



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Odes to Bob Dylan

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Odes to Bob Dylan
Sacred Cow: Bob Dylan (Part One)

Those who create should honor what they did not create.

September 15, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. In an earlier report, I stated our Sacred Cows poll had been completed, or at least put on hold. However, I think another candidate should be considered: Bob Dylan.

This morning, I came across a newspaper article about Mr. Dylan's new album, "Modern Times."¹ The slant of the article was: (a) Mr. Dylan has been borrowing others' works. (b) But because Mr. Dylan is Mr. Dylan, this bootlegging is a part of his genius. (c) Therefore, unlike other writers, whose feet are held to the fire for verse imitation, Mr. Dylan has made his heretofore obscure sources famous by his borrowings. So everything is cool.

A source for Bob's verse in this album is a poet named Henry Timrod, who wrote poems during the Civil War about the impact of the war on the South. The *Times* article stated the biographer of Mr. Timrod, Brian Cisco, had found seven phrases from Timrod's work that are in Dylan's work. The article says:

"No doubt about it, there has been some borrowing going on."...But Mr. Cisco didn't seem particularly bothered: "I'm glad Timrod is getting some recognition," he said.

Why is Mr. Cisco not bothered? Because Mr. Timrod's getting *some* recognition will result in Mr. Cisco's biography of Mr. Timrod getting *more* recognition. Let's use a table (see next page) from the *Times* article comparing the verse of Timrod and Dillon.² You be the judge.

As a Dylan admirer, I find the first three examples disquieting. The fourth example might give me more hope about the chances of using similar words in similar phrases...if only I had not read the first three examples.

The first example is especially disheartening in the implication of its machinations: He uses two almost similar phrases, but reverses them in his lyrics. What is the probability of that happening? Such contrived constructions do not happen by accident.

¹ Motoko Rich, "Who's This Guy Dylan Who's Borrowing Lines From Henry Timrod?" *New York Times*, September 14, 2006, B1 and B6.

² *Ibid.*, p. B6.

Henry Timrod	Bob Dylan
"A round of precious hours. Oh! here, where in that summer I basked. And strove, with logic frailer than the flowers. From "A Rhapsody of a Southern Winter Night"	"More frailer than the flowers, these precious hours." From "When the Deal Goes Down"
"There is a wisdom that grows up in strife." From "Retirement"	"Where wisdom grows up in strife." From "When the Deal Goes Down"
"How then , O weary one! explain the sources of that hidden pain." From "Two Portraits"	"Can't explain the sources of that hidden pain." From "Spirit on the Water"
"Which, ere they feel a lover's breath, Lie in a temporary death;" From "Two Portraits"	"In the dark I hear the night birds call I hear a lover's breath I sleep in the kitchen with my feet in the hall Sleep is like a temporary death;" From "Workingman's Blues #2"

Definitions of Plagiarism

Here is what Microsoft's Encarta Dictionary has to say about plagiarism:

pla-gia-rism [pláyjə rizzəm]

(plural **pla-gia-risms**)

noun

- stealing somebody's work or idea:** the process of copying another person's idea or written work and claiming it as original
- something plagiarized:** a piece of written work or an idea that somebody has copied and claimed as his or her own

Heroes

Bob Dylan has become a folk music hero to the world (and this writer). He has composed lyrics and notes that we treasure. We listen to his songs and become lost in another world; a world that is sometimes for the better and other times for the worse, but removed from our prosaic day-to-day ploddings.

Be they rock singers or ball swingers, we need to trust our heroes. We need to be assured their extraordinary talents are above what we mere mortals are capable of accomplishing. We do not want them to be unoriginal folk singers, or steroid-laden bat swingers. These shams sully their image and mar our fantasies. James Thurber, author of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, said, "The majority of American males put themselves to sleep by striking out the batting order of the New York Yankees."...Or silently singing the lyrics to "Blowing in the Wind."

I wish I could avoid this subject and move on to a report on something else, but I find the situation with Dylan's verse bothersome. Read those passages again. What do you think?

More Sacred Cow Apologia

The article goes on to say:

- Mr. Dylan does not acknowledge Timrod's contribution to his verse.
- A liner in Dylan's album reads, "All songs written by Bob Dylan."
- Numerous other instances are cited where fans have found "striking similarities between Bob's work and others' work."

Yet:

- A disc jockey from Albuquerque, "I think that's the way Bob Dylan has always written songs. It's part of the folk process..."
- The same disc jockey, who says Dylan's work is original, "You could give the collected works of Henry Timrod to a bunch of people, but none of them are going to come up with Bob Dylan songs."
- "Critics and fans have long described the song-writer's magpie tendencies, looking upon that as a manifestation of his genius..."
- Christopher Ricks who has written a book on Dylan, says, "I may be too inclined to defend, but I do think it's characteristic of great artists and songsters to immediately draw on their predecessors."....And, "...it is atypical for popular musicians to acknowledge their influences."

These thoughts represent revolting sycophancy and extraordinary lapses of common sense. Why has Mr. Dylan not been taken to task in his industry? Because he's a sacred cow.

Here is one more quote from the *Times* article. James Kibler, a professor of English at the University of Georgia, "If I were Timrod, I would love it...I would say he's doing me a great honor to Timrod and let's celebrate that."

Except for one point Professor: *How can Dylan be doing Timrod an honor, when Dylan does not even credit Timrod?* Kibler's comment comes from an English teacher, a person who should be instructing us about the arcane concept known as crediting others' work.

Let's hear from Bob on this issue, as quoted from the *Times* article. While reading this passage, imagine the mental retention powers of Mr. Dylan---his mind is a veritable photographic memory:

Mr. Dylan has long been interested in the Civil War: in "Chronicles: Vol. 1," Mr. Dylan's autobiography, published by Simon & Schuster in 2004, he writes about spending time in the New York Public Library combing through microfilm newspapers published from 1855 to 1865. "I crammed my head full as much of this stuff as I could stand and locked it away in my mind out of sight, left it alone."

Very impressive. He is able to recall word-by-word the verse of another writer, but he is not able to recall the name of the writer, or the fact that the words were not his. He wills himself to lock it away. Lock it away? To what end? See the table above.

Sourcing Others

During my writing endeavors, I have probably used others' ideas without giving them credit. Such has never been my intent. I believe attribution is the ethical way to write. Furthermore, it is an easy task to pen a footnote. Few people really care if the pearl of wisdom comes from me or someone else. What makes the specific quote valuable is how it is used in the context of my writings.

Yes, given Timrod's poetry, I could not come up with a Dylan song. Conversely, *not given* Timrod's poetry, Dylan could not have come up with those specific lyrics in his songs.

How many of us walk around the earth thinking original thoughts all the time? None of us do. In this regard, we are derivative creatures. With the exception of my later work, my books were based on the ongoing standards, specifications and research papers in the computer networks industry. For my books on the Internet, I placed an attribution in the front of the book stating the text represented my summaries of Internet Standards. No one cared, certainly not the Internet authorities. I was touting the Internet and the readers wanted to read my books because they were too busy to read thousands of pages of abstract text.

If I used an idea from another author, I footnoted it. No one cared if the thought was not mine. Again, it was the context in which I used it that mattered. I am certain the quoted author was happy to see his/her work was being read and used.

I will wager Henry Timrod's descendants would be thrilled to have the great Bob Dylan tell the world the inspiration for some of his verse came from Timrod's poems. But Bob "locked them away...out of sight." Until he suddenly unlocked them, brought them back into sight.

Becoming a Famous Person...and Keeping that Rating

Famous people. We worship them. We make them even more famous by worshiping the fact that they are famous. The trick is becoming famous. It is often a long road of toil, punctuated with good and bad breaks. Or maybe it can be made a bit easier, summed by the saying, "Short cuts to fame are the only way to travel."

OK, maybe you don't take short cuts to fame. So, once you are famous, should you be allowed to take short cuts to stay famous? I don't think so, but after reading the *New York Times* article, I think I am in the minority.

I care less if famous people are beautiful, creative, brilliant geniuses. I admire those traits, but in the main, they don't count for a hill of beans. What counts is *how* they got to where they are. I have failed often in pursuing this lofty goal, but I have tried to remember that the means to the end is more important than the end itself. I think, as a general rule, the end will work itself out if I pay attention to the means to get there.

Sure, it is easy to forget a source here and there. Things merge in our minds, and we can forget that we did not actually fire our own synapses to come up with an idea. But several lines of verse...almost verbatim? It appears that Bob Dylan has been too focused on the ends and not the

means to get there. And he has gone beyond the pale. If you have doubts, please re-read the quotes in the table.

Ah Bob, what does it matter if you used someone else's profundities on occasion? Your work would still be judged as your work. As far as we would have known, you would have created innovative and original work. Now, history will footnote your bootleggings. A sorry legacy, and all you had to do was acknowledge someone else's ego other than your own.

...But I'm not sure the assertions in the last paragraph are correct. I'm beginning to believe a lot of folks don't care about Dylan's "folk process." I do, because I believe the brilliance of originality is just that, originality. If an artist claims to be original and is not, his fans have been the unwary dupes of intellectual and artistic deceptions.

I've sometimes wondered why Bob Dylan has such a scowl on this face: Narrow eyes, tense looking forehead, and pursed lips. All-in-all, an unhappy look. I perhaps know the answer: His facial afflictions are a manifestation of writer's block. The cure? See the table above.

Your on the Street Reporter

Odes to Bob Dylan
Sacred Cow: Bob Dylan (Part Two)

September 19, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. *The New York Times* ran another story on Henry Timrod and Bob Dylan.³ The writer of the column is Suzanne Vega, a Grammy-winning singer and songwriter.

Ms. Vega makes reference to the 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi, and quotes one of his poems. She then quotes one of her songs and implies the two works are similar, then adds, "I had never even heard of Rumi, and I thought the resonance of ideas was a remarkable coincidence. I felt vaguely guilty and wondered if I should be paying royalties to someone."

Ms. Vega, your verse has no passages (not even three successive words) that are the same as Rumi's. You have two successive words, "meet you" that are the same. As best I can tell that's it. And my interpretation of yours and Rumi's verse leads me to have different notions of what you are saying. In a nutshell, your stuff bears little resemblance to Rumi. So, relax.

But you are not forgiven. You then say, "Still, Bob Dylan doesn't have to steal from anyone." Next you say, "Did he do this on purpose? I doubt it. Maybe he has a photographic memory, and bits of text stick to it." Come on, Ms. Vega. If a person can recall entire lines of verse that he read elsewhere, I'll bet he can remember where the verses came from.

You continue, "But I am trying to imagine a Bob Dylan with footnotes, asterisks, *ibid.*'s and nifty little anecdotes about the origins of each song. It's not going to happen."

I doubt that anyone is asking Robert to learn the rules of attribution. I think what we might be asking is that he learn the *courtesy* of attribution, not to mention the *ethics* of attribution.

A brief note would suffice, such as, "Some verse from the Civil War poet Henry Timrod is reflected in several songs in this album." That's it! That's all we ask of our hero.

Ms. Vega finishes her apologia, "He's never pretended to be an academic, or even a nice guy. He is more likely to present himself as, well, a thief. Renegade, outlaw, artist. That's why we are passionate about him."

Surreal. The moral vacuity of some people is astounding.

Your on the Street Reporter

³ Suzanne Vega, "The Ballard of Henry Timrod," *New York Times*, September 17, 2006, 14.

Odes to Bob Dylan Grammy for “Modern Times”?⁴

February 10, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. The Grammys are to be awarded tomorrow night for best: *record*, *album*, *song*, and others.⁵

What is the difference between best *record* and best *album*? A reasonable response is, a *record* is one recording on an *album*. Fine. Then what is the difference between best *record* and best *song*? They appear to be the same

I can't figure it out. If someone wins both best *record* and best *song*, it seems to me they win two grammys for the same recording. It's not my line of work to know the difference between a record and a song, or a record and an album. If you know, please send me an email.

Anyway, as a run-up to the Grammys, yesterday an article appeared in *USA Today* titled, "Dylan, Blige Deserve Recognition."⁶ Excerpts:

What about Bob? And why not hail Mary?

Though the Grammy's best-album race isn't short on talent, two glaring omissions undermine the competition: Bob Dylan's criminally omitted “Modern Times,” arguably the most highly praised work of 2006...

To critics and handicappers, both were considered slam-dunks. Dylan earned rhapsodic reviews for “Modern Times.” Blender compared him to Yeats and Matisse, and the London's *The Guardian* saw parallels to Wordsworth. Prickly scribe Robert Christgau graded it A-plus.

As you may recall, an earlier report cited findings revealing verse from “Modern Times” was taken from a dead Civil War poet. Taking up this issue again, plagiarism is defined as, "Stealing somebody's work or idea: the process of copying another person's idea or written work and claiming it as original." To be fair, I don't know if Bob's borrowings fit the legal definition, because this poet had no copyright on his work. But what about common courtesy from one creator to another?

Fast forward to February 11, 2007:

⁴ Dictionary definitions and quotes in this section (with the exception of verse, to which your Reporter claims the blame) are sourced from Microsoft® Encarta® 2006. © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

⁵ As well as: new artist, female pop vocal, male pop vocal, pop group or duo, pop collaboration, pop instrumental, pop instrumental album, pop vocal album, dance recording, electronic/dance album, traditional pop vocal album, solo rock vocal, rock duo or group, rock song, best rock album, alternative music album, female B&B vocal, male B&B vocal, urban/alternative, R&B song, R&B album, contemporary R&B album, rap album, female country song, male country song, country group or duo, country album.

⁶ Edna Gundersen and Steve Jones, "Dylan, Blige Deserve Recognition," *USA Today*, February 9, 2007, 2D.

Grammy Awards Ceremonies⁷

The envelope is opened. The best album award is awarded to Bob Dylan's "Modern Times." Bob saunters onto the stage and takes the statue in hand. As writers of borrowed angst tend to do, he frowns at everyone---likely brought-on by repressed guilt.

Presenter, "To what do you owe your genius, Bob?"

Dylan, "I remembered....then forgot....then remembered this quote, ' The best way to become a successful writer is to read good writing, remember it, and then forget where you remember it from.'⁸ Pretty cool idea for my award-winning album."

Presenter, "How can you be so prolific?"

Dylan, "A dead man once said...No, not the dead man who writes some of my verse. Someone else. Oops, I just remembered. This guy's not dead yet, so I can't copy his verse, as he may read it before he appears in the Obits. You know, royalty issues. They're writers' feed. They keep us going. Don't have to feed dead people.

"Oh well, no matter; he said, ' Plagiarism has many advantages over the labor of creation. It is much easier to carry out and less hard work. You can finish twenty works of plagiarism in the time it takes to produce one creative work.'⁹

Presenter, "Yes, so I've heard. I've also been told one lone seed of an idea---an expression---can spawn scores of others in a few minutes. But without this seed, a writer spends many hours creating each idea, each expression."

Dylan, "Sure, one seed leads to another. Say! You've just seeded my new mega-hit. Here's the first verse:

Strum, strum, strum...
One lone seed,
spawns hundreds of creeds.
But without that seed,
I'm without my feed.

He continues, "And I forgot this idea: ' Imitation is not inspiration, and inspiration only can give birth to a work of art. The least of man's original emanation is better than the best of a borrowed thought.'¹⁰

⁷ All quotes of Mr. Dylan and presenter are hypothetical and the scenario is fictional.

⁸ Attributed to Gene Fowler, U.S. author. (1890 - 1960).

⁹ Bernardo Atxaga, Basque writer. (1951 -). *Obabakoak* (Margaret Jull Costa (tr.)).

¹⁰ Albert Pinkham Ryder, U.S. painter. (1847 - 1917).

"Which provides fodder for my next record album:

Strum, strum, strum... 🎸🎸🎸
A good composer does not imitate, he just steals.¹¹
His pain's not his, but what others feel.
Imitation's his inspiration,
his borrowed titillation,
as he signs yet another big deal.

"Besides, as I always say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Presenter, "Uh, Bob, you may always say it, but someone else said it first."¹²

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, but most of the population in the Western world knows this quote did not come from you."

"OK, how about this? It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"

Presenter, "That's really all we ask of you Bob. A bit of attribution here and there would not dull the glow of your star. Your fans would still buy the works of you and dead poets. You would still be idolized. You would still get your feed after you do your feeds to your audiences."

"Say, I like that expression! I'll use it for my next hit. In the meantime, all this attention has gotten my creative juices going. Here's some verse sang to the tune of 'Blowin' in the Wind'."

Strum, strum, strum... 🎸🎸🎸
How many words can one man write,
before he runs out of ideas?
And how many thoughts can this lone soul cite,
before he knows he must steal?

Yes, and how many times must this man excel,
before he is put in his grave?

The answer my friend,
is blowin' in the wind,
the answer is blowin' in the wind.

Your on the Street Reporter

¹¹ The original sentence from Igor Stravinsky, Russian-born U.S. composer. (1882 - 1971) is, "A good composer does not imitate; he steals."

¹² Charles Colton, British clergyman and writer. (1780 - 1832).

PS: February 12, 2007. The Dixie Chicks win the 2006 Grammy awards for Best Record of the Year and Best Song of the Year. The best record is, "Not Ready to Make Nice." The best song is, "Not Ready to Make Nice."

Odes to Bob Dylan B. Dylan and M. Twain Limericks

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. My criticisms about Bob Dylan have hit a chord with some of my readers. But others have told me to "Let it go!"

This report is not dated because it spans two separate reporting periods: An earlier report on borrowings of Bob Dylan and a later report on the life and writing of Mark Twain. I've included it here, because it serves as a fitting follow-up to the report on Bob Dylan. As you can see, it's a set of limericks about the subject, sung to the tune of a folk chant, and acoustic guitar:

Strum, strum, strum... 🎸🎸🎸
*There once was a man named Bob Dylin',
who wrote catchy songs for a livin'.
 He borrowed some verse,
 from those in a hearse,
and ended-up making a killin'.*

Refrain:
*Aye, aye, aye, aye,
the last limerick was so witty.
 So here comes another...
 just like the other...
and if Bob thinks it's wrong, what a pity!*

*Yes, we know of this man named Bob.
He was good at doing his job.
 And wasn't he brave!...
 to take from the grave,
some lyrics, which made his fans sob.*

Refrain Here

*We keep hearing about Bob Zimmerman,
and his songs about life's grimmer hand.
 If you want to the real truth,
 Bob was born in Duluth,
and had nothing to do with the common man.*

Refrain Here

*There once was a man named Mark Twain,
who was noted for witty refrain.
 He made up his verse,
 and left those in the hearse,
to bask in their own silent fame.*

Refrain II:

*Aye, aye, aye, aye,
the last limerick was so witty.
 And that was the last line,
 there'll no other rhyme,
And let's hope we left Bob feeling silly.*

Your on the Street Reporter

Odes to Bob Dylan Generational Perspectives

This bird chirps for seed.

May 29, 2008

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I've not sent a serious report to you for a while because I've been busy living the idle life. Notwithstanding this luxury, these past few days I learned several lessons from three younger people. In spite of their youth and inexperience---and associated naiveté---I respect their opinions. They are my niece, nephew, and son. I will not identify the first two, as they are not aware I'm "sourcing" them in this (last?) report on the subject of Bob Dylan. Obviously, I can't hide the identity of my son, but I let him know I was quoting him for this report, and he gave me permission to do so.

Part of this lesson deals with my criticism of Bob Dylan for his use of an American Civil War poet's verse in his songs, not giving attribution to this poet, and claiming the verse as his own. I wrote about this topic in other reports, which are included in this essay. As you may know, I've also parodied Dylan in other reports with limericks.

My point in these essays and limericks was to explain my aversion to Dylan's borrowing verse (nearly verbatim in some instances) from someone and not giving credit to that someone. My other point was my bafflement about the near universal reaction to this action: *It's done all the time. Why make a big deal of it?*

During this debate, my niece, nephew, Tommy, and I agreed that most writing is derivative. For that matter, so are most of our thoughts. Humans' creativity comes not so much from a colossal, original idea, but from tacking-on a small, original inference from past ideas. This addition then becomes a "colossal, original" idea, leading to Grammy awards and Nobel prizes.

This derivative aspect of our minds is usually unintended. It's part-and-parcel of how we have evolved. As we read, see, and hear, these stimuli enter into our grey matter. Unwittingly, they may become part of our unconscious. Thus, when Bob Dylan picks up his guitar to compose a song, he has much support from his cerebral past. When my son picks up his guitar, he has Dylan images, refrains, and beats in his mind. When I turn to my keyboard to write a parody, Mark Twain and Dave Barry are lurking in my frontal lobes and hippocampus.

Does that mean Bob Dylan, Tommy Black, and Uyless Black can download these memories onto our respective instruments of creation without acknowledging the creators of the images? The answer can only be yes if the repetition is unconscious. I believe the answer should be no if the repetition is conscious. Further, if this downloading leads to monetary compensation, the answer should be an *adamant* no. For private use, go for it. For commercial, public use, go for it, but acknowledge the derivation.

Therein lies the problem. How much of this “originality” is part our brain’s conscious or unconscious? I think it is impossible to answer this question, because we are continually loading information into our memories. But I also believe Mr. Dylan’s conscious prowling around in a library and proclaiming this utterance is---at best---open to question: “I crammed my head full as much of this stuff as I could stand and locked it away in my mind out of sight, left it alone.”¹³

Mr. Dylan engaged in serious research. He went to a library, looked-up microfiche copies of a long-dead poet’s verse and studied the prose. Then, he tells us he, “left it alone.” He, “locked it away.” It was, “out of sight.”

If you buy-in to Bob’s assertions about this subject, I’ve a bridge in Brooklyn you might like to buy. OK, being less assertive, I proclaim his contention seems suspect. But then, my take on the matter is just an opinion and to each his own. Anyway, I’ve concluded my nephew, niece, and son either: (a) think Bob is telling the truth, or (b) if he is not, it does not matter. Why?

My niece and nephew tell me the borrowing of an idea, or even specific words, and wrapping a song around these words is a common and accepted practice in the music industry. Furthermore, the sources of the idea or the attribution to the specific words do not have to be revealed. My nephew tells me if this practice were followed, the music world would become unmanageable.

Their concepts are identical to the opinions of other people whom I quoted in the essays cited above: It’s OK to copy verse without attribution to the creator of that verse. My niece and nephew read the verses (see the table on page 2) and had no problem with how Dylan used the poet’s material.

Tommy tells me it’s the whole package that matters. Furthermore, he and my nephew ask me: Should a singer credit Bible passages? Or should “Happy Birthday to You.” be sourced to its writer (even if the source is known)? I answer no, but I admit I’m not sure why I so-answered. Perhaps it’s because if Tommy appears in the Viper Room for a show, and sings, “In the beginning Dylan created Heaven and Earth,” folks know Tommy did not create the underlying verse leading to this clever lyric. (Clever in my view, because I wrote it.) They do know this derivative line is from the Bible, and Tommy wrapped a funny idea around it. On the other hand, if Tommy sings, “Can't explain the sources of that hidden pain,” no one is going to know Tommy did not create this wonderful idea---*especially* if Tommy announces, “All songs in this concert are written by Tommy Black.” I may show my narrow-mindedness, but I find this mode of thinking a bit shady, even creepy.¹⁴

¹³ Motoko Rich, “Who’s This Guy Dylan Who’s Borrowing Lines From Henry Timrod?”, *New York Times*, September 14, 2006, pp B1 and B6.

¹⁴ The source of using the words “shady” and “creepy” in this context are derived from Tommy Black. See, eh hear: Tommy and Uyless Black, “Conversations over the Telephone,” May 29, 2008. All rights relinquished.

Part of this ethical debate deals with the artist asking, “Do I know this verse came from me? Did I come up with it at this very moment? Was it an inspiration? Or is this masterful passage from someone else? If I am consciously aware it did not come from me, I’ll give credit, still make a bunch of money, and the public won’t care.”

I agree. So does Bruce Springsteen, who was brought to my attention by one of Tommy’s friends. I was told Bruce is the opposite of Dylan in honoring others’ input. He makes a point to explain he is singing someone else’s ideas. I watched a program a few weeks ago in which Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen were the stars. I was struck by Springsteen’s humble approach to his work and his crediting others’ work.

Tommy’s friend also said Dylan would likely be remembered in the same context as Shakespeare. After writing these essays, and after discussions with my son, nephew, and niece; after reading the newspaper articles on this issue, I agree. And like Shakespeare, Dylan will have a legend of borrowing to deal with. But at least, Bob will not have to contend that he himself ever existed.

Tommy further told his Dad, “No one can touch Bob Dylan. Other albums make you forget about it pretty quick.” I agree with this idea. But I can no longer feel at ease when I hear a Dylan lyric. Believe me readers, I wish I could.

Part of my disenchantment with Dylan comes from knowing people have plagiarized my writings (and my admittedly emotional reaction to their theft). I know they are borrowed because their sentences were just too similar to my writings. On one occasion, a writer “lifted” a beautiful, brilliant idea from one of my books, and placed it into one of his books---one that competed with mine. But my beautiful, brilliant idea---rendered with a drawing---had one small problem. It was incorrect. The drawing had ten numbers in it, created in an exact sequence for them to be accurate. One of the numbers was wrong. My competitor had the same error in his book. He made no attribution to my mistake.

On other occasions, he quoted my material, but referenced the incorrect book (but one I had written). Thus, if readers wanted to find out more about this subject, they were up a creek without a book, and I was without an associated royalty payment. When I came upon this theft for the first time (in a bookstore in Ottawa), it was a mental kick in the stomach. I simply could not fathom why someone would resort to such behavior.

Another lesson I learned these past few days? I’m out of touch with the opinion of the majority. I’ve come to the conclusion that, yes indeed, “borrowing” without attribution is an accepted practice in the music industry---as long as it is not too blatant. My nephew told me of a famous musician who successfully sued a semi-famous musician for borrowing too many rhythmic routines from the famous person.

As recounted by my nephew, the borrowed routines were almost the same, but with a slight variation. Result? A court decision giving several million dollars to the offended famous musician. This action confused me. As I cited in the earlier reports:

Poet: "A round of precious hours.

Oh! here, where in that summer I basked.

And strove, with logic frailer than the flowers

Dylan: "More frailer than the flowers, these precious hours."

Poet: "'How then, O weary one! Explain the sources of that hidden pain."

Dylan: "Can't explain the sources of that hidden pain."

Poet: "Where wisdom grows up in strife."

Dylan: "There is a wisdom that grows up in strife."

As stated, I learned it is because "lifting" phrases is OK in the music industry. Hm. Or it could be that Mr. Dylan is one smart cookie. He's careful to lift verse from those who are long gone...and not copyright protected. Otherwise, he would suffer the consequences of the litigant just cited. This aspect of the issue is what bothers me: *He was acclaimed for writing it, yet he did nothing to correct this misperception.* (I have not come across any comment from him. If you have, please let me know, and I will update this part of the report.)

My other lesson from these dialogues is that there is a different code of ethics for writers and song writers. If I, as a writer, were to write, "...wisdom that grows up in strife" that was found to exist in an earlier writing, I would be admonished by my industry. If a song writer writes the same phrase...no big deal.

My nephew told me that with the world of the Web, with its many sources---some with attribution, and some not---it is not feasible to provide attribution in the way I have described. I have thought about this notion and I disagree---adamantly. Surfing the Web and downloading "images" for one's private use is fine. But if the image is later used for commercial purposes, it should be subject to a conventional copyright procedure. Irrespective of copyright, the "borrower" of the image should at least have the courtesy (a humble ego?) to acknowledge the material came from someone else.

I'm told the spontaneity of the Web, tubes, faces, and chat rooms further obviate the idea of respect for intellectual originality. How can one possibly attribute another's ideas during all this frenetic activity?

I am not suggesting we do attribution in personal (perhaps frenetic) correspondence. What I am suggesting is that in the recording studio, where hours are spent recording a song---many non-frenetic hours---the artist honor his legacies, if they are specific and conscious phrases from which he gains his fame and fortune. I think my nephew (a brilliant guy) is using our automated information world as a crutch: *We're drowning in data! It's overwhelming! We can't source others' ideas!* If you're making money on those ideas you should honor the source, otherwise you're little more than a thief.

As a writer, I don't care if someone copies my work as long as they say-so. Indeed, I welcome the attribution, as it may lead to more book sales. *But of more importance, the*

attribution acknowledges a vital human trait: creativity.

The idea that the technology of the Internet obviates ethics is disturbing to me. Some writers now claim all information should be free. They state the cost of, say, sending electronic, digital images across the Net is so small, it is of no consequence. These folks seem to be oblivious to the huge outlays the Internet service providers have made to make it so easy and expensive to do Facebook and text.

I suspect I shall never convince my niece, nephew, and son that my views on this subject are correct. I suspect they will never convince me otherwise.

A Copyright Expert Weighs-in:

I've a friend who practices law in Washington, D.C. His specialty is copyright law.¹⁵ Here's what he has to say about those three passages:

Now, as far as the Dylan infringement issues you raise, here is my take. Remember, I am viewing it from the perspective of a dispassionate lawyer—motive, ethics, and other non-legal issues play a back seat.

With that in mind, the quick and easy answer to your question is that—assuming the original author wrote the poems during the Civil War period—any copyright rights have long lapsed and Dylan, you, me and any other Tom, Dick or Harry can copy the poems to our hearts' content without attribution or royalty obligations.

Assuming the works were copyright protected, I view Example 1 as a slam dunk in Dylan's favor (yes, he copied the "spirit" and some of the words, but there is no infringement).

As for Examples 2 and 3, there is clearly some verbatim copying, but from an infringement perspective, the quantity (3-4 words in sequence) may be so limited as to be de minimus. But if one could find a half dozen or more such examples, then stringing together these individually de minimus copied words could create a reasonable case for infringement.

Having said all that, I agree that someone of Dylan's stature—who is or should be sensitive to copyright issues—should have at least given credit to the original author. And rebel image or not, Dylan clearly benefited from the copyright laws and should have at least paid lip service to the copyright rights (expired or otherwise) of others.

I agree with my friend's opinion. But then I'm a writer, not a song writer. Anyway, let's borrow some of Bob's verse about my stand on the matter. Bob will furnish the guitar music and I will insert some changes to his verse. Take it away Bob!

¹⁵ I'll not reveal his last name, but if you are ever in need of a fine copyright attorney, he's your man! Thank you Tobey for your comments.

Strum, Strum, Strum...
My views on this, my friend,
Are blowin' in the wind.
My views, they are blowin' in the wind.

Your on the Street Reporter