

# Bob Dylan as Dylan

## Part 2 of 3

Bob Dylan  
Paul Jay Robbins

1966

This Interview Is something of a rarity in that it is one of the very few—if any—in which Dylan volunteered to talk to and with his interviewer in a manner honest and meaningful. However, I do not claim to have caught Dylan in it—I have only caught a segment of his shadow on that day...

Robbins: I don't know whether to do a serious interview or carry on in that Absurdist way we talked last night.

Dylan: It'll be the same thing anyway, man.

R: Yeah. Okay... If you are a poet and write words arranged in some sort of rhythm, why do you switch at some point and write lyrics in a song so that you're singing the words as part of a Gestalt presence?

D: Well, I can't define that word poetry. I wouldn't even attempt it. At one time I thought that Robert Frost was poetry, other times I thought Allen Ginsberg was poetry, sometimes I thought Francois Villon was poetry—but poetry isn't really confined to the printed page. Hey, then again, I don't believe in saying, "Look at that girl walking; isn't that poetry?" I'm not going to get insane about it. The lyrics to the songs... just so happens that it might be a little stranger than in most songs. I find it easy to write songs. I been writing songs for a long long time and the words to the songs aren't written out for just the paper; they're written so you can read it, you dig. If you take whatever there is to the song away—the beat, the melody—I could still recite it. I see nothing wrong with songs you can't do that with, either—songs that, if you took the beat and melody away, they wouldn't stand up. Because they're not supposed to do that, you know. Songs are songs...I don't believe in expecting too much out of any one thing.

R: Whatever happened to Blind Boy Grunt? (a name Dylan recorded a couple of his first folk sides under)

D: I was doing that four years ago. Now there's a lot of people writing songs on protest subjects. But it's taken some kind of a weird step. Hey, I'd rather listen to Jimmy Reed or Howlin' Wolf, man, or the Beatles, or Francois Hardy, than I would listen to any protest song singers—although I haven't heard all the protest song singers there are. But the ones I've heard—there's this very emptiness which is like a song written "Let's hold hands and everything will be grand." I see no more to it than that. Just because somebody mentions the word "bomb," I'm not going to go "Aaiee!" man, and start clapping.

R: It's that they just don't work anymore?

D: It's not that it doesn't work, it's that there are a lot of people afraid of the bomb, right. But there are a lot of other people who're afraid to be seen carrying a Modern Screen magazine down the street, you know. Lot of people afraid to admit that they like Marlon Brando movies...Hey, it's not that they don't work anymore but have you ever thought of a place where they DO work? What exactly DOES work?

R: They give a groovy feeling to the people who sing them, I guess that's about it. But what does work is the attitude, not the song. And there's just another attitude called for.

D: Yeah, but you have to be very hip to the fact about that attitude—you have to be hip to communication. Sure, you can make all sorts of protest songs and put them on a Folkways record. But who hears them? The people that do hear them are going to be agreeing with you anyway. You aren't going to get somebody to hear it who doesn't dig it. People don't listen to things they don't dig. If you can find a cat that can actually say, "Okay, I'm a changed man because I heard this one thing—or I just saw this one thing..." Hey, it doesn't necessarily happen that way all the time. It happens with a collage of experiences which somebody can actually know by instinct what's right and wrong for him to do. Where he doesn't actually have to feel guilty about anything. A lot of people act out of guilt. They act because they think somebody's looking at them. No matter what it is. There's people who do anything because of guilt.

R: And you don't want to be guilty?

D: It's that I'm NOT guilty. I'm not any more guilty than you are. Like, I don't consider any elder generation guilty. I mean, they're having these trials at Nuremberg, right? Look at that and you can place it out. Cats say, "I had to kill all those people, or else they'd kill me." Now, who's to try them for that? Who are these judges that have got the right to try a cat? How do you know they wouldn't do the same thing?

R: This may be a side trip, but this thing about the Statute of Limitations running out and everybody wants to extend it? You remember, in ANIMAL FARM, what they wrote on the wall? "All animals are equal." But later they added, "but some are more equal than others." It's the same thing in reverse. That some are less equal than others, like, Nazis are REALLY criminals, so let's REALLY get them; change any law just to nail them all.

D: Yeah, all that shit runs in the same category. Nobody digs revenge, right? But you have these cats from Israel who, after TWENTY years, are still trying to catch these cats who're OLD cats, man, who have escaped. God knows they aren't going to go anywhere, they're not going to do anything. And you have these cats from Israel running around catching them. Spending twenty years out of their lives. You take that job away from them and they're no more or less than a baker. He's got his whole life tied up in one thing. It's a one-thought thing, without anything between: "That's what it is, and I'm going to get it." Anything between gets wiped all away. I can't make that, but I can't really put it down. Hey: I can't put ANYTHING down, because I don't have to be around any of it. I don't have to put people down which I don't like, because I don't have to be around any of those people. Of course, there is the giant great contradiction of What Do You Do. Hey, I don't know what you do, but all I can do is cast aside all the things NOT to do. I don't know where it's at, all I know is where it's NOT at. And as long as I know that, I don't really have to know, myself, where it's at. Everybody knows where it's at once in a while, but nobody can walk around all the time in a complete Utopia. Dig poetry. You were asking about poetry? Man, poetry is just bullshit, you know? I don't know about other countries, but in this one it's total massacre. It's not poetry at all. People don't read poetry in this country—if they do, it offends them; they don't dig it. You go to school, man, what kind of poetry to you read? You read Robert Frost's "the Two Roads," you read T.S. Eliot—you read all that bullshit and that's just bad, man, it's not good. It's not anything hard, it's all soft-boiled egg shit. And then, on top of it, they throw Shakespeare at some kid who can't read Shakespeare. Hey, everybody hates Shakespeare in high school, right? Who digs reading Hamlet, man? All they give you is Ivanhoe, Silas Marner, Tale of Two Cities—and they keep you away from things which you should do. You shouldn't even be there in school. You should find out from people. Dig: that's where it all starts. In the beginning—like from 13 to 19—that's where all the irruption is. These people all just overlook it, right? There's more V.D. in people 13 to 19 than there is in any other group, but they ain't going to ever say so. They're never going to go into the schools and give shots. But that's where it's at. It's all a hype, man.

R: Relating all this: if you put it in lyrics instead of poetry, you have a higher chance of hitting the people who have to be hit?

D: I do, but I don't expect anything from it, you dig? All I can do is be me—whoever that is—for those people that I do play to, and not come on with them, tell them I'm something that I'm not. I'm not going to tell them I'm the Great Cause Fighter or the Great Lover or Great Boy Genius—or whatever. Because I'm not, man. Why mislead them? That's all just Madison Avenue, that's just selling. Sure, Madison Avenue is selling me, but it's not really selling ME, 'cause I was hip to it before I got there.

R: Which brings up another thing. All the folk magazines and many folk people are very down on you. Do they put you down because you changed or...

D: It's that I'm successful and they want to be successful, man. It's jealousy. Hey, anybody with any kind of knowledge at all would know what I'm doing, would know by Instinct what's happening here. Somebody who doesn't know that is still hung up with success and failure and good and bad...maybe he doesn't have a chick all the time...stuff like that. But I can't use comments, man. I don't take nothing like that seriously. If somebody praises me and says how groovy you are!", it doesn't mean anything to me because I can usually sense where that person's at. And it's no compliment if someone who's a total freak comes up and says, "How groovy you are!" And it's the same if they don't dig me. Other kinds of people don't HAVE to say anything because, when you come down to it, it's all what's happening in the moment which counts. Who cares about tomorrow and yesterday? People don't live there; they live now.

R: I've a theory which I've been picking up and shaking out every so often. When I spoke with the Byrds, they were saying the same thing that I'm saying—a lot of people are saying it—you're talking it. It's why we have a new so-called rock & roll sound emerging, it's a synthesis of all things...

D: It's further than that, man. People know nowadays more than before. They've had so much to look at by now and know the bullshit of everything. People now don't even care about going to jail. So what? You're still with yourself as much as if you're out on the streets. There's still those who don't care about anything, but I got to think that anybody who doesn't hurt anybody, you can't put that person down, you dig, If that person's happy doing that.

R: But what if they freeze themselves into apathy? What if they don't care about anything at all anymore?

D: Whose problem is that? Your problem or theirs? No, it's not that nobody can learn by somebody else showing them or teaching them. People got to learn by themselves, going through something which relates. Sure, you say how do you make somebody know something. People know it by themselves; they can go through some kind of scene with other people and themselves which somehow will come out somewhere and it'll grind into them and be them. And all that just comes out of them somehow when they're faced up to the next thing.

R: It's like taking In until the time comes to put out, right, But people who don't care don't put anything out. It's a whole frozen thing where nothing's happening anywhere; it's Just the maintenance of status quo, of existing circumstances, whatever they are...

D: People who don't care? Are you talking about gas station attendants or a Zen doctor, man? Hey, there's a lot of people who don't care; a lot don't care for different reasons. A lot care about some things and not about others, and some who don't care about anything. It's not up to me to make them care about something—it's up to me not to let them bring me down and not to bring them down. It's like the whole world has a little thing; it's being taught that when you get up In the morning, you have to go out and bring somebody down. You walk down the street and, unless you've brought somebody down, don't come home today, right? It's a circus world.

R; So who is it that you write and sing for?

D: Not writing and singing for anybody, to tell you the truth. Hey, really, I don't care what people say. I don't care what they make me seem to be or what they tell other people I am. If I did care about that, I'd tell you; I really have no concern with It. I don't even come in contact with these people. Hey, I dig people, though. But if somebody's going to come up to me and ask me some questions which have been on his mind for such a long time, all I can think of is, "Wow, man, what else can be in that person's head besides me? Am I that important, man, to be in a person's head for such a long time he's got to know this answer?" I mean, can that really straighten him out—if I tell him something? Hey, come on...

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