



Music Appreciation: The History of Rock

Chapter 13 Bob Dylan



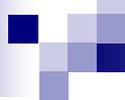
Born ***Robert Allen Zimmerman*** in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota, singer and songwriter Bob Dylan is one of the most influential and revered figures in Folk and Rock. Among the most celebrated songwriters of the 20th century, Dylan is often credited with introducing ***literary and intellectual ambition*** into popular music.

Dylan came to prominence as part of the ***American folk revival*** of the early 1960s, and has maintained an active career that spans five decades and over 30 albums.

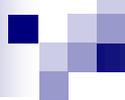


Bob Dylan was a teenager when Rock and Roll exploded onto the American landscape in the mid-1950s and the young Dylan was an avid fan, teaching himself to play ***guitar and harmonica*** and performing with his high school band, the Golden Chords.





By the time Dylan graduated and enrolled in the University of Minnesota, his early musical influences of ***Little Richard, Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly*** gave way to a ***Woody Guthrie*** obsession that would eventually compel him to drop out of college to immerse himself in the Greenwich Village Folk-scene of New York in the early 1960s.



His performances eventually gained the attention of John Hammond at **Columbia Records**, who signed Dylan in 1962. What followed was a series of albums whose songs became enmeshed with the 1960s anti-war and Civil Rights movements and defined Dylan as "the voice of his generation": "Blowin' In The Wind," "Masters Of War," "A Hard Rains A-Gonna Fall," "The Times They Are A Changin'," "With God On Our Side."

Oxford Town



Oxford Town itself resulted from a competition in Broadside magazine (issue 14) where the invitation was sent out for composers to write a song about ***James Meredith's University of Mississippi enrollment***. It was one of two very notable submissions – the other being “Ballad of Oxford, Mississippi” by Phil Ochs.

Even the opening verse tells us there is something deeply, seriously wrong here. Dylan doesn't have to say why, because we know.

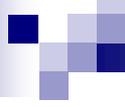
And yet despite the fact that some of the lines appear to have been thrown in without deep thought, the song has the power because it is so simple and understated. A “this is the world we live in – we really ought to get this sorted” type of song, except that it is not “we” who need to take action, but rather “someone”.

Blowing in the Wind

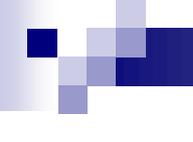


In the 1960's America was once again involved in a devastating war. During this time there was many songs speaking against the war. Bob Dylan's *Blowing in the Wind* is one of those songs. The anti-war symbols in *Blowing in the Wind* are impressive. *Blowing in the Wind* interpretation is about being against the ***Vietnam War***.

“How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?” This opening question to the famous Dylan hit *Blowin' in the Wind* alludes to the fact that many young men, barely out of high school, were shipped off to war. The symbolism in *Blowing in the Wind* shows the belief of the time that going off to war makes a boy into a man, by posing the question essentially what makes you a man. Is it going off down as many winding roads as possible?

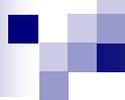


The symbolism in Blowing in the Wind continues with “How many seas must a white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand?” This metaphor uses the dove which is widely accepted for a ***symbol of peace***, the opposite of what war is all about. Dylan uses the dove specifically and the phrase “sleeps in the sand” as a reflection of the passage in the Bible of Noah sending the doves out to find land after the flooding of the earth. He was searching for a place to land and rest. Blowing in the Wind meanings is about this rest that comes from peace time.



The anti-war symbols in *Blowing in the Wind* continue with the next stanza “Yes, ‘n how many times must the cannon balls fly before they are forever banned?” This call to ban cannon balls is a direct correlation with his stance on the war. He wants the firing to stop, the use of ***destructive weapons*** to stop. He sees the futility in this. *Blowing in the Wind* interpretation can really be anchored to this line, he wants the fighting to stop.

“The answer my friend, is blowin’ in the wind. The answer is blowin’ in the wind.” This means that the answer is out there. *Blowing in the wind* meanings poses the question to everyone about peace but tells us we have to get out there in order to find the answers. The answers can be found if you are interested in finding them.



The symbolism in Blowing in the Wind continues with the following stanza “Yes, ‘n how many years can a mountain exist before it’s washed to the sea?” This is all about life. This is another anti-war symbol in Blowing in the Wind. Those who are about peace will exist longer than those who are for war. The “sea” will swallow the war mongers up first. Blowing in the Wind interpretation is all about being anti-war and surviving longer if you are more interested in being peaceful. The song goes on to ask the question how many years some people can exist before they’re free. This anti-war symbol in Blowing in the Wind tells us that those who are in the midst of war are not free. They are the pawns of the governments.

The Times They are a Changin'



by Bob Dylan

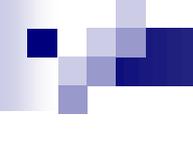
1. Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
Admit that the waters
Around you have grown
Accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
Your time to you is worth savin'
You better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a changin'

2. Come senators ^{and} congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
Heed that which gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside and it's ragin'
It will rattle your windows
And shake ~~all~~ your walls
For the times

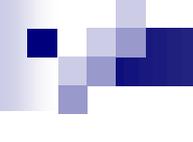
3. Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize what you ^{can't} understand
Your sons and daughters
Are beyond your command
The ~~old~~ ^{old} road is rapidly aging
Get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the

4. The line ^(it) is drawn
The curse ~~is~~ it is cast
The slow one now will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be ~~past~~ past
The ~~order~~ ^{order} is rapidly fading
And the first one now will later be last
For the times

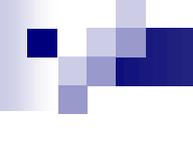
~~The Times They Are A Changin'~~



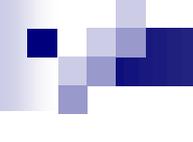
"Dylan's friend, Tony Glover, recalls visiting Dylan's apartment in September 1963, where he saw a number of song manuscripts and poems lying on a table. 'The Times They Are a-Changin'' had yet to be recorded, but Glover saw its early manuscript. After reading the words 'come senators, congressmen, please heed the call', Glover reportedly asked Dylan: 'What is this shit, man?', to which Dylan responded, 'Well, you know, ***it seems to be what the people like to hear***'.



"Dylan recalled writing the song as a deliberate attempt to create an anthem of change for the moment. In 1985, he told Cameron Crowe: 'This was definitely a song with a purpose. It was influenced of course by the Irish and Scottish ballads . . . 'Come All Ye Bold Highway Men', 'Come All Ye Tender Hearted Maidens'. I wanted to write a big song, with short concise verses that piled up on each other in a hypnotic way. The ***civil rights movement*** and the ***folk music movement*** were pretty close for a while and allied together at that time.'



"The climactic lines of the final verse: 'The order is rapidly fadin'/ And the first one now/ Will later be last/ For the times they are a-changin' have a Biblical ring, and several critics have connected them with lines in the Gospel of Mark, 10:31, 'But many that are first shall be last, and the last first.'



"A self-conscious protest song, it is often viewed as a reflection of the generation gap and of the political divide marking American culture in the 1960s. Dylan, however, disputed this interpretation in 1964, saying 'Those were the only words I could find to separate aliveness from deadness. ***It had nothing to do with age.***' A year later, Dylan would say: 'I can't really say that adults don't understand young people any more than you can say big fishes don't understand little fishes. I didn't mean 'The Times They Are a-Changin' ' as a statement. . . It's a feeling"

Dylan's **1965 Newport Folk Festival** appearance marked a turning point in his career, with Dylan backed by a rock band and trading his acoustic guitar for a Stratocaster. He was famously greeted by boos from the purist crowd. <https://youtu.be/BF9i8ih2yLk>



<https://youtu.be/UXbf7o8HGv0>

The subsequent album *Highway 61 Revisited* became a chart-topping hit, and produced the iconic "***Like A Rolling Stone***," which Rolling Stone magazine placed at No. 1 on the top of their list of 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.



Newport was far from the last time Dylan would confound expectations: in the decades since, over dozens of records and countless live performances, he's reinvented himself repeatedly, proving as mercurial and inscrutable as he is brilliant.



More than any other performer associated with Rock and Roll, Bob Dylan created a body of work that could be — and has been — analyzed in *literary* terms. Often referred to as “a poet,” Dylan took popular music’s possibilities to new places.



Nominated for a ***Nobel Prize in Literature***, honored by the Kennedy Center, Dylan has been called the “voice of a generation,” a tag he has rejected but never fully escaped, if only because he achieved a kind of influence that supported such a claim.



Positively Fourth Street

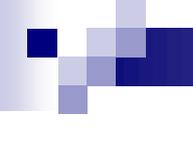


According to *Rolling Stone* magazine, this song is about all the naysayers and plastic people Dylan encountered during his time in Greenwich Village (when he lived on West 4th street) and his stint on fraternity row at the ***University of Minnesota*** (located on 4th Street in Minneapolis). The song deals with the jealousy he encountered from people in the artistic community who resented his success.

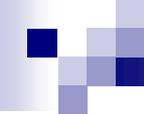
Subterranean Homesick Blues



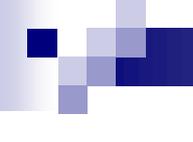
The first song of Dylan's album, Subterranean Homesick Blues, is sure to shock his devout folk music fans. The upbeat tempo, electric instruments, and '*stream of consciousness*' lyrical styling used throughout this song is a far cry from Dylan's previous works. He had largely been regarded as a folk musician armed with a harmonica and acoustic guitar, not some rock performer. Additionally, Subterranean Homesick Blues expresses Dylan's negative views on American society. Drugs, political corruption, civil rights, and unequal wealth are topics that Dylan critiques throughout this song. His unique lyrical approach is itself a break from the norm and gives the effect that all these emotions were bottled up inside of Dylan, but are now being released.



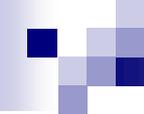
In 1965 it was well known that many individuals experimented with drugs, and Dylan refers to this popular pastime through the line “mixing up the medicine.” It is as though drugs are acting as a medicine to ease the pain that society is inflicting on Johnny. The idea of a shady government system is synthesized upon in the next few lines. “The man in the trench coat/Badge out” can be seen as a corrupt government agent who is trying to get money by being “paid off.”



The harsh scrutiny Dylan feels under American society is seen through the lines, “Look out kid/It’s somethin’ you did/God knows when/But your doin’ it again.” Dylan does not know what he did wrong, but the unfair nature of the government is making him a guilty man. The final lines of the song illustrate how Dylan feels there is an unfair wealth distribution amongst American citizens. Though much is asked of hardworking people, they do not make the money that they should. As a result, everyday citizens must live without.



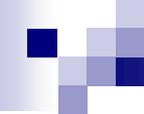
Dylan's distrust of America's government is more deeply explored through the first few lines of the songs next stanza. "Maggie" can be interpreted as a common hardworking American because her face is said to be covered with "**black soot.**" She indicates that "the heat" (U.S government officials) put some sort of a bugging device in her bed, but the government already tapped her phone anyway. Dylan is protesting against the ***invasive nature of the government in citizens' lives.***



It doesn't matter who you are "what you did" because the government watches everyone, which is why you cannot afford to be unaware by taking "No Doz." Dylan even touches lightly on civil rights when he mentions the "***fire hose***" that is inflicted upon innocent individuals who the government does not approve of. There is a clear idea of what every American should look and act like, and for this reason you don't need to "know which way the wind blows" since the government controls it.



The inability for many Americans to make a decent living is argued by Dylan through this stanza. First you “hang around an ink well,” or ***try to become an author***. But then when the book doesn’t sell, and even writing Braille does not help, a life in jail or the army appears to be the only future available. It is as though Dylan is saying that American citizens cannot help but become trapped within a web of government agencies and officials. Many people therefore become “users, cheaters/Six-time losers” who wander aimlessly. Dylan thought it was important to tell his listeners to reject this lifestyle but instead do something distinctive with their lives.



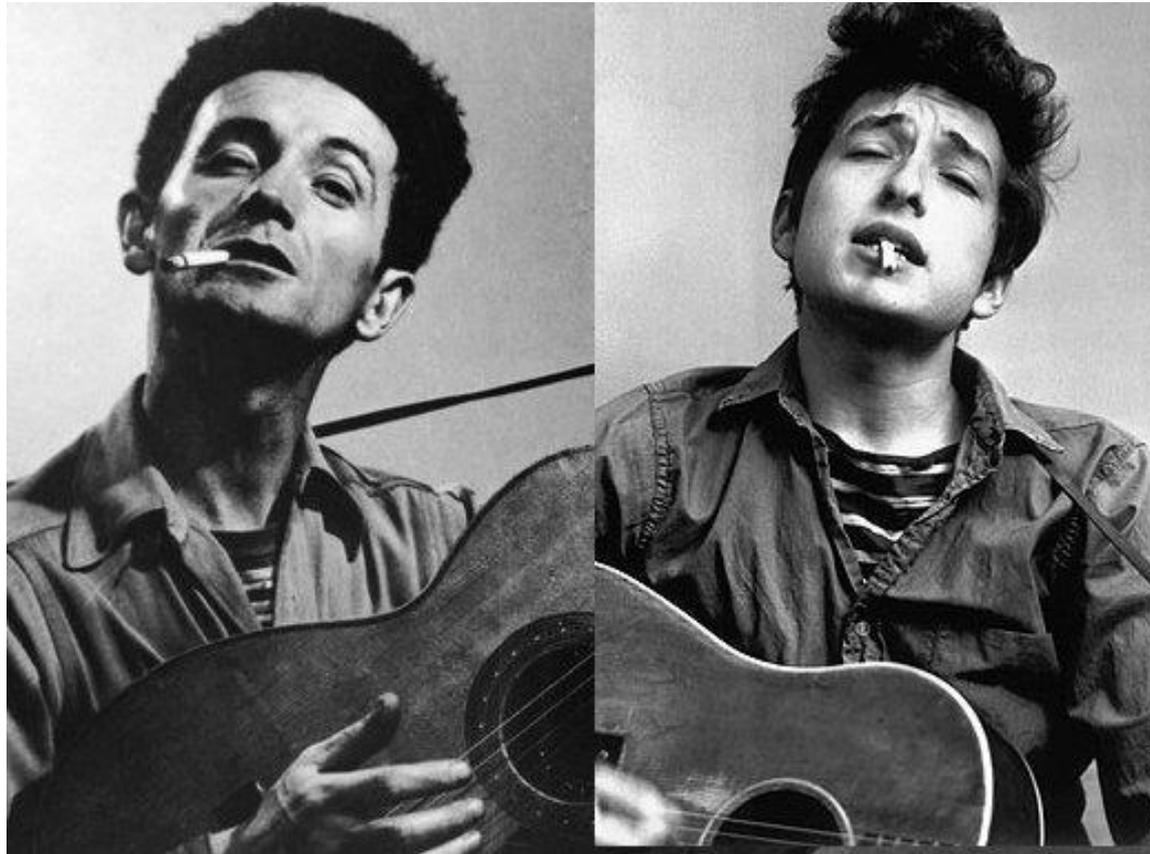
Many young people become trapped living a life similar to their parents: attend school, get married, and work at a middle class job. This lifestyle is echoed by Dylan in the first 8 lines of this last stanza. He focuses on the idea of individuality for the conclusion of Subterranean Homesick Blues, continuing his closing thought from the last stanza. Dylan tells his listeners to “jump down a manhole” to escape a tedious life. To live a fulfilling life one must look presentable and be prepared at all times, even if less civilized vandals “took the handles.”

Mr. Tambourine Man



Who was "Mr. Tambourine Man"? Many of Bob Dylan's listeners assumed the song was about a drug experience, as the Tambourine Man puts the singer in a spell and takes him on a trip through an exotic, poetic landscape. But in 1985, Dylan insisted it was inspired by ***Bruce Langhorne***, the folk musician who accompanied him on guitar during the recording of the song. "He had this gigantic tambourine," Dylan remembered. "It was as big as a wagon wheel. He was playing, and this vision of him playing this tambourine just stuck in my mind."

If as a teenager Dylan was in love with Rock and Roll, by the time he left his home state of Minneapolis for New York City, his interest was Folk music, and his inspiration was Woody Guthrie.

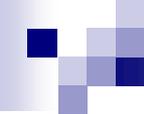


Song to Woody

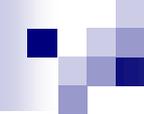


Talkin' New York





Once in New York, ensconced in the ***Greenwich Village*** Folk world, Dylan quickly became an important figure on that scene and would remain so even as he followed interests that would lead him into new territories, including the poetry of the ***French Symbolists*** and that of the ***Beats***.

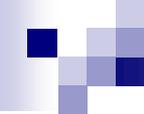


His most celebrated shift, “going electric,” has been isolated as among the most important moments in Rock and Roll’s history. It came around the time of the release of “Like a Rolling Stone,” his highest charting single, and, at ***over six minutes***, an anomaly on commercial radio. But by that time Dylan was an anomaly in more ways than one. Everyone, from the Beatles and Stones to Leonard Cohen and, later, Patti Smith, had their eyes on him.

Knockin' on Heaven's Door



The song is from the movie ***Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid***, where Garrett a sheriff was rumoured to be an old friend of the gangster Billy the Kid. Garrett had to make a tough decision to choose his duty over his friendship. The song may perhaps arose in his heart at the moment when he had to shoot down his buddy.



"Mama take this badge off of me"

"I can't use it anymore".

by this lines Pat Garrett means he doesn't want to be sheriff anymore if it's means to kill your friend for the sake of duty.

"It's getting dark too dark to see"

Feel like I m knocking on heaven's door".

here Garrett is trying to denote that the conception of the good and the bad is getting hazy and unclear....and due to this he's unable to conclude on which side he is or what he's doing is the right thing or not?

As a result it seems he's been denied salvation and an entry into heaven for all the sins he's committed...that's why he feels like knocking on heaven's door and waiting to be permitted in.....



"Mama put my guns in the ground"

"I can't shoot them anymore"

Garrett is seen here asking his mama(mother) to put his gun, his weapon of destruction, harmlessly in the ground because he doesn't want to take anymore lives.

"That long black cloud is coming down"

"I feel like I m knocking on heaven's door"

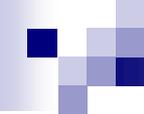
here the long black cloud may have been regarded by Garrett as the elements from the heaven which is keeping a record of all the sins he is doing and it's coming down to question him about his deeds. Still, he's standing outside heaven's door, knocking and begging to be let in.

The song simply deals with the concept of blindfolded thinking and the conflict within oneself when the person's conscience rises to make him realize the true meaning of his deeds.

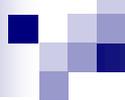
All Along the Watchtower



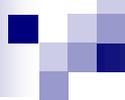
The song is a mysterious and enigmatic story with no chorus. Dylan was experimenting with his songwriting, and told his friend and Beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, that he was “Writing shorter lines, with every word meaning something (Zak 620.)” Ginsberg recalls the change he heard on Dylan’s album, “John Wesley Harding,” on which “All Along a Watchtower” first appeared: “There was to be no wasted language, no wasted breath. All the imagery was to be ***functional rather than ornamental.***” While the song’s lyrics and music are simple, it is infused with meaning. Dylan’s conscientiousness regarding his diction illustrates his seriousness as a songwriter, as he applies principals of poetry to his own work.



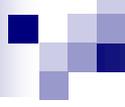
The song is seen as a ***comment on society***, as the two characters, the joker and the thief, have an existential debate on the meaning of human social actions and life itself. While the joker illustrates frustration with the material world and the ignorance of the social players, the “businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen take my earth/ none of them along the line. Know what any of it is worth.” These lines imply that people have a misunderstanding of their purpose on earth or misplaced values. These lines can be seen as a critique of those who may be greedy for earthly delights: like wealth and wine.



The joker and the thief can be seen as literary tropes, offering commentary as the “fool” may have done in an Elizabethan drama, and the thief was often a character in pastoral plays and later dramas such as Shakespeare’s “The Winter’s Tale,” in which the thief makes a fool out of all of the honest men at a party. The role of the thief as someone who outsmarts is played upon here, as the thief can reassure the joker that he knows something that many other people do not when he says: “There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke. But you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate.”



The subsequent lines contain imagery that is meant to represent the some established society of the past. This adds to the courtly aspect of the poem, which already uses the characters of Renaissance drama, and adds to the imagery of royalty. While the princes of the establish world watch from their tower, they sense that danger is approaching in the form of a wildcat. The wildcat can be seen to represent the social uprisings that protested the established society and values of materialism. In the closing line, “Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.” This line brings back the two characters, while it also introduces the device of the wind.



Dylan used the wind in his signature protest song, “Blowin’ in the Wind,” to represent the unknown force that moves us. Here, the wind is “howling” which implies that serious change is coming. The song can be seen to fit within his politically driven canon as a song of social commentary that predicts change, while using the conventions of poets and dramatists of the past to cryptically display his existential argument.

Tangled Up in Blue

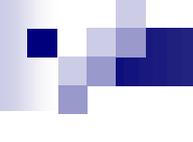


“You’ve got yesterday, today and tomorrow all in the same room, and there’s very little you can’t imagine not happening”.
So said Dylan of this song...

This song was influenced by the **art classes** Dylan was taking with Norman Raeben, a popular teacher in New York. Dylan credits Raeben for making him look at things from a nonlinear perspective, which was reflected in his songs.

This is a very personal song for Dylan. It deals with the changes he was going through, including his marriage falling apart.

Dylan sometimes introduced this on stage by saying it took "**10 years to live and 2 years to write.**"



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did Bob Dylan's early experiences with Folk and Rock and Roll music influence his songwriting?

Artists from the Beatles to Bruce Springsteen have cited Bob Dylan as one of the most important influences on their music making and songwriting, noting that Dylan helped them see the possibilities of a different kind of lyric writing that was more *intimate, personal, and autobiographical* than what they found in early Rock and Roll songs.



Forever Young



Dylan has six children. Jesse, Anna Lea, Samuel, Jakob, Maria (adopted) and Desiree. He had four children with his first wife Sara Lownds as well as adopting her daughter, Maria, from a prior marriage. He had another child (Desiree) after he divorced Lownds with Carolyn Dennis, a backing singer who he married in 1986 and subsequently divorced in 1992.

Evidently Dylan said that he wrote the song, Forever Young, while on tour as he was ***missing his sons***. It was released on the album 'Planet Waves', 1974 and the song was recorded twice, the first in the slower rhythm with which most people are familiar and a second, more upbeat version on the reverse side of the album.

Hurricane

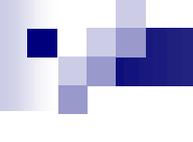


This is about ***Rubin "Hurricane" Carter***, a boxer who spent 19 years in jail for a murder Dylan felt he did not commit.

Carter was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of 3 white people who were gunned down at a bar in Paterson, New Jersey on June 17, 1966.

Police were looking for 2 black men and pulled over Carter and his friend John Artis. They were sentenced to life in prison.

8 years into his incarceration, Carter sent Dylan a copy of his autobiography. Dylan visited him in prison, and convinced of his innocence, wrote "Hurricane."



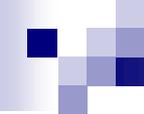
Much of what Dylan was doing stemmed from his early experiences with the Folk music scene in New York City and as a self-styled disciple of the legendary Folk singer Woody Guthrie. But it is often forgotten that Dylan's first forays into popular music came as a member of several Rock and Roll bands in high school in Minnesota, where his yearbook picture noted that his dream was ***“to join Little Richard.”***



If Dylan is known as an artist who injected lyrical complexity and seriousness of purpose into mainstream Rock and Roll, his early career also reflects the injection of a Rock and Roll sensibility into the Folk idiom.

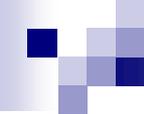


Dylan's early musical experiences reflect an artist with an uncanny ability to create something new out of what had come before, and how he sowed the seeds of a ***Folk/Rock and Roll*** hybrid that would have enormous influence on American popular music.



ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did Bob Dylan merge poetry with popular music?



"I consider myself a poet first and a musician second. I live like a poet and I'll die like a poet."

-- Bob Dylan

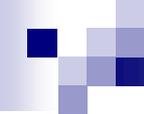
"I'll never be able to write like Dylan. He thinks of these fantastic word combinations. It doesn't matter if you get lost in one of his compositions, you can get hung up on just two words – the man is a poet."

-- **Paul McCartney**



*“Dylan has merged **poetry, myth, and song**, with an unsurpassed artistic ambition. Dylan’s fusions...can also be understood as a fulfillment of what the Modernist Ezra Pound foresaw as Modernism’s future, reincarnating the spirit of Homer’s epics and classical Greek drama in their mixture of words and music.”*

-- Dylan biographer Sean Wilentz

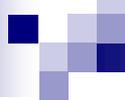


No investigation of Bob Dylan's influence on popular culture is complete without careful attention to the highly poetic nature of his lyrics, which are widely considered among the finest in the history of popular song. Dylan's work bears the deep influence of poets who came before him, particularly those of the postwar Beat Generation, such as ***Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.***

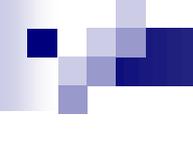
His own compositions in turn transformed the possibilities of what Rock and Pop could do not simply as music, but as a literary force. Almost singlehandedly, Dylan expanded the parameters of what ***subject matter, language and tone*** were suitable for a Rock song. To consider, for example, the shift, from the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" (1964) to "A Day in the Life" (1967) is to see the influence of Dylan, who inspired a generation of songwriters to think of lyric writing as not just a craft but an art form.

Shelter From the Storm

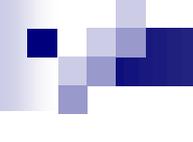




The Greenwich Village neighborhood in New York City is widely considered one of America's centers of *bohemian* culture. In the decades before Bob Dylan's 1961 arrival in New York City, the "Village" was a gathering place for artists. Beat Generation writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac frequented — and sometimes wrote about — life in the Village. Clubs including Cafe Wha?, the Gaslight Cafe, and Gerde's Folk City served as venues for up-and-coming Folk artists, including *Joan Baez, Dave Van Ronk, and Peter, Paul, and Mary*, who would take their turns on the stages playing both traditional songs and, in some cases, original material.



Bob Dylan had moved to the city in **1961** to follow in the footsteps of his musical role model, Woody Guthrie. Dylan even went to visit Guthrie's family home in Coney Island, along with visiting Guthrie himself (who had been confined to a hospital in New Jersey by that time). In New York City, Dylan wasted no time trying to become a part of the Village Folk scene. In fact, it was at Gerde's Folk City, in the spring of 1962, when a still relatively-unknown Bob Dylan walked onto the stage to perform a song he had recently written called "Blowin' in the Wind." He went on to record the song at Columbia Records the following year.



Dylan is the winner of the ***Pulitzer Prize, the Presidential Medal Of Freedom, numerous Grammy Awards, an Academy Award, and a Golden Globe Award.*** He was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1989.