

WHISKEY SAUCE: or,
CHRONICLES: VOLUME TWO

Stephen Scobie

Author's Note

This lecture was originally composed for delivery at the Bob Dylan Symposium in Frankfurt, Germany in May, 2006. It was also made available for participants, in my unavoidable absence, at a Dylan conference in Dartmouth College, Hanover New Hampshire, in August, 2006.* The text here presented is the lecture as I gave it in May. Consequently, it omits any reference to some subsequent developments. At the time of writing, I had heard only the first of Dylan's "Theme Time Radio Hour" DJ broadcasts, and I had not yet heard the new CD, *Modern Times*. Both of these works would, I think, have extended and confirmed the arguments I present here, not only by virtue of their innate excellence, but also in terms of their very strong and positive critical reception. Dylan's reputation now stands at its highest point since 1966. I hope that this paper, even with its temporal limitation, can contribute to an understanding of this present phase of this continuous, and endlessly changing career.

Stephen Scobie
October, 2006

Since my title today is "Chronicles: Volume Two," let me admit right from the start: I have no idea when, or even if, Volume Two might actually appear. Rather, I'm using "Volume Two" in a figurative sense, to describe where we now are, in this new, post-*Volume One* world. "Volume Two," for this purpose, is everything that has happened *since* the publication of *Volume One*. What influence has the appearance of *Volume One* had upon our attempts to enjoy, follow, analyse, or account for Dylan's art and career? What changes in that career are signaled by the book's success, or may even be produced by it? I'm going to group my remarks under four headings: Voice, Name, Time, and Tradition.

* **Error! Main Document Only.** *Stephen Scobie was invited to give a paper at the Dartmouth College Conference on Bob Dylan's Lyrics, August 11-13, 2006. A late conflict arose in his schedule that prevented him from attending the Conference, but he sent along a copy of his talk beforehand to share with those in attendance. I had at first thought to read it for him in absentia, but the schedule of presentations and audience responses to them made this untenable at the time. In my introductory remarks at the Conference, however, I had mentioned his paper's availability to anyone who wished to read it while at the Conference, and four or five conferees subsequently did so. As Professor Scobie notes, he had given "Whiskey Sauce" earlier that year in Frankfurt, Germany. He has graciously given his permission to make the paper available on this Dartmouth Conference website. In addition, please note that he has also contributed a paper dealing with the Dylan song and the Todd Haynes movie "I'm Not There," which I have placed under the present website section entitled "Related Papers on Dylan's Lyrics."*—Louis A. Renza, 11/16/2007

Voice.

The first thing that happened after the publication of *Volume One* was its immense success, both commercially and critically. It shot onto the lists of bestsellers, reaching number 2 on the *New York Times* tabulation. Critics raved about it. In the London *Sunday Times*, Bryan Appleyard wrote, “I cannot remember a book that has made me happier than this one.” Almost the only dissenting voice came from Tom Carson, in a sour and caustic dismissal published in the *New York Times Book Review*.

Simon & Schuster, the publishers, seized upon this critical ecstasy when they issued the paperback edition, prefacing it with *thirteen pages* of quotations from reviews. Successful books often get three or four pages of such blurbs, but thirteen is almost unheard of. These pages now form a curious part, or non-part, of the book, similar to what Derrida called a *parergon*. They are part of it, within its covers, relating directly to it, and to some extent pre-conditioning the response of the reader who comes first to the paperback edition. But they are also *not* part of it: neither written by Dylan, nor (presumably) selected by him. They are unpaginated; the book commences at page one after them. Perhaps they might be regarded as the opening pages of my figurative “Volume Two.” They are of course selected, by Simon & Schuster, from their original publications, and at least one of them is shamelessly wrenched out of context. I now want to compound that process, by selecting from the selections. As I was reading through these thirteen pages, I became increasingly aware of a recurring leitmotif:

“a candid memoir”

“Remarkably candid”

“genuine insights”

“candor ... and vulnerability”

“powerfully honest”

“strikingly candid”

“unadorned”

“lucid”

“surprisingly straightforward”

“surprisingly—no make that shockingly—candid”

“there’s no denying the honesty”

“unexpectedly frank”

“disarmingly sincere”

“lucid, engaging, and incredibly direct”

“surprisingly honest and revealing”

“blazingly honest”

“superbly candid”

“unaccountably touching”

“intimate”

“a genuine peek into the workings of Dylan’s soul”

Two elements, then, in this response: firstly, that the book is “direct,” “honest,” “genuine,” and above all “candid.” And secondly, that this candour is “unexpected,” “surprising,” no, make that “shocking.”

This latter response relates to the widely held image of Dylan as secretive and reclusive, rarely giving interviews, and, when he does, either mocking the interviewer or giving cryptic and unintelligible answers. There is some truth to this image. Dylan’s delight in demolishing interviewers was especially strong in the mid-60s, and can be seen in *Don’t Look Back* and the San Francisco press conference. But he is also capable of giving very serious and thoughtful interviews: recently, for example, his conversation on the craft of songwriting with Robert Hilburn in the *Los Angeles Times*, 2004. Or, one of the most remarkable interviews he has given in recent years, with Mikal Gilmore in the November 22nd 2001 issue of *Rolling Stone*. Nor are Dylan interviews all that scarce, as witness the 2004 collection *Younger Than That Now: The Collected Interviews with Bob Dylan*. The title is somewhat misleading: this volume is far more a “Selected” than a “Collected,” yet it still runs to 290 pages.

So, if the blurb-writers’ surprise and shock are somewhat overstated, what about their emphasis on honesty and candour? Just how candid is *Chronicles: Volume One*? One of the things that Dylan is candid about is, precisely, his lack of candour. Almost the first extended anecdote in the book describes his interview with Billy James, head of publicity for Columbia:

I strolled into his office, sat down opposite his desk, and he tried to get me to cough up some facts, like I was supposed to give them to him straight and square. He took out a notepad and pencil and asked me where I was from. I told him I was from Illinois and

he wrote it down. He asked me if I ever did any other work and I told him I had a dozen jobs, drove a bakery truck once. He wrote that down.... I hate these kind [sic] of questions. Felt I could ignore them.... I didn't feel like answering his questions anyway, didn't feel the need to explain anything to anybody.... [My answers were] pure hokum—hophead talk (7-8).

Dylan knows that he is “supposed” to be “straight and square”—candid— but he just isn't interested. Placed so early in the book, this passage raises several questions. Are we, the readers, to take it as a warning, an advance notice that Dylan is not always completely truthful when talking about himself? How much of what follows might not Dylan, at some future date, turn around and dismiss as “pure hokum—hophead talk”? Or is Dylan pulling a double bluff here?—by being so candid in this admission, is he attempting to vouch for the honesty and accuracy of the rest of *Chronicles*? Look, he says, when I'm lying, I'll tell you about it; otherwise, you can trust me. Yeah, sure.

In relation to the accuracy of *Volume One*, the most serious questions arise around dating and chronology. The exact dates on which things happened, and their sequence, are frequently vague and muddled. Otherwise, most of the questions about “candour” relate not so much to what Dylan does say as to what he does *not* say. Critical response to the book has come up with few, if any, statements from people saying “No, he got that wrong. I was there, and it wasn't like that.” Rather, attention has focused on the gaps and omissions in his narrative, what he chose to leave out.

The largest gaps are the elision of everything that happened between 1961 and 1968, and his studious avoidance of any comment on his religious beliefs or family life. But there are smaller, no less telling omissions. The eulogistic account of Dave van Ronk conveniently omits any mention of van Ronk's anger when he learned that Dylan, without advance notice or permission, had gone ahead and recorded van Ronk's distinctive arrangement of “House of the Rising Sun.” And the non-specialised reader has no way of knowing that the “my wife” of Chapter Three is not the same person as the “my wife” of Chapter Four. “Superbly candid,” indeed!

In fact, all these words —“candid,” “honest,” “lucid,” “frank,” “sincere,” “direct” —may be out of place in discussions of autobiography. As Dylan said to Gilmore, “A question like that

can't be answered in the terms that you're asking." It is widely acknowledged that autobiography is not a transparent genre. Any narrative presupposes omission and selection. The process is especially blatant in autobiography, which always carries a whiff of self-justification; politicians and generals re-fight their old battles, and in retrospect they always win. Most readers instinctively allow for this tendency, and approach autobiography with a healthy dose of scepticism.

What is at issue is the way in which the *writing* of an autobiography creates and constructs a persona for the narrator. And one of the most important ways in which this construction is achieved is through the creation of a *voice*—that is, a stance, a tone, a way of speaking, a choice of vocabulary, that all combine, not into a personality, but into the linguistic construct of a personality.

Thus, one of the most interesting comments in the thirteen pages of blurbs is this one: "The real literary achievement of *Chronicles* is the voice Dylan has devised for his youthful self, which is spellbinding." This quotation is made to appear as flattering as all the others, but in fact, in a gesture of bare-faced impudence, or perhaps cheeky revenge, it has been wrenched out of the context of the most hostile review that *Chronicles* received, that by Tom Carson. Carson does not just say "which is spellbinding": he says "which is spellbinding in its hokum"! Here is the original context:

[T]he major surprise of *Chronicles* is its literary cunning.... [Its] real literary achievement ... is the voice Dylan has devised for his youthful self, which is spellbinding in its hokum. // The voice is transparently fraudulent... Yet simply as writing, it's some of the best fake "Huckleberry Finn" I've ever read.... Semiliteracy this effective requires a fabulous ear....

These comments may sound like compliments, but they are decidedly left-handed ones. Yet there is some truth in what Carson is saying here. The voice of *Chronicles* is indeed a constructed one, and it is constructed out of a strange balance of opposites: at times urbanely sophisticated, at times simplistically naïve.

Sometimes it does seem to be the naïve, awe-struck voice of the country hick in the big city. For example, he tells us that someone "looks like Robert Burns, the poet, or Montgomery Clift, the actor" (41). Does any conceivable reader of *Chronicles* need to be told that

Montgomery Clift was an actor, or that Robert Burns was a poet? These superfluous identifications come across like the nervous gestures of an unsophisticated novice, anxious to impress. Yet the person to whom Burns and Clift are compared is Carl Phillip Gottfried von Clausewitz (1780-1831), Prussian military strategist and philosopher of warfare, to whom Dylan devotes several pages—surely an unlikely choice for an unsophisticated boy from backwoods Minnesota. (Though the portrait of Clausewitz reproduced on the Web page Clausewitz.com looks to me nothing like either Robert Burns, the poet, or Montgomery Clift, the actor.)

But to say that the voice of *Chronicles* is constructed is not necessarily to say that it is “fake,” “fraudulent,” or “hokum.” The constructed voice can produce magnificent stretches of richly-layered rhetoric, such as the superb evocation of New Orleans (179-181: too long to quote here). But the careful shifts of tone and mood can orchestrate even the most apparently simple or inconsequential passages. Like this one:

One day I went to the clinic where the doctor examined my hand, said the healing was coming along fine and that the feeling in the nerves might have a chance of coming back soon. It was encouraging to hear that. I returned to the house where my eldest son was sitting around in the kitchen with his soon-to-be-wife. There was a thick seafood stew brewing up on the stove as I walked by. I took the cover off the pot to check it out.

“What do you think?” my future daughter-in-law asked.

“What about the whiskey sauce?”

“It has to be arranged,” she said.

I dropped the cover back on the pot and went out to the garage. The rest of the day went by like a puff of wind (170).

Here is the characteristic lack of specificity about dates— “One day” is not very helpful, in a chapter which slides murkily back and forth between 1987, 1988, and 1989. A similar obscurity shields his family behind the terms “eldest son,” “soon-to-be wife,” and “future daughter-in-law,” without ever yielding anything as clear as a name.

The passage begins in a matter-of-fact tone: I went to the clinic, the doctor said. When he records his feelings, he does so in an ironic understatement, so straight-faced as to be hilarious: told that his hand wound is healing, and that he may soon be able to play music again, all he says is “It was encouraging to hear that.” Then comes an anecdote about a seafood stew, foreshadowing the New Orleans setting later in the chapter. Bob as gourmet chef: tasting, advising. It all seems like a simple, almost banal incident: what is the point of including it in an autobiography? If there is a point, it seems to be contained in the answer by “my future daughter-in-law”: “It has to be

arranged.” But this proves to be a cryptic line. Is “has to be” being used as a loose future tense — “It has still to be arranged, but will be”—or in the stronger sense of a necessity— “It must be arranged”? How exactly do you “arrange” a sauce? Should we take seriously the further sense of a musical “arrangement,” and see the line as looking forward to the main topic of the chapter, the recording of *Oh Mercy*: are Daniel Lanois’ arrangements the “whiskey sauce” for Dylan’s songs? As it turns out, we never do find out whether or not the sauce was added. The line is left hanging, and we turn to the simplicity of “went out to the garage.” Then Dylan caps the anecdote with a concise simile (the only overt image in this passage): “The rest of the day went by like a puff of wind.” It is on the one hand unrevealing: whatever happened between Dylan and his family, even whether the stew was any good or not, is not going to be told. But on the other hand, the image, simple as it is, opens up the whole scene, explodes its limitations, nudges towards the universal. The image is simultaneously of the elemental and of the transient. (And that’s not even to begin to consider the multiple echoes of “wind” in Dylan’s work.)

So, even a passage as apparently inconsequential as this one contains many delicate shifts of tone, stance, and implication: from factual recital to ironic understatement to abstract avoidance to cryptic aphorism to lyrical image. These are the effects of *voice*, and it is the construction of that voice, I would argue (though not in the same sense as Tom Carson), that is indeed the literary achievement of *Chronicles*.

Name.

Chronicles, according to Curtis Ross of *The Tampa Tribune*, “offers a genuine peek into the workings of Dylan’s mind” —and this theme is echoed in many of the other blurbs. The idea is that Dylan has, at last, spoken “candidly” about his creative processes—and thus, that the statements in *Chronicles* are authoritative. To any disputed point, Dylan has now given the definitive answer. So where does that leave us, as fans, as critics? What happens if we are still interested in material omitted by a strictly literal interpretation of the scriptures? Let me approach this question by returning to Robert Zimmerman’s alias, Bob Dylan’s name.

Early attempts to explain why Bobby Zimmerman chose the name “Bob Dylan” concentrated, unsurprisingly, on Dylan Thomas (“the poet”). Echo Helstrom has claimed that Bob explained it this way to her as early as 1958. In the 60s, however, Dylan disclaimed this influence, and floated a flimsy smokescreen about an uncle on his mother’s side of the family called Dillon, or even Dillion. Over the years, various other explanations have been attempted, from the hero of the tv series “Gunsmoke,” Matt Dillon; to the mid-1950s all-star linebacker for

the Green Bay Packers, Bobby Dillon; to the singer of a 1956 pop song, “The Ballad of James Dean,” Dylan Todd.

In *Chronicles*, however, Dylan blithely ignores most of these speculations, allowing only a brief nod to Dylan Thomas, and comes up instead with a brand new version. He begins by acknowledging his earliest pseudonym, “Elston Gunn,” but dismisses it as “temporary” (all quotations in this discussion are from pages 78-79). The implication is that he was, from very early on, determined on some element of alias or disguise in his name. “What I was going to do as soon as I left home was just call myself Robert Allen,” he writes, reasonably enough, since these were his first two names. “It sounded like the name of a Scottish king and I liked it. There was little of my identity that wasn’t in it.” There are in fact no Scottish kings called simply “Robert Allen,” but the combination is certainly plausible, even though the identification with Scottish royalty seems somewhat unlikely for a middle-class Jewish boy from Minnesota. The “little of my identity that wasn’t in it” is of course “Zimmerman”: the identifiably ethnic name which his father (Abraham, son of Zigman) had already compromised with the choice of the quintessentially WASP “Robert Allen.” *Chronicles*, despite its Old Testament title, has strikingly little to say about Bobby Zimmerman’s Jewish background.

Then Dylan introduces an entirely new factor, previously unremarked in any biography: “a West Coast saxophone player named David Allyn.” Bobby was attracted by the name (his brother was called David), but suspicious of the spelling (he thought “Allyn” might have been altered from “Allen”). Then he played back and forth with several variations (including the Welsh poet) before arriving at “Bob Dylan.” The choice seems to have been made on purely aesthetic, acoustic grounds: “Robert Dylan. Robert Allyn. I couldn’t decide—the letter *D* came on stronger.... Bobby Dylan sounded too skittish to me.... “ Interestingly, the effect of this account is to suggest that the switch from “Zimmerman” to “Dylan” was less traumatic than the switch from “Bobby” to “Bob”! Writing to an old friend, he records that he “signed it Bobby. That’s how she knew me and always would. Spelling is important.”

A first reaction to this passage might well be: Well, Bob, if it’s as simple as that, why didn’t you say so earlier? Why did you allow your fans and biographers to spend forty years dredging around tv cowboys and Wisconsin football players, when all along you could simply have told us about a West Coast saxophonist? Did you take some kind of perverse delight in

reading all these far-fetched attempts to explain your alias? Did you see them at all? Or did you simply not care? It certainly seems as if Dylan, over many years, has been less than “candid” on this topic. So are we obligated to believe him now? Might not this account be one more elaborate joke? Might not “David Allyn” prove just as chimerical as a distant relative called “Dillion”? A Google search on “David Allyn saxophone” yields precisely zero results.

But if we do, at least provisionally, take the author of *Chronicles* at his word, and accept this account as true, what then happens to all the others, Matt and Bobby, Thomas and Todd? Do we simply forget about them, erase them from the record? I don’t think so. In 1978, talking to Allen Ginsberg, Dylan said:

Nobody’s Bob Dylan. Bobby Dylan’s long gone.... Let’s say that in real life Bob Dylan fixes his name on the public. He can retrieve that name at will. Anything else the public makes of it is its business.

The name “Bob Dylan” has indeed for many years been fixed on the public, and part of what the public has made of it is the range of associations conjured by Dylan Thomas, Matt Dillon, Bobby Dillon, and Dylan Todd. The account in *Chronicles* may then be seen as Dylan’s attempt finally to “retrieve” that name, to bring its power to generate multiple meanings back under his authorial control. But can he in fact do that? Or has the name always already escaped any power to “retrieve” it? I would argue that the name, once entered into the public domain, becomes an inextricable part of the total system which is Bob Dylan’s “text.” Within such a system, authorial intention plays an important part, but not a controlling one; as Jacques Derrida writes, intention “is not annulled ... but rather [inscribed] within a system which it no longer dominates” (*Of Grammatology*, 243). Thus, while “David Allyn” now has a fairly strong claim to be regarded as definitive in any account of Bobby Zimmerman’s conscious intentions in forging his alias, it is, in the larger context of the play and interplay of meaning in the Dylan text, no more than one contributing factor.

Before leaving the issue of naming, I would like to add a couple of comments about that other name, the one that “Bob Dylan” attempted to leave behind: the carpenter’s name, *auf deutsch*, Zimmerman[n]. At times in *Chronicles*, it seems as if Dylan is having some quiet fun with “Zimmerman.” He includes a reference (not picked up by any previous name-hunter) to a “Bobby Zimmerman” who was “One of the early presidents of the San Bernardino [Hell’s]

Angels,” killed in a motorcycle accident in 1964. “That person is gone,” Bob Dylan writes. “That was the end of him” (79). As if 1964 is the definitive end of “Zimmerman”—except that Dylan’s own motorcycle accident, in 1966, uncannily echoes that “end.”

And then, in his discussion of Robert Johnson, Dylan records how Johnson “went off and learned how to play guitar from a farmhand named Ike Zinnerman [sic], a mysterious character not in any of the history books” (286). So Dylan, describing one of his own musical models and mentors, ascribes to him a mentor in turn, a “mysterious” figure, “not in any of the history books,” whose name echoes, not quite precisely, the name of Dylan’s actual father. Two “Zimmerman”’s on offer then: a biker outlaw and a mysterious mentor. Not a bad summary of what Bob Dylan was to become.

Then there is the literal meaning of the German word “Zimmermann,” carpenter. Several critics, such as Christopher Rollason and myself, have made extensive use of this definition in looking at the few instances of the word “carpenter” in Dylan’s works— “house carpenter,” “carpenters’ wives.” Dylan himself has never alluded to it, nor given any hint that he even knows the German meaning. But maybe he gets close to some kind of devious acknowledgment towards the end of *Chronicles*, when he writes that

I built some furniture for the place. With some borrowed tools, I made a couple of tables....I also put together a cabinet and a bed frame.... even made a couple of mirrors using an old technique I learned in a high school woodworking class.” (267-8)

Tools, woodworking: the one word *not* used in this passage is “carpenter.”

The final note. The first draft programme of speakers for [the Frankfurt Dylan Conference] included the great German film Wim Wenders, who has on several occasions quoted Dylan in his films. I have always loved the “double cross” in *Am Lauf der Tage* (*Days of the Road*). And in *Der Amerikanischer Freund* (*The American Friend*), the tragic protagonist, Jonathan (who works with picture-framing) dies at the end of the film while singing “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” (he doesn’t get past the first line). In

Patricia Highsmith’s novel to a Hamburg setting, Wenders had to provide his character with a new, German, surname. His surname in the film is, of course, Zimmermann.

According to Dave Perceval, the single word that appears most frequently in Bob Dylan’s songs is “time.” Perceval’s concordance to lyrics, *Love Plus Zero/With Limits*, was published in 1994, yet it remains the most complete volume of its kind. It lists 259

ces of “time” or “times”; I would add 5 in *Time Out of Mind*, and 8 in “*Love and Theft*.” “Time” barely outstrips “man,” comes up 256 times, but it leaves “love” far in the distance at 164.

Chronicles, from its title right on down, is all about time. Even the American Civil War is seen in these terms. “There was a difference [between the North and the South] in the concept of time,” writes Dylan:

In the South, people lived their lives with sun-up, high noon, sunset, spring, summer. In the North, people lived by the clock. The factory stroke, whistles and bells. Northerners had to “be on time.” In some ways the Civil War would be a battle between two kinds of time. (86)

Dylan sets up a fairly standard contrast between two concepts of time: natural time, governed by the cycles of the days and the seasons, and artificial time, imposed by the clock and man-made schedules—where, you might say, “fiends nail time bombs / To the walls of the clocks.” What is interesting here is not so much Dylan’s characterisation of the difference between the two societies as the way he is prepared to assign to it. “In some ways the Civil War would be a battle between two kinds of time. Abolition of slavery was an issue when the first shots were fired” (86).

Opposed to each other, these two concepts of time nevertheless share a sense of sequentiality: the movement of time may be circular, but it is ongoing and continuous. Dylan, however, is also interested in a third concept of time, one whose progression is interrupted, reversed, shuffled, or even stopped.

Although it is a book about youth, a *Bildungsroman* “portrait of the artist as a young man,” *Chronicles* is powerfully shadowed by the haunting from the names of dead singers whose music survives them to the haunted cemeteries of New Orleans. The sense of an inexorable progression towards death is pervasive. Yet at the same time (as it were), time in *Chronicles* is also malleable, flexible. Sequence is twisted, contorted back against itself. Cause and effect drift loose from each other; dates change places. Entire eras are blithely omitted. The very last thing that *Chronicles* attempts to do is to offer any kind of chronological chronicle. The effect can be seen at every level of the book, from its overall structure down to its treatment of individual details. Chapters One and Two have some overlap, and do not proceed in a clearly sequential manner, but they cover roughly the same period (1961). Chapter Three jumps ahead seven years, and Chapter Four jumps ahead another fifteen years or so. Chapter Five loops back to a time before Chapter One begins, catches up, and ends at more or less the same spot as Chapters One and Two. Within each chapter, chronological order is similarly obscured, or ignored altogether. The effect is especially noticeable in Chapter Three, which regards the years of the late 1960s and early 70s as cards to be shuffled—so that, for instance, a visit to Jerusalem in 1971 somehow precedes the recording of *Street Scene* in 1969, but nevertheless leads directly into the recording of *Blood on the Tracks* in 1974, all in a single page.

Over the period covered by Chapters One, Two, and Five, that is, Dylan’s early days in New York. In this account, two things stand out: the astonishing amount of music that he listened to, and the even more astonishing number of books that he read. He listened, it seems, to everyone, from Ricky Nelson to Robert Johnson, from John Jacob Niles to Roy Orbison. He listened to them live in clubs, or on records borrowed from friends. All this listening takes time: hours, one would think, every day. Yet he also found time to read voraciously: from Balzac to Thucydides, Clausewitz to Allen Ginsberg. “I read the poetry books, mostly. Byron and Shelley

g-fellow and Poe” (37). He read a biography of Robert E. Lee, became fascinated by the Civil War, and spent days in the New York Public Library reading microfilms of newspapers from 1855 to 1865. The reading list that *Chronicles* displays would be an assignment for a four-year undergraduate curriculum, even without allowing time to listen to all that music, as well as to his own performing career. Yet all this accumulation is described as happening within the limits ostensibly set out by Chapters Two, Three, and Five: that is, between his arrival in New York, in January 1961, and his signing with Columbia Records, in September of the same year—a period of almost exactly eight months.

Chronicles, time is malleable. In these New York chapters, it stretches like an elastic band. “I did everything fast,” he writes. “I ate fast, talked fast, and walked fast. I even sang my songs fast” (84). Yeah, but not that fast. In writing *Chronicles*, Dylan transformed that early New York period into an idealized image, a golden age, even a Paradise—with the Fall being marked by his signing to Columbia, the end of innocence, his entry into the fallen world of commerce and fame. And into that idealized period he crammed everything that he could—every book he’d ever read, every old blues he’d ever listened to—until these eight months matter as a chronological unit, becoming instead a mythological “time out of mind,” a moment where time stood still. This would then function as “the all-encompassing template behind everything that I would write” (86). In his own words: “I filled my head full of as much of this stuff as I could stand and locked it away in my mind out of sight, left it alone. Figured I could look back for it later” (86). Forty years later, that truck is still coming back full.

Dylan describes his experience when he was absorbed in his early experiments with drawing: “I’d lose track of time completely. Two or three hours could go by and it would seem like only a minute” (270). Again, these words recall what he said in 1978. “You wanna stop time?” he said to Ginsberg:

that’s what you wanna do. You want to live forever,
right Allen? Huh? In order to live forever you have to
stop time. In order to stop time you have to exist in the
moment, so strong as to stop time and prove your
point.... That’s a heroic feat! We have literally stopped
time in this movie [*Renaldo and Clara*].

Chronicles: Volume One is another attempt to stop, or at least to suspend time—in the American sporting phrase, it calls a “time out” (270). Working within genre—chronicles—whose very definition requires chronological succession, Dylan attempts to subvert the linearity of his chosen form, and to present an image of himself which is always frozen within the idealized and infinitely malleable “time” of summer 1961.

1.

No idea whether Dylan’s omnivorous reading included T.S. Eliot’s 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” but it is made fully relevant, not only to *Chronicles: Volume One*, but also to everything that Dylan has done since then, “Volume Two.” In 1919, Eliot writes, involves not only “the historical sense ... the pastness of the past” but also its presence; the artist must “write not only with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of ... literature ... has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” Tradition for Eliot is not a static and unchanging thing: rather,

what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered....

resses, first, a “historical sense ... the pastness of the past”: or, in the phrase from Ginsberg’s “Kaddish” which Dylan said was fine for the whole of *Renaldo and Clara*, “What came is gone forever every time.” Yet the past is also “simultaneous,” having “sense of the timeless.” Thus, tradition comprises an “ideal order,” which is both complete (at any one moment) and incomplete, requiring new works, the “supervention of novelty,” to act as a supplement. (I use the word “supplement” here in its full sense.) If Dylan’s view of “tradition” is to be seen in Eliot’s terms, then, it must encompass both the historical sense of older and his own “supervention of novelty.”

“supervention” (such an Eliotic word!) came most spectacularly in the years between 1962 and 1966—the years, that is, that are so prominently passed over in *Chronicles: Volume One*. On the one hand, we may choose to believe that Dylan’s omission of these years is strategic: that he is using it to struggle against the reductive impulse to define him *only* in terms of the mid-60s, against all the trappings of the “protest singer” who “went electric,” and against the widespread neglect of his later work. But on the other hand, a great part of what Dylan has done *since* the publication of *Chronicles: Volume One* has been focused almost exclusively on these “missing”

years. Much of this activity did not involve active participation by Dylan, it certainly required his authorisation and collaboration. It was with the 2005 exhibit at the Seattle Experience Music Project, “Bob Dylan’s American Journey, 1955-1965,” a stunning collection of memorabilia, manuscripts, original documents and artifacts, and hours of fascinating video. Some of this material was included in *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook, 1956-1966*, published by Simon & Schuster later that year, in a fairly blatant attempt to capitalize on the success of *Chronicles*. Then came the quasi-official release, through Starbucks, of the 1962 Gaslight Café concert: poor sound quality, pointlessly incomplete selection. And then, in fall 2005, came the double-whammy of *No Direction Home*—both a film documentary, and the double-CD soundtrack, released as Volume 7 of *The Bootleg Series*. The overwhelming emphasis of the film and CD is on the early to mid 1960s.

Viewers, including myself, were initially worried by this emphasis, fearing that it would perpetuate the stereotype of Dylan as a one-time figure, significant only in the 60s, and fading thereafter into obscurity and mediocrity. I’m still apprehensive of such a reading, but I’d also like to offer a more positive reading.

Perhaps *Chronicles: Volume Two* has already appeared, and its name is *No Direction Home*.

Given that the format of *Volume One* is so idiosyncratic, why should we assume that *Volume Two* need be confined within printed pages and covers? *Volume One* leaves the mid-60s as a gaping hole crying to be filled; *No Direction Home*, plus the Seattle show, plus the

ok, plus the Gaslight CD, fill precisely that hole. After all, once you have seen Liam Clancey singing “Girl of the North” what could possibly be added by Bob Dylan saying that it was written about Echo Helstrom, or Bonnie Beecher, or whoever? A re-take of “Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat” is all we’re ever going to hear about the *Blonde on Blonde* sessions, then I am, only a contentedly, content.

His version of “Volume Two” answers to the “supervention of novelty” aspect of Eliot’s “tradition,” how about the “historical”? What has Dylan done to embody and carry forward this sense of “tradition”? An awareness of the continuity of American music has always been a major concern of his career. It goes back to the very roots of his performance, to the repertoire he sang in his early Greenwich Village days on which *Volume One* focuses. In the mid-90s, it was celebrated to supreme effect in his twin disc of solo acoustic renditions of traditional songs, *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*. On tour, it surfaces in a variety of guises of everything from bluegrass gospel to the glorious 2002 tributes to Warren Zevon. But in recent years it has intensified. Increasingly, Dylan sees his own position as being that of the inheritor and the transmitter. He is among the last performing artists of his generation to have had direct contact with the great musicians of a preceding generation, and he accepts the duty, the responsibility, to carry on. And in doing so, he seems poised to celebrate not only the music, but also the medium of that music’s delivery: not LPs. or MP3s, or I-Pods, but radio.

Dylan’s most intriguing project for 2006 (apart from the new album, due in August), and certainly a key chapter in my musical “Volume Two,” is his assumption of the role of radio DJ. The first programme, broadcast on May 3rd, exhibits the wide range of Dylan’s eclectic taste. It features everyone from Muddy Waters to Dean Martin, via gospel, country, and calypso—and who else could have got away with playing Jimi Hendrix directly followed by Judy Garland?

As relaxing as the music may be, it is also important that the medium is radio. In *Chronicles*, Dylan records that:

At the house on Audubon Place the radio was always on in the kitchen and always tuned to WWOZ, the great New Orleans station that plays mostly early rhythm and blues and rural South gospel music. My favorite DJ, hands down, was Brown Sugar, the female disc jockey. She was on in the midnight hours, played records by Wynonie Harris, Roy Brown, Ivory Joe Hunter, Little Walter, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Chuck Wills, all the greats. She used to keep me company a lot when everyone was sleeping. Brown Sugar, whoever she was, had a thick, slow, dreamy, oozing molasses voice—she sounded as big as a buffalo—she’d ramble on, take phone calls, give love advice and spin records. I wondered how old she could be. I wondered if she knew her voice had drawn me in, filled me with inner peace and serenity and would upend all my frustration. It was relaxing

listening to her. Whatever she said, I could see every word as she said it. I could listen to her for hours.

Wherever she was, I wished I could put all of myself in there. (187-8)

own programme, Dylan doesn't exactly give "love advice [in a] molasses voice," but he does speak in a personal and seductive way that values the intensity and intimacy of radio's connection to its listeners. He sounds as if he's enjoying the role, which helps his listeners to enjoy themselves too.

WWOZ was the kind of station I used to listen to late at night growing up, and it brought back to me the trials of my youth and touched the spirit of it. Back then when something was wrong the radio could lay hands on you and you'd be all right.... (188)

For example, the early scenes of the Johnny Cash biopic, *Walk the Line*, which dramatize the situation of the young boy in bed at night listening to the forbidden radio stations which bring to him, from a great distance, a music of liberation. Similar tales have been told about young Bobby Zimmerman, listening to the stray and magical sounds his radio could pick up in Hibbing, Minnesota.

It gave him one way to experience the tradition, but there is also a sense of direct connection, personal experience, immediate connection with older singers. Dylan sees himself as one of the last living contacts with an older American music; as the direct repository of a tradition which it is his duty to carry on. Talking to Mikal Gilmore in 2001, Dylan said:

Folk music is where it all starts and in many ways ends. If you don't have that foundation ... and you don't feel historically tied to it, then what you're doing is not going to be as strong as it could be. [Eliot would have been in full agreement.] Of course, it helps to have been born in a certain era because it would've been closer to you, or it helps to be a part of the culture when it was happening.... I think one of the best records that I've ever been part of was the record I made with Big Joe Williams and Victoria Spivey [March, 1962]. Now that's a record that I hear from time to time and I don't mind listening to. It amazes me that I was there and had done that.

In a 2001 interview with Edna Gundersen, he stated:

The people who played that music were still around then, and so there was a bunch of us, me included, who

got to see all these people close up—people like Sun House, Reverend Gary Davis or Sleepy John Estes. Just to sit there and be up close and watch them play, you could study what they were doing, plus a bit of their lives even rubbed off on you....They're not ghosts of the past or anything. They're continually here.

s sense of tradition, of the pastness and yet also the presence of American music, of a continuity carried on in his own body, his ory, that Dylan (I would argue) now sees as his most important task and commitment. He carries it on in his music, in his tion of his own musical history, in his new recordings, in his activities as a DJ, in all the ways in which his career now serves orates his inheritance: in short, in everything which we may now see as comprising the vital ingredient of "Chronicles: Volume he arrangement of its whiskey sauce.