"Am I Mixed Up Too Much, Am I Mixed Up Too Hard?"

Collage in Bob Dylan's Lyrics

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Abstract

Bob Dylan's writing walks the line between poetry and song. I argue that the best way into Dylan is to read him as a collage artist. This thesis is the first work of scholarship to close-read songs from Dylan's most recent album, *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, putting them in conversation with his previous works and uniting them under the literary technique of collage. Dylan's collage involves taking existing fragments and carefully combining them in order to shift their meanings. In the songs "Visions of Johanna" and "Gates of Eden," Dylan chooses fragments from other poets, like Edgar Allan Poe and William Blake. In the process, their styles also become part of his collage. In the songs "Desolation Row", "Tangled Up in Blue", and "I Contain Multitudes," the material he chooses to "cut and paste" into songs varies widely, from historical figures and fictional characters to narratives described in his own earlier work. By constantly revising his lyrics, Dylan collages himself. Collage is also a path towards creating a legacy, and in "My Own Version of You" the speaker uses collage to create his own person and challenge linear time. Using a visual term like collage to describe music is especially fitting right now, in a moment when we cannot easily divide media into auditory and visual categories. Art is art and pieces come from other pieces, which is what collage is all about.

Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to my father, Andy Cook, for singing me to sleep with "Tangled Up in Blue" and other Dylan renditions. Even though I felt betrayed when I discovered you hadn't written them specifically for me, these songs were constructed from so many different elements that if they can belong to Dylan, they can belong to you too. I'm so grateful you gave me these songs and infused them with your own meanings. You're gonna make me lonesome when you go.

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Introduction. "Yes, I Am a Thief of Thoughts": Dylan and Collage

In Bob Dylan's 1963 poem "11 Outlined Epitaphs,"[1] the speaker says openly: "Yes, I am a thief of thoughts." Where thoughts are concerned, poet and speaker are in the same boat, and Dylan's thought-thievery is one of his most well-known traits. The transplantation of characters, phrases, and images goes by many names: allusion, embedded quotation, intertextuality, mosaic, pastiche, mixing, and less charitably, appropriation or plagiarism. While all these terms adequately describe parts of Bob Dylan's modus operandi, "collage" may be the best way to capture his method of referencing elements from other works and putting them together to create something entirely new.

"Collage" was originally a French word meaning the process of pasting or gluing (OED). In 1771, Mary Delany gained recognition for her "Paper-Mosaiks," which she created by cutting tiny pieces of colored paper and arranging them on a black background, building up layers and shading until the complete picture formed a detailed plant (Hayden 132.) These were an important precursor to the collage of twentieth-century Cubist artists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Their technique involved incorporating fragments of newspaper articles, photographs, and painted pieces of paper into their work. Collage was also used by Dadaists, who repurposed magazine cuttings and pieces of garbage into their collages to challenge the concept of art itself. After the Dadaists, Surrealists such as Joseph Cornell and André Breton used collage to create their own dreamlike scenes (Richman-Abdou 1). Collage then expanded from the artistic world to the literary world, with Surrealist poets creating "cut-up" poems

[1] This poem was not intended to be a song, but it was included in the liner notes of Dylan's third album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964).

formed by taking different fragments of text and putting them together into one body. Although in different mediums, both literary and artistic collage involved taking disparate pieces from existing sources and putting them together to create something new.

Robert Polito endorsed the connection between Dylan and collage in his chapter for the *Cambridge Companion to Dylan*: "*Highway 61 Revisited* is also the first occasion Dylan might be styled a modernist, the crazy quilt of folk process blasting into Dada collage" (138). Polito aligns Dylan with modernists, folk singers, and Dadaists all in one sentence. The use of folk poetics is its own kind of collage, blending high literary forms with populist blues and folk traditions. The use of collage is also a Dadaist thing, and specifically points to the absurdity in these random combinations of cultural detritus. Dylan's technique identifies him with collage artists, but he also stands apart. While Delany used colored paper and Dadaists used various pieces of trash, Dylan's collage material often comes from popular culture and existing literary works. In "11 Outlined Epitaphs," the lines go: "Yes, I am a thief of thoughts / Not, I pray, a stealer of souls." This is true for the speaker in the poem, and it is true for Dylan as well.

Dylan draws on many authors, but he riffs on them rather than simply copying their work, taking their thoughts without stealing their souls. This is evident in his strong connection to Edgar Allan Poe, whom he references frequently. My first chapter explores how they both deal in melancholy and use intentional repetition of sound to build gloomy, pensive atmospheres throughout their respective oeuvres, which is particularly apparent in "The Raven" (Poe 1845) and "Visions of Johanna" (Dylan 1966). From the incorporation of one figure, Poe, I move on to look at the incorporation of many figures in my second chapter, which focuses on "Desolation Row" (1965). In this song Dylan brings disparate people like Ophelia, Casanova, and Ezra Pound together, and by putting them in a new context, he draws new meaning from their

interactions. Using existing figures as collage pieces raises questions about their agency, and how much of their previous characters are retained in Dylan's reformation. This creates contradictions within Dylan's work. To access these contradictions, I repeat the strategy I used in Chapter 1 by turning to a poet to decode Dylan. Chapter 3 illuminates William Blake's influence on Dylan. Both Dylan and Blake dig into contradictions, existing in the liminal space of both/and instead of choosing sides. Like Blake, Dylan often presents pairs and opposites that are not as simple as they seem to be. Contradiction is present not only in these pairs, but in different iterations of the same songs.

After discussing the ways in which Dylan brings influential authors and characters into his collage, in my fourth chapter I turn to his practice of revision in performance, and show how collage is part of his speaker's conception of self. The lyrics of "Tangled Up In Blue" change significantly from version to version, from studio recordings to live performances, with new lyrics often contradicting the meaning of the original ones. This revision creates a sense of progression in Dylan's work where he returns to songs and adds shades to their meaning, effectively collaging himself. Finally, I will come to the 2020 song "My Own Version of You," in which Dylan outlines a Frankenstein-esque project. For this project, he collages pieces together in an effort to manipulate time. In this song collage functions as a tool for dealing with time, and works as a model for memory. This brings clarity but also confusion, ultimately causing Dylan's speaker to question whether he should have even attempted a collaged person in the first place.

Dylan's lyrics are often studied on their own, and several books have been published specifically to enshrine all the lyrics in text. These volumes are useful to scholars, and I look to Simon & Schuster's *The Lyrics: 1961-2012* when I can't quite make out what words Dylan is

singing. *The Lyrics* is a massive tome designed by Geoff Gans that lays out the words of every song from every album, from *Bob Dylan* (1961) to *Tempest* (2012). The description on Bob Dylan's official website calls the book a "comprehensive and definitive collection," and mentions that Dylan edited several songs for this publication. A unique aspect of *The Lyrics* is that it lists the albums chronologically and includes all songs from each album proper, not just the ones that made it to the studio recording. This means that a song like "Walls of Red Wing[2]" is included in the *Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* section because that's when it was written. The recording of "Walls of Red Wing" wouldn't show up on that album, instead coming much later in the well-loved *Bootleg Series*, but *The Lyrics* puts it with the other songs on *Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* because of its creation date. Ordering the songs based on written albums instead of studio recordings emphasizes that this book is really all about the words and Dylan's writing process, not the chronology of performances and recordings.

This text is helpful, and I have used it often, but like any text it is limited. Because it records original written versions of songs, all the subsequent revisions made by Dylan in the studio and on the stage are omitted. These include significant changes to the words, and also changes to the music that goes with them. The printed page cannot capture the shifts in voice, the syllables that are held out on long notes and the ones that are sharp and shouted. It cannot capture the emotion Dylan conveys with his tone, or the shades of meaning added by his guitar and harmonica. The lyrics do not exist in isolation; they are embedded in melody. With this in mind, I created a playlist of the songs discussed in this thesis, in the order that they are mentioned. My hope is that the playlist can act as a kind of soundtrack so that my interpretations, like Dylan's lyrics, are not just words on a page.

[2] This song is about a boys' reform school in Red Wing, Minnesota, Dylan's home state.

Bob Dylan has been through countless phases and transformations as an artist. Although he has been at various times a protest singer, a modernist, a surrealist, an electric rocker, and a born-again Christian, in the beginning he was only a folk singer trying to emulate his hero, Woody Guthrie. In a poem he wrote for Guthrie and recited in 1963, Dylan asked, “Am I mixed up too much, am I mixed up too hard? / Why am I walking, where am I running? / What am I saying, what am I knowing?” (ll. 67-69). Dylan isn’t mixed up too much or mixed up too hard. We can find out things he is saying and things he is knowing by looking at what he mixes up and how he does it.

Playlist:

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2RJpUxLBujctZVB7HyTEEa?si=ClL9OuLgSlKGN2KUNzHyeQ

Chapter 1. "Got A Tell-Tale Heart, Like Mr. Poe": The Art of Melancholy

"Got a tell-tale heart, like Mr. Poe / Got skeletons in the walls of people you know." Bob Dylan sings these words in the 2020 song, "I Contain Multitudes." The song title is a Walt Whitman quotation, from his vast poem "Song of Myself." [3] "I Contain Multitudes" can be seen as an imitation of Whitman, or as Dylan's own song of himself. Throughout the song Dylan weaves in other people, places, and things, mainly focusing on artists and authors and how he is like all of them in some way. Right after he tells us about his tell-tale heart, he goes on to declare that:

> I'm just like Anne Frank, like Indiana Jones
> And them British bad boys, The Rolling Stones
> I go right to the edge, I go right to the end
> I go right where all things lost are made good again
> I sing the songs of experience like William Blake
> I have no apologies to make
> Everything's flowing all at the same time
> I live on the boulevard of crime
> I drive fast cars, and I eat fast foods
> I contain multitudes (ll. 16-25)

[3] "Talk honestly, for no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer. / Do I contradict myself? / Very well then… I contradict myself; / I am large… I contain multitudes" (Whitman 63).

In the past Dylan famously eschewed associations with great literature. A whole generation of scholars has tried to pick out what surely were Dylan's formative influences, while he insisted he was not a poet, simply a "song and dance man" (San Francisco Press Conference 1965, 2:10-2:25). In another interview he explained: "I don't call myself a poet because I don't like the word. I'm a trapeze artist" (qtd. in Cott 49). He even made headlines by refusing to go to Stockholm and accept his Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016. But here he is naming Poe, Blake, Anne Frank, Indiana Jones, The Rolling Stones, Beethoven, and Chopin all in the same song, and alluding to others like Walt Whitman and Warren Smith. This is a dramatic contradiction. While refusing to even be a poet at all, Dylan at the same time calls on an array of poets, musicians, composers, historical figures, and fictional characters to help him say everything he is and everything he contains. Perhaps he chooses to do this now because he is going "right to the end… where all things lost are made good again." Why are these specific people chosen as points of comparison? Maybe they have been lost to a certain extent, and by collaging them together, Dylan is bringing them back and making them good again. The use of famous figures can also operate as a kind of shorthand. Dylan is only mentioning a few names in quick succession but each name carries with it a huge body of connotations in the minds of his listeners, so he can say a lot about himself in a short amount of time. Some of these associations say more than others.

The tell-tale heart line is telling. Although name-dropping Poe this way would usually indicate an affinity, saying he has "a tell-tale heart like Mr. Poe" doesn't make sense. Poe did write a story called "The Tell-Tale Heart," but in the story the heart belongs to an old man who is murdered, not Poe himself. The story's narrator, someone who is acutely sensitive to visual and auditory stimuli, kills and dismembers the old man and hides his body beneath the floorboards of

the house. Despite this, he continues to hear the old man's heart beating, and the sound is "such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton" (Poe 2). This sound escalates his paranoia until at the end of the story, he admits his guilt. By saying the words "tell-tale heart" Dylan brings all the elements of the story into his song. Those that have read it will immediately recognize his allusion. But Dylan does not simply mention the story; he specifically says that he's "got a tell-tale heart." He could be referring to his own beating heart, or someone else's, like the story. For the protagonist of "The Tell-Tale Heart," it's the heart of the old man he has killed, the one that continues to haunt him and eventually drives him to his frenzied confession. The question for Dylan then becomes: whose heart has he got? Which one of his vanquished victims continues to agitate and disturb from under the floorboards? Alternatively, if Dylan is singing about his own heart, beating on and revealing a truth even after death, what is the tale his heart will continue to tell? If the rhythm of his music is a kind of heartbeat, then maybe the truth that beats on is located in his lyrics. Or perhaps his tell-tale heart is both his own and the one under the floorboards. What Dylan the performer sings may be different from what Dylan the human feels, but the tell-tale heart is always underneath and exposes the truth. When he sings that he has a tell-tale heart like Mr. Poe and skeletons in the wall, he is all at once identifying himself with Poe, the old man, and the narrator of the story. He is both the concealer, the concealed, and the creator, Poe himself. And he conveys all of this with just one line, taking one reference and letting it say new things in a new context.

The tell-tale heart line is not the only time Poe comes up in Dylan's lyrics. There is evidence of intertextuality in many places, both in the form of direct allusion and more general similarity. For example, "In Love Minus Zero" (1965) he sings: "My love she's like some raven / At my window with a broken wing" (*The Lyrics*) and in his memoir *Chronicles*, he contrasts Poe

with the works of Thucydides and Magnus he was reading in 1961: “A lot of these books were too big to read, like giant shoes fitted for large-footed people. I read the poetry books, mostly. Byron and Shelley and Longfellow and Poe. I memorized Poe’s poem ‘The Bells’ and strummed it to a melody on my guitar” (Dylan, *Chronicles* 37). Nearly 60 years before he sang about his tell-tale heart in “I Contain Multitudes,” Dylan was already thinking about Poe. By memorizing “The Bells” and putting it to music, he was taking Poe’s work and adapting it to his own artform, recognizing the musicality of poetry and building on it. Dylan was reading Poe and referencing him directly, but he was also embodying elements of Poe’s style.Broadly, they share an interest in the same images. Mirrors, graveyards, dreams, shadows, and gloom all feature prominently. Christopher Rollason even argues that Dylan’s lyrics are a continuation of the American Gothic that Poe made so popular (“‘Tell-tale Signs’-- Edgar Allan Poe and Bob Dylan” 41). But it’s more than that. Poe is not just present in Dylan’s art; in many ways the two are the same kind of artist, and melancholy is their medium.

In *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846), Poe says that “Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones” (119). According to the writer himself, melancholy and terror do not exist in his stories and poems for their own sake. Instead, melancholy is a vehicle for beauty, and it is only in a mood of melancholy that beauty can be most fully accessed and developed. This theory can also be applied to many of Dylan’s songs, the most poignant of which are usually the sad ones. Exploring melancholy is useful to see why Poe and Dylan both think of it as a legitimate poetical tone. The term melancholy carries with it gloom but also introspection, dejection but also sentimentality. Prior to the seventeenth century, the word meant “a pathological condition thought to result from an excess of black bile in the body, characterized

in early references by sullenness, ill temper, brooding, causeless anger, and unsociability, and later by despondency and sadness" (OED). The word has evolved since then, but still carries with it the embodiment aspect of its original definition. Melancholy pervades the whole physical self, not just the mind. In the opening chords and lines of "Visions of Johanna," Dylan sets up the perfect melancholy space for his speaker to reflect on past experiences. The song opens with a lilting, longing harmonica pull and steady guitar strums before the drum comes in, picks up the pace and sets the stage for the vocals. Then, he continues setting the scene with words:

> Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when you're trying to be so quiet?
> We sit here stranded, though we're all doin' our best to deny it
> And Louise holds her handful of rain, temptin' you to defy it
> Lights flicker from the opposite loft
> In this room the heat pipes just cough
> The country music station plays soft
> But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off. (ll. 1-7, *The Lyrics*)

He brings us in with how the space looks, sounds, and feels. In this setting there's a kind of universal loneliness: "we sit here stranded, but we're all doin' our best to deny it." We all have this melancholy, this isolation, but we avoid talking or thinking about it. It is not necessarily something to be sad about; it just is. In a 1966 interview, a few months before "Visions of Johanna" would be released on the *Blonde on Blonde* album, Dylan said: "Hey, it's lonesome everyplace. The people that can't live with it, that can't accept it [...] They are just going to blow up the world [...] and make things bad for everybody, only because they feel so out of place [....]

Everybody has that in common— they are all going to die" (qtd. in Cott 91). He sees a kind of irony where everyone is lonely, and everyone thinks they're the only one that feels that way. Embracing solitude and living with melancholy becomes not just a way to access beauty, but a means of survival. What's important for Dylan is to accept that we're all stranded, because those that don't accept it are liable to "blow up the world." Poe is part of Dylan's collage because they share a perspective on melancholy, which is itself a collage of many different emotions. It is embodied sadness but also acceptance of that sadness and its universality. Poe recognizes that melancholy is a relatable mood when he says in *The Philosophy of Composition* that "throughout construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable" (118). Neither Poe nor Dylan wants to isolate their readers or listeners by describing an obscure emotion. They want to say something about being human that will ring true for everyone, and paradoxically that thing turns out to be melancholy, and the feeling of being alone.

In describing how he wrote "The Raven," Poe explains: "I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by adhering in general to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain – the refrain itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried" (120). This seems a pretty accurate description of his refrains:

> Only this and nothing more.
>
> Nameless *here* for evermore.
>
> This is it and nothing more.
>
> Darkness there and nothing more.
>
> Merely this and nothing more.

> ’Tis the wind and nothing more!
> Perched, and sat, and nothing more.
> Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”
> With such name as “Nevermore.”
> Then the bird said “Nevermore.”
> Of “Never—nevermore.”
> Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”
> *She* shall press, ah, nevermore!
> Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”
> Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”
> Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”
> Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”
> Shall be lifted – nevermore!

The repeated refrain comes at the end of every stanza. Looking at all the refrains together, we see that it varies but constantly has the “more” sound which functions as a kind of gently pounding rhythm, not unlike a heartbeat. This rhythm facilitates the building tension of the poem, from eerie silence to the height of desperation. Dylan does a similar thing in “Visions of Johanna.” The song has five verses, and each verse ends with a slightly varying refrain:

> And these visions of Johanna that conquer my mind
> Where these visions of Johanna have now taken my place
> And these visions of Johanna, they kept me up past the dawn

But these visions of Johanna, they make it all seem so cruel
And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain

"These visions of Johanna" functions the same way as "nevermore." The monotone of sound allows the meaning to vary with each repetition. Dylan does this with the refrain at the end of each verse, but it also happens on a smaller scale, inside the verses themselves. The rhyme scheme varies slightly from verse to verse, but the pattern holds true. Each verse begins with a fairly standard rhyme scheme, ABAB or AABA, but then halfway through it settles on one rhyme and hits it four or five lines in a row, sometimes multiple times in a line, emphasizing it by a tidal kind of repetition. It starts with just four rhyming lines in the first verse:

Lights flicker from the opposite loft
In this room the heat pipes just cough
The country music station plays soft
But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off (ll. 3-6)

By the last verse, the pattern is taken to its most extreme, beating on the same "ode" sound seven lines in a row:

And Madonna, she still has not showed
We see this empty cage now corrode
Where her cape of the stage once had flowed
The fiddler, he now steps to the road

He writes everything's been returned which was owed
On the back of the fish truck that loads
While my conscience explodes (ll. 44-50)

Just as Poe describes in *The Philosophy of Composition*, Dylan is using sustained repetition of sound to intensify the effect of the song. The "ode" sound builds and builds along with the speaker's anxiety, to the point that there is too much to take in and his "conscience explodes." When we get to this point, in the final verse, the last two lines bring the song full circle. After the speaker's conscience explodes, Dylan pauses before singing: "The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain / And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain." Despite all the noise, the harmonicas and the fish truck, the speaker is still left alone with these visions in the end. In "The Raven", the speaker is constantly thinking of the absent Lenore and connecting everything the raven says to her. In "Visions of Johanna," the speaker's mind is haunted by the specter of the absent Johanna, despite all the other things going on in the song. The overall tone of these two works is very different, but they both use the same kind of riffing refrain, the same monotone of sound, to create a heightening sense of melancholy and imply the spectral presence of an absent woman. By saying that he's "got a telltale heart like Mr. Poe" Dylan collages Poe into the song itself; he has collaged Poe's style into his own.

Chapter 2. "Take What You Have Gathered from Coincidence": Collage of Characters

In "I Contain Multitudes," after the Poe reference discussed in the last chapter, we get this unlikely combination of Anne Frank, Indiana Jones, and the Rolling Stones. What connects these three? Do they all in some way "go right to the edge, go right to the end?" Jones certainly is a risk taker that goes right to the edge many times, and you could say the same thing about the Rolling Stones. (This association also immediately brings to mind the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* image of Jones himself nearly being crushed by an actual rolling stone. Was this on Dylan's mind too?) Anne Frank was also extraordinarily courageous, and recorded herself in words a bit like the way Dylan is doing now, except hers had a lot more narrative structure than this freewheelin' diary / manifesto / declaration that Dylan presents to us in under five minutes. Courage and self-expression tie Jones, the Stones, and Frank together, but it's still strange to see them as a group, and maybe that strangeness is deliberate. If Dylan really does contain multitudes, there are bound to be odd collections and contradictions within him. In this chapter I argue this holds true for the collage of people outside him, people that do not define who he is, but exist in the worlds he has created.

In the 1966 song "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" Dylan's speaker tells the addressee, Baby Blue, that: "The highway is for gamblers, better use your sense / Take what you have gathered from coincidence." (ll. 7-8, *The Lyrics*) It seems that he takes his own advice decades later in "I Contain Multitudes," where Walt Whitman, Anne Frank, Mr. Poe, William Blake, and Indiana Jones are all people he has gathered from coincidence. By reading, writing, and just existing within American culture, he has collected these people and their stories. There are definitely points of connection between Dylan and each one of these figures, but it seems quite

plausible that their presence is less about the individuals and more about the grouping. The focus is on what they have in common and how they interact.

Dylan loves to get an unlikely group together, which is most famously evident in the song "Desolation Row" on the 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited.* The cast includes Cinderella, Romeo, Cain, Abel, the hunchback of Notre Dame, Ophelia, Einstein, Dr. Filth, the Phantom of the Opera, Casanova, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, along with other nameless people like the blind commissioner, the tight-rope walker, the fortune-telling lady, the good Samaritan, the jealous monk, the nurse, the skinny girls, the agents, the superhuman crew, the insurance men, the calypso singers, the fishermen, the lovely mermaids, and the "I" of the poem that "looks out tonight from Desolation Row." This is an eclectic mix of characters both historical and fictional, and their presence together on Desolation Row feels exceedingly chaotic. The one thing that unites them is that they are all in the same place, which Dylan never lets us forget. Each verse describes different goings on, but they always end the same way. The last two words of each verse are "Desolation Row," just like the title.

But where even is Desolation Row? When asked about its location in an interview Dylan responded: "Where? Oh, that's someplace in Mexico. It's across the border. It's noted for its Coke factory. Coca-Cola machines are — sells— sell a lotta Coca-Cola down there" (Cott 72). Even if he was being sincere, the possibilities for Desolation Row's nature and location extend well beyond a Coke factory in Mexico. The name sounds a lot like Death Row, and the first line of the song, "They're selling postcards of the hanging," evokes a kind of public execution. Everyone here awaits a death sentence for their crimes, and they are well-known people so of course a crowd will be drawn and of course postcards will be sold. Alternatively, a row can be a road, as in Cannery Row, Savile Row, Candlemaker Row, or even the seductive rows of

Bunyan's Vanity Fair. Desolation Row, then, could just be a particularly depraved city street (an image we see Dylan return to in "I Contain Multitudes" with the "boulevard of crime".) T.S. Eliot's presence in the song's last verse makes it easy to think of the city as a wasteland. While Eliot's Wasteland was like London, Dylan's is probably more akin to New York, which he had mixed feelings about. He refers to it at various times as "the city that would come to shape my destiny," "this dark freezing metropolis," and a "friendly old town" with "mighty many people all millin' around / They'll kick you when you're up and knock you when you're down" (*Chronicles*, 9 & "Hard Times in New York Town," *The Lyrics*). Desolation Row could be in New York or in Mexico, and it could be a street, a prison, or something else entirely.

If Desolation Row really is a Death Row-like prison, then everyone is there against their will. If it is a street, then Romeo, the Phantom, and the fortune-telling lady are all there by choice. They decided to visit, and they will choose when to leave. There are some lines in the song that lend themselves to the latter interpretation, one of autonomy. At the tail end of the third verse we meet "the good Samaritan, he's dressing / He's getting ready for the show / He's going to the carnival tonight / On Desolation Row" (ll. 33-36, *The Lyrics*). And in the next verse, we learn that Ophelia "spends her time peeking / Into Desolation Row" (ll. 47-48). The Good Samaritan and Ophelia *choose* to visit the Row for a night on the town. Both characters have a voyeuristic attitude towards Desolation Row: The good Samaritan is going to see a carnival show, and Ophelia is peeking in. They are both outside observers rather than active participants. They choose to observe because in a sense, the Row is the place to be.

Other characters, however, don't seem to be having a good time and don't seem to be there by choice. One example is the blind commissioner: "Here comes the blind commissioner / They've got him in a trance / One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker / The other is in his pants"

(*The Lyrics* ll. 5-8). The commissioner is being manipulated by a group of people. We don't know who "they" refers to, but we know they're people on Desolation Row, tying him up and entrancing him without his consent. Another example of questionable agency comes at the end of the song. There may be music at first, but "the only sound that's left / After the ambulances go / Is Cinderella sweeping up / On Desolation Row." The ambulances are gone, the scene is quiet, and Cinderella is still sweeping, so she never got her happy ending. On Desolation Row she is a different person than she was in her original iteration. She never got her prince, never went to the ball, but is continually relegated to cleaning up. We know that this is a future Cinderella would not choose for herself, but it has been imposed on her nonetheless. It is difficult to determine how much agency the characters bring in from their own contexts, and to what extent they are paper figures taken out of their territory and being manipulated by larger forces on the Row. There isn't a satisfying answer as to whether people choose the Row or are trapped on it, and I think that's intentional. On Desolation Row, all the lines of selfhood are blurred.

Three verses after we are introduced to Ophelia, we get a suggestion of why she may simply be peeking into Desolation Row instead of going openly: "And the Phantom's shouting to skinny girls / 'Get outta here if you don't know' / 'Casanova is just being punished for going to Desolation Row.'" If the skinny girls are being told to get out, and warned against the punishments that happen on the Row, then maybe Ophelia should avoid it too. If it's not safe for the skinny girls and Casanova, it's not safe for her either. And the fact that they're ignorant of something is the reason they need to leave: "Get outta here if you don't know". Don't know what? What about "not knowing" makes this place dangerous?

Perhaps the most disturbing indication that the city is a dangerous place comes in the third verse from the end:

Now at midnight all the agents
And the superhuman crew
Come out and round up everyone
That knows more than they do
Then they bring them to the factory
Where the heart-attack machine
Is strapped across their shoulders
And then the kerosene
Is brought down from the castles
By insurance men who go
Check to see that nobody is escaping
To Desolation Row (ll. 85-96)

Desolation Row may be a little dodgy, but it's a safe haven compared to the apocalyptic city that surrounds it, patrolled by agents, superhuman entities, and worst of all, insurance men. Usually the word insurance promises safety and security, but on the Row that's a false promise, and the insurance men are actually the ones patrolling. The punishment they mete out is an industrial one: it happens in a factory, and they use kerosene and their "heart-attack machine." (Or possibly, it's a tell-tale heart-attack machine, weaponizing personal anxiety to create pain and fear.) Notably, this punishment is only for those that "know more than they do," so the ignorant people are safe. Why are the knowing people the ones who are targeted? Maybe it's not the knowing itself, but the hierarchy of knowing that is the issue. Knowledge is fine, but if you have

more knowledge than the "agents and the superhuman crew," that puts you at risk and they'll come for you. The people that know are disrupting the system by knowing more than the agents. However, the earlier Ophelia lines indicate that ignorance is also a liability, and not knowing is dangerous. The residents of Desolation Row have to know exactly enough, no more and no less. Dylan takes the idea about knowledge even farther in the penultimate verse:

> Between the windows of the sea
> Where lovely mermaids flow
> And nobody has to think too much
> About Desolation Row

Even though a variety of strange and violent things are happening on Desolation Row, its residents are discouraged from thinking too much about it. And it's easy to not think about it when there are also so many moments of beauty. The windows of the sea, which can be read as portholes when viewed in conjunction with earlier lines about the Titanic, show an underwater world separate from the one the characters inhabit. Between these windows, in the spaces of ocean not visible through the portholes, lovely mermaids flow, showing that there is beauty functioning in multiple ways here: seen and unseen, real and imagined. The overwhelming multiplicity of images and figures in the collage that is Desolation Row means that really, nobody does have to think too much about Desolation Row, which can be seen as sad but also as darkly humorous.

Desolation can mean a barrenness of landscape, but it also denotes "deprivation of companionship; the condition or sense of being forsaken; solitariness, loneliness" (OED Online).

Many characters on Desolation Row look to the carnival to distract from their own aloneness, but melancholy is still the pervasive mood. There's also a sense of absurdity because despite all that is going on with Einstein, Romeo, etc., the penultimate verse tells us that "The Titanic sails at dawn" (*The Lyrics* ll. 98). So injustices may occur and people may be lonely, but tomorrow morning the ship will sink anyway, so the passengers are already doomed.

In "I Contain Multitudes," Dylan brings a wide variety of characters onto the scene in order to say something about himself. They constitute some of the multitudes that he is. "Desolation Row" has a similarly diverse and strange roll-call, but does something different with the group. The characters aren't there to compare himself to. They have lives of their own and they all exist and interact within the titular space. Dylan is pushing the technique of collage to its very limits, right to the edge, packing light and sound and smoke and people into one city street, and then stepping back and seeing what happens. The roster is long and draws from a wide swath of time, from Biblical characters to Shakespeare to Modernists. As time goes on and culture gains more and more characters, the street is likely to get more and more crowded. It is claustrophobic to the point that it is meaningless, which is the ultimate paradox of the city: to be surrounded by millions, and still feel desolate, melancholy -- alone.

Chapter 3. "I'm A Man of Contradictions, I'm A Man of Many Moods": Contradicting Truths in Blake and Dylan

The attraction to dualities and contradictions connects Dylan and William Blake, specifically in the context of "Desolation Row" and its dizzying multiplicities. Dylan's most recent album returns to and deepens these poetic connections. In "I Contain Multitudes" he sings: "I'm a man of contradictions, I'm a man of many moods." The title of this song comes from Whitman, and within the song he returns to many other artists and poets that he has referenced or imitated in the past. He also contradicts some of his own work, complicating its meaning. Later in the song Dylan does something he's never done before, and makes it known that he "sings the songs of experience like William Blake." Earlier in his career Dylan denied associations with high literary forms, but now he openly embraces Blake as an influence.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, along with its counterpart *Songs of Experience*, provides some hindsight context for (and further collaged material in) Dylan's 1966 lyrics: "Now, little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously / He brags of his misery, he likes to live dangerously" ("Visions of Johanna," ll. 20-21, *The Lyrics*). Blake has two poems which include a "little boy lost," one of innocence and one of experience. In the first poem, the lost boy is found and guided by the light of God. The second boy is not so lucky, and ends up getting burned to death by a priest (Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*). It is more likely that Dylan's little boy lost is the experienced one, and the misery he brags of is what he underwent in Blake's poem. By referencing the little boy lost, Dylan is taking a tragic figure who has undergone a painful death, and turning him into a confident person bragging of the hardships he has suffered. He seems to have a somewhat antagonistic relationship with the speaker, who says of the little boy lost: "He's

sure got a lotta gall to be so useless and all" (ll. 24). Not only is the little boy alive and well, but he now has the audacity to be aimless. While he was the titular figure in two of Blake's poems, here he is relegated to a useless background character. He lives dangerously and he has gall but ultimately, he does not accomplish anything. This evocation is something we've seen Dylan do before: he takes the little boy lost in Blake and brings him into the world of his music. The little boy lost both carries the connotations of Blake with him and is remade by his new role in "Visions of Johanna."

Despite this allusion and many others in Dylan's discography, he did not acknowledge Blake as an influence for most of his career. He gave Poe a spot on his reading list and wrote about reading "The Bells" and putting it to music, but he did not give Blake the same credit. Dylan's close friend, the poet Allen Ginsberg, was especially fond of Blake and pointed out connections between Dylan's song "Gates of Eden" and images in Blake's poetry.[4] The poet Michael McClure noticed similar connections and had an emotional experience when first listening to "Gates of Eden," saying: "I had the idea that I was hallucinating, that it was William Blake's voice coming out of the walls… Then I went back to those people who had tried to get me to listen [to Dylan] and I told them that I thought the revolution had begun." Because of this surreal moment, McClure was eager to meet the songwriter he saw as the leader of the revolution and Ginsberg saw as the continuation of the Beat poets' legacy. McClure met Dylan shortly after first listening to "Gates of Eden," and told him how powerful and Blakean the listening experience had been. Dylan responded bluntly by saying he "had not read Blake and did not know the poetry" (qtd. in Walker 5). Whether this is true and the similarities with Blake were

[4] Ginsberg's own poetry was strongly influenced by Blake, and he even claimed to have heard Blake's disembodied voice speak to him in 1948 (Walker 5).

unintentional, or it was just Dylan being contradictory and eluding anyone's analysis of him, it is evident that he wasn't eager to claim a connection between Blake and himself. Ironically, this refusal to be pinned down brings him closer to Blake, whose work similarly defies categorization or definition.

Dylan doesn't just take occasional Blake characters and incorporate them into his songs; Blakean imagery is collaged into Dylan as well. One example, notably pointed out by Ginsberg and McClure, is "Gates of Eden," from the 1965 album *Bringing It All Back Home*. Titling the song "Gates of Eden" evokes Blake's picture book *The Gates of Paradise*. In "Gates of Eden," Dylan presents us with "men wholly, totally free / To do anything they wish to do but die" (Dylan, *The Lyrics*). Similarly, Blake's *The Gates of Paradise* includes "The Immortal Man that cannot Die" (42). Within Dylan's Eden, men are free to make their own decisions and do whatever they please, with one large exception: they cannot die. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is left ambiguous, like many of the lines in the song. Staying forever in Eden would ordinarily be a great thing to do, but Dylan's Eden is one made of negatives. He tells us about Eden by showing what it doesn't have: "There are no kings inside the Gates of Eden" and "No sound ever comes from the Gates of Eden." In other verses, we learn that there are no sins or trials inside the Gates of Eden, and although "the princess and the prince / Discuss what's real and what is not," the next line states plainly that "It doesn't matter inside the Gates of Eden." This a place where there's no death, no sin, and reality doesn't matter. A place like this can be a paradise, but can also feel empty or meaningless. With this in mind, immortality seems less like a blessing, and the men "wholly, totally free" becomes ironic, because the one thing they can't do (which is to die) might be the thing they want to do most.

Dylan's immortal men are a shade more conflicted than Blake's Immortal Man, and the environment of "Gates of Eden" is more conflicted as well. We get a better sense of the environment when Dylan sings in the seventh verse:

> The kingdoms of Experience
> In the precious wind they rot
> While paupers change possessions
> Each wishing for what the other has got (ll. 43-46)

The editors of *The Lyrics* have chosen to capitalize "Experience" in the first line of the verse, which supports the idea that Dylan is referring to Blake's imagined kingdoms. It's unclear whether this capitalization comes from Dylan's own notes or it was assumed by textual editors familiar with *Songs of Experience.* Initially, "Gates of Eden" was connected to *The Gates of Paradise* because both authors are describing the same place. Each work talks about a paradise which is seen as a timeless place. In this verse, however, Dylan refers back to *Songs of Experience* instead, and the worlds of these songs seem to have aged. The "kingdoms of Experience" are now rotting and being eroded by the winds of time. What may have once been beautiful and prosperous kingdoms are now deteriorating, showing that even poetry cannot escape the aging process. The kingdoms of Experience stand in for *Songs of Experience,* and the fact that they're rotting means that the poems do not hold the power they once did. This justifies Dylan's use of Blakean lines and images in his songs: the kingdoms by themselves are rotting, so their essential parts must be reintegrated into new art so they can survive. However, the kingdoms of Experience don't have to just refer to Blake. Experience can be read in a broader

sense as all the experience of those that have come before. If the kingdoms built by the experienced ancestors are rotting, that gives Dylan even more justification for creating a new method with collage. Dylan's Eden is ideal but contains decaying elements, demonstrating its contradictory nature and a need for change.

The double-sidedness of Eden also comes through in Blake. In *The Gates of Paradise*,

> Serpent Reasonings us entice
> Of Good and Evil, Virtue & Vice,
> Doubt Self Jealous, Watry folly.
> Struggling thro' Earth's Melancholy,
> Naked in Air, in Shame and Fear,
> Blind in Fire, with shield and spear,
> Two Horrid Reasoning Cloven Fiction
> In Doubt, which is Self contradiction,
> A dark Hermaphrodite We stood,--
> Rational Truth, Root of Evil and Good. (ll. 7-16)

The Gates of Paradise is full of binaries: Good and Evil, Virtue & Vice. Blake sets them up as opposites, only to complicate our view of them by pointing out what they share. Good and Evil may be opposites, but they share the same origin: Rational Truth. Blake positions truth as the starting point, and humans determine whether to transform that truth into good or evil. And this process appears to be a difficult one, because while we are trying to trace Rational Truth forward to Evil and Good, doubt, jealousy, melancholy, shame, and fear all get in the way. "Serpent

Reasonings us entice," tempting and confusing and causing truth to be more difficult. Rational Truth is the root of Good and Evil, but *The Gates of Paradise* points out the difficulty of getting from the root to the end result unscathed. Dylan both echoes and complicates Blake's statement in the opening lines of "Gates of Eden" when he sings: "Of war and peace the truth just twists / Its curfew gull just glides." Here the initial opposite is war and peace, but like in Blake, truth binds them together. While Blake argued that truth was the origin of good and evil, Dylan is saying that truth twists war and peace together, making one difficult to distinguish from the other, while truth's "curfew gull" simply glides above the confusion.

This is a more pessimistic worldview than Dylan has expressed in the past, and by conjuring the image of war and peace twisted by the truth, he contradicts his earlier protest songs that gained him so much recognition. In songs like "Masters of War," "The Times They Are A-Changin'," and "Blowin' in the Wind," Dylan's speaker makes his stance patently clear. This voice denounces violence, spews vitriol at the military-industrial complex, and insists on peace and truth as the only way forward. In "Gates of Eden," a mere two years after his famous protest songs came out on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, the line between right and wrong that was once so clear becomes cloudier. In "Masters of War" the singer spoke truth to power. He drew on another biblical analogy and he addressed the Masters of War:

> Like Judas of old
> You lie and deceive
> A world war can be won
> You want me to believe
> But I see through your eyes

And I see through your brain

Like I see through the water that runs down my drain (ll. 17-23)

Here his attack is direct. The masters of war are the deceivers, but Dylan's speaker knows the truth. He doesn't use obscure language to get this point across; he speaks as "I" and speaks directly to "you," which refers to the eponymous Masters of War. The figurative language he *does* use serves the purpose of invective. Two similes compare the masters to Judas and their brains to clear water. The last three lines also repeat the phrase "I see through," which lends force to the statement that the addressee is lying, and the speaker is very aware of that. He sees through their eyes straight to the brain, and he understands how the masters are justifying war by lying to the people.

This clarity is missing from "Gates of Eden." When the truth "just twists" war and peace, it's harder to see through to the truth the way you see through water that runs down a drain. Dylan comes back to truth in the last three lines of "Gates of Eden," where he admits that, "At times I think there are no words / But these to tell what's true / And there are no truths outside the Gates of Eden". His song is the only way to convey the truth, but truth itself only means something within Eden. Outside, truth gets too twisted and hard to make out. This last statement brings him back to Blake's original argument that rational truth is at the root of good, but it is also at the root of evil. Blake and Dylan will continue to do this in their writing: they set up a seeming binary, only to cast doubt on our ability to delineate anything that clearly, moving always toward ambiguity and away from obvious answers.

Chapter 4. "We Always Did Feel the Same, We Just Saw It from a Different Point of View": Collage as Revision

In the previous chapter we saw Blake and Dylan drawing on similar images, both struggling with the idea of truth and how to access it. Zooming out, there are moments in Blake's writing that connect him to Dylan through a shared viewpoint on contradiction in general. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he argues that "without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence" (7). As a "man of contradictions," Dylan's likely to agree that contraries are necessary for progression. He often changes the lyrics, rhythms, and tunes of his songs, sometimes to the confusion of his audiences who go to concerts expecting the words they know. When an interviewer asked him about this tendency to edit, Dylan replied, "time lets me find new meanings to every song, even in the older ones, and it's important to be always looking for new meanings. Yes, the body of the song remains the same but it wears new clothes" (qtd. in Corcoran 356). When Dylan is looking for new meanings, he keeps the body of the song but dresses it in new clothes. But what counts as the body, and what does a song wear for clothes? When the songs change over time, they are often performed at different tempos or in different keys, which impacts the mood of the song. Spatial and temporal reality also changes over time and across different versions. When the lyrics change though, it's not a complete transformation, and the verse patterns and rhythms usually remain. Changes to the words don't erase the original lyrics, but they do add new meaning. When Dylan contradicts himself, or alters what he has said and sung in the past, it's not a doubling back but a moving forward.

If Blake is right, and contraries are necessary for progression, then Dylan has progressed a great deal over the course of his career. This is embodied in the lyrics: “We always did feel the same, we just saw it from a different point of view”. They come at the end of “Tangled Up In Blue,” the first song on Dylan’s 1975 album *Blood On the Tracks*. This album came out a decade after “Desolation Row,” and has taken that song’s surrealist collaging to the next level. Robert H. Bell describes the album’s importance when he writes:

> *Blood on the Tracks* is energized by a pervasive uncertainty, enhanced by prismatic perspective, and complicated by multi-layered suggestivity. The voices are introspective and reflective, wary of the world’s illusions yet aware of the self’s delusions. Doubleness is the central quality of Dylan’s best songs, and the competing roles of omniscient narrator and poor fool are most productively at work and play throughout *Blood on the Tracks.* (114)

Many of the elements that Bell sees as essential to *Blood on The Tracks* align with Dylan’s use of collage. Putting together many different images can create a “prismatic perspective,” and “multi-layered suggestivity” comes from layering many different collaged parts on top of each other. Bell also points out doubleness as a central quality of Dylan’s work. Moments where the speaker is both omniscient and clueless are examples of foils or doubles, and they also represent a form of collage. Instead of collaging different images, with doubles Dylan is collaging different selves.

As the first track on the album, “Tangled Up In Blue” previews the kind of doubleness and “pervasive uncertainty” that will continue through the rest of the songs. When the song begins we hear a speaker who seems to be reflecting on a past love:

> Early one mornin’ the sun was shinin’
> I was layin’ in bed
> Wond’rin’ if she’d changed at all
> If her hair was still red
> Her folks they said our lives together
> Sure was gonna be rough
> They never did like Mama’s homemade dress
> Papa’s bankbook wasn’t big enough (*The Lyrics* ll. 1-8)

These opening lines introduce a relationship that has gone sour. We know that class difference had the odds stacked against this couple from the start; her family did not approve of his family’s situation, as indicated by their homemade clothing and the size of their bank account. We also know that it didn’t work out, but the speaker still wonders about her and if she’s changed since they were together. The song goes on to tell the rest of the story, each verse creating its own scene like individual rooms. In the “Tangled Up in Blue” that is printed in *The Lyrics* these rooms are separated by space on the page, and in the song they are separated by guitar chords. Although the verses appear as individual scenes, each verse ends with the same line as the title: “tangled up in blue.” Like in “Visions of Johanna,” repeating this line throughout the song builds its impact. The speaker encounters vastly different people, places and happenings throughout the

song, but after each episode he is in the same position: still blue and still tangled, still melancholy and still confused.

Another thread that runs through every verse is the first-person speaker. We're not really sure what the order of events is, or if the "her" is the same woman throughout the song, but we know that in each scene, the speaker is tangled. After introducing the relationship in the first verse, the second one describes a sad but amicable split where the lover tells the speaker that they'll meet again someday. In the next verse he goes on to work different jobs across the U.S., going from a kitchen in the Great North Woods to a fishing boat on the coast of Delacroix Island. The fourth verse is where it gets especially tangled. The "I" appears to be the same person speaking throughout the song, but the "her" is more ambiguous. The verse begins with the lines:

> She was workin' in a topless place
> And I stopped in for a beer
> I just kept lookin' at the side of her face
> In the spotlight so clear
> And later on as the crowd thinned out
> I's just about to do the same
> She was standing there in back of my chair
> Said to me, "Don't I know your name?" (ll. 36-43)

Is this the same one that he broke up with in the lines, "We drove that car as far as we could / Abandoned it out West / Split up on a dark sad night / Both agreeing it was best," and the one that "never escaped [his] mind" as he worked different blue-collar jobs? If she is, then this is

their reunion, and the “Don’t I know your name” is a teasing kind of recognition. However, it’s also possible that this is a completely different person, and not the redhead he was thinking of and wondering about on that early sun-filled morning. The next verse provides a little clarity because the speaker addresses “you” for the first time in the song. The woman from the topless bar invites him home, offers him a pipe, and hands him a book of poems by an “Italian poet / From the thirteenth century”. (This suggests that the book is Dante’s *Divine Comedy,* but we can’t be sure.) He describes the book by saying that when he opened it, “every one of them words rang true / And glowed like burnin’ coal / Pourin’ off of every page / Like it was written in my soul from me to you / Tangled up in blue”. Whatever book of poetry this is, it has moved him deeply. The words touch him so personally that he feels they were written in his own soul “from me to you.” The person he’s thinking of, the “you” for whom the poetry is written in his soul, is not the woman he is with. It’s the first one, the one that told him they’d meet again and never escaped his mind. This clue helps the narrative take a more defined shape: the speaker is travelling across the country carrying the first woman in his mind, and reading poetry with this person he’s just met brings the memories rushing back. (Yet again, the speaker is haunted by an absent love. This one is unnamed, but she’s likely a colleague of Johanna and Lenore.)

The next verse raises ambiguity about place:

I lived with them on Montague Street

In a basement down the stairs

There was music in the cafés at night

And revolution in the air

Then he started into dealing with slaves

And something inside of him died

She had to sell everything she owned

And froze up inside (ll. 66-73)

So after meeting the woman in the bar, going home with her and reading poetry, he's now living with "them" on Montague Street. We're not sure who "them" is, but we know that it includes a "he" that deals with slaves and a "she" that sells all her possessions. These two are at the opposite ends of the possession spectrum: "he" deals with owning people, and "she" is a person giving away everything she owns. It's safe to assume that the "she" is the same woman from the previous verse, but what about the "he?" It could be a new person, a stranger that lives with the group in the basement. It could also be a double of the speaker, or how he looks from the outside, a kind of second self. But then what would this person be doing "dealing with slaves" to the point that "something inside of him died"? It's a puzzling line, assuming that the song takes place in Dylan's present where slavery had been abolished. My reading is that the "he" is not a stranger or the speaker, but actually the Italian poet. When the speaker was reading in that Montague Street basement with the woman, the poetry was powerful enough to make the poet a character that lived with them. The poet becomes a member of "them," his voice pervasive enough to qualify him as a third roommate. By "dealing with slaves" he was writing about the institution of slavery, a hard subject that takes a toll on the writer. The process of addressing slavery breaks the poet down, impacting his subsequent work like "something inside of him died." Simultaneously the woman hits hard times, so hard that she "froze up inside." The situation on Montague Street is looking pretty bleak at this point so the speaker decides to move on, leaving his two roommates behind and going out once more in search of his first love.

The last verse begins with him declaring that "Now I'm goin' back again / I got to get to her somehow" and ends with him saying: "We always did feel the same / We just started from a different point of view / Tangled up in blue." After a brief, poetic interlude with the woman on Montague Street, he ends the song determined to get back to the person that's never left his mind. They always shared feelings, but they started from different points of view. This could be a callback to the original problem, which was the class difference between him and her wealthier family. However, now he has travelled far and wide and is ready to find her again, which is where the song ends.

For nine years, that was the story. (And for those scholars that only use *The Lyrics,* it continues to be the story.) Lovers split up by fate and a speaker that rambles and reads and experiences until he is ready to seek out that same lover once again. However, in 1984 at Wembley Stadium in London, Dylan sang this song again with some notable revisions.[5] A major change is the addition of a third-person narrator. While the original version (on the *Blood on the Tracks* album) began in the first person with "I was layin' in bed," in 1984 Dylan stepped out of the main character to watch omnisciently, singing "He was layin' in bed / Wond'rin' if she'd changed at all / If her hair was still red". The scenes of the song continue much as before, with key pronoun changes. Now we see that "*they* drove that car as far as they could," and "*he* drifted down to New Orleans". In 1984 Dylan is revisiting the lover, the poet, and the "Tangled Up in Blue" speaker, and discovering that they have changed while he was away. Maybe the change in the narrative reflects a change in the lyricist's point of view, feeling that these characters cannot have remained stagnant all this time. It could also be more personal. Maybe when Dylan first

[5] The 1984 performance is by no means the only time Dylan changed the lyrics of "Tangled Up In Blue". It's a long song, and he sang many different iterations at different times. I've chosen to focus on this one specifically in comparison to the studio album version because it has some of the most interesting lyrical revisions.

wrote this love song and recorded it in 1975, he was writing from experience and felt like an active participant, versus now in 1984 he's in the third person looking back at who he was.

A key point where Dylan's live lyrics contradict his original meaning is the third verse, which describes the jobs across the country:

1975 (Album)	**1984 (Live)**
But all the while I was alone	And all the while he was alone
The past was close behind	The past was close behind
I seen a lot of women	He had one too many lovers then
But she never escaped my mind, and I just grew	None of 'em were too refined all except for you
Tangled up in blue	But you were tangled up in blue

The changes to the 1984 version support the idea that he's looking back with hindsight. The first-person speaker just says he's "seen a lot of women", but the omniscient third-person speaker has judgment in his tone, saying there were "one too many lovers." The line "The past was close behind" stays consistent in both versions, but in 1984 there is more judgement on that past. This is also the first time in the 1984 version that the speaker is taking an active role and addressing "you" whom we can presume is the same lover from the beginning. It's a significant moment because the third-person narrator knows her, addresses her, and describes to her the moment in her past when she had love, but she was tangled. This is a kind of awareness that's not so evident in the 1975 version, which simply ends the verse with "tangled up in blue", not evaluating the addressee's entanglement at all. The awareness of the lover's situation shows a level of empathy and understanding of the lover, whereas in the 1975 version the speaker understood her less and saw her as an incomprehensible enigma.

After this verse, the narration switches to first-person, so it's the "I" that sees the woman in the bar, gets his shoe tied, and lives on Montague Street. This "I" is a separate person from the

"he" that met her first, drove the car out West, and worked outside Delacroix. This distinction comes to a head in the last verse, the one that varies the most from the 1975 version:

1975 (Album)	**1984 (Live)**
So now I'm goin' back again	So now I'm goin' back again
I got to get to her somehow	Maybe tomorrow, maybe next year
All the people we used to know	I got to find someone among the women and men
They're an illusion to me now	Whose destiny is unclear
Some are mathematicians	Some are masters of illusion
Some are carpenter's wives	Some are ministers of the trade
Don't know how it all got started	All in a strong delusion
I don't know what they're doin' with their lives	All of their beds are unmade
But me, I'm still on the road	Me, I'm still headin' towards the sun
Headin' for another joint	Tryin' to stay out of the joint
We always did feel the same	We always did love the very same one
We just saw it from a different point of view	We just saw her from a different point of view
Tangled up in blue	Tangled up in blue

The lines of each version follow the same structure, but the 1984 version feels deeper and more expansive. Mundane mathematicians and carpenter's wives get turned into grander versions of themselves, becoming "masters of illusion" and "ministers of the trade". The 1974 speaker doesn't know how the process started, or what these people are doing, but the 1984 speaker argues that it's their "strong delusion" that keeps their beds unmade. The 1984 speaker can more confidently analyze these people, and seems to have a broader plan for himself as well. While the 1975 speaker was "still on the road", this speaker is "headin' towards the sun". He's not limited by earthly paths and patterns, and heads directly to where he wants to go. He also makes a stronger statement about the central woman in the song, saying that the speaker and the "he" in the song "always did love the very same one," spelling out what the emotion was, while the 1975

speaker could only go so far as to say that they “did feel the same,” without ever admitting that the feeling was love.

The 1984 speaker sets up a triangle. He and the original 1975 speaker “always did love the very same one,” but they saw her from different points of view, which is understandable considering one has nine extra years of hindsight. By looking at these versions side by side we can witness Dylan’s process. He is circling back to his old classics but he doesn’t leave them stagnant. He comes back as a different person and he deepens the meaning, adding more perspectives and changing parts of the narrative. This is not like the collage of characters in “I Contain Multitudes” or “Desolation Row,” because he’s just revising his own material. He’s collaging himself, taking old elements, adding to them, tweaking them, and making something new.

Conclusion. "I Was So Much Older Then, I'm Younger Than That Now": Temporal Transgressions

Collage blurs spatial boundaries by taking disparate or unrelated elements and putting them in conversation. It can also blur temporal boundaries, taking different pieces of different times and making a new temporal space. In the song "My Back Pages" Dylan sings: "Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now." The song describes a past in which "half-wracked prejudice leaped forth / 'Rip down all hate,' I screamed / Lies that life is black and white / Spoke from my skull, I dreamed" (*The Lyrics* ll. 9-16). This past is violent and extreme. The speaker was frustrated by prejudice, hate, and the fallacy of binaries, and cried out in opposition to these things. This past self also had to reckon with the line between real and not real. In the past he heard "lies that life is black and white". In the present he calls them lies, so he knows that life cannot be reduced to a binary. But the way these lies confront the speaker isn't externally, but from his own mind. He says that they "spoke from my skull," meaning that they came from within him, and not just from his mind but from his very bones. Before the speaker even gets to struggle with these lies being inside himself, another layer of unreality is added when we find out that he dreamed the whole thing. The present speaker of the song acknowledges that all this happened in this verse (and each subsequent verse) by qualifying that he was much older back then, and he is younger now.

At first, this ending qualification strikes listeners as a mix-up. How can you have been older in the past, and younger in the present? Is the speaker aging in reverse, like Dorian Gray? A biographer might say this line is referring to the shift between Dylan's earlier, moralistic protest songs, and his more recent and far more ambiguous work. The judgement passed by his

early work comes from an older voice than the young one of the later albums. However, I am not a biographer, and it feels reductive to say that "My Back Pages" is necessarily and primarily autobiographical. A more persuasive reading is that by saying "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now," Dylan is referring to a collage of different selves that does not proceed in an orderly, chronological way.

This song's time is not traditionally linear, but filled with snapshots of different selves, ages, and images. In the past, an older man raged against hate, now a younger man sees things more clearly, and both selves are together in the same moment. By using collage, he goes against the idea that everything can be neatly and chronologically organized. Collage as a metaphor for time maps pretty well onto the blurry environment of human memory. This is an aspect that applies to the original, visual sense of collage in addition to Dylan's musical version. When describing the work of collage artist Paul Klee, Vincent Czyz argues: "memory, too, is a kind of collage, eroding and weathering even as it goes about the business of fattening its files" (97). In "My Back Pages," the speaker's memory is a collage of moments and selves, and the collage very intentionally doesn't appear in any specific order. To order the selves by age and time would be to go against the poetics of collage. By singing that he was older then and is younger now, Dylan's memory is eroding, transforming, and fattening its files.

Dylan's creative perspective on time in the lines of the 1964 "My Back Pages" extends all the way to his 2020 album, *Rough and Rowdy Ways.* In "My Own Version of You," he takes inspiration from Mary Shelley and describes a project of reanimation. This undertaking involves collaging a human together and defying time in the process. In the first verse, the speaker describes his goal:

All through the summers, into January
I've been visiting morgues and monasteries
Looking for the necessary body parts
Limbs and livers and brains and hearts
I'll bring someone to life, it's what I wanna do
I wanna create my own version of you (ll. 1-6)

The line "limbs and livers and brains and hearts" also evokes the tell-tale heart line of "I Contain Multitudes" and the heart-attack machine in "Desolation Row." However, these first two uses of "heart" have been mediated. The tell-tale heart is one "like Mr. Poe," not Dylan's alone. The heart-attack machine belongs to the characters on the Row, not to the speaker himself. In this song, the speaker is not acting through any narrative or characterization. He is the agent, and he is the one collecting the pieces. The earlier songs edged around hearts and accessed them through characters, but this speaker is getting down to business and doing the work of collecting himself. While the speaker of "Tangled Up In Blue" reminisced regretfully on past selves and what could have been, this speaker is not wasting any time. Instead of longing for what once was, he is physically creating the image of his person.

While the speaker is initially confident in his plan to reanimate the subject, he has doubts as the song progresses, and sees time on a much larger scale. Still addressing the "you" of the poem, presumably the person he is trying to make a version of, he says:

I can see the history of the whole human race

It's all right there, it's carved into your face

Should I break it all down? Should I fall on my knees?

Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

Can you tell me, please?

His collaged person, made up of materials from modern-day morgues and ancient monastic reliquaries, contains all human history in her (his? their?) face. This has been the goal of the project, but the resulting timeless person is overwhelming. The initial impulse was to create, but now he's tempted to "break it all down" and separate the pieces he has joined. Doctor Frankenstein himself had a similar impulse, seeking to destroy what he had created once he realized what the repercussions could be. Like Frankenstein, the creator in "My Own Version of You" is also confronted with larger questions about time and the infinite, and asks if he should be on his knees praising someone, or if there is even light at the end of the tunnel at all. The tunnel image corresponds to a linear sense of time with a start and a finish, and possibly an afterlife. He supplicates his creation, asking if such a light exists, but he gets no response. As much as the speaker wants someone to answer with confidence his existential questions, the person in front of him is still just the pieces he has put together, so the only answers would be the ones he can construct.

After this moment of doubt, he continues with his science project, and closes the song with these lines:

Shimmy your ribs, I'll stick in the knife

Gonna jumpstart my creation to life

I wanna bring someone to life, turn back the years

Do it with laughter, and do it with tears

In the end, he recognizes that his task of creation will involve joy and pain, but he continues anyway. Putting himself in the role of creator also gives him control over time, and the ability to "turn back the years". He is turning back the years of his creation, by taking pieces from their graves and bringing them back to life. In doing this, there's the possibility of turning back his own years too, that a new lifetime with this new person will give him more time than he's been granted.

By struggling with a physical collage project in the 2020 song "My Own Version of You", Dylan is developing the relationship with collage that has been evident in his work since the 1960s albums. Whether it's bringing historical figures onto the same Row, riffing on a Blakean Eden, or physically stitching body parts together, Dylan is constantly collaging. Even his medium is a collage in and of itself, because it is simultaneously auditory and visual. I have tried to make my own collage by bringing in the playlist, and using a visual artistic term to describe the work of a musical artist. As art evolves and transforms, it will be more and more difficult to make the distinction between visual and auditory, poet and performer. I hope that collage can continue to expand as a term, offering us the best possible tool to interpret works that "go right to the edge". When asked by Ralph Gleason what was more important to him, the music or the message, Dylan responded: "The whole thing while it's happening. The whole total

sound of the words" (Dylan qtd. in Ricks 12). Collage is the whole total thing, the all in all, and Dylan is still adding pieces to it.

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