music video should be, the creative team behind this visualisation of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" took on a relatively minimal approach. Focused momentarily on an alleyway under construction, the camera pans out to the artist standing beside some discarded rubble and bins. Carrying a stack of cue cards, one can read the word "Basement" upon the first of these. To his right stands the unmistakable poet Allen Ginsberg, carrying a shepherd's staff while in conversation with another staff-carrier who, from his involvement in many of the scenes to follow, we know to be Bobby Neuwirth. Dylan, dressed smartly in a shirt, slacks and waistcoat begins to reveal the cards he is carrying. In conjunction with hearing "Subterranean Homesick Blues" play, we watch these figures, presumably hearing it also in a different time and place, as each new cue card comes to represent a particular fragmented lyric of the song we are listening to. With his eyes darting between the cards he is holding and the camera that is filming him, Dylan's foremost concern on screen appears to be his attempt to maintain fluidity between what each card contains in relation to where such an allusion appears in the song itself. Nobody present, let alone Dylan

himself, interacts with the song playing in any practical sense; there is no singing, playing of instruments or dancing etc. With the audience aware of the song's impending conclusion (it was already some two years old by the time anyone witnessed this visual incarnation of it), Dylan presents a closing cue card simply stating "What?" With the remaining few moments of music, Dylan and his two accompanying figures on screen simply walk one of three ways separate from each other.

A brief consultation of David Kinney's *The Dylanologists* would urge caution in those seeking to analyse the apparent intention and meaning within the minutiae of Dylan's work. Of that initial cue card carrying the word "Basement", certain viewers were almost certainly drawn toward the idea of Dylan's basement tapes; a series of recordings Dylan and The Band had been creating and withholding since an earlier point in 1967. Yet, filmed two years earlier, before Dylan had begun working with The Band in earnest, it is purely a coincidence. Beyond any agenda to tease his audience with clues, Dylan uses the video to ask questions of his listeners (and viewers). Taking his most commercially popular song at the time of filming and making a subsequent video to accompany it, Dylan challenges one to consider whether you should be listening to the words of the song or studying carefully the cards he is holding. As we witness Dylan occasionally struggling to keep his cards in tandem with his music as it plays, we begin to understand that listening intently and watching with equal concentration is not feasible. Although hardly a concern now with the advent of YouTube and the convenience of watching and listening at will, within the confines of *Dont Look Back* and its initial release, Dylan instigated an immediate cause for concern amongst those who were viewing this film in its original format. For the purpose of demonstrating the transitional quality this music video possessed with relation to Dylan's late style, the art of watching it shall require an independent examination.

An early attempt with video that would become a focal point for future experimentation with the form, the undoubted selling-point of its particular intrigue rests with the iconic image of Dylan holding and thus dispensing with his array of cue cards. Emblematic of the many uses such cards can possess, their prominence hints at Dylan's overarching concern; creating distance between performer and audience. Considering Bertolt Brecht's writing on the alienation effect, Dylan's cue cards initially succeed in "turning the object of which one is to be made aware ...from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" (143). At first viewing, an audience with even a remote interest in Dylan would have assumed a certain degree of understanding regarding the song that they were now seeing and listening to on screen. The presence of these cue cards and their distinct reference to the song itself thus arouses in the audience a sense of doubt regarding what it is that they assumed was already safely understood words and phrases. Brecht's concern for the complacency that can enshroud an audience manifests itself in Dylan's onscreen approach. Unlike the prospect of an alternative take of the song, Dylan has enlivened the prospect of amazement and confusion in a song that may have been assumed to "have nothing more to say" (144). Although we are aware now that the cards themselves were jointly manufactured and written upon by many people present within Dylan's inner-circle in England, the intentional misspellings and puns that contrast what is on the cards with what is in the song suggests a dismissal of the sacrosanctity of Dylan's lyrics. This irreverent approach toward the words demonstrates a value in the video that was not immediately apparent. Despite a certain degree of self-reverence such as this project determined, Dylan was not taking himself seriously with regards to his "voice of a generation" tag; how could the words of one so important be rearranged and messed with in this manner otherwise? Ultimately, one gets the impression that this playful lack of respect for his own lyricism is a message directed at the audience. The accelerated delivery and electrical backing that permeated "Subterranean Homesick Blues"

only served to compound the comparative difficulty listeners would have had trying to decipher these new lyrics in the first place. The added inhibition of misguiding cue cards could therefore appear to be detracting even further from the possibility of a collective sing along. An element of the folk-music tradition that was continually heralded by the widely influential Pete Seeger among others, Dylan appears to suggest that such attempts are now futile. That even Dylan himself can be seen not moving his mouth and singing along suggests a degree of ambivalence toward the very notion of such a collectively purposeful act.

The presence of Allen Ginsberg dressed like Moses and carrying his shepherd's staff similarly destabilises the manner in which we are encouraged to contemplate the litany of "commandments" Dylan is proscribing.²⁶ Lost in conversation with Neuwirth, Ginsberg/Moses appears to be missing the bush as it burns. Unlike the vengeful repercussions that Moses' Old Testament God tended to distribute to those who paid scant heed to him, Dylan appears equally unaware of who is in his immediate surroundings. As Dylan would testify to throughout the documentary itself, Ginsberg was a poet he had taken great interest in.²⁷ A minor detail perhaps, Ginsberg's on-screen presence was notable. Similarly, the ever-present Neuwirth reinforces the impression that Dylan had chosen to associate himself with an altogether different group. With his cue cards, akin perhaps to the ring girl signifying the round to come in a boxing match, Dylan becomes but a brief distraction from something more substantial happening elsewhere. With publicity and acclaim from another existence put to one side, Dylan appears intent on starting afresh, beginning a new discourse as an old one carries on. He is already on the move before the music comes to a conclusion.

²⁶ "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is, after all, a long list of orders and instructions.

²⁷ In one particular scene of *Dont Look Back* set seemingly in a hotel room, Dylan inquires of the natives present whether or not they have any poets like Allen Ginsberg writing there in the U.K.

To many viewing this scene initially, the prospect of reading these cue cards as placards instead must have seemed only natural. An integral method of presenting one's dissent should they be unable to have their voice heard in an audible manner, Dylan's fast and loose approach to presenting a message on the card before dispensing with it quickly undermines a practise so revered within the counter-culture of the 1960s that valued Dylan's work. Although perhaps a sly dig at those to whom Dylan himself had become a "voice" they could inhabit when necessary, the application of such a reading suggests a growing dismay with the social responsibilities that had been thrust upon him. Interesting to note also is the steadfast nature of his refusal to move with the music whilst he concentrates on ensuring you see all of his cards. Of the song's aforementioned musical influence, one would be hard pushed after all to find a visual rendition of "Too Much Monkey Business" in which Chuck Berry remains so immobile; this was music to move to. The stoic disposition he employs throughout determines that he is not now performing for you. Watching him listening to his song as you do likewise, it becomes apparent – touching again upon Brecht's alienation effect – that Bob Dylan has alienated himself from the creation you may have come to realise in listening to his works. This music video would remain the sole visual performance of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" for twenty-three years. Fittingly, that particular performance came at a time when Dylan would once again seek to reinvigorate himself and take on a new, far more rigorous and intimate approach to touring; what would become *The Never Ending Tour*.

By virtue of the music video accompaniment to "Subterranean Homesick Blues", Dylan encouraged discussion with relation to how he would henceforth be viewed. Recalling the events of an earlier Dylan concert in New York's Philharmonic Hall (1964), Sean Wilentz relays the manner in which an adoring audience "knew every word" that Dylan sang, in spite of the fact that some were still relatively new at this time (87). Retrospectively realising that Dylan had in fact already moved on even as he performed in front of them, the question of

Dylan's attire that night is curious in its presence amongst Wilentz's recollections. Although he had already moved beyond the point where his clothes required "a bit of tailoring," resembling as he once had "a cross between a choir boy and a beatnik," the Dylan of Wilentz's memory dressed like "the cynosure of hip, when hipness still wore pressed slacks and light brown suede boots" (Shelton, "Liner notes"; Wilentz 87). As *Dont Look Back* was being recorded, some seven months after the concert Wilentz attended, Dylan had already developed a preference for wearing "a leather jacket... [with] jeans that were tight and black above his black cowboy boots" (Wald 257). As a means of resistance, this sartorial change was an effective statement. Throughout *Dont Look Back* (keeping in mind that this documentary captured Dylan's last tour in which his acoustic, folk/protest work would be played unanimously), Dylan's new clothing leaves him looking inappropriately dressed for the performance of such songs. Had it not been clear to Wilentz in 1964 that the Dylan he saw in concert was already on the move, anyone attending these British shows couldn't have missed the change that was taking place. Of the "Subterranean Homesick Blues" music video, an irony remains that upon finally seeing it two years after it had been filmed, an accepting audience would have quickly realise that this latest Dylan was already outdated also.

Although the impact that a performer from an altogether different field can have on Dylan has been demonstrated with reference to Gorgeous George, the noted effect of Charlie Chaplin's films on an early Dylan would appear to have sustained his intrigue throughout these initial years also. Aware that he would be seen to be silent in this music video, it is not surprising that Dylan may have had Chaplin in mind throughout the filming process.²⁸ A

²⁸ We must remember that the song as we are hearing it is clearly present as the result of a subsequent edit. In much the same way that Chaplin's silent films did indeed possess a soundtrack, we are aware while watching them that the music we are hearing is not concurrently being heard by Chaplin as we view him. In direct contrast to the *cinéma vérité* style that Pennebaker and Dylan wished to cultivate in *Dont Look Back*, this opening scene cannot but stand apart from the film that first presented it.

determinative influence on Dylan's early stage habits, Robert Shelton testifies to such Chaplin-esque behaviour in the liner notes of *Bob Dylan*:

Another strong influence on Bob Dylan was not a musician primarily, although he has written music, but a comedian – Charlie Chaplin. After seeing many Chaplin films, Dylan found himself beginning to pick up some of the gestures of the classic tramp of silent films. Now as he appears on the stage in a humorous number, you can see Dylan nervously tapping his hat, adjusting it, using it as a prop, almost leaning on it, as the Chaplin tramp did before him (“Liner notes”).

Of the concert that Wilentz witnessed, such mannerisms were still in use throughout. Yet the recordings from the tour that would follow hardly possess such fleeting moments of friendly showmanship. The Chaplin influence as it is witnessed in this music video thus remains subtle, but telling, nonetheless. While Chaplin's tramp tended to dress in dishevelled finery that stood at direct odds with the worlds he turned up in, Dylan's new slim-fitting slacks, trendy shirt and waistcoat achieved a similar feat of isolation for the wearer. Like Chaplin's tramp, Dylan's own transgression with regards to his clothing permitted him a degree of allowance and expectancy to act differently. It is never expected that Chaplin's tramp will do what we in the audience perceive to be as the sensible thing. For the old, new and ever-present Dylan fans that encountered *Dont Look Back* at its release, the overriding sense of inevitable disillusion regarding what you expect of Dylan and what you will get can be reduced to the very clothing that he wears.

As a visual statement of intent that was to be viewed in hindsight, Dylan displays a degree of indifference toward expectation that would stay with him throughout his career from this point onward. A distinct snap shot in time though this video may be, it reveals to us the depths of Dylan's imagination when confronted with a public resistance to his capabilities for expression. With such credence being afforded to his internal creativity at this time, it is

implausible to approach this music video without actually consulting who it is that we are physically witnessing. Perhaps more pertinent when considered in lieu of the figure we subsequently see within the scenes of *Dont Look Back*, if Dylan was somewhat overwhelmed internally regarding the excesses of his growing fame and the clawing efforts of those who felt somewhat responsible for putting him there, it showed externally too. With his touring schedule indefinitely escalating as his fame grew, the usage of various drugs becoming a suitable manner of stabilising his means of dealing with this. Dylan often looks increasingly worn-out as the documentary progresses. Although his “80 cigarettes a day habit” is dismissed as ludicrous by Dylan when printed in an English paper charting the development of his tour, it is remarkably rare to find a shot of him throughout *Dont Look Back* not smoking. A product of the times perhaps, Dylan rarely appears relaxed or to be enjoying himself. When the ante would be raised even higher a year later during an even wider world tour, Dylan’s dependencies escalated also. Captured in a climactic scene of Todd Haynes’ pseudo-biopic of Bob Dylan *I’m Not There*, the grave reality of Dylan’s burnout is met with the sad assessment of a character representing Allen Ginsberg: “He’s already gone” (Haynes).

Representative of the interior dialogue between mind and body, the coalescence of mental and physical experience determined that a change was required for Dylan. It is such bodily alterations that aid the development of a late style in an artist. That it did not embrace Dylan at a point where his physical life was approaching an end does not detract from the point that mentally he was approaching a degree of exhaustion that would soon see him depart from touring for eight years. The retrospective release of this music video indicates Dylan’s attempt to determine perhaps that he was not to be rendered complete. From what had appeared to be his peak as a folk singer emerged his importance as a singer of protest songs. An experimental indulgence of adding electricity to the mix was capped off with a series of albums that ultimately re-established the boundaries of what song-writing and popular music could be. In

the space of half a decade Dylan had done all this. That he ultimately chose a music video as his final release of this period illustrates a creative desire to be held in an unpredictable light. The constant revision and reworking of what has come before is by now a tenet of Dylan's style so important as to suggest that from a very early age he has always been late. As with all great artists however, being late becomes a virtue of shaping your time.

Chapter Three: Reinterpret and Reinvent

In preparation for the release of *Shadows in the Night* (2015), Bob Dylan conducted a solitary promotional interview. Granted to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a publication targeting a fifty years and older readership, a specific demographic was in mind for Dylan's latest release. Containing a repertoire of songs previously recorded by Frank Sinatra, *Shadows in the Night* was a collection of American 'standards' that would likely resonate with fans of a similar age to the interpreter in question. Contrary to a more contemporary appreciation of Sinatra's music, the songs Dylan chose to record were largely taken from the further reaches of Sinatra's back-catalogue; there would be no "My Way" on this album. Displaying a creative preference for work that predated Sinatra's embodiment of what Gay Talese described as "the fully emancipated male" of American culture, Dylan's Sinatra showed no traces of what Adam Gopnik identified as "the bad-guy stuff... [that was] about as bad as one imagined and a lot worse than one had hoped" (64; "Frank Sinatra and the Biography"). Considering a period of work that correlates with Sinatra as he is still in the process of 'making it', Dylan's selections illustrated the importance he afforded to the songs in question, and indeed, to the act of covering itself.

As a prodigious young song-writer, the appropriation of his music by other performers quickly became a reality for Bob Dylan. Under the shared management of Albert Grossman, associated acts like Peter, Paul & Mary made hits of songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" or "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright", before they ever become known as original Dylan compositions. As Dylan became a more prolific performer in his own right, the proliferation of artists covering his work only served to expand. Conceding that many of these covers "definitely started something for [him]," Dylan was aware of those who could alternatively

make his work sound “like commercials” (“Read Bob Dylan’s MusiCares Speech”). Covering the work of other artists was fraught with potential pitfalls. As a covering artist himself, Dylan’s tastes tended to stay within the realm of traditional genres; contemporary music rarely made an appearance. An artist keenly aware of all facets surrounding the performing of another artist’s work, Dylan nonetheless maintains a curious relationship with this mode of musical expression. Taking umbrage throughout his AARP interview with the actual premise of covering another artist’s work, it is the prospect of “uncovering” that Dylan articulates as the stimulant behind this act.²⁹ It is with this initial idea of uncovering that one ought to approach Dylan’s *Shadows in the Night*.

Whilst discussing the songs he selected for *Shadows in the Night*, it is curious then that Dylan would simultaneously express the concern that these well-established standards had already “been done to death” (Love). If they were largely resistant to any further revelation, what was he hoping to “uncover” exactly? Considering Theodor Adorno’s theoretical standpoint on the mortality of art works, it may be more accurately surmised however that it is not the songs that have “been done to death”, rather, the previous performances of them: “Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art” (“Late Style in Beethoven” 566). Exploring this theory with relation to Dylan’s own situation at the time of recording, a performer approaching his mid-seventies could potentially find in these overworked songs a certain commonality; both could be said to have achieved all they could hope to. An artistic project that was perceived by some as evidence of Dylan’s own inability to compose anything of worth any longer, the reality is scarcely as straight forward as this. Before *Shadows in the Night*, Dylan can point to six further studio albums of covered material interspersed throughout the entire range of his recording career. While a portion of these albums will be discussed in

²⁹ In the referenced interview undertaken with AARP, Dylan is concerned with “the word “covers” [that] has crept into the musical vernacular. Nobody would have understood it in the '50s or '60s. It's kind of a belittling term. What does it mean when you cover something up? You hide it. I've never understood that term” (Love).

later chapters, to dissuade the critical assumption that Dylan's cover albums signify his creative decline, *Good as I Been to You* (1992) and *World Gone Wrong* (1993) will be the focus for this current chapter. Containing a selection of songs that not only predate the work on *Shadows in the Night*, but the popular recording industry itself, they carry within them songs at the very forefront of America's musical tradition. Two albums that are largely overlooked within the greater scope of Dylan's oeuvre, it is my intention to demonstrate why these recording choices represent significant manifestation of Dylan's lateness.

Investigating the timing of their release, the recording process and song selection Dylan applied, and the way both works were received and related to the time from which they emerged, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* establish the unburdened nature in which Dylan re-imagines the landscape of American music before driving it in another direction. Prior to considering the works themselves, it is important to deduce how such works can be viewed with relation to Said's vision of late style. With reference to Said and Adorno, the basis of the framework is readymade. Given Dylan's convoluted late style however, such preconceptions, within both the theory itself and Dylan's suitability for it, will require revisions. Considering the broader critical issues regarding how cover works ought to be considered, attention will initially turn toward Edward Said's *On Late Style* and the question of artistic style generally.

Interpreting style, Said illustrates the connection that an artist has with "his or her own time, or historical period, society, and antecedents" (134). Irrespective of any efforts on the artist's part, the work "is nevertheless a part – or paradoxically, not a part – of the era in which it was produced or appeared" (134). Late style therefore stands as a general, objective style to begin with. What then of art that is built upon a tangible connection with two or more of these styles? Although Said countenances the complexities of one artist, in his own time, appropriating the work of another artist in theirs, the cover album is perhaps unsurprisingly not

a mode of artistic expression that Said investigates directly. If we accept his determination that an artist is susceptible to the stylistic remit of their own time, how may we suitably accommodate the subsequent appropriation of artistic material created and/or performed by another artist in another time with an alternative style to begin with? Furthermore, how does this dichotomy of style influence our understanding of late style?

In the final chapter of *On Late Style*, Said suggests that a unilateral sense of lateness permeates Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and Benjamin Britten's subsequent operatic treatment of the same novella. Although Mann's text "was published in 1911, and so within his oeuvre the work is a relatively early one", Said suggests Britten's resulting opera to be "a late testamentary work by virtue of its subject matter" (148-49). Premiering three years prior to Britten's relatively premature death at sixty-years old, the parameters by which Said's investigates the lateness of this subsequent *Death in Venice* focuses upon his interpretation of Britten's relationship with the novella in question. Be it Mann's original or Britten's operatic interpretation, *Death in Venice* has subsequently been enmeshed in two substantially different times. With relation to Dylan's covering of songs that often-emerged before his own birth, we locate a similar ripening of potential lateness in the covering artist who possesses the necessary hindsight.³⁰ Upon this premise we locate a greater understanding for what Dylan determined to be his attempts at uncovering another artist's work.

Such efforts on Dylan's part, however, have not always subscribed to this chronologically satisfying formula of lateness. Broadly considering the range of music that

³⁰ One demonstration of this development came with Dylan's performance of "The Night We Called It a Day" during the final week of David Letterman's long-running talk-show career. Taken from *Shadows in the Night*, Sinatra's original performance was recorded a year after Dylan's birth in 1942. Yet, mirroring the necessary presence of late subject matter which had enabled *Death in Venice* to become a simultaneously early and late text after Britten's operatic treatment, the finality of the context in which Dylan's performance took place determined a fresh, late perspective for a song that initially lamented the loss of young love. Sinatra was only twenty-seven years old when recording "The Night We Called It A Day" in 1942. Tom Adair, the lyricist behind the song, was similarly only around twenty-eight years old when the song was published in 1941.

Dylan has chosen to cover on *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*, Said's treatment of the Greek Alexandrian poet Constantine Cavafy is worthy of consideration. Although Cavafy's original work is not symptomatic of the covering efforts in question, an artistic preoccupation with "a moment or incident from the past, either a personal past or that of the wider Hellenic world" demonstrates how this nineteenth-century poet stood at odds with "the modern Arab world" (143-44). With *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* we witness Dylan's own preoccupation with a vision of American society and culture that appears equally at odds with contemporary America. Comprised of old blues, gospel and folk songs largely unknown to those who do not possess Dylan's intimate knowledge of American music, they too look backward whilst inevitably moving forward. The "time...historical period, society, and antecedents" that underwrite these songs enabled the development of a later time in which artists like Dylan could flourish (Said, *On Late Style* 134). He is working with the very building blocks of a musical tradition he would later develop further again. Yet when he returns to these foundational songs, the work that separates the 'then' from the 'now' cannot be forgotten; the artistic status cultivated by Dylan off the back of these foundations cannot be overlooked. Akin to Said's analysis of Cavafy's work, "the future does not occur, or if it does, it has in a sense already happened" within these two subsequent Dylan albums of cover material (145). They are a self-contained sampling of Dylan's ability to demonstrate what Said describes thus as:

the prerogative of late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity...unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile (148).

There is an awareness amongst Dylan's listeners that a younger version of this same artist once played these same songs and created something new as a result. No such creativity is forthcoming on these albums. *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* do not

encapsulate growth and development in terms of what may subsequently emerge. Rather, they are emblematic of Dylan standing outside, apart, tangential from a process that has already occurred. As with Cavafy, Dylan's performances here “deliver meaning to someone else” as he renders his previous incarnation as the inheritor of this musical tradition temporarily obsolete (Said, *On Late Style* 146).

I

Prior to the release of *Good as I Been to You* in late 1992, an ongoing celebration of anniversaries and commendation commenced for Bob Dylan. Having recently turned fifty years old, lifetime achievement awards, honorific concerts, and official bootleg releases of previously unpublished material would pre-empt two albums that, on the face of it, were at odds with the well-received *Oh Mercy*, released three years earlier.

Comprised of songs that “preceded the material [Dylan covered] on his first album, issued thirty years before,” *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* signified the removal of Dylan “from the prison of his own career and returned him – or his voice, as a sort of mythical fact – to the world at large” (Marcus, *Invisible Republic* xvii). Yet, with the subsequent successes of *Time Out of Mind* (1997), “*Love & Theft*” (2001) and *Modern Times* (2006), a rationale akin to that afforded to his eponymous debut album also befell these two later attempts at covering; in (re)visiting the roots of American music, Dylan had asserted himself creatively in his own time. Marcus’ vision of Dylan’s voice being released to “the world at large” only truly manifested itself with the far more successful works that followed. *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* are largely overlooked therefore in lieu of these successes. They have been categorised not as works of art, but, as documentation of a finite period in American music that Dylan once again tapped into for his own needs. Whereas *Time*

Out of Mind would later suggest that Dylan was not creatively spent after all, and dually signified to others that this was a natural starting-point for Dylan's late style period, a carefully packaged, expertly produced and commercially successful album rarely upholds Adorno's assertion that "in the history of art late works are the catastrophes" ("Late Style in Beethoven" 567).

Adhering to Adorno's assessment regarding the prominent, unvarnished application of convention to late works, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* demonstrate none of the transformative genius that *Time Out of Mind* would exemplify thereafter. Whilst discussing Adorno's writings on Beethoven's late style, Richard Leppert demonstrates how Beethoven's unexpected "adherence to [conventions]...renders [his late works] enigmatical" (517). The similarly undisguised presence of American musical conventions throughout these two enigmatic Dylan albums has consistently raised questions regarding the apparent absence of Dylan's own transformative genius. Challenging the assumption that Beethoven's "indifference to appearances" had dampened the creative capabilities of his late work, Adorno declares that "the content of art always consists in mere appearance" ("Late Style in Beethoven" 566). The presence of convention itself and what it may reveal thus takes on an importance beyond any perceived lethargy on the artist's behalf. Remediating the assumption that *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* were carried out absentmindedly, late style requires the presence of the unexpected. Dylan's sudden adherence to convention typifies this.

It is intriguing that when Dylan became an acceptable target for such accolades, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* signified both a breakthrough and a demonstration in arch-repetition. An inability to chart Dylan's development in convenient terms of the early, middle and late periods which Adorno associates with Beethoven is evident at this juncture of Dylan's career. Yet the critical reliance upon biography undermines the analysis of late works according to Adorno. Detailing that "studies of the very late Beethoven seldom fail to make

reference to biography and fate,” Adorno argues that the subsequent devaluation of artistic theory when faced with an artist's own mortality misrepresents the nature of the work in question: “Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art,” as noted above (“Late Style in Beethoven” 564-66). To appreciate the later works appropriately, therefore, one must not “fix one's gaze on the psychological origins, but on the work itself” (564).

Yet were one to consider *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* without any idea of Dylan's biographical details, they would scarcely make any sense whatsoever, and yet a general understanding that Dylan's work will and always has been viewed in lieu of his public persona disturbs the notion that such an approach can be overlooked when considering his late style. Unlike the retrospective scrutiny of Beethoven's later works with especial consideration of “every notebook” that troubled Adorno, Dylan's recording career has developed according to the inference that “because Dylan is a star, his life has public meaning” (“Late Style in Beethoven” 564; Marshall 3). Beethoven, despite his prominence in his own time, scarcely had to contend with the public intrusiveness that ultimately comes to shape a life like Dylan's.

Late style therefore cannot unilaterally be subject to Adorno's misgivings regarding the prominence afforded to biography. Contemplating the issue of authorial presence at a time more chronologically linked to the emergence of Dylan, Roland Barthes's thoughts on the author's role are of value:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us (“The Death of the Author” 1322).

Although Adorno dismisses the importance placed upon biography, the entirety of Dylan's oeuvre has been subject to increasing degrees of interest in his associated personality. Inevitably, how we consider Dylan's artistry ultimately relies upon how we understand his life. While both Adorno and Barthes reject the notion of the author/artist being “the past of his own book...stand[ing] automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*,” Dylan's late style cannot be accurately assessed without consulting the idea of the ever-present, alternative 'Bob Dylan' (“The Death of the Author” 1324). Considered in greater detail throughout a previous chapter, this *other* ‘Bob Dylan’ resonates with Marcus’ imagined obituary of he whose legacy is already finite.

Crucial to Adorno's distrust of biographical detail was the assumption that such an outlook negated the importance of the work itself. Although no artwork can be created within a vacuum, the artist's personality was nonetheless to be viewed somewhat incidentally. Yes, “touched by death, the hand of the [ageing] master sets free the masses of material that he used to form,” thus enabling the emergence of a late style (“Late Style in Beethoven” 566). However, with this lack of creative control comes an inevitable incapability on the artist's behalf to truly make this late work his own. With regards to Beethoven's later works, Adorno considers the effects of this irredeemable divide: “This sheds light on the nonsensical fact that the very late Beethoven is called both subjective and objective. Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which – alone – it glows into life. He does not bring about their harmonious synthesis” (567). Returning to Barthes' thoughts on the development of the author in the late 1960s, Adorno's projection of the late artist yielding conscious, creative control is suggestive of the image Barthes presents of the “modern scriptor...born simultaneously with the text” (1324) Incapable of “preceding or exceeding the writing”, the scriptor, much like Adorno's late Beethoven, “is not the subject with the book as predicate” (1324). Dylan, unlike Beethoven, was not “touched by death” prior to or during the creation of the two albums in

question. Nonetheless, biographical detail demonstrates how the presence of a late style in these works is not necessarily implausible. Dealing exclusively with conventional songs that were themselves the foundation of American music, Dylan becomes a scribe, a copyist, carefully reviving and recording songs that represented a basis of meaning in musical terms. If not impending death therefore, what brought Dylan to this point can and must be located with the aid of biographical detail.

Albeit embellished with speculation and secondary source material, throughout periods of the 1980s Dylan is generally assumed to have undergone a series of personal struggles; what Marshall has described as evidence of Dylan's "mid-life crisis, viewed as precipitated either by his turning forty in 1981 or by his divorce in 1977" (152). Writing in *Chronicles*, Dylan described a point in 1987 where he recognised that "the previous ten years had left me pretty whitewashed and wasted out professionally" (146-47). While the details of his debauchery are unimportant, what cannot be overlooked is the overwhelming negativity surrounding this period in the artist's career.³¹ Inconsistent in terms of quality, both in his recorded music and accompanying concert performances, the product of Dylan's efforts became increasingly questionable. Reviewing a performance at Wembley Arena for the *Observer* that year, radio disc jockey John Peel illuminated what appears to have been a general consensus of Dylan at this stage: "being an enigma at twenty is fun, being an enigma at thirty shows a lack of imagination and being an enigma at Dylan's age is just plain daft" (285). Running with this impression, Peel subsequently queries why "no rock star who has continued rocking into middle age has done so without becoming sentimental, repetitious, embarrassing or, in Dylan's

³¹ Although this negativity does not necessarily manifest itself in a constant flow of outright condemnation, the conclusion of the period in which Dylan's creativity most openly embraced Christianity (1979 to 1981, *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved* and *Shot of Love*) signalled the tempering of mass interest in Dylan and his work. In spite of occasional acclamation (*Oh Mercy* (1989) particularly) and a significant rise in the regularity of accompanying literature about Dylan's prior work, analysing subsequent, contemporary commentaries on Dylan and his work in its entirety, it becomes evident that this period of the nineteen-eighties is one that few consider worthy of extensive investigation. With reference to Perry Meisel's writings on Dylan being read typologically, the 1980s come to suggest an extensive period of 'falling' before eventual resurrection once again.

case, impertinent?" (285). Sentimentality aside, repetition, embarrassment and indeed impertinence were adjectives one could easily apply to Dylan throughout this period.

Whereas Dylan's divisive nature once revolved around conflicting interpretations of his artistic intentions, a prolonged portion of the 1980s demonstrated that his legacy had become the sole reason why anyone remained interested. Dylan appeared to acknowledge "the hollowness of recognition and glory and was beyond longing for acceptance" (94). Reiterating a question asked by Marshall as he contemplated this period of Dylan's career: "How did the burden of being Bob Dylan prevent him from doing the things that Bob Dylan was supposedly so good at?" (153). Where *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) signified Dylan's ability to harness the realities of being 'Bob Dylan' and create something astonishing despite it, the 1980s signalled a loss of control on Dylan's behalf. The distinction between the personal and the professional appeared to blur beyond recognition for even Dylan himself.

In condemning Dylan's attempts at sustaining this enigmatic image, Peel highlights the manner in which Dylan's reputation as an artist in continual flux had been shaken by the mid to late 1980s. Where Dylan's efforts at masking and deflection had been a given, a heightened degree of candour was now expected. Drawing from Marshall's analysis of Dylan in the 1980s, it becomes apparent that the transition of popular artist from the 1960s to popular artist in the 1970s represented a smoother journey than the transition that would occur thereafter:

As the eighties developed, however, wider social changes involving a re-conceptualisation of both 'rock' and 'the sixties' meant that Dylan gradually began to lose the battle with his history. During this period Dylan became understood almost entirely in nostalgic terms and his live shows and public appearances functioned as living reproductions of past glories (152).

In living through the perceived debauchery and madness of the 1960s, an initial allowance was made for those who persevered throughout the 1970s. In accordance with Marshall's

chronological reading of developments within rock and roll however, such hospitality would not extend into the following decade (159). With “the death of rock” came a general undermining of Dylan's capabilities as an artist who had at one time been the focal point of this now much maligned genre. Although this development would eventually determine the occurrence of Dylan's late style by way of *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* in the following decade again, initial attention must be paid to the alternative approach Dylan adopted with regards to performing and touring.

Delineating the development of rock and roll, Marshall describes how this genre that had initially “emerged within the mainstream... [only to take] over the mainstream” became, in the 1980s, a kind of “lifestyle choice” (159-60). No longer capable of captivating people with the same allure of meaning as it once had, those major rock acts that would survive into the 1980s became the stuff of pure spectacle; the high-point of stadium rock. While certain artists flourished in the sprawling – yet inevitably contained, and limited – venues, Dylan's unwillingness to perform his music with a consistency that satisfied a crowd of this scale (largely present as they were for nostalgic reasons), only served to enhance the belief that the artist was lacking any direction or drive whatsoever. Reflecting on this period in *Chronicles*, Dylan conceded that he had had his own fears at this time: “I realised that my playing days might well have faded out. In some sense, it would have been fitting, for up 'til then I had been kidding myself, exploiting whatever talent I had beyond breaking point” (146). Writing specifically about his performances throughout this spell, Dylan likened the situation to a house in which “the windows had been boarded up for years and covered with cobwebs, and it's not like I didn't know it” (*Chronicles* 146). This was Dylan in 1987.

How then does Dylan come to invert this downward spiral? Meisel's identification of the critical tendency to highlight the importance of “typology, or *figura*” again becomes relevant here, when contemplating the structure of both Dylan's popular reception and his

critical interpretation. This is most evident in Dylan's "fall from acoustic to electric at Newport in 1965 [as he] repeated the Biblical fall from innocence to sin," and many events throughout Dylan's highly publicised career have attained meaning "by being [apparent] repetitions and fulfilments of earlier ones" (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 156). Dylan's departure from a touring model that never truly suited his music is read as one such 'Damascene' moment. It arrived at a moment during a performance in Locarno, Switzerland, in 1987.³² Dylan would recall his moment of clarity over the following years:

It's almost like I heard it as a voice. It wasn't like it was me thinking it. *I'm determined to stand whether God will deliver me or not.* And all of a sudden everything just exploded. It exploded every which way. And I noticed that all the people out there – I was used to them looking at the girl singers, they were good-looking girls, you know? And like I say, I had them up there so I wouldn't feel so bad. But when that happened, nobody was looking at the girls any more. They were looking at the main mike. And that is when I sort of knew: I've got to go out and play these songs. That's just what I must do (qtd. in Bell, *Time Out Of Mind* 328-29).

Documenting the performances Dylan had delivered either side of this Locarno concert, Bell concludes that "connoisseurs of the numerous illicit Temples in Flames recordings can point to fine performances...both before and after the 'epiphany'" (*Time Out of Mind* 329). It is similarly worth noting that Peel's withering review came at witnessing Dylan perform a fortnight after the concert at Locarno. Dylan himself had suggested that although the event at Locarno "had taken place in front of everybody's eyes...a difference in energy" is all that may

³² Within *Chronicles* Dylan offers forth additional reasoning behind his sudden alteration in approach (from his perspective anyway). Writing of a time in which he and The Grateful Dead began playing together in preparation for proposed performances together shortly thereafter, Dylan recalls stumbling upon a band of musicians performing "jazz ballads" in a nearby bar (150). Although Dylan had become almost immediately disillusioned with what he felt was his own performing limitations with or without The Grateful Dead, the singer in this band he had stumbled upon granted Dylan some apparent respite. Identifying the manner in which "[the singer] wasn't very forceful [because] he didn't have to be," Dylan felt "like the guy had an open window to my soul" (150). Combined with Dylan's later recollection of techniques for playing the guitar that had been shown to him by Lonnie Johnson years previously, the Locarno moment is afforded significance rooted in the development of Dylan's sense of professional possibilities.

have been perceived (*Chronicles* 153). A seemingly inconspicuous night from which Dylan discovered a great deal of importance, Paul Williams identifies a measure of positive change after watching in the artist perform a year subsequent to Locarno:

Hence this 1988 gambit. Listen to Dylan sing (and emphasize, stretch out) the word “I” in the lines “I am a man of constant sorrow” and “I bid farewell to old Kentucky” and “I’m bound to ride that open highway” in spring 1988, and I think you can actually hear a person getting connected, and discovering and creating a platform on which to do his work as a performer (*Bob Dylan Performing Artist: 1986-1990* 150).

Yet, as Meisel argues, to fulfil this typological process Dylan must continually “fall in order to continue being a myth” (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 156-57). Events dictated by Dylan such as that at Locarno demonstrate a reawakening perhaps of the distinction between the man and artist. However, the blatant lack of correspondence between this moment and any notable upturn in Dylan's popular reception highlights just how far he had fallen at this stage of his career, and, perhaps, how much further he may yet fall.

Of the many positive experiences that would occur in concert over the following years for Dylan, Bell alludes to shows “in Scotland, Ireland and in London [that] had left even hardcore fans shocked by his demeanour and his grisly performances” (*Time Out of Mind* 351). In lieu of his later redemption, Locarno and the alternative touring schedule that began shortly thereafter have been granted retrospective importance. In truth, although the alternative touring model is intrinsically linked to the two cover albums that Dylan would release, when he began working on those albums he more closely resembled Adorno's vision of a fractured genius rather than any creative force one may have expected. The late 1980s demonstrated Dylan amid pre-empted lateness.

II

Two studio albums of original material would separate Dylan's altered approach to performance and the release of *Good as I Been to You* in 1992. *Oh Mercy* (1989) and *Under the Red Sky* (1990) represent the relative best and worst of Dylan's albums within the respective decades in which they were released; a surprising rise precipitating another notable fall. Thanks to Dylan's scrupulous detailing of the events which led to the emergence of *Oh Mercy* (he devoted an entire chapter of *Chronicles* to it), we can recall the evident struggles Dylan had working with Daniel Lanois and the assemblage of musicians that the producer had gathered. Although Dylan would share creative control with producer Don Was for *Under the Red Sky*, it is hardly conceivable now given these prior struggles, that Dylan would nonetheless agree to use popular artists as varied as Slash, Elton John, Stevie Ray Vaughan, George Harrison and others throughout the recording process. Ultimately, a combination of “too many people in the room, too many musicians, too many egos, ego-driven musicians that just wanted to play their thing” determined the manner in which Dylan had forfeited a degree of control within the recording studio (Lethem). Having consistently worked with accompanying musicians in each of his studio albums since the release of *Bringing It All Back Home* in 1965, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* would not singularly identify Dylan's initial attempts at capturing the music of other artists on record; they also signified Dylan's first truly solo albums since his recording of *Another Side of Bob Dylan* in 1964.

The recording of *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* by no means represented the execution of a carefully planned, conscious effort of forgoing usual recording techniques either though. Brought about in stages, Dylan's extensive touring schedule enabled a broader scope upon which he may perform “traditional songs [that] had become more than a gesture to a few of the old folk devotees dotted around the halls” to develop (Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 354). Performing ninety-two shows in venues across the World on the year in which

Good as I Been to You was released, Bell suggests that “even amid the insanity of 1966, when trying to write and record *Blonde on Blonde* before setting out to conquer an obdurate world, he had never tried to make an album under these conditions” (355). Although some may question Dylan's motivation behind creating an album in such trying circumstances, contractual practicalities determined that he owed Columbia Records two albums of musical material.

It had not appeared clear initially that Dylan would go about recording these two works in the manner that he did, however. In Chicago, “less than a fortnight after finishing up a spring tour of the western states in Las Vegas...he was working with David Bromberg and a disparate group of musicians...on perhaps 30 songs” (Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 355). Consisting of little or nothing that could be described as original work on Dylan's behalf, Bromberg's recollection of events suggests that this recording session was anything but quaint. Bell writes of how “for one track, described as a 'contemporary Christian' piece, an entire gospel choir was brought in; for another a zydeco accordion player was hired” (355). Despite this occasionally grandiose accompaniment, “plenty of traditional songs, blues of various vintages, country songs and folk tunes were attempted” (355). Upon returning from the European leg of his World tour, Bromberg recalls Dylan's dissatisfaction with the resulting songs that he had charged Bromberg with mixing in his absence. Although Bromberg did not attempt to hide the fact that he had little or no idea of what Dylan wanted from these eventual mixes, Bell subsequently agrees with Bromberg's suggestion that during his absence Dylan simply “lost interest” in the project (356). Therefore, with slightly over one month available before Dylan was required to restart his touring once more, he “retreated to his Malibu garage, where there was room enough to spare for a modest home studio” (356). Whereas traditional music had continued to appear sporadically throughout his live performances and his recordings with Bromberg earlier that year, an immediate and absolute reversion “to being a hardcore, uncompromising folk musician” permeated Dylan's Malibu recordings (356).

With what David Yaffe has described as “his out-of-tune guitar and low-fi equipment”, Dylan's rudimentary approach to the recording of these songs is important (22). Commercially, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* are amongst Dylan's least successful albums. By contrast, Eric Clapton's *From the Cradle* (1994), an album similarly shaped by cover material, would become one of Clapton's highest selling albums. Yet, furnished with a polished proficiency in terms of performance, production and personnel, Dylan's approach was peculiarly antiquated by comparison. Despite his initial intention to work with Bromberg and the assorted musicians, what we receive instead are two albums that do not primarily appear concerned with impressing the imprint of the recording artist on the established work therein. Attempting to recreate the initial conditions in which such songs were recorded, Dylan's recordings suggest a dual concern for performing this music as it first came to him, whilst concurrently demonstrating the apprehension of a collector striving to capture the sound before it disappears.³³ Once again, the very conventions of the recording process are demonstrated plainly throughout. Although this music constituted the very cornerstone of Dylan's own creations and remains embedded within America's musical foundation, in refining his own recording technique Dylan becomes a vessel through which the music may re-emerge in a contemporary setting; Barthes' scriptor. Taking such songs back to the root of their initial recording by the likes of field musicologists such as John or Alan Lomax, Dylan distorts the commercial aspect of such music. Working with Debbie Gold in a secluded, isolated setting that can only perhaps be likened to the circumstances in which he recorded *Bob Dylan*, Dylan recreates a moment in which such music entered a format that would enable future artists such as Dylan himself to locate them.

³³ Although it was scarcely Dylan's intention to suggest any degree of mimicry on this front, that his recordings of such songs mirrored the 'basic' process by which field musicologists such as John or Alan Lomax had employed when initially gathering these recordings cannot have gone unnoticed by Dylan himself. Throughout *Chronicles* Dylan would make reference to Alan Lomax and the impact he had in enabling young artists such as Dylan himself to hear the kind of music that would be so fundamental an influence on his own artistry.

The presence of Debbie Gold as the producer of *Good as I Been to You* further contributes to this idea of Dylan's late style.³⁴ While Bromberg's assertion of Dylan's short span of interest in their recordings together merely seemed to highlight what had been a recurring theme throughout the 1980s for Dylan, Gold appeared at far greater ease with compelling Dylan to persevere with songs that he himself had become quickly tired of. According to the recording engineer Micajah Ryan, Dylan "consulted Debbie on every take. He trusted her and I got the feeling that was unusual for him. She was never afraid to tell him the truth" (McKay). While in certain respects the resulting albums would benefit from Dylan's willingness to listen to the advice of someone around him, consideration of what makes these albums late cannot but scrutinise this altogether different approach on Dylan's behalf. Dylan's inadvertent concession regarding what would necessarily be best for a 'Bob Dylan' record suggests a degree of uncertainty on the artist's behalf. Informed by the increasing frustration of previous attempts at working with assorted collections of musicians, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* demonstrated Dylan's return to type. Although, as stated, many have interpreted this as an attempt to recapture his songwriting ability, a consideration of certain songs therein appears to suggest that the future was not something Dylan was investing too much hope in; for himself, or anyone else.

Interpreting Dylan's frame of mind at the time of recording these two albums, Wilentz believed the artist to be "still thinking about salvation, humanity, and old songs, but now with a sense that those songs – which could keep the world's power and greed at bay – were doomed; and that he might be one of the dwindling last generation of singers to remember and sing them;

³⁴ Described by Bell "as a long-standing friend of the artist," Gold's background was with Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead. Her list of accomplishments also included her work with Bruce Springsteen and his "immense 1978 tour to promote his *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album" (*Time Out of Mind* 357). However, neither Gold nor any other producer bar Dylan himself would partake in the work that led to the emergence of *World Gone Wrong* in 1993. Recording and mixing credits would be afforded to Micajah Ryan; a musical engineer that Gold had hired for the initial recording of *Good As I Been to You*.

and that all he can do in the face of that knowledge is to sing them anyway (237). Throughout the 1980s, and up to the point that these works emerged, Dylan had increasingly chosen to voice his concerns for facets of American life that troubled him. Perhaps dealing with greater specificity than he had even during the ‘protest’ period of a quarter-century earlier, a 1986 interview with Mikal Gilmore for *Rolling Stone* magazine provided an insight into his dismay:

I’m not particularly into this *American* thing, this Bruce Springsteen-John Cougar – ‘America first’ thing. I feel just as strongly about the American principles as those guys do, but I personally feel that what’s important is more eternal things. ... To me, America means the Indians. They were here and this is their country and *all* the white men are just trespassing. We’ve devastated the natural resources of this country, for no particular reason except to make money and buy houses and send our kids to college and shit like that. To me, America is the Indians, period. I just don’t go for nothing more, Unions, movies, Greta Garbo, Wall Street, Tin Pan Alley or Dodgers baseball games. It don’t mean shit. What we did to the Indians is disgraceful. I think America, to get right, has got to start there first (“Interview with Mikal Gilmore 342).

Dylan’s concern for America’s first inhabitants, America’s starting-point, is reflected in the songs he chose to record for *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*. Although both albums share similar characteristics within the wider oeuvre of Dylan’s catalogue of works, distinctions between the two are most clearly identified in the artist’s choice of songs for each. While there is an evident overlap regarding origins and genre, the former, with its renditions of “Canadee-i-o”, “Arthur McBride”, “Froggie Went A-Courtin’”, “Blackjack Davey” and “Jim Jones”, demonstrates a heightened awareness of works that have originated elsewhere; occasionally predating ‘America’ itself. With *World Gone Wrong* however, the selection of songs is more distinctly American in flavour. It is a more considered rebuke of American life on Dylan’s part.

Scrutinising Dylan's personal imprint on the liner notes and accreditation of each work (or lack thereof) will be discussed in greater detail shortly. However, for the sake of convenience, it should be noted that for the initial *Good as I Been to You*, Dylan chose to contribute nothing bar the songs themselves. To the chagrin of many folk-music enthusiasts, the packaging of the album itself merely suggested that all songs therein were traditional and arranged by Dylan himself. Perhaps wishing to palliate this furore with *World Gone Wrong*, Dylan contributed liner notes to this follow-up album. Somewhat satisfying the question of where these songs had come from, Dylan concurrently used this medium to compound his earlier concerns for contemporary American life; no more so with his understanding of "World Gone Wrong" itself:

WORLD GONE WRONG is also by [the Mississippi Sheiks] & goes against cultural policy. "strange things are happening like never before" strange things alright – strange things like courage becoming befuddled & nonfundamental. evil charlatans masquerading in pullover vests & tuxedos talking gobbledygook, monstrous pompous superficial pageantry parading down lonely streets on limited access highways. strange things indeed – irrationalist bimbos & bozos, the stuff of legend, coming in from left field – infamy on the landscape – "pray to the Good Lord" hit the light switch! ("Liner notes", *World Gone Wrong*).

Unpackaging Dylan's dismay during a time when America has drifted from these things that once were, both of these albums demonstrate a lateness that Dylan identifies as being greater than himself. It is a theme that has been explored by others within Dylan's musical realm previously. Regarding Dylan's aforementioned concern for America's "Indians", it is difficult to identify a previous public moment in Dylan's life where this issue was raised. Without questioning Dylan's sincerity, it remains interesting that as he doubts America's ability to redeem itself, attention is drawn toward the most basic, foundational understanding of that land's humanity. With Jonathan Silverman's characterisation of Johnny Cash's relationship

with this theme, a greater understanding of Dylan's motives may be rendered. Having gone much further than Dylan in an effort to draw attention to the manner by which Native Americans were pushed back and crowded out while others "claimed this land for [themselves] or for another country", Cash's quest for authenticity on this front is an issue Silverman queries (82). Writing of Cash's *Ride This Train* (1960), Silverman charted the artist's attempt "to appeal to everybody":

With its geographical diversity and emphasis on Native American place names, it nods to authenticity and seriousness; by acknowledging the presence of Native Americans before white settlers, Cash showed both his knowledge and understanding *and* his political savvy. ... Of course, Cash drew on traditional, even stereotypical ideas of Native Americans, but in doing so, he maintained his political stance about the plights of natives while appealing to his listeners' immigrant pasts. It was a difficult task to appeal to everybody, but Cash's narrator seemed determined. ... The performance showed the Cash was serious about his role as a re-interpreter of American culture through music and, in particular, stories about those disadvantaged or forgotten (82).

The suggestion that Cash possessed the artistic desire to reinterpret "American culture through music" could be similarly applied to Dylan's own intentions with *World Gone Wrong* particularly. Although *Ride This Train*, and the subsequent, "tragic history of the American Indian", *Bitter Tears* (1964) came at a stage of Cash's career that does not quite merit a late profile, Dylan's embrace of America's musical past does (84). Lacking the audacity (or authenticity, perhaps) that emboldened Cash and his tribute to the Native Americans, Dylan's *World Gone Wrong* identifies all that is wrong with America whilst, if not quite offering a solution, briefly reminding listeners of the evident positivity in the musical equivalents of the Native Americans themselves. Furthermore, unlike the more relatively early Cash, Dylan doesn't appear to possess (or certainly doesn't appear keen to wield) any political savvy.

During a time where Dylan's faith in America wavers, he once again enters a – if not quite *the* – basement.

III

In Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Adorno identified a work that “offers no justification for the admiration accorded it” (“Alienated Masterpiece” 569). Contrary to the apparent complexities of the piece, Adorno contended that “the unassailable prestige of the composer” overshadowed flaws that became apparent through familiarisation (572). Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* resisted analysis that sought to separate it from its creator. A similar issue has consistently plagued analysis of *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*. With the arrival of Dylan's *Time Out of Mind* four years after the two albums in question, the precursory works were similarly afforded a retrospective rationale. Whereas *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* had demonstrated no apparent trace of Dylan's earlier genius, *Time Out of Mind* would suggest that Dylan had a hold of these transformative qualities once more; convention need no longer be as baldly stated. William McKeen illustrates the critical consensus surrounding these covered works:

I think of it as a rediscovery, reenergising, the thing that links the previous great Dylan albums like *Infidels* or *Blood on the Tracks* or *Oh Mercy* with his later albums *Time Out of Mind* and “*Love and Theft*”. I don't think these later albums would have happened without this voyage of rediscovery of these two acoustic albums of the '90s (qtd. in Bream 182).

Once again, Dylan's work is prescribed a narrative that seeks to ensure nothing ever emerges without an explanation.

Be it before or after the emergence of *Time Out of Mind* therefore, *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* were felt to possess a degree of artistic autonomy and foresight on Dylan's behalf. This is a fallacy. Scrutinising Dylan's work in such a chronological manner requires the subservience to a critical framework that obscures more than it reveals. Considering the most contemporary figure of Said's *On Late Style*, the introduction of Glenn Gould notably begins with his obituary also: "Only a few figures in the history of music, and only a small handful of performers, have had as rich and complex a reputation outside the musical world as the Canadian pianist, composer, and intellectual Glenn Gould, who died of a stroke in 1982 at the age of fifty" (115). Given Gould's presence throughout the late twentieth century, he is perhaps the only figure in Said's study for whom such clarification is necessary; the rest, we can be certain, are already dead.

Contrary to many of the figures considered throughout *On Late Style*, Gould's late style is not situated at any one time or specific portion of his career; it is continuous and all-encompassing. Furthermore, with an eye on Dylan's attempts at covering work from America's musical past, Said's focus is drawn toward Gould's performances of Johann Sebastian Bach's eighteenth-century compositions. Albeit something of a stretch to suggest that Gould's interpretations of such work mirrors Dylan's attempts at covering, the interaction of both artists with established works is conducive to certain points of interest: "[Gould performs] in a particular intellectual critical tradition, in which his quite conscious reformulations and restatements of virtuosity attempt to reach conclusions that are normally sought out not by performers but rather by intellectuals using language only (121). Considering Gould's work in its entirety, Said suggests: "[Gould] furnishes an example of the virtuoso purposefully going beyond the narrow confines of performance and display into a discursive realm where performance and demonstration present an argument ... radically at odds with the aesthetics of performance as understood and accepted by the modern concert audience" (121). Said's

depiction of Bach's work being "anachronistic" enabled Gould to employ the "particular kind of inventiveness... taken up by the performer and formulated dialectically in modern terms" (127). Underlying Gould's work was an "amazingly prescient and almost instinctive understanding of Bach's creativity" (127). As was previously alluded to, Dylan has made similar claims for his own artistic prescience and understanding of such musical roots.³⁵

Furnished with further examples of the songs he sang and how they enabled him to eventually write, Dylan's creativity emerged in a manner that resembles the genius of Gould as he repetitiously performed the works of an earlier creator in Bach. Quoting Said's helpful summation of this development:

To put it simply, this is exactly the kind of Bach that Gould chose to play: a composer whose thinking compositions provided an occasion for the thinking, intellectual virtuoso to try and interpret and invent, or revise and rethink, in his own way, each performance becoming an occasion for decisions in terms of tempo, timbre, rhythm, color, tone, phrasing, voice leading, and inflection that never mindlessly or automatically repeat earlier such decisions but instead go to great lengths to communicate a sense of reinvention and reworking of Bach's own contrapuntal compositions (*On Late Style* 130).

As Dylan said of "John Henry", "Key to the Highway", and many other lyrics and solitary performers, consistent performance lead to occasions for thinking, interpreting and invention – albeit in a way that almost seemed automatic. With the release of *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*, we witness Dylan in his late style, curating and conserving these foundational works in response to contemporary developments.

Returning to the liner notes that accompanied Dylan's *World Gone Wrong*, Heylin describes "the paranoid, word-association free-for-all that passed for sleeve notes" (*Behind the*

³⁵ Quoted in a previous chapter, "Read Bob Dylan's Complete, Riveting MusiCares Speech" demonstrates the immersive lengths Dylan went to in familiarising himself with the music that would precede and inspire his own.

Shades 675). Deciding that “the economy of phrasing had gone out of his art... [and] the words themselves had lost their meaning,” they nevertheless provided further insight into Dylan’s disillusioned impression of American life. Writing of the song “Two Soldiers”, Dylan’s apparent disapproval of “the celestial *grunge*... the insane world of entertainment”, carries certain, unavoidable connotations. Released in 1993, it is intriguing to consider that Nirvana and Pearl Jam, two purveyors of such grunge, had spent a combined number of weeks atop of America’s album charts either side of the arrival of Dylan’s *World Gone Wrong*.

Whereas *Good as I Been to You* was relatively well received (theoretically, if not commercially), the interest had diminished somewhat as *World Gone Wrong* emerged. Utilising the same source material that had led to the release of *Bob Dylan* and subsequent albums, the artist had seemingly ceased to recognise his “capacity for inventing” (Said, *On Late Style* 129).³⁶ Comparatively, Nirvana’s Kurt Cobain, the foregrounded face of grunge music, demonstrated an intriguing awareness of what Dylan seemingly lacked. Documenting the “connecting thread between Leadbelly and Dylan’s work,” Michael Gray enables a comparison to be drawn between the Dylan of this period, and his younger contemporary Cobain:

It was a set of Leadbelly 78rpm records, given to Dylan as a gift before he left Hibbing, that proved his first revelatory direct initiation into the pre-war black repertoire. He might well have proved the first person Dylan heard who ‘talked his way into a song’, in Robert Shelton’s phrase, as [Dylan] duly did himself on his first album (“60th Anniversary of Leadbelly’s Death.”).

³⁶ Said’s discussion regarding the additional, earlier understanding of ‘invention’ is being applied here. Quoting from *On Late Style*:

Inventio has the sense of rediscovering and returning to, not of inventing as it is used now – for example, the creation of something new like a lightbulb or transistor tube. Invention in this older rhetorical meaning of the word is the finding and elaboration of arguments, which in the musical realm means the finding of a theme and developing it contrapuntally so that all of its possibilities are articulated, expressed, and elaborated (129).

Recording their widely celebrated *Unplugged in New York* a matter of weeks after Dylan's *World Gone Wrong* was released, a performance of Lead Belly's "Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" was particularly notable. Speaking of the final line Cobain sings ("I would shiver the whole night through"), Neil Young described the singer's jump in octave as "unearthly, like a werewolf, unbelievable" (Chamings). Contrary to Dylan's evident struggles with materials once mastered, Cobain's performance demonstrated his capacity to present a "model for a type of art that is rational and pleasurable at the same time, an art that tries to show us its composition as an activity still being undertaken in its performance" (Said, *On Late Style* 132-33). Critical of the "celestial grunge" working its way through the "insane world of entertainment" in America, the intransigent manner in which *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* appeared in opposition to these popular forms, inspired by a portion of the same musical source material though they were, demonstrated further Dylan's declarative step away from Said's "established social order" (8).

Discussed at greater length throughout a following chapter, the emergence of Dylan's *Theme Time Radio Hour* satellite radio show in May 2006 signalled the commodification of a habit Dylan demonstrated with the two albums in question: that of curation. With occasional air time afforded to contemporary artists (Blur, The White Stripes, The Streets etc.), one was encouraged to tune into "the sultry growl of a living legend who took them on a thematic journey through musical history." Intriguingly, "Bob served as curator, educator, philosopher and comedian in our journey through his vast collection of recordings, including some secret gems that had been all-but-lost to us" ("Welcome to the Theme Time Radio Hour"). Although the theatrical elements surrounding Dylan's stint as a radio DJ does not detract from what remains an extremely enjoyable – and musically informative – show, there remains an inevitable link back to his younger self: "The kid who once avidly listened in the small hours to 50,000-watt clear-channel stations for music 'blastin' in from Shreveport' had become an

older gentleman with the freedom to play any record that took his fancy” (Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 479). This, however, is largely unproblematic when we consider Dylan’s continued creativity aside from his contribution to the radio broadcast; he would release *Modern Times* and *Together Through Life* throughout the three-year stint of *Theme Time Radio Hour*. The curating element surrounding *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong* was not a means to an end, but an end itself. The general sense of unease which permeates Dylan’s liner notes for *World Gone Wrong* is nothing new for the artist in question. However, his stockpiling of songs that seem “to have been recorded rather than produced in any conventional sense,” signal the late style workings of an artist temporarily incapable of bringing about Adorno’s “harmonious synthesis” of the objective (music from the American canon) and the subjective (his previous capability to interpret this canon and (re)*invent*) (Heylin, *Behind the Shades* 674; “Late Style in Beethoven” 567).

Chapter Four: Uncovering “Bob Dylan”

I can't go back to Paradise no more / I killed a man back there

- Bob Dylan, “Spirit on the Water”, *Modern Times*

The previous chapter began by referring to *Shadows in the Night*, Dylan’s 2015 album only containing cover versions of material recorded by the young Frank Sinatra. As with *World Gone Wrong* and *Good as I Been to You* the combined absence of *original* material therein is significant, but it represents if anything a more radical exploration of lateness.

Its total absorption in Sinatra blocks out the range of influences which are customarily cited for Dylan, some of which are represented in those earlier albums of covers. As a statement of Dylan’s late style in the Saidian manner, *Shadows in the Night* demonstrates the associated characteristics of intransigence, potential alienation and contradiction. Cultivating the occasional – but rarely explored – relationship Dylan has with the ‘standards’ of American popular music, the release of his thirty-sixth studio album determined the unimaginable necessity of altering the analytical framework by which a new Bob Dylan album is measured. Although it possessed little that one may deem revolutionary in terms of content, the inescapable difference of *Shadows in the Night* has been surmised as follows: “It is not crooning. It is suspense: Dylan, at 73, keeping fate at arm’s length as he looks for new lessons, nuance and solace in well-told tales” (Fricke). *Shadows in the Night* is evidence of Dylan’s ongoing dalliance with lateness.

In *On Late Style*, Said contemplates the late style of Giuseppe di Lampedusa as that of “an ultimate descendent of an ancient noble line whose...extinction culminated in himself”;

Dylan presents both Sinatra and himself as similarly lingering remnants of a culture on the wane (94). Furthermore, *The Leopard* is unique in Said's study of late style because it is identified as a book that is relatively easy to process: "in a thoroughly readable form: Lampedusa is no Adorno or Beethoven, whose late styles undermine our pleasure, actively eluding any attempt at easy understanding" (104). Late style is not always rebarbative and *Shadows in the Night* is easy listening, yet it still is readable as thoroughly provocative.

Dylan is one of the few performers for whom Frank Sinatra's body of work is more than just a retrospective curiosity. Discussing the presence of Sinatra throughout his childhood and adolescent years, Dylan conceded that although he never "bought any Frank Sinatra records", he has always been "conscious" of his music (Love). Sinatra's abiding presence in that American imaginary bears comparison to the presence of the Sicilian backdrop throughout Lampedusa's novel. What likens these disparate experiences further is the relative artistic choice made to contemplate these experiences publicly. Both Dylan and Lampedusa contemplate the precarious experiences of youth from creative viewpoints at the other end of life. Considering the potential reasons behind Lampedusa's decision to write his first and only novel at such a late point, Said suggests that the last Prince of Lampedusa was for a long time "fearful perhaps of a bad reputation on the mainland and also unwilling to compete with other writers" (93). As a living link to the crumbling Sicilian aristocracy he writes of, an awareness of his own mortality would appear to have superseded Lampedusa's long-standing insecurities and compelled him to write. Although Dylan's artistic concerns rarely if ever contend with fears for his reputation or competing artists, *Shadows in the Night* is a testament to his awareness of the ephemerality of fame, and that even greats like Sinatra might not survive the machine of time without active preservation. While the nearness of death does not appear prevalent throughout this album, Dylan was surely aware that time was nonetheless passing, and that this particular kind of cover album required a great deal of work that would suitably be carried out

sooner rather than any later.³⁷ Dylan accorded himself the role of a high curator and interpreter of America's popular musical foundations.

What is particularly intriguing is that Dylan only chose to record Sinatra material from his days as proto pop idol, long before the polished sleaze of the Rat Pack. This is clearly an indication by Dylan of periodicity in Sinatra, yet the resulting product shows “more traces of history than of growth” (Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven” 564). Songs that Dylan would have become aware of in his pre-New York City youth, they are jointly indicative of America's musical history, and also the sort of music that would cede popularity in the early 1960s when figures such as Dylan emerged. Dylan in fact only chooses Sinatra songs that pre-date Dylan's emergence as an artist. Clearly though, from *Bob Dylan* to *Shadows in the Night*, Sinatra's early music travelled with Dylan. Yet, it never truly developed a profile in Dylan's work which would allow for Sinatra to be safely described as an influence.

In contrast to *The Leopard*, *Shadows in the Night* queries the value of experience. Across the decades that separated Dylan's initial hearing and eventual recording of these songs, they appeared unaffected by the complications of time. As both chronicler and performer, Dylan serves to jointly serve and dismember Said's vision of lateness. Pre-empting a performance on Tony Bennett's ninetieth birthday celebration concert, actor Steve Buscemi introduced Bob Dylan as following:

Our next performer is a musical legend. Growing up in Minnesota with a steady radio diet of Frank Sinatra, and Tony Bennett, he developed an early affinity for the American standards. For more than fifty years he has been on the same record label as Tony, and today they share a friendship based on their mutual interests of music, painting and social activism (“Bob Dylan

³⁷ During Dylan's interview with AARP he revealed how he had, been thinking about [this kind of album] ever since I heard Willie [Nelson's] *Stardust* record in the late '70s. I thought I could do that, too. So I went to see Walter Yetnikoff, he was the president of Columbia Records. I told him I wanted to make a record of standards, like Willie's record. What he said was, “You can go ahead and make that record, but we won't pay for it, and we won't release it. But go ahead and make it if you want to.” So I went and made *Street Legal* instead. In retrospect, Yetnikoff was probably right. It was most likely too soon for me to make a record of standards (Love).

– Tony Bennett Celebrates 90”).

While Dylan's earlier remarks regarding the perennial presence of Sinatra's music throughout his youth affirm the listening habits that Buscemi identifies, the portrait of Dylan as dedicated follower of the American standard is somewhat less established. Taking Sinatra as a lead exponent of such songs, it is unsurprising that the comprehensive biographies of Dylan by both Bell and Heylin fail to find need for a mention of Sinatra prior to Dylan's performance during a concert celebration of Sinatra's eightieth birthday in 1995. Yet in both biographies it is Dylan's performance of "Restless Farewell" at Sinatra's behest that indicated the manner in which Dylan "had always admired Sinatra" (Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 369). Given that Dylan had previously performed the song live only once since its release in 1964, Sinatra's invitation prompts consideration of a shared admiration and awareness between these seemingly disparate artists. Although neither has spoken publicly about the other at length prior to Dylan's release of *Shadows in the Night*, this album affirms the long-standing nature of Dylan's youthful awareness of a totemic figure of popular American music. Understanding the hitherto silent approach on Dylan's behalf becomes possible, however, when we consider the wide-ranging development of his listening habits upon leaving Minnesota.

Relative contemporaries born only three years apart from one another, Woody Guthrie and Frank Sinatra signify two diverse points of America's early recording industry. Although it is probable that Guthrie was aware of Sinatra's music and career, it is unlikely that this awareness was necessarily shared. Although Guthrie would influence Dylan's creativity decisively, without Dylan's subsequent acknowledgement of this key influence, it is difficult to foresee how Guthrie's work may have retained the critical interest his association with Dylan ensured it would. Employing Guthrie's ruffled aesthetic, Dylan's equally conscientious efforts at sounding like Guthrie whilst singing Guthrie's songs was not an end in itself. However, the fundamental ideal of the singer, with his guitar, performing songs of his own creation, would

ultimately shape Dylan's musical development definitively. Where the 1940s and 1950s had presented chart success for performers such as Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Glenn Miller and Elvis Presley, the 1960s would demonstrate the commercial impact of the singer-songwriter – be it an individual or as a member of a band. Come that decade's end, artists like The Beatles, Rolling Stones and Dylan himself determined what was popular. Furthermore, they had shifted the very idea of how a popular musician looked and performed. To better understand the irony attached to Dylan, *Shadows in the Night* and it being only his second U.K. number one album in forty-five years, it is necessary to demonstrate how his emergence signalled a creative conclusion for Sinatra and other artists of the era, irrespective of Dylan's admiration. Although Dylan's assertion regarding Sinatra's perennial presence is true to this day, Dylan's emergence signified the artistic silencing of Sinatra.

When Gay Talese came to write his 'Frank Sinatra Has a Cold' article for *Esquire* magazine in 1966, Sinatra had already become “the man who can do anything he wants, *anything*, can do it because he has the money, the energy, and no apparent guilt” (64). Referencing an ideological period in American history “when the very young seem to be taking over, protesting and picketing and demanding change”, Sinatra's survival as a pre-war product-cum-national phenomenon had little impact whatsoever. Upon the release of the article in April of that year, Bob Dylan was one month from the conclusion of his final World Tour for eight years; he was at the very peak of his popularity. An adopted emblem of the protesters and picketers, when Dylan returned to touring in 1974, he too had become – however reluctantly – a national phenomenon. Introducing Sinatra as he stood quietly brooding in the corner of a private club in Beverley Hills, Talese offhandedly refers to young couples dancing “in the centre of the floor to the clamorous clang of folk-rock music blaring from the stereo” (63). Alternatively interpreted as that “thin, wild mercury sound” which permeated Dylan's latest album (*Blonde on Blonde*, 1966), whether those young couples were necessarily dancing to

Dylan's folk-rock “clamouring” is irrelevant. Demonstrating the shift in popular listening habits, although Sinatra may have become a “national phenomenon” the continued source of interest had little to do with his creative activity as a musician or performer. From artists like Dylan came entertainment and – if you were seeking it – moral guidance.

Contemplating the unlikely development of Sinatra into the “decisive male icon” Talese encounters, Perry Meisel remarks upon the “quirky figure” that the artist projected at earlier moments throughout his career. A jazz singer capable of finding “unexpected scales available to the soloing singer in standard pop songs”, Meisel equates Sinatra's foundational technique to that of Buddy Holly and his importance as a popular songwriter of the nineteen-fifties (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 178). Truthfully, one could just as easily equate Sinatra's youthful, complex talents and awkward mannerisms with Dylan's own skills-set on his emergence in the early 1960s. Yet the reality of Meisel's comparison hints at the realisation that Holly died at twenty-two years old in 1959. Embraced and acknowledged as an essential precedent to the musical developments of the 1960s and beyond, Holly offers a contrasting image to the figure of Sinatra whose precocious talents appeared to grow older before his time. On this note, Meisel discusses the reductive nature by which Sinatra “grew more refined rather than more developed” musically (179). An understandable process perhaps, this musical refinement of Sinatra nonetheless coincides with his transition from “the shy boy from Hoboken [that] became the confident man of Hollywood and Las Vegas, and the Chairman of the Board, of the Rat Pack” (179). Albeit now a common route available to the established artist seeking a steady audience (and earnings), Sinatra's first live album, *Sinatra at the Sands*, would be recorded in early 1966 and determine Sinatra's steady, unchallenging path thereafter; refinement was complete. Although the reasoning behind Dylan's decision to limit *Shadows in the Night* to songs largely recorded by Sinatra prior to this transition will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter, it is important to initially consider Dylan's emergence during these

developments.

Describing the prevalence of what he describes as “the practical, instructional attitude which is to be found in a great many canonical works of high [American] literature”, Edward Said’s exploration of “how-to-ism” retains its legitimacy when contemplated alongside this period of American music (“How Not To Get Gored”). Aside from the content-driven nature in which Said references Melville, Cooper, Twain and others considering their apparent ability to provide expert guidance through reality, the widespread popularisation of guitar music in the 1950s demonstrated a participatory potential to popular music hitherto inconceivable. If one could get their hands on a guitar, recognition – and perhaps fame – was a feasible possibility. Contrarily, where was one to find an orchestra the like of which Sinatra worked with? A rather rudimentary analysis perhaps, it was nonetheless decisive that the sourcing and performance of songs became a far more personal and streamlined operation upon the emergence of self-reliant individuals or bands. The earlier emergence of the long-playing (LP) vinyl record in the late 1940s enhanced this development as various musical acts explored the possibilities of the album, as opposed to the popularly established – but crucially, shorter – single. Largely used to release the collected songs of popular musicals and the assorted songs and covers of popular musicians, there was little sense initially that the newly defined perimeters of the LP record itself could influence the artistic efforts captured therein. Yet as documented throughout BBC Four’s *When Albums Ruled The World*, in the early 1960s “folk music was about to show that the LP could be the canvas for a new kind of musical expression” (O’Hagan).

Regarding the release of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* in 1963, Travis Elborough describes how this album marked “a change, and one that’s quite noticeable among [Dylan’s] peers and the general public... that the songs are credited to Bob Dylan. He is the artist behind this album” (O’Hagan). Charting Dylan’s immediate development thereafter, Elborough details how “Dylan’s career in a way provides a blueprint for how artists that follow him want to

pursue their careers. They want to be able to pursue their own artistic vision, and they want to pursue it on an album” (O’Hagan). This manner of artistic creation was largely incomprehensible to an artist such as Sinatra, for whom the possibility of a ‘hit single’ determined commercial success. By the end of the 1960s, artists willing to embrace the album format overran their earlier, singles-focused counterparts.

Furthermore, regarding Said's essay, there developed a level of personal interaction and recognition that the admittedly entertaining, but crucially aloof image of a singer and his extensive orchestra could not accommodate. Although the product of his own careful decisions, it is not altogether surprising that in cheating time as he did, Sinatra was regarded as otherworldly, “the boss. *Il Padrone*” (Talese 67). With his own particular brand of engaging, socially-conscious music, and a singing voice that convoluted the parameters of what a singing voice ought to sound like, upon his nationwide emergence in the early 1960s, the popular understanding of who Bob Dylan was could not have been more different from the perception surrounding a big band leader. If Sinatra was the boss, Dylan initially represented the unillusioned voice of the worker.

This disparity in terms of artistic interpretation is demonstrated in the respective works of each artist at the point of Dylan's initial encounter with widespread recognition. Although the retrospectively widespread admiration *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963), *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964) and *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964) (somewhat less so) generate misrepresents the relatively cult, campus-driven following that Dylan initially garnered, across the fifteen-month period in which *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966) were released, Dylan's fame escalated to a frenzied status. Musically, Sinatra's 1960s can be summarised in terms that reflect Meisel's observation regarding the artist's careful creative refinement. With “It Was A Very Good Year” (1965), “That's Life” (1966) and “My Way” (1969) signalling a sample of his more successful singles

throughout this decade, a pervading sense of closure permeated Sinatra's work. Contrary to this, however, Talese's article demonstrates Sinatra's continually intense working schedule. Apart from his determination to keep recording new albums of music, Sinatra, approaching fifty years of age and with a personal staff of seventy-five people, was concurrently working on his role in a new film whilst also recording a special, hour-long performance for NBC. Although the same article illuminates the decadent style in which Sinatra's life carried on despite these commitments, to retain a semblance of his former popularity Sinatra could no longer afford the permutations of chance. Almost every aspect of his life, professionally and personally, was being minutely observed and managed.

Contemplating the chronological aspect of late style, Dylan's age (seventy-three years old) upon the release of *Shadows in the Night* satisfies the Saidian requirement. Although his persistent approach to touring and recording new and 'old' music determines that Dylan's career cannot be looked upon as being complete or finished, speculation regarding the artistic direction Dylan may turn after the particularities of his latest work is informed by his enormous oeuvre thus far. In an effort to accurately assess the late qualities of *Shadows in the Night* therefore, consideration will be afforded to Dylan's *Tempest* (2012), the most recent album of original material that Dylan has released. Although questions regarding the timeline of Dylan's chronology will be scrutinised throughout, *Tempest* is not necessarily indicative of any potential beginning or ending. Contemplating its relation to *Shadows in the Night*, this analysis will provide a foundation upon which we may ascertain the whereabouts of Dylan's career as *Shadows'* was released, and, in turn, why it may be viewed as late in the Saidian sense of the term.

The physiological aspect of late style is an issue Said considers briefly throughout *On Late Style*. Dylan's age determines that – irrespective of his health and well-being – he cannot be working within anything other than a late period. Normalising Dylan's late style in this

manner generates queries regarding the actual starting-point of Dylan's late period. Although the basis of this study has sought to reconfigure Said's vision of lateness to better suit Dylan's contrary late style, removing as a result the impression that it begins or ends at a specific point, this analysis of Dylan's late style at the correct time necessitates a nuanced view of Dylan's anachronistic performance of late style. With the subsequent *Fallen Angels* (2016) and *Triplicate* (2017), two albums similar in style to *Shadows in the Night*, we must consider the immediate past to consolidate the normalcy of Said's vision of lateness in the later Dylan works. This brings us to *Tempest* and all that may be ascertained therein.

Upon the release of *Tempest* in 2012, Dylan cannot have been surprised when Shakespearean allusions were drawn with relation to the chosen title of his thirty-fifth studio album. Distinguishing that “Shakespeare's last play was called *The Tempest*...[not] just plain *Tempest*”, Dylan attempted to forego the critical assumption that this would be his final work also (Gilmore, “Bob Dylan Unleashed”).³⁸ Yet, there is little doubt that the two similarly titled works do share certain similarities beyond their respective arrivals. Writing of Shakespeare's play, Stephen Greenblatt could be speaking of Dylan's *Tempest* when he surmises: “[Shakespeare's work] does not appear to have a single dominant source for its plot, but it is a kind of echo chamber of Shakespearean motifs” (3055). An album that demonstrated the continued strength of Dylan's creative capabilities, *Tempest* similarly echoes themes of Dylan's work post-*Time Out of Mind*.

Said asserts that Shakespeare's late works do not possess a late style and that *The Tempest* in particular demonstrates “the accepted notion of age and wisdom...that reflects a special maturity, a new spirit of reconciliation and serenity often expressed in terms of a

³⁸ Albeit difficult to accurately determine the precise order in which Shakespeare's plays came to fruition, given its use of 'material that was not available until late 1610' (Greenblatt 3055), *The Tempest* can unquestionably be considered amongst the last that Shakespeare wrote.

miraculous transfiguration of common reality” (*On Late Style* 6). Dylan’s *Tempest* possesses a similar timeliness and aspect of serene maturity, and therefore was not a work in possession of a late style; as such, it stands in thorough opposition to the intransigent lateness of *Shadows in the Night*, which confounded the expectations of its audience. As always, late style emerges contrary to the expectations of the listening crowd.

In discussion with Jon Bream, Kevin Odegard suggest that *Tempest*, with its many references to death and destruction, possesses “the biggest body count of any Dylan record” (Bream 216). According to Dylan himself, this tendency toward morbidity should come as no surprise: “There’s plenty of death songs. You may well know, in folk music every other song deals with death. Everybody sings them. Death is a part of life” (Gilmore, “Bob Dylan Unleashed”). The album’s title track taps into this folk music format. Describing the sinking of the Titanic, and the adjoining film directed by James Cameron eighty-five years after it had sunk, the reference to “sixteen hundred gone to rest” may have appeared fatalistic on Dylan’s part (*Tempest*). Yet, recalling Dylan’s “Talkin’ Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues” (1961), of the six thousand people Dylan allows to board that ship, Clinton Heylin describes how the initial version of this song proceeded to a point where “the ship actually sinks and the protagonist ends up on the shore, a little the worse for wear” (*Revolution In The Air* 58). The implication being that many thousands more were not as fortunate. Although the caustic wit of “Bear Mountain” differentiates it from the more sombre “Tempest”, death and despair has been a recurring theme throughout Dylan’s recording career.

“Black Diamond Bay” (1976) describes a scene in which an occupied hotel sits beneath an erupting volcano: “the [entire] island [that] slowly sank” in this instance (*Desire*). “The Groom’s Still Waiting at the Altar” (1981), “High Water” (2001) and “Cross the Green Mountain” (2002) are further examples of this trend (*Shot of Love*; “*Love and Theft*”). Renewing the nautical theme, Dylan addresses during *Chronicles* his sadness at the news that

his “sixty-three-foot sailboat had hit a reef in Panama.” Having “sailed the entire Caribbean and spent time on every island from Martinique to Barbados” with his family, Dylan conclusion of events therein could as easily be a line from one of these many songs relating to death and destruction: “Eventually, the sea took her back and the boat was gone” (163). Albeit a consistent thematic concern throughout *Tempest*, death is by no means unique to this album. Similarly, it does not necessarily indicate any especial awareness or closeness to death on Dylan's part; no more so than usual anyway.

Alternative themes or images increasingly associated with Dylan's work from *Time Out of Mind* onward take root in *Tempest* also. In this regard, it can be interpreted as one in a line of partially related albums. Frances Downing Hunter identifies the “outsider, the outlaw, that journey motif, warriors, mythological hero[s]” that become clear as *Tempest* develops (Bream 215). While one may recall songs such as “Joey” (1976), “Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)” (1978) or “Jokerman” (1983) as evidence of Dylan's creative reliance upon such figures, their appearances throughout Dylan's work are consistent and certainly not unique to *Tempest*. A more troubling – but less talked about – theme that manages to sustain itself throughout *Tempest* is Dylan's apparent inability “to resolve his tendency to view women as either Madonnas or whores” (Heylin, *Still on the Road* 243). While Heylin's assessment contemplated Dylan's song-writing as it was in the early 1980s, Hunter, speaking of the later *Tempest*, delineated between what she saw as “the ideal, the Mary figure, the earth mother, the mother of Jesus – the Madonna whore, to some extent. And then the other woman, that present woman who will do” (Bream 215).

Opinions regarding Dylan's creative portrayal of women are manifold. Barbara O'Dair remains positive that Dylan's occasional contempt for women displayed through song develops and rights itself therein. Discussing “Idiot Wind” of *Blood on the Tracks* (1975), O'Dair initially understood “You're an idiot, babe / It's a wonder that you still know how to breathe” as an

embarrassing indictment of Dylan and his misogyny. However, O'Dair suggests that Dylan's concluding line ("We're idiots, babe / It's a wonder we can even feed ourselves") "opens the reach of the song to include its speaker, and maybe the rest of us, too" (83). Contrarily, Richard Goldstein, writing a few months prior to the release of *Modern Times*, remonstrated with the apparent "hostility to women [that] is a recurring motif in Dylan's songs" ("Bob Dylan and Nostalgia of Patriarchy"). Identifying the aforementioned "Idiot Wind" and "Like A Rolling Stone" as primary examples, Goldstein's reference to "Sweetheart Like You" indicates one of more troubling, confusing lyrics:

You know, a woman like you should be at home
That's where you belong
Watching out for someone who loves you true
Who would never do you wrong (*Infidels*).

Albeit another example where O'Dair's analysis regarding the second, qualifying line could be used to explain the issues with the first, for the purpose of this discussion, *Tempest* is an extension of this particular habit on Dylan's behalf. Although a song like "Long and Wasted Years" does indulge the fond retrospection of past relationships ("It's been such a long, long time / Since we loved each other and our hearts were true / One time, for one brief day, I was the man for you"), the assumed female figure in any such moment is kept anonymous to the point of abstraction. Throughout *Tempest* we are presented with a "harlot" ("Soon After Midnight"), a "flat-chested junkie whore" ("Scarlet Town") and another woman who is both "a murderous queen and a bloody wife" ("Tin Angel"). Tropes that Dylan has augmented and addressed throughout the entirety of his career, their presence throughout *Tempest* is hardly surprising.

Along with the thematic similarities demonstrated within *Tempest*, Dylan's vocal

performance and musical accompaniment were largely what one may have expected also. Hunter's suggestion that Dylan is "not in voice in the same way that he was on *Blood on the Tracks*" goes without saying (Bream 213). It is not a comparison one would freely draw with regard any subsequent Dylan album. Yet, recalling the discussion pertaining to Dylan's vocals in the previous chapter, *Good As I Been to You, World Gone Wrong* and – perhaps most significant of all in terms of accessibility – *Time Out of Mind* signalled the redevelopment of Dylan's voice as a powerful instrument within his steady band. Given that fifteen years, four further albums and many hundreds of live performances separate *Time Out of Mind* from *Tempest*, the apparent deterioration of Dylan's voice is to be expected. "Pay In Blood", viewed comparatively to "Cold Irons Bound" of *Time Out of Mind*, demonstrates the extent to which Dylan's voice, in spite of retaining a certain appeal and authority, provides the impression of having been ravaged across these intervening years. The song's opening line ("Well I'm grinding my life out") mirrors the manner in which substantial effort on Dylan's part seems to underwrite his very ability to deliver these words. Without necessarily devaluing any of the work therein, the important issue surrounding Dylan's vocal performance throughout *Tempest* is the manner in which it will significantly change when he comes to record *Shadows in the Night*. Although the vocal performance of *Shadows* will be discussed in greater detail shortly, the trajectory of Dylan's voice that could be plotted on *Tempest* becomes compromised thereafter, highlighting once more the late profile of *Shadows in the Night*.

The sound of the self-produced *Tempest* similarly enlivens the musical direction Dylan seemed to take with the release of "*Love And Theft*" in 2001. Accompanied by Tony Garnier, Donnie Herron, David Hidalgo, Stu Kimball, George G. Receli and Charlie Sexton in studio, each musician had prior recording experience with Dylan; Garnier had been involved in each recording from "*Love And Theft*" onward. As many of these musicians were working with Dylan during his extensive world tours, an unmistakable familiarity between all parties

involved enabled the development of what are now considered amongst Dylan's best-sounding albums. The “great musicianship throughout” *Tempest* on occasion redeemed what Odegard suggested were some of the otherwise forgettable songs (Bream 216). Although Garnier, Herron, Kimball, Receli and Sexton would feature once again during *Shadows in the Night*, the circumstances would change. Aside from the fact that seven new musicians would enter the studio to contribute, it is more so what Dylan required musically from his consistent collaborators that resultantly alters *Shadows in the Night* from *Tempest* so tellingly. To be discussed in greater detail as we now move toward the analysis of *Shadows in the Night* as a late style work, one remaining point of intrigue that aligns Dylan's work post-*Time Out of Mind* and pre-*Shadows in the Night* is the critical perception surrounding Dylan and America. Prior to investigating what *Shadows in the Night* reveals on this front, it is important to first consider Hunter's assertion that “Pay in Blood” (to take but one example) is evidence of Dylan's desire to “kill them for what they've done to this country” (Bream 215). Although the 'them' that Hunter speaks of is not clarified, let us briefly consider Dylan's standing on this front up to and including *Tempest*.

The emergence of Bob Dylan in the early 1960s is marked by his determination to address America's perceived social ills. Across the subsequent decades, this initial period of protestation would remain crucial in numerous critical evaluations of Dylan's work. Through varying degrees of subtle (“Blowin' in the Wind”, “Oxford Town” (1963)) and overt musical condemnation (“Masters of War” (1963) “Hurricane” (1976)), Dylan has managed his dissent with an increasing level of nuance. With the exception of the aforementioned “Hurricane” and other occasional examples (“Neighborhood Bully” (1983)) thereafter, Dylan's intention to definitively move beyond such blatant characterisation is clear. Consider the highly regarded “Blind Willie McTell” (recorded 1983, released 1991) and one may accurately determine the artist's continued ability to portray dispiriting elements of America's past with alarming clarity:

See them big plantations burning

Hear the cracking of the whips

Smell that sweet magnolia blooming

See the ghosts of slavery ships

I can hear them tribes a-moaning

Hear that undertaker's bell

Nobody can sing the blues

Like Blind Willie McTell (*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*).

Yet, as the song reaches its concluding verse, the portion of his work that Dylan once described as always tailing “off with “Good luck – I hope you make it”, focus shifts somewhat toward a more general, contemporary message (qtd. in Cott 68):

Well, God is in His heaven

And we all want what's his

But power and greed and corruptible seed

Seem to be all that there is.

Is the 'we' referenced therein reflective of the same society contending with the reality of burning plantations, cracking whips and slavery ships? In his own *Time Out of Mind*, Ian Bell has described this verse as “a wholly conventional ending... [that provides a] nod to [Dylan's] born-again evangelical studies” (283). Having embraced Christianity at a time when a “conservative, faith-driven, patriotic, disinclined to listen to bad news or to complicated explanations” faction of Americans were about to elect (1981) and overwhelmingly re-elect (1985) Ronald Reagan, Bell determines the strange nature in which Dylan finds himself communicating with/to a portion of American society ideologically synchronised with a President in possession of a social vision that Dylan's work had apparently opposed:

Candidate Reagan was, if a little belatedly, opposed to abortion, in favour of capital punishment, no friend to environmentalists, an opponent of the long-contested Equal Rights Amendment intended to guarantee equality for women, a supporter of prayer in schools, and, as already noted, a chuckling character who had spoken out against civil-rights legislation (Bell, *Time Out of Mind* 193-4).

Emerging throughout the recording sessions that would lead to Dylan's first album after his decisively Christian music period, the concluding verse of "Blind Willie McTell" alludes to an opinion that Dylan would further elucidate upon in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 1986 (Gilmore, "Interview with Mikal Gilmore").³⁹ Along with the enhanced piety being felt and demonstrated by swathes of the American public was the acceptable idea that faith in God could – or, perhaps crucially, should – generate significant prosperity for the faithful. Whether this parallel between faith and financial well-being irked Dylan to the point of writing about "power and greed and corruptible seed" cannot rightfully be determined. Yet, Dylan treats sceptically the notion that "God wants everybody to be wealthy and healthy" (Gilmore, "Interview with Mikal Gilmore"). A line he had heard from many preachers of the day, that "it doesn't say [such a thing] in the Bible" is enough to dissuade Dylan's belief; irrespective of the earthly source (Gilmore). Listen to *Infidels* further and similar distinctions may be drawn from the songs that eventually did make the album's final cut. What this example may reveal to us about *Tempest* is Dylan's habitual concern for and condemnation of America's bad habits. When he asserted complete creative control with "*Love and Theft*" in 2001, Dylan, unearthing and accommodating many likely and unlikely sources along the way (many of them American), embraced this habit with a renewed fervour. Although rarely typifying the bluntness of earlier

³⁹ The selection of albums that can be determined as outwardly Christian music ranges from *Slow Train Coming* (1979) up to but not including *Infidels* (1983), the recording sessions of which Dylan initially toyed with "Blind Willie McTell".

songs such as “Masters of War”, *Tempest* perhaps evokes his feelings for contemporary America in their most blatant form since.

Consider once more the title track of *Tempest* and one is faced with a song concerning numerous passengers of a ship who died *en route* to America. “Roll on John”, a lengthy homage to John Lennon, similarly trades on the image and transitional nature of Lennon divided between the same ocean separating the United Kingdom and America. Contemplating Lennon's murder in New York City in 1980, Dylan likens his death to the hauling of “your ship up on the shore”. “Narrow Way” considers the “bleeding wound in the heart of town” that came about as a result of the British burning “the White House down” – in 1814. Throughout *Tempest* a pervading sense of danger surrounds Dylan's vision of life in America across the nation's lifespan. “Pay in Blood”, perhaps the most evocative, all-encompassing example of this trend, describes the manner in which “Night after night, day after day / They strip your useless hopes away”. Significantly different though it is from earlier examples of Dylan's consternation with the state of the nation, songs as far back as “North Country Blues” (*The Times They Are a-Changin'*) nonetheless allude to the figure in question making it back home, only to fatten the purse of the detested subject of the song; in that particular case, it was the capricious mine owners. Whereas “North Country Blues” resonated with the submission to a hopeless scenario however (“My children will go as soon as they grow / Well, there ain't nothing here now to hold them”), “Pay in Blood” finds Dylan gnarling “You bastard! I'm supposed to respect you!” Including a whole variety of perceived ills, Dylan continues:

Another politician pumping out the piss
Another angry beggar blowing you a kiss
You got the same eyes that your mother does
If only you could prove who your father was (*Tempest*).

Political distrust, homelessness and parental uncertainty in this regard are the focus of Dylan's ire. Of his initial vitriol for the dishonest politician, draw a comparison between “Summer Days” of “*Love and Theft*” and one may identify the caustic nature in which “Pay in Blood” is beyond the humour Dylan would earlier employ:

Politician got on his jogging shoes

He must be running for office, got no time to lose

He been suckin' the blood out of the genius of generosity.

Of the bastardised children he references, one may consider that even in the desolate North Country, children had two parents; however compromised this situation indeed was: “And my schooling was cut as I quit in the spring / To marry John Thomas, a miner”. The concluding vision of “Pay in Blood” is equally disconcerting:

Our nation must be saved and freed

You've been accused of murder, how do you plead?

This is how I spend my days

I came to bury, not to praise.

Who exactly America is to be saved and freed from is not made clear. Throughout his interview with *Rolling Stone* ahead of *Tempest's* release in 2012, Dylan was continually questioned about President Obama; the sitting U.S. President as Dylan wrote and released *Tempest* (Gilmore, “Bob Dylan Unleashed”). Although Dylan expectantly did little to endorse a politician, his stated impression of Obama that he loves music, is personable and dresses well, sounds like approval. *Tempest* rather expresses a general disgust with America and its veiled conspirators. Quoting Shakespeare's Mark Antony at the funeral of the murdered Julius Caesar (“I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him”), the proposition of Dylan also identifying himself as “no

orator”, but “a plain blunt man...[with] neither wit, nor words, nor worth, / Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech, / To stir men's blood” demonstrates perhaps a humorous return in an otherwise brutal, unmistakable song (1589-92). Like the huckster or con man that pervades so much of Dylan's music and public persona, one cannot but smirk at the idea of Dylan achieving his desires with tactics similar to those used by Mark Antony in the presence of the gathered plebeians. Is this concluding remark intended to give the listener cause for immediate reconsideration? After all, were Mark Antony's remarks – like Dylan's lyrics therein – not simply a means of achieving his own vainglorious desires in the wake of Caesar's death? Was he not the veiled conspirator seizing upon the present opportunity? What Dylan could be hoping to achieve is less obvious however. What may be accurately asserted of the work that Dylan has released beginning with “*Love and Theft*” and concluding with *Tempest* is the artist's continued repatriation of past events into the contemporary American scene.

Recycling cultural material otherwise (and often) forgotten or unknown by his listeners, *Tempest* was but one album in a series. Looking now to *Shadows in the Night*, something of this habit can be seen once more. However, contrary to previous examples of Dylan taking something old and making something new, *Shadows* is evidence of Dylan as outright conservationist. Addressing musical conventions hitherto absent throughout almost the entirety of his recorded music, *Shadows in the Night* gives cause for a reevaluation of Dylan and the popular tradition. In the absence of an angry, disdainful voice, Dylan appears reconciled with a more comfortable period in his own American life.

When determining the late qualities of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, Said contemplated how “late style manifest[s] itself in [the] altogether more accessible realms... of Hollywood films and mass-market novels?” (*On Late Style* 93). For the purposes of considering *Shadows in the Night*, an album deeply rooted in popular culture, Said's consideration of Lampedusa provides a suitable foundation. Said's consideration of Luchino Visconti and his

film adaptation of *The Leopard* also displays how the already-acclaimed director mirrors Dylan's own achievements prior to their relative acts of covering. Although Lampedusa's sole work generated significant success, *The Leopard* was posthumously published and, as such, excludes Lampedusa from this pairing of great, established artist. In addition to possessing substantial bodies of work prior to the release of these late works, Dylan and Visconti would live to witness and continually create thereafter the production of these late style products. With these links in mind, both Dylan and Visconti need not be considered in relation to one another. Directing exclusive focus toward the initial text, Dylan's *Shadows in the Night* shall offer an alternative counterpoint for Lampedusa's requiem for "the regretted end of an era" (Said, *On Late Style* 98).

Introducing the Sicilian Prince shortly after the conclusion of the family's evening prayers, Lampedusa's *The Leopard* documents the internal issues afflicting Don Fabrizio:

[He possessed] German strains particularly disturbing to a Sicilian aristocrat in the year 1860, however attractive his fair skin and hair amid all that olive and black; an authoritarian temperament, a certain rigidity of morals, and propensity for abstract ideas: these, in the relaxing atmosphere of Palermo society, had changed respectively into capricious arrogance, recurring moral scruples and contempt for his own relatives and friends, all of whom seemed to him mere driftwood in the languid meandering stream of Sicilian pragmatism (7).

Set against the backdrop of Italian unification (*risorgimento*), Lampedusa's Prince strikes the odd combination of being out of time, but ultimately too far gone for this changing of the guards to be of direct harm to himself: "stretching back in time, immersed in time like a giant in water" (98). Investing most of his public interest in his socially-aware, upwardly mobile nephew Tancredi, the Prince attempts to act upon Tancredi's perceptive message: "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change" (21). With his own remaining years assured to proceed as they always have, it is the well-being of his social class beyond this that concerns

him. Willing to compromise, but wary of their limitations, the Prince outlines his determination to sustain:

Any palliative which may give us another hundred years of life is like eternity to us. We may worry about our children and perhaps our grandchildren; but beyond what we can hope to stroke with these hands of ours we have no obligations. I cannot worry myself about what will happen to any possible descendants in the year 1960 (29).

With Lampedusa himself becoming a Sicilian Prince in 1934, the incapability of Lampedusa's fictional Prince of Salina to foresee the whereabouts of the Sicilian nobility one hundred years on possesses a certain prescience. Lampedusa's first and only novel, *The Leopard* conveys traces of experience from a far younger age in the artist's life. As it was with Dylan, Sinatra and the eventual *Shadows in the Night*.

Said demonstrates how the aforementioned conclusion of the daily rosary sets "the tone of the entire book. The first event Lampedusa describes is the discovery of a dead soldier in the garden. Now is the hour of death" (*On Late Style* 104). Overstating it perhaps, Randall Roberts suggests that *Shadows in the Night* carries with it "a soaring lifetime's worth of emotion conveyed with the fearlessness of a cliff diver spinning flips and risking belly flops in the open air" ("Bob Dylan's 'Shadows in the Night'"). Indicative of an analytical trend that seemed surprised with Dylan's willingness to take artistic risks, the impression that *Shadows* signifies the product of a "lifetime's worth of emotion" is a stretch. However, song titles such as "The Night We Called It A Day", "Why Try To Change Me Now" and "Full Moon And Empty Arms", indicate from the outset a preoccupation with finality – and helplessness – that connotes Lampedusa's novel. Said determines that "the lateness of Lampedusa's novel consists precisely in its taking place as the transformation of the personal into the collective is about to occur" (*On Late Style* 106). In recalling and recording these pop standards of his earlier, pre-"Bob Dylan" youth, *Shadows in the Night* signifies an effort on Dylan's behalf to reconnect

with the “collective” via this strand of music, and Sinatra himself.

Having not been “exactly a popular figure among the folkies in the Village,” Sinatra represents a musical element of Dylan’s youth perfectly at ease with its role as ‘pop’ music (Deusner). Contrary to the anguish, uncertainty and retribution permeating *Tempest* and elements of Dylan’s immediate albums prior to this, *Shadows in the Night*, despite its melancholy and despair, “sits alongside a love of life and a habit of comfort” that may be assured on the basis that this album exists at all (Said, *On Late Style* 105). Of the diverse back-catalogue that signals Dylan’s collected works, *Shadows in the Night* projects a sense of satisfaction on the artist’s behalf. It serves as an unchallenging road not taken; the road upon which ‘Bob Dylan’ never existed.

Dylan’s relationship with America, however integral to so many elements of his development, rarely satisfies itself with the illusion of perfection; not inherently, or absolutely anyway. Unlike Lampedusa’s Sicilians and their expectations of “a grand funeral”, *Shadows in the Night* signifies Dylan’s contradictory feelings regarding what is exceptional about America: new beginnings. With the subsequent arrival of *Fallen Angels* and *Triplicate* (Dylan’s first three-disc album), Dylan also displays the “disregard for... continuity” that Said references (*On Late Style* 10). There is a realisation that five discs combining covered music from America’s musical past only really scratches the surface; and that this is an infinite project, at least until Dylan is no longer able to record. Relaying Rose Subotnik’s assessment of Beethoven’s late works, what began with *Shadows in the Night* for Dylan has now become a series of works from which “no synthesis is conceivable” (270). Yes, the two subsequent albums carry forth the initial affiliation with America’s musical past that began with Dylan’s Sinatra covers. However, with the broadened remit of *Triplicate* comes a realisation that Dylan has engaged these conventional, foundational works in a manner that can never be completed. Contrary to the perfunctory manner Dylan carried out the recordings for *Good as I Been to You*

and *World Gone Wrong*, these later works more closely resemble Adorno's identification of the "catching fire between extremes" that Beethoven's late style resembled ("Late Style in Beethoven" 567). There are moments throughout these five discs of other peoples' songs where one recognises the presence of Dylan's originality, however fleetingly and sporadically.

Identifying this juxtaposition, therefore, is relatively straightforward. In contrast to *Tempest* particularly, Dylan would alter his vocal performance, and the performance of his accompanying band, when it came to recording the initial songs for *Shadows in the Night*. Consider the seven additional musicians that Dylan would recruit in attempting to locate the desired sound, and, contrary to the relatively tight, close-knit recording formula that had been so successful from *Time out of Mind* up to this point, Dylan suddenly appeared as the band leader of his own big band. Furthermore, although the vocal stylings employed throughout *Tempest* would hardly have suited Dylan's latest repertoire of songs, Tom Moon is one who has conceded that he "didn't expect [Dylan's vocal capabilities] to be anywhere near as good as it was" (Bream 221). Exploring this surprise within the broader context of contemporary popular music, Moon suggests that "in an era where all these voices are so glossed up, hearing something that's just this *verité* is wonderful" (Bream 222). Although Dylan's vocal performances on songs such as the aforementioned "I'm A Fool To Want You", "The Night We Called It A Day" and "Why Try To Change Me Now" warranted critical praise, the underlying fact of what is occurring remains. In a statement released by Columbia in anticipation of the album's release, Dylan clarifies his stance in tones similar to those expressed during his AARP interview: "I don't see myself as covering these songs in anyway (sic). They've been covered enough. Buried, as a matter of fact. What me and my band are basically doing is uncovering them. Lifting them out of the grave and bringing them into the light of day" (qtd. in Bream 218). Accomplished though these recordings are, they increasingly signal with each additional release Dylan's deepening late style. As Adorno notes of Beethoven,

Dylan's "late work still remains process, but not as development" ("Late Style in Beethoven" 567). The process is one of uncovering.

For some charged with reviewing *Shadows in the Night* upon its release in early 2015, the presence of songs recorded previously by Frank Sinatra necessitated no further investigation; this fact was noteworthy enough for a new Bob Dylan album. Yet additional probing may have revealed the fact that nine of the ten songs Dylan recorded for *Shadows* had been first recorded by Sinatra before Dylan had even become a recording artist himself in late 1961.⁴⁰ In certain regards these selections coincide with Perry Meisel's assertion that from the late 1950s onward Sinatra's talents and performances became refined and less adventurous, and, as a result, less intriguing perhaps to an artist such as Dylan. Although Dylan did not choose to record any songs that are amongst Sinatra's best known today, they are nonetheless choices that largely highlight the period in which Sinatra was at his creative peak. Yet, from the 1960s right up until his death in 1998, Sinatra remained active in the recording studio. Although changes in the recording industry would deem Sinatra's previous rate of releasing upward of fifteen singles in a year excessive, the release of *The Complete Reprise Studio Recordings* of Frank Sinatra in 1995 helpfully highlights Sinatra's continued capabilities as a recording artist. Containing four-hundred and fifty-two recordings across twenty discs, it demonstrates the amount of material Dylan overlooked when deciding upon the eventual songs to record.

In one instance, 1961 signified the year Dylan turned twenty years of age, established himself in a city many miles from where he was born, and as such, it is perhaps understandable that Sinatra exclusively evokes – keeping in mind Dylan is not a devoted follower of Sinatra's work – a portion of Dylan's life before this date. As was referenced previously, Sinatra and his

⁴⁰ "Stay With Me" is the solitary song included that Sinatra recorded after Dylan himself had become a recording artist. This emerged in 1964 as Dylan was releasing his third studio album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. In some cases, as with "Full Moon And Empty Arms", Sinatra's recordings predated Dylan's signing with Columbia by some ten or fifteen years.

work held little currency with the Greenwich Village “folkies” that Dylan initially associated with in New York City. Yet Dylan’s preference for the earlier works of great artists only seems equivalent to his repeated disdain for their later efforts. It is with this peculiarity that the late reality of *Shadows in the Night* becomes clear. Far from being a traditional example of Saidian late style, it questions the value of experience that Said deems necessary for such developments to take place. With his unequivocal separation from anything that could be considered a classical Frank Sinatra work, Dylan’s version of lateness only becomes apparent through his unexpected dalliance with Sinatra’s early period.

Beyond this example, Dylan’s treatment of other substantial artists and their later works reveals a dismissive trend regarding their later works. Although Dylan rarely provides more than allusions to the names of artists or songs that he favours, he was surprisingly blatant in his condemnation of an artist he described as the “North Star... you could guide your ship by”, Johnny Cash (Diehl). Granting an interview ahead of the 2009 release of *Together Through Life*, the significance of Dylan’s chronologically late work brought into focus Johnny Cash’s series of *American Recordings*. A collection of albums that witnessed the unusual pairing of Cash with producer Rick Rubin, it provides a demonstration of what Jonathan Silverman has determined as “the arbitrariness of genre, and the universality of song”, on the basis that Cash demonstrates a willingness to experiment musically (201). Yet Dylan displays a lack of enthusiasm for this project verging on the impression that he is somewhat insulted by it: “I tell people if they are interested that they should listen to Johnny on his Sun records and reject all that notorious low-grade stuff he did in his later years. It can’t hold a candlelight to the frightening depth of the man on his early records. That’s the only way he should be remembered” (Brinkley).

While few would have suggested that Cash’s early and later works ought to have been viewed in mutual exclusivity, Dylan’s viewpoint appears harsh given his own issues with legacy

and critical perception. Discussing what Adorno may categorise as Cash's middle-period in *Chronicles*, Dylan recalls Cash's 1969 release of "A Boy Named Sue" with greater neutrality. Yet there remains an undeniable touch of suspicion nonetheless: "I clicked on the radio. Johnny Cash was singing "Boy Named Sue." Once upon a time Johnny had shot a man in Reno just to watch him die. Now he was saying that he was stuck with a girl's name that his father had given him. Johnny was trying to change his image, too" (127). In both instances, Dylan appears reluctant to endorse Cash's work post-1958.⁴¹ Once again, Dylan displays an unmistakable contempt for an enormous collection of additional work that came to fruition after he himself emerged as a recording artist. Speaking retrospectively of Elvis Presley and his influence, Dylan retains this outlook: "When I first heard Elvis' voice I just knew I wasn't going to work for anybody; and nobody was going to be my boss ... Hearing him for the first time was like busting out of jail" (Bell, *Once Upon a Time* 67-68). Yet taking Bell's two biographies as detailed accounts of Dylan's various statements and actions from this "busting out of jail" onward, Presley becomes a marginal figure thereafter in terms of his creative output. Dylan, in a similar vein John Lennon and his thoughts regarding Presley's career in its entirety, appears to locate a definite point where his interest ended: "Just before Christmas in '57 Elvis Presley received his draft notice. John Lennon would later decree this to be the moment at which rock and roll ended" (*Chronicles* 104).

Dylan's apparent dismissiveness may be explained with reference to a discussion Leonard Cohen recalled having with Dylan years after both had become significant artists: "Dylan says to me, "As far as I'm concerned Leonard, *you're* Number 1. I'm Number Zero." Meaning, as I understood it at the time – and I was not ready to dispute it – that his work was beyond measure and my work was pretty good" (Remnick). Dylan's awareness of his own

⁴¹ This being the final year in which Cash would record at Sun Studios during this initial period.

talents has rarely been clouded by doubt, and it remains likely that no artist who came after him quite captured his interests like those who came before; despite the unequal measure of this division in time. Yet, his thoughts on the later works of Cash, Sinatra or indeed Presley indicate something substantial within Dylan's development. Writing of Presley's premature death in 1977, Bell describes how Dylan "was distraught for days" as a result. Extending this revelation further, Bell speculates as to why this was the case:

Elvis, the music, the lost world of the 1950s, the hope and defiance and unstoppable energy, had been essential to the person Dylan was, or believed himself to be. If those sound like childish, self-involved notions, the truth about this artist is misunderstood. He was of a generation, perhaps the last such generation, for whom pop music was part of the meaning of existence. It's not a big guess to say that Dylan grieved for himself when he grieved for Elvis. According to what he would tell Robert Shelton almost a year later, he suffered 'a breakdown' when he heard about the death (*Time Out of Mind* 154).

It is along these lines of thought that Dylan would eventually release *Shadows in the Night*. With its exclusive consideration of songs from Dylan's youth, it promised a secure moment in time for the artist in question; and a relatively secure moment in Dylan's American experience. Writing of those who mature early, Adorno posits that life thereafter is spent in anticipation. Dylan was one such figure whose early maturation was captured publicly: "His experience is a-prioristic, an intuitive sensibility feeling out in images and words what things and people will only realise later" (*Minima Moralia* 161). Although *Shadows in the Night* is a rare example of Dylan acting upon these pre-'Bob Dylan' figures who so affected his youth, Adorno's concluding thoughts on these early maturers are compelling for the question of Dylan and his late style:

In their inner economy, unconsciously but implacably, the punishment is meted out that has

always been thought their due. What was proffered to them with deceptive benevolence is revoked. Even in psychological fate there is an authority to see that everything is repaid. The individual law is a puzzle-picture of the exchange of equivalents (161).

What these equivalents are in Dylan's case returns us to that notion of Bob Dylan and "Bob Dylan". With the emergence of the artist came a compromised understanding of what the man behind it could realistically hope to be or do. Signalling the point at which this division began, *Shadows in the Night* represents Dylan repaying these unspoken dues. Akin to Lampedusa and his extended deliberation over whether he ought to attempt writing what would become *The Leopard*, *Shadows* marks Dylan's acknowledgement of a musical period that ended with his emergence. Relapsing into "the childishness that he had once surmounted with too little exertion and which now exacts its price; he becomes immature" (Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 161). He has become a covering artist. Indicative of Dylan's late style, but not quite possessing the exactitudes of Said's strict framework, *Shadows in the Night* jointly serves to reconnect Dylan with the overlooked music of his youth, while, with its true-to-the-original approach, propose an alternative existence in which "Bob Dylan" never emerged at all.

Chapter Five: ‘Politics, Philosophy and Organic Farming’

Music made to kill time ended up dissolving it. As one listens, no date adheres to the basement tapes, made as the war in Vietnam, mass deaths in black riots in Newark and Detroit, the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and the Summer of Love all insisted, in their different ways, on the year 1967 as Millennium or Apocalypse, or both. The year “America fell apart,” Newt Gingrich has said; “deserter’s songs,” a skeptic called the basement tapes in 1994, catching an echo of a few people holed up to wait out the end of the world.

- Greil Marcus, *Invisible Republic* (xvi)

Released in its entirety in 2014, the product of Bob Dylan’s home-made recording sessions with the Band became gradually – and illicitly – available from July 1969, approximately two years after being recorded in 1967.⁴² Although the release of *The Basement Tapes* in 1975 signalled Columbia’s efforts of curtailing the growing influence of further bootlegs, the subterranean *Great White Wonder*, *Troubled Troubadour*, *Waters of Oblivion* and *Little White Wonder* continually enabled additional exposure to the extent of the work carried out.⁴³ Given the insatiability of his fanbase, who will “devour millions of words of scholarship on his life and work... spend hours arguing about the songs... and hunt down underground tapes”, it is not surprising that Dylan’s basement tapes became “the most bootlegged recordings of all time” according to Clinton Heylin (Kinney 1-2; *Behind the Shades* 280). What is contained therein remains the source of great pride for scholars who declare the impact these songs had on

⁴² Although this date signifies the emergence of the first of many bootlegs, Dylan himself would initially send his music publishers “ten of the songs penned in the preceding months... as demos for other artists to cover” (Heylin, *Behind the Shades* 278). The inevitable availability of these demos – and the assumption that artists such as The Beatles or Rolling Stones (referenced below) had some privileged access to them – demonstrates the possibility of their influence as posited by Petridis below.

⁴³ *The Basement Tapes* released in 1975 only contained a portion of what was initially recorded by Dylan and the Band. The accompanying presence of the illicit material and its broader collection of recordings was therefore significantly more appealing to listeners eager to hear the full collection of songs therein.

popular music. Reviewing *The Basement Tapes Complete* upon their release, Alexis Petridis relays the details of this proposed development:

The accepted wisdom is that when some of the lo-fi songs he'd taped leaked via a publishing acetate, his peers took it as a sign that Dylan was calling time on the experimentation of the psychedelic era, directing them to an earthier hue: he and the Band had cleared the path that led the Beatles from *Sergeant Pepper* to the *Get Back* sessions, the Rolling Stones from *We Love You to Beggars' Banquet* and the Byrds from *Artificial Energy* and *Dolphin's Smile* to *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* – an album that included not one, but two songs from *The Basement Tapes* (“Bob Dylan and the Band”).

However revolutionary the basement tapes may have sounded, the suggestion that Dylan was likely to assert a creative hold over his contemporaries might misrepresent his own artistic designs at this point. Although Heylin is correct in assuming that Dylan must have suspected these roughly cut songs would emerge with or without his permission, the arrival of *John Wesley Harding* in December 1967 queries the immediate artistic importance and merit Dylan afforded to these sessions with the Band (*Behind the Shades* 280).

The selection process Dylan employs with relation to choosing songs for an upcoming album has always been a contentious topic. Upon its release in 1991, *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3* documented a portion of his most peculiar omissions to date. Analysing the release of *John Wesley Harding*, Ian Bell describes how the recordings “began in October, days (if that) after he emerged from ‘the basement’” (*Once Upon a Time* 487). For the purposes of this album then, Dylan decided to overlook completely these raw materials in favour of a fresh pursuit entirely. Similarly choosing to dispense with the musical accompaniment of the Band in favour of a more streamlined sound, *John Wesley Harding* arrived unexpected and whole. Yet while *John Wesley Harding* may have differed greatly in terms of content, recording and personnel, the “war in Vietnam, mass deaths in black riots in Newark and Detroit” and

everything that constituted Newt Gingrich's assessment of why "America fell apart" remained a presence (qtd. in Marcus, *Invisible Republic* xvi). While Robbie Robertson of the Band suggested to Marcus that the basement tapes were initially "a goof", the product of playing with absolute freedom and not something they "thought anybody else would ever hear", *John Wesley Harding* constituted Dylan's first official album release in eighteen months (xvi). Unlike the basement recordings, definitive dates adhere to – and contextualise – Dylan's subsequent, solo project. Furthermore, aware as Dylan was of the heightened anticipation surrounding his latest work, what he would – or, would not – say of these social issues was going to be open to much scrutiny.

Reconciling his desire to release new music with the understanding that any such release would be intensely scrutinized became a necessity for Dylan after the release of *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964). How Dylan's earliest original work became closely associated with social issues is well-documented by now; Dylan strove to disrupt this connection with the release of *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), and intensified with *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). This process is then seen to conclude with the Free Trade Hall 'Judas' concert of May 1966. The condemnation of Dylan's decision to embrace rock and roll masked the actuality of what was occurring within Dylan's music. New works such as "Subterranean Homesick Blues", "Maggie's Farm", "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" and "Ballad of a Thin Man" did not demonstrate Dylan's indifference toward social issues. Although significantly different in how it was presented, Dylan's "sell-out" work contained an even more refined critical awareness of those issues.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ In Todd Haynes' *Im Not There*, Dylan's "Ballad of A Thin Man" is viewed in this complicated light. Presenting a scene in which a group of likely Black Panthers are contemplating the meaning of Dylan's lyrics, the extent to which various strands of American society sought understanding in Dylan's work is illuminated.

Far from abandoning those fans who demanded his political engagement, subsequent works demonstrated a sense of nuance which would contribute substantially to his outstanding status as a songwriter. Having been treated as a socially-conscious figure since his early twenties, the occurrence of major social events or injustices inevitably found a way of emerging throughout the many interviews he conducted at this time; his long-standing abhorrence for the “spokesman of a generation” tag was taking root here. Detailing “the kind of politics that in 1966 occurred whenever [Dylan] opened his mouth”, Marcus, quoting a later comment Dylan made regarding Live Aid in 1985, highlights the inescapable nature of Dylan’s relationship with social conflict throughout this period: “The big difference between now and the sixties is that then it was much more dangerous to do that sort of thing. There were people trying to stop the show any way they could... Then, you didn’t know which end the trouble was coming from. And it could come at any time” (*Invisible Republic* 6). Whether courting such attention or not, Dylan’s continued presence determined that the shift in style executed after *The Times They Are A-Changin’* did not result in any tangible loss of expectation from those who valued Dylan’s thoughts on everything from “politics and philosophy [to] organic farming” (“Bob Dylan Destiny”).

John Wesley Harding definitively took Dylan out of the 1960s. From the quixotic basement tapes to an album recorded quickly within a Nashville recording studio, it signalled the beginning of what was arguably Dylan’s most conventional period to date. With the subsequent arrival of the albums *Nashville Skyline* (1969), *Self Portrait* (1970) and *New Morning* (1970), tendencies which were present within *John Wesley Harding* would be explored further. In terms of musicality, lyricism and the personal events that appeared to shape this change in Dylan’s work, these three progressively “late” albums serve to expand further our understanding of *John Wesley Harding* and Dylan’s convoluted late style. After *Harding’s* “softer and gentler, and more country-influenced” sound, *Nashville Skyline* was simply

“straightforward country music” (Bream 62-73). While Dylan’s lyrics “remained about as challengingly enigmatic as they’d been for the last three or four years” throughout his first post-*Blonde on Blonde* album, *Self Portrait* subsequently challenged listeners to the point of consternation and, occasionally, outright dismay (62-73). When *New Morning* is released shortly thereafter, a period of homeliness, religiosity and themes verging on the notion of utopianism illuminate the tearing open of “the career and the artist’s craft ... [reopening] the questions of meaning, success, and progress that the artist’s late period is supposed to move beyond” (Said, *On Late Style* 7). In the course of three years, Dylan gives cause for reconsideration of a career that had, in various ways, shaped the musical breakthroughs of the 1960s.

Analysing Theodor Adorno’s “diagnosis” of Beethoven’s late style, Rose Rosengard Subotnik details how “Adorno interprets [Beethoven’s] third-period style as a critique of the second-period one” (251). If Dylan’s career is read similarly within the arc of his first decade’s worth of music, such a third-period begins with *John Wesley Harding* and concludes with *New Morning*. Despite not being a final period work like Beethoven’s, this three-year stint of creativity would lead into four years of relative silence on Dylan’s behalf.⁴⁵ With the additional fact that Dylan would not pursue a touring schedule again until 1974, the eighteen-month period separating *Blonde on Blonde* and *John Wesley Harding* is less extreme in hindsight. Taken from the closing verse of “Sign on the Window”, Dylan’s idealistic image of seclusion seems prescient: “Build me a cabin in Utah” (*New Morning*). Although he would return with

⁴⁵ While it is true that *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* and *Dylan* would both be released in 1973, Dylan’s next significant work after *New Morning* would arrive in 1974 with *Planet Waves*. As stated in a previous chapter, *Dylan* was merely a collection of recorded covers by Dylan put together by Columbia. Dylan did not possess any creative control over the release and it was largely carried out on Columbia’s behalf in the hope that it may embarrass Dylan after a dispute between the artist and recording company. With the exception of “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door”, *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* was primarily a soundtrack for the Sam Peckinpah film of the same name. While not without its charm, the album is largely instrumental and perhaps more indicative of Dylan’s alternative interests to music throughout this period – he would play the figure of ‘Alias’ in the film itself.

Planet Waves, an extensive touring schedule and the highly-acclaimed *Blood on the Tracks*, Dylan's relative disappearance affords this 'third-period' the critical illusion of finality.

Of Adorno's 'second-period', Dylan's equivalent may be determined as the three-year span in which *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* led to *Blonde on Blonde*. Although Dylan's artistic development should not be viewed lineally in terms that suggest consistent improvement to the point of achieving perfection, from 1963 to 1966, Dylan's creativity matured in a relative vacuum at a rapidly quick rate. His transformation from Greenwich Village curiosity to globally renowned star was supported with the incredible diversity evidenced in the astonishingly quick releases of new albums. While "Blowin' in the Wind" differs from "Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" in just about every conceivable way, they nonetheless exist as two points on the same creative graph. Although this three-year span could demonstrate such diversity, it nonetheless remains a point in Dylan's career that is often recalled quite simplistically as his 'protest' period. A brief era of creativity that Greil Marcus believes has already come to identify Dylan's legacy, this sub-genre of popular music is one which Adorno held to be "doomed from the start":

The entire sphere of popular music, even there where it dresses itself up in modernist guise is to such a degree inseparable from past temperament, from consumption, from the cross-eyed transfixion with amusement, that attempts to outfit it with a new function remain entirely superficial...And I have to say that when somebody sets himself up, and for whatever reason sings maudlin music about Vietnam being unbearable I find that really it is this song that is in fact unbearable, in that by taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumerable, it ends up wringing something like consumption-qualities out of it ("Theodor Adorno – Music and Protest").

Although "Masters of War" (1963) was a "protest" song in a significantly different way to "Mr. Tambourine Man", an under-current of protest does admittedly remain evident, nevertheless.

In her assessment of Adorno's opposition to the "formalistic view of art which dominates much of Anglo-American music criticism" at the time in question, Subotnik demonstrates Adorno's vehement rejection of the idea that "any first-rank artist [would] transfer outward events, even world-historical events, in his art in any direct manner" (247). "Masters of War" contempt for subtlety might be seen as a pure counter-example; this is largely why Marcus himself would ultimately deem it a "bad" song. Contemplating the preferable realm of first-rank artists, Subotnik relays Adorno's belief that their main concern will alternatively turn toward "the immanent problems of art" instead. From this however, Subotnik identifies how "Adorno simultaneously maintains that the more rigorous the exclusiveness with which the artist devotes himself to such immanent problems, the more certain is the resulting art to embody, within its own structure, an artistic counterpoint to the structure of external human affairs, or in other words, contemporary history and society (247).

So while "Mr. Tambourine Man" may not subscribe to the rhetoric of "Masters of War", it still displays the effects of Dylan's surrounding social climate as it impacts upon his increasingly "first-rank" art.⁴⁶ As Dylan arrives at *Blonde on Blonde*, this transition could be said to be almost complete. With *John Wesley Harding* however, the link has been categorically severed and Dylan is ready to fulfil his role as a "first-rank" artist. Contemplating the "external reality" surrounding Beethoven's last decade, Subotnik suggests that Adorno believed "the predominant characteristic of external reality... had become precisely the irreconcilability of subject and object, and above all, of individual freedom and social order" (253). Although only eighteen months separated *Blonde on Blonde* from *John Wesley Harding*, the increasing escalation of war in Vietnam, coupled with a devastating stint of racially aggravated riots

⁴⁶ Upon its general release in 1972, Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* would carry a dedication to 'Bob Dylan, for "Mister Tambourine Man"'. An emblematic figure of protest himself, Thompson would later share his belief that Dylan possessed 'the purest, most intelligent voice of our time' (Willis 2010).

beginning in Newark on July 12, 1967, contributed to a significantly altered external reality in which a “public” artist such as Dylan operated.

While the popular consensus of what the 1960s represents in American culture is accurate to a degree, it simply cannot be viewed without scrutiny of its rapidly shifting timeline, much like Dylan himself. While Dylan did demonstrate his usefulness as a spokesman for this revolutionary generation, *John Wesley Harding* also signifies Dylan’s realisation that “the best minds of my generation [have been] destroyed by madness” (Ginsberg 49). Whether understood as a lost opportunity, or a complete misjudgement of one generation’s capabilities for change to begin with, elements of the work produced throughout Dylan’s ‘second-period’ demonstrate similarities with how Adorno viewed Beethoven’s equivalent period. Contemplating the idea of “dialectical synthesis” in Beethoven’s lifetime, Subotnik suggests that although “Adorno never asserts that dialectical synthesis was in fact achieved by society in Beethoven’s lifetime... the possibility of such a synthesis was a reality at this time, at least enough of a reality to suggest its own conceptual categories of form to the artist’s imagination” (250-51).

Dylan’s work now appeared to acknowledge that any such synthesis was an impossibility, and so the ‘third-period’ style becomes a critique of the ‘second-period’ and the ideologies materialised therein. Subotnik highlights Adorno’s description that any such “powerful illusions of synthesis... would have meant falsifying the nature of existing reality and weakening individual understanding of what is true” (253-54), and that “the only protest left to authentic art is withdrawal from society, and hence for art such as Beethoven’s late work to preserve its critical force and protest the musical (i.e. human) subject, the artist must sever, as cleanly as possible, the overt connections between his art and society.”:

He must actively resist designing (or ultimately even permitting) his art to please existing society or to serve it in any way. Aware of his inability to satisfy both himself and society, he

must fashion his art more single-mindedly than ever before to the specifications of his own imagination, deriving from the latter both his rules of procedure and his criteria for artistic success. His art must become consciously and implacably autonomous (255).

From such criteria emerged Dylan's *John Wesley Harding*. Compared to his own work up to this point, *John Wesley Harding* possessed little common-ground; it would become an album that held much more in common with Dylan's work thereafter. Yet, beyond the remit of Dylan's early works, it is an album that nonetheless demonstrates Dylan's (re)embrace of convention and – comparative to its release in 1967 – owes little to the creativity of the artist's contemporaries or the time in question. Documenting the precursory period that led to The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's*, Philip Norman describes one of the inescapable exchanges of influence that contributed to its release:

The Beach Boys' superb 1966 album *Pet Sounds* was an answer to [the Beatles'] *Rubber Soul* by their unstably brilliant leader Brian Wilson. No sooner had the Beatles answered Wilson with *Revolver* than he answered back with "Good Vibrations," a single that took two months to make, cost a phenomenal \$40,000 and packed in more layers of electronic and harmonic wizardry than many an entire album (480).

Considering the influence of Dylan on John Lennon, Norman subsequently explains how "one competitor, above all, hovered constantly at the edge of John's consciousness; never more so than amid this creative meteor shower of 1966" (480). A symptom of the musical awareness that Petridis described above, the particularities of the Beatles-Beach Boys axis displayed an increased willingness for experimentation that Dylan did not seemingly share:

I didn't know how to record the way other people were recording, and didn't want to. The Beatles had just released *Sgt. Pepper*, which I didn't like at all... I thought that was a very indulgent album, though the songs on it were real good. I didn't think all that production was

necessary, 'case the Beatles had never done that before (qtd. in Heylin, *Behind the Shades* 284).

Although Dylan's dismay with the Beatles' decision to attempt something they had never done before is curious, his reluctance to indulge this expansive style of recording remained firm. However apart he may have seemed, publicly at least, Dylan was one in a group of many rock and roll artists like Lennon, Wilson, McCartney and Jagger; Petridis' comments signify the manner in which he is still viewed within this collection. Yet *John Wesley Harding* resonated with a musicality that predated rock and roll completely.

Within a year of *John Wesley Harding's* release in December 1967, the Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Electric Ladyland* (October 1968) would present a cover version of *Harding's* "All Along The Watchtower." Although Dylan's initial performance of the song carried a relatively high tempo within the confines of the album, Hendrix' subsequent treatment of the song became iconic, his Fender substituting Dylan's harmonica. It could be said that the latent possibility of such a rendering on Hendrix's behalf lay within Dylan's original, yet with only the occasional pedal steel guitar of Pete Drake and Charlie McCoy's bass, *John Wesley Harding* can by no means be considered an electric album.⁴⁷ Did this essentially acoustic album suggest a creative U-turn on Dylan's behalf? Was he, after a brief experimentation with electrical accompaniment, returning to the more tangible, authentic realm of folk-music and its preferred musical methods?

The short answer is no. While Dylan's ability to remind his contemporaries of the acoustic sources from which their "progressive" music came from is one element of this third-period, that he seemingly removed himself from a loose co-dependency of creativity cannot be viewed in isolation. Documenting Allen Ginsberg's "assessment and insistence on the

⁴⁷ The credited musicians on Dylan's initial version are limited to Dylan himself (acoustic guitar and harmonica), Charlie McCoy (bass guitar) and Kenneth Buttrey (drums).

influence of black culture and jazz on the Beats”, Anne Waldman, who worked with Ginsberg at Naropa University, described Ginsberg’s understanding that “Black America really *is* the salvation of the USA” (xiv). Yet while *John Wesley Harding* may correctly be considered amongst Dylan’s better albums, for once Dylan looked away from black influence altogether.

I: *Nashville Skyline*

Whereas *John Wesley Harding* presented the kind of complexities that had become commonplace on a Dylan album, *Nashville Skyline* seemed self-explanatory, if not in terms of Dylan’s artistic direction. When Dylan had released *Bringing It All Back Home* in 1965, the change in his artistic direction was similarly plain. Recording half of the album’s songs with an electrical accompaniment, this was the album that was thought to demonstrate Dylan’s definitive transition from folk music to rock; a transition that had been hinted at with *Another Side of Bob Dylan* seven months earlier. Although it would take some listeners time to appreciate that a change of musical style had not necessarily reduced the impact of Dylan’s lyricism, the musical shift that coincided with *Nashville Skyline* did not appear to contain any lyrical nuance; it is *John Wesley Harding* without what Paul Nelson described its “vision of intellectual complexity” (1969). While some listeners would certainly have sought out subtexts nonetheless, *Nashville Skyline* was quite plainly a country & western album. This generated a whole new range of questions for Dylan’s audience.

Although the extent of Dylan’s musical influences was well-known even then, never had an album of his appeared so observant of one specific genre. Not only had Dylan appropriated a countrified twang, his original songs therein bore faint resemblance to anything one may have expected of Dylan’s lyricism. Johnny Cash’s poem for the album’s liner notes seems to address the inevitable consternation that the album was bound to generate:

There are those who do not imitate,
Who cannot imitate
But then there are those who emulate
At time, to expand further the light
Of an original glow (“Liner notes”).

Proceeding to describe the Dylan of *Nashville Skyline* as “a hell of a poet. / And lots of other things / And lots of other things”, Cash affords the album an authenticating sincerity, protecting it from any suspicion that the whole enterprise might be a form of joke.⁴⁸ Quaint and clichéd though it may occasionally sound, *Nashville Skyline* was Dylan’s second-most complete album to date after its immediate precursor. Much like the two albums that followed it, *Nashville Skyline*, contrary to certain assessments at this time, was never intended to be a parody.

Across the two-year period (1967-69) in which *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline* were recorded, country & western music did enjoy a level of popular interest that was perhaps unprecedented.⁴⁹ Yet aligning Dylan’s artistic direction with commercial vogue never really holds true.⁵⁰ After all, the four albums preceding *Nashville Skyline* had reached the top-ten of the American charts. That he would abandon this formula for the relatively niche confines of country & western music is unlikely. In fact, had Dylan continued to record albums the like of which define his ‘second-period’, his commercial value would have unquestionably

⁴⁸ The presence of Cash notes did not convince some of Dylan’s more doubtful fanbase.

⁴⁹ Bobbie Gentry’s *Ode to Billie Joe* and Glen Campbell’s *Wichita Lineman* represented two country music albums that temporarily displaced the all but ubiquitous Beatles at the top of Billboard’s album charts.

⁵⁰ This is not to suggest for a moment however that Dylan is averse to exploring unusual opportunities if the financial remunerations are correct. It is rare however that he would do so via his work directly.

risen further still.⁵¹ Irrespective of what motivated Dylan, the albums in question stood at odds with what was expected of any popular artist, let alone one called “Bob Dylan”.

Reading *Nashville Skyline* might be done more productively through the issue of race. In *Just Around Midnight*, Jack Hamilton investigates how rock music – the most popular genre of music throughout this period – can be viewed in relation to its stance on these social issues. Although Hamilton’s work shall be investigated further throughout this chapter, it is important to initially consider his understanding of how rock music understood itself throughout the 1960s:

Rock music constructed an ideology of authenticity based on the ideal of heroic genius and resistant rebellion that rendered its racial qualifications implicit rather than explicit. By adopting its individualist ethos, rock ideology was able to deny outwardly race’s salience, even proclaim its own affinity for and indebtedness to black musical forms (54).

Having appeared to embrace rock music with the releases of *Bringing it all Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* (not to mention his live performances), his subsequent denial of that genre for a country & western alternative could have been construed as troubling. Country & western music proclaimed no great affinity with black musical forms, let alone declaring any kind of indebtedness to them. It was far more closely affiliated with the racially-insensitive American south. Distancing himself from a genre that was seemingly proud of its progressive outlook and comfortable with the idea of black influences (and black performers), Dylan’s embrace of this white-orientated alternative encourages questions as to his artistic motive. Although he had held a tight grip on the affections and imaginations of a significant portion of America’s youth, this was not the kind of music upon which revolutionary

⁵¹ It should be noted that prior to Dylan’s fabled motorcycle accident in nineteen-sixty-six, Dylan’s manager, Albert Grossman, had arranged yet another series of concert performances for Dylan due to astounding demand. With the accident happening in July of that year, it is a testament to Dylan’s popularity that he had already performed forty-five shows, across three continents, by May of 1966.

thoughts could flourish. Describing the nature of this divide in the late nineteen-sixties, David Dalton highlights the line Dylan may have been perceived as crossing:

The fault line between North and South created by the Civil War a century earlier still rankled. Northerners treated country music with scorn. And while folksingers in [Greenwich] Village had idolised Appalachian hollow dwellers, the contemporary urban progeny of these mule-skinners and moonshiners were a lot less appetising. In turn, these descendants hated the pinkos, the homos, and the negro-loving, sandal wearing residents of Greenwich Village with a distilled passion (216).

One cannot escape the fact that country musicians (as well as Woody Guthrie, Robert Johnson, Little Richard and many others) played a substantial role in Dylan's musical development; Hank Williams, for one. While the idea of him committing to a country album may have been strange, it nonetheless contained a certain amount of artistic precedent. Irrespective of his dislike of Dylan's change in artistic direction, Dalton has described his understanding of Dylan's own thoughts regarding country & western music: "Dylan had always recognised country as the genuine legacy of white folk music" (215). In this regard, the late style of Dylan's work is hinted at it. In going beyond the "white folk music" that had initially informed his artistic direction as a recording artist, Dylan is going deep into the musical conventions of his art. Furthermore, in subscribing to it so wholeheartedly, the conventions are borne out with little of the artist's own genius. With regards the timing of these two albums, the lateness of the work in question is intensified further still.⁵²

⁵² A regular feature of Dylan's career is the realisation that many of the unusual artistic directions he takes were the product of ideas that had emerged years earlier. In the case of his albums (*Shadows in the Night* (2015) and *Fallen Angels* (2016)) covering songs previously sung by Frank Sinatra, this was a project Dylan had initially intended to pursue in the nineteen-seventies. Regarding his Christmas-themed album, *Christmas in the Heart* (2009), it had long been an ambition of Dylan's to cover a series of songs previously recorded by Bing Crosby; many of the songs recorded therein were previously made popular by Crosby. With regards to *Nashville Skyline* then, it is a little unusual that Dylan pursued such a project so quickly after having imagined it.

As stated previously, such music was principally at odds with what Dylan's young, progressive audience were listening to. Although many bought *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline* (they charted #2 and #3 respectively in the Billboard charts), it did not resonate with the "sound" of the resistance. One would suspect that a healthy portion of those who purchased *Nashville Skyline* particularly did so off the strength of Dylan's name alone. The album did not demonstrate Dylan's stance on current affairs, and its style intimated a level of musical timelessness that could be construed as regressive. Dylan, it seemed, was leveraging his own withdrawal from a position of authority and guidance; you cannot conceivably follow someone who is not moving. While both albums are now looked upon favourably, it is not unimaginable that Dylan's apparent indifference would have seen him labelled as part of "the problem", such was his unwillingness to engage with "the solution". Contrary to the omnipresent Beatles and their expansive approach to music-making, Dylan's musical regression was no longer a recognised means of locating fresh inspiration. Dylan stepped outside of racially "progressive" rock music and chose to embrace these more conventional forms.

In his comprehensive study of Dylan's original works, Clinton Heylin's focus generally returns to the artist's lyricism. Of the period from which *Nashville Skyline* emerged, Heylin's estimation of the songs therein is less than flattering:

Plenty of singer-songwriters would consider a couple of years in which they wrote the likes of 'Lay, Lady, Lay,' 'I Threw It All Away,' and 'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You' to be something of a golden era, but for the preeminent singer-songwriter of his time, these were dark days. Those songs, none of which were exactly 'Like a Rolling Stone,' were the cream of a very thin crop. On the verge of becoming a parody of his former self, Dylan turned off the tap, preferring to parody others, beginning work on a most unbecoming *Self Portrait (Revolution in the Air 468)*.

Although *Self Portrait* and the question of Dylan's lyricism will be discussed in the next portion of this chapter, it is important first to investigate the actual musical backdrop of these songs comprised within *Nashville Skyline*. While Heylin contends that a certain amount of musical potential is evidenced throughout, his general impression of Dylan's musical direction tallies with his concerns for the lyricism: "'Peggy Day' and 'Country Pie' are, frankly, embarrassing. One can't help but wonder what the Nashville cats thought about such un-Dylanesque drivel. They could tell a B side when they heard one, and it must have struck them that Dylan was stockpiling a whole slew of 'em" (480). Yet even Heylin cannot overly criticise the one song "which would itself define [this] dramatic switch in style", "Lay, Lady, Lay" (469). Although it would be difficult to identify a Dylan album where this song could more appropriately be found, "Lay, Lady, Lay" does not necessarily sit comfortably within *Nashville Skyline*. Originally written with the film *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) in mind, an initial request from the producers of the film to Dylan "for some songs they could use" fell away as "Harry Nilsson's cover of Fred Neil's 'Everybody's Talking'" was chosen instead. Lyrically, the song is a suitable fit for the album. The "commanding and kind, benevolently paternalistic" Dylan that Barbara O'Dair identifies with can be similarly found on songs such as "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You" (80). Musically however, Heylin's estimation that "one of his most memorable melodies ... [remained stagnant] until Dylan suggested bongos," hint at the surreal nature of this outlier (469-70). Speaking with Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* magazine in the wake of *Nashville Skyline's* release in 1969, Dylan's brief reflection on the song is revealing. Discussing potential titles for the album other than *Nashville Skyline*, Dylan asserts the he "certainly couldn't call the album *Lay, Lady Lay*. I wouldn't have wanted to call it that, although the name was brought up. It didn't get my vote, but it was brought up" ("Bob Dylan Talks").

Heylin's suggestion that "Lay, Lady, Lay" "*defined the Nashville Skyline* sound and set the agenda for these sessions" appears at odds with Dylan's later attempts to "stretch out or cut up" the album's most successful product (469-71). In that discussion with Wenner, commercial thinking may have urged Dylan to profess that *Nashville Skyline* was his favourite of the five albums he had recorded with electrical accompaniment. Yet confessing that he is "listening for sound now," and that *Nashville Skyline* had "the sound," Dylan's aversion to "Lay, Lady, Lay" becomes more intriguing. As Heylin suggests, it was the song that kick-started the sessions, but, by the end, it sounded completely apart. When asked by Wenner what songs on the album he preferred above the others, Dylan, after some hesitation, identified "Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You" and "Tell Me That It Isn't True," "although it came out completely different than I'd written it. It came out real slow and mellow." Another feature of this work that permeated many of the songs on *Nashville Skyline* (and presumably elevated the album above the likes of *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* for Dylan) was the fact he "wrote it in F. They're all in F ... not all of them, but quite a few. There's not many on that album that aren't in F. So you see – I had those chords ... which gives it a certain sound." Notably enough, "Lay, Lady, Lay" was not written in F, and scarcely satisfied the sound that Dylan had in mind. "Lay, Lady, Lay" becomes the exception which proves *Nashville Skyline's* late style. Although it is by no means a 'second-period' Dylan work, the manifestation of the song reflects the more haphazard nature in which songs of this period were recorded. This is demonstrated in Heylin's recollection of how the album recording of the song came about:

It was the only song he went back to at consecutive sessions, feeling that he had a song with some real potential, one of only two compositions he had been sitting on since the previous year. And so, despite cutting three complete takes at the first session, he returned to it at the end of the following day's excursions (469-70).

The musicality of Dylan's late style throughout this period scarcely collaborates with this notion of spending such an amount of time on one song. As was evidenced above in his repetitious use of the chord F, and as will be later demonstrated when he came to write the songs for *John Wesley Harding* and *Self Portrait*, "Lay, Lady, Lay" stood at odds with what he wanted to "go after" (Wenner).

Another topic that Wenner couldn't but touch on was Dylan's status – willing, or otherwise – as a "youth leader." Although the prospect of Dylan fulfilling such a role in the wake of *Nashville Skyline* didn't appear overly problematic for Wenner, Dylan's thoughts on the matter were firm:

If I thought I was that person, wouldn't I be out there doing it? Wouldn't I be, if I thought I was meant to do that, wouldn't I be doing it? I don't have to hold back. This Maharishi, he thinks that – right? He's out there doing it. If I thought that, I'd be out there doing it. Don't you ... you agree, right? So obviously, I don't think that ("Bob Dylan Talks").

The autonomy of Dylan's decision-making is clear. He is not, and will not, fulfil such a role as this is not what he believes he ought to be doing. Although he would deviate further still from the mere suggestion that he could be countenanced as suitable for such a role with *Self Portrait*, *Nashville Skyline*, and the autonomy that was demonstrated there with relation to the aforementioned "sound" he was seeking, made definite moves toward this eventuality. As Dalton queried after hearing *Nashville Skyline*, did the album's "simplicity and simple-mindedness" intend to suggest that "there was nothing wrong with the world now, that it was all fine and we didn't need to worry about the My Lai massacre or Buddhist monks in flames?" (217-18). Without a rock music sound, *Nashville Skyline* was instantly thought to be incapable of sharing any worthwhile message on these matters. However, Jack Hamilton deconstructs the notion that rock music was as racially fluid as it may have appeared to begin with. Characterising Dylan's inadvertent role in the increased "whitening" of a musical form that

keenly promoted its “indebtedness to black musical forms”, Hamilton discusses the emergence of an “exclusionary white masculinity” at the forefront of popular rock music: “And through no fault of his own, the figure who most enabled this was Bob Dylan, an artist whose mythic break from folk to rock was far more of a connective move than both communities might have been inclined to admit.” (54).

In moving toward country & western music, Dylan again becomes a connecting figure; albeit this time in reverse. Despite his deep aversion to *Nashville Skyline*, Dalton identified “Dylan’s gravitational pull [as a reason behind] the country-rock fever of the 1970s” (223). Dylan’s desire to embrace a country sound is composed of elements known and unknown, but it does seem as if *Nashville Skyline* was devoid of any “message”. Rooted in a part of America’s musicality that went against the grain of popular music and its mores, it is an album that allows Dylan to fulfil Adorno’s estimation of what a late work ought to be. Shirking all responsibilities to a rock music society that he inadvertently “corrupted” by definition, *Nashville Skyline* was a “catastrophe” for rock music (“Late Style in Beethoven” 567).

In response to the white masculinity of rock music as presented by Hamilton, Dylan’s abandonment of a medium that he would never truly return to cannot subsequently be read as an outright abandonment of black musical forms or Dylan’s own indebtedness to them. Regarding Jimi Hendrix’s cover of “All Along the Watchtower”, Hamilton discussed at length the contradictions surrounding rock music at this time, black musical forms, and a performer who was described as “a black man in the alien world of rock”:

Throughout Hendrix’s tragically brief stardom the guitarist’s race has been an incessant topic of fascination among fans of the music that had once been known as “rock and roll”. Even in the late 1960s, the hypervisibility of Hendrix’s race confirmed a racial imagination of rock music that was quickly rendering blackness invisible, so much so that at the time of his death

the idea of a black man playing electric lead guitar was literally remarkable – “alien” – in a way that would have been inconceivable ... only a short while earlier (3).

While Dylan’s decision to revert to conventional musical forms demonstrated a step away from contemporary rock music, Hendrix’s “All Along The Watchtower” carried out the fulfilment of Adorno’s earlier suggestion. A singular black figure in the aesthetically white world of rock music, Hendrix takes Dylan’s “implacably autonomous’ work from the outskirts of this musical society and embodies Dylan’s art as a “counterpoint to the structure of external human affairs, or in other words, contemporary history and society” (3). He confirms the emergence of Dylan’s “first-rank” art by making it dialectical. Dylan brings black music into a white medium before Hendrix returns it to black.

II: *Self Portrait*

Self Portrait is quite unlike any album Dylan has ever released. Described by Geoffrey Green as “a pivotal and quite revealing album into the seriousness of [Dylan’s] art”, Jon Bream highlights the surprising nature in which such insight was initially received: “*Self Portrait* ... marked the first time [Dylan’s work] was greeted with almost universal derision” (Bream 69-73). According to Dalton, this “Sargasso Sea of undigested, misshapen fragments ... [that was] greeted with incomprehension and hostility ... [caused fans of Dylan’s] to fall away in droves” (226). The scrutiny surrounding Dylan’s artistic autonomy gives one reason to recall D. H. Lawrence’s estimation of American “freedom” and what one could get away with saying or doing before it became too much:

The land of the free! The land of the free! Why, if I say anything that displeases them, the free mob will lynch me, and that’s my freedom. Free? Why, I have never been in a country where the individual has such an abject fear of his fellow countrymen. Because, as I say, they are free to lynch the moment he shows he is not one of them (9).

The aggression that greeted this collection of some original work, live recordings and cover versions of both old and contemporary music was unparalleled for Dylan. At odds with the two carefully structured albums which preceded it, it is little wonder that Dylan would follow *Self Portrait* with the more accessible *New Morning*. According to Heylin, *Self Portrait* reflected an effort on Dylan's behalf to drive an even larger wedge between what we now identify as his 'second' and 'third' period work: "*Self Portrait* was a deliberate, concerted attempt to dispel much of the iconography surrounding him, once and for all" (*Behind the Shades* 313). In terms of Said's understanding of late style and the alienating effect such work has upon the artist's established listeners, *Self Portrait* is unmistakably – almost brutally – late.

Addressing Dylan's songwriting style for the purposes of understanding the late style of *Self Portrait*, it may initially appear counter-intuitive to consider an album that only possessed four original works.⁵³ However, as an initial consideration of *John Wesley Harding* will demonstrate, *Self Portrait* enabled listeners to locate a clearer understanding of Dylan's late approach, irrespective of how little "original" material was present. With *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan had shifted his lyrical style away from the expectations of his 'second-period' work; *Nashville Skyline* had seen him deviate further still from this method to a point that Dalton believed Dylan was doing "Tin Pan Alley ... deadpan" (226). Throughout *Self Portrait*, Dylan extends this process beyond all recognition, regressing beyond even *Bob Dylan* (1962) in terms of achieving his alienation from the "established social order of which he [was] a part" (Said, *On Late Style* 8). As Bell writes of Dylan throughout this period, he had gone from being "the 'country' singer of *Nashville Skyline* [to] the baffling anonymous artist of *Self Portrait*" (*Time Out of Mind* 20).

⁵³ In total, the album contained twenty-four different songs.

The song-writing style that developed throughout Dylan's 'second-period' work resists any singular, overarching definition. From writing "Blowin' in the Wind" in a matter of minutes, to extracting a song from reams of written verses as he did with "Like A Rolling Stone", the song-writing style of his 'third-period' work is generally quite formulaic. Although Dylan rarely discusses his song-writing publicly, there are scattered examples to draw from. Speaking of songs such as "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" (*Bringing It All Back Home* 1965), Dylan conceded: "I don't know how I got to write those songs. Those early songs were like almost magically written. Try to sit down and write something like that. There's a magic to that, and it's not Siegfried and Roy kind of magic, you know, it's a different kind of penetrating magic, and I did it at one time ... but I can do other things now" ("Bob Dylan Destiny"). While this understanding on Dylan's behalf was revealed forty years after he had possession of this "penetrating magic", such songs ceased to appear in Dylan's new albums from *John Wesley Harding* onward. The braggadocio that enabled Dylan to famously inform the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards that he "could have written "Satisfaction", but you couldn't have written "Desolation Row"" was gone (Britton). Dylan appeared content writing 'ordinary' songs. In keeping with Adorno's assessment of Beethoven's 'third-period' lateness, Dylan's once enigmatic, boundary-shifting approach to song-writing was replaced with a style that focused upon conventional writing forms. Although this does not necessarily suggest a regression in terms of quality, no songs written by Dylan throughout this 'third-period' would command the kind of response such a significant number of his 'second-period' works did. Incapable (or unwilling) of producing work that captivated an audience in terms of a unique style, content and delivery, Dylan's 'third-period' work demonstrated a clearer connection to established forms that listeners could feasibly understand. The shock of Dylan's newness was no longer a facet in his 'third-period' work. Although the lingering effects of his 'second-period' work would still encourage many listeners to probe for meaning in these newer works,

this was simply part of the “losing battle” Dylan fought, “when the tables were turned and Bob Dylan became famous the world over, sought after, idolised, labelled a prophet and a guru” (Kinney 33).

The importance of convention within late works relies upon its virtual absence throughout the artist’s ‘second-period’. Describing this absence of convention, Adorno makes way for the importance of this newly visible dimension in the ‘third’:

Thus it is precisely the middle Beethoven who, through the creation of latent middle voices, through his use of rhythm, tension, and other means, always drew the traditional accompanying figures into his subjective dynamics and transformed them according to his intention – if he did not indeed develop them himself, for example in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, out of the thematic material, and thus free them from convention on the strength of their own uniqueness (“Late Style in Beethoven” 565).

In comparison to this earlier mastery, “the late Beethoven ... [possesses convention] in a form that is bald, undisguised, untransformed ... that would scarcely have been tolerated in the middle style” (565). The initial argument for this later “indifference to appearances” (566) was rooted in a psychological rationale that suggested the artist’s “uninhibited subjectivity ... or personality” (564) had overrun their artistic capabilities. For Adorno, such a reading is inadequate. It is with some irony then that an album titled *Self Portrait* should be viewed in terms of its aversion to such subjectivity. Yet, akin to Beethoven’s ‘third-period’ work, it is an album that lacks Dylan’s previous ability to “transform ... accompanying figures ... according to his intention.” Despite the critical proclivity that wishes to consistently align Dylan’s work with his “life”, *Self Portrait* is the “irascible gesture with which [subjectivity] takes leave of the work”. *Self Portrait* “remains process, but not as development; rather as a catching fire between extremes, which no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity” (567). Upon this fractured landscape, *Self Portrait* becomes a late work.

Identifying the conventional elements of *Self Portrait* is a relatively straight-forward task. Compared to the work of Dylan's popular contemporaries, *Self Portrait* was incredibly quaint; pursuing in places a musicality that predated those on show throughout even *Nashville Skyline*. In comparison to his own 'second-period' work, *Self Portrait* may as well have been recorded by another artist entirely. Consisting of a variety of musical reference points that could not be considered unanimous with any one genre, it is curious how far *Self Portrait* deviated from the initial idea which Heylin assumes Dylan had for this latest work:

If it is possible to glean intent from a set of tape logs, then Dylan's 'original' intent was the same as the one that inspired his attempt at a joint Dylan-Cash project, and the album of country covers he recorded in Nashville in the spring of 1969 – to put together a set of covers that reflected something of who he was, and how he came to be (*Behind the Shades* 313).

As such, it is an album that appears to mask very little. While Dylan later claimed that he intended to record an album that “they can't possibly like...can't relate to”, Heylin is perhaps correct in assuming that *Self Portrait* was never truly supposed to be a joke: “many of the covers recorded [throughout the *Self Portrait* sessions] were not the kind that Dylan would have been inclined to parody” (313). Although *Self Portrait* did become more than just an album of such covers, the idea that it is to be disregarded in terms of Dylan's overall canon is false. Both “old, weird America” and relatively new (in terms of original material and some of the more contemporary covers), one song Dylan recorded for the album explicates the issue of time that *Self Portrait* generates with its range of influences and points of origin. Despite some debates regarding when it was written, “Copper Kettle” was most likely composed in nineteen-fifty-three for the folk-opera, *Go Lightly, Stranger*.⁵⁴ One of “the most affecting performances

⁵⁴ While A.F. Beddoe made the authorship claim in a letter to *Time* magazine in November 1962 (shortly after Joan Baez had recorded the song for her *Joan Baez in Concert*), Pete Seeger has contrarily claimed that the song's origins date from 1946. It is difficult to ascertain which claim is absolute, but for the purposes of this study, Beddoe's claim carries somewhat more legitimacy.

in Dylan's entire official canon" according to Heylin, in a similar vein to The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down", "Copper Kettle" manages to capture the intricacies of America's past from a relatively contemporary viewpoint (314). Lacking the 'authentic' element of a folk song that comes in being continually passed down and adapted (but sounding the part nonetheless), this creation of the nineteen-fifties romanticises the making of moonshine whiskey in eighteenth-century America:

My daddy, he made whiskey

My granddaddy, he did too

We ain't paid no whiskey tax

Since 1792 (*Self Portrait*).

Performed with the kind of reverence Dylan generally reserves for those songs that are part of his "lexicon and ... prayer-book", "Copper Kettle" is both old and new, late and early. Blurring the lines of what Dylan was trying to achieve with *Self Portrait*, the conviction with which this song was performed is curious. A modern interpretation of an old style, "Copper Kettle" disrupts the notion of timeliness within *Self Portrait*.⁵⁵ In terms of the role of convention within the album, Dylan demonstrates how loose his understanding of conventional music has become. It similarly addresses his artistic unwillingness to mould conventional forms for his own creations. "Copper Kettle" suggests the presence of convention, without containing it. It is a pastiche that Dylan is content to indulge and treat as if it were an original folk-music standard. *Self Portrait* exemplifies similar traits. Conventional forms become something that

⁵⁵ With the release of *The Bootleg Series Vol. 10: Another Self Portrait (1969-1971)* in 2013, an alternate recording of "Copper Kettle" further exemplifies this issue of timeliness and *Self Portrait*. Prior to beginning the recording, Dylan is heard introducing the song as "one of our old favourites". Albeit "old" in so far it had been written slightly more than fifteen years earlier, the notion of it being "old" in accordance with how much older it sounds is not a fact Dylan is keen to clarify. He would appear to be content with the idea that "Copper Kettle" is an authentic, folk-music relic.

can be toyed with and treated almost casually. The pressure to “transform” them is not felt throughout.

Considering the releases of *John Wesley Harding*, *Nashville Skyline*, *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* on a sliding scale of increasingly blatant lateness, there is not an immediate correlation with regards the songwriting demonstrated on the first and third of these albums. Whereas hints of what was to come with *Self Portrait* can be retrospectively found on *John Wesley Harding*, an objective assessment of both works would suggest that the songs on *Harding* came from an artist who was not struggling with his creative capabilities. By comparison, *Self Portrait* is nowhere near as fecund. Yet as shall be seen with *New Morning*, Dylan’s song-writing had not quite deserted him as brutally as one may have suspected. In this regard, what does appear on *Self Portrait* must be taken as evidence of Dylan’s artistic designs at this point. How Dylan decided upon the songs to include, and the running order of the album become of greater interest as a result. Despite many critical assumptions to the contrary, the quick release of the wholly original *New Morning* shortly thereafter suggests that Dylan could have included more original work on *Self Portrait* should he have wished. Looking first to the precedent set with *John Wesley Harding*, consideration of Dylan’s escalating late style can then be clearer seen in the making of *Self Portrait*.

In his collection of notes from Dylan’s recording sessions, Clinton Heylin highlights the unusual nature in which *John Wesley Harding* was executed and the effect such a process had on the result:

The fact that Dylan wrote *John Wesley Harding* self-consciously as “an album of songs” in a month and a day, and recorded it in just three afternoons, gives the album a unity all of its own. That Dylan entered the studio with just producer Bob Johnston and his favourite two Nashville studio cats – who well remembered the madness of the *Blonde on Blonde* sessions and were astonished by Dylan’s calm professionalism – made the process as smooth as a rhapsody. It

would take Dylan a long time to get back to recording another “album of songs” without the process itself getting in the way (*Bob Dylan: The Recording Sessions* 76).

As was previously alluded to regarding Dylan’s ad-hoc recordings with the Band, *John Wesley Harding* truly did emerge unexpected. Displaying no real traces of the work that had gone on in the basement, it is an album that we may assume Dylan had a very clear idea of from the outset. A point Heylin mentions and Wilentz confirms in his gathered retelling of the process behind making *Blonde on Blonde* (and the two albums immediately prior to this), Dylan’s “calm professionalism” certainly indicated the probability that something different was occurring with *John Wesley Harding*. Consider the stark change in Dylan’s studio behaviour compared to Wilentz’s description of prior events here:

The making of *Blonde on Blonde* combined perfectionism with spontaneous improvisation to capture what Dylan heard but could not completely articulate in words. “He never did anything twice,” the album’s producer, Bob Johnston, recalls of Dylan’s mercurial manner in the studio, “and if he did it twice, you probably didn’t get it.” Making the record also involved happenstance, necessity, uncertainty, wrongheaded excess, virtuosity, and retrieval (108).

Dylan’s work on *John Wesley Harding* recalls virtually none of these characteristics. It was not, as Heylin writes of its immediate predecessor, an album that would be “written in the studio while the musicians pulled out their playing cards” (*Revolution in the Air* 435). No longer looking to capture some unintelligible idea or imagining, Dylan’s first third-period work has definitive lines of reference to it. Ultimately, an album in possession of a “unity all of its own” owes its structure to the form the artist sought to implement first and foremost.

Investigating the form Dylan applied to the songs therein, Heylin’s *Revolution in the Air* provides an invaluable clarity. Within the liner notes that Dylan contributed to *John Wesley Harding*, an oblique reference is made to “Frank”, the proposed “key” to understanding the

album it accompanies. With the album's eponymous opening track, Heylin identifies a potential meaning behind Dylan's potentially meaningless instruction:

Not only couldn't the album have been more perfectly constructed, but in keeping with long-standing practice, Dylan used the opening song to demonstrate which stylist the listener could expect this time around. Like Frank, he was enticing the listener to venture in 'just far enough so's we can say that we've been there' – and what better way than to give them a simple cowboy ballad that was nothing of the sort (448).

Such misdirection would become commonplace throughout *John Wesley Harding*. Apparent adoptions of previous, familiar forms would ultimately come to nothing. Akin to Adorno's impression of Beethoven's third-period, Dylan's listeners were allowed glimpses of the great artist "catching fire between extremes" ("Late Style in Beethoven" 567). This is carried on throughout "As I Went Out One Morning", the song following "John Wesley Harding": "After a cowboy ballad, Dylan decided to try his hand at a lyric of love unrequited. Once again, he is determined to have a little fun with folk commonplaces. And there is no greater commonplace than 'As I went out one morning', the folk equivalent of the classic blues opening, 'Woke up this morning'" (449). Yet another demonstration of his dealing with musical conventions when constructing these latest songs, it is telling that he never indulges such forms entirely. Of an album that can be described as united and whole, the structural narrative upholding the songs therein possesses late characteristics from the outset.

With "Drifter's Escape" the key to understanding what sparked this approach is evident according to Heylin's research. The sixth track on an album of twelve songs, it was amongst the first songs that Dylan would write specifically for *John Wesley Harding*. Although the balladry of "Frankie Lee and Judas Priest" was somewhat typical in its extensive length, Heylin suggests that "Drifter's Escape" (running less than three minutes in length) convinced Dylan that he "had found a way to tell a five-act story in just three verses. Enthused by what he had

achieved, he began writing a whole set of songs along similar lines” (440). A minor alteration of yet another conventional songwriting approach, this enthusiasm would ultimately determine the form of “All Along the Watchtower”, “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” and “The Wicked Messenger”, most tellingly. Describing this stylistic occurrence within *John Wesley Harding*, Heylin’s synopsis of how Dylan achieved this end is of crucial importance:

Recorded with minimal fuss, the songs set the listener up for an epic ballad with its first two verses, only to cut, after the briefest instrumental interlude, to the end of the song, leaving the listener to fill in his or her own (doom-laden) blanks. It was a technique he employed a couple more times on *John Wesley Harding* – notably on “The Wicked Messenger” – but as Dylan told John Cohen some months later, this particular song ‘opens up ... in a stranger way’:

The scope opens up, just but a few little tricks. I know why it opens up, but in a balled in the true sense, it wouldn’t open up that way. ... The third verse of “The Wicked Messenger” ... opens it up, and then the time schedule takes a jump and soon the song becomes wide. ... The same is true of ... “All Along the Watchtower,” which opens up in a slightly different way, in a stranger way, for here we have the cycle of event working in a rather reverse order.

Much has been made of this song’s supposed circularity – i.e., the last line could be the first, and vice versa. Dylan’s comments about ‘the cycle of events working in a ... reverse order’ does suggest there is something to this (444).

Upon these two stylistic shifts in Dylan’s song-writing, the increasingly late profile of his work is clarified. Between executing a “five-act story in just three verses” and composing songs with a circularity that allows one to imagine that “the last line could be the first, and vice versa”, Dylan toys with forms that he had previously upheld and in many cases elevated throughout his ‘second-period’ work. In accordance with Adorno’s vision of late style, we witness the “process”, but, in approaching *Self Portrait*, lose sight of an end “development” (567). Whereas Bob Johnston had suggested that it was impossible to get Dylan to repeat anything “twice” during the recording sessions of *Blonde on Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding* is almost deliberately

an exercise in repetition. Fashioning unusual subject matter into songs that are designed to explore the stylistic abnormalities Dylan was locating, such creativity would find a way of reoccurring during the *Self Portrait* sessions. Between “Alberta #1” and “Alberta #2”, “Little Sadie” and “In Search of Little Sadie”, repetition becomes a far more blatant feature on *Self Portrait*. We are presented with both the product (the album) and how this product came to be in the first place. In his review of the album, Marcus identifies what he believes was Dylan’s intention in pursuing this style:

Self Portrait is a concept album from the cutting room floor. It has been constructed so artfully, but as a coverup, not a revelation. Thus “Alberta #2” is the end, after a false ending, just as “Alberta #1” was the beginning, after a false beginning. The song moves quickly, and ends abruptly. These alternate takes don’t just fill up a side, they set up the whole album, and it works, in a way, because I think it’s mainly the four songs fitted in at the edges that make the album a playable record. With a circle you tend to see the line that defines it, rather than the hole in the middle (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus 25*)

Although the various lines of thought regarding Dylan’s intention for this album have made a critical consensus near impossible to determine, the analogy Marcus draws between the line of the circle and “the hole in the middle” is useful. Whereas previous works had been more complete, colouring in this gaping hole, the late style of *Self Portrait* is demonstrated via the fractures that fail to generate any kind of substantial subjectivity.

When we then consider the original songs that Dylan recorded for the album, this demonstration of the artist’s late style becomes clearer still. With “All the Tired Horses” and “Wigwam”, the opening and penultimate tracks on *Self Portrait*, Dylan’s ‘song-writing’ takes on a most basic form. Over the course of the collective six or so minutes that both songs last, fifteen words are used: “All the tired horses in the sun / How’m I supposed to get any ridin’ done?” Used exclusively in the former, the two recurring lines are sung by a trio of female

backing singers; Dylan's voice never materialises. With "Wigwam", a song that had no lyrical accompaniment whatsoever, the only presence of Dylan can be ascertained in his humming along with the melody. In terms of his late style, this facet of the song is particularly interesting. Once again touching on the idea of unfinished work, Dylan's humming becomes another voice. A stage of the song-writing process that would usually suggest the artist has the melody, but not the words, "Wigwam" becomes trapped in this in-between state; it is not one thing nor another. This process is furthermore indicative of a drastic change in Dylan's creativity when we consider an interview he carried out in the height of his 'second-period':

Questioner: *Would you say that the words are more important than the music?*

Dylan: The words are just as important as the music. There would be no music without the words.

Questioner: *Which do you do first, ordinarily?*

Dylan: The words. (*Dylan on Dylan* 63).

"Wigwam" was then something completely out of the ordinary for Dylan. Reiterating once more Adorno's assessment of Beethoven's late works, Dylan does not bring to "Wigwam" the "harmonious synthesis" of a typical 'second-period' work (567). Akin to Marcus' assessment of the album as a whole, "Wigwam" doesn't attempt to hide the hole inside the line of the circle.

Of the two remaining original songs on the album, "Woogie Boogie" and "Living the Blues" sound similarly incomplete and reliant upon "bald" convention. Equivalent to "Nashville Skyline Rag" of his previous album, "Woogie Boogie" possesses no lyrical accompaniment either. It merely resembles the sound of Dylan and his band warming up; although unlike the song from *Nashville Skyline*, "Woogie Boogie" falls in the middle of *Self Portrait*, not at the beginning. "Living the Blues" therefore becomes the only original work on

which one hears Dylan singing. Despite the “blues” reference in its title, “Living the Blues” could easily be mistaken for another *Nashville Skyline* number. Perhaps a coded reference to the source material that underwrites both country and rock music (i.e. the blues), the song was initially slated to be released as a single alongside *Nashville Skyline*’s “I Threw It All Away”. *Self Portrait* thus became its secondary, reluctant home. If *John Wesley Harding* had determined Dylan’s intention to be heard on his own terms, and *Nashville Skyline* presented a version of Dylan that possessed little by way of his expected voice and mind, *Self Portrait* took Dylan to a point where he could conscientiously say nothing, whilst remaining heard.

III: *New Morning*

Released only a few months after the critically panned *Self Portrait*, it was initially assumed by critics that *New Morning* reflected Dylan’s panicked efforts at reclaiming artistic credibility.⁵⁶ Consisting solely of original material, the resulting positivity surrounding this release stemmed from the assumption that it signalled Dylan’s timely return to form; *Self Portrait* could be thought of as a mild aberration that could be as quickly forgotten. Yet, while the speed with which *New Morning* emerged may indeed have been influenced by the poor reviews, Clinton Heylin demonstrates why the album should not necessarily be viewed as a response to its unwelcome predecessor: “Dylan had all but completed *New Morning* at a series of sessions in New York the week prior to the release of *Self Portrait*” (*Behind the Shades* 317).

⁵⁶ Greil Marcus, one of the most vehement detractors of *Self Portrait*, had, in his infamous review of that album, suggested that “unless [Dylan] returns to the marketplace, with a sense of vocation and the ambition to keep up with his own gifts, the music of [the mid-sixties] will continue to dominate his records, whether he releases them or not. If the music Dylan makes doesn’t have the power to enter into the lives of his audience ...the audience will take over his past” (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 13). In this sense, the relatively quick release of an album titled as provocatively promising as *New Morning* would have appeared a submission to such critical assumptions initially.

Despite their contrary receptions, *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* essentially stemmed from the same sustained period of creativity. Reviewing the album for *Rolling Stone* magazine, famed rock music journalist Ralph J. Gleason was one who nonetheless believed *New Morning* signalled the return of Dylan – in *Chronicles*, Dylan would later highlight the point that such a proclamation was “the first of many” (141). As Jon Bream documents in his lengthy study of Dylan’s back-catalogue, “*Self Portrait* is [now] regarded as more interesting and worthwhile than it seemed at the time”, and, subsequently, *New Morning* is no longer thought of as an artistic breakthrough signalling Dylan’s long-anticipated return to early 1960s form (74). Yet another example of Dylan’s work being externally framed to suit a narrative, *New Morning* does in fact correspond to the conclusion of the ‘third-period’ in question.

Considering the late parallels that exist between *John Wesley Harding* and *New Morning*, attention will be directed toward the subject matter in question, and how it was conveyed. Unlike *Harding*, *New Morning* possesses virtually no external concerns on Dylan’s part. As Robert Christgau has noted of the album, “it is definitely not one of his more prophetic records ... it’s funny, because it’s terse and bouncy and tuneful ... it’s a love record, and there really aren’t a lot of those in his canon” (qtd. in Bream 74-75). Although “All Along the Watchtower”, “The Wicked Messenger” and “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” did not exactly satisfy the previous notion of a protest-singing Bob Dylan, they did nonetheless carry with them a certain amount of social awareness; or certainly inspired it in others. *New Morning* does no such thing. As Dylan subsequently wrote in *Chronicles of New Morning*: “[It] had no specific resonance to the shackles and bolts that were strapping the country down, nothing to threaten the status quo” (141). Expanding on this point, Dylan’s disenchanted impression of America highlights his determination to once and for all remove himself from any “group portrait” of its making:

The events of the day, all the cultural mumbo jumbo were imprisoning my soul – nauseating me – civil rights and political leaders being gunned down, the mounting of the barricades, the government crackdowns, the student radicals and demonstrators versus the cops and the unions – the streets exploding, fire of anger boiling – the contra communes – the lying, noisy voices – the free love, the anti-money system movement – the whole shebang. I was determined to put myself beyond the reach of it all. I was a family man now, didn't want to be in that group portrait (109).

In this way, Colleen Sheehy has described the record as having “a lot of fatherhood” within it (Bream 77). Dylan's family had grown and extended in the three years that separate *New Morning* from *John Wesley Harding*. Allusions toward married life and fatherhood are plentiful. As Dylan notes, the death of his own father had left him feeling – as “a father three times over” himself – that he had a lot on this topic that he “wanted to share” (*Chronicles* 108). To his wife and the mother of his children, Dylan displays his affection consistently, affording her a kind of saviour status for what she has done to redeem his life:

The man in me will hide sometimes to keep from bein' seen

But that's just because he doesn't want to turn into some machine

Took a woman like you

To get through to the man in me (“The Man In Me”).

^
If not for you

Babe, I'd lay awake all night

Wait for the mornin' light

To shine in through

But it would not be new

If not for you (“If Not For You”).

We’ll fly the night away

Hang out the whole next day

Things will be ok (“One More Weekend”).

With allusions toward fatherhood similarly present throughout these charming love songs, the closing verse of “Sign on The Window” would appear to highlight most clearly the overall shift in Dylan’s priorities:

Build me a cabin in Utah

Marry me a wife, catch rainbow trout

Have a bunch of kids who call me “Pa”

That must be what it’s all about.

In both *John Wesley Harding* and *New Morning*, the heavenly father is also present:

Father of day, Father of night

Father of black, Father of white

Father, who build the mountain so high

Who shapeth the cloud up in the sky

Father of time, Father of dreams

Father, who turneth the rivers and streams (“Father of Night”, *New Morning*).

Dylan's awareness of who has provided the landscape and means of his earthly paradise is unequivocal. Fatherhood becomes both a practical and spiritual exercise. Unlike the later series of albums that would signify the brief extent of Dylan's public Christian period, the religiosity of *John Wesley Harding* and *New Morning* is nowhere near as fervent. Lacking the zealous approach that would see a later Dylan actively imposing his faith on anyone who was still listening, the belief transmitted throughout *John Wesley Harding* and *New Morning* was not of a 'born-again' nature. It was conservative and insular, if idiosyncratic. Paired with the natural images Dylan offers as a backdrop to these themes, *New Morning* can be construed as an album that is purposefully ignoring that which is going on beyond Dylan's immediate sphere of interest.

Alongside the noted characteristics of *New Morning* that made it appear a more typical (and welcome) 'Bob Dylan' album, the change that had been noted in Dylan's voice from *John Wesley Harding* through to *Self Portrait* appeared to have reverted to type with the final of these four works. In this element of his performance, the first and last of these albums share similarities that the other two do not. Singing in a slow, methodical manner that bore little or no resemblance to the increasingly frenzied approach Dylan had opted for during his 'second-period' work, one may conceive that in tandem with an album of original songs, Dylan sought complete audible intelligibility from prospective listeners. Augmenting his voice to suit particular needs was not a move lacking precedence in Dylan's career. Detailing a time prior even to the release of Dylan's eponymous debut album, Heylin describes the response of one close associate of Dylan's during the time he spent living in St. Paul, Minnesota: "He had ... the most beautiful voice ... I really thought he had a good singing voice. Which I might add was something of a disappointment after he became well known, and I heard the voice that made him famous ... It was so different from the voice that I had first heard coming out of

him” (*Behind the Shades* 40). The suggestion that the singing voice we most closely associate with Dylan acted as a determinative factor in the eventual arrival of his fame is partially correct. Early reviews of his performances or albums rarely failed to make some notation of his “anything but pretty” voice (Shelton, “20-Year-Old Singer is Bright New Face”). Yet, the idea that this same voice could indicate Dylan’s inauthenticity undoubtedly led to his awareness of what his singing voice may represent or achieve, depending on what was required or intended. In this regard, Dylan’s decision to sing in an unexpected manner must be explored when considering the late style of this period.

Unlike “other great Dylan records” which nonetheless contained ‘a wasted word, or a thousand, on many of them’, Joe Levy suggests that *John Wesley Harding* has “not a wasted word on it” (Bream 59). What may perhaps be taken from this assessment is the idea that Dylan’s newly clarified approach to enunciation gives the listener reason to believe that each line is of equal importance. Taking “The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest” as one example, at five and a half minutes in length this is the album’s longest song. With its steady narrative – “albeit one that resembles a medieval mystery play”– this song could be said to resemble earlier Dylan tracks ranging from “Talkin’ World War III Blues” (*The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*) to “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream” (*Bringing It All Back Home*) (Heylin, *Revolution in the Air* 438). With the first of these demonstrating a performance heavily modelled on Woody Guthrie, and the second carrying that urgency captured best by the singer’s realisation that he hadn’t “eaten for five days straight”, “Frankie Lee and Judas Priest” consolidates what would be an understandable impression of one uninitiated in Dylan’s early work; these three songs cannot surely be from the same performer. In terms of Dylan’s vocalisation alone, this paradox holds true. Dylan’s performances display relatively few similarities. While the influence of the material Dylan was now focusing upon shall be explored in greater detail when *New Morning* is considered shortly, the conduit – in this case Dylan’s voice – through which the artist sought

to articulate his thoughts relied upon his fulfilment of the role as messenger. Whereas Dylan's previous three albums, in their frenzied, intensified manner, had attempted to disturb the notion of "Bob Dylan, protest singer", *John Wesley Harding*, with its considered, articulate vocal performance, highlights Dylan's intention to be carefully listened to, even if it is just to reaffirm his desire to no longer be listened to quite so carefully. By the time *New Morning* arrives, Dylan's determination to convey how much happier he has become since relaying this message takes on greater emphasis still.

At just over two minutes in length, "The Wicked Messenger" is the shortest song on *John Wesley Harding*. With the exception of the album's two final songs – these being somewhat more indicative of what was to come with *Nashville Skyline* – it acts as the more natural conclusion to the album.⁵⁷ If we briefly consider the content of this unusually forthright performance, it becomes clear initially that the wicked messenger in question possesses certain characteristics reminiscent of the nineteen-sixties protest singer. Notable also is Dylan's vocal performance therein; it is certainly the one song that Dylan performs with a degree of intensity and speed redolent of *Bringing It All Back Home* especially. Unlike the protest singer that will emerge from within a movement however, this messenger has seemingly arrived from an uncertain place, with uncertain motives. Prompting one to insert Dylan himself into this role, it is with the song's concluding verse that the dichotomised nature of the song's meaning is relayed. Singing in a voice somewhat familiar to those who envisioned and cherished Dylan's earlier brush with protest music, the singer describes a curiously familiar scene:

And the people that confronted him were many

⁵⁷ Although the presence of "Down Along the Cove" and "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" is not to be denigrated with this assessment, their jaunty, country & western infused sound – largely because of the introduction of Pete Drake on pedal steel guitar – can at times sound foreign to the general sound of *John Wesley Harding*. While no song recorded for *Nashville Skyline* could realistically fit the tone of *John Wesley Harding* before this point, these two concluding songs could quite easily have appeared on this subsequent album. Furthermore, according to Clinton Heylin's (2009, p. 453) research, the inclusion of these two concluding songs demonstrated Dylan's intention to not 'end the album on a downbeat note.'

And he was told but these few words

Which opened up his heart

“If ye cannot bring good news, then don’t bring any.

Foregoing his assigned role as the bringer of “good news”, Dylan illuminates the implausible nature of such a task, opting instead to look deeper within himself and his own personal experiences with scant consideration for surrounding details. This was a decision that appeared to reach its desired end in *New Morning*.

Given the external events that Dylan was choosing to forego completely in his latest work however, it is important to rationalise what could have been read as a cowardly, or selfish move on the artist’s behalf. Although for the purposes of this study, it is precisely Dylan’s aversion to such happenings that encapsulates the late style of this work further still, consideration of Edward Said’s writing on the German composer Richard Strauss in *On Late Style* rectifies why a work like *New Morning* can in fact be worthwhile. Investigating Strauss’ reluctance to indulge the terrifying rise of national socialism in Germany throughout his late works, Said discusses the seemingly safer eighteenth-century setting that Strauss prefers. Communicating “a sense of return and repose, to some extent greatly belied by the appalling events taking place all around him,” Said is ultimately impressed by “their undiminished power and yet strangely recapitulatory and even backward-looking and abstracted quality” (25-29). While *Nashville Skyline* and *Self Portrait* had demonstrated a refracted timelessness in terms of Dylan’s surroundings and the monumental events taking place therein, *New Morning* achieves the same goal in the least gimmicky, most plain-spoken manner. Whereas those two previous albums could be generously described as thematic and, as such, could be forgiven for overlooking the world in which they were created, as a collection of original works, sang in a more recognisable, less-affected manner, the apparent absence of any social conscience on the

artist's behalf in *New Morning* is more difficult to explain away. Disregarding previous expectations of his work in the most blatant way imaginable, it is an unquestionably late work.

The shift of Dylan's primary concern toward his family life is captured in some detail throughout *Chronicles*. A period that is devoted one of the five chapters that the memoir is separated into, the 'New Morning' chapter details Dylan's difficulties with fame and the unyielding attention of "dropouts ... druggies ... goons ... rogue radicals, unaccountable-looking characters, gargoyle-looking gals, scarecrows [and] stragglers" (116). Constantly referring to the well-being of his family in lieu of such challenges, it is a chapter that certainly offers some rationalisation to the utopian existence Dylan creates within *New Morning*. Resembling one of Adorno's "early maturers", the artist who had sang of once having "mountains in the palm of my hand" on *Nashville Skyline*'s "I Threw It All Away", is now "obliged to catch himself up" in mastering these more domestic affairs (*Minima Moralia* 161). The idea of conventional fatherhood is demonstrated time and again throughout the 'New Morning' chapter of *Chronicles*:

We had five kids and often went to the beach, boated on the bay, dug for clams, spent afternoons at a lighthouse near Montauk, went to Gardiner's Island – hunted for Captain Kidd's buried treasure – rode bikes, go-carts and pulled wagons – went to the movies and the outdoor markers, walked around on Division Street – drove over to Springs a lot' (132).

Set against this suburban backdrop, Dylan's recollection of time spent with the poet Archibald MacLeish offers an intriguing counterpoint. Furthermore, his visits to MacLeish's home would be instrumental in the recording of *New Morning*.

Although the importance of the MacLeish meetings has been subsequently questioned by Heylin in terms of how they influenced *New Morning*, the precise aspect of when certain songs in question were first written or recorded exactly may be overlooked momentarily. The

origin of their meeting came because of MacLeish's desire to have Dylan write a selection of songs for a play he had written. Although this would never ultimately come to fruition, the sense of inadequacy that Dylan admits to while in MacLeish's company is worth investigating further. Well into what may be considered MacLeish's own chronologically late-period, the esteemed nature in which Dylan – not yet thirty years old – is being publicly held appears to disarm him when in the presence of MacLeish:

Deep down, I knew that I couldn't have anything to add to the message of his play. He didn't need my help anyway. He wanted only to talk about the songs for his play and that's why I was here, but there was no hope and there was nothing to be done and soon that became obvious. ... I wondered, now, whether all of us – MacLeish, me and everyone else – had been inscribed and marked before birth, given a sticker, some secret sign. If that's true, then none of us could change anything. ... If the secret sign thing is true, then it wouldn't be fair to judge anybody ... and I hoped MacLeish wouldn't be judging me. (130)

Such antipathy toward change and judgement signalled quite a development for a songwriter who had initially made his name on the back of utilising the latter to enable the former. Further diluting the image of himself that had left him a target for mobs “with bullhorns ... calling on me to come out into the streets and lead a march on city hall, on Wall Street, on the Capitol” (129), Dylan appears equally uncomfortable in the presence of the esteemed alternative. Understanding MacLeish to be in possession of answers and “more knowledge of mankind and its vagaries than most men acquire in a lifetime”, Dylan couldn't bring himself to ask any questions of him (129). Regarding the “secret sign thing”, Dylan appears to indulge the notion of his – and everyone else's – external, incurable fate. Such a conclusion resonates with the growing affinity Dylan seemingly had with the almighty, with his vision of God. While conceding that he could be of no practical use to MacLeish, Dylan's temporary inability or

wariness regarding songwriting was seemingly overpowered: “I mean to keep writing whether I like it or not” (107).

Dylan’s determination to court such isolation manifests itself in the songs of *New Morning*. Incapable of fulfilling the role MacLeish inhabits as a great man of American letters (or even operating any longer within the “landscape of twentieth century America” that MacLeish had helped define), Dylan pursues a line of artistic freedom that D. H. Lawrence describes in his *Studies in Classic American Literature*:

Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, *believing* community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealised purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. Men are freest when they are most unconscious of freedom (12).

With *New Morning*, Dylan seeks freedom in the “living homeland” he initially abandoned; or some imagined version of it, at least. Once being the young man that initially travelled from west to east in search of New York City, Dylan returns as father and husband to a west that is scarcely wild. Creating an album that can be loosely traced along certain lines of the American pastoral, Lawrence Buell’s essay “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised” reveals the temptation pastoral art provides to “portray a less complex state of existence than the writer’s own” (4). For Dylan, although it is doubtful he set out to record a pastoral work as such, it is not surprising that in striving to avoid such complexities, he found himself working with such pastoral themes; what else was there for him? While consideration of the pastoral elements within *New Morning* will come shortly, it is important to initially determine why such themes proffered such a cataclysmic effect for the social and culture responsibilities Dylan was thought to possess. Analysing Henry David Thoreau’s “Slavery in Massachusetts,” Buell identifies “the

seeming insouciance with which the persona turns away from social confrontation for the sake of immersion in a simplified green world.” As it was for Thoreau, so it became for Dylan. Further remarking upon Ralph Waldo Emerson’s dismayed chiding of Thoreau in death “for being content to “be captain of a huckleberry party” when he might have been “engineering for all America,”” Buell’s assessment of Thoreau reflects Dylan’s own “abrupt-seeming swerve from” protest and political radicalism for good (6-7). If the previous three albums had demonstrated Dylan’s progressive removal from the “established social order” Said identifies great artists as being a part of, the aptly-titled *New Morning* signalled Dylan’s total escape.

In comparison to the image of family life concocted within *New Morning* by the artist, biographical accounts of Dylan’s life would suggest that Dylan and his family never attempted to reside in any kind of American wilderness. Yet, the album nonetheless becomes an emblem of Dylan’s imagined utopia. In her assessment of Irish pastoral poetry, Edna Longley discusses this inhabitation of one world, whilst imagining or dreaming of the other: “The rural cosmos distilled into the poem, into ‘a corner of my mind’, obliquely resists the city – source of the ‘ravens passion’ that lies in the future inhabited by the speaker” (94). Unlike Longley’s poet, Dylan cannot wholly forego the usefulness of the city. In the interview Dylan conducted for *Rolling Stone* magazine in nineteen-sixty-nine, he reveals how even living outside of New York City causes problems when it comes to recording music:

I would come to New York if I wanted to use the studio, because it’s all here ... if you need a good engineer, or if you need a song, or somebody to record it, an artist ... whereas, some place like up in the country there, in the mountains, you could get a studio in, but that doesn’t guarantee you anything else but the studio. You can get violin players, cello players, you can get dramatic readers ... you can get anybody at the drop of a hat, in New York City (Wenner, “Bob Dylan Talks”).

Using the pastoral as an imagining of Longley's "future" becomes problematic for Dylan, therefore. If New York City remains the ideal place for recording new music, it is scarcely conceivable that Dylan could embrace the kind of "green world" that Buell alludes to in his discussion of Thoreau (6). As such, *New Morning* becomes a pastoral work that substitutes a mixture of Dylan's past and present for this impossible future; yet another example of the circularity that pervaded Dylan's songwriting on *John Wesley Harding*. With the album's second song "Day of the Locusts" we are presented with Dylan's recollection of actual event from his life, but, crucially, it is the closing verse of this song that sets up where the remainder of the album will go. As Heylin clarifies, the song was written "long after the bulk of [*New Morning*] had been completed" (*Revolution in the Air* 503). Yet, in terms of the convoluted "future" Dylan was concocting with this album, this is a suitability contrary element of its origin. "Depicting in metaphorical terms his trip to Princeton to collect a doctorate in music," the late recording of "Day of the Locusts" allowed Dylan "to rethink what he wanted the album to say" (503-4). The sense of unease that Dylan describes in both the song and his recollection of the event in *Chronicles* resembles his discomfort in MacLeish's presence also. Ultimately, the song's conclusion sets out in very plain terms the pastoral setting that is to come:

I put down my robe, picked up my diploma

Took hold of my sweetheart and away we did drive

Straight for the hills, the black hills of Dakota

Sure was glad to get out of there alive.

With the album's next song "Time Passes Slowly", the transition from city to country, urban to rural, frantic to tranquil, is made complete. Given a glimpse of the artist's imagined "future", there are issues with Dylan's imaginings nonetheless:

Time passes slowly up here in the mountains

We sit beside bridges and walk beside fountains

Catch the wild fishes that float through the stream

Time passes slowly when you're lost in a dream

Once I had a sweetheart, she was fine and good-lookin'

We sat in her kitchen while her mama was cookin'

Starin' out the window to the stars high above

Time passes slowly when you're searchin' for love

Ain't no reason to go in a wagon to town

Ain't no reason to go to the fair

Ain't no reason to go up, ain't no reason to go down

Ain't no reason to go anywhere

Time passes slowly up here in the daylight

We stare straight ahead and try so hard to stay right

Like the red rose of summer that blooms in the day

Time passes slowly and fades away.

Contrary to Buell's assessment of Thoreau's "pastoral inset" into an otherwise "directly political discourse," "Time Passes Slowly" contains the aversion Dylan now held toward external concerns (6). Marking his distaste for the event that had occurred at Princeton University, and much of the prior events over recent years that had led to that point, his relief at getting out alive appears to be sincere. With its mountains, fountains, wild fishes and streams, the element of nature overrides even the sense of loss that permeates Dylan's departed "sweetheart" in "Time Passes Slowly". From the album's remaining songs – particularly the lyrics referenced at the beginning of this section – we gather however that the artist is not sorrowful or heartbroken at all. With the song's closing line ("Time passes slowly and fades away"), the "future" Longley ascribed to the pastoral poet can be seen to have already happened. Doubtful that Dylan is already imagining the break-up of his marriage as would be captured in *Blood on the Tracks* later in the decade, the pastoral work in question would appear to be lacking an element that Longley identifies as crucial to the process of pastoral art. Yet what hope of an undisturbed, "green" future could a public property like Dylan aspire to have? Striving to attain Buell's lesser "complex state of existence" in a pastoral setting was not possible for Dylan by any traditional means. Consulting once again Adorno's thoughts on "early maturers", Dylan's alternative means of exploring pastoral art are offered a semblance of understanding:

He who matures early lives in anticipation. ... The narcissistic direction of his impulses, indicated by the preponderance of imagination in his experience, positively delays his maturing. Only later does he live through, in their crude violence, situations, fears, passions, that had been greatly softened in imagination, and they change, in conflict with his narcissism, into a consuming sickness. So he relapses into the childishness that he had once surmounted with too little exertion and which now exacts its price. ... He is struck down by passion; lulled too long in the security of autarky, he reels helplessly where he had once built his airy bridges (*Minima Moralia* 161).

In Dylan's "surmounted" childhood, he locates a realm not wholly explored that can now prop up an imagined future. Dylan, like Strauss, has set his work along lines that cannot be disturbed by the unexpected. With the album's title track, Dylan comes as close to Buell's characterisation of Thoreau as one would imagine possible with regards his disclosure of, and apparent joy in, the natural world that surrounds him in *New Morning*:

Can't you hear that rooster crowin'?

Rabbit runnin' down across the road

Underneath the bridge where the water flowed through

So happy just to see you smile

On this new morning, new morning

On this new morning with you

Can't you hear that motor turnin'?

Automobile comin' into style

Comin' down the road for a country mile or two

So happy just to see you smile

Underneath the sky of blue

On this new morning, new morning

On this new morning with you

The night passed away so quickly

It always does when you're with me

Can't you feel that sun a-shinin'?

Ground hog runnin' by the country stream

This must be the day that all of my dreams come true

So happy just to be alive

Underneath the sky of blue

On this new morning, new morning

On this new morning with you.

Compared to the strained existence Dylan recalls living through at this time, “New Morning” is an incredibly positive song. The artist’s reiterated “sky of blue” offering the kind of pathetic fallacy that is rarely left so plain and bereft of additional meaning in Dylan’s work. Similarly compounding the idea that Dylan, his family and the surrounding wildlife are experiencing life in its simplest, undisturbed form, even the intruding presence of the “automobile” in question is afforded a pass because of its singularity. For Heylin however, “New Morning” is evidence of Dylan’s efforts “to convince himself that the sun is shining again – hoping such an act of will can make everything right” (*Revolution in the Air* 499). Once again dipping into these pastoral themes, Dylan’s life and work nonetheless makes any such existence implausible. Akin to “Time Passes Slowly” however, reference to the singer’s “dreams” being fulfilled is offered great importance. Although the album’s title suggests as much, the thematic presence of dreams, and the transition from night to morning (the in-between period being where dreams take place), is explored consistently throughout *New Morning*. With “Winterlude”, Dylan offers a take on nightly seduction that suggest a little more familiarity between the two figures involved than “If You Gotta Go, Go Now (Or Else You Got To Stay All Night)” did in 1964.

In “Three Angels”, we are presented with what appears to be a scene capturing the return to normality that follows the Christmas period. Between “three fellas crawling on their way back to work” and “the bakery truck” that acknowledges the presence of the angels in question, we can ascertain the humdrum morning activities that make those figures present incapable of appreciating “Three angels up above the street / Each one playing a horn.” “One More Weekend” similarly rests on the idea of Dylan and his partner flying “the night away / Hang out the whole next day.”

Perhaps the greatest example of Dylan’s reliance upon his past to conjure an imagined “future” comes with the album’s fourth song, “Went to See the Gypsy”. Generally accepted as being inspired by an audience Dylan had with Elvis Presley whilst in Las Vegas, “Went to See the Gypsy” is one song that Heylin suspects Dylan thought of as being “important” (492). One of a limited number of living artists Dylan would have still held in very high regard, what is of particular interest here is Dylan’s apparent reference to himself at the song’s end. Once again operating within that dream-like realm, the singer is able to transmit himself from being in the gypsy’s hotel room to his own childhood home in “that little Minnesota town.” Rare though it is for Dylan to make a direct reference to his own childhood, such an allusion is key to the understanding of both the pastoral and late elements of *New Morning*. Literally signalling his place in ‘that’ little town where he came from, it is surely no coincidence that Dylan places himself there at the break of day, as the sun was rising. According to Heylin, Dylan’s inability to imagine a “future” where he does not face the responsibilities of being a performer are reiterated once again (492). Perhaps not quite as subservient to the idea of pastoral art as other songs on the album, the implicit rurality of his hometown in America’s mid-west counters such an argument. The song that hints most plainly at Dylan’s awareness that the ‘real’ world around him cannot be overlooked indefinitely, one is drawn to Longley’s assessment that pastoral art is “a capacious generic umbrella ... rather than synonymous with ‘escapism’” alone (90).

While the nature of Dylan's "future" as viewed through this album's pastoral lens is unlike Buell's depiction of American pastoral in certain instances, it is upon these contradictions that Dylan's late style flourishes. Having revisited his hometown in Minnesota for his father's funeral a few years earlier, Dylan's reflection in *Chronicles* on the dichotomised nature of what that town meant to him and his father is telling:

In the short time I was [back in Minnesota for his father's funeral], it all came back to me, all the flimflam, the older order of things, the Simple Simons – but something else did, too – that my father was the best man in the world and probably worth a hundred of me, but he didn't understand me. The town he lived in and the town I lived in were not the same (108).

In "that Minnesota town" Dylan had once been enlivened by the prospect of Elvis Presley, rock music and all that came along with it. Returning there in *New Morning*, Dylan envisions the possibility of seeing things anew. Be it the hope of reclaiming the kind of creative powers evident in his 'second-period' as Heylin suspects, or perhaps an attempt to garner a greater understanding of a man "probably worth a hundred of me" for the benefits of his own home life, as so often happens within Dylan's music subsequent to *New Morning*, investigating elements of his past is the only way he may envision the future.

Chapter Six: The Dylan-Image

Evaluating the cover art of Bob Dylan's 1963 album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Anthony DeCurtis afforded the image an epoch-defining importance: "It is one of the most evocative images of Greenwich Village in the 1960s." A photograph of Dylan and his girlfriend, Suze Rotolo, taken in the physical centre of the folk-music revival, New York City, DeCurtis credits this image with epitomising "the romantic youth culture of the time – its freedom and fragility, its rootlessness and sense of purpose" ("Memoirs of a Girl from the East Country"). Captured by the Columbia Records photographer, Don Hunstein, he later revealed in an interview with Daniel B. Schneider the serendipitous nature of this photograph's emergence: "I can't tell you why I did it, but I said, 'Just walk up and down the street.' There wasn't much thought to it." Hunstein describes this image as "a last glimpse of Bob Dylan leading the life of a relatively ordinary young man." Subsequent to *Freewheelin'*: "Bob Dylan became Bob Dylan." Hunstein's assertion is affirmed by David Kinney in his assessment of "Blowin' in the Wind." The opening song on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Kinney explores how becoming Bob Dylan irrevocably altered the artist's life:

It was a perfect song for its time. The youth movement was blooming. The teens and twentysomethings of the early 1960s were soaking in new music, experimenting with mind-altering drugs, raising their voices in a politically tumultuous age. ... In a few months they would spend thirteen days fearing nuclear annihilation. In a year they would hear Martin Luther King Jr. say, "I have a dream." Later they would protest the Vietnam War. Behind it all, "Blowin' in the Wind" played. ... By asking questions, he implied that he had the answers, that he carried some special knowledge, some hidden truth about the world. From then on, everybody wanted to know what it was (40-41).

Echoing Lee Marshall's assessment that "because Dylan is a star, his life has public meaning," this search for Dylan's hidden truth or knowledge about the world left no emanation of his safe from analysis or scrutiny (3). As Kinney explains in his study of *The Dylanologists*: "We keep track of everything. ... We are preoccupied with facts and dates, as if cataloguing these things will solve the mysteries of his life, and ours" (2). Although the cover art of Dylan's albums remains one of the lesser-studied aspects of his output, interest has nevertheless been forthcoming from those seeking answers:

Questioner: I'd like to know the meaning of the cover photo on your album, 'Highway 61 Revisited'?

Bob Dylan: What would you like to know about it?

Questioner: It seems to have some philosophy in it. I'd like to know what it represents to you – you're a part of it ...

Bob Dylan: I haven't really looked at it that much.

Questioner: I've thought about it a great deal (Dylan on Dylan 62).

Recalling the photograph session undertaken for the cover art of Dylan's follow-up album to *Highway 61 Revisited*, *Blonde on Blonde*, Jerry Schatzberg relayed the similarly extravagant fan-theories that followed its release. Responding to questions about why Dylan's image is blurred in the photograph that adorns the album's cover, Schatzberg provides the logical explanation:

Well, it was pretty cold out. I know all the critics, everybody, tried to figure that, 'Oh, they're trying to do a drug shot or something', but, it's not true. It was February, and he was wearing just a jacket and I was wearing something similar, so we were really cold. To his credit, he's the one who chose that photograph ("The story of the "Blonde on Blonde" album cover").

When *John Wesley Harding* emerged eighteen months after *Blonde on Blonde*, close examination of the album's cover art appeared to reveal "a variety of small faces hidden in the trees and background foliage" ("Dylan Record Puts Beatles Up A Tree"). Furthermore, Dylan was accompanied in the photograph by three unrecognisable men. Although speculation regarding the "variety of small faces" was accurate, that four of these faces among the trees represented each member of the Beatles potentially alluded to a greater narrative at play. In May 1967, the cover art of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* presented (among many others) a picture of Dylan. Releasing *John Wesley Harding* in December of the same year, it is not inconceivable that he was merely replying in kind. While this move did represent a fresh element of intrigue to the album's cover art, it hardly signified a major creative move toward the more abstract and elaborate efforts of his contemporaries; it was, in essence, still a straight-forward photograph of the artist.⁵⁸ Throughout the 1960s, as Dylan's musical and lyrical artistry developed at an astounding rate, the cover art of his albums remained a relatively conservative space.

This conservatism acts as a testament to Susan Sontag's assertion that, "to photograph is to confer importance" (*On Photography* 28). While a selection of his 1960s contemporaries explored the potential of this form and what it could offer in terms of artistic (or marketable) distinction, Dylan's approach suggested an apparent indifference to such possibilities; a photograph of Dylan was distinction enough. Consider the recollections of those Dylan worked with in sourcing the photographs used for his album covers, and this sense of indifference is palpable. Hunstein and Schatzberg both attest to only the slightest hint of a plan in their sessions with the artist; a series of photographs were taken, and Dylan would choose the one to use on

⁵⁸ With the exception of *Bringing it all Back Home* and *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan is pictured alone. In the former he was pictured with Sally Grossman, wife of Dylan's manager, Albert. For the 1967 release, *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan appears alongside two Bengali Bauls, South Asian musicians brought to Woodstock by Dylan's manager. Also in the picture is Charlie Joy, a local stonemason.

the album's cover. Furthermore, Elliot Landy, the photographer charged with producing an image for *Nashville Skyline*, similarly portrays Dylan's casual approach to the task. After plans to use "a picture of the skyline of Nashville, where he had recorded the album" were shelved, Landy describes the process by which he and Dylan set about capturing the eventual photograph that would be used:

He was still uncomfortable being photographed and, therefore, I was uncomfortable photographing him, but we stayed with it. . . . We were just easy – it was very casual. He wanted some pictures, we took them, and neither of us conceptualised it. I'm spontaneous when I work, and so is he. An Art Director might have said 'Take the glasses off', but neither he no I thought about it. However people present themselves is how I photograph them – I don't judge it ("Cover Story – "Nashville Skyline" by Elliot Landy").

Although Dylan may have been "uncomfortable" with being photographed, and the eventual photoshoot was "very casual," he undoubtedly understood the importance of the visual component successive album covers lent the music contained therein. Communicating what Sontag described as the "solemnity, frankness, [and] disclosure of the subject's essence," Dylan's image allowed listeners the luxury of knowing he was still there; a peculiarly important detail when one considers the initial unrecognizability of his voice on *Nashville Skyline* (37-38). Throughout the 1960s, these photographs partially informed the general perception of who or what Dylan was. As Kinney noted upon first seeing Dylan's face on an album cover: "The man glowering on the front cover looked like he didn't take orders from anybody. I liked that" (2-3).⁵⁹ In the absence of any grand artistic conceptualisation on the artist's behalf, Dylan's photographed image inevitably generated sufficient interest on its own. Contrary to any apparent indifference, this detail was not lost on Dylan. As Marshall notes: "In 1965, he was

⁵⁹ The album in question was the 1985 release, *Biograph*. A disparate collection of Dylan's music up to this point, despite the release date of the album, the photograph on the front cover presented an image of the artist from the mid-1960s.

the only person to give the impression that he knew exactly what was going on, always two steps ahead” (93).

Providing a simple photograph of himself on the cover art of his albums throughout the 1960s, Dylan displayed on one hand a transparent image of the artist as he is. From this standpoint, he could accurately inform the quoted questioner with a special interest in the cover art of *Highway 61 Revisited* of the photograph’s unassuming origin: “It was just taken one day when I was sittin’ on the steps y’know – I don’t really remember too much about it” (*Dylan on Dylan* 62). Yet, when it is subsequently suggested that the image of a motorcycle on Dylan’s t-shirt in that photograph reflects a greater theme at play within his song-writing, Dylan immediately reasserts the possibility that this image may have greater meaning than he initially let on: “Oh, we all like motorcycles to some degree” (62). Although Schatzberg explains that Dylan’s blurred image on *Blonde on Blonde* is the result of both the artist and photographer shivering on a cold day, one can nevertheless locate the same two strands of accountability and deniability. In one regard, we are presented with Schatzberg’s legitimate recollection of the photograph being taken in unforgiving weather conditions; an understandably human detail. Yet if this imperfect feature of the image was unsatisfying, why would Dylan chose to use it nevertheless? Although he may not have foreseen the drug-related reading that Schatzberg was keen to quash retrospectively, *Blonde on Blonde* opens with “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35”; a song Clinton Heylin criticises for its use of “a fairly lame pun to avoid being banned on the radio”: “Everybody must get stoned” (*Revolution in the Air* 377). It is clear, therefore, that the use of a drug-related double entendre was hardly absent from Dylan’s mind entirely. Consider Landy’s recollection of the *Nashville Skyline* photoshoot, and this rationale is explored further still:

During those days in Woodstock, he was really open and in a good mood. It was sunny out and we just followed our instincts. It was the first picture of him smiling and, in my opinion, it

reflects the inner spirit, the loving essence of the man behind all of the inspiring music he has given us. Someone told me that the reason people like [the image] so much is that it makes them happy. Every review of the album mentioned his smile on the cover. . . . This was a magical picture for all of us (“Cover Story – “Nashville Skyline” by Elliot Landy”).

In the same “brown leather jacket . . . he had worn for the covers of *John Wesley Harding* and *Blonde on Blonde*,” the cover art of *Nashville Skyline* demonstrates this sartorial link with *Blonde on Blonde* clearer than the monocoloured cover art of *John Wesley Harding* (“Cover Story – “Nashville Skyline” by Elliot Landy”).⁶⁰ Once again, such consistency affirms Dylan’s casual approach to the task at hand; he is still wearing the same jacket three years on, after all. Afforded significant prominence on the cover of *Blonde on Blonde*, when one opened a physical copy of the album in its original format, the initial image of Dylan’s upper-third became a photograph that enabled one to see this jacket in its entirety. Along with the striking length of Dylan’s expansive hair and a chequered scarf, the brick wall against which this image is set leaves one with nowhere else to look but at Dylan, and by extension, how he looks and what he is wearing.

With *Nashville Skyline*, however, the opposite effect is achieved. Taken at an alternative angle that allows the smirking Dylan to look downward toward the camera, the initial photograph taken by Landy captures a far greater proportion of Dylan than we get on the cover of the album itself. Refined and zoomed in to focus on similar bodily dimensions as one finds with the front album cover of *Blonde on Blonde*, the ‘identity’ of the jacket is lost amid more pressing accoutrements; namely, his hat and his guitar. The sternness of Dylan’s glance on *Blonde on Blonde* is replaced with a smirk. Instead of a featureless wall, a cloudless blue sky is interrupted only by Dylan himself and the branches of a tree. Yet, it is the presence of Dylan’s

⁶⁰ Although one can certainly see that Dylan is wearing the same jacket for the cover photograph of *John Wesley Harding*, amid the other figures surrounding him, and the album cover’s lack of colour, it is a far easier feature to overlook initially. This is not the case with *Blonde on Blonde* and *Nashville Skyline*.

hat and guitar that strikingly reminds one not of *Blonde on Blonde*, but Dylan's eponymous debut album of 1962.

Rather than drawing any artistic correlation between the music of *Bob Dylan* and *Nashville Skyline* (although certain similarities are evident), in repeating this pose for his ninth studio album, Dylan demonstrates how he has always been aware of the importance an album's cover art possesses. Although musically, *Bob Dylan* depicts an understanding of the artist not quite fully-formed, aesthetically, it sets a tone for Dylan's album covers that will remain unbroken for the duration of the 1960s; the artist being photographed as he is. Demonstrated in the various examples above, Dylan – if not necessarily determining them himself – is aware of the depths certain readers will go to in extracting meaning from these images. Consistently instilling a sense of uncertainty about what may or may not have been carried out purposefully, Dylan's approach to cover art can be likened to Lewis Hyde's assessment of the fabled Trickster. Acting as both the creator and crosser of boundaries, Hyde's demonstrates: "The best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found – sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms" (7-8). In repeating the pose he used for *Bob Dylan* on *Nashville Skyline*, Dylan contradicts the expectations of timeliness. He has reached backward to acquire an image that resembles his current situation; a time prior to which Hunstein identified the artist's transition to "Bob Dylan." With his workers' hat and acoustic guitar, the debut album primes potential listeners for the kind of songs – both musically and thematically – they can expect within. It is perhaps no surprise that the same trick is attempted on *Nashville Skyline's* album cover. This, after all, was an album that would demonstrate Dylan's attempt at recording country and western music; a previously unexplored genre in Dylan's catalogue of works. However, coming at a time when listeners had already established an understanding of what they expected from Dylan, the cover art of *Nashville Skyline* acts as

more of a warning. Looking at Dylan from the photographer's perspective, the viewer is placed beneath the artist; with Dylan's back to the sky – located at the boundary once more.

The importance of the album cover in Dylan's artistry reflects a broader awareness of the elements that can instil meaning within the popular music industry. The medium offered a visual component that would accompany the audible product. Outlining the emergence and growing interest in rock music throughout the 1960s, Lee Marshall highlights the pivotal role Dylan played:

My suggestion is that rock did not exist before Dylan's shift to electric music. All of the contemporaneous media reports on Dylan's shift to an electric band that I have seen refer to him playing not 'rock' but 'rock and roll'. Rock and roll was a label that described a teenage music assumed to be good for dancing and little else. There are references to a new type of 'folk-rock' but no mentions of 'rock music.' Rock has a long history in popular music as a verb (e.g. 'Rock Around The Clock', or 'Rock me Baby') but at this time it did not exist as a noun that classified a form of music. Dylan was seen to have become a rock and roll (or, derogatively and synonymously from a number of disgruntled fans, a pop) performer; it is only afterwards (at least 1967, maybe even later) that it is presented as a shift from 'folk' to 'rock'. (89-90).

A growing interest in every detail of the artist's output inevitably led to an external framework in which each element, from the major to the minute, could be discussed and pored over. As the decade progressed and rock music became more popular, so too did the scholarly concern for the music and the artists involved. Dylan's rise throughout the decade coincides with what Jack Hamilton describes as "the rise of a new literary figure: the rock critic" (3). Lending rock music a seriousness that mainstream pop music did not hitherto possess, this external adjudicator of the form clarifies the importance of Marshall's assertion that Dylan was "always two steps ahead" – this is why he had to be (93). As the album cover of *Bob Dylan* attests to, Dylan had become consciously aware of the interest he and his music generated from a very

early point in his career. Marshall outlines Dylan's means of acknowledging this detail, and subsequently playing with the form:

On 31 October 1964, Dylan played a concert at the Philharmonic Hall in New York. He began to play the song 'If You Gotta Go, Go Now (Or Else You Got To Stay All Night)' with a shrill blast of his harmonica but stopped as his guitar was out of tune. 'Don't let that scare ya', Dylan assured his audience, 'it's just Halloween. [pause] I have my Bob Dylan mask on.' After another short pause he exclaimed, 'I am mask-erading!' and giggled, evidently pleased with his pun. ... Dylan evidently likes playing around with the idea of Bob Dylan (14-15).

Where Theodor Adorno had once criticised popular music for its "strict attention to ... standardization," by the 1960s, via the offshoot of rock music, the most popular artists and songs could no longer rely on beating "out the standard scheme" ("On Popular Music" 438). Although the genre remained susceptible to influential acts exacting a creative hold over lesser artists, it was, nevertheless, a time of significant artistic breakthrough in the realm of popular music. The growing influence of the rock critic inevitably ensured that an artist's work was subjected to a level of analytical interest that required a certain standard to be met. As Adorno wrote elsewhere: "An art aware of itself is an *analysed* art" ("On the Problem of Musical Analysis" 168). Few perhaps grasped this realisation quicker than Dylan himself. The subject of an astounding level of critical interest, the issue of Dylan and the critics inevitably informs our reading of his work. Be it the critical response to Dylan, or, as demonstrated above, Dylan's ability to confound their analysis with seemingly simple remarks or actions, how this interchange plays out across his album covers enables an alternative understanding of his timeliness also. Although Marshall accurately highlights Dylan's disdain for "journalistic triviality," this does not categorise the limit of Dylan's relationship with the more astute rock critics; they operate at a greater remove from Dylan himself (93). Detailing the importance of

such musical analysis, Adorno's understanding of its usage with relation to classical music tallies with the indelible mark such analysis has had on our understanding of Dylan's work:

The word analysis easily associates itself in music with the idea of all that is dead, sterile and farthest removed from the living work of art. One can well say that the general underlying feeling toward musical analysis is not exactly friendly. The musician's traditional antagonism toward all so-called "dead knowledge" is something that has been handed down of old, and continues to have its effect accordingly. One will encounter this antipathy again and again, above all in the rationalization represented by that absurd though utterly inextinguishable question: "Yes, everything you say is all well and good, but did *the composer himself* know all this – was the composer *conscious* of all these things?" I should like to say straight away that this question is completely irrelevant: it is very often precisely the deepest interrelationships that analyses are able to uncover within the compositional process which have been unconsciously produced; one has to differentiate here – differentiate strictly – between the object itself (that is, between what is actually going on within the object itself) and the way in which it may have arisen in the consciousness or unconsciousness of the artist ("On the Problem of Musical Analysis" 162).

Establishing Dylan's awareness of incessant scrutiny, no emanation can be looked upon as random, or without meaning. While this does not suggest that everything Dylan does possesses importance beyond what may be ordinary and obvious, it nevertheless contributes to his standing as an artist who has turned the ordinary and obvious into something exceptional. These expectations serve as the boundary that Dylan both creates and crosses with unsuspecting regularity.

It is with great interest then that we return to *Self Portrait*. Beyond the musical content of the album, however, there is more to investigate here regarding Dylan's untimely lateness. For reasons unknown, *Self Portrait* was the first studio album Dylan released that did not use a photograph of himself on the front cover. In its place, Dylan chose one of his own oil

paintings, presumably a self-portrait. Brutally simple in its execution, the image adorns an album that would be roundly criticised at the time of its release. We have seen how Marcus struggled with *Self Portrait*, yet in his conflicted assessment of the album's opening song, "All The Tired Horses", we locate a suitable metaphor for the actual self-portrait in question, and the album with which it is associated: "The beauty of this painted signpost promises what its words belie, and the song's question becomes the listener's: he can't ride when the horse is asleep in the meadow" (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 7). Although the question of this painting's aesthetic beauty is debatable, Dylan's self-portrait nevertheless fulfils an important characteristic afforded to the term by literary critic, Denis Donoghue: "[Beauty] thrives on keeping quiet and never explains itself" (1). In comparison to the images that Dylan had chosen for his previous nine studio albums, *Self Portrait* offered something remarkably personal. Yet, it was nevertheless confusing and vague: is that Bob Dylan on the canvas, or is it "Bob Dylan"? Alongside an album that contained such a sparse collection of original musical material, here was a painted self-portrait. Yet as James Hall writes in his study of the genre in painting: "Self-portraits are still often regarded as the most autonomous of art forms, spontaneous uncommissioned expressions of the artist 'at free play'" (46). In terms of the painting itself, the album upon which it appeared, the artist's use of cover art up to this point, and the place *Self Portrait* held within the wider context of the popular music industry, Dylan's self-portrait possesses an undeniable lateness.

Initially focusing on the general approach to cover art within music industry of the 1960s and early 1970s, this chapter will demonstrate the distinct move away from standard practice that the cover art of *Self Portrait* established. In an effort to establish a framework by which to measure the lateness of *Self Portrait* against the norms of the music industry, the development of Dylan's cover art to this point will be examined in comparison to prominent contemporaries, The Beatles. From the release of their debut album *Please Please Me* in 1963,

to the emergence of their concluding 1970 work, *Let It Be*, the astounding rise (and lasting cultural significance) of both the Beatles and Dylan can be charted along a similar timeline. Furthermore, given their surging popularity throughout the period in question, the Beatles represent a secure overview of creative tendencies amongst numerous contemporaries. Releasing albums that would reach a wider scope of listeners (and viewers, importantly) than any other act, their work became a model that other artists – irrespective of their thoughts on the work itself – would inevitably create under (or, in spite of) the influence of. As Said writes: “Any style involves first of all the artist’s connection to his or her own time ... the aesthetic work, for all its irreducible individuality, is nevertheless a part – or, paradoxically, not a part – of the era in which it was produced and appeared” (*On Late Style* 134). Furthermore, the Beatles understood the capabilities that cover art possessed as a means of further creativity. While it is not possible to offer a complete overview of cover art throughout this period, the Beatles, with their own intriguing development across a relatively short seven-year spell, signify the closest one can come to an act that influenced these stylistic tendencies greater than any other.

In terms of the actual self-portrait itself, an additional reading of Dylan’s late style becomes possible. Failing to resemble the artist in any traditional sense, the cover art of *Self Portrait* nevertheless signalled the high-profile introduction of Bob Dylan, the painter.⁶¹ An incredibly personal revelation, Heylin’s *Behind the Shades* illuminates the concerns this decision aroused in Dylan: “When it came to painting and drawing [Dylan] was a lot less sure he wanted to risk a caustic reception for what he produced than he was with his very public music-making” (832). This portion of the chapter will seek to explore this dichotomy. Bearing his artistic vulnerability with the album’s cover, Dylan chooses to pair it with an album containing a relatively conservative selection of songs. One of many musicians who featured

⁶¹ In later years, Dylan would release a number of books collating a series of his paintings; *Drawn Blank* (1994), *The Drawn Blank Series* (2008), *The Brazil Series* (2010), *The Asia Series* (2011), *Revisionist Art: Thirty Works by Bob Dylan* (2013), *Bob Dylan: Face Value* (2014) and *The Beaten Path* (2016).

throughout the album, Al Kooper, argued that *Self Portrait* evidenced Dylan's desire to "do a record where he was the interpreter, as opposed to the composer" ("Bob Dylan – *Another Self Portrait*"). Musically, therefore, he was thought not to be taking any significant risks. Yet, for the purposes of the album's cover art, Dylan embraced the role of composer (or, painter) in a highly uncertain fashion. Consulting Hall's extensive study, *The Self-Portrait*, this investigation will consider Dylan's painting and what it yields regarding the artist's peculiar lateness. In one regard, Dylan's work reflects an aspect of Hall's analysis that could equally ascribe his musical choices for the album in question: "Self-portrayal [is] an occasion for self-incrimination, and an assertion of his own unheroic status" (126). Echoing the thoughts of another musical collaborator on Dylan's *Self Portrait*, David Bromberg identified Dylan's frustrations with the widespread portrayal that had been created for him beyond his control: "People don't really speak to you, they speak to their image of you" ("Bob Dylan – *Another Self Portrait*"). Embracing the limitations Sontag characterises when contemplating the possibilities of a painted portrait in contrast to the photographic alternative, Dylan foregoes the camera's capability to capture "a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can" (154). Reinterpreting the ramifications of Hunstein's assessment that after *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, an ordinary young man "became Bob Dylan," the artist recuses any perceived intimacy and knowledge shared between Dylan and his audience.

I

The lateness of *Self Portrait* was unprecedented in Dylan's cover art. Whereas a number of Dylan's contemporaries sought to explore artistic realms beyond the remit of a standard photograph, photography nevertheless played a visible role more often than not. Taking the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* (1971) as one example, we are presented with an album that

possesses cover art designed by Andy Warhol.⁶² Carrying the image of a jeans-clad male crotch with a real zipper, *Sticky Fingers* dispensed with the standardised approach of prioritising the image of the artists in question. In this regard, one may identify certain similarities with Dylan's approach for *Self Portrait*. Like Dylan, the Rolling Stones' popularity throughout the 1960s all but assured that any new release would be met with a certain level of excitement. Recognisable without the need of using their photographed image on a new album's cover, they could feasibly explore the creative possibilities of an album's cover art without necessarily risking their market-strength. However, unlike *Self Portrait*, any creative risk evidenced in the album cover of *Sticky Fingers* was counteracted with the band's desire to additionally embrace an alternative realm of popularity. This motivation is captured in a letter the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger wrote to Warhol discussing plans for the artist to design such an album cover two years before the release of the album itself: "I leave it in your capable hands to do what ever you want ... and please write back saying how much money you would like" (Jagger). Blending their music with a visual art phenomenon, one could scarcely describe the Rolling Stones' move away from a standard approach to cover art as being against the grain, or late.

In painting his own cover, Dylan demonstrates an immediate correspondence with this concept of lateness. As Hall noted of the painter practising the art of self-portraiture: "[They are] at 'free play'" (46). Painting an image of oneself scarcely hints at any great rush for the finished product. By contrast, Jagger's correspondence with Warhol highlights the musician's desire for simplicity: "In my short sweet experience, the more complicated the format of the album ... the more fucked-up the reproduction and agonising the delays" (Jagger). Furthermore, in seeking to bolster their own popularity with this visible link to Warhol, the Rolling Stones only highlight Dylan's decision to deviate from such conveniently lucrative

⁶² Although his stylings would vary as the decades progressed, Warhol is acknowledged to have been creating album covers for artists since the late 1940s. The 1949 release of Carlos Chávez's *A Program of Mexican Music* is widely thought to be the first credited design of a 21-year-old Warhol.

links. That Dylan chose to paint a self-portrait even somewhat belies his standing. As Hall writes of Rembrandt, and his proclivity for painting self-portraits: “Self-employed rather than a salaried court painter, it may be that he felt he needed to keep reminding distant patrons, actual and potential, of his continuing presence and present fame” (152). Unlike Rembrandt, Dylan was not beholden to such desires for artistic or financial legitimacy. In commercial terms, Dylan’s five studio albums prior to the 1970 release of *Self Portrait* had all charted within the top-ten of America’s album charts. However, the *Self Portrait* painting can be read as distinctly ‘Anti-Pop’ in terms of its concept and execution. Not only going against the standard practice of this period, Dylan’s self-portrait offers a curious take on the long-standing approach to cover art the music industry had adopted over thirty years before.

Taking the innovation of Columbia Records’ art director, Alexander Steinweiss, the artistic and commercial potential of aesthetically pleasing cover art was first realised in the late 1930s. Steinweiss designed alternative, album-specific packaging to replace the usual “drab heavy paper sleeve with only a title embossed on the front and spine” (Chilton). Introducing a visual component to the purchase of audible material, the inherent marketing possibilities of this additional element were not lost on recording companies; a detail exemplified by the inclusion of a ‘Best Album Cover’ prize at the inaugural Grammy Awards in 1959.⁶³ From Steinweiss’ graphically designed cover art to the widespread usage of photography, record labels increasingly turned to this latter method in an effort “to shape the identity of an artist” in the mind of the public; a detail wonderfully captured on Dylan’s eponymous debut album (O’Hagan).

⁶³ As Chilton demonstrates; “Designers such as Alex Steinweiss, whose illustrated covers – for singers such as Paul Robeson, or the classical records of Beethoven – led to huge increases in sales” (“Cover Story: A History Of Album Artwork”).

With his corduroy hat, sheepskin jacket, guitar, and a sullen look toward the camera, Dylan's image complimented the description of the artist presented by Robert Shelton in the album's liner notes contained therein: "In less than one year in New York, Bob Dylan has thrown the folk crowd into an uproar. Ardent fans have been shouting his praises. Devotees have found in him the image of a singing rebel, a musical Chaplin tramp, a young Woody Guthrie, or a composite of the best country blues singers" ("Liner notes"). This success of this photographic method may be measured in terms of its longevity. Driven primarily by its commercial capabilities, Sontag has outlined why photographic images and the demands of a consumer-focused industry work in such harmony:

Photography is acquisition in several forms. In its simplest form, we have in a photograph surrogate possession of a cherished person or thing, a possession which gives photographs some of the character of unique objects. Through photographs, we also have a consumer's relation to events, both to events which are part of our experience and to those which are not – a distinction between types of experience that such habit-forming consumership blurs (155-56).

As detailed in the previous chapter, *Self Portrait* evidenced Dylan's late style. A period in which Dylan's work encompassed what Said described as the artist's abandonment of "the established social order of which he is a part," achieving instead "a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (*On Late Style* 8). Irrespective of the quality ascribed to Dylan's work throughout this period, his most well-known and widely admired work would come prior to the conclusion of his touring commitments. By contrast, the Beatles would enjoy their most revered period of creativity from this point onward. Unburdened with the prospect of performing their new music in front of a live audience, experimentation within the recording studio flourished. Akin to the perception of a liberated Dylan possessing sufficient time to paint self-portraits, the Beatles were similarly unrestricted by external demands. It is perhaps no

surprise, therefore, that the subject of album covers became quite so pertinent an issue within their creative process.

Demonstrating the circumstances certain popular musicians had to contend with, the development of the Beatles' cover art enables one to identify two strands of lateness that have been associated with Dylan's *Self Portrait*. Akin to the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers*, *Sgt. Pepper's* and the *White Album* demonstrated the band's creative embrace of popular visual artists and artistic trends. Furthermore, despite the affectations of *Sgt. Pepper's*, and the overarching whiteness of the *White Album*, photography and the associated importance of the band members' image would nevertheless retain a sense of priority – even if this is challenged somewhat on the latter of the two. Despite McCartney's claims that the band were looking to relinquish certain expectations that came with being the Beatles, the cover art in question more readily shows the band's determination to redirect their astounding fame; while not compromising it greatly.⁶⁴ Unlike Dylan's *Self Portrait*, these album covers do not necessarily enact a divide between popular artist and audience. Given the commercial standing of the Beatles within the pop music industry, one may ascertain that in acting contrary to these norms, the cover art of Dylan's *Self Portrait* compounds the late style already evidenced by the album's music. Considering the Beatles' chosen cover art, the commissioning of significant Pop artists Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton for the creation of *Sgt. Pepper's* and the *White Album* respectively will now be examined.

Emerging “in the early 60s as a key member of the burgeoning Pop Art movement,” the artistic ideal behind Peter Blake's work on the cover art of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* reflects the general incentive behind this chronologically late Beatles' album: “If you bought the record you also bought a piece of art on exactly the level that I was aiming for”

⁶⁴ After all, in one form or another, the cover art of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* possesses two distinct images of the band members as a quartet.

(Wroe; Cain). Choosing to release the album without any pre-emptive single from the collected songs, *Sgt. Pepper's* demonstrated the Beatles' determinative move away from traditional pop-stardom. This transition was not lost on critics, and felt particularly evident when one considered the extravagance of the album's cover art: "With characteristic self-mockery, the Beatles are proclaiming that they have snuffed out their old selves to make room for the new Beatles incarnate, and there is some truth to it" (Waxman).⁶⁵ The subsequent work of Richard Hamilton on the *White Album* would further demonstrate the Beatles' contentedness at being associated with prominent British artists. Another "notable Pop artist, ... Hamilton intended the cover design to resemble the look of conceptual art, an emerging movement in contemporary art at the time" ("The White Album Project"). Unlike *Sgt. Pepper's* and its plethora of photographed faces, the *White Album* distinctly came with no image of the band whatsoever. Perhaps more closely resembling the band's desire to sever the acquisitional ties of photography that Sontag alluded to, and Dylan would achieve with *Self Portrait*, a curious amendment to the design of the *White Album's* physical cover leaves this decision looking a little less radical than it may have appeared at first: "The album's inter-gatefold opening at the top originally, not the sides" ("The White Album Project"). Instead of opening the cover left-to-right, the *White Album* would open top-to-bottom. Given the unusual and unexpected nature of this change, it is perfectly plausible that upon holding the physical album for the first time, most buyers would be caught off guard and have the album fall open in their hands. Although the white album cover inscribed with 'the BEATLES' may have been their first view, the inside cover presented four traditional photographs of each band member. If they were breaking ties with industry tradition, it was only for a matter of seconds. Although both album covers are

⁶⁵ This "characteristic self-mockery" didn't manifest itself without plenty of external help. Jann Haworth, Blake's wife and collaborator, recalled how far things had come since a traditional photograph had sufficed for an album's cover; "We spent almost two weeks constructing the set at the studio of photographer Michael Cooper, who shot the final image. We were printing black and white images of the celebrity faces, gluing them to hardboard, cutting them out with a jig-saw, and fixing them to the backdrop" (Sheridan).

distinctly different in execution, *Sgt. Pepper's* and the *White Album* nevertheless demonstrated the Beatles' desire to embrace popular artistic trends; not to escape them.

When considering *Self Portrait* in comparison to the Beatles and their creative decisions as market-leaders, it is possible to accurately gauge how against the grain Dylan goes in his designs for the album's cover art. In contrast to how other bands embraced popular artistic trends, Dylan's decision to paint his own cover art is a decisive gesture. Whilst Blake and Hamilton may have been in the business of creating modern art on behalf of musicians, Dylan's explored an artistic realm that was widely felt to be rather antiquated by the early 1970s. As American art critic Max Kozloff alluded to in an essay released the same year as *Self Portrait*: "Self-portraits are defunct in modern art. Liquidated along with the larger idea of genre, they are among those subjects no one expects to see anymore" (qtd. in Hall 257). Documenting Dylan's brief flirtation with Pop artistry a few years earlier, Bell details the artist's dismissive approach toward the market-leader of its American branch, Andy Warhol:

Dylan also wasted some semi-precious time on Andy Warhol and one of the Factory 'screen tests' the artist used to win people and influence friends. Dylan at least wangled an Elvis silkscreen print for his pains, but in the end traded the thing for one of his manager's spare sofas. Word of the slight got back to a discomfited Warhol, in time. Word, you suspect, was supposed to get back (*Once Upon a Time* 438/39).

Curiously, Bell goes so far as to suggest that in simply meeting Warhol, Dylan was wasting his own time. During a period in which Dylan released his most captivating, popular mid-1960s work, this assessment further demonstrates the skewed relationship with timeliness that Dylan would establish when embarking on artistic projects such as the painting of his self-portrait a few years later. Interestingly, Hall identifies how one can read the same sense of "self-mockery" into Dylan's art:

Aggrandisement of the artist could license its polar opposite – debasement and a vision of the world turned upside down. Self-mockery and self-laceration is a perk afforded to the supremely confident. Only emperors, kings and nobles have fools, and the powerful prove their wisdom urbanity and invulnerability by tolerating laughter (104).

Detailing Hall’s assessment of what self-portraiture signified, coupled with Dylan’s embrace of what Kooper described as his musical role of “interpreter” for this album, the cover art of *Self Portrait* demonstrated Dylan in a significantly more vulnerable light: “Most painted and sculpted self-portraits set out to prove the artist to be exemplary in some way (hard-working, humble, presentable, upstanding, eagle-eyed, socialised, etc.) and thus a ‘spotless mirror’” (38). If *Self Portrait* was intended to signify the exemplary elements of Dylan, it would do so in a manner that gave cause for complete reconsideration of who or what “Bob Dylan” was.

II

At what point Bob Dylan became familiar with the music of Joni Mitchell is unclear. It is known, however, that in June 1969, one month after the release of Mitchell’s second album, *Clouds*, the two performed together on *The Johnny Cash Show*. During a recording session in June 1970 for his eleventh studio album, *New Morning*, Dylan recorded a version of Mitchell’s best-selling single to date, “Big Yellow Taxi.” Released in April of the same year, it had been the lead single from Mitchell’s third studio album, *Ladies of the Canyon*. Given Dylan’s personal acquaintance with David Crosby, a former member of the Byrds and the producer of Mitchell’s debut album in 1968, there is reason to believe that Dylan may have been aware of Mitchell’s music from the outset.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it would seem that Dylan was aware of

⁶⁶ Although it is difficult to distinguish at what point Dylan may have met Crosby for the first time, Heylin identifies that by June 1970, when Dylan was receiving an honorary doctorate from Princeton University, Crosby, along with Dylan’s wife Sara, had made the journey from John Hammond’s house with Dylan (*Behind the Shades* 321).

Mitchell's proclivity for painting also. When *Self Portrait* was released a little over a year after Mitchell's *Clouds*, there was a distinct commonality between Dylan's tenth studio album and Mitchell's second; the cover art on both were paintings by Dylan and Mitchell themselves, of themselves; self-portraits. While Mitchell's painting clearly resembled the artist herself, Dylan's was somewhat more muddled.⁶⁷ Reflecting no obvious likeness to the artist himself, it is perhaps only the name of the album that would encourage one to believe that this "fractured, cubist portrait" could represent Dylan's own face (Handy). Possessing the image of an isolated head set against a light-blueish background, the differentiating lines between head and background vary. Ranging from a darker blue and black in places, on occasion the faded orange colour chosen for the face blends with this nondescript background. Although the painting does not include much of the figure's head beyond the reaches of the upper-forehead, a darker shade of orange is coupled with the same dark-blue lining to create some semblance of a hair-line. Differentiating both the figure's ears, they are coloured in two varying extremes of the orange colour applied to the face; the ear to the left of the viewer's perspective displaying perhaps the most visible brushstrokes on a painting replete with such artistic touches. When examining the face itself, more complexities become apparent. From the viewer's point of view, the same light-blueish colour that adorns the background spills over the head's right eye, and the entirety of its nose; not to mention the eyes themselves. Defining the eyebrows and outline of the mouth with the same dark-blue/black hue, the crookedly open mouth is filled with a distinctively red colour; not entirely unlike a miniature inverse of Mark Rothko's "Black in Deep Red", or one of the artist's Seagram Murals. In so far as one is aware Dylan painted this image for the cover art of an album called *Self Portrait*, there is no actual likeness between this painted figure and the artist in question.

⁶⁷ Without drawing any assertions regarding the quality of either work, Mitchell had been painting years before Dylan seemingly began to gravitate towards it in the late 1960s, and early 1970s particularly. This, in turn, may explain Mitchell's ability to more readily capture her own likeness in the self-portrait presented on *Clouds*.

Writing of the self-portrait years later, Dylan described the creative process that had led to his painting of this image for *Self Portrait*:

Staring at the blank canvas for a while encouraged me to blindfoldedly make a picture that would paste all the songs together between the sleeves. it didn't take a whole lot of strokes to compleat the face. art lovers claimed it was primitive & maybe it was if not having any formal art school training makes it so. my painting style which was under-developed at the time had more to do with allowing my eye instead of my mind to regulate my senses ... [but] it wasn't my purpose to paint my own picture (qtd. in Heylin 833).

Describing Dylan's song choices for the album, David Bromberg believed that Dylan "called it *Self Portrait* because this was the music that he came out of" ("Bob Dylan – Another Self Portrait"). The album's cover art retains this same sense of ambiguity on the artist's behalf; numerous influences, perhaps, but no definitive individual style is necessarily forthcoming. Although Dylan shied away from the impression that he had been purposefully attempting to paint his "own picture," where this self-portrait perhaps fails in terms of its artistic merit, Hall identifies why it is in fact a resounding success in terms of its subservience to the genre:

One of the wonders of self-portraits is their capacity to induce unique levels of uncertainty in the viewer. Is the artist looking at us with a view to portraying or judging us? Is the artist looking at a mirror, with a view to portraying or judging themselves? Is the artist creating a persona to serve specific ends? Or have they delved into the book of memory, myth and imagination to create a work personal in its meaning? (9).

Rather than attempting to assess where the artist is looking as Hall posits, however, viewers are left staring into a light-blue void where the artist's eyes ought to be. Is this an ironic allusion toward the "blindfolded" approach Dylan claims to have undertaken while painting a self-portrait in which his eyes regulated his senses? Of what one can take from the limited details of both the self-portrait and Dylan's subsequent rationale, it is intriguing that although Dylan

claims to have afforded creative control to his eye over his mind, it is this organ that has been blatantly overlooked. Akin to the sensation the cover art of *Nashville Skyline* encourages, where one is left looking beyond Dylan to the bright blue sky, *Self Portrait* leaves one wondering whether this light-blue void is in fact the background upon which the image of the face rests; are there eyes there at all? Where the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* made a very public show of the band's influences and personalities on the album's cover, this presentation of the artist with no eyes is Oedipal in its execution. In contrast to how Oedipus blinded himself upon discovering the cruel reality of his fate, then enduring banishment, Dylan's self-portrait encapsulates this artist's desire to abandon the world in which he had enjoyed such tremendous success.

Reflecting on this period during an interview with John Preston ahead of the release of *Chronicles* in 2004, Dylan recalls a time when he too understood the transition Oedipus is seen to suffer: "It was ... very disorientating. In the early years everything had been like a magic carpet for me – and then all at once it was over. Here was this thing that I'd wanted to do all my life, but suddenly I didn't feel I could do it anymore" (qtd. in Heylin, *Revolution in the Air* 507). As with Oedipus, however, regardless of being blinded and banished, the knowledge of his fate remains. So it is with Dylan also. While the artist's embrace of musical influences is evident from the songs contained within the album itself, the cover art seeks to demonstrate that Dylan, like Oedipus, is doing his best to forget the present, and reconvene in an alternative place where the burdens of creativity are not quite so potent.

In terms of the industry into which *Self Portrait* was nevertheless released, Dylan's brief abandonment of the traditional photographic method is worth considering, however. Dylan could not – or, would not – literally disappear. Whilst his self-portrait differs in terms of the artistic likeness one encounters on Mitchell's *Clouds*, that both should veer so tellingly from the photographic method, only to land on the same idea of a painted self-portrait is intriguing. Although it is unknown whether or not Dylan painted his self-portrait with

Mitchell's work in mind, her early recollections of time spent in Dylan's company does suggest a shared artistic interest of which he clearly was aware.⁶⁸ Given relatively little critical concern has been afforded to *Self Portrait* and its cover art in the intervening years, and that Dylan has rarely spoke about either, consideration of Mitchell's *Clouds* provides a potential point of entry into Dylan's work. Discussing the album ten years after its release, Mitchell contemplated her dissatisfaction with a work that failed to differentiate between artistic affectation and her own style:

It's very hard to be true to yourself. For instance, I don't care too much for the second album I made [*Clouds*]. I like the first one, the first one's honest. *Blue* is an honest album. *Clouds* has some honest moments on it, but at the time, I was singing a lot with Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and *they* had a style, out of necessity, to blend with one another. They had a way of affecting vowel sounds so that when they sang together, they would sing like a unit. I picked up on that and there's a lot of that on the album. I find it now kind of irritating to listen to, in same way that I find a lot of black affectations irritating (Crowe, "Joni Mitchell Defends Herself").

Although Mitchell's dissatisfaction appears to come from the musical content of *Clouds* rather than the album's cover art, this issue of affectation is one that cannot be overlooked when considering Dylan's *Self Portrait*. As epitomised with the album's cover art, Dylan's self-portrait bears no specific trace of an individual artistic style; evident when one considers the

⁶⁸ Discussing a series of meetings with Dylan after their initial introduction on *The Johnny Cash Show*, Mitchell, speaking in 1979, relayed certain details of "a series of brief encounters" between the pair. Taking place after the release of both *Clouds* and *Self Portrait*, painting appeared to dominate much of their discussions:

At one point we were at a concert. ... Anyway, we're backstage at this concert. Bobby and [Dylan's friend] Louie Kemp were holding up the wall. I went over there and opened up the conversation with painting. I knew he was discovering painting. ... Anyway, I was describing [an idea for a canvas], really getting carried away with all of the colours. And Bobby says to me: "When you paint, do you use *white*?" And I said, "Of course." He said, "Cause if you don't use white, your paint gets muddy." I thought, "Aha, the boy's been taking art lessons" (Crowe, "Joni Mitchell Defends Herself").

At a later event where the two were in attendance and found themselves alone together, Mitchell recalls how Dylan chose to break a long silence; "He said, "If you were gonna paint this room, what would you paint?" I said, "Well, let me think. I'd paint the mirrored ball spinning, I'd paint the women in the washroom, the band ... I said, "What would *you* paint?" He said, "I'd paint this coffee cup." Later, he wrote "One More Cup of Coffee.""

anonymity of the figure Dylan paints for his self-portrait. At a significantly earlier point in her career as a popular musician, Mitchell's cover art achieves the kind of photographic likeness one expects of an emerging figure in the music industry trying to shape an image of the artist in the imagination of the public. The proficiency of her effort serves to highlight both the artistic limitations of Dylan, and his attempts at fraying this link between performer and the audience. If he had been aware of *Clouds* prior to painting the cover art of *Self Portrait*, he would undoubtedly have known that he could not replicate in kind what Mitchell had done. Nevertheless, he still paints his self-portrait .

Returning to Dylan's assessment of his own self-portrait, the artist's continued attempts at allusivity ought not to be overlooked. As displayed during interviews and discussions quoted in the opening section of this chapter, Dylan upholds the potential for uncertain readings of his latest cover art. After all, to whatever degree Dylan wishes to alter his perception in the minds of his audience, that he is releasing a new album at all ultimately demonstrates a willingness to retain some relevancy; even if he wishes to reshape or refine it. Discussing unspecified claims from "art lovers" that the self-portrait in question displayed a primitive artistic style, Dylan concluded that this may be the case; but one like him, without "any formal art school training," could scarcely comment (qtd. in Heylin 833). Outlining in *Chronicles* the development of his interest in painting, one may consider the artistic road Dylan did not, or could not, take:

About that time I began to make some of my own drawings. I actually picked up the habit from Suze, who drew a lot. What would I draw? Well, I guess I would start with whatever was at hand. I sat at the table, took out a pencil and paper and drew the typewriter, a crucifix, a rose, pencils and knives and pins, empty cigarette boxes. I'd lose track of time completely. An hour or two could go by and it would seem like only a minute. Not that I thought that I was any great drawer, but I did feel like I was putting an orderliness to the chaos around – something like Red

[Grooms] did, but he did it on a much grander level. In a strange way I noticed that it purified the experience of my eye and I would make drawings for years to come (270).

Although Mitchell demonstrates that there is no mutual exclusivity in being both a formidable singer-songwriter and a painter, Dylan's talent for the former did not extend to the latter. In this regard, one can look to Dylan's acknowledgement of claims that his painting is primitive, and consider how Dylan may have understood the potentialities of this assessment. As a songwriter, Dylan's ability to take primitive or, folk music and develop something new enabled his creative growth. As his self-portrait demonstrates, it is not clear that Dylan ever developed beyond the point of imitation as a painter. It is perhaps no surprise that this painting should then emerge along with an album that demonstrated, as Kooper alluded to, Dylan's desire to fulfil the role of an interpreter, rather than an innovator. As such, the cover art of *Self Portrait* is more an amalgamation of facial features than a human representation of himself. Bearing closer resemblance to a mask (perhaps those vacant eye-sockets are where Dylan himself can look through from behind), the image one sees on the album's cover is bereft of even the small, diffuse hints a photographed image of Dylan might reveal of the artist's thoughts or mood. In his analysis of Pablo Picasso's early self-portraits, Hall highlights the artist's proclivity for the usage of masks during this process. It is a useful indicator of what Dylan may have been trying to achieve with the cover art of *Self Portrait*. One could certainly argue that Dylan's self-portrait enables the artist to manufacture an elusive quality that would scarcely have been possible had Dylan opted for more traditional, photographic cover art.

As Dylan embarked upon his first series of live performances eight years after the conclusion of the 1966 World tour (and four years after the release of *Self Portrait*), the artist adopted a literal approach to the figurative "mask-erasing" Marshall recalled from Dylan's 1964 concert in New York City's Philharmonic Hall (15). Captured in Sean Wilentz's *Bob Dylan's America*, the author's recollection of witnessing Dylan begin his 1974 performance

wearing a “clear plastic mask” only served to hide an additional disguise that would be revealed later on:

At the song’s end, Dylan lifted what looked like a flower-bedecked sombrero to take off his mask, and sure enough, it was certainly he, the now-unmasked marvel – except that Dylan’s face, which at first just looked pale, turned out to be covered by a thin coating of white makeup, or this is how I have remembered it. Because I have seen so much film from the tour of Dylan in thicker streaks of whiteface, my memory could be faulty (though photographers still seem to bear me out), just as I may be wrong about his wearing a plastic mask in New Haven (142-3).

This image of Dylan in white-face draws one back to the similarly featureless disguise on the cover art of *Self Portrait*. In the sense that this is a self-portrait, one can locate a likeness between Dylan in his white face-paint, and the image of Dylan we are presented with on the album’s front cover. Although one may not recognise Dylan’s features in the latter, as Wilentz demonstrated one could when the artist donned the face-paint or transparent mask, it is nevertheless an image of Dylan’s face due to its being a self-portrait. Considering once again Edward Said’s assessment of the late novella, *Death in Venice*, the closing image of Gustav von Aschenbach reclining on a beach lounge as the city of Venice (and he himself) is besieged by choleric plague, becomes all the more startling for his earlier aesthetic attempts at retaining a sense of youthfulness:

And like a craftsman unable to finish, unable to satisfy himself, he passed busily and indefatigably from one procedure to another. Aschenbach, reclining comfortably, incapable of resistance, filled rather with exciting hopes by what was happening, gazed at the glass and saw his eyebrows arched more clearly and evenly, the shape of his eyes lengthened, their brightness enhanced by a slight underlining of the lids; saw below them a delicate carmine come to life as it was softly applied to skin that had been brown and leathery; saw his lips that had been so pallid now burgeoning cherry-red; saw the furrows on his cheeks, round his mouth, the wrinkles

by his eyes, all vanishing under face cream and an aura of youth – with beating heart he saw himself as a young man in earliest bloom (Mann 262).

Captured in the 1971 film that director Luchino Visconti based on Mann's novella, the closing scene depicts the white-faced Aschenbach finally succumbing to the disease that had engulfed a city, and caused visitors such as he to flee. Where the application of this face cream was initially intended to make the aging Aschenbach appear "as a young man in his earliest bloom," his untimely death results in one bearing witness to a recently living body that appears to have progressed through the stages of bodily decay at an accelerated speed. Considering this closing image as captured in Benjamin Britten's operatic treatment of Mann's novella, Said depicts the distancing effect Aschenbach's appearance and presence on the beach has between him and object of his desires, young Tadzio:

Adorno, as we have seen, calls such figures of nearness and distance both "subjective and objective. Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which – alone – it glows into life. He [the artist] does not bring about their harmonious synthesis. As the power of dissociation, he tears them apart in time, in order, perhaps to preserve them for the eternal. In the history of art late works are the catastrophes" (*On Late Style* 160).

Performing in his white face-paint during the comeback tour of 1974, one cannot ignore this same sensation of space that now exists between the performer and his audience. With this dichotomy of nearness and distance that Adorno identifies as a wholly late concept, the cover art of *Self Portrait* can be read as a figurative iteration of what Dylan would make literal four years later. Breaking with his traditional approach to cover art for his tenth studio album, Dylan successfully highlights the disconnect between the artist and his audience. Yet, with consideration once more for Hyde's Trickster figure, Dylan is forever waiting at the boundary. Creator and destroyer, it is his ability to acknowledge the necessity of both roles that has informed his eternal lateness.

Chapter Seven: “Isn’t There Enough Irreverence in the World?”

Christmas music only acquires significance in mid-Winter. Reliant upon this time for meaning and purpose, Christmas music offers a corresponding soundtrack to the seasonal shift into a period of lateness.⁶⁹ Whereas Winter will turn into Spring, however, Christmas music resists the pull of finality. Aligned with a late moment in time, the artistic works of this genre nevertheless do not age. As with Theodor Adorno’s assessment of an artist’s late style works: “They show more traces of history than of growth” (“Late Style in Beethoven” 564). Christmas music retains its significance precisely because it tends to remain the same, offering an illusory comfort that the future will be similarly unchanged. Encouraging greater familiarity and affection for the works themselves rather than the artists responsible for them, the timely nature of this genre determines that Christmas recordings will never enter the popular mainstream entirely. They remain bound to this seasonally late period, never emerging before or after it.

As a genre, Christmas music incorporates both the sacred and profane, the traditional and the popular. An instrument of the Christian faith, the role of music in celebrating the arrival of Christmas possesses long-standing importance: “Carol-singing is as old as the Druids, and to retrace its steps is to exhaust the Christian calendar” (Duncan 687). Although music is of great importance in a number of Christian festivals, this entry taken from an 1888 edition of *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* outlines both the particular significance of Christmas music and, even one-hundred and thirty years ago, the manner in which its sacredness was being infiltrated by undesirable external influences:

⁶⁹ One need only consider the ‘Live Aid’ finale in July 1985 to grasp the irregularity of hearing a Christmas recording beyond its apt moment.

There are many traditional customs connected with the observance of Christmas, and music is associated with several of them. Not to speak of Carols, which are asserted to be purely Christian in origin, and which offer one of the purest of the musical pleasures of the season, there are the folk songs, dances and legendary practices derived from a high antiquity, songs preserved in the observances of the play of the hobby-horse, mumming and other customs, and there are the Waits. ... The best known Christmas music is that which is called "The Waits." It is a custom which of all others has been most modified and influenced by outside pressure so that it has lost its original shape and intention. ... From the Courts of kings and nobles it extended to wealthy cities, then to guilds within in the cities, and when it was no longer protected by official sanction, it was undertaken by licensed and unlicensed musicians, who traded upon the sympathies and sentiments awakened at the season of Christmas ("Christmas Music" 721).

Trading upon the same "sympathies and sentiments awakened at the season of Christmas," the popular treatment of this genre by the music industry constitutes the other alternative of Christmas, where religious values get replaced by consumerist ones.

The popularisation of Christmas music demonstrated a determined attempt to commodify the concept wholesale. Becoming a sub-genre of popular music in a general sense, the festive period offered popular artists the opportunity to record a collection of Christmas songs, releasing the result of their efforts into a marketplace replete with readymade buyers. Producing music which demonstrated a greater awareness of the seasonal phenomena surrounding this period, this popular alternative possessed less of a creative reliance upon Christian theology. Whereas tradition had celebrated this period for the birth of Jesus Christ ("Joy to the World, the Lord is come / Let Earth receive her King"), Christmas music created for the popular market shifted this premise of a new beginning into a more all-encompassing, secular realm. As such, a greater reliance on the themes of family gatherings, nostalgia, regret, or a willingness to embrace the present despite adverse weather conditions, was established.

Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" and "Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!" remain two prescient examples of the new standard that was put in place. Written in 1942 by Irving Berlin, "White Christmas" does not require one to possess a particular religious affiliation for the song's meaning to be successfully imparted. It is unmistakably broad, with the experience of the singer easily transmitted to the increasingly secular audience being targeted for such songs:

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas

Just like the ones I used to know

Where the treetops glisten and children listen

To hear sleigh bells in the snow.

Similarly, "Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!" highlights the harsh natural elements of this period (albeit in a typically jovial fashion), and the importance subsequently afforded to warmth, shelter and human interaction:

When we finally kiss good-night

How I'll hate going out in the storm

But if you really hold me tight

All the way home I'll be warm.

As Jacques Attali presents in *Noise*, music – and especially Christmas music – plays an essential role in creating a safe space: "Today, it is unavoidable, as if, in a world now devoid of meaning, a background noise were increasingly necessary to give people a sense of security" (3). Often little more than background noise, Christmas music nevertheless remains a significant contributing factor in ensuring the broad appeal of the festive season.

As with popular music in a general sense, the Christmas genre remains capable of generating songs that occasionally step beyond such a formulaic approach, attaining some semblance of artistic merit in their own right. Yet, even the very best Christmas music will only be heard in conjunction with the very worst. Be it on radio stations, Christmas playlists or compilation albums, the genre itself outmanoeuvres any concern with individual artistic quality. Subsequently, the commodification of Christmas music has come to be regarded by some as an aberration; one of many “jovial contaminations” according to Frank Kermode:

The various episodes are either forgotten or mixed randomly together in our minds and the minds of our children, who see no objection to adding Santa Claus, reindeers, Christmas trees, intolerable pop songs, office parties and so forth, to the Nativity mix. ... For the laity, and especially its juvenile members, the build-up of extra marvels is acceptable because, whatever some say about the venality and bad taste that can make Christmas tedious, nothing these critics complain of can wholly prevent the celebration of an orgiastic midwinter festival far more ancient than these enfeebled allusions to it (“Was It A Supernova?”).

Kermode’s condemnation of these marvels and their contribution to the “venality and bad taste” of this period highlights the quandary surrounding Christmas music in the popular sphere. Created with the intention that it will appeal to as many listeners as possible, for as many years as possible, how ought one accurately measure the artistic worth of Christmas music? Striving for the kind of “instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort” one associates with kitsch works of art; Christmas music may be best considered under similar guidelines (Menninghaus 41). A source of critical consternation when it comes to determining whether or not it is a source for good, kitsch art is nevertheless understood along broadly similar lines: “Kitsch, a concept originating in the 19th century among German art dealers to describe bad art, is commonly associated with fakes, aesthetic rubbish, and that which is cheap. While (good) art is thought to require effort and seriousness, kitsch is linked with pleasure and

entertainment” (Blandy and Congdon 198). Considering kitsch art, Adorno identifies how such characteristics come to light when one specifically considers its impact upon music:

It clings faithfully to ancient, actually probably ritual schemes like that of stanza and refrain. It has a preference for harmonies that were once especially exposed and striking. It also differentiates itself from every individual formal creation by virtue of the fact that it is constructed in types. ... What is absolutely excluded is the penetration of any stirrings of compositional independence into the kitsch region. On the other hand, good prospects exist for ideas that hew strictly to the bounds of convention (“Kitsch” 503-4).

This is an outlook Adorno ascribes to popular music generally, and one begins to realise that although Christmas music “shows more traces of history than of growth,” it is scarcely considered to present this historic lineage in a flattering light (“Late Style in Beethoven” 564). Reliant upon an age-old human response to the Winter period for meaning, Christmas music broadly attempts to appeal to this sensation without necessarily offering any kind of intuitive awareness or resistance. In contrast to what one may consider a serious, time-consuming artistic endeavour, Christmas music prizes the quick accessibility of allowing an artist to re-record songs that already exist, and a large proportion of the potential buyers already know they like. Whereas the genre inspires works that are undoubtedly “furrowed, even ravaged,” Christmas music is overwhelmingly adored and cherished at the right time of year (564). Contrary to Adorno’s assessment of late style works, Christmas songs are seasonally late and most certainly “surrender themselves to mere delectation” (564). This is their primary purpose, after all.

In this regard, one may substantiate Adorno’s distressing assessment afforded to those works bound by convention, lacking any kind of subjective influence from the latest artist primed to record them. As with Adorno’s assessment of “all real kitsch,” Christmas music “offers the outline and draft of objectively compelling, pre-established forms that have lost their content in history, and for which the unfettered artist, cast adrift, is not able to fashion the

content on his own” (“Kitsch” 501). Subsequently, Adorno does not necessarily hold the artist responsible for what is essentially a lost cause:

Hence the illusory character of kitsch cannot be unambiguously traced to the individual inadequacy of the artist, but, instead, has its own objective origin in the downfall of forms and material into history. Kitsch is the precipitate of devalued forms and empty ornaments from a formal world that has become remote from its immediate context. Things that were part of the art of a former time and are undertaken today must be reckoned as kitsch (501).

Resultantly, kitsch works of art stand almost independent from the artists who create them. In stark contrast to Adorno, Winfried Menninghaus outlines Walter Benjamin’s alternative approach to kitsch art, and the possibilities he believes they possess: “It has – as Benjamin says with no trace of irony – ‘something that is warming’, is even conducive to “‘heart’s ease” ... Kitsch ... is ... art with a 100 percent, absolute and instantaneous availability for consumption” (41). As alluded to in Crosby’s recording of “Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!”, the sensation of comforting warmth now takes on both a figurative and literal meaning. Furthermore, regarding the “instantaneous availability for consumption” Benjamin attributes to kitsch works of art, one may evidently align this quality with Christmas music. Packaged to correlate with the general festivities of the Christmas period, these songs simply (re)emerge to provide the essential background noise for such celebrations.⁷⁰ No more so than for the juvenile members Kermode alludes to in the quotation above. It is with this aspect of kitsch that

⁷⁰ Ian Bell outlines the “comfortable lethargy” of a marketplace that became increasingly accessible to the wares of nationwide industries:

One historian has summed up the Eisenhower years of Dylan’s youth as ‘in general ones of comfortable lethargy’. ... The soporific conservatism seeping from the White House certainly seemed to suit a mostly prosperous country. The president himself called it ‘the politics of tranquillity’. On the other hand, those who grew up in the period always claim to remember a neurotic hidebound era – ‘the Fatuous Fifties’ – in which imagination was not much prized, big business owned the government, and uniformity was a virtue. ... Adlai Stevenson, the great lost hope of 1950s liberalism, one enquired; ‘With the supermarket as our temple and the singing commercial as our litany, are we likely to fire the world with an irresistible vision of America’s exalted purpose and inspiring way of life?’ (*Once Upon a Time* 75).

Menninghaus outlines the source of Benjamin's interest in toys and the less restrictive nature of childhood:

Defining kitsch in terms of a saving of intellectual effort and the suspension of normative taboos is rich in implications. For Freud, these behavioural mechanisms are typical of both humour and, more broadly, of the libidinous regression to infantile gratifications which have normally fallen victim to the reality principle and cultural prohibitions. Benjamin's constant references to childish perception in *The Arcades Project* are largely based on the hypothesis ... that children enjoy an experiential advantage as a result of their incomplete submission to the taboos and laws of the symbolic order (41).

Characterising the “unadulterated beauty [and] simple invitation to wallow in sentiment” provided by kitsch works of art, Menninghaus argues that Benjamin's outlook offers “a true antidote to any Adorno-type aesthetics of negativity.” Nevertheless, Benjamin, like Adorno, understood kitsch art “as a phenomenon of utmost political significance” (42). Yet, where Benjamin understood this to be a positive feature, Adorno couldn't look beyond the menacing qualities of this incredibly accessible, and perhaps invasive, form: “[Kitsch] has a social function – to deceive people about their true situation, to transfigure their existence, to allow intentions that suit some powers or other to appear to them in a fairy-tale glow. All kitsch is essentially ideology” (502). In the easy accessibility of such art, Adorno lamented the alternative ease with which the ideologues could access the buyers themselves.

Despite his opinion of such works as reprehensible (in so far as they are considered worthy of critical consideration), kitsch art demonstrates a certain linearity with Adorno's understanding of late style works. As noted above, kitsch art similarly displays traces of convention in a form that may be considered “bald, undisguised, untransformed” (“Late Style in Beethoven” 565). Upholding Adorno's argument that “the content of art always exists in mere appearance,” Christmas music is unquestionably concerned with prioritising the

importance of appearance above all else. In much the same way as the “fragments of convention” evident in late style work are not the result of an artistic “indifference to appearance,” the success of popular Christmas music is largely determined by the manner in which these surface details are upheld. Regardless of the standing the artist in question holds, the Christmas album must look, sound and feel like Christmas. Furthermore, with relation to Christmas music and the unavoidable presence of kitsch within it, its resistance to finality despite its chronologically late setting mirrors Adorno’s assessment of late style works: “Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art” (566).

No other genre of popular music demonstrates a greater indifference to the created being than Christmas music. It is here that the works of art take absolute precedence, and it is in this regard that they subsequently cannot be considered late works in isolation. Whatever of the links shared between Adorno’s assessment of kitsch and late style, the latter requires the presence of a particular individual to become evident. Bob Dylan’s *Christmas in the Heart* does not seek to confound the expectations of the Christmas music genre. It is an unmistakably kitsch work in principle. However, as shall be outlined throughout this chapter, the presence of such a principle inevitably informs its status as a late style work.

I

Released in 2009, *Christmas in the Heart* signalled Bob Dylan’s first engagement with the festive marketplace. Containing a selection of well-known Christmas songs and carols, Dylan considered the music in question to be “part of my life, just like folk songs” (“Bob Dylan Talks About *Christmas in the Heart*”). Adopting a similar approach to that which had been applied to his previous albums of covered material, Dylan chose to record music that predated his own emergence as a renowned singer-songwriter; music from his childhood. In this regard, a

chronologically late work in terms of the artist's career harks back to a distinctively earlier time. In stark contrast to *Good as I Been to You* (1992), *World Gone Wrong* (1993) and the folk music tradition these albums celebrated, *Christmas in the Heart* directed the listener's attention toward a genre that Dylan had not previously demonstrated an artistic interest in. As Stephen Erlewine noted: "I was surprised at its existence, and then once I actually listened to it, it very much seemed part of his lineage and made sense. It fell in with how he's fascinated with song and loves to get into the roots of that" (Bream 207). Forfeiting the specifications of folk music, Dylan embraces a far broader musical lineage; one almost everyone of a certain age had access to. Where there had been a sense of propriety in Dylan's artistic return to the music that had inspired his own songwriting, *Christmas in the Heart* acted as an artistic acknowledgement of a hugely popular genre that had played no singularly determinative role in his original work. Hinting at something larger at play, biographer Clinton Heylin outlined the significance of Dylan's song selection and what these choices revealed:

[*Christmas in the Heart*] came across as ... nostalgia for the Christmases he grew up with in the frozen north, a setting he effortlessly evoked in picture-postcard fashion when prompted to talk about those times now: 'Plenty of snow, jingle bells, Christmas carollers going from house to house, sleighs in the streets, town bells ringing, nativity bells.' ... Dylan had underlined where his own heart was – and it was firmly in the fifties, a time 'before the sexual revolution, huge sound systems, techno-pop' (*Behind the Shades* 842).

Reengaging with his idyllic youth, the implicit lateness of *Christmas in the Heart* mirrors that which Said associated with Beethoven's late masterpieces: "[They] are late to the extent that they are beyond their own time, ahead of it in terms of daring and startling newness, later than it in that they describe a return or homecoming to realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless advancement of history" (*On Late Style* 135). While the "homecoming to realms

forgotten” is self-evident, the startling newness of this album appears in relation to the confusing role it played in disturbing the general perception surrounding Dylan and his artistry.

Recording a series of popular Christmas classics from his youth, Dylan similarly dealt with those “more hallowed and old” carols too (Swanston). Commemorating the religious and the secular, the traditional and the popular, Dylan approached the project with an unmistakable sincerity:

Bill Flanagan: Very often when contemporary artists do Christmas records, they look for a new angle. ... You played this right down the middle, doing classic holiday songs in traditional arrangements. Did you know going in you wanted to play it straight?

Bob Dylan: Oh sure, there wasn’t any other way to play it. These songs are part of my life, just like folk songs. You have to play them straight too (“Bob Dylan Talks About *Christmas in the Heart* With Bill Flanagan”).

In playing this age-old selection of Christmas songs straight, Dylan does not seek to disturb the ideal he has in mind. As with Adorno’s assessment of truly kitsch works, *Christmas in the Heart* demonstrated no determined effort by the artist to impart any artistic influence on the work in question. Songs that had for the most part been recorded countless times previously, there was no apparent suggestion that *Christmas in the Heart* would signify a daring new creative step for the genre. Rather, it was principally a festive recording that every listener could enjoy; Dylan’s first album that appeared to cater to such a broad audience. Compared to the artist’s recording career up to this point, however, such a categorisation of his work signalled a noteworthy departure. An album certain to divide opinion between avid and casual listeners of Dylan’s music alike, the premise of the work alone is enough to determine its status as a late style work. As Said asserts: “Lateness ... is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it” (16). In order to explore the

layered lateness of *Christmas in the Heart*, it ought to be considered in terms that do not limit the analysis of this work singularly to the end product. In deciding to record and release a Christmas album, Dylan again embraced a creative step that appeared inherently at odds with the objective understanding of who this artist is, and what he represented. Investigating Dylan's relationship with the festive marketplace, one is given cause to revise the artist's position as he seeks exile in a heavily populated musical sphere. As the subsequent investigation of the album itself will demonstrate, this task was carried out with a curious sincerity on Dylan's part. *Christmas in the Heart* offers forth the most Saidian example of Dylan's late style.

Outlining the objective acknowledgement of a celebrated figure and the cause for such celebration, Greil Marcus suggests: "The media loves a simple idea. No matter how famous you are, how complex you are, how not obvious you are, when you die, you get one idea, and one only" (*Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus* 407-8). As referenced in a previous chapter of this study, Marcus believes that when Bob Dylan dies it is his protest music that will be held up as his one idea. It is a sentiment the critic Perry Meisel similarly alludes to: "Everyone knows Dylan's early musical history" (*The Myth of Popular Culture* 154). Critically speaking, such an assessment is largely unsatisfying. However, it does highlight the prominent backdrop against which *Christmas in the Heart* appears as a wholly unexpected work. Documenting a concert performance from Dylan's early years, Marcus touched upon the artist's aversion to such simplified descriptions:

This person had stepped onto someone else's stage, and while in some ways he seemed as ordinary as any of the people under the tent or the dirt around it, something in his demeanour dared you to pin him down, to sum him up and write him off, and you couldn't do it. From the way he sang and the way he moved, you couldn't tell where he was from, where he'd been, or where he was going – though the way he moved and sang made you want to know all of those things (*Like a Rolling Stone* 18).

Embracing this sense of uncertainty among his listeners, the rapid development of Dylan's artistry would elevate him to a place alongside Said's "original thinkers who challenged the artistic and social norms of their eras" (134). From the breakthrough protest songs came a rich, diverse body of work. Yet, irrespective of Dylan's complexities, the desire for a straightforward narrative remains. In spite of the enigmatic characteristics Marcus identified, Dylan's career will be boiled down to one idea. In this regard, it is likely that Marcus is correct to assume that the one idea Dylan will be afforded is his protest music. If nothing else, it was his first idea after all. Problematically, if one is to consider Dylan's protest music, attention inevitably turns toward his departure from this genre. As important as "Blowin' in the Wind," "The Times They Are A-Changin'," or "Masters of War" are in determining Dylan's one idea in the eyes of Marcus, the well-documented nature of the acrimony surrounding his 'going electric' possesses a powerful hold over the general perception of the artist also. As Meisel asserts, this moment is central in the history of rock and roll; let alone Dylan's career (155). So to whatever degree he is primarily considered a protest singer, Dylan is nominally understood as an artist who turned his back on protest music; this is in itself further evidence of his impulse to go against the grain, as Said terms it.

As the subjects considered within David Kinney's *The Dylanologists* demonstrate, deciphering the logic of this uncertainty can all but become one's entire life's work. Considering the broader appreciation of his career, Dylan's unwillingness to act in an expected manner is consistently referenced when the artist's name requires treatment in a mainstream context:

If you appreciate the reinventor that Bob Dylan has always been, you'll be entranced by this show. If not, recall that it's 52 years since an audience member at the Manchester Free Trade Hall screamed "Judas!" at Dylan because he was holding an electric guitar. As his opening

number noted, Things Have Changed – but then again, they’ve always been a-changin’ (Gordon).

An extract from a typically reductive review of a Dylan concert, it serves to illuminate the confusion that continues to inform the broad consensus of who this artist is, and what he does. Acknowledged as a continual reinventor of his persona and sound, Dylan is nevertheless summed up with a number of easy references to moments that occurred in his career half-a-century earlier; the closing line yet another nod to his protest music. Whereas onlookers can decipher that something has changed, instead of assessing what these changes may be, or even exploring the product of these changes in their own right, it is so often the case that Dylan’s incentive to change is reason enough to form an opinion. That he acts in a manner contrary to what one may expect is the truly defining idea afforded to Dylan. In this regard it is necessary to slightly augment the argument Marcus presents. Agreeing with the general principle of Marcus’ one idea per public figure, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that the summation of Dylan’s career will be boiled down to his perpetual willingness to protest. Rather than his actual songs of protest, this feature of his behaviour has arguably left a greater impression on the objective onlooker.

Approach Dylan’s standing from this point, however, one is left wondering why *Christmas in the Heart* should have come as such a surprise? As Amanda Petrusich asked in her *Pitchfork* review: “What, after all, is more absurd than a beloved iconoclast embracing the schmaltziest, most achingly commercial genre of all?” (“Bob Dylan”). Known for his willingness to brook conventional expectations, Dylan engineered a move nobody would have necessarily expected. Just the premise of this work alone was capable of surprising listeners; furthermore, it tended to come as something of a disappointment. As Erlewine noted of *Christmas in the Heart*: “I think people often attacked this record for the idea of the record

without ever listening to it” (Bream 211). Sean Wilentz touched on a similar sense of consternation surrounding news of the album’s existence:

When word spread during the summer of 2009 about the contents of Bob Dylan’s second album of the year, *Christmas in the Heart*, there were almost audible gasps of astonishment on the Dylan fan blogs and Web sites. ... No matter how many singers had come before, to fans who still remembered Dylan as the rebellious voice of the counterculture, or even those who had heard the older, sophisticated re-assembler of American music and literature, the thought of him recording anything as sentimental as a Christmas album seemed odd (332).

Ian Bell also identifies this sense of consternation, lamenting the ridiculous expectations levelled at Dylan and his creative impulses:

On the internet, nevertheless, scandalised fans reacted as though that artist had contrived another *Self Portrait* (as though that would have been a bad idea). Not for the first time, many missed the point. Not for the first or the last time, their reluctance to accept that Dylan was entitled to autonomy, or just to his whims, was striking. Elvis had made Christmas albums; Springsteen had done Christmas songs: where was the by-law forbidding a wistful messianic Jew with a taste for tales of the apocalypse from participating in an All-American tradition? (*Time out of Mind* 508).

As Wilentz alluded to, *Christmas in the Heart* was Dylan’s second release of 2009; earlier in the year, the original *Together Through Life* had emerged to positive reviews. This can be seen as evidence of Said’s “sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness” on Dylan’s part, and it is intriguing that both Wilentz and Ball make arguments for *Christmas in the Heart* on the basis that it demonstrates Dylan’s ongoing relationship with American musical tradition (Said, *On Late Style* 7).

If the album can be read in such terms, why was this detail lost on many who would rather the album didn’t exist? What is it about the idea of Bob Dylan embracing popular

American culture that is so off-putting? Why are listeners left bemused at the thought of Dylan undertaking a sentimental project, as Wilentz describes it? From the artist who is renowned for protesting in one manner or another, Dylan's participation in the festive marketplace brought together two opposing themes that listeners struggled to comprehend collectively. As Said writes, such an eventuality hints at the "prerogative of late style":

It has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist's mature subjectivity, stripped of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile (148).

Determining the lateness of *Christmas in the Heart* therefore becomes an exploration of Dylan's willingness to engage popular culture in an unabashedly straight-forward manner. As Heylin surmises: "[Dylan] refrained from injecting some much-needed humour into the exercise" (842). Although this assessment somewhat overlooks the qualities of an album that would give cause for plenty of wry smiles, Heylin correctly argues that there was a notable lacking in terms of Dylan's willingness to resist or protest the framework by which any artist may have carried out this recording.

Chronicling the latter years of Walt Whitman's public life, David S. Reynolds explored a similar concern held over the poet's temptation "to enjoy the fruits of his growing fame": "How could the poet who had presented himself as a working-class rough conceivably align himself with money and power?" (546). Of Whitman's fondness for the good life, Reynolds asserts: "[Whitman] became more and more beloved by America even as he became less and less the poet of America" (547). A slight inverse of this assessment is required should one wish to locate a comparison within Dylan's career. Contrary to Whitman, Dylan's work received almost immediate critical and popular approval; he did not have to wait for America's adoration. Yet, in appearing to undertake a number of commercially incentivised moves, the

artist's later years are redolent with decisions that equally appear to distance Dylan ever further from contemporary roles such as 'America's poet' or the spokesman for a generation. Consider the increasing willingness with which Dylan appeared in high-profile advertising campaigns for multi-national companies (Victoria's Secret, Chevrolet, IBM), and the likeness to Reynolds' presentation of the late Whitman intensifies:

And it was during these years that there appeared a Whitman cigar, a Whitman calendar, a Whitman tree, Whitman anthologies, a Whitman church, and various Whitman societies. The poet even fantasized whimsically about a Whitman popcorn. Walt Whitman as capitalist commodity? The poet often put up lip-service resistance to his own commodification. But he let it happen, in some cases with enthusiasm (546).

In reality, the apparent brazenness with which Dylan recorded a Christmas album had nothing at all to do with its commercial possibilities; all the money *Christmas in the Heart* raised would perpetually fund charities tackling homelessness. On this detail, one can perhaps even witness Dylan's protesting streak at play once more. Taking the most commercially-driven of genres, Dylan turns it into a vehicle for charity. However, this detail does not come into play when we are left to contemplate the 'one idea' theory Marcus alludes to. Irrespective of who gains financially, there are expectations surrounding Dylan's artistic output. Prior to investigating the details of the eventual album that would emerge, *Christmas in the Heart* was one in a number of signifiers that hinted at an unusual inconsistency regarding Dylan's relationship with American public life.

Rightly or wrongly, it had generally been assumed that Dylan's place in the cultural landscape tarried with that of the outsider.⁷¹ As Heylin detailed, however, Dylan's *Christmas*

⁷¹ As quoted earlier, Elijah Wald surmises the characterisation that attached itself to Dylan from an early stage in his career:

Dylan was the iconic voice of a decade famed for rebellion. ... He was already recognised as a mercurial genius, the ultimate outsider, compared to Woody Guthrie in *Bound for Glory*, Jack Kerouac in *On the*

in the Heart hinted at a time before what Elijah Wald describes as the “decade famed for rebellion” (2). Irrespective of the music therein, Christmas albums naturally tend to correspond with a pervading sense that everything is alright. Problematically, such assurances were scarcely what had elevated Dylan into his role as an ambassador for “youth and the future” (3). An impression of Dylan that is not solely influenced by his music, a series of lengthy interviews have similarly informed this impression of Dylan that Wald alludes to. In spite of Dylan’s frequent unwillingness to engage with the public in a clear, unvarnished manner, through these interviews we are afforded an insight into his thoughts and feelings regarding the goings-on in American public life. Although he has long since abandoned writing the kind of protest songs that enabled his commercial breakthrough, Dylan doesn’t necessarily shy away from the prospect of speaking his mind on topics that strike him as troubling.

Dylan’s displeasure with aspects of American life have similarly manifested themselves in considerations of everything from popular music to race relations. Quotations taken from interviews in 1991, 2007, 2009 and 2012 respectively demonstrate his willingness to discuss these issues with an increasing frankness. Possessing a vigour that was not necessarily forthcoming during the most intense (and seemingly more appropriate) period of his fame in the mid-1960s, it is nevertheless clear that the idea of Dylan as a figure of protest has deep roots within the individual himself, and is not merely a media construct:

Pop entertainment means nothing to me. Nothing. You know, Madonna’s good. Madonna’s good, she’s talented, she puts all kinds of stuff together, she’s learned her thing ... But it’s the kind of thing which takes years and years out of your life to be able to do. You’ve got to sacrifice a whole lot to do that. Sacrifice. If you want to make it big, you’ve got to sacrifice a whole lot. It’s all the same, it’s all the same” (qtd. in Cott 373).

Road, Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, the nameless protagonist in Albert Camus’s *Stranger* – and most frequently of all to James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (2-3).

Sixteen years later, Dylan remains critical of these popular trends; identifying its inescapable impact in the homogenisation of the country as a whole. Right down to the very landscape of the United States of America, the artist laments the blandness of what he encounters:

Well, America's a different place than it was when those other records were made. It was more like Europe used to be, where every territory was different – every county was different, every state was different. A different culture, different architecture, different food. You could go a hundred miles in the States and it would be like going from Stalingrad to Paris or something. It's just not that way anymore. It's all homogenized. People wear the same clothes, eat the same food, think the same things (Wenner, "Bob Dylan Hits The Big Themes").

Nearing his seventieth year, Dylan focuses his attention on contemporary youth. Concerned with the manner in which a generation of people have become relatively more introverted in their search for entertainment, the artist dwells upon the potential for individual damage as a result of this inward-facing existence:

It's peculiar and unnerving in a way to see so many young people walking around with cell-phones and iPods in their ears and so wrapped up in media and video games. It robs them of their self-identity. It's a shame to see them so tuned out to real life. Of course they are free to do that, as if that's got anything to do with freedom. The cost of liberty is high, and young people should understand that before they start spending their life with all those gadgets (Brinkley)

Casting a wider glance over America once more, the resistant rhetoric of Dylan's remarks about colour and race is firm, and, arguably, quite forceful:

This country is just too fucked up about color. It's a distraction. People at each other's throats just because they are of a different color. It's the height of insanity, and it will hold any nation back – or any neighbourhood back. Or any anything back. Blacks know that some white didn't want to give up slavery – that if they had their way, they would still be under the yoke, and they

can't pretend they don't know that. If you got a slave master or Klan in your blood, blacks can sense that. That stuff lingers to this day. Just like Jews can sense Nazi blood and the Serbs can sense Croatian blood. It's doubtful that America's ever going to get rid of that stigmatization. It's a country founded on the backs of slaves. You know what I mean? Because it goes way back. It's the root cause. If slavery had been given up in a more peaceful way, America would be far ahead today. Whoever invented the idea "lost cause..." There's nothing heroic about any lost cause. No such thing, though there are people who still believe it (Gilmore, "Bob Dylan Unleashed").

Disenchanted with fundamentally important aspects of modern American life, the core issue at hand is one of uniformity. Principally, Dylan's frustration appears to lie with those for whom this collective unthinking is a beneficial state of being. As had been the case when Dylan was creating music in spite of the sameness that permeated the song-houses of New York City's Tin Pan Alley, the music industry remained keenly reliant upon its ability to decipher what the majority wanted from their music, and how to transmit it to them in any number of different ways imaginable.

Discussing the presidency of Barrack Obama and the challenges he faced as the nation's first black President, Dylan condemned the role the mass media played in enabling such industries a platform unto which they could prey upon a consumer-driven, easily manageable populace: "You mean in the press? I don't know anybody personally that's saying this stuff that you're just saying. The press says all kinds of stuff. I don't know what they would be saying. Or why they would be saying it. You can't believe what you read in the press anyway" (Gilmore, "Bob Dylan Unleashed"). It is against this very backdrop that Dylan chooses to engage the Christmas market, nevertheless. Bereft of his usual irony, and displaying no obvious trace of the hostilities quoted above, Dylan's *Christmas in the Heart* stand up to the scrutiny of Adorno's forceful warning that "All kitsch is essentially ideology" ("Kitsch" 502)? With

such an apparent sell-out comes reason to revisit the nature of Dylan's sustained condemnation of America's increasing blandness.

As detailed above, Dylan's pursuit of this project had nothing to do with financial gain in any personal sense of the word. In this regard, the album cannot be regarded as a vain attempt to maximise upon the strength of his musical standing, and the interest such an unforeseen project would guarantee. Neither can it be looked upon simply as an act of good-will, however. For a renowned artist, the album has artistic ramifications. While it is not appropriate to delve into the manner in which Dylan deals with his finances, if his intention was to embark upon a project that could subsequently help a number of people, why did such a project have to be the release of a Christmas album? For all of Dylan's protestations regarding the ill-effects of popular forms on the susceptible individual, surely he was aware that *Christmas in the Heart* would be critically read as his endorsement of the genre, and, subsequently, much of what appeared to trouble him in modern life? Although it can be presented as an inherently worthwhile album, Dylan's indulgence of the Christmas market cannot be read as the artist's isolated embrace of mass consumerism; it is part of a wider trend that has developed within Dylan's behaviour. Epitomised by Dylan's appearance in a 2014 Super Bowl commercial for the car manufacturers Chrysler, this brief advertisement would arguably cause a greater stir than even *Christmas in the Heart* could manage.

Interspliced with images of Dylan taken from the mid-1960s and an edited version of his Academy Award-winning song "Things Have Changed," the advertisement opens with Dylan asking the following question: "Is there anything more American than America?" With its numerous allusions toward an American landscape (small towns, factory-line workers, a fun-fair, etc) that tallies with the quoted nostalgia Dylan holds for his 1950s youth, the added significance of cars, roads and going someplace that is not necessarily here, appears suited to Dylan's own interests also. Affirming the worth of American-made cars ("because you can't

import original”), Dylan’s willingness to “let Germany brew your beer, let Switzerland make your watch, [and] let Asia assemble your phone” affords the rhetorical opening a quality not too dissimilar from the statement that would shortly overwhelm the nation’s political sphere: ‘Make America Great Again’. Although Dylan is arguably only attempting to remind the viewer of its greatness, the advertisement is unquestionably rooted upon an ideological terrain that would have a decisive impact on America’s 2016 presidential election: “When it’s made here, it’s made with the one thing you can’t import from anywhere else. American pride.”

As a personal undertaking, Dylan’s decision to explore this presumably lucrative endeavour is of no great consequence; why should he not do what so many popular performers routinely carry out with these endorsements? Furthermore, it is wholly irrelevant to speculate upon the political leanings of the artist. Yet of Dylan’s decision to start selling cars in his seventies, the Super Bowl commercial hinted at the pervading late style *Christmas in the Heart* earlier captured. Casting himself in this commercial light, Dylan explores the deeper recesses of irony as he continues to resist the pull of being boxed in by casual and avid listeners alike. Although it would be facetious to suggest that either endeavour was necessarily a gag, it is clear that in his attempts to retain (or, perhaps, to assure us of) his individuality, the artist reserves the right to willingly box himself in. Reflecting on the time he spent in Dylan’s company during a joint-tour in the mid-1980s, Stan Lynch of The Heartbreakers explained an important facet of Dylan’s occasionally fundamental appeal to people:

I pretty much saw it all. I saw the girl who slept in an elevator claiming to be his sister from Minnesota; I saw the one who claimed to be his *masseuse* who flew in from Perth and was riding up and down the elevator trying to figure out what floor he was on. I also saw the people that were genuinely moved, who felt they had to make some connection with him, that this was an important thing in their life. They wanted to be near him and tell him they’re all right, because they probably feel that Bob was telling them that it was going to be all right when they

wereⁿ't all right, as if Bob *knew* they weren't doing so well at the time. They forget one important thing: Bob doesn't know them; they just know him. But that's all right. That's not short-sightedness on their part. That's just the essence of what people do when you talk to them at a vulnerable time in their lives. It doesn't matter that he was talking to them by way of a record; he was still talking to them (qtd. in Cott 340).

Fostering a delicate relationship between the artist and his listeners, Dylan's *Christmas in the Heart* demonstrated his embrace of a hugely popular genre that left no room for such intimacy; however one-sided it had been in the first place. A decidedly kitsch work in principle, Congdon and Blandy outline why such a creative step possesses a crucial duality that may at first be overlooked:

Kitsch perplexes and unnerves. Kitsch simultaneously repulses and seduces by its apparent superficiality and appeal to baser instincts. Kitsch is also perplexing because understanding and appreciating kitsch cannot be reduced to simplistic claims such as it is all about "junk" or all about "class." However, the perplexity associated with kitsch does not dissuade people from appreciating and collecting it. It is likely that kitsch's appeal may, in part, be due to its resistance to classification (200).

In two distinct ways, therefore, Dylan can be read as resisting the "established social order" in which his artistry has been received and celebrated (Said, *On Late Style*, 8). Engaging kitsch by way of the Christmas album, Dylan's art "constitutes a form of exile" the like of which Said locates within late style works (8). However, as shall be demonstrated in the third section of this chapter, his embrace of this clichéd move into the festive marketplace serves to "perplex and unnerve" the very timelessness he seeks to dip into. *Christmas in the Heart* serves to dually present both the artist's late style in a specific sense, and the manner in which Dylan retains the possibility of always being read as a late artist.

II

Bob Dylan's approach to the recording of *Christmas in the Heart* prioritised a superficiality one may not have previously associated with his work. Recording a selection of well-known festive classics, Dylan opted not to tamper with the essential components of the songs in question.⁷² As he discussed in his interview with Bill Flanagan, his song choices required a straight performance. Unlike the lesser-known songs that would be chosen on earlier cover albums, *Christmas in the Heart* could almost be read as a Christmas album by numbers; it did not appear to have required much more from Dylan than the very act of recording itself. As with most kitsch works of art, it objectively appeared as if it could have been created by anyone, anywhere and, when one consulted the origins of the songs themselves, at almost any point in the timeline of contemporary popular music. In this regard, the album did not necessarily possess an incentivised wish to conserve older music for posterity. In comparison to *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*, Dylan's Christmas album offered a knowing nod to songs that everybody knew, and were in no danger of being forgotten. Within the context of Dylan's own career at this point, this was a notable first. In the midst of an impressive period of creativity, there is not even an argument to be made that Dylan simply had nothing original left to offer. On the basis of Dylan's productivity throughout this period, one may well have queried why he opted not to write a selection of Christmas songs himself? While the concept alone sufficiently stumped many fans and critics, that it was carried out with no distinct tweaking or artistic license on Dylan's part only served to intensify this sensation. Whereas Dylan's work typically allows for flexibility, reimagining and growth, *Christmas in the Heart*

⁷² To be discussed in greater detail throughout this third section of the chapter, the songs Dylan chose to record for *Christmas in the Heart* were as follows: "Here Comes Santa Claus", "Do You Hear What I Hear?", "Winter Wonderland", "Hark the Herald Angels Sing", "I'll Be Home for Christmas", "The Little Drummer Boy", "The Christmas Blues", "O' Come All Ye Faithful (Adeste Fideles)", "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas", "Must Be Santa", "Silver Bells", "The First Noel", "Christmas Island", "The Christmas Song" and "O Little Town of Bethlehem".

is as it always will be; as it always has been. It promised none of the creative mutability evidenced throughout Dylan's career.

Demonstrating a keen awareness of the artist's nostalgic fondness for his 1950s youth, *Christmas in the Heart* pays homage to a period in time that Dylan readily celebrates: "The Fifties were a simpler time, at least for me and the situation I was in. ... Where I grew up was as far from the cultural centre as you could get. It was way out of the beaten path. ... You know, it was a lot simpler. And when you grow up that way, it stays in you" (Gilmore). Transmitting that same simplicity, the album has the feel of a work that grew organically from this period. Away from the cultural centre as Dylan terms it, tradition may remain undisturbed by external influences. Returning to the source material of the Christmas genre, *Christmas in the Heart* does not toy with the potential of alienating anyone within this broad festive marketplace. Kitsch by its very nature, therefore, Congdon and Blandy outline the measurement by which Dylan sought to approach this album: "Objects identified as kitsch are usually associated with items integrated into the everyday lives of people" (197). Taking no discernible risk in terms of song selection or performance, *Christmas in the Heart* seeks to resemble a product of a bygone age. It is, as Congdon and Blandy identify with regard to kitsch art, something of a fake, a product that not only lends itself to mass reproduction, but is itself only created as a result of the same consumer-driven tendencies that prompted the emergence of popular Christmas music in the first place (198).

Exploring the wider popular precedent Dylan was following in recording this album, Wilentz details: "[Dylan] was about the only major popular American singer or musician of

modern times who had as yet failed to make a Christmas album” (331).⁷³ As his interview with Flanagan outlines, it was a musical tradition Dylan was happy and willing to participate in:

Bill Flanagan: Is recording a Christmas album something you've had on your mind for a while?

Bob Dylan: Yeah, every so often it has crossed my mind. The idea was first brought to me by Walter Yetnikoff, back when he was President of Columbia Records.⁷⁴

It is initially difficult to determine what difference Dylan had in mind for *Christmas in the Heart*. At any point throughout the entirety of his recording career, such an album could have been made without any requirement to change the fifteen songs he selected. Speaking to Flanagan, Dylan does hint at the previous reluctance he had had for such a project, and why he felt comfortable that the 2009 release could presumably make the required, but undetermined, difference: “Well, it just came my way now, at this time. Actually, I don’t think I would have been experienced enough earlier anyway” (“Bill Flanagan”). That Dylan believes one requires a certain level of experience to record such songs is indeed quite curious. After all, such recordings are present within the lives of festive revellers from a very young age. Partaking in the singing of such songs is all part of the celebration, and is true of both the popular classics and the religious carols. With particular consideration of the carols, they were presumably written with the intention that they would be performed within a collective setting; a joint celebration of religious faith, and the birth of Jesus Christ. What this prerequisite for making a

⁷³ As Jon Bream notes; “Christmas releases have been a tradition among major recording stars since the dawn of the record industry. Some of the heroes of Dylan’s youth, like Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers, put out Christmas albums; major rock stars and producers of the 1960s like the Beach Boys and Phil Spector put together Christmas LPs; and the Beatles made annual Christmas discs, even if those were distributed only to fan club members” (206).

⁷⁴ Although Yetnikoff’s presidency of Columbia Records ran from 1975 to 1990, and it is difficult to surmise when exactly the idea had been presented to Dylan, it is clear that the groundwork for a Christmas album had been laid decades before the eventual release of *Christmas in the Heart*.

difference does reveal, perhaps, is the manner in which such songs initially found their way to Dylan.

Despite being raised within the Jewish faith, Dylan's exposure to Christmas music had not been limited:

Bill Flanagan: Your family was Jewish – as a kid did you ever feel left out of the Christmas excitement?

Bob Dylan: No, not at all ("Bill Flanagan").

Considering the minority status of Jewish people in the Minnesotan town of Hibbing where Dylan grew up, Heylin attempts to paint a picture of Dylan's upbringing: "The Jewish community in Hibbing in the late forties and fifties remained a small enclave, a minority in an essentially distrustful Catholic infrastructure" (*Behind the Shades* 9). Given the artist's own testimony regarding his standing as a Jewish child in a largely Catholic environment, Heylin's objective assessment hints at a level of malice that never quite emerges within Dylan's own retelling of his lived experience. Although he does not clarify to what degree his family celebrated the festive season at this time, we can conclude with some certainty that Dylan was exposed to a Catholic understanding of Christmas by proxy of his whereabouts. Although it is doubtful, perhaps, that his family would have gone so far as to participate in the Catholic celebrations, Dylan's noted inquisitiveness regarding music would have inevitably left him aware of the songs' existence. Wilentz outlines the irresistible allure of such songs for Dylan, despite not growing up within the Christian faith:

Some listeners heard *Christmas in the Heart*, with knowing irony, as a parody of 1950s white-bread music, but the album contains not a single ironic or parodic note. It is a sincere, croaky-voiced homage to a particular vintage of popular American Christmas music, as well as testimony to Dylan's abiding faith: hence, its title. . . . But the most salient thing about the album

is how much of it consists of hits written and originally recorded in the 1940s and early 1950s – the years of Dylan’s boyhood, when these songs formed a perennial American December soundscape, even for a Jewish boy (332).

As Erlewine similarly affirms: “The whole album seems to grow out of that love for American song form” (Bream 208). Evidenced throughout Dylan’s career, it is likely that the inspiration behind *Christmas in the Heart* draws most tellingly from what Dylan was hearing on the radio.

Approaching the project with an unshakeable sincerity, the particular manner in which Dylan spoke of *Christmas in the Heart* could lead one to overlook its intrinsically popular nature. Although he may speak quite solemnly of the concept with Flanagan, it remains a plausibly kitsch album. As David Hinckley outlines: “It does hark back to records from a pop era in which we find a certain amount of goofiness. In that sense, you could say there’s a kitsch element” (Bream 210). Having frequently detailed the importance of the radio in his early musical education, Hinckley offers further reasoning as to why Dylan was keen to retain an understanding of the songs as he had found them; “These are songs that everyone knows. While not everything on *Christmas in the Heart* is on the level of Gershwin or Irving Berlin or Cole Porter, nonetheless he has such respect for the carols in particular as songs that he wouldn’t fool with any of them” (208). With the introspection of one who first encountered Christmas songs before later discovering a Christian identity, Dylan is driven by the dual forces that uphold the genre itself; religious faith and an awareness of the commercial marketplace. Blending the two strands of festive music into a seamlessly kitsch whole, *Christmas in the Heart* delivers on this premise up until the moment Bob Dylan starts singing. In his chronologically late years, the sound of his aged and overworked voice recording these songs lends the objective principal a distinctly subjective tone. According to Adorno’s assessment of kitsch music, this was not permissible: “The objectivity of kitsch is the source of its justification” (501). Although he attempts to recapture the timelessness of the idyllic fifties,

Christmas in the Heart demonstrates that the young boy has become an old man. Identifying the late profile of the work in question, it is of initial importance to demonstrate the method by which Dylan created an overwhelmingly kitsch product to begin with. Attention will then turn to *Christmas in the Heart* and its demonstration of kitsch as resistance.

Critiquing the album upon its release, Chris Willman noted: “[*Christmas in the Heart* is] a tribute to the kind of mass-market holiday records that [Dylan’s] own family might have picked up in suburban Minnesota in the ‘50s, as a freebie at the gas station” (in Bream 207). Beginning with the album’s cover art, we are presented with an image of a man and a woman in a horse-drawn sled. Set against a backdrop of trees and a clear blue sky, it appears to have stopped snowing for the time being. Blanketed to protect herself from the cold, the woman sits still and cross-armed while the man, with whip in hand, directs the two horses down a snowy hill. Situated beneath the album’s title on the front cover, *Christmas in the Heart* is printed in a font that only serves to enhance the idea that the overall image bears closer resemblance to a Christmas card than anything else.⁷⁵ Bearing no trace of the artist himself, even the name ‘Bob Dylan’ is printed at the very top of the album’s cover where you may initially overlook it. At first glance, one may have been tempted to liken this scene to that which brings Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome* to its disastrous conclusion. Speeding down a snowy hill, with the reined horses slipping slightly outside of the snow-globed shape centred on the album’s front cover, it would not be terribly unlike Dylan to draw allusions toward Wharton’s crash scene, the fatality of Mattie, and Ethan’s subsequent suffering. Yet, despite the implied speed at which the couple in question are travelling, there is simply no implicit implication of danger.

If not quite a joyful Christmas scene, it certainly possesses a carefree serenity. Although it is not entirely uncommon for Dylan to release an album that fails to carry his own image on

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that certain hard copies of the release came with five Christmas cards for the buyer. Needless to say, the image which adorned these cards was that of the album’s front cover.

the front cover, it is worth noting that on *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*, Dylan's image is a prominent feature of the cover art. Tapping into the broad lineage of folk music, Dylan's presence appeared suitable; he was an important part of this musical tradition. With *Christmas in the Heart*, however, the artist is nowhere to be seen. For an album that will possess little or no trace of artistic originality on Dylan's behalf, that he distances himself from the album's packaging only serves to heighten the awareness of the objective stance from which he is approaching the music therein. Allowing his Christmas album take on the trappings of a kitsch festive work the like of which Willman referenced, *Christmas in the Heart* possesses an undeniably "decorative" quality (Congdon and Blandy 197). An album that seeks to afford primacy to the festivities rather than the artist himself, this intriguing attempt at creating a suitable surface for the work takes on added significance when one considers the music video that accompanied one of the album's most distinct recordings, "Must Be Santa".

Observing Dylan's use of music videos up until this point, "Must Be Santa" affords the performer a prominence that is usually not quite as forthcoming. Periodically singing along with the song as it plays, this in itself was something of a departure for Dylan. Prior to investigating the music video, however, it is important to initially consider the song itself. Standing quite apart from the remaining fourteen songs on *Christmas in the Heart*, Hinckley offers a convincing rationale for Dylan's decision to include this relatively up-beat song: "This isn't a dance album, but I think he wanted to put something in that had more movement in it. Doing that as a polka was a brilliant stroke. It broke up the record in a way that didn't sound silly" (208). First released by Mitch Miller in 1960, "Must be Santa" is one of the lesser-known songs on the album. Furthermore, it is a Christmas song that possesses a direct correlation to the region from which Dylan came:

Bill Flanagan: "Must Be Santa" is a real jumping polka. Did you hear a lot of polka bands growing up?

Bob Dylan: Yeah, I heard a few.

Bill Flanagan: I never heard that song before. Where did you hear it?

Bob Dylan: I first heard that song years ago on one of those *Sing Along with Mitch* records. But this version comes from a band called Brave Combo. Somebody sent their record to us for our radio show. They're a regional band out of Texas that takes regular songs and changes the way you think about them. You oughta hear their version of "Hey Jude" ("Bill Flanagan").

Playing on the party atmosphere of a polka, the accompanying music video embraces the imagined adjoining scene wholesale; what springs to mind when Frank Kermode referenced the "orgiastic midwinter festival" ("Was it a Supernova?"). Filmed in an ornate country manor, Bob Dylan fulfils the role of a merry reveller at a Christmas party. Affording himself greater visibility than was evident on the album's cover art, Dylan's physical appearance gives cause to reconsider this apparent contradiction. Attired in a black jacket with silver lining not all that dissimilar to what Dylan wears during concert performances in recent years, the artist is initially seen wearing a bowler-hat, over a long, straight, silvery wig. Covering one half of his face, Dylan's presentation stood at odds with what many watching had come to expect of him: "Then you realise something's very wrong. Bob is wearing a straight-haired wig. STRAIGHT HAIR. But it's those curls Bob, didn't you know, that are what we've always *really* loved about you. Going straight, that really is the ultimate betrayal" (Burrow). Encountering Dylan without his usual curly hair is something of a departure. Although it had admittedly taken on various extremes throughout his career, the significance of Dylan's hair can be measured in terms of its immediate recognisability.

As the party descends into anarchy, with one reveller being chased around the house by a number of others, Dylan does not lose sight of the task at hand. Dylan dances along with the music, using the same range of minimal moves one experiences during his live concert

performances. Furthermore, he – along with most others present – sings along to the song as it plays. When the troublesome figure chased around the house finally makes his exit out of the window, Dylan, who has since swapped his bowler hat for a Santa hat (the wig remains in place), stands alone with Santa Claus himself. A similarly enigmatic figure, a significant feature of Dylan’s performance within the music video was the manner in which he would freely move about the house. Appearing as if by magic in a variety of rooms, Dylan, like the mythological Santa Claus, does not appear bound by physics. Both there and not there, the artist is something of an ephemeral presence; participating in the revelries as he so desires, but capable of disappearing again at any given moment.

This freedom of movement afforded to Dylan in this music video hints at the absurdity of what we are viewing. Embracing the festivities in a manner one would scarcely expect of Dylan, it poses a defiant contradiction to Heylin’s claims regarding the absence of any humour in this project (*Behind the Shades* 842). Perhaps nothing more than a comical prop, one is nevertheless left questioning why Dylan opted to wear the wig – what was he trying to hide? In truth, it is more suitable to consider what the artist revealed with this gesture. During a 2012 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, the interviewer dwells on how the artist had arrived for their meeting: “Dylan is dressed warmer than the Southern California weather invited, in a buttoned black leather jacket over a thick white T-shirt. He also wears a ski-cap – black around its lower half, white at its dome – pulled down over his ears and low on his forehead. A fringe of mop-top-style reddish-blond hair, clearly a wig, curls slightly out from the front of the cap, above his eyebrows” (Gilmore, “Bob Dylan Unleashed”). Arriving at the conclusion that Dylan opts for a disguised look in the hope of not being recognised, the particular usage of a wig is once more noteworthy. Whereas this public setting provides an understandable rationale for his decision, why was it necessary in a music video? Akin to Dylan’s decision to wear white make-up on his face whilst touring in the mid-1970s, numerous possible theories for Dylan’s

straight, silvery wig can be imagined. What can be discerned, however, is the fact that Dylan chose to situate himself within this festive scene appearing as another. With its polka sound, “Must Be Santa” signified the closest *Christmas in the Heart* came to celebrating the festive season in a regional style distinctly familiar to Dylan’s upbringing. Reimagining such a scene, the idyllic nature of the 1950s, Dylan could not appear as is. As Colin Burrow alluded to, it is Dylan’s hair above all else that acts as his most distinguishable physical trait. Much like its purpose in public settings, donning a wig allows Dylan to embrace the festive scene from his youth undetected; leaving behind any trace of the Bob Dylan that was yet to come.

Directing attention toward the songs themselves, *Christmas in the Heart* demonstrates none of the intransigence one may have expected from the artist in question. Be it with his song choice or the manner in which he recorded them, Hinckley affirms the rarity of this creative decision: “I was probably a little bit surprised that he didn’t go a little further from traditional arrangements and traditional vocal styles” (Bream 207).⁷⁶ Similarly, Heylin outlines what many may have expected Dylan’s Christmas album to look and sound like:

Despite the absurdity underlying the whole idea, he also refrained from injecting some much-needed humour into the exercise, though it had been more than evident in the Christmas 2006 episode of his *Theme Times Radio Hour* show, which featured the likes of the Bellrays’ ‘Poor Old Rudolph,’ Red Simpson’s ‘Truckin’ Trees for Christmas,’ Sonny Boy Williamson’s ‘Santa Claus’ (‘Here’s Sonny Boy with his hands in his baby’s dresser drawer, and you wouldn’t believe what he’s trying to find!’), and best of all, Kay Martin & Her Body Guards’ ‘I Want a Casting Couch for Christmas,’ a song he felt was ‘skat[ing] dangerously close to ... a single entendre’ (842).

⁷⁶ One need only look at the manner in which Dylan performs his own music to appreciate the artist’s general reluctance to do things in the expected fashion. Frequently revising the musical sound and lyrics of his most famous works, as Dylan’s interview with Flanagan reveals, there was something noteworthy in Dylan’s decision to record *Christmas in the Heart* without necessarily imposing his own individual creative touch upon the songs in question.

Heylin's call for Dylan to inject humour into the project misses the point, however. Although it may have made for a more entertaining record, it would not have fulfilled Dylan's understanding of what Christmas music is intended to represent. Overlooked in Heylin's assessment is the fact that Dylan approached the album, and chose a number of the songs, with one eye fixed on the Christian element of the Christmas period; another on the popular alternative. At no point does it appear to Dylan that a Christmas album is necessarily the medium through which artistic risks are to be taken:

Bill Flanagan: The Chicago Tribune felt this record needed more irreverence. Doesn't that miss the point?

Bob Dylan: Well sure it does, that's an irresponsible statement anyway. Isn't there enough irreverence in the world? Who would need more? Especially at Christmas time ("Bill Flanagan").

Given the inclusion of many classics from the popular realm of this genre, *Christmas in the Heart* is an admittedly more secular album than the three records he would produce during his pronounced Christian period (1979-81). However, as Dylan's conversation with Flanagan reveals, the artist had no intention of shying away from the distinctly faith-driven alternative:

Bill Flanagan: You really give a heroic performance of "O' Little Town Of Bethlehem." The way you do it reminds me a little of an Irish rebel song. There's something almost defiant in the way you sing, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." I don't want to put you on the spot, you sure deliver that song like a true believer.

Bob Dylan: Well, I am a true believer ("Bill Flanagan").

Although one scholar likened the shock of *Christmas in the Heart* to that which surrounded the artist's "actual conversion to Christianity thirty years earlier," this assessment is something of a stretch (Bream 206). Overall, however, it does affirm the general sense that Dylan had created

a perfectly bland, easily accessible and hugely relatable work. This justified reading of the album only becomes problematic when consideration is afforded to Dylan's singing of the songs therein.

The manner in which Dylan's *Christmas in the Heart* satisfied the most superficial, stereotypical demands of the genre has been established. Embracing the long-standing conventions of the Christmas album, elements of the artist's own originality were subsumed into the more appealing whole. As Heylin as alluded to, *Christmas in the Heart* was not necessarily what listeners may have expected a Christmas album by Bob Dylan to be. Instead, one is presented with Dylan's impression of what a Christmas album ought to be; or once was over half-a-century earlier. In this regard, when one listens to the artist's performance of the songs in question, they retain a certain degree of the expected objectivity. Having recorded thirteen of the fifteen songs selected for *Christmas in the Heart* throughout his career, Bing Crosby emerges as the key performer in shaping this objective assessment of what Dylan believes Christmas sounds like. Although it was not advertised as such, Crosby is to Dylan's Christmas album what Frank Sinatra would later be to Dylan's *Shadows in the Night*. Speaking in the mid-1980s, Dylan outlined his admiration for Crosby and, importantly, revealed plans to record some of the performer's songs: "Sinatra, Peggy Lee, yeah, I love all these people, but I tell you who I've really been listening to a lot lately – in fact I'm thinking about recording one of his earlier songs – is Bing Crosby. I don't think you can find better phrasing anywhere" (qtd. in Heylin 604). While such a project never manifested itself at the time, this Christmas album acts as an eventual product of the artist's sentiment. The question of phrasing, along with a broader concern for Crosby's singing technique and stylistic choices, would play a crucial role in compromising the festive feel of Dylan's *Christmas in the Heart*.

Bob Dylan's recording of "O' Come All Ye Faithful (Adeste Fideles)" provides an intriguing insight into where *Christmas in the Heart* falls away from the artist's overriding

intention for this album. Repeatedly covered by popular artists, Dylan's decision to include an opening verse in the original Latin went against what prominent artists such as Elvis Presley or Nat King Cole had done before him. On his 1945 album *White Christmas*, however, the devoutly Catholic Bing Crosby chose to include the Latin opening. Tying together both Dylan's childhood experience of Christmas as a Catholic affair and Crosby's performance of the song inspired by his own Catholic upbringing, Dylan's own vocal performance of the song is suitably shaped on Crosby's earlier example. In this regard, Dylan may be read as fulfilling the technical guidelines Crosby demonstrated, replicating what Roland Barthes described as the pheno-text behind a performer's performance:

The *pheno-song* ... covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation: in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissue of cultural values (the matter of acknowledged tastes, of fashions, of critical commentaries), which takes its bearing directly on the ideological alibis of a period ('subjectivity', 'expressivity', 'dramaticism', 'personality' of the artist) (*Image Music Text*, 182).

With this in mind, the surprising importance Dylan afforded to being sufficiently experienced enough to record such songs takes on an added dimension. Bing Crosby was forty-two years old when recording the version of "Adeste Fideles" that would appear on *White Christmas*. Set against a wealth of singing experience, one is struck by the manner in which Dylan's take on the same song seeks to replicate Crosby's recording. Right down to imitating the manner in which a female chorus of singers breaks up Crosby's own performance, much like the silvery wig donned in the "Must Be Santa" music video, Dylan takes refuge in the identity of another to fulfil a suitably festive work.

Accounting for Barthes' understanding of the pheno-text, Dylan's adherence to Crosby's stylistic approach fooled nobody, however. A singular example of Dylan's singing that stretches across the entirety of the album, Heylin was particularly reproachful of Dylan's singing throughout:

One also has to pick songs cut according to one's cloth cords; and in Dylan's case this did not mean 'Hark! the Herald Angels Sing' or 'O Come All Ye Faithful,' both of which he murders mercilessly (in the latter's case, in Latin first, and then in English). Of the four traditional carols sprinkled across the fifteen-song set, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' is the only one that really works, albeit in a this-side-of-mawkishness, *Self Portrait*-like way (841).

However efficiently the experienced Dylan carried out his recordings, Crosby's gold-standard performances ultimately guaranteed an understanding of Christmas that Dylan failed to replicate:

I used to play the opener "Here Comes Santa Claus" as a sadistic goof for unsuspecting company, guaranteeing my spot on the naughty list as I watched their faces turn sour with bewilderment and disappointment. Those unprepared for the straight-faced sincerity of his performance found the execution as savagely unfunny as the imaginary *SNL* writers' room assuredly would. Despite my best efforts, I never could captivate anyone long enough to complete a playthrough of that song, and to this day that album is banned household listening as per my incredibly forgiving wife (Suarez).

Even those like much critic Gary Suarez who virulently disliked what they heard couldn't ignore the "straight-faced sincerity" of Dylan's performance. For all that it was modelled on a Christmas album such as Crosby's *White Christmas*, Dylan's *Christmas in the Heart* became something altogether different; a Christmas tragedy.

For many (if not most) listeners, Dylan's singing voice has always been problematic. That being said, it has scarcely always been the same. Self-introspection and an awareness regarding his own singing voice has long been a feature of Dylan's work:

I walked down there and ended up

In one of them coffee-houses on the block

Got on the stage to sing and play

Man there said, come back some other day

You sound like a hillbilly

We want folksingers here ("Talkin' New York", *Bob Dylan*, 1962).

From this initial ostracization by members of the folk-music community who would shortly thereafter celebrate his songwriting (and his voice), to the release of *Nashville Skyline* seven years later, the immediacy with which one acknowledges the contradiction between Dylan's voice and some of his popular contemporaries disguises the subtlety with which he uses this instrument. Although *Christmas in the Heart* scarcely sounded like Crosby's *White Christmas*, it did demonstrate the technical proficiency of Dylan's singing. Identifying where the impact was ultimately lost requires one to consider not the pheno-text Barthes alludes to, but the geno-text of Dylan's performance.

Locating the illusory 'grain' of a voice in his genotextual reading of a performance, Barthes attempts to define an experience ultimately rooted in the ear and mind of the listener:

The 'grain' of the voice is not – or is not merely – its timbre; the *significance* it opens cannot be better defined, indeed, than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak, must

write – for what is produced at the level of the geno-song is finally writing. ... The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs (185-88).

Broadening the concept of this ‘grain’ for the purposes of a Christmas recording, Dylan’s performance scarcely reflects the desired harmony of a genre that intends to soothe and comfort the listener. Songs that are by their very nature designed for the multitudes to sing, the lone presence of Dylan’s voice on this album is more reminiscent of a drunken reveller singing away in the early hours. An experience many listening to *Christmas in the Heart* could undoubtedly relate to, it nevertheless fails to transmit an idealised sense of the festive season that Dylan was attempting to replicate. However closely he followed Crosby’s example, Bob Dylan is not Bing Crosby.

Whereas an array of other singers may (and repeatedly do) record Christmas albums more closely in keeping with the creative precedent Crosby set in place, the issue that arises with *Christmas in the Heart* is not reflective of a necessary failure on Dylan’s part. Inducting the performer into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Bruce Springsteen highlighted the inescapable vagueness of the ‘grain’ one locates in Dylan’s singing voice:

The first time I heard Bob Dylan, I was in the car with my mother listening to WMCA and on came that snare shot that sounded like somebody’d kicked open the door to your mind: ‘Like a Rolling Stone’. My mother – she was no stiff with rock-‘n’-roll, she liked the music – sat there for a minute, then looked at me and said, ‘That guy can’t sing.’ But I knew she was wrong. I sat there and I didn’t say nothing but I knew that I was listening to the toughest voice that I had ever heard. It was lean and it sounded somehow simultaneously young and adult (qtd. in Thompson and Gutman, 286).

How one reliably identifies the toughness, leanness and ageless nature of a voice relies primarily upon a subjective assessment. Exploring this phenomenon, Barthes outlines the specifications of a genotextual reading:

The *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate ‘from within language and in its very materiality’; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language – not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters – where the melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. It is, in a very simple word but which must be taken seriously, the *diction* of the language (182-83).

It is in this realm of performance that one locates the ‘grain’ of a voice. Within Dylan’s own work, this ‘grain’ is of immense importance. As Springsteen alluded to, Dylan’s voice elevates his songs in a manner that is not easily reconciled or communicated. Undoubtedly thriving upon its uniqueness in comparison to his musical contemporaries, when placed within a genre such as Christmas music, this uniqueness takes on a more restrictive quality. Having attempted to create an album carefully in keeping with the fundamental characteristics of the festive marketplace, it is Dylan’s voice, that indefinable ‘grain’ which leaves listeners dissatisfied. Among those who celebrate Dylan’s creativity and yearn for it to be applied to original works, or casual listeners who stumble upon *Christmas in the Heart*, it is Dylan’s voice that acts as both a reminder of what he could be doing, and a warning of what he has decided to do. An unmistakably late work, *Christmas in the Heart* fulfils the proviso attached to Edward Said’s *On Late Style*; it captures Bob Dylan going ‘against the grain.’

Conclusion

“I see the light come shining / From the West down to the East”

- Bob Dylan, “I Shall Be Released”

Going against the grain means confounding expectations, transforming your audience. Late style is creative intransigence, a refusal to conform to convention except when that in itself is the unconventional thing to do. Contemplating the timeliness of rock and roll, Perry Meisel surmises that it’s “very belatedness ... is what gives it its earliness” (*The Cowboy and the Dandy* 35). Freely traversing this boundary, Bob Dylan, crossing from the West down to the East, “orchestrate[s] an irony” (35).

Written in 1967, “I Shall Be Released” would never find its way onto one of Dylan’s studio albums; closing off The Band’s *Music From the Big Pink* instead. Coming as Dylan moved from the ‘wild, thin mercury sound’ of *Blonde on Blonde* to the “large sign reading *Calm*” that signified *John Wesley Harding*, Clinton Heylin captured the artist’s relentless desire for flexibility: “Prisons of the body and the mind seemed to have preyed on Dylan’s mind” (qtd. in Bream 56; *Revolution in the Air* 425).

It is always true that “Things Have Changed”, and that they will change again. One year earlier, as Dylan and The Band brought a show in Manchester’s Free Trade Hall to its conclusion, the rabid remark of a displeased concert goer had cut through the silence: “Judas!” Alienated, yet unoffended and showing no trace of distress, Dylan, wisely and with critical intelligence responded: “I don’t believe you.” In such circumstances, late style’s disregard for continuity makes a lot of sense; a means of resisting the tyranny of certainty.

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