

Bob Dylan: his lyrics as poetry?

Discussion at The Park

Wednesday 1 March 2017 7:30pm at *The Park Tavern, Macclesfield*

An Introduction:

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016 was awarded to Bob Dylan "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition". The Nobel Prize website describes Dylan's work in these terms. "...his debut album, *Bob Dylan* (1962). In the following years he recorded a number of albums which have had a tremendous impact on popular music: *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* in 1965, *Blonde On Blonde* in 1966 and *Blood On The Tracks* in 1975. His productivity continued in the following decades, resulting in masterpieces like *Oh Mercy* (1989), *Time Out Of Mind* (1997) and *Modern Times* (2006). ... Besides his large production of albums, Dylan has published experimental work like *Tarantula* (1971) and the collection *Writings and Drawings* (1973). He has written an autobiography, *Chronicles* (2004), which depicts memories from the early years in New York and which provides glimpses of his life at the center of popular culture. Since the late 1980s, Bob Dylan has toured persistently, an undertaking called the "Never-Ending Tour". Dylan has the status of an icon. His influence on contemporary music is profound, and he is the object of a steady stream of secondary literature."

In his acceptance speech, Dylan says, "I would bet that the farthest thing from Shakespeare's mind was the question 'Is this *literature*?' " Then he adds about himself, "Not once have I ever had the time to ask myself, 'Are my songs *literature*?' "

Questions:

1. Consider the lyrics of two of Bob Dylan's songs, overleaf. Participants are also welcome to bring along other texts of Dylan's songs to introduce into the discussion.
2. We will follow the discussion where it leads.

Further Listening or Reading:

Bob Dylan's website is here: <http://bobdylan.com> , including all the lyrics of his hundreds of published songs, spanning 55 years of his writing.

The Nobel Prize website is here

https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/

including the presentation speech on behalf of the Swedish Academy, here

https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/presentation-speech.html

and Bob Dylan's acceptance speech, read by the US Ambassador to Sweden, here

https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/dylan-speech.html

A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

WRITTEN BY: BOB DYLAN

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?
I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains
I've walked and I've crawled on six crooked highways
I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests
I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans
I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard
And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall

Oh, what did you see, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, what did you see, my darling young one?
I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it
I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it
I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin'
I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin'
I saw a white ladder all covered with water
I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken
I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children
And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall

And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?
And what did you hear, my darling young one?
I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin'
Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world
Heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin'
Heard ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin'
Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin'
Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter
Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley
And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall

Oh, who did you meet, my blue-eyed son?
Who did you meet, my darling young one?
I met a young child beside a dead pony
I met a white man who walked a black dog
I met a young woman whose body was burning
I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow
I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded with hatred
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall

Oh, what'll you do now, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, what'll you do now, my darling young one?
I'm a-goin' back out 'fore the rain starts a-fallin'
I'll walk to the depths of the deepest black forest
Where the people are many and their hands are all empty
Where the pellets of poison are flooding their waters
Where the home in the valley meets the damp dirty prison
Where the executioner's face is always well hidden
Where hunger is ugly, where souls are forgotten
Where black is the color, where none is the number
And I'll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it
And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it
Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin'
But I'll know my song well before I start singin'
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall

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It's All Over Now, Baby Blue

WRITTEN BY: BOB DYLAN

You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last
But whatever you wish to keep, you better grab it fast
Yonder stands your orphan with his gun
Crying like a fire in the sun
Look out the saints are comin' through
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

The highway is for gamblers, better use your sense
Take what you have gathered from coincidence
The empty-handed painter from your streets
Is drawing crazy patterns on your sheets
This sky, too, is folding under you
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

All your seasick sailors, they are rowing home
All your reindeer armies, are all going home
The lover who just walked out your door
Has taken all his blankets from the floor
The carpet, too, is moving under you
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

Leave your stepping stones behind, something calls for you
Forget the dead you've left, they will not follow you
The vagabond who's rapping at your door
Is standing in the clothes that you once wore
Strike another match, go start anew
And it's all over now, Baby Blue

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