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Introduction

This thesis presents reader-response theory that is meant to inform the discussion on the reception of Bob Dylan's *topical songs* (a.k.a *protest songs* a.k.a *finger-pointing songs*). Combining theoretical concepts dealing with the reader's response together with accounts of thoughts and comments on his creative process, the analysis highlights some of Dylan's literary techniques which manipulate the listener (or reader) to position themselves, together with Dylan, at the side of his protagonists. According to Wolfgang Iser, in his theory on the interaction between reader and text, the non-dyadic nature of the interaction creates an imbalance in which (more) different ways of interpretation becomes possible. Omission, as a literary technique, is a control mechanism that regulates the outcome of interpretations, and a technique frequently employed by Bob Dylan. It can be seen in Dylan's reluctance to answer questions honestly about his life and in the establishment of the Dylan myth, but it also becomes a frequent and sometimes very powerful aspect of his rebellion songs and topical texts. A result of these control mechanisms that Dylan employs is the provocation of sympathy for characters that society otherwise does not require.

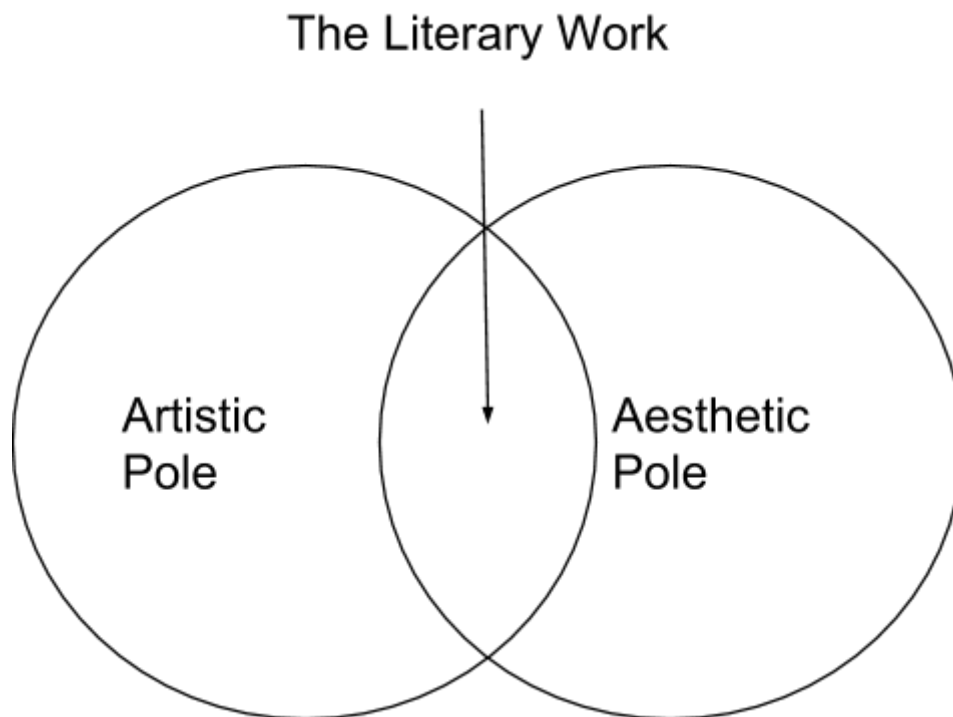
Throughout his career, Dylan has, on the one hand, been accused of deliberately confusing and provoking his fans, by stealing texts and ideas or changing his persona, as Kinney (55) suggests. On the other hand, he stubbornly refused to answer any questions about the meaning of his texts (except on rare occasions). In this reluctance, and without specified guidance or ideas about intended readership, a frustrated space of interpretation has been created. Scrutinizing his topical songs, the accusations made towards actual people have caused controversy, especially in "Hurricane" (1975) and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1964). In the former, Dylan was sued for defamation by one of the witnesses (Fairhall), and William Zantzinger, portrayed as the wicked antagonist of the latter, had this to say about Dylan: "He's just like a scumbag of the earth. I should have sued him and put him in jail. [The song is] a total lie." (Sounes 153) Zantzinger's obvious bias might strip the statement of credibility, but he touches on something of a recurring theme in Bob Dylan's artistry, namely his singular relation with the concept of 'truth'. In the case of "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll", Dylan makes a point about a racially biased legal system, a point which is enforced by the depiction of a particularly evil antagonist, Zantzinger. Evil

because he killed Hattie Carroll, an innocent victim, yes, but also because he is young and rich, and his victim poor and old. What a powerful metaphor for a poet to express concern over the development over his contemporary society. The power-balance is unjust, and this needless, senseless crime represents a deep, deep hopelessness. Dylan needs Zantzinger to be as evil as he can make him, and Hattie Carroll as innocent and pure as possible. Reportage and nuance are the last things on his mind.

Poetic truth is different from objective reality. A common and ancient distinction in the discussion of the concept of truth is that between the subjective and objective. On the subjective side, John Stuart Mill thought that: “poetry, when it is really such, is truth; and fiction also, but they are different truths. The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly; the truth of fiction is to give a picture of life.” (Waugh 27-8). If this is the truth of poetry, Dylan’s poetry then, given that the man was ascribed with the epitaph “the voice of his generation” is not only expressive of the truth and moral in his soul — but also of many of his contemporaries. This feeling, the spirit of the 60s, captured by Dylan and his poetic contemporaries reflects a discrepancy between what now became subjective ‘truth’ from the political authorities and corresponding reality of young people. Kofsky (256) reminds us of Frank Zappa’s statement that young people were loyal, not to “flag, country or doctrine, but only to music”. The topical song especially, in which the objective truth, or reality, of the events and actual people portrayed, and the poetic, subjective representation of these, merge and create a new space. For Dylan, operating in this space has led to an expectation of an expression of objective truth that he has famously ignored, and instead leans on Mill’s assumption: “for Mill, literature was a higher form of knowledge than logic, because it was able to embody a moral and symbolic knowledge that was fundamentally human.” (Waugh 27-8) Dylan’s artistry then, although full of imagery, is ultimately not descriptive of the world he sees, but rather prescriptive of a world he wants to be in. In addition, the concept of ‘truth’ or objectivity becomes increasingly complex when the dynamics of the text’s position across time and space varies. Dylan says that: “A folk song might vary in meaning and it might not appear the same from one moment to the next. It depends on who’s playing and who’s listening”. (Chronicles 71)

As any message must have a sender as well as a receiver, any given literary work must have (at least) two participants. In Wolfgang Iser’s discussion on the interaction between the text and the reader (Finkelstein and McCleery, “Book History”), the responses to

the author's text are taken into consideration, and from it we can form a model. Here, the author's text belongs to the Artistic pole, while the the reader's realization of that text (nb: not the reader him/herself) belongs to the Aesthetic pole. It is during the interaction between the two poles, i.e. when someone is reading actively, that the literary work appears (as an abstract). See Fig.....:



Among the implications following an adaption of Iser's model of creation, a few things are important to notice. First, the text is not synonymous with the literary work. This means that an analysis of e.g "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" is not limited to the text, but accounts such as Zantzinger's comment above may be considered too. Secondly, the interaction between the two poles, is non-dyadic which means that the text does not change itself in relation to the reader; there is a one-way conversation. Of course, one might argue that in a song which changes during re-recordings, re-masterings and live performances, dynamics are introduced to the artistic pole. However, the official versions of the texts, as they appear on original recordings have static qualities to them, from which all other versions

adapt. This static quality creates an imbalance in the interaction between text and reader, an imbalance which by measure of its own indeterminability enables different ways of communication, i.e. interpretations. With this knowledge, Iser stresses that the text needs to exercise a certain control over the reader's response. This control, or manipulation, is a mechanism executed by the author. It is subtle, not explicitly expressed in the text. In fact, it is what is omitted and unfinished that invites the reader to participate: "the gaps arising out of the dialogue - this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections." (392) Equally, the actual words, their direct meaning, only: "take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning." (392-93) While gaps and blanks activate the reader's imagination, *negations* function as another tool for reader control as they cancel out familiarized elements of interpretation. Thus, the reader forms a position in relation to the (static) text, which has guided the reader via blanks and negations. In other words, the reader uses his experience to determine what the text is not, and thereby forms an understanding of it. Omission and negation are large parts of the Dylan myth, incorporated both in his texts and in his persona: "Over and over, Dylan casts himself as outlaw, as the negation of whatever society expects or requires, as judge and satirist of the *status quo*" (Brake 79) On the one hand, Bob Dylan, maintains that throughout his career, his songs are not about anything in particular, and in an interview with Playboy in 1966 he made this point very clear, when asked what his songs are about: "Oh, some are about four minutes; some are about five, and some, believe it or not, are about eleven or twelve." (Cott 108) "Reading" listeners (those who have focused mainly on the lyrical aspect of Dylan artistry) seem to think that there is quite a lot hidden within the lyrics as indicated by David Kinney's book "The Dylanologists", not to mention the fact that Dylan received the Nobel Prize in Literature. The literary work, as created in the interaction between Dylan and his readers, has a vast gap to fill then.

The analysis of three of Dylan's topical songs uncovers an underlying pattern of hope as a driving force, expressed either actively as anger, in 'Hurricane' (1976) or inactively, as lamentation, in "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1963) and "Only a Pawn in Their Game" (1963). They are songs about the injustices of the world, depicted as metaphor where wicked and conspiratorial antagonists prey on innocent and powerless, gentle heroes. Omission, or gaps, becomes a crucial part in this polarization. The literary manipulation of reality is a multitool in Dylan's construction of what Gearey ('Outlaw Blues' 1) calls a "law

above the law”, i.e, a moral and personal law that his texts prioritize above the judicial, common law. In this law, factual truth is manipulated as a necessity, in order for Dylan’s aesthetic vision to come across. In his overlapping personal and artistic expression, the truth of the world as others might see it, becomes secondary or completely disregarded.

A note on the analysis material

Lyrics in a song differs from written text on paper. When the song is performed they lose their static quality, which opens up for a whole new range of interpretational possibilities. That does not mean, however, that song lyrics are entirely dynamic. In most cases, there is an official account of the lyrics of a song, in the original recording as well as transcripts of the lyrics in official sources, such as bobdylan.com. In order to fix the text as much as possible it is therefore sensible to use official accounts of the lyrics.

Chapter 1: Intertext

What worth is there in the study of cultural icons? According to McCarron (‘Light Come Shining’) cultural icons symbolize, on a societal level, the fears and fantasies of the collective. In search of Dylan’s self-descriptions and recurring themes in order to make sense of the fleeting artist’s many personal and artistic changes, he becomes a “prince of protean self-reinvention and deflection” (5). Dylan’s personal and artistic changes, he argues, are different from those of other artists, as his change in musical style is accompanied by change in “spoken vernacular, ideas about spirituality, company and interview answers” (5). Dylan’s artistic changes has many times been interpreted in cynical ways — as a con artist. These examples draw attention to the fleeting nature of a man and an artist, a character that refuses to be known, as film director Todd Haynes expressed it: “The minute you try to grab hold of Dylan, he’s no longer where he was. He’s like a flame: If you try to hold him in your hand you’ll surely get burned. Dylan’s life of change and constant disappearances and constant transformations makes you yearn to hold him, and to nail him down.” (McCarron 3)

The latest controversy involving Dylan’s loose interpretation of ‘truth’ and ‘honesty’ came in the aftermath of his Nobel Lecture, in which it was revealed that he used Sparknotes analyses in large parts of his account of Melville’s *Moby Dick*. On 13 October, 2016, Sara Danius, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy made an announcement that would

mark the beginning of a fiery debate in the world of literature, as Bob Dylan was awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature. Despite the Academy's motivation "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" ("Bob Dylan - Facts"), the debate seemed to center around the problems of awarding a singer-songwriter with, arguably, the world's most renowned literature prize. As if anticipating controversy about the choice of a musical icon, rather than a novelist, the Swedish Academy, through Sara Danius ("Video Player" 00:00 - 02:07) asserted that Dylan is a "great poet in the English speaking tradition, and he embodies the tradition of sampling", in addition to having shown a great ability to reinvent the artistic self. In what retrospectively looks like a preemptive, defensive comment on songwriting as a process within the literature field, Danius asserted that the choice was not so controversial if we go "far back", as she compared Dylan's art to that of Homer and Sappho, who "wrote poetic texts that were meant to be listened to. [...] But we still read Homer and Sappho. [Dylan] can be read and should be read". Defensive stands regarding Bob Dylan's authorship belonging in the field of poetry have connected him with Shakespeare, a connection made especially by Christopher Ricks who wrote that "those who wish to disparage the art of Dylan ought to make sure, at least, that they go no further than did William James in his affectionate disparagement of William Shakespeare" (*The Force of Poetry* 365). Salman Rushdie wrote in a tweet that, "From Orpheus to Faiz, song & poetry have been closely linked. Dylan is the brilliant inheritor of the bardic tradition. Great choice." and John Scalzi, through the aforementioned medium said: "Folks: Songwriting is writing, and Bob Dylan is one of the most influential writers in the last 100 years. It's a defensible Nobel pick." (Merry)

Literary critic Jacke Wilson, in a podcast discussion, asks "does a writer of song lyrics deserve to be ranked among the world's finest poets and novelists?" While appreciating Dylan's lyrics "[t]here were things in [Dylan's lyrics] to think about - but it's one thing to say that the lyrics were interesting, or more interesting than pop music, and it's another thing altogether to say that 'it's the best that literature has to offer'"(00:12:12). Wilson uses the lyrics to "Lay Lady Lay" as an example of Dylan's non-poetry, "disqualifying words", he scoffs, "that, if put in front of the Nobel committee, would cross him off the list". The phrase "you can have your cake and eat it too", he asks laughingly: "is that poetry?" (00:15:32) However, in his book "*The Force of Poetry*", Ricks identifies, as one of Dylan's poetic trademarks, his cliché twists, in which he re-uses overused idioms and "rotates a cliché so

that a facet of it catches a new light” (366). He reminds us of a T.S Eliot statement: “being genius with words is often a matter of being original with the minimum of alteration” (367). A benevolent look at Dylan’s line might conclude the same. Obviously, the idiom suggests that a cake cannot be consumed while still being in one’s possession - a choice that excludes one of the options has to be made. In Dylan’s twist, the metaphorical ‘cake’ of “Lay Lady Lay”, he suggests, is reassuringly still in possession after being consumed. As his lover contemplates succumbing to her desire for the narrator, she fears her innocence will be lost. In order to successfully seduce his object of desire, the narrator first has to create a safe space for her and he achieves this by playing with the old phrase until he reassures her that she can indulge in her desire while keeping her innocence - she does not have to choose. Dylan, in “Lay Lady Lay”, carries the metaphysical poets’ torch in this seducer poem which draws back to John Donne’s “The Flea” in which the narrator tries to persuade his listener to disregard her reluctance:

Thou know’st that this cannot be said

A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead (Ferguson et al 309-310)

On the other hand, Dylan’s lines might be perceived as too simple, too unimaginative, slightly altering a worn out phrase. A malevolent interpreter would concur with Wilson. Is it poetry? Is it art? Does he *deserve* the authority that the Nobel committee has now granted him? Yet another angle is seen when the motivation behind the Swedish Academy comes into question. Margaret Atwood thought that the nomination was politically strategic; in the midst of Brexit and Trump “a U.S counter-cultural figure from the 60s is elected” (00:00:10). Now, in what has been called a “post-truth” era, established authorities again seem to be under scrutiny and the media filter between our micro- and macro lives being disregarded as “fake news”, Dylan’s reluctance to answer for his poetry outside of the artistic sphere is a reminder of the subjectivity of the concept of truth. By not conforming to expectations on the author and the artist, by media, critics or even his own fans, ‘truth’ as a personal conviction in the realm of poetry is in many ways Dylan’s most cherished virtue. With the Nobel prize, this reluctance to conform to expectation again manifested itself.

Dylan himself took some time to react to the prize publicly, which, while one member of the Swedish Academy interpreted the late response as arrogance, other saw it as a sign of

humbleness and many were in between. He eventually responded, accepted the prize and delivered a thirty minute Nobel lecture in which he concurred with Danius's assessment of the relation between songs and literature as he explains in his Nobel lecture (Bob Dylan - Nobel Lecture) that:

songs are unlike literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage. Just as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page

Apart from lyrics being written for the voice to be sung, how do they differ from other texts exactly? According to Ricks ("Bob Dylan and the Nobel Prize") a song, or "the art of song" (00:05:58) can be seen as a triple compound which consists of Voice, Music and Words. While all three components are necessary, and Ricks argues that no component is more vital to a song than any other part, he does agree that when it comes to Dylan, "*most of the time*, the Words are an exceptionally powerful constituent of [his] songs" (00:06:57). Ricks further contends that the Words in songs are the reason he sees literature in songs, and responding to critics that seek to belittle Dylan's art, proclaims that "any notion of literature by which Shakespeare would not be an eligible would be a pretty crass notion about what literature is" (00:07:15). This seems as a fair assessment, and motivates a literature analysis concerned mainly with Dylan's words, rather than his voice or his music.

Dylan is notoriously difficult to categorize (as McCarron's book, "Light Come Shining: The Transformations of Bob Dylan", points to). However, if we accept Danius's and the Swedish Academy's conviction, that Dylan's poetry harkens back to Sappho and Homer, then we can at least say that he has written some lyric poetry. Then again, Dylan writes folk, pop and rock songs, not poems. They take on aspects of poetic genres, but do not limit themselves to any genre. As ballads, his texts are not traditional in the sense that it presents itself in certain rhythmic or metric patterns or rhymes, although sometimes they do: in "Boots of Spanish Leather", featured in the "Popular Ballads of the Twentieth Century" section of the Norton Anthology of Poetry (Ferguson et al 1854), lines two and four of the four-line verses sometimes rhyme perfectly (weather/leather), sometimes they almost rhyme (askin'/passin'; roamin'/goin'), and most of the time they rhyme only barely, or not at all (golden/Barcelona; ownin'/ocean). Of course, when sung, words may be pronounced so that

words that does not rhyme in text rhyme vocally, but in this song that is not the point. Instead, the language, as with most other Dylan songs, embodies another aspect of lyric poetry - the emotional and intuitive. By shunning norms of style and rhyming, these are the aspects that resonate with the listener, or reader. The point of this chapter is that the role of the author, in terms of expectations or demands by readers, critics and publicists is dynamic, changes over the course of time and in different contexts. For Dylan then, the transition from a folk music scene into a folk rock scene might explain some of the clashes between himself and the listeners. A very early definition of the “author” concept comes from the 13th century philosopher St. Bonaventure, who defined four categories of textual production, from left to right in increasing degree of creativity, or of producing own material: scriptor/compiler/commentator/auctor. The auctor (author):

writes both his own material and those composed by others, but his own are the most important materials and the materials of others are included in order to confirm his own; and this person must be called the author. (Finkelstein and McCleery, “An Introduction” 69).

With the introduction of print in the 1450s, authorship began to encompass more creative dimensions. Authors still made a living out of reproducing only, but it seems that a line had been drawn between creating original work and re-presenting works in original, or modern forms. Often, Dylan has been accused of doing precisely those things, but values have shifted so that, instead of being called a “compiler” or a “reproducer”, he and other artists who make their influences known, are called “plagiarists” or “imitators”. Dylan himself does not seem to mind the idea of himself as a sampler, and he has defended his borrowings of Timrod (on the album *Modern Times*) on three grounds, one alluding to intertextuality as he asks: “And as far as Henry Timrod is concerned, have you even heard of him? Who’s been reading him lately? Who’s been making you read him?” (Kinney 173) He also points to the fact that sampling may be regarded as an art in itself: “And you think it’s so easy to quote him and it can help your work?” And finally: “It’s part of the tradition. It goes way back.” (Kinney 174) The difference, for artists that “reveal” their influences by quoting them, between being considered a plagiarist and an creator, most likely lies in ownership of the work. The pre-Romantic concept of author includes copying and reshaping as a natural part of the

process, while the post-Romantic concept sees the author as a creative genius (Finkelstein and McCleery, "An Introduction" 70). Part of the difficulty with categorizing Dylan is that he has moved across these dimensions in varying degrees, from singing mainly versions of traditional songs on his first album "Bob Dylan" (1962) to what sounds as almost randomly selecting scraps of quotes and lines that he collects in a box: "I write down things from movies and things I've heard people say [...] and I throw them in a box" (Kinney 173). This form of bricolage repeats itself in a more concrete way in Dylan's metal sculptures. For 30 years now, he has collected scraps and pieces of metal objects from different places that he travels to, and forges them into metal gates (Shi). To Lethem, the drawing on old knowledge and past sources conflicts with Dylan's generally progressive message and he calls this a paradox of Dylan's art which in turn both embodies an old tradition and merges styles with other art expressions: futurism, Dada and pop art are a few of the expressions which Lethem lists. "In fact, collage, the common denominator in that list, might be called the art form of the twentieth century, never mind the twenty-first." (60) We can then think of Dylan's frequent integration and sampling of other works as bricolage, his Nobel lecture being no exemption. And Lethem maintains that: "[Dylan] is a ravenous artist, absorbing material from a huge array of sources just like many great, ravenous artists have done before him". The big difference between the context of the Bonaventurian categories of authorship and our society is that they focus on a mechanical reproduction of thought and idea. Today, focus instead has shifted to creative, imaginary literature, information provision and intellectual interpretation. (Finkelstein and McCleery, "An Introduction" 69) Much of the controversy about Dylan's sampling can then be understood as the interpretation of the author as a creative genius that creates 'something from nothing', while sampling and bricolage is a form of authorship often overlooked.

Whether it is parody as in 'Talkin' World War III Blues', twisting cliches or quotes, or integrating real people as in his topical songs, filtering material from all around him and putting it together into a song is a big part of Dylan's creative process. And as some fans and critics have been disappointed by discovering that Dylan is not as 'original' as they thought, the man himself has been quite open about his nonchalant method. In *Chronicles*, he writes: "I was making up some compositions on the spot, rearranging verses to old blues ballads, adding an original line here or there, anything that came into my mind—slapping a title on it". (227) According to Dylan's own account of the folk music scene when he started out, few

artists wrote their own material, i.e, the norm was take the role as scriptor, compiler and commentator. He was one of few who took the step into the role as auctor. The reason for this seems to lie in the importance of tradition. Dylan writes: “There were a few who wrote their own songs,...and because they used old melodies with new words they were pretty much accepted.” (Chronicles 81-82) This indicates that the folk scene at the time did not give credit to originality, but rather, to the ability to renew already existing traditions. Equally, Gray talks about the preservation of a certain “purity of style” (Gray 17) in the collective folk mind. Although Dylan entered this culturally conservative scene as a “new voice” (Gray 18), moving too far from those traditions was met with opposition and disapproval; something Dylan famously experienced in his transition to electronic music in the mid 1960s. According to Barker and Taylor (76), during the 1960s, popular song lyrics underwent significant change. From being generic, they began to include, using the Swedish Academy’s terminology, ‘new poetic expressions’, e.g. being autobiographical and confessional in mode. Questions of authorial authenticity for popular musicians began to be asked, as it then became (more or less) a requirement, or at least, a serious advantage, for singers and artist to write their own songs. Prior to that, the industry norm was for artists to reproduce old folk songs. Now, the ability to be original and ‘fresh’ became an increasingly efficient way to reach new listeners. However, with such a vast foundation of folk songs, and only so many artists to reproduce them, originality proved to be a tricky feat to achieve. The solution to this problem was to shift themes of songwriting from general observation (or topical songs) to those that were based on personal experience. Hence, the autobiographical lyric began its journey, and although Dylan has never been one to expose details on his private life, and he never wrote especially personally confessional lyrics, he is regarded by the authors to be an important part of this development. Possibly because, in the process, the authors think that Dylan introduced a sense of mystery to popular music.

In another succinct summary of the history of the popular music lyric, beginning with a hermeneutic ‘content analysis’ of Tin Pan Alley songs in the 1940s, Astor identifies a tangible “Post-Dylan”-change in the 1960s which is mainly characterized as inclusive of, or approximating to, a specific kind of literature and poetry influenced by William Blake and “the amphetamine-driven outpourings of” (Astor 144) Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. This inclusion indicates a sort of paradigm-shift for rock lyrics in which the new and more complex lyric now took rock music into the substance and depth realms of folk - which,

according to Astor's analysis, was the reason Dylan's development to electric was met with snobbery and rejection by that audience. The production of literature, and especially Goldstein's "The Poetry of Rock" from 1969, focusing exclusively on the rock lyric can also be interpreted as an indicator of its development into 'higher culture', and the demand for a closer look at the lyric was thus met. Interestingly, Astor also sees contemporary online lyric databases as a continuation of that demand being met (although it could be argued that non-native fans who are interested in the lyrics just to sing along also make up parts of that demand).

As if to demonstrate his ability to sample others, it was later discovered by Andrea Pitzer that Dylan had based large parts of his Nobel Lecture (a prerequisite for receiving the prize money of approximately €900,000) on the sparknotes.com study guide to *Moby Dick*, one of three literary works he used as examples of books that had influenced him heavily. According to Pitzer's comparison, out of 78 lines of discussing *Moby Dick*, at least 20 references are made, more or less directly, to *Sparknotes*. While some critics reacted with shock and disappointment, Pitzer remain calm as she pointed out that the tendency to fabricate quotes is nothing new to Dylan's style of writing songs (most notably the fabricated Abraham Lincoln quote from 'Talkin' World War III Blues'), and that nobody should be surprised:

Half of the people can be part right all of the time
Some of the people can be all right part of the time
But all of the people can't be all right all of the time
I think Abraham Lincoln said that ('Talkin' World War III Blues')

Singing the fourth line of this verse on the recorded version, Dylan puts emphasis on "Abraham Lincoln", and not the word "think", implying he thinks that it was Lincoln and no one else that said it, while remaining confident that the actual words are correct. This becomes clear when we listen to that version of the song. However, when read, we might emphasize the word "think" instead, concluding perhaps that Dylan is not really sure if he is quoting Lincoln correctly. The real Lincoln quotation (although it appears in slightly differing variations and there is ongoing debate on its validity (Wikiquote)) is: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool

all of the people all of the time”. Dylan’s version of the quote is a form of parody and does not really come off as a “fabrication” as Pitzer calls it, as much as an example of Dylan’s sense of humour. In fact, in a performance at the Philharmonic Hall in 1964, he alters the lyrics, singing:

All the people can be some right part of the time,
Part of the people can be some right all of the time,
But all the people can't be all right all of the time.
Carl Sandburg said that (Chester)

Carl Sandburg was a Pulitzer winning Lincoln scholar and a poet, possibly the link between Dylan and Lincoln’s quote. In the end, it does not matter who said what, except that, as Dylan finishes the verse and the song, singing:

“I’ll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours”
I said that (‘Talkin’ World War III Blues’)

The juxtaposition of an own quote next to a deliberately (I assume) distorted one could then be Dylan saying, “hey, at least I know what *I* am saying”. That Dylan “fabricated” the Lincoln quote in the context of a discussion about the Sparknotes allegations takes things to an infected place. Who said what might not matter so much in that example, but other times they do. Where some people accuse Dylan of ‘theft’, others say he ‘borrows’. Where critics claim he plagiarizes, the Swedish Academy used the word ‘sampling’. While ‘plagiarism’ is a strictly legal concept, it also encompasses a feeling of betrayal and inauthenticity. But what is that ‘tradition of sampling’ that the Academy referred to? If we take the Swedish Academy’s approach and look far back, ‘sampling’ puts Dylan within a tradition of collecting and passing on texts from various sources, much like that of the pre-Romantic, St. Bonaventurian ‘compiler’. All of these accounts suggest that there is a tradition of sampling, one that Dylan manifests as bricolage, that has, with changes in value and interpretation of the author’s function led to the negative interpretation of Dylan’s approach.

As much as Dylan has demonstrated his ability to sample others, his own creations have been adapted by lots of other artists, himself becoming elements of the bricolage of

others. This has happened to the point where Mosser proclaims that “the music of Bob Dylan is probably the most fecund source of covers, from entire albums devoted to bluegrass and reggae covers of Dylan songs, to what is often regarded as the most successful cover in contemporary popular music, Jimi Hendrix’s cover of Dylan’s “All Along the Watchtower”” (5). The concept of a ‘cover’ opens up discussion of the relationship between authorship and static/dynamic texts. One of the key differences between Dylan’s texts and those of conventional poets is that a traditional poem is static. On the other hand, Dylan’s lyrics are re-presented to the world, hundreds, if not thousands of times, performed in concerts. Dylan, the rock star, is as much part of that process, through performance, as the words themselves. How then, can we use Barthes’ concept and “kill” the author? Can we remove Dylan and analyse his texts as independent from his name? First of all, I would like to problematize that notion. The musical lyric, even though it is performed live, normally has a sense of originality and standard in its first recording. The way the lyric is presented there is not so dynamic, and the lyrics are there set; any other version will necessarily have to be compared with that version. This, it seems, undermines the notion of a song lyric being entirely dynamic. These are the versions of the texts, that even though changed or altered during a live performance, can be read in official accounts of the texts, such as bobdylan.com or the publication of compilations such as Simon & Schuster’s “Bob Dylan: The Lyrics 1961-2012”.

Dylan’s role and profession as a live performer of his texts surely makes the texts less static. Therefore, to “kill” the author as Barthes would have us do, i.e, to remove Dylan from his texts and interpret them without his name as signifier in an analysis is problematic. Yet, he has proven himself as a text creator beyond almost any other if we were to consider the amount of covers other performing artists have borrowed from him. In these cases, Dylan’s text lives without him - most famously through “Mr Tambourine Man” (made popular by the Byrds), and more recently Adele, who covered the 1997 song “Make You Feel My Love” in 2008. These cover versions of Dylan songs could arguably be, what Mosser calls “minor interpretive covers” in which the general sense of the base song, i.e, tempo, instrumentation and lyrics remain more or less unchanged. This type of cover “serves as an homage to the base song, allowing its influence to be recognized, while maintaining the original integrity of the base song” (4)

To sum up, it seems sensible to think of Dylan's work as bricolage, whether or not it involves unscrupulous theft/borrowing/sampling of material. While some fans and critics have accused Dylan of this, the controversy can just as easily be traced back to the readers' expectations of the author in general as a creative genius, or the malevolent misinterpretation of parody as "fabrication".

Chapter 2: Analysis

In this analysis, we will see how Dylan takes on the role of an observer who knows something that we as listeners (and as a society) do not. He enhances that role poetically with vivid imagery of an "evil" antagonist, and a "gentle" protagonist. That antagonist is positioned in a larger scheme, a conspiracy, that most often consists of the media, the judicial system and the politicians. The protagonist, in Dylan's vision, is a victim of that big wheel. Dylan uses the format of the topical song to create a platform for positioning himself on a high moral ground, opposite the traditionally, or conventionally, authoritative institutions of law and the media, and makes it easy for the reader or listener to follow.

Dylan's Topical Songs

In his autobiography *Chronicles* (83), Dylan explains that: "I didn't think I was a protest singer, that there'd been a screw up. I didn't think I was protesting anything any more than I thought Woody Guthrie songs were protesting anything." For those who are reluctant in accepting that Dylan never was a *protest singer*, some discussion is necessary. A basic, but very wide definition of the term *protest song* is found in the Cambridge Dictionary: "a song that expresses disapproval, usually about a political subject". If we accept this definition, it seems then that to Dylan, what is missing from his songs is a call for some kind of action of reprimand in response to a specific problem in a political system. Attwood ("Never a writer of protest songs") claims that the term *protest singer* didn't become established until the 1960s, at a point which coincides with (and makes it fair to accept) Dylan's own claim that: "The term 'protest singer' didn't exist any more than the term 'singer-songwriter'" (82). In a 1965 interview by Nat Hentoff (Cott), during the recording of "Another Side of Bob Dylan",

Dylan uses another phrase to denote the same songs, and at the same time proclaims he is done with writing them. “There aren’t any finger-pointing songs in here [...] Those albums I’ve already made. [...] You know — pointing to all the things that are wrong.” (Cott 17) Instead, he simply thought of himself as a folk-singer, a performer and writer of “topical songs”, songs with a story based on a real event. While Dylan started his career re-using other folk-singers’ topical songs, as was customary, he soon began writing some of his own. A *topical* song might intuitively be thought of as a song based on a true event, but in addition to that, an event that has occurred fairly recently. When writing a song based on a real-world incident involving real-world people, a challenge that would necessarily face its author then is the question of how to present the facts of that event. Dylan has not been preoccupied with a nuanced depiction of the events or the people, but instead been leaning on the “higher truth of poetry”, or the sense of the “law above the law”. As such, omission of positive information is part of Dylan’s vilification of the antagonist(s) while the omission of negative information becomes important in topical songs depicting protagonists. As a reinforcement of the idea of controlling his reader by literary devices, Dylan, in a commentary on writing songs in that particular category, says something pretty fascinating: “Songs about real events were always topical. You could usually find some kind of point of view in it, though, and take it for what it was worth, and the writer doesn’t have to be accurate, could tell you anything and you’re going to believe it” (Chronicles 82). When analysing Dylan, it soon becomes clear that this “point of view” means re-presenting the event with the incorporation of omission of information that controls the reader’s response to the text. Then, the reader can position themselves on Dylan’s, and the protagonist’s side, morally speaking. Brake’s claim that Dylan “casts himself as an outlaw” indicates that this moral stance is not necessarily corresponding with pertaining law. The “outlaw” theme is certainly one that has interested Dylan. Topical Dylan texts often embrace *rebellion* as a recurring theme or general feeling of the song. In Chronicles (83) he distinguishes the two closely linked concepts, rebellion songs (used interchangeably with the term *rebel ballads*) and protest songs, in a commentary of The Clancy Brothers’ music: “The rebellion songs were a really serious thing. the language was flashy and provocative—a lot of action in the words, all sung with great gusto. [...] I loved these songs and could still hear them in my head long after and into the next day. They weren’t protest songs, though, they were rebel ballads”.

To Kinney (2014) the notion of Dylan as a “protest singer” was forged with “Blowin’ in the Wind” from 1963. It also forged the idea of Dylan “as a man who knew something that eluded everybody else. The song is written as a series of questions about life and virtue:

How many roads must a man walk down,
before you call him a man? (‘Blowin’ In The Wind’)

We immediately sympathize with this protagonist, perhaps because the question Dylan asks implies that his “man” has already “walked down some roads”, i.e, experienced some hardship or suffered (but it could also be interpreted simply as having experienced events in life, difficult or not). Therefore, the question could be put: How much suffering (or experience) does a person gather before he or she attracts some recognition for it? When will the deserving hero get to claim his victory? When will society and the world appreciate this man and comfort him? Familiarly, the answer is blowing in the wind, written perhaps on a piece of paper that may or may not fall into our hands, and even if it does, may just as likely fly off again. Dylan, young and a man, in asking these crucial questions about justice and ethics creates an agonizing suspense for his listener, who shares Dylan’s desire to get an answer. This way of positioning the self together with the protagonist is a main function of all the topical songs of this thesis. “Blowin’ in the Wind” is not topical, but its force lay in the openness of applicability. What is a question if not a blank to be filled in? And as the questions open up for interpretation, given the political and social turmoil of the time, Kinney thinks that “by asking the questions, Dylan implied that he had the answers, that he carried some special knowledge, some hidden truth about the world. From then on, everybody wanted to know what it was.” (41)

The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll

In “The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll” Dylan uses the topical format to lament an unjust asymmetry in the legal system: its spread of power and consequence for the participants. Likewise, songs typically categorized as protest songs, e.g. “Percy’s Song”, “Only A Pawn In The Game”, “Hurricane” and “Blowin’ in the Wind” are all songs that call for lamentation,

but never for action, as they do not offer any specific guidelines on how to respond except to grieve. We can analyse “Hattie Carroll” to see some of these concepts developing.

The song is based on the death of the African-American (a fact that is relevant, but not mentioned in the song as we will see later) barmaid Hattie Carroll in 1963. William Zanzinger, a 24-year-old tobacco farmer who “owned 600 acres” according to Dylan’s elegy, was committed for manslaughter and sentenced to six months prison. Frazier (2005), in an article for *The Guardian*, digs into the facts and legacy of the song and as he traces the steps back he finds that, while some newspapers reported on the story, none of the major papers commented on the briefness of the sentence. Filling this gap, Dylan “took a small story and gave it the magnitude it deserved”. According to Frazier, Dylan gets some facts wrong, e.g. the spelling of the perpetrator as “Zanzinger” and tweaks the story so that all doubt of guilt is omitted (in reality the case was more complicated than Dylan lets on, Frazier writes). Again, Dylan’s aim is not reportage or a nuanced depiction of that event, but instead to use the story as a platform for listeners who were concerned with civil rights, and a growing racial division particularly. From that point of view, altering some minor facts does not matter - he gets his point across. The fact that he brings up the story, taking a clear stand against racial and rich/poor injustice, while the newspapers did not, contributes to Dylan’s authority as moral compass, and positioned him far away from the commercial interest of many of his contemporaries. It all adds to the sense of Dylan as the “voice of the generation” and “the voice of freedom” that has been assigned to him. Taking a stand for the marginalized and positioning himself on high moral ground is arguably one of Dylan’s greatest devices. The way Ricks (‘Visions of Sin’) reads the song, Dylan displays a great self-control in concealing his anger, refusing “to commit the sin that is Zanzinger’s anger” (227) thus alienating himself further from the perpetrator. This restraint is present in the lyrics as well as in the vocal performance. The effect of restrained anger in its factual and on point text only strengthens the contempt for Zanzinger in Rick’s view. “The double challenge to the song lay in its duty not to yield to the anger that had seized Zanzinger, and in its duty to resist melodrama and sentimentality” (222).

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll

With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger (‘Hattie Carroll’)

The opening lines of the song in which the first line is a cold statement, a factual one that might have been read as the summary of that newspaper article Dylan had read about the case, except for that little word “poor”. This value modification contrasts with the harsh factuality of the line, a liberty Dylan takes that the newspapers did not - “poor” Hattie Carroll, instead of [pause] Hattie Carroll (being an option as Dylan does not restrict or tie himself to any specific amount of syllables (between ten and fifteen throughout the four verses)). In the consequent contrast, an emphasis is put on the word which calls for a closer look at its polysemy - “poor” can mean “monetarily impoverished”, but it can also indicate someone to pity, or feel sorry for, regardless of financial status. Together with its following line, Dylan establishes a theme that develops throughout the song: the rich/poor contrast, as represented by the use of *poor/diamond ring*. Another interesting thing to notice about this opening is the cane. Usually, being a solid hard object, a cane would not “twirl around” anything, but in Dylan’s vision of the event it does. This distortion of physiology is a way of emphasizing Zanzinger’s villainous, ugly and evil attributes, or a subtle way for Dylan to express his anger and frustration with the senselessness of the crime.

But you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears
Take the rag away from your face
Now ain’t the time for your tears (‘Hattie Carroll’)

The lines of the refrain rhyme perfectly in an ABAB pattern, separating it sharply from the so strikingly non-rhyming and monotonous line endings of the verse. “But you who...”: now Dylan aims his words directly at the listener, assigning some of the blame for Hattie’s fate on “us”, the public. “Now ain’t the time for your tears”: we are told, because there is more to this story that needs to be told.

William Zanzinger, who at twenty-four years
Owns a tobacco farm of six hundred acres
With rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him (‘Hattie Carroll’)

Dylan continues to develop Zanzinger’s character: young, rich and spoiled, or “provided” for. This will contrast with Hattie, who is presented as poor (in all meanings of the word, as

we saw in the discussion above), and later, in verse three as a mother and a maid, i.e. a protector and a provider. The tautology in the third line of verse two does seem odd, because in a text that is otherwise not strictly bound to a form, one of the words “rich/wealthy” could not simply be ‘stretched out’ or manipulated vocally so that the line would still fit the meter. Ricks, however, defends this tautology saying “Superfluous? You bet. Wasteful? But not a word is wasted.” (‘Visions of Sin’ 230). It combines with an alliteration (parents/provide/protect) on the same line, which tells us that Dylan is highly aware of his the words he is choosing.

Hattie Carroll was a maid of the kitchen
She was fifty-one years old and gave birth to ten children (‘Hattie Carroll’)

In addition to being a servant/provider and a mother (a different type of provider), age becomes an interesting contrast, in which the old mother of ten is further represented as a caretaker who serves and cleans up after the younger Zantzinger.

Who carried the dishes and took out the garbage
And never sat once at the head of the table
And didn’t even talk to the people at the table
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table (‘Hattie Carroll’)

The repetition of Hattie’s relation to “the table” becomes a sort of pause in the text. She did not sit at the table, she did not talk to anyone at the table, she just cleaned up the food from the table. The repetition becomes an invitation to visualize Hattie in silent action, alone and not speaking, overlooked and taken for granted. In this metaphor, the rift between her and the people she serves develops into an abyss, as we feel that her relation to “the table” both serves as an explanation, but also as a consequence for her death. In 1963, this metaphor must have struck a chord with anyone concerned with growing social inequalities.

Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle
And she never done nothing to William Zantzinger (‘Hattie Carroll’)

Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle: In this alliteration, the word “determined”, which otherwise would be a neutral word, becomes linked with “doomed” and “destroy”, giving it a discomfiting angle, like the stubborn and destructive determination of a wasp trying to fly through a glass window. As Ricks (‘Visions of Sin’) points out, the line also functions as a way to position the narrator on side with “the gentle”, in a link between content and form, “gently” being how the song is performed on its original recording on *The Times They Are A-Changin’*.

And high office relations in the politics of Maryland
Reacted to his deed with a shrug of his shoulders
And swear words and sneering, and his tongue it was snarling (‘Hattie
Carroll’)

Is it the high office relations, the parents or Zantzinger himself who reacts indifferently to the killing of Hattie Carroll? In this grammatically tricky construct one is inclined to answer: all three! Again, the character is depicted with classically ‘evil’ imagery. In Dylan’s re-presentation of this actual case, Zantzinger not only killed Hattie Carroll, but he also fails to show regret afterwards as he only reacts by “shrugging his shoulders”. In fact, he does more than that - he displays contempt and frustration as he swears, ironically feeling unjustly treated. These alliteration-packed lines place Zantzinger in a position where his relatively (to that of Hattie Carroll) high social status renders him absolutely oblivious to her equal value as a human being. The conclusion:

In the courtroom of honor, the judge pounded his gavel
To show that all’s equal and that the courts are on the level (‘Hattie Carroll’)

At the beginning of the last verse, we are (hopefully) already convinced of the horrible injustice that has taken place. These lines therefore stand out as ironical. The judge, the final and most sacred symbol of the justice system, pounds his gavel with great solemnity, but when Dylan presents the lines to us, they only enforce the feeling of despair. The judge just does not get it.

And that even the nobles get properly handled
Once that the cops have chased after and caught 'em ('Hattie Carroll')

Here, Zanzinger becomes a “noble”, which by all accounts, he really was not. But the richer he seems, the better. Dylan needs his character to be rich and distanced from Hattie in as many ways as possible. The court and the cops also create a mascopy, a construction that will return in “Only a Pawn in Their Game” and “Hurricane”.

And that the ladder of law has no top and no bottom
Stared at the person who killed for no reason
Who just happened to be feelin' that way without warnin'
And he spoke through his cloak, most deep and distinguished ('Hattie
Carroll')

Dylan becomes omniscient now, as he gets into Zanzinger's head at the moment of the crime. He “just happened to be feelin' that way”, is possibly even worse than if he had had some kind of motive. Now, the death is endlessly senseless. And the judge and the court, who are there precisely to protect us from such mad acts contrasts with their solemnity.

And handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance
William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence ('Hattie Carroll')

The final line concludes the story of Hattie's death, and brings an end to the listeners' agony of restraining their grief. It has been a tragic case of sudden violence, and although the crime was committed in passion, it was not entirely random. Instead, Dylan has connected this tragic event to a story of a society in which such events occur as a consequence of the maintained status of social inequality between rich and poor, young and old, man and woman, and (indirectly) black and white. As all of these notions of social dissymmetry pile up, the disgrace of the light sentence is the final blow to “the gentle”. At last, we may weep:

Oh, but you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears

Bury the rag deep in your face
For now's the time for your tears ('Hattie Carroll')

The inclusion of the adjective “lonesome” in the title separates it in style from its otherwise value-neutral feel. As we will see, this is a recurring method for Dylan’s style in this demonstration of his ability to create topical songs: adding sentiment and moral value to a story. In the absence of satisfactory media coverage, judicial consequence and general sympathy, Hattie’s death was just as lonesome as her life, serving silently at the table.

Dylan has omitted the fact that Hattie was black and Zantzinger white. Somehow, we all know that this is the case anyway, and to Ricks (‘Visions of Sin’ 231) “it’s a terrible thing that you know this from the story, and from the perfunctory prison sentence, even while the song never says so”. The omission lets us project our worst fears and concerns unto the song. We have seen senseless violence from a young, rich, white man, against an old, poor, black woman. He is wicked, she is gentle. Dylan, while from these facts alone has more in common with Zantzinger than Carroll positions himself with the latter, perhaps representing a new way of thinking, a new moral order.

Only a Pawn In Their Game

The “topical” elements of “Only a Pawn” are obvious — Dylan wrote and performed the song within a month of the murder of the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) field worker Medgar Evers, by the Ku Klux Klan member Byron de la Beckwith. Being “fresh”, Dylan, as with most of the songs in this category, knew that the song would catch the attention of the crowd. It is perhaps best thought of as a result of Dylan’s concern for the discrimination he saw in the 1960s, but also because he knew that these songs were strategically rational choices to make a name for himself, something he hints to in 1964: “Those records I’ve already made. I’ll stand behind them; but some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard and a lot of it was because I didn’t see anybody else doing that kind of thing.” (Cott 17) Written in 1963, he performed the song in front of mostly African American audiences, which Ricks (171) recognizes as courageous (as opposed to Beckwith’s actions). Dealing with such a delicate and recent event as this, and having the audacity to have an opinion on where the audience should place the blame, Dylan must have

been confident in his ability to manipulate the listener's response. The text draws us away from anger, and assists us in contemplating the killer's reasons for his horrible crime. The use of omission is different - this time, Dylan makes the skin color of the characters explicit, but he omits the name of the perpetrator.

There are some similarities with "Hattie Carroll". Dylan transposes the attention away from the individual and to a grander scheme, but he takes it one (huge) step further. While William Zantinger is the center of blame for the listener's attention in "Hattie Carroll", the call to look at seemingly meaningless hate crime from a broader perspective returns in "Only a Pawn In Their Game". In the song, the murderer (Byron de la Beckwith) is a "poor white man" (first line second verse), but in reality, Beckwith was not poor, at least not monetarily (Kolers 29). To Kolers, Only a Pawn in Their Game is an argument for the moral responsibility of societal institutions outside of the individual. In another Dylan song, "Who Killed Davey Moore?" (from the Bootleg Series, vol 1), this question is discussed - can the individual be entirely responsible for his actions? "Only a Pawn" answers that question.

The song, beginning like "Hurricane" and "Hattie Carroll", with the action:

A bullet from the back of a bush took Medgar Evers' life ('Pawn')

Drawing responsibility away from Beckwith is done right from the start. Although the shooter acted cowardly, both in hiding (in a bush), and in shooting someone in the back. Notice however, that the person shooting that bullet did not take Medgar Evers' life, but the bullet did. This way, Dylan's argument of holding moral responsibility not on the individual but rather on external functions is initiated and later expanded on.

As the listeners are now invited to think on the killing, and on this mysterious, murderous bullet, Dylan capitalizes on this attention immediately in the second line, as if to answer: "who shot that bullet?"

A South politician preaches to the poor white man

"You got more than the blacks, don't complain" ('Pawn')

The “poor white man” is in the song Beckwith, but his name is never mentioned - because he is only in the periphery of the discussion. Yet another way of transposing the attention away from Beckwith is by not actually referring to him as a person at all. A pawn, yes. But the entity, Beckwith, is only composed of different instruments that can be used for a certain purpose:

A finger fired the trigger to his name
A handle hid out in the dark
A hand set the spark
Two eyes took the aim
Behind the man’s brain (‘Pawn’)

Who shot that bullet? A finger/A handle/A hand/Two eyes/brain. Not a person, because in Dylan’s line of argument, the person, like the eyes behind the brain is subordinate in the question of blame:

But he can’t be blamed
He’s only a pawn in their game (‘Pawn’)

Ricks (‘Visions of Sin’) suggests that the song ultimately expresses contained anger, but I want to show that this song, as well as “Hattie Carroll” is an example of lamentation.

The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the governors get paid
And the marshals and cops get the same (‘Pawn’)

Dylan, as in “Hattie Carroll” and “Hurricane”, expands his go-to conspiracy and includes the military this time. To some extent, the administrative authorities under the government are interchangeable — all of them are part of the plot to deceive the common man:

But the poor man’s used in the hands of them all like a tool (‘Pawn’)

From fifteen to nine to fourteen syllables in the starting three lines of the third verse. A pattern has developed. Throughout the five verses Dylan begins with:

He's taught in his school
From the start by the rule
That the laws are with him
To protect his white skin
To keep up his hate
So he never thinks straight
'Bout the shape that he's in ('Pawn')

To Gray (24), both Evers and Beckwith are the pawns in Dylan's game, i.e. they are used as literary devices in one of his most recognized topical song that calls for some important question of individual responsibility and the relation between society and the individual act. Why is Dylan blaming William Zantzinger in "Hattie Carroll" but not Byron de la Beckwith? One answer could be that there is more at stake in blaming the latter. Most obviously, the perpetrator in both cases have been white and their victims black. Apart from that, there are plenty of important differences they may underlie Dylan's conclusion in the question of blame: first, Hattie Carroll was a barmaid, while Medgar Evers was a political figure, working as a field secretary for the NAACP. He had, prior to the fatal attack in 1963, been targeted and threatened by "those who opposed racial equality desegregation" ('Medgar Evers'). The victim being a political activist opens up for a whole new discussion on guilt and blame, because, his death may have been incentivized by the perceived political benefit of some party of ideologogists. The same cannot be said about the murder of Hattie Carroll, even though the two have similarities. However, it is important to note that, in neither of the two songs, the killers are entirely blameless or entirely guilty. It is just matter of degree - by not engaging in political activity, Hattie Carroll is as innocent as she can be, while Evers being a political figure is, by his own choice, part of a game that is highly confrontative. The law is usually harder on perpetrators of politically driven crime, but in accordance with Dylan's "ethical law" the argument follows that Zantzinger bears more responsibility than Beckwith, having murdered someone more innocent.

For Gearey ('Outlaw Blues' 1), Dylan's songs explicates "at the heart of his lyrics the need to articulate a law above the law that is located in the space between man and God." This "law" that Dylan has created can be understood as "ethics that goes beyond the law". In order to maintain his authenticity as an opposer of conventional law, this ethical law can never be explicit however. This view of Dylan makes a lot of sense. It explains to a certain extent the need to be cryptic, using theological and/or metaphysical themes, imagery and style, in other words, the deliberate obscurity becomes a necessary part of the construction of the Dylan-myth. In fact, indistinction and leaving things in the unclear may correspond well with a political activist agenda too. Stewart ('The Ego Function') argued that songs are optimal for protesters as they enable them to position themselves on the side of what it is that they want to protest, on the positive moral ground by the mechanisms of "ego-enhancement". His analysis, based in "protest songs" concludes that "protesters have difficulty making the essential transition from a self-image of victim to one of power, worth, and virtue. They cannot extricate themselves from symbolically defensive positions in a hostile environment." Dylan's topical songs then, by means of gaps and omission, allows politically inclined listeners to project their own moral on the text. Stewart argues further that, essential for these songs are that they divide the narrative into two: the innocent victim and the wicked victimizer. When that divide has been established, it becomes easy for the listener to choose sides, and the song then meets three essential requirements of the early stages of a social movement: raising consciousness; allaying guilt; reclaiming or proclaiming one's ego.

Hurricane

Another song that is undoubtedly a topical song is "Hurricane" (but it also carries aspects of the outlaw, or rebellion song) from the 1976 album *Desire*. This song, as the rest of the album, is co-written by songwriter Jacques Levy, which poses some problem of authority, because, how would we know who wrote what? Although there does not seem to be a truly satisfying account in response to that question, however, through interviews with Jacques Levy it seems evident that while his parts are very significant to the collaboration, the topics and themes were all Dylan's ideas. In fact, his and Dylan's mutual interest for "Hurricane" Carter's legal case became a starting point for their work together, and Levy's creative role in that song seems to have been to tie the ideas together into a coherent narrative: "Bob is not

really that good at telling stories, he doesn't go from A to B to C to D" ('Part 1' 00:02:27). Attwood ("Hurricane" - Does it matter if it is accurate?") notices the same change, and calls the organized structure "an onrushing never stopping full speed story line". In his analysis, he asks whether or not it matters that there are factual errors in the song. Perhaps we should explain them simply as "poetic license" and get on with it? Part of the tendency to break Levy's idea of the line of narration is perhaps due to Dylan's way of omitting denigrating information and enhancing or exaggerating accounts of approval about his protagonists. In that process, keeping to the factual, again, is not the priority. In the song, Rubin Carter is the "number one contender for the middleweight crown", but in reality he was ranked as number nine in the world. Levy and Dylan were informed of some of the factual errors in *Hurricane*, particularly in a verse which stated that two of the characters, Bello and Bradley, had robbed the corpses. This statement could lead to lawsuits and the writers were therefore asked to modify these lines, prior to the song being recorded (Myhr 259). Other, less judicially sensitive factual errors, remained. Levy said: "'Hurricane' is more about you than about Hurricane Carter, isn't it?" ('Part 5' 00:02:15), a statement which alludes to the concept of poetic license, but it also a plea for the listener to accept the justification of the deliberate inclusion of factual errors.

Keeping these things in mind, using songs from *Desire* in an analysis of Dylan should be done with some caution. In my opinion, for the sake of this thesis, the analysis of "Hurricane" must be limited to themes that are familiar to Dylan's earlier artistic expression. In "Hurricane", some of the themes surrounding social inequality and justice developed during the first years of Dylan's career continue as a thread and as such becomes an interesting piece in the puzzle. "Hurricane" deals with many of the same confrontations that we see developing in "Hattie Carroll" and "Pawn": a corrupt and failed judicial system driven by a racially divided societal power structure, a biased media coverage and a depiction of a greater conspiracy against the protagonist of the story, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. Again, Dylan comes off as a person who somehow knows something that the rest of us do not. This becomes evident when looking at the idea of Dylan's "law above the law" that is omnipresent in the text. In addition, the development of "Hurricane" as a character is full of omission of denigrating information about real-world Rubin Carter.

The song is delivered in eleven verses, containing exactly nine lines each. In comparison with "Hattie Carroll" and "Pawn", which are not so strictly organized,

“Hurricane” stands out as focused and precise, emphasizing the anger and urgency that Dylan expresses. This also means that the song does not build up or culminate in the way the other two songs do. Instead, the words come to us as a perpetual stream, easy to follow. Dylan wants us to listen closely, and uses an “tell them what you are going to say” - “say it” - “tell them what you have said” presentation technique to make sure he gets the message across: the first verse: “Here comes the story of the Hurricane”, the fifth: “Yes, here’s the story of the Hurricane”, and the eleventh and last: “That’s the story of the Hurricane”.

Remember how the text of “Hattie Carroll” manages to critique bigotry and racism without ever mentioning any of the characters’ skin-colour? In “Hurricane”, there are no such hidden messages, instead the lyrics strike us with its bold and confrontative language culminating in verse nine (out of eleven):

And to the black folks he was just a crazy nigger
No one doubted that he pulled the trigger
And though they could not produce the gun
The D.A. said he was the one who did the deed
And the all-white jury agreed (‘Hurricane’)

Here, Dylan does not suggest a plot or a conspiracy between the “black folks” and the “all-white jury”, instead, there is hopelessness and bitterness in the verse, about the notion that all across the spectrum, and based on little to no facts, “no one” doubts Hurricane is guilty. The district attorney, the racially biased jury and the judgemental public crowd all seem to have their own, separate reasons for distrusting the boxer. Dylan, like a fish swimming upstreams, with just as little, or less, information would rather conclude that they are all victims of “groupthink” and employs the benefit of the doubt to Hurricane’s benefit.

His opinions on the case are made explicitly clear in the song:

Rubin Carter was falsely tried
The crime was murder “one”, guess who testified
Bello and Bradley and the both boldly lied
And the newspapers, they all went along for the ride (‘Hurricane’)

We can see this as a deliberate attempt at influencing public opinion. The “both boldly” lying witnesses in the third line in this verse alliterate in name, a fact that Dylan emphasizes here. It packs them together, enforces the conspiracy and their effort, rather than having them operating independently. As they do, the newspapers can “go along” rather than initiating the witch hunt. In 1978, three years after the song, Dylan expresses his sympathy for Rubin Carter in an unusually open Rolling Stone interview: “I don't personally think he is [guilty]. [...]He's a righteous man, a very philosophic man — he's not your typical bank robber or mercy slayer. He deserves better than what he got.” (Cott 207) But he was also criticized for his portrayal of Carter. Sounes notes that “there was no reference to [Hurricane's] antagonistic rhetoric, criminal history, or violent temper.” (337) These omissions speak to the notion that Dylan's aim is not to portray a nuanced picture of his protagonist, but instead to contrast him with his antagonists. The omissions are a way of disregarding common law, and to speak directly to the “law above the law”. Dylan was equally criticized for the positive portrayal of a New York mafia associate named Joey Gallo, in his song Joey, also from Desire. Heylin (399) says that Dylan defended the song as “a valid recreation of the traditional ballad form, which had eulogized outlaws for six hundred years”. On the contrary, Carter is portrayed as a powerful but humble man:

Rubin could take a man out with just one punch
But he never did like to talk about it all that much (‘Hurricane’)

In essence, he is also part of the “gentle”, a theme that was developed in “Hattie Carroll” and “Pawn”. Once more, the gentle find themselves in a position in which they cannot defend themselves, mute and powerless, but this time Dylan truly expresses anger. As anger in “Hattie Carroll” and “Pawn” is a useless feeling, because the victims are no longer alive to be saved, in “Hurricane”, Dylan expresses an intense anger and an urgency, because Rubin Carter is still alive, can be saved, and at the time of writing this story had not yet seen its ending. While “Hattie Carroll” and “Pawn” are examples of topical songs culminating in lamentation, “Hurricane” is a topical song in which the rebellion song overlaps the topical. One of the effects of these songs was, according to Hajdu (Schweber), that Dylan created an outlaw persona - a rebel who sided with socio-economically marginalized people who were in some kind of conflict with the law. The characteristics of this persona resembles another of

Dylan's characters, John Wesley Harding, from the 1967 album with the same name. Already in the opening two lines of the song, Dylan develops a morally righteous, but violent character:

John Wesley Harding was a friend to the poor
He travelled with a gun in every hand ('John Wesley Harding')

John Wesley Harding is violent, yes, but he represents the "law above the law" that continues throughout Dylan's topical songs. The verse ends with the line:

He was never known to hurt an honest man. ('John Wesley Harding')

In reality, John Wesley "Wes" Hardin was sentenced to prison for murder (of which he claimed to have committed 42 of). In Dylan's depiction, the reader is set to position him/herself together with Hardin, and to accept that all of these killings were of men who were not "honest" and that Dylan, arriving at this conclusion, knows something the historians have failed to grasp. Again, we see the literary device of omission at play, displayed by Dylan as the omission of denigrating facts for the protagonist. At the same time, and ultimately to serve the same purpose is the enhancement of denigrating information about the antagonists. That is the foundation of "Dylan's penchant for creating songs built around compelling narratives, if not necessarily strict adherence to the facts" (Schweber), and a scene is constructed in which the protagonists are misunderstood, misjudged, conspired against and the antagonists consist of a soup of lawyers, judges, news outlets and self-serving civilians.

Discussion

Bob Dylan is a poet who works with words. He works with his voice and his instruments too. He sings his songs, and others sing them. Most Dylan fans listen to the songs, but they also read the lyrics. The songs were meant to be heard, not read. But the Swedish Academy may be right in saying that, we should. That "Boots of Spanish Leather" is featured in The Norton Anthology of Poetry, and "Mr. Tambourine Man" is featured in the The Norton Introduction to Literature suggests that others do too. The way we read Bob Dylan's texts are influenced

by our decision on whether or not what we are reading is poetry or song lyrics to sing along to. It is also influenced by how we regard the person behind the text. Dylan is a poet, a writer, an author. His creative method is sampling, bricolage and stealing. He enhances some parts, and omits other parts, and with every transformation of persona and with every controversy, his texts are read with a new set of eyes. But it is not the text that changes, it is the world around the text. I have tried to present some of that context which may shape our understanding of Dylan, and place him in an intertext, and thereby inform the closer reading of his topical songs, and some of what I think are the most important aspects of them. When read by a fan or a critic, or performed in front of an audience, the literary devices used to manipulated characters depicted in “Hurricane” or “John Wesley Harding” are tools for either discovering or reinforcing Dylan’s and his crowd’s notion of a world gone wrong and a failed legal system. Whether the text is read or heard, it interacts with the crowd or reader to form an abstracted consensus, a playground and a common room for our emotions. But put the same text of, for example, “Hurricane” in the legal room, and all of a sudden, that text is material of defamation of real people. And so, Dylan’s truth is confronted, its limit tested. In all of the songs, but especially in “Hattie Carroll” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game”, Dylan connects the individual in action with larger, societal and often political agendas. While he rarely analyses or theorizes these structures, he delivers only the observation he has made, leaving it open for the audience, reader or listener to interpret as they will. Drawing back to Iser’s theory we can view it as the artistic pole in which he operates becoming an interactive space with a vastness in intertextuality. In the interaction between Dylan and his listeners his texts become filters and funnels at once. Dylan’s topical songs also produced an expectation from his audience, but in the freedom of his artistic expression, he never cared about meeting these expectations. Nor does he see his arena as a platform for political discussion. Objective truth becomes secondary as Dylan is more concerned with expressing, not truth, but his own perspective, his personal truth and his own law above the law. In fact, he has on many occasions been honest with the fact that he is not being honest. Take this quote as an example:

Truth was the last thing on my mind, and even if there was such a thing, I didn’t want it in my house. Oedipus went looking for the truth and when he

found it, it ruined him. It was a cruel horror of a joke. So much for the truth.
(Chronicles 125-6)

Whether it is accusations of plagiarism, being dishonest about his sources or portraying real-world people in unfair ways, Dylan's relation to "truth" is also characterized by omission of information about himself, sometimes in the form of refusal to give fans and critics answers. In this, he is as unapologetic as his "outlaw" heroes. Yet, he reminds us that fact and fiction are not perfect opposites, but they are much more complex than that. The complexity becomes evident when statements are tested in different contexts. And in the presentation of complexity, Dylan has chosen omission as a way to make it easier to understand.

In "Hattie Carroll" Dylan presents his antagonist and his protagonist, with age, gender and many other characteristics, but their skin color has been omitted. In "Only a Pawn In Their Game", presenting another racially motivated hate crime, skin color is essential, but the name of the perpetrator is now gone in omission. In "Hurricane", everyone is named, and everyone is blamed - except for Rubin Carter. All denigrating information about him has been omitted. Omission as a tool for creating forceful contrasts, between the wicked and the gentle. The contrast he constructs reflects the spirit of the times, the disappointment towards the authorities that failed to support the ones who needed it most. Dylan's topical songs made the cases clear, and choosing sides an easy task. And the omissions and the gaps are not only there in his texts, but in his persona too, shunning everyone who wants a piece of him, media, authority, critics and even his own fans.

Dylan does not seem to enjoy his songs being criticised, as Kinney's book "The Dylanologists" testify too. Still, fans have been obsessive since the start of Dylan's career, partly due to his own myth-building. It seems natural for a fan, who have had a deep experience from the music, to ask the question "why is it so good?" and to want to examine and dissect a work in order to understand it better. On the other hand, like a magician who knows that, once his tricks are revealed the sense of magic will disappear, Dylan is the kind of artist that seems to be afraid that the magic in his songs will disappear if the listener understood, as the artists does, every detail of the creative process that lead up to the result, after all, the artist might not feel the same awe of his own work that the listener does. And as we try to figure out the new rules that come with the new spaces and the new times as the world changes, Dylan's topical songs will be there, waiting for us to initiate the conversation.

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Abstract

Bob Dylan received the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition". The announcement sparked a discussion on the boundaries of the concept of literature, but also about the nature of the author. The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on Bob Dylan's construction of songs using real events and people, i.e, his topical songs, in which the boundaries between personal ethics and law, subjective truth and objective reality have caused much controversy for the artist. Using Wolfgang Iser's theory on interaction between reader and text, the analysis finds that omission, the creation of gaps, used as a literary device both in text and in the construction of the Dylan persona, was employed to control the reader's response on these songs.

Reflection Notes: Teaching With Lyrics

Fourteen years ago, I was a high school student and my favourite subjects were Music and English. An English session I remember particularly well was one in which our teacher had instructed us to bring a hard copy of the lyrics of a song that we liked, sit in small groups and talk about its contents. I brought “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright”, the four verse break-up song that seemed to me to embrace all aspects, known and unknown to an eighteen-year-old, of the phenomenon: comfort and good-will towards your lost friend, mixed with ill-will and scorn towards your lost lover, all while struggling to balance devastation with a sense of dignity. In retrospect, the song provided me with concepts to guide my understanding of my own feelings, caught me right where I was, in a Vygotskian hand reaching down to support my steep climb up the staircase from where I was only peaking into the room of adulthood. Indeed, music is balm for the soul, especially if you are a teenager.

The production of this thesis has required studying some of Bob Dylan’s lyrics in depth, which means reading up on poetic expression, technique and terminology, all through the theoretical boundaries of critical literary theory. Thus, the project has provided a training ground for the practical application of abstract theory. The applications in a classroom for English students are innumerable, and this reflection page might as well be a page-long vertical list of tasks spanning across all the educational goals: reading, writing, listening, speaking. Studying text in the form of song lyrics are not only targeting English either. Large parts of my thesis is a reflection on the concept of truth and the presentation of a personal view of the world. When my parents went to school, fact and truth were concepts that teachers had monopolized. That started to change by the time I was finishing high school. Now, every student has a million perspectives of the world available in their smartphone, which has led to an urgent demand for teachers to guide students in their pathway to knowledge. Critical thinking, understanding that there is a link between personal belief and the perspective that is presented as fact and recognition of one’s own bias, these are topics that are absolutely crucial for students today.

I hope that the production of this thesis has helped me gain some of the professional insights that will become invaluable for me in my endeavour to provide that Vygotskian hand for the students, just as Bob Dylan’s lyrics once did for me.