

The Political Art of Bob Dylan

*Second
enlarged
edition*



Edited by David Boucher and Gary Browning

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Revised and Expanded Second Edition

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Published in the UK by
Imprint Academic, PO Box 200, Exeter EX5 5YX, UK

Published in the USA by
Imprint Academic, Philosophy Documentation Center
PO Box 7147, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7147, USA

Digital edition converted and distributed by
Andrews UK Limited www.andrewsuk.com

Print ISBN - 9781845401207
PDF ISBN - 9781845406530

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library and US Library of Congress

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for permission to reprint Bob Dylan's lyrics: 'Jokerman' © 1983 Special Rider Music. 'Most Likely You Go Your Way (and I'll Go Mine)', © 1966, renewed 1994 Dwarf Music. 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit', © Warner Bros Inc. 1965, renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music. 'Cross the Green Mountain', © 2003 Special Rider Music. 'Hard Times in New York Town', © 1962, 1965 MCA, renewed 1990 MCA. 'It's Alright Ma I'm Only Bleeding' © 1965, Warner Bros Inc., renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music. 'The Times They Are A'-Changin'' © 1963, Warner Bros Inc., © renewed 1991 by Special Rider Music. 'Things have Changed', © 1999 Special Rider Music. 'Shelter From the Storm', © 1974 Ram's Horn Music. 'Senor (Tales of Yankee Power)', © 1978 Special Rider Music. 'Shelter From the Storm', © 1974 Ram's Horn Music. 'Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again', © 1966, renewed 1994 Dwarf Music. 'Sweetheart Like You', © 1983 Special Rider Music. 'Shooting Star', © 1989 Special Rider Music. 'Caribbean Wind', 1985 Special Rider Music. 'Summer Days', © 2001 Special Rider Music. 'Union Sundown', © 1983 Special Rider Music. 'Political World' © 1989 Special Rider Music. 'Train A' Travellin'', © 1968, renewed 1996 Special Rider Music. 'Slow Train', © 1979 Special Rider Music. 'Blind Willie McTell', © 1983 Special Rider Music. 'George Jackson', © 1971 Ram's Horn Music. 'Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' © Warner Bros Inc., © renewed 1992 by Special Rider Music. 'Hurricane', © 1975 Ram's Horn Music. 'Highway 61 Revisited', © 1965 Warner Chappell, renewed 1993 Special Rider Music. 'From a Buick 6', © 1965, renewed

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David Boucher and Gary Browning

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Preface

The inspiration for the original book came from one of the contributors, Lawrence Wilde, who organised a panel at the Political Studies Association at The London School of Economics in April 2000 entitled 'The Chimes of Freedom: The Political Art of Bob Dylan' at which he and the editors gave papers, and in which Andrew Gamble participated. The same panel was given at the conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, Kent University, 2001. The success of the conferences encouraged us to develop the themes of this book further and invite further contributions. The first edition of the book was published in hardback and is now out of print. Since its publication a great deal of material by and about Bob Dylan has appeared, and the introduction and contributions have been revised to reflect this. We have added Elizabeth Brake and Chris Brown to the list of contributors to provide added dimensions to our understanding of Dylan's many and remarkable talents.

The editors would like to thank all those who attended the panels and who made perceptive and invaluable comments and suggestions. David Boucher would like to thank the AHRC (formerly AHRB) for funding research on a larger project, of which this is a part and Lisa Berni and Gemma Broadhurst for their help in preparing the text, printing various versions and for organising the scanning of images. Gary Browning would like to thank his son Conal and his daughter Eleanor for their help and inspiration. We would like to thank Keith Sutherland for his help and encouragement. We are also immensely grateful to Jeff Rosen for granting permission to quote from Dylan's lyrics,

without which this book would be severely impoverished. We are also indebted to Larry Keenan for the cover photograph of Bob Dylan and Robbie Robertson of the Band at Berkeley California, 1965.

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Introduction

The Political Art of Bob Dylan

[E]very now and then there are people ... who do have to create the taste by which they are enjoyed (Ricks, 2008: 2).

On the Album Sleeve of *Freewheelin*, released in 1963, Bob Dylan and Suze Rotolo, his girlfriend, strike an identical pose to that of Dylan and Caitlin Thomas caught on camera in New York on the same street some thirteen years before. It was Bob Dylan's second album, and unlike the first, almost wholly included his own compositions. Among them are some of the anthems of the 'sixties, adopted by the anti-nuclear and civil rights movements: 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Masters of War', 'A Hard Rain's A gonna Fall' and 'Oxford Town'. His astronomical rise to stardom was not only unexpected, it was also unlikely. The Chaplinesque figure, with a precariously perched corduroy hat, faded and worn blue jeans, working man's check shirt and affected Oklahoma accent, mirroring the pose of the near vagrant Woody Guthrie, became the voice of American youth, expressing the words and sentiments that no one else, despite the many competing protest singers, could rival. Although Dylan eventually abjured the responsibility of being a spokesman for his generation, in 1962 he was certainly prepared to take up that mantle. He said, for example: 'There are so many lies that have been told, so many things that are kept back. Kids have a feeling like me, but they ain't

hearing it no place. They're scared to step out. But I ain't scared to do it, man' (Williamson, 2004: 359).

The endurance of the appeal of Bob Dylan over five decades to an audience that spans the generations is testimony to his undeniable talent, but also to the ingenuity of his management and of Dylan himself. The five decades of Dylan's ever changing persona are projected in multiple media in a never ending present in which the many faces of Bob Dylan are simultaneously juxtaposed. The bootleg series that took control of the way Dylan was to be presented in all facets of his career; the first volume of his autobiography which carefully crafts and reinterprets his life; the films such as the re-released 'Don't Look Back' which rescued footage of a completely different Dylan from that portrayed in the original; Martin Scorsese's 'No Direction Home', with Jeff Rosen executive producer, the architect of Dylan's career, and Dylan himself choosing the way that he is to be presented. The early Dylan endures in a perpetual stream of sound and visions. In addition to the bootlegs and numerous biographies, we are assailed with books of memorabilia (Santelli 2005) and of iconic photographs (Fenstein 2008). Add to these Dylan's own acting credits, his art exhibition, not to mention Cate Blanchett's portrayal of him in 'I'm Not There', and his idiosyncratic but engaging radio show, and you have the ineffable enigma that is Bob Dylan. Alongside this virtual Dylan represented in multiple media is the live and 'in person' Dylan and his band on the perpetual never ending tour – a constant reminder that not only is he a living legend, but that the legend lives.

Since Bob Dylan published *Tarantula* in 1966 his autobiography has been anticipated with some trepidation (Dylan, 2004). Would it be as unreadable? Would it lay to rest the misinformation spread about him and by himself. Well, it is certainly readable, and it is in fact beautifully written in a style that flows and rolls with ease. It is not a book of self-analysis, nor self reflection. It is a book of reminiscences and astute observations and characterisations of people and places, and is particularly engaging in conveying the vibrancy of Greenwich Village in the early 1960s. The style

is reminiscent of a detective novel, using the typical tricks of the genre, and of film, in using flash-backs and leaps forward, as he chronicles his way through the early years of fulfilling what he believed to be his destiny. He describes listening to Ricky Nelson while waiting to be called to sing at Café Wha, and then relates how ten years later Nelson was booed off the stage for changing direction. Nelson was a man with whom he could empathise, having gone through the experience many times himself.

Chronicles is not a history. Bob Dylan is born on page 29, and after gliding through various episodes, including signing for John Hammond at Columbia records, he returns to describe his home town of Hibbing Minnesota on page 229. In between there is a sudden leap to 1987 when he is recuperating from a hand injury, and artistically burnt-out. He begins *Chronicles* by describing a meeting with Lou Levy, the music publisher at Leeds Music, just after arriving in Greenwich Village and ends the book by telling how Al Grossman, his manager, gave him \$1000 to buy himself out of the deal shortly after.

His character sketches of the people he knew are precise and incisive, such as of Tiny Tim, later famous for his hit, sang in a falsetto voice accompanied by a ukulele, 'Tip-toe Through the Tulips'. In describing Bob Neuwirth, who became a close friend, Dylan writes, in Raymond Chandler style: 'Right from the start you could tell that Neuwirth had a taste for provocation and that nothing was going to restrict his freedom. He was in a mad revolt against something. You had to brace yourself when you talked to him'. Neuwirth appears in the Dylan Film 'Don't Look Back', and these character traits are evident in his treatment of Joan Baez.

There is a good deal of self justification in the book. Dylan tries to put the record straight on a few mythologies that have surrounded him. He treats in a cursory manner his well known predilection to fabricate stories about his own background. He explains how when confronted with Billy James the publicity man for Columbia Records, he felt intimidated by his Ivy League Harvard presence, telling

him that he was from Illinois, worked on construction in Detroit, had no family, and had rode into New York on a freight train. He doesn't explain why he lied about his past to his friends, nor does he try to analyse how hurt his parents were at being disowned by him. He is quite bitter in remembering how Joan Baez criticised him for abandoning the folk movement. He vehemently denies having been a spokesman for a generation, but this is somewhat disingenuous. He didn't feel comfortable with the responsibility of being hailed as a spokesman, but there is no getting away from the fact that he consciously wrote songs, such as 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Playboys and Playgirls', and 'The Times They are A' Changin'' in order to appeal to the social conscience of his generation. After Kennedy's assassination he felt distinctively vulnerable, and did not himself want to become a target. He has on many occasions denied that he took his name from Dylan Thomas, and once famously said that 'I have done more for Dylan Thomas than he ever did for me'. In *Chronicles* he talks about the process of choosing a stage name. He had thought of calling himself Robert Allyn, changing the e in his own name to a y. At about the same time he read some Dylan Thomas, and imagined that Dylan must have changed his name from Dillon to Dylan. Bobby Dylan, he thought, was too much like Bobby Darin, and anyway there were too many Bobbies making records. He settled on Bob Dylan, because it sounded right, not because he had any particular liking for the poetry. In fact, in an interview that is accessible in Robert Shelton's archives (Music Experience Project, Seattle), Dylan explicitly said that he disliked Dylan Thomas' flowery and affected style.

The book is not an act of self-disclosure, the mask is not taken from the face, and there is very little sense of the emotional life of the author. He says very little about intimate relations, except to express his desire to protect his wife and family from the gaze of publicity, and to complain of the constant invasion of privacy. He also says very little about his relationship with Joan Baez, or St, Joan as she was pejoratively known.

Bob Dylan's *Chronicles* were well worth the wait, and while they do not allow the reader too great an insight into the inner life of the artist, they reveal a considerable deal about his psychology, and how he is still prepared to be economical with the truth on many issues. In fact, he reveals a great deal about his manner of writing when he talks of himself and Bono, of U2. He says that they are very alike in that 'We can strengthen any argument by expanding on something either real or not real' (Dylan, 2004: 175).

Fans who were won over to Bob Dylan by the strength of his lyrics will be disappointed that he talks only of the process of writing songs, but not of their content. He makes no attempt to explain their meaning, nor to analyse their impact. This is not surprising given that when asked about the meaning of his lyrics he always got irritated and dismissed the questions with such curt answers as 'I don't know, man'.

This book takes on the challenge of developing interpretations of Dylan's art and politics in the light of his disruptive changes of identity and his inscrutability. Its chapters take Dylan as offering various forms of critique of the political world from a number of vantage points. It brings together eight authors whose expertise spans the intellectual worlds of literary criticism, popular culture and political philosophy. It demonstrates the immense possibilities of locating Dylan provocatively in different, but related discourses. The authors, as well as having a thorough grasp and enthusiasm for Dylan's work, bring their disciplinary expertise to bear on his lyrics and life in order to reveal and project new and enticing interpretations. The chapters imaginatively invoke some iconic contemporary aesthetic theories in an accessible way to illustrate how Dylan's imaginative artistry reveals compelling perspectives on the political condition. Collectively, the authors cover the whole of Dylan's career, as well as focusing on certain definitive moments in his turbulent and controversial life.

Dylan is widely acknowledged as the great pop-poet of the 1960s, transforming the popular song into a medium for questioning the personal, social and political norms of his

times. Dylan's songs of the 1960s expose the futile grand illusion of the American Dream, painting disturbing and distorting images of a subterranean reality beneath the surface appearances. By the mid-1960s Dylan had created an alternative reality, one that was just as illusory: the certainty of temporal salvation through self-righteous innocence. In breaking the chains of conventionalism he and those like him became imprisoned by their own hedonism born out of a drug culture that unwittingly cultivated dependence in the name of freedom, and liberation of the mind while inadvertently enslaving the body. The Earthly Paradise of New York or Los Angeles was paradoxically more of an illusion than the great American Dream itself. The New Jerusalem was induced hallucinogenically. Far from being about self-knowledge, it was about self-delusion, fantasy and escapism. The children of the revolution, *pace* Marc Bolan, were fooled. Flower power, ostensibly an escape from the city, was nevertheless a form of escapism, the delusion of saving the world by retreating into a dream world.

The epitome of this myth was the legendary Woodstock Festival, the shrine of the 1960s, and immortalised in song by Joni Mitchell, who wasn't in fact there, and in the Summer of Love in San Francisco. Dylan, although living close by Woodstock, refused to participate. He had rejected the protest culture that he so typified and consolidated, and now rejected the sub-culture of which his poetic imagery was emblematic. Dylan derided the young who embraced flower power, believing that they had resorted to escapism in acid (LSD), disillusioned and deluded by cultural and mass overload (Jerome 1975). Recapturing the dream would come, not by exiling oneself from the culture one despised, but by rediscovering traditional roots in communing with nature: the countryside became the Promised Land, and the city, the new Sodom and Gomorrah, or the site of a new biblical Exodus from Egyptian enslavement. In Meisel's terms, the East had turned back upon itself and gone West (Meisel 1999: 8-9). Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* provides an emerging vision of the true path to salvation, self-discovery and understanding, not in dependence upon

a drug culture, but in cultivating the spiritual dimension of the soul through religious redemption. Dylan himself described it as the first album of biblical rock. It was an album that confronted fear, sin and false conceptions of freedom through allegory. Andy Gill, commenting on the album and sleeve photograph, makes the interesting remark that even though Dylan seems to be wearing the same suede jacket that he wore on the cover of *Blonde on Blonde*, 'there was none of that album's air of stifling urban decadence. Instead a rural breeze whispered through its lonely margins' (Gill 1998: 126).

What Dylan offered the public was constantly in transition, and his strongest claim to being a poet is the gradual emergence of an abstract expressionist lyric, first evident on the early albums in such songs as 'Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and 'The Chimes of Freedom'.¹ His musical output between 1965 and 1968 is generally taken to stake his claim to be a poet of merit much more strongly than either the earlier protest material or most of what he wrote after 1968. The poetry of his most creative period is full of social, political and psychological imagery, which explores the submerged and strange sub-cultures barely beneath the surface of a disturbing cityscape, and such images find new expression in more recent songs such as 'Mississippi' and 'Dignity'. The alternative versions of these songs that appear on *Tell Tale Signs*, volume 8 in the bootleg series, are completely different versions with which he experiments testifies to the remarkable talent he had for changing the mood, or point of songs, by different inflections. For example, one can almost weep at the tragedy that dignity is so elusive and rare in modern culture, and in an earlier alternative version one can laugh at the vain search, as in the line 'dignity' was the first to leave.

The protest songs of his early career, although exemplifications of a genre, were not, however, conventional in the 'topical' or 'finger-pointing' mode. Instead, they reveal a

[1] Ricks (2003), however, treats the whole of Dylan's *oeuvre* as poetic and analyses lyrics from throughout Dylan's career with the same scrupulous care.

journey of self-exploration that subsequently took him through the mellow narrative phase of *John Wesley Harding* the Country and Western air of *Nashville Skyline* and *Self-Portrait*, the religious fundamentalism of *Slow Train Coming*, and the return to his blues roots in the early 1990s on *Good as I Been to You* and *World Gone Wrong*. Interspersed in what many fans regard as these relatively low points in his career are the albums that at least temporarily signalled a return to form, such as *Blood on the Tracks*, *Street Legal* and *Desire*. The release in 1997 of his sombre, world-weary, hauntingly eerie *Time Out of Mind* brought him the greatest critical acclaim he had enjoyed in 30 years and earned him a Grammy. The release of *Love and Theft* in 2002 demonstrated the eclectic character of his music more fully than any previous single album, drawing as it does on the American musical heritage that saturated his youth: rock and roll, jazz, blues, bluegrass, country and folk. *Modern Times* (2006) continued Dylan's revival as a cultural icon, as a significant figure in rock music and as a masterful interpreter of a range of American popular music. It was his fastest ever selling album. The release of alternative versions and leftover gems from the period spanning *Oh Mercy* to *Modern Times* on *Tell Tale Signs* (2008) confirmed Dylan's late return to form. His contemporary public pre-eminence has been supported by his emergence as a DJ of flair, knowledge and wit and by the making of interesting and celebrated film biographies: *No Direction Home* by Martin Scorsese and *I'm Not There* by Todd Haynes.

The phases that are associated with the continuously changing Dylan are not, however, easily subject to distinct and discrete periodisation because concurrent with the changes there was continuity, an identity in difference or unity in diversity. The large number of retrospective albums and the official bootlegs, not to mention the unofficial recordings, ensured that at any one moment the multifaceted Bob Dylan is continuously projected. The performing Bob Dylan, with the exception of his fundamentalist religious phase, always relied heavily on his back catalogue. Todd Haynes'

film *I'm Not There* makes the elusiveness of the various Dylans of past and present its central theme.

In what remains of this Introduction we give a brief overview of the arguments of each chapter. The three chapters 'The Drifter's Escape' by Andrew Gamble, 'Bob Dylan's Critique of Judgement: Thinkin' about the Law' by Richard Brown and 'Dylan and (Post)Modern Times' by Gary Browning are linked in that they review Dylan's work as a whole. They see all of his work as casting light on the political world. These chapters recognise Dylan's enduring critique of the political condition, its judgements and values, while they acknowledge and distinguish the changing forms and styles of critique that Dylan adopts. The chapters by Lawrence Wilde and Michael Jones take as their starting points an emblematic moment in Dylan's career, namely the infamous 'Judas' accusation during the concert at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, for many decades wrongly known as the Albert Hall Concert. From the same starting point they move in very different directions. Wilde relates Dylan to Adorno's aesthetic and theory of artistic commitment, whereas Jones sets Dylan in the ideological context of folk music in Britain, contrasting it with its American counterpart. Chris Brown's chapter focuses upon Dylan's performance at Live Aid, where his opening remarks disturbed the overt political theme of the concert. Elizabeth Brake's chapter is concerned with interpreting Dylan's generally overlooked film, *Masked and Anonymous* in the light of his late preoccupation with an older man's concern over how self-realization and freedom fit with personal, cultural and political pasts. David Boucher concludes the volume by looking at different modes of interpretation spanning the whole of Dylan's career, and suggests that asking the appropriate questions of the different types of lyric is crucial to sound appraisal. In this respect he offers us an exercise in meta-interpretation.

Gamble's chapter, 'The Drifter's Escape', opens by reflecting on the title of Dylan's 1990s album of traditional songs, *World Gone Wrong*. He takes the severity of its judgement on the political to be emblematic of Dylan's persisting

standpoint. Politics for Dylan is a world gone wrong. Gamble goes on to reflect upon Dylan's song 'Political World' on the album *Oh Mercy*, where politics is construed as a world of unremitting bleakness. Gamble reviews Dylan's acerbic judgements on the political via a number of interrelated themes. Dylan's sense of the alienation of the political world, its estrangement of the self from its authentic standpoint, is highlighted. This notion of alienation is seen to be ever-present in Dylan's work, though the changing styles and viewpoints of Dylan songs reflect differing senses of alienation. Gamble distinguishes between songs of redemption and songs of survival, with the latter conveying a bleaker assessment of the possibilities of changing or redeeming the political world. Dylan's identification of alienation is seen to go along with his adherence to an American dream of rural simplicity that is set against Old World complexity. Dylan's adherence to a fundamentalist Christianity in the late 1970s is seen to inflect his sense of alienation from the political world with an Augustinian view of the corruption of the fallen ungodly world. The power of Dylan's critique of an alienated world of politics is sharpened by his persisting vision of an impending apocalypse. Dylan's reference to the imminence of destruction through hard rain, flood, storm and earthquake underlies the urgency of his critique of politics. 'All Along the Watchtower' is seen to be the masterly, economical expression of the apocalypse, where the enigmatic lyrics include reference to the Biblical horsemen, who are harbingers of catastrophe.

Gamble observes how Dylan persists in using arresting metaphors of the political condition. He notes how Dylan sees the world as a prison and as a graveyard in songs such as 'George Jackson', 'Hurricane', 'Highway 61 Revisited' and 'Tombstone Blues'. Gamble reads Dylan's songs of the mid-1960s as heightening his satire on the political system, which is seen as absurd and perverse. He notes Dylan's image of an 'Insanity Factory' to convey the lifelessness and absurdity of contemporary America, where capitalism produced a consumerist, militaristic and nationalistic culture that destroys authenticity. Dylan's mid-1960s songs are seen

as exploring the absurdity of the political system via a variety of deliberately discordant means, including allegory, deliberate obscurity and satire. 'It's Alright, Ma, I'm Only Bleeding' and 'Desolation Row' probe deeply into the disoriented world of modern America. In the latter, society is teetering on the abyss and the only refuge from the madness is no refuge at all; it is Desolation Row. As a counterpoint to his critique of the political system, Dylan is recognised to embrace the romantic counter-image of the outlaw or drifter.

Richard Brown's chapter, 'Bob Dylan's Critique of Judgement: Thinkin' about the Law', takes another approach to the theme, which nevertheless resonates with key aspects of Gamble's analysis. He begins by recognising the senses of Dylan's work that are explicitly political, the criticisms of distinct aspects of contemporary American economy and society that are featured in the early songs. Again, Dylan's mid-1960s songs are held to harmonise with a new, youthful, radical counter-culture consensus. Brown observes, though, that what is particularly engaging about Dylan's treatment of politics is the question of the ways in which it may be said to be political. Like Gamble, Brown attends closely to the relatively neglected but provocative late song, 'Political World'. He reads the song as attesting to Dylan's disturbing postmodern sense of extreme post-industrial alienation. He highlights the mediated hollowness of Dylan's image of the political. He remarks that the unreality of the modern political world, for Dylan, is felt rather than discursively comprehended. This feeling of the unreality of the political world points to Dylan's counterposing of the aesthetic to the political. This foregrounding of the contrast between the aesthetic and the political world of ordered judgement serves as a prelude to Brown's complex and engaging review of Dylan's sense of politics via Kant's critique of the faculty of judgement. The way in which judgement itself is experienced by feeling, for Kant, is non-categorisable and is different from the judging of items of experience in terms of categories. Brown takes this contrast between feeling and intellectual judgement according

to rules and categories to apply to Dylan's exploration of politics.

Brown undertakes a considered review of one of Dylan's most celebrated political songs, 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', pausing along the way to consider Marqusee's elaborate contextual reading of the song and Ricks' contrasting non-contextual and concentrated textual analysis. Both of these interpretive strategies highlight the politics of Dylan's critique of the plight of the poor black victim of injustice, Hattie Carroll. Brown, though, attends to the song's abjuring of philosophical judgement and observes its evocation of an authentic feeling of injustice that is not to be measured or categorised. Brown goes on to highlight Dylan's deprecation of the institutions of justice and judgement and his valorisation of non-discursive feeling in his lovesongs and in his songs of social commentary. He relates the many jibes Dylan makes at the expense of judges, and his countervailing appreciation of outlaws, who are manifestly outside the conventional political world of judgements. Brown connects Dylan's radical perspective on politics and ethics to Badiou's notion of a disorienting event that enables a movement away from conventional judgements.

Following from Brown's exploration of the different ways in which the political is expressed in the songs of Dylan, Michael Jones explores the political in what has become one of the most infamous incidents in Dylan's long career. The wounding accusatory charge of 'Judas' directed at Dylan during the legendary Manchester Free Trade Hall concert. The concert is analysed in terms of its impact on Dylan and his audience from both a personal and a political perspective. It is Heideggerian in acknowledging the situatedness of the performer in the particular context of the accusation and the situatedness of the author at the time, and also in looking back on such a defining moment over 40 years later. Jones shows how, even though folk music had left-wing tendencies in both America and Great Britain, the composition of those tendencies was very different, to a large degree represented by the attitudes of Pete Seeger and Ewan MacColl.

There was, of course, much that Seeger in the United States and MacColl in Britain had in common. They had the moral strength of their own convictions, reinforced by a belief that history was on the side of the people in the struggle against the oppressors. They were almost messianic in conjuring up an imagined vision of the future arising out of the imagined past and constructed present. Music was a wonderful medium through which to convey this vision and was inclusive because of the communal or participatory character of the songs. Commercial music constituted a threat to the authenticity of the transformative power of the collective music-making experience. Despite the ideological congruency, Jones argues that features peculiar to the British context help explain why members of a British audience at a Dylan concert would react in the way they did, knowing what they were about to encounter and yet paying good money to register their disgust.

In particular, it was Ewan MacColl who, with his inauthentic name, drew the demarcation lines of what was authentic in British folk music. From the point of view of the Stalinist MacColl the betrayal by collaboration, selling out to commercialism, symbolised by the electric guitar, was indicative of American capitalism and its cultural imperialism, which were threatening to engulf traditional British culture. The most significant tension between MacColl's commitment to a 'folk revival', resurrecting the truly traditional aspects of English and Celtic culture, and Seeger's political campaigns, fought in song, was that much of MacColl's work was largely negative. It was against American music in all its forms, and not just against American popular music. MacColl, and the ideology that he represented, rejected Dylan from the start, whereas for Seeger, Dylan for a while represented the redemptive power of political song. Jones suggests that the reaction against Dylan, and the accusation of betrayal, were ill judged and held the American responsible for views of which he could not be expected to be the custodian.

The author reflects in a personal way on how Robert Zimmerman, the man behind the many masks, was in fact

unmasked, wounded and disarmed by the shout of Judas, and how he betrayed not his audience, but an uncharacteristic weakness, underlying the cool persona he had until then so successfully projected. This realisation forces Jones to confront the limitations of his personal 'consumption' of Dylan. Dylan had constructed himself first as a 'folk-singer' and then as a temporary 'rock star'. Viewed from the vantage point of an overview of Dylan's entire career it becomes apparent that his use of metamorphosis is key to understanding what has remained stable in all his incarnations – the expressive and 'analytical' power he has continued to draw from 'traditional' music in his desire and determination to explore the 'human condition'.

Lawrence Wilde begins his essay by taking the same incident that Michael Jones analyses. By using the theoretical work of Adorno, Wilde wants to show that in going electric Dylan had not become another Rock-a-Day Johnny, but instead had transformed the political protest medium into a higher level of expression. Adorno and Dylan are an unlikely combination, given that the former viewed popular music with disdain. Despite this, Wilde contends that Adorno's writings on commitment in art serve as a conceptual tool for appraising the revolutionary artistic power of Dylan's disturbing imagery exposing the underlying corrosive pillars of modern society, greed, hypocrisy and corruption. Principally, but not exclusively, the songs are to be found on *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*. The songs in this genre conform with Adorno's severe criteria for an autonomous aesthetics of protest, and so constitute an art of resistance that aggressively resists assimilation into the social forces that it confronts and condemns. For Adorno the German Expressionist Movement of the early twentieth century epitomised revolutionary art. Wilde contends that Dylan's work of this period resurrects Expressionism in a novel and popular form.

The work of this period renounces traditional narrative form and abjures the conventions of popular song. They are a fusion of the poetic technique of modernism and a relentless social critique. They conjure up an alternative and sub-

versive ethical community, comprising a challenge to prevailing moralities. Wilde is not suggesting that the early German Expressionists had a direct influence on Dylan, merely that there are strong affinities in the manner in which content and structure are constructed to provoke the receiver emotionally to confront the dominant values. Wilde contends that Dylan outgrew the folk music idiom because it ceased to be an adequate vehicle for the new form and content of his songs. The controversy surrounding the acoustic versus electric debate disguised the transformation of his songwriting, which ultimately was of greater artistic significance. Of the songs that provide the focus for Wilde, only 'Ballad of a Thin Man' has electric backing. The songs are the product of a brief transition in his career, although their artistic strength is enduring.

Developing the theme, Wilde goes on to address Adorno's theory of commitment in art with a view to discerning the manner in which Dylan rejects the 'official' politics of the day, enabling the American to develop a more sophisticated songwriting style characterised by a more forceful radical rejection of late capitalist social structures and values. Following from this, Wilde examines the development of social expressionist songs in terms of form and content, from 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' to 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)', and illustrates the point that the most extreme and hard-hitting social expressionist songs in Dylan's catalogue are 'Ballad of a Thin Man' and 'Desolation Row'. By way of conclusion Wilde establishes the distinctiveness of this brief period in Dylan's career, maintaining that he created a revolutionary aesthetic of powerful dramatic proportions that was radical in scope and displayed lyrical panache. The songs are a searing denunciation of surrendering to the allure of money and power, and of the conservative reverence for order and the fear of freedom. These songs have enduring significance in a world that continues to be profane.

Chris Brown focuses on yet another controversy in which Dylan became embroiled. Dylan's plea at Live Aid in the States to divert a proportion of the money to help American

farmers and save some of their farms from being repossessed was severely castigated by Bob Geldorf for being stupid crass and nationalistic. Losing one's livelihood pales into insignificance when compared with losing one's life. Brown challenges this characterisation. While acknowledging that in a certain respect Dylan's comments were nationalistic, he contests the claim that they were crass and stupid. Dylan's comments reflect and illuminate important debates in contemporary (international) political theory. Brown takes Dylan to be saying not that charity should be bounded by a national moral community, and that we have no obligations beyond those boundaries, but instead that a charity that does not begin at home ought not to be taken seriously. Nothing in Dylan's plea intimates or implies that we need not concern ourselves with the interests and needs of 'distant strangers'. Brown contends that what Dylan implies is that our concern for distant strangers should not supersede or trump our concerns for those of our compatriots closer to home. Our obligations to those closer to home are stronger than those towards strangers and to juxtapose the loss of livelihood with the loss of life raises much more complicated issues than Geldorf acknowledges.

Following Brown's discussion of the issues raised by Dylan's impetus in establishing Farm Aid, Gary Browning broadens the perspective by reviewing Dylan's corpus as a whole. He takes as his starting point Dylan's recent album *Modern Times*. His chapter, 'Dylan and (Post) Modern Times' discerns a postmodern emphasis upon ambiguity, elusiveness and the complexities of identity in Dylan's work and notes parallels between Dylan's career and art, and the disconcerting postmodernism of the philosopher, Lyotard.

The sceptical perspectivalism of postmodernism brings into focus Dylan's extraordinary career, his complex simultaneous engagement with a variety of objects; the burdens of celebrity, the distortions of the media, the opacity of personal relationships and the alienating world of politics. Moreover, the greatness of Dylan's lyrics and his singing weave together postmodern themes in ambiguous perfor-

mances that attest to aesthetic insight while renouncing intellectual, discursive explanations. The focus on the changing styles and standpoints of Dylan's career as a singer and songwriter and his self-conscious engagement with the burdens of his own celebrity are taken to be central to an understanding of Dylan and to Dylan's political and personal concerns. His firsthand appreciation of the idiot wind orchestrated by the media infecting personal relationships and of the cost of the struggle to be innovative and expressive testify to what is at stake in resisting the power of the political world. Dylan, like Lyotard, is seen to question the nature of the political, and in critiquing aspects of its impact, is recognised as seeing the struggle to achieve authentic self-expression as taking place against the backdrop of a diverting and constraining political world. The postmodern aspects of Dylan's politics, though, should not be taken as a label that excludes other readings. Lyotard, the arch-postmodernist did not take postmodernism to exclude preceding perspectives and indeed drew significantly upon Adorno so that Browning's postmodern reading of Dylan is not opposed to Wilde's recognition of Adornian themes in Dylan's expressionist songs of the mid 1960s.

Brake's chapter, "You can always come back, but you can't come back all the way" Fate and Freedom in Dylan's Recent Work', discusses how Dylan considers freedom in his most recent work. She builds upon a previous reading of Dylan as moving beyond a concept of negative freedom. In this piece she reflects upon how Dylan in his latest work reconsiders freedom from the standpoint of someone who has experienced much and who now has to confront the identities he has himself expressed. She is surely right to recognise the maturity of Dylan's recent songs, their power in expressing an older man's reflections on identity and freedom. She sees Dylan's late songs to be about connecting with the past and the senses of recovery with which engagement with them might achieve. She observes how Dylan also revisits the American past, relishing and drawing upon its musical and lyrical styles and achievements but also looking at its failures and omissions. But Brake does not