

16 Gitlin 92.

17 Martin Buber, "Religion and Modern Thinking," *Eclipse of God*, Trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper, 1954) 97.

Chapter 2

The Nightingale's Code

Early in 1963, Dylan responded to the idea that he was a prophet in a song, with the words, "I know I ain't no prophet / And I ain't no prophet's son!"¹, but from time to time he would write another song that hinted about Judgment Day the way "Blowin' in the Wind" did—by making reference to the wind, the rain, or other effects of a storm, including especially a deluge like the Flood described in the Bible.

The first time he came back to this meteorological "conceit" was in September 1962, when he wrote "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." He returned to it, again, in August 1963 with "When the Ship Comes In," in September 1963 with "The Times They Are A-Changin'," in February 1964 with "Chimes of Freedom," in October 1964 with "Gates of Eden," in December 1964 with "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," in July 1965 with "Desolation Row," and in November 1965 with "Visions of Johanna." Dylan suddenly retired in the summer of 1966, but during the first year and a half of his retirement he continued to make up new songs, and among them was one more song that seemed to say that the end of the world was coming by referring to a storm. The date of composition of "All Along the Watchtower" has not been established, but it was recorded in November 1967. After that, Dylan stopped communicating with the public altogether, for a while, and brought an end to the phase of his career in which his reputation as the prophet of the peace movement was established.

Between the fall of 1961, when he signed his first recording contract, and the fall of 1967, when he concluded his apocalypse, Dylan wrote dozens of songs that enhanced his reputation as a prophet; but "Blowin' in the Wind" and these nine other storm songs would probably be the best examples of prophecy from Dylan's compositions of that period because of the way they worked in tandem to describe the coming of the Messiah and heaven and hell.

Although these songs spoke darkly, they shed light on numerous contemporary issues. Individually and in ensemble they offered a complex critique of American society, which is a matter of utmost concern to the historical record because the conduct that distinguished the members of the peace movement was their participation in political demonstrations on behalf of social causes. In fact, four of these storm songs, "Blowin' in the Wind," "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," "When the Ship Comes In," and "The Times They Are A-Changin'," have repeatedly been mentioned or quoted by historians, in passing, when they discuss the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement. The other six songs, "Chimes of Freedom," "Gates Of Eden," "It's all Over Now, Baby Blue," "Desolation Row," "Visions of Johanna," and "All Along the Watchtower," are more difficult than the first four and are not cited by historians; nevertheless, they had an influence on the evolution of the peace movement—especially the ones that Dylan played with rock and roll instrumentation ("Desolation Row" and "Visions of Johanna")—because after Dylan started playing with a rock and roll band he was able to reach a much younger and much larger audience.

I have one more reason for naming these ten songs as outstanding examples of prophecy, which has to do with the fact that they are all highly enigmatic—that is, when

Dylan discovered the rhetorical means to address religious issues and political issues simultaneously, through enigma, he discovered one of the means used in magic cultures to make rain. I would assume that he did so instinctively, without thinking about rainmaking—as I would assume he crafted the music of these songs, which might be called “dance music,” without thinking about dancing. Nevertheless, his discovery of this poetic device, which has been used since prehistoric times to make rain, was highly appropriate, for Dylan not only pretended to describe the Messiah’s coming by describing an approaching storm, he pretended again and again to wish for that storm to begin. He even prayed for the Messiah to come in one song, “**Mr. Tambourine Man**,” which he wrote in 1964. There the idea that the “tambourine man” will take him for a ride on his ship provides the best clue to the idea that he was addressing God and asking God to come (verse 2). There is no direct reference to the storm in “Mr. Tambourine Man,” but Dylan hinted about the fate of the world by calling the world “evening’s empire” and by saying that he wished to see himself beside the sea at dawn, dancing, laughing, and ready to depart.

I will return to the subject of enigma. For now, one observation about the genre should suffice: what makes riddles work is detail that does not make sense or that runs counter to ordinary experience. In Dylan’s storm songs it is what he implies about the way the storm will be related to society, above all, that is odd; furthermore, this is the essential prophetic content of these songs. For example, “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” suggest that the storm will end cruelty and unkindness; “The Times They Are A-Changin’” suggests that people can help to bring on the storm but cannot stop it. “When the Ship Comes In” and “Chimes of Freedom” suggest that some people will be lifted up above the waters of the storm, while others will be swept away by them; “Gates of Eden” and “Visions of Johanna” suggest that some people will live happily in a garden after the storm, while other people will be confined in a place of abject misery; and “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” “Desolation Row,” and “All Along the Watchtower” suggest, among other things, that the storm will take people by surprise.

Other enigmatic detail in the narratives sketched by these songs concerns the “ship” that will carry people who are saved to heaven. In “When the Ship Comes In,” Dylan suggested that he and his friends will watch from the deck of this ship when the sea washes their enemies away (verse 8); he called it a “magic swirling ship” in “Mr. Tambourine Man” (verse 2); but in “Visions of Johanna,” he used a more puzzling expression to describe a ship that has to do with one of the functions of ships. A ship hauls people and equipment for fishing, or a ship can haul fish back to land, so Dylan called the Messiah’s ship a “fish truck” (verse 5). In “Gates of Eden,” he suggested that there will be more than one ship to carry the saints to heaven, calling them “ships with tattooed sails” (verse 2). The idea that passage to another life might be like passage in a boat, over a river or sea, would seem to be universal; but Dylan’s suggestion that the ships that carry souls to heaven will have something written or drawn on their sails may have been his innovation—certainly, his way of working with this idea was uniquely his own in “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” where he pretended that the “empty-handed painter” was getting the ship ready by “drawing crazy patterns” on Baby Blue’s “sheets”—which is another word for sails (verse 2). This was one of Dylan’s more carefully hidden references to the ship, the storm, and the Messiah; but an equally difficult reference could be found in

“Chimes of Freedom,” where Dylan pretended to describe the moment of salvation and rescue as a event that had already happened, and said that he and his companions “ducked inside the doorway” to refer to their entry into the ship (verse 1). But the most obscure reference to the ship in all of Dylan’s published songs of the period is the first reference he made to her in “Blowin’ in the Wind,” where he compared her to a bird and called her *The White Dove*² (verse 1).

Dylan worked with an unusual and ambiguous assortment of images to name the Messiah in these songs. In “Gates of Eden” he called him, “the cowboy angel” (verse 1) and “silver-studded phantom” (verse 5)³; in “It’s all Over Now, Baby Blue” he called him “the empty-handed painter” (verse 2) and “the vagabond” (verse 4); in “Desolation Row” he called him “the Good Samaritan” (verse 3) and “the phantom of the opera” (verse 7); and in “Visions of Johanna” Dylan called the Messiah “the fiddler” (verse 5).

The most common enigmatic references in these songs, and in Dylan’s repertoire in general, concern the sea, the rain, and the element of water, per se. They include Dylan’s subtlest images—beginning with two references to the sea that appear in “**Blowin’ in the Wind**”: he envisioned the “dove” sailing the seas in search of a place to rest, and he envisioned a “mountain” washing into the sea. There was not another word in this song, except in the chorus, to help Dylan’s listeners understand that he had begun to sketch visions of a global deluge—but that was exactly what he was doing.

In “**Hard Rain**,” Dylan made his meaning regarding the flood much clearer; however, the figure in this song that suggests most powerfully that water will cover the entire earth is profoundly enigmatic. It is near the conclusion, in the line which says, “I’ll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin’.” The wording might bring to mind the biblical anecdote concerning Jesus walking on water and Peter sinking into it⁴; however, Dylan’s curious way of expressing himself in this case is not altogether different for the way he expressed himself in “Blowin’ in the Wind,” in the line, “How many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea?” In both cases, the listener is obliged to discover that the singer sees a flood in his mind’s eye when he looks at dry land, and that for him “the mountain will be washed to the sea” in the same way that he will “start sinkin’” into the ocean—that is, the rising water will bring the sea up to him and to the mountain.

The influence of the English ballad, “Lord Randall” on “Hard Rain” is obvious because Dylan borrowed the melody of “Lord Randall” and he imitated the dramatic situation presented in “Lord Randall” in his song—that is, ostensibly the song is a dialogue between a young man and his mother concerning matters of life and death. But the self-portrait Dylan created in “Hard Rain” is nothing like the portrait of “Lord Randall,” who came home to “lie down and to die.”⁵ Dylan pretended that he was going back out (verse 5) and that he was going to “sing”; furthermore, when he said he would “walk to the depths of the deepest dark forest” he showed that he had read Dante’s *Inferno* and that he intended to do what Dante had done—that is, he would pretend to visit hell and to write about what he would see there.⁶

The only time Dylan explicitly pretended to describe the ship, the rescue of the saints, and the destruction of the damned was in “**When the Ship Comes In**.” In this song, he scrambled the sequence of events slightly as he told his story: he described what will

happen when the ship first appears in verses 1, 2, 3, and 4; he described what will happen when the ship arrives at heaven's shore in verses 5 and 6; and then he described what will happen when the ship departs from this world in verses 7 and 8. Although Dylan did not explicitly say so here or anywhere else, the sea was all that separated heaven, as he envisioned it, from hell. It was a living part of a world in which everything was animated and happy (verses 1, 2, and 3), and it was also a monster that breaks its "chains" in the night to attack (verse 4). When Dylan pretended, in verses 7 and 8, that he and his companion will be able to see through the walls and into the bedrooms of people who "will be drowned in the tide" he was working with an idea he had already begun to elaborate in "Masters of War" and would continue to elaborate in "The Times They Are A-Changin'," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and "Desolation Row."

In "**Masters of War**," which Dylan wrote about six months before "When the Ship Comes In," he characterized his enemies and summoned them with the words, "You who hide behind walls!" and "You who hide behind desks!" and he suggested that he could see through his enemies themselves by comparing them to water that carries away sewage (verse 3). This would seem to have been the lowest comparison he could create—using water as his reference, that is—because it not only suggested that his enemies were filthy, it suggested that they had lost their proper form and were no longer fully human.⁷ "Masters of War" is not a riddle, and it does not make reference to the storm, but it is prophetic because it is a formal curse: it names the enemy, it invokes Jesus by name when it says that the enemy will "never" be forgiven (verse 6), and it expresses a wish that the enemy will "die" (verse 8).

"Masters of War" would be a fine example of the songs Dylan wrote, in addition to his storm-warning songs, that helped promote his reputation as a prophet; but "**The Times They Are A-Changin'**," which was Dylan's fourth storm song, proclaimed that the peace movement was a revolutionary movement in more explicit terms than anything he had written before or anything he would write later. Its title, "The Times They Are A-Changin'," became one of the most frequently repeated catchphrases of the decade; however, journalists and historians used it to describe the present, whereas Dylan used it to describe the future as well. He specified that he was talking to "writers and critics" (verse 2), "senators and congressmen" (verse 3), and "mothers and fathers" (verse 4), and what he told them was to leave young people alone and to prepare to see destruction.

This was not the first time Dylan had indicated that he was speaking on behalf of youth—he did so very subtly in the first line of "Blowin' in the Wind," and he did so most explicitly in "Masters of War"—but in "The Times They Are A-Changin'" he did not address militarism or racism. Working with the image of the "new road" to speak of the peace movement (verse 4) and pretending that he could see through things and could speak to people inside buildings (verse 3), Dylan suggested three things about the movement: its members were gathered outdoors, they were young, and they were at war with their elders. He suggested that the authorities were indoors, that they were old, and that they were going to be defeated. When Dylan said that the "battle" was going to shake the "windows" and rattle the "walls" of the enemy, he equated the peace movement with the storm, and in effect he cursed cities and buildings along with the people inside them.

"**Chimes of Freedom**" also mentions "walls" that will be destroyed at the end of time

(verse 2), but the first reference in it to a structure, “We ducked inside the doorway, thunder crashing,” refers to the ship, not to a building; however, Dylan did not mention the ship or the sea in this song. He depicted the storm by speaking of the lightning and thunder, the “rain” (verse 2), the “hail” (verse 3), and a “cloud’s white curtain” (verse 5)⁸; however, to interpret his story the listener has to recognize that the events concerning the singer and his companions are told in reverse chronological sequence. Verse 6 tells what happened first, “Starry-eyed and laughing...we were caught / ... / We listened ... we watched... spellbound”; verse 2 tells what happened next, “In the city’s melted furnace unexpectedly we watched / With faces hidden while the walls were tightening”; and verse 1 tells what happened last, “We ducked inside the doorway.” If the listener turns past tense verbs to future tense and reverses the sequence of the song’s events, Dylan’s prophecy emerges: the Messiah will come to claim his people before the storm hits, he will take them onto his ship, and as the world is destroyed he will take them to heaven.

“Chimes of Freedom” is less obviously political in character than “The Times They Are A-Changin’” and less obviously prophetic, because Dylan used the past tense in this song to describe what will happen in the future. It closely resembles “The Times They Are A-Changin’” in that it implies that the singer is a member of a company of people who will be saved. “When the Ship Comes In” makes this sort of statement, too, but after “Chimes of Freedom” Dylan pretended to describe the situation of the damned in four storm songs: “Gates of Eden,” “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” “Desolation Row,” and “Visions of Johanna.” The ugly things he had to say about people in these songs and the problematic way these songs are constructed make them difficult to contemplate—that is, they depict perversion and vanity, and they relate events in reverse chronological sequence. However, there is also humor in the way Dylan mocked his enemies and in the way he envisioned the Messiah in these songs.

“**Gates of Eden**” is the only song among these storm-warning-songs that hints that the vision it describes was seen in a dream, at night, during sleep; it is also the only one that seems to include references to Dylan’s personal life. Verse 5 envisions him on stage singing. Verse 8 envisions an empty “bed” that he said was “never” his. Verse 9 identifies a woman called “my lover.” The remark in that verse to the effect that she does not try to understand her “dreams” introduces the possibility that she dreamed the things the song describes—that is, that the song concerns the woman’s dream, not the singer’s. Dylan may have been hinting that he had met the woman he was going to marry; and, simultaneously, he may have been speaking allegorically in this reference to a woman of the dawn in order to suggest that the day he described in this song is the “last day.”

The content of the dream is revealed in verses 1, 3, 4, and 6, but the task of interpretation is made especially difficult by the fact that Dylan prefaced his narrative in verse 1 with an abstraction expressed in convoluted syntax, and then he entered the narrative abruptly, seemingly in the middle of forming a simile (“Of war and peace the truth just twists / Its curfew gull just glides / Upon four-legged forest clouds, the cowboy angel rides...”). Furthermore, he interrupted his dream-narrative in verses 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9 to describe and comment on the world around him, and in those verses he used terms that blur the distinction between what was seen in the world and what was seen in the dream. For example, in verse 2 he said, “The lamppost stands with folded arms / Its iron claws attached / To curbs ’neath holes where babies wail.” However, in contrast to the ugly

things he described in the world and in his vision of hell, he referred to heaven as a place with “trees” (verse 2), and he called it “Eden.” He also indicated that light could be seen there (verse 1) and laughter could be heard there (verse 4).

The only references to the storm in this song are extremely vague. There are no references to wind, rain, lightning, or flood, per se; however, the first dramatic image in the song envisions a “gull” in flight, which implies the presence of an ocean or large river or lake, the second scene envisions “clouds,” which implies the presence of moisture in the air and the potential for rain, and the third scene envisions a “beach” and departing “ships,” which distinctly implies the presence of a sea of some kind. All of these figures are clustered at the beginning of the song—which is to say at the end of the story, at nightfall. In order to make sense of them, the listener has to “see” all the song’s images and interpret all of its events, and this means that the listener has to know something about Dylan’s other work and the realm of ideas he tended to explore.

The song begins with a conclusion that can be restated prosaically something like this: “The truth about war and peace will be revealed at the end of time”—that is, it expresses this thought enigmatically. It ends with a hypothesis that can be rephrased: “The truth may be revealed in dreams.” Retold in normal chronological sequence, in the future tense, the dream-narrative can be retold something like this: the “Phantom” and the “motorcycle-black-madonna-two-wheeled-gypsy-queen” will ride into the world; the “dwarf” in “greyflannel” will “scream” when he sees them; “Aladdin” and the “monks” will make a futile attempt to break out of hell; the “soldier,” the “hunter,” and the “dogs” will panic when they see the ships leaving them behind; then the cowboy angel will ride into paradise bearing light, a feast will begin “beneath the trees,” and a bird will fly over the waters that separate heaven and hell.

In “**It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue**,” Dylan pretended that the end of the world had come and that the woman he was speaking to—“Baby Blue”—did not understand what was happening. He was speaking to her through the closed door of her house, and he could see her inside. He saw her strike a match in verse 4, apparently because the lights went out for her at about the time she heard him at the door. He saw the carpet being pulled out from under her in verse 3. He could read her mind as she continued to hesitate, wondering which way to go and what to take with her, in verse 2. He told her to “grab” something that would “last,” and he also insinuated that she was already dead because he referred to her “orphan” in verse 1. In the third line of verse 1, he characterized this orphan by saying that he had a “gun” and that he was “crying.”⁹ The fourth line, “Look out, the saints are coming through!” told the listener rather explicitly that this song was apocalyptic; however, Dylan made only one reference to the storm—the enigmatic reference to the ship he made by saying the empty-handed painter was drawing patterns on Baby Blue’s “sheets.”

There are several hints about the storm in “**Desolation Row**.” Dylan pretended that he was one of the damned and that he was inside a building talking to someone outside—which is to say, the dramatic situation presented in this song is similar to the dramatic situation in “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” except that the role Dylan assumed in “Desolation Row” is the opposite role. He was playing a part like “Baby Blue’s,” but he only seemed to be speaking to someone outside his door in verse 10; the rest of the time

he seemed to be talking to himself about what was happening and about what had happened before “the doorknob broke.” Someone called “lady” was shut inside with him, which may suggest that they were together when the world was suddenly transformed. The singer describes some of the sights and sounds of hell in verses 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8, and in the first half of verse 9. In the second half of verse 9, he describes heaven, mentioning laughing “calypso singers,” “fisherman,” “flowers,” and “lovely mermaids” he glimpsed for a moment through the “windows of the sea”; however, in verse 7 he indicates that his view of heaven—“across the street”—was permanently cut off when cloud “curtains” were “nailed up” and the “Phantom” separated people he was going to leave behind from those he was taking to heaven. Dylan referred to water as a “window” again in verse 4, when he had the singer say that “Ophelia” was “beneath the window” wearing an “iron vest.”¹⁰

In verse 3, the singer speaks about events he did not see that unfolded when the storm hit and the Messiah “showed” himself. It may seem that another person is speaking in this verse, but the sardonic allusions to “Cain and Abel” and the “Hunchback of Notre Dame” indicate that the speaker is the same individual speaking in the other verses. Knowledge of the other “side” of the sea, and of the rescue that was carried out while he and “lady” were “making love,” has come to him too late. He does not really understand, and he will never see heaven.

In “**Visions of Johanna**,” Dylan pretended once again that he was in hell; this time he pretended he was inside a building with two other people, “Louise” and “Little Boy Lost.” His song is a monologue; and, as in previous songs, he described what was happening to him and his companions and what had happened to them in a chaotic and surreal way. The first verse envisions the last event in his story: “Little Boy Lost” and “Louise” are in bed, and the singer stands near them. The second verse envisions scenes in hell outside the room where the singer, “Louise,” and “Little Boy Lost” are imprisoned. The third verse suggests that the singer is in Louise’s embrace, and that “Little Boy Lost” stands with his face turned to the wall. The fourth verse seems to envision the Louvre and its patrons as a part of hell. And the fifth verse envisions the Messiah loading passengers aboard a ship—which would be the first event of the story if it were told chronologically.

The most important clues to this interpretation are the references to the “opposite loft” (verse 1), where there are lights and music, references to the “fiddler” and the “fish truck” (verse 5), references to the rain (verses 1 and 5), to “electricity,” i.e., lightning (verse 2), and to “harmonicas,” i.e., wind (verse 5). The idea that a cold rain will fall in hell and that the damned will be naked are ideas that Dylan may have borrowed from Dante and the *Inferno*. In Dante’s story, the damned are naked and cold and exposed to bad weather¹¹, whereas Dylan envisioned the damned as being indoors; nevertheless, the line, “Louis held a handful of rain,” can be taken to mean that she, “Little Boy Lost,” and the singer were naked, wet, and cold, like the damned in the *Inferno*, because in the previous songs Dylan had hinted that the buildings that will be standing when the storm hits will be shaken and rattled (“The Times They Are A-Changin;”)—that is, it may be appropriate to think that the building in which the singer and his two companions are held is delapidated and that rain is pouring in. Then it would be possible for Louise to just hold out her hand in order to fill it with rain.

In 1962, Dylan made up a song about a woman whose name was the diminutive of

Louise—he called her “Gypsy Lou.”¹² The first verse presents the problem the song concerns: “She’s a ramblin’ woman with a ramblin’ mind / Always leavin’ somebody behind.” The next six verses describe “Gypsy Lou’s” travels and the singer’s pursuit in a jocular manner, but the last lines of the last verse do not scan well, and the idea they express—that “Gypsy Lou” was jailed for breaking a boy’s heart—is naive, however, it brings emphasis to the thought that sexual immorality destroys people. “Louise” in “Visions of Johanna” resembles “Gypsy Lou” because she is imprisoned and because the sexual conduct attributed to her is immoral. The singer mocks his two roommates by calling her “delicate” (verse 2) and him “Little Boy Lost” (verse 3). The name, “Little Boy Lost,” may indicate that this is the same “boy” who “committed suicide” in “Gypsy Lou.”

The name “Johanna” in the title and refrain of “Visions of Johanna” has been interpreted as being a reference to Joan Baez¹³, but Baez could not have been Dylan’s principal reference because she did not see visions—or she did not say that she did. Joan of Arc suffered martyrdom on account of her claims about her visions, but Joan of Arc’s visions cannot have been the visions Dylan referred to because they compelled her to go to war in defense of a monarchy. The only interpretation of this name that fits an eschatological interpretation of “Visions of Johanna” would be that Dylan was referring to St. John the Divine. Johanna is closer in sound to the Hebrew name “Johanan,” from which the Latin “Johannes” and several variations (including John and Joan) are derived, than any other. It enabled Dylan to speak of St. John’s *Revelations* and to suggest that his song was apocalyptic without using the word “revelation” or the name “John.”¹⁴

Dylan may have been on tour when he wrote “Visions of Johanna,” and he may have finished it before he was married, in late November, to Sara, the woman who would become the mother of his children. When he was not touring in late December, he recorded “Visions of Johanna” with The Band, calling it “Seems Like a Freeze Out.” Then he recorded it a second time with Nashville musicians reflecting the idea that country music will play in heaven (“the opposite loft”), which is suggested in verse 2. He went to Nashville in February, just before he began his last tour, which enabled him to perform at venues all around the world—that is, across the United States, then to Canada, Hawaii, Australia, Europe, Scandinavia, and the British Isles. He changed the last verse slightly so that his reference to the Messiah would be clearer,¹⁵ and he changed the song’s title to the obvious choice—“Visions of Johanna.”¹⁶

In March 1966, Robert Shelton interviewed Dylan during the first segment of that rock and roll tour, as Dylan was flying from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Denver, Colorado.¹⁷ He reports that Dylan was reading the galley proofs of *Tarantula*, which may indicate that Dylan brought that work to a conclusion before he retired, and Shelton says that Dylan talked about the movie that was going to be made during the last segment of the tour before him. The album on which “Visions of Johanna” appeared (*Blonde on Blonde*) was released on May 16, 1966, Dylan celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday on May 24, and he performed his last concert May 27. Then he went home, with his wife, to Woodstock. Later that summer Dylan’s manager informed the press that he was canceling all of the concerts that were scheduled for Dylan for that fall and winter. He said that Dylan had fallen from his motorcycle and had broken his neck; but Dylan hinted in the pages of *Tarantula* that he was going to retire. He also made the following remarks to Shelton in March, prior to his

retirement:

I could quit...People want to tear me apart, man. I don't take people up to the country now...I can be alone...I don't have anything to say to anybody...But it's hard for other people like that.¹⁸

Shelton reports that Robbie Robertson told him that when Dylan and The Band returned to the United States from their tour they, “didn't listen to music for a year.”¹⁹ That may mean that they didn't turn on the radio, listen to records, or go to concerts; however, they did get together to play music. Their collaboration is documented by dozens of songs that were recorded on the clandestine “basement tapes,” which told members of the peace movement's underground (the political “basement,” so to speak) that Dylan was okay and that he still had something to say. And after Dylan and The Band recorded these songs, Dylan worked with another ensemble to record an album entitled *John Wesley Harding*, which included the last storm-warning song he wrote before he began a more profound rest.

“**All Along the Watchtower**” begins with a conversation between two men, the “joker” and the “thief,” who are within a walled city, and it concludes with the singer's remarks about what is going on outside the city while this conversation is taking place. The joker complains about the world, but the thief warns him that the world is coming to an end. Their exchange might bring to mind the conversation recorded in the Bible that occurred between the two men who were crucified with Jesus because, in that story, too, one man was a scoffer, while the other feared God.²⁰

The singer's remarks in the last verse characterize the city by saying its inhabitants are controlled by “princes” and are served by “women” and “barefoot servants,” and they conclude by suggesting that the city and its inhabitants are about to be destroyed. To be more precise, in the last verse Dylan employed four images. The “wildcat” that growls “outside” is an enigmatic reference to the sea and the storm, resembling the figure in “When the Ship Comes In” that says, in effect, that the storm and the sea will roar like a monster that has broken its “chains.” The “two riders” who approach the city were also sketched in “Gates of Eden,” where Dylan called them the “motorcycle-black-madonna-two-wheeled-gypsy-queen” and “silver-studded phantom.” They are just called “riders” here, so the listener might imagine them as riding on motorcycles or horses—or on clouds or the wind. The fourth “image” is suggested in the song's last line, “The wind began to howl.” This phrase translated Dylan's enigmatic reference to the “growl” of the “wild cat” into explicit terms—the “howl” is the voice of the invisible “wind”—and it also closed the cycle of songs that began with questions about something “blowin' in the wind.” The songs within this cycle suggest that the storm Dylan began to hint about in 1962 had drawn closer, had hit full force, and had devastated the world. In January 1968, when “All Along the Watchtower” was released, the peace movement really *had* become a kind of storm, visiting several countries.

There is a legend in Welsh folklore that says twins were born at the beginning of the world who were named “Llewellyn,” which means “light,” and “Dylan,” which means “darkness.”²¹ This Dylan of Welsh lore leaped into the sea while he was still a boy and lived in the sea until the day he died. He was called “Son of the Wave.” Bob Dylan's work

“reflects light” in that it teaches ethics through reference to the Judeo-Christian tradition; however, “darkness” is a name that fit Dylan well because, from 1962 to 1967, he warned Americans that some of them were going to perish. Dylan hinted that the world was about to be destroyed and that God was about to bring salvation—that is to say, he spoke as a prophet. In fact, Dylan’s retirement and silence after autumn 1967 may be interpreted as a sign of humility and religiosity appropriate to a devout Jew. After six years of work (December 1961 to December 1967), perhaps Dylan believed that it would be a good idea to observe a special Sabbath. He may have bound himself to the peace movement beginning in 1961, when he became one of the founders of *Broadside*, with the idea that after six years of work he would rest for a year.

Notes

1 “Long Time Gone” has never been released on an official recording. It is printed in *Lyrics: 1962-1985* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) 27. Here is verse 7:

If I can help somebody with a word or song,
If I can show somebody they are travelin’ wrong,
But I know I ain’t no prophet an’ I ain’t no prophet’s son,
I’m just a long time a-comin’ an’ I’ll be a long time gone.

2 Dylan says, “The bird is here and you might want to enter it, but of course the door might be closed,” in “Sign on the Cross” (*Lyrics* 306). This song was on the bootleg *Basement Tapes*, but it has never been released on an official recording.

3 According to Shelton, when people asked Dylan for his autograph in 1966, he signed, “the Phantom.” Shelton 412.

4 *Matthew* 14: 25-32, begins: “During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake...” The translation I use here and elsewhere is *The Holy Bible, The New International Version, Containing The Old Testament and The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978).

5 Lord Randall says, “I fain would lie doone,” after he tells his mother that he has been poisoned.

6 Dante “stumbled on the side of a misty mountain” at the beginning of the *Inferno* (Canto I) and then followed the ghost of the poet Virgil to “the depths of the dark forest” (Canto II). Dante saw a “black branch with blood dripping” and “wicked birds of prey,” too (Canto XIII).

7 There is a more elaborate example of this sort of figure in *Tarantula* on pages 121-122, in one of the book’s “letters”:

...you can’t have me under your thumb anymore—not
because i’m too squirmy, but because your hands are
made out of water...when you wish to talk to me, let me
know ahead of time...i’ll have a bucket waiting.

8 In “Desolation Row,” when he said “Across the street they’ve nailed the curtains” (verse 7), he was probably referring to clouds, too.

9 Maybe Dylan compared the weeping of this person to a “fire in the sun” because the light of a fire is wasted in the sun, like tears that come too late.

10 Ophelia was the name of Prince Hamlet’s fiancée. According to Shakespeare’s rendering of the story, Hamlet wanted to sleep with Ophelia, but she refused him; then, when he stopped courting her, she committed suicide.

11 Before he entered hell, Dante said he saw an enormous throng of people, standing naked and cold, waiting to be carried across the River Styx (*Inferno*, Canto III, 62-129). Inside of hell, he depicted gluttons beaten down by heavy rain, hail, and snow (*Inferno*, Canto VI, 7-54).

12 “Gypsy Lou” has never been released on an official recording, but it appears in *Lyrics*, on page 26. (The text is printed in the appendix, on page 197.)

13 Anthony Scaduto seems to have assumed that Joan Baez was on Dylan’s mind when he sang about “Johanna” because he devoted an entire chapter of his book to an interview he conducted with Baez, and gave it the title, “Visions of Johanna.” Scaduto 191-210.

14 Nick DeSomogyi would seem to agree with me, for he remarks that “Visions of Johanna” concerns the “Johannine end.” Nick DeSomogyi, *Jokerman and Thieves: Bob Dylan and the Ballad Tradition* (Lancashire: Wanted Man, 1986) 21.

15 The change occurred at the end of stanza 5, which had said:

The fiddler now steps to the road
Everything’s gone which was owed
He examines the nightingale’s code
Still written on the fishtruck that loads
My conscience explodes

The no-action-verb “examines” was replaced by the action-verb “writes,” and Dylan told the listener what the fiddler writes. He eliminated the enigmatic reference to the “nightingale” (himself), which brought no action to the verse, and he added the word “while,” making the action described in the last line clearer.

16 “(Seems Like A) Freeze Out” may have referred to the exclusion of the damned from heaven and to the ice and cold of hell. (Dante described the hideous, frozen bottom of hell in the final cantos of the *Inferno*.)

17 Shelton describes this interview and quotes liberally from it. Shelton 394-412.

18 Shelton 405, 6.

19 Shelton 429.

20 The conversation between the two thieves and Jesus is recorded in *Luke* 23:32-43.

21 Charles Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance* (London: Gresham, 1910) 261.

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