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## **THE TRANSITION FROM POPULAR INTO “HIGH” CULTURE: BOB DYLAN – THREE SONGS OF THE EARLY 1960’s**

This paper looks at the work of Bob Dylan, particularly the approach to which he has taken in the creation of his work and his early topical songs from the 1960s. It involves discovering the merit Dylan had in transforming popular music into live media to examine the political and sociological norms of the time. One of the concerns of this paper is to show that Dylan has considered himself to be more of the storyteller than the activist, especially concerning the transfer of popular *zeitgeist* into “high” culture. In terms of better understanding the relationship between the lyrical mind of Dylan and popular culture, the politically and psychologically grounded histories and Post War America can be explored through the counterculture which Dylan reluctantly came to represent. The paper also explores the civil rights movement, racism, and poverty of the America of Dylan’s 1960s and establishes their place and significance in creating his work.

**Key words:** Bob Dylan, popular culture, 1960s, topical songs, civil rights, racism, storytelling, folk music

### **Dylan amidst Protest**

Newsweek magazine in 2004 awarded Bob Dylan with the ceremonial claim of “the most influential cultural figure now alive” (Gates, 2004: 48). This sentiment has come to echo within his Nobel Prize win of 2016, recognizing his overall life achievement and contribution to literature. Yet, Dylan has never singularly codified his place within the artistic world nor has he been anything but a singer/songwriter and, at times, poet. He best describes himself in the words “I’m a poet and I know it / Hope

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I don't blow it" (Dylan, 1994: 201).<sup>2</sup> The question remains of how such a phenomenon as Dylan the popular singer can hold claim over being a fundamental force within literature. The answer to this conundrum is that Dylan has been at the heart of social commentary as an artist reflecting on his times, which makes his music and lyrics that much more influential. In order to shed better light on this fact, the emphasis in this paper is to be on the "golden 60s" of Dylan's career so that the nature of his approach to his art and its ability to transcend categories may be better illuminated.

While the 1950s in the United States was largely a decade that followed strict observance of the *status quo*, the 1960s were largely a rebellion against it. The rules and conventions that made up the segregated societies of the 1950s fell to challenges from a broad spectrum of social movements within the 1960s. As a *zeitgeist* of the decade, these challenges to the norm were inherent to the overall narrative spoken by the people of the time.

Still, the 60s of American culture had their roots embedded in the 50s. The rebellious music of the apex of Woodstock was the child of the impersonal, uniform songs for mass consumption promoted in the 1950s. The rock music that became synonymous with "America" was the original mix of rhythm and blues performed by African American musicians from the 1940 and 1950s. The folk or alternative music scene had its roots in a long tradition of folk singers throughout American political and cultural history. It was into this environment that Dylan emerged on the folk-music and popular-music scene.

In 1961, Columbia Records offered Dylan a contract. After releasing two albums, it became evident that Dylan fit into the folk-protest genre, expressing an angst of his generation. The songs he became most famous for at this time were written over a period of 20 months in the early 1960s, from January 1962 to November 1963 (see Marqusee, 2003), and were influenced by a social-consciousness of the changes that were underway in society or that advocated as such. This was true especially in regard to the civil rights movement, which came to be presented in a number of his songs. These are to be the focal point of examination within this paper.

In these works, Dylan's enigma is also present. He self-purportedly never viewed them as being truly representative as mere protest songs, perhaps due to the feeling that his "voice" and music were used for something more than he himself fully intended. Instead, although they were

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2 (1964). *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. I Shall Be Free No. 10.

composed in the spirit of defiance, Dylan did not compose them to this aim, rather as a commentary as a singer and songwriter.

### **Dylan - The Reflective Storyteller in His Own Words**

Dylan has been in the public eye for such a long time that his own commentary on his own life and work is available in the form of autobiography. While it may be challenged on grounds beyond which the artist himself claims to consider his work, it is hard to make a case against what the artist set out to accomplish according to his own assertions. Thereby, his memoirs provide important insight into his process of artistic creation.

Before 1965, Dylan released four albums, *Bob Dylan* (1962), *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963), *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964) and *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964). The work of these albums, while not showing a clear cut from his later works, are still distinctly separate in their tone, sound, nature, and approach to subject material, as well as how Dylan ascribed the nature of the work, and hence serve as a clear bridging from his start of a career in which he was forged and the rest in which he developed. This fact is reflected upon in *Chronicles: Volume One*, in which Dylan focuses the bulk of his reminiscences on the seminal works of the early 1960s and these albums in order to explore the ideas that he faced while writing and performing some of his most famous works, as well as to explain the manner in which he viewed their creation.

It is foremost important then to first clarify the manner in which Dylan regards his work of this time, especially those songs which he wrote and performed thereof, giving him a foundation on the American music scene against the tumult of the 1960s. The counter culture of this decade had its roots in folk music, which “became chic among certain middle-class college students who disdained rock 'n' roll as an inane, fleeting fad” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 124). Although overshadowed later by the British invasion, folk music’s revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s was on cornerstone on which the music of the 60s emerged and of which Dylan was an integral part.

The folk music scene of that time owed much to the singer Woody Guthrie, the pre-World War Two American folk musician, travelling the

country to sing songs about the common day everyman.<sup>3</sup> Guthrie “added his own lyrics to folk and country songs to tell what he saw and suffered in his travels across America during the Depression. He modified the Badman Ballad to write songs about good men down on their luck” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 124). Guthrie was also essential in changing the folk scene in other ways. Whereas his songs were essentially “topical” and “would inform people of current events which might not be covered honestly in the media” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 124), the atypical purpose of these folksongs and singers “was to promote group solidarity and rally listeners into supporting workers’ rights by joining unions” (2000: 124). Guthrie and singers akin to him also “formed a commune in Greenwich Village” (2000: 124), where the folk music scene of the 50s and 60s came to lay its roots.

Dylan has always envisaged himself as a version if not the successor to the spirit of Guthrie, even viewing Guthrie as his musical mentor.<sup>4</sup> The influence of Guthrie on Dylan can therefore not be understated. When Dylan speaks of the first time he encountered Guthrie, or rather the moment from which Dylan’s idolization of Guthrie’s work came, the amount of influence and emulation that Dylan ascribed to the singer for his own work begins to become even clearer. In his memoirs, Dylan comments on this first encountering of Guthrie, citing his state of listening as a “trance” in which Guthrie’s soloist compositions are what inspired him to create his own compositions in the same style and manner: “A voice in my head said, ‘So this is the game.’ I could sing all these songs, every single one of them

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3 Guthrie was “the self-appointed folk spokesman for the Dust Bowl migrants and agricultural workers during the Great Depression. His pro-labor/anti-capitalist stance attracted many radical and left-leaning liberals during the 1930s and 1940s, but his lasting fame came from his influence on the folk revival of the 1960s. (...) Throughout his writings, Guthrie expressed his belief in justice and his faith that it could be brought to prevail through action. For him personally, action took the form of singing and writing, best exemplified by the slogan proudly displayed on his guitar: ‘This Machine Kills Fascists.’ His sense of the role of a folksinger as crusader for the less fortunate and as a critic of society’s oppressors and manipulators had greater influence on the course of American popular music than his style of singing or any one composition” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 328, 329).

4 This fact can be supported by the fact that Dylan went to see Guthrie in the hospital in Brooklyn as he was dying in 1961. Dylan commemorated this visit in his own work, “Song to Woody”, the first composition of his own that Dylan ever performed in public, when he made his New York Town Hall concert debut in ’63. He even, “put down his guitar to read a seven-minute poet about him” (Williamson, Love, & Jones, 2007: 54).

and they were all that I wanted to sing” (Dylan, 2004: 581). Given this statement, it is of vital importance therefore to see the connection as it was the singer-songwriter that emerged out of the folk culture of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s that Dylan aspired to. This genre of music that encapsulated contemporary issues of the time is the foundation from which Dylan began to model himself after in his early career. Dylan held Guthrie’s works as the exemplar model in this regard, as well as others.<sup>5</sup> He noted most recently in his Nobel lecture that these early influences were also what educated him into the field of music in general and, more to the point, he hints at the fact that following the lyrics to such music was the manner in which he educated himself to write his own work. In the Nobel lecture proper, he noted that “[B]y listening to all the early folk artists and singing the songs yourself, you pick up the vernacular. You internalize it. (...) You hear all the finer points, and you learn the details” (Dylan, 2017). Dylan’s work should therefore be approached in this manner as to gain a clearer understanding into its composition and importance.

To further evidence this point, Guthrie’s songs such as “Ludlow Massacre”, “1913 Massacre”, “Pretty Boy Floyd”, “Hard Travelin’”, “Jack-hammer John”, “Grand Coulee Dam”, “Talkin’ Dust Bowl Blues”, and “This Land Is Your Land”, are among the songs Dylan cites as having the most impact on his perception of lyrical expression. These songs in particular are significant since they themselves address contemporary social issues of Guthrie’s era which Dylan would go on to emulate for his own. Guthrie, the travelling singer-songwriter, based his music on his interaction with the individuals he met on his journeys; Dylan would also go on to try to meet this aim in the early part of his career in which he went to the southern states undergoing civil rights protests to sing of the events there and which this paper shall focus on.

In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan also elaborates on the sheer nature of the music itself in its influence: “He [Guthrie] was so poetic and tough and rhythmic” (2004: 580). It is evident through Dylan’s own ballads which rely on heavy repetition in their refrains that this is a decisive

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5 Dylan cites “ragtime blues, work songs, Georgia sea shanties, Appalachian ballads and cowboy songs” (2017) as all being influential on his overall career. These various styles and manners of home-grown American folk music share in the same aspect stemming from the contemporary voice of the masses which fits into ballad form and addresses topics that are not high-art, but are of concern to the everyday individual.

influence.<sup>6</sup> Yet, more of necessity for this work here is the connection between the subject matter and the formation of the lyrics. Dylan cites Guthrie's lyrical style, in which "Guthrie tore everything in his path to pieces" (2004: 580). Dylan means this in both the sense of the harsh criticism present in the lyrics as well as the staccato nature of the individual lines thereof. In this regard, Dylan modeled his stylistic approach to his own music to the extent that Dylan claims that his view of the world and his ability to represent it in art came into focus through Guthrie (see Dylan, 2004: 582). Leadbelly was Guthrie's contemporary equal in the rhythm and blues community of the Deep South, whom Dylan has also frequently cited as part of his musical background, even claiming that hearing Leadbelly's record "Cottonfields" "changed his life then and there" (Dylan, 2017). The strong rhythm and blues evocative of the Deep South is also evident as an influence in Dylan's work (see Tyler & Israelson, 2015: 98-99).

The background and style of Dylan's work is crucial to underscore that while Dylan can be interpreted and has been commonly viewed as a social advocate, this has not been the primary reason or muse for his work overall; rather, it is the concept of setting the social *zeitgeist* to music that drove his early work. Therein, the political protest movement of the 1960s acquired Dylan's work, but Dylan himself had been reluctantly cast as the singer embodying a voice of protest, as opposed to the songwriter he aimed to be. This fact can be evidenced by Dylan's eventual departure from and disillusionment with the folk music scene which focused itself on the political:

[Dylan] became increasingly dissatisfied with the politics-on-its-sleeve modus operandi of the protest music movement, and weary too of the internal battles between folk purists, the folk-music equivalent of 'original instrument' devotees in the classical-music world, and those who believed that the animating spirit of folk music endorsed its appropriation for contemporary political struggle (Dettmar, 2009: 5).

Nevertheless, Dylan was not an apolitical individual. The issue is that he had been involved as adjunct to political movements due to the music of which he made that focused primarily on social concerns as a

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6 See *The Political World of Bob Dylan: Freedom and Justice, Power and Sin*, Ch. 1, Bob Dylan's roots and traditional world, specifically the subchapter Southern musical roots on southern influences which highlights the child ballad which Dylan often returns to as a songwriter. pp. 26-29.

progression in the continuum of folk music as a popular genre. Dylan himself had a great appreciation for the rebellious nature of the folk song, but it was the language and nature of the song that Dylan was inspired by: “[d]rinking songs, country ballads and rousing rebel songs. (...) The language was flashy and provocative – a lot of action in the words” (Dylan, 2004: 192). By his own admission, he notes that he had never thought of his own music to belong to the category of protest songs, reflecting the more popular idea of folk music of the time; instead, “they were rebel ballads (...) even in a simple, melodic wooing ballad there’d be rebellion waiting around the corner. You couldn’t escape it. There were songs like that in my repertoire, too” (Dylan, 2004: 192). It was the nature of this very genre he would then emulate, not due to its protest like nature, but to its common-clay, traditional aspects that were the foundation to his own music making.

### **Political (Dis)engagement**

While Dylan’s well-known divergence from the greater folk movement of the early 60s was symbolized by his “Dylan Goes Electric” appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, it is often misconstrued simply as a shift in his musical tonality. The fact of the matter is that his use of an electric guitar and amp shocked the folk community, not for the fact that he was using them but his introduction of the *Highway 61* album which divorced himself from the political tome of the folk music community.<sup>7</sup> While Dylan’s works have always been controversial, it may be safely claimed that he had never initiated them under the mere intention of making a political act or socially-conscious work. Instead, his “going electric”, was the point at which he asserted an independence from the folk music scene so that he could act as the lyrical singer-songwriter which he had originally began as. He had sought since the start of his career to be a storyteller, but his songs were topical to current events of the time and, therefore, politically relevant. For this very reason, they were adopted within the larger cultural movement of the 60s as embodying the supposed progressive shift in rights, but not

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7 The activist Irwin Silber even criticized Dylan for losing touch with the political audience that he had built up and who had built his career, without regarding Dylan’s evolution as an artist. See Shelton, R. *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, p. 313.

actually nor originally made as the anthem to such a movement. Dylan commented as such in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 1972, long after the fact, that he was more interested in pursuing his own artistic goals than what should otherwise be expected of him: “I don’t want to write *for* people anymore. You know – be a spokesman. (...) From now on, I want to write from inside me” (qtd. in McGregor, 1972: 47). He even goes so far as to state that the work he had made in his early career was more attributable to the writing of such topical songs, because “some of that was jumping into the scene to be heard and a lot of it was because I didn’t see anybody else doing that kind of thing” (McGregor 1972: 47).

Such a claim may stand in sharp contrast to Dylan’s adoration of Guthrie, who was a politically active in every sense. It was not the political nature of Guthrie’s work that Dylan most was impressed by or desired to emulate, however, but the encapsulation of the event through lyrics and music. Guthrie would take a popular subject and ascribe lyrics to it with obvious political overtones. Dylan was impressed at the outset of his career foremost by this specific manner in which to compose a song, but did so with political undertones. To this extent, Dylan clearly departs from Guthrie. Dylan himself, when reflecting on some of his most popular “protest” or “socially-conscious” songs does not openly claim that he is political or apolitical, but rather encourages that his music be experienced, which can be found ubiquitously throughout interviews and press conferences. When discussing his influences and exposure to certain musicians and experiences which he himself found providential to his work and their creation, Dylan never asserts (either intentionally or through omission) a politicized, socially conscious. Rather, he goes out of his way to highlight the influence of blues, folk, and other musicians in their style of composition: “I probably used about five or six of Robert Johnson’s blues song forms, too, unconsciously, but more on the lyrical imagery side of things” (Dylan, 2004: 688,689). Dylan’s influence by Johnson can indeed be clearly heard in the former’s work, which “emphasizes an intricate interplay between guitar and voice” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 558). Johnson and Dylan both share in common “sung lines with rhythmic bursts of guitar playing, typically playing a bass line with his thumb while picking out chords and riffs with his fingers (...) often dropping into a speaking voice at the end of lines” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 558). Dylan has been quoted at numerous times to even reject the idea that he is a folk artist, insisting instead that he is a singer



first and foremost. By doing so he implies that the artistic nature with which he approaches his work is unique. In 1998, in an interview for *Playboy*, he scathingly stated: “Folk music is a word I can’t use. Folk music is a bunch of fat people. I have to think of all this as traditional music. (...) Everybody knows that I’m not a folk singer” (qtd. in Cott, 2006: 98).

Given his rejection of that which brought him early fame, cynically it could then be said that Dylan utilized his fame in the larger folk and protest movement of the time to achieve notoriety and was then fatigued by the limits it placed on his creativity. Joan Baez, his colleague and contemporary, has noted as such (see Boucher, 2004). Dylan, again, rejects this notion:

Joan Baez recorded a protest song about [...] challenging me to get with it — come out and take charge, lead the masses — be an advocate, lead the crusade. [...] The press never let up. Once in a while I would have to rise up and offer myself for an interview so they wouldn’t beat down the door. [...] I would tell them repeatedly that I was not a spokesman for anything or anybody and that I was only a musician. [...] Later an article would hit the streets with the headline “Spokesman Denies That He’s a Spokesman” (Dylan, 2004: 275, 276).

In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Bob Dylan comments on his reaction to this withdrawing from the larger world of folk music, for which he was acclaimed, rejecting the “political nature” which had come to be ascribed to his musical works. He notes that, even if they had had a political slant, it was not the intention to make them purely political, but rather political with a political nature as it undertone:

Topical songs weren’t protest songs. The term “protest singer” didn’t exist anymore than the term “singer-songwriter”. You were a performer or you weren’t, that was about it — a folksinger or not one. “Songs of dissent” was a term people used but even that was rare. I tried to explain later that I didn’t think I was a protest singer, that there’d been a screwup. I didn’t think I was protesting anything any more than I thought that Woody Guthrie songs were protesting anything (Dylan, 2004: 69).

Here, in Dylan’s own words, it can be readily noted how he cites Guthrie’s work as being the strongest of his influences, but it is far more interesting to note that he admits to not taking the political nature of it to be the essence of songwriting, rather the storytelling of the topic itself. This, therefore, is the vision Dylan himself ascribes to his own music and his own songwriting, and which it may be examined.

In order to define the context of how Dylan fits into the popular culture of his time, Dylan's own context needs to be applied as self-described singer/songwriter. Instead of being examined through the lens of a political activist or poet, he should be analyzed as a singer/songwriter who wrote of the times and of the society to which he was an active participant. Therefore, this paper takes the analytic view that Dylan need not be interpreted as the politically observant singer; rather, he is one who utilizes the *zeitgeist* to reflect upon and compose songs about, describing an observation thereof. It is important to see Dylan creating his own works as a contemporaneous bard, supported by his constant scorn of labeling his career, especially his early work. "Though uncomfortable always with the label 'protest singer', Dylan has found ways over the years to make his voice heard, without restricting its range" (Dettmar, 2009: 6). Dylan has done so, particularly, in order to be freed of imposed limitations to his artistic endeavors.

It could be argued that Dylan cannot negate his associated origins as a protest singer of the 1960s. However, this would be limiting his genuine artistic merit. This error possibly recurs owing to a misconception that Dylan's work and attitudes would have needed to remain politically overt in his work to have borne out a reflection in artistic media and popular culture. This reasoning is misplaced, since it assumes the power of the lyrics and the relevance are of more import than the song styling itself. Dettmar notes this precisely when commenting on the breadth of Dylan's career, remarking that "just as not all topical songs are political, so too a song needn't be topical to have political importance. This distinction has too often been ignored" (2009: 4). While he does underscore the fact that Dylan is political, he agrees that a mere single distinction of the political in Dylan's work is a common misnomer. Specifically, "Dylan is the most political of our popular artists, and the most popular of our political artists. But he requires us to understand the term 'politics' in its largest sense" (Dettmar, 2009: 4). In this same sense, this paper aims to explore Dylan's engagement of the topical and transforming it into the lyrical.

When Dylan speaks of his creative process, he claims as much to this fact. He insists that the muse of his works that gives sparks to their creation is more serendipitous than planned. One apparent aspect, however, is that he does state that he does not set out to search for a topic to be a theme in his music, rather that "[O]pportunities may come along for you to convert something — something that exists into something that didn't yet. That might be the beginning of it" (Dylan, 2004: 39). Such a mindset is the opposite of the

political singer who would first pick the topic to meet a perceived political aim. Instead, Dylan clearly lays out the fact that his songs seek to aggrandize a concept of the current affair into a lyrical and poetic form within its expression as literature. Dylan attests to this fact in his musing that "[Y]ou want to write songs that are bigger than life. You want to say something about strange things that have happened to you, strange things you have seen" (Dylan, 2004: 39). In order to accomplish this aim of writing about the grander aspects of experience as inspiration occurs, it could be stated that Dylan turned to writing about the topical, recent events which had some non-descript impact upon him that he felt were worthy of putting to lyrical description, relating himself and his attitude through the work itself. Again, turning to his own words on the subject, Dylan asserts that his songs are topical forthwith in this very manner: "Songs about real events were always topical. You could usually find some kind of point of view in it, though, and take it for what it was worth, and the writer doesn't have to be accurate, could tell you anything and you're going to believe it" (2004: 69). This also suggests that Dylan never aimed to tell the "factual truth", which would be the objective of the political; instead his focus was placed on a "good story" encompassing a total idea of plot and structure that could be set to musical forms.

Poague concurs with this sentiment as he challenges the concept of the overt political as the watchword to Dylan's work of the early 1960s. He shifts attention to his so-termed "story" songs, which he defines as an entirety of lyrics taken as a whole leading to a transformation in the understanding of the actual into a variety of literature that focuses on the extenuation of the story itself:

[s]tory songs (...) tend to shift audience attention from social to literary concerns. We get caught up in the story, identify with the characters, and we go through a mental process more reflective than directive. We go "out of" ourselves and "into" the story; and our primary locus of interest is the world of the song, a world which often seems very different from the world of our everyday present (Poague, 1979: 79).

Given this observation, the story (read: topical) song is akin much to the audience of a play who find a common form within the story which fits to a theme that creates in its comprehension more than merely the topic at hand, but a thread within literary themes. Dylan's works of the early 1960s, as we shall now examine, aim to do much of the same. It was by turning to the topical nature of storytelling that allowed Dylan to seize the spirit of the times and express his artistic desires in topical form first and foremost.

## Dylan's Impressions on the Civil Rights Movement – Struggle into Poetry

Dylan's artistic attitudes as he arrived onto the music scene coincided with significant changes experienced by American society. Dylan actively recognized as such ("America was changing. I had a feeling of destiny and I was riding the changes" (Dylan, 2004: 60)), but it should be underscored that he claims to have been aware even at this time in his early career, that he was conscientiously developing his craft in order to assemble the then current events into a literary form of lyrics that could be sung: "[i]f I wanted to compose folk songs I would need some kind of new template, some philosophical identity that wouldn't burn out" (2004: 60). As it would turn out, he would resort to the topical songs that would mark the rest of his career in order to do so.

The America of the 1960s is remembered as a time of great social change which rocked every corner of the country. African Americans, after suffering under nearly a century of oppression under a white dominated culture and Jim Crow Laws suddenly began to assert their rights through community activism.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent to these social events, Dylan compiled lyrics in their regard and found a ready topical theme to turn to.

One such song was "Oxford Town".<sup>9</sup> Focused on these events as a part of the larger civil rights movement then unfolding, Dylan put to lyrics the common experience young blacks were having throughout the Southern United States by challenging racism directly through enrolling into *de facto* segregated schools and institutions of higher learning:

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8 This time "represented a turning point in the black struggle for equal rights. With the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that outlawed the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of 'Separate But Equal', African Americans realized that the time was right to end all vestiges of Jim Crow and discrimination. On the heels of *Brown*, black Southerners undertook battles to achieve voting rights and integration, under the broad leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. Through marches, rallies, sit-ins, and boycotts, they were able to accomplish their goals by the late 1960s" (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000: 519). It was seismic and clear paradigmatic shift within society, challenging rigid norms that had been set up till then that could be felt in every aspect of American life, even beyond civil rights.

9 Inspired by the events surrounding the campus riots sparked off when James Meredith, a black student whom had been barred from enrolling at the University of Mississippi purely based on his race, was accompanied by U.S. Marshalls on September 20, 1962 under direct order from President John F. Kennedy in order for him to be able to do so. Two students died and numerous others were injured.

Oxford Town around the bend / He come in to the door, he couldn't get in / All because of the color of his skin / What do you think about that, my frien'? (Dylan, 1994: 9-12)

While the lyrics may appear to be direct, the underlying theme of “Oxford Town” is not as simple. Avoiding an unwavering demonization of racism while still heavily criticizing it, Dylan opts to demonstrate the lack of reason to deny education based on one’s skin colour, by asserting the baselessness as referenced in the reiteration of “color of his skin”. By doing so, Dylan creates a broader scope of the nature of said racism. Dylan even goes so far as to ask the listener to reflect on the situation, imploring that “[t]wo men died ’neath the Mississippi moon / Somebody better investigate soon” (Dylan, 1994: 19-20) in reference to the event and the extent racism can go to shape violence and opinion.

In fact, Dylan here composed a song about racism as focused through an event. According to him, the song “deals with the Meredith case, but then again it doesn’t. [...] I wrote that when it happened, and I could have written that yesterday. It’s still the same” (qtd. in Heylin, 2009: 78). Here, Dylan implies that despite the efforts of the time, the nature of racism is universal and has not ended in spite of the civil rights movement. Through this song, it can be evidently concluded that Dylan, while his work may be topical, are grounded in deeper undertones of thematic issues. This fact can be seen in his other work “Only a Pawn in Their Game”. Upon hearing of Evers’ death<sup>10</sup>, Dylan immediately wrote the song, which he performed for the first time on July the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1963 (see Doyle, 2008).

Much like “Oxford Town”, “A Pawn in Their Game” is unique in its approach which Dylan took in describing the events in lyrical form. Dylan

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10 Evers, a World War Two Veteran who earned his college degree in 1952 found that simple civic rights were denied to him, particularly the right to vote. In 1954, Evers applied to the segregated University of Mississippi to study law, but was rejected based on his race. He thereafter became the cause celebre of the NAACP, eventually becoming its first field secretary in the state. “He travelled throughout Mississippi recruiting new members, organizing voter-registration, protesting unequal social conditions, and boycotting companies that practiced discrimination. Evers soon had a high profile as an activist, and that made him a threat to the power structure in Mississippi, and also a target” (Doyle, 2008). On the evening of June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1963, after having attended a meeting at the New Jerusalem Baptist Church, Evers returned home. As Evers exited the car, he was shot in the back of the head by Byron De La Beckwith, a fertilizer salesman and member of the Ku Klux Klan.

commonly crafts an independent viewpoint, allowing him to express an expanse of depth in verse that goes beyond addressing mere aspects surrounding the event. This song is no such exception as, by focusing attention on the assassin and his motives which drove him to do so, Dylan attempts to tackle the issue of racism through a focal point of the event as many on a theme.

Evers' assassination was not in a cultural or societal vacuum. Competing forces between traditional segregated southern society and the emergence of the civilly-conscious African American were directly competing with one another. The traditional society of racism allowed for the poor white to have a more dignified place, no matter how far down the economic or social ladder, compared to that of the disenfranchised black. Even those whites who would be sympathetic to the civil rights movement found themselves in a difficult predicament since they were found in a position of abandoning long-held racist tradition that was seen as a fundamental pillar of southern society, or accepting it through fear. "By appealing to the basest emotions of greed and hatred and fear, they had built a majority (...) willing to be led to march backward" (Egerton, 1994). In these circumstances, or in the desire to address them, Dylan writes of Evers' death.

Considering that Dylan had the courage to first perform "Only a Pawn in Their Game" to a voter registration rally of black workers outside Greenwood, Mississippi, in July 1963, (see Doyle, 2008), it would appear that he felt there was something more important to express than an attack on an assassin or assassination. Even if it was more than clear that Dylan "understood the anger that he might invite by not sounding angry enough (...) aware of how he might himself be blamed for not blaming" (Ricks, 2005: 171), he chose to offer a song about the assassin as nothing more than a small character in the issue of the times. Hence, "A Pawn" uses repetition again through appellation to relate the problem of racism instead of those who were racist. By addressing Evers' death as a topical event, Dylan chooses to indict racism as a whole as a societal problem, hence the common repetition in all verses of the appeal of the assassin remaining blameless in some fashion or, failing that, not deserving total blame nor does any individual. However, Dylan also goes so far as to underlie the fact that the "poor white" is also not to be blamed, rather the racism holding sway over them. This fact is underscored in the second, third, and fourth verses, where "the wording changes to something that in its way uneducated and so might be heard as sympathizing with the poor white (not condescending...)" (Ricks,

2005: 171). In this regard, it is essential to point up how Dylan draws attention to the exploitation of both African and White Americans:

A South politician preaches to the poor white man / 'You got more than the blacks, don't complain. / You're better than them, you been born with white skin,' they explain. / And the Negro's name / Is used it is plain / For the politician's gain / As he rises to fame / And the poor white remains / On the caboose of the train / But it ain't him to blame / He's only a pawn in their game (Dylan, 1994: 8-18).

Dylan also appeals to the fact that the racism to which African Americans are subjected is an instilled behavior from above, neither inherent nor by nature. Consequently, it is the actual antagonism to be confronted instead of the mere assassin:

The deputy sheriffs, the soldiers, the governors get paid / And the marshals and cops get the same / But the poor white man's used in the hands of them all like a tool / He's taught in his school / From the start by the rule / That the laws are with him / To protect his white skin / To keep up his hate / So he never thinks straight / 'Bout the shape that he's in / But it ain't him to blame / He's only a pawn in their game (Dylan, 1994: 19-30).

Dylan's open sympathy to the "poor white", or even an appeal to their sensibilities, while not entirely politically popular at the time, creates an aspect of racism that can be examined as based upon the highly relevant topic of Evers' death for the overall period. Through Dylan's method of storytelling, he reaches out to create a context, establishing the idea of equality under oppression. In this regard, Dylan even merges the poverty and/or exploitation faced by both the African and White American as being equal or the same, where in the third verse he speaks of being punished for being poor, as opposed to being lynched for being black:

From the poverty shacks, he looks from the cracks to the tracks / And the hoofbeats pound in his brain / And he's taught how to walk in a pack / Shoot in the back / With his fist in a clinch / To hang and to lynch / To hide 'neath the hood / To kill with no pain / Like a dog on a chain / He ain't got no name / But it ain't him to blame / He's only a pawn in their game (Dylan, 1994: 31-42).

Dylan refrains "only a pawn in their game" in every final line to imply that the individual white racist and the death of Evers are both forfeit to a larger structure of racism. They are, in fact, both pawns. The white

racist is perhaps even portrayed as being more the victim than the black since Dylan remarks that they are victim to their own racism. It is this poetic power that Dylan uses to go beyond a simpler condemnation to look at principal causes that constructs his songs as being high art and social commentary, but apolitical while being topical. The corresponding object of the racist attack, the African American community, remains the focus of the theme, however but not its only subject.

Dylan underscores the lack of predetermination in death caused by racism (such as to be found in Evers' death) to be akin to classic tragedy wherein the protagonist cannot escape an integral flaw (here, being the victim of racism). Therein, by removing the name of the assassin<sup>11</sup> and focusing on the cause of hatred, Dylan aims to cause a subtext to the nature of the song in which he represents racism as the true problem at hand and that which took Evers' life, "not because of divine destiny, only because of human hatred. As to the killer's name: it means nothing, it means nothingness" (Ricks, 2005: 175). Evers emerges in symbolic form to be of more consequence than the act itself. While the assassin is left nameless as it could be any racist, "Medgar Evers left a name behind him. (...) His name is there in the first line of the first verse (as it will be in the first line of the last verse), and it remains the only name in the fifty – two lines of the song, a song in which the word 'name' is sounded four times" (Ricks, 2005: 175). Moreover, as to strengthen this effect, Dylan abandons the usage in the final verse of blame, which he returns to in the last lines of all other verses, to focus on a suggested outcome whereby "the words that have constituted the climax of every verse becoming – in the final end – not only his epitome but his epitaph [plain]: 'Only a pawn in their game'" (Ricks, 2005: 172). Dylan is here clearly implying that assassination will prove fruitless, as his name will be forgotten, whereas Evers' shall live.<sup>12</sup>

By speaking out against the assassination of Evers, Dylan does not seek to condemn the assassin or even forgiveness of him, but to express the mind of the racist, to show what motives there are that are to poison them and provoke their racism. Dylan therefore explores broader issues of the

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11 Byron De La Beckwith

12 "‘Only a Pawn in Their Game’ accords its killer no name: ‘He ain’t got no name’. The last words of the song, the killer’s laconic epitaph, get their dour force from the vacuity of ‘Carved next to his name’" (Ricks, 2005: 175).



origins of this racism, transforming the topical into a motif of hatred and questioning its origins. Dylan forces the listener to reflect upon racism by often switching the focal point away from the actors who participated in the event, while still referencing the participants in order to “put a ‘human face’ on political issues that can seem difficult to personalize” (Dettmar, 2009: 49). As in his transformation of the topical in popular culture into accessible literature, by “moving the focus away from individual people and specific events” Dylan is better able to point to and discuss “larger social causes and meanings” (Dettmar, 2009: 49).

This intentional omission of a name, however, stands in stark contrast to another of Dylan’s works, “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”. In this song, “the killer enjoys a certain infamy: William Zanzinger, immortalized for that mortal blow of his” (Ricks, 2005: 175). For a topic, it fits the theme of the murder of an African American by a white man in a much similar, but more brutal fashion.<sup>13</sup> However, Dylan chose the name as an anaphoric reference point in the refrain itself and is used as much as a device as the lack of Byron De La Beckwith’s [Evers’ assassin] is.

Only by highlighting the name is Dylan able to here stress the larger motifs in the song itself. In one sense, it is a public shaming of a murderer: Zanzinger representing not only a villain but money and power against poverty as well. In another sense, it is a song addressing such social or class injustice embodied by the story, much like other works of Dylan. Indeed, what this particular song shares in common with “Oxford Town”, “Only a Pawn in Their Game”, and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” is that they all seek justice and the truth of the root of societal issues. This is in line with the fact that “many of Dylan’s songs hinge upon the cardinal virtue that is justice (...) turns upon (...) *injustice*. There can be no grosser injustice than those perpetrated by the law itself, by justice” (Ricks, 2005: 221). In this regard, while “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” is as-

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13 The song itself based on the events of one William Zanzinger who proceeded to drunkenly assault the staff of the the Emerson Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland, at the white tie Spinners’ Ball held on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1963, using a toy cane to do so. He directly contributed to the death of one Hattie Carroll, a 51 year old African American barmaid, and assaulted three others. Though officially charged with murder, Mr. Zanzinger was convicted of manslaughter and assault after the charges had been lowered, and was only sentenced to six months in county jail and a moderate fine (see Doyle, 2008).

sociated with racism and segregation, it also addresses their related social ills pertaining to inequality of social divides. Dylan uses the popularity of the event to highlight the multi-form gap between victim and perpetrator as being an inherent motif of injustice between culturally known, binary opposites. In Ricks' own words on the song: "You just know that she must have been black. But then you know that Zanzinger is white [...] while the song never says so. It's white upon black, it's man upon woman, it's rich upon poor, it's young upon old" (2005: 231). When examined in this light, it becomes clearer that Zanzinger is continually represented to be the counter-point embodying privilege against disenfranchisement:

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll / With a cane that he twirled around  
his diamond ring finger / At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin' (Dylan, 1994: 1-3)

or

William Zanzinger who at twenty-four years/ Owns a tobacco farm of six hundred  
acres / With rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him (Dylan, 1994: 10-12).

In contrast to Zanzinger, Hattie Carroll is presented as an embodiment of poverty:

Hattie Carroll was a maid in the kitchen / She was fifty-one years old and gave  
birth to ten children / Who carried the dishes and took out the garbage / And never  
sat once at the head of the table / And didn't even talk to the people at the table /  
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table (Dylan, 1994: 20-25).

Based on the substance of these lyrics, Dylan relates these events not singularly as a miscarriage of justice for a murder, but the perpetuation of societal inequality. Again, Dylan is not interested in presenting the popular ire related to it, but the context that forms it into a substantive narrative of conflict. Only after listing the suffering as epitomized by Carroll versus the inherent entitlement symbolized by Zanzinger does Dylan implore the listener to cry, since the whole event, as well as even being aware of the yawning gap between the two extremes, results in nothing.<sup>14</sup>

While many of these songs have political undertones and have been understood politically, they have stood the figurative test of time due to

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14 "Oh, but you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears / Bury the rag deep  
in your face / For now's the time for your tears" (Dylan, 1994: 45-47)

the fact they are topical in nature commenting on one period of time that incorporate themes that are respective antagonisms that are irrespective of the period. The songs of "Oxford Town", "Pawn" and "Hattie Carroll" all address certain events pertinent to their place and time, but they have been crafted in such a manner as to display the struggle of the downtrodden against their rulers. Therefore, they have transcended the political realm and their original "popular" form to meet standards given to high literature.

Dylan took effort in his craft to keep a distance in his songs between the popular moment of their time and the content they actually speak of. For this reason, Dylan shunned the image of the folk movement and the political laurels given to him, as, according to Ricks, he had "a supreme understanding of the difference between writing a political song and writing a song politically" (2005: 233). For Dylan, politics could not be the subject of a poem, but only an element in accordance with T. S. Eliot's practice on differencing between writing religious poems and writing poems religiously: "[f]or my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (1982: 41). If the form of the medium is taken as a given, then Dylan has utilized it to express a story that goes beyond the event that is the nominal subject of the title. Politics is but part of the incorporated totality. For this very reason, "Hattie Carroll", much like Dylan's other works can be viewed as one of his "greatest political songs, not so much because it has a political subject as because everything in it is seen under the aspect of politics" (Ricks, 2005: 233). The significance here is that Dylan has been able to forge works that have been able to bridge the gap between the socially popular and the literary by creating lyrics that address both.

It therefore may be argued that while Dylan cannot be divorced from the political or popular, he was conscientious in his choosing of style and theme to transform them. Dylan never even felt that the protest song was the end goal, but that it was illuminating the unseen that was the aim. As Dylan himself has noted: "Protest songs are difficult to write without making them come off as preachy and one-dimensional. You have to show people a side of themselves that they don't know is there" (2004: 121). Dylan does succeed in creating songs that reveal the underlying issues portrayed in them by appealing to wider issues that surround their themes.

Dylan may be separated from a mere popular singer to poet due to the fact that he stands out precisely because his “lyrics demand attention; and it is therefore reasonable to examine in great detail the poetic/philosophic visions embodied in their [read: his] lyrics” (Poague, 1979: 79). In this same regard, Dylan obviously aspires to a higher level of literary merit and culture as he espouses “the apolitical nature of all great literature”, in which “careful in his artifice as any great writer, Dylan simultaneously wrote incisively about political hypocrisy” (Dettmar, 2009: 9, 10). It was by addressing these themes that his work may be considered to meet more stringent requirements of serious literature and that he may be taken seriously as an author himself.

### **Dylan as High Literature**

Even after receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature, which should otherwise clear any vagueness towards Dylan’s value as an author, there still might exist the quandary as to whether Bob Dylan’s lyrics themselves should be regarded as literature. Margaret Atwood has claimed that the Nobel Prize is a political act in and of itself. She also asserts that, as such, it cannot be regarded as being the deciding factor to judge the value of literary merit. Nonetheless, she does not mention diminishing Dylan’s value as an author (see BBC Two – Newsnight, 2016). Dylan, in his belated acceptance of the Prize, claims indirectly in his speech that his works may be seen as similar to that of great literature, but is still uncertain as to whether his own work should so be included.

In his 2017 Nobel lecture, Dylan focuses particularly on the themes of literary and poetry as manifested in written works. He touches upon both *Moby Dick* and *The Odyssey* as a means to try to make clear the concept of finding oneself in spite of social limitations. He concludes that the themes themselves bear significance since they can be found as relatable to one another, including the songwriter, but they need not pertain to a particular meaning. Instead, the song and its theme are better presented within the framework of its actual usage; i.e., a song is best left to be sung and thereafter interpreted:

“Myself and a lot of other songwriters have been influenced by these very same themes. And they can mean a lot of different things. If a song moves you, that’s all

that’s important. I don’t have to know what a song means. I’ve written all kinds of things into my songs. And I’m not going to worry about it – what it all means” (Dylan, 2017).

Albeit his intentions are to state why he feels that his work may be considered on par with great literature, Dylan’s indirect conclusions are, unfortunately, further evidence to the contentions inherent to his career as an author and the uncertainty regarding the literary impact he has had throughout as a nonliterary icon. Merely stating that one should not worry about the meaning and enjoy a piece of literature in itself begs the question of Dylan’s popular character transitioning into literary academia. This issue is further compounded by Dylan’s status as a popular icon in the media. Despite this unapparent paradox, Dylan’s work has found resonance in academia, to the extent that “no popular culture figure has ever been adopted into the curricula of college and university language and literature departments in the way Dylan has” (Dettmar, 2009: 1). In fact, the crux of the issue lies in the fact that “Dylan is recognized as an important literary artist without ever having published a significant work of traditional ‘literary’ merit” (Dettmar, 2009: 3). Clearly, something is amiss in the state of literature when an author can and cannot be an “author” per se.

Michel Foucault’s discussion of the “author’s function” in his essay “What is an Author?” proclaims that authenticity is affirmed (and confronted) via the figure of the author. Literary discourse claims a work to be acceptable only if it carries the author’s name, and, sometimes, it is even judged according to its creator, not alone on its merit (see 1979: 141-160). If Dylan is therefore not examined as a famous songwriter and a performer, but as an anonymous poet (hence clearing away all prejudice as to how a singer cannot be called an “author” or poet), his ‘authenticity function’ as an author should be met, whereby authenticity is affirmed (and confronted) via the figure of the author, according to Foucault. Moreover, there should be no dilemma as to the high literary value of Dylan’s work due to Dylan’s standing as he has made a name for himself within the field of poetry.

When the question is posited as to Dylan’s worth within the field of literature, Boucher has noted that authors also establish themselves through the application of novel ideas into standard forms and thus revolutionizing the field as a whole (see 2004: 6). Taking this into consideration, Dylan’s work may be seen as having a strong impact on the literary world. Even if

presented in the form of music and accompanying lyrics, his ability to encapsulate the authentic experience as well as the underlying origins of said experiences, “contextualizes them and gives them their meaning, lending them both grace and warmth” (Dettmar, 2009: 103). This is the influence that Dylan’s work bears in literature that distinguishes it and allows it to be its own. Therefore, Dylan’s music need not require justification as literature since “[t]he lyrics don’t stand up as poetry on a page because they don’t have to” (Dettmar, 2009: 103). These lyrics of Dylan’s composition are therefore themselves poetry since they have their own characteristics which are applied through Dylan’s own style and may be even viewed as being high literature.

In *Understanding Popular Culture* Fiske sets out an applicable definition of popular culture, where “in elaborated societies [popular culture] is the culture of the subordinate who resent their subordination, who refuse to consent to their positions or to contribute to a consensus that maintains it” (2010: 134). This would pertain to Dylan as riding the crest of a social movement in which many parties expressed their non-desire of being subordinated by the *status quo*. Dylan utilized this aspect of popular culture to create his songs and lyrics, but they do not detract from literature as being high culture, merely the counter-position to the standardized concepts of high literature of the times in which they were written/ analyzed. Along these lines, it may be argued then that popular culture and standards of high culture, especially within literature, are only measured by the passing of time and the subordinate gaining acceptance thereafter.

In this regard, the great academic discussion as to whether poetry written by a popular songwriter is worth greater merit and esteem, or is even poetry at all, is the true question that haunts Dylan from an academic standpoint. What is undeniable, though, is that Dylan’s great desire to edify his work, forming it to be suitable enough to tackle areas of social conflict and which do not meet the *status quo*, are present more in his work through the layering ideas and presentation through poetic forms. As Dettmar notes, “Dylan’s work is literary (...) in the most fundamental of ways: his is a sensitivity, and a sensibility, that turns almost instinctively to the resources of literary language in order to manifest itself” (2009: 3). As such, this fact alone makes him a serious artistic force to be considered.

His value as an author comes more into light when examined from

the point of view that Dylan sought to amplify his work as an artistic product at a time of artistic reductionism. According to Dettmar, "[P]op art broke down the divide between high and low by making bits of mass culture and everyday consumer products into paintings that hung in elite galleries and, soon, museums. Dylan would attack the divide from the other side, making rock & roll that had the seriousness and complexity of high modernism" (2009: 111). To this extent, how one will decide to approach Dylan and his "musical poetry" (in pure satisfaction of music or due to the layering he wrote into his lyrics) depends. However, Dylan does indeed meet the criteria of high literature owing to its ability to break free of the bonds set by the limitations of the established form itself. "What Dylan achieved in the medium of popular song is in fact comparable to certain breakthroughs in other twentieth-century art forms, breakthroughs associated with the term 'modernism,' or sometimes 'high modernism'" (Huges, 2011: 19). Dylan has been regarded as a transformative and revolutionary musician not without cause. His work as an author has transcended the pre-established barriers between popular music and poetry, to combine both of them into a popular form, which even then goes beyond the normative. Ultimately, what Dylan came to achieve is a conjunction of literary poetry and an appropriate musical background. No matter what comes first, he as a musician or as a literary poet, it is irrefutable that he is both, and that his work should be considered on its artistic and literary value.

When Dylan's own thoughts on the subject are examined, it becomes more evident that he considers himself to be a high-literary artist, owing to the fact that he invests considerable attention to his own approach of music and seeks not to be the popular entertainer, even if he may be, but to be the respected (song)writer. This alone may have initiated him to abandon the folk music scene of the early 1960s and reject the superimposed role of protest leader by which others insist he label himself. Dylan has never wanted to limit himself in his artistic expression, constantly reinventing his work as his career has progressed. Despite his interest in social issues and the thematic mode of topics superimposed into his work, Dylan has used these as an underlying framework for his lyrics and music. His interests lie, like with his idol of Guthrie, in the topical story that relates and tells, but merely serve as a topic to set a theme.

In summation, this article has endeavored to highlight the direction and intent of Dylan as an author by examining three of his earlier songs.

These “works” demonstrate the nature that Dylan has sought to establish as an author of high-literature, particularly in examining the underlying themes which Dylan based them on: “Oxford Town” is not merely a song about racism, but the ridiculous nature of it in practice; “Only a Pawn in Their Game” seeks to explore the reasons behind racism and makes Medgar Evers’ assassin an excuse for artistic and public dialogue on the nature of the poor white racist at the exploitation of others; and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” goes a step further, implying racism, but seeking out for the audience to mourn at a greater amount of injustice that should offend all.

The deeper layering of his work is enough to establish Dylan as a author of high culture, but these songs, especially the latter two, also show poetic merit in their usage of language; the repetition of certain couplets or phrases, such as “Now ain’t the time for your tears” to end, after having explained the tragedy of the situation, with: “For now’s the time for your tears” or to refrain repeatedly to “Only a Pawn in Their Game” both note the poetic and artistic skill with which Dylan composes his works, structured more than only upon first glance.

Dylan’s work is able to bridge the divide of high and low culture for this very reason of being of two camps, of the high and low. His storyteller approach, embodied in musical form and shared by the masses, does not seek to be simply of base value, but rather expands into high culture. “The texts of high and low culture in the early decades of the twentieth century has in large measure been bridged in the postmodern public sphere that Dylan inhabits; and so too in the academy” (Dettmar, 2009: 3). The disadvantage that all popular artists face, especially in their own life time, is that they must innovate in order to bridge this gap. The artist must establish newer ideas and ways of delving into their medium, which can offend or upset accepted norms or standards. Dylan is no exception to this rule. Moreover, it would seem that it has not yet been firmly defined as to whether a popular artist can be considered “valuable” or “high” with their work bearing literary or other artistic value. However, without their trail-blazing, nothing would be created nor explored.

Dylan is a conundrum as he has tried to go against his popularity as well as other conventional and more accepted forms of artistic or literary expression to bring about his own artistic literary visions. In this sense, Dylan is a true storyteller and one that deserves to be considered of high culture, as he has been able to transpose the folk and wit of the everyday or the popular into works that deem literary criticism and discussion in their depth and breadth.



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### Sažetak

#### PRELAZAK IZ POPULARNE U VISOKU KULTURU: BOB DILAN – TRI PESME RANIH ŠEZDESETIH

Rad razmatra stvaralaštvo Boba Dilana, naročito Dilanov pristup prilikom oblikovanja ranih tematskih pesama iz 1960-ih. To uključuje razotkrivanje zasluge koju je Dilan imao u transformaciji popularne muzike u živi medij koji bi ispitao političke i sociološke norme toga vremena. Rad ima za cilj da prikaže i da je Dilan sebe smatrao više pripovedačem nego aktivistom, posebno u pogledu prenošenja duha popularne u „visoku“ kulture. U smislu boljeg razumevanja odnosa između pesničkog uma Boba Dilana i popularne kulture, politički i psihološki utemeljene istorije i posleratna Amerika mogu se ispitati kroz kontrakulturu koju Dilan nerado, ali svakako, predstavlja. U radu se, takođe, ispituje i pokret za građanska prava, rasizam i siromaštvo u Americi tokom Dilanovog angažmana 1960-ih, i uspostavlja se njihovo mesto i značaj tokom njegovog stvaralačkog rada.

**Ključne reči:** Bob Dilan, popularna kultura, 1960-e, tematske pesme, građanska prava, rasizam, pripovedanje, folk muzika