

The Streets of Rome: The Classical Dylan

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Taming the proud: the case of Virgil

For those of us—and there are a few of us in my neck of the woods—interested in the Roman poet Virgil and in the art of Bob Dylan, the strange days that followed September 11, 2001 were particularly memorable. Dylan’s two-year stint in the Hibbing High Latin Club was at that point unknown to me. In the summer of 2005 a trip to the Seattle Music Experience revealed his early interest, set out on the page of the Hibbing High School yearbook, the *Hematite*, as it is called. The page is also featured in Scorsese’s *No Direction Home*. But even on the first time through *Love and Theft*, even before we had noted the quotes around the title that drew attention to the theft of Eric Lott’s title, before we had been handed the snippets of *Confessions of a Yakuza*, transformed into Appalachian and other vignettes, there was Virgil, loud and clear, in the tenth verse of “Lonesome Day Blues” (itself a Blind Willie McTell title):

I’m gonna spare the defeated, I’m gonna speak to the crowd / I’m gonna spare the defeated, boys, I’m going to speak to the crowd / I am goin’ to teach peace to the conquered / I’m gonna tame the proud // (“Lonesome Day Blues”)

But yours will be the rulership of nations, / remember Roman, these will be your arts: / to teach the ways of peace to those you conquer, / to spare defeated peoples, tame the proud // (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.851-53, [trans. Mandelbaum])

Teaching peace, sparing the defeated, and taming the proud. Too much precision there for accident, even without the album’s title or Junichi Saga’s presence. Now Virgil’s Latin is close to the translation I give, but Latin it is, with the three Roman arts spread over a line and a half:

tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
 (hae tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem
 parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.

The Latin in fact has four Roman qualities: “to rule over people with empire, to institute law in addition to peace, to spare the subjected, and to war down the proud.” If I had given that translation, and it is more “faithful” to the Latin though less poetically put, there might be doubt as to whether Dylan was alluding to Virgil’s *Aeneid* at all. But that is the point: Dylan’s intertext is not created from the Latin of Virgil—though Hibbing High’s Robert Zimmerman may possibly have gotten far enough in his Latin to have read some Virgil back then. Rather, Dylan read, as I have given it, the English translation of Allen Mandelbaum,¹ the best contemporary translation until 2005, when Stanley Lombardo’s excellent new version arrived on the field.²

The cover of Lombardo’s *Aeneid* translation shows a section of the Vietnam wall, including fragments of names of those killed in the war. This reflects recent readings of Virgil’s poem that see it as, among other things, a questioning of the worth of the imperial enterprise. Already, however, Mandelbaum’s 1971 preface let the wrongs of that war into the Roman world of the Virgil he was translating (xiv):

And place, which for me at least had always been the last mode through which I heard a poet, after twelve years lived in the landscapes of Virgil, finally began, even as I was leaving Italy, to reinforce the voice of Virgil. That happened to me at a time of much personal discontent. I had long contemned any use of the poetic word for purposes of consolation. But pride lessens with the years, and Virgil consoled. The years of my work on this translation have widened that personal discontent; this state (no longer, with the Vietnam war, that innocuous word “society”) has wrought the unthinkable, the abominable. Virgil is not free of the taint of the proconsular; but he speaks from a time of peace achieved, and no man ever felt more deeply the part of the defeated and the lost.

Mandelbaum’s preface (xii) also quotes the lines Dylan used, and that context—connecting Roman war to American—may explain how Dylan saw the uses of the Virgilian text.

What does it *mean* that Dylan incorporated these lines from a 2000-

¹ See Mandelbaum 1971.

² See Lombardo 2005. The Virgil quote has been noted by many blogs. Eyolf Østrem cites Mandelbaum’s translation without comment (<http://dylanchords.nfshost.com>).

year old poem into his 2001 song? That depends on the reader. For me the verse activates the Roman poet's conflict about empire: Aeneas fails to live up to his father's urging that he tame the proud but spare the defeated, when at the end of the *Aeneid* he kills his wounded and suppliant enemy. Further, the war in "Lonesome Day Blues" becomes—again, for me—not just the war of the *Aeneid*'s mythological frame, set 1000 years before Virgil's time, but also the Roman civil wars, and the wars against Antony and others on which the empire of Augustus would be founded. Before the intertext emerges and as long as the singer of Dylan's song seems to belong in the time of Robert Zimmerman, the war that has brought desolation to the singer is most naturally the Vietnam War, the defining war of empire and moral failure of our time. The two contexts merge and make the song about no war and every war, as happens so often with time and place generally in Dylan.

But this doubling of the temporal frame is of course too simple, once we add the ingredient of Junichi Saga's *Confessions of a Yakuza* (1997), from which Dylan disperses some twelve undeniable passages across five songs, including two in "Lonesome Day Blues":³

Samantha Brown lived in my house for about four or five months. / Don't know how it looked to other people, I never slept with her even once. ("Lonesome Day Blues")

Just because she was in the same house didn't mean we were living together as man and wife, so it wasn't any business of man what she did. I don't know how it looked to other people, but I never even slept with her—not once. (*Confessions of a Yakuza*, 208)

Well my captain he's decorated—he's well schooled and he's skilled / My captain, he's decorated—he's well schooled and he's skilled / He's not sentimental—don't bother him at all / How many of his pals have been killed. ("Lonesome Day Blues")

There was nothing sentimental about him—it didn't bother him at all that some of his pals had been killed. He said he'd been given any number of decorations, and I expect it was true. (*Confessions of a Yakuza*, 243)

It is not difficult to see the appeal of Saga's work, which blurs the genres of novel and biography, fiction and non-fiction, and whose narrative complexity and shifts, along with its lively use of colloquial language (at least in John Bester's translation) clearly appealed to Dylan's literary sensibility. *Confessions* recounts the life of an early- to mid-twentieth

³ The "theft" was first noted in *The Wall Street Journal* on July 8, 2003.

century gangster, Ijichi Eiji (b. 1904), narrated in his own voice but as “quoted” by the novelist Saga who portrays himself as the late twentieth-century doctor of the dying Eiji. The two passages in question come from late in the novel. The first (208) has to do with Osei (= Samantha Brown), whose stay with Eiji happened during World War II, soon before the American defeat of Japan’s “imperial empire,” to quote from “Honest With Me,” another song that would quote from *Confessions*. The second (243) comes from Eiji’s final narrative chapter, as he recollects Osei turning up in 1951 (238): “The Korean War was going strong, and my new gambling place in Tokyo was doing really well”—why does this sound so much like a line from “Brownsville Girl” or some other Dylan narrative? The unsentimental source for Dylan’s decorated captain is one Nagano Seiji, encountered while Eiji is in prison, and a man who had sliced off a fellow-prisoner’s arm. The pals whose death didn’t both him were the about-to-be arch-enemies of the clearly American singer of “Lonesome Day Blues,” Japanese soldiers who died in the Chinese-Japanese War (1937-45).

So the war that is the backdrop of “Lonesome Day Blues” (“Well, my pa he died and left me, my brother got killed in the war”) is further and utterly mystified, but not finally so. Eyolf Østrem notes Dylan’s use of two passages (uncovered by “Nick”) from Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*):⁴

My sister, she ran off and got married / Never was heard of any more.
 (“Lonesome Day Blues”)

. . . and my sister Mary Ann run off and got married and never was heard
 of no more (*Huck Finn*, ch. 17)

Last night the wind was whisperin’, I was trying to make out what it was /
 Last night the wind was whisperin’ somethin’— / I was trying to make out
 what it was / I tell myself something’s comin’ / But it never does.
 (“Lonesome Day Blues”)

I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars was shining, and
 the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; . . . and the wind was
 trying to whisper something to me and I couldn’t make out what it was.
 (*Huck Finn*, ch. 1)

The first of these quotes comes from the Grangerford-Shepherdson episode of the novel, which has itself been seen as Twain’s metaphor for the broader

⁴ http://dylanchords.nfshost.com/41_lat/lonesome_day_blues.htm

Civil War. It is also noteworthy that the tale Huck is here spinning is just that, a fiction. If Dylan's Twain reference complicates our identification of the singer's "my brother got killed in the war," making us move maybe from Vietnam back to the American Civil War, the Virgilian lines which immediately follow the reworking of *Huck Finn* force us back even further, to the wars of Virgil's youth, the civil wars that tore the Roman republic apart and led to the establishment of the Roman empire, the paradigmatic empire of the West. The singer is an American from the twentieth century ("I'm forty miles from the mill—I'm droppin' it into overdrive"), but he is also Aeneas, also the Japanese warrior speaking within the narrative of a 1989 Japanese gangster, and, perhaps closest to home for Dylan/Zimmerman, he is Huck Finn. Dylan was wearing a Huck Finn hat before he became Dylan, more or less, but the creative renaissance that has been going on since *Time Out Of Mind* (and before it in terms of performance) has brought Twain's world into focus with Dylan's. Mississippi, Missouri, the river flooding or not, from its source in the Highlands, "Cold Irons" or North Country, north of Hibbing or north of anywhere and nowhere, down to New Orleans, a place that still defies identification other than as a place of loss and trouble—these were always the places of Dylan's creative exploration, as they were of Twain's.

Back to Virgil and the Classics. The examples of *Huck Finn* and *Confessions of a Yakuza* show that Dylan is quite freewheeling in his intertextuality, and is unbounded by song, or even by album in the case of *Time Out Of Mind*, *Love and Theft*, and *Modern Times*, the third part of the trilogy. As with the voice of Ijichi Eiji, so that of Aeneas, and the Aeneas who will bring empire, spare the defeated and tame the proud, may legitimately be seen elsewhere in these songs. On December 22, 2001 *Rolling Stone* published Mikal Gilmore's interview of Dylan, who said of *Love and Theft* that, "the whole album deals with power . . . [T]he album deals with power, wealth, knowledge and salvation." He follows, "It speaks in a noble language [including Latin perhaps?]. It speaks of the issues or the ideals of an age in some nation, and hopefully, it would also speak across the ages."⁵ *Some nation?* That obviously includes imperial Rome and imperial Japan. If so, we can invoke not just the pure intertexts of Saga and Virgil, but other reflections as well. The ending of "Bye and Bye," whose lyrics suggests the interchangeability of time ("Well the future for me is already a thing of the past"), may also work for the world of Rome, the world in which Virgil saw Augustus, descendant of Aeneas in his own propaganda, turn republic into empire: "I'm gonna establish my rule through civil war /

⁵ See Jonathan Cott, *Bob Dylan: The Essential Interviews* (2006:426).

Gonna make you see just how loyal and true a man can be.” And in “Honest With Me” empire comes up again: “I’m here to create the new imperial empire / I’m going to do whatever circumstances require.” From Aeneas and Augustus to Bush this works with any and no empire, with the issues of “some nation” “across the ages.”

The Last Outback at the World’s End: Into Exile with Ovid

One of the immediate classical resonances on *Modern Times* comes in the first song, “Thunder on the Mountain.” Particularly in the wake of “Lonesome Day Blues” the sixth verse of “Thunder on the Mountain” pointed straight to Ovid, and his *Ars Amatoria*: “I’ve been sittin’ down studyin’ the art of love / I think it will fit me like a glove.” But that was just the beginning. On October 10, 2006, Cliff Fell, a New Zealand poet and teacher of creative writing, wrote in the *Nelson Mail* (Nelson, New Zealand) of a striking discovery. He happened to be reading Peter Green’s Penguin translation of Ovid’s exile poetry,⁶ the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Black Sea Letters*), while listening to *Modern Times*:

And then this uncanny thing happened—it was like I was suddenly reading with my ears. I heard this line from the song “Workingman’s Blues 2,” “No-one can ever claim / That I took up arms against you.” But there it was singing on the page, from Book 2.52 of *Tristia*: “My cause is better: no-one can claim that I ever took up arms against you.”

Fell experienced what many of us experienced, though in an inverted way, when we heard in “Lonesome Day Blues” the familiar lines from *Aeneid* 6; as he read on in Ovid he came across further lines that were entering his consciousness from listening to *Modern Times*:

Bob Dylan, “Ain’t Talkin’” Heart burnin’, still yearnin’ In the last outback at the world’s end.	Ovid, <i>Black Sea Letters</i> , 2.7.66 I’m in the last outback, at the world’s end.
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Bob Dylan, “Workingman’s Blues #2” To lead me off in a cheerful dance.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> , Book 5.12.8 or Niobe, bereaved, lead off some cheerful dance.
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Bob Dylan, “Workingman’s Blues #2”	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> , Book 5.13.18
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⁶ See Green 2004. This translation contains the *Tristia* and the *Black Sea Letters* (*Epistulae ex Ponto*).

Tell me now, am I wrong in thinking That you have forgotten me? Bob Dylan, "Workingman's Blues #2" My cruel weapons have been put on shelf / Come sit down on my knee You are dearer to me than myself / As you yourself can see.	May the gods grant ... / that I'm wrong in thinking you've forgotten me! Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> , Book 2.179 Show mercy, I beg you, shelve your knee / cruel weapons. Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.14.2 wife, dearer to me than myself, you yourself can see.
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I e-mailed Cliff Fell, who then brought up our conversation and the current article I had mentioned to him in a radio show, which consequently made it onto the best and most thorough Dylan website, www.expectingrain.com. This in turn led to an e-mail to me from Scott Warmuth, Dylan aficionado, who had followed up on Fell's discovery and added further Ovidian intertexts:

Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" Every nook and cranny has its tears.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 1.3.24 every nook and corner had its tears.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" all my loyal and my much-loved companions.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 1.3.65 loyal and much-loved companions, bonded in brotherhood.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" I'll make the most of one last extra hour.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 1.3.68 let me make the most of one last extra hour.
Bob Dylan, "The Levee's Gonna Break" Some people got barely enough skin to cover their bones.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 4.7.51 there's barely enough skin to cover my bones.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" I practice a faith that's been long abandoned.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.7.63-64 I practice / terms long abandoned.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" They will tear your mind away from contemplation.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.7.66 tear my mind from the contemplation of my woes.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" They approve of me and share my code.	Ovid, <i>Black Sea Letters</i> 3.2.38 who approve, and share, your code.

At this point I ordered from Amazon.com one of the two available used copies of Peter Green's out-of-print 1994 Penguin translation of Ovid's exile

poems. I can now add the following further intertexts:

Bob Dylan, "Ain't Talkin'" Who says I can't get heavenly aid?	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 1.2.12-13 Who says I can't get heavenly aid when a god's angry with me?
Bob Dylan, "Spirit on the Water" I want to be with you any way I can.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.1.80 I want to be with you any way I can.
Bob Dylan, "Ain't talkin'" They will jump on your misfortune when you're down.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.8.3-5 Why jump / on misfortunes that you may well suffer yourself? / I'm down.
Bob Dylan, "Workingman's Blues #2" Now the place is ringed with countless foes.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> 5.12.19-20 I'm barred from relaxation / in a place ringed by countless foes.
Bob Dylan, "Spirit on the Water" Can't believe these things would ever fade from your mind.	Ovid, <i>Black Sea Letters</i> 2.4.24 I cannot believe these things could fade from your mind.
Bob Dylan, "Workingman's Blues #2" Them I will forget / But you I'll remember always.	Ovid, <i>Black Sea Letters</i> 4.6.42-3 <i>Them</i> I'll forget, / but <i>you</i> I'll remember always.

There is much else on *Modern Times* beyond these nineteen undeniable correspondences that shows Dylan identifying his singer with the exiled and aging Ovid. Where Ovid wrote (*Black Sea Letters* 4.9.95-96) "No man, no child, no woman has had grounds to complain on my account," Dylan followed with (Workingman's Blues #2) "No man, no woman knows / The hour that sorrow will come." And Ovid's (*Black Sea Letters* 4.14.7) "I don't give a damn about where I'm posted from this country" becomes in Dylan's "Thunder on the Mountain," "I don't give a damn about your dreams." And finally we have a sense from Dylan of marvel at the extent of the world, also of the debatability of its being round ("Ain't Talkin'"): "The whole wide world which people say is round." The phrase "whole wide world" is common in Green's translation (*Tristia* 3.10.77, 4.8.38, 5.7.44, 5.8.24-5; *Letters from the Black Sea* 4.9.126). The culture and age behind Dylan's sentiment that "the whole wide world which people say is round" points right to a world (third-century Greece and Rome following) that had proven in theory and practice, but maybe didn't quite believe, that the world was indeed round.

Fell noted the appropriateness of the intertexts: Dylan, 65 years old, in the inner exile he has created for his own protection, invokes the Ovidian exile poetry, coming at the end of the career of Ovid. Indeed, the last words of the last song, “Ain’t Talking,” and therefore the last words of the third album of the trilogy, suggest a finality, a closing of the book, and they are straight from Ovid (see above), as Dylan puts himself “in the last outback, at the world’s end.”

The 2001 *La Repubblica* Interview

Dylan rarely gives interviews, particularly in recent years. Earlier in the fateful 2001, in fact three days before the release of *Love and Theft*, on September 8, the Italian paper *La Repubblica* published an Italian version of the interview. The interview itself took place in July of 2001. An English version of it⁷ turned up on the www.expectingrain.com website, where it was joined by an English translation of a Swedish summary, and other bits of furniture.⁸ On May 22nd, 2006, two days before Dylan’s 65th birthday, the actual interview, consisting of seven mp3’s, was posted on the website www.whitemanstew.com (no longer available online).⁹ Where it has been all these years it is hard to say, and one has to conclude that the release is somehow deliberate.

Whether or not that is so, the interview shows that the Dylan of *Love and Theft*, even without the evidence of “Lonesome Day Blues,” has been thinking about Greek and Roman literature and his place in it. Already in “When I Paint My Masterpiece,” the *New Morning* outtake that came out on *Greatest Hits, Vol. 2* (1971), there is a turning back to those who came before: “Oh, the streets of Rome are filled with rubble, / Ancient footprints are everywhere.” The song moves from the Coliseum, where Dylan imagines himself “Dodging lions and wastin’ time,” and goes back through time to a story he perhaps picked up in his Latin Club days: “Train wheels

⁷ The English version is translated by David Flynn and can be accessed at <http://home.worldonline.dk/justesen/index/romeint.html>.

⁸ Note Dylan’s brilliant conflation of two disparate Ovidian sites as he creates an exquisite verse, based on both intertexts, but achieving its own lyrical heights in ways that take the verse to a high literary and pathetic level.

⁹ The exact URL was <http://www.whitemanstew.com/category/music/page/3/>, though this site is no longer available online. Any quotes from the review are my own transcriptions of the interview.

runnin' through the back of my memory, / When I ran on the hilltop following a pack of wild geese." The wild goose chase surely alludes to one of Rome's most famous myths of its early history, one of the scenes on Aeneas' shield in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, that is, the geese of Rome's Capitoline Hill, whose honking alerted the Romans to the invading Gauls.

Thirty years later the Rome interview goes back to those days:

My songs [on *Love and Theft*] are all singable. They're current. Something doesn't have to just drop out of the air yesterday to be current. This is the Iron Age, you know we're living in the iron age. What was the last age, the age of bronze or something? You know we can still feel that age. We can still feel that age. I mean if you walk around in this city, people today can't build what you see out there. You know when you walk around a town like this, you know that people were here before you and they were probably on a much higher, grander level than any of us are. I mean it would just have to be. We couldn't conceive of building these kind of things. America doesn't really have stuff like this.

The "current" can be a long time before yesterday, as the Virgilian and Ovidian lines show. Dylan deflects a question that might have taken the interview deeper. Asked whether he reads books on history, he responds "Not any more than would be natural to do." A similar deflection occurs a few minutes later when he is asked whether he is "still eagerly looking for poets that you may not have heard of or read yet" The reply comes after a long pause: "You know I don't really study poetry." More importantly, Dylan in this interview also shows he has become familiar with the major Greco-Roman metaphor of mythical-religious cultural change, the equivalent of Eden and the Fall in the Judeo-Christian system. At first sight it looks as if Dylan is simply including us in the actual Iron Age (following the various Stone Ages and Bronze Age) that began in Europe at the beginning of the first millennium BCE. But some minutes later in the discussion the subject comes up again, when he is asked about a reference he had made on the liner notes of *World Gone Wrong*:

Interviewer: In the same liner notes you talk about the new Dark Ages in the contemporary world.

Dylan: Well, the Stone Age, put it that way. We've talked about these ages before. You've got the Golden Age which I guess would be the Age of Homer, then we've got the Silver Age, then you've got the Bronze Age. I think you have the Heroic Age some place in there. Then we're living in what people call the Iron Age, but it could really be the Stone Age. We could be living in the Stone Ages.

Unfortunately none of the interviewers saw where he had been headed, or what he was really talking about, and one cracks a joke (“Maybe in the Silicone Ages?”), to which Dylan replies with a laugh “Exactly.” And the topic shifts to the internet, the mask back on.

From a scientific point of view Homer (c. 750 BCE) in fact belongs to the Iron Age, while the Trojan War (c. 1100) belonged to the Bronze Age. The system Dylan refers to is not that one, however, but rather the myth of the ages found in Hesiod (c. 700 BCE), in whose poem the *Works and Days* (109-201) is our first record of the five ages of the world, seen from the perspective of the present, the debased Iron Age, as Dylan noted. The progression is as Dylan has it, from ideal Gold (Eden) through Silver then Bronze, with the Age of Heroes preceding the Iron Age. Hesiod puts the Trojan War in the Age of Heroes, doubtless motivated by the existence, in pre-publication form, of oral versions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The overall myth is of central importance in Greek and particularly Roman poetry, for instance in Virgil’s fourth Messianic eclogue in which he predicted a return to the golden age that would accompany the birth and maturation of a miraculous boy, mistakenly identified with Christ by the early Christians. That is why the thirteenth-century Italian poet Dante could have Virgil as his guide, at least until the legitimately Christian Beatrice took over. Ovid has a version of it, without the Bronze Age, at the beginning of his *Metamorphoses*, “the scary horror tale . . . next to the autobiography of Davy Crockett” in Ray Gooch’s library, if we care to believe *Chronicles: Volume One* (p. 37), to which we soon turn.

Depending on our view of that, Dylan’s use of classical texts and images seems to be somewhat recent, as compared say to his relationship with the Bible, which has been there from very early on. The idea of Eden and the Fall makes it likely that he would in his reading eventually encounter the Hesiodic version or some variant of it. “Gates of Eden” itself (1965) seems devoid of anything classical, but “Changing of the Guards” from *Street Legal* (1978) may be another matter. In an interview for *SongTalk* in 1991 Paul Zollo put it to Dylan:¹⁰

Your songs often bring us back to other times, and are filled with mythic, magical images. A song like “Changing Of The Guard” seems to take place centuries ago, with lines like “They shaved her head / she was torn between Jupiter and Apollo / a messenger arrived with a black nightingale....” How do you connect with a song like that?

Dylan pauses before replying, enigmatically, “A song like that, there’s no

¹⁰ See Jonathan Cott, *The Essential Interviews* (2006:371).

way of knowing, after the fact, unless somebody's there to take it down in chronological order, what the motivation was behind it." And later "To me, it's old. [Laughs] It's old." In part it too is as old as Hesiod, where the cultural change away from Golden Age towards Iron is also figured at the divine level as the father-slaying that happens when the son Jupiter (Zeus) takes over not from Apollo, but from Saturn (Kronos). We therefore have an intimation of that system, with the woman torn between the old and the new, with conflicting loyalties in the changing of the guard. As with the war of "Lonesome Day Blues," the cultural change is not quite that of Genesis (though "Eden is burning"), not quite that of Hesiod (though we have Greco-Roman gods), but quintessentially Dylan's own hybrid that embraces both and much else besides. Generally, then, Dylan's contact with Greece and Rome is a more recent phenomenon, though in his own creative fictions it is already a thing of the past, as we shall see.

In Ray Gooch's library

What can we make of this remarkable scene from the second chapter of Dylan's *Chronicles: Volume One* (2004:35-39)? "The Lost Land" suggests myth and fiction, a world outside of history, but that in the setting of Dylan's "autobiography" is around 1961. Dylan has recently arrived in New York City, and is staying at this moment with Ray Gooch and Chloe Kiel, a colorful couple whose identity has been doubted by some readers and reviewers. The description of the two on p. 267 is virtuoso descriptive writing, not just of Ray, who "was like a character out of some of the songs I'd been singing"—or maybe memoirs he was writing? Dylan finds himself "looking for the part of my education that [I] never got," and so takes us on a tour of Ray's books. The reading he does is the reading we know he did at some stage, and presumably already in high school—"the poetry books, mostly. Byron and Shelley and Longfellow and Poe." It is the other books he seems to have just browsed rather than read: "I would have had to have been in a rest home or something in order to do that." Some he started, such as *The Sound and the Fury*: "didn't quite get it, but Faulkner was powerful." Of Albertus Magnus, St. Albert the Great, the German friar and encyclopedic writer from the thirteenth century, he says "Magnus seemed like a guy who couldn't sleep, writing this stuff late at night, clothes stuck to his clammy body." He adds that, "a lot of these books were too big to read, like giant shoes fitted for large-footed people." Is Dylan letting his Latin in (magnus = "big, large")?

However big the book of Magnus, "it was lightweight compared to

Thucydides.” The great Athenian historian of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BCE) seems to be at the peak of Dylan’s Parnassus, receiving three mentions in two pages. Dylan gets the title of the work wrong (*The Athenian General*, not necessarily a mistake), but no matter, for he captures the relevance of the Greek historian (36):

It was written four hundred years before Christ and it talks about how human nature is always the enemy of anything superior. Thucydides talks about how words in his time have changed from their ordinary meaning, how actions and opinions can be changed in the blink of an eye. It’s like nothing has changed from his time to mine.

The Penguin translation of Rex Warner gives the following for the one of the most famous passages of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1.22):

It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future. My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever [sic].

Nothing has changed from Thucydides’ time to mine, says Dylan. What is his time? Somewhere in 1961, if we can bring ourselves to imagine that his book is straight autobiography. But the comment works better for 2004, when Dylan was writing the book and when many of us were connecting events of those years, including imperial adventures, with similar events from antiquity. Not least of these events was the Athenian expedition against Sicily, which ended in disaster. Thucydides’ narrative “would give you the chills” says Dylan. Certainly some of us got the chills in 2003 when we recalled Thucydides 6.24 and the unwise decision of the Athenians to invade Sicily: “The result of this excessive enthusiasm of the majority was that the few who were opposed to the expedition were afraid of being thought unpatriotic if they voted against it, and therefore kept quiet.”

Other classical works encountered in the “library” of Ray Gooch include *The Twelve Caesars* (presumably the work of Suetonius), “Tacitus’ lectures and letters to Brutus,” “Pericles’ *Ideal State of Democracy*,” Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, “the scary horror tale,” and “Sophocles’ book on the nature and function of the gods.” It is curious that three of these are non-existent books, but in subtle ways: Tacitus wrote a dialogue about orators (including the long-dead Brutus, to whom Cicero wrote actual, surviving letters);

Pericles, who *was* an Athenian general, wrote nothing that survives but looms large in Thucydides, whose work includes the general's famous funeral oration, which does treat the ideal state of Athenian democracy; Sophocles only wrote tragedies, but they are often about the nature and function of the gods. Dylan's style is exquisite in these pages, and we see his typical humor, as with the comment on "Magnus," in placing the *Metamorphoses* "next to the autobiography of Davy Crockett," or with Alexander the Great's strategy of having his men marry local women: "After that he never had any trouble with the population, no uprisings or anything." Gooch's library is like a Dylan album cover, with messages and intertexts. Davy Crockett matters. Mark Twain would have been too obvious, so he put in another nineteenth-century purveyor of the Americana that is so central to Dylan, humorist Davy Crockett. Gooch's library is also like the creative essence of Dylan's mind, unfettered by catalogs or by order. Like the characters and scenes of "Like A Rolling Stone," "Desolation Row," or "Idiot Wind," the book-titles and what they evoke come at us in a stream of consciousness manner that goes to the heart of what Dylan is, not just what he may or may not have seen in an apartment in Greenwich village a couple of light years ago.¹¹

Even the non-classical books in Ray Gooch's library have connections to Latin and other foreign languages. Finally, Dylan says he read Graves' strange book, *The White Goddess*, now mostly a textbook for Wiccans and Pagans, and notes that "Invoking the poetic muse was something I didn't know about yet" (p. 45). Invoking the muse puts Dylan into a relation with other texts, since for Virgil and others the Muses are the connectors to other traditions, and particularly in his later work that is what Dylan is up to. The Muses are also slippery. When initiating the poet Hesiod at the beginning of

¹¹ This aspect of Dylan's surreal humor, consisting of absurdist juxtaposition, has become a trademark feature of his *Theme Time Radio Hour*, for instance in Episode 11, "Flowers," where he gives us the following: "Tonight we're going to be talking about the most beautiful things on earth, the fine-smelling, colorful, bee-tempting world of flowers, the Bougainvillea, the Passion Flower, the Butterfly Cleradendron, the Angel's Trumpets, the Firecracker plant, we're going to be talking about Rosa rugosa, the Angel Face, All that Jazz, the Double Delight, the Gemini [Dylan's zodiac sign] and the Julia Child, we're going to be talking about the Knockout Shrub, the New Dawn, the Mr. Lincoln—and that's only the roses—we're also going to hit on the Silver King, the German Statis, the Globe Thistle and the Joe Pie Weed, the Violet, the Daisy, the lovely Chrysanthemum, the Arrow and the Tansy, we'll be hitting on the Bachelor's Button, the Coxcomb and the Lion's Ear, the Love in the Mist and the Victoria Sorghum [laughs],—I just made that one up—we're going to be talking about Flowers, on Theme Time Radio Hour." The list is arranged to form a poem, almost a talking blues of flower names.

the *Theogony* (27-28) they tell the poet “We know how to speak many false things that seem like the truth, but we also know, when we wish, how to sing the truth.” On the threshold of Ray Gooch’s classical library, that is pretty much the outlook of Dylan (p. 35): “If you told the truth, that was all well and good and if you told the untruth, well, that’s still well and good.”

Intertextuality/Intratextuality: An Italian poet from the 13th century

Like Dylan, Virgil was accused of plagiarism. There is an anecdote in Suetonius’ *Life of Virgil* 46 on the poet’s response to the critics’ charge of plagiarizing Homer: “Why don’t they try the same thefts? They’ll find out it’s easier to snatch Hercules’ club from him than a single line from Homer.” Dylan successfully stole three from Virgil, embracing T. S. Eliot’s maxim “immature poets imitate; mature poets steal.” Poems that are layered with intertexts reveal depths of meaning through our recognition of those texts as we import other contexts that work together with new images, metaphors, and other poetic or musical effects. That is true of Virgil, Dante, Milton, and as we saw, it was true of “Lonesome Day Blues” and much else on *Love and Theft*. This way of writing indeed seems to be particularly a feature of the mature Dylan, starting with *Time Out Of Mind*. In his December 5th, 2004, *60 Minutes* interview he says of “It’s Alright, Ma,” “I don’t know how I got to write those songs.” When asked if he can still write like that he replies that he cannot: “I did it once, and I can do other things now. But, I can’t do that.”

Ray Gooch’s library included Dante’s *Inferno*, with “The cosmopolitan man” written on the title page (36). This suggests a familiarity with that Italian poet prior to the epiphany in “Tangled Up In Blue,” which clearly suggests a discovery:

And every one of them words rang true / And glowed like burnin’ coal /
Pourin’ off of every page / Like it was written in my soul from me to you /
Tangled up in blue.

There is debate about who the Italian poet is, Dante (1265-1321) or Petrarch (b. 1304, so not quite of the thirteenth century). Dylan himself seems to have pointed to the latter.¹² Others favor Dante, and his poem on the effects of

¹² Dylan: “I like that song. Yeah, that poet from the 13th Century.” McGregor: “Who was that?” Dylan: “Plutarch. Is that his name?” McGregor: “Yeah.” (Craig McGregor interview, 12 March 1978.) Published in *New Musical Express* on 22 April 1978. This from Eyolf Østrem, “A Day Above Ground Is A Good Day” from Bob

Beatrice in *Vita Nuova*. Given our Virgilian theme, it might be worth mentioning Canto 21.94-99 of *Purgatorio*, where Dante and Virgil meet the Roman poet Statius, who is unaware he is in the presence of his own Muse. Statius (died 96 CE) was one of the epic successors of Virgil (died 19 BCE), and in Dante's vision the *Aeneid* functions much like the book Dylan read:

The seeds of my ardor were the sparks which warmed me from the divine flame by which more than a thousand others have been warmed; Of the *Aeneid* I speak, which was mother to me, which to me was nurse, in my poetry; without it I would not be worth a penny.

Whatever the identity of the Italian poet, like the books in Ray Gooch's library it is part of the general intertextuality Dylan shares with European poetry, particularly before the Romantics. The texts that feed into such poetry include those of the writer himself. Intratextuality allows internal narratives and connections to suggest themselves.

Time Out Of Mind's "Highlands" is a case in point. As many have noted, the song has an obvious debt to Robert Burns' "My Heart's in the Highlands," with its chorus:

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer;
A-chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

Dylan alerts us in a general way ("where the Aberdeen waters flow"), and the Burns poem comes in strongly at one point in the song:

Well my heart's in the Highlands, with the horses and hounds /
Way up in the border country, far from the towns /
With the twang of the arrow and a snap of the bow.

Dylan's debt is in fact fairly slight, just the five words with which he and Burns begin, and he has almost deliberately avoided further intertexts, replacing the objects of the hunt (deer, roe) with its agents (horse, hounds, arrows, bow), but because of those opening words, and because of markers absent from Burns ("Aberdeen waters"), the presence of Burns' poem is strongly felt. But something is happening here, for Burns himself wrote of the song (as he called it), "The first half-stanza [the five words in question]

Dylan's album *Love and Theft*, which can be accessed online at http://www.dylanchords.com/professors/a_day_above_ground.htm.

of this song is old; the rest is mine,”¹³ words that Dylan could say of his own “Highlands,” over 200 years after Burns. Kinsley also notes that “the Air is *Fáilte na miosg* (*The Musket Salute*),” from Oswald’s *Curious Collection of Scots Tunes* of 1740, almost twenty years before the birth of Burns. Burns’ song-poem is melancholic in its dwelling on absence and on a place now only in the memory, but it hardly rises to a level of aesthetic beauty or meaningfulness that gives its melancholy a power to affect us, as the melancholy of our three authors does. The constant “aabb” rhyme, the simplicity of the repeated frames, the lack of any profound thought, these all keep it on an unsophisticated level, and it flirts with sentimentality, even achieves it perhaps, as much folk music does. At the same time it is an eighteenth-century pop-folk song, and a pretty one at that. Dylan seems to have found it, took what he wanted and discarded much else, but in the process has tied himself to the tradition in which Burns was writing—a tradition within which Dylan himself has always been working.

But the location is otherwise unspecified, and the Highlands where Dylan has already arrived in his mind at the end of the song is a refuge from a world Dylan has outgrown, though he wishes this were not so, wishes someone would “push back the clock” for him: “All the young men with their young women looking so good / Well, I’d trade places with any of them / In a minute, if I could.” He’s listening to Neil Young, “Thrasher” I would guess, has to turn up the sound, which annoys those in the vicinity. Then there is the scene in the Boston restaurant, a scene where the singer has an encounter with what looks like second-wave feminists. The exchange is a complete failure, with the two speaking at cross-purposes. The setting suggests the possibility of a pick-up, but this is completely frustrated.

A quarter-century earlier Dylan spoke of walking into another establishment, and in that instance he seems to have been more successful.¹⁴

“Highlands”:

I’m in Boston town, in some restaurant

I got no idea what I want

“Tangled Up In Blue”

¹³ Cf. J. Kinsley, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Kinsley 1968:1334), from Burns’ manuscript *Notes of Scottish Song*, ed. J. C. Dick (London 1908:48).

¹⁴ These excerpts have been taken from two songs: those lines in non-bold are taken from the song “Highlands,” off Dylan’s record *Time Out Of Mind* (1997); those lines in bold have been taken from the song “Tangled Up in Blue,” off the album *Blood on the Tracks* (1975).

She was workin' in a topless place

And I stopped in for a beer

Well, maybe I do but I'm just really not sure

Waitress comes over

Nobody in the place but me and her

It must be a holiday, there's nobody around

And later on as the crowd thinned out

She studies me closely as I sit down

I muttered somethin' underneath my breath,

She studied the lines on my face.

She got a pretty face and long white shiny legs

I just kept lookin' at the side of her face

In the spotlight so clear.

She says, What'll it be?

I say, I don't know, you got any soft boiled eggs?

She looks at me, Says I'd bring you some

but we're out of 'em, you picked the wrong time to come

Then she says, I know you're an artist, draw a picture of me!

She was standing there in back of my chair

Said to me, don't I know your name?

I say, I would if I could, but,

I don't do sketches from memory.

Well, she says, I'm right here in front of you, or haven't you looked?

I say, all right, I know, but I don't have my drawing book!

She gives me a napkin, she says, you can do it on that

I say, yes I could but,

I don't know where my pencil is at!

She pulls one out from behind her ear

She says all right now, go ahead, draw me, I'm standing right here

She was standing there in back of my chair

I make a few lines, and I show it for her to see

Well she takes a napkin and throws it back

And says that don't look a thing like me!

I said, Oh, kind miss, it most certainly does

She says, you must be jokin.' I say, I wish I was!

Then she says, you don't read women authors, do you?

Least that's what I think I hear her say,

Well, I say, how would you know and what would it matter anyway?

Well, she says, you just don't seem like you do!

I said, you're way wrong.

She says, which ones have you read then? I say, I read Erica Jong!

Then she opened up a book of poems

And handed it to me

Written by an Italian poet

From the thirteenth century.

And every one of them words rang true

And glowed like burnin' coal

Pourin' off of every page

Like it was written in my soul from me to you
 She goes away for a minute and I slide up out of my chair
 I step outside back to the busy street, but nobody's going anywhere
She lit a burner on the stove and offered me a pipe

Viewed through the previous success, although “Tangled Up In Blue” in the end focused on the loss of relationship, though with the hope of rediscovery.

Smooth like a rhapsody: Homer, Dylan, and performance variation

Seen from the perspective of Homeric poetics, Dylan works like a blend of rhapsode (performance artist) and a poet on the cusp of oral and literary cultures. The pre-literate oral tradition became the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* through the creative genius of a poet/performer—let's call him Homer, and let's put him in the eighth century BCE. These Homeric poems were then transcribed and were surely *read* as we read them, but they continued to be sung/performed over centuries by rhapsodes (lit. song-stichers), whose performances introduced some variation and fluidity into the fixity of the text. This variation may be detected within textual variants that emerge in the third century BCE, hundreds of years after the original versions. At that period a number of scholars worked on restoring the “original” text, but in the process introduced or removed detail that changed the Homeric poems in trivial or non-trivial ways.

The transcribing of Homer's oral poetry, roughly coincident with the invention of the Greek alphabet, may be seen to be parallel with Dylan's writing and recording of the studio version of a song. At that point, as was true with the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* after their transcription, there is a canonical text. The process is somewhat like the process whereby folk song is passed on, and in both cases an authoritative text limits the scope for change. Of course, Dylan's compositions are only rooted in the prior tradition and are not versions of it *per se*, but the relationship is clear, whether from Guthrie's version of “Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Foot” to Dylan's “Kingsport Town” or Dylan's appropriation of Charley Patton in “High Water.” Dylan's composition is of course transformational, and with the exception of all but two of the songs on *Bob Dylan*, and the songs on *World Gone Wrong* and *Good As I Been To You*, is inspired by his various traditions, never or rarely just giving versions of them.

Homeric performance by the rhapsodes, along with the transmission of the text over a number of centuries, introduced variation that might have been in competition with a set, written version, possibly coming together in

Athens in the sixth century BCE after Pisistratus, the sixth-century BCE tyrant of Athens. In a sense Dylan is an amalgam of Homer and the rhapsode. Like Homer, he is the original creator and original performer of his narratives and lyrics, the seeds of which may be found in a whole range of texts from the Bible to the blues. Those versions are available to others, who in a sense also function like rhapsodes, generally departing very little from the studio versions, and for the most part with a reverence for the original, reperformance of which is the aim. But Dylan himself is also a rhapsode who has performed his enormous corpus with powers of memory that seem Homeric in scope over the last 45 years. In a memorable three-concert stand at the Boston Orpheum on April 15-17, 2005, he sang 40 different songs, repeating only one (“Highway 61 Revisited”) in addition to framing his closing encores with the traditional “All Along The Watchtower,” with just one middle-concert “Like A Rolling Stone” closer, and each night throwing in untraditional lead-off encores, “Mississippi,” “Blind Willie McTell,” “It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry.” It is as such a performer that he clearly defines himself. The studio version, to which he does not listen after it has been put down (if we are to believe the Rome interview of 2001) does not constrain him, however, so the creative process continues from band to band and tour to tour, with endless variations of arrangement, vocal style, and, in some cases lyrics. This is what distinguishes Dylan from singers of similar longevity, such as the Rolling Stones, or Springsteen.

The most intensive meaningful variation of lyrics is found in the songs that have seemed most autobiographical, especially the songs of *Blood On The Tracks*, and particularly when the status of a relationship is at stake. It is as if Dylan is responding to biographical readings by essentially changing, and at times radically transforming, the singer’s point of view. In the year he produced *Blood on the Tracks*, ten years after its original release, a live version of “It Ain’t Me, Babe” makes it clear that nothing has changed, with its emphatically enunciated variations “No, no, no it *sure* ain’t me, Babe” and “But it *still* ain’t me, Babe.” Similarly, by the onset of the Christian period in 1978, “She opened up a book poems and handed it to me” on “Tangled Up In Blue” had become “she opened up the Bible and started quotin’ it to me.” The *Real Live* version (1984) creates a completely different and now playful narration: “She was married when they first met to a man four times her age” (can’t be Sara Lownds, right?). Or on the same version: “Then he drifted down to New Orleans where they treated him like a boy / He nearly went mad in Baton Rouge he nearly drowned in Delacroix.” Gray (*Song and Dance Man III*, 651) has however noted that in recent years the lyrics have settled back to their canonical text—though the

Fall 2006 tour has the “She was workin’ at the Tropicana [rather than “in a topless place”]” verse. The story of the variations on *Blood On The Tracks* is well known. What we officially heard from the release on January 20, 1975 differed in quite distinct ways from what appeared on March 26, 1991, when *The Bootleg Series Volume 2* presented versions of “Tangled Up In Blue,” and “Idiot Wind,” while *The Bootleg Series Volume 3* yielded a version of “If You See Her, Say Hello.” Bootlegs of the so-called “Acetates on the Tracks” were widely distributed. The Minneapolis sessions also produced *Blood On The Tracks* versions of “Lily Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts.” So, after more than 15 years we were given the generally angrier or harsher New York lyrics and less upbeat arrangements that Dylan had changed some when he returned to Minneapolis after recording the entire album in a few days in New York in September of 1974.

I select just two instances of performative variation, with parallels from the Homeric and the Virgilian texts. The New York “Lily Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts” has an entire verse that would be dropped from the Minneapolis version, although it was included in *Lyrics 1962-1985*, where it stands as verse 12:

Lily’s arms were locked around the man that she dearly loved to touch, / She forgot all about the man she couldn’t stand who hounded her so much. / “I’ve missed you so,” she said to him, and he felt she was sincere, / But just beyond the door he felt jealousy and fear. / Just another night in the life of the Jack of Hearts.

I myself did not hear this version until a number of years after 1975, after the narrative of the Jack of Hearts et al. had become hard-wired. What does omission or inclusion do? Essentially the stanza slightly demystifies the Jack of Hearts, offers a glimpse through the mask, by giving us his point of view or focalization: “he felt she was sincere . . . he felt jealousy and fear.” Without this stanza this is a song where mystery is much of the point, where the main actor, sometimes merging with the card itself, is generally “face down like the Jack of Hearts,” where he is seen only from the outside, through the thoughts of Lily Rosemary and Big Jim: “I know I’ve seen that face before,” “she’d never met anyone quite like the Jack of Hearts,” “she was leaning to the Jack of Hearts,” “she was thinking about the Jack of Hearts.” Inclusion of the verse transforms the song through the shock of telling us something about the Jack, and it is easy to see why Dylan, author of this song, of Jokerman, of Jack Fate’s benefit show, took it out, so that nothing would be revealed.

Numerous passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were in the third and

second centuries BCE either removed or athetized by Alexandrian scholars of that age (Zenodotus 325, Aristophanes of Byzantium c. 257-180, and Aristarchus c. 216-144 BCE, the first self-ordained professors of the West), either because they had been in fact been added by interpolators or because they could be argued to have been so added, and did not fit received opinions about what Homer should/could have written. The presence or absence of many of these lines has similarly radical effects on our reading of the narrative and on our involvement with those poems. Since ancient discussion of the lines are preserved (in the “Homeric scholia”), we know, for instance, that Zenodotus excised from his text some lines at *Iliad* 12.175-81, in which the poet sings of the difficulty of describing the clash of battle. Here is Pope’s version:¹⁵

Like deeds of arms through all the forts were tried; / And all the gates
sustain’d an equal tide; / Through the long walls the stony showers were
heard, / The blaze of flames, the flash of arms appear’d. / The spirit of a
god my breast inspire, / To raise each act of life, and sing with fire! /
While Greece unconquer’d kept alive the war, / Secure of death, confiding
in despair; / And all her guardian gods, in deep dismay, / With unassisting
arms deplore the day. / Even yet the dauntless Lapithae maintain / The
dreadful pass, / and round them heap the slain.

The ancient scholar omitted the lines, but Aristophanes and Aristarchus put them back in, though by athetizing them recorded their view that the lines were not genuine. What they and a number of modern editors and commentators objected to was the presence of the narrating poet’s voice, very unusual in this poem, particularly in such a random part of the poem rather than at the beginning, for example, where we expect to find that voice. And as with Dylan’s song, the absence or presence of the lines makes a difference.

Moving from Greece to Rome, from Homer to Virgil, one of Dylan’s Latin poets, we have an example of a passage present in some manuscripts, absent in others. Book 2 of the *Aeneid* tells the story of the fall of Troy. Helen, the Greek beauty kidnapped by Paris, cousin of Aeneas, survived the fall, and Virgil’s readers might have expected Trojan Aeneas, who also survived to found Rome, to have mentioned Helen in his recounting the story to Dido, Queen of Carthage—the song within the song that is *Aeneid* 2-3. Here is Dryden’s translation of some of the 22 lines of Latin (*Aeneid* 2.567-88):

¹⁵ See Pope 1720.

Thus, wand'ring in my way, without a guide, / The graceless Helen in the porch I spied / Of Vesta's temple; there she lurk'd alone; / Muffled she sate, and, what she could, unknown: / But, by the flames that cast their blaze around, / That common bane of Greece and Troy I found.

Aeneas contemplates killing her:

Trembling with rage, the strumpet I regard, / Resolv'd to give her guilt the due reward:

Before the narrative has to deal with the dilemma of Rome's hero and the founder of the Latin race killing a woman, his divine mother appears and tells him to get on with the business of leaving Troy. Most editors now believe that the lines are not genuine, or were not meant for publication, but this possibly does not detract from an essential truth: our reading of the poem and of the character of Aeneas is very much conditioned by whether or not we encounter the passage in our text.

I return now to Dylan and the end, and to his complex manipulation of how we hear and read what is the most transformed song on *Blood On The Tracks*, the song of break-up, "If You See Her Say Hello." From the December version that ended up on the album, as everyone knows, there was an extensive change in the third verse:

If you get close to her, kiss her once for me / Always have respected her for doing / what she did ("for busting out," / *Lyrics 1962-1985*) and gettin' free / Oh, whatever makes her happy, I won't stand in the way / Though the bitter taste still lingers on from the night I tried to make her / stay.

In the 1992 published version of the New York outtake from 1974 we heard a more bitter and caustic song:

If you're making love to her, kiss her for the kid / who always has respected her for doin' what she did / Oh, I know it had to be that way, it was written in the cards. / But the bitter taste still lingers on, it all came down so hard.

The change from "If you're making love to her" to the less specific and less wounded "If you get close to her" delivers a more delicate touch to the song. As Les Kokay and others have noted, by the time of The Rolling Thunder Revue, at the Lakeland Florida Civic Center on April 18, 1976, the song had been completely rewritten and had become savage and unambiguous. And nine days later at Florida State University he sang it again, with further

differences:¹⁶

If you see her say hello, she might be in North Saigon / in outer space
She left here in a hurry; I don't know what she was on / I could have got her
to her place (gotten over to her place?)

You might say that I'm in disarray and for me time's standing still
Oh I've never gotten over her, I don't think I ever will

A bright light from me I saw, a shattering of souls / I saw salvation in her
soul

Just one of them reckless situations, which nobody controls.

Well, the menagerie of life rolls by, right before my eyes / goes by, I try
not to go

We all do the best we can, which should come as no surprise / (.....)
grow(?)

If you're making love to her, watch it from the rear

You'll never know when I'll be back, or liable to appear

For it's natural to dream of peace as it is for rules to break / like it is for
rules to break

And right now I've got not much to lose, so you'd better stay awake

Sundown, silver moon, hitting on the days / shining on the haze (hate?)

My head can't toler..stand no more, what my heart don't tolerate / My heart
can't understand no more, what my head don't tolerate

Well I know she'll be back someday, of that there is no doubt

And when that moment comes Lord, give me the strength to keep her out

The fourth verse with its ending of “Maybe I'm too sensitive or else I'm getting soft” was gone and the attitude to the addressee-rival has become menacing, but the regret and the feelings are still there.

For whatever reason, Dylan did not perform the song for almost 18 years, but on July 3, 1994 in Paris, the first concert of a European summer tour, he opened with “To Be Alone With You” (all other concerts of that year opened with “Jokerman”) and followed up with “If You See Her, Say Hello.” Back in the U.S., he performed it ten times between August 24th and November 12th. In the years since it has come back into his arsenal, with the fourth verse back in, while the third is gone forever from versions I have heard. As a result, the addressee is no longer a rival, and there is less at stake. To begin with, the versions of the lyrics were those of *Tangled Up In Blue*, but over time we find variations in the lyrics that seem to defy our

¹⁶ See Les Kokay, *Songs of the Underground: A Collector's Guide to the Rolling Thunder Revue 1975-1976*. Private publication (2000). Available at <http://www.bjorner.com/RTR%20Tour%20Guide%20Letter.pdf>.

reading it as a single representation of emotion, even from the point of view of the lyrics, as a single song. The second verse gives us a whole range of possibilities, from “She still lives inside of me (my mind) / I’ve never been alone” to “I’ve got to find someone to take her place, you know I don’t like to be alone.” As for his forgetting her, we get “Don’t tell her it isn’t so,” but also “I only wish it was so.” In the fourth verse, “I’ve never gotten used to it, I’ve just learned to turn it off” is rounded out by the original lyrics, but also by the hilarious “Her eyes were blue, her hair was too, her skin so sweet and soft.” In New York City on August 13, 2003, it was protracted (I think) to “sort of, sort of . . . soft.” Dylan perhaps adds these lyrics just in case his audience was wondering if her hair was still red; no, he informs them, it’s now blue—or was that a different girl? Difficulty of comprehension seems to be part of Dylan’s game. We also find “I’ve never gotten used to it, it took me her long load (?) / Suddenly I believe you know, it’s harder on the road.” This same version (performed in Augusta, Maine, August 4th, 2002) also provides one of the most negative endings, even more so than in Florida in 1976. Now we have “If she’s passing back this way, and you know it could be quick, / Please don’t mention her name to me, b’cause the mention of her name makes me sick.” This alternates with more or less the original, more hopeful ending, with variations such as “if she comes up with the time,” to a more middle-of-the-road possibility such as (in the same New York City concert) “If she’s passin’ back this way, Lord and I sure hope she don’t, / Tell her she can look me up, I’ll either be here or I won’t.”

This is obviously more varied and delivers a wider range of meanings than do the classical instances we have seen. But there is a common element in that both deal with the possibility of change and evolution through performance, a feature that is shared for instance with folk music, but not so much with poetry in recent centuries. At the end of the day Dylan defies identification, and perhaps “singer-songwriter” works fine for him, as it does too for Homer or Virgil. Dylan has been dressing in the costume of mid-nineteenth or early mid-twentieth century Americana, the world that his songs have brought back to life. But he has also been going back much further in his mind’s time. I don’t expect him to turn up in the toga or with any old laurel leaves on his head, but that doesn’t matter since he’s already back there in my mind and that’s good enough for me.

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