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Time Out of Mind as Distant Past Beyond Memory; Bob Dylan and his "Late Style"

Koji Matsudo
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Time Out of Mind as Distant Past Beyond Memory: Bob Dylan and his “Late Style”

Koji Matsuda

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Musicology
at the City College of the City University of New York

May 2011
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Last but not least, I would like to thank Bob Dylan. Obviously, I have been a huge fan of him since my very first encounter with him on February 16th in 1997 in Japan. On the night I saw him for the first time, I knew it was going to change the direction of my life. Fourteen years and thirty-four concerts later, I ended up here in New York, writing a thesis about him. As naïve as it sounds, I felt that I was somehow saved by his music at that time. So, “thank you” for being there! The world, at least my world, became, and remains, a better place because of you, Mr. Bob Dylan.
“Ladies and gentleman, please welcome the poet laureate of rock ‘n’ roll. The voice of the promise of the ‘60s counterculture. The guy who forced folk into bed with rock, who donned makeup in the ‘70s and disappeared into a haze of substance abuse, who emerged to find Jay-sus, who was written off as a has-been by the end of the ‘80s, and who suddenly shifted gears, releasing some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the late ‘90s. Ladies and gentleman, Bob Dylan!”

———

“Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m younger than that now”

———“My Back Pages” from Another Side of Bob Dylan (1963)

Introduction: Bob Dylan’s Back Pages and his “Late Style”

Bob Dylan first emerged as a folk music singer/songwriter in the 1960s New York counter-cultural music scene, and very quickly became a prominent and influential figure in American popular music. Many of his early songs focused on political issues. When he moved away from such themes, he was met with a great deal of resistance from his devoted followers. Members of the folk community regarded his arrival on the folk music scene as if it had been anticipated, even divinely ordained, and the audience opportunistically anointed him as a savior. Furthermore, they expected this manufactured messiah to give them direction, to become a symbol of their cause. That expectation, however, only made Dylan desire escape from the responsibility arising from his role as leader. And yet, he never fully denied or cut off his ties to the folk element in his music or the folk community at large. Instead, Dylan, in a way, situated himself in a space between his position as leader of a movement and exiled excommunicant. Such a position forced him into a “no-place,” the literal meaning of utopia—and as with all utopias, occupying such a space requires irony as the primary mode of communication.1 From his

perspective, he had been largely misunderstood, as he describes at great length throughout his autobiography. First and foremost he was just a singer songwriter, and yet one could attribute his success to this ironic and iconoclastic persona. It is as if, under the alias “Bob Dylan,” he transfigures himself, as he pleases, like a chameleon. He looks back asking, “What did I owe the rest of the world? Nothing,”\(^3\) but at the same time he sings and entertains for you as a “song and dance man.”\(^4\) This negotiation of his place in society is a crucial part of his shifting and contested identities, and in some ways, such contestation contributed to the shift of his musical style in the mid ’60s from urban folk to electrified rock music. This interaction, or quarrel for that matter, between Dylan and the audience is now discussed as one of the milestone moments in the history of popular music,\(^5\) providing a key insight into the ways in which musical identities are constructed and developed among musicians and their listeners. As a constant factor within these constructed identities, Dylan is not only a musician who plays his instrument and sings, but also an artist who presents and shares his intellect and values with society.

Though Dylan kept releasing new records during the ‘80s and early ‘90s—the time periods that some fans call the “born-again period” because of his reverential use of Christianity in the lyrics—his materials from this time period were not well received in general. While several factors contributed to the unpopularity of this period, one of the main causes was that he lost the focus and the control of his musical direction after the well praised productive “early” period. By his own admission, he was trying to “find Jay-sus,” whom Dylan was once metaphorically thought to be, presumably seeking direction

\(^3\) Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, volume one* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 123.
in his life. Though his identity as a “born-again Christian” is now one of Dylan’s many faces, perhaps there is some irony to be found here. Dylan the folk hero was regarded as a secular working-class savior; Dylan the saved Christian was a proselytizing pariah. Somehow the audience at that time was not looking for a martyr who narrates his music from a religious point of view.

It is perhaps possible to designate these times as “middle period” in relation to the “early” and “late” periods in the context of a discussion of his stylistic developments over the years. The new music from the late ‘90s and onward, however, has earned much acclamation by critics and the public. By the end of the twentieth century, he ended up becoming, once again, one of the most widely acknowledged recording artists, and his prior status as a singer/songwriter seems to have grown to that of one of the cultural icons of the century. Although his fame may have become less recognizable in recent years, Dylan still continues to perform and work on new music, alongside other projects, at the age of seventy.

There were innumerable celebrated artists who were as artistically influential and creative as Dylan was in the 1960s and ‘70s, yet there seems to be only a handful of these musicians who remain influential today. One of Dylan’s strengths as an artist, I propose, is his persistent creative endurance spanning nearly five decades. Like any other artist, he has had ups and downs over the years in his productivity and popularity, yet I think his ability to move forward is a precious gift. He never stops reinventing—whether it be his persona or the character of his music—both good and bad. Sometimes the audience misses his former style, yet he just moves on to the next. Dylan’s sustained creativity, especially successful in recent years, as well as the renown from the ‘60s, is remarkable
and noteworthy in today’s popular music world, in which the styles of music and artists interchange ever so quickly. A great deal of his artistic reputation, however, still stems from his work from the ‘60s, mostly owing to his so-called protest songs from that time period, which earned him the title, “voice of a generation,” in histories of American music. This was a pivotal moment, more than just a matter of chronology, for the history of American popular music. The idea of popular music partially shifted from recreational or entertaining music, that was largely based on boy-meets-girl themes and dancing, to the cause of possible political or social change. It may be true that his artistic contribution as an anointed spokesperson of that timeframe could be more significant in terms of socio-cultural discourse in modern American history than his current and recent activities. Nevertheless, his newly recorded materials possess qualities that should be more closely examined and scrutinized than they are.

One of the notable qualities in his recent music, for instance, is what I shall call the apparent aesthetics of retrospection—themes and lyrical images of death pervade the music and provide a sense of summarizing the past and encapsulating the history of American music. He is aging for sure, but those retrospective elements do not seem to be just sentimental and nostalgic moments that cling to the past. One may argue that, because Dylan’s music has always been deeply rooted in traditional American music, employing retrospection in his music is a traditionalizing process. It is not, I argue. Dylan remembers how John Hammond, a renowned talent scout who is often credited with having discovered Dylan, “… explained that he saw me as someone in the long line of a tradition, the tradition of blues, jazz and folk and not as some newfangled wunderkind on
the cutting edge.” For sure, Dylan has been transforming and incorporating traditional elements into his music for all these years, however, employing retrospective elements differs from being “in the long line of a tradition.” Essentially, retrospection is an act, or a process, of looking ahead by learning from the past because we can only learn from the past; in other words, the end result of retrospection lies in the hope of the future that is assumed to be there. The essential quality of tradition, on the other hand, is to seek the pastness of the past where we look for the parts of authenticity reflecting our faded values. Both processes look back, but both the purpose and the outcome are different. On the basis of these differences, furthermore, the way in which Dylan developed American popular music, by injecting his own set of original concerns and utilizing traditional and retrospective elements, is highly relevant to his enduring creativity. This is the focus of this thesis.

Moreover, in the past decade and a half he not only made music, but he also published his autobiography, *Chronicles, volume one*, in 2004 and collaborated with a director, Martin Scorsese, on a biographical documentary, *No Direction Home* (2005). Dylan served as a disc jockey for three years for the radio show, *Theme Time Radio Hour*, during which he played a wide range of old and new music for the satellite station. It was an eye-opening experience for many of his fans because hearing his conversational voice gave the impression of him talking directory to them and opening up—he rarely talks at live concerts even to this day. This has been crucial to his career, I believe, because Dylan has never revealed this much about himself: his life story, thoughts on his earlier career in the autobiography and taste in other types of music, among other things. Many aficionados have always wanted to know more about him. The former “voice of a

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6 Dylan, *Chronicles, volume one*, 5.
generation,” though no longer as an anointed prophet, now finally seems to offer his voice! These mediums of his expression, such as poetry and literature, radio shows, and interviews, surely reveal interesting points of view; nevertheless, it is the music that I am curious to study in this thesis because I believe that is the medium that best conveys his aesthetic viewpoint. It is essential to know why and how he now shapes and delivers his music in the mode of retrospection in order to gain insight into this artist and his artistry. Therefore, Bob Dylan’s late period, including those retrospective elements among others, and especially his recent music, should indeed be studied and analyzed.

*Time Out of Mind* (1997) and “*Love and Theft*” (2001) created two substantial impacts in the popular music scene around the turn of the century. These are two albums that are considered to be his artistic comeback from his less popular period preceding them. Although he has been making new recordings periodically since his debut in 1962 and has been touring extensively around the globe, especially from the late ‘80s on, the success of these two albums seems to have brought him back to the forefront of the popular music scene. *Time Out of Mind* was produced by Daniel Lanois, who once produced Dylan’s *Oh Mercy* (1989) in the previous decade, and “*Love and Theft*” was produced by Dylan himself under the pseudonym, Jack Frost. The former album is sometimes described as containing “atmospheric sound,” and the latter album is more blues-oriented rock music. Although four years apart in release dates, some songs from these two albums were written and recorded around the same time, and there seem to be some connections in lyrical and musical themes between the two. There is no doubt that his following album, *Modern Times* (2006), can be seen as a continuation of these two

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7 Time Out of Mind – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
albums in themes; yet, *Time Out of Mind* marked the beginning of his comeback and seems to possess significant artistic development in relation to his career and the time of its release at the end of the century. Dylan has an interesting sense of timing that is uncannily untimely yet oddly timely such as when he released acoustic albums—*John Wesley Harding* (1967) and *Nashville Skyline* (1969)—in the midst of the psychedelic flower movement. And because *Time Out of Mind* has this kind of quality, conveying timeliness and untimeliness at the same time, I shall focus on this album exclusively.

If so-called “protest songs” in the ‘60s defined his earlier career as the “voice of a generation,” what defines his late period? The music from these newer recordings can be considered as exemplifying “late period,” because of the timing of the releases in relation to his career. However, the style he employed appears to be another matter. Literary theorist and cultural critic, Edward Said, asks, “Does one grow wiser with age, and are there unique qualities of perception and form that artists acquire as a result of age in the late phase of their career?”8 If anyone creates works of art in the late phase of his or her career, is it unconditionally in “late style?” The aesthetics and themes Dylan employed in these albums, such as the lyrical images and sounds around death and retrospection, do seem to indicate the distinctive style that he is acquiring as an experienced artist. Although he still makes new records, for many aficionados and by his own admission, it seems that he has “shifted gears” with these albums from the previous “middle period.” The death theme, for instance, does not seem to be an especially distinctive and rare topic for many composers and artists who are aging and in their late period, and yet, the late style, the perspective that only experienced artists can acquire with or without aging, does

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seem to have an important place in the careers of artists, including Dylan. If so, then, how does it differ from the "early," or "middle," styles? Like Said asked, is there some uniqueness in Dylan’s music that is ingrained in his late style?

Another essential element in those songs is the blues. *Time Out of Mind*, for instance, earned him the Album of the Year at the 1998 Grammy Awards, re-claiming his recognition as a songwriter, and yet many songs from this album, and from "*Love and Theft*", are written in the fairly recognizable form, the blues, that he’s been employing for decades. Dylan has been interested in the blues from the beginning of his career. In fact, if there is a single musical element that is coherent throughout these albums, binding these songs as a whole, it could be the element of the blues. Though it is too soon to designate these albums as simply blues albums just because of the pervasive blues elements throughout, he made this heavily-blues-oriented music near the end of his career, which happened to be around the turn of the century. It is conceivable that Dylan was trying to summarize his career at this point in his life, and he chose the blues to narrate his musical stories. Eric Lott’s description of *Time Out of Mind* as having a "‘party’s-over’ vibe"⁹ is suitable to the discourse in this context, because the blues is so often associated with the notions of sorrow and mourning. Do the blues help create that kind of vibe? How essential is it for Dylan to be using the blues again and again over the years? Do the blues even, authentically and unconditionally, create that kind of feeling as a form? What blues elements contributed to Dylan’s success with these albums?

One more element in *Time Out of Mind* that is important to its success, I argue, is the timbre. Unlike the vast majority of repertoire of so-called Western classical music, for which the text we study is the musical notation on manuscript paper, the text we ought to

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be studying comes from the actual recordings in popular music study. It is no exaggeration to claim that the history of modern popular music largely parallels the history of recorded music. With the recent developments of recording technology, it became substantially more flexible and inexpensive for all musicians to engrave the sonic image they have in their mind onto recordings. Dylan has certainly not been known for his creative sound production in the way, for instance, his earlier counterparts, most notably the Beatles and the Beach Boys, were known for their experimental sounds created by inventive recording techniques. Having stated that, however, the sonic image from these two albums seems to suggest and invite interpretations in broader ways. With the help from producer Daniel Lanois, *Time Out of Mind*, for instance, provides a wide variety of sonic hints or clues that should be read more carefully, alongside the style of music and the lyrics, in order to discern meanings within the recordings. The deep reverb added to his voice and the unfiltered background noise in the recordings create a paradoxical atmosphere that is at once distanced and immediate—leading to what I am here calling an aesthetics of retrospection. Moreover, the instrumentation of these recordings certainly adds to its colors. Besides his standard ensemble of band members like guitarists, bassists and drummers, the sound of lap steel guitar and organ is pervasive in these albums. What function do these instruments have in his sound design? In popular music, seemingly unquantifiable elements like these, unlike fixed pitches and measured rhythms, should indeed be included in an overall analysis, and his recordings, especially these, are no exception.

My approach to the analysis of Bob Dylan’s late music in this thesis is based on a deeply *musical* interest. The socio-cultural analyses by historians and English language
scholars, while compelling, too often dominate the discourses surrounding popular music, thereby occluding the very source of their original concern—the music. Sean Wilentz’s recent account of Dylan relating to modern American history and Greil Marcus’s writings through cultural perspectives are incredibly insightful and help to elevate the legitimacy of popular music study in higher academic institutions. However, as I stated above, we should not forget that the text we ought to be studying is the recording. We first need to listen to music, not start reading in a manner modeled after the way in which we read literature, and ideally the historical and socio-cultural analyses are able to provide further support to the musicological approach in this thesis. The musical elements, such as melody, harmony and rhythm, can only be experienced, in a true sense, through listening, and are carefully investigated in this thesis. While interpretation has to be narrated and communicated through language, if language could explain music perfectly, we would not need the music.

Bob Dylan’s music is meant to be performed and listened to, not to be read silently off the paper. First and foremost, he is a singer who records, just like most popular music artists. The general consensus has it that Dylan is not a good singer, and one of the reasons, I suspect, for that belief may be the incredible amount of attention devoted to his lyrics. There is absolutely no doubt that his lyrics had an unprecedented impact on popular music and American culture and the lyrics became the basis of his artistic reputation. However, I firmly attest that he is one of the most prolific singers who ever existed! If he was making a living well all these years by selling his music and lyrics and not recording his voice, like some composers do, that consensus may be justified. But his music and lyrics are always performed and recorded by Dylan himself, and that is
how we heard his music. Therefore, my approach is to study all the elements, the musical and non-musical, in the recordings as deeply as possible. I will investigate melodic and harmonic designs, formal structure, rhythms, and timbre, along with lyrical and other interpretations in relation to the context of American culture and music histories, such as the element of blues and “late style.”

Dylan expressed frustration towards the public in his autobiography, asserting that his songs are more than just words; he fears he has been misunderstood insofar as listeners have taken him to be a singing poet rather than a musician. Well then, I hope this musicological study of his music will bring some fruitful insight into his musical mind.

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10 Dylan, Chronicles, volume one, 119.
“Lateness” as Such: Late Style

At every Bob Dylan concert since 2002, an introductory announcement is made, by one of his touring crew members, right before he and his band start performing. It has become a highly anticipated and exciting aspect of his live shows for repeat concert-goers. The most intriguing line from this announcement, in respect to my thesis, is the one in which he acknowledges that he has “suddenly shifted gears, releasing some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the late ‘90s.” Other than Beethoven, whose “late period” was marked by his deafness, not many artists can be easily placed into certain periods, nor do many consciously and willingly admit to stylistic changes, as Dylan does. Bob Dylan has been a singer/songwriter since his debut in 1962, yet something in his artistry shifted “in the late ‘90s,” presumably marked by the release of *Time Out of Mind* in 1997. There were times when his recordings were not well received, and some critics and fans thought Dylan had lost his ability to keep up with the music scene. In retrospect, however, it appears that he has been continuously active all these years. I propose that, because of the retrospective views and death-related themes on *Time Out of Mind*, this is the album through which he “shifted gears,” and I propose this shift is indicative of his “late style.”

The study of “late style” in various creative fields has a long history. In her book, *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, Karen Painter explains how romanticism and historicism played a role in constructing and sustaining this interest in the 19th century. The German word, *Spätstil*, means “late style,” and the person most commonly associated with this concept is probably Theodor Adorno, whose essays on the late style of Beethoven greatly influenced the way one studies the subject today. Edward Marcus, *Bob Dylan by Greil Marcus*, 319-20.
Said, who claims to be “the only true follower of Adorno,”\textsuperscript{12} in the words of Painter, “turned to the idea of late style only to reject the idea that “reconciliation and serenity” were hallmarks of late style.”\textsuperscript{13} That said, Painter writes, “No single character or aesthetic emerges consistently in late works, whatever the artistic medium or historical period.” Therefore, she suggests that one could try to acknowledge and interpret the subjectivity of the enterprise.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, within the discourse of “late style,” the definition of it hardly exists, and generalization does not help to comprehend the theory of “late style.” However, Said’s notion of “irreconcilabilities” does seem to encompass many of Dylan’s retrospective elements, and moreover, the notion of “irreconcilabilities” does seem to comprehend and explain many other possible elements of “late style.” Therefore, instead of defining what “late style” is, I would like to investigate what may constitute Dylan’s possible “late style” artistic framework.

There are many elements of “late style” that Said analyzes in his book, \textit{On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain}, and I would like to add more possible interpretative elements as attributes to “late style,” in respect to Dylan’s music, along with the basis of Said’s “irreconcilabilities.” Here is the list of those elements:

1. Retrospection – looking back over a distance
2. Retrospection as sentiment and the site of loss
3. Form and the unfinished quality
4. Timeliness vs. untimeliness as a consequence of an overriding concern with time/displacedness
5. Irony and the ironic reappropriation of the past
6. Irreconcilabilities

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 7.
Though it may seem too obvious to state, one of the elements most commonly associated with the works of “late style” is retrospection. It is understandable that artists, in the last phase of their lives, almost inevitably reflect those lives in the styles of their works. At the same time, retrospection is a way of making an artistic choice among the options available to them at the moment. However, what I would like to stress here is that the purpose of retrospection is essentially a look into the future, though it may sound contradictory in terms of an aging artist looking toward the future. Michael Wood writes in the introduction of the aforementioned Said book about criticism and “late style”:

Said insisted, as Stathis Gourgouris reminds us in a recent essay, that “all criticism is postulated and performed on the assumption that it is to have a future.” “Late style,” Gourgouris continues, “is precisely the form that defies the infirmities of the present, as well as the palliatives of the past, in order to seek out this future, to posit it and perform it even if in words and images, gestures and representations, that now seem puzzling, untimely, or impossible.”

It is crucial to acknowledge that, like criticism, retrospection in “late style” does not imply finality, but rather, ultimately, a hidden futurity that lies underneath—it is not “last style.” Although predicting the future is a highly abstract concept, one can detect the patterns that may emerge in the picture of the future, through memory or history, in the process of retrospection. The past is the only source one has in which to find a clue to the future. Just because death surrounds the artist, that does not mean he or she is less concerned about the future. Though death is inevitable, being creative in the face of human mortality, I think, is a reminder of a sheer love and faith in creativity, and a stubborn hope in the life of mortal creatures. Many people can relate to this eternal struggle of human beings. That may be the reason why people are fascinated by this subject of “late style,” which is highly humanistic. In Dylan’s “late style,” the “walking”

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image on this album represents this retrospection. My reading is that Dylan decided to “walk the line” in order to engage the retrospection because “walking” requires autonomy, which in turn gives it an ethical quality. Moreover, because “walking” is slow, it illuminates the relationship of distance and destination well, which is another pervasive element on this album. Dylan once sang, “Pounced with fire on flaming roads / Using ideas as my maps” (in “My Back Pages”), and this time he uses the “walking” as his maps in order to illustrate the distance and engage in retrospection.

One of the characteristics of “late style” that Said analyzes in his aforementioned book is that the retrospection may involve sentiment for the older system and possible restoration of that world order. For instance, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel, *The Leopard*, depicts the decline of 19th century aristocracy in Sicily in the midst of revolution. Lampedusa and Luchino Visconti, the director of the adapted film version, were both from wealthy families, and Said writes that they both must have felt a change of social order as threatening to the familiar, older social system. It is natural to speculate that the decline of the older system must be something meaningful for aging artists, because that was the timeframe in which they presented their work. This work inevitably reflects the values of the timeframe in which they lived. In Dylan’s case, his consistent use of the blues form, for instance, could be taken as a gesture of homage to these lingering older ways of songwriting and performance. He is certainly not suggesting that all popular music should be an extension of the blues he is fond of but, by showing what he can do with the blues and how he does it, he is celebrating what influenced him early on, and the possibilities of what the blues form can offer. It is political in a larger context
in that he must have felt a bit of responsibility, seeing himself as one of the last artists to possess direct knowledge of an older system of popular music.

In relation to the discussion of the blues as form, the form in which the artwork is presented should be mentioned briefly. According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others, some conceptualize form as part of a social contract. Because of this social contract, one could expect, therefore, to be surprised when the unexpected appears in music. In this context, the terms, such as AAB form, are the structural design whereas the form is something done to us in the larger context of experiencing music. That said, Dylan did not merely try to cover or simply present a modernized version of old blues; rather, it was a personalized blues he presents in *Time Out of Mind*. It had to be personalized because he, too, had to rediscover and prove to himself anew what the blues could offer. Dylan’s belief in the blues form was a personal choice, therefore, his style of blues, with his own words, was the only way for him to reconcile with his less successful “middle period.” In other words, he had to restore his faith in the blues as well as the validity of the blues as a great form of expression that society once embraced. If “form” is something done to one, it also works for the one who accepts, believes in, and uses it. In this sense, Dylan did reconcile to some degree with his own “irreconcilable” past because, with his love and faith in blues, he “shifted gears.”

In relation to the issue of form, Adorno’s metaphorical, and sometimes philosophical, description of Beethoven’s “late works” as fragmental and unfinished, or abandoned, parallels that of Dylan’s *Time Out of Mind*. Said tried to summarize the essence of Adorno’s writing on Beethoven:
A moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. His late works constitute a form of exile.\textsuperscript{16}

Said furthermore says that there is heroism in it as well as intransigence, which leads to his idea of “irreconcilabilities.” Beethoven in his “late period” still made the music in the realm of the classical era, yet he negated the very idea of the social contract that contextualizes the form of the time. This is a fascinating view, and, as illustrated in the song analyses later in this thesis, Dylan’s composition and recording do have the qualities of “unfinishedness” on this album. However, it should be mentioned here that, in my reading, Dylan’s intention for this quality is slightly different; it is rather presenting the material with a rawness that gives genuine legitimacy to the recording. Recording music is a way of documenting, and he may have wanted to document his attempts to reconcile with the irreconcilable past. In recent years, the trend in popular music has been to lose the immediacy, for better or worse, and Dylan is, in a way, negating this trend by leaving “unfinishedness” in the recording. He communicates with the audience through this “unfinishedness,” such as leftover background noise and loose editing, which narrates Dylan’s attempts to reconcile with the past and mortality. In this reading, he is negating the current trend of popular music that society embraces which could indicate a “form of exile.”

The notion of “irreconcilabilities” relates to a concern with time, and Said writes, “Late style is in, but oddly apart from the present.”\textsuperscript{17} This statement seems to represent the contradictory nature of “late style” in which anachronism plays a big role.

\textsuperscript{16} Said, \textit{On Late Style}, 8.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 24.
Anachronism is essentially a displacement of time, and it may happen inevitably when one is engaged in retrospection because no one can really escape from the present. Because retrospection is an attempt to explore the past from the present, it creates the distortion in time that results in anachronism. At the same time, however, the art is always perceived in the present moment; thus, it is experienced as timely. In one instance of Dylan’s “late style,” among others, this happens through a contradictory sound design. His voice is captured in a way that the listeners hear the closeness of the voice so present, yet it is saturated in the deep reverb. This timbre factor of the recording distorts the conventional relationship of time and distance, and it can be taken as both appropriate and inappropriate, as in timely and untimely.

Though Dylan may always have been associated with the idea of irony, he may not always play with it in the same fashion. Said paraphrases Adorno’s statement on Beethoven that “late style does not admit the definitive cadences of death; instead, death appears in a refracted mode, as irony.”\textsuperscript{18} This is useful in explaining what Dylan has been doing in recent years. In Time Out of Mind, the main lyrical theme is death, and it is narrated in the form of the blues, possibly an old style blues. As Said seems to be attracted to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century setting of operas by a 20\textsuperscript{th} century composer, Richard Strauss, Dylan’s timeframe implied by his music and lyrics appears to be doing a similar thing. As indicated with the title, Time Out of Mind, the appropriated timeframes by both Strauss and Dylan are ones before they were born. In Dylan’s case, he is narrating his death-theme album in a timeframe that he has never known, and his impending death is a reality. Even though he may be avoiding the reality of death by setting the album in a timeframe that he can manipulate, since he will never know the reality of that time, death

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 24.
follows and haunts him wherever he escapes. Dylan may have been searching for “utopia” in “distant past beyond memory” where death cannot reach, yet such a place indeed does not exist. It has never existed, and that may be the reason people are still trying to find it. This is the irony of retrospection.

In a brief summary, these possible “late style” elements in Dylan can be summarized as “irreconcilabilities.” Every artist is first and foremost a person. Some factors that this person and artist, Bob Dylan, is trying to reconcile with are time, death, and his legacy, among others. Michael Wood quotes Adorno, who “writes of Beethoven’s refusal to “reconcile into a single image what is not reconciled.””\(^{19}\) Moreover, Said writes about Adorno’s writing style that, “To be late meant therefore to be late for (and refuse) many of the rewards offered up by being comfortable inside society.”\(^{20}\) People may not understand him in the way he wants them to understand him, yet people are, in my opinion, fully aware of Dylan’s humanistic struggle with his “irreconcilabilities.”

\(^{19}\) Michael Wood, “Introduction”, in *On Late Style*, xv.

**Time Out of Mind (1997) and the Aesthetics of Retrospection**

*Time Out of Mind* is a unique album in Dylan’s long career, and it has both a coherent theme as well as contradiction and ambivalence. Because the contradiction is an important element of the aesthetics of retrospection, one should investigate the paradox of these contradicting relationships along with the coherence on this album. In these sections, the possible theoretical framework of “late style” discussed above is examined in terms of how it can be applied to the actual music. Both the music and non-musical elements of this album indicate and contribute to the aesthetics of retrospection.

**Overview**

Bob Dylan’s thirtieth studio album, *Time Out of Mind*, was released in September 1997, becoming his last album released in the twentieth century. The most notable difference in its sound from the preceding three albums is perhaps the effect of the presence of the producer, Daniel Lanois, with whom Dylan previously worked, roughly a decade earlier, on *Oh Mercy* (1989). The two solo acoustic preceding albums to *Time Out of Mind*, *Good as I Been to You* (1992) and *World Gone Wrong* (1993), were commercial failures, as was *Under the Red Sky* (1990), despite the effort of its all-star ensemble of session players. These two solo acoustic albums consist of traditional songs arranged and performed by Dylan. He had not released a solo acoustic album for a long time, since *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964). The approach was significantly different from the music of the time and must have been new to the audience, yet these releases were commercially unsuccessful. Presumably, because *Oh Mercy* was a successful album in terms of critical response, Dylan asked Lanois to produce an album again, and this
became *Time Out of Mind*. It is worth mentioning that the albums preceding *Oh Mercy*— *Knocked Out Loaded* (1986) and *Down in the Groove* (1988)—were also not well received critically or commercially, nor were the three albums after *Oh Mercy*. One of the characteristics, or patterns, of these unsuccessful albums is that Dylan did not seem to be fully responsible for the production. None of these albums, except *Oh Mercy*, is an album in which all songs were written and performed by him; there were many covers and co-written songs performed by Dylan and “guests.” It is usually beneficial to have guest stars in popular music, as they provide better recognition for the album and boost sales. However, these recordings may give the impression that Dylan relied on other artists for composition and performance, rather than taking full responsibility for writing new original songs without the name value of the guest stars. In another words, those songs were not personalized enough to reflect what he meant and had to say. Dylan is a singer/songwriter known for narrating his personal and interpersonal affairs in his own words, yet he was delivering the interpretation of what others had to say, rather than himself. If he did not trust his own words, who would? It is not necessarily a bad thing, of course, to cover or co-write songs, but it might not have been what the audience was looking for from him at those times. In retrospect, *Time Out of Mind* radically differed from these albums because in this album Dylan wrote all the songs and produced them with the help of a producer who had a novel vision and approach. According to Lanois, he and Dylan knew this album was going to be something radically different from the previous albums.
Title

The title *Time Out of Mind* is appropriate for this album’s overall lyrical images and sound quality. The phrase itself is the same as “time immemorial,” and defined as “Extending beyond the reach of memory, record, or tradition; indefinitely ancient; as, existing from time immemorial,”\(^\text{21}\) or “used to refer to a point of time in the past that was so long ago that people have no knowledge or memory of it.”\(^\text{22}\) Others put it more simply, “the distant past beyond memory.”\(^\text{23}\) Some speculate as to where this phrase was taken from and why it was chosen as the title of the album, partly because there is no song of the same title on this album. Some think that it was likely quoted from various sources of classic literature—namely, for example, William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*; Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* and *Barnaby Rudge*; Edgar Allan Poe’s *the Devil in the Belfry*. In *Rome and Juliet*, Mercutio, one of the characters in the play, famously makes a speech about a fairy named Queen Mab:

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Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o’ mind the fairies’ coachmakers.\(^\text{24}\)
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In Dickens’ *Bleak House*, the phrase is used in the beginning of the book:

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The very solicitors’ boys who have kept the wretched suitors at bay, by protesting time out of mind that Mr. Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise was particularly engaged and had appointments until dinner, …\(^\text{25}\)
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\(^{24}\) William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I.
Another book from Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, states:

> It was, in fact, the twenty-fifth of March, which, as most people know to their cost, is, and has been time out of mind, one of those unpleasant epochs termed quarter-days.\(^{26}\)

Edgar Allan Poe also used the phrase in the short story, *the Devil in the Belfry*:\(^{27}\)

> The woodwork, throughout, is of a dark hue and there is much carving about it, with but a trifling variety of pattern for, time out of mind, the carvers of Vondervotteimittiss have never been able to carve more than two objects -- a time-piece and a cabbage.\(^{28}\)

Notice that these examples are more than a century old, and the connotation of the phrase is that of an old adage or proverb, which instantly creates a notion of built-in wisdom by virtue of the wording itself. One uses the phrase and it unconditionally provides unattainable knowledge that resides in the past. By using this phrase “time out of mind” for the album title, it produces an aphoristic quality, for which Dylan has been known and that he employs whenever he narrates his songs with the fragments of an old English phrase, tale, biblical figure, and so on. In addition, it is probably fair to state the phrase no longer belongs to the standard lexicon of the English language. Simply, people do not use it anymore. Thus, on top of the meaning of the phrase, it provides a slightly out-of-date quality. For another instance of such anachronism, Dylan uses the word “gay” as the original meaning of “enjoyable” or “happy” in the following lines: “I’m strumming my gay guitar,” and “Well, I’ve been to London, and I’ve been to gay Paris.” He clearly

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\(^{27}\) “Vondervotteimittis” is a name of the town in the story.  
chooses this word, with full knowledge that it is out-of-date. It is anachronistic, but the
time is out of his mind, just as the title indicates.

Another possible source of the quote, if it is indeed a quote, is a song by Warren
Zevon, “Accidentally Like A Martyr.” When Zevon became ill with terminal cancer in
2002 and announced that he had several months to live, Dylan started playing this song
regularly on his tour as a tribute to Zevon, who was a friend of Dylan’s. And Zevon
covered and included Dylan’s “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” on his last album in 2003,
recorded after the announcement of his expected passing. All of these incidents came
long after the release of *Time Out of Mind* in 1997, but fans began to realize that the song,
which was first recorded in 1978 for Zevon’s *Excitable Boy*, contains the phrase “time
out of mind.” Though it is out of context, the phrase is used in one of the verses in this
song:

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The days slide by, should have done
Should have done, we all sigh
Never thought I’d ever be so lonely
After such a long, long time
Time out of mind29
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Here, Zevon clearly used this phrase with a sense of grief and regret. There is also a sense
of helplessness that perhaps makes him pray “like a martyr.” What he “should have
done” is too long ago to remember. The phrase makes one realize how powerless and
vulnerable a person can look in the long history of time. There is nothing one can do to
retrieve that memory, and because of that, all we can do is to be, “Accidentally, Like A
Martyr.” Thus, the phrase signifies much more than what it means.

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The greater significance of this title, however, is that it encompasses the contents and the ambition of the recording. This album’s timeframe is around the early 20th century, as I will discuss later in relation to both musical and non-musical elements. The pervasion of the blues in this album will also be discussed later, but it should be mentioned here that the blues is often considered to have originated in the early 20th century, particularly in the 1920s and 30s. On the basis that Dylan was born in 1941, those 1920s and 30s are indeed “time out of mind” for him. He has a deep knowledge of the history of American music in general, especially of old style blues, and the old style blues is indeed the music of “the distant past beyond memory.” However, the significance here, paradoxically speaking, is that this “distant past beyond memory” can be a solidly constructed truth because one could make up his or her own truth on the basis that there is no way to retrieve those times, the times before one is born. One’s own memory, in this sense, can be more deceiving because one actually lived through and experienced those times; in other words, one could not modify or lie to him or herself. The irreconcilable past is always irreconcilable, yet there is a potential to make a reconciliation in the past where no one can reach because the distant past beyond memory is constructed in one’s imagination. And the music from that era works as a key to the door that opens up that world. By setting that timeframe, Dylan is trying to make a reconciliation and artistic redemption that propels him to the next phase. And 1997 was a most appropriate time in this sense to visit and encompass one’s past because the beginning and ending of the century were good times to place a bookend.
**Album Jacket**

The non-musical elements of *Time Out of Mind* reinforce the album’s retrospective quality. The album’s jacket could be read in two ways in relation to the lyrical content and his earlier material. A black and white image of Dylan appearing on the jacket is blurred and shadowy. Combined with the lyrical content on this album, such as, “Walking, through streets that are dead,” and “I’m trying to get to heaven before they close the door,” the photograph strongly suggests death and the afterlife, and his blurred image suggests the ghostly. Secondly, like the Beatles once pretended to be the “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” on their album jacket of the same title, standing next to the cardboard picture of their earlier and younger selves, Dylan may be doing a similar thing. This is not the first time that his figure on an album jacket is out of focus. The album, *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), also had a blurred picture of him as if the photographer was unable to make his camera focus on Dylan. It cannot be confirmed if the *Time Out of Mind* photograph was produced under the direction of Dylan, or that of his production team, with an intention of referencing his earlier well-received record, but it is plausible to read it this way. He has certainly aged compared to his picture from three decades ago, but at the same time it celebrates that he is still active making new records. Besides that, the photograph may be blurred to show that he is still a mysterious figure, like he always has been, after all these years. In addition, it may just be pure coincidence, yet *Blonde on Blonde* and *Time Out of Mind* have similar structural features; both albums are lengthy (they are both over seventy-one minutes long) and the last songs on these albums are two of the few songs Dylan recorded that count over eleven minutes (“Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” on *Blonde on Blonde* and “Highlands” on *Time Out of Mind*). “Sad Eyed
“Lady…” was mentioned in Daniel Lanois’s interview as a suggested model for the recording session, and it later became the rhythmic basis of “Tryin’ to Get to Heaven.” Therefore, there is no doubt that Dylan and Lanois had *Blonde on Blonde*, which is often considered to be one of Dylan’s best albums, in mind during the recording sessions. Moreover, both titles contain the contrasted words, “Low” and “High”, before “lands”, as if the songs are contrasted in theme (both songs have “a woman” in the lyrics), and it is possible to conceive that this was the golden pattern for Dylan, to place the lengthy epic song at the end of the album. If so, Dylan was consciously trying to make an ambitious, large-scale album, like *Blonde on Blonde*, based on that once-proven formula. Lanois says that he was amazed by how much lyrical material Dylan had before the recording sessions, and he anticipated this album was going to be another epic, something different from what Dylan had recently produced.

**CD Label**

Furthermore, Jon Pareles of the *New York Times* mentioned in an interview that the design of the printed label on the compact disc itself of *Time Out of Mind* resembles Columbia’s old-time design on vinyl records. Shown in Figure 1, the printed label on the CD, on the left, reads “Viva-tonal Recording; Electrical Process,” with the replicated design exactly, including the font and the Columbia Records’ logo from the 1920s. Notice Columbia’s vinyl design, on the right, which was used on a record by Art Gillham, who was one of the first artists to record at Columbia Records in the 1920s.

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Time Out of Mind was released as a two-disc vinyl record set, as well in the following year, 1998, after having been released as a single CD. Though now it seems that releasing the vinyl version is considered a “cool thing” to do, both artistically and in terms of marketing. For a contemporary popular music artist, it does remind the consumers how music was distributed and consumed in a large part of the 20th century. The quality of the CD is state-of-the-art nowadays, no doubt; nevertheless, it is not just a high-fidelity of playback sound the popular music artists are looking for in recorded media—it is about how it is presented and what it culturally represents. Whether this decision was made by the record company, or Dylan, it is evidence that the connection was made between this music and the music of the past. It is indeed ironic to state on the label that high-end recording quality with “Electrical Process” has been used, now that we are in the age of digital recordings. It is a mockery, in a sense stating the obvious, but at the same time, it helps to recall, “how it used to be.” Like a theatrical performance set in the past requires that the props and setting remind one of the timeframe, the props used on this album may have been meant to remind the listener that it was set in the early 20th century. Thus, the album jackets and the disc design could both be modes of retrospection.

A similar nostalgia surrounds the latest Ben Folds release.
Producer and Production

It is natural to speculate that Dylan was searching for, and struggling to create, his ideal sound and production method at that point in his career, considering the sense of lost direction with the previous recordings. Daniel Lanois, who is known for his creative sound design, was recommended for the *Oh Mercy* album by U2 singer, Bono, when Dylan had been dissatisfied with his sound production. Dylan writes about this experience at length in his autobiography, saying that Lanois was a rigorous producer who demanded a lot and would do anything to get what he wanted. Dylan went on to write that he sometimes felt Lanois cared too much for his production values.\(^{34}\) Lanois presumably had his vision for the album, while Dylan had his own vision. Lanois brought musicians with him for the sessions, while Dylan brought his touring band. As a result, there are some atypical production procedures on this album. For instance, the two drummers, Brian Blade, a jazz drummer who Lanois brought in, and Jim Keltner, a session drummer who Dylan brought in, are credited at the same time as having played on the same song. The various interviews indicate that Dylan and Lanois occasionally had arguments over the musicians and production process. It’s fascinating to hear how good the album sounds, considering the arguments during production and the variety of musicians used. While Dylan’s songwriting and performance are the core of this album, Lanois’s production value and aesthetic certainly added to and polished the final artifact, more than Dylan probably expected.

However, Daniel Lanois was not the only producer on this album. The album credits read that it was “Produced by Daniel Lanois …in association with Jack Frost

\(^{34}\) *Dylan, Chronicles, volume one,* 194.
Productions,” and it only later became apparent that Jack Frost was in fact Dylan himself. There is no mystery Dylan co-produced the album, yet one can speculate on the use of the pseudonym and its origin. “Jack Frost,” of course, has a connotation of winter and snow, and winter is the last of the four seasons. It is the time when living things freeze and die. By and large, the year 1997, when *Time Out of Mind* was released, was the “winter” of the 20th century. What popular music does well in general is act as a reflection of a society in a specific time. It may be true that all art forms intrinsically reflect the times in which they are created. Yet, partly because popular music is designed for mass consumption, neglecting the audience and their collective subconscious can result in failure. One of the strengths of Dylan is his ability to capture and reflect what is happening, both consciously and subconsciously, in society and present it with his unique artistic twist. It is probably fair to say that, in 1997, people were inevitably reflecting back on the century and looking forward to the new century with mixed feelings. The rumor, for instance, about the possible computer crash in the new millennium was, in retrospect, a good example of collected fear and worry in people’s subconscious at that time. Then, Dylan’s response was to say that that was the wintertime of the century, as well as implying that his career was moving into a different phase, which he described as “shifted gears.” Whether or not Dylan’s death theme on this album was a reflection of society, it was at least a reflection of Bob Dylan, the aging artist; and people related to and sympathized with these qualities in his music. Twelve years later in 2009, it was simply ironic that he used this pseudonym when he released his first “Christmas album,” still produced under the name “Jack Frost.” Indeed, he is one of Dylan’s many faces now.
Sound and Unfinished Quality

The sound of *Time Out of Mind* is unique to Dylan’s oeuvre, yet the album has been one of his most well received recordings to this day. The recorded sound, as well as some parts of the songwriting, have an unfinished quality, which contributes to the album’s overall sense of remove from the present. The general perception of Dylan is that he is not too concerned with the sound design of his recordings; nevertheless, there are some sounds intentionally included in the production design that are not the result of an accidental or sloppy editing process. The producer, Daniel Lanois, is known for his meticulous and detailed sound design, and that seems to be one of the reasons why Dylan chose him to be his producer and collaborator on this album.

Some of the unfinished quality of this album provides the feeling of an old vinyl recording and the timeframe that comes with it. The timeframe captures the notion of old folk in a slow paced, serene world and, at the same time, the roughness and toughness of economical hardship in everyday life. The unfinished quality to which I refer is the inclusion of background noise, which can easily be, and usually is, edited out. Here, there was a decision to leave it in. In “Love Sick,” a background noise that sounds like the harmonics and tuning of a guitar is heard over the stepping or stomping sound that turns into the “walking motif.” It sounds, though very minimal, like a fade-in as well. Considering it is the first sound one hears on this album, it is as if one is entering another world, or perhaps someone’s mind. Though abstract and metaphoric, it could be described as one sticking his or her head into another’s clouds of subconscious, which explains the illusory images in the lyrics. In another instance, one hears a rattled utensil sound over the introduction in “Highlands.” These background noises remind one of the
time of old vinyl recordings when the noise inevitably had to be included due to the unsophisticated equipment. The inclusion of these sounds invites the listeners to enter the world sometime in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Moreover, in relation to the fade-in, “Million Miles” has a slight fade-in as well, in which an ethnic drum, not the standard rock drum kit, enters with the fade-in. It has a lot of reverberation that elongates the tail of the sound, thus it sounds like it is coming from very far away, maybe a “million miles” away. These fade-ins create continuity, and a smooth connection to the timeline one is invited to visit.

Another unfinished quality is the leftover sound that can be heard before the ensemble actually begins to play. This is found in three songs and it lends a demo tape or jam session quality to the recordings. In “Can’t Wait,” the track seems to start in the middle of a tape that was already running. In “Cold Irons Bound,” one hears the sound of blowing into the microphone. Again, these leftover sounds can be easily edited out with modern sophisticated recording equipment. Instead, they are left out there so one can experience being at the recording sessions in the same room where the musicians play live. Because of that, the performances emerge spontaneously from the continuous timeline of the session, rather than being chopped up and separated as individual tracks. Some of Dylan’s earlier recordings, such as “Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35,” and \textit{The Basement Tapes} (1975), had this demo quality in which background noise was included, or the recording was actually meant as a demo. Those recordings are intimate and accessible in the atmosphere and, more importantly, create the energy of live music, long after popular music started giving the impression of separately recorded tracks. Certainly, one could argue that is why “live/concert recording” is available, yet this is a studio
album that could have been released without these treatments. While it is not rare to feature “demo quality” in popular music, it is not a standard practice and can be taken as a reference to the old ways of recording. In addition, one can apply the aesthetic of incompleteness here, as in the works of other artists. For instance, Beethoven’s work from the late period is said to be fragmental and perceptible as a refusal to complete at times. Dylan’s refusal or unwillingness to make the work completed parallels the aesthetic of Beethoven in some ways, and it could be a prominent component of the “late style” in the artistry of so-called genius artists.

Paradoxically speaking, there are some meticulous, well-planned recording aspects in this album as well, as opposed to those unfinished qualities. The most notable of these is the recording quality of Dylan’s voice. The distinct character of his voice is so well captured in some of the songs that it gives them strong emotional drive. The various characteristics of Dylan’s voice have been a familiar issue for fans and critics alike, who know how different he sounds on his various albums. On Nashville Skyline, his voice is smooth and warm, especially in “Lay Lady Lay.” In some songs on Time Out of Mind, his voice has a right-to-your-ear quality that seems to have been captured with close miking. This emphasizes the intimate and personal qualities of his voice. Because the distance between the singer and the microphone determines the virtual space between the singer and the listener, Dylan clearly wanted to deliver his message right to the ear of his listeners. Perhaps, he means to emphasize his confessional and redemptive lyrics. At the same time, in some songs, such as “Love Sick,” his voice is saturated with deep reverberation, leaving the impression that he is reaching one’s ear from afar. In a way, he is right there, and yet he is not where you think he is. It is a contradiction to create this
ambivalent relationship within the treatment of the voice, which is the core of most popular music. This tension between the sense of the intimate and the feel of remove could be taken as a part of the “irreconcilabilities” that Said explains as an element of “late style.”

**Blues Elements**

While those production processes added many colors to the final artifact, Dylan’s songwriting framework is undoubtedly crucial. Blues dominate the album’s overall formal structure, and that becomes the spine of this album. About half of the collection is easily perceived as blues, or at least based on blues, because of either the use of 12-bar blues scheme or similar blues gestures. These gestures include repeating harmonically or lyrically twice before moving on, or elongating one harmony with some variations. The distorted guitar and the way it is used also contributes to making the recording bluesy. Interestingly, these blues songs are positioned on the even numbered tracks starting at track two, “Dirt Road Blues,” to track ten, “Can’t Wait.” The last track, “Highlands” is an exception, having the clear 12-bar blues scheme that runs over sixteen minutes. This blues-in-every-other-song, though a somewhat loose construction, continues in the next album in 2001, “Love and Theft”, in which the odd numbered track gets the blues song this time. Dylan’s use of the blues in his songwriting is already a long-standing tradition at this point, yet this positioning of the blues seems to be a sign of appreciation for his predecessors who inspired and paved the way for 20th century popular music artists who came after them. At the boundary of the 20th and the 21st century, Dylan was showing his gratitude by using the form created by these artists. He certainly included the common
blues line, “I woke up this morning,” (in “Highlands”) signaling to all blues connoisseurs that he can do the blues right. At the same time, because the blues and similar styles of music no longer pervade the current music scene, he was trying to show how it is done, as the last artist to have direct knowledge of, and pride in, the importance of the blues. Dylan certainly did not owe anything to the public artistically, yet he must have felt that he owed something to the blues artists who inspired him all those years ago. In addition, a song such as “Love Sick,” which is not strictly a blues song, still has the 12-bar blues scheme as a basis for the verse section in the verse-chorus structure. In fact, this is a great example of incorporating the blues element to songwriting in order to showcase the validity of the blues as a songwriting framework. Moreover, this album’s formal structure is overwhelmingly strophic, not including the harmonically elaborated section as the bridge. It is arguable to try to encompass the formal structure by what is not there. However, by excluding the bridge, Dylan has created songs that do not belong to the standard formal structure of popular music. They stand slightly apart from the present trend, which is an important aspect of the “late style.”

In relation to the formal and harmonic structure of this album, the rhythm is elaborated, along with the content of the lyrical images. A plethora of walking images in the lyrics will be discussed in the following section, but it should be mentioned here that many of the songs on this album have a shuffle or swing rhythm, and it helps to move that walking forward. The drum patterns, especially the pulsing hi-hat cymbal along with Dylan’s bluesy vocals, often with so-called blue notes, are driving, and move the songs forward well, especially those with the shuffle rhythm. It is hard to see the groove on the transcribed score, yet, as always, it is easier to hear those grooves. For instance, at least
four out of eleven songs have the clear shuffle rhythm, and Dylan often sings with a triplet rhythm creating a “ONE, two, three” feeling. Though almost all the songs are conceivable and able to be notated in 4/4 rhythmic meter, since the shuffle rhythm is often represented as a triplet over a quarter note, it has a built-in 3/4 feeling, which has always been important for Dylan’s use of rhythm. James Grier talks of Dylan’s use of 3/4 feeling in his compositions, especially prominent in his earlier writing, such as “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” or “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” and he argues that it originates from Dylan’s roots in the folk music tradition.\(^ {35} \) It should also be mentioned here, in relation to music history, that the dotted rhythm, which is close to shuffle rhythm because of its elongated aspect, signified the entrance of the king in French Baroque music. Thus, the use of these rhythmic elements closely relates to the walking that Dylan often sings about on this album. It is almost a given that he uses the shuffle rhythm in order to sing about walking, but it may have been a prominent driving factor in this collection because many songs are moderate to slow in tempo, and needed the shuffle to move them along.

**Lyrics**

When examining the work of Bob Dylan with respect to an aesthetic of retrospection, certainly one must investigate the lyrical images of his songs. This is most pertinent to our understanding of *Time Out of Mind* insofar as many of the songs collected here are imbued with images of death, retrospection, loss, and an attempt to reconcile with the irreconcilable past (a key aspect of late style according to Edward

Said). The point of a late style is not that the author is actually at the end but rather that he or she is nearing the end. This is an important difference. In *Thus Spake Zarathrustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche criticized Arthur Schopenhauer’s notion of a will to life:

> Indeed the truth was not hit by him who shot at it with the word of the “will to existence”: that will does not exist. For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life is there also will.36

For Nietzsche, as long as one exists, one wills, desires, and seeks to reconcile life to one’s inner drive. This is an illuminating way to think of late style. Dylan, in the lyrics to *Time Out of Mind*, exhibits that will, that desire. Life is not over for him and yet so much of his life has passed. He looks toward the past as the site of irrevocable loss and yet simultaneously as a rich resource for memory, creativity, and reconsideration. Late style does not represent finality. Dylan stills projects toward a future but it is a limited future and one intrinsically tied to the past.

As mentioned earlier, one of the prominent images in this album is that of walking. While “walking” is not a rare image in song lyrics in general, the pervasion of the motif here calls attention to itself. Walking differs from other modes of transportation by involving the self. It wears on the body, and the fact that it is tiring connotes the strain of our aging corporeality. Because it is slow, walking seems to suggest the more contemplative, and in these songs Dylan makes it clear that he walks alone (in “Cold Irons Bound,” he sings, “I’m beginning to hear voices and there’s no one around,” and “Well, it must be a holiday, there’s nobody around” in “Highlands”). At the same time, in many of these lyrics, the sensation of motion, of traversing distance, turns out to be

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illusory. As Dylan sings in “Not Dark Yet,” it “looks like I’m moving but I’m standing still.” As in so many examples of late-style art and thought, the seeming directedness of life belies an underlying sameness and immobility. As Dylan writes in “Can’t Wait,” “there’s some people all around / Some on their way up / Some on their way down.” The balance, it would seem, remains the same. No real progress is made. One witnesses movement without purpose, without direction, without real accomplishment. And yet walking (in that same song) has an ethical quality to it. Dylan claims that he is “tryin’ to walk the line,” that is, he is trying to walk the proper path, all the while realizing that such a path may not exist. (“Left the life somewhere along the line”)

Furthermore, Dylan sees moving as a necessary action to take in order to stay creative. For example, he has described the process of writing a song:

A song is like a dream, and you try to make it come true. They’re like strange countries you have to enter. You can write a song anywhere, in a railroad compartment, on a boat, on horseback—it helps to be moving. Sometimes people who have the greatest talent for writing songs never write any because they are not moving. I wasn’t moving in any of these songs, not externally, anyway. Still, I got them all down as if I was. Sometimes things you see and hear outside of yourself can influence a song.37

37 Dylan, Chronicles, volume one, 165-6.

While walking, Dylan keenly observes his surroundings, and moves through space and time in order to stay creative. To do that, he can be “crawlin’ down the avenue” and can “go to the end of the earth for you” (in “Make You Feel My Love”). His determination to do so is forged by forces such as aging and mortality. The consensus is that he is a genius songwriter, yet he knows that he has to do his part, walking the line step by step—no short cuts. It is his job, after all, his vocation. Moreover, at the same time, he really needs to get going because he can “hear the clock tick,” (in “Love Sick”) and sometimes
confesses, “I wish someone would come and push back the clock for me” (in “Highlands”). For him, “time is running away” (in “Not Dark Yet”). Nevertheless, the reality is that, “I can only get there one step at a time” (in “Highlands”). These are certainly fragments of the lyrical images taken out of context; however, these pieces of thoughts slip into different songs about different conditions because he is subconsciously saturated in this retrospective mode.

In relation to these retrospective and contemplative qualities of the lyrics, he names actual places that work as anchors in his memory. When wandering and wondering in the memory, which is unique to him, the places mentioned are the points to be connected to form the line of time, or in Dylan’s case a series of interconnected lines. A Western conception of time is said to be linear and, in order to make the line straight, Dylan needs these reference points. He tries to recall events and affairs in his memory by naming these places where he has walked, and will walk in the future. “Baltimore,” “New Orleans,” “Boston town,” and “Chicago” are, for instance, mentioned in the songs on this album, and he sometimes explicitly calculates the distance towards a place saying, “twenty miles out of town, Cold Irons Bound,” or “Well, I’ve tried to get closer but I’m still a million miles from you.” In the song, “I Shall be Released,” written in 1968, he sang, “Yet every distance is not near.” In addition to these places in space, he contemplates how far he has come in relation to time as well as to people. In “Can’t Wait,” he sings, “I wish I knew what it was that keeps me lovin’ you so,” and in “Not Dark Yet,” he shows signs of regret; “I can't even remember what it was I came here to get away from.” This last line can be interpreted in many ways in respect to his career;
however, it may be fruitful to acknowledge again that this album was released at the near end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Furthermore, in both these real and imagined places, the weather conditions are a concern. Some days are better than others. Once in a while, he has to be “Rolling through the rain and hail” (in “Dirt Road Blues”) or “I’ve been rollin’ through stormy weather” (in “Can’t Wait”). But sometimes he is welcomed by the weather; “The sun is beginnin’ to shine on me” (in “Highlands”). One of the reasons for him to look up the sky is that that is where the notion of heaven, or God, resides. Weather is divinely created and it is beyond human capability. These images are particularly important in this album because the lyrics of this album has a confessional and redemptive quality. The impression left here is that it is not a religious point of view; rather, it is a humanistic point of view from an aging artist who is facing to the reality of immortality. Also, weather could be read as a metaphor for the hope in life; no bad weather will last forever.

Lastly, the word “love” is included in every song except two on this album, and there is nothing casual or easy about the love mentioned here. Dylan tries to get loved, but he often fails; “I need your love so bad… Well, I’ve tried to get closer but I’m still a million miles from you” (in “Million Miles”). Once he gets loved he often fails to maintain that relationship and has to give a parting shot, with much regret; “I’m doomed to love you” (in “Can’t Wait”); “I was alright, ‘til I fell in love with you” (in “’Til I Fell in Love with You”); “I’m sick of love, I wish I’d never met you” (in “Love Sick”). In addition, he sometimes clings to love; “I’m trying to recover the sweet love that we knew” (in “Can’t Wait”); “The ghost of our old love has not gone away” (in “Standin’ in the Doorway”). In relation to the “walking” discussed before, these images in fact
suggest that he is walking alone. After all, he must face death and reconcile with the past with no one’s help. Besides that, he may want to “walk” alone to allow for better contemplation and retrospection.

Cover Versions

Some of the songs from this album are covered by other musicians. For instance, “Make You Feel My Love” was covered by Billy Joel and released in August 1997 as a part of his Greatest Hits Volume III before the actual release of Time Out of Mind with “To Make You Feel My Love.” This song was also subsequently covered by Garth Brooks in 1998, which earned him the nomination for Best Male Country Vocal Performance and the Best Country Song, and then by a British singer/songwriter, Adele, in 2009. A song, “Mississippi,” which appeared on the album, “Love and Theft”, in 2001, was actually written for Time Out of Mind, and was covered and released by Sheryl Crow in 1998 before Dylan’s own release of this song. Subsequently, Dixie Chicks routinely performed this song at their concert tours roughly from 2003 to 2006. In listening to these various cover versions, it becomes obvious that Dylan’s composition has a quality that can be transformed by various kinds of musical artists in different genres. Dylan’s music has been covered innumerable times, and the songs from Time Out of Mind, though particularly unique in Dylan’s oeuvre, are no exception.

Reception

All in all, the completed album enjoyed a very positive critical reception by both critics and fans, as well as commercial success, and some fans arguably designate this
album as Dylan’s best album. According to Lanois, Dylan is very proud of this successful album, and many songs from this album are still played at his concert tour frequently.
Song Analyses:

“Love Sick”

The first track I analyze from *Time Out of Mind* is “Love Sick,” and, in many ways, it is a fitting representative as the first track of this album, as it introduces and sets the foundation for the gloomy atmosphere of the whole collection. This song’s detailed design conveys the lyrical images of the music in a way that is unique to this moment in Dylan’s output. The formal structure of the song is based on the so-called verse-chorus form, in which the verse part is based on the 12-bar blues scheme. This is not atypical, yet it is important in order to understand his songwriting framework in “Love Sick.”

This song was cut as the second single from the album after the first single, “Not Dark Yet,” and one might attribute the success of this album to this song’s commercial success. Dylan and his band performed the song at the 1998 Grammy Awards, where the album was nominated for the Album of the Year. *Time Out of Mind* indeed won in that category. “Love Sick” was also featured as a soundtrack to the Victoria’s Secret’s TV commercial campaign in 2004 titled “Angels in Venice,” in which Dylan himself appeared. Barbara O’Dair points out that the plot of this thirty-second commercial—a young lingerie model dressed as an angel, an immortal figure, encountering an old man, Dylan, in Venice Palazzo—is a parody of Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, in which an old man encounters a beautiful boy in Venice.38 While calling this TV advertisement a precise parody of the classic novella is debatable, it is set, seemingly unnecessarily, in Venice. If a part of the novella was about the nature of beauty and its embodiment, in the form of a boy in the story, the TV commercial may be a statement that the lingerie model is the modern standard of beauty, contemporary symbol of allure. In this reading, Dylan

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38 Barbara O’Dair, “Bob Dylan and Gender Politics,” in Dettmar, 82.
would be the modern poet/author who is “Love Sick” for this beauty. Aschenbach, the old man in *Death in Venice*, was a dignified man who fell in love with a young boy, despite his well-respected social position. Dylan is a contradictory man with a social reputation for actions that are often unpredictable and mysterious—sometimes, even puzzling. Thus, he was an ideal model for a modern Aschenbach. Though the comparison is superficial, maybe that is the point. A TV commercial for lingerie aims to create a dreamy, superficial fantasy world. In contrast to the seriousness of the death-theme of this album, Dylan, once again, managed to mock our expectations. He was once certainly known for being against commercialism, and now he makes fun of himself by “selling out,” appearing in a lingerie commercial. Some thought it was just pure absurdity, yet at the same time, some argued that the unpredictability is an appealing aspect of Dylan. This affair illustrates two points; one is that he is good at parodying, if it is indeed meant as such, by juxtaposing the different social registers of characters, including himself, just as he put God and Abraham on “Highway 61” or Casanova and Cinderella on “Desolation Row.” He mixes things up to create new symbolic meanings. Another point is that the aesthetic of retrospection often involves the contrasting, contradicting, and sometimes ambivalent, point of view, in which the seriousness of the song’s sick/death theme encounters the commercialism. This aesthetic cannot be applied to the song itself, but the way Dylan authorized this song to be used in a TV commercial in a way fits the model of retrospection in the late style.

The overall structural design of “Love Sick” is basically the verse-chorus structure throughout, but it is not as clear-cut as it is in much of popular music. After the two verses, the chorus, which includes the refrain that contains the title of the song,
comes in. For the next time around, only one verse is stated with one chorus, and then the chord progression of the verse part is played over an instrumental break. After that, the song goes back to a verse-chorus combination, and it ends with the latter part of the verse. This ending does not give the sense of full closure of the piece, just like the line, “leave me hanging on to a shadow.” The bridge, a harmonically contrasted area that sometimes appears after a few choruses in popular music compositions, is not included in this song. Although the overall sonority of this song does not imply the blues-ness too much, because the verse part is largely based on the 12-bar blues scheme, this song’s structural frame is, I would call, the hybrid blues. Figure 2 shows the formal structure with some lyrics and the basic chord progressions. The song is written in the key of E minor and it is in medium tempo.

**Figure 2**

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|Em | D | Em |
I’m walking through streets that are dead
|Em | D | Em |
Walking, walking with you in my head
|Em | D | B | Am |
My feet are so tired, my brain is so wired
|Am7 | Em |
And the clouds are weeping
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|GA | GA | Em |
I’m sick of love but I’m in the thick of it
|GA | GA | Em |
This kind of love; I’m so sick of it
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The verse part is based on the scheme of the 12-bar blues, which is largely in AAB structure, both harmonically and lyrically. After the introduction, which was
discussed in the previous section as containing the background noise and stepping/stomping sound, the first four-measure, the first A section, starts with the 4-bar phrase, with the second measure being harmonically shifted—a typical first 4-measure pattern that has been heard in numerous blues songs. The common 4-bar phrase, the first A section, typically has the IV chord in second measure, but Dylan substitutes with bVII chord (D chord) as you can see in the musical example 1. The second 4-bar phrase, the second A section, is repeated in the same fashion with the substituted bVII chord again, and this repetition is one of the most typical gestures of the blues scheme, in which A is repeated twice before it moves to somewhere different harmonically and lyrically—the B section, the last four measures in 12-bar scheme. Although the second A section tends to be repeated with the shifted harmony, typically the IV chord for two measures, Dylan simply repeats the same chord progression of the first 4-bar phrase.
The B section of 12-bar blues scheme typically moves to the V chord followed by the IV and the I chord, and the lyrics tend to be some kind of answer or resolution to the statement made in the twice-repeated A section. However, Dylan does not move to the V chord; instead, the bass line descends on every two beats from Em chord, creating two additional beats before the harmony moves to the IV chord (Am chord)(the measure 9 to 13, for instance). The published score turned this passage into a measure of 4/4 and 2/4, six beats in total, but I made it to a measure of 6/4, thus six beats in total, so that the fifth beat does not become the downbeat of the new measure, emphasizing the beat. There is,
in fact, the V chord (B chord) in this measure momentarily, but the note B in the bass is the passing note connecting notes from D to A in the next measure, where there is a slight sense of resolution where the “walking” pulsing sound takes a break for the first time.

Adding these beats in the 12-bar blues scheme is one of the important characteristics of Blind Lemon Jefferson’s music. David Evans studied Jefferson’s use of additional beats in his recordings, and speculates that it partly originates from the interaction between his singing and the guitar playing, creating a call-and-response effect.\textsuperscript{39} In “Love Sick,” the ensemble of performers is playing along with these additional beats, and it sounds more like a slow surge of emotion, the collective crescendo where the tension is accumulated. In the Western classical music tradition, the cadence is defined as the resolution of harmonic movement, punctuating the music. However, Dylan’s use of slowly-built crescendo created by the bass movement and the increase of ensemble volume in dynamics is, in a way, a cadence providing the punctuation and the contrast in the phrase both harmonically and dynamically, which is an important function in the 12-bar blues scheme, at least harmonically, when the V chord appears for the first time. Dylan’s use of additional beats here, I think, cannot be justified as a direct reference to Blind Lemon Jefferson’s music; however, it could be a gesture more generically pointing to old blues with which the performer is not formally and structurally restricted and the performance had improvisatory quality. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the actual music in blues is formally elusive—extending and stretching the phrase is a common practice. Though innumerable blues are written on the basis of the 12-bar scheme, it has never been rigid as a form for performers and

composers. It is worth mentioning that the first verse in this song is thirteen measures whereas the second verse is only twelve measures, creating asymmetrical, or just looseness, in form; whether or not this is Dylan’s intention as a reference to the old style blues, he was certainly in the mode of elusive, old style blues. The two-piece rock band The White Stripes covered this song numerous times at their concerts, and they did not neglect these additional beats in their performances.

Evans’s study on Jefferson and the origin of additional beats is crucial to Jefferson’s style of music, and it should be noted that his music was recorded solo with his voice and the guitar. In other words, the interaction between the two instruments, which creates the conversational effect, caused those stretching phrases. However, Dylan’s way of stretching sounds more like a moment to contemplate before delivering the next phrase. It was necessary for Dylan to have some hesitant, silent moments. In fact, this song employs a lot of non-spoken moments as if he is still contemplating what to say next. On the other hand, the less he says by taking those rests, the more we have time to wander around in his lyrical world—less is more. If Jefferson decided to accommodate these additional beats for the conversational quality in his music between his voice and the guitar, Dylan’s additional beats and silence were to involve the audience and throw them into his contemplating head. It is a silent, psychological interaction between the performer and the audience.

Furthermore, the song “Not Dark Yet” on this album has the similar rhythmical characteristic that creates these uncommon rest moments. Its rhythm alternates between 4/4 and 6/4 throughout the song. Example 2 shows a verse-chorus section of the song.
Example 2

Notice Dylan pauses over at least three beats on each 6/4 measure, leaving a moment right before the next phrase comes in, and because the tempo of this song is slow, these unspoken moments provide a lingering effect. Each note before these rests, E and B, is where Dylan lyrically rhymes “day” and “way”, “steel” and “heal”, and “where” and there” as if he wanted us to hear his rhymes clearly by following those notes with the rests. One of the lines of this song, “I know it looks like I’m moving, but I’m standing still,” reminds us of his will to carry himself somewhere and his inability to do so, as if he is thinking too much during these pauses. There are a lot of words for listeners to digest on this album, yet the way Dylan delivers them, with these moments of contemplation, enables us to listen and enjoy the music effectively.

The chorus section of “Love Sick” is brief, and, partly because of that, it does not provide a sense of lyrical closure or musical conclusion for the listener. The chorus in popular music is usually considered to be a hook that attracts the listeners’s attention and is, ideally, memorable. Yet, this is only an eight-measure chorus and harmonically does not advance. Dylan could have extended the phrase and “gone somewhere far” with this section, but it is as if his subconscious did not allow him to move forward. Because he is walking, he must, at least, go slowly. That said, this section of music harmonically shifts
slightly from the prolonged Em area of the verse with a sudden entry of distorted guitar sound. At the last beat of the verse section, the guitar descends as a syncopated figure with a slid G-to-A chord, while the aforementioned pulsing walking sound stops. Like the line, “Sometimes silence can be like thunder,” that guitar figure does sound thunderous, and, because of that sudden scary sound, like a deer caught in headlights, he is momentarily frozen and unable to move forward. This four-bar phrase is repeated after going back to the Em chord for two measures with that pulsing walking sound, as if he has started walking again. Yet, even for the second time around, it just repeats the same chord progression. This A chord is harmonically IV area in relation to the key of Em, and shifting the harmony to IV area can be taken as the prolongation technique in Western classical harmony. As a result, the verse is a prolonged “I” area and the chorus is prolonged “IV” areas. An alternation of “I” and “IV” harmonic areas might be indicating the overall not-going-anywhere quality of the song. Although IV area (subdominant) can sometimes be thought to function like traditional V area (dominant) in popular and folk music, another factor reinforces this prolonged, not-going-anywhere quality—the melody.

The entire melody of “Love Sick” is constructed around the note E, and the contour of the melody, too, is limited. The first eight-measure only contains D, E, and F, except the low B in the fifth measure, which still is a member of the Em chord, and the notes D and F work as the lower and upper neighbor notes to E. In other words, the first eight-measure only prolongs the note E. The B section of the verse, the measure nine to twelve in Example 1, sees a leap of the melody for the first time to the note B, which slowly descends to E in the next measure. With the combination to the bass line, which
also descends as the parallel fifth to the melody, the melody slowly descends from B, A, F to E (without G between A to F). It momentarily looks like it has gone somewhere, but it has just circled around back to E. The not-going-anywhere is, again, apparent here. In addition, the chorus section of the melody, too, hangs around E, advancing only slightly. Also, because the key is written in E minor, the so-called blue notes, the minor third and flatted 7th degree, G and D, are built into the scale. The melody of the chorus section, in fact, only consists of these two notes and the tonic note E. The track does not particularly recognizable at first as blues, or even just bluesy, but Dylan is singing these so-called blue notes and phrasing with a conversational quality, which is important to the blues, especially to the old blues.

In relation to this quality of contemplation in “Love Sick,” the lyrical images reflect the music, and vice versa. Right after the line, “Did I hear someone’s distant cry?” the lap steel guitar plays the very high-pitched, inflective line, presumably imitating someone’s cry. In another instance, right after the line, “Sometimes the silence can be like thunder,” some kind of rustling noise, like the sound the bottleneck makes when it’s rubbed on the steel strings, is heard, again, imitating the sound of thunder. This kind of text-painting is not usual practice for Dylan; nevertheless, it contributes to the atmospheric and illusional overall sound of this album, in which the retrospection, or reflecting back the memory of the past, may be taking place in Dylan’s mind. In addition, the staccato sound created by the organ, and the guitar’s cutting later, is heard throughout the song, and this motive imitates the lyrics very well. For example, the very opening word, “walking,” is re-created with this pulse-like staccato sound. When one listens to this sound very closely, the sound from the right channel is slightly delayed; it is moving
from the left to the right in a matter of milliseconds. It is as if creating the direction for the “walking.” Moreover, this pulsing motive doubles as the sound of clock as well. Dylan explicitly sings, “I hear the clock-tick,” and the implication of the time-ticking is that not much time is left, possibly for his life/career or even the 20th century. One certainly hears the clock tick, in a metaphoric sense, when the surrounding is quiet or contemplating, which seems to be the dominant quality of this song.

The overall lyrics of “Love Sick” are highly metaphorical and perceptual, and it is as if all the things described here take place in his mind. Figure 3 shows the entire lyrics of this song:

**Figure 3**

I’m walking through streets that are dead  
Walking, walking with you in my head  
My feet are so tired, my brain is so wired  
And the clouds are weeping  
Did I hear someone tell a lie?  
Did I hear someone’s distant cry?  
I spoke like a child; you destroyed me with a smile  
While I was sleeping  
I’m sick of love but I’m in the thick of it  
This kind of love I’m so sick of it  
I see, I see lovers in the meadow  
I see, I see silhouettes in the window  
I watch them ’til they’re gone and they leave me hanging on  
To a shadow  
I’m sick of love; I hear the clock tick  
This kind of love; I’m love sick  
Sometimes the silence can be like thunder  
Sometimes I wanna take to the road and plunder  
Could you ever be true? I think of you  
And I wonder  
I’m sick of love; I wish I’d never met you  
I’m sick of love; I’m trying to forget you  
Just don’t know what to do  
I’d give anything to be with you

One thing noticeable is the frequent use of “I” in the lyrics describing the narrator’s condition, and there is no mention of the third person. It is all narrated between “I” and “you,” and, because “you” certainly does not have voice here, the lyrics are all what the narrator hears, feels, sees, and thinks. Yet the listeners are not even sure if they can take these words literally because some of the things described here are illusional and nothing
seems to be concrete. After all, the narrator of the song, or Dylan himself, is sick and “don’t know what to do.” The common sense is that when one is “love sick,” one is usually happy and sick at the same time; however, the person here is so tired after wandering around in his mind, and the only solution suggested is “trying to forget you.” There is a sense of pessimism here that does not allow him to go back to her, yet he still clings to her, muttering at the end, “I’d give anything to be with you.” These contradictions and perceptions are reinforced by the timbre as well—the electric piano and the organ are used to create a sonic ambience that is pervasive in this track, rather than using those sounds as separate instrumental entries. It is used like a sound effect, not as a country or blues musical styles. The sound of the guitar and the drums is sparse as well; it is hard to point out in what kind of style those instruments play, other than stating again that they are like sound effects. His voice, too, reinforces the tiring quality of this song, with its raspiness indicating he has been out all day long walking around, contemplating, and murmuring to himself. The described objects like “streets that are dead,” “clouds are weeping,” and “lovers in the meadow” are illusory and sensory and may exist only in his mind. Moreover, because he is walking, there is also a sense of the time passing in his mind, as if the whole song is about his thought process. In the first chorus, he says he is in the middle of the relationship that, “I’m sick of love / but I’m in the thick of it.” And in the second chorus, he becomes a bit impatient, stating, “I hear the clock tick,” and finally, he admits, “I wish I’d never met you,” a conclusive statement of regret. Yet, the result in the end is that it is probably too late. This relationship, or even imaged relationship, is unfixable and irreconcilable, and he is forever haunted by these images.
“Cold Irons Bound”

The second song I analyze is “Cold Irons Bound,” and Dylan often plays this song, as well as “Love Sick,” at his live concerts. It lasts over seven minutes in the span of the six verses including the instrumental break, yet it takes a little while before the band gets into the groove and starts playing together. In the first thirty seconds, various noises are heard over the pulse of the hi-hat cymbal, and what are possibly guitar harmonics that sound like a bell are heard twice. The delayed guitar and/or the lap steel guitar sound pervade the space, and one hears someone is blowing into the microphone causing an exaggerated wind sound. This introduction conjures up the place where you are standing, probably a deserted place where there are no walls around, perhaps “twenty miles out of town.” Because of these unfixed pitches produced by delay and reverberation, the sounds seem not to represent themselves directly (that is, we do not hear guitar sounds per se) but rather they depict a landscape; it is all rather cinematic. These sonic images are not part of an integral songwriting framework; however, they are essential parts of how the listeners experience the recording, and the producer Daniel Lanois, and Dylan, are fully aware of that.

“Cold Irons Bound” may sound like a standard blues song at first listen, in terms of its chord progressions, yet it employs an unexpected harmony elaborated with the blues formal design. This song lasts over seven minutes with strophic form. Example 3 shows the melody with the chord progressions of the verse section of this song.
Example 3

The first 16 measures prolong the Bb harmony with four 4-bar phrases. Indeed, extending tonic harmony to 16 measures, in contrast to the standard 8 measures, is a fairly common practice in the blues formal design. Each phrase contains the so-called blue notes (the minor 3rd, Db, and the minor 7th, Ab, in the key of Bb), and, because of a lack of 2nd and 6th degree in the scale throughout the song, the collection of pitches is the so-called blues pentatonic scale. Each phrase also features an arch-like shape of ascending and descending notes, always resting on the low Bb at its end. The highest note here, the high Db, and the lowest note, the Bb, create the contour of the minor 10th, which

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was not heard in the stationary melody of “Love Sick,” in which the verse melody was primarily neighbor tones to the key note, Eb.

The next section of music, from measure 17 onward in this example, is the B part of the 12-bar blues scheme. A harmonic shift is expected here and it does occur; however, the progression does not go to the expected V chord followed by the IV chord. Instead, the harmony moves to the C chord, which can be taken as the V/V chord since the expected chord here is the V chord (F). In this sense, the 3rd of the C chord, the note E, is supposed to work as a leading tone and resolve to F, a half step higher. However, the bass here is E, and it chromatically descends to the Eb, the root of the IV chord (Eb chord), a half step down. One of the most identifiable gestures in the 12-bar blues scheme is the progression of V-IV chords followed by the I chord. This E-Eb motion in the bass does simulate this V-IV progression with the descending bass line, but it does it with the “wrong” note. The bass line F-Eb is the “correct” bass line in V-IV motion, but here it is E-Eb. In other words, the bass E seems as though it “wanted” to go up a half step higher to fulfill its role as the secondary leading tone, yet it went a half step down instead, in order to satisfy the expected blues descending motion.

In relation to this descending bass line, Robert Hatten writes about Beethoven’s use of the unexpected bass descent, which is strikingly similar to “Cold Irons Bound,” and says that it leads to an important interpretative element that he calls, “abnegation.”

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Shown here in Example 4 is the excerpt of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in Eb, Op. 7, second movement, mm. 1-7, and the key of this movement is the key of C. Marked here as V\(^6\)/V (D), it is expected to move to V (G), and it does so, but without the secondary leading tone, F#, resolving a half step up to G; instead, Beethoven descends, moving from F# to F natural, which becomes the 7\(^{th}\) of the dominant chord, making it the third inversion. Hatten calls this point, the “crux” (expressive focal point) of the phrase (marked with sf as well), and explains how this F#-F natural relationship is developed later in the piece. He interprets this phrase and defines the “abnegation” as follows:

Now the yearning is not realized as (F#-G); instead, a reversal (F#-F natural) displaces the goal and creates a denial, or negation, of the implication of the bass F#. The combination of yielding and denial of implication is a powerful pair, creating a sense of resignation that is more actively involved in its reversal of yearning. This “willed” resignation is more than a passive yielding, and may suggest the more refined concept of abnegation. Abnegation implies not only a conscious choice, but a positive spiritual outcome resulting from acceptance of a less than pleasant situation.\(^{41}\)

**Abnegation**: Willed resignation as spiritual acceptance of a (tragic) situation that leads to a positive inner state, implying transcendence.\(^{42}\)

In order to discuss Hatten’s interpretation as applied to Dylan’s unexpected bass line, there should be a clear distinction here between acceptance and giving up. Giving up is a

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\(^{41}\) Ibid. 59.
\(^{42}\) Ibid. 287.
way of abandoning altogether the issue that has to be solved, whereas acceptance is a way of subsuming the issue and internalizing it as a reality. The reality of death, for instance, is an unavoidable issue for every human being, and creative geniuses are no exception. In this sense, acceptance can be taken as the first step to reconcile in relation to Said’s “irreconcilabilities.” This song, among others, on *Time Out of Mind* is confessional because Dylan is seeking this acceptance that is the first and necessary step, to reconcile both himself and society to his aging, and the decline of his popularity from his “middle period.” Of course, the irony here is that this acceptance won him back the admiration of the public. While op. 7 and other pieces by Beethoven that Hatten analyzes are not from Beethoven’s late period, this interpretation of the bass line, and the aesthetic of voice-leading in the classical era, as “abnegation,” coincide almost perfectly with the notion of late style, drawing a parallel to Dylan’s subject matter (the lyrical images will be discussed later). Like the rhythmical connection of the blues between Blind Lemon Jefferson and Dylan, the connection made here between Beethoven and Dylan is certainly not directional and referential. However, Dylan negated his bass line (using the “wrong” note) and yielded (with the unique chromatic descending that resembles the usual blues gesture), and this can be seen as “abnegation.” I see this interpretative connection plausible and applicable. Dylan has been fairly successful in sales and popularity after *Time Out of Mind*, probably because, as Hatten felt, it “leads to a positive inner state, implying transcendence.” If the “willed resignation” brought him a “spiritual acceptance,” this might have been the moment that Dylan felt the transcendence, through his own creation, in the form of the blues.
This B part of the music itself, again from measure 17 onward, features blues gestures. The chord progression of C/E-Eb-Bb is repeated twice before moving to the Eb-Db-Bb progression that simulates the “correct” F-Eb-Bb progression. In other words, C/E-Eb-Bb is the A part and Eb-Db-Bb is the B part of the 12-bar blues scheme, constructing a miniature AAB form. The lyrics here, though not the entire song, also have a similar AAB construction; “I’m waist deep, waist deep, in the mist,” and “It’s almost like, almost like, I don’t exist.” A tiny AAB blues gesture is built into the large-scale blues scheme, which is a testimony to how the blues form is elusive and elastic in nature.

In addition, the refrain of this song, “I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound,” is repeated twice only in the third and sixth verses, counting the instrumental break as the fourth verse. In other words, three verses becomes a unit, and, within that unit, the AAB blues gesture is, again, built into the larger structural design. These intricate structural designs are far from the conventional 12-bar blues scheme, yet the elaborative capacity of the scheme is the beauty of it. Furthermore, the melody here consists of only three notes, Ab, Bb, and D, and they are, again, the so-called blue notes, the flatted 7th and the minor 3rd in respect to the key of this song, Bb. The chorus part of “Love Sick” consists of these three notes as well.

The lyrical images of “Cold Irons Bound,” like many other songs on this album, consist of a supernatural power, distance, place, and love, some of them seen in retrospective mode. One of the reasons this song lasts more than seven minutes is the fairly long lyrics, shown in the figure 4:
Figure 4
I’m beginning to hear voices and there’s no one around
Well, I’m all used up and the fields have turned brown
I went to church on Sunday and she passed by
My love for her is taking such a long time to die

I’m waist deep, waist deep in the mist
It’s almost like, almost like I don’t exist
I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound

The walls of pride are high and wide
Can’t see over to the other side
It’s such a sad thing to see beauty decay
It’s sadder still, to feel your heart torn away

One look at you and I’m out of control
Like the universe has swallowed me whole
I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound

There’s too many people, too many to recall
I thought some of ’m were friends of mine; I was wrong about ’m all
Well, the road is rocky and the hillside’s mud
Up over my head nothing but clouds of blood
I found my world, found my world in you

But your love just hasn’t proved true
I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound
Twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound

(Instrumental Break)

Oh, the winds in Chicago have torn me to shreds
Reality has always had too many heads
Some things last longer than you think they will
There are some kind of things you can never kill

It’s you and you only, I’m been thinking about
But you can’t see in and it’s hard lookin’ out
I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound

Well the fats in the fire and the water’s in the tank
The whiskey’s in the jar and the money’s in the bank
I tried to love and protect you because I cared
I’m gonna remember forever the joy that we shared

Looking at you and I’m on my bended knee
You have no idea what you do to me
I’m twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound
Twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound

“Coldirons” at www.songmeanings.net writes the following about the title of this song:

Although it’s not often mentioned, it is important to note that much of “Time Out of Mind” (including the title itself) comes from phrases used in “The Pilgrim's Progress” by John Bunyan. The phrase “twenty miles out of town in cold irons bound” comes from the description of the prisoners in the castle of the Giant Despair. This incredible song seems to be a song about a man struggling with sin and pride and the frustration that his desires of his sinful nature trap him in despair and prevent him from getting closer to God.43

The issue of Dylan’s “borrowing” from literature or any other source is not news at all at this point in Dylan’s career for the critics and fans alike, and it seems that this comment about the description of prisoners does make sense for the content of the lyrics. Yet, it

precisely makes the point that the way Dylan interpreted the “borrowed” material through his own lyrics, if the title and some images are indeed taken from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, can be reinterpreted by the listeners. Moreover, because Dylan presents this song with the melody and phrasing in the blues, the experience is even more interesting.

Whether this song is about prisoners or not, it is questionable if the narrator is still alive because of some of the retrospective and supernatural images. The narrator at first refers to a woman as “she” but later refers to “you.” This interchangeable image is somewhat confusing, as if the narrator himself does not really know the truth. Indeed, he sings, “it’s almost like, almost like, I don’t exist.” And he seems to be somewhat paranoid saying, “I’m out of control,” and “I’m beginning to hear voices, and there’s no one around.” In “Love Sick,” the clouds were weeping, and this time the image is “Up over my head nothing but the clouds of blood.” These images may in fact be normal for people who are confined in a space where one “Can’t see over to the other side,” like a prison. Moreover, there are some regretful comments about his past, “I thought some of ‘m were friends of mine / I was wrong about ‘m all,” and “I’m gonna remember forever the joy that we shared.” Presumably, people at the prison are forced to be there, yet, ironically, it may be the perfect place to reflect on one’s life or engage in retrospection.

The title of this song seems to indicate the Northern part of the Midwest. On the basis that “bound” implies the confined space or region, “iron” and “bound” reminds one of the name of the region “Iron Range,” where Dylan grew up. In “Not Dark Yet,” he sang, “Feel like my soul has turned into steel.” The images of coldness reside in metal objects, which leads one to imagine the relationship between supernatural power and its

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44 No such images were found in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, though “Giant Despair” and “the prisoners” are depicted in the book.
repellent, such as a horseshoe on a door. It goes along with the themes of this album. In addition, Chicago is mentioned in the lyrics, and that city is an important place in the history of the blues. In the perspective of retrospection, Dylan may be wandering in his mind around his hometown that is close to the landmark of blues history. Nevertheless, he is not quite there yet because he is “twenty miles out of town.”
**Conclusion: Summary of an Interpretation**

Was Bob Dylan ever anguished about his creativity? Was he ever anxious about his legacy and works that would later come out before he “shifted gears” in the late 90’s? Was he concerned at all about his artistic validation, even thought it appears that he has never cared? The short answer to these questions, I would imagine, is yes, yes to all.

The most essential quality of *Time Out of Mind* is, I think, that it is one of his most personal albums. He is naked on this album, and sincerely honest about his anxiety towards mortality that led him to engage in retrospection. As a result, this anxiety turned out to be a concern and a source of sympathy for the listeners. When his legacy is discussed in retrospect, his status as “voice of a generation” seems to always surface as the number one cause of his success, and people still seem to cling to that legend to this day. It is understandable that people at that time actually felt that an anointed messiah had arrived on the scene. One of the reasons other political leaders or visionaries at that time could not reach out to the consciousness of people, I suspect, is that no one, in a good way, disturbed the emotion of the time like Dylan did. The “voice of a generation” did not come from a peculiarly smart and keen political point of view, nor a divinely appreciative religious narrative. It came out of a singer/songwriter who shook the sentimental part of human emotion with lines like, “I gave her my heart but she wanted my soul / but don’t think twice, it’s all right” (in “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right”). It was his deeply personal music, and a bit of political and anti-conformist attitude, that made him a highly influential figure of the 1960s. I argue that a similar thing happened in the late 90s. *Time Out of Mind* was, again, a deeply personal and confessional album that showed Dylan’s vulnerable side as a person and a singer/songwriter who was, at one
point, thought to be a cultural icon of the twentieth century. He had been famous and
called a genius, therefore, he must be happy—this kind of shallow view is completely
rejected when one hears lines like, “I was born here and I’ll die here against my will” (in
“Not Dark Yet”). He is still an artist who is concerned about his mortality and artistry.

The retrospection in Dylan’s “late style” represents these concerns, not only
because he is a so-called creative genius, but also a person who is genuinely sensitive
about his life and art. If works of art are the means to express these concerns, artists may
feel some kind of urgency to create another work before they are no longer capable of
expressing themselves. If anyone’s “late style” is a subject of interest, I think it is this
urgency that compels the audience. In Dylan’s “late style,” he tells stories, not just
random allegorical stories, but his deeply personal death-related stories, through the form
he has been using all these years, the blues. The blues take him to the world of “distant
past beyond memory” in which he tries to “walk the line,” attempting to reconcile with
the “irreconcilabilities.” He had some props, like the album jacket and the CD label, that
further illustrated the notion of “time out of mind.” In the end, though, one can only
speculate how much he achieved reconciliation. From the fans’ and critics’ point of view,
Dylan “came back” to the scene and has been successful. Yet his fight with
“irreconcilabilities” through his retrospection is deeply personal and private.

As of this writing, Dylan recently performed in China, and he was somewhat
accused of “selling out,” having his set list censored by the Chinese government before
the concert. Some people still expect him to be a symbol of collective ideology. The more
one expects from him, it seems, the more he escapes from one’s expectation. If there is
one thing that one can expect from Dylan, it may be that he is expected to be unexpected.
In a recent interview, President Barack Obama spoke of Dylan, who did not show up for the photo opportunity with the President, preceding the performance at the White House:

Here’s what I love about Dylan: He was exactly as you’d expect he would be. He wouldn’t come to the rehearsal; usually, all these guys are practicing before the set in the evening. He didn’t want to take a picture with me; usually all the talent is dying to take a picture with me and Michelle before the show, but he didn’t show up to that. … And I thought: That’s how you want Bob Dylan, right? You don’t want him to be all cheesin’ and grinnin’ with you. You want him to be a little skeptical about the whole enterprise.45

It seems the President got the nature of Dylan’s character right! If one tries to help him reconcile with his irreconcilable past, which is partly constructed by the audience, one may need to let him go, as the President did. If one tries to understand Dylan, one may need to understand his “late style,” in which he tries to “walk the line” with the retrospection. I hope he finds something meaningful in the “distant past beyond memory” with the wisdom he acquired through aging. Ah, Bob Dylan was so much younger then, and he is older than that now. Things have changed. But may his songs stay forever young.

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