

APOCALYPSE JUKEBOX

APOCALYPSE

DAVID JANSSEN AND EDWARD WHITELOCK

JUKEBOX

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THE END OF THE WORLD
IN AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC



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5

**BOB DYLAN'S POETICS OF APOCALYPSE
THE CASE OF "INFIDELS"**

No other single figure in twentieth-century popular music, perhaps in all the arts of that century, has produced a more prolific body of work concerned with apocalypse than Bob Dylan. One might even say apocalypse is Dylan's muse. A fascination with death is discernible even with a cursory glance at the song titles from Dylan's debut: "In My Time of Dyin,'" "Fixin' to Die," "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean." Though these are not his compositions, his choice of material on the first album still provides a glimpse of an apocalyptic aesthetic that is perhaps *the* defining element of both the content and style of Dylan's own songs, from 1962's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* to *Modern Times*, his most recent album from 2006. His seeming to appear from out of nowhere, the alias and the self-mythologizing, the motorcycle crash, his divorce, his Christian conversion—Dylan's life itself also seems to have been lived on apocalyptic principles. Though it is cliché, it really is true that, in Dylan's life and in his art, a closed door points the way toward an open window. All that he asks of us is that we be willing to jump out the window with him. Sometimes we don't care for the new room and cannot wait for the new window. Other times it feels like we have to be dragged out of the rooms we like the most. Those of us who continue the journey with him, though, are richly rewarded more often than not, for in Dylan's

Apocalyptic House there are many mansions. And that House continues to expand because he is still working on it. Like Blake, Dylan works a system of his own creation, and like Blake's, it will never be "finished." That system is also responsible for instigating apocalyptic changes in his art form. In that sense, even Dylan's voice is an apocalypse. Most would agree that voice is an acquired taste (to say the least), but it altered our conception of voice in song by expanding the possibilities. In *Don't Look Back*, a reporter challenges Dylan on the issue of his voice. If that bothered him, you couldn't tell. Without blinking, he replied, "I'm better than Caruso. I hit all the notes."¹⁸² He had already created his own system.

Like the man himself, Dylan's art is impossible to capture in a simple thesis sentence or definitive statement. Because he is an artist who wears so many different hats, any approach to his art must acknowledge that with each new hat comes a different perspective, a new outlook, another open window. Of course, any attempt to comment upon, or make sense of, Dylan's body of work must acknowledge and confront the various metamorphoses that are part and parcel of that work. Thus Todd Haynes's decision to portray the singular "Dylan" with a motley cast including Richard Gere and Cate Blanchett, among others, to portray the artist in different phases of his career. As we chart that path in this chapter, we are also arguing that every one of those phases is suffused with an apocalyptic ethos. Our contention is not simply that he embraces change, though he clearly does. For Dylan, change is defined in apocalyptic terms, and appropriately, that definition itself is subject to change. With that principle in mind, the following approach seeks to "unveil" some common threads, features, and themes in Dylan's House of Apocalypse. (As Dylan is an apocalyptic icon of the twentieth century, it has to be conceded that no single chapter can exhaust the possibilities.) In order to get a clear sense of the House's foundation, the first half of this chapter is classified according to four common apocalyptic motifs, the central pillars if you will: the secular, the profane, the Romantic, and the sacred. We have already encountered most of these motifs, but not in the way that Dylan handles them. This is an important acknowledgment because Dylan is, in a key sense, the centerpiece to the Jukebox itself, for all the other artists treated in this

book have been to his House, and/or have played an important role in its construction. The second half of this chapter applies those four apocalyptic approaches to a reading of the overlooked gem *Infidels*. Though Dylanists might debate its overall importance in the larger canon (Dylanists like to do that), it is a fascinating, complex work that speaks apocalypse from various angles. On *Infidels* there are clear calls to the sacred, which sometimes seem to clash actively with the secular, while at other times the two seem to be in league with one another. The profane, which most often comes from a post-apocalyptic perspective, mocks and curses both. And the Romantic? Well, she is catching the next train out of town, but on *Infidels*, there ain't even a slow train on the horizon.

Dylan's Secular Endings

Early in his career, Dylan showcased his sardonic side with "Talkin' World War III Blues," from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1962). The lyric relates a "crazy dream" in which the narrator awakens to find himself an unlikely Omega Man. Haplessly, he wonders where everyone is, then lights "a cigarette on a parking meter." There is a good bit of Swiftian pessimism in this satire. He tries to convince a lovely survivor to go "play Adam and Eve." She replies, "You crazy? See what happened last time they started?" In many ways, this song makes the perfect Janus face in combination with the tragic mien of "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," also from *Freewheelin'*. This combination of ribald humor, utter doom, and world destruction surfaces again in 1965's "Highway 61 Revisited." The final verse relates the plight of a (rock?) "promoter" in search of the proper arena for his show of shows. Where to stage the end of the world? Simple: "But yes I think it can be very easily done / Just put some bleachers out in the sun / And have it out on Highway 61." Protest songs, antiwar sentiments, these are not. Of course, neither are they "promoting" Armageddon, but that is hardly the point. This is good old apocalyptic comedy. In fact, it should be emphasized that "protest" songs are perhaps the only aspect of Dylan's work that can escape an apocalyptic reading. The ambiguities of "Blowin' in the Wind" seem to

have been lost on those who have treated it like “We shall overcome.” “The Times They Are a-Changin’,” the other protest chestnut in Dylan’s repertoire, is much less ambiguous in its message, but it is more strongly aligned with the prophetic tradition than with the apocalyptic. True, it does describe a changing world order, but as with all prophecy, the crucial option is offered: “You better start swimming or you’ll sink like a stone.”

As dark and damned as the political world appears in Dylan’s work (see, most obviously, 1989’s “Political World”), the natural world provides a much more fitting venue for his secular endings. *The Basement Tapes* includes the clearest examples of a natural, immanent and imminent, apocalyptic condition. “Crash on the Levee (Down in the Flood)” captures the moment before by trying to imagine post-apocalyptic possibilities: “You’re gonna have to find yourself some other best friend somehow.” “This Wheel’s on Fire” is likewise on the ledge: “Let’s notify my next of kin / This wheel shall explode.” On the other hand, “Too Much of Nothing” portrays a world in and of apocalypse. Such immanence has no beginning, middle, and end; it’s just there: “Say hello to Valerie / Say hello to Vivian / Give her all my salary / On the waters of oblivion.” In Dylan’s imagination, oblivion and desolation are places one lives. This stance is not limited to a particular period or phase in Dylan’s work. It has recently resurfaced in “Not Dark Yet” (from 1997’s *Time Out of Mind*), “High Water (for Charley Patton)” (from 2001’s *Love and Theft*), and “Thunder on the Mountain” (from 2006’s *Modern Times*).

The nod to blues legend Charley Patton above is especially telling, for it highlights Dylan’s other major apocalyptic influence, his early education in the American blues and folk heritage, from which he continues to pull inspiration as from a sacred text. Fittingly, another major influence is the Bible; the man knows his scripture, an interest that was fostered long before his late ’70s–early ’80s Christian period. Robert Shelton reports that, during his late ’60s Woodstock exile, “Dylan had a huge Bible opened on a raised wooden bookstand” in his study.¹⁸³ Yet the work he produced in that environment is certainly not *sacred*, at least not in any conventional sense of the term. Instead, it mixes sacred and secular to the point that one cannot make clear distinctions between the two, which just may be the point.

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Judas, John the Baptist, and Abraham, for instance, all make well-known cameo appearances in Dylan's motley cast. As Shelton mentions in his discussion of *John Wesley Harding*, "Biblical allusion, style, and syntax mixed with commonplace language and folklore run throughout the album."¹⁸⁴ Certainly, the same can be said of *The Basement Tapes*, composed near that same Bible in Woodstock. The connection between the Bible and folk tradition is key. Dylan once called *John Wesley Harding* "the first biblical rock album."¹⁸⁵ "Biblical rock" is a challenging term, but in the sense that Dylan applied it to *John Wesley Harding*, it has more to do with his notion of folklore and folk music than it has to do with any traditional sacred sense.

In 1965, Dylan told Nora Ephron, "Folk music is the only music where it *isn't* simple! It's weird, man, full of legend, myth, Bible and ghosts . . . chaos, watermelons, clocks, everything."¹⁸⁶ A year later, talking with Ralph Gleason, he expressed the same idea about folk music with different images: "based on myth and the Bible and plague and famine and all kinds of things like that which are just nuthin' but mystery and hearts and naked cats in bed with, you know, spears growing right out of their back and seven years of this and eight years of that and it's all really something that nobody can touch."¹⁸⁷ This wonderful definition works so nicely because Dylan employs the illustrative style of folk in the description itself. What's more, we also see in that description the central importance of the *apocalypsed* image in Dylan's imagination. It is worth remembering that young Robert Zimmerman, upon discovering the *Harry Smith Anthology*, spent weeks locked away in a bedroom playing the albums over and over track by track and teaching himself how to play and sing in the old style that characterizes the performers on the records and which would for music fans come to characterize the definitive Bob Dylan folk style. More than having learned just a style, Dylan's apprenticeship in "Smithville" immersed him in the apocalyptic undercurrents of American folk music, and that vision is perhaps the only constant throughout his work.

Dylan's understanding of folk seems to rest on the presumption that such natural chaos can pop up out of nowhere. That possibility seems so obvious in a song *about* apocalypse, such as "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall." Even more interesting, though, is Dylan's use of

Mother Chaos in seemingly mundane contexts. The song “Day of the Locusts,” from 1970’s *New Morning*, is a perfect example of such day-in-the-life fissures of revelation. The song is one of a handful of nakedly autobiographical lyrics in the Dylan canon, along with other confessionals like “Ballad in Plain D” and “Sara.” It concerns the graduation ceremony at which he received an honorary doctorate from Princeton. The song might be summed up thusly: Dylan gets his diploma then goes home; it’s that mundane, at first: “There was little to say, there was no conversation / As I stepped to the stage to pick up my degree.” And then it happens; it isn’t “simple” after all: “Oh, the locusts sang off in the distance, / Yeah, the locusts sang and they were singing for me.” Later, Dylan uses “chill” to rhyme with the locusts’ “trill.” It is a “chilling” touch, and the Old Testament echoes of that refrain make it so. The apocalyptic possibilities inherent in a rite of passage like graduation are not lost on Dylan: “Darkness was everywhere, it smelled like a tomb.” That one is obvious, but he maintains chaos in more subtle ways as well: “But the next time I looked there was light in the room.” The narrator only has enough sense of order here to interpret sequence for us. We are not told, “So and so turned on a light.” Instead, it was dark, and then “there was light.” At the very least, he has dissociated. In the next stanza, Dylan throws in a dose of tribulation: “The man standin’ next to me, his head was exploding, / Well, I was prayin’ the pieces wouldn’t fall on me.” The song concludes with his escape: “Sure was glad to get out of there alive.” The graduation experience as Armageddon. Who else would, or could, sing that? Dylan would probably say that Charley Patton could.

Dylan’s Profane Laughter

Whereas the terms *sacred* and *secular* function in almost perpendicular fashion to describe either the presence or absence of divinity, the *profane* exists in direct opposition to the sacred, attempting to undermine the moral order that the sacred represents. There is a deliberate element of profanity involved in Dylan’s visions of tribulation. Indeed, there is a whole current in Dylan’s work that focuses on “the

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disregard or contempt of sacred things.”¹⁸⁸ As he writes in “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m only Bleeding)”:

*Disillusioned words like bullets bark
As human gods aim for their mark
Make everything from toy guns that spark
To flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark
It’s easy to see without looking too far
That not much is really sacred*

This is the dark side of Dylan’s folk, a dark side that dominates what many rock fans would consider the golden age of Dylan’s output, his three great, precrash, electric albums: *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde*. The much-touted influence of Arthur Rimbaud on Dylan is often used to gloss this period, but Robert Shelton mentions a better reference because it places both Rimbaud and Dylan in a larger context and tradition: the context and tradition of the grotesque. Shelton quotes Wolfgang Kayser, one of two leading theorists in the twentieth century on the grotesque:

Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque . . . we are . . . terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable . . . The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death . . . the progressive dissolution, which has occurred since the ornamental art of the Renaissance; . . . the loss of identity, the disorder of “natural” size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality, and the fragmentation of the historical order. *Apocalyptic* [our emphasis] beasts emerge . . . demons intrude upon us . . . What intrudes remains incomprehensible, inexplicable, and impersonal . . . We are unable to orient ourselves in the alienated world, because it is absurd.¹⁸⁹

As Shelton helpfully points out, the grotesque is an essential component of Dylan’s overall vision of the world, but it is also important to emphasize that the grotesque is a two-sided coin; it is terrible *and* humorous. Mikhail Bakhtin, the other major twentieth-century theorist on the grotesque, argued that Kayser overemphasized the

former—the terrible—consequently ignoring the healthy effect of the latter—the humorous. In response, Bakhtin wrote that the grotesque “liberates the word from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright. All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities.”¹⁹⁰ Of course, they are both right, and in his grotesque expression Dylan finds ample room for both the ludicrous and the terrible in this monstrous world. It might best be said that Dylan’s grotesques are postapocalyptic because they portray a world that lacks for redemption. It is a world in which the train for that New Morning, Revelation’s new heaven and new earth, has long since left the station. Instead, this is what it’s like to be “left behind,” the very fear on which Tim LaHaye and countless others continue to capitalize. What that ilk and Dylan have in common is the acknowledgment of the inherent terror in being left behind. However, unlike apocalyptic *terrorists* like LaHaye (and countless other pulpit-pounders), Dylan doesn’t hesitate to explore its comic absurdities as well.

Bakhtin laid central emphasis upon the “principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based.”¹⁹¹ Dylan certainly employs that spirit in his work of this period, though it is tempered by the dark sense of alienation and disorder that characterizes Kayser’s side of the argument. *Highway 61 Revisited*, for instance, is nothing if not a grotesque carnival, a funhouse ride of horrible hilarity, as the toy whistle that opens the title song announces at its outset. “Ballad of a Thin Man” features a freak, a geek, a deformed midget, and a sword-swallower. “Desolation Row” takes us directly to “the carnival tonight.” In the first stanza, we are told, “The circus is in town.” Terror itself is humorous on the Row. Supposedly, Einstein “looked so immaculately frightful / As he bummed a cigarette,” in a Robin Hood costume no less. Conversely, the jokes are terrible: “Yes, I received your letter yesterday / About the time the door knob broke / When you asked me how I was doing / Was that some kind of joke?” As Kayser stresses, the grotesque describes a world that is unreliable, inexplicable, and fragmented. In the conclusion of “Desolation Row,” simple questions don’t even make sense. The song ends with a reply to “your letter”: “You asked me how I was doing / Was that some kind

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of joke?” Trying to communicate over the boundary of Desolation nearly becomes a foreign-language issue. In the end, though, the Row exists more as a psychological condition than a physical setting, and therein lies the terror—and the humor—of the modern grotesque. This is why Shelton called the song a “contemporary apocalypse” and argued for its placement “beside Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ and Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’ as one of the strongest expressions of apocalypse.”¹⁹²

Dylan continued to trace the spirit of Babylonian Carnival in *Blonde on Blonde*, and with the possible exception of “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” these letters bear the same desolate return address. The listener is nearly assaulted with terror and laughter on “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35,” both with the obvious pun on getting “stoned” and with the manic delivery of the song. The circus is still in town. The jugglers make a cameo appearance in “Obviously 5 Believers,” the “hard” woman in “Temporary Like Achilles” owns a “circus floor,” and Shakespeare is decked out in “his pointed shoes and his bells” in “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again.” Kayser’s emphasis upon grotesque disorder and dissolution is perhaps nowhere better illustrated in Dylan’s work than in “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat,” wherein the narrator claims that the hat “balances on your head / Just like a mattress on a bottle of wine.” That simile’s distorted viewpoint is characteristic of the entire album. *Blonde on Blonde* is a collection of dead ends. Even “Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” in all its unabashed harlequin passion, merits at best a partial qualification, for that passion is never resolved; should he leave his “warehouse eyes” and “Arabian drums” at her gate, or should he wait? “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again,” though, is perhaps the epitome of Dylan’s grotesque vision. Shakespeare in his silly costume is but the tip of the iceberg. The title itself is disorienting. A precise definition of the *Memphis* blues is never given, which contributes to that sense of disorientation, along with the obvious suggestion that the narrator is stranded in the wrong place. This is truly a bizarro world, where eyelids are “smoked” while a cigarette is “punched,” a fire is shot “full of holes,” and the kind ladies of Mobile, for no apparent reason, dispense “tape.” Arthur Rimbaud championed the process of sensory disorientation, but Mobile illustrates the “ugly” side of that experiment:

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*Now the rain-man gave me two cures
 Then he said, jump right in
 The one was Texas medicine
 The other was just railroad gin
 And like a fool I mixed them
 And it strangled up my mind
 And now people just get uglier
 And I have no sense of time.*

The dissolution of the narrator's sense of time heightens the terror inherent in, and underscores the apocalyptic fear of, his refrain: "Oh mama, can this really be the end?" The song suggests that, even if the answer is yes, not knowing is worse.

The terror of being "stuck" in Babylon is all too real in these works, but so is the twisted humor that always accompanies grotesque representation. Cameron Crowe, in his liner notes to Dylan's *Biograph* compilation (1985), begins with an anecdote that nicely illustrates the grotesque itself:

A friend of mine was recently in Australia, where he attended a special costume party. The theme was simple. Everyone was requested to dress as a character from a Bob Dylan song. My friend went as Maggie's Brother, and he handed out nickels and dimes while asking everybody if they were having a good time. ("I ain't working for you no more," most responded.) During the course of the evening he met Louie the King, had an interesting conversation with a Diplomat who carried on his shoulder a Siamese cat, and he mingled with a large and noisy crowd that included Einstein disguised as Robin Hood, the Queen of Spades, Napoleon in Rags, several Tambourine Men, and a Preacher with twenty pounds of headlines stapled to his chest.¹⁹³

Crowe concludes that this party idea is a rather unique compliment to Dylan's artistry. Indeed, his grotesque menagerie makes the party possible.

The Incurable Romantic

Like John Coltrane, Dylan's art has much in common with Romantic idealism. The constant sense of personal quest, in which the artist is hero, along with an intense interest in creative revision, are prevalent in both men's work. Yet, Dylan is also a romance writer, his own personal quest often focusing on the pursuit of love in all its human forms, but especially the passions of the heart. More often than not, those passions acquire an apocalyptic hue in Dylan's work; the constant pursuit of or from love is one of the main reasons we find him jumping out the window. Not all songwriters are comfortable with the love song. For every Paul McCartney and his "silly little love songs," there is a John Fogerty who even wrote a song about his inability to write a love song.¹⁹⁴ Dylan easily fits in the former camp. He seems most at ease writing love songs, for the sheer number of love songs, as well as the variety and depth of his treatment of love, in his catalogue is astounding.

Romanticism is a mode of idealistic expression, an expression that can never be complete or fulfilled, due to our very real limitations, but for those who are attracted to Romanticism, it is the pursuit that matters, not the endpoint. Dylan is often compared to Blake and Shelley, and there is a direct line from Dylan to Allen Ginsberg to Walt Whitman, America's great Romantic poet. Since he is connected to this long tradition, it should come as no surprise that he is not the first to merge Romantic idealism with the romance of the heart, a merger that is almost always due to fail on some level.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the beautiful losers in the Romantic tradition, explained it like this, to a girl he liked, in "Dejection: An Ode":

*Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,*

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*All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.*¹⁹⁵

In short this is an expression of Romantic apocalypse because the poem argues that the outside world responds to the changes in our perception that poetry makes possible; Romantic poetry celebrates revolutionary change through the “marriage” of mind and nature. The irony in Coleridge’s case is that this is a goodbye letter, for he didn’t get the girl. Dylan’s “New Morning” expresses this same Romantic “joy” in natural embrace:

Can't you feel that sun a-shinin'?
Ground hog runnin' by the country stream
This must be the day that all of my dreams come true
So happy just to be alive
Underneath the sky of blue
On this new morning, new morning
On this new morning with you.

At least in this song, Dylan gets to have his cake and eat it too because he does get the girl. Both Coleridge and Dylan are celebrating the same alignment of stars and hearts, but in “Dejection” that celebration is marred by the fact that the poem is a heartfelt farewell letter, to his unrequited love Sara Hutchinson, to his partner in poetry William Wordsworth, and to his poetic endeavors in general. So, for Coleridge, the poem is also a very personal apocalyptic expression. Dylan’s “New Morning,” on the other hand, seems to boast that he has found *it*, yet we know that in the vast majority of love songs in Dylan’s canon, this is not the case. One could even argue that “New Morning” is not representative of Dylan. Simply put, there is a lot more breaking up than making up in his songs.

Dylan likes to write farewell songs: “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright,” “Restless Farewell,” “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” “Most Likely You Go Your Way (And I’ll Go Mine),” “You’re a Big Girl Now,” “Going, Going, Gone,” just to name a few. His fondness for having the last word is reminiscent of Lord Byron, who also had a penchant for the dramatic farewell. As with Byron, Dylan’s endings

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are just as often bitter as they are sweet. Dylan also shares an impulse with Byron to challenge *romantic* conventions and mores, which in itself is a *Romantic* impulse inasmuch as it suggests change. “It Ain’t Me, Babe” is a perfect example of such a song:

*You say you’re looking for someone
Who’ll pick you up each time you fall,
To gather flowers constantly
An’ to come each time you call,
A lover for your life an’ nothing more,*

“Nothing more” is an ingenious reversal; it is a Romantic appeal toward romantic change. “All I Really Want to Do” works in a similar vein.

Dylan’s romantic Romanticism is also revealed by his willingness to wear his heart on his sleeve. Lovelorn and passionate effusion is certainly a stereotype of Romantic art, but in this case the type-casting is well earned. Shelley’s “I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!” is a standard example of emotional excess in Romantic poetry.¹⁹⁶ *Blood on the Tracks* is certainly in that same tradition. This is not to denigrate that masterpiece, but the fact is that it’s an emotionally bloody work. During an interview, Mary Travers told Dylan “how much she’d enjoyed” the album. Dylan answered, “A lot of people tell me they enjoyed that album. It’s hard for me to relate to that—I mean, people enjoying that type of pain.”¹⁹⁷ To some extent, this seems disingenuous. Dylan the artist had to have known that with *Blood on the Tracks* he’d knocked one out of the park. It also depends upon what we mean by “enjoy.” Of course, it is an “enjoyable” album, but only in the sense that tragedy is enjoyable; every once in a while, the heart does need a good “bleeding.” Like Dylan, Byron was also often irked that his audience would attempt to read “into” his life from his work, but that is a job hazard that necessarily comes with the Romantic trade.

Fire and Brimstone

Dylan is one of the great provocateurs of rock and roll, and considering that provocation is one of the fundamentals of rock, like dribbling

is to basketball, that is saying something. He turned the pop idol interview process into a satirical Platonic dialog; he pulled the rug out from under the folk community, at twenty-one, by stealing the spotlight; he betrayed them by strapping on an electric guitar; he confused the rock world with country music; and he downright baffled everyone by accepting Jesus Christ as his Lord and personal Savior. This is not to suggest that any of the above were calculated career moves, although in today's cultural climate the concept of religious conversion as career move does not seem all that farfetched, remarkably. Even in retrospect, though, it has to rank as one of the more bizarre moves in the lore of rock and roll. In 1980, Dylan described the moment like this: "There was a presence in the room that couldn't have been anybody but Jesus . . . Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up."¹⁹⁸ Clinton Heylin has discussed Dylan's born-again experience more fully than any of his biographers. Perhaps the most shocking revelation that Heylin unveils concerns the brand of Christianity with which Dylan became associated in the late '70s and early '80s. Some members of his band at the time, including T-Bone Burnett, were involved with the Vineyard Fellowship based in Southern California. Heylin summarizes the Fellowship's theosophy accordingly:

The message conveyed by the Vineyard Fellowship was not simply concerned with spreading the Gospel. It elevated the final book of New Testament allegories, St. John the Divine's Revelation, into a literal account of the end times. All one needed was the code. The end of the world was not merely nigh, it was NIGH, with a capital double-underlined N! . . . Aside from the scriptures, the classes sought to provide a grounding in the works of one Hal Lindsey, the man to whom God in his infinite wisdom had revealed the true code of Revelation. Though no saint himself, Lindsey was closely associated with the Vineyard Church. His book *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), became Dylan's second Bible and added an apocalyptic edge to his worldview, allowing Christ Come Again precedence over Jesus the Teacher.¹⁹⁹

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Thus, with simple geometry, we have a “straightish” line from Dylan back to Miller. Coming from the man who once advised “Don’t follow leaders” and who once satirized Christ as “the commander in chief” in “Tombstone Blues,” a reborn Dylan was more than some could take. The ghost of Judas again didn’t seem so far off.

Anyone skeptical about the Dylan-Lindsey connection need look no further than *Saved!: The Gospel Speeches of Bob Dylan*. In 1990 Heylin collected Dylan’s notorious between-song speeches from the “Slow Train” tour; it is an astonishing little tome. More than once, Dylan rails against rock music, à la Bob Larson: “And the devil’s takin’ rock and roll music and he used it for his own purposes.”²⁰⁰ Apparently, Dylan had forgotten that the rock and roll he grew up on was claimed to be devil-spawned also. Of course, an obvious comparison between his “gospel” shows and his first “electric” concerts is that he was booed; there was much discussion of people walking out on Dylan, and *The Gospel Speeches* demonstrates that the antagonism was mutual. For instance, at one point during a show in San Francisco Dylan praises with faint damning, “All praise and glory to God tonight. Ain’t nobody down here deserves any.”²⁰¹ Now, “nobody down here” might just as well refer to all of us “down here” as to his audience in particular that night, but either way it is a good example of what Shelton has called Dylan’s “uncompromising, unforgiving sort of gospel stance” during this time.²⁰²

The most common theme, though, of Dylan’s speeches concerns the “end times.” Likely due to the Lindsey influence, Dylan resorts at times to Milleresque fortune-telling. Again in San Francisco, Dylan announces:

The world as we know it now is being destroyed. Sorry, but it’s the truth. In a short time—I don’t know, in three years, maybe five years, could be ten years, I don’t know—there’s gonna be a war. It’s gonna be called the War of Armageddon. It’s gonna be in the Middle East. Russia’s gonna come down first. Anyway, we’re not worried about that. We know there’s gonna be a new kingdom set up in Jerusalem for a thousand years. That’s where Christ will set up His Kingdom, as sure as you’re standing there, it’s gonna happen.²⁰³

The only thing that keeps this from being a cliché is the fact that *Bob Dylan* is the ranter, the man who sang, “Propaganda all is phony.” As we have argued, though, Dylan’s interest in, one might say obsession with, apocalypse has informed his work from the start. Dylan’s gospel period could be seen as simply the most obvious manifestation of that interest/obsession. One surprising and overlooked feature of Dylan’s gospel lyrics, though, is that, overall, they are not advertising Armageddon. Doubtlessly, the moment of acceptance in fundamentalist Christianity is an apocalyptic moment on an individual level, and that is the focus of Dylan’s gospel songs. Certainly, there are suggestions of the end of the world, but unlike the speeches, these songs do not tend toward that imminent point. For instance, “Precious Angel,” from *Slow Train Coming*, laments: “My so-called friends have fallen under a spell. / They look me squarely in the eye and they say, ‘All is well.’ / Can they imagine the darkness that will fall from on high / When men will beg God to kill them and they won’t be able to die?” Yet, that moment of doom is interrupted by the redemption offered by the song’s chorus: “Shine your light, shine your light on me.” So, Dylan’s gospel songs are revelatory, but they are not “unforgiving.” The most popular song from this period, “Gotta Serve Somebody,” eschews end-time warnings. True, there is a prophetic quality to that lyric. Even the sound of Dylan’s voice on “Gotta Serve Somebody,” for which he won a Grammy Award for Best Male Rock Vocal, carries with it an eerily prophetic din, almost sublime. Yet, the lyric is not apocalyptic at all. The song demands that we choose a master, but it does not suggest any final showdown between the two choices offered. This de-emphasis on imminent apocalypse is even more pronounced on the second two albums that comprise Dylan’s gospel trilogy, *Saved* and *Shot of Love*. After *Shot of Love* (1981), when Dylan’s audience had either moved on or reconciled themselves with Christian Dylan, he quietly returned to *this* world. In 1983, Dylan released *Infidels*, an album that perhaps best reveals his apocalyptic aesthetic in full force.

The Attitude of an Infidel

Infidel: Want of faith; unbelief in religious matters, esp. disbelief in the truth or evidences of Christianity; the attitude of an infidel.

—*The Oxford English Dictionary*

Just months after the release of *Infidels*, Mick Brown interviewed Dylan for the *Sunday Times*. Brown, trying to pin Dylan down on his religious beliefs, asked him if he believed in evil:

Sure I believe in it. I believe that ever since Adam and Eve got thrown out of the garden that the whole nature of the planet has been heading in one direction—towards apocalypse. It's all there in the Book of Revelation, but it's difficult talking about these things, because most people don't know what you're talking about anyway, or don't want to listen. What it comes down to is that there's a lot of different gods in the world against the God—that's what it's all about. There's a lot of different gods that people are subjects of. There's the god of Mammon, Corporations are gods. Governments? No, governments don't have much to do with it anymore, I don't think. Politics is a hoax. The politicians don't have any real power. They feed you all this stuff in the newspapers about what's going on, but that's not what [is] really going on. But then again, I don't think that makes me a pessimistic person. I'm a realist. Or maybe a surrealist.²⁰⁴

Understandably, Brown wanted to press Dylan on the “religion question,” and it is fortunate that he did, because the above comments shed light on Dylan's first artistic statement since emerging from the “Christian trilogy.” Obviously, it is significant that apocalypse remains at the forefront. Yet even more importantly, Dylan's answer to the question of evil shows a willingness to discuss this world, just as *Infidels* does. His distinction between God and gods is of immense value here. If one had to describe *Infidels* in one sentence, perhaps the best thing to say would be that it is a (sur)realistic scrapbook of an ungodly

world from a Godly perspective. This is apparent even in the work's title. Who are the infidels? In this case, every song is a portrait of infidelity, of those lesser gods going to hell in a handbasket in which they've gift-wrapped this world.

Significantly, God doesn't even make a cameo appearance on *Infidels*.

For Dylan scholars, the content of *Infidels* is somewhat controversial. In his own discussion of the album, Clinton Heylin claims that the material included “notably four of his finest expositions on the End Times: ‘I and I,’ ‘Jokerman,’ ‘Blind Willie McTell,’ and ‘Foot of Pride.’”²⁰⁵ Heylin also recounts how Dylan went back to the studio and, inexplicably, did his own editing job, in the absence of producer Mark Knopfler. In the process, he decided to exclude “Foot of Pride” and “Blind Willie McTell.” We will begin our explication there, with the material that didn't make the final cut. Fortunately, they were released on the first *Bootleg* series, but hopefully future editions of *Infidels* will restore those songs. They should be there, not only because they were recorded during those sessions, but more importantly because thematically they work so very well.

In the booklet that accompanies *The Bootleg Series Volumes I–III*, John Bauldie has this to say about “Foot of Pride”:

Dylan's never painted as convincing a picture of the fallen world, of a 20th century Babylon, as he does in this song; neither has he been as overtly wrathful in his abhorrence of the corrupters and corrupted, nor as confident that eternal judgment is to be meted out at last beyond this world, and that for the wicked, the dividers of the word of truth, vengeance will be terrible, swift, and sure.²⁰⁶

Everyone has heard the old chestnut, “Pride cometh before a fall,” which is only a slight misquote of Proverbs 16:18: “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” It's a subtle difference, and an important one in the context of “Foot of Pride.” The song's refrain runs, “Well, there ain't no goin' back when your foot of pride come down.” This song is one of Dylan's great rants, and the “chains of flashing images” that make up its dense verses can obscure the relatively simple claim that “*your* foot of pride” is the step that always

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precedes *your* ruin. As Bauldie correctly reads it, “vengeance will be terrible, swift, and sure.” Yet, the song’s imagery does not focus on that final kick of retribution, though that is precisely what “there ain’t no goin’ back” implies. Instead, the song is primarily concerned with “20th century Babylon.”

Just as Dylan discussed the gods of this world gone wrong, so too are there lowercase satans, and the song’s third verse depicts one such little devil: “There’s a retired businessman named Red, cast down from heaven and he’s out of his head / He feeds off of everyone that he can touch / He said he only deals in cash or sells tickets to a plane crash / He’s not somebody that you play around with much.” Red predominates in a *Hollyworld* of gorgeous creatures who are capable of unspeakably ugly abomination: “They kill babies in the crib and say only the good die young / They don’t believe in mercy.” And, in case we missed the fact that we’re in Revelation, Dylan unseals it for us. Those beautiful, grotesque hypocrites have “got mystery written all over their forehead.” The poet in Dylan knew that “mystery” is better than “666.” Anyway, that’s not the mystery here. The mystery is that they don’t see the brand of doom on one another. Evidently, pride is “going” like hotcakes. Unlike St. John, Dylan deprives us of the pleasures of divine retribution: “Judgment on them is something that you’ll never see.” Well, at least they’re not “goin’ back.” This song makes “Desolation Row” sound like Easy Street, but that is entirely the point.

Unlike the grotesquerie that is “Foot of Pride,” “Blind Willie McTell” is a Romantic apocalypse. Heylin refers to “Caribbean Wind,” an outtake from the *Shot of Love* sessions, as Dylan’s “Kubla Khan” because it “was an example of ‘go[ing] back and try[ing to] pick it up, [when] the inspiration is just gone.’”²⁰⁷ Indeed, that description fits “Kubla Khan” nicely in many ways. Like Coleridge’s poem, “Caribbean Wind” remains a fragment. Yet “Blind Willie McTell” could be considered in the tradition of “Kubla Khan” as well due to the singer’s admitted failure to do justice to his vision. In “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge describes a vision of “a dancer with a dulcimer.” He writes, “Could I revive within me / Her symphony and song / To such deep delight ’twould win me.”²⁰⁸ The conditional “could” is telling because it clearly implies that he cannot, which is what makes

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the poem such a beautiful failure. Similarly, Dylan sings the blues about not being able to sing the blues. Unlike with Coleridge, though, it's not just him: "Nobody can sing the blues like Blind Willie McTell." Throughout, the ghost of apocalypse howls:

*Seen the arrow on the doorpost
Saying, "This land is condemned
All the way from New Orleans
To Jerusalem."
I traveled through East Texas
Where many martyrs fell
And I know no one can sing the blues
Like Blind Willie McTell.*

The one ghost who is not haunting the singer is McTell. Indeed, the singer seems to regard his song as a kid of failed incantation. Yet the power of the song, as with "Kubla Khan," lies in its ability to conjure presence even in absence; the belief in the ghost of McTell does haunt the listener, to the bone. John Bauldie has suggested that Dylan deleted "Blind Willie McTell" from *Infidels* due to an anxiety of influence, an inability to "revive" all that McTell represents for him. It's both the lack of a singer and the knowledge thereof that are being lamented in the song, as well as the knowledge of the state of the world.²⁰⁹ In the song's final verse, the singer gives his State of the World address: "Well, God is in heaven / And we all want what's His / But power and greed and corruptible seed / Seem to be all that there is." Unfortunately for the singer, he doesn't seem to realize that, in the midst of the Wasteland, he has given his listeners a gleam of hope in the resonant ideal of Blind Willie McTell's voice.

Those were the songs left off, and many a commentator has suggested that they are far superior to some of the other cuts on *Infidels*, though most do agree that the album's first song, "Jokerman," is among its gems. Even though Dylan had appeared to stop with the sermonizing, the album's biblical connections, particularly on "Jokerman," could still be discerned. The *New York Times* saw the album as a collection of "incendiary political rants, quasi-biblical tirades and

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surreal love songs [that] capture the apocalyptic mood of the moment with shuddering immediacy,” and the reviewer from *Time* saw the jokerman in “Jokerman” as “part salvation hunter, part satanic twister.”²¹⁰ Likewise, Heylin claimed that the song “continued his fascination with Revelation. In both, it was the battle to separate false messiahs assuming Christ-like attributes from the one true Messiah that began to preoccupy him.”²¹¹ As all these critical ears discerned, “Jokerman” is a tricky and “twisted” song.

As the title suggests, the song is a riddle, wrapped inside a beautiful melody and delivered as one of Dylan’s finest vocal performances. Who is the jokerman? Shelton said that the song was “ironically self-revealing.”²¹² Does that mean that jokerman is Dylanman? Maybe so, but if we try to follow that path we will wind up bumping into mirrors on all sides. Perhaps that is what Shelton meant by “*ironically* self-revealing.” Maybe we’re all the joker. The first line of the lyric is a curveball: “Standing on the water casting your bread.” It is easy to miss the preposition there when the line glides by: Who stands “on” water? Ohhh . . . So, Jokerman is Jesusman. A possible allusion to loaves and fishes seems to reinforce that, but this is another dead end. There is no face behind the mask. In Yeats’s description of apocalypse, “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold.”²¹³ Jokerman is a Yeatsian “thing.” Another question that cannot be answered: Does Jokerman know he is in the abyss? As Dylan sings, “Freedom just around the corner for you / But with the truth so far off, what good will it do?” The only answer to such a desolate question the song offers is its chorus, a couplet so inane that its very emptiness can only be deliberate: “Jokerman dance to the nightingale tune / Bird fly high by the light of the moon.” Is Jokerman the noble savage? Does this refrain have anything to do with the verses that surround it? “Oh Jokerman, you don’t show any response,” the narrator complains. One thing is clear: This joke isn’t funny.

Most of the biblical allusions in the song are pointedly Old Testament: “You’re going to Sodom and Gomorrah / But what do you care? Ain’t nobody there would want to marry your sister.” It is not even clear here if the latter remark about “your sister” is supposed to be an insult or a compliment. It is clear, though, that the song

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inhabits a postapocalyptic Babylonian land of the lost, steeped in a decay of its own making and therefore doomed. Maybe that is why Jokerman is dancing in the moonlight.

*It's a shadowy world, skies are slippery gray,
A woman just gave birth to a prince today and dressed him in scarlet.
He'll put the priest in his pocket, put the blade to the heat,
Take the motherless children off the street
And place them at the feet of a harlot.
Oh, Jokerman, you know what he wants.*

Maybe Jokerman knows more than he will say; is that why he is dancing in the moonlight? This “shadowy world” is full of portents, omens, and signs, and the birth of this prince is clearly bad news, but our main character here is either a happy fool, or the prophet who can see beyond the news of this stanza. Is it a celebratory dance, the way that St. John seems to already be celebrating the bloody destruction of Babylon in Revelation? As the mayor prophesies in Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*, “Those who know don’t tell, and those who tell don’t know.”²¹⁴

The album segues to “Sweetheart like You,” a song which at least puts us on firmer ground as it develops the conceit, “What’s a sweetheart like you doing in a dump like this?” As Heylin reports, Dylan did catch some flak for the line, “A woman like you should be at home / That’s where you belong.”²¹⁵ Yet, it is clear that Sweetheart is also a harlot, and at least the singer is not casting stones. The singer finds her in the same land of counterfeit milk and honey as “Foot of Pride.” She probably works for Red:

*They say that patriotism is the last refuge
To which a scoundrel clings.
Steal a little and they throw you in jail,
Steal a lot and they make you king.
There’s only one step down from here, baby.
It’s called the land of permanent bliss.*

In some ways, even though it appears more straightforward on the surface, this song is at least as twisted as the opener. Not only is sweetness

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itself about to be used for an ashtray, but hell is defined as “permanent bliss.” Jokerman is still dancing.

“Neighborhood Bully” has been read as Dylan’s defense of Zionism, but the bully could be anybody’s martyr. He’s a scapegoat, the Frankenstein monster hunted by the mob, or maybe Christ. Whoever the bully is, the song punctuates the sense that *Infidels* is a place where opposites don’t just attract; they permeate one another, blurring any comfortable sense of distinction:

*Well, he knocked out a lynch mob, he was criticized,
Old women condemned him, said he should apologize.
Then he destroyed a bomb factory, nobody was glad.
The bombs were meant for him.
He was supposed to feel bad.
He’s the neighborhood bully.*

Armageddon is on, and the next song, “License to Kill,” mourns the consequences, condemning the human greed that ruined the world through the voice of an old woman whose sole refrain, “Who gonna take away his license to kill,” is never answered. The song’s portrait of bellicose, rapacious man makes any attempt at an answer seem ludicrous: “Now, he’s hell-bent for destruction, he’s afraid and confused, / And his brain has been mismanaged with great skill. / All he believes are his eyes / And his eyes, they just tell him lies.” It gets worse because even if the old woman could find an answer to her question that brought some sense of peace, the next song, “Man of Peace,” returns to the communication breakdown of “Neighborhood Bully” by arguing that such a man may in fact be Red himself. Martyrs are bullies, war is peace, and, as both George Orwell and Thom Yorke from Radiohead remind us, $2 + 2 = 5$. Therefore, the singer sardonically urges that we party like it’s 1999:

*Well, the howling wolf will howl tonight, the king snake will crawl,
Trees that’ve stood for a thousand years suddenly will fall.
Wanna get married? Do it now,
Tomorrow all activity will cease.
You know that sometimes Satan comes as a man of peace.*

“Union Sundown” describes one way Satan apparently got his foot in the door, by stoking the engine of capitalism and creating a world-economy behemoth. Heylin has disparaged this song as an “ill-judged rant,” but in a twenty-first century world of outsourcing, perhaps it is worth our reconsideration.²¹⁶ Just as he conjures Merle Haggard in “Workingman’s Blues #2” (from *Modern Times*), here Dylan seems to be joining forces with Country Outlaws, who celebrate the trials, laments, and joys of the American worker. Unlike so many of those Outlaw songs though, from Haggard’s original “Workin’ Man Blues,” to Johnny Paycheck’s “Take This Job and Shove It,” Dylan doesn’t sing from the workingman’s perspective in “Union Sundown.” On *Infidels*, it’s too late for that. Instead, this song seems to be a farewell to the workingman *ideal*, and the apocalyptic resonance of the song inheres in the title, with its punning farewell to both labor unions and the good ole’ USA itself.

“I and I” reinforces *Infidels*’s collapse of meaning and conflation of opposites with a portrait of a doppelganger, but in this case both I’s are equally monstrous and foreign to one another. In this song, the self is an other. The song finds the narrator, awake and restless, gazing at his sleeping lover. This is not so much a sweet scene, as the first line makes clear: “Been so long since a strange woman slept in my bed.” The sense of isolation that line conveys is compounded, not only by the fact that it’s been a while, but also by his own feelings of estrangement. The chorus makes clear the root of this disconnection: “I and I / In creation where one’s nature neither honors nor forgives. / I and I / One says to the other, no man sees my face and lives.” A “strange” physical encounter has initiated a crisis of identity. In the apocalyptic context, this song emphasizes that we can think of the end on both macro and micro levels, for “I and I” is a story of imminent (or is it immanent?) self-destruction. Especially if we are to believe the last line of the chorus, somebody is going down. This dark epiphany on the narrator’s part reveals a deep longing to make connections and sense that just aren’t there, which is the central conflict of this song, and indeed of the entire album, the “attitude of an infidel.” As he goes out wandering, he recounts former quests:

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*Took an untrodden path once, where the swift don't win the race,
It goes to the worthy, who can divide the word of truth,
Took a stranger to teach me, to look into justice's beautiful face
And to see an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*

What does it mean to “divide the word of truth”? Apparently, that is a laudable accomplishment. Yet, it does not seem that this speaker can pull off that trick. Clearly, he is attracted to old-school “justice,” and the obvious yet clever pun on “eye” suggests that such retribution extends to “an I for an I” as well. The next stanza implies that we are in fact staring at immanent self-destruction here because he’s not jumping off any bridges or writing suicide notes; he’s planning to return to that claustrophobic bedroom:

*Outside of two men on a train platform there's nobody in sight,
They're waiting for spring to come, smoking down the track.
The world could come to an end tonight, but that's all right.
She should still be there sleepin' when I get back.*

That last comment suggests that this speaker doesn’t entirely buy into the concept of imminent apocalypse, but it also reveals a desire for it; that would solve some problems, that strange woman for starters, and not to mention the mystery of self that this poor bastard will never solve. “I and I” is ultimately an apocalyptic fantasy, a wish for a final showdown with one’s dark double (the other is always the evil twin) that never comes.

Infidels ends with a whimper. The title of the final cut sums it up: “Don’t Fall Apart on Me Tonight.” Why does this speaker not want his lover to fall apart tonight? “I just don’t think that I could handle it.” It is rather characteristic of Dylan to end an album with a love song. *Blonde on Blonde* ends with the revelation of “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands.” *Bringing All Back Home* does so with “It’s All Over Now Baby Blue,” certainly a fitting farewell for that album of grotesques, and, lyrically speaking, a good example of going out with a bang. The pastoral apocalypse of *John Wesley Harding* concludes with “I’ll Be Your Baby Tonight,” a lilting promise of carefree union that seems somehow out of place, yet does convey a sense of hope by ending on such a

note. There are no such happy hints here. This is implosion rather than explosion and as a result, even more of a downer. There certainly is no solace outside: "You know, the streets are filled with vipers / Who've lost all ray of hope." And, even the limited intimacy the narrator asks for is just one last tired gasp of need. The End.

Too often underrated, *Infidels* is one of Dylan's most interesting works because it finds him at yet another turning point, obviously parting ways with the "born again" phase of his songwriting, but retaining the flavor and energy of those Gospel speeches and applying it to more personal and secular concerns. "Reinventing himself" is such a Dylanist cliché but only because it applies so well. The late '80s and early '90s continued to find Dylan working in the vein of *Infidels*. *Time Out of Mind*, for example, found him still exploring the immanence of apocalypse. In a disparaging review of Dylan's Kennedy Center Honor award and performance, R. Emmett Tyrrell, writing for the conservative *American Spectator*, trashed both Dylan and his generation. The fact that Gregory Peck placed Dylan in an American tradition including Mark Twain and Walt Whitman was, we shall say, rather upsetting to Tyrrell. With the full confidence of sweeping generalization, he damns the generation of the '60s for its mediocrity and fraudulence. Scoffing at the idea that Dylan is or was ever considered a prophetic voice in American life, he concludes, "Frankly if Dylan is a prophet, the world he prophesied is all pratfalls and misery."²¹⁷ Doubtlessly, this was intended as an insult, but with a richer understanding of the poetics of apocalypse at work in Dylan's songs from the early '60s to the present day, it is actually a rather nice compliment, maybe even unintentionally prophetic.

Dylan's apocalyptic imagination is indeed something to celebrate. One of the things Dylan continues to show us is the flexibility of perspective necessary to live life, and to create, with an apocalyptic viewpoint. It's a visionary thing. Dylan suggested as much when he was asked during an interview in 1995 if America was better or worse off since the '60s:

I see pictures of the '50s, the '60s and the '70s and I see there was a difference. But I don't think the human mind can comprehend the past and the future. They are both just illusions that can manip-

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ulate you into thinking there's some kind of change. But after you've been around awhile, they both seem unnatural. It seems like we're going in a straight line, but then you start seeing things that you've seen before. Haven't you experienced that? It seems we're going around in circles.²¹⁸

Dylan is saying that a circular view of history makes an apocalyptic aesthetic possible. This matters because, even with an apocalyptic view-point, there is an outside, another window. The ability to see the interconnectedness of introduction and conclusion is the only thing that allows for the ability to see past the "illusion" and thus to "reinvent" new mornings out of those long night journeys. In a 1997 interview, when asked if he would ever stop performing and recording, Dylan replied, "I could stop any time . . . I can see an end to everything, really."²¹⁹ Then again, in the liner notes to *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, he wrote, "Poetry is anything that ain't got no end." There are windows he hasn't yet discovered, and there are many that we will continue to find long after he is as gone as Blind Willie McTell.