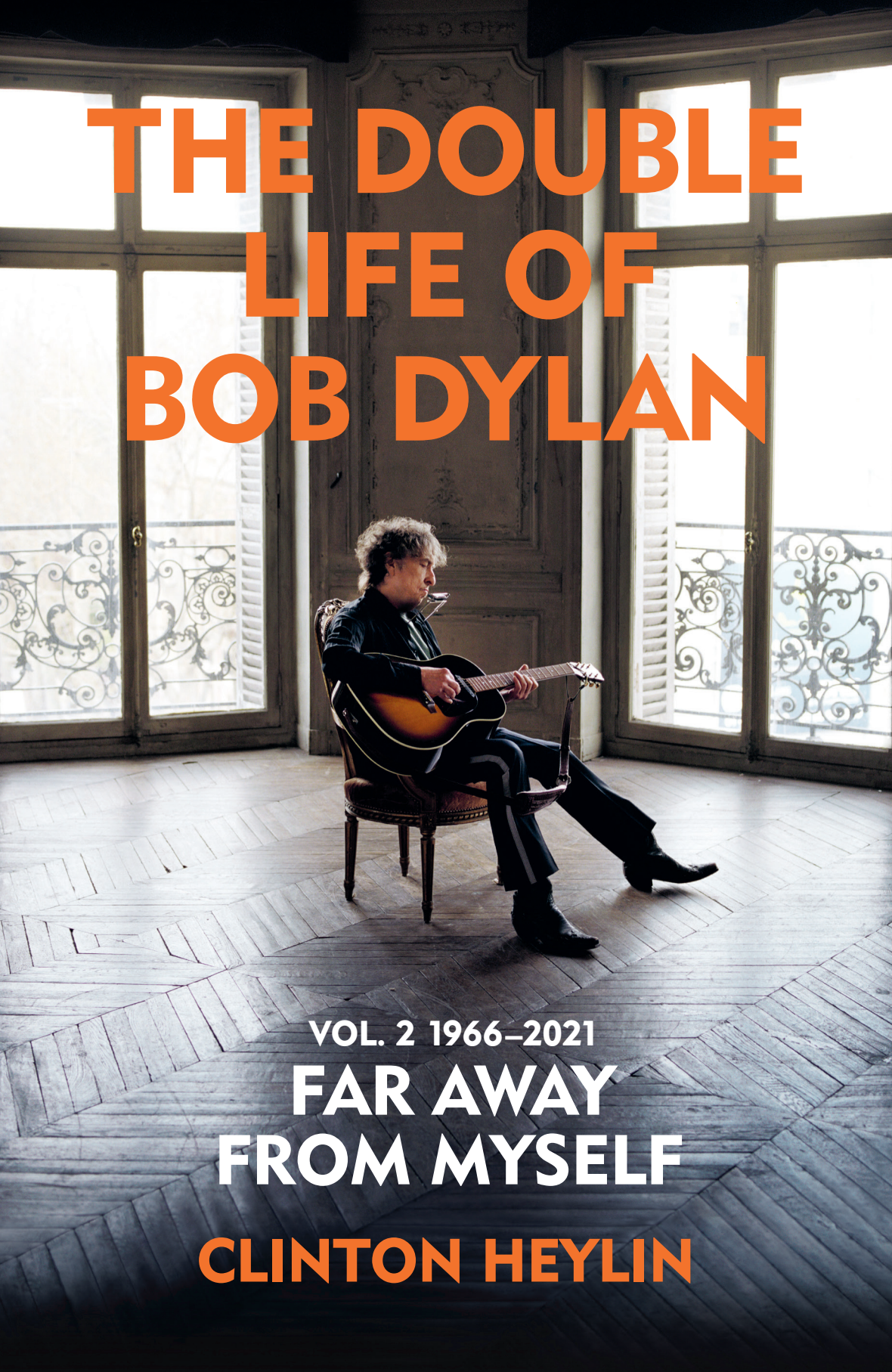
THE DOUBLE LIFE OF BOB DYLAN



VOL. 2 1966–2021

FAR AWAY FROM MYSELF

CLINTON HEYLIN

The Double Life of Bob Dylan

ALSO BY CLINTON HEYLIN

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The Double Life of Bob Dylan

Volume 2: 1966–2021
Far Away from Myself

CLINTON HEYLIN

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Dedicated to Dr. Peter Heylyn (1599–1662),
who was 'Unfriended' by Thomas Fuller in 1659
for 'Telling It Right Like It Is'.

Contents

Three Distinctly Different Amnesiacs

(a.k.a. I Forgot To Remember To Forget)

> Of course, all life is a process of breaking down, but . . . the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come, from outside – the ones you remember and blame things on – . . . don't show their effect all at once. There is another sort of blow that comes from within – that you don't feel until it's too late to do anything about it, until you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again. The first sort of breakage seems to happen quick – the second kind happens almost without your knowing it.
>
> F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'The Crack-Up', *Esquire*, 1936.

> Most of the time I do feel like I'm an amnesiac. It's good for me to feel that way, so I can block out the past.
>
> Bob Dylan, to Pete Oppel, October 1978.

*

The first 'crack-up' – or as Dylan called it, 'the amnesia' – came late. Historians and fans alike look for epiphanies; a proclivity the late, great cartoonist Ray Lowry sedulously satirised when he drew his 1974 cartoon of Dylan sailing over the handlebars on July 29th, 1966, as a light bulb came on, 'Country Rock!' Actually, as Dylan himself explained to Jonathan Cott in September 1978, his own post-accident crack-up belatedly snuck up on him without him knowing, 'One day [in Woodstock] *I was half-stepping, and the lights went out*. And since that point, I more or less had amnesia.'

How did I become Another in that moment? This was a question with which Dylan would wrestle all through what he appositely called

'the amnesia', even mocking himself in the opening line of 1971's 'Watching The River Flow', 'What's the matter with me, I don't have much to say.' Only when the amnesia subsided in early 1974, did he find the words of a poet to encapsulate what he had been through in a single couplet, written in blood:

> Till he started into dealing with slaves,
> And something inside of him died.

By the time he wrote those lines, in the spring of 1974, one must assume he'd read, or cast a glance at the letters Arthur Rimbaud wrote from Abyssinia in the years when he was allegedly 'dealing with slaves'. These mundane documents have not a whiff of the 16-year-old thief of fire who wrote to Paul Demeny in May 1871 expounding his own unique variant on the Blakean creed that the road of excess inexorably led to the palace of wisdom. When the shattered symbolist crossed the Mediterranean, 'something inside of him' really had 'died'.

So, how did Dylan come out the other side, and other contemporaries did not? It's not like he was alone in an era when self-discovery and prodigious drug use went hand in hand. Indeed, the motorcycle accident – *that* fabled motorcycle accident – comes at almost the exact mid-point between two of the more spectacular crack-ups on the Sixties pop scene, both in sleepy London town. One, in May 1965 claimed Brit-rocker Vince Taylor – and almost claimed Dylan himself. The other came in August 1967 and turned Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett from being a one-man epicentre of the psychedelic scene into a laughing madcap, first; a vegetable man, second. Both were the result of a conscious disordering of the senses (*'dérèglement de tous les sens'*) brought on by the hallucinogens a Hollywood-based Huxley once unwisely suggested opened the doors of perception.*

If Taylor had just been at the wrong place, Dylan's Savoy suite – at the wrong time, an impromptu party – to be 'dosed' by person or persons unknown, Barrett was a confirmed pot smoker by the time this self-confessed Dylan nut's life was changed by the May 1964 Festival Hall show, the night the American debuted 'Mr Tambourine Man', a

* Actually, he didn't say anything of the sort, but he might as well have, such was the book's influence.

song widely taken to be a drug song, but actually a homage to the Rimbaudian seer.

Syd then called his first significant composition 'Bob Dylan Blues'. Composing it shortly after that Festival Hall show, it had one couplet which hinted at the later scatter-brained Barrett, 'My clothes and my hair's in a mess/ But you know, I just couldn't care less.' After August 1967, he really 'couldn't care less', and Rock music had lost the one pop poet who could have become Britain's Bob Dylan. Neither Taylor nor Barrett would ever quite be the same again. Both eventually subsided into silence, the call of their muse put on permanent hold, to be joined there by other Sixties casualties like The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson, Fleetwood Mac's Peter Green, Atomic Rooster's Vincent Crane and Nick Drake.*

It would take a sixty-something Dylan to encapsulate the curse that consumed the above gifted souls in verse: 'You can always come back/ But you can't come back all the way.' Yet for Dylan, that first crack-up had come only *after* the most creative eighteen months of his career – not the eighteen months before his accident, the eighteen months after it.

By then, he knew he had been one of the lucky ones, even after something similar happened a second time. That second 'amnesia' would come after he decided to retire from the road and regroup, in 1981, after pushing his voice to the limit to get his message across, and still losing half his audience. Finally, he was forced to conclude, 'They don't want me around/ because I believe in You.' How ironic that many former followers had already decided it was his conversion to Christianity that represented his second crack-up, not its post-fundamentalist aftermath.

Again, the actual amnesia – a combination of writer's block and a fear of performing – took a while to appear, and longer still to abate. In the immediate aftermath of his second retirement from the road – one that save for a brief tour of Europe lasted four and a half years – he came up with *Infidels*, which should have been his best album since *Blood on the Tracks*. (He certainly had the songs to make it so.) And even after the 1984 European tour, which at times resembled a man going through the motions, he still found the inspiration to (co-)write one of

* I refer interested readers to my book on the subject, *All The Madmen: A Journey To The Dark Side of British Rock* (Constable-Robinson, 2012).

his most epic creations, 'New Danville Girl', before the fog descended for a second time.

For the next three years, the songs refused to come – Dylan often resorting to recording instrumentals and songs with dummy lyrics, hoping inspiration would later dawn – while most of the shows he gave with Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers and The Grateful Dead smacked of a man caught in the spotlight, showing all the signs of stage fright and/or a few draughts 'of vintage' too many.*

For the second – and last – time, he would use the word 'amnesia' to describe what had happened, telling the trusted Robert Hilburn in December 1997, 'I was going on my name for a long time . . . I had sort of fallen into an *amnesia* spell . . . I didn't feel I knew who I was on stage.' Not just onstage. Witchy women were giving him trouble, nothing but trouble, throughout most of the Eighties (see chapter 5.3). He was as emotionally adrift as he was creatively shot.

Thankfully, having escaped the asylum of amnesiacs before, he did so again, rediscovering his muse in time to make *Oh Mercy* (1989), *under the red sky* (1990) and *Time Out of Mind* (1997) – the first and third of which were widely acclaimed, while the second has gone unjustly underappreciated – before the clouds rolled in again.

Or did they? When Dylan took a business card he'd been given some time in 1999 and jotted on its back a single line, 'I'm trying to get as far away from myself as I can,'† was this an amnesiac fearing a third amnesia, or was this a man self-consciously looking to separate his twinned Selves, Artist and Man? Had a man who for decades referred to 'Bob Dylan' in the third person finally decided to make the separation as real as could be; the same man who at the height of the second amnesia in June 1987 once almost signed a note to his eldest son, 'Bob Dylan' and only just remembered in time, scratching it out, and writing, 'Dad'?

Almost immediately after writing that line, he took a leaf from Michael Douglas's professor in *Wonder Boys*, dumping everything from

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* The video feed of the opening Dylan-Dead show in Foxborough on July 4th, 1987 provides all the proof required.

† Appropriately, the line would trigger a song about a man suffering a seven-year long writer's block. 'Things Have Changed', the theme song to Curtis Hanson's magnificent movie of Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys*, would win Dylan an Oscar, a rare instance of the Academy recognising genius in its midst.

the memoir he had been working on for the past eighteen months in the river and starting again, explicating a new credo. It would no longer be the work of a man who lived outside the law. It would be 'A Liar's Autobiography', a work that laughed behind its authorial hand at those who couldn't tell truth from fiction, lies from fact.

But it wasn't just his book – still filed under non-fiction, down the shelf from Patti Smith's *Just Kids* – which took liberties with every turn of the page. Dylan's songs no longer addressed the life he once led. Instead, they now interweaved a mosaic of intercultural references with imaginary lives, convincing would-be Dylan scholars to become Sherlocks, as they followed the trail of clues without ever asking themselves, Is this man still doing pretty good stuff?

And still the ex-Pop idol turned Pied Piper played the tune in his forgetful heart – through albums imperceptibly different in technique, style, reference-points or aesthetic, yet each invariably greeted as the twenty-second coming – until fifty years on from the night he went half-stepping, he told a Martin Scorsese interviewing him for the *Rolling Thunder Revue* film, 'I don't remember a damn thing!' Though he seemed to think his audience might believe him, it was the one line at the NFT premiere in 2019 in London where the whole audience burst out laughing.

By then, Dylan had been a third-term amnesiac by sheer force of will for nigh on two decades. But perhaps what he'd really done was carefully create the persona of an amnesiac from the bits he remembered when he had been a *genuine* amnesiac. Like the Ronald Colman character in *Random Harvest* (1942) – who only became a writer *after* he lost his memory, and stopped being one when he got it back (a neat reversal) – Dylan gained the world's confidence only when he knew he was stringing it along.

Unlike Colman, he has not been saved by the love of a good woman. No Greer Garson, as far as we know, has led a life of sacrifice, waiting for him to come back at least some of the way. Even 'his' Sara, who endured the entire first crack-up for the love of her man, has long passed out of his life. No wonder he reached the point where he was 'sick of love', and in his sixth decade on earth decided to write of it no more.

The work that has followed this third epiphany has been of a different hue; indeed, has come from an entirely 'different point of view'.

Mortality has trumped the power of Women. It rather smacks of that hard left turn just before the last hairpin curve. But is this work as worthy as what came before? Can it still divide the word of truth? Or is it 'just the price you pay for the chains you refuse'? Let's wait and see. We've got a long way to go, the shadows are lengthening, and the sign on the window says, 'Lost time is not found again.'

Read on, rave on, rock on,

Clinton Heylin, April 2022.

Prelude

July 29th, 1966: Bound Upon The Wheel

At that time I deserved to crash, 'cause I certainly couldn't have gone on.
Bob Dylan, to Matt Damsker, 15th September 1978.

New York, Tuesday [9/8/66] – Bob Dylan is reported to have broken several neck vertebrae and suffered concussion as a result of his motorcycle accident last week. The accident occurred near the home of his manager, Al Grossman, at Woodstock, New York. Dylan was riding the machine to a garage for repairs when the rear wheel locked and threw the motorcycle out of control. He was tossed over the handlebars . . . His doctors say he must recuperate for at least two months . . . There is a veil of secrecy over where Dylan is . . . In fact, news of the accident itself took three days to leak out to the press.
Ren Grevatt, *Melody Maker* 13th August 1966.

⋆

Grevatt, the man who had previously 'broken' the story of Dylan's marriage to Sara back in December was at it again, and seemed to have the scoop on *Time* magazine, who merely reported that Dylan had 'severe face and back cuts'. Three days after he filed his report, Dylan's editor at Macmillan, Bob Markel, was telling his staff a different tale:

'I must advise you that the publication date for Dylan's book TARANTULA must [now] be considered 'indefinite'. As you know, Dylan has been spending every bit of his time in past weeks holed up at his manager's place in the country revising his galleys. He was not satisfied with the book the way it stood in galleys. As he told me, 'I want this to be a

> real book, not just something that people will buy because it's got my name on it.' On Friday, July 29th, Dylan hopped on his motorcycle for a short ride to town. The front wheel locked on him, there was a crash and the result was a concussion and a fractured vertebra of the neck. I have been told that the first thing he said to his manager when they brought him to the hospital was: 'Holy [shit]! What the hell am I gonna tell Bob Markel and the MacMillan Company?'

Spinning one version to the press and another to Dylan's own would-be publisher, the singer, Grossman and whoever else cooked up this motorcycle nitemare couldn't even stick to a version of events consistent in every detail. Was it the front or back wheel that locked? Was he taken to hospital, or wasn't he? Did he 'fracture' a single vertebra or break 'several neck vertebrae'?

If these two contemporary accounts have more holes than Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Sally Grossman eventually confirmed a growing suspicion that this was a story planted in the press, much like his March 1965 *Village Voice* 'press conference' and March 1966 *Playboy* 'interview'. She recalled him leaving 'her house in Bearsville that morning [and] . . . returning a few minutes later,' under his own steam.

Yet, within a matter of weeks, he had convinced TV executives, publishers and record company lawyers alike that he was laid up, and laying low. Even after he had time to formulate a set narrative, Dylan would take journalists for a ride, telling the first pressman to track and chase him down, Michael Iachetta, the following May that 'the back wheel locked . . . I lost control, swerving from left to right. Next thing I know I was in some place I never heard of – Middletown, I think – with my face cut up . . . and my neck busted up pretty good . . . New X-rays should be comin' through any day now.'

Despite his best efforts, though, an alternative narrative soon started to form, one that questioned the severity (and even the veracity) of the accident. At the Isle of Wight press conference in August 1969 one impertinent scribe even asked him to 'tell us *exactly* what happened when you suffered an accident a while ago'. Dylan visibly blanched and turned to festival MC Rikki Farr, with whom he had a pre-agreed signal to bring proceedings to a close if things got too personal, only to find he wasn't there and he'd have to come up with a response. The reply he managed was as monosyllabic as most of that afternoon's answers,

'It's true I suffered a broken neck. It's awful hard to explain. I have to take it easy sometimes.'

The question still would not go away. Craig McGregor asked him straight out on his next tour of Australia, 'Did you have a motorbike accident at all?' When Dylan replied in the affirmative, McGregor raised the ante, 'It wasn't just a cover-up?' almost prompting a man always on the run from the truth to be honest: 'It wasn't that the crash was so bad. I couldn't handle the fall. I was just too spaced out. So, it took me a while to get my senses back . . . It was almost as if I had *amnesia*. I just couldn't connect for a long, long time.'

By 1986, when it was playwright-actor Sam Shepard asking Dylan *if* he 'had a crash', such was the mythology swirling around the motorcycle accident that Dylan knew anything he said would merely compound the myth-making. Not that he wasn't happy to oblige. His reply reads like a lost section from their contemporary co-composition, 'Brownsville Girl', further proof that the 'liar's autobiography' approach to his personal history was no latter-day whim:

> [It happened] way back. Triumph 500 . . . It was real early in the morning on top of a hill near Woodstock. I can't even remember exactly how it happened. I was blinded by the sun for a second. This big orange sun was comin' up. I was driving right straight into the sun, and I looked up into it even though I remember someone telling me a long time ago when I was a kid never to look straight at the sun 'cause you'll get blinded. I forget who told me that . . . and, sure enough, I went blind for a second and I kind of panicked or something. I stomped down on the brake and the rear wheel locked up on me and I went flyin' . . . [My wife] was followin' me in a car. She picked me up. Spent a week in the hospital, then they moved me to this doctor's house in town. In his attic. Had a bed up there in the attic with a window lookin' out. Sara stayed there with me. I just remember how bad I wanted to see my kids [sic]. I started thinkin' about . . . how short life is. I'd just lay there listenin' to birds chirping.

The doctor in question, Dr Thaler, later recalled, 'Sara did not take Bob to the hospital. She drove Bob directly from the Grossman property to [my] house-cum-surgery in Middletown' – which was fully fifteen miles away. Given that Thaler was not remotely qualified to deal

with the kind of injuries sustained in a serious motorcycle accident, this does rather suggest that Dylan's immediate injuries – if any – were minor, but that he had been in bad shape before the spill. It was this which was most in need of treatment. Dylan's relocation to Thaler's home also meant no-one could track him down to corroborate the press release. According to the doctor's wife, Selma, it was Dylan's idea, 'He didn't want to go to the hospital. So, we said, "You can stay here." '

I think we can be fairly certain he did not spend a week – or any time at all – in hospital. It seems equally unlikely that Sara, who was nursing their six-month-old son, Jesse, stayed at Dr Thaler's with Dylan. Indeed, a single verse to an unfinished lyric called 'Key To The Alley', which seems to date from the immediate post-accident period, contains a reference to 'sitting in my lonely room/ waiting for you to come.' For now, he was seeing no-one, and talking to no-one. Not even Bob Markel. The shutters had come down, internally and externally.

Part 3

Why Must I Always Be The Thief?

Turn on, tune in, drop out.

Timothy Leary, 1966.

There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act.

Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, 1970.

You sat behind a million pair of eyes and told them how they saw / Then we lost your train of thought, your paintings are all your own.

David Bowie, 'Song For Bob Dylan', 1971.

Do you hear the voices in the night, Bobby? They're crying for you.

Joan Baez, 'To Bobby', 1971.

I can't be the saint people dream of now. People want a . . . saint with a cowboy mouth. Somebody to get off on when they can't get off on themselves . . . [That's] what Bob Dylan seemed to be for a while. A sort of god in our image.

Patti Smith, *Cowboy Mouth*, 1971.

People shouldn't look to me for answers. I don't know what's going down on the campuses, what's in their heads. I have no contact with them, and I'm sorry they think I can give them answers. Because I can't.

Bob Dylan, to Anthony Scaduto, January 1971.

3.1

July 1966 to May 1967: There Must Be Some Way Out Of Here

[Any] kid [of mine] wouldn't open his eyes . . . until [he was] five or six years old. I wouldn't imagine I'd even be around by that time.

Bob Dylan, to Nat Hentoff, October 1965.

I don't know if Dylan can get on the stage a year from now. I don't think so. I mean, the phenomenon of Dylan will be so much that it will be dangerous.

Phil Ochs, October 1965.

I came to believe . . . that Dylan was sacrificing himself in his whole philosophy, his thinking. That he would eventually die or that something horrible would happen to him . . . Other people felt it [too].

Rosemary Gerrette, Australian actress.

I was never confident when I was riding on the backseat of his motorcycle . . . I remember one time he almost got creamed . . . We were waiting anxiously at a train stop, gunning our motorcycles. The train goes by, he guns it – only he didn't see the train coming in the opposite direction. He almost slipped down under the wheels.

John Bucklen, childhood friend.

I got a motorcycle . . . but unlike the last ones I had on south dakota an minnesota roads, this one's for the fields. so . . . I'm not really goin all that fast. you cant go too fast in the fields you know.

Letter from Bob Dylan to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, February 1964.

Each of Dylan's concerts this past year had had a way of arousing the same feeling. There was no sensation of his having performed somewhere the previous night or of a schedule that would take him away once the inevitable post-concert party was over. There was, instead, the familiar comparison with James Dean, at times explicit, at times unspoken, an impulsive awareness of his physical perishability. Catch him now, was the idea. Next week he might be mangled on a motorcycle . . .

Richard Fariña, 1964.

'You look very near death.'

Remembering. 'He passed me last night. On Academe Avenue . . . Kind of a bald cat, looked like a teenager, though.'

'You should have asked him in for a nightcap, save him the trouble of looking you up in a year or two.'

Richard Fariña, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* (1966).

I could feel the steady thrust of death that had been constantly looking over its shoulder at me.

Bob Dylan, to Sam Shepard, August 1986.

⋆

The premonitions of death and disfigurement had been coming thick and fast in the first six months of 1966 as Dylan bound himself to the spinning wheel of fortune, wondering how to get off. What we don't know is when exactly he found out that his literary rival and former friend, Richard Fariña, had died in a motorcycle accident on wife Mimi's 21st birthday, April 30th; riding pillion without a helmet, after a well-attended launch party for his debut novel, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me*.

Unbeknownst to Dylan, the Fariñas' last recording had been a new song of Richard's called 'Morgan The Pirate', the subject of which was unmistakeable, as was the bitterness: 'I appreciate your velvet helping hand, even though you never gave it/ I am sure you had to save it, for the gestures of the friends you understand.' The song would not be released until 1968, by which point Dylan himself may have come to recognize the validity of Fariña's acerbic portrait if something he

wrote in the summer of 1966 – part of an attempt to rework *Tarantula* perhaps – was autobiographical:

> famous most well respected artest (that whom is redeemed); [']the legendary public harmless' when once was great & suffered to conceive & starved & birth is unknown but public accepts him as kind madman as he is but still now [his] mysti[q]ue & that which radiates his name has been rewarded; he is blessed with many sex & success; the sacred rubies of his country at his feet; he is all fortune & quite [d]erive[d] . . . his name of basterd.

In David Hajdu's dual biography of the two writers, he suggests it took two decades for Dylan and Mimi to speak again, and that all Dylan offered at that point concerning Richard's death, was, 'Hey, that was a drag about Dick. It happened right around my thing, you know. Made me think.' In fact, not only did Dylan spend time with Mimi on the 1974 tour, she also attended a personal preview of the *Blood on the Tracks* material at Pete Rowan's house, the following summer. She had already written to Dylan, in 1968, offering him the lead role of Gnossos in the (never-to-be-made) movie of Richard's novel, a letter she signs off with a surprisingly heartfelt, 'I still do and always have loved you very much.' Clearly, whatever hard feelings he'd left behind had not sundered that particular bond.*

As for Dylan's claim that Richard's death 'made me think', the evidence is against him. A few days before Fariña went flying from a motorcycle, another beatnik buddy of Bob's, gentle giant Geno Foreman, had been knocked from his motorcycle in Rome by a misdirected football, doing enough damage to his back for him to consult a doctor in London, setting in motion a series of events that would see him graveyard-bound just six months later.

Dylan would hear Foreman's tale of woe first-hand, on touching down in Stockholm in late April. The fact that Foreman found himself there at all was entirely down to Dylan, who had summoned him to the Swedish capital to help him with his tour film, even sending him a

* In the recently published transcripts of Anthony Scaduto's interviews for his 1971 biography, Joan Baez says, 'He always loved Mimi. She always loved him, but she always picked on him, and she had the knack.'

thousand dollars advance and an airline ticket. Foreman, the son of civil rights activist Clark and a close friend of Baez, had been estranged from his friend and fellow traveller for over a year, after Dylan advised him *not* to marry his pregnant girlfriend, Marcia.

Geno had told Dylan he thought they needed to be legally married to stop their baby from being taken away by the government.* Shortly afterwards, the couple fled America, convinced they were about to be arrested by the CIA. Oddly enough, the lady Dylan was advising Geno not to marry, Marcia Stehr, was one of his oldest New York confidants, a close friend of Suze, and the former wife of Mark Spoelstra, whose 1962 wedding Suze and Bob had both attended.

And yet, when Geno informed Dylan that he had given the money he'd sent him to his wife, the singer responded, 'Hey man, if I had known you were going to give it to your old lady, I never would have sent it.' In fact, barely had Geno and Dylan resumed relations than the former was promptly dismissed – seemingly at Grossman's behest – for corrupting Bob's backing band with some powerful weed, as outlined in a letter he wrote to Marcia after high-tailing it to London:

> Having [had] just one slim joint and strict orders from fat al the gross man NOT to hold anything, I met dylan, whose plane arrived twenty minutes after ours and climbed into a car driven by an obliging swede along with his lead guitarist and his runner and no sooner had we swung out on to the high way but ol' reliable had his rippity tip lit up and hangin on his lip plus passin it around to musicians and other humouns alike, this action being naturally accompanied by my marvellous musical admonishment that this was my last and only and then I was clean clean clean as it were, only to have an old and dear friend that very night lay a grandiose hunk of the old chocolate on me for safe combustion. well the next night was concert night and by [now] I was natch fast friends with all the musicians whom I sent to the stage in a rather righteous state of mind.

Clearly, the paranoia that had hovered over the tour since the

* Geno and Marcia were married on March 1st, 1965 at Rev. Gary Davis's New York apartment. Neither Dylan nor Baez attended. Eight months later, Dylan married his own heavily pregnant girlfriend, Sara Lownds.

Melbourne drug-bust was still rampant. Indeed, according to a hastily scribbled note to Mrs Foreman, Geno got his marching orders not because he shared his largesse but because he 'got Dylan and Grossman [so] paranoid . . . they gave me the gate.' Meanwhile, the old, dear friend who had given him said hunk of hash – undoubtedly Victor – remained in situ, distributing said chocolate bars far and wide.*

And it was not just the band who maintained 'a rather righteous state of mind' long after the tour finished. Photos taken by a European photographer just days before his own motorcycle spill show a sunken-cheeked, hollow-eyed 25-year-old ex-folksinger. Dylan later told Shelton said epiphany happened when he went out 'one morning after I'd been up for three days'. So much for rest and recuperation.

Robbie Robertson states he was in Toronto when Grossman called to tell him, 'Bob had flipped over on the bike and fractured his neck,' and that he 'had gone for treatment to a particular doctor in Middletown, New York, from whom he could receive private and intensive care.' Dylan later described Dr Thaler to Robertson as 'a miracle worker' (which he must have been if he treated him for fractured vertebrae from his *home*). He also supposedly told Robbie, 'Come up to Woodstock when you get back,' having now remembered the whole band were still on retainer and the meter was ticking.† Robbie wasn't the only person Dylan invited upstate to attend to outstanding business in the immediate aftermath. Donn Pennebaker was summoned, too:

> I saw him a couple of days later, walking around with a brace. He didn't appear very knocked out by the accident . . . But he was very pissed [off] . . . [] . . . I know he wasn't as sick as he made out. I was working on a television show with him then, and one of the things this provided was the basis of an excuse for delaying delivery of that show, which is what he wanted to do. But I know he [had been] at a doctor's. I went to see him a number of times [when] he was in a brace. When I heard he'd been hurt I was in California and I went right back and drove to Bearsville . . . and said, 'I heard about the accident.' And he said,

* Both Spitz and Sounes – paraphrasing the former without checking his facts, perchance? – suggest Geno was fired from the tour for asking Bob for money. Not true.

† They were due to resume performing just a fortnight later, an August 13th show at the Yale Bowl.

> 'Where'd you hear about it?' It was a very funny reaction, and I thought maybe there wasn't any accident . . . But then . . . I knew he'd been hurt in other ways, so either [way], what he was doing was recovering.

Other visitors who came to see him that August included Odetta – who found him at the Thalers, having come to visit the doctor herself for 'exhaustion'. She saw fellow Grossman client, Dylan, 'living in a spare room on the third floor . . . [and] well enough to complain about artists recording cover versions of his songs with mistakes in the lyrics.' Meanwhile, Allen Ginsberg 'brought him a box full of books of all kinds. All the modern poets I knew. Some ancient poets like Sir Thomas Wyatt, Campion, Dickinson, Rimbaud, Lorca, Apollinaire, Blake, Whitman.' Ginsberg would also be quoted in *World Journal Tribune* that October, suggesting, 'This accident may have been a good thing. It's forced him to slow down,' a view Dylan would come to share by the turn of the century, when he told father-confessor Jeff Rosen, 'I'd just about had it with the scene. Whether I knew it [or not], I was looking to quit for a while.'

In fact, the accident all but brought him to a dead stop, creating more mystery than your average crime writers' convention. One lyric from this period, possibly tied to the million dollar smash, reads:

> I went down to the graveyard & looked into the sun
> The hound dogs took a piece of my pants
> That old piece that was pulled from the wreck on the road.
> Begging for just one more chance.*

A month later, The Beatles joined him in semi-retirement, playing their final paying gig at San Francisco's Candlestick Park on August 29th, at which they played not a single song from their latest, most ornate studio concoction, *Revolver*. They were as sick of the touring treadmill as Dylan, albeit for different reasons, and felt no need to concoct a get-out clause to pull the plug. Perhaps seeing Dylan and The Hawks in full flight three months earlier had made them realize performance-art was not their forte and never would be.

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* The last line of the verse has been cancelled with xxxxs on the typewriter, but is still legible.

Both Sixties trendsetters had made a conscious choice, one Dylan articulated to Ian Brady in 1969, 'When I was touring, that was my job. You have two choices – either go out and do it, or don't go and do it . . . I realize now that there must be another way of doing things . . . I don't want all *that* to happen again.' In another 1969 interview, Dylan almost let slip that maybe the accident was not 'real', even if the damage was: '[It was] at least a year after that [before] I realized that it was a *real* accident. I mean, I thought that I was just gonna get up and go back to doing what I was doing before.'

Time to find another path, something he addressed head-on in one of the more intriguing lyrical fragments of the period, bearing the evocative title, 'Stand Back From The Fire':

> When desolation
> falls on you
> what do you do?
> Do you walk around
> with your head bowed down
> saying it isn't true?
> Do you praise your perverted ways
> or do you look for something new?

These were the kind of questions that begun to consume him, even as his mind turned to what to do about the *Stage '66* film he was due to deliver. According to Pennebaker, he was already feeling the 'pressure on him to get the film ready for TV'. He, in turn, pressured Pennebaker and Neuwirth to make a rough cut of the film, to show to ABC. The result was, in Pennebaker's words, 'All guessing. We didn't figure out what to do with any of these things, we just stuck them together quickly as a kind of sketch to jump-start the editing process, because nothing was being done.'

Only after Pennebaker and Neuwirth delivered their forty-five-minute edit, to which they (and/or Dylan) gave the name *Something Is Happening Here*, did Dylan take a look at the rolls and rolls of film shot himself – 'all of it, including unused footage' – and came to the conclusion, 'It was garbage. It was miles and miles of garbage. That was my introduction to film.'

Actually, the film Pennebaker and Neuwirth compiled on his

behalf – now housed in the Tulsa Dylan archive – was perfectly fit for purpose, contractually at least. In many ways it is more akin to what ABC thought they'd contracted, nay expected. The excerpts from exchanges with John Lennon and Johnny Cash – the 'special guests' ABC had been promised – are wittier and wackier than those in the final film Dylan and Howard Alk produced. In this context, even a clear drug reference during his exchange with the Beatle would probably have slipped past ABC's censor:

John Lennon: I hear you're backing the Mamas and the Papas.
Bob Dylan: You're just interested in the big chick. She's got a hold on you, too.
JL: Barry McGuire is a great war hero. He met me through you, Bobby . . . He looks so natural but he's really shaking . . . [interrupted]
BD: Tell me about the Silkies? I've taken a few milligrams of Silkie once.
JL: . . . Barry being on the bosom of the folk-rockin' boom.

The sequence where Dylan and Cash discuss how to sing 'I Still Miss Someone' together – something they still hadn't figured out by February 1969 – is also more complete. Cash offers to 'do it your way. It'll make you look better,' Dylan shooting back, 'I'm not noted for looking better. I haven't looked better up till now. Don't you dare! You didn't know I was a piano player, I bet.' Cash insists he heard him play piano 'at a session, in between songs', just before the film cuts to Dylan and Lennon in a car and the famous exchange:

JL: Come, come, it's only a film.
BD: Why don't I vomit into the camera. I've done just about everything else.
Tom Keylock [at the wheel]: It'd be a nice ending.

It is almost the end. As Dylan bemoans, 'I wanna go back home. Baseball games. All night TV. I come from paradise, man,' the film cuts to him and Robbie working on 'I Can't Leave Her Behind' in the Glasgow hotel room, before the last four minutes of a live 'Like A Rolling Stone', some of it shot upside down, after which Dylan says, 'Thank you. You've been very nice to us. You've been the best audience.' And that is it. The end of *Something Is Happening Here*.

Though the film has none of the cut-cut-cutting Alk preferred, many of its tropes should be familiar to anyone who has watched *Eat the Document* more than once, albeit nothing like as 'fast on the eye'. It has Dylan talking to schoolkids and boy scouts; a close-up of an old man dining on a terrace; little scenarios played out with continental women in Scandinavia and Paris. Meanwhile, four sections of 'Tell Me Mama' (almost the entire song), a solid chunk of an animated 'Thin Man', and a manic 'Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat' collectively hit a better balance of music and midnight mayhem than *Eat the Document*.

All in all, it's hard to see why Dylan did not simply turn this over to ABC and collect that $200,000 check. After all, he was going to need it. The only explanation which springs to mind is that he not only didn't like the man he saw on the screen, but couldn't relate to him. As he wrote in another lost lyric that summer, 'Some do it for peanuts, others do it for cash/ Some do it just for the sake of reward . . . I do it on my own accord.'

Perhaps viewing the raw footage from Europe persuaded Dylan to reconsider his shoddy treatment of his friend Geno Foreman. If it did, Geno never knew. He died at home in Hammersmith on November 15th, 1966 from acute peritonitis, having been suffering abdominal pains for months, which he thought were the result of his own motorcycle accident. It turned out he had ulcerative colitis, which had eventually perforated. The doctors missed the tell-tale signs and sent him home, where he died a painful death four days later.*

This time, Dylan was certainly informed of the passing of one of his oldest friends, aged just 25 – Geno having been born a mere five days after Bob. His wife wrote to Marcia to offer her condolences two weeks later, and to ask if Bob could possibly have back the hat he had given to Geno. The fact that it was Sara, someone who never knew Geno and barely knew Marcia, who wrote such a letter – rather than the person who had been friends with both – says a great deal about how Dylan was cutting himself off from the milieu which had created the piratical Morgan, and all the denizens who had shared it.

He'd consciously changed from the creature he was, and anyone and everyone who spent time with him in the months after the crash would

* Again, Spitz and Sounes (plus Jonathan Taplin) cast aspersions on Geno, suggesting it was an overdose.

comment on it, starting with Sara's college roommate, who, having first met him in 1965, at the height of his amphetamine insanity, felt 'it wasn't until after his accident . . . that I really got to meet him as he is when he's not play-acting . . . There was a great change in him from what I'd seen of him before. He'd positively mellowed . . . Even Sara said he was . . . very reluctant to go back to anything approaching the hectic pace of the early years of their marriage.'

One of those who had known him well in those mercurial times, Michael Bloomfield, revealed in a 1968 *Hit Parader* article that he had visited him post-accident, and that he had 'his neck in a brace, [even though] he just got scraped up a little'. He apparently informed the guitarist, 'he just didn't want to go out in front of the kids any more . . . because the crowds would yell at anything. It didn't make sense to play any more.'

Dylan also informed Happy Traum, who had relocated to the Catskills too, 'I've got to get a normal life here and the only way I can do that is to shut everybody else out.' He should perhaps have consulted with the missus first. When *World Journal Tribune* reporter, Mike Pearl, found Dylan's hideaway that October, and was confronted by 'a young woman' – clearly Sara – 'she refused to produce Dylan'. Nonetheless, she told Pearl, 'It gets very lonely here. Very few friends have come up, and we never go to town.'

At least his ever-patient editor, Bob Markel, was unfazed by this new Dylan, finding him to be 'far more friendly, far less distracted. He was more grown-up and professional, easier to be with.' But he was still not about to countenance the book's release, telling Markel, 'He didn't know if he wanted the book published *at all*.'

Some of the material now housed at Tulsa suggests Dylan could have started an entirely different book, a mantra Macmillan were now spouting if the question came up. When Tony Glover asked at a local bookstore for the book – as related in a letter to Dylan that August – he was informed his friend was apparently 'rewriting it'. But if 'the trouble with it was it had no story' – as Dylan suggested in 1968 – the pieces he was typing on his new typewriter were hardly more linear or narrative in style than the galleys he had failed to correct. Rather than reading the volumes of the venerable poets Ginsberg had brought for him, it seems he had simply re-read 'Howl':

No longer Lambs of Pagan Blood
No longer St Maude Screaming now & FLY BUY NITE
No longer the sound of sound of
No more soun[d] of sound of the pseude
No longer Jezabelle, the bearded women, mak[ing] me march in the name of Anthem, George Anthem, around my rosy room
No longer now comes Jezebelle, the bearded vessel . . .
No longer any change in Winston Keef, the man who knows everything & never dies; no longer any elements of matter & no more stealing what's been stolen from the lesser decent men . . .

One near-insurmountable problem is dating this material.* Fortunately, on the back of one sheet is Dylan's letter to Ginsberg about the 1966 *Kaddish* album, which is almost certainly pre-accident, suggesting he may have been reworking the book before the crash. He certainly appears at times to be still trying to emulate Kenneth Patchen, even down to the oblique chapter headings, familiar names and lyrical references (the steam engine in 10, below, is based on 'Casey Jones'):

1. ramona put our heads in gunny sacks, tied our hands & feet – & took our clothes to another room – we then would vi[o]lently hop around, always being aware not to make any noise – she'd come back, scream at the top of lungs 'FREEZE!' & whoever was the last to freeze not only [would] have to stay in his gunny sack but also be her lover for the nite . . . the others would only have to come to breakfast naked

THE REST IS HISTORY . . .

10. NEW METHODS OF SELLING GREEN
Shelley said he had a dream world & three people volunteered. one was a common laborer who maintained that the sun was feminine & the moon was masculine. one was a brave volunteer & the other was Shelley's father-in-law. one was going downgrade & the other two were on

* Like a great deal of material from the immediate post-accident era, these papers were collected and collated at a later date, at the instigation of Dylan's new lawyer/manager, Naomi Saltzman.

the hill. Shelley was going upgrade. along came a steam engine & bashed one's brains out – the other three were scalded to death by the steam.

Already, he cannot get back there, no matter how hard he tries. In a section called 'Take One Like Kafka' – a *Tarantula*-esque chapter heading, if ever there was one – he crosses John F. Kennedy's famous request with the golden rule, 'ask not what I can do for you. ask what you can do for me,' before revealing more of himself than anywhere in that rejected galley: 'you cannot kill illusion . . . when you do/ you are doing nothing more [than] killing yourself.'

This reads like a post-accident Bob on his way to meet John Wesley Hardin, in the company of Frank. And it is hardly a single salvo. Among two-dozen extant pages, insights into a mind in turmoil repeatedly flit forth: 'i'm scared of reliving the past/ but i'm not afraid to die'; 'there is no direction but the one for me now' (circled, and handwritten); 'does this mean that grief is lonely & that man has no business imitating nature?'; 'it don't do no good to stand up and laugh about it/ just like it don't do no good to sit down and cry' (again handwritten).

Elsewhere, he has a bee in his bonnet about religious advocates whom 'we must convince . . . of our sincerity, these long-haired preachers/ whose jobs are to flog us until we confess that we're comfortable.'* He also uses religious imagery to make a more Sartrean point:

the flesh of the image is the sound (of vision), the bones and the soul of the image is a VISUAL thing not heard
there is no beginning and there is no end
the key to the sound of image is vision
there is no such thing as di-vision [–] as [in] no sound.

At times, he adopts a declamatory tone which could have come straight out of the New Testament: 'we are now on the verge of becoming religious leaders & serious politicians/ but let us not forget that we are not unwanted; let us openly admit that/ we are not good husbands, patient wives nor perfect children.'

On the other hand, much of the content is renouncing past

* This is from a section headed 'Last Words'.

certainty: 'no more Popular belief in people. no more, this Overthrowing of all Order. no more imagining that We are all Brothers . . . like a Church on fire, i'll Just stand here & let my enemy Defend me.' Through it all is an ongoing search for a meaning as yet unrevealed to the 'hairy beggar', a Christ-like figure who finds himself on the receiving end of man's inhumanity:

> what's the meaning do you suppose? what's the meaning of seeing a hairy beg[g]er not only being dragged into an iron cage & then examined by the ancestors of children but then also watching them cut his wrists & lay him down upon a filthy anvil – cut his hair – & cook him like meat & then bite him with their teeth? what's the meaning of that? what's the meaning of when they hang him up to dry – shoot him full of holes & gamble for his wig . . . does this mean that money is the root of all evil? does this mean that war is bad & pease is good?

Remarkable stuff, though for how long did he continue down this road? Not long, I suspect, before he remembered he was a songwriter, first and last. However, the evidence would not be forthcoming until 2014, when – after nearly five decades without anything known to be composed between August 1966 and April 1967, i.e., post-accident, pre-basement tapes – it turns out he was writing up a storm, lyrically anyway.

That year, no less than twenty songs from this period appeared on a set called *Lost On The River: The New Basement Tapes*, followed shortly afterwards by a two-hour *Showtime* documentary called *Lost Songs: The Basement Tapes Continued*.* Dylan, though, contributed almost nothing to either project – save the briefest of interviews, during which he insisted, 'A lot of this stuff just fell by the wayside. I don't even know where it was kept all these years. I have never seen these lyrics since the day they were written,' thus reinventing where the basement tapes began in the same month a genuine *Bootleg Series* (vol. 11) recalibrated

* My own ghostly presence hovers over the documentary, the director having decided to use my disembodied voice from *filmed* interviews. What is never addressed is the rather crucial point that these lyrics have *nothing* to do with the basement tapes.

where it ended. If such a productfest was decidedly Dylanesque, it came with a double-D for deconstruction and disinformation.*

Where he missed a trick was in not making the resultant artifact an audio-visual affair, with all the handwritten lyrics – and a veritable night school's worth of artistic doodlings – reproduced alongside the febrile 'reimaginings' of two-dozen lost Dylan songs circa 1966-67 perpetrated by the likes of Mumford & Sons, Rhiannon Giddens and Elvis Costello (who, frankly, should have known better). But that might have allowed the material to be seen by the sort of people who could smell snake oil at ten paces; the kind who knew in a heartbeat, this was *pre*-basement – and all the more important for it.

Here was that vital missing link, the answer to what kept Dylan's raging mind occupied in the nine months that separates the crash from the Big Pink basement, and probably what he was rambling on about when he told Michael Iachetta in May 1967, 'Songs are in my head like they always are, [but] they're not goin' to get written down until some things are evened up – not until some people come forth and make up for some of the things that have happened.'

Here was a theme of atonement and retribution also spattered across lines like: 'If I were you, I'd put it back what I took/ A Guilty man has got a Guilty look.' Old-Testament-style judgement also rains down in the following:

> From somewhere, out of the darkest night, the strangers came to throw rocks and sticks at him.
> This, and this alone, is what ye pay for if ye so pass him.
> Do not go self-cent'red and ye shall soon forget him.

It seems 'Drifter's Escape' is beckoning. The olde-worlde morality invoked in such songs may well reflect recent reading matter, now he had time to catch up on some. A typed reference among latter-day *Tarantula* papers cites page 54 of the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, which praises 'he who regards/ everyone as equal . . . the foe & the traitor/ the crippled & the wicked/ the man who arrested him/ &

* To further the disinformation, he told Bill Flanagan, 'They were found in an old trunk which came out of what people called the Big Pink house in Woodstock.' The one place they never could have been was Big Pink.

all those who judge him.' Another song from this period, 'The Return Of The Wicked Messenger',* predates its non-returning namesake by a good year, setting the stage for its compositional cousin as well as 'Quinn The Eskimo':

> The sky was dark and the cloud was in sight
> People were lining the streets in the night
> Gold neon signs and glittering lights
> Everyone had shut their shutters and turned in for the night . . .
>
> The people were lining the streets below
> When a voice sprang forth both loud and clear
> Say[ing], Everybody in trouble, dry your tears
> And lay your burden on the Lord.

Some of the more interesting lyrics in these two *pre*-basement folders would remain mere fragments, unsuitable for 21st century desecration by ye heathens, going mercifully unreferenced by T-Bone Burnett, the overseer of *Lost On The River*. These included lines like, 'I'm waiting for the one that's not from this world', 'If the devil looks into you, can you expect god to look out,' and verses like, 'Now the Lord looked down from a cloud on high/ and he set my people free/ The earth shook as he passed by/ And he set my people free,' and, 'Do not curse the idle youth. sing him God-sent messages. Do not unto Him but unto him as you would have him Do unto God,' a witty variant on the golden rule twelve years before 'Do Right To Me Baby'.

Mercy – the biblical kind – was once again on his mind. In fact, the 'holy slow train' he referenced in the *Highway 61* sleeve notes crops up repeatedly, most notably on 'The Whistle Is Blowing'. Not that one would know this from the traducing it received from Marcus Mumford on *Lost On The River*, who decided to remove the plentiful hints in Dylan's handwritten draft that the train in question is the train of salvation:

> The diesel is humming, there's another one coming
> I'm late already, I must not stay . . .

* He revisited the theme not once, but twice, writing a sequel to the *John Wesley Harding* track, called 'I Am That Wicked Messenger?' in 1968.

The whistle is [blowing, the train is] going
Has all my labor been in vain
A wild dust storm blows across the platform
It seems all my life I been trying to catch that train.

The reference to 'the diesel . . . humming' confirms Dylan is consciously evoking the spirit of Curtis Mayfield's 1965 45, 'People Get Ready' – which contains the line, 'All you need is faith to hear those diesels humming.' It's a song cogently captured at Big Pink the following year, and twice more in the studio, in 1975 and 1987.

Mumford preferred to make the song about 'that woman [who]'s always right', an aspect of the original lyric f'sure, but only as a way for Dylan to admit his most egregious former sin, 'a wandering eye', as he stands on the platform awaiting Her, wondering whether he should get on board: 'All of my possessions are loaded on board/That woman she left me, she wouldn't accept me . . . The rain is falling, the engine's crawling/All my life I been looking at that train.'

Another fragment suggests he has finally come to realize the hurt his wanton ways have caused, and recognizes a need to atone, not so much to God as to his significant other:

The tears of a lonely man are hidden within
As he moves from one woman to the next, his spirit grows thin
And when he falls in love with one, it's hard but it's true
But it's oh so much harder still when that woman is you.

One lost lyric hinting of promise even contains a symbolic renewal of vows, aligned to the very covenant God made with His chosen people:

I wanna tell you I love you / more than any man can
So come on/ take me to your Promised Land.
I wanna tell you a secret/ no-one else should know
I want you to take me where no *one else* [crossed out] can go
I wanna tell you I love you and give you a wedding band
So come on take me to your Promised Land.

Seemingly, she gave the songwriter in him religion, prompting this

supplication: 'You hold my future, you hold my past/ You hold everything I do . . . Oh how I love you.' But the change in Dylan was not just on the inside. As Al Aronowitz noted, 'In the years following his motorcycle accident, Bob acted like a romantic cornball when he was with [Sara]. More and more, he depended on her advice as if she were his astrologer, his oracle, his seer.'

Though some of these lyrics hint at the moralism of *John Wesley Harding*, others – like 'That Blue-Eyed Girl' (surely a conscious nod to Jimmie Rodgers's 'My Blue-Eyed Jane') – come from that 'romantic cornball'. This time the door is open and the one who is coming through is 'all that I can heed'; the one who will 'always do it'.

Dylan had made a conscious choice, one articulated in a rare moment of candour in *Chronicles*, 'I wanted to get out of the rat race. Having children changed my life and segregated me from just about everybody and everything that was going on.' The change both amazed and impressed someone who had known him at the very height of *le dérèglement de tous les sens*:

> **D.A. Pennebaker**: He understood that . . . he had to get straight with his wife and family, and live a kind of personal life that was in fact evolutionary and made sense . . . That's something very few people thrown into that incredible [fame] thing can ever figure out.

Another occasional eyewitness to the new Dylan, local painter Bruce Dorfman, whom Dylan befriended hoping to learn some tricks of the trade, sensed 'he was trying to reclaim some way of incorporating his sense of family into his life. He had an idea about some kind of middle-class life, and the closeness and comfort of family,' one which undoubtedly derived from childhood, and parents from whom he had become estranged in the headlong rush into the abyss. Or so it seemed to the family man and son of Abraham, and to Dave Van Ronk, who felt he'd 'returned to being the middle-class Jewish kid'.

Dylan articulated all his mixed-up confusion in a long free-verse poem he wrote for himself, and perhaps his nearest and dearest. It was called, simply, 'A Quest'. It begins with him talking about the birth of 'an age of [self-]discovery', before delineating two forms of love – 'One love' and 'The other love'. Trying to learn to trust, he is consumed by 'a disbelief that it might be returned'. He admits to a 'desperate desire to

please' but is consumed by a blend of emotions 'indefinable', the strongest of which, tellingly, is revenge. But he knows if he perseveres he will come to know 'the real "kind" of love' – what he calls 'the other love'. This he groups with contentment, compassion, trust, unselfishness, even pleasure. He considers anyone who feels a need to please, blessed.

He insists he has only known the former; that he may have known contentment, self-assurance, compassion and pleasure fleetingly, but he has never known true trust. He feels that any man who reveals 'his limitations, his failings, his doubts' to a woman he loves is 'laid bare'. Any 'protective covering' he has is stripped away, leaving him mocking himself for such a display of 'weakness'. Only finally, painfully, does he come to accept that he must learn to trust someone else completely. If he fails, he can never 'love another completely'. Such is the quest, and when Dylan wrote this letter to himself, it had 'only just begun'.

How soon after the accident he wrote such a heartfelt poem is unclear, but now was evidently a time for confession. It was also time to relearn the craft of songwriting, in isolation, reflecting on new concerns that for all their mundanity were excitingly new to him, something as simple as seeing 'the children playing, their mother talking'. It seems he really meant it when he wrote, 'Everyday I make a brand new start . . . When my true love and I aren't apart/ It's all I can do to go out of my head,' perhaps referencing their enforced separation at Thaler's.

However, the old Bob is biding his time, still inclined to satirise the normality of such a life – as he would a year later, with the inspired 'Clothes Line Saga'. One song, 'Try A Little Muscatel', might even have found a home on *New Morning* with a little work:

When the old weathervane is all rusty
And that windmill just plows up and down
And silly as it might seem, it's all dusty
And anyway it's just driving a hole in the ground
When that old hardware man comes a-calling
And gives you that old hard sell
Just keep both feet on the ground
Don't let it get you down
And try a little muscatel.

All of these new songs – finished and fragmentary – seem to have come relatively easily. There are certainly enough of them. Yet they are not a bridge to Big Pink. Though they lead within a matter of months into the hijinks and low ribaldry of the basements, hints of its rambunctious tone prove surprisingly thin on the ground, even if 'Eskimo Woman' employs a double entendre or two: 'Eskimo woman, my behind's in the bin/ Gimme some of that mouth, not only a grin,' and 'Eskimo woman, how 'bout a little chunk/ Come give me a kiss, gimme some of that funk/ I'm all saddled up and I'm ready to plunk.' Likewise, 'Bank Teller' threatens to become a proto-'Please, Mrs Henry'. Right now, though, he just needs a dime to ring his baby, not relieve himself:

> Bank teller, take me back to the backroom please.
> I just gotta make a phonecall. I'm on my bended knees.
> I'll ask you and I'll beg you 'cause I got to find a phone
> My baby's waiting patiently, she's waiting all alone.

The third verse of 'Card Shark', which just about survived Taylor Goldsmith's Attic Trax rendition on *Lost On The River*, benefits from a sip of its own bottle of bread, with a dash of 'Lo And Behold': 'Set 'em up Sambo and sit on it a while/ Toss in the towel and kick/ Stick it in the rear and roar for a bit/ And waddle down the road like a brick.' In a similar vein is another unresolved fragment, 'You gotta kick loose, turn on the juice, there's no excuse for more abuse this morning/ You gotta hold tight, see the light, save your might, and don't fight this warning/ For life is a puzzle, those who disagree are few/ So if you just promise to love me, little girl/ I'll promise to love you, too.'

His more lascivious self peeks over the parapet in lines like, 'My woman's got a mouth like a lighthouse on the sea/ Every time she smiles, she shines her light on me.' But wacky characters and non sequiturs remain in short supply, save for one snatch preceding 'Duncan And Jimmy': 'The king is sleeping, said Tiny Tim, but your secrets are safe with me.' Of course, Tiny Tim – unlike the cavalcade of characters to come – was a real person, someone Dylan spent time with in the winter of 1967 (as meticulously documented by Tim's own diaries).

Elsewhere, he flirts with traditional idioms in a way that almost presages his next LP, while tweaking the lines with a disconcerting

modernity. In 'Spanish Mary', he returns to 'Kingston town, of high degree', in the company of 'the buffoon, the fool, the fairy'; in 'Duncan And Jimmy', unlike 'Duncan And Brady', they 'walk side by side/ Nobody walks between them.' In 'Santa Cruz', he enquires of a woman, 'Just where would [you] be going to, my dear sweet lovely swan?' only for her to inform him, 'I was just driving up to Santa Cruz . . . and then she commenced to yawn.' At this point the song unexpectedly morphs into something Chuck Berry might have penned, 'Now I'm not one to brag any but man did I hit that gas/ I tore right out of there so quick, her head nearly hit the glass/ Everything was in front of me that day but there was nothing I didn't pass/ And when we pulled into Santa Cruz, she said, "Boy, you sure got class." '

In one sense, the songs on – and contemporaneous with – *Lost On The River* resemble those songwriting exercises he'd scribbled on the table of Eve and Mac McKenzie back in 1961, just with a firmer grasp of songcraft and vernacular. Reaching for a branch on the tree of roots, nothing quite gels like it had the previous winter, or would, the following spring. Not so much *Lost On The River* as lost in the woods, looking for a successor to the brilliantine sheen of *Blonde on Blonde.*

These songs ain't that. Nor are they a bridge to the Babylonian basements. In fact, the main motif they share with this more mercurial material is an inner resentment and desire for retribution – a characteristic Dylan always kept well hid, save in song. Here, the male partner of Pirate Jenny shows his flickering face in lines like: 'There I sat with my eyes in my hand/ Contemplating killing a man/ For greed was one thing I just couldn't stand.'

He later alludes to such impulses when on the road to recovery, admitting there came a 'turning point . . . back in Woodstock, a little after the accident. Sitting around one night under a full moon, I looked out into the bleak woods and I said, "Something's gotta change." There was some business that had to be taken care of.' And the feeling would still be there in a 1984 interview, 'I woke up and caught my senses, I realized I was just workin' for all these leeches.' Such feelings prompted the following verse from a post-accident bank account blues:

> You don't have to turn your pockets inside out
> But I'm sure you can give me something
> You don't have to go into your bank account . . .

The 'Bank Teller', in Dylan's case, was near neighbour Albert Grossman, who continued to control the purse strings, an arrangement that had not previously caused the artist sleepless nights, but began to do so as contract negotiations with Columbia came off the rails, and Dylan began reading some of the contracts he'd signed in the years his manager had lined both their pockets.

What was concerning Dylan greatly was the way Columbia were running circles around his rottweiler manager regarding the terms for release from the slave contract he had signed in 1961 and reaffirmed in 1962. Evidence Columbia was spoiling for a fight can be found in an internal memo Jack Wiedenmann sent to corporate attorney Clive Davis on December 8th, 1966. In it, Wiedenmann breaks down all the studio recordings Dylan has made across the five annual terms of the contract by 78 rpm side – with both 'Desolation Row' and 'Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands' each being assigned a single 10" 78 (maximum playing time: two minutes 58 seconds), as Columbia sought to make the ludicrous argument that Dylan should 'maintain' the average number of 'sides' he had recorded for the label per annum, based on the 190 sides he recorded in the first four years, in the 'final' year of his contract.

Actually, Dylan had only once in those years released two studio albums in a single twelve-month period, having already delivered an album since March 1st, 1966, the contract's fifth anniversary – and a double-album at that.

Also – as Wiedenmann noted – the label had 'at least a two-record set from the 1966 concert [sic] recorded in England'. They were even threatening to bastardize Bobby's studio detritus to make up another album or two, after staff producer Dave Rubinson, who would go on to produce Moby Grape and precious little else of note, 'listened to the older material and . . . indicated that he feels some of the material would be very saleable if the tracks were musically sweetened in order to update the sound.'

Thus did Columbia lay bare its patent disregard for Dylan's artistic integrity. Here was the very label which in 1973 would release *Dylan*, widely regarded as an act of revenge on an artist who had given them ten years' loyal, lucrative service. They missed a trick by not simply getting Dylan to agree to release a double live album from Manchester, and leaving it at that – but such a deed would have required vision.

Wiedenmann, blessed with neither, advised 'a brief discussion to establish the number of sides we feel would be reasonable to request from Mr Dylan before the expiration of his contract'. The memo prompted an immediate response from Davis, in thrall to the same idea that a one-minute joke like 'Talkin' Hava Negeilah Blues' should share parity with the six-minute-plus songs Dylan had been writing and recording in the past year; an argument they could never have won in court. And yet, on December 13th, 1966, Clive Davis wrote to Dylan via Grossman 'requesting twenty-one sides to fulfill contract,' to prove he had a lot of nerve.

Grossman was almost entirely to blame for the situation in the first place for not advising Dylan to delay the Nashville *Blonde on Blonde* sessions for three more weeks, and for failing to tell his artist to go on strike until Columbia honoured a previous verbal agreement to 'bump' his royalty rate retrospectively. He now found himself between a rock and a rolling stone.

Dylan was anxious to resolve the matter, though not so anxious as to okay the release of a live album. The haste with which he had pressed the label to release the live 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' stands in stark contrast to the silence that now ensued on the subject of that live album from the edge of forever.

Now, he just wanted out of Columbia. A brand spanking new, lucrative contract with MGM Records was sitting on the counter, just waiting to be signed. That contract was for $1.5 million, paid over ten years, though the contract only required product for the first five, with a mechanical royalty of 24 cents per album, a contract Columbia could not or would not match. To do so would have required the kind of foresight in perpetually short supply on Seventh Avenue.

Their own offer had been a $650,000 advance with $150,000 in re-adjusted royalties payable along with the advance, an open admission that they had been robbing him blind for the last five years. They would return what they had stolen in the first place – but only if it became part of a new deal. (Their mothers would have been so proud.) At the same time Davis set out to use sleight of hand to scupper the MGM deal in order to retain an artist the label had never understood and only recently prioritized.

First, he asked Dylan's producer if he had heard anything about the rival offer. On January 4th, 1967, Johnston replied, via Richard Asher, 'I

have received no communication from Bob Dylan except by way of a publisher friend who advised me that a high exec. of MGM advised him that he was signed.' Davis sensed he needed to act fast. Two days later he wrote to his boss, Goddard Lieberson, 'We have been very reliably informed that he has received a guarantee offer of $1.5 million from MGM payable over ten years, and that unless an immediate counter-proposal is received from us, the deal will be signed.'

By then, Davis almost certainly knew what the MGM offer was, down to the last red cent, having in his possession a copy of the contract Dylan just needed to sign, courtesy of an advisor to the MGM board with whom he had just had lunch; an individual whom an English High Court judge, presiding over the dissolution of the world's biggest band three years later, would describe as having 'the flavour of dishonesty'. His name was Allen Klein, and according to Marc Eliot's wretched *Rockonomics* (Omnibus, 1989), he had already 'made a complete study of Dylan's finances, and considered wooing him away from his over-protective manager . . . [convinced] Grossman's rank amateurism was displayed nowhere more clearly than during . . . negotiations with MGM.'

Klein was, in Davis's words, 'obstreperously opposed [to] the [MGM] deal', and became doubly so after being fed Dylan's true sales figures by Davis, a clear breach of ethics. But it was as nothing to the one Klein breached when he gave Davis in return a copy of the MGM contract, which still sits in the Sony archives.* Convinced that the Dylan deal was a bad deal for MGM, Klein was determined to scupper it; code of ethics go hang.

As it happens, he was hopelessly wrong about Dylan's ongoing commerciality. Every single album he would deliver Columbia in his second term (1967-71) would outsell *all* the albums from the first. Dylan's retreat would make him a greater cultural icon, a point lost on someone who saw only the bottom-line: a bean-counter, and a crooked one at that.

What the MGM contract would have meant for Dylan's career had

* In case anyone thinks I am exaggerating the ethical breach, when MGM Records' then-president, Mort Nasatir, heard of the tête-à-tête between Davis and Klein – just that – he threatened to bring suit for conspiracy. If Davis's defence was that the figures he gave Klein were true, it was no defence.

he signed it, can only be speculation at this point, though some clauses suggest he still had some business lessons to learn. Having no doubt about his own ongoing fecundity, he was prepared to commit himself to twenty-four 'sides' a year for MGM for the next five years, knowing that should he fail to come up with the requisite number of tracks 'during any year of the term hereof, Artist agrees to repay to MGM upon demand, for each record side or equivalent thereof, not so recorded by Artist, the sum of $12,500'.

In return, he would receive that whopping 'mechanical copyright royalty of 24 cents per single-disc album and 48 cents for each double-disc album *which contains musical compositions written by Artist* and having a playing time of not less than thirty minutes per single-disc album and sixty minutes per double-disc album'. Yet, nowhere did it say that Dylan must record *only* his own songs. Perhaps he already intended to 'beef' up his output by recording covers. He certainly recorded enough of them in 1967.

The other unusual aspect of the MGM contract was Dylan's use of 'deferred payments', meaning that the substantive advance would be spread over a ten-year period to mitigate his personal tax liability. Not only that, but there were several long and complex clauses about how said money would be reinvested on Dylan's behalf by the record company. Such schemes were an innovation Klein had previously used to convince, among others, The Rolling Stones to use his services, a decision they continue to rue to this day. They would only benefit Dylan if he was planning to constrain his touring activities and other revenue streams in the same period. It seems he was.

But before he could put pen to paper, there was still the small matter of an outstanding commitment to Columbia, one that the label was using to bully him, beginning with a letter on February 9th notifying Dylan he was in breach of contract and 'that we have put into effect the suspension provisions of sub-paragraph fourteen' of a contract he signed as a minor, and affirmed without legal representation.

Even now he could have challenged them on the excessive length of that contract, and the fact that it was reaffirmed without due representation. Columbia knew this. Knowing that the matter might go to litigation – which they would almost certainly lose, while delaying Dylan's return – they made plans to raid the vaults. Richard Asher wrote to Walter Dean on March 16th, 'We have sufficient suitable

unreleased Dylan material to make up two Dylan albums.' Eleven days later, Dylan signed a settlement agreement – with a remarkably child-like signature – that required him 'to render [his] services at recording sessions at our studios, at mutually agreeable times, for the purpose of making satisfactory master recordings which shall constitute a minimum of fifteen 78 rpm record sides, or their equivalent'.

The royalty on said record would remain a miserly 4%. Nor were Columbia content with their pound of flesh. They also wanted Dylan to acknowledge 'that we have validly exercised all our options to extend the term [of the original contract]. You also hereby acknowledge that you have made no written objections to any royalty accounting statements previously furnished to you . . . and you hereby affirm that all of said royalty accounting statements were properly prepared.' In other words, he was required to acknowledge that Columbia had been *legally* robbing him for the past five years. Welcome to the US labels' way of doing business, Bob, where bending over is never enough.

A week later, Grossman called Davis personally and 'begged that we reduce our demand to fourteen sides and said that we'd get them in about a month'. Davis agreed, hoping he might woo Dylan back to the label. Such was the state of play even unto the second week in May, when Grossman informed Dylan's UK publicist Ken Pitt that 'sometime in the near future Bob will be going into the recording studios in Nashville to cut fourteen songs for CBS to fulfil his contract with them'.*

By this time one must assume Dylan had heard about the death of Paul Clayton, proof that April really was 'the cruellest month'. Like Fariña and Foreman, Clayton had frequently behaved like he was immortal as he had spiralled downward, buffeted by, in Stephen Wilson's words, 'an endless prescription of Dexamyl from his college days. In the early years, Dexamyl and grass were the only medications in play. Later, there was some experimentation with LSD, but it was infrequent. [By April 1967,] he was living with a guy called John. John and

* The magical figure of fourteen has so enticed some online Dylan 'experts' they have convinced themselves these are the same fourteen songs as those that appeared on acetate from the Big Pink sessions with The Hawks. Those songs were copyrighted in two parts – and total fifteen songs, actually – six to nine months after the original settlement agreement. Sometimes a number is just a number.

David Lyle found him floating in the bath with a clock radio. I had managed to get an Emergency Psychiatrist to come to his apartment the day before. He was ruinously psychotic, but Clayton looked out the window and would not admit the stranger . . . That was his last social transaction.'

How many of these details Dylan heard at the time is unknown. He portrays Clayton in *Chronicles* as 'an intellectual, a scholar and a romantic', but he and Clayton had been estranged since that January 1965 copyright claim, and Dylan was by now far removed from the milieu which had fed and watered his own creativity and curtailed Clayton's. The folksingin' folklorist would not be the last lost soul to be found dead in strange circumstances in the years Dylan beat the retreat. Another old friend, Brian Jones, would be found floating upside down in a Surrey swimming pool in July 1969, in circumstances some still deem suspicious.

Dylan could not afford to dwell on these losses. As he told Liam Clancy in the 1990s – when, pint of Guinness in hand, the blunt Irishman asked whether he felt any responsibility for the tragic deaths of so many friends who had lived in his shadow – 'Man, how can I be responsible? . . . These people had to do what they did. If I were to dwell on that, become obsessed with it, I wouldn't get on with my life. I wouldn't create anything. I wouldn't write anything.' Nothing was more important than that, especially now he had to find fourteen songs from somewhere before he could be free and clear of the 'whores on Seventh Avenue'.*

* This line in Paul Simon's song, 'The Boxer', recorded by Dylan in 1970, has been widely interpreted as a reference to Columbia Records, to whom Simon signed in 1964. Dylan even riffs on that very line at the March 1970 session perhaps aware it has some hidden significance, having met Simon the previous summer.

3.2

February to December 1967: A Bunch Of Basement Noise

Back then, Bob was one of the guys . . . He just wanted to ground himself . . . raising a family and coming over to Big Pink each day to make music.

Robbie Robertson, *The Times* 13th February 2021.

I'd retired . . . I was fulfilling my recording contracts, but outside of that I think I felt like I had retired from the cultural scene.

Bob Dylan, to Mikal Gilmore, 25th September 2001.

A gypsy-like figure in faded dungarees, lavender shirt with collar turned up to cover his neck and a purple-and-blue striped blazer, his sandy hair . . . longer and wilder than ever.

Michael Iachetta, describing the Dylan he interviewed in May 1967.

It's unnerving at times, but he can switch himself off as it were, and be completely withdrawn from what is going on around him. It gives him a misleading, unapproachable expression, bordering on coldness. It's almost impossible to tell what he's thinking or whether he's [being] serious or not. He makes the wildest statements and tells downright lies all with the same deadpan face. [But] when he can be bothered, he's a gifted conversationalist and speaks in a soft, cultured voice far removed from the popular hip hillbilly image so beloved of pressmen and public.

Sara's college roommate, describing Dylan, circa 1969.

> Serious writers and serious composers are interested in speaking to their public through their writings and through their music. If they were interested in communicating with their public on a different basis, perhaps they would choose a different profession, and perhaps become a journalist or work for some sensational [sic] magazine. It is my firm belief that performers' personal lives . . . are their own.
>
> Albert Grossman, rebuffing three questions directed at Dylan by *Melody Maker* readers, *Melody Maker* 15th April 1967.

> Albert's a beautiful guy. He really is a genius. His mind works in these weird circles. You have to get high to understand him, and [yet] he's completely straight.
>
> Bob Dylan, 17th July 1963.

> Woodstock was a place you could go and get your thoughts together. It was an artists' colony. There were plenty of painters who lived in that area but very few musicians . . . Later there was, but when we were up there in the mid-sixties, we were pretty much by ourselves . . . The events of the day were happening [but] seemed to be a million miles away. We weren't really participating in any of that stuff. It was the summer of love, but we weren't there. We did our thing [and] wrote [songs like] 'Million Dollar Bash' [instead].
>
> Bob Dylan, *Lost Songs* DVD (2015).

⋆

In a life of contradictions, no year presents greater contradistinctions than 1967, whether it be the American artist or the son of Abraham showing his face, as a fast-burgeoning motorcycle-crash mythology swirls around in the mist. Remove the enigmatic wrapping paper, though, and two undeniable works of genius stand revealed: 'The Basement Tapes' – whatever that entails⋆ – and *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan's eighth studio album, released two days after Christmas to

⋆ The 1975 CBS double-album is certainly a travesty, comprising eight wholly unrelated Band songs and sixteen Dylan Big Pink recordings in mono, some with overdubs. The original 14-song acetate, assembled by Garth Hudson and released on vinyl in 2014, remains the one official artifact reflecting the original conceit.

bring seasonal cheer to discerning rock fans who prized songwriting over sound effects.

For the first two or three months of 1967, though, Dylan was doing a whole lot of nothing and seemed content doing so. The Hawks had now relocated upstate, seemingly under the mistaken impression – the recently-affianced Robbie excepted – that they would continue where they had left off in Europe, the previous May. Much to Robertson's chagrin, 'The other guys would go into town and pick up chicks and come back and party all night long.'

If the guitarist meant Woodstock, calling it a town in 1967 was a stretch. It was little more than a hamlet, and not yet a safe haven for hippies when the Canadian carousers rolled in, expecting to resume making music and mayhem with their main man. They discovered Dylan was more interested in making home movies with Howard and Jones Alk, the kind of home movies Pennebaker privately disdained:

> Howard Alk's concept of editing I found very destructive. I would never let Howard edit a film for me because he really likes the idea of undoing anything – bump, bump, bump – a kind of throwing things against the real time of a scene or a situation. Whatever it is, go against it. So what you get in the end looks to me like someone just being really smartass.

Nonetheless, Pennebaker agreed to loan Dylan some movie equipment so he could play the *auteur*, filming some test scenes for 'The Movie' he and Howard were going to make – one day. Meanwhile, the retained Hawks found themselves playing bit parts, even as Dylan drove his wife mad, leaving 'movie camera equipment all over the place . . . with leads and plugs ly[ing] around on chairs and tables.'

When he wasn't causing chaos and upsetting his pregnant wife, he would sometimes disappear for a few days, alone or with a single companion. Thus, on February 5th, 1967, two days after the eighth anniversary of Buddy Holly's unnecessary plane crash, he and Robbie Robertson flew all the way to Houston to watch Muhammad Ali fight Ernie Terrell in a private plane, in apparently atrocious weather.

Enter nightclub singer Tiny Tim who, due to start filming with Dylan the following week, felt compelled to write in his diary that day, 'I pray Mr Dylan and Mr Robertson's flight will be safe.' Two days earlier, he had thanked the Lord 'for a swell night at The Scene as I rehearsed with

Mr Bob Dylan's orchestra [!] for the movie on Tuesday'. Due to 'the blizzard', the original filming date for 'the movie' – which was not Dylan's, but one Peter Yarrow was making concurrently with Alk, *You Are What You Eat* – was rearranged.

Dylan had first seen Tiny Tim with Suze at the Living Theatre circa 1963, and what delighted him *and Suze* was that 'it made no difference to him if he was being ridiculed or appreciated. He revelled in both . . . He never stepped out of character.' His secret was safe. Dylan knew exactly how that felt. He even drove down to New York to see Tim play with The Hawks, before going to Texas to see Ali beat Terrell on points. He asked the falsetto singer if he would be interested in helping with his own film, prompting Tim to thank the Lord 'for letting me be . . . good friends with the greatest composer and personality of our day – as well as poet.'

A week later, Robbie phoned Tim to tell him, 'Dylan wants [you] to come up to his place next week for filming.' The following Monday he became 'one of the privileged few who stayed at Mr Bob Dylan's house – as well as having a chance to be playing [in] his upcoming television spectacular in April . . . Mr Ronnie drove me up to Mr Grossman's house and a handy man . . . then drove me to Mr Bob Dylan's real house. It has 26 rooms – [including] a big music room in which lies Mr Dylan's guitars, pianos, electric mandolin, etc . . . I chatted with him about Mr Rudy Vallee . . . I also sang for his beautiful wife and kids.'

Mostly, though, they discussed the film project, Tim's above comments suggesting Dylan was planning to add 'new scenes' to the unfinished *Stage '66* film, to make it something other than a tour documentary – something 'smartass', more like the film he described to John Cohen the following year, 'What [Alk and I] were trying to do was . . . to make a story which consisted of stars and starlets who were taking the roles of other people . . . [But] we were very limited because the film was not shot by us, but by "The Eye," and we had come upon this decision to do this only after everything else had failed.'

Not surprisingly, their idea hit a brick wall called ABC, who were quoted in an April 1967 *New York Times* article as saying the special had been cancelled because 'there was some disagreement over the format of the show'. Full house. Dylan was now in dispute with ABC, Columbia *and* MGM, while still contracted to deliver Macmillan a book. And still he chartered private planes.

Meanwhile, back in Woodstock, Dylan the moviemaker was going

ahead with some tests on the third day Tiny Tim stayed with him, only to discover – as Tim's diary records – 'a leak in the camera . . . may have ruined everything we did today, as well as in the past . . . [But] Mr Dylan [still] wants me back.' Sure enough, on Sunday, February 26th, Tiny Tim travelled up to Woodstock again – this time staying at a motel – ahead of four more days of shooting. On the following Tuesday and Wednesday, Tim 'sang with Dylan, [and] heard him sing and play his guitar' before returning to New York on the Thursday with his $88 fee, 'thrill[ed] to [get to] act and sing with him. Also [had] a nice time with Mr Rick [Danko], Mr Rich[ard Manuel] and Mr Robertson.'

According to a notebook of Dylan's, the plan for Thursday had been to shoot a 'scene where Tiny plays a very tall man and [I] use box to stand on'. The following day, he had 'Richard leaning out [of a] window,' hoping to match it with a shot of a door frame. What they were shooting has not survived, but a reel of 'wild audio' has, in a most unexpected place – amongst a box of audio reels for *Dont Look Back* Pennebaker was keeping safe – as have some black-and-white photos Alk kept (see photo section).

One would love to know what D.A., the master of *cinéma vérité*, made of something so unscripted and chaotic, especially as Dylan had previously sketched out a couple of scenes – found among the *Lost On The River* papers – including one in a sandwich shop in which a policeman confronts the owner:

> **Policeman**: Have you seen this man?
> [**Man**]: What did he do?
> [**Policeman**]: He stole a motor out of a car down at Louie Louie's, three nights ago. We got a lead on him from two ladies, just happened to see him go by.

The 32-minute audio reel contains no such scene, but begins with Dylan riffing on various ways to introduce a different kind of star: 'Here he comes now, that valiant Cornish knight, King Mark himself, [and] here comes his faithful servant, Curverknell . . . Here he comes now, that famous ringmaster.'* Instructing Mrs Alk, 'All right, Jones,

* 'Dylan was interested in doing a film, with a circus act. Tiny Tim was supposed to be the circus guy, with the hat and the whip.' –D.A. Pennebaker to Justin Martell, 2017.

enough of this,' he then breaks into an acoustic blues in a strong southern accent, 'Cruisin' with my baby last Wednesday morn/ with my foghorn.' Cue shouts of 'Foghorn' from The Hawks.

Finally, after everyone calms down, he gets Tiny Tim to recite the lyrics to 'Yesterday', à la Peter Sellers's *Richard III* 'Hard Day's Night'. Dylan then suggests, 'Why don't you sing one,' and Tim counters, 'I'll sing one with you,' prompting Dylan to again adopt a fake southern accent. This lyric also barely gets off the ground, 'A thousand miles from nowhere/ In my country shack . . .' Dylan then requests Henry Burr's 1915 standard, 'Memories' – evoking, 'Childhood days, wild wood days/ Among the birds and bees . . .' – and Tim obliges while assorted Band members sing harmonies seemingly designed to drown out the birds and bees. At this point the tape mercifully runs out.

Whether or not this was Alk's idea of 'throwing things against the real time of a scene or a situation', ABC were never going to green light this kinda thing. Nor were their executives likely to think much of Dylan's and/or Alk's scattershot 'notes' on camera technique, which ran as follows:

> technique: (also but just one) during conversation of which circles around the crucial happening, dialogue being sometimes pert[ine]nt and needed for all moviegoers whom come in hop[ing] to watch the movie without speaking) case in point of which: A speaks to B & B is speaking to A. full convers[a]tion held perhaps in 5 or 6 [shots] or whatever pleases. camera follows all time . . . cut inside of editing room.

Not surprisingly, this is as far as this film project ever got. A more pressing matter now took precedence. As of March 27th, Dylan had agreed he owed Columbia fourteen songs. And as of May 27th, *Disc* was reporting he would 'in the near future . . . be going into the recording studios in Nashville . . . to fulfil his contract with [Columbia],' even as the first tentative steps to resolving his contract dispute were being taken. A Columbia memo from Clive Davis, five days earlier, reported he had 'just had lunch with [David] Braun . . . Assuming Grossman follows Braun's advice on the other two points, this is the last remaining issue.'

Whatever could he mean? It meant Dylan and/or Grossman had been getting cold feet about the MGM deal. Davis, in his 1974 memoir, *Clive*, suggests Dylan had already signed the contract and it was merely awaiting ratification by the MGM board. But that appears to be a form

of self-justification for his own actions in scuppering the deal. Dylan had not put pen to paper, and since MGM were currently stymied by his obligation to deliver an album to Columbia before they could proceed, the ball was very much in his court.

Davis's May 22nd memo makes it clear that Columbia's own counter negotiations with Dylan were by now well advanced. By June 16th – under a blanket of complete secrecy – a new contract had been drafted and sent to Braun. A fortnight later, it was ready for Dylan's signature. The following day, he put his normal signature to the document. Once again, he used 'deferred payments' to spread his tax liability, with, 'payments of more than $75,000 or $150,000 [in] any contract year [to be kept in] a separate Deferred Payment Account to which shall be credited all accrued royalties in excess of $75,000 or $150,000. Columbia will invest . . . the amount credited to the DPA as artist may direct.' Such provisions suggested a period of retrenchment was still in the offing.

Although Davis rather suggests it was down to his brilliant negotiating skills,* something more personal had led to a dramatic change of heart on Dylan's part. What was perhaps preying on his mind was the sheer amount of product the MGM deal committed him to – effectively two albums per annum for the next five years. He began to suspect he simply didn't have it in him.

He instead committed to just 'Eight Long Playing 33⅓ Record Sides (i.e. four albums) During The Term', which would run for five years. (He would deliver ten sides in that time.) He would in turn receive a $75,000 advance for any single album, double that for a double, considerably less than MGM were offering. Likewise, the royalty – though it doubled what it had been under the old contract – was still less than the MGM deal. But at least he finally got the royalties on back catalogue bumped up to 5% *retrospectively*. He also made sure Columbia would not release any of the bulging shelves of outtakes and live tapes they had been assiduously cataloguing for a rainy day or twelve.

Contrast this with the deal The Beatles had signed with EMI on January 27th, 1967 – at the height of Dylan's battle with Columbia – which was a nine-year deal, tying the band collectively and individually to the label until 1976 and requiring the group to deliver a minimum of

* Even in his 1974 memoir, Davis could not get the deal right, insisting it was for no advance and for five years.

seventy tracks by 1972, for only the same royalty rate Dylan was receiving. The EMI deal also allowed Brian Epstein – and / or his *beneficiaries* – to take 25% of all earnings for the full term of said contract, even though his own management contract was due to expire in a matter of months – along with the man himself, it transpired.

Dylan, by contrast, was already counting the days to the end of his association with Grossman, a prospect that probably helped to persuade him not to give his manager a huge wedge of any $1.5 million deal with MGM. The new Columbia contract also noted, 're the agreement dated March 27th, 1967, minimum of 14 78rpm sides – these recordings shall be deemed to have been recorded.' Dylan was free and clear of any immediate obligation. Maybe now was a good time to call a temporary halt on the regular home sessions he had been privately taping with The Hawks. After all, Sara was due to give birth to their second child any day now.

Because, unbeknownst to the world, by early July 1967 Dylan had recorded more than enough songs to have fulfilled his now obsolete get-out clause with Columbia. Had this ever been the intended purpose behind all this music-making? Did Dylan really resume recording with The Hawks in early spring just in case he needed some songs with which to fob Columbia off? As noted earlier, some would-be authorities have seized on fourteen – the number of songs he owed Columbia in March 1967 *and* the number of songs assembled on a Dwarf Music demo-tape in January 1968 – put two and two together, and come up with 3.14.

Which isn't to say that these 'home' sessions did not begin with a view to conjuring up the songs he owed the label. We know Dylan needed to work up some songs, and quickly, but had no intention of giving Columbia anything intended for the 'real' follow-up to *Blonde on Blonde*. Perhaps he would give them exactly what they asked for, fourteen 78 rpm sides, i.e. songs which lasted less than three minutes, pop songs like the ones Bobby from Hibbing dreamed of writing when all he had to do was dream.

Even for such an adept lyricist, the idea of writing a dozen or more pastiche pop songs on every subject from the scatological to the sacrilegious – all containing a catchy chorus – was an outrageous notion. Yet that is precisely the direction he now went in. Nothing in

his career leads up to the basement tape songs and nothing leads away from them. It would be like a busman's holiday.*

Any songs he had been working on just prior to the start of these home sessions would go unrecorded, even one tellingly called 'You Can Change Your Name (But You Can't Run Away From Yourself)'. Was he saving this for some more rarefied purpose? Not if Al Aronowitz's contemporary eyewitness account of a home session is anything to go by:

> 'Dylan has been doing nothing, absolutely nothing,' said Jamie Robertson, Dylan's guitarist, to an inquiring reporter . . . But that was just a contribution to the Dylan mystery. Actually, Dylan was writing ten new songs a week, rehearsing them in his living room with Robertson's group, The Hawks, and trying to complete a one-hour film TV special for ABC, which said it couldn't use the programme because it was seven months late . . . He was sitting at an electric piano while a Japanese windchime played random melodies on the porch outside . . . He wore a beard now, and rimless Benjamin Franklin eye-glasses, and from behind his incognito he sang . . . 'You can change your name but you can't run away from yourself [twice].' 'Do you like that song?' he asked [me]. 'I think it's great.' . . . Dylan turned to Jamie Robertson. 'See,' Dylan said, 'We shouldn't keep any music critics around here. We just lost another song.'

Sure enough, the song is nowhere to be found among four pre-Big Pink reels recorded that spring with The Hawks, none of which were taped in a basement, or a garage. They were made in Dylan's 'big music room', the Red Room, part of what Aronowitz depicts as 'a rambling American chateau of mahogany-stained shingles that clung to a mountain top'.

I doubt the reason the song wasn't recorded was Aronowitz's familiar presence. Rather, as Dylan suggests in the 2015 *Showtime* documentary on these new 'basement tapes', 'I knew I wasn't gonna be writing anything about myself. I didn't have nothing to say about myself.' *This* song was very much about himself, as we now know because its lyrics have

* The *Lost On The River* songs have far more in common with *John Wesley Harding* than the songs on these ferric-shedding tapes, leading some to believe they date from after that album. I can't see it.

been serendipitously preserved in one of those small notebooks he continued to use to jot down song-ideas. No question, this was a song of self-analysis, designed to save money on a therapist:

> You can conquer everybody (anybody)
> But you can't conquer yourself [x2]
> You can judge yourself
> But you can't judge anyone else.
>
> Everyone asks you
> 'Where have you been?'
> Everyone will ask why and when
> are you going back again? . . .
>
> The times have changed
> Any fool can see that
> Everything is rearranged.

Although one must assume the notebook in question dates from around the time Dylan started the Red Room recordings, neither 'You Can Change Your Name' nor the other fragments of lyrics or song titles therein tally with anything found on these pre-Big Pink reels: not the song titles 'Cat Fever', 'You Can't Do No Wrong' and/or 'Three Redheads'; not the revelatory line, 'I'm gonna start out again, but this time I'm gonna know when to stop'; nor, 'A holy man is a man who doesn't mind the flies buzzing around his head'; or an entire verse hinting at a youth revisited:

> When I was 12, I invented the wheel,
> I could use it to run and it taught me to steal
> Janis the clown, she came from Green Lake
> She was filled with desire, and was quite a mistake
> She gave me a thrill and I paid her my wheel
> The next thing I knew, I was watching her kneel.

So, what exactly *was* Dylan recording in the Red Room? Was he, as he audibly suggests at one point, just 'wasting tape'? Or did he record some forty songs there, as asserted by ex-Long Ryder Sid Griffin in his revised edition of *Million Dollar Bash: Bob Dylan, The Band And The*

Basement Tapes (Jawbone, 2014)? As the de facto author of sleeve notes to the eleventh official Bootleg Series, *The Basement Tapes Complete*, he was privileged to hear all the tapes – including nine songs omitted from the 'complete' official edition. He should surely know.

But in this hastily-executed cash-in, confronted by recording dates where information was sketchy or in most cases non-existent, Griffin simply resorted to guesswork. Though he heard everything, he never consulted with the producers of the set nor bothered to reference the more edifying 'historical notes' that follow his essay in that 6-CD set. Those notes make it clear that of the original master reels, three were clearly marked 'Red Room', one of which – a crucial one, full of classic country covers – Griffin bizarrely assigned to Big Pink.*

When the correct order and sequence is used, the Red Room reels reveal a new Dylan emerging from its chrysalis, even if the process is neither instant, nor painless – for Dylan *or* latter-day listeners.† According to Garth Hudson, who was operating the reel-to-reel: 'We were doing seven, eight, ten, sometimes fifteen songs a day. Some were old ballads and traditional songs . . . Others Bob would make up as he went along . . . We'd play the melody, he'd sing a few words he'd written, and then make up some more, or else just mouth sounds or even syllables as he went along.'

Save for the part about 'old ballads and traditional songs' – which Dylan only starts to do on the final Red Room reel – Garth has it about right. Of the 'originals' on these reels, not one sounds composed. Rather, they remind one of Dylan's description to Ginsberg – from around this time – of a technique he'd used in late 1965: 'babbl[ing] into the microphone then rush[ing] into the control room and listen[ing] to what he said . . . arrang[ing] it a little bit, and then maybe rush[ing] back out in front and sing[ing] it [again].' The fact that a dozen such examples from these home sessions are now part of the official canon – and copyrighted accordingly – says much about the grip these sessions have on pop mythology.

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* None of which has stopped Olof Björner from accepting Griffin's song assignments as gospel on his widely-referenced *Still on The Road* web resource, singularly failing to reference the more reliable 'historical notes'.

† The first two Red Room reels, recorded at 3¾ ips, suffer from distortion, the ostensible reason why most of these songs were shuttled across to the 'bonus' 6th CD on the 2014 set.

Dylan was just enjoying himself. As Robertson has said, 'There was no particular reason for it. We weren't making a record. We were just fooling around. The purpose was whatever comes into anybody's mind, we'll put it down on this little tape recorder. *Shitty* little tape recorder.' When Sally Grossman popped by to lend an ear, her response was dismissive, 'It sounded like throwaway stuff. Nonsense stuff. Bob and the guys were [just] hanging out, playing and having fun. The titles alone are enough of a clue.'

Though Sally is actually referring to the Big Pink songs, she might just as well have meant 'Edge Of The Ocean (Seagulls)', 'Northern Claim', 'On Blueberry Hill (I Am For You Baby)' – inexplicably omitted from the 'complete' 2014 boxed-set – 'King Of France', or 'I Can't Come In With A Broken Heart', five of the more realized improvisations recorded during those weeks in the Red Room. As Robertson rightly recalls, '[Bob']s ability to improvise on a basic idea was truly exceptional and a lot of fun to witness.' But there was never any question of this material being used, as is or reworked.

For now, whenever Dylan and the boys attempted authentic covers, they almost entirely eschewed the folk canon, the guys in the band remaining innately suspicious of the whole genre. As Robertson told Griffin, 'None of the guys in the band were about folk music. We were not from that side of the tracks. Folk music was from [the] coffee houses, where people sipped cappuccinos. Where we played as The Hawks, nobody was sipping cappuccinos, I'll tell ya [that]!'

Where these good ol' northern boys' tastes did coincide with the big boss man was Fifties rock'n'roll. So, it should come as no surprise that two of the earliest songs attempted in the Red Room were the 1954 Hank Ballard song Bobby had performed as his camp debut, 'Work With Me, Annie' (a.k.a. 'Annie Had A Baby'), and a song he cut to acetate on Christmas Eve 1956: 'Confidential'. Dylan also got The Hawks to cut one of his favourite Hank Williams songs, 'My Bucket's Got A Hole In It'. They also tried to capture 'Hey Good Lookin', before Garth rewound the tape and erased it, a common crime that spring.

Dylan really is returning to the starting point, retracing roots. He even adds the date (1956) to the title of 'I'm Not There', one of the highlights from these magnetic movements, captured before The Hawks lost some of their identity. Dylan lamented the loss, telling

Kurt Loder, 'What came out on record as The Band . . . was like night and day . . . They could cover songs great. They used to do Motown songs, and that, to me, is when I think of them as being at their best.'

If he was still feeling his way back to his good ol' used to be, Ian Bell noticed an inherent irony: 'Whenever Dylan delves . . . in[to] old music – and only a handful of basement songs sound other than ancient – he seems to wind up pointing to the future.' If the first two Red Room reels were mostly spent trying to twist raw ideas into song shapes, the last two show him returning to musical roots with which The Hawks were barely familiar:

> **Robbie Robertson**: He would play songs . . . I'd never heard, and after we'd . . . played it, I would say, 'Did you write that?' and he would say, 'No, that's an old song by blah-blah-blah,' and frequently he would tell a little story . . . [about] what was behind the song. And that was interesting, learning some of these old-timey songs.

Though it is hard to believe that the Hawks would not already know 'You Win Again', a Hank standard, or the Sun-era Cash classics, 'Big River' and 'Folsom Prison Blues', Dylan sometimes left them fumbling for the light switch. He does so when, just before the Red Room sessions draw to a close, he pulls out six traditional songs, reflecting every aspect of Anglo-Americana: the hillbilly hokeyness of 'Cool Water'; the Irish drinking songs, 'Ol' Roison The Beau' and 'Johnny Todd'; two songs he used to sing in the clubs, 'Come All Ye Fair & Tender Ladies' and 'Poor Lazarus'; and, most gorgeous of all, Dominic Behan's quasi-traditional 'The Auld Triangle', a.k.a. 'The Banks Of The Royal Canal'.*

Robertson, for one, sensed there was some underlying method to such madness. The boss was gently leading the guys by the nose: 'Bob was educating us a little . . . He'd come up with something like "[The] Royal Canal," and you'd say, "This is so beautiful! The expression!" . . . But he remembered too much, remembered too many songs too well . . . He'd prepped for this . . . and then [he'd] come out here, to

* 'Young But Daily Growin', 'The Auld Triangle' and 'Big River' would all be pulled to the 'comp. master' reels from which Robertson and producer Rob Fraboni would compile the 1975 CBS album.

show us.' Sure enough, the lessons led somewhere The Hawks, if they chose to, could call home.

At some point that spring they left the Red Room and re-convened at The Hawks' newly-rented place in West Saugerties: a gaudy old country shack called Big Pink. One suspects Sara had a say in the relocation. If it wasn't camera equipment, it was 'Mr Dylan's guitars, pianos, electric mandolin, etc.'

This was when it all changed. As Robertson notes, 'There's the music from Bob's house, and there's the music from our house. The two houses *sure* are different.' For the first time, Dylan wasn't just prepping songs from his past, he was creating characters Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear might have jointly imagined after a night with Thomas De Quincey in the opium dens. The first of these were found in 'Tiny Montgomery', with his partners-in-crime Skinny Moo and T-Bone Frank. One still wonders how much of this was made up on the spot. Did Dylan really sit down and type 'Scratch your dad, do that bird, suck that pig and bring it on home'? According to the 2015 Dylan, he was simply watching too much TV:

> These songs weren't tailor made for anybody. I just wrote what I felt like writing . . . I had nothing else to do, so I started writing a bunch of songs. I'd write them in longhand and I'd write them on a typewriter. Whatever was handy. The TV would be on – *As The World Turns*, or *Dark Shadows*, or something [like that]. Just any old thing would create a beginning to a song. When China first exploded that hydrogen bomb, that kinda flashed across the headlines of the newspaper, so we [would] just go in and [do] 'Tears Of Rage'.* . . . Just one thing led to another. And after [I] got the lyrics down, we'd take the song to the basement.

Robertson challenges his former paymaster's take in his 2016 memoir, 'I never saw Bob write out lyrics longhand; he either typed them out or scratched a couple of words on a napkin.' According to Danko, their employer even sometimes used the typewriter as an alarm clock, 'If we were sleeping, he'd get us up. He'd make some noise or bang on

* The first Chinese nuclear test was in October 1964, three years before Dylan wrote 'Tears Of Rage'.

the typewriter on the coffee table,' but not before he had hammered out that day's excursion/s into what Greil Marcus would fondly christen, Weird Ol' America.

Yet so scant was Dylan's regard for the lyrics he was now producing like ticker-tape that not one of them appears among the Tulsa manuscripts, even though he retained the earlier, unrealized *Lost On The River* material and at least a smattering of drafts for *John Wesley Harding* songs. Nor has a working draft of a Big Pink song ever emerged on the lucrative manuscript market.

What happened to them? We know from co-author Richard Manuel, he saw the 'Tears Of Rage' typescript, which came about after Dylan went 'down to the basement with a piece of typewritten paper . . . It was typed out – in line form – and he just said, "Have you got any music for this?" . . . I just elaborated a bit, because I wasn't sure what the lyrics meant.' Presumably, Danko received something similar for 'This Wheel's On Fire', as the blessed recipient. Danko's handwritten lyric did later turn up in a Band-related archive, possibly hand-corrected by Dylan, but not the original typescript he was handed.

Otherwise, all we have to go on from this productive period is a single, incomplete typescript of 'I'm Not There', sent anonymously to Wanted Man, the Dylan Information Office, in 1990. Seemingly authentic, the absence of a couplet like, 'Now when I treat the lady I was born to love her/ But she knows that the kingdom weighs so high above her,' suggests it and others were improvised when the tape rolled. Yet the song was clearly always heading in this direction, as indicated by two unrealized thoughts at the bottom of the page: 'heaven knows the answer – don't call nobod[y]/ i go by the lord BEWARE BE[WARE].'

How long he worked at songs like this – minutes, hours or days – is mere conjecture. All we have are finished takes. But if 'Tiny Montgomery' really was the trigger, Dylan didn't empty the chamber just yet. He had three more reels of musical lessons he wanted to teach The Hawks before he felt they were tutored enough to sit their first serious 'studio' examination since January 27th, 1966.

This gave Garth the opportunity to fine-tune the audio set-up, to Dylan's visible delight. According to Robertson, 'When he saw the setup in the [Big Pink] basement, he scratched his chin, looking pleased. "This is great. Can you record *anything* here?" In response, Garth

played back some experimental taping we had done.'* Everyone proceeded to make themselves comfortable:

> **Robbie Robertson**: Garth set up these microphones . . . Not a lot of people [were] doing recordings like this . . . [just] a little echo unit or something like that, and just getting a vibe . . . out of the . . . sound there . . . [We] would set up in a circle, so we could balance the instruments. No monitors, no nothing . . . If you played too loud you couldn't hear the vocal, and that meant you were playing too loud. Because we were sitting in a circle looking at one another . . . it became like, hey, this is the way to play music! Everybody was in on it . . . [It was] the idea of musicians near each other, making eye contact and reacting to the physical.

If Dylan remained in improv. mode for most of the first Big Pink reel – destined to yield the bacchanalian delights of 'See You Later Allen Ginsberg', 'The Spanish Song' and 'I'm Your Teenage Prayer' – by the third reel, the vamps and riffs take on a life of their own as Dylan begs and pleads, 'Baby, Won't You Be My Baby', 'Try Me, Little Girl' and 'Don't You Try Me Now', before laying down one last breath-taking trilogy from tradition: 'Young But Daily Growin', 'Bonnie Ship The Diamond' and 'Hills Of Mexico'. He will not revisit the past again till the fall. Instead, he uses up four 7" reels of tape – three Scotch and one Shamrock† – cutting nineteen original songs that for anyone else would be a career. For him, they were just footsteps in the sand.

Across the next four decades he would be pretty consistent about the underlying purpose – or the lack of one – insisting in 1975, 'It wasn't a record, it was just songs which we'd come to this basement and recorded – out in the woods,' and then in 2015, 'I had no intention of putting these songs out.' The fact remains, he cut eleven original songs, one after the other, in no more than two takes, while using up just two Big Pink reels. They include perennial favourites 'You Ain't Goin'

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* Presumably, he means the truly awful 'Even If It's A Pig' which acquired legend status until it was heard.

† Shamrock was a notoriously low-grade tape-brand. As Robertson explains, 'We were always afraid of running out of tape and were too poor to buy extra, so we recorded on a slow speed, 7½ ips or maybe [even] 3¾ ips if we were running really low.' It never seems to have occurred to Dylan to order a box of blanks.

Nowhere', 'I Shall Be Released', 'This Wheel's On Fire' and 'Million Dollar Bash', all of them copyrighted by September 1967. All were cogent compositions, conceptually of a piece – the sublimely semi-coherent 'I'm Not There' excepted – as the musical faucet flowed unceasingly.

Hudson, for one, was 'amazed [by] his writing ability . . . How he could come in, sit down at the typewriter, and write a song? . . . Also, what was amazing was that almost every one of those songs was *funny*.' A riot, in fact. And they got funnier still when he recorded them. In one instance, 'You Ain't Going Nowhere', he recorded what are clearly dummy lyrics at the start of a session – the famous 'Ain't no head of lettuce' version – before returning later that day, or the next, with a set of *compos mentis* lyrics that served to provide the perfect summation of their activities, 'Strap yourself to a tree with a roots/ You ain't going nowhere.'

Whether his original impetus in writing such a cohesive set of songs was simply to get Columbia off his back or whether, as he claimed in 1978, 'They were written vaguely for other people,' these eleven songs were unlike anything anybody else was doing in 1967. As Dylan observed a decade later, 'At that time psychedelic rock was overtaking the universe and we were singing these homespun ballads.'

If he still thought he might have to give Columbia fourteen such songs, then the latest recording date for the first six Big Pink reels would be June – which could be the case. If the first ten 'basement' reels, four from the Red Room *and* six from Big Pink, were recorded between late March and June 1967, then the picture one can garner for this period is reasonably complete, rewound and erased snatches notwithstanding.*

Before sessions resume, though, there seems to have been a significant hiatus, perhaps coinciding with the birth to Sara of a daughter, on July 11th, Anna Lea; the visit of two delighted grandparents; and Dylan beginning to sketch out an entirely different brand of song for his eagerly-awaited seventh Columbia offering, now that contractual obligations receded into the distance.

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* If the reel with 'Goin' To Acapulco', 'Gonna Get You Now' and a coupla Band instrumentals is the 'missing' Reel #6, then reels #1-10 have all survived. We are not so fortunate with reels #11-20.

Fatherhood had inextricably changed Dylan's view of many things, including his own father, prompting him to write in a post-accident folder, 'My daddy was a . . . good man. Very seldom did I ever see him raise his hand. To each of his children, he gave love and care.' When the more effusive Beattie also came to the house, she was delighted to find 'a huge Bible open on a stand in the middle of his study. Of all the books that crowd his house, overflow from his house, that Bible gets the most attention. He's continuously getting up and going over to refer to something.' She wasn't the only one to have noticed this new interest:

> **Al Aronowitz**: Of course, Dylan had always used Bible imagery in his songs but that had nothing to do with his personal faith. But when I was spending time up in Woodstock with him, after the accident, it was different. He had a large Bible at home and he was reading it. It seemed to me like he was searching. Not for lyrics this time though, but for something else . . . He didn't say anything to me, but there was *something* going on.

The notebooks of the period bear out a revived interest in eschatology, with Dylan noting down chapter and verse from various parts of the Old Testament. He also left little doubt which edition he was referencing, writing 'KJV' – for King James Version – next to both 1 Chronicles 17:8 ('And I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of . . . great men that are in the earth') and Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 ('Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth . . . but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment . . . for childhood and youth are vanity'). Both suggested a new-found gratitude for God's infinite mercy.

But the most surprising citation from the former apostate must be Hosea 13:4, a famous verse which twelve years later would assume especial resonance: 'Thou shalt know no God but me; for there is no saviour beside me.' In his notebook, Dylan prefaces this quote with the words of a preacher, 'For all those who speak of the savio[u]r, let them open their books . . . and read this.' And when an old friend came to call to preach the word of the Fab Four's latest 45, he was advised in no

uncertain terms to expand his reading matter beyond the sleeve of *Sgt. Pepper*:

> **Noel Stookey**: After Bob had his motorcycle accident . . . a friend, [a DJ called Dave Dixon,] and I . . . wanted to go see Bobby . . . We felt that The Beatles' music . . . was now expanding the human psyche. So, I called Bob up in Woodstock . . . I said, 'Hey, I want to come up and talk to you.' He said, 'Okay, come up.' He was really gracious. What I was trying to say was that [I felt] The Beatles were talking about Love . . . I asked, 'What do you think The Beatles are trying to say? You've been writing a long time, where are *you* headed now?' And Bob said, 'Based on your questions, Noel, I think you're going to like my next album.' . . . Bobby also said, 'You should read The Bible, Noel.'

At least two Big Pink songs also contain passing references to the gospels. The freshly composed 'I Shall Be Released' inverted Matthews's prophecy, 'As the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man' [24:27], the imprisoned narrator seeing his own 'light come shining from the west down to the east'. While the most sublimely spiritual of the Big Pink songs – the seven-minute 'Sign On The Cross', recorded during the second phase of sessions – sees Dylan ponder the words nailed above Christ on the cross, 'This is Jesus, The King of the Jews' [Matthew 27:37]. Again, the song has a most unexpected moral:

> If that sign on the cross . . . begins to worry you
> Well, that's all right because you just sing a song
> And all your troubles will pass right on through.

He remained wary of the epithet Prophet, even when citing the most apocalyptic of Old Testament Cassandras, Jeremiah, 'Ye do not hearken unto the words/ Of the prophets who are prophesying to you, They are making you vain things.' [23:16] There are other clues in these notebooks of Dylan enjoying taking an irreverent attitude to Scripture. He describes Jonah as 'a selfish man – who burned his children at the stake', and referencing the deeds of another Judas, wonders, 'How much could the thirty pieces of silver weigh? . . . Was it enough money to buy a camel?'

However, nowhere in these notebooks does he cite the Book of Isaiah, from which he would soon take a verse prophesying the fall of Babylon – 'For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen' [21:6] – as the starting point for his most Apocalyptic song since 'When The Ship Comes In'. For the first time in a Dylan song the Thief of Fire, a.k.a. the Joker, converses with the Thief in The Night.

'All Along The Watchtower' could well have been one of the songs he played to Bob Johnston when he came to Woodstock in September to hear some works in progress. But aside from playing him some new songs – none of them from Big Pink – Dylan had little to say. Johnston later recalled, 'My old lady Joey and Sara talked for a couple of hours while Bob and I sat and watched the fire. He never said a word, and neither did I.'

Another possible sounding board for the new songs was banjo player Happy Traum, another former Village stalwart who'd relocated upstate. Traum has described this as 'the time we knew Bob best. It was very family-oriented – dinners together, hanging out and playing a lot of music. He would come down to our house and say, "Hey, you wanna hear this new song I wrote?" . . . I [particularly] remember some of the songs from *John Wesley Harding*. Very few people were let in to that world.' Not even Ginsberg was so blessed, though he remembered Dylan at this time 'telling me how he was writing shorter lines, with every line meaning something . . . No wasted language, no wasted breath.'

Such was certainly the case with four new songs. Two small notebooks from the second half of 1967 contain rudimentary drafts of 'I Dreamed I Saw St Augustine', recorded at the first *JWH* session on October 17th, 'I Am A Lonesome Hobo' and 'As I Went Out One Morning', both cut at the second (November 6th), and 'Dear Landlord', recorded on the third and last (November 29th).*

This suggests Dylan might have had much of the album sketched out in his head before he recorded a single song – 'sketched out' being the operative phrase. 'I Dreamed I Saw St Augustine' just has the lines, 'Oh I awoke in agony with no place to stand or hide/ I put my fingers against the glass and bowed --- cried,' which is how he sings it on the

* These remain the only extant draft lyrics from this landmark album housed in Tulsa.

first take, released in 2019. 'As I Went Out One Morning' also contains just the germ of the idea: 'Until I soon lost all resistance/ Pity me, Tom Paine, I said/ (Twas then I turned to my long lost soul) . . . Who took me over the field and the mountain.'

There's more of 'I Am The Lonesome Hobo', but rather than serving time 'for ev'rything', the hobo has 'never stolen from a thief', and once had 'a sweetheart'. It is unclear whether a stray verse in the notebook served as its early bridge: 'How much does a man need/ Before his need turns to greed/ Before his want turns into lust/ Before his bones turn into dust.'

Wherever the verse went – and it could have belonged to either the lonesome hobo or a morally dissolute landlord – it is the early draft of 'Dear Landlord' which provides the greater revelation. Any doubts that the song is 'about' Albert Grossman – as has been long rumoured – fly out the window with the very first couplet: 'Dear Landlord, please don't put a price on this soul/ I'll pay you the debt just as soon as I can get out of this hole.' And the tone only becomes more ominous. The not-so-cryptic ending to the first verse reads, 'I told you before and I'll tell you again/ Everything's soon going to change, just as soon as I'm able,' while the third verse peels back the layers yet further: 'I've heard all the stories they've told about you/ And I've never believed one to be true.' Finally, an impending comeuppance is explicated with the final line, 'You'll get everything that's coming to you.'

Its inclusion in these notebooks suggests he could have done the song at the first *JWH* session. Something stopped him – perhaps the actual presence of Albert Grossman, who can be heard after a long breakdown on the opening song, 'Drifter's Escape', saying, 'Bob, Charlie can do the turn around on one of the other tracks, if you're satisfied with the other track.' To which Dylan replies, 'I'll get through it another time,' already eschewing any unnecessary overdubs on the multitrack.

Perhaps Grossman thought that attending the session was one way of stopping his client writing and recording songs directed at him. If so, he was sorely mistaken. Possibly, he had already been tipped off that Dylan was writing about himself again. In 2014, Sally Grossman recalled an evening at Big Pink where the couple had been invited to 'hear some [new] material' recorded in situ. One of the Hawks' girlfriends had baked a cake, but as 'they played the tape . . . almost immediately Albert looks at me and says, "We gotta go." He was

allergic to the buckwheat flour in the cake . . . They thought Albert hated the music so much, he'd got up and split.'

It may not have been the cake. Another new Dylan original, 'Nothing Was Delivered', references someone who 'must provide some answers/ For what you sell [that] has not been received,' and is asked to explain 'just what you had in mind/ When you made ev'rybody pay.' 'Nothing Was Delivered' was one of four new songs recorded on a single reel [#10], the contents of which were now added to the ten previous Dwarf demos. The others were 'Quinn The Eskimo', 'Open The Door Homer' and 'Tears Of Rage', all top-drawer Dylan, all with choruses and unchained melodies, if darker in tone than the songs previously captured that summer.*

The fact that he could shuttle styles so effortlessly, while simultaneously sketching out his first concept album, still beggars belief. But for others in a tight inner circle, the growing tension between Dylan and his personal manager was proving wearing. Pennebaker recalled, 'Towards the end, both were telling me different stories about things, and they [simply] didn't agree,' while Aronowitz lamented, 'If Albert wasn't managing Dylan anymore, he was still managing The Band, and Robbie was caught in the middle, just as I was.'

One thing was for sure. By the time a second Nashville session was booked, the first week in November, Grossman was *persona non grata*. The first session had resulted in 'Drifter's Escape', 'I Dreamed I Saw St Augustine' – from which Dylan dropped a lovely harmonica intro after two takes – and his own reimagining of the kind of laconic ballad he'd rediscovered in the Red Room, 'The Ballad Of Frankie Lee And Judas Priest'; proof positive his kaleidoscopic imagination remained intact, even if he now spoke more like Luke The Drifter than Bobby the Poet. Musicians McCoy and Buttrey were as prepped as ever:

> **Charlie McCoy**: When we did *John Wesley Harding*, I didn't have any information prior to going in about what it was going to be like. But [us] Nashville studio musicians . . . usually never [know] what we're going to be doing. We hear the music the first time we walk into the studio.

* *Melody Maker* journalist Nick Jones, son of Max, heard two of these songs in London in late October, so the songs date from no later than mid-October.

By the second session, McCoy and Buttrey realized the days of all-night sessions were long gone. Dylan was looking to cut these songs in double-quick time. If the session logs can be believed, he cut five songs on November 6th between six and nine in the evening, beginning with 'All Along The Watchtower', which save for a fluffed ending, he nailed on the first take. After a second take where Buttrey – thinking he'd got the hang of it – gets a little carried away, Dylan does the unthinkable and simply records a new coda, which he tags onto take one and moves on.*

Once again venturing into the unknowable region, Dylan's focus proves unerring. The contrast with the next set of Nashville sessions in February 1969 – where he merely embellished the same rhythm section – could not be starker. Not only do these complex songs have original arrangements, they also have real tunes, something not immediately obvious because of the stripped-down acoustic guitar-bass-drums set-up. If there is a lead instrument, it is the harmonica, which Dylan wields with judicious precision.

He can even allow himself to cast aside a decent original tune for 'I Pity The Poor Immigrant'. After recording it with the now-familiar tune and a great harp intro., and having pushed his voice as far as it can go, he tells Johnston, 'Don't take this,' and proceeds to teach the musicians a different tune. The next take starts with Dylan telling them, 'Yeah, the melody changed.' Still not satisfied, he attempts a synthesis of the two, capturing it by take four. The tune the memory man ended up using was one he learnt from Jean Redpath in the Village, Scottish folksong, 'Tramps & Hawkers'.

By the end of this second session, *John Wesley Harding* was all but in the bag. What now became apparent is that he was making a concept album. Not a *Sgt. Pepper* 'we'll stick with the concept for three songs, put a pointless coda on the end and call it a concept' album, but a cohesive piece of work with a narrative arc, which achieves resolution.† As Ian Bell notes, 'There is a formal unity to this collection

* The *John Wesley Harding* take information in Michael Krogsgaard's sessionography, used verbatim on Olof Björner's website, is pure fantasy. By fall 1967, logging false starts had become anathema at Columbia.

† For a fuller explication on *Sgt. Pepper's* merits and demerits, I refer interested readers to my 2007 volume, *The Act You've Known For All These Years* (Canongate).

[that] is unlike anything Dylan had attempted previously.' It also has a moral, the same one offered at the end of 'Sign On The Cross'. Dylan was deliberately making *his* statement without studio jiggery-pokery, later rebuking The Beatles for all the goings-on at Abbey Road through the first half of 1967, 'I didn't think all that production was necessary.'

Dylan was able to do this because for the first time he had a clause to his new contract – one that was only added on September 18th, ten weeks after he signed on the dotted line. It read, 'Dylan has the right to approve positioning of master recordings on albums.' From hereon, it would be his sequence, and his alone. With this in mind, he completed his carefully-conceived narrative arc on November 29th with a six-hour session (6-12 p.m.) that gave him the album's last three tracks: the moralistic 'Wicked Messenger', and the bucolic 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight' and 'Down Along The Cove'; as well as a song he'd mused over for a while, 'Dear Landlord' – his very own 'Take A Message To Albert'.*

The album was done and dusted. For those paying attention, everything about it sounded original, even the use of pedal-steel on the last two tracks of a folk-rock album. The player responsible, Pete Drake, notes, 'It opened the door for the pedal-steel guitar, because then everybody wanted to use one. I was getting calls from all over the world. One day my secretary buzzed me [to say], "George Harrison wants you on the phone." '

Yet Dylan would later claim, 'I didn't intentionally come out with some kind of mellow sound. I would have liked . . . more steel guitar, more piano, more music . . . I didn't sit down and plan that sound.' If Robbie Robertson can be believed, the two of them even 'talk[ed] about doing some overdubbing on it, but I really liked it when I heard it, and I couldn't really think right about overdubbing on it'.

Any such conversation – like life – would have been brief. The album was in the shops within four weeks of that third and final session. There was not even time to arrange a proper photo-session for the cover. Instead, Dylan asked Columbia's art-director, John Berg, with whom he had clashed on previous covers, to come up to Woodstock

* Only the completed masters from the final *John Wesley Harding* session remain in the Sony vaults. The session-tapes seem to have been lost or stolen, as the November 6th tapes were, before being bought back.

and snap a Polaroid of him wearing his *Blonde on Blonde* jacket, just to prove he hadn't changed, he was the same man.

He would be flanked on either side by some visiting folk musicians, Indian cultural ambassadors, the Bengali Bauls. After taking half a dozen photos, Berg spread them out on Dylan's dining-room table, and Dylan picked out the one he liked, which was ever so slightly blurred and in black and white (though some colour shots were apparently taken). He told Berg he wanted something that 'looks like a snapshot'.

Some post-production would still be needed. As soon as the album appeared as a belated Christmas present, observant fans began claiming all four Beatles had been super-imposed in the tree behind, something Berg admitted was true, 'but was reluctant to talk about', when *Rolling Stone* approached him two months after the album appeared for a news story called 'Dylan Record Puts Beatles Up In A Tree'. He also let on that 'the hand of God . . . was nestling along the right-hand side of the tree.'

Further proof that Dylan had not lost his sense of humour could be found on the rear sleeve, which featured the story of Three Kings, Frank (the key to the album) and Terry Shute. This parody of a parable confirmed his immersion in the 'King James' while sending up the very idea that the album had a 'key', and it allowed Dylan to cast himself as a modern John Bunyan, talking in riddles, challenging the listener to discern the word of truth.

It was a narrative style, sadly, he never revisited, but one he had evidently been playing around with for months, writing in one contemporary notebook: 'The man who wins the lookalike contest looked exactly like the president except for a small mole beneath the nose and a scar which he would not say how he received. "I'm a peaceful man," he said as he accepted the bronze plate.'

If Three Kings suggested he had become a moderate man, the whole premise had as its precursor an unused section of the *Tarantula* ms. dating from March 1965, which included a reference to 'three wise constipated kings: Hobble, Jobble an Jerry' who are looking for a 'young mountain climber', having brought along 'a bag full of games'.

Dylan had his sleeve, and his album. And what an impressive piece of work it was, even if the *auteur* in him would prove slightly dismissive of the results in later life, telling Cameron Crowe it was 'just a bunch

of songs, really,' and indicating to Matt Damsker that he had originally 'figured [the basement tapes] was just the kind of stuff I wanted to do on my record . . . But then I went back and wrote just real simple songs . . . I knew it wasn't where I was gonna stay very long, but I had to explore that territory.'

Now he just needed to wait and see what the folks back home made of a work that comprised largely 'homespun ballads', sure in the knowledge that he had at the very least found his own moral compass for this brave new world.

3.3

October 1967 to February 1969: When The Lights Went Out

Robert Love: In a period around 1966, you went into seclusion for more than a year, and there was much speculation about your motives. It was to protect your family, wasn't it?
Bob Dylan: That's right . . . I gave up my art to do that.
RL: And was that painful?
BD: Totally frustrating and painful, of course, because that intuitive gift – which for me went musically – had carried me so far . . . and it hurt to have to do it. But I didn't have a choice.

[2015]

There was a very strong middle-class or lower-middle-class ethic lurking with him all the time. You could really see it when he was around his mother or when he talked about his brother . . . I remember him sitting in the studio and dwelling on his notoriety and the inner tension that came from it. He'd sit there and say, 'I can't understand it – all I am is an entertainer.' I think he really believed that.

Bruce Dorfman, painter.

Woodstock is a very womb-like place . . . and people who go to Woodstock are transformed; people who live there, that is.

Elliott Landy, photographer.

I could never reach him directly, for he guards his privacy very carefully. The technique was to call his secretary Naomi, who would call him; then, if he chose to, he would call back.

Clive Davis.

> In the early years everything had been like a magic carpet ride for me – and then all at once it was over . . . Suddenly, I didn't feel I could do it anymore.
>
> Bob Dylan, to John Preston, 26th September 2004.

*

If Dylan had taken a fair few liberties with the cover material he and the Hawks had recorded in the Red Room the previous spring, it was as nothing to the ones he now took with the first song recorded at Big Pink that fall, Bobby Bare's 'All-American Boy'. Originally recorded by Bare as a demo for Bill Parsons in December 1958, and mistakenly released as a Parsons original, the song – intended as a comic talkin' blues about the recently enlisted Elvis Presley – went all the way to number two.

Dylan clearly remembered the gist of it, but once he begins to riff on some of the lines there is no stopping him: 'Pickin' hot licks . . . showin' off,' becomes, 'Kicking a hot storm up over the ocean/ He took himself a notion/ He got some lotion/ And he put it on his guitar.' 'Impressin' the girls,' turns into a lascivious reverie as he begins to imagine, 'makin' 'em little girlies giggle . . . makin' 'em all just jump up an' down an' wiggle/ Empty their socks in their britches.' Everyone in the high-flying band joins in with the festivities. Likewise, the portrait of 'a man with a big cigar/ [who] said . . . I'm gonna make you a star,' was rendered more relevant, nay apposite, as Dylan replaced Colonel Tom with Uncle Albert:

> Well, sooner or later a man's gonna come
> He gonna take a look at you, look at your drum
> He'd be a man and he'll take you home
> Yeah, he'll take you out to his farm
> He'll give you a good one, he'll give it to ya.
> Well, sooner or later you're bound to meet his wife
> And you'll come in 'n' have the time of your life.

Grossman wouldn't hear the song in real time; indeed, not until his business relationship with Dylan was severed in 1971. Imagine his surprise when a tape consisting of eleven Dylan originals and a traditional

arrangement ('900 Miles') arrived on his desk, sent it seems from Columbia, where it had been lodged for safe-keeping. The songs had been compiled from at least four of Garth's 1967 reels, all recorded after the previously copyrighted demos, some recorded at 3¾ ips, some at 7½ ips; with 'Sign On The Cross' and 'All-American Boy' tagged on last, but almost certainly recorded first. If 'All-American Boy' was meant to be a joke at Albert's expense, it didn't stop Grossman copyrighting the song – to Dylan, and Dylan alone* – one of five belated additions to the ever-expanding catalogue of Dwarf demos from the Big Pink treasure trove.

Even if one was tempted to think his reimagining of 'All-American Boy' was a spur of the moment exegesis on Dylan's part – a recording nobody was ever going to hear – it's not so easy to explain the inflammatory rewrites he made to the song sometime between August 4th, 1971 – when he was sent a typed transcript of the 1967 recording to correct for copyright purposes – and June 15th, 1973 when he returned the corrected lyrics, with handwritten amendments.†

By the time Dylan rewrote these lines he had entirely extricated himself from Grossman's commercial clutches. Yet the animosity evidently still ran deep. At a time when he was struggling to write anything from scratch, Dylan seemed to have no trouble immersing himself in a vat of Big Pink again, adding a couplet like, 'There was a holy cow and a medicine man/ And a sacred cow and an iron jaw that wouldn't break,' and another where the Mephistophelean manager proffers a poisoned chalice, 'Drink that sonny, it comes in a cup/ Yeah, he'll take you out to his farm/ Where he's fixin' it up.'

There could be some truth to Dylan's implied *j'accuse* – that Grossman actively encouraged his clients' addictions – if one attaches credence to two remarks made to Barney Hoskyns for his history of the Woodstock music scene, *Small Town Talk*; one from ex-Fug Ed Sanders: 'Too many of [Grossman's] artists were junkies, and I think it's possible he used their addiction as a way of controlling them'; the other, offered anonymously and all the more unguarded for it: 'If Bob

* Perhaps a righteous response to Bare claiming a half-copyright to Hedy West's '500 Miles From Home', the title-track of his 1963 album.

† Dylan's amendments probably date from the summer of 1972, when he was also sent transcriptions for other songs found on the same reel (see chapter 3.6).

had been my client, I would have put road people on who made sure he didn't get any drugs, or certainly wouldn't have supplied them to him. Albert made sure to do exactly the opposite.'

Dylan himself only came to share such suspicions after he stopped drinking from Grossman's cup, which definitely happened by autumn 1967, by which time his animosity had become obvious enough for Aronowitz to notice, 'My first hint of bad blood boiling between Albert and Bob came when Bob started sneering at the very mention of Albert's name, muttering angry words about a mysterious incident concerning somebody's wife' – probably the very one who had offered the all-American boy 'the time of your life', having disappeared with him for three hours on her wedding day back in 1964.

Others less observant took longer to recognize the festering animosity. Levon Helm only noticed 'Bob and Albert weren't speaking to each other' at a benefit concert in January 1968. After a sabbatical on an oil rig, Levon had returned to the fold in early November, probably while Grossman was still in England, and just after Dylan and The Hawks cut the last of the home reels [#13] to be accessed by Sixties bootleggers.

'Get Your Rocks Off' – the one song on this reel copyrighted in January 1968 – again shows him enjoying making the girls giggle. But Dylan was also looking to rock out. 'Odds And Ends' is the most raucous thing he'd recorded in a year and a bit, delighting Helm when he heard it, though he did not play on it. Equally catchy was 'Apple Suckling Tree', which sees Dylan take to the piano for a parting glass of largely spontaneous ribaldry.

This last pre-Helm reel draws a line in the sand. Gone is the pop sensibility of the fourteen 'acetate' songs the others recorded between May and September, even if pastiche remains the order of the day. The satirical send-up 'Clothes Line Saga' – originally named 'Answer To Ode' – does for Bobbie Gentry's recent number one single, 'Ode To Billy Jo', what he'd done to Bare's 'All-American Boy' a matter of days before.

Yet Dylan continued to demo songs with his retained friends. Between this reel and the 'final' basement reel [#20] in early 1968 – featuring Dylan's one genuine nod to Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* on these tapes, country-rock renditions of 'Wildwood Flower' and 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean' – there are still

plenty of joys to behold. But no-one, it seems, can agree on when the material was recorded or on what 'basement' songs the returning Helm plays. Sid Griffin has him playing on 'Silent Weekend', but not on any of the other dozen songs on the same reel, a faintly ludicrous assertion; especially as Robertson vividly describes Helm's playing on 'Santa Fe', from the same reel, as 'a bit rusty and tentative from just getting back, and still a little unfamiliar with the clubhouse groove'.

Maybe this rustiness explains the unembellished playing on these songs. Or perhaps Helm had simply figured out the boss liked drummers who just kept the beat. A greater issue is the twenty songs which cannot be assigned to any given reel, or to a specific period – though all are from post-September '67 'home' sessions. (Some are evidently from Wittenberg Road, where The Band moved in late November.) They include songs as important as 'Sign On The Cross', 'Wild Wolf' and 'All You Have To Do Is Dream', three enticing avenues Dylan could have gone down.*

'Wild Wolf' and 'All You Have To Do Is Dream' take on particular importance because both appear to be post-*John Wesley Harding*, and each contain lyrics that are, at times, 'authentic frontier gibberish', to quote Mel Brooks. The copyrighted transcript of the former reads like the work of a slightly deaf Edward Lear. All we know about 'Wild Wolf' is that he's 'gonna howl his way from morning', is 'still bubbling under', and he had something to do with the destruction of 'the Pharaoh and his armies'. Its one performance is as enigmatic and unfathomable as Blind Willie Johnson's 'Dark Was The Night'.

Destruction also rears its head in 'All You Have To Do Is Dream', as something which 'causes damage; and damage causes lust', to which the narrator himself seems to have succumbed, as on the very next line he asks some 'little girl' to 'come . . . blow this horn, hard as any horn I've seen.'

In both cases, the tapes would take years to appear, the originals having been mislaid by Garth. 'All You Have To Do Is Dream' would emerge on a fabled 1986 four-LP bootleg set, while 'Wild Wolf' would

* Of the second ten 'basement' reels, only #13 and #20 are numbered. The gaps suggest lost tapes and more Band-only recordings like the 'This Wheel's On Fire' and 'We Can Talk' demos.

not be heard until 2014's official round-up of the source tapes.* As such, the evidence they offer of Dylan's mindset post-*John Wesley Harding* remained under wraps until well after he emerged from that first 'amnesia'.

Also on this reel, surely with Helm *in situ*, are 'Ain't No More Cane' and 'Don't Ya Tell Henry' – both songs Helm later sang with The Band. Each receives a raucous Dylan vocal, as do two songs from Dylan's 1961 repertoire, '900 Miles' and 'Satisfied Mind', and full-blooded electric arrangements of 'Blowin' In The Wind', 'One Too Many Mornings' and 'It Ain't Me, Babe', the first time in eighteen months he had acknowledged the existence of a pre-accident canon. These are worked-up performances, too. There is a purpose to them, vouchsafed by the fact that they were captured on the same reel – in the case of 'Blowin' In The Wind' at 7½ ips – as 'Don't Ya Tell Henry' and the Mardi Gras mayhem of 'Bourbon Street'.

One possibility is that Dylan was thinking of doing one (or more) of his own songs at a tribute concert for Woody Guthrie at Carnegie Hall on January 20th, 1968. He certainly intended to bring along the band – now called The Crackers – whatever he elected to do, a decision that made others nervous. As Robertson recalls, 'I felt like a bit of an intruder in this setting, but the responsibility for inviting us along fell on Bob's shoulders.' Also intruding backstage between sets were Michael Bloomfield and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, who claimed the two of them ended up 'playing . . . guitar for two hours backstage . . . We were just making up shit, just like when we used to be together.'

In the end, Dylan did three Guthrie songs, in a way that showed he had fully assimilated Woody's most important lesson, 'Be yourself.' He wasn't about to give such a respectful audience what they expected, pulling off – in rock critic Ellen Willis's words – another 'of his brilliant reversals: having had the nerve to use only acoustic instruments on *John Wesley Harding*, he now came on in the middle of a memorial to the quintessential folkster with a four-man electric band and three rousing country-rock arrangements'. Guthrie, who had died the

* Sid Griffin fondly imagined he heard two takes, as opposed to two dubs of the same 'Wild Wolf'.

previous October, finally succumbing to Huntington's, would have approved.*

It was a crackerjack performance from The Band, too, even if it was also a symbolic parting of the ways. Ten days earlier, they had entered A&R Studios, the very studio where Dylan had recorded his first six albums, Columbia's old Studio A. They were going to record their own *Music from Big Pink*, including two songs with Dylan lyrics and Band tunes, 'Tears Of Rage' and 'This Wheel's On Fire'. Indeed, a demo of the latter in mile-wide stereo is the final song on the 'Wild Wolf' reel. This time it's a Danko vocal and a Band arrangement.

These floorbirds were about ready to spread their wings, and they knew they had better hurry up and choose which of Dylan's discards they wanted before they all disappeared. As of January 16th, when Dwarf Music copyrighted the last four songs for the fabled 'acetate', there was an unseemly rush to record all fourteen songs, generating Dylan's – and Grossman's – primary revenue stream for the foreseeable.

At some point in October 1967 Garth Hudson had set about compiling a mono 7½ ips reel from the master reels at Grossman's behest.† Quite probably the impetus for this was Albert's imminent visit to the UK. We know he took with him at least some Big Pink songs because his British publisher promptly played seven of them – including the not-yet-copyrighted 'Tears Of Rage' and 'Quinn The Eskimo' – to *Melody Maker*'s Nick Jones.

The tapes soon found their way to the likes of Manfred Mann (who successfully covered 'Mighty Quinn', as they decided to call it) and Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger & The Trinity (who had a number one with 'This Wheel's On Fire'), as Dylan covers once again filled the airwaves. He might even have had a third Top Ten from these tapes if Hendrix hadn't decided to release his stunning interpretation of 'All Along The Watchtower', rather than the 'Tears Of Rage' he demoed at this time. But no

* Many assumed Guthrie was already dead, notably the punter who heckled Dylan in Liverpool in May 1966, 'Woody Guthrie would turn in his grave.' Dylan evidently knew something of the state his mentor was in because when Alan Price asked about him in 1966, he replied, 'He's alive, if you call that alive. He's breathing.'

† Robertson claims *he* and Garth put the tape together 'for Albert to pass on to the music-publishing people'. Perhaps he could therefore explain why he omitted three of its key performances from the 1975 CBS LP.

matter how much energy Grossman exerted spreading the word, these seminal recordings were destined to become the last administered by him on Dylan's behalf.

A bitter war for the reversion of Dylan's copyrights was about to commence and Dylan, who knew his enemy and had come to know himself, was fully prepared to fight dirty, if required. The first shot across the bows came on March 28th, 1968, when Columbia Business Affairs received the following letter from Dylan's new legal secretary, Naomi Saltzman:

> Gentlemen: Please be advised that . . . Mr Dylan, requests that all checks and original statements forthcoming to him under the [July 1st, 1967] agreement be hereafter addressed as follows: Mr Bob Dylan, P.O. Box 36, Prince Station, New York 10012. Copies of all statements should be sent to Mr Albert B. Grossman.

Evidently, Dylan had finally got around to reading all his contracts. Sara, who remained friends with Sally even as she was forced to take sides (and deliver any messages Dylan had for the Grossmans, after he cut off all other lines of communication), confided in Bruce Dorfman that her husband 'was thinking of changing managers. [He felt] that he shouldn't have had to read the contract, which . . . a lot of artists would say: they feel they shouldn't have to. They should be able to trust people.' Trust and betrayal lay at the very heart of the matter. As Dylan later said, in deposition, when asked how long he had known Grossman, 'Well, I don't think I've ever known the man.'

It was primarily Grossman's double-dipping on Dylan's publishing that had made him take a long hard look in the mirror. How and when he came to discover Uncle Albert was guilty of this practice is not documented. Sounes suggests it was after a brief discussion with David Braun – his *and* Grossman's lawyer – in Dylan's car, after Braun explained the real terms of the contract he had signed in April 1966 setting up Dwarf Music. In response, Dylan apparently convened a meeting at Naomi Saltzman's house with her, Braun and a forensic accountant.

Former road manager, Jonathan Taplin, in his 2021 memoir claims it was Saltzman who first stirred the pot: '[Dylan] had an accountant [sic] named Naomi Saltzman, who was constantly reminding him how

much he was paying Albert Grossman, and she'd gotten him so worked up about money that Bob proposed they renegotiate their publishing deal. Albert . . . was [not happy about] the same tactic [he'd used repeatedly] being applied to his share of Bob's music publishing.' Once Braun joined the Dylan team, Taplin sensed it was all over for Albert, 'They essentially got Bob to feel that Albert was taking way too much of the music-publishing revenue. Once Bob began to believe that Albert was screwing him, it was all downhill.'

Both Sounes and Taplin imply Dylan *needed* to be told the truth; that he had to be brought to the realization he'd been screwed. I don't necessarily buy that. But whatever the truth, recruiting Saltzman and Braun, thus turning his ex-manager's poachers into gatekeepers, was a masterstroke. Between them, they knew where most of the bodies were buried. It gave Dylan an edge he could use, and evidently did, because by the end of 1968 he had renegotiated his publishing arrangements with Grossman, who agreed to set up a new company, Big Sky, even though the Dwarf Music contract had *seven* years left to run. Under the terms of a new agreement, new songs would be lodged with Big Sky and Saltzman would be in charge of its administration.

It meant that Grossman was reliant on Dylan to receive his cut, not the other way round. Grossman still shared net profits on Big Sky songs in the same 50/50 proportion as Dwarf Music but only until June 1971, when the new Columbia deal was also due to expire. Such a deal can only have been agreed because Dylan had found the smoking gun and threatened to use it. The feared negotiator had been outmanoeuvred by his protégé.

If, in this instance, Saltzman already knew the name of the beast, her next adversary, ABC, was an entirely different creature. Her brief was to extract Dylan from his ABC contract and the *Stage '66* deal with a minimum of upfront costs, while retaining maximum control. ABC had already commenced an action against Dylan's production company, Rangoon, in New York's Supreme Court, so time was of the essence. Naomi promptly proved her mettle by negotiating an agreement (dated February 1968) which, for an upfront payment of $10,000, ensured the problem went away. Under the agreement, duly ratified by both parties in May, Rangoon became the 'sole owner of film and program', and was 'not obligated to complete or release film'.

In theory, the agreement meant ABC were entitled to receive half of

the net receipts the film generated up to $100,000, but it was not beholden on Dylan to do anything with the film. Given the fate of the basement tapes and *Tarantula*, such a clause should have given ABC cause to pause. By now, though, they just wanted shot of the whole sorry project. Yet the film had not actually been abandoned by Dylan or Alk. Indeed, the day after the ABC settlement Alk forwarded Naomi an estimate of the cost of completing the film – $38,493 – and a request to 'know what the release situation is [with] Lennon, Spencer Davis, Johnny Cash &c.' The film now had its title and an aesthetic, or as Pennebaker suggests, an anti-aesthetic:

> Dylan [and Alk] made this film from the outtakes of the rough cut Bobby [Neuwirth] and I had put together. They took these pieces of footage and jammed them together. They were trying to make a point by doing that. It was a . . . put-down of documentaries . . . The title is Al Aronowitz's. He said, 'Documentary? Eat the document!'

There was even a proposal drawn up, supposedly designed to sell the film to distributors, though it would be ten years before Dylan and Alk released any movie, and when they did, it would be entirely self-financed. Evidently, Pennebaker was not alone in disavowing Alk's schtick. According to the proposal, probably jointly composed by Aronowitz and Dylan:

> [EAT THE] DOCUMENT [is] based on the Novel, 'Document' by Alfred Aronowitz [and is] to star Bob Dylan. music & the abstraction of the condition of the music to illustrate the Prolonged Mind destroyed & re-created thru the process of previous experience. this is not an easy feat, but to plant the seeds of both motion & stability has not always been an easy challenge. mr dylan will sing six or seven songs of Lore. nine if necessary to show the power of a Passive Universe . . . The songs themselves shall then, too, dissolve when the Monumental Failure of both Disappearance & Investigation cease to become entrapped in the suggestion & not the probability of the song itself.

The film described here bore no evident relationship to *Something Is Happening Here*, or indeed any film made before or since, even as it gave Dylan and Alk breathing space to make a film according to their joint