

Intimacy and Icon:

The Emergence of “The Personal” and the Endurance of Protest In and Beyond the Folk Revival

By

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Dedication: Thanks Papi, for singing with me about my friends, the ants in the wind!

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Abstract

How did folk music move from the political to the personal? In the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a gentle but definitive transition to folk personal songwriting, as artists delved into their inner lives, and left the confident blanket statements of political songwriting behind. In this thesis, I look at the music that I and many others have loved, in order to get closer to just why we love it so much. With the shift from political songwriting to personal, identity-based (and at first confessional) songwriting emerged as artists allowed themselves to be confused—instead of pretending to have the answers, they asked questions, and acknowledged when they made mistakes. In becoming authentic people in their songs, and exposing themselves as humans, hungry fans took this as leeway to come even closer, creating an invasive but dependent relationship as celebrity found its way into folk, a formerly anti-capitalist genre. While artists rightfully objected to this invasion of privacy, they still admitted that they needed celebrity in some sense. As such, I argue that folk personal songwriting expanded again, taking on an air of personal protest in some moments, as artists wrote (both directly and in nuanced ways) about their relationship with the media and their audience. The protest mode, which had seemed to be in danger of dying out at the beginning of personal songwriting, was shown only to be dormant. Instead of the decisive black-and-white morals of political songwriting, the protest ethos combined with the personal in songwriting to create protest music more relevant to artists' own lives, that did more to emotionally engage with the listener. In my first chapter, I contrast the clear, decisive tone of political protest music with the ambiguity and nuance that Bob Dylan began to bring into the genre, indicating the coming of the personal songwriting movement. My second chapter examines the many different usages of the personal in songwriting of this time through the work of musicians such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen, looking at how artists connected with the listener through the greater blend of empathy, accountability, and open-endedness of this mode. My last chapter looks at how the protest ethos combined with “the personal” in songwriting, particularly with Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, creating more powerful, nuanced music that really asked the listener to connect with what the artist was writing about even when they didn't have the answer themselves. Some may say the folk revival was folk's “protest” era—in showing how the desire for change that drove protest combined with the personal lives of artists in their songwriting, I assert that protest is one of the pillars of folk music, and never left the genre. Overarchingly, I am also gently guided by a large question: What is personal? I believe the looseness of this question and its many answers reflect what is found in artists' work; the personal is confusion, the personal is a many-layered emotional cake, the personal is not having the answers, the personal is a constant reflection on oneself that includes change, protest, and introspection.

Keywords: “the personal,” protest, ambiguity, celebrity, identity, empathy

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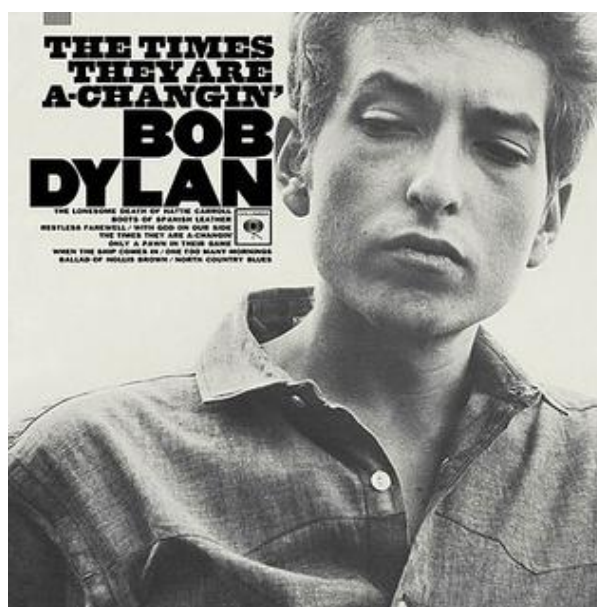


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Introduction

As a listener, it is enchanting to think you are trusted enough by someone you've never met to receive their heart through music. Perhaps this is a bit presumptuous, that through the simple state of being open and listening, you have done enough to be taken into their confidence. More likely, there's this desire for shared experience, the cathartic release of finding yourself reflected in art. It handily creates the illusion that you and the artist have both been equally vulnerable, and have been connected by their vulnerability that you've experienced. However, most often, the artist is the one to have shared their insides with the world, while you have only ever been open with yourself—your vulnerability is not openly shared, save for others perhaps knowing that you like and connect with this artist. Loving a personal artist's music can be an admission of vulnerability, admitting something to others about what you search for in art, what you are searching for in yourself.

Just as your choices in art reflect something in you, so do artists' choices making their art reflect something in them, of course. After all, although song lyrics might seem like immediately raw work in some cases, they are often the result of deep meditations and reworkings, especially when considering lyrical works as in depth as those of Bob Dylan or Joni Mitchell, or as didactic and rhetorical as the writing of Woody Guthrie. When I began to write this thesis, focusing specifically on the period of folk music from the 1960s to the 1970s, I viewed the personal in binary terms: first there was political protest folk music, then there was personal folk music. It's clear in the writing of certain critics and scholars that I was not alone in this assumption.

Michelle Mercer¹, in her book *Will You Take Me As I Am: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period*, discusses how Dylan's "disillusionment with the principles of the '60s led him to look at his own

¹ Mercer, Michelle. "Beyond Personal Songwriting." *Will You Take Me as I Am: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period*, Backbeat Books, Milwaukee, WI, 2012.

emotional vicissitudes instead.” (Mercer, 153) This statement completely separates emotional searching from not only the political content of the music of the folk revival, but also a total difference in *attitude*, a separation from the protest and change of the '60s. Irwin Silber, the editor of folk music journal *Sing Out!* penned an open letter² to Bob Dylan after the release of Dylan's notably personal album *Another Side of Bob Dylan*³ that parted ways with being a political messenger of the 1960s. Silber writes: “But any songwriter who tries to deal honestly with reality in this world is bound to write “protest” songs. How can he help himself? Your new songs seem to be all inner-directed now, innerprobing, self- conscious -- maybe even a little maudlin or a little cruel on occasion.” By using “inner-directed” and “innerprobing” as his main critiques of Dylan's introspection, he does not allow “protest” (which represents the *real world*) to exist in conjunction with personal songwriting. Initially I also assumed that it had to be personal vs. protest, as this somewhat encapsulated a major shift in folk music at this time. The shift was away from music typically written with politics and social movement in mind, in defiance of the way things were and written as an anthem for people to agree with and rally around. Slowly, while keeping the musical aesthetics of the folk genre, the lyrical content evolved to become something that, while hard to specifically pin down, music critics defined as “personal” or “confessional” songwriting as the work of artists evolved. This often meant writing about your own experiences, which were often assumed to be autobiographical. When you were being personal, you were being *factual* about your life, I thought. Yet the more research I undertook, the more I realized that lumping the personal together with autobiography limited what the personal could look like. Honesty did not have to be grounded in fact. Creativity combined with honesty often roots itself in feeling, rather than strict fact, allowing listeners to

² Silber, Irwin. “An Open Letter To Bob Dylan.” *Sing Out!*, Nov. 1964.

³ Dylan, Bob. *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1964.

empathize with the songwriter. Defining the “personal” work of artists as that which is purely factual limited what artists can do, and how comfortably they could express themselves. As such, separating “personal” from “protest” seemed like an inherently flawed boundary to set, given that what is most personal to you affects your life most closely and you want to change it for the better. So where I was initially interested in finding the point of separation between the “personal” and the “protest,” I turned to an investigation of the locations where the two concepts meet and how this meeting affected change in modes of songwriting as a result. This led me to conclude that the protest mode in folk songwriting never actually disappeared from folk; instead, it became more powerful in conjunction with personal songwriting. With the rise of personal songwriting, and the eventual recombination with protest songwriting, folk artists created more powerful, nuanced music that asked the listener to connect with what they were writing about, artist and listener going on the same emotional journey for truth.

Still, there was, of course, some sort of transition in song subjects at the time (distinct from the songwriting *approaches* described above). It must firstly be noted that folk as a genre encompasses many sounds and subgenres (while still possessing an overall aesthetic). This is fitting, given its values as a genre made by and for the people, and can include music from singer-songwriter efforts to folk-rock. Furthermore, in an effort to describe a musical movement without defined temporal boundaries, I will loosely group the “earlier” section of folk as being highly influenced by political, social and civil movements (with “earlier” as a time frame referring to folk music largely written before the mid- 1960s), and the “later” section meaning folk written about the movements and activities of the individual, rather than the society or community (with “later” referring to folk music written during or after the mid-1960s). Especially relevant is that far more music began to actually be written by the artists singing these

songs in this time, instead of folk artists largely covering the work of others as had been done, in part, in the folk revival, as the singer/songwriter generation of folk burst forth. In the forthcoming chapters, I explore this transitional period, elucidate this change in song subjects, and look closely at the works of artists who began to deal directly with the individual in their work, even if that individual wasn't always themselves, as a form of understanding themselves better and connecting more deeply with the listener. In turn, I observe a pattern of change in the ways that prominent musicians, most specifically Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, related to their audiences, as the artists became more honest and honed in on the individual. Often, due to their treatment by fans and the media, they altered the way they approached this style of writing with "the personal" in mind. Although I cover Mitchell and Dylan extensively, they are two prominent examples in my driving questions and argument, instead of the sole focus of my work. Through close readings and a contextualization of their work, I explore the ways they integrated the personal into their music and to what effect on the listener, keeping the overarching question "What is the personal?" in mind as a driving point of interest and connection to this research. "The personal" is clearly an ongoing project of humanity that cannot be fully addressed by any one person, but it is certainly compelling to build my own relationship to it, as well as examine certain folk musicians' relationship to it. Additionally, I look at the ways their "personalness" was cultivated and monetized by critics, industry representatives, and musicians themselves alike, leading to the commercialization of individuality. This was especially the case as the folk celebrity rose, in a time when folk music was considered the pop music of the day due to its thoughtful lyrics deeply relevant to the troubles of the age's youth; these musicians transitioned from communities that looked down on creatives who made money, into a business surrounding music that was hungrily realizing its full potential at this very time. In response, musicians

combined personal and protest in their songs to stand up against a culture that profited off of their image, and tried to keep themselves accountable for their own role in it. How could these artists balance sharing themselves as an honest artist in their songs with making money and maintaining reasonable privacy from cruel and seeking media?

This is an especially relevant question when looking at folk's lyrical history as a genre. A lot of folk singers, such as Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and others before them used their platform to make political points, rooting this genre in anticapitalism. This often aligned folk with the hippie movement of the day, as songwriters called out politicians of the time for their profiteering ways, advocating for the civil rights movement, and speaking out against the Vietnam War, the police, and other systemic forms of violence. In between acoustic guitar strings whistled the hopeful winds of change. The genre's shift into a money-making industry is made further apparent as Sean Nelson writes⁴: "According to a landmark 1976 book* about the inner workings of the record business, the mid-70s rock 'n' roll industry was more lucrative than the movie business (by a factor of \$500 million); it was also bigger than 'football, hockey, basketball, and baseball—both collegiate and pro—added together,'" in his book on the commercialization delved into by Joni Mitchell on her seminal album *Court and Spark*. (Nelson, 17) There was no escaping the uncomfortable truth: people were making money off of music.

This leads me to my first chapter, in which I examine the straightforward decisiveness of political folk songwriting and its rhetorical strategies, and the emerging strains of ambiguity and the relationship to the listener emerging in Dylan's work, indicators of elements of the personal mode of songwriting. The artist I will look at most specifically is Bob Dylan, setting his work in context among other music titans of the era, and comparing it to older folk songwriters, such as

⁴ Nelson, Sean. *Court and Spark*. Continuum, 2007.

Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Additionally, I will consider the protest music of Dylan's contemporaries in the '60s, looking at the work of Joan Baez and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Dylan is important to observe, especially on his album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*⁵ (1963), as he changed the face of protest music, advancing the nuance and craft of protest songs, giving them that edge of the personal that made them find their target in the listener's heart.

Following this, in my second chapter, I break down works by Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, James Taylor, and Leonard Cohen to drive home the impact and range of what can be considered personal songwriting, and its uses and effects on the listener. Through their songwriting, one can see their development of personal songwriting; they introduce ambiguity, elements of confusion and a willingness to meditate on their mistakes, giving a depth to the genre. The chapter will dig into the lyrics of albums that were mostly written at the point of change, when the popularity of confessional songwriting began to rise, and investigate the many facets of the personal. Two albums I especially keep in mind are *Blue*⁶ by Joni Mitchell and *Blood On The Tracks*⁷ by Bob Dylan. I believe and emphasize that every truly meaningful piece of art has a piece of the creator within it, tying honesty and empathy together.

My third and last chapter looks at artists' response to the commercialization of them done by media, fans and themselves. I argue that they combined the personal and protest modes in songwriting, using them to more emotionally and empathetically make their point and their protest against their own celebrity. Mitchell and Dylan serve as two examples, with very different ways of responding. For Dylan, a desire to escape the path planned out for him by his fans led him to identity-based songwriting, and made him use identity as a concept to hide behind; it was never clear what amount of himself he was putting into his songs. In some cases,

⁵ Dylan, Bob. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1963

⁶ Mitchell, Joni. *Blue*, Reprise Records. 1971.

⁷ Dylan, Bob. *Blood On The Tracks*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1975.

this lead to him being accused of using the identities of others for his own profit in his songwriting, such as on *Desire*⁸ (1976), becoming a shadow, or calculating his own celebrity, such as on *Nashville Skyline*⁹ (1969) as is noted in music journalism of the time by writers such as Lester Bangs and Ellen Willis. Meanwhile, Mitchell withdrew from the honesty of her first released forays into songwriting with albums such as *For The Roses*¹⁰ and *Court and Spark*¹¹, still accessing the deeply personal but often through stories that were not necessarily her own, or at least making the narrative less clear than it had been. It is through this exercise in deep-rooted empathy that Mitchell finds power and kindness as a songwriter, accessing both her own emotions and those of the audience without ever becoming so exposed as to be uncomfortably on display. In this, she also reclaimed the power of her own image, and her agency over it, a form of protest against sexist takes on her work. Vitally, these artists (re-)introduced protest to their personal work, using protest as a way to emphasize their personal aggravations and beliefs, while acknowledging a gray moral space, as was a defining characteristic of “the personal.”

In a small addition to the study of these works, I investigate the lingering effects of identity and protest being mixed and brought to the forefront of folk music, studying artists such as Gillian Welch and the band Big Thief. This serves as a sort of conclusion to my thesis, as these artists also mean a great deal to me personally. They also uphold the protest ethos in folk. The artists of the folk revival paved a path that never let go of protest, but was made richer by personal songwriting that encouraged mutual introspection from artist and listener. But before we get to that, we have to start at the beginning—or rather, *a* beginning, for folk music, magical genre that it is, has been around practically as long as humans have been singing...

⁸ Dylan, Bob. *Desire*, Columbia Records, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1976.

⁹ Dylan, Bob. *Nashville Skyline*, Columbia Records, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1969.

¹⁰ Mitchell, Joni. *For The Roses*, Asylum. 1972.

¹¹ Mitchell, Joni. *Court and Spark*, Asylum. 1974.

CHAPTER ONE– “Blowin’ In The Wind:” Opening A Space For Ambiguity

The 1960s was filled with the sound of protest, especially in the form of folk songs. Though the work of artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and others is fast sorted into the “protest” genre box, this sort of automatic titling can be more harmful than helpful, as it often reduces these songs down to one aspect, erasing a lot of the nuance and personal connection the artist put into the song. As Jerry Rodnitsky¹² points out in “The Decline and Rebirth of Folk-Protest Music,” folk singers did not necessarily consider their music to be protest music, but often, in telling their own stories, they centered a theme of protest, building stories from their own lives. Judy Collins articulates it well: in a 2004 interview noted by Rodnitsky, asked when she would begin to perform protest songs again, she noted that her songs were already protest songs, they just did not protest what was popular at the time. In this vein, we see that the labeling by the media of songs as “protest songs” often referred to the political content they covered, rather than the drive or artistic intention behind the song. For a long time, there was a notable “political” style of folk songwriting that often overlapped with protest and did *not* contain personal elements. In the 1960s, this began to change, signifying the rise of personal songwriting.

Going forward, in this chapter and beyond, I will deal heavily with the ideas (but also the *terms*) “the political,” “the personal,” and to a lesser extent, “the apocalyptic” in songwriting. Importantly, I also use “protest” as a word in conjunction with both personal and political music—it is a mindset from which songs are written, describing their tone rather than their content. I will define “the political” in this context, and in relation to the folk tradition, as being clear, directed and motivational—something especially true of older political folk songs, from

¹² Peddie, Ian, and Jerry Rodnitsky. “The Decline and Rebirth of Folk-Protest Music.” *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, Routledge, 2017.

the musical movement before “the personal” complicated the songwriting (circa the early to mid 1960s). The songs written as political pieces were tunes that could be sung at a rally, ones that gathered a community together. They also often painted situations as black and white, with two sides, in some cases clarifying an enemy. This term, in some cases, works in contrast with “the apocalyptic”—whereas political songwriting worked extensively with hope, making room for change, the apocalypse makes one helpless. With apocalyptic doom, much more is predestined, happening more or less as it will happen. Lastly, “the personal” is the dearest and most important term I work with here, and doesn’t have one easy definition. While I am eager to explore the different ways it is used and build up the complexity of this word, for the time being in this first chapter, I will define it in relation to these other terms. Here, it means a turn towards introspection and away from the broadness of “political” in music, using some sort of lens of the individual in one’s songwriting. Personal songwriting lives in a space of ambiguity; often, the songwriter somehow acknowledges their own subjectivity and the nuance of the matter.

Dylan thrived in this blending of the personal into his songwriting, integrating the listener and allowing any protest sentiments to strike even deeper with his listeners. The impact of and change created by his work is clear when looking at the history of folk, and who came before him. In notable music journalist Ellen Willis’s essay on Dylan¹³, published in 1967, Willis gives important context to how the folk genre was imbued with politics, stating that Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Malvina Reynolds all served as older family members to this movement. Pete Seeger was a crucial figure in the folk movement prior to Dylan, a perfect example of a musician ingrained in the tradition of folk. He was described in his obituary in the *New York Times*¹⁴ as a

¹³ Willis, Ellen. “Dylan.” *Cheetah*, 1967.

¹⁴ Pareles, Jon. “Pete Seeger, Champion of Folk Music and Social Change, Dies at 94.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 28 Jan. 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/arts/music/pete-seeger-songwriter-and-champion-of-folk-music-dies-at-94.html>.

“singer, folk-song collector and songwriter.” (Pareles) Important here to note is that “folk-song collector” comes before “songwriter,” highlighting a key way that Seeger engaged with music—as per the folk tradition, he often recorded songs written by others, that had passed through many hands before his own (it is called *folk* music, after all). It appreciates the personal element in live folk performances that feel personal just in the way they are experienced as an intimate community. It does not highlight the experiences of the individual; rather, it asks them to cast aside their individuality and raise their voices in song together. “Folk,” as the name might imply, encourages the folk to come together. Seeger’s work as a musician was built on learning from the past, and using it heavily going forward. This was the case with the artists of the ’60s and ’70s as well—the difference here is that not only did he learn from the past, but he often worked with tunes written by someone long before him. He participated in the tradition of folk as something passed hand to hand, changing imperceptibly.

Seeger famously performed the song “Which Side Are You On?” a track about unionizing (originally written by Florence Reece in 1931¹⁵) (Lomax). It is an obviously decisive song, asking the listener to be for or against the union, and deriding them if they were in opposition. With lyrics like, “Oh workers can you stand it? / Oh tell me how you can? / Will you be a lousy scab / Or will you be a man?,” the tone and the decision the song wants you to make is clear. The chorus consists of many repetitions of “Which side are you on?” with a slow and steady tune bouncing between a few notes; it is easy to sing along to. It’s a song you can imagine at protests. It perfectly exemplifies these key traits of older political folk songwriting, even moreso because this tune wasn’t written by Seeger (the artist who made it famous), but had clearly been passed along. Seeger was not the first nor the last person to sing this. It was a song

¹⁵ Lomax, Alan, and Elizabeth (arranger) Poston. *Penguin Book of American Folksongs: 111 Ballads, Sea Shanties, Love Songs, Lullabies, Reels, Worksongs, Cowboy Songs and Spirituals Popular in America from Colonial Days to Modern Times*, Penguin, 1964, p. 139.

written by the wife of a union organizer for a miners group—it was meant to be as broadly applicable as possible, asking everyone to participate instead of highlighting individuality. This is a huge difference from the confessional direction in folk some decades later, and contains far more of the political than the personal. The personal, as an inherently subjective songwriting mode, makes room for gray space, and there’s none of that here.

Another beautiful protest track of Seeger’s is “Where Have All The Flowers Gone?,” (1955) put together by the artist himself with the lyrics inspired by the traditional Cossack folk song “Koloda-Duda” and the melody borrowed from an Irish tune¹⁶. In his construction of the song alone, Seeger’s openness to communities outside his own is apparent. The way he borrows from them and adds his own material is highly in keeping with the folk tradition up to this point. This track strikes a different, mournful tone. It once again paints in broad strokes, addressing a wide audience. This is evident in the following lyrics:

Young girls

They’ve taken husbands every one.

Young men

They’re all in uniform.

Soldiers

They’ve gone to graveyards every one.

Graveyards

They’re covered with flowers every one.

Flowers

Young girls have picked them every one.

¹⁶ Sands, Tommy and Seeger, Pete. ““Where have all the Flowers gone,’ connecting Ukraine and Ireland, a chat with Pete Seeger.” YouTube, uploaded by Tommy Sands Music, 2 Mar.. 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oetsbC5kTak>.

Each marked “character” is introduced as a group—girls, soldiers, flowers. Even when these groups get separated into individual beings, it is still as individuals that are part of a community, with the words “every one.” “One” marks them as individuals, while “every” makes sure to still mark them as part of a community. This song takes care *not* to become too personal, leaving everyone in anonymous groups that are easy to understand on paper because they are painted in broad strokes. It is also distinct from personal songwriting in that it makes generalizations, again putting the issue in black and white. There are no exceptions to the loss of the girls, the uniforming of the young men, the deaths of the soldiers and flowers. With this, it makes its regretful stance clear, sending a direct message, serving as a clear example of the direct political/protest songwriting common in folk leading up to the ’60s. The repetitive nature of the song also makes no inroads to new emotional material; rather, this structure drives one specific point all the way home. It also forms a circle, beginning with the young girls and connecting them to flowers in the very end, tying the song into a lyrically neat knot. There is nothing left unresolved here except for the terribleness of the war he is protesting.

In various biographies online, Seeger is described as someone who preserved rather than innovated in music; on a list of 20 essential Pete Seeger tracks, published by the famous music publication *Rolling Stone*¹⁷ in memorium, only around a quarter were originals written by him. He played from early in his life (born in 1919) until very late, releasing an album titled *At 89* in 2008, a few years before his passing in 2014. He guarded folk traditionalism, passing along music as a way of sharing breath and moments. As many acknowledge, he *did* write impactful original songs, but what sets him and Dylan apart is that Seeger, along with Guthrie, and others, represent this older guard of folk. They often made old, traditional songs their own, adapting and

¹⁷ Rolling Stone. “Pete Seeger: 20 Essential Tracks.” *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 28 Jan. 2014, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/pete-seeger-20-essential-tracks-12893/>.

revising, instead of performing individualistic music that was, most of the time, original, as Dylan did. All three represented a strongly political side of music, but this was Seeger and Guthrie's defining songwriting trait. Seeger came under Congressional review during the Cold War (which coincided with the whole of the folk revival) for being a member of the Communist Party, and using his music to spread a progressive message. (Dunaway¹⁸) As is evident, politics had played a heavy role in folk music, certainly before Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, and even before Guthrie and Seeger. Pieces such as Willis's essay on Dylan at this time make clear just how much the music world expected folk to (continue to) deal with the political.

Woody Guthrie was a friend of Pete Seeger's, and another key figure in recorded political folk; with a sign reading "This Machine Kills Fascists" famously tacked onto his guitar, he was a socialist, writing articles for communist publications such as the *Daily Worker* and the *People's World* (Kaufman, Dilawar¹⁹). His famous song "This Land Is Your Land" is nowadays often made into a strangely patriotic, oversimplified theme for America. But lyrics omitted from the largely well known version change the lens through which one might see it, as follows:

As I went walking I saw a sign there,
 And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
 But on the other side it didn't say nothing.
 That side was made for you and me.
 In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
 By the relief office I seen my people;

¹⁸ Dunaway, David King. *A Pete Seeger Discography : Seventy Years of Recordings*, Scarecrow Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=662209>.

¹⁹ Kaufman, Will, and Arvind Dilawar. "The Radicalism of Woody Guthrie —An Interview with Will Kaufman." *Jacobin*, 26 Aug. 2020, <https://jacobin.com/2020/08/woody-guthrie-socialism-radical-kaufman>.

As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking

Is this land made for you and me?

Looking at the lyrics a bit further, one might note the use of “I” and “you” establishing a companionship between singer and listener early on. Guthrie asks, “Is this land made for you and me?”, and by constantly using “you and me” together in a phrase, puts himself into community with the listener. Using the first person makes the song’s tone *seem* intimate and personal. There is certainly honesty about how he feels regarding the difficulties the working class in America face, but always in a broad sense that does not feel personalized. Through the “I” and “you,” the listener may feel like they have a place in the song, but the song is vague enough to be able to have that effect on *any* person. Through the non-specifics, any listener gets to be involved—they *are* a character in the song, the problems listed applying to them as well. Furthermore, the question, although open-ended, leads the listener, telling them there is a right answer through the directness of the facts presented.

Joan Baez, a political folk musician who began performing in the early 1960s (and was a paramour of Dylan’s around this time), followed largely in the footsteps of Seeger and Guthrie as a folk musician and songwriter. In Markus Jaeger’s dissertation²⁰, “Popular Is Not Enough: The Political Voice Of Joan Baez: A Case Study In The Biographical Method,” he makes her early rootedness in protest apparent. She was a figurehead in the folk scene of the 1960s, an image that the youth was attracted towards, and could attach themselves to and identify with. She also performed mostly the songs of others—in a video²¹ from the late 1960s, she performs “Sweet Sir

²⁰ Jaeger, Markus. Popular Is Not Enough: The Political Voice Of Joan Baez : A Case Study In The Biographical Method, Ibidem Verlag, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=5781886>.

²¹ Baez, Joan. “Joan Baez - Sweet Sir Galahad.” YouTube, uploaded by Kevin Macquer, 20 Feb. 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9cpBML9SoE>.

Galahad,” calling it the “only song that I’ve ever written that I sing [that] works outside of the bathtub.” This one is highly personal, about the passing of her little sister’s husband, a folk singer named Richard Fariña. For the most part, though, she covered others’ songs, following the tradition of passing along the voice of the people, not just her own. She is renowned for her rendition of “We Shall Overcome,” a traditional gospel/folk song that Seeger also famously covered as aforementioned. She performed this at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (Pelly²²), and in a BBC televised performance in 1965²³, she asks that the audience sing with her. She calls out the lyrics ahead of time so that no one gets lost. The lyrics of this song make it instantly evident that this song is not meant to glorify or highlight the experiences of one individual—the first word in the title speaks of community. The lyrics are variable, and change from version to version, but (like “Which Side Are You On?”) they are simple and repetitive, easy to memorize and sing along to. Each stanza contains a word of community—“we,” “us,” “together.” Like Pete Seeger, she was cut from the folk cloth—a performer who was there to engage in community and perform with others, instead of becoming a celebrity on their own. Celebrity figures are different; they often innovate, driving their craft further, but also become isolated, commercialized figures—something evident with Bob Dylan, among others.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young were fellow folk artists during this time, similarly making political forays with songs like “Ohio.” Written to protest the Kent State Massacre in which the Ohio National Guard killed four protesting students and wounded nine more, the intensity is teeth-gritting. The song has a morbid marching rhythm, with opportunities for anguished, improvised yells from the band. Importantly, it has their signature harmonies—key

²² Pelly, Liz. “Five Songs of Resistance: The Protest Songs of Joan Baez.” *Shadowproof*, 16 Jan. 2020, <https://shadowproof.com/2017/07/01/five-songs-resistance-joan-baez/>.

²³ Baez, Joan. “Joan Baez - We Shall Overcome (BBC Television Theatre, London - June 5, 1965).” YouTube, uploaded by John1948SevenB, 28 Oct. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nM39QUiAsoM>.

from this group who helped make the folk song, for so long a simple tune intentionally made to be easy to pass around, for anyone to learn, into a more layered art form. It's clear exactly how the listener is meant to feel—"Four dead in Ohio" is howled over and over, and the scene is depicted clearly: "Tin soldiers and Nixon coming / We're finally on our own." The listener can picture the disaster headed straight for them, without any idea of how to stop it. This song was part of the new political folk scene surrounding Dylan as he headed into the personal. There is an artfulness to it, but it still takes the point of view of the collective, with a clear point that it wants to leave with you. At its root, this is a song meant to make a community come together.

Politics, in short, was expected of folk. In Willis's essay, we see how knotted Dylan was to political folk music in the public eye through the notable music journalist's writing; for instance, she includes casual asides such as, "[His first album] contained only two Dylan compositions, both nonpolitical." It is in such "throw away" language that we see how Dylan was viewed by the culture of the time, and that the political was seen as his typical ground. It is clear that his audience had expectations for him, that his fame had grown out of political songwriting, and as such this was what was awaited of him going forward. We can also see the longevity of this association, as Willis's essay was published in 1967, three years after Dylan had decisively turned away from political content. Additionally, Willis refers to the genre as "folk music—that is, antiestablishment music." In this blending of the two, we can once again see how strongly political lyrics were associated with earlier folk music aesthetics: tunes written with sparse arrangements, often by one person. Anyone, it seemed, could (theoretically) pick up an instrument and challenge the institutions they disagreed with. Willis also noted Dylan's specific connection to and influence on politics, writing of how Peter, Paul and Mary (an important and popular folk trio of the 1960s) covered "Blowin' In The Wind," a song of Dylan's about the large

questions that the government turned a blind eye to. With lyrics like, “And how many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free? / Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head / And pretend that he just doesn't see?,” the questions were heavy-hitting, but written with beauty and attention to word choice. Willis commented on the legacy of this song, saying: “[Peter, Paul and Mary’s] recording of the song sold a million copies, inspired more than fifty other versions, and established topical song as the most important development of the folk revival. The relative subtlety of the lyric made the topical movement aesthetically self-conscious. It did not drive out direct political statements — Dylan himself continued to write them — but it set a standard impossible to ignore, and topical songs began to show more wit, more craftsmanship, more variety.”

This suggests that not only did Dylan follow in the political steps of his forebears at first, but he was in large part responsible for developing political folk songs into a more refined practice, something that could be done with subtlety, nuance, and beauty like any other art form. This might seem as though he made them more complex, possibly distancing his audience—in fact, he put politics on terms that, through his masterful writing, naturally induced empathy. He introduced *emotional* nuance to the field of politics, rather than further intellectualizing it. Although his writing became more subtle and innovative, this did not have to mean that it became more highbrow—the messages concerning political mindset still came back to what his listeners would instinctively understand, because they could *feel* them. The song does not go quite so far as to become actively personal, but does begin to lay the foundations for this later movement in folk. The chorus of “Blowin’ In The Wind” makes this attitude instantly apparent: “The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind.” By the simple act of addressing the listener as a friend, he makes the setting feel intimate and small, like he is singing to you, like you have

context for his thinking on what he is singing about, like this is a conversation the two of you have had many times before. He brought the political song closer to his audience—the trouble was, they took the closeness and empathy of his storytelling as permission to come even closer.

Having analyzed lyrical content in both “This Land Is Your Land” and “Blowin’ In The Wind,” two songs of long lasting fame with roots in the political and the protest, it is worth examining them side by side, to see the change covered in the 20-odd years between them. Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ In The Wind” lays the ground for the personal. Although it still has a clear message it wishes to impart with his listeners instead of treating the song as a search for the answer, he integrates his audience into his themes of protest so as to set them up for the same emotional highs and lows that he experiences with injustices. He sets them up with questions, asking them to introspect on their own relationship to his material. In this tune, he involves the listener right from the start by posing the song as a series of questions:

“How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they’re forever banned?”

The questions invite the listener to share in the frustration and disappointment with which they are posed. Their ambiguity makes them more thought-provoking. They can be read in different tones—rhetorical in some ways, yet still demanding an answer. When posed as rhetorical, they seem to urge the listener to contribute their own grievances, perhaps in the form of exclamations or affirmations. But by making the song so open-ended and yet with a pointed direction to the

questions, he also invites the listener to reflect on their own answers; in the end, listeners create a far more intimate relationship with the material by arriving at their own conclusions (nevertheless helped along by the phrasing of the questions), rather than being told what to think.

Meanwhile, Guthrie's song, as discussed, uses the "I" and "you" throughout, but addresses the general "you", not getting too personal with the listener. The song is mostly statements of Guthrie's belief that this land was made for all. And when a question does come, it lands with great intention: "By the relief office I seen my people; / As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking / Is this land made for you and me?" This is part of the verses left out of the most popular version; in the most well-known set of lyrics, a question never arises. The asking of this question is the portal to the whole song, however, and it makes sense that without it, the song has been so often mis-interpreted as a staunchly patriotic tune. The question seems to make Guthrie vulnerable in a moment of uncertainty about this country. But far from giving the matter gray space, it actually drives home the point he has been making this whole song: He wants to make sure this country is actually made for all. The question remains unresolved, and the last thing that Guthrie asks, leaving it with the listener (In some versions, the question is rephrased to a statement). Through the question but also the *hesitation* surrounding this question, one sees how folk music could sometimes dip its toe into the ambiguity of the personal, but protest songs like this were generally more direct in their sentiments, using their opinions as claims instead of invoking a subtler relationship with the listener so as to reach these opinions and conclusions together. Questions were rhetorical strategies rather than invitations. Guthrie phrased his clear answer as a question. Dylan's questions in "Blowin' In The Wind" were never "yes/no" queries ("How many roads must a man walk down / Before you call him a man?", "And how many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free?"). In their vastness and

unanswerableness, they had a more personal, subtle relationship with the listener, leaving them thinking; the rhetoric of “learning together” through the ambiguity of these questions potentially provided a far more helpful, influential method of political songwriting than the in-your-face style of other musicians. Rodnitsky mentions that Arlo Guthrie and Judy Collins, both notable folk musicians of the time, didn’t feel that protest music made a big impact, but rather served as preaching to the choir. By speaking in questions and encouraging the listener to engage in this self-reflection, personally done protest music could more sensitively make a larger impact on listeners, perhaps even actually changing the minds of some.

“All Along The Watchtower” by Bob Dylan, released on *John Wesley Harding*²⁴ (1967), comes *after* Dylan largely rejected politics on *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), and further injects a more ambiguous narrative into protest messaging. It is no longer the sort of black and white political statement that Dylan used to write, rather just carrying a caution in innuendo, perhaps meant to inspire self/societal-reflection through some degree of fear. In *Dylan’s Autobiography of a Vocation*, Louis A. Renza²⁵ suggests the two riders in the song represent two different sides of Dylan (a joker and a thief) approaching society, bringing warnings. Through these grand metaphors of society and its problems being told in a narrative style, Dylan demonstrates how intricately interwoven the faults of society and things that shape it (like the government and large corporations) are into our own every days, even when they seem so large as to be out of touch with our lives completely. One can tell this distinctly apart from Dylan’s former political/societal work, as this song does not try to offer any solutions. Instead, with the unresolvedness that the personal would later bring into songwriting in full force, it acknowledges that there is no single answer, with answers at any rate being hard to sum one up in four verses

²⁴ Dylan, Bob. *John Wesley Harding*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1967.

²⁵ Renza, Louis A.. *Dylan's Autobiography of a Vocation: A Reading of the Lyrics 1965-1967*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

and a chorus. There's a warning when the riders approach, as Dylan sings that "the wind began to howl." Of course, a joker and a thief aren't the two most reliable characters to take advice from—perhaps this is Dylan recognizing how some people see him, as a musician with no technical, "educated" expertise in the politics he wrote about before this. However, they soon prove to be sage characters, with the most poignant piece of advice from the song being:

"No reason to get excited," the thief, he kindly spoke
 "There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke
 But you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate
 So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late."

In this, Dylan affirms that just because he is moving away from political songwriting does not mean that he is taking life or society any less seriously. This is a call to action, without attempting to dictate people's actions. It suggests the path of thinking he has taken, but does not force the listener to take his side. By presenting himself as a joker and a thief, he is fitting to carry the warning, but not to have the burden of leadership thrust upon him as a result.

"Talkin' World War III Blues," off of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*²⁶ (1963), similarly takes politics and an impending sense of doom and puts it on personally relatable terms: it sets the stage for a nightmare. Dylan dreams of a world war, with a doctor telling him, "Them old dreams are only in your head." This brings the tragedy of such a war into personal terms for Dylan, as the doctor tells him that it exists only inside of him. As the song progresses, the world war he imagines is put on political terms that would sound eerily familiar to anyone existing alongside him in 1960s Cold War-era society—he rings a fallout shelter bell, and a man he calls "friend" thinks him to be a communist and runs away screaming. This personal-"only"-to-Dylan element is interestingly reversed at the end of the song—everyone can relate to a nightmare. The

²⁶ Dylan, Bob. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1963.

doctor tells him: “Hey I’ve been havin’ the same old dreams / But mine was a little different you see / I dreamt that the only person left after the war was me / I didn’t see you around.” With this, it’s clear that such a scenario can feel so personal that it might scare one into thinking they’re the only one to experience it. Dylan merges personal and political at the end, singing, “Everybody’s having them dreams / Everybody sees themselves walkin’ around with no one else / ... I’ll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours.” Here, the artist acknowledges the universality of this fear, that the root of the problem is the polarization of society, and offers a tentative solution—to stick together, something he bids the listener personally. The one-on-one narration of the song is striking, both in Dylan’s conversation with the doctor, and his turn to the listener. The half-dream song is not as straightforward as older political folk work. Pete Seeger’s songs/famous recordings took a different approach, with removed narrators (as in “Where Have All The Flowers Gone?”), or asking a crowd to move as one (such as in his famous version of “We Shall Overcome.”) These songs served to preach to a larger crowd, rather than addressing the individuals and their individual fears directly. Dylan’s own writing of songs, as opposed to Seeger’s covering the work of others, increased the autonomy he had over the impact he made on the listener, increasing his ability to connect with them emotionally, and setting him up to be an initiator of the personal in folk. The folk scene around him, including Baez and CSN+Y, was still headed on a train towards politics, with straightforward lyrics that depicted events in a black-and-white manner. Dylan changed the course of the track.

CHAPTER TWO: “All I Want:” The Birth of Personal Songwriting

Perhaps “confessional,” “individualized,” or “personal” songwriting can feel like isolating concepts (with all three terms having slightly different definitions). It can seem like an individual writing to their own experience, and leaving everyone else out. In fact, I find that the most personal music (a subjective metric, surely) is that which invites the listener inside, asking listeners to experience things on their own terms and connect with the music from some part deep inside themselves. Often, several folk artists in the 1960s and ’70s did that by displaying vulnerability concerning their own experiences or emotional state, allowing the listener to step in with them and undergo this experience together. It was an emotional quest in which the artists themselves did not have all the answers, and even made mistakes—their music was used as a method of reflecting and meditating on all of this. This journey through song and ambiguity emerged in opposition to the forced focus of the political songwriter, who had to know what they wanted to convince the listener of in order to write their song. In this next section of my thesis, I unpack the various uses of “the personal” in songwriting, what it did with the emotional journey and drive of folk songs. “The personal” evolved the folk form’s emotional capacity; although it briefly seemed that protest had left the genre, this would soon be disproven. In this chapter, I examine the in-between phase before protest made its role known in conjunction with the personal—here, the reader may observe the many uses of the personal, and the emotional impact of the personal on folk. Moving into this chapter, it is worth revisiting how I have been using “the personal,” as going forward I will show many different sides of how it is used by artists. The term, in how I continue to use and shape it, means a place from which the artist writes, a method of how they connect with their audience by bringing themselves closer and allowing some form of vulnerability. It can involve factual honesty, but doesn’t have to—more so, it is an emotional

honesty, asking their listener to become part of their song, sometimes by directing it towards them with questions and tone, and sometimes by just opening themselves up. It is certainly part of the birth/surge of confessional songwriting in this time period, which I largely investigate in this thesis, but is more so a mentality, a feeling of allowance to be oneself whether artist or listener, and the idea that every work is ingrained with a piece of oneself in some way.

“Confessional” is a slightly more limited term than “the personal”—I use confessional to mean a song rooted in more strictly factual autobiography, with the emotions described being more easily traceable to real life events. The personal approach could be used even when artists wrote about lives not their own; often, through pondering the experiences of another individual, they found some clarity of their own. This kind of personal introspection and individual lens, along with inviting the introspection of their listeners, is what defined this movement in folk music.

Another defining factor was the complication of feeling present—there was not just one emotional note in these songs but many, revealing the narrator to be a real and human person, not some curated image. In these songs, artists were personal because they were humans who messed up and didn’t always have a clear lesson they had learned, or hadn’t “figured it out”—and their music became all the more personal and touching for it. Artists did not come to the stage having their mind made up and their message ready for the audience like that of political songwriters; instead, they asked for a *process* of personalness, as artist and audience together learned more about who they were. This process was, necessarily, individualistic, and one person would not have the exact same experience as another.

The lyrics included in *Blue* by Joni Mitchell (1971) serve as a perfect example. They heart-wrenchingly involved the personal, in a way that seems obvious but is still worth examining so that the degree of their honesty can be fully understood. *Blue*, as Mitchell’s fourth

studio album, was not her first foray into the personal. It followed *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), her first album to go platinum in the U.S. (a stunt *Blue* also accomplished), which brought her fame and attention. *Blue* garnered her a lot of good press and a lot of sexist press (which I will go into later), but most of all painted a very revealing portrait of her. It was given with trust to her audience. It is most commonly acknowledged as having to deal with loneliness and the stages of love. But as any confessional songwriter worth their salt will tell you, albums (or songs!) whose emotions can be classified in one word are not truly personal and confessional, as the heart is never really feeling just one emotion. As such, the album holds just as much love as it does loss in it, as without a clear and full representation of the love, the listener could not fully process the pain of what Mitchell has lost.

One of the best examples of this lively, full-blooded, complicated love is the record-opener, “All I Want.” The lyrics include minute details, such as her desire to “wreck [her] stockings in some jukebox dive,” and of course the iconically loving lines “I wanna talk to you, I wanna shampoo you / Wanna renew you again and again.” These feel like the kinds of details that emerge from true stories and memories, giving the listener an intimate look into the most personal monotony of her life and love. Shampooing her lover is a simple yet close act, a ritualistic and regular cleansing that she offers to complete. Love would be nothing without the details. With these small pieces she builds her love story up for the listener, making it all the more potent when she reveals what is going wrong: “Oh the jealousy.” This “love” song (and the whole record) opens with the lines, “I am on a lonely road and / I am traveling.” What happy love story begins with an admission of loneliness even inside a relationship? The pain they cause each other is not overlooked, as she sings, “Do you see, do you see, do you see how you hurt me, baby? / So I hurt you too / Then we both get so blue.” Admitting her and her lover’s

failures—the ways they hurt each other, their pettiness in reciprocating the pain inflicted on them—takes a lot of strength to display to an audience. These are the kinds of shortcomings you don't often want to admit — even to yourself. Throughout the album, she is willing to admit her imperfections, cracking this image of perfection in celebrity. Her list of desires also aches with intimacy; there can be something soul-baringly painful about telling someone all the things you want but don't have. By letting us know that she wants to “be the one that you want to see,” to “knit you a sweater,” and repeatedly to, “make you feel free,” she shows us her hopes for her romance, the walls she feels they have not yet breached.

There is a similar difficult candor at the end of “River,” another track off *Blue* in which Mitchell takes a very hard look at herself. The song winds itself up as she wishes she had a river she could “skate away on,” with the image becoming nearly tangible in the listener's mind. Slowly, she unveils the story of her stress within the music industry, where she says: “I'm going to make a lot of money / Then I'm going to quit this crazy scene.” She already feels the unsettledness of the artificiality: in the scene, in the snowless greenery of southern California. The choice to make this a Christmas tune was intentional—there's an alienation that she feels, embalmed in the sun of L.A., from her inner snowiness. And then in the heart of the song, her voice thin and quivering, she admits, “I made my baby cry.” A few lines later, she sings gently, almost as if she were talking to you, “I'm so hard to handle / I'm selfish and I'm sad / Now I've gone and lost the best baby / That I ever had.” And in one of the last personal lines, she admits (loudly at first, then sadly softening), “I made my baby say goodbye.” In this song, she takes responsibility for the issues in the relationship, not letting herself off the hook. For her to be upfront and admit her own flaws, her own *selfishness*, a trope of celebrity, certainly packs a punch. It takes away the glamor of fame while conceding that she might have some of the

negative attributes of a star. Taking responsibility for her own flaws also marks a drastic turn from political folk, which only ever focused on the faults of the other side. But she complicates this by simultaneously crafting the song around her desire to run away, repeating “Oh, I wish I had a river / I could skate away on.” The heart is never just one thing, and as admirably and vulnerably as Mitchell stands up to herself, pointing out her own flaws and perhaps trying to gather the awareness to do better, so does she at the same time want to run away from all this accountability and sorrow, knowing that she messed up. There isn’t a clear moral message in this song—you know that she’s the one that made the mistakes, yet can’t help but empathize and feel bad for her as she admits her heartbrokenness. This is the complexity of personal songwriting, and where it differs so dramatically from political songwriting—there are many emotions, often conflicting ones, experienced and expressed all at once. She’s not telling you what to feel, but offering you a more whole narrative, and allowing you to decide for yourself.

Interestingly, some of the most personal songs on the album retained a secrecy in their honesty, the most prominent example being “Little Green”; in the vein of ambiguity, personal songwriters often wrote about their most intimate emotions, but without always feeling the need to clarify. Lyrics like “Born with the moon in Cancer / Choose her a name she will answer to / Call her Green, and the winters cannot fade her / Call her Green for the children who’ve made her” seem cryptic at first. Or perhaps they are obvious: a list of wishes for a child born to “the children who’ve made her.” It is interesting that, given the deeply honest nature of the rest of this record, no one should assume that this might also find basis in the facts of her life. But it took until the early ’90s, when a tabloid²⁷ would expose Mitchell’s secret of giving her baby up for adoption, for the public to discover just how true the lyrics to this song really were (Johnson).

²⁷ Johnson, Brian D. “Joni’s Secret: Mother And Child Reunion.” *Maclean’s*, 21 Apr. 1997, pp. 48–52.

Knowing the burning, painful truth of these lyrics, while seeing how she had to slightly disguise their message creates heart wrenching layers to this track. The pain found in the autobiography of lines like “He went to California / Hearing that everything’s warmer there” is apparent, the time-old tale of a woman left with her life upended by a choice two people had made; the feeling of desertion is made more universal and available to the listener through her hurt. Her child’s father’s trip to California is also laced with the idealism and escapism of the ’60s; with this album released in 1971 and this tragic story of her giving up their child, she is the one who has to deal with the fallout of ’60s idealism, and remain in the real situation she is left with, with consequences either way. Political folk songs of the ’60s often encouraged this sort of idealism, whereas her personal songwriting has to be realistic, because it’s about her life. Any action taken in this song is more concrete. There’s a hurt to being left alone, and a sarcasm, as well as a lingering fondness for him, when she sings, “So you write him a letter and say ‘Her eyes are blue’ / He sends you a poem and she's lost to you / Little green, he’s a non-conformer.” Her old admiration for his wayward behavior is now complicated by her bitterness towards him, seen in the slight admiration, disappointment at, and derision of his “nonconformity,” all overlapping with the love in this song for her child. It is also worth (heartbreakingly) noticing that the color of her child’s eyes matches the title of the album. Making a song at this time took courage—listeners could have seen this song as containing moral gray space too, admitting to relations out of wedlock and parting ways with her child (although listeners today would most likely and should be more understanding of all the nuances involved in and upsides of such decisions). The vulnerability of her outlook is deeply apparent once the lines are set into context. “Child with a child pretending / Weary of lies you are sending home,” she sings, her second reference to her own child-like state. And in the way she sings this song, her naked vulnerability

seems to transport her back to this state of childhood once more; the singer becomes both her childlike self (pregnant and giving birth at only 21) and her own child through imagining the child's life, complicating her own perspective by trying to see things from various viewpoints. She acknowledges the hurt her child will probably feel through being given up to adoption, but maintains that her love for the baby will keep living on. Although this may be argued to be one of the most keenly honest songs on the record, the secrecy of its subject balances the deeply personal emerging in songwriting while still being, in some sense, veiled. The song finishes: "There'll be icicles and birthday clothes / And sometimes there'll be sorrow," as she imagines the world her daughter will live in that she will never come to know.

Let us now turn to the closing song on the album: "The Last Time I Saw Richard." The title alone suggests a great closeness, as the small detail of naming a person, rather than just using them as an anonymous tool, develops the storyline, truly allowing listeners to see Mitchell's story as a snippet from her *life*, rather than just an intentional metaphor to a songwriter's end. Importantly, however, she doesn't make her story and lesson more shallow by merely writing plainly about her introspective train of thought. Through the story of one specific conversation with Richard, a figure from her past (even if perhaps fictional), Mitchell invites the listener into her story with empathy, allowing us to truly understand her learning process, and even draw our own conclusions from the conversation between the two, instead of being forced to automatically agree with hers. She depicts this conversation as a *process*, with no clear outcome. The setting is specific, separating now from then—Detroit, 1968. Mitchell started releasing music in '68, so with this lyric she opens the door to a version of her before the fame brought by her last couple albums, allowing us to see her younger self. It seems to possibly be a fight between two inner selves, with this younger version of herself on one side and Richard,

representing the voice of the world or possibly a more pessimistic Mitchell, on the other. He tells her that all romantics end up in the same way eventually, “cynical and drunk and boring / Someone in some dark cafe.” He plays songs on the jukebox, and Mitchell rebuffs him, “It’s just that now you’re romanticizing some pain that’s in your head / You’ve got tombs in your eyes, but the songs / You punched are dreaming.” It’s a rebuttal to a world that is harsh on the romantics, and Richard’s dreaming and saving grace seems to come, fittingly, in Mitchell’s own choice form of expression and escape: music.

One of Mitchell’s great gifts as a songwriter, as we will especially see later on, is empathy, and it is through this that she can get into the minds of cynics like Richard so well, presenting them knowingly to her audience. Her own state of mind, having been so open throughout the whole album, becomes harder to determine in the last few stanzas of this closing track. Just because she’s being confessional, doesn’t mean she’s laying it all out, making it easy to guess—often the opposite, as discussed, with the songs holding an introspective journey that could be interpreted in many ways. There are once again the many layers of personal songwriting present. She sings of “hiding behind bottles in dark cafes,” a call back to some vestiges of the past, perhaps, before singing, “Only a dark cocoon before / I get my gorgeous wings and fly away / Only a phase, these dark cafe days.” The “hiding” notion of this line, juxtaposed with the clarity she seeks, seems to reflect the struggle of being a “personal” songwriter, in which you’re forced (for your own privacy’s sake) to conceal as much as you seem to reveal from/to your listeners. These lines are decidedly unresolved, as they depict a time of hope and transition (with words like “cocoon” and “phase”) mixed with cynicism—the song is an eternal push-pull. With the shifting of timelines in this song, it is hard to tell which version of her (younger or grown-up) is singing these last lines. Is she looking back on her days before fame? Does she consider her

current times to have the sorrows of “dark cafe days” in a different way? Is it an anthem for all that she has accomplished since Detroit in 1968, celebrating what the romantic in her has brought, or does it mourn the hearts of cynics like Richard, and what the world has done to them? Is there any hint of fear in these lines of what the world might do to her, especially now that it has her heart in an album? By sitting beside Mitchell in this darkened, intimate cafe, you see part of her artistic evolution, and inside the complications of pursuing a career as a professional dreamer.

Blue remains a pinnacle of confessional and personal songwriting, a lasting example for generations. It was released right around this era of change from political to personal, and gives the audience a deep look at the many faces of personal songwriting. This album shows personal songwriting to be far more complicated than the political folk that came before, with the direction musicians’ followed in their songs becoming less clear. There was more room to be confused, to make mistakes, to not have any of the answers. Music became a process that musicians engaged with to meditate on themselves and their train of thought, rather than arriving at their guitar and notebook with everything they would say already decided. *Blue* was so clearly all of these things, a record of Mitchell unraveling and discovering herself alongside the listener. And in doing so, she gives an example of how to admit when you’ve messed up, how to process your feelings, and allows the listener to join her.

A fellow confessional songwriter of Mitchell’s was James Taylor. His album *Sweet Baby James*²⁸ (1970) is a large breakthrough of this mode of vulnerability in songwriting, although it inhabits the singer/songwriter genre more so than folk. As David Shumway writes in his book

²⁸ Taylor, James. *Sweet Baby James*, Warner Bros. Records. 1970.

*Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen*²⁹, “More important than its musical innovation, however, was the fact that *Sweet Baby James* was the first record to make confessional songwriting a popular success.” As such, this marks the public arrival of something that songwriters such as Leonard Cohen (and somewhat Dylan) had already been doing in the public consciousness. Indeed, the public was truly reaching toward confessional songwriting when they reached towards this record. That popular success set the ground roots for the folk celebrity. “Fire and Rain” remains a famously confessional song; the song begins with autobiography, addressing a specific person (Suzanne) at a specific time (yesterday morning). Suzanne was a friend of Taylor’s who had passed away due to suicide, a deeply cutting personal connection³⁰. (White) This was a song that kept fans intensely guessing about the subject matter, with the inspiration so clearly coming from real life events. Shumway elaborates,

“‘Fire and Rain,’ however, advertises itself as autobiography. Contemporary stories about Taylor report listeners asking if his girlfriend had been killed in a plane crash (‘sweet dreams and flying machines in pieces on the ground’), or if he had recently experienced a religious conversion (‘won’t you look down upon me Jesus’). Yet besides the reference, obscure to most listeners, to Taylor’s early band, the Flying Machine, the song does not require the listener to guess the names of those it describes, like a roman à clef. Rather, the sense that we have that this song is autobiographical is conveyed by its manner of performance and lyrical style.”

Taylor’s voice is stripped back and sorrowful, a slight quiver allowing the listener into his headspace when singing. This track does not have the emotional complication and confusion of the work of songwriters like Mitchell, Dylan, and Leonard Cohen. His grief is very plain but is

²⁹ Shumway, David R. “JONI MITCHELL - The Singer-Songwriter and the Confessional Persona.” *Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2014.

³⁰ White, Timothy. “Interview: James Taylor.” *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 25 June 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/interview-james-taylor-231710/>.

nonetheless extremely deep; the track allows the audience to come closer, to share his hurt. His emotions are out in the open for anyone to connect with—unlike Dylan and Cohen, this work is not “the personal” disguised in metaphor and symbolism. It is straightforwardly part of him.

“I walked out this morning and I wrote down this song / I just can't remember who to send it to,” he sings, allowing you to observe his instinctual reaction to hearing the terrible news of his friends’ passing (to process the event through music, as has been earlier discussed), and the confusion that grief puts him in. He is vulnerable in these lines, actively acknowledging that he needs healing, and doesn’t have the answers. And then the second verse:

“Won’t you look down upon me, Jesus?
 You’ve got to help me make a stand
 You’ve just got to see me through another day
 My body's aching and my time is at hand
 And I won’t make it any other way”

The pleading in these lyrics is desperate—as the listener can do nothing to help him (that’s up to Jesus), one feels in a similar position of helplessness to Taylor. The sympathy the listener feels for him, the sharedness of this feeling, is a critical element of the personal. His tone is plaintive and sparse, nothing flashy, without flourishes as he is open and honest in his grieving. The song’s drums and piano add hopeful, musical notes that contrast with the deep sorrow of the lyrics—they seem to keep him in motion as he processes his grief through the music, to keep him moving even as sorrow embeds him. The movement of the song keeps both him and the listener going, providing a possible way out of this grief at the same time as he ponders it.

Now, to pivot to another deeply moving personal songwriter: Leonard Cohen. A famous (and truly beautiful) song of Cohen’s that serves to illustrate the lasting power of the personal,

detailed narrative is “Suzanne,” off of *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967). The song is made powerful and touching by its usage of minute details, and interestingly remains in a confessional tone while largely addressing another person. Although the song might seem at first to be entirely about this other character Suzanne, and thus less personal, it is in fact about *his* train of thoughts and observations about Suzanne, which, together with descriptions of their interactions, communicate what the narrator/Cohen values, his thought process about her, and what he is trying to learn from Suzanne. The choice of name for this other character (should it not be a real name) alone makes some of this clear: Susan is a normal, often used name in Cohen’s North American setting, while Suzanne takes this usual name and gives it a twist of mystery, making it foreign and somewhat worldlier. The lyrics themselves contain all these tiny trappings of a life, creating a world that it is easy to slip into. The song is written in the second person; this could be addressing the listener, but the “you” feels broader here. The tone of the song, and Cohen’s languorous singing, make it feel dreamier, as though the “you” is himself in a past memory of his that he has removed himself from, speaking to address or discuss his old self. Or, the “you” is to create a more general audience and metaphor in the song, as he allows any listener to follow the trope of the exciting, sensual ’60s, as they accompany Suzanne. In this interpretation, she would serve as a stand-in for the vivid unpredictability of this time period, allowing the listener to indulge in fantasy. While carrying a wide capacity for symbolism, the lens is simultaneously focused on the experiences of this couple, a romantic ballad, making it feel closer to the listener. “Suzanne” is also deeply sensory, describing how “You can hear the boats go by,” and “she feeds you tea and oranges that come all the way from China,” using this activation of the senses to move the song into a more sexually sensual territory. Cohen builds up this sensory world only to strip it away in the lines right before the emotional climax and synthesis, singing “And you want

to travel with her, and you want to travel blind.” Importantly, Cohen finds the shared ground between the sexual/physical and the emotional, creating a song where a personal feeling of your body is deeply important to how you understand and process your emotions, and what you associate with the one you love. But in the line concerning blindness, he takes you to an innermost understanding of the ties between your body and emotion, a comprehension and unity of the lovers’ emotional and physical selves so deep that even the sensory deprivation of blindness cannot stop the love that conjoins the two—for Suzanne, he would travel blind. This is then cemented in the following often repeated line, the emotional synthesis of the song, “For you’ve touched her perfect body with your mind.” Body and mind are joyfully rejoined, with the full self (mind, body, emotion) understanding and feeling the message of the song. The depth of this love, and the passion that drives his willingness to give up everything for her create this deep gut-feeling. Although it might seem straightforward, the mystery and complexity surrounding Suzanne makes it anything but a “simple” encounter. This song makes it clear that truth and facts are not the same, as this is a deeply honest, personal song, regardless of whether or not it is factual. The complexity and attention to communicating the wholeness of this experience to the listener make the song deeply personal. Suzanne’s possible metaphorical prominence as a symbol of the 1960s, with a freedom that was being fought for and found in sociopolitical happenings, creates a personal angle into a cultural change so enormous that to display it otherwise could be overwhelming. Putting it through this personal angle gives it specifics, makes it understandable to each listener. To form a definition of confessional songwriting around the concept of factual autobiography is to mistake what makes the genre great.

With so many specific facts included, and yet a vague dreaminess in the tone, one wonders whether Suzanne is a real person or a symbol. This begs the question: Did the folk

tradition get less truthful in the shift to the metaphor of the individual? Did less “real” stories get told? The personal song mode, once introduced, never left, instead combining with old folk traditions to introduce a wider range of personal themes (even if not always autobiographical), and the freedom to exist with ambiguity. Now, with the experiences of the individual centered in folk music, folk began often to find some sort of individual at the center of songs.

Cohen uses traces of detail and possible biography to build a story that is no less personal, even when it detaches itself from specific fact; Cohen’s work with these pieces seems to land between Mitchell’s more direct autobiography and Dylan’s way of playing with the individual as a concept. Unlike Mitchell, Dylan did not have a clearly confessional phase free of influence from the crowds and media. His work with the personal examined his identity in a veiled way, at times pondering introspection and the individual more as abstract concepts than things that applied to him, often in response to the media and public treatment of his songs. As a personal artist, he used songwriting as a place for introspection; as a very private man, he turned away from the vulnerability this could bring. It is vital to understanding how Dylan approaches the personal to set up a distinction between his phase of introducing elements of personal songwriting into political music (such as ambiguity and reflective relationships with the listener), and Dylan’s later work with the personal. For someone who had been so outspoken about politics earlier in his career, Dylan’s commitment to privacy and not having his work as an artist labeled by his personal beliefs is clear. Tony Ortega’s review³¹ of Dylan’s 1969 release *Nashville Skyline* recounts an example where this is particularly apparent, in which Dylan is asked about his views on the Vietnam War. Ortega quotes his SingOut! Interview, in which he defends an artist friend

³¹ Ortega, Tony. “Bob Dylan's 'Nashville Skyline' - People Are Missing the Point!” *The Village Voice*, 1 May 1969, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2010/07/08/bob-dylans-nashville-skyline-people-are-missing-the-point/>.

of his who supports the war in Vietnam, saying: “...I admire him, he’s a friend of mine. People just have their views. Anyway, how do you know I’m not, as you say, for the war?” As Ortega succinctly puts it, “He is a private man, but a public artist.” His desire for privacy led him to confuse his audience as well as admit his own confusion in life at times—creating an inherently personal and complicated environment in his songs through his specific desire to keep from the audience exactly what he is thinking, but express himself nevertheless.

His desire for privacy is apparent in lyrics of his, as Mike Marquese points out in his book³², “Wicked Messenger : Bob Dylan and the 1960s; Chimes of Freedom”. One particular song he pulls out as an example is “I Shall Be Released,” written in 1967, which demonstrates Dylan’s worry about the individual in a society designed as, well, a society—a communal mass. It’s not even the focus of the song—there is just a reference, in the midst of another point, to the “lonely crowd,” a mass of individuals not finding any true connection in their togetherness. This demonstrates that although his concern for his privacy is not always the focus of his writing, it is a state of being that he more or less permanently exists in.

His most personal songs are scattered throughout his career, developing during his political time and increasing and evolving after his turn away from it. Even when Dylan was deep in politics, he always made room in his songwriting for achingly personal sentiments as well. As such, we can see that his confessional songwriting was not just birthed out of nowhere in a sudden shock, but rather had long been present as an emotional tactic in songwriting. He introduced elements of the personal mode in songwriting into his political pieces, but also wrote deeply intimate pieces about his own life. For example, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963), one of his most political albums with tracks such as “Blowin’ In The Wind,” “Masters of War,” and

³² Marquese, Mike. “The Hour Is Getting Late.” *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s, Chimes of Freedom*, Ont., New York, 2005.

“Oxford Town,” also features one of his most deeply touching love ballads, “Girl From The North Country.” This one introduces the listener into the story as one who will see Dylan’s old love, bringing them in on an even more personal note. It asks the listener, in their travels, to “Remember me to one who lives there / Oh, she once was a true love of mine / See for me if her hair's hanging down / It curls and falls all down her breast.” Even as he sings with such tenderness about this ex-lover of his, there must be something keeping him from talking to her, an emotional distance that the listener doesn’t understand, and perhaps one Dylan doesn’t either. These visual details, these pleas to the listener, bring them deeply into the song, empathizing with Dylan as a forlorn lover, making the listener a character with agency in his relationships.

This was not the last time he would write through this sort of lens. Even years down the road, with his acclaimed 1975 album *Blood On The Tracks*³³, he wrote a somewhat corresponding track with “If You See Her, Say Hello.” His description of his experience of heartbreak again involves the listener as someone who gets to see his former love when he does not. The listener is someone he trusts with his secrets, telling them, “She might think that I've forgotten her / Don't tell her it isn't so.” Bit by bit, he sings in simple, open beauty about the pain he undergoes in remembering his time with her, ending with a heartbreaking attempt at nonchalance: “If she’s passin’ back this way / I’m not that hard to find / Tell her she can look me up / If she’s got the time.” By making the song like a real conversation, he imbues it with the relatability of real life—his breakthrough of honesty, his step back as he tries to pretend he cares less than he does. Although these songs did not necessarily contain small facts of his life, they held an enormous emotional truth, and more direct vulnerability from Dylan than is often seen.

This album as a whole is a layer cake of emotions, speaking of the loss of a specific love—“Idiot Wind” comes at it from an angry angle, but most approach the subject with a

³³ Dylan, Bob. *Blood On The Tracks*, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1975.

complication of grief and nostalgia. In both “If You See Her, Say Hello” and “Tangled Up In Blue” he misses his love, but can’t get over his pride and their arguing to go after her. “Tangled Up In Blue,” after telling a great love story, ends with the arrogant lines, “We always did feel the same / We just saw it from a different point of view / Tangled up in blue,” as he tells us that he is moving on the road again. To disguise his persona of constantly leaving before he can ever deeply commit, he pretends to himself that there’s a disconnect that is *not* entirely his fault. But because this comes at the end of a strange, passionate love story, we see his self-awareness as he knows his closed off nature is to blame. “You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go” luxuriates in the depth of a love that he assumes cannot stay (because no love ever has). “Simple Twist of Fate” also packs quite an emotional punch, in a typically cryptic Dylan manner.

Although he begins the song in a removed way (developing an emotional situation through characters, using “they” to describe the pair in question), he soon subtly inserts himself into the story. He allows his renowned mask to slip just a bit, admitting the distance that he holds when he sings, “They walked alone by the old canal / A little confused, I remember well.” In doing so, he is effectively quietly admitting to being one of the characters involved, as the characters walk alone, but he remembers it well. The little laugh with which he sings seems to be an acknowledgement of letting the listener in just a bit, admitting some self-awareness about his guardedness. In a public format, Dylan ponders how hard it is for him to admit his own feelings to himself, singing,

“He woke up, the room was bare

He didn’t see her anywhere

He told himself he didn't care

Pushed the window open wide

Felt an emptiness inside
To which he just could not relate
Brought on by a simple twist of fate.”

As Dylan pushes away his feelings and blames it on fate (not his own emotional unavailability), we see his deep confusion about what makes him feel empty. By writing this song, he’s trying to understand himself, but still does not have the courage to push all the way into new introspective territories, instead mourning his inability to do that very thing. This opens up the multitudes felt, creating an emotional portrait perhaps all the more relatable because of its complications.

Such songwriting portrayed many compelling individuals, oftentimes the artists themselves, with specific personhood in the lyrics. As the audience knew that the singer was exploring the same subject (themselves) across multiple songs, the artists behind the music became tangible personalities. Audiences could create relationships to what they sang about. It also seemed, momentarily, that protest was no longer heavily involved in folk. Instead of the extremity of political protest folk that only ever pointed out the enemy’s mistakes, artists were beginning to...admit their own? Who were the mysterious artists behind such empathetic work?

CHAPTER THREE: “It Ain’t Me Babe:” The Push and Pull of Celebrity

As individual identities arose in folk songwriting, people grew curious about the artists behind these intoxicating, personal songs. The intimate nature of the songs made it clear that there was a *person* behind these songs, not just a movement or an ethos. Thus, the folk celebrity was born. Of course, the artists in question had a complex association with the commercialization of their work. They dealt with it in different ways, altering the presentation of themselves in their work. Stung by the prying eyes of the public, they were less quick to share as deeply of themselves. Having moved from political protest music to personal music, I observe that certain folk artists moved “back” to protest music—only this time, the form of their songwriting protested fans and the media’s treatment of their personal, honest work. I argue that this shows the endurance of the protest ethos even as personal songwriting rose, that it never really left the folk genre when political songwriting fell out of style but instead married with the personal. These songs still struck that personal note as they were about the artists’ struggles, but with a somewhat defiant tone, whether overtly, or implicitly in the songs’ structures and artists’ actions and attitudes; the personal and protest together enriched the emotional impact of the song. Sometimes, the songs also protested more in action than in lyric, often by the artists setting firm boundaries with nosy fans by refusing to divulge facts of their life in their music, or writing about what fans wanted them to write about. Because personal songwriting had brought more “realness” into folk, and asked artists to acknowledge themselves more fully, including their shortcomings, this protest writing did not have blinders on. They at times acknowledged how they played into the very system that they protested, intentionally and skillfully profiting off of their celebrity, music and the identity in it to some extent, even as they asked to not be known. Their music was a space for them to meditate on their relationship to celebrity as much as it

helped them protest it. The way they held themselves accountable was in line with the realness of the personal in songwriting, instead of the impermeable ideals of political music. It was a difficult tightrope to walk.

Bob Dylan had been the poster child of protest; his personal work is deeply feeling but often cryptic, and a lot of the songs that encompass his own specific feeling are to tell the audience to stop trying to involve themselves in his personal life quite so much. His work engages personal protest through his actions and attitude—he strongly takes an “individualist” stance in folk, creating work that says what he wants it to say, whereas before there came many artists who recycled songs that had been passed down for years. This did not always make his audiences happy, although they loved his first forays into original music (his first album being mostly covered songs written by other artists). But famously, at the Newport Folk Festival of 1965, Dylan shocked and disappointed a jeering crowd by “going electric,” blending folk and rock together. In breaking the folk chain of tradition through this and inventing folk rock, he protested any who tried to make him conform (as many wanted him to, evidenced in instances such as Editor of *Sing Out!* Irwin Silber’s open letter asking Dylan to change his creative path from personal songwriting). As mentioned earlier, his original songs allowed him the crucial space to write personal protest that felt most relevant to his life, instead of singing the ideas and protest of others, as traditionalists in folk (Baez, Seeger) had done. By continuing to follow his own creative intuition, he refused to allow celebrity culture to force him down a certain path.

This makes sense, as a large part of his “personal protest” work as an artist was his purposeful element of mystery, keeping audiences at bay even as he sang songs heavily built through the personal. He would allow small vulnerable glimpses, and then shift tracks entirely to singing about the lives of others, or change his tone to convince the audience of a hardness where

they had just gotten used to softness, or vice versa. He shook off what the public wanted from “their” celebrities, while simultaneously creating an even greater intrigue and mystique around himself. While much of his work does not strictly align itself with the later factual, “confessional” style in folk, there is some that does, and beyond that, he pushed folk to celebrate individualism where before it was built on tradition, complicating the genre by not viewing personal and protest as a binary of songwriting forms. His personal songs took on a deep intimacy, often combined with a chin-up defiance against what others were asking him. His individualistic pushes were done both through vulnerable songwriting, and through the innovative way he wrote and pushed boundaries as musician and celebrity. Furthermore, he explored “the individual” as a concept, a character to take on *and still find crucial bits of himself inside*. He did not only use characters in his songs as ways to prove a point, but explored them as personal individuals, too. However, this troublingly also led to him arguably doing exactly what he sometimes protested that his public had done to him—commodifying these character’s individual identities.

An active cast-off of the public’s false feelings of control over his work comes in his song “My Back Pages,” off of his famous album *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), in which, as aforementioned, he retreated from the role of political messiah. With lines like “Yes, my guard stood hard when abstract threats / Too noble to neglect / Deceived me into thinking / I had something to protect / Good and bad, I define these terms / Quite clear, no doubt, somehow,” he determined the public’s influence on his thinking, always casting it off with the chorus “Ah, but I was so much older then / I’m younger than that now.” He rebukes himself in this song for acting as a political mouthpiece in his earlier writing, clarifying that he acted in the ways that others told him was right, instead of following his own intuition. He quite literally defines the “lies that

life is black and white,” a precursor to the ambiguity and moral nuance of personal songwriting. He strives to hold himself accountable, instead of just vilifying the institutions that tried to force his hand, accepting responsibility being another key element of the personal mode. The role of political protest celebrity and the responsibility it came with pressed him into a role he dramatically breaks out of here. He describes the pressuring words of others sarcastically (“abstract threats / Too noble to neglect”), pushing away the (to him) polarized mentality of the political movement at this time. The chorus follows this up as a statement of individuality and freedom for him—he reclaims his youth, rejecting the responsibility and the role of spokesperson. He clings to his individuality, to his right to have his own opinions, to simply not know. The way he calls himself “older” seems sarcastic, as though he was pretending he had all the answers, knew the right perspective on complicated sociopolitical matters. Now, he relaxes into the flexibility of youth, a time full of questioning and self-reflection. By framing this as a return to the carefreeness of youth, his audience can more easily sympathize and relate. With these lines, he puts his songwriting back on his own terms, reclaiming the way that he experiences his life, and denying the celebrity that is forcing him to grow up too fast. The stance the song takes is to *not* take a clear stance, deeply in line with the personal approach of admitting to his share of faults in the problem he points out, along with the ambiguity of the personal, while protesting by speaking out against these former groups with whom he allied himself.

From the same album, “It Ain’t Me Babe” appears to be about casting off a lover’s expectations, but could just as easily be read as a rejection of the public’s expectations. Through this metaphorical format, Dylan deeply engages in the personal protest, by protesting his audience’s attempted influence on his life through likening it to a personal romantic relationship. Framed through the lens of romance, Dylan’s feelings of imprisonment become far more

relatable to the listener in a way that his grievances with his celebrity might not have been when presented more straightforwardly. Many of the lyrics are concerned that the lover is asking Dylan to stay the same for life, singing, “You say you’re lookin’ for someone / Who will promise never to part,” and, “You say you’re looking for someone / Who’ll pick you up each time you fall / To gather flowers constantly / And to come each time you call / A lover for your life and nothing more.” The language here reinforces at every turn the consistency expected of Dylan, something he always shrugs off by singing, “It ain’t me babe.” He lets the audience know they can’t expect the same thing from him forever, and can’t impose their will on him, starting right now. He is instead gearing himself up for a jump into the unrestricted and unknown. This whole album is about Dylan changing and resisting expectations, admitting in a manner key to the personal to his inability to perform in certain ways, and he lets you know exactly what you’re in for, beginning with the title *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. In certain lines, he takes a more clearly political response, singing, “You say you’re lookin’ for someone / Who’s never weak but always strong / To protect you and defend you / Whether you are right or wrong.” This is applicable to a romantic relationship, but also echoes his sentiments from “My Back Pages,” in which he decried political protestors for thinking they were always right. Here, he tells them that they can’t expect him to remain in their corner on every issue, protesting their expectations put on him by the spotlight of celebrity. Crucially, the listener can empathize with his frustration and be impacted by the emotion of his protest without necessarily understanding that he was protesting them. By making this song a dispute between him and a lover, he puts the disagreement on more personal terms, creating an intimate argument that many listeners could sympathize with. It also gives him the chance to settle his disputes with the public without them automatically knowing it, allowing him a veil behind which to still creatively process while they still feel his emotions;

he is able to cast off their treatment and protests more subtly, in line with the personal mode of songwriting instead of in his black-and-white manner of earlier days.

A couple years later in 1966, Dylan famously suffered a motorcycle accident, which caused him to hide from the public eye for a while. In Ellen Willis's iconic 1967 essay on Dylan, she, too, points to his motorcycle accident as a large part of what made him retreat into himself, and disguise himself further and further in his lyrics. As she aptly puts it, "Dylan's refusal to be known is not simply a celebrity's ploy, but a passion that has shaped his work. As his songs have become more introspective, the introspections have become more impersonal, the confidences of a no-man without past or future. Bob Dylan as identifiable persona has been disappearing into his songs, which is what he wants." This pinpointed his exact reaction to the mantle of "celebrity," and presents another way to package identity in songwriting in a way that keeps the artist "safe:" introspection from the point of view of the nobody. Through losing his own identity, Dylan created one that is genius because it is not "one." It is an identity less tied to anything, anyone, any movement than anything he released before—and yet, through still existing as a point of view, Dylan still had a form of "personhood" from which he could speak and be personal and have a say in things, without the same responsibility as taking the perspective of a specific person. In his work, Dylan makes it possible for "no identity" to become an identity, identifying with the space outside of just himself, and making it a part of himself at the same time that he makes himself a part of it. He refused to act as himself when everyone tried to presume for him what his "self" was. It allowed him to "fool" his audience at times, playing with their expectations and again taking that role of unreliability. The combination of unreliability together with introspection serves as a form of personal protest, as it allowed Dylan to reflect and reach the catharsis through music that he desires, but made him the only person

who was sure of how much of it is truly Dylan, and how much of it is a songwriting/identity experiment. He protested by holding tight to his individuality and *withholding* it, as he did not feel he had to make it clear to anyone but himself. His protest asks his listeners not necessarily to change, but *executes* the change himself—if they won't step back, he will. This movement and change is key to the elements of action that protest asks for.

At the same time, this exact sort of mystery made the audience want to know even more, feeding into his image as a removed celebrity that invoked curiosity. When compared to the tradition of protest set by folk artists such as Pete Seeger, one sees how much subtler and more complex this form is. There is room for a variety of interpretations to Dylan's songwriting—in the celebrity culture of these later years of folk, protest could come from a withholding, instead of the bold, obvious statements that Seeger favored. Additionally, putting his protest in terms of an emotional argument with a lover, as in these past songs, allowed the listener that much more empathy. By melding protest with the personal in songwriting, Dylan expanded what was possible with the protest mode in songwriting, creating a more imaginative songwriting world. Dylan used a public format, that of fame and published, performed music, to assert the importance of the privacy of the individual.

His album covers provide another interesting look at the aesthetic vulnerability (or lack thereof) with which he presented himself and his work. Album covers provide an obvious example of how musical celebrities cultivated their own image with fans in mind. Celebrities could play into certain images that they wanted to sell to the public, or were an opportunity to protest the monetization of their image by holding the audience at a distance, and not giving them what they wanted. This is a place where the protest *sentiment* could shine through, even though this was not songwriting directed. Though it may seem an obvious reminder, it is worth

noting that at the time of release, these were all vinyl records, and you often couldn't test out the music beforehand—thus, the image was the first thing meant to jump out at you in a record store. Dylan started out by releasing his self-titled debut in 1962, featuring a close shot in which he sports a baby-faced half-smile. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, his next album in 1963, portrays him walking down the street with then-girlfriend Suze Rotolo³⁴. She clings to him, his head tucked between his shoulders semi-awkwardly, and the two like any other of a young couple.



Figure 1: *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* by Bob Dylan album cover

He shows his audience a close, casual moment in his life here, but also sells a version of himself as a normal guy, one who is much like the listeners themselves. This matches the lyrical content of the album, which contains many political anthems meant to be for “the common man.” This energy shifts on his next cover, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*³⁵, an album notable for highly political tracks such as the titular track, and “With God On Our Side,” a song about the way each

³⁴ Wernecke, Ellen. “Suze Rotolo: A Freewheelin' Time.” *The A.V. Club*, The A.V. Club, 22 May 2008, <https://www.avclub.com/suze-rotolo-a-freewheelin-time-1798204300>.

³⁵ Dylan, Bob. *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Columbia Records, Sony Music Entertainment, Inc. 1964.

country justifies war and violence to themselves. The shot is close up, but his expression shifts, and he appears leaner, tougher, perhaps trying to fit into the image of political/protest messiah that he knew was beginning to be expected of him. He fills three-quarters of the shot, so the viewer can't ignore him, and can see the particulars of his burdened expression.

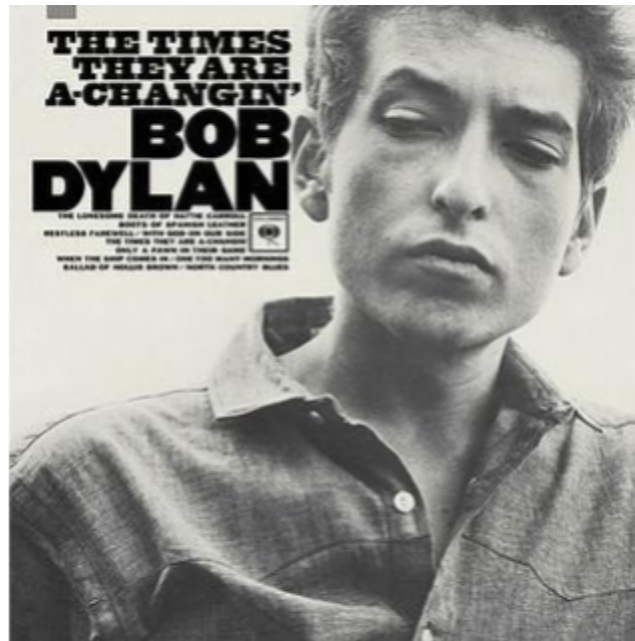


Figure 2: *The Times They Are A-Changin'* by Bob Dylan album cover

With 1964's *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, the album controversial for diving deeply into personal songwriting in the protest mode by asserting his independence from his roots in social and political songwriting, the cover depicts his full body, taking quite a literal step back. He takes up far less of the space on the album cover, and sports a distant expression. This could be a protest against how his audience had tried to control his image; here, he takes it back, reasserting his own power over his image and his ability to find privacy even as a celebrity.

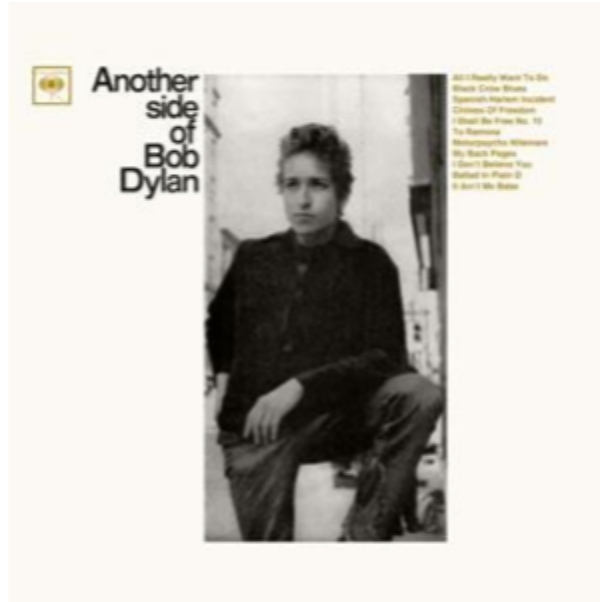


Figure 3: *Another Side of Bob Dylan* by Bob Dylan album cover

Subsequent album covers, including *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), are done more carefully and calculatedly, with an artistic angle in mind. Some, including these examples, are also quite literally blurrier, making the depiction of Dylan less clear. He always maintains a hardened expression. There's a stoniness coming from these images, through which he continues to not just ask but demand that his audience keep a distance.

Then, soon after *Blonde on Blonde* came his famous motorcycle accident, after which he withdrew from recording and the public for a while. Music writer Tony Ortega sums it up in his 1969 review of *Nashville Skyline*, saying:

“For the past four years, since the traumatic turn to rock, Dylan has been as private a celebrity as J.D. Salinger. In the beginning he was shy, perhaps wary of his own fame, but at the same time a funny and engaging, hence beloved performer. After Newport 1965, [the famous night on which Dylan shirked the “pure” folk he had previously been working with and “went electric” with folk rock] however, he stopped doing his half. Public appearances became rare, and because he was in demand as a profile subject, his distaste for reporters became notorious.

Even before the [motorcycle] accident he was difficult to reach; afterward he became a pure recluse, but though none of his fans were sure he would ever be heard from again, they continued and in fact intensified the one-sided affair.”

The public’s obsession with Dylan is clear in the way his attempts for privacy increased the investigation of him, and the entitlement audiences felt to him through his celebrity (“he stopped doing his half”). We can also see *why* he craved this privacy, with a hint being given in Ortega’s harsh treatment of Dylan’s creative efforts and direction towards folk rock as “traumatic.” *John Wesley Harding*, released in 1967 and his first album since his crash in 1966, has a black-and-white image on the cover, with certain elements being difficult to make out. Things take an interesting turn on *Nashville Skyline*, however, released two whole years later in 1969 (a long period after the steady stream of albums in the early/mid -’60s). Dylan smiles down at you, soft and friendly, the intimacy, warmth, and closeness of the shot recalling earlier album covers.



Figure 4: *Nashville Skyline* by Bob Dylan album cover

Reviews of the time by publications such as Rolling Stone and the Village Voice lauded the album as being, quite simply, happy—a *seeming* acquiesce to the openness his audience desired from him.

However, Ortega, in his review of it for the Village Voice, did add important observations that showed that Dylan continued to cling to his individuality and independence even as he had appeared to have warmed up and mellowed out. Herein we see that, paradoxically, the very individualism that leads to Dylan's innovative artistry and celebrity is that which has him abhorring the audiences this creativity attracts: "If there is anything clear about Dylan, it is that he doesn't like organizations," Ortega writes. "He insists on being his own man. He has gone to country music because it is the repository of such values, and he has no apparent interest in exposing, or even understanding, their subversion. For while country music appears Jeffersonian it is really Jacksonian — intensely chauvinistic, racist, majority-oriented, and anti-aristocratic in the worst as well as the best sense." It would seem that Dylan uses the image of country to carve out this position of "individual" for himself, taking a stand as a lone wolf against music institutions at the same time that this was part of his celebrity image. "Outlaws" are also something Dylan finds fascination with from the perspective of identity, using them as tools in his protest lyrics (as I will address shortly).

Dylan's interaction with his own celebrity does not escape Ortega's notice, who writes, "His music has become markedly more complex. He has experimented with the pop-song break instead of chug-chugging from stanza to stanza. This kind of distillation can only take place in a controlled environment, and Dylan obviously cherishes his privacy for more than scientific reasons... He says he only writes songs because he has a contract; as long as he must, he does them as well as he can. So perhaps he wouldn't miss his art. But he would miss his privacy

terribly. A disinclination to go out among men — that tour keeps being delayed — is the mark of the aristocrat, self-appointed or otherwise.”

Indeed, in an interesting turn, Ortega’s interpretation of Dylan’s celebrity at this time is that it seems to give him the possibility to relax into his privacy, doing what he wants and sticking to the studio; following Ortega’s reasoning, Dylan protests in a way that subverts celebrity by turning this public iconism into an opportunity for privacy. Above all, Ortega leaves the reader uncertain, warning us not to get complacent in this new (for the time) image of Dylan as a friendly cowboy, because what Bob Dylan does best is paint an image. As Ortega writes, “It is touching that everyone wants to believe Bobby has settled down, but don’t bet on it. All those protestations of easy innocence may be just one more shuck. Or maybe they’re not. Which would make them the biggest shuck of all.” By switching his image back and forth, Dylan seeks to disorient his audience from truly ever knowing him, or being able to predict his next moves.

For all Dylan’s valuing the privacy and mystery of his own life (or perhaps due to this), he frequently investigated the minds and personal lives of others in his music, using them to follow his lines of protest. His 1976 album *Desire*, in particular, is a release that tells the stories of others, sometimes verging on commodification. This album takes the side of those who have run into trouble with the law, glamorizing them and painting their portraits in a dramatic manner, for better or worse. “Hurricane” tells the story of the imprisonment of boxer Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, which Dylan described as unjust, using examples of racial profiling against Carter to drive home the prejudice involved in the trial. His song “Joey” tells the story of Joey Gallo, a mobster killed a few years prior. Using the “outlaw” character here, or someone who had clashed with society in some manner, Dylan identified himself with them, refusing to fall into society’s lines. This was another form of protest, by going exactly contrary to the takes of society—telling

stories that not all were happy to hear. The narrative tone followed the intimacy of personal protest, but also ran the risk of assuming too much about a story that wasn't his. Perhaps he truly intended this as protest, genuinely meaning what he sang no matter what listeners thought. However, it was also possibly a way of cultivating his celebrity image to include an element of danger, without taking any risk himself.

Lester Bangs, a prominent music journalist of the time, viewed these songs as a blatant attempt to profit off of the experiences and hardships of these people, accusing Dylan of making them into characters. In his article "Dylan Dallies With Mafia Chic: Joey Gallo Was No Hero,"³⁶ Bangs writes that, "One tends to wonder if the myths he has made, even when they deal with actual historical personages, might not devolve to an endless alienated outlaw narcissism; if he has not, in fact, been talking about himself all the way down the road. I believe that; I don't think he is being straight with his audience anywhere on *Desire*, but is rather exploiting both them and the subjects of his songs to keep his own image polished." Bangs looks at Dylan's use of outlaws not as a noble act to tell a misunderstood story, nor as a form of valiant protest by gently taking the first stand and identifying with the outlaws to make a point about the confines of society, but as a blatant, unearned self-comparison to the "outlaw" character without having to deal with any of the harsh consequences of *actually* being arrested. Here, according to Bangs, Dylan commercializes the identities of others, in a form of "personal" songwriting that verges closer to narcissism than to truly open-minded and introspective personal songwriting, in order to keep his celebrity identity intact.

Taking a look at Dylan's lyrics, the sensationalization of the personalities is clear. In "Joey," for instance, he tells a highly sympathized version of the life of Joey Gallo, with lyrics

³⁶ Bangs, Lester. "Dylan Dallies With Mafia Chic: Joey Gallo Was No Hero." *The Village Voice*, 8 Mar. 1976.

such as “One day they blew him down in a clam bar in New York / He could see it comin’ through the door as he lifted up his fork / He pushed the table over to protect his family / Then he staggered out into the streets of Little Italy,” painting him as someone who tried to protect his family first, with other lyrics referring to his time in prison as a time of reform. However, as Bangs sets straight, Gallo beat his wife badly, and told tales of gang-raping a young man in prison at cocktail parties after his release. Furthermore, he reveals that the psychoanalyst that spoke with Gallo before his time in prison maintained that “Joey was a terrifically prejudiced guy,” going very much against the sentiment in Dylan’s lines, “His closest friends were black men ’cause they seemed to understand / What it's like to be in society with a shackle on your hand.” By telling and revising the story of another, Dylan did not respect the harm this man had done, and instead took his status as a “tough outlaw” to serve the protest point Dylan wanted to make (certainly a good point, fighting back against assumptions many made against incarcerated peoples)—but he smudged the facts. By writing about Gallo in this way, Dylan perhaps wanted to regain some street credibility lost to him because of his celebrity, and hoped to remain in the spotlight through releasing an album that some might find controversial. Although it was another form of personal protest, aligning with how he himself felt misunderstood by society, the way he went about it used a lot of the tactics that he himself had abhorred when they were used against him by the media. Although he wrote about this man’s identity, he made Gallo a vessel for the narrative he wished to tell, in his poet’s way, instead of writing about the gangster as he actually was. Due to what he gained from this, it would seem that this was a direct commercialization of identity, rather than an artist’s quest for truth, undercutting his own protest’s genuineness.

Joni Mitchell likewise used the personal to protest the celebrity thrust upon her, while struggling to maintain the benefits of it, although in a markedly different way. To understand her

personal protest, it must be noted that her celebrity included the sexism of the music industry, particularly from the media, who often unnecessarily linked her with men and former lovers. As 1990s folk musician Ani DiFranco has observed³⁷,

“Why has Bob [Dylan] been so thoroughly canonized and Joni so condescended to over the years? Maybe, in part, because when Joni was uppity, she was considered a bitch, and the media retaliated. From day one, however, Bob could be as uppity as he wanted, and the great mammoth rock press lauded his behavior as rebellious, clever, renegade and punkishly cool. Maybe it's also because Bob's songs are inherently more masculine (go figure) and have therefore been viewed as more universal, while Joni's writing, which has a more feminine perspective, is put in a box labeled ‘girl stuff.’”

Magazines and the media would treat her as a female musician with famous male friends, with Rolling Stone dubbing her “Old Lady of the Year” in 1971, the year her album *Blue* came out. (Nelson, 10) At first defined by her boyfriends and subjected to cruel, sexist jokes such as these, she was then further put into the box of broadly representing women in music, with *Time* magazine putting her on the cover nearly four years later with the broad headline “Rock Women,” leaving little room for distinguishing one woman and her music from the next (additionally, who would ever call Mitchell a “rock musician?”). The incredibly honest nature of *Blue* unfortunately fed into this kind of speculation, which the media used to paint a cruel picture of her as, in Sean Nelson’s (author of the 33 ½ book on Mitchell’s album *Court and Spark*) words, a “tell-all miserablist, humorless warbler, promiscuous insider, rock-star ornament...” (34) As Michelle Mercer writes in her book “Will You Take Me As I Am: Joni Mitchell’s Blue Period,”

³⁷ DiFranco, Ani. “Court And Spark: Folk Troubadour Ani DiFranco Chats With the Iconic Joni Mitchell About Her Legacy, Her Life--and the Current State of Feminism.” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Sept. 1998.

“Early singer-songwriters created an aura of authentic directness by appearing as solo acts with piano or guitar accompaniment. That they were all alone up there made it easier to believe they were testifying truth. For Mitchell, this spare mode of presentation had combined with her disarmingly candid lyrics to create an image of a vulnerable blonde. On tour with Jackson Browne in 1972, she saw that her delicate performances were associated with her own pain, loss, and heartbreak—and invited continuous speculation about the identity of her boyfriends.”

(157-158)

This was not the case, as one might guess, for her boyfriend Jackson Browne, whose songs were allowed to stand on their own. In order to escape how the media stole and misused the identity she had presented in these songs, the lyrics of her next ventures were not as upfront, leaving instead an examination of emotional truths that remained personal and identity-based, but without sharing the intricate details and facts of her own life. Doing so was a form of self-protection as well as protest, serving as a “STOP” sign to too-curious fans.

Mitchell is honest in her lyrics about her journey with her celebrity identity, and how difficult it was for her to grapple with, using the personal to chart the nuances of this. In *For The Roses*, her 1972 follow up album to *Blue*, the titular track opens with the dreamy, uncertain, yearning lyrics, “I heard it in the wind last night / It sounded like applause,” setting the stage to deal with Mitchell’s guilty relationship with her own celebrity. It goes on to admit that “I guess I seem ungrateful / With my teeth sunk in the hand / That brings me things / I really can’t give up just yet.” Although this position of fame has stung her so badly, it has also brought her a glamor that she can’t bring herself to let go of, even as she criticizes it. The protest here is more internal, as she desires some sort of change from herself, but is still figuring out in the course of these

songs just what that change might be. The protest and change demanded was not always directed at larger institutions—artists held themselves accountable for what had gone wrong as well.

Although at this time she wrestles over whether or not to allow the commercialization of herself and her music into something that will make her rich despite her qualms, in a couple years time, she seemed to have left these concerns behind. “The Boho Dance,” off of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*³⁸ in 1975, shows contempt for those who maintain that to be considered truly genuine and “rock ‘n’ roll,” you could never make money or be famous. Although this may initially have been the perception in the anti-capitalist roots of folk, Mitchell clearly left this behind. Here, she protested her own community, individualizing herself from the communal line of opinion on such matters, following her own compass as to what she wanted to do creatively and commercially. Although she does not directly mention the music industry, it seems that she falls further in line with its goals of money and success here, giving in partially to the celebrity image. Her lyrics describe herself as fascinated with this glitter of status from the very beginning, storytelling, “But even on the scuffle / The cleaner’s press was in my jeans / And any eye for detail / Caught a little lace along the seams.” She reveals that this is what she’s been like from the very beginning, honest with her audience even when it makes them view her contemptuously. She softly admits the appeal of fame, while declaring herself to be apart from the condescendingly named “boho dance,” singing, “It’s just that some steps outside the boho dance / Have a fascination for me.” Later, her tone begins to bite, as she admonishes the listener, “Don’t you get sensitive on me / ’Cause I know you’re just too proud / You couldn’t step outside the boho dance now / Even if good fortune allowed.” Here, she uses her position as the one willing to make money to mean that she is the one with the potential for individual thought, perhaps painting herself as *more* of an individualist because she can flow with mainstream

³⁸ Mitchell, Joni. *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, Asylum. 1975.

money. And she declares that she will continue to remain flexible and out of reach of boxes, in the last stanza: “Nothing is capsulized in me / On either side of town / The streets were never really mine / Not mine, not mine, these glamor gowns.” It is in this last stanza that we hear her as she truly is; these “glamor gowns” don’t belong to the real Joni Mitchell, but instead the Mitchell invented to fit into the place of celebrity. Subtly acknowledging the discomfort with her celebrity through these lines, she emphasizes that she is not her core self in this music, reminding listeners that while personal music can contain more sides of a person than the political music of before, it still cannot contain the wholeness of a person. This songwriting has both elements of the personal and protest to it. She fights back at the music industry when it frustrates her, but she does not want to stand entirely against its benefits—she is able to acknowledge her own confusion and contradictions (as is vital to personal songwriting) as she can’t find the perfect point of balance between fame and riches, and feeling centered in herself.

Similar to Dylan, looking through Joni Mitchell’s album covers gives context to her image presentation in conjunction with her music, showing the evolution of her protest, albeit with the analysis occurring in a different context than Dylan due to the sexism she faced in the music industry. First, it should be noted that Mitchell did her own cover art for a large number of albums, which gives the listener a unique look into someone exercising direct control over the exact image she wanted to leave her listeners with. One of her first albums, *Clouds* (1969), features a self-portrait. Wide eyes, delicate lips and freckles, and a red flower held in front of a sunset feel almost cheesy in the pointedness of this image, clearly aligning her with the visual stereotype of the feminine folk songwriter present at this time—slender, gentle women with long hair, with an air of independence at the same time as men could still find them attractive.



Figure 5: *Clouds* by Joni Mitchell album cover

This is how she presented herself early on—fitting in with what she assumed the public wanted. Two albums later came *Blue* (1971). It features a photograph of her, unlike her other self-painted album covers. The photo captures just her shadowed face, despondent, her eyes almost closed. It is a melancholy blue; you feel that you have stumbled on the singer when she wished to be alone.



Figure 6: *Blue* by Joni Mitchell album cover

It is an incredibly vulnerable image, something the singer trusted to the world.

This vulnerability is something that the media of the time preyed on. Music critics insistently speculated about her male lover, exemplified in Timothy Crouse's review for *Rolling Stone*³⁹. Crouse somewhat gives the attention and success of the album over to this unnamed lover, writing, "It is also the most focused album: *Blue* is not only a mood and a kind of music, it is also Joni's name for her paramour. The fact that half the songs on the album are about him give it a unity which *Ladies [Ladies of the Canyon (1970)]* lacked. In fact, they are the chief source of strength of this very powerful album." He goes on to criticize fan favorites that have stood the test of time such as "River" and "Little Green" which, although they involve lovers as characters, do not put them in the spotlight as she instead focuses on her own deep reactive sadness. His language is carelessly dismissive about the intimacy of her writing as he picks at her vulnerabilities, and sexistly connects the success of her songwriting back to men, instead of analyzing the lyrics for the emotion that they hold relative to her and her writing talent.

In response to such criticisms, the direct vulnerability of *Blue* was revoked on later albums. When Mitchell's audience betrayed her in the overbearing way they reacted to *Blue*, it is only natural that she should deny the public eye more of that, protesting their reaction through refusing to step back into the role that had first made her famous. Subsequent album covers clearly display the withdrawal of her trust, and the ways that protest in personal music could subtly be found in setting firm boundaries with celebrity and fans. The album cover of *For The Roses* (1972), her next release of original music, features another photograph of her, but feels very different. She sits in a relaxed position, as you might with a friend; the picture is casual, like a photo from vacation, nowhere near the intimacy of the cover of *Blue*. Her expression is

³⁹ Crouse, Timothy. "Blue." *Rolling Stone*, *Rolling Stone*, 5 Aug. 1971, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/blue-104415/>.

expectant and slightly tense, holding the viewer at a distance. It continues to project the natural aesthetic of folk music, but without the same pain implied by *Blue*'s cover.



Figure 7: *For The Roses* by Joni Mitchell album cover

Court and Spark (1974), her next project and one which she actively created to be commercially successful, features one of her drawings on the cover. It is an abstract image, composed mostly of simple lines, with mountains in the background. There is potential in this image's vagueness.



Figure 8: *Court and Spark* by Joni Mitchell album cover

Although it is a personal drawing of Mitchell's, its indeterminate quality keeps the viewer at a distance. It balances Mitchell's relationship with the listener, the cover containing personal parts of her but without explaining things explicitly to her audience, allowing her to still keep some secrets. It is a cover done on her own, somewhat elusive terms, instead of giving the audience exactly what they want. She seems determined not to repeat the "mistakes" of *Blue* twice.

Court and Spark, similarly to the difference in album covers, is a more guarded album than *Blue*; although it was made to be a commercial album, it is also a protest album in content and form, responding to the ways Mitchell has interacted with celebrity. It still engages deeply in personal songwriting, but finds protest through finding boundaries, approaching "the personal" with less real, particular details. "The personal" on this album is engaged through reflection and introspection, rather than her own factual experiences. When the most honest songwriting was what stuck Joni Mitchell into this cruel, stereotyped image fabricated by the media of her as a morose songwriter who could not escape the sexism projected on her, of course she would turn to something else—and at some points does so in a kiss-off way, turning the lens on those who would otherwise profit off of her music. Thus, as Sean Nelson points out in his 33 1/3 book on the album, *Court and Spark* accesses these universal emotions through a personal lens, but without narrowing the lens so far as to become autobiographical, and thus potentially alienating some listeners from being able to relate to the songwriting. This album was released at a time when the rock and roll business was at its most profitable—as quoted earlier, it was "more lucrative than the movie business (by a factor of \$500 million); it was also bigger than 'football, hockey, basketball, and baseball—both collegiate and pro—added together.'" (Nelson, 17) It was a project designed to relate to listeners, where Mitchell tested just how personal she could get in

her songwriting without clearly sharing tales from her own life. It remains one of her ultimate exercises in empathy, while at the same time carrying the protest ethos with her by somewhat distancing her life from her listener to take back her selfhood from the hunger of celebrity.

In “Free Man In Paris” off of *Court and Spark*, Mitchell plays with identity as something integral to the relatability of her music while not directly assuming it. In this track, she clearly tells the story of another (famously known to be music industry titan David Geffen). By taking on his perspective, she gets to criticize the music industry that has been the source of so much hurt for her without putting herself at stake for the thoughts she expresses. However, she also empathizes with him, complicating the portrait of him (in the style of the personal) as a tough businessman but with contradicting wishes and a past of his own. Through beginning with, “‘The way I see it,’ he said,” she establishes her apartness from the central character of the story, but still manages to tell it in his own, personal words. As Nelson puts it, “‘Free Man in Paris’ has to be the pinnacle of Joni Mitchell’s career as a songwriter. It’s the ultimate extension of her effort to be personal without being autobiographical.” (50) Here, she reflects on her own career and situation without directly putting herself under the microscope. With lines like, “Stoking the star maker machinery / Behind the popular song / I deal in dreamers / And telephone screamers / Lately I wonder what I do it for,” she bites back at the popular music industry without taking the fall for this criticism herself. She deepens her protest against the dehumanization and music machine of the industry by giving everyone, even the top executive, a backstory and an unfulfilled dream, pointing out what the business takes away from people. Although he’s in a position he got himself into, he is regretful of having others “future[s] to decide.” In this line, one can see the cruel disappointment others can feel at his hands. She makes him multidimensional by writing that he’s doing the best he can, admitting to dreams of his: “Thinking how I’ll feel

when I find / That very good friend of mine / I was a free man in Paris / I felt unfettered and alive.” She demonstrates that being “personal” does not have to mean being factually honest about her own life; clearly, she empathizes with Geffen to some degree, even when frustrated with music titans such as him. Even in her protest against the music industry, this song shows the nuance of her perspective, as she tries to understand even the top music executives.

Dylan and Mitchell both use characters in their writing as mouthpieces for their own personal protest against the expectations placed on them, often by audiences, the music business, or their own celebrity. They also write about individuals who are the source of some contention, societally or to themselves, and who are *real people*. These are people who listeners will know, who have already made some sort of a splash in society. By connecting themselves to these individuals, they tell the listeners, however subtly, something about themselves and their own point of view and associations. In taking on this perspective of an individual, they can find emotional bridges between themselves, this character, and the listener, the protest taking on a more intimate, first-person feel. Dylan, as seen in the earlier examples of this chapter, is fascinated by the character of the outlaw (even in earlier work I have laid out, such as “All Along The Watchtower,” he uses the characters of the joker and the *thief* to deliver warnings), and identifies himself with this “othered” perspective. Mitchell, meanwhile, by writing from David Geffen’s point of view, somewhat identifies with his frustration with the intense rat race of the music scene, but also derides him. She exposes a famous music business titan to have had a secret past life that he wishes he could escape to, suggesting that all his success isn’t necessarily bringing him happiness...and that perhaps the same could be said for her. In a strong move, she takes back the power of narrative over men like that, who control her professional/musical life over which she is clearly so conflicted, protesting the media’s depiction of her as a helpless

woman. Here (and in *Court and Spark* as a whole), she makes it clear that *she* holds the narrative power, with the ability to humiliate Geffen and to tell the listener exactly what she pleases.

“People’s Parties,” off of *Court and Spark*, presents another way of using perspectives outside of Mitchell’s own while she still achieves some deeper level of introspection. Crucially, it also exposes the real melancholy of stardom; she protests very gently against the loneliness of fame, more acknowledging and exposing the personal impact it has on these characters (and thus, her). The song follows a first-person point of view at a glamorous party (where people have “a lot of style” and “stamps of many countries”). There are several characters brought in who each have their own small lesson to teach you—the Photo Beauty is beautiful until all of a sudden she’s weeping, saying “laughing and crying / You know it’s the same release.” Eddie thinks he’s nobody, Grace hides emotionless behind her fan—the listener is let into the reality of these glamorous L.A. parties, and is shown the pain hiding behind the money. The portrait is made more real and personal by giving people specific names (all except for the elusive “Beauty” at the center of the story). But here, there are other characters more vulnerable than Mitchell—it is the Beauty who is openly crying, not her (or at least not the narrator). She is not forced to open herself to the listener anymore, but, as an observer in the story, still takes away her own form of emotional catharsis from the procedures, describing the narrator as being in a “frightened silence / Thinking I don’t understand.” There’s a defeat to this song, especially in the last few lines, as she admits, “I wish I had more sense of humor / Keeping the sadness at bay.” While still not having all the autobiographical openness of confessional songwriting, this is Mitchell at an important peak of her songwriting—in songs like this throughout the album, she gives you a look into her emotions, doing some reflection herself without divulging the full story. Being open about how sad the music scene and its supposed glamor was making her in songs such as this one

and, to some extent, “Free Man In Paris,” bit back at those who assumed she was contently resting with her celebrity, shaming those who put musicians and celebrities under the glass jar of supposed happiness. By just giving them her feelings, and not allowing them to ask for a more in depth circumstantial explanation, she forced the listener to handle her emotional reality of the heaviness of celebrity on this album (with the song “Court and Spark” secretly being about a run-in with a deluded fan who thought every song Mitchell had written was secretly addressed to him) (Mercer, 163-165). But, she denied them access to the actual facts of her personal life, continuing to assert herself in her songwriting in this way.

“People’s Parties,” while keenly emotional, does not have romantic love at the center of it, an important thing to note about many songs on *C&S*. There is a variety of emotions being reflected on and picked through, as Mitchell demonstrates the complexity and range of her songwriting chops. When her male lovers were lauded as the reason for the success of earlier releases, speaking less about her love life while still making a highly successful personal album was another act of protest, showing the media how wrong they had been for assuming her love life (which they tracked vigorously and viciously) was the reason for her talent.

Even the sound of *Court and Spark* emphasizes a blend of protest and self-protection, following Mitchell’s personal interests. The richness of the orchestral arrangements gives her sound a folk-pop fullness, whereas her earlier work was far more sparse and exposing, often just her and her guitar. Vital to note are the little jazz touches and inflections throughout, such as in “Raised On Robbery” and the outro of “Car On A Hill.” These hint at Mitchell’s move into her jazz fusion phase, one in which she lost a lot of popularity. This was a turn towards purely what interested her, and as it seeps through just a bit on the pop-ish sound of *C&S*, one hears her

rebellion coming, her turn toward making music that was creatively interesting to her, even if it didn't attract as much commercial attention as her other work.

It was foolish to think that a vital element of the birth of a genre would ever really vanish. The protest impulse found in the early years of the folk revival emerged again more personally as it mixed with confessional- and individual-styled songwriting. At the same time, this impulse grew more nuanced, ambivalent, uncertain as artists probed and protected their minds. They protested things relevant to their own lives, but made it universally felt through their music. Oftentimes, it was complicated in that their songs protested celebrity culture, the very structure making it financially possible for them to live as working musicians. They criticized the fans listening to these very songs, the music business that produced them, the culture and loneliness of celebrity, and sometimes themselves, for participating in it all. They engaged with the real world through a tone of protest, because, according to Irwin Silber's, editor of *Sing Out!*, letter to Bob Dylan about *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*, all songs dealing with the real world wind up as protest songs. But as Silber couldn't foresee, they did it through their own introspection, with the personal songwriting he had viewed as so selfish from Bob Dylan, lending their point of view to the listener for a few minutes, allowing the listener to empathize with their protest all the better. And though they wrote these personal protest songs from an intimate, genuine place, it was still these songs that continued to develop and establish their celebrity, and were perhaps calculated to do so. Instead of a position of moral black and white, the protest they were doing was now subjective, concerning things they believed but were still, as per one of the core elements of the personal, willing to leave some gray space on. Although they moved with a protest ethos, they were open to having their minds changed. Their "beliefs" that they protested with were a shifting depiction of themselves. They asked for the listeners' empathy instead of anger.

Conclusion

This thesis is a snapshot of a period in time, looking at the deeply personal start made by artists still revered today. It recognizes their talent and the protest ethos they upheld, while also seeing them as human beings capable of contradicting themselves. After all, that is what “personal” music holds most—this contradiction of self, the room to be human and hold not just one agreeable, straightforward point of view. Paradoxes were part of the personal in songwriting, as we have seen. There was protest clashing with celebrity, capitalist stardom. There was an acceptance of one’s mistakes at the same time as artists ran away from them. The heart never contained just one thing, and emotions overlapped. Artists were allowed to contradict themselves, and it added to their mystery. Combined with protest, introspection in songwriting and the personal moved towards change. Personal songs, and the space to sing about issues personal to you, instead of being a vessel for something else, was a huge step in the musical world. It’s like the old lesson they tell you in art school: the more specific you get, the more universal. Music fans saw themselves in their musical heroes—it felt like they were given a key of some sort, a way into the music they loved, a way to be part of it.

Today, this scene still holds a lot of impact. You can see how the tradition of the individual mixed with protest has continued to play out in the writing of many folk/country musicians. Gillian Welch, a country/folk musician who began her discography in the 1990s and writes with her partner David Rawling, is one such individual. Her music is sparse and often somber, highlighting her voice over spare instrumentals. She is known for piercing emotional tracks and tales, such as her famous song, “Annabelle,” about the grief of a sharecropper over their dead daughter, or “Hard Times,” which features a farmer talking to his mule. *Revival* (1996), her debut album featuring “Annabelle,” was harshly criticized⁴⁰ by Ann Powers of

⁴⁰ Powers, Ann. “Gillian Welch - *Revival*.” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 1996.

Rolling Stone, who maintained that Welch tells stories that aren't her own, and that she has no right to, writing, "Unlike the new-country artists she admires – Steve Earle, for example, or Lucinda Williams – Welch never takes the risk of wondering what her own experience might bring to the tradition she so fervently embraces, how her own life might break down that tradition and make it fresh again." These are similar criticisms to the ones that Bob Dylan faced from Lester Bangs, over *Desire*—taking the identities of others unfairly and to your own benefit. Many would argue with this, and *Rolling Stone* published an article 20 years later about the same album but in a much different tone, titled "How Gillian Welch Created an Americana Touchstone in 'Revival.'" (Harold⁴¹)

Arranged so sparsely, Welch's music sees the individual at the center of feeling, allowing the aesthetic vulnerability of just a person and their guitar, that made folk the birthplace of the confessional, and acknowledges the depth and richness of some sad and lonely moments. There is a depth to her music: "Hard Times" acknowledges a truly difficult life, but always has the farmer asking his mule to walk a little bit farther, singing, "Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind no more." In her song "Elvis Presley Blues," she describes Elvis much more wholly than he is usually painted: "Just a country boy that combed his hair / Put on the shirt his mother made / And he went on the air / And he shook it like a chorus girl / And he shook it like a Harlem queen." She makes the listener see the human behind the star, giving his identity a realness.

Perhaps her move in which she kept observing and empathizing with the lives of others in her songwriting (with tracks like "Elvis Presley Blues" and "Picasso") could be seen as a form of personal protest against critics that told her not to. But her work, though concerned with an inner

⁴¹ Harold, Zack. "How Gillian Welch Created an Americana Touchstone in 'Revival'." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone, 25 June 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/how-gillian-welch-created-an-americana-touchstone-in-revival-121832/>.

life like these songwriters before her, tended less towards an actual tone of protest and defiance. Instead, she made songs holding fast to her ideals—“One Little Song,” for instance, prays and hopes toward a world where there is still room for simple creativity for all, while lamenting the quick moving pace of the world (written in 2003—how the world would continue to speed up!). “There's gotta be a song left to sing / Cause everybody can't have thought of everything,” Welch sings, near despairing. Her songs paint a world that feels both distinct and universal—it can feel like she’s singing next to you with her guitar, or from the heart of a mountain 100 years ago. Like Dylan, she combines the folk tradition with her own writing—she has released several covers of old traditional songs, but many albums of her own work that often have characters at the center of songs. She is not afraid to use the word “I” when singing.

Although Welch is still writing and releasing music (and has been for about 30 years), perhaps a more contemporary example of the personal and protest in folk is alternative folk band Big Thief. Their music takes on a strikingly personal character. With many songs bearing the names of specific people (such as “Mary,” addressed to front person Adrienne Lenker’s childhood best friend), and small touches like the line, “Open the screen door, talking with Diane Lee / That's my grandma!” in “Red Moon,” there is no denying that there are real stories shining through. The songs named after real people take on the layered complexity of the relationship, showing both the intimacies and terrors of love. They draw people close because of the intense vulnerability displayed by the musicians, allowing love and pain and all the different corners of the heart to be shared and meditated on. They continue to tell stories of the small things that matter to them, and thus end up mattering to us with the strange sweetness of their songwriting.

There are still lines of protest found in their music and songwriting, even though somewhat more implicit. “Spud Infinity,” a song off their 2022 album *Dragon New Warm*

*Mountain, I Believe In You*⁴², strikes a tone between joking and deep societal awareness. Lenker sings, “What's it gonna take? / To free the celestial body? / From way up there it looks so small / From way down here it looks so small / One peculiar organism aren't we all together?” Through endless questions and communal language, Lenker gathers their audience together to examine the issue at hand (just as Dylan did in “Blowin’ In The Wind.”) In a polarized America (and world), asking for togetherness follows similar lines of protest from the 1960s. This point is exacerbated by the highly consumerist, social media-influenced society we live in today—by asking us to step back and take a look at how we exist, Lenker is asking us to recalibrate fully. Lenker also often writes casually and intimately about their queerness, with songs like “Vampire Empire” (unreleased) and “12,000 Lines” speaking of queer relationships and queer joy. Although queerness is becoming more normalized and accepted everyday, it can and has been argued that queer joy is inherently a form of protest in a society that is not designed for it, and in some cases is actively working against it. Lenker and Big Thief’s openness about who they are is radical and in keeping with the individualist ancestry of folk.

I have also observed that the individualization of folk music has helped idealize a specific type of individuality in online culture. These are simply musings from someone who grew up in the 2000s, but I do believe there is some traction to them. The powerful artists producing this music have towering personalities, ones that broke the mold of even the wild ’60s, and although their music spoke out in favor of individuality, these personalities still got capitalized on and typified. Nowadays, the ’60s themselves are spoken about with a wistfulness for the freedom of those times. Similarly, there is a glorification of the strong, adventurous individuality expressed by songwriters like Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, and Leonard Cohen. On social media sites today, there is often a retro dreaminess about times that are not now. In an era where life is lived largely

⁴² Big Thief. *Dragon New Warm Mountain, I Believe In You*, 4AD, 2022.

online, it makes sense that the wildness of this past era would seem mythical and inviting. It also keeps the commercial machine surrounding this time going, only instead of ascertaining the rawness and realness of the present moment (as was done by the commercialization of folk music of the '60s), the past is made the real thing. There is a nostalgia to this in line with some of the heartbreak and retrospection found in the vulnerability of these tracks, but this misses the presentness and connection to self and process that individuality in folk initially expressed. Our age of social media puts us in a unique position to hear about the individual in short, choice clips that show things in a rather one-sided manner (unlike the personal music of these artists, which, as discussed, paint a more complex emotional portrait).

Perhaps most importantly, this era of music introduced something very real and raw into the culture. There was a permission to show the real self, to expose oneself and treat music as a shared emotional experience with the listener, a continued space for protest and change. This follows the tradition of folk (folk as community, folk as shared experience, perhaps even folk as healing and caring) very well. Although the influence of celebrity soon made itself felt, this wasn't a sad decline into selling out. The definition of personal was expanded, making room for both facts and vulnerable introspection, and incorporating protest as something personal to them, rather than something attempting to address crowds of thousands. It's hard to define in words how much this meant to so many, but it's easy to understand when you look around at how many children grew up revering these artists at first because their parents did, and then finding their own *personal* connections with them. "Blowin' In The Wind" is one of the first songs I remember knowing (thanks, Papi!), and I used to misunderstand and sing it as "The ants are my friends / They're blowing in the wind." In forging such strong connections to these artists, their songs, this music, we find the personal beautifully surrounds us.

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*Appendix A:**Song Lyrics of Songs Mentioned*

Seeger, Pete. "We Shall Overcome" Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhnPVP23rzo>

We shall overcome

We shall overcome

We shall overcome, some day

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome, some day

We'll walk hand in hand

We'll walk hand in hand

We'll walk hand in hand, some day

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome, some day

We shall live in peace

We shall live in peace

We shall live in peace, some day

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome, some day

We are not afraid

We are not afraid

We are not afraid, TODAY

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome, some day

The whole wide world around

The whole wide world around

The whole wide world around some day

Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe

We shall overcome, some day

Seeger, Pete. "Which Side Are You On?" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XEnTxlBuGo>

Which side are you on boys?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on boys?

Which side are you on?

They say in Harlan County

There are no neutrals there.

You'll either be a union man

Or a thug for J. H. Blair.

Which side are you on boys?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on boys?

Which side are you on?

My daddy was a miner,

And I'm a miner's son,

He'll be with you fellow workers

Until this battle's won.

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Oh workers can you stand it?

Oh tell me how you can?

Will you be a lousy scab

Or will you be a man?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Come all you good workers,

Good news to you I'll tell

Of how the good old union

Has come in here to dwell.

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Seeger, Pete. "Where Have All The Flowers Gone?" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1NTlofVf29qbhhdpxva0id?si=d736cac632814382>

Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?

Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?

Where have all the flowers gone?

Young girls have picked them everyone

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Where have all the young girls gone, long time passing?

Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago?

Where have all the young girls gone?

Gone for husbands everyone

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Where have all the husbands gone, long time passing?

Where have all the husbands gone, long time ago?

Where have all the husbands gone?

Gone for soldiers everyone

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Where have all the soldiers gone, long time passing?

Where have all the soldiers gone, long time ago?

Where have all the soldiers gone?

Gone to graveyards, everyone

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Where have all the graveyards gone, long time passing?

Where have all the graveyards gone, long time ago?

Where have all the graveyards gone?

Gone to flowers, everyone

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Oh, when will they ever learn?

Guthrie, Woody. "This Land Is Your Land" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxIMrvDbq3s>

This land is your land and this land is my land
From the California to the New York island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me

As I went walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
Saw below me that golden valley
This land was made for you and me

I roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
All around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me

When the sun comes shining then I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
A voice come chanting as the fog was lifting
This land was made for you and me

This land is your land and this land is my land

From California to the New York island

From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters

This land was made for you and me

When the sun comes shining then I was strolling

And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling

A voice come chanting as the fog was lifting

This land was made for you and me

The following verses are not included in this recording:

As I was walkin' - I saw a sign there

And that sign said "No trespassin'"

But on the other side it didn't say nothin!

Now that side was made for you and me!

In the squares of the city - In the shadow of the steeple

Near the relief office - I see my people

And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin'

If this land's still made for you and me

Dylan, Bob. "Blowin' In The Wind" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/18GiV1BaXzPVYpp9rmOg0E?si=23088eed68f44c60>

How many roads must a man walk down

Before you call him a man?

How many seas must the white dove sail

Before she sleeps in the sand?

Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly

Before they're forever banned?

The answer, my friend

Is blowin' in the wind

The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes, and how many years can a mountain exist

'Fore it is washed to the sea?

Yes, and how many years can some people exist

Before they're allowed to be free?

Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head

And pretend that he just doesn't see?

The answer, my friend

Is blowin' in the wind

The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes, and how many times must a man look up

Before he can see the sky?

Yes, and how many ears must one man have

Before he can hear people cry?

Yes, and how many deaths will it take till he knows

That too many people have died?

The answer, my friend

Is blowin' in the wind

The answer is blowin' in the wind

Dylan, Bob. "All Along The Watchtower" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0Fnb2pfBfu0ka33d6Yki17?si=8e9b08cb703b4c34>

"There must be some way out of here," said the joker to the thief

"There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief

Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth

None of them along the line know what any of it is worth"

"No reason to get excited," the thief, he kindly spoke

"There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke

But you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate

So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late"

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view
While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too
Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl
Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl

Dylan, Bob. "Talkin' World War III Blues" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/0ePDsEDDIPZNpbwRUEXKoX?si=3ce91c4078904fc9>

Some time ago a crazy dream came to me
I dreamt I was walkin' into World War Three
I went to the doctor the very next day
To see what kinda words he could say
He said it was a bad dream
I wouldn't worry 'bout it none, though
They were my own dreams and they're only in my head

I said, "Hold it, Doc, a World War passed through my brain"
He said, "Nurse, get your pad, this boy's insane"
He grabbed my arm, I said, "Ouch!"
As I landed on the psychiatric couch
He said, "Tell me about it"

Well, the whole thing started at 3 o'clock fast

It was all over by quarter past

I was down in the sewer with some little lover

When I peeked out from a manhole cover

Wondering who turned the lights on

Well, I got up and walked around

And up and down the lonesome town

I stood a-wondering which way to go

I lit a cigarette on a parking meter and walked on down the road

It was a normal day

Well, I rung the fallout shelter bell

And I leaned my head and I gave a yell

“Give me a string bean, I'm a hungry man”

A shotgun fired and away I ran

I don't blame them too much though, I know I look funny

Down at the corner by a hot-dog stand

I seen a man

I said, “Howdy friend, I guess there's just us two”

He screamed a bit and away he flew

Thought I was a Communist

Well, I spied a girl and before she could leave
“Let’s go and play Adam and Eve”
I took her by the hand and my heart it was thumpin’
When she said, “Hey man, you crazy or sumpin’
You see what happened last time they started”

Well, I seen a Cadillac window uptown
And there was nobody aroun’
I got into the driver’s seat
And I drove down 42nd Street
In my Cadillac. Good car to drive after a war

Well, I remember seein’ some ad
So I turned on my Conelrad
But I didn’t pay my Con Ed bill
So the radio didn’t work so well
Turned on my record player—
It was Rock-a-day Johnny singin’, “Tell Your Ma, Tell Your Pa
Our Love’s A-gonna Grow Ooh-wah, Ooh-wah”

I was feelin’ kinda lonesome and blue
I needed somebody to talk to

So I called up the operator of time
Just to hear a voice of some kind
“When you hear the beep it will be three o’clock”
She said that for over an hour
And I hung up

Well, the doctor interrupted me just about then
Sayin’, “Hey I’ve been havin’ the same old dreams
But mine was a little different you see
I dreamt that the only person left after the war was me
I didn’t see you around”

Well, now time passed and now it seems
Everybody’s having them dreams
Everybody sees themselves
Walkin’ around with no one else
Half of the people can be part right all of the time
Some of the people can be all right part of the time
But all of the people can’t be all right all of the time
I think Abraham Lincoln said that
“I’ll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours”
I said that

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. "Ohio - Live" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/41ytOd3Kz41Nu9hPRfHjvD?si=b313bf75194b4488>

Tin soldiers and Nixon's comin'

We're finally on our own

This summer I hear the drummin'

Four dead in Ohio

Gotta get down to it

Soldiers are gunning us down

Should have been done long ago

What if you knew her and

Found her dead on the ground?

How can you run when you know?

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na, na

Gotta get down to it

Soldiers are gunning us down

Should have been done long ago

What if you knew her and

Found her dead on the ground?

How can you run when you know?

Tin soldiers and Nixon's comin'

We're finally on our own

This summer I hear the drummin'

Four dead in Ohio

Four dead in Ohio (Whoa!)

Four dead in Ohio (four)

Four dead in Ohio (Ah!)

Four dead in Ohio (How many more?)

Four dead in Ohio (What?)

Four dead in Ohio (Oh!)

Four dead in Ohio (Oh!)

Four dead in Ohio (What?)

Four dead in Ohio (Ah)

Four dead in Ohio

Mitchell, Joni. "All I Want" Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wq2jhs19_V8

I am on a lonely road and I am traveling

Traveling, traveling, traveling

Looking for something, what can it be?
Oh, I hate you some, I hate you some, I love you some
Oh, I love you when I forget about me
I wanna be strong, I wanna laugh along
I wanna belong to the living
Alive, alive, I wanna get up and jive
I wanna wreck my stockings in some jukebox dive
Do you want, do you want, do you wanna dance with me, baby?
Do you wanna take a chance
On maybe finding some sweet romance with me, baby?
Well, come on

All I really, really want our love to do
Is to bring out the best in me and in you too
All I really, really want our love to do
Is to bring out the best in me and in you
I wanna talk to you, I wanna shampoo you
I wanna renew you again and again
Applause, applause, life is our cause
When I think of your kisses, my mind see-saws
Do you see, do you see, do you see how you hurt me, baby?
So I hurt you too
Then we both get so blue

I am on a lonely road and I am traveling
Looking for the key to set me free
Oh, the jealousy, the greed is the unraveling
It's the unraveling and it undoes all the joy that could be
I wanna have fun, I wanna shine like the sun
Wanna be the one that you wanna see
I wanna knit you a sweater
Wanna write you a love letter
I wanna make you feel better
I wanna make you feel free
Wanna make you feel free
I wanna make you feel free

Mitchell, Joni. "River" Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLHxxBTI71I>

It's coming on Christmas
They're cutting down trees
They're putting up reindeer
And singing songs of joy and peace
Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on

But it don't snow here

It stays pretty green

I'm gonna make a lot of money

Then I'm gonna quit this crazy scene

I wish I had a river I could skate away on

I wish I had a river so long

I would teach my feet to fly

Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on

I made my baby cry

He tried hard to help me

You know, he put me at ease

And he loved me so naughty

Made me weak in the knees

Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on

I'm so hard to handle

I'm selfish and I'm sad

Now I've gone and lost the best baby

That I ever had

I wish I had a river I could skate away on

I wish I had a river so long

I would teach my feet to fly
Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on
I made my baby say goodbye

It's coming on Christmas
They're cutting down trees
They're putting up reindeer
And singing songs of joy and peace
I wish I had a river I could skate away on

Mitchell, Joni. "Little Green" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTxUrDtoPP0>

Born with the moon in Cancer
Choose her a name she will answer to
Call her green and the winters cannot fade her
Call her green for the children who've made her
Little green, be a gypsy dancer

He went to California
Hearing that everything's warmer there
So you write him a letter and say "Her eyes are blue"
He sends you a poem and she's lost to you

Little green, he's a non-conformer

Just a little green

Like the color when the spring is born

There'll be crocuses to bring to school tomorrow

Just a little green

Like the nights when the Northern lights perform

There'll be icicles and birthday clothes

And sometimes there'll be sorrow

Child with a child pretending

Weary of lies you are sending home

So you sign all the papers in the family name

You're sad and you're sorry but you're not ashamed

Little green, have a happy ending

Just a little green

Like the color when the spring is born

There'll be crocuses to bring to school tomorrow

Just a little green

Like the nights when the Northern lights perform

There'll be icicles and birthday clothes

And sometimes there'll be sorrow

Mitchell, Joni. "The Last Time I Saw Richard" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igj20M84hbo>

The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in '68
And he told me, "All romantics meet the same fate someday
Cynical and drunk and boring someone in some dark café
"You laugh," he said, "you think you're immune
Go look at your eyes, they're full of moon
You like roses and kisses and pretty men to tell you
All those pretty lies, pretty lies
When you gonna realize they're only pretty lies?
Only pretty lies, just pretty lies"

He put a quarter in the Wurlitzer
And he pushed three buttons and the thing began to whirr
And a bar maid came by in fishnet stockings and a bow tie
And she said "Drink up now, it's gettin' on time to close."
"Richard, you haven't really changed," I said, it's just that
Now you're romanticizing some pain that's in your head
You got tombs in your eyes, but the songs you punched are dreamy
Listen, they sing of love so sweet, love so sweet
When you gonna get yourself back on your feet?
Oh and love can be so sweet, love so sweet

Richard got married to a figure skater
And he bought her a dishwasher and a coffee percolator
And he drinks at home now most nights with the TV on
And all the house lights left up bright
I'm gonna blow this damn candle out
I don't want nobody comin' over to my table
I got nothing to talk to anybody about
All good dreamers pass this way someday
Hidin' behind bottles in dark cafés
Dark cafés, only a dark cocoon
Before I get my gorgeous wings and fly away
Only a phase, these dark café days

Mitchell, Joni. "My Old Man" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zREpjywwJpo>

My old man
He's a singer in the park
He's a walker in the rain
He's a dancer in the dark

We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall
Keeping us tied and true

My old man keeping away my blues

He's my sunshine in the morning

He's my fireworks at the end of the day

He's the warmest chord I ever heard

Play that warm chord, play and stay, baby

We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall

Keeping us tied and true

My old man keeping away my blues

But when he's gone

Me and them lonesome blues collide

The bed's too big

The frying pan's too wide

Then he comes home

And he takes me in his loving arms

And he tells me all his troubles

And he tells me all my charms

We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall

Keeping us tied and true, no

My old man keeping away my blues

But when he's gone

Me and them lonesome blues collide

The bed's too big

The frying pan's too wide

My old man

He's a singer in the park

He's a walker in the rain

He's a dancer in the dark

We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall

Keeping us tied and true, no

My old man keeping away my lonesome blues

Taylor, James. "Fire and Rain" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1oht5GevPN9t1T3kG1m1GO?si=c5f3bacf55a547cd>

Just yesterday morning, they let me know you were gone

Suzanne, the plans they made put an end to you

I walked out this morning and I wrote down this song

I just can't remember who to send it to

I've seen fire and I've seen rain
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end
I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again

Won't you look down upon me, Jesus
You've got to help me make a stand
You've just got to see me through another day
My body's aching and my time is at hand
And I won't make it any other way

Oh, I've seen fire and I've seen rain
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end
I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again

Been walking my mind to an easy time, my back turned towards the sun
Lord knows when the cold wind blows it'll turn your head around
Well, there's hours of time on the telephone line to talk about things to come
Sweet dreams and flying machines in pieces on the ground

Oh, I've seen fire and I've seen rain
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end

I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend

But I always thought that I'd see you baby, one more time again, now

Thought I'd see you one more time again

There's just a few things coming my way this time around, now

Thought I'd see you, thought I'd see you, fire and rain, now

Cohen, Leonard. "Hallelujah" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/7yzbimr8WVyAtBX3Eg6UL9?si=ae808b58fb2b4767>

Now I've heard there was a secret chord

That David played and it pleased the Lord

But you don't really care for music, do ya?

It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth

The minor fall, the major lift

The baffled king composing "Hallelujah"

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Your faith was strong, but you needed proof

You saw her bathing on the roof

Her beauty in the moonlight overthrew ya

She tied you to a kitchen chair

She broke your throne and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well, really, what's it to ya?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool ya
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the lord of song
With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah

[Additional Lyrics]

Baby, I've been here before

I know this room, I've walked this floor

I used to live alone before I knew you

And I've seen your flag on the marble arch

Love is not a victory march

It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

[Additional Lyrics]

There was a time you let me know

What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in you
The holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah

[Additional Lyrics]

Maybe there's a God above
But all I've ever learned from love
Was how to shoot at someone who outdrew you
And it's not a cry that you hear at night
It's not somebody who's seen the light
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

Cohen, Leonard. "Suzanne" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2L93TdW2GMue1H2zlk30F?si=34316db0b96e4faf>

Suzanne takes you down
To her place near the river
You can hear the boats go by
You can spend the night beside her
And you know that she's half crazy
But that's why you want to be there
And she feeds you tea and oranges

That come all the way from China
And just when you mean to tell her
That you have no love to give her
Then she gets you on her wavelength
And she lets the river answer
That you've always been her lover

And you want to travel with her
And you want to travel blind
And you know that she will trust you
For you've touched her perfect body with your mind

And Jesus was a sailor
When he walked upon the water
And he spent a long time watching
From his lonely wooden tower
And when he knew for certain
Only drowning men could see him
He said "All men will be sailors then
Until the sea shall free them"
But he himself was broken
Long before the sky would open
Forsaken, almost human

He sank beneath your wisdom like a stone

And you want to travel with him

And you want to travel blind

And you think maybe you'll trust him

For he's touched your perfect body with his mind

Now Suzanne takes your hand

And she leads you to the river

She is wearing rags and feathers

From Salvation Army counters

And the sun pours down like honey

On our lady of the harbor

And she shows you where to look

Among the garbage and the flowers

There are heroes in the seaweed

There are children in the morning

They are leaning out for love

And they will lean that way forever

While Suzanne holds the mirror

And you want to travel with her

And you want to travel blind

And you know you can trust her
For she's touched your perfect body with her mind

Dylan, Bob. "I Shall Be Released" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/5vyw005QQ42hrzrLxb3xEX?si=40bf73d3d6e84269>

They say every man must need protection
They say every man must fall
Yet I swear I see my reflection
Some place so high above the wall

I see my light come shining
From the west down to the east
Any day now, any day now
I shall be released

Down here next to me in this lonely crowd
There's a man who swears he's not to blame
All day long I hear him cry so loud
Calling out that he's been framed
Yeah

I see my light come shining
From the west down to the east

Any day now, any day now

I shall be released

Dylan, Bob. "Girl From The North Country" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/739sLmfUkVFoyPtb0C3263?si=414285e028f847ae>

If you're travelin' in the north country fair

Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline

Remember me to one who lives there

For she once was a true love of mine

If you go when the snowflakes storm

When the rivers freeze and summer ends

Please see she has a coat so warm

To keep her from the howling winds

Please see if her hair hangs long

If it rolls and flows all down her breast

Please see for me if her hair's hangin' long

For that's the way I remember her best

I'm a-wondering if she remembers me at all

Many times I've often prayed

In the darkness of my night

In the brightness of my day

[Instrumental Bridge]

So if you're travelin' in the north country fair

Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline

Remember me to one who lives there

For she once was a true love of mine

Dylan, Bob. "If You See Her, Say Hello" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3xNO6JUK9ySYjxuqzcZYRB?si=13e7f8c169dc4b7c>

If you see her, say hello, she might be in Tangier

She left here last early Spring, is livin' there, I hear

Say for me that I'm all right though things get kind of slow

She might think that I've forgotten her, don't tell her it isn't so

We had a falling out, like lovers often will

And to think of how she left that night, it still brings me a chill

And though our separation, it pierced me to the heart

She still lives inside of me, we've never been apart

If you get close to her, kiss her once for me

Always have respected her for doing what she did and gettin' free

Oh, whatever makes her happy, I won't stand in the way
Though the bitter taste still lingers on from the night I tried to make her stay

I see a lot of people as I make the rounds
And I hear her name here and there as I go from town to town
And I've never gotten used to it, I've just learned to turn it off
Either I'm too sensitive or else I'm gettin' soft

Sundown, yellow moon, I replay the past
I know every scene by heart, they all went by so fast
If she's passin' back this way, I'm not that hard to find
Tell her she can look me up if she's got the time

Dylan, Bob. "Simple Twist of Fate" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/3wAX3qn53iQUFE84hpfeen?si=bf9f7342b0dd47f2>

They sat together in the park
As the evening sky grew dark
She looked at him and he felt a spark
Tingle to his bones
'Twas then he felt alone
And wished that he'd gone straight
And watched out for a simple twist of fate

They walked alone by the old canal
A little confused, I remember well
And stopped into a strange hotel
With a neon burning bright
He felt the heat of the night
Hit him like a freight train
Moving with a simple twist of fate

A saxophone someplace far-off played
As she was walking on by the arcade
As the light bust through a beat-up shade
Where he was wakin' up
She dropped a coin into the cup
Of a blind man at the gate
And forgot about a simple twist of fate

[Instrumental Bridge]

He woke up, the room was bare
He didn't see her anywhere
He told himself he didn't care
Pushed the window open wide
Felt an emptiness inside

To which he just could not relate
Brought on by a simple twist of fate

He hears the ticking of the clocks
And walks along with a parrot that talks
Hunts her down by the waterfront docks
Where the sailors all come in
Maybe she'll pick him out again
How long must he wait?
One more time, for a simple twist of fate

People tell me it's a sin
To know and feel too much within
I still believe she was my twin
But I lost the ring
She was born in spring
But I was born too late
Blame it on a simple twist of fate

Dylan, Bob. "Tangled Up In Blue" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/6Vcwr9tb3ZLO63F8DL8cqu?si=7330bd8e5c4f4b51>

Early one morning the sun was shining
I was laying in bed

Wondering if she'd changed at all
If her hair was still red
Her folks they said our lives together
Sure was going to be rough
They never did like Mama's homemade dress
Papa's bankbook wasn't big enough
And I was standing on the side of the road
Rain falling on my shoes
Heading out for the East Coast
Lord knows I've paid some dues
Getting through
Tangled up in blue

She was married when we first met
Soon to be divorced
I helped her out of a jam, I guess
But I used a little too much force
We drove that car as far as we could
Abandoned it out west
Split up on a dark sad night
Both agreeing it was best
She turned around to look at me
As I was walking away

I heard her say over my shoulder

“We'll meet again someday

On the avenue”

I had a job in the great north woods

Working as a cook for a spell

But I never did like it all that much

And one day the ax just fell

So I drifted down to New Orleans

Where I lucky was to be employed

Working for a while on a fishing boat

Right outside of Delacroix

But all the while I was alone

The past was close behind

I seen a lot of women

But she never escaped my mind

And I just grew

Tangled up in blue

She was working in a topless place

And I stopped in for a beer

I just kept looking at the side of her face

In the spotlight, so clear

And later on, when the crowd thinned out
I was just about to do the same
She was standing there, in back of my chair
Said, "Tell me, don't I know your name?"
I muttered something underneath my breath
She studied the lines on my face
I must admit, I felt a little uneasy
When she bent down to tie the laces
Of my shoe
Tangled up in blue

She lit a burner on the stove
And offered me a pipe
"I thought you'd never say hello," she said
"You look like the silent type"
Then she opened up a book of poems
And handed it to me
Written by an Italian poet
From the thirteenth century
And every one of them words rang true
And glowed like burning coal
Pouring off of every page

Like it was written in my soul

From me to you

Tangled up in blue

I lived with them on Montague Street

In a basement down the stairs

There was music in the cafes at night

And revolution in the air

Then he started into dealing with slaves

And something inside of him died

She had to sell everything she owned

And froze up inside

And when it finally, the bottom fell out

I became withdrawn

The only thing I knew how to do

Was to keep on keeping on

Like a bird that flew

Tangled up in blue

So now I'm going back again

I got to get to her somehow

All the people we used to know

They're an illusion to me now
Some are mathematicians
Some are carpenter's wives
Don't know how it all got started
I don't know what they're doing with their lives
But me, I'm still on the road
A-heading for another joint
We always did feel the same
We just saw it from a different point
Of view
Tangled up in blue

Dylan, Bob. "My Back Pages" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2bCFKT7w3wwGfCV3cjrjqi?si=9e674014f3084e7c>

Crimson flames tied through my ears
Rolling high and mighty traps
Pounced with fire on flaming roads
Using ideas as my maps
"We'll meet on edges, soon," said I
Proud 'neath heated brow

Ah, but I was so much older then
I'm younger than that now

Half-wracked prejudice leaped forth
“Rip down all hate,” I screamed
Lies that life is black and white
Spoke from my skull, I dreamed
Romantic facts of musketeers
Foundationed deep, somehow

Ah, but I was so much older then
I'm younger than that now

Girls' faces formed the forward path
From phony jealousy
To memorizing politics
Of ancient history
Flung down by corpse evangelists
Unthought of, though, somehow

Ah, but I was so much older then
I'm younger than that now

A self-ordained professor's tongue
Too serious to fool

Spouted out that liberty
Is just equality in school
“Equality” I spoke the word
As if a wedding vow

Ah, but I was so much older then
I'm younger than that now

In a soldier's stance, I aimed my hand
At the mongrel dogs who teach
Fearing not I'd become my enemy
In the instant that I preach
My existence led by confusion boats
Mutiny from stern to bow

Ah, but I was so much older then
I'm younger than that now

Yes, my guard stood hard when abstract threats
Too noble to neglect
Deceived me into thinking
I had something to protect

Good and bad, I define these terms

Quite clear, no doubt, somehow

Ah, but I was so much older then

I'm younger than that now

Dylan, Bob. "It Ain't Me Babe" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5nbNWAfT1S6V1vqj3snHxS?si=0ccd712744cc4dae>

Go away from my window

Leave at your own chosen speed

I'm not the one you want, babe

I'm not the one you need

You say you're looking for someone

Who's never weak but always strong

To protect you and defend you

Whether you are right or wrong

Someone to open each and every door

But it ain't me, babe

No, no, no, it ain't me, babe

It ain't me you're looking for, babe

Go lightly from the ledge, babe

Go lightly on the ground
I'm not the one you want, babe
I will only let you down
You say you're looking for someone
Who will promise never to part
Someone to close his eyes for you
Someone to close his heart
Someone who will die for you and more

But it ain't me, babe
No, no, no, it ain't me, babe
It ain't me you're looking for, babe

Go melt back in the night
Everything inside is made of stone
There's nothing in here moving
And anyway I'm not alone
You say you're lookin' for someone
Who'll pick you up each time you fall
To gather flowers constantly
And to come each time you call
A lover for your life and nothing more

But it ain't me, babe

No, no, no, it ain't me, babe

It ain't me you're looking for, babe

Dylan, Bob. "I'm Not There" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/27ihjLGfySO5YPb8ZrD08o?si=360f0505783042d2>

It's alright

And then she's all too tight

In my neighbourhood

She cries both day and night

I know it because it was there

It's a milestone

But she down on her luck

And she daily so lonely

But to make hard to buck

I remain

I believe where she's stoppin'

If she wants time to care

I believe that she'd look upon

Deciding to care

And I go by the Lord in a way

She's on my way

But I don't belong there

No I don't belong to her

I don't belong to anybody

She's my prize-forsaken angel

But she don't hear me cry

She's a lone-hearted mystic

And she dain't carry on

When I'm there she's alright

But when she's not when I'm gone

Heaven knows that the answers

She's don't call no one

Sh's the way, assailin' beautiful

She's mine for the one

And I lost her heavy tension

By temptations does it runs

But she don't holler me

But I'm not there, I'm gone

Now I've cried tonight

Like I cried the night before
And I'm least on the high string
But I dream about the door
It's a long, she's forsaken
By her fate, ways to tell
It don't hang by formation
She's smiled, said thee well

Now went out treat the layway
I was born to love her
But she knows that the kingdom weighs
So high above her
And I run but I race
But it's not too fast to slim
But I don't perceive her
I'm not there, I'm gone

Well it's all about dead years'n
And I cried for her veil
I don't need anybody now
Beside me to tell
And it's all affirmation

I perceive but it's not

She's an old-hearted beauty

But she don't like the spot

And she come

Yes she's gone like the rainbow

The shining yesterday

But now she's warm beside me and

I'd like to hear to stay

She's a unforsaken beauty

And don't trust anyone

And I wish I was beside her

But I'm not there, I'm gone

Well it's a too-hard to stakin'

And I don't far believe

It's all bad for abusing

An' she's hard, too hard to leave

It's unknown, it's a crime

The way she mauls me around

But she told, phoned to hate me

But it's doomed to make a clown

Yes, I believe that its rightful
Oh I believe it in my mind
I been told like I said when I before
Carry on the grind
And she's all good to tole her
Like I said, carry on
I wish I was there to help her
But I'm not there, I'm gone

Dylan, Bob. "Joey" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/3sXLemtrtO6ygZF0G4OIwI?si=fa5f466927184baa>

Born in Red Hook, Brooklyn, in the year of who knows when
Opened up his eyes to the tune of an accordion
Always on the outside of whatever side there was
When they asked him why it had to be that way, "Well," he answered
"Just because"

Larry was the oldest, Joey was next to last
They called Joe "Crazy," the baby they called "Kid Blast"
Some say they lived off gambling and runnin' numbers too

It always seemed they got caught between the mob and the men in blue

Joey, Joey

King of the streets, child of clay

Joey, Joey

What made them want to come and blow you away?

There was talk they killed their rivals, but the truth was far from that

No one ever knew for sure where they were really at

When they tried to strangle Larry, Joey almost hit the roof

He went out that night to seek revenge, thinking he was bulletproof

The war broke out at the break of dawn, it emptied out the streets

Joey and his brothers suffered terrible defeats

Till they ventured out behind the lines and took five prisoners

They stashed them away in a basement, called them amateurs

The hostages were trembling when they heard a man exclaim

“Let’s blow this place to kingdom come, let Con Edison take the blame”

But Joey stepped up, and he raised his hands, said, “We’re not those kind of men

It’s peace and quiet that we need to go back to work again”

Joey, Joey

King of the streets, child of clay

Joey, Joey

What made them want to come and blow you away?

The police department hounded him, they called him Mr. Smith

They got him on conspiracy, they were never sure who with

“What time is it?” said the judge to Joey when they met

“Five to ten,” said Joey. The judge says, “That’s exactly what you get”

He did ten years in Attica, reading Nietzsche and Wilhelm Reich

They threw him in the hole one time for trying to stop a strike

His closest friends were black men because they seemed to understand

What it’s like to be in society with a shackle on your hand

When they let him out in ’71 he’d lost a little weight

But he dressed like Jimmy Cagney and I swear he did look great

He tried to find the way back into the life he left behind

To the boss he said, “I have returned and now I want what’s mine”

Joey, Joey

King of the streets, child of clay

Joey, Joey

What made them want to come and blow you away?

It was true that in his later years he would not carry a gun

“I’m around too many children,” he’d say, “they should never know of one”

Yet he walked right into the clubhouse of his lifelong deadly foe

Emptied out the register, said, “Tell them it was Crazy Joe”

One day they blew him down in a clam bar in New York

He could see it coming through the door as he lifted up his fork

He pushed the table over to protect his family

Then he staggered out into the streets of Little Italy

Joey, Joey

King of the streets, child of clay

Joey, Joey

What made them want to come and blow you away?

Sister Jacqueline and Carmela and mother Mary all did weep

I heard his best friend Frankie say, “He is not dead, he’s just asleep”

Then I saw the old man’s limousine head back towards the grave

I guess he had to say one last goodbye to the son that he could not save

The sun turned cold over President Street and the town of Brooklyn mourned

They said a mass in the old church near the house where he was born
And someday if God's in heaven overlooking His preserve
I know the men that shot him down will get what they deserve

Joey, Joey

King of the streets, child of clay

Joey, Joey

What made them want to come and blow you away?

Dylan, Bob. "Hurricane" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1lqMLr9Wj7SM2F9AikGcxN?si=721e6c73043447df>

Pistol shots ring out in the barroom night
Enter Patty Valentine from the upper hall
She sees the bartender in a pool of blood
Cries out, "My God, they killed them all!"

Here comes the story of the Hurricane
The man the authorities came to blame
For something that he never done
Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been
The champion of the world

Three bodies lyin' there

Does Patty see

And another man named Bello

Moving around mysteriously

“I didn’t do it,” he says

And he throws up his hands

“I was only robbin' the register

I hope you understand

I saw them leaving,” he says, and he stops

“One of us had better call up the cops”

And so Patty calls the cops

And they arrive on the scene

With their red lights flashin’

In the hot New Jersey night

Meanwhile, far away in another part of town

Rubin Carter and a couple of friends are drivin' around

Number one contender for the middleweight crown

Had no idea what kinda shit was about to go down

When a cop pulled him over to the side of the road

Just like the time before and the time before that

In Paterson that’s just the way things go

If you're black

You might as well not show up on the street

Unless you want to draw the heat

Alfred Bello had a partner and he had a rap for the cops

Him and Arthur Dexter Bradley were just out prowling around

He said, "I saw two men running out

They looked like middleweights

They jumped into a white car with out-of-state plates"

And Miss Patty Valentine just nodded her head

Cop said, "Wait a minute, boys, this one's not dead"

So they took him to the infirmary

And though this man could hardly see

They told him that he could identify the guilty men

Four in the morning and they haul Rubin in

They take him to the hospital and they brought him upstairs

The wounded man looks up through his one dying eye

Says, "Why did you bring him in here for?

He ain't the guy!"

Here's the story of the Hurricane

The man the authorities came to blame
For something that he never done
Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been
The champion of the world

Four months later, the ghettos are in flame
Rubin's in South America, fighting for his name
While Arthur Dexter Bradley's still in the robbery game
And the cops are putting the screws to him
Lookin' for somebody to blame

“Remember that murder that happened in a bar?”
“Remember you said you saw the getaway car?”
“You think you'd like to play ball with the law?”
“Think it might-a been that fighter that you saw
Running that night?”
“Don't forget that you are white”

Arthur Dexter Bradley said, “I'm really not sure”
The cops said, “A poor boy like you could use a break
We got you for the motel job
And we're talking to your friend Bello
Now you don't want to have to go back to jail

Be a nice fellow

You'll be doing society a favor

That son of a bitch is brave and gettin' braver

We want to put his ass in stir

We want to pin this triple murder

On him

He ain't no Gentleman Jim"

Rubin could take a man out with just one punch

But he never did like to talk about it all that much

"It's my work", he'd say, "and I do it for pay

And when it's over I'd just as soon go on my way"

Up to some paradise

Where the trout streams flow and the air is nice

And ride a horse along a trail

But then they took him to the jailhouse

Where they try to turn a man

Into a mouse

All of Rubin's cards were marked in advance

The trial was a pig-circus

He never had a chance
The judge made Rubin's witnesses
Drunkards from the slums
To the white folks who watched
He was a revolutionary bum

And to the black folks he was just a crazy nigga
No one doubted that he pulled the trigger
And though they could not produce the gun
The D.A. said he was the one
Who did the deed
And the all-white jury agreed

Rubin Carter was falsely tried
The crime was murder "one,"
Guess who testified?
Bello and Bradley and they both baldly lied
And the newspapers, they all went along for the ride

How can the life of such a man
Be in the palm of some fool's hand?
To see him obviously framed
Couldn't help but make me feel ashamed

To live in a land

Where justice is a game

Now all the criminals in their coats and their ties

Are free to drink Martinis

And watch the sun rise

While Rubin sits like Buddha

In a ten-foot cell

An innocent man in a living hell

Yes that's the story of the Hurricane

But it won't be over till they clear his name

And give him back the time he's done

Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been

The champion of the world

Mitchell, Joni. "California" Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm39YkGrHp8>

Sitting in a park in Paris, France

Reading the news and it sure looks bad

They won't give peace a chance

That was just a dream some of us had

Still a lot of lands to see

But I wouldn't wanna stay here
It's too old and cold and settled in its ways here

Oh, but California
California, I'm coming home
I'm going to see the folks I dig
I'll even kiss a Sunset pig
California, I'm coming home

I met a redneck on a Grecian isle
Who did the goat dance very well
He gave me back my smile
But he kept my camera to sell
Oh, the rogue, the red red rogue
He cooked good omelets and stews
And I might have stayed on with him there
But my heart cried out for you

California
Oh, California, I'm coming home
Oh, make me feel good rock 'n roll band
I'm your biggest fan
California, I'm coming home

Oh, it gets so lonely
When you're walking
And the streets are full of strangers
All the news of home you read
Just gives you the blues
Just gives you the blues

So I bought me a ticket
I got on a plane to Spain
Went to a party down a red dirt road
There were lots of pretty people there
Reading Rolling Stone, reading Vogue
They said, "How long can you hang around?"
I said a week, maybe two
Just until my skin turns brown, the I'm going home

To California
California, I'm coming home
Oh, will you take me as I am?
Strung out on another man
California, I'm coming home

Oh, it gets so lonely
When you're walking
And the streets are full of strangers
All the news of home you read
More about the war
And the bloody changes

Oh, will you take me as I am?
Will you take me as I am?
Will you?
Will you take me as I am?
Hmmm mmmmm
Take me as I am

Mitchell, Joni. "For The Roses" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uRRcAba7aA>

I heard it in the wind last night, it sounded like applause
Did you get a round resounding for you way up here?
It seems like many dim years ago since I heard that face to face
Or seen you face to face, though tonight I can feel you here

I get these notes
On butterflies and lilac sprays

From girls who just have to tell me

They saw you somewhere

In some office sits a poet and he trembles as he sings

And he asks some guy to circulate his soul around

On your mark red ribbon runner, the caressing rev of motors

Finely tuned like fancy women in thirties evening gowns

Up the charts, off to the airport

Your name's in the news, everything's first class

The lights go down and it's just you up there

Getting them to feel like that

Remember the days when you used to sit and make up your tunes for love

And pour your simple sorrow to the sound hole and your knee

And now you're seen on giant screens and at parties for the press

And for people who have slices of you from the company

They toss around your latest golden egg

Speculation, well who's to know

If the next one in the nest

Will glitter for them so?

I guess I seem ungrateful with my teeth sunk in the hand
That brings me things I really can't give up just yet
Now I sit up here the critic and they introduce some band
But they seem so much confetti looking at them on my TV set

Oh the power and the glory
Just when you're getting a taste for worship
They start bringing out the hammers
And the boards and the nails

I heard it in the wind last night, it sounded like applause
Chilly now, end of summer, no more shiny hot nights
It was just the arbutus rustling and the bumping of the logs
And the moon swept down black water like an empty spotlight

Mitchell, Joni. "The Boho Dance" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQc-reJOQ8A>

Down in the cellar in the Boho Zone
I went looking for some sweet inspiration
Oh well, just another hard-time band
With Negro affectations
I was a hopeful in rooms like this
When I was working cheap

It's an old romance, the Boho dance

It hasn't gone to sleep

But even on the scuffle

The cleaner's press was in my jeans

And any eye for detail

Caught a little lace along the seams

And you were in the parking lot

Subterranean by your own design

The virtue of your style inscribed

On your contempt for mine

Jesus was a beggar, he was rich in grace

And Solomon kept his head in all his glory

It's just that some steps outside the Boho dance

Have a fascination for me

A camera pans the cocktail hour

Behind a blind of potted palms

And finds a lady in a Paris dress

With runs in her nylons

You read those books where luxury

Comes as a guest to take a slave
Books where artists in noble poverty
Go like virgins to the grave
Don't you get sensitive on me
'Cause I know you're just too proud
You couldn't step outside the Boho dance now
Even if good fortune allowed

Like a priest with a pornographic watch
Looking and longing on the sly
Sure it's stricken from your uniform
But you can't get it out of your eyes

Nothing is capsulized in me
On either side of town
The streets were never really mine
Not mine these glamor gowns

Mitchell, Joni. "Free Man in Paris" Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xW_IS-DPZ1E

The way I see it, he said, you just can't win it
Everybody's in it for their own gain
You can't please 'em all

There's always somebody calling you down

I do my best and I do good business

There's a lot of people asking for my time

They're trying to get ahead

They're trying to be a good friend of mine

I was a free man in Paris, I felt unfettered and alive

There was nobody calling me up for favors

And no one's future to decide

You know I'd go back there tomorrow

But for the work I've taken on

Stoking the star maker machinery behind the popular song

I deal in dreamers and telephone screamers

Lately I wonder what I do it for

If I had my way, I'd just walk through those doors

And wander down the Champs-Élysées

Going café to cabaret

Thinking how I'll feel when I find

That very good friend of mine

I was a free man in Paris, I felt unfettered and alive

Nobody was calling me up for favors

No one's future to decide

You know I'd go back there tomorrow

But for the work I've taken on

Stoking the star maker machinery behind the popular song

Mitchell, Joni. "People's Parties" Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JsVcxopKTE>

All the people at this party, they've got a lot of style

They've got stamps of many countries, they've got passport smiles

Some are friendly, some are cutting, some are watching it from the wings

Some are standing in the center, giving to get something

Photo beauty gets attention, then her eye paint's running down

She's got a rose in her teeth and a lampshade crown

One minute she's so happy, then she's crying on someone's knee

Saying laughing and crying, you know it's the same release

I told you when I met you I was crazy, cry for us all beauty

Cry for Eddie in the corner thinking he's nobody

And Jack behind his joker and stone-cold Grace behind her fan

And me in my frightened silence, thinking I don't understand

I feel like I'm sleeping, can you wake me?

You seem to have a broader sensibility
I'm just living on nerves and feelings with a weak and a lazy mind
And coming to people's parties, fumbling deaf, dumb and blind

I wish I had more sense of humor, keeping the sadness at bay
Throwing the lightness on these things
Laughing it all away
Laughing it all away
Laughing it all away

Mitchell, Joni. "Down To You" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3ZgSUmuy74>

Everything comes and goes
Marked by lovers and styles of clothes
Things that you held high and told yourself were true
Lost or changing as the days come down to you

Down to you, constant stranger
You're a kind person, you're a cold person too
It's down to you
It all comes down to you

You go down to the pick up station

Craving warmth and beauty

You settle for less than fascination

A few drinks later you're not so choosy

When the closing lights strip off the shadows

On this strange new flesh you've found

Clutching the night to you like a fig leaf, you hurry

To the blackness and the blankets

To lay down an impression and your loneliness

In the morning there are lovers in the street, they look so high

You brush against a stranger and you both apologize

Old friends seem indifferent, you must have brought that on

Old bonds have broken down, love is gone

Love is gone, written on your spirit this sad song

Love is gone

Everything comes and goes

Pleasure moves on too early and trouble leaves too slow

Just when you're thinking you've finally got it made

Bad news comes knocking at your garden gate

Knocking for you, constant stranger

You're a brute, you're an angel

You can crawl, you can fly too

It's down to you

It all comes down to you

Welch, Gillian. "Annabelle" Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mb7fm6YCAI4>

I lease twenty acres and one Jenny mule

From the Alabama trust

Half of the cotton, a third of the corn

Ya get a handful of dust

And we cannot have all things to please us

No matter how we try

Until we've all gone to Jesus

We can only wonder why

I had a daughter, called her Annabelle

She's the apple of my eye

Tried to give her something like I never had

I didn't want to ever hear her cry

And we cannot have all things to please us

No matter how we try

Until we've all gone to Jesus

We can only wonder why

When I'm dead and buried I'll take a hard life of tears

For every day I've ever known

Anna's in the churchyard, she's got no life at all

She's only got these words on a stone

And we cannot have all things to please us

No matter how we try

Until we've all gone to Jesus

We can only wonder why

Until we've all gone to Jesus

We only wonder why

Welch, Gillian. "Hard Times" Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k35haKwqY14>

There was a Camptown man, used to plow and sing

And he loved that mule and the mule loved him

When the day got long, as it does about now

I'd hear him singing to his muley cow

Calling, "Come on, my sweet old girl

I'd bet the whole damn world

And we're gonna make it yet to the end of the row"

Singing "Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind

Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind, Bessie

Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind no more"

Said it's a mean old world, heavy in need

And that big machine is just a-picking up speed

And we're supping on tears, and we're supping on wine

We all get to heaven in our own sweet time

So come all you Asheville boys

And turn up your old-time noise

And kick 'til the dust comes up from the cracks in the floor

Singing, "Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind, brother

Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind

Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind no more"

But the Camptown man, he doesn't plow no more

I seen him walking down to the cigarette store

Guess he lost that knack and he forgot that song

Woke up one morning and the mule was gone

So come all ye ragtime kings
And come on, you dogs, and sing
And pick up your dusty old horn and give it a blow
Playing, "Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind, honey
Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind, sugar
Hard times ain't gonna rule my mind no more"

Welch, Gillian. "Elvis Presley Blues" Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/track/61P1PWE1JfgK4JU1BZiOkA?si=2f1884b7ae274149>

I was thinking that night about Elvis
Day that he died, day that he died
I was thinking that night about Elvis
Day that he died, day that he died

Just a country boy that combed his hair
And put on a shirt his mother made and went on the air
And he shook it like a chorus girl
And he shook it like a Harlem queen
And he shook it like a midnight Rambler, baby
Like you never seen
Never seen

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

'Cause he took it all out of black and white

Grabbed his wand in the other hand and he held on tight

And he shook it like a hurricane

And he shook it like to make it break

And he shook it like a holy roller, baby

With his soul at stake

Soul at stake

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

He was all alone in a long decline

Thinking how happy John Henry was that he fell down and died

When he shook it and he rang like silver

And he shook it and it shined like gold

And he shook it and he beat that steam drill, baby

Well bless my soul

Well bless my soul

And he shook it and he beat that steam drill, baby

Well bless my soul, what's wrong with me?

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

I was thinking that night about Elvis

Day that he died, day that he died

Just a country boy that combed his hair

And put on a shirt his mother made and went on the air

And he shook it like a chorus girl

And he shook it like a Harlem queen

And he shook it like a midnight Rambler, baby

Like you never seen

Never seen

Like you never seen

Never seen

Welch, Gillian. "One Little Song" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/7wjKYtmxLwZeY6iEMadee8?si=85bda04d61024729>

There's gotta be a song left to sing
'Cause everybody can't have thought of everything
One little song that ain't been sung
One little rag that ain't been wrung out completely yet
That's got a little left

One little drop of falling rain
One little chance to try again
One little bird that makes it home now and then
One little piece of endless sky
One little taste of cherry pie
One little week in paradise and I start thinking

There's gotta be a song left to sing
'Cause everybody can't have thought of everything
One little note that ain't been used
One little word ain't been abused a thousand times
In a thousand rhymes

One little drop of falling rain
One little chance to try again
One little bird that makes it every now and then
One little piece of endless sky

One little taste of cherry pie

One little week in paradise and I start thinking

Gotta be a song left to sing

'Cause everybody can't have thought of everything

One little song that ain't been sung

One little rag that ain't been wrung out completely yet

'Til there's nothing left

Big Thief, "Mary" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2l6aKj7mOu8MyYX4yFtlZ8?si=8e1a99bf92c945c9>

Burn up with the water

The floods are on the plains

The planets in rows

Who knows what they contain?

And my brain is like an orchestra

Playing on, insane

Will you love me like you loved me in the January rain?

Mom and Dad and violins

Somber country silence

The needle stopped the kicking

The clothes pins on the floor

And my heart is playing hide and seek

Wait and count to four

Will you love me like you loved me and I'll never ask for more

What did you tell me Mary

When you were there so sweet and very

Full of field and stars

You carried all of time

Oh and, heavens, when you looked at me

Your eyes were like machinery

Your hands were making artifacts in the corner of my mind

Monastery monochrome

Boom balloon machine and oh

Diamond rings and gutter bones

Marching up the mountain

With our aching planning, high and smiling

Cheap drink, dark and violent

Full of butterflies, the violent tenderness

The sweet asylum

The clay you find is fortified

We felt unfocused fade the line

The sugar rush, the constant hush

The pushing of the water gush

The marching band when April ran

May June bugs fly and

Push your gin Jacob

With the tired wiry brandy look

Here we go round, Mary

In your famous story book

We overcome the sirens

We look both left and right

And I can feel the numbness accompany my plight

And I know that someday soon I'll see you

But now you're out of sight

And you'll kiss me like you used to in the January night

What did you tell me Mary

When you were there so sweet and very

Full of field and stars

You carried all of time

Oh and, heavens, when you looked at me

Your eyes were like machinery

Your hands were making artifacts in the corner of my mind

Monastery monochrome
Boom balloon machine and oh
Diamond rings and gutter bones
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With our aching planning, high and smiling
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We felt unfocused fade the line
The sugar rush, the constant hush
The pushing of the water gush
The marching band when April ran
May June bugs fly and
Push your gin Jacob
With the tired wiry brandy look
Here we go round, Mary
In your famous story book

Big Thief. "Red Moon" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3AqSeHqtg45ddsAYJeuCqm?si=912dd923213943cb>

Red moon rising like a fire in me
So many questions, she asks them all to me

I have to answer most curiously
Scarlet angel, I am too small to see
Earn, earn, shuffle 'round the big city
Burning the rubber down, crossing the hot concrete
I'm gonna leave town, there is someone to meet
She turns her head around a full three-sixty
Woo

Bedroom rising from an old growth tree
Bringing out the sawmill, cutting the twelve-inch beams
Building a pattern, the reservoir to fill with dreams
Rings like Saturn telling their old story
Windmills turn and turn eternally
What do you yearn for? Where do you long to be?
I've been here before, looking at the wild country
Open the screen door, talking with Diane Lee
That's my grandma

Radio singing from the corner of the kitchen
I got the oven on, I got the onions wishing
They hadn't made me cry, filling the sink with dishes
Letting them air dry, waiting for the wind's permission
Too many movies got me shivering and shy

Turning the lights out, glistening in the owl's eye

Glimmer like lightning under the violet sky

Shimmer like diamonds, watching the red moon rise

Ooh

Big Thief. "Spud Infinity" Spotify.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/3Q6VfeIZ1bTjWiNe2Or4LQ?si=565bf4b006204c2b>

What's it gonna take?

What's it gonna take?

What's it gonna take

To free the celestial body?

From way up there, it looks so small

From way down here, it looks so small

One peculiar organism aren't we all together?

Everybody steps on ants

Everybody eats the plants

Everybody knows to dance, even with just one finger

What's it gonna take?

What's it gonna take?

What's it gonna take

To free the celestial body?

When I took another look
The past was not a history book
That was just some linear perception
Ash to ask and dust to dusk
A dime a dozen, aren't we just?
But a dozen dimes will buy a crust of garlic bread

What's it gonna take?
What's it gonna take?
What's it gonna take
To free the celestial body?

When I say celestial
I mean extraterrestrial
I mean accepting the alien you've rejected in your own heart
When I say heart, I mean finish
The last one there is a potato knish
Baking too long in the sun of Spud Infinity
When I say infinity, I mean now
Kiss the one you are right now
Kiss your body up and down, other than your elbows
'Cause as for your elbows, they're on their own

Wandering like a rolling stone
Rubbing up against the edges of experience

What's it gonna take?
What's it gonna take?
What's it gonna take?
What's it gonna take
To free the celestial body?
Woo

Big Thief. "Vampire Empire" Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XCMoPu8TXw>

Watching TV tired, bleeding on the bed
The milk has just expired, all the leaves are dead
I'm not quiet, you've been quiet, just receiving what you said
Reeling feeding feeling filled by everything you fed
I see you as you see yourself through all the books you read
Overwhelmed with guilt and realizing the disease

You give me chills
I've had it with the drills
I am nothing, you are nothing, we are nothing with the pills
I am empty 'til she fills

Alive until she kills

In her vampire empire, I'm the fish and she's my gills

Falling, yeah

Falling, yeah

I see you there rejecting all your earthly power

Protecting and dissecting 'til you've emptied every hour

We jumped into the pond and then come under the shower

We lay upon my pillow and you open like a flower

I wanted to see you naked, I wanted to hear you scream

I wanted to kiss your skin and your everything

I wanted to be your woman, I wanted to be your man

I wanted to be the one that you could understand

You give me chills

I've had it with the drills

I am nothing, you are nothing, we are nothing with the pills

I am empty 'til she fills

Alive until she kills

I'm her vampire empire, I'm the fish and she's my gills

Falling, yeah

Falling, yeah

[Instrumental Break]

I walked into your dagger for the last time in a row

It's like trying to start a fire with matches in the snow

Well, you can't seem to hold me here, you can't seem to let me go

So I can't find surrender, can't keep control

You turn me inside out and then you want me outside in

You spin me all around and then you ask me not to spin

You say you want to be alone and then you want children

You wanna be with me, you wanna be with him

You give me chills

I've had it with the drills

I am nothing, you are nothing, we are nothing with the pills

I am empty 'til she fills

Alive until she kills

In her vampire empire, I'm the fish and she's my gills

Falling, yeah

Falling, yeah

Falling, yeah

Falling, yeah [scream]

Big Thief. "12,000 Lines" Spotify

<https://open.spotify.com/track/054hQgiHkYgHZzHjIDj7ch?si=40fb88afeb044250>

Crossed twelve-thousand lines looking for your face

Only to find not a trace

Even the memory of your mouth tries to disappear

Little lights turn into spheres

Blue mountain in the rearview

Some nights, barely breathing at all

Waiting for my woman to call

Cross twelve letters down, found the longest word

This morning, I'd heard

Somebody said they saw you 'round 1st and 23rd

Blue feathers in your hairdo

Some nights, barely breathing at all

Waiting for my woman to call

Maple cherry leaves start to fall

Waiting for my woman to call

Sweet honey, stirring in my tea

You're stirring me

Forgiveness, all the money in the world

Won't buy it

Some nights, barely breathing at all

Waiting for my woman to call