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"WORDS ARE BUT WIND": THE PROVERBS AND PROVERBIAL EXPRESSIONS OF BOB DYLAN

Abstract: This essay examines the use of proverbs and proverbial language in the music and life of Bob Dylan. Through the lens of paremiology, it explores current Dylan scholarship including: biographies, literary studies, Dylan interviews, and his extensive catalogue of music in order to understand the way that proverbs and proverbial expressions influence his work and audiences. It also explores the extent that they also reflect his life experiences and philosophical viewpoints.

Keywords: Bob Dylan, proverbs, folk music, blues, rock and roll, civil rights, protest songs, anti-proverbs, folklore, paremiology.

One of Bob Dylan's most famous songs is "Blowin' in the Wind" (1962), a protest song which appears on Dylan's second studio album, *The Freewheelin Bob Dylan* (1962). Dylan was highly involved in the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s (Marqusee 2003). A defining moment from this era is when he performed his iconic song, "Blowin' in the Wind," on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 28th, 1963 before King's "I Have A Dream" speech. "Blowin' in the Wind" is widely interpreted as an outcry against racism, capitalism, and war, and Dylan has performed it frequently for nearly six decades. On election night, November 4, 2008, forty-five years after the March on Washington, Dylan would perform the song again before a crowd of 5,000 at the University of Minnesota, the school that he attended in 1960, to celebrate the election of Barack Hussein Obama, who would become the 44th U.S. president and the nation's first and only African-American president (Epstein 2011: 428-9). The time span that separates these two monumental events is proof of the song's significance and timelessness. Mike Marqusee asserts that the music that Dylan writes during the 1960s "still exudes the spirit and the pain of human liberation" and it also "still asks demanding questions of anyone who wants to

change society" (Marqusee 2003: 282). "Blowin' in the Wind" carries the label "protest music" although in some early interviews Dylan is quick to shun the term protest, preferring instead to think of his music as an overt expression of indivualism, and a way of conveying his own very strong personal values and convictions (Marqusee 2003: 56-7). If Dylan denies that he ever spoke for any social or political movement, then it is this unique characteristic or personal quality in his song lyrics which allows the music to lend itself so readily to civil rights struggles. Dylan wrote several popular "protest" songs in the 1960s including: "Only a Pawn in Their Game" (1963), "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" (1962), "Masters of War" (1963), and "Let Me Die in My Footsteps" (1963). Furthermore, "We Shall Overcome" (1960), a black spiritual and important anthem of the Civil Rights era, has its melody derived from Dylan's "No More Auction Block" (1962) (Marqusee 2003: 44, 55). Dylan has inspired just as many protest songs as he has written, one of the most well-known being Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come" (1964) (Marqusee 2003). Despite being a driving force behind this turbulent era in American history, Dylan vehemently denies being a leader or a prophet, he instead thinks of his song writing talent as his way of speaking truth to power.

The inherent power in Dylan's music is derived, in part, through his use of proverbs. For decades, scholars, historians, and self- proclaimed Dylanologists have worked tirelessly to reveal underlining sources of oratorical strength in Dylan's music. This process has often involved making connections between Dylan's music and other literary and musical art forms. Dylan has said in some interviews that it is impossible to find any one source for any of his songs, but due to scholarly archeological evidence, strong correlations have been established between his music and other sources (Gilmour 2004; Ricks 2005; Rogovoy 2009; Thomas 2017). Among the many, these sources include: The Bible (especially the Torah), the writings of Aristotle (and other classics), American and British poets (such as Jack Kerouac, Lord Tennyson, and William Blake), popular blues artists (such as Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson), and influential folk artists (such as Pete Seeger, and his childhood idol Woody Guthrie, etc.). This diverse and unlimited range of influences in Dylan's music is a reason it is so resistive to labeling and categorization. It is simultaneously folk, blues, and rock and roll. He is the first artist to be labeled folk-rock, and he

also has experience with many other musical art forms including gospel and rap. It is difficult to say what allows him to be so effective at transcending genres. This distinctive quality in Dylan's work is evidence that it resonates well with many. There are also other qualities in his work that help him to connect with audiences. In fact, people may relate to Dylan because of his expert use of proverbs and proverbial expressions. Some may even argue that proverbs are a driving force behind his music.

According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett proverbs are a very important aspect of folkloristics because they "sound authoritative. The truths they proclaim feel absolute. This impression is created by the proverb's traditionality and the weight of impersonal community consensus it invokes" (1981: 111). This is why historically proverbs have always been a vital part of folk music. Like early folk music, proverbs are created through slow communal processes over time. They have to be shared from person to person, oftentimes by word of mouth. Likewise, when people recognize proverbs, it is because they have heard and used them at some point in their lives. There is no doubting that this has been the case with Dylan. Some Dylan scholars have ignored this quality in his work while others have addressed proverbs while completely ignoring the meaning behind them. This is a mistake because a proverb's meaning is often decided by the context in which it is used (Kirshenblatt- Gimblett 1981; Mieder 1989; Prahlad 1996). Dylan clearly illustrates the importance of context in his music, and it is obvious that his music holds a plethora of noteworthy examples of proverb usage, some of which will be explored in this essay.

It is important to note that scholars often disagree about what proverbs are, so definitions will vary from text to text. In *The Proverb* (1931), paremiologist Archer Taylor captures the problematic nature of describing what a proverb truly is:

> The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial.

> Those who do not speak a language can never recognize all its proverbs, and similarly much that is truly proverbial escapes us in Elizabethan and older English. Let us be content with recognizing that a proverb is a saying current among the folk. At least so much of a definition is indisputable. (3)

Paremiologist Bartlett Jere Whiting, a friend and counterpart of Taylor, constructs a definition that touches on several significant literary features as well as the essential elements of apparent truth and tradition in "The Nature of the Proverb" (1932):

> A proverb is an expression which owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth—that is, a truism, —in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it must bear the sign of antiquity, and, since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times. This last requirement we must often waive in dealing with very early literature, where the material at our disposal is incomplete. (302)

In 1985, paremiologist Wolfgang Mieder takes a different approach to defining the proverb. He conducts a survey in his hometown of Vermont in which he asks 55 citizens to explain what they think a proverb is. In analyzing data from this survey, Mieder focuses on common language used amongst all of his respondents. Surprisingly, the result is a concise definition that also reflects, in many ways, the statements of both Taylor and Whiting:

> A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 2004: 3)

Mieder's definition is further evidence that when it comes to defining proverbs, the common folk may already agree on the elements of brevity, wisdom, and tradition, even without scholarly references. Despite having definitions which may be considered ideal, both past and recent proverb scholarship illustrates that the characteristics of proverbs may always be enumerated to an even greater extent. A definition found in the sixth edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (2015) also includes the fact that they "...offer advice or [present] a moral in a short and pithy manner" (Speake 2015). Additionally, proverbs can make abstract statements, specific observations, or express traditional knowledge about certain topics such as health, weather, or husbandry (Speake 2015). Furthermore, proverbs often express these ideas using poetic devices and stylistic elements such as: alliteration, parallelism, ellipses, hyperbole, paradox, personification, and metaphor (Arora 1984; Mieder 2004). The way that proverbs are circulated (often by spoken word) and the amount of time that this process may take (in some cases centuries) makes them traditional. Modern methods of communication such as the internet and social media also aid the transmission of proverbs. Additionally, society continually generates new proverbs. Likewise, those proverbs not shared eventually fall into disuse. Proverbs that are not widely known may experience a resurgence in popularity due to use by famous or well-known public figures. In fact, according to Mieder "proverbs in modern songs of all genres are more often than not cited in truncated and altered ways, i.e., the proverbs are intentionally changed to fit the needs and thoughts of modern people" (Mieder 1989: 195).

Over the years, Dylan has popularized a lot of proverbs and proverbial expressions. One example of Dylan's knowledge of proverbs appears in the protest song "Blowin' in the Wind." Many people may know that the song speaks to many of the social and political issues of the 60s, but they may not know that the song is also reflective of the well-known proverb, "Words are but wind," which first appears in 13th century England (Wilson 1970: 915). An expanded version of the proverb "Words are but wind, but blows unkind" is first documented as early as the 17th century (Wilson 1970: 915). This proverb means that the words of men oftentimes lacks substance which renders them meaningless like wind. If words may be equated with wind, then powerful gusts of wind may be equated with evil. Thus, Dylan's use of the proverb may

express a strong distrust of politics and the endless amounts of political jargon that is often associated with it. The philanthropic message implied in the song's title and refrain is reiterated further through rhetorical questioning. "Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free? / Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head / Pretending he just doesn't see?" (Dylan 2016: 53). Lines such as these openly denounce racism and establish strong connections between politics and human suffering. Some of his other protest songs such as "Hurricane" (1975) and "The Death of Emmitt Till" (1962) also express similar views.

The song "Blowin' in the Wind" incorporates the proverb "Words are but wind" in a multitude of ways. Mieder asserts that "In those cases where one proverb is used as a title and as a recurrent statement of a basic truth within a song we feel justified in calling such a poem a 'proverb song'" (Mieder 1989: 196). In the case of "Blowin' in the Wind", the proverb is used in the title, as an overall theme, and as a significant refrain that contributes to the song's overall structure, so as Mieder asserts, this song and others like it may rightfully be labelled proverb songs. Surprisingly, due to the lyrics, one does not have to be familiar with the original proverb to understand the music. Some songs which also display similar characteristics include: "Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others)" (1979), "One Man's Loss" (2014), and "Like A Rolling Stone" (1965). The song "Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others)" appears on Dylan's first Gospel album *Slow Train Coming* (1979). This album is important because it marks his conversion to Evangelical Christianity. Dylan would record two Gospel albums, *Slow Train Coming* (1979) and *Saved* (1980). There was even an Evangelical component to his shows and the song "Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others)" is a prime example of his newly found Evangelist message. The song's refrain reads "But if you do right to me, baby / I'll do right to you, too / Ya got to do unto others / Like you'd have them, like you'd have them, do unto you" (Dylan 2016: 411). As Seth Rogovoy observes, the song's title and refrain is a variation of a well-known proverb from biblical scripture. Dubbed in society as "the Golden Rule" it is "…popularly rendered 'Love thy neighbor as thyself' and by logical extension, 'Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you'" (Rogovoy 2009: 204). It appears in the Bible in several places.

Leviticus 19:18 reads "'That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow'" (Rogovoy 2009: 204). Likewise, in Matthew 7:12 Jesus says ''So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.'" The proverb also appears in Luke 6:31 and reads "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Litovkina and Mieder document an anti-proverb that was created as a response to the biblical Golden Rule and the entry reads "Do unto others before they (can) do unto you (before they do you)" (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 123). The anti-proverb clearly reverses the original proverb's language and its intended meaning. It may be interpreted as a call for vengeance as opposed to a statement of peace, and if one is familiar with the original, it may also be considered humorous by comparison. According to Litovkina and Mieder, "We laugh at some anti-proverbs because they skew our expectations about traditional values, order, and rules. We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in parodies, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of making punning possible" (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 44). Contrarily, Dylan's song captures all of the intended meaning of the original proverb in the first verse, "Don't wanna judge nobody, don't wanna be judged / Don't wanna touch nobody, don't wanna be touched / Don't wanna hurt nobody, don't wanna be hurt / Don't wanna treat nobody like they was dirt" (Dylan 2016: 411). This ten-verse song goes on to address several more common abuses including being shot, cheated, and betrayed. Overall, "Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others)" illustrates Dylan's proclivity for extending age old sayings while also making the intended messages of proverbs easier for people to grasp.

Another song from Dylan's extensive catalogue of music that incorporates proverbs is "One Man's Loss" which appears on *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 11: The Basement Tapes Complete* (2014). *The Basement Tapes* were originally recorded in Woodstock, N.Y. in a studio called the Big Pink (which was a large home that was converted into a studio). Dylan also recorded in the basements of various band members. These recordings take place as Dylan is recovering from a motorcycle accident that happened in 1967. Although he would retreat from public performance for a few years as he healed from his injuries, he continued to write and rec-

ord music with friends (Epstein 2011; Brown 2014). Recordings made during this time would be released eight years later in 1975. The song "One Man's Loss" consists of three, six-line verses. The rhyming couplet at the end of each verse contains the proverb, "One man's loss is another man's gain." The first verse reads:

> Let's take a cherry, I can't make it no more
> Can't stop, she's breaking all time on the
> floor
> Better come down easy or don't come
> down at all
> You don't try and to please me,
> somebody's gonna fall
> One man's loss always is another man's
> gain
> Yes, one man's joy always is another man's
> pain

This song, like most others, clearly illustrates Dylan's penchant for rhyme. It also demonstrates Dylan's adeptness in organizing and arranging proverbs to provide sound structure in music. Other lines in the song appear to be a series of abstract scenes, from a troubled relationship. For instance, the fourth line of the second verse, "Better not lose her, best stayed alive," suggests that the speaker is trying to see value in attempting to save his relationship. The proverb in the rhyming couplet at the end adds meaning to the song. The base structure of the proverb [one man's *this*, is another man's *that*] allows one to fill in the blanks with anything which may quantify value, which is why the proverb may take so many different forms. Among the many different variations listed in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (2012) there is: "One man's floor is another man's ceiling," One man's meat is another man's poison," "One man's fortune is another man's sorrow," and "One man's trash, is another man's treasure" (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012:161-2). The fact that Dylan chose to complete the structure with the adjectives *loss*/*gain*, *love*/*pain* may help to reflect the vast range of emotions that he may have experienced during this eventful time in his life.

"Like A Rolling Stone" from *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) is important for several reasons. It is a title that is derived from the popular proverb, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." It is also a

proverb that may characterize an important moment in Dylan's life. "Like A Rolling Stone" is one of the significant songs that marks Dylan's transition from traditional sounding folk music to electric rock and understanding some of the details behind this transition may help one to better understand the song's language and meaning. Previously, Dylan had played songs using the standard acoustic guitar which was usually backed by his harmonica, (a sound that characterizes a lot of blues and folk music of the 19th and 20th century), but *Highway 61 Revisited* is filled with the sound of electric guitar—a sound which he would first unveil in front of 16,000 fans at the Newport Folk Festival in N.Y. in July of 1965 (Heylin 2001: 206-16). Referred to by ethnomusicologist Elijah Wald as the night that split the sixties, this performance would make many of his folk music fans feel that he had turned his back on the folk music scene. Wald describes the crowd's reaction to Dylan's performance saying, "Dylan's set left some listeners thrilled, some baffled, some fascinated, some angry at him, some angry at other listeners" (Wald 2015: 264). One fan, "Leda Schubert, a self-described Dylan fanatic who had followed him from his first album, says she was 'stunned.' She had always considered him an antidote to commercial acts like the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul, and Mary, and now, 'I thought Dylan was abandoning us...I remember wandering through the crowd, sort of at loose ends...Dylan was all of a sudden wearing a leather jacket, and it was LOUD. I think I stayed for a while and then wandered off in some sort of Daze'" (Wald 2015: 265). According to some historians the 1965 Newport Folk Festival performance and the subsequent fan reactions may have been foreshadowed in the lyrics of the song. At the time Dylan had quickly reached a point in his career where he wanted to expand his musical repertoire, and that included experimenting with new sounds, but of course Dylan knew that some of his fans may not understand. This process, in turn, made Dylan himself "Like A Rolling Stone." Of course, there are other interpretations, but when one analyzes the meaning behind the proverb "A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss" this interpretation makes sense.

"Like A Rolling Stone" also incorporates a number of proverbial expressions with each contributing differently to the song's overall meaning. According to Ricks, the first three lines of the song allude to a popular proverb regarding the dangers of pride,

"(Of pride, the proverb says: 'be her garments what they will, yet she will never be too hot, nor too cold'" (Ricks 2005: 180). This proverb identified in Ricks is first cited as early as 1614 according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1982). For the purpose of cross-comparison the proverb may be juxtaposed with the first three lines of Dylan's song which read, "Once upon a time you dressed so fine / You threw the bums a dime in your prime, didn't you? / People'd call, say, 'Beware doll, you're bound to fall'" (Dylan 2016: 167). Of course, Dylan most likely is also alluding to the biblical proverb "Pride goes before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Certainly this passage contributes to the song being interpreted as a very aggressive put down addressed to some well-deserving unnamed woman. However, upon closer examination it may also be interpreted as a metaphor for Dylan's own relationship to the folk music community, which he may have feared would turn on him for going electric. This interpretation may also be supported by the proverb's meaning in biblical scripture. A passage in Revelation 3:15 says, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!" This proverb could certainly be intended as a double entendre on the part of Dylan. On the one hand, it may be a reference to an unnamed prideful woman and on the other hand, it may be a metaphor for Dylan's merging two separate genres of music—folk and rock. Of course, the last three lines of the fifth stanza (although not a proverb) support this notion the strongest, "Ain't it hard when you discover that / He really wasn't where it's at / After he took everything from you he could steal" (Dylan 2016: 167). These lines may be interpreted as a reference to his using the knowledge that he gained from blues and folk music to perform a different genre, thus placing himself in the position of a traitor or modern-day Judas, which he would famously be called by an angry fan at the performance known as "The Royal Albert Hall concert" in Manchester on May 17th, 1966. At this show, a heckling fan shouted the name "Judas!" Ironically, Dylan responded by instructing his band to play louder (Epstein 2011; Shelton 2011; Wald 2015).

The complete proverb from which the title and theme of the song is derived reads, "A rolling stone gathers no moss, and a running head will never thrive" (Ricks 2005: 191). The proverb is used in reference to those that continually move, never settling in one permanent location. The lack of settlement is also the direct

cause of one's lack of wealth. The proverb description that appears in Litovkina and Mieder (2006) also reflects this meaning. It reads, "People who do not settle down and constantly move from place to place will never make money or amass affection" (74). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning" (1981) also describes several different interpretations of the proverb "A rolling gathers no moss" derived from her own students at the University of Texas, one of which matches the description found in Litovkina and Mieder. As she explains, in a class of around 80 students, three separate possibilities were presented: "(1) a rolling stone gathering no moss is like a machine that keeps running and never gets rusty and broken; (2) a rolling stone is like a person who keeps on moving, never settles down, and therefore never gets anywhere; (3) a rolling stone is like a person who keeps moving and is therefore free, not burdened with a family and material possessions and not likely to fall into a rut" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1981: 113). The fact that many of her students were only familiar with one or two of the three interpretations speaks to the flexibility of proverbs and highlights the notion that the same proverb may be suitable in multiple contexts. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett the diverse range of meanings that may be derived from the proverb "Rolling stones gather no moss" depends primarily on four different factors:

> (1) what is understood in the metaphor (stone roller, stone brook); (2) what is understood as the general principle expressed by the metaphor (movement promotes efficiency, stability promotes tangible gains); (3) how the general principle is evaluated (tangible gains are worthwhile, tangible gains are not worthwhile); (4) the requirements of the situation in which the proverb is used regardless of what one actually believes in principle (does one want to console or criticize the stable person; does one want to console or criticize the wanderer). (113)

As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett demonstrates, any proverb may have a unique set of factors that determine meaning. In 1926 Stephen Leacock argues that "...in modern life it is the rolling stone that gathers the moss" (Ricks 2005: 191). The metaphor that would be implied by this proverb would be contingent upon what one might equate with moss. Leacock continues, "And the geologists say that

the moss on the actual stone was started in exactly the same way. It was the rolling of the stone that smashed up the earth and made the moss grow" (Ricks 2005: 191). Leacock's interpretation suggests that there may be a degree of scientific accuracy behind the anti-proverb "The Rolling Stones are starting to gather moss" (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 75). Like most anti-proverbs it may also be read as a pun, or a play on the name of the famous rock band. The fact that Litovkina and Mieder cite more than two dozen anti-proverbs for "A rolling stone gathers no moss" further attests to its popularity in the American lexicon.

It is more realistic to accept the fact that the proverb does embody a number of different meanings as opposed to arguing in favor of just one. First, the statement, to be like a rolling stone, is not an overt reference to Dylan's life as a traveling performer in general, but it certainly does carry that connotation. The fact that the proverb is simultaneously the name of a musical genre, another iconic rock and roll band (and Dylan's counterparts), a popular music magazine, and it is also the title of a song by Muddy Waters (from which the famous rock band derived their group name), gives the connotation of the traveling performer a very strong sense of permanence. Betsy Bowden stresses this sense of permanence and the dynamic allegorical nature of the metaphor displayed in Muddy Waters and all of blues oral tradition, calling the rolling stone "a popular floating image" which symbolizes "both responsibility –free traveling and male sexuality" (Bowden 1982: 78). Secondly, there is Dylan's symbolic movement between the genres of folk and rock for which the anti-proverb "The Rolling Stones are starting to gather moss" may be even more appropriate, especially if the accumulation of moss may be equated with the accumulation of knowledge and music abilities (as can be derived from the Leacock scientific explanation) (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 75). Lastly, there is the literal interpretation of the proverb which, combined with the speaker's choice words for his spurned lover, paints the portrait of a relationship that has run its course and ended. The proverb "When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose," appearing near the end of the song, supports this notion. *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (2012) says that this particular Dylan line may be read in at least two separate ways, "[as an expression of] sympathy at another's loss or [as] bravado before a coming challenge," so it may be paired with either interpretation

(Bowden 1982: 77; Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 181). Dylan uses another variation of this proverb a year earlier in "To Ramona" (1964) which reads, "I've heard you say many times / That you're better 'n no one / And no one is better 'n you / If you really believe that / you know you got / Nothing to win and nothing to lose" (Dylan 2016: 120). Two variations of this proverb are known to exist and are recorded in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992), one of which appears as an undated entry that reads "Beware of him who has nothing to lose" (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 432). The second entry reads "If you have nothing, you've got nothing to lose" and is first recorded as early as 1557 (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 432). The main idea that the proverb expresses may be traced all the way back to medieval times. For instance, "the medieval commonplace that a poor man may sing in the presence of thieves" conveys a similar message (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 181).

There is ample evidence that proverbs and proverbial phrases that people associate with Dylan may be found in the speech of others as well. People recognize these sayings and they also understand what they mean. Some evidence of this may be witnessed in President Jimmy Carter's acceptance speech for the Democratic party nomination on July 15, 1976. The Governor of Georgia at the time, Carter quotes a line from Dylan's "It's Alright Ma, (I'm Only Bleeding)" (1964). Carter says, "My vision of this nation and its future has been deepened and matured during the nineteen months that I have campaigned among you for president. I have never had more faith than I do today. We have an America that, in Bob Dylan's phrase, is busy being born, and not busy dying" (*The American Presidency Project*). According to historian Donald Brown, Carter's variation of the proverb, *He not busy being born is busy dying*, at the time "...stressed the degree to which American politics needed to resurrect itself after the debacle of Nixon" (Brown 2014: 132). It is no accident or coincidence that Carter would use Dylan's words in his speech to bolster political support. According to Ron Rosenbaum, "Jimmy Carter has said that listening to [Dylan's] songs [taught him] to see in a new way the relationship between landlord and tenant, farmer and sharecropper..." (Rosenbaum 1978: 150). There is no doubting that Dylan's music contains many life lessons concerning race and class in America.

Some of his music expresses a strong work ethic that some of Dylan's biographers associate with his upbringing in the small, close-knit, mid-western, iron mining town of Hibbing, Minnesota (Smith 2005: 1-15; Pichaske 2010: 17-61; Epstein 2011: 43-67). Although, the proverbs and proverbial expressions that Dylan uses are not isolated to one specific locale or general region, some details about Dylan's life in Hibbing may help one to understand the logic behind some of these expressions. Learning to work at an early age in his parent's appliance store, Dylan would sometimes visit the homes of classmates (many of whose fathers were miners) to collect payments on appliances that were bought in the store. Of course, Dylan did not like to repossess appliances, but he was sometimes forced to do this job as well, so "the relationship between landlord and tenant, farmer and sharecropper" that President Carter says he hears in Dylan's music was all too real for Dylan, even as a young child. Upon graduating from Hibbing High School in 1959, Dylan briefly attended the University of Minnesota, but would leave the school after the first semester to pursue a career in music. During this time, he would also change his name from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan. During his early days as a performer Dylan would make up outrageous stories of being a homeless orphan and traveling with a circus because he felt that it would help him to be accepted as a folk singer much more so than a privileged background ever could (Hentoff 1964: 21-7; Epstein 2011: 102-3; Shelton 2011: 40). In an interview, twenty years later, Dylan explains the kinds of difficult life lessons that he has learned over the years as a traveling folk artist, and he sums it up perfectly with a proverb. Dylan says "One is that if you try to be anyone but yourself, you will fail; if you are not true to your own heart, you will fail. Then again, there's no success like failure" (Rosenbaum 1978: 134). At this point in the interview Rosenbaum, being familiar with Dylan's music, is able to finish the expression for him saying "And failure's no success at all" (Rosenbaum 1978: 134). Dylan first introduces this paradoxical proverb in the song "Love Minus Zero/No Limit" on the album, *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), and the lyrics seem to emphasize the very same message that Dylan is conveying in his conversation with Rosenbaum. The second verse reads:

In the dime stores and bus stations
People talk of situations

> Read books, repeat quotations
> Draw conclusions on the wall
> Some speak of the future
> My love she speaks softly
> She knows there's no success like failure
> And that failure's no success at all
> (Dylan 2016: 145)

Throughout the entire song the speaker distinguishes his lover from other people in the world in order to illustrate why she is the perfect mate. The couplet "She knows there's no success like failure / And that failure's no success at all" reads as a true proverb and its absence from proverb texts suggests that it is one that Dylan has created himself (Dylan 2016: 145). It is certainly one heartfelt love song, and Dylan and Rosenbaum's use of the proverb during their conversation provides some evidence that it has passed into common usage and that its meaning is transferable to real life situations.

In the Rosenbaum *Playboy* interview of 1978 Dylan uses other proverbs as well. In fact, Rosenbaum's introduction even begins with a proverb from one of Dylan's favorite poets. He says, "In the 'Proverbs of Hell' William Blake...wrote: 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom'" (Rosenbaum 1978: 111-2). Rosenbaum's proverbial manner of describing Dylan's quick rise to stardom is evidence that he is certainly aware that proverbs are a part of Dylan's verbal repertoire. In addition to references to his music, Dylan uses proverbs and proverbial phrases randomly throughout the entire interview. There may be some historical associations to be made with some of the sayings that Dylan uses, but as previously shown, others may simply be Dylanisms or proverb-like language that Dylan creates himself.

At one point in the interview Rosenbaum asks Dylan if he is associated with any particular music scene while living in California and Dylan uses a well-known proverbial expression in his response:

> I'm only working out here most, or all, of the time, so I don't know what this town is really like. I like San Francisco. I find it full of tragedy and comedy. But if I want to go to a city in this country, I will still go to New York. There are cities all over the world to go to. I don't know,

> maybe I am just an old dog, so maybe I feel like I've been around so long I am looking for something new to do and it ain't there... (125)

The proverbial expression "to be an old dog" is an allusion to the proverb "It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks" which is documented as early as 1523 (Wilson 1970: 805; Speake 2015: 312). There are other variations of this proverb including "It is hard to make an old dog stoop" (Wilson 1970: 805). The proverb and each of its variants are meant to be interpreted literally and they speak to the difficulty of teaching an old canine anything that it has not been taught as a young pup. The apparent truth in the literal interpretation makes the expression appropriate for human beings as well. Based on Dylan's use of the saying, he has cities that he has always preferred over others and does not think that his preferences will ever change.

Rosenbaum and Dylan also discuss his new film *Renaldo & Clara* (1978), a five-hour film which features Dylan and several people from his inner-circle, none of whom play themselves, including Dylan. In a discussion regarding the potential confusion that this particular feature may cause, Rosenbaum probes for further clarification. In one exchange, Rosenbaum asks, "Aren't you teasing the audience when you have scenes played by Baez and Sara, real people in your life, and then expect the viewers to set aside their preconceptions as to their relationship to you?" (Rosenbaum 1978: 134) Based on Dylan's responses, this is not one of his concerns. In fact, he dispels the notion that it may even be confusing for viewers at all, and he uses a well-known proverbial expression to drive home the point:

> In order to legitimize this film. We confronted it head on: The persona of Bob Dylan is in the movie, so we could get rid of it. There should no longer be any mystery as to who or what he is—he's there, speaking in all kinds of tongues, and there's even someone else claiming to be him, so he's covered. This movie is obvious, you know. Nobody's hiding anything. It's all right there. The rabbits are falling out of the hat before the movie begins. (135-6)

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (2005) to "'pull a rabbit out of a hat' means to achieve an action that is

fortuitous and may involve sleight of hand or deception; the reference is to a stage conjuror making a rabbit appear or disappear" (Knowles 2005). Based on the meaning of this proverbial expression, one may believe that any confusing elements in the film are intentional on the part of Dylan. The fact that the proverbial "rabbits are falling out of the hat" before the film even starts may imply that Dylan intends to give his audience just enough information to make sense of the film for themselves.

In another exchange, Dylan explains to Rosenbaum that he sometimes visits a woman that reads palms:

> Her name is Tamara Rand. She's for real, she's not a gypsy fortune-teller. But she's accurate! She'll take a look at your hand and tell you things you feel but don't really understand about where you're heading, what the future looks like. She's a surprisingly hopeful person. (139)

Rosenbaum responds by asking Dylan "Are you sure you want to know if there's bad news in your future?" (Rosenbaum 1978:139) Dylan responds in the affirmative, using a proper proverbial expression in the process. He says, "Well, sometimes when the world falls on your head, you know there are ways to get out, but you want to know which way. Usually, there's someone who can tell you how to crawl out, which way to take" (Rosenbaum 1978:139). A variation of this proverbial expression is used in the title of the popular song, "As the World Falls Down" by David Bowie in 1986. Likewise, Bowie's former guitarist, Mick Ronson also released a similar song entitled "When the World Falls Down" (1994). It is Ronson's song which echoes Dylan's language from this interview the closest, most notably the song's refrain which reads "That's when the world falls down, right on your head, oh yeah / When the world falls down and it's really very sad." Surprisingly, on the same album, *Heaven and Hull* (1994), Ronson would also cover Dylan's 1960s hit, "Like A Rolling Stone." Perhaps, Ronson is singing about a lack of original material when he says "...it's really very sad." While Bowie and Ronson's gestures may be odes to the early folk-rock pioneer, many other artists would simply pass themselves off as newer versions of Bob Dylan (Heylin 2011: 335).

Some early American and English musicians use Dylan's sound, style, and proverbial language without giving Dylan any

credit at all. For instance, folk artist Neil Young released "Heart Gold" (1972) and while the lyrics may be original, his own proverbial heart may not have been so golden. The song matches Dylan's music closely in theme, form, and content. "Heart of gold" is a proverbial expression that Dylan uses on his first studio album *Bob Dylan* (1962) to describe a character named rambling, gambling Willie in a song of the same title. He says, "But Willie had a heart of gold and that I know to be true" (Dylan 2016: 10). The phrase is also featured in "Tears of Rage (with Richard Manuel)" on *The Basement Tapes* (1989). The line reads "And now the heart is filled with gold / As if it was a purse" (Dylan 2016: 287). Many of the songs on this album were recorded over a decade before the original release date. Dylan had also used the phrase previously in interviews. Additionally, in some of Young's early live sets he even imitates stage humor that Dylan had abandoned in the 1960s, such as cajoling his audience as he fumbles around in his pockets to find the correct harmonica. In an interview in 1985, Dylan would describe his reaction upon hearing Young for the first time:

> I used to hate it when it came on the radio. I always liked Neil Young, but it bothered me every time I listened to 'Heart of Gold'...I'd say, 'Shit, that's me. If it sounds like me, it should as well be me.' There I was, stuck on the desert someplace, having to cool out for a while. New York was a heavy place. Woodstock was worse, people living in trees outside my house, fans trying to batter down my door, cars following me up dark mountain roads. I needed to lay back for a while, forget about things, myself included, and I'd get so far away and turn on the radio and there I am, but it's not me. (Heylin 2011: 335)

While Dylan's proverbial language may make for excellent song material to steal and "borrow," his sayings often have meanings that are very personal, reflective, and introspective. For instance, at another point in the interview Rosenbaum asks Dylan about his political beliefs. He asks, "Are there any heroes or saints these days?" (Rosenbaum 1978: 152-3) In his response, Dylan warns of the dangers of hero worship and vanity. Again, his language displays the consistent verbal pattern of employing proverb-like statements to emphasize important concepts. In the following ex-

ample the proverb-like expression appears in the last sentence of the passage:

> A saint is a person who gives of himself totally and freely, without strings. He is neither deaf nor blind. And yet he's both. He's the master of his own reality, the voice of simplicity. The trick is to stay away from mirror images. The only true mirrors are puddles of water. (152-3)

Rosenbaum, sensing the inherent wisdom of Dylan's statement, seeks further clarification. He asks, "How are mirrors different from puddles of water? (Rosenbaum 1978: 153) Dylan explains:

> The image you see in a puddle of water is consumed by depth: An image you see when you look into a piece of glass has no depth or life-flutter movement. Of course, you might want to check your tie. And, of course, you might want to see if the makeup is on straight. That's all the way. Vanity sells a lot of things. (153)

Dylan's proverbial lesson on human nature embodied in the statement "The only true mirrors are puddles of water" may reflect his knowledge of Buddhist scripture and it may even embody some of the fundamental principles of physics. Regardless of the inspiration behind this expression, one can tell that it also reflects values that he believes in. It warns against arrogance and speaks in favor of humility. There is no doubt that this proverb should be regarded favorably among the many Dylanisms already in circulation.

Rosenbaum also asks Dylan about his perception of heroes. Dylan's response includes a proverbial expression which may reflect his vast knowledge of American literature. "A hero is anyone who walks to his own drummer" (Rosenbaum 1978: 154). This proverbial expression became common place in the American lexicon primarily through the writings of Henry David Thoreau, the 19th century transcendentalist. Thoreau writes in *Walden* (1854), "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Thoreau 1854: 175). As a young student at Hibbing High, Dylan became familiar with Thoreau's writings and the significance that Thoreau places on solitude and self-analysis. Thoreau's ideas would influence

Dylan in his later years as well (Pichaske 2010: 110,132, 285-6). Like Thoreau, freedom and personal autonomy have been two of Dylan's most valued priorities. Artistically, he has always refused to be placed in a box regardless of how comfortable others may be with simple categories, and this quick and concise, emphatic statement, in the form of a proverb, is evidence.

At another point in the interview Rosenbaum, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of Dylan's sense of religion and spirituality poses another question. He asks, "You say you don't feel Jewish. But what about your sense of God?" (Rosenbaum 1978: 156) Dylan says in response:

> I feel a heartfelt God. I don't particularly think that God wants me thinking about Him all the time. I think that would be a tremendous burden on Him, you know. He's got enough people asking Him for favors. He's got enough people asking him to pull strings. I'll pull my own strings, you know. (156)

In using the proverbial expression "to pull strings," Dylan may be alluding to the proverb "Strings high stretched either soon crack or quickly grow out of tune" (Wilson 1970: 781). This proverb dates back to the 16th century and mostly applies to all string instruments which need to be tuned accurately in order to maintain a desirable sound. Too little tuning and the instrument's sound will be off. Likewise, over-tuning may result in ruined strings. Dylan's use of the proverbial phrase *to pull strings* and his earlier use of the expression involving drums may be reflective of his musical background. It may also reflect the kinds of idioms that may be heard in communities of musicians that he is a part of. The fact that he would use this particular proverbial expression in a response to a question regarding religious faith, may also illustrate how closely for him his music and spirituality are entwined.

To conclude the interview, Rosenbaum asks, "Could it be there's an undisclosed twin or a double to Bob Dylan?" (Rosenbaum 1978: 159) Dylan responds by saying "Someplace on the planet, there's a double of me walking around. Could very possibly be" (Rosenbaum 1978: 159). Rosenbaum then asks Dylan if he has "any messages for [his] double" and Dylan answers: "Love will conquer all—I suppose" (Rosenbaum 1978: 159). Rosenbaum's first question in this final exchange may be a reference to

the proverb song "Love Is Just a Four Letter Word" from *Bringing It All Back Home* (1964), which will be addressed further at a later point in this essay. The most revealing evidence lies in the third stanza which reads:

> I said goodbye unnoticed
> Pushed towards things in my own games
> Drifting in and out of lifetimes
> Unmentionable by name
> Searching for my double, looking for
> Complete evaporation to the core
> Though I tried and failed at finding any door
> I must have thought that there was nothing more
> Absurd than that love is just a four letter word
> (Dylan 2016: 164)

Rosenbaum concludes this interview on an interesting note with an implicit allusion to the double that Dylan is searching for in the song. The interview is successful because he is already familiar with Dylan and his music and Dylan, known for his adept memory, is able to recall lines very quickly. The proverb "Love will conquer everything" may not be a direct quote from this particular song, but if they both have the song "Love Is Just a Four Letter Word" in mind, then the proverb serves as an appropriate counter to Rosenbaum's question, acting as an anti-proverb. This interview exemplifies what Bowden means when she says that "Whole conversations, not just advisory exchanges, can be carried on in Dylan lines" (Bowden 1982: 77). In order to maintain a dialogue of this nature one must certainly have an inscrutable understanding of Dylan's music as well as a solid understanding of the proverbs that he uses.

A statement that Dylan makes in a separate interview may reveal other ways that proverbs reflect his thinking process. In an interview with John Pareles, Dylan describes his mind-set while working on *Time Out of Mind* (1997), his 30th studio album:

> This one phrase was going through my head. 'Work while the day lasts, because the night of death cometh when no man can work.' I don't recall where I heard it. I like preaching, I hear a lot of preaching, and I probably just heard it somewhere. Maybe it's in the Psalms: it beats me.

> But it wouldn't let me go. I was, like, what does that phrase mean? But it was at the forefront of my mind, for a long period of time, and I think a lot of that is installed into this record. (Gilmour 2004: 43)

Dylan does not say exactly how long this proverb has been on his mind, but based on Dylan's expansive catalogue of music, spanning fifty-five years and thirty-two studio albums, it may have been on his mind his entire life. The proverb is alluded to in Dylan's music and the original appears in biblical scripture. It reads, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). Dylan expresses the main idea behind this Bible verse several times in "Not Dark Yet" (1997). The first two lines of the song read, "Shadows are falling and I've been here all day / It's too hot to sleep, time is running away" (Dylan 2016: 566). The refrain reads, "It's not dark yet, but it's getting there" (Dylan 2016: 566). Lines such as these work to depict a kind of darkness that may be thought of as being synonymous with the ephemerality of each fleeting moment in life. Scenes from the Bible may also be reflected in other proverbs in the song. For instance, the first line of the last verse reads "I was born here, and I'll die here against my will" (Dylan 2016: 566). This line reflects a proverb from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and important source of Jewish law and scripture. It may also be reflective of his upbringing in a Jewish household. In Mishna 4:29 one will find the ancient proverb "Against your will you were born, against your will you die" (Rogovoy 2009: 12-13). The biblical proverbs, when used together in the song, paint the description of an individual who is desperate for a meaningful existence, but is also fully aware that his time is quickly expiring. There are no overt religious references in "Not Dark Yet," but when one carefully examines Dylan's creative implementations of proverbs and proverbial expressions the biblical connections become much more apparent.

Dylan sometimes used proverbs during his live shows as well. One example of this occurs during his Evangelistic years at a concert in Hartford, Connecticut in May of 1980. At this concert Dylan is on stage proselytizing. He employs a proverb to try to get the audience involved. Overall, the exchange illustrates Dylan's enthusiasm for didactics:

> I know the modern trend. It's not fashionable to think about heaven and hell. I know that. But God doesn't have to be in fashion because He's always fashionable. But it's hard not to go to hell, you know. There's so many distractions, so many influences; you start walking right and pretty soon there's somebody out there gonna drag you down. As soon as you get rid of the enemy outside, the enemy comes inside. He got all kinds of ways. The Bible says, 'Resist the Devil and the Devil will flee.' (Heylin 2001: 525)

The proverb "Resist the Devil and the Devil" will flee appears in the Bible as, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Dylan uses this proverb to articulate the human struggle to avoid doing things that go against one's own moral judgement. During another interview on August 15th, 1981 with Neil Spencer, Dylan conveys a similar message using a different proverb. During the interview Dylan is asked about a line from "When You Gonna Wake Up" from the album *Slow Train Coming* (1979). Spencer asks, "When you said 'strengthen the things that remain' what were you thinking of?" (Spencer 1981:181) Dylan responds, "Well, the things that remain would be the basic qualities that don't change, the values that do still exist. It says in the Bible, 'resist not evil, but overcome evil with good.' And the values that can overcome evil are the ones to strengthen" (Spencer 1981:182). This proverb originates from a verse in Romans which reads "Be not conquered by evil but conquer evil with good" (12:1). The similarities between the two proverbs that Dylan uses here on two separate occasions suggests that the message that Dylan conveys in public during this time in his life stays consistent. Dylan's values are made much more explicit through his use of proverbs and proverbial phrases. He clearly envisions his religious conversion as a transcendent path to moral improvement and he believes that he can lead his fans along on this journey as well.

Within Dylan's extensive catalogue of music exists a vast treasure trove of proverbs and proverbial expressions. Dylan's most memorable sayings are powerful one-line proverbs that can seem to define a song. Some of these sayings he creates himself while others are derived from different sources. As evidenced in

speaking patterns displayed in some of his interviews, Dylan does not usually begin conversations with proverbs, and his songs are no different. Instead, Dylan often builds up to the proverb using his characteristic penchant for rhyme and sublime literary imagery. The proverbs that Dylan incorporates usually stand out dramatically from other lyrics. This is due to his remarkable accuracy in assigning proverbs to appropriate rhetorical situations. After the buildup, the proverb helps to emphasize the song's theme. I have identified a few songs that display this feature, "Subterranean Homesick Blues," (1965) "Wicked Messenger," (1967), and "Heart of Mine" (1981).

"Subterranean Homesick Blues" is a blues song that contains a series of melancholy images that work to evoke a sadness that is often exhibited in traditional blues music. Dylan's fast paced delivery resembles a talking blues as opposed to the slow rhythmic singing style that is more common. The first four lines read "Johnny's in the basement / Mixing up the medicine / I'm on the pavement / thinking about the government" (Dylan 2016: 141). Each of the four stanzas begins with an uninviting, forbidding image that may characterize 1960s city life in America during a time when many people were simply trying to survive. The song displays the 1960s drug craze, the feeling of being trapped in a dead end nine to five, and an overall distrust of the government. The second stanza marks the height of the inherent feeling of paranoia that seems to drive much of the narrative:

> Maggie comes fleet foot
> Face full of black soot
> Talkin' that the heat put
> Plants in the bed but
> The phone's tapped anyway
> Maggie says that many say
> They must bust in early May
> Orders from the D.A.
> Look out kid
> Don't matter what you did
> Walk on your tiptoes
> Don't try "No-Doz"
> Better stay away from those
> That carry around a fire hose

Keep a clean nose
Watch the plain clothes
You don't need a weatherman
To know which way the wind blows (141)

The last four lines of this second stanza, "Keep a clean nose / watch the plain clothes / you don't need a weatherman / to know which way the wind blows" conveys the image of a speaker who is always looking over the shoulder both literally and figuratively (Dylan 2016: 141). The proverb-like formulation, "You don't need a weatherman / to know which way the wind blows" became very popular because of this song. According to Rogovoy, it "contains the seeds of an entire revolution…" (Rogovoy 2009: 77). In fact, "the underground terrorist group Weatherman (aka the Weathermen and the Underground Weather Underground Organization)" derived their names from this song (Rogovoy 2009:77). It would also become the banner slogan for a special issue of *New Left Notes*, a circular devoted to issues such as racism, imperialism, and the Vietnam war. The paper would circulate at the very last Student Democratic Society (SDS) convention held in June of 1969 in Chicago. The paper's headline would read, "YOU DON'T NEED A WEATHERMAN TO KNOW WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS" (Marqusee 2003: 257). Unlike most weather proverbs that may predict the direction of wind, the "weather proverb" in this song predicts ensuing trouble for American youth in inner cities. Another famous Dylanism or proverb-like expression which appears at the end of the third verse embodies the solution to this problem. The speaker says, "Don't follow leaders / Watch the parkin' meters" (Dylan 2016: 141). This proverb-like statement serves as a warning against the blind acceptance of bogus political agendas. The parking meters may represent the many unquestioned social injustices that have become status quo in our society.

Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* (1967) album is filled with biblical allusions. In the song "The Wicked Messenger," Dylan does a lot of creative storytelling in order to build up to the proverb. Dylan assumes a prophetic voice whose message is resisted by those that need to listen to his words the most. The song takes place in an ancient and sacred setting called Eli. In verse one, the

wicked messenger reveals his inability to speak when questioned about who sent him:

> There was a wicked messenger
> From Eli he did come
> With a mind that multiplied the smallest matter
> When questioned who had sent for him
> He answered with his thumb
> For his tongue it could not speak, but
> Only flatter (232)

He signals with his thumb as opposed to voicing God's name (Rogovoy 120-1). The second verse reveals that the wicked messenger visited a mysterious place and returned with some vague written message:

> He stayed behind the assembly hall
> It was there he made his bed
> Oftentimes he could be seen returning
> Until one day he just appeared
> With a note in his hand which read
> "The soles of my feet, I swear they're
> burning" (232)

According to Rogovoy, this verse may be read in either one of two ways. On the one hand, it may be read as a biblical reference to the book of Ezekiel in which a messenger does return from a mysterious place with burning feet (Ezekiel 1:7-13). On the other hand, it may be read as a biblical reference to the book of Exodus. In Exodus 3:5 Moses has his first spiritual encounter during which God instructed him to take off his sandals (Rogovoy 120-1). The third and final verse of "The Wicked Messenger" ends with a scene of disorder and mayhem:

> Oh, the leaves began to fallin'
> And the seas began to part
> And the people that confronted him were many
> And he was told but these few words
> Which opened up his heart
> "If ye cannot bring good news, then don't bring any"
> (232)

This scene positions the Moses like figure against the people who in turn have a message for him. The people's message is so deep and filled with meaning that it "…opened up his heart" (Dylan 2016: 232). Fittingly, the lesson comes in the form of a proverb-like expression, "If ye cannot bring good news, then don't bring any" (Dylan 2016: 232). This scene may be a reference to the biblical book of Samuel 4:10 which depicts a bloody battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. In this battle scores of people are slaughtered. If this association is accurate, then the statement may serve as a reminder that sometimes hurtful information may do just as much harm as hurtful deeds. In Dylan's song, the wicked messenger who intends to share this information is met with scorn by the group. There is no question that the lurid biblical scenes which precede the final message add rhetorical force.

The song "Heart of Mine" from *Shot of Love* (1981) brings together three icons of early American rock music featuring Dylan, Ron Wood of the Rolling Stones, and Ringo Starr of the Beatles. This secular love song is written as a painful lamentation to the speaker's personified heart, warning himself not to fall for an attractive woman who is bound to cause him trouble for any number of unspecified reasons. The refrain, "Heart of Mine" appearing at the beginning and ending of each of the five, six-line verses works to maintain this compelling emotional dirge (Dylan 2016: 441). The song's proverbs and proverbial expressions also help to sustain the song's theme. The first proverbial phrase that the speaker uses appears in the first verse:

> Heart of mine be still
> You can play with fire but you'll get the bill
> Don't let her know
> Don't let her know that you love her
> Don't be a fool, don't be blind
> Heart of mine (441)

The second and third lines of the first verse, "You can play with fire but you'll get the bill" is no doubt an allusion to the well-known proverb "If you PLAY with fire you get burnt" (Mieder 2004: 24-5; Speake 2015: 250). Variations of this proverb have been documented as early as the 13th century and it warns against engaging in potentially dangerous situations without being prepared to face the consequences. A historical example which most

closely resembles Dylan's use of the proverb in "Heart of Mine" appears in the religious poetry of Henry Vaughn. Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* (1655) contains a poem which has the lines, "I played with fire, did counsell spurn…But never thought that fire would burn, Or that a soul could ake" (Speake 2015: 250). Vaughan is speaking proverbially regarding matters of the heart, and given Dylan's familiarity with William Blake, and other religious poets, it would certainly be no surprise if Vaughan did have some influence on Dylan's work. In the second verse, the speaker cautions his heart about stepping over the proverbial line by openly expressing his need for her affection:

> Heart of mine go back home
> You got no reason to wander, you got no reason to roam
> Don't let her see
> Don't let her see that you need her
> Don't put yourself over the line
> Heart of mine (441)

In the fourth stanza, the speaker warns the heart to not "untie the ties that bind" (Dylan 2016: 441). The proverbial ties must remain tightly knotted and the reason is revealed in the next verse in form of a proverb. The fifth and final verse reads:

> Heart of mine so malicious and so full of guile
> Give you an inch and you'll take a mile
> Don't let yourself fall
> Don't let yourself stumble
> If you can't do the time, don't do the crime
> Heart of mine (441)

The third line of the fifth verse, "Give you an inch and you'll take a mile" closely mirrors the original proverb which reads, "Give him an inch and he'll take an ell" (Wilson 1970: 303). Its earliest recorded use is 1546. An important aspect of this proverb are its units of measurement, however antiquated they may seem. The message implied by the inch, ell, or mile is that any quantifiable measure of tolerance can sometimes escalate into serious offences. The reason behind all of the speaker's proverbial warnings is revealed in the form of yet another proverb which reads, "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime" (Dylan 2016: 441). This is another proverbial warning against committing crimes if one does

not want to face the consequences of one's actions. According to *The Modern Dictionary of Proverbs* it dates back to 1957 and here Dylan captures its original language perfectly (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 46). The speaker never explicitly tells what "crime" he would be committing if he did trust himself and give in to his emotions and temptations, but one may certainly speculate. One or both of them may be married, he may fear the pain of rejection, or he may even fear the proverbial "shot of love" implied by the album's title. Regardless of the specific reason, the proverb is placed most appropriately at the end of the song because it serves as a culmination of all of the speaker's mixed emotions.

In addition to "Heart of Mine," and those previously mentioned, there is an overabundance of songs that contain proverbs and proverbial expressions concerning love and matters of the heart scattered throughout Dylan's vast catalogue of recordings. One of the most meditative and introspective of these songs is "Love Is Just a Four Letter Word" (1965). In this four verse song, the speaker seems to be doing some soul-searching, looking inwardly for the meaning of love. In the second verse the speaker finds the answer that he is looking for as he overhears a woman speaking to the father of her child:

> Outside a rambling storefront window
> Cats meowed to the break of day
> Me, I kept my mouth shut, too
> To you I had no words to say
> My experience was limited and underfed
> You were talking while I hid
> To the one who was the father of your kid
> You probably didn't think I did, but I heard
> You say that love is just a four letter word
> (Dylan 2016: 164)

The speaker seems to have an epiphany in the fourth and final stanza as he decides that his previous understanding of love must have been naive at best:

> Though I never knew just what you meant
> When you were speaking to your man
> I can only think in terms of me
> And now I understand

After waking enough times to think I see
The Holy Kiss that's supposed to last eternity
Blow up in smoke, its destiny
Falls on strangers, travels free
Yes, I know now, traps are only set by me
And I do not really need to be
Assured that love is just a four letter word
(Dylan 2016: 164)

The entry for this proverb in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (2012) reads "Love is (just, only, nothing but) a four-letter word" (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 151). It is first documented as early as 1937, but the proverb became very popular as a result of Dylan's song (Doyle, Mieder, and Shapiro 2012: 151). "Love is just a four letter word" is only one of many proverbs in existence that offer a simple three or four word prognoses for what people think love is. Some others are: "Love is foul," "Love is free," "Love is full of fear," "Love is a sweet torment," and "Love is lawless" (Wilson 1970: 490-1). The structure of this love proverb is versatile in that regardless of one's circumstances one only has to replace "is" with a phrase or adjective that corresponds with one's particular situation. Dylan is known to use this structure often. He also uses it in the song "You're A Big Girl Now" from *Blood on the Tracks* (1976). Though the song has a slightly different theme, the speaker's views on love are no less cynical. The fourth verse reads:

Love is so simple, to quote a phrase
You've known it all the time, I'm learnin' it these days
Oh, I know where I can find you, oh, oh
In somebody's room
It's a price I have to pay
You're a big girl all the way
(Dylan 2016: 335)

The speaker seems to use the proverb "Love is so simple" only to highlight the complicated nature of his predicament. Throughout the song the speaker laments the fact that he must remain separated from his lover and eventually comes to the heartbreaking conclusion that they must remain apart. This sentiment is expressed

through the use of another proverb in the fifth and final verse which reads:

> A change in the weather is known to be extreme
> But what's the sense of changing horses in midstream?
> I'm going out of my mind, oh, oh
> With a pain that stops and starts
> Like a corkscrew to my heart
> Ever since we've been apart
> (Dylan 2016: 335)

The original proverb listed in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) reads "Don't change horses in the middle of the stream" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 311). This proverb has at least six different variations listed, one of which reads "Don't change your horse in the middle of the stream if you want to keep your trousers dry" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 311). Perhaps the consequence imposed in this variation underscores the difficulty that the speaker foresees in maintaining this long-distance relationship.

Another song that incorporates a proverb that utilizes the *Love is* structure is "I Threw It All Away" from *Nashville Skyline* (1969). Additionally, the song includes a couple of other configurations as well, two of which appear within the very same line. Surprisingly, all of the proverbs appear in the third verse of this four-verse song:

> Love is all there is, it makes the world go 'round
> Love and only love, it can't be denied
> No matter what you think about it
> You just won't be able to do without it
> Take a tip from one who's tried
> (Dylan 2016: 240)

The speaker uses proverbs to express the impossibility of living without love and warns his listeners that if they do find love, to not do as he did, and "throw it all away" (Dylan 2016: 240). The first line of verse three combines the proverbs "Love is all there is" and "Love makes the world go around." While the *Love is* structure lends itself more readily to static imagery, the *Love makes* structure generally implies transformation. This is clearly visible in some other proverbs that utilize this structure. For in-

stance, "Love makes a wit of the fool," "Love makes all hard hearts gentle," and "Love makes one fit for any work" (Wilson 1970: 492). Sometimes combining these two proverb structures can result in funny anti-proverbs. Litovkina and Mieder illustrate that combining the proverb "Love makes the world go 'round" with "Love is blind" will result in the anti-proverb "Love makes the world go blind" (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 208). Another anti-proverb that utilizes both structures reads "Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile" (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 207). The second line of the third verse contains a variation of the proverb "Love can't be denied." Proverbs that take the *Love can't* form usually carry an authoritative message which is why Dylan begins this line with the phrase "Love and only love." It certainly emphasizes the commanding nature of the proverb. Some other proverbs which take this form sound equally authoritative. For instance, "Love cannot dwell with suspicion," "Love can neither be bought nor sold," and "Love cannot be compelled" (Mieder, Kingsbury, and Harder 1992: 388; Wilson 1970; 489).

Another Dylan love song which utilizes proverbs in a creative way is "Meet Me in the Morning" from *Blood on the Tracks* (1975). "Meet Me in the Morning" is a melancholic love song that utilizes a lot of subtle mid-western imagery. The first verse reads:

> Meet me in the morning, 56th and Wabasha
> Meet me in the morning, 56th and Wabasha
> Honey, we could be in Kansas
> By the time the snow begins to thaw
> (Dylan 2016: 340)

In this song the speaker longs for the moment when he can be reunited with his lover who has apparently broken up with him. Throughout the song he begs relentlessly for her to take him back. The proverb which appears in the second verse of the song as a refrain accentuates the touching mood:

> They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn
> They say the darkest hour is right before the dawn
> But you wouldn't know it by me
> Every day's been darkness since you been gone
> (Dylan 2016: 340

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (1970), the proverb "The darkest hour is that before the dawn," has been recorded as early as 1650 and the four variations that are listed only show minor differences in language and structure. One of the most telling explanations for this proverb come from *Shirley*, a fiction novel written by Charlotte Brontë in 1849. A passage from chapter 20 reads "This is the terrible hour, but it is often that darkest point which precedes the rise of day" (Wilson 1970: 168). The meaning implied by this metaphor is that one's darkest hour is when one has reached one's lowest point in life. Unable to fall any lower, one may only expect circumstances to improve from that point going forward. The speaker in "Meet Me in the Morning" feels that he has reached his darkest hour in being separated from his lover, and he will experience a proverbial dawning or improved mental state when the two are reunited.

Amongst all of the Dylan scholarship that has most recently come about in the early part of the twenty-first century, including the biographies, the interviews, the multitude of texts that focus on specific events in his life, and also the important studies that examine Dylan lyrics (for which he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016), the most useful to this study have been those texts that work to identify some of Dylan's literary and biblical influences (Bowden 1982; Gilmour 2004; Ricks 2005; Rogovoy 2009; Thomas 2017). This particular category represents a broad range of texts that when examined holistically may help one to visualize at least one aspect of Dylan's song writing technique which is that his familiarity with the Bible and other kinds of literature has provided him with a store of knowledge. Furthermore, this literary knowledge has more than likely influenced his decision to use some of the recurring tropes, plots, themes, and characters that are visible in his work. In examining this infinite list of influences, there is no doubt that proverbs and proverbial expressions (both secular and religious) should be included. As I have tried to illustrate here, gauging Dylan's use of proverbs and proverbial phrases will more than likely reveal other literary sources because many proverbs have origins in literature. One should also keep in mind that proverbs also tend to reflect general ideas found in society. Using reference texts to juxtapose original meanings of proverbs or proverbial expressions and ways that they are incorporated into songs may help to better understand Dylan's music and

worldview. In interviews Dylan has often expressed disdain for explicating his own lyrics, preferring instead to leave this task to others. One reason he may feel this way is because there is always the possibility that his own interpretation could limit the scope of his music. As Gilmour reminds us "…readers of literature themselves bring a bundle of (con) texts to the objects of their study. This introduces further subjectivity; it is not only difficult to distinguish what an author has created from what is borrowed; it is also true that what is heard or read by different listeners or readers will not always be the same" (Gilmour 2004: 15). The aim in this particular study has been to illustrate some of the ways that proverbs and proverbial expressions contribute to Dylan's work. Of course, proverbs could also contribute in a multitude of other ways, many of which may lie outside the scope of this project. While it would be very difficult to find every single proverb that exists within the Dylan catalogue, my overall goal is to illustrate that studies of this nature may have immense value for literary scholars and folklorists.

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