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Bob Dylan's 1960s Albums and the Beat Generation

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1 Introduction

Bob Dylan is one of the most important figures of American music and popular culture. With Dylan, the category of the songwriter was reevaluated and it acquired a greater importance of that of the singer, since his lyrics were immediately labeled poetry. Due to this, Dylan was the first popular singer to enter college curricula and become the interest of literary critics who recognized the intertextuality between his songs and “highbrow” poetry. Among numerous poetic influences, that of the Beat Generation cannot be overlooked, especially when it comes to the beginning of Dylan’s career. Within the Beat movement, Allen Ginsberg is the poet that exerted a major influence on the songwriter, which is confirmed also by the many collaborations and mutual friendship between the two.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the interaction between *Howl*, Ginsberg’s most influential collection, and Dylan’s albums that include the folk phase (*The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*) and the electric trilogy (*Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, *Blonde on Blonde*), spanning from 1962 to 1966. The first chapter gives a general overview of the most important aspects of the Beat Generation – genesis, representatives, characteristics – and explores Dylan’s relationship with the movement. The second chapter examines how the academia approached Dylan from the 1960s onwards and discusses the legitimacy of referring to Dylan’s lyrics as “poetry” with the aim of determining the singer’s position in relation both to literature and music.

The following two chapters analyze the interaction between *Howl* and Dylan’s albums. The third deals with the two writers as poets-prophets exploring, on the one hand, Ginsberg’s position in relation to the Romantic poetry and its visionary mode, and on the other, Dylan’s relation as prophet-singer to the beatnik. In the fourth chapter the analysis turns to Dylan’s electric trilogy as following: in the first place, it shows the presence of Beat themes in the

sense of the same disdain towards what in Ginsberg is embodied in the figure of Moloch, and of the subterranean characters and their lifestyles; secondly, it analyzes the writers' references to surrealism and Dadaism on the level of wordplay and defamiliarization; and finally, it shows how Ginsberg's breath-based lines, which organize his poetry metrically following Whitman's free verse, come as close to singing as the written word can get, enabling Dylan to introduce the breath unit into the realm of music with his singing style.

The thesis follows contemporary criticism's approach to Dylan which considers musical albums in their complexity, acknowledging the interpretative contribution of also non-verbal elements to the analysis of Dylan's lyrics.

2 The Beat Generation

A group of writers that arose in the 1940s, but gained prominence in the mid-1950s by questioning current American values, was known as the Beat Generation. The name of the movement was coined by Jack Kerouac, one of its most prominent members, and it had several connotations. Richard Gray enumerates three meanings of the word “beat”. The first is the musical sense in which “beat” suggests keeping the beat, being in harmony with others, but it also implied the jazz beat, since beat poetry aspired to catch the abrupt rhythms and the improvisations of jazz, bebop and swing. In a social, psychological and vaguely political sense, the term refers to the “beaten” condition of the outsider, the alienated, the dispossessed and even the nominally insane, in other words, all those who are at the margins of the “normal” society and reject its discipline and rules. The third one is the spiritual meaning. “Beat” is here related to beatitude describing the innocence, blessedness and raptness of the outsider in pursuit of visions through music, meditation, drugs, mantras or poems (299).

Apart from its principal representative Jack Kerouac, other members of the Beat Generation were Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes, Neal Cassidy and others. The movement was initially connected to the New York scene, but it later moved to San Francisco, contributing to the artistic phenomenon of the 1950s that became known as the San Francisco Renaissance.

Gregory Stephenson identifies two distinct periods or phases of the Beat Generation: the underground period (1944 – 1956) and the public period (1956 – 1962). Admitting that the dates are approximate, Stephenson chooses 1944 as the starting point following Kerouac’s recollection of meeting hipsters in New York that year and feeling an affinity with them that marked the birth of a new consciousness (17). In the early Fifties certain works of Beat literature began to emerge, like Kerouac’s *The Town and the City* (1950), Holmes’ *Go* (1952)

and Burroughs' *Junkie* (1953). However, it was not until Lawrence Ferlinghetti published Allen Ginsberg's collection *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956 that the Beats began attracting public and media attention, especially due to the obscenity trial that began shortly after the book's publication. *Howl* marked a turning point for the Beat Generation, which went from being underground to gaining publicity. Stephenson says that the end of the Beat era is more difficult to establish. He has personally chosen 1962 since it was the year in which Kerouac published *Big Sur*, which marked the end of the writer's personal quest, but perhaps also that of the movement. The critic provides an alternative terminal date: 1965 with the advent of the Vietnam War. From that point on the Beats were substituted, or rather their legacy was carried on, by the hippies and the counterculture (18).

Sean Wilentz, on the other hand, mentions a very specific date as the end of the Beat Generation: January 26, 1961. On that day, a group of writers gathered at the apartment of the Belgian theater director Robert Cordier to discuss (and celebrate) the death of the Beat movement. As it often happens to underground streams, they are soon sucked into the mainstream, thus losing the subversive potential and the initial allure. "What had begun as an iconoclastic literary style (whether one approved or not) had become, the detractors said, just another fad, a subject fit for television comedies." (Wilentz 68-9) A few years after the movement had turned public, the stereotypes on the Beats reduced their members and sympathizers exclusively to the image of a bohemian hipster, ignoring other aspects present in the complexity of the Generation. However, today the term "beatnik" has lost the initial connotations, and is used as a synonym for "Beat".

When it comes to the influences that helped shape the creation of the Beat Generation, according to Stephenson, we must return to another generation, the post-WWI Lost Generation. F. Scott Fitzgerald defined "generation" as the reaction against the fathers, which inherits the ideas, in a moderated form, by the madmen and outlaws of the previous

generation, and has its leaders and spokesmen. By this definition, the Beats were both a generation and a movement (19). The affiliated to the Lost Generation (Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot and others) felt disillusioned and culturally orphaned due to the experience of the catastrophe of World War One, which forced them to rebel against the manners and customs of their age. As a result, they sought new values and inaugurated new modes of expression. In this sense, the Beat Generation can be seen as a parallel to the Lost Generation; only the former was the product of WWII and the Cold War (*ibid*). The Beats too rejected the social, political, artistic and religious norms of their era, seeking new replacements. Another aspect that the Beats inherited from the Lost Generation was the cult of jazz. Nevertheless, the significant continuity between the two generations does not match when it comes to the beatnik's intense interest in metaphysical issues, mysticism and spirituality (20).

Among other movements that can be seen as “the precursors” of the Beats, Stephenson identifies hipsterism, bohemianism, radicalism, Dadaism and surrealism (19). Even though hipsterism was contemporaneous to the Lost Generation, the two were actually tangential, since the members of the former were drawn from minorities and the working-class urban areas bordering with the small-criminal milieu, while the latter were of the middle class or even upper middle class (20). In his essay *The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster*, Norman Mailer describes the hipster as a blend of the bohemian, the adolescent criminal and the African-American: “[T]he bohemian and the juvenile came face-to-face with the Negro, and the hipster was a fact in American life” (279). Hipsters took the bohemian indulgence in drugs, loose sexual codes and self-imposed poverty and combined it with the lifestyle, dress code and slang of the African-American jazz musician, thus becoming a white Negro. Mailer explains: “(...) [I]t is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries. But the

presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American life is probably due to jazz, and its knife-like entrance into culture (...)” (278). By adopting the influences of bohemianism and the African-American culture, hipsterism became another anti-conformist subculture throughout the US whose literary advocates soon became the Beats by embracing, interpreting and transforming it (Stephenson 21).

From bohemianism the Beats accepted unconventionality, the anti-materialist ethics and the faith in the transforming power of art, while the radical tradition was appreciated by the beatniks for its “general libertarian-egalitarian-populist-anarchist orientation and its strategy of forming a new society within the shell of the old” (*ibid*). However, the Beat revolt was rather one of the soul, or the spirit, and not a political one.

While the beat generation was anti-establishment, it was not involved with the kind of programmatic leftism that characterized many of the writers of the Thirties. Rather, it was committed to what Norman O. Brown has termed ‘metapolitics’, the politics of Blake, that is, in which psychological or spiritual freedom is the only sure warrant for political freedom. (R. Gray 300)

Johnston too notices that the Beat movement lacked the cohesion of a direct political attack on the system it opposed; it was rather a desire to escape socioeconomic conditions that the Beats believed subdued the individual to the level of consumer objects in an increasingly totalitarian, commodity-driven society (107).

When it comes to Dadaism and surrealism, the Beats took their subversive and revolutionary approach in the cultural, philosophical and aesthetic sense regarding society as suffering from a collective madness or psychosis which manifested itself in the form of Cold War, consumerism, conformity, and the passivity and compliance of the masses hypnotized by television and other media. Following the tradition of the two avant-garde movements, the

Beats employed extreme forms of expression breaking the established taste, literary decorum and legal censorship (Stephenson 21). The Beat Generation had also a significant relation to transcendentalists like Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, as well as to English Romanticism, namely to the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake. Influences and predecessors notwithstanding, Stephenson points out that the Beat Generation must be recognized as an independent original phenomenon, a response to the artistic, social and spiritual environment of mid-20th century America (22).

The Beat Generation was never a homogeneous movement, nor it aspired to be. Unlike the avant-garde movements, the beatniks did not issue any manifestos, nor formulated dogmas or embraced doctrines. Their affinity was more the result of mutual sympathy and inspiration, and of a set of attitudes and values expressed by the various writers identified with the movement (23). If one was to look for the essential Beat ethos or a common denominator, it would be the concern with the issues of identity and vision; “the knowledge of the true self and the discovery or recovery of a true mode of perception” (*ibid*). Thus, the motif of the quest or the journey becomes central to the poetic of this literary movement, but the quest is not only physical, it is also spiritual. The inner quest is “a descent into the darkness and the depths of the psyche”, a struggle which ultimately results in “a renewal of the self and an ascending impulse toward equilibrium and transcendence” (23).

Among the recurrent themes in Beat writing we can enumerate criminality, obscenity, drug addiction,¹ madness, rebellion and everything that falls under the breaking of boundaries and the violation of taboos. Besides being acts of rebellion against rationality and order, these behaviors are also efforts “to confront the destructiveness within and to transform it into

¹ According to Johnston, one of the *leitmotifs* of Beat writing is the comparison between advanced capitalist economy and addictive behavior. The analogy between capitalism and addiction can be found mainly in Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), but also in the famous line from Ginsberg's “Howl”: “narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism” (“Howl”, 72-3) (Johnston 110).

creative energy” (24). Stephenson explains that the treatment of these themes was often misinterpreted as glorification or justification of violence and nihilism. Instead, the presence of these “abnormalities” in Beat writing was a record of a condition of the spirit that reflected the common disease of American society. They were a necessary phase of the writers’ personal, artistic and spiritual development, but at the same time they were a way of opposing “the organized and collective criminality, the obscenity and madness of war, and the other social forms of human destructiveness” (*ibid*). The various forms of transgression served to denounce the hypocrisy and conformity of Americans who failed or refused to see the real obscenity, criminality and madness behind what the media and the government offered them. Apart from the transgression of laws, norms and censorship, Beat art was characterized by the transgression of traditional literary forms and conventions. The writers created new forms which could “articulate the language of the body and of the unconscious mind” in order to express new truths (25). Examples of these radical new forms would be Kerouac’s spontaneous prose, Ginsberg’s breath unit and Burroughs’ cut-up method (*ibid*).

As they suddenly emerged on the literary scene of the Fifties, the Beats equally quickly disappeared in the 1960s. Ginsberg and Burroughs travelled the world, Corso struggled with his heroin and alcohol addiction, while Kerouac spent most of his time writing, drinking and living with his mother until his death in 1969 (Wilentz 69). However, the legacy of the Beat Generation was carried on by what Stephenson considers the second generation Beats, which would include Ed Sanders, Ken Kesey, Ted Berrigan, Emmet Grogan, Bob Dylan and Richard Fariña. Their activities helped bring about the counterculture of the late Sixties and early Seventies, which shared similar principles with the beatniks: the rejection of commercial values and notions of career and status, drug abuse as a mode of personal and spiritual exploration, the interest in the Orient, the prevalent antirational and anti-technological disposition, and the pacifist-anarchist political orientation (28-9). Moreover, they had an

enormous impact on rock and pop music, initially on the Beatles and Bob Dylan, and later on Punk and Generation X (Johnston 110).

The Beat Generation movement evolved from what had initially been a group of writers with their own vision of America into a very complex literary and cultural phenomenon that influenced artists and future movements in expressing their anger and discontent with the predominant modes of thinking and living.

2.1 The Folkies, the Beats and Bob Dylan

Anyone familiar with Bob Dylan's music knows about its connection to the folk movement of the 1930s and the 1940s that led to the folk revival of the Fifties and early Sixties, among which Dylan was the leading songwriter. According to Michael Gray, American folk music, as "music created by the people and for the people", can be divided into four main types: Yankee, Southern poor white, Cowboy and Black, and all four of them appear in Dylan's art in very different guises (232). Sean Wilentz believes that Dylan's first albums were written and composed under the influence of left-wing radical composers, a large musical scene that evolved in the Thirties. The most important folk musician that inspired Dylan was Woody Guthrie, and to a lesser degree Pete Seeger (27). In his book *Bob Dylan in America*, Wilentz explores how the ideas of the folk scene in some points overlap with those of the Beat Generation, and how the intermingling of the two helped shape one of the best songwriters of all times.

Many composers and musicians of the 1930s folk scene were affiliated with the Communist Party. The artists, in addition to collecting and transcribing popular songs that were in danger of disappearing, used folk music as a tool for radical politics, promoting union organizing and racial justice (28-9). One example would be the folk band the Almanac

Singers formed in the late Thirties by Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie, which in the late Forties evolved into The Weavers. Wilentz states that this band would later prove essential in introducing a younger generation, including Dylan, to especially Guthrie's music, and would help shape the folk revival of the following two decades (*ibid*).

The folk movement, just like initially the Beat movement, was closely linked to New York City, mainly to Greenwich Village. The documentary *No Direction Home* shows how folksingers and beat poets shared the same stage at the various *cafés* of the Village. The beatniks would read their poems between folksingers' performances. The two movements shared the same disdain for consumerism and conventional 1950s norms, while they obviously differed when it came to music, since the beatniks preferred swing, bebop and jazz experimentations. Moreover, the Beat's bohemianism and hip style clashed with the folkies' sober aspiration for authenticity (Wilentz 66-7). While the Beats were on the wane in the early Sixties, the folk revival was, on the other hand, becoming more and more popular (69).

When it comes to Bob Dylan, he arrived in New York in 1961, around the time that Wilentz interprets as the burial of the Beat Generation. Dylan became familiar with Beat writings in his teenage years while he was still living in Minnesota. He says about *On the Road*:

I felt that atmosphere of everything Kerouac was saying about the world being mad, and the only people that for him were interesting were the mad people, the mad ones, the ones who are, you know, mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn, all those mad ones. And I felt like I fit right into that bunch. (Dylan in *No Direction Home*)

However, just before arriving to New York, Dylan started listening to Woody Guthrie and reading his biography *Bound for Glory*. He claims that he identified with it more than he ever did with *On the Road* (*ibid*). Dylan writes in his memoirs:

Within the first few months that I was in New York I'd lost my interest in the "hungry for kicks" hipster vision that Kerouac illustrates in his book *On the Road*. That book had been like a bible for me. Not anymore, though. I still loved the breathless, dynamic bop poetry phrases that flowed from Jack's pen, but now, that character Moriarty seemed out of place, purposeless – seemed like a character who inspired idiocy. (Dylan 57-8)

Dylan came to New York to find Woody Guthrie, whose songs "ruled [his] universe" (49). He considered Guthrie "the true voice of the American spirit" (99).

Dylan began singing other people's songs in the bars of the Village, namely at *The Gaslight Café* and the *Café Wha?*. His talent came to the attention of the producer John Hammond, who invited Dylan to sign a contract with Columbia Records and record his first album. The first album, entitled simply *Bob Dylan* (1962), consisted of well-known folk, blues and gospel songs, and only two original compositions ("Talkin' New York" and "Song to Woody"). The album made little impact and had poor sales. Nevertheless, by the time Dylan released his second album the following year, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, he began to make a name of himself as a singer-songwriter. When *The Times They Are A-Changing* came out, his songs were being called protest songs, and Dylan was already being considered a poet-prophet and the spokesman of a generation. He was a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement and he sang at the March on Washington in 1963 along with his singing partner Joan Baez. Even though Dylan abandoned the Beat hipsterism at the very beginning of his career, he would soon return to it, especially after meeting Allen Ginsberg. "The Beat

influence would rekindle only after Dylan had established himself as a rising star – the greatest young folksinger in the Village and, for that matter, in the country – when he met up with Allen Ginsberg.” (Wilentz 71)

Ginsberg had always been the most political of all Beat writers. He stood “as a cultural revolutionary, antibourgeois seer, and antagonist of the academy”, and was thus respected by the left-wing affiliates (79). Still, Dylan was not interested in Beat literature as “a source of new political causes”; in fact, the songwriter often expressed his independence from politics. What Dylan appreciated was the beatnik’s “play of language as well as their spiritual estrangement that transcended conventional politics of any kind” (58). As the folksinger Dave Van Ronk says: “Bobby was not really a political person. He was thought of as being a political person and a man of the left. And in a general sort of way, yes, he was, but he was not interested in the true nature of the Soviet Union or any of that crap...” (*No Direction Home*). In this sense the influence of Ginsberg, Kerouac and others served Dylan just as rock and roll did, as something he had picked up before he came to New York, and then returned to and absorbed anew after he had moved away from the left-wing orthodoxy of the folk revival (Wilentz 58). The shift from folk to rock, from the acoustic to the electric guitar and from old folk ballads to Beat-inspired verbal wit, upset Dylan’s fans, who considered it a sell-out and a betrayal of the folk revival’s values. This became popularly known as the electric controversy.

The first glimpses of change in style appeared on Dylan’s 1964 album *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, with its much lighter mood, but it was his fifth album, *Bringing It All Back Home* (March 1965) that created an outrage among the singer’s fans. Side One featured Dylan backed by an electric band, while on Side Two there was just Dylan with his acoustic guitar and a harmonica. Five months later, Dylan released *Highway 61 Revisited*, which featured “Like a Rolling Stone”. The song became a revolutionary track and one of the most influential compositions in post-war popular music, and helped Dylan become a rock icon. In 1966 he

issued *Blonde on Blonde*, his first double album. At this point Dylan was able to make one masterpiece after another, and be at the same time admired by the critics and new fans, and hated by the folkies who resented the detachment from social and political issues.

Dylan still acknowledges the Beat influence. Under the section “Books” on his official webpage one can find a collection of published works on Dylan, books written by Dylan, like the *Chronicles* and the novel *Tarantula*, as well as what could be considered Dylan’s favorites like Guthrie’s *Bound for Glory*, Rimbaud’s *A Season in Hell*, and by Beat writers Kerouac’s *On the Road* and Ginsberg’s *Howl* and *Kaddish*.

When it comes to Kerouac’s novels, references can be found in the titles of Dylan’s songs from the electric trilogy: *On the Road* becomes “On the Road Again”, *The Subterraneans* is turned into “Subterranean Homesick Blues”, *Visions of Gerard* is reflected in “Visions of Johanna”, and “Desolation Row” is a reference to *Desolation Angels* (M. Gray 377). The influence of Allen Ginsberg, on the other hand, is even more prominent: “Dylan’s debt to *Howl* (and the later *Kaddish*) is far more direct than Ginsberg’s to *Leaves of Grass*” (M. Gray 255). By the time Dylan became a celebrity, his friendship with Ginsberg was a public fact. Dylan mentions Ginsberg in a line of the poem “11 Outlined Epitaphs” printed on the cover of the folk album *The Times They Are A-Changin’*. In the final enumeration of artistic influences that the singer stumbles on while writing his own songs, he mentions the “love songs of Allen Ginsberg”, and interestingly enough, Ginsberg is the only Beat writer mentioned in this poem. A photograph of Ginsberg appears on the cover of *Bringing It All Back Home*, the first electric album. Moreover, in Pennebaker’s film *Dont Look Back* [sic], a *cinémavérité* that covers Dylan’s 1965 UK tour, Ginsberg is seen in the backstage and he also appears in a cameo role in the famous clip for “Subterranean Homesick Blues”. Wilentz believes that in 1964-65 the two influenced each other as they were trying to recast their public images and

their art (73). Moreover, Ginsberg outgrew the Beat Generation thanks to Dylan by becoming “an older avatar of the late-1960s counterculture” and thus acquiring a new fame (79).

The media recognized Dylan’s connection with the Beats early on in the musician’s folk phase. The songwriter remembers: “(...) Robert Shelton, the folk and jazz critic for the *New York Times*, would review one of my performances and would say something like, ‘resembling a cross between a choirboy and a beatnik... he breaks all the rules in songwriting, except that of having something to say’” (Dylan 97, my italics). After Dylan had gone electric, the connection with the Beats became of greater interest to the media and Dylan would be asked by the journalists if he was in fact “the ultimate beatnik”, to which Dylan would never give a concrete answer (*No Direction Home*). The media attention will follow him up to his reclusionin 1966, which started after he had experienced a motorcycle accident that put his rising career on hold. Dylan did not tour for the next eight years; however, he continued recording and issuing new albums that expressed yet again new phases after the electric shift.

3 Bob Dylan between Poetry and Music

Very early on in Bob Dylan's musical career, the followers and the media referred to his lyrics as poetry, and perceived him more as a poet than a singer-songwriter. In February 1964 Dylan participated to *The Steve Allen Show* in which the host read the following quote from the magazine *Billboard*: "Dylan's *poetry* is born out of a painful awareness of the tragedy that underlies the temporary human condition" (Steve Allen in *No Direction Home*). Apart from the music magazine and Dylan's fans, scholars at English Literature departments began studying Dylan's lyrics having recognized their interaction with poetry. The immediate connection to poetry is visible in Dylan's pseudonym and its direct reference to Dylan Thomas. However, in his memoirs the songwriter explains that the choice of changing his name from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan was rather based on the sound than on a strong and important reference to the Welsh poet. Dylan's first choice had been Robert Allyn, but he changed his mind after reading some poems by Thomas: "Dylan and Allyn sounded similar. (...) I couldn't decide – the letter *D* came on stronger (...). Bob Dylan looked and sounded better than Bob Allyn" (Dylan 78-9). Moreover, Dylan describes going to his friends' houses before arriving in New York and reading all sorts of books, from philosophy, fiction and history books to poetry. "I read the poetry books, mostly. Byron and Shelley and Longfellow and Poe. (...) I read a lot of the pages aloud and liked the sound of the words, the language. Milton's protest poem, "Massacre in Piedmont." (...) It was like the folk song lyrics, even more elegant." (37-8) Upon arriving in New York, Dylan became even more interested in poetry. "I had broken myself of the habit of thinking in short song cycles and began reading longer and longer poems to see if I could remember anything I read about in the beginning. I trained my mind to do this, had cast off gloomy habits and learned to settle myself down. (...) I began cramming my brain with all kinds of deep poems." (56) What Dylan crammed his brain with was being recognized in his own writings. In fact, his lyrics were being thought of

and studied as poems put to music; however, with the emergence of new schools of criticism, the formalist textual analysis and neglect of music and performance became problematic.

In his concise overview of the relationship between Dylan and the academic circles, Lee Marshall explains the dynamics behind it in the context of the development of different critical schools, and the problems arising from confining Dylan, a musician and performer, strictly to the area of poetry and literature. As Marshall explains, Dylan's songs were being analyzed as poetry at universities already in the 1960s, which the sociologist attributes to a historical coincidence; in other words, to the fact that Dylan emerged on the scene when New Criticism was still the dominant mode of Anglo-American literary criticism.

The dominance in the early 1960s of New Criticism – the approach to literature that eschews consideration of authorial intention and audience effect in favor of forensic analysis of the text itself – lent itself to the study of the complexity of poetry. If Dylan was to be studied at universities in the 1960s, then his work would have to be brought under the wing of this approach to literature. There was no place else for it to go.
(Marshall 104)

The reason why Marshall finds problematic putting too much emphasis on the text is that “songs gain their emotional and artistic power not merely from the semantic meaning of the lyrics but from a constellation of *sound*” (101, italics in original). The words are performed and along with the music and the voice they create “a distinctive cultural artifact and not a verbalized poem” (*ibid*). Moreover, the critic argues that when it comes to poetry, the reader reads it in his or her own voice and speed, thus having control over the poem. When it comes to songs, on the other hand, the singer is the one who controls the pace at which the listener hears a song as well as the voice that sings it. In this sense, the music and the voice can contribute to a different interpretation of a song, adding new nuances, while aspects like

whether the voice is male or female, or whether the style of singing is sincere or ironic, are not necessarily available in written (103).

Todd Kennedy shares a similar opinion with Marshall on the status of Dylan's lyrics. He argues that Dylan wants his lyrics to be heard, not read; they are songs, not poems. Nevertheless, Kennedy still believes that Dylan's lyrics can be discussed in terms of their relation to modern poetry and he sees the singer's artistic production as having a rhizomatic form² emerging "as neither pure music nor pure poetry, but rather both at the same time" (41). Moreover, "the rhizome, as an aesthetic and linguistic structure, establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles"; therefore, the rhizome becomes essential in inserting Dylan into the tradition of performance literature, an artistic form that dates back to the troubadours, only with the technological ability to record the oral performance in an audio format (*ibid*). The latest literary criticism, although it acknowledges the existence of intertextuality between Dylan's lyrics and mainly modern poetry, it does not neglect the text's interaction with music, placing Dylan's art on a liminal position between poetry and music.

Christoph Lebold believes that a major part of Dylan's success stands in the fact that the listeners of his songs experience a specific literary pleasure³ that arises from the concurrence of three literary activities: (1) Dylan's lyrics are first written, and then performed; (2) the lyrics are rhythmically re-written by the voice; (3) the songs are used by Dylan to write himself; in other words, to create a series of numerous *personae*, or numerous "Bob Dylans"

² By rhizomatic, Kennedy refers to the philosophical concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972-80), where the rhizome stands for a horizontal and non-hierarchical conception of thinking, as opposed to arborescent thinking, defined by a vertical hierarchy, binarism and dualism.

³ Lebold is here referring to Roland Barthes' analysis of literary pleasure in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), and more specifically to the critic's distinction between readerly and writerly texts. According to Lebold, Dylan's songs would fall under writerly texts, since their semantic openness and sophisticated imagery require a greater hermeneutic activity from the listener/reader (60).

(57). Much like Marshall, Lebold too believes that subjecting Dylan's lyrics to a New Criticism-type scrutiny neglects the fact that the lyrics are never autonomous, but they are in interaction with non-verbal elements like music, voice and the *personae* of the performer, the latter being "the fictional or semi-fictional identities that the artist constructs in the lyrics and his public appearances" (59). Lebold acknowledges that Dylan's lyrics are "*inherently poetic*"; however, he believes that in Dylan's case "the poet is also a performer and much of the poetry lies in the performance and music" (*ibid*, my italics). We can, therefore, wonder about the reasons why Dylan was in the past approached mainly from the point of view of literary criticism, and what caused the recent critical appreciation of music, sound, voice and performance as integral parts of Dylan's works.

Apart from the historical coincidence of Dylan's emergence in the period in which New Criticism was still popular at universities, Lebold believes that we must also take into consideration that in the past fifty years all dominant critical discourses in mainstream academia have considered the written word in higher regard as opposed to the oral; therefore, the song as an artistic form acquires less than secondary importance, unlike the poem. In this sense, Dylan's talent was recognized as poetic, not musical (58). On the other hand, Marshall approaches this problem by referring to a broader cultural background: the shift in the perception of high and low culture in the context of postmodernism and the emergence of cultural studies.

Marshall argues that Dylan's status as the leading songwriter of the folk revival enabled his acceptance within the academic milieu even when he became a rock star. The folk revival should be observed in the broader context of the critique of mass culture and pop music as being shallow, impermanent and driven by the market, while folk music is deep, pure and

authentic (105).⁴ When it comes to rock music, it must be clarified that it was not just another mainstream music, since rock paved the way for stratification, creating higher and lower levels of popular music. In other words, not all forms of popular music were mindless and disposable, some of it became worthy of being taken seriously. Thus, rock music erased the difference in quality as that between serious/classical music and light/popular music; more precisely, it differentiated between serious, worthwhile popular music (rock) and trivial, lightweight popular music (pop) (*ibid*). In this sense rock music became considered a “higher” cultural form and its artists serious and original. Originality, Marshall argues, became a pre-requisite of rock authenticity and created the context within which rock lyricists were being considered poets, with Dylan as the clearest example of this phenomenon (106). Dylan emerged on the scene in the time in which the attitudes to the study of culture were changing, when postmodernism generally blurred the clear-cut distinction between high culture and low culture.

Moreover, Marshall believes that along with postmodernism another important aspect is the emergence of cultural studies. “Cultural studies approaches have pluralized the notion of culture and weakened the idea that artistic value could only be found in one particular sphere.” (107) Opposite to what one might expect, the studies of popular culture have not changed the approach to Dylan’s music in more appropriate ways; in fact, they have quite neglected the singer and his artistic production. Once again, Marshall attributes this paradox to a historical coincidence, i.e. the fact that cultural studies became an established discipline in the 1980s, a decade in which Dylan’s career and music were at their lowest ebb. Furthermore, in the 1980s Dylan was “corrupted” by the fact that in the prior decades he had entered the realm of “high” culture. Mainstream rock music was being ignored within cultural

⁴ Marshall is here careful to point out that this was the belief of folksingers and their (purist) fans, since the folk revival was itself part of mass culture (105).

studies in favor of more diverse, local, subcultural and minority genres (107). In spite of an increasing focus on popular culture and a considerable theoretical contribution to its analysis, in the 1980s Dylan was no longer an interesting figure to the Academy. Cultural studies looked at the canon as a specific social construction based on cultural privilege rather than on aesthetic merit, due to which Dylan's brilliance in songwriting became irrelevant (*ibid*). Nevertheless, the sociologist sees some progress in the study of Bob Dylan in recent years. Dylan has been analyzed within the interest in "traditional" musical genres like folk, blues and country, where he appears as a representative. There is also a recent development regarding aesthetic quality. The debates about differentiating between good and bad popular culture have enabled the publications of a number of single-artist studies within popular music, such as the *Cambridge Companion* in which Marshall publishes his text (108).⁵ Two historical coincidences determined the critical approach to Dylan's artistic production: Dylan's emergence on the scene in the period still marked by New Criticism's formalist scrutiny of the text, and Dylan's lowest artistic production being simultaneous with cultural studies' establishment as a strong discipline at universities.

Dylan often expressed his discontent regarding the way his songs were being analyzed. He writes in his memoirs:

The *New York Times* printed quacky interpretations of my songs. (...) For sure my lyrics had struck nerves that had never been struck before, but if my songs were just about the words, then what was Duane Eddy, the great rock-and-roll guitarist, doing recording an album full of instrumental melodies of my songs? (...) I was sick of the

⁵ Interestingly enough, as can be verified on the official webpage of the Cambridge Companion book series, *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* does not fall under the category of either music or literature, but under the series dedicated to philosophy, religion and culture. Under the category of music, The Beatles are the only ones analyzed among the single-artist studies within pop music, while all the other single-artist studies are dedicated to classical composers. This example also points to the problem of confining Dylan to either literature or music, and putting him under the category Philosophy, religion and culture could seem like taking the easy way out.

way my lyrics had been extrapolated, their meanings subverted into polemics (...).
(Dylan 119-120)

Dylan's lyrics became the focus of search for subliminal messages and hidden meanings, which had nothing to do with a legitimate critical analysis. As Michael Gray explains, there was confusion between critics and interpreters, the latter being interested in "the superficial message-hunting" and finding out what the songs were about, thus militating in favor of reductionism, none of which should appear in serious criticism (196).

Bob Dylan is not the only songwriter analyzed within academic circles from a literary perspective. One only need to type the names of other rock songwriters into academic databases to see that there is, for example, a similar approach to Leonard Cohen's songs, that scholars have analyzed Patti Smith's appropriation of Arthur Rimbaud and that articles have been published on the notion of class and the American dream in Bruce Springsteen's lyrics. However, Bob Dylan is the only singer-songwriter to have been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature from 1996 onwards, and was awarded with the Pulitzer Arts Award in 2008. In 2011, in the occasion of his 70th birthday, the English Department at the University of Bristol organized an academic conference entitled *The Seven Ages of Dylan*, where the UK's best Dylan scholars celebrated and discussed his career.

Popular music, from folk to rock, contributed to a shifting of the perception of what poetry was, detecting thus poets among musicians, with Dylan as the first and clearest example. Today's criticism tends to look at songs as a complex artifact made of lyrics, sound, voice and the *persona* of the musician performing his or her work. The recognition of this complexity brought on the awareness that non-verbal elements can also contribute to the interpretation of lyrics, just like the changes in musical influences and in the image of the performer. This is especially important for Dylan, an artist who has based his career on constant shifts in poetic

influences and musical genres, and on the transformations of his public image. His electric phase did not only concern the introduction of a band; symbolism started to dominate his lyrics and he switched a simple jeans-and-shirt outfit for a leather jacket and a pair of hip sunglasses. When it comes to musical albums, besides the audio recording, they contain pictures, images and, in Dylan's case, poems printed on the covers, which along with the lyrics form the whole of the album. Apart from the lyrics, the non-verbal elements as well contribute to the analysis of Bob Dylan's position regarding the Beat movement.

4 Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan as Poets-Prophets

Walt Whitman was the American poet that most distinctively shaped Allen Ginsberg. According to Raskin, Whitmanian elements are present in Ginsberg's poetry on many levels: on the level of form, Ginsberg took from Whitman the model of the long poem with long prose-like lines and transformed them into breath units; both poets wrote about themselves in the first person; Ginsberg shaped his animal howl on the example of Whitman's barbaric yawp; and they were both known for creating striking public *personae* of themselves (20). The most frequent and famous of Whitman's *personae* was that of the American prophet, a democratic poet "with no special status in a society that has transcended class distinctions, [who] must also inspire and instruct the people, awaken in them a sense of dignity and wisdom" (Pascal 48). When it comes to Ginsberg, Raskin identifies in the beatnik the qualities of the protean poet, due to "his ability to remain detached from any one fixed identity" (191). Ginsberg went from being a poet accursed by the bourgeoisie to becoming the poet scholar (199). But it was with *Howl* that he matched the immense *persona* of the American prophet (230). He inherited from Whitman the sense of being a chosen, sacred, blessed poet "whose vocation is to prophecy to America" and be messianic (R. Gray 301).

Nevertheless, when it comes to the motif of America, Raskin recognizes "a deep abiding sense of evil" in Ginsberg's poems that *Leaves of Grass* lacks. He believes that Ginsberg's America is a much darker and pessimistic nation than the one Whitman envisioned, and that in fact, Ginsberg wrote about the fall of Whitman's America and its democratic ideals, hence a sense of doom and disaster permeates *Howl* (21). In the poem "Howl" America is portrayed as a country of infernal cities dominated by darkness and machines. Here are some of the poetic images that describe it: "the starry dynamo in the machinery of night" ("Howl", 6), "the wartime blue floodlight of the moon" (134), "the tubercular sky" (143). Raskin explains:

“Unlike the writers of the American Renaissance of the 1850s – Whitman, Emerson – the writers of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance of the 1950s did not have a deep, abiding faith in American democracy” (*ibid*). While the Romantics idealized the new nation and its democratic beliefs, the Beats dealt with the aftermaths of WWII and the present threats of the Cold War, which epitomized the failed promises of American democracy.

In order to understand what Ginsberg’s America is like, it is perhaps appropriate to look at the poem “America”. Contrary to what might be expected from the title, Ginsberg does not glorify the nation; instead, the lyrical “I” makes numerous accusations through a series of questions in the form of a monologue. Its opening line illustrates the difficult and especially unfair relationship between the narrator and America: “America I’ve given you all and now I’m nothing” (1). The poet does not sustain from addressing directly what he perceives to be wrong with the nation: “America when will we end the human war? / Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb” (4-5). Nevertheless, we can see in the question about ending the war that America is not addressed with the pronoun “you”, but that rather the lyrical “I” is involved in the pronoun “we”. The poem contains two direct identifications between the narrator and America: “America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.” (17); and a more direct one in “It occurs to me that I am America. / I am talking to myself again.” (49-50). Richard Gray believes that these lines are exemplary of the poet’s capacity to be intimate, prophetic, comic and serious at the same time, and they also express his desire to celebrate and sing himself as a representative man (304). Raskin too states that this is Ginsberg’s way of becoming a Mr. America, the voice for the silenced nation. Here is the account of Mr. America:

My national resources consist of two joints of marijuana millions of genitals

anunpublishable private literature that jetplanes 1400 miles an hour

andtwentyfive-thousand mental institutions.

I say nothing about my prisons nor the millions of underprivileged who live

in my flowerpots under the light of five hundred suns. (53-58)

The national resources encompass loose lifestyle, censorship, technological power and institutions, while the underprivileged have no voice. The poet refers to his initial intention of writing a holy litany, but America prevents him from doing it: “America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?” (61). Instead, the poem becomes only a litany of complaints directed at America. While Ginsberg sees and shares with his readers the faults of the nation, the poet does not offer solutions; neither the personification of America nor the narrator answer the questions.

Like Ginsberg, Bob Dylan also sang about and to America, and his adolescence was shaped by the Cold War period. In *No Direction Home*, Dylan remembers how much in the 1950s the air raid drills and hiding under school desks created “a sense of paranoia”. In “Blowin’ in the Wind” Dylan places the narrator in a similar position to that of Ginsberg’s “America”. Each stanza contains three questions followed by the same closing couplet: “The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind / The answer is blowin’ in the wind”. Like in Ginsberg, one of the themes is war (“How many times must the cannonballs fly / before they’re forever banned?”) (5-6),⁶ but also freedom and equality of all men, which made this song an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement (“How many roads must a man walk down / Before you call him a man?”) (1-2). The repetition of the questions in each stanza builds the anticipation that the narrator will reveal the answer in the closing couplet, which he does, but it is no concrete answer at all. The answer exists and it is blowing in the wind, and this is

⁶ All the quotations from Bob Dylan’s lyrics are taken from the singer’s official website bobdylan.com and from here on will be followed only by the line number in parentheses.

stated as something obvious. Dylan constantly challenges his listeners to stretch their imagination, while refusing to provide easy answers. He challenges them to see what he means, but he is constantly abstracting the meaning and keeping it at a distance (Bulson 127-128). As Pascal explains, the poet-prophet differs from the religious demagogue in the subtlety with which he achieves his ends. While the latter tells the faithful what is good for them, the former's discourse has a characteristic obliqueness to it and an inclination towards imaginative uses of language primarily associated with poetry (49-50).

Another aspect that connects Ginsberg to Romanticism is the notion of the sublime. According to Quinn, the sublime is "a moment that jettisons personality and history in favor of vision of a reality that remains obscure in the everyday life" (193). Among American Romantic writers, Whitman most closely linked the sublime to the narrative of national fate (*ibid*). When it comes to Ginsberg, he reconfigured the relationship between the sublime and its ideological function by socializing and familiarizing it: "Friends, family and even the larger patterns of national fate are no longer abandoned by the rhapsode, but are imbricated within the very texture of his transcendental experience" (194). In "Howl" the sublime is replaced by an account of people who have experienced it, which results in a Whitmanian catalogue of characters who are seen by the rhapsode, but who are also experiencing the vision (195). The rhapsode sees those "who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels / staggering on tenement roofs illuminated" ("Howl", 10-11). In this way, Ginsberg avoids deploying his poetic powers to persuade the reader of his own *ecstasis* like Whitman did; he rather asserts the sublime by offering convincing portraits of those who experienced it. Their vicissitudes, some tragic, others ironic, are a result of their vision of the sublime (Quinn 195). The visionaries are those "who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the F.B.I. in beards and shorts / with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out / incomprehensible leaflets" (69-71).

In the opening line of “Howl” the lyrical “I” refers to his fellow-visionaries as “the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness” (1). Throughout the poem they become “angelheaded hipsters” (5), “visionary indian angels” (57), “saintly motorcyclists” (84), “human seraphim” (86). Solidarity between the narrator and the best minds is expressed already in the first line by stating their belonging to the same generation. However, a supposed solidarity persists throughout the first section of the poem in the reaction of the visionaries against the status quo, which in section two is embodied in the figure of Moloch (Quinn 195). The status quo is a blend of ruthless capitalism, asylums and advertising agencies:

who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze

of Capitalism,

.....

who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before

the machinery of other skeletons,

.....

who were burned alive in their flannel suits on Madison Avenue

amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron

regiment of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising

(73-74, 77-78, 143-145)

In the second section Moloch is “the sphinx of cement and aluminum” (221), a monster that personifies everything that is wrong with America – technology, money and war: “Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is / running money! Moloch whose

fingers are ten armies!” (232-233). In the third section the narrator moves from an observer to a participant, and he is thus more involved and implicated in the story (Raskin 156). The section is marked by the repetition of the verse “I’m with you in Rockland!” in which the narrator expresses a strong solidarity with Carl Solomon, “the archetypal American caught up in the madness of society” (Raskin 145).

Even though in “Howl” America is a nation of infernal cities, mental institutions, machinery and suicides, the poem’s deeper level is affirmative and there is a sense of joy, holiness and liberty (23). The closing stanza announces an angelic war that will destroy all forms of oppression and bring freedom. The lyrical “I” and Solomon will both “wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls’ airplanes roaring over the roof” (308). The airplanes have come “to drop angelic bombs” (310) and the prophet announces:

imaginary walls collapse O skinny

legions run outside O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal

war is here O victory forget your underwear we’re free (311-313)

This final, exultant remark illustrates Ginsberg’s capacity in combining humorous particulars of everyday life with the proclamation of the presence of the ideal. Religious intensity and wry realism both find their own place in the poet’s prophetic announcement (R. Gray 303).

The song with which Dylan attracted Ginsberg’s attention was “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”. The poet recognized in Dylan’s lyrics a very strong connection to his own generation of writers: “I heard ‘A Hard Rain’ and wept because it seemed that the torch had been passed to another generation from earlier, bohemian or beats illumination and self-empowerment.” (Ginsberg in *No Direction Home*) The poet saw in Dylan a descendant to his movement and a representative of the second generation of beats.

In “Hard Rain” Dylan again resorts to the typical question-answer form of folk ballads. The questions that open the first four stanzas inquire on the vicissitudes of the narrator, referred to as the blue-eyed son and the darling young one: where he has been, what he has seen and heard and who he has met. Like Ginsberg, Dylan depicts an infernal scene, only his is not an urban one. The singer resorts to a more classical image of the dark forest; the blue-eyed son has “stepped in the middle of seven sad forests” (“Hard Rain”, 5) and “been ten thousand miles in the mouths of a graveyard” (7). The inferno is filled with horrific emblems of war: “I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin’ / I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin’” (14-15). He encountered indifference: “Heard ten thousand whisperin’ and nobody listenin’ / Heard one person starve / Heard many people laughing” (26-27). He bumped into “a young child beside a dead pony” (34) and “a young woman whose body was burning” (36). In the song the answerer becomes somebody who has gone to hell and returned to retell the story (Epstein 33). The last stanza inquires on the intentions of the blue-eyed son. He is determined to go back once again before it is too late: “I’m a-goin’ back out ‘fore the rain starts a-fallin’ / I’ll walk to the depths of the deepest black forests” (44-45). What follows is another description of the inferno, this time a place of hunger and darkness: “Where hunger is ugly, where souls are forgotten / Where black is the color, where none is the number” (50-51). The song closes with the narrator’s promise to share his vision of truth with all the souls:

And I’ll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it

And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it

Then I’ll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin’

But I’ll know my song well before I start singin’ (53-56)

Ginsberg comments that he was “knocked out by the eloquence” of these closing lines and their resemblance to a biblical prophecy (*No Direction Home*). Epstein too interprets these verses as Dylan’s messianic purpose, in the poetic line that stretches back to Whitman, enriched with a touch of humor. Dylan identifies with Jesus standing on water; only he will at some point start sinking (33). “Hard Rain” was famously interpreted as a comment on the Cuban missile crisis and the threat of nuclear war. Dylan always rejected this interpretation, but he stated its prophecy: that something was going to happen (30). In “Hard Rain” the prophet becomes one with the vision he is to reflect from the mountain, avoiding in this way Ginsberg’s shared vision of “Howl”. Still, just like Ginsberg, Dylan too adds a touch of humor and irony to his annunciation. While Ginsberg will witness the presence of the ideal without his underwear on, Dylan will walk on water like Jesus to eventually lose this power and sink.

Dylan turned to Ginsberg’s shared vision in the song “Chimes of Freedom” from *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. While “Hard Rain” offered a more classical vision of hell, in “Chimes of Freedom” Dylan follows Ginsberg by placing his characters in an urban inferno: “In the city’s melted furnace unexpectedly we watched / With faces hidden while the walls were tightening” (9-10). Moreover, the narrator is not the only one who experienced the vision; he witnessed it with an undetermined and very generic “we” and he is reporting it. In this song sound and vision merge in the tolling of the chimes, which announce freedom for the downtrodden (Wilentz 72). The opening four lines set the mood and the tone of the song:

Far between sundown’s finish and midnight’s broken toll

We ducked inside the doorways, thunder went crashing

As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sound

Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing (1-4)

The following stanzas all return to the depiction of the vision as blinding lightning accompanied by thunder and the tolling of bells. This is followed by a catalogue of the underprivileged for whom the vision is meant. These are soldiers and victims of war, prisoners, lovers and artists, and in the second stanza there is also a group of marginalized similar to that of “America” and “Howl”: “Tolling for the rebel, tolling for the rake / Tolling for the luckless, the abandoned an’ forsaked / Tolling for the outcast, burnin’ constantly at stake” (13-15). In the following stanzas the bells of freedom are tolling also for “the mistitled prostitute” (30), “the misdemeanor outlaw, chained an’ cheated by pursuit” (31) and “for each unharmed, gentle soul misplaced inside a jail” (39). The song closes with a very general catalogue of those waiting for their freedom: “For the countless confused, accused, misused, stringed-out ones an’ worse / An’ for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe” (46-47). On the one hand the generic “we” suggests that there are numerous visionaries, and on the other, that the chimes are announcing freedom for the same types of characters voiced in Ginsberg’s poetry. Since it is not clearly stated who are those experiencing the vision, it could be speculated that there is an identification between the visionaries and the dedicatees, but Dylan keeps it ambiguous. Apart from adopting Ginsberg’s shared vision, Dylan abandons the typical question-answer form of folk ballads moving to more poetic forms and impressionistic imagery.

Ginsberg recognized already in Dylan’s folk phase a continuation to his own literary movement, especially in the songwriter’s exploration of the visionary mode of poetry. Dylan follows Ginsberg in revisiting the tradition by exploring the failed promises of the American dream and by being ironic about his own prophetic powers. As Dylan started to move away from the folk movement and write more impressionistic and intimist songs, he got closer to Ginsberg in inserting the shared vision and the urban inferno in “Chimes of Freedom”.

4.1 Dylan's Parody of the Poet-Prophet

While in the folk phase Dylan created in his songs the *persona* of the poet-prophet, with the electric shift he began to parody the same *persona* that made him famous. In his analysis of Dylan's transformations, Lebold states that the songwriter's success in making the audience believe in his prophecies was due to the use of invective, exhortation and general truth, accompanied by the motif of apocalyptic visions, which enabled Dylan to "rhetorically construct a posture of authority" (Lebold 66). However, the critic notices that every Dylan's mask, including that of the prophet, represents a moral or lyrical discourse that is later parodied and deconstructed, like in the example of "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35", the opening track on *Blonde on Blonde* (*ibid*). In this song Dylan plays with two meanings of the verb "to stone": to kill somebody by throwing stones at them and its passive form "to get stoned", as in being intoxicated by drugs. The public stoning occurs in very ordinary, everyday situations:

Well, they'll stone ya and they'll say that it's the end

Then they'll stone you and then they'll come back again

They'll stone ya when you're riding in your car

They'll stone ya when you're playing your guitar (19-22)

The passive form of the closing couplet of each stanza is closer to the slang expression: "But I would not feel so all alone / Everybody must get stoned". The evocation of the biblical image of public stoning is placed in casual situations, while the final comment that everybody must get stoned plays with the double meaning of the expression. While in "Hard Rain" the prophet ironically walked on water until he started sinking, in "Rainy Day Women" he is parodying a biblical image and, at first glance, inviting everyone to do drugs.

When it comes to music, we can hear what appears to be a drunken marching band, and Dylan himself adds to the inebriated atmosphere by laughing in the middle of the song. The musicians even literally deconstructed the musical tradition by swapping, disassembling and recombining instruments to produce a drunken stagger of a march, and thus a parody of a marching band (Coyle and Cohen 144). “Although the words would seem to be directing us to particular conclusions, the song as a whole undermines its own authority.” (147) In “Rainy Day Women”, the music adds another layer of parody to the “get stoned” expression which is not recognizable just by reading the lyrics.

The identity of the poet-prophet is just one of many Dylan’s *personae*. All of the identities present in his lyrics are engaged in a dialogue with Bob Dylan’s public *persona*, either by supporting, invalidating or parodying it. In this way the songs become also a means of constructing and deconstructing Bob Dylan, giving him an elusive and protean identity (Lebold 66). While in the folk phase the songwriter cultivated the image of the poet-prophet becoming a spokesman of a generation and the Civil Rights Movement, in the electric trilogy he moved away from it and parodied it, like in the example of “Rainy Day Women”.

5 The Vision and Language of “Howl” in Bob Dylan’s Electric Trilogy

5.1 The Beat Ethos in Dylan’s lyrics

In *Bob Dylan in America*, Sean Wilentz analyzes the interaction between Dylan’s song “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” and Ginsberg’s poem “Howl”. The song opens with the image of “darkness at the break of noon” (1). As Wilentz notices, Dylan takes the title of Arthur Koestler’s book *Darkness at Noon* and combines it with the syntagm “the break of dawn”, only he changes it by replacing “dawn” with “noon”. Moreover, darkness does not simply arrive; it breaks at noon, making it more sinister and scarier. Wilentz compares this image to Ginsberg’s “crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox” (“Howl”, 38), in which the poet substitutes “dawn” with “doom” to give the sense of an impending disaster (97). In addition, the critic states that the rest of the song explores very similar topics to those of “Howl”: “The hypnosis that is modern advertising, the fake morals that limit sex but bow down to money, the rat-race society that twists people into meanness and conformity: Dylan had written a song of Ginsberg’s Moloch, exposing the human corruption and self-delusion that had driven the best minds mad.” (98) Here is a glimpse of Dylan’s Moloch:

Old lady judges watch people in pairs

Limited in sex, they dare

To push fake morals, insult and stare

While money doesn’t talk, it swears

Obscenity, who really cares,

Propaganda, all is phony (84-89)

Apart from living in infernal cities, Ginsberg's characters experience "great suicidal dramas" ("Howl", 120). They "plunged themselves under meat trucks" (135), "cut their wrists three times successfully unsuccessfully" (140) and "jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened" (148). Even if the drug addicts, outlaws, criminals and depressives are not attempting suicide, they are still barely surviving. Ginsberg's characters cower, sink, fall to their knees and fade out; nobody seems to walk with a sense of dignity (Raskin 136). Dylan too resorts to death to make his version of Moloch darker. The closing stanza reveals that the vision is a dream; however, if the dreamer is to reveal his dangerous thoughts, he risks getting his head cut off: "And if my thought-dreams could be seen / They'd probably put my head in a guillotine / But it's alright ma, it's life and life only" ("It's Alright Ma", 102-104).

Wilentz also connects "Desolation Row" to "Howl". He explains that the song presents a carnival of "fragments, shards of a civilization that has gone to pieces, in a modernist tradition that runs from Eliot's *Waste Land* to Ginsberg's 'Howl'" (83). In "Desolation Row" he identifies a critique of any type of loyalty to fake illusions similar to those explored in "It's Alright Ma". "In all of its strangeness, the song mocks orthodoxies and confining loyalties of every kind – loyalties to religion, sex, science, romance, politics, medicine, money – which the singer has rejected." (Wilentz 84) Dylan introduces us to a restless riot squad ("Desolation Row", 9), Dr. Filth, his "sexless patients" and the nurse "in charge of the cyanide hole" (61-66), the agents and the superhuman crew that "round up everyone / that knows more than they do" (87-88), and insurance men who make sure "that nobody is escaping to Desolation Row" (95-96). In "It's Alright Ma" the songwriter presents us with a dark dream-vision of all the evils that in "Howl" are incarnated in Moloch. In "Desolation Row" Dylan depicts a world populated by characters that stand as metaphors for those same illusions and evils. According to Wilentz, a song like "Desolation Row" is a perfect example of how Dylan absorbed Beats

literary practice and sensibilities into his electrified music completing a merger of poetry and song (84).

Dylan did not only turn to Ginsberg's dark vision, he also recognized the more comical aspects of his poetry and of Beat writing. "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is perhaps the song that most distinctively linked the singer to the Beat Generation with its hint to Kerouac's novel and Ginsberg's presence in the promotional clip, which supported the premise that "Dylan took the aesthetic of *Howl* and set it to a rockabilly riff" (Yaffe 20). As the title indicates, typical beat subterraneans find their way in Dylan's lyrics. In "Howl" these characters are those who "hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the / supernatural darkness of cold-water flats" (7-8) and who hung around "storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon / blinking traffic light" (28-9). They may be suffering in infernal cities, but their vicissitudes are also marked by "comic realism and humorous hyperbole" (Raskin 169).

If we look at "Homesick Blues", the opening lines drag us in a chaotic world of underground activities that leave room for political commentary:

Johnny's in the basement

Mixing up the medicine

I'm on the pavement

Thinking about the government (1-4)

Among other characters we encounter "the man in the coon-skin cap / by the big pen" (15-16), Maggie, whose face is "full of black soot" (20), "users, cheaters / six-time losers" (47-48), and a "girl by the whirlpool" (50). The lyrics are addressing a kid, who is being warned throughout the song. The warnings include "bad puns, clichés and random maxims" (Yaffe 19). Dylan makes fun of apparently serious warnings by rhyming them with common objects:

“leaders” with “parking meters” (“Don’t follow leaders / Watch the parking meters”) (52-53) and “sandals” with “scandals” (“Don’t wear sandals / Try to avoid scandals”) (66-67). In addition, he depicts a conformist lifestyle:

Ah, get born, keep warm

Short pants, romance, learn to dance

Get dressed, get blessed

Try to be a success

Please her, please him, buy gifts

Don’t steal, don’t lift

Twenty years of schoolin’

And they put you on the day shift (54-61)

The images follow one another paratactically suggesting the automatism and conformity of actions that result in the dullness of the day shift. For those who have failed to adjust to this lifestyle, the army is always a way out (“Get jailed, jump bail / Join the army, if you fail”) (43-44). “Homesick Blues” explores Beat’s main themes. It presents us with the adventures of subterranean characters, while sarcastically commenting on conformity and “etching the myriad hypocrisies of the American dream” (Tamarin 133). Moreover, the chaos of the lyrics is supported by the fast electric beat, making “Homesick Blues” a rock protest song and an anti-authoritarian rap in one (*ibid*).

In “It’s Alright Ma” Dylan sketches all the evils of America that are in “Howl” represented in the figure of Moloch; in “Desolation Row” they are no longer abstract, but are embodied in the song’s characters. “Homesick Blues” abandons the dark vision and instead opts for a more

chaotic and comical representation of underground characters and activities, but still delineating the false promises of the American dream.

5.2 Ginsberg's Juxtaposition, Dylan's Wordplay and Defamiliarization

The Beat Generation followed Dadaism and surrealism in viewing society as suffering from a collective madness; therefore, they saw the need to free the mind from “the restrictions of logic, rationality, and conscious control” (Bigsby 42). “Howl” abounds in surrealist imagery when it comes to the characters’ vicissitudes (“who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death or / purgatoried their torsos night after night / with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares (...)”) (20-22), and to the critique of the restrictions of rationality (“Visions! omens! hallucinations! ecstasies! gone down the American / river!”) (255-256). In addition, Ginsberg follows the surrealists on the linguistic level in using juxtapositions. According to Richard Gray, juxtapositions are crucial, since they organize and sustain Ginsberg’s poetry (302). In the self-reflexive closing lines of the first section of “Howl”, the poet refers to those

who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images

juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual

images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of

consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens

Aeterna Deus (204-8)

By juxtaposing one word against the other, a gap is created between them. The gap’s aim is to simultaneously reach different parts of the mind and then join them together to create “a temporary suspension of habitual thought” (R. Gray 302). Ginsberg was inspired by Paul

Cézanne's post-impressionistic paintings; the poet's gaps between nouns, which he calls ellipsis, are equivalent to the painter's white spaces between colors (Jackson 304). An example would be "winter midnight smalltown streetlight rain" ("Howl", 62) in which Ginsberg joins elements that belong to the same visual plane, just like Cézanne juxtaposes colors creating a form that is not juxtaposed to any other form outside of the painting's general context (Jackson 307). The poet achieves density by deleting as many syntactic links as possible (313). Dylan resorts to juxtaposition to create the character of "the motorcycle black madonna two-wheeled gypsy queen" ("Gates of Eden"). The juxtaposed words are part of the same visual plane; however, unlike in Ginsberg's example, Dylan joins only two semantically connected "groups" of words in the ABAB form: "the motorcycle" is linked to the adjectival compound "two-wheeled", while "the black madonna" is related to "the gypsy queen". Dylan's example is simpler but similar to Ginsberg's juxtaposition in the density created from the lack of syntactic links.

Apart from Cézanne's paintings, Ginsberg was also influenced by surrealism. The effect of a surrealist juxtaposition is the following: "The confrontation of disparate ideas and words serves to break the analogical mode of the mind and liberate the imagination. (...) The more distant and just the relationship between these two conjoined realities, the stronger the image (...)." (Bigsby 61) To illustrate Ginsberg's usage of the surrealist juxtaposition, we can return once again to the syntagm "hydrogen jukebox". "Hydrogen" suggests politics and the bomb, while "jukebox" evokes music. Ginsberg joins images from very distant contexts to cause a surrealist shock (Jackson 309). In this way "hydrogen" and "jukebox" joined together become an infernal machine that reflects the age of mechanization and mass destruction (Raskin 160). The difference between a surrealist and a Cézanne-inspired juxtaposition is that the former combines words from very distant contexts, while the latter from the same visual plane.

Dylan also resorts to surrealism inspired by Beat wordplay (Wilentz 58). “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again” opens with the image of the ragman’s incomprehensible behavior pointing to one of the main themes of the song – the inability to communicate:

Oh, the ragman draws circles

Up and down the block

I’d ask him what the matter was

But I know that he don’t talk (1-4)

This is the first of many of the song’s disconnected visual glimpses in which the narrator is standing disconsolate, not able to discern any meaningful pattern and aware that there is no point in trying to communicate (M. Gray 644). In the following stanza the lyrical “I” would like to send a message to some French girl, “but the post office has been stolen / and the mailbox is locked” (14-19). Besides referring once again to the impossibility of establishing communication, these verses also indicate Dylan’s particular usage of surrealism in substituting the two subjects (it would be logical for the post office to be locked and the mailbox stolen). In another instance Dylan mixes up the direct objects: “An’ he just smoked my eyelids / An’ punched my cigarette” (29-30). The effect is one of confusion and dazzle. The sentences are comprehensible without the changes in perception; therefore, the reversal of words is more “a self-conscious manipulation of the surreal rather than an actual use of it” (Coyle and Cohen 146).

According to Coyle and Cohen, in “Most Likely You Go Your Way and I’ll Go Mine” surrealism functions on several ways simultaneously:

The judge, he holds a grudge

He's gonna call on you

But he's badly built

And he walks on stilts

Watch out he don't fall on you (27-31)

The image of the judge working a child's toy, apart from being humorous, suggests the artificial eminence given to such public servants. The internal rhyme "judge-grudge" serves also as a comment on justice. Moreover, Dylan again switches words: the quality of being "badly built" would be more pertinent to the stilts than to the judge's physique. Dylan's verses provide rich play and comment on justice without being directly didactic (Coyle and Cohen 146-147). In another example the songwriter inverts perception and sense by making the Commander-in-Chief state that "The sun's not yellow it's chicken" ("Tombstone Blues", 36) (Rodgers 28). While on the linguistic level Ginsberg resorts to surrealist juxtapositions, Dylan's verbal wit consists of switching words and inverting sense and perception creating the same effect of shock and dazzle.

Dylan did not only switch words with a dazzling effect, he also took well-known cultural images and defamiliarized them by putting them in completely new contexts. Michael Rodgers has analyzed how Dylan subjects his characters to transformation in "Desolation Row". The song does not only present us with characters that symbolize everything the Beat movement went against; it also depicts a phantasmagorical world characterized by "macabre defamiliarizations of normal activity" (Rodgers 24), the first of which can be found in the song's opening lines: "They're sending postcards of the hanging / They're painting the passports brown" (1-2). In addition, Dylan packs each of the ten twelve-line stanzas with cultural images, which are also defamiliarized and modified resembling a *horror vacui* (*ibid*). Nevertheless, Dylan avoids a simple enumeration; instead, the characters wear costumes and

are often disguised as other cultural figures (25). Cinderella “puts her hands in her back pockets / Bette Davis style” (“Desolation Row”, 15-16), Einstein is “disguised as Robin Hood” (49) and the Phantom of the Opera is “a perfect image of a priest” (76). Dylan takes existing preconceptions of cultural figures and transforms them into new characters, with all their precedent meaning, thus making hybrids of disparate *dramatic personae* in an entertaining and particularly defamiliarizing way (Rodgers 25). In the final self-referential stanza, the narrator admits that all these characters are “quite lame”, which made him “rearrange their faces / and give them all another name” (114-116). Dylan defamiliarizes cultural images by deliberately transposing them from their contexts.

In “Visions of Johanna” he takes the technique of defamiliarization onto another level:

But Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues

You can tell by the way she smiles

See the primitive wall flowers freeze

When the jelly-faced women all sneeze

Hear the one with the moustache say, “Jeez

I can’t find my knees” (31-36)

The cultural image in question is Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made *L. H. O. O. Q* (1919), a postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* onto which the artist drew a moustache and a beard with a pencil. As Rodgers analyzes, Dylan first introduces the original *Mona Lisa* joking about her enigmatic smile, turns to other exhibits of flowers and jelly-faced women, and then returns to the *Mona Lisa*, but this time it is not the da Vinci, it is Duchamp’s version. The apparently nonsensical reference to “the one with the moustache” who cannot

find her knees dies away when one remembers that the painting is a half-length portrait of the woman (22-23). This subtle allusion to Duchamp's work is a reworking of an already appropriated image, which allows "Dylan's *own* objective to be articulated through hybridizing or adopting two existing cultural markers and making something new" (23, italics in original).⁷ While Duchamp reworked the da Vinci painting by adding a moustache and a beard, Dylan made Duchamp's *Mona Lisa* come alive and comment on the pictorial representation of her own body. In "Desolation Row" the characters' metamorphoses are a defamiliarization of existing cultural images; in "Visions of Johanna" Dylan defamiliarizes Duchamp's painting that is already a defamiliarization of da Vinci's masterpiece. However, the difference between Duchamp and Dylan is that Dada ready-mades were anti-art gestures that rejected the achievements of the past mocking the idea of taste and form (Bigsby 34). Dylan's irony is more a postmodern one; he turns to Duchamp, da Vinci and other cultural figures without neither rejection nor nostalgia, but with an ironic detachment of resorting to them and making something new out of them.

When it comes to Ginsberg, he inserts a reference to Dadaism in "Howl": "who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently / presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with / shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide (...)" (176-178). The characters ironically throw the salad at their lecturers on Dadaism, performing thus a typical anti-art gesture that Bigsby interprets as an essential part of the movement (16). The image's comicality is lessened by the characters' subsequent institutionalization, which points to the theme of madness that connects the Beat Generation to Dadaism and surrealism. Both Ginsberg and Dylan ironically resort to certain aspects of the movement, only Dylan's

⁷ Rodgers also stresses the importance of a photograph on the back cover of *Blonde on Blonde* in which Dylan is holding a framed picture and a pair of pliers. The photograph suggests that the singer is about to change the original image with creative force. It is a pictorial metaphor for Dylan's appropriation and modification of cultural images present in the electric trilogy (23).

appropriation and modification of cultural figures is more elaborate and reflects the postmodern ironic approach to past.

5.3 Breath Unit

Ginsberg turned to Whitman's free verse to organize his poetry metrically; however, in doing it he was primarily focused on his breath. This became known as the breath unit and it meant drawing in breath and blowing out a phrase until a long line would come out (R. Gray 301). The idea was "to adapt poetry rhythms out of actual talk rhythms" (*ibid*). In fact, Ginsberg read his poetry at public readings, so the poems were primarily meant to be heard in public, instead of being silently read in private (Raskin 164). The poet refers to the breath unit and its effects by the end of the first section of "Howl":

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before
you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet
confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his
naked and endless head (209-212)

The breath unit is a poetic rendition of the "inferior" form of prose that mimics the flow of thought. It blurs the line between poetry and prose, since the long lines should give the look and feel of prose paragraphs (Raskin 185).

Ginsberg recognized the presence of the breath unit in Dylan's singing. In "It's All Right Ma" Dylan sings each stanza made up of short verses in one breath. While in Ginsberg's poetry the unit determines the length of the verse, in Dylan's song it organizes the length of the stanza. The poet saw Dylan perform at a concert in 1964 and recognized the singer's vocal ability as a continuation to his own poetic style: "What struck me was that he was at one, or

became identical with his breath. Dylan became a column of air so to speak, at certain moments, where his total physical and mental focus was this single breath coming out of his body.” (Ginsberg in *No Direction Home*)

Breath-based lines blurred not only the limit between poetry and prose, but also that between mind and body, an important dichotomy in Ginsberg’s poetry. “Howl” may open with and be dedicated to the best minds, but in “Footnote to Howl” the body becomes holy too: “The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! (...)” (3). Ginsberg stresses the importance of the balance between mind and body and its presence in Dylan’s singing. He says about “Like a Rolling Stone”: “Dylan puts his whole lung in one vowel: ‘How does it FEEL...’ – the whole body into it epitomizing a physiological vocalization that is the expression of the whole body, single body, single mind” (Ginsberg qtd. in Johnson 90).

Ronna Johnson explains that when reading aloud breath-based lines, their fusion renders the body a vibrating chamber making the unspoken word on the page as close to singing as it can get. Dylan successfully repeats this in the sung projection of the line and its propulsive musical backup (89). His leering moan in the chorus of “Memphis Blues Again” (“Oh, Mama, can this really be the end? / To be stuck inside of Mobile / With the Memphis Blues Again”) to Johnson is “an unalloyed abstract sound that overcomes an intended denotative sense” (90). In a song dominated by disconnected visual glimpses, the visual predominance dies away in the heartfelt cry of the chorus. We can picture the ragman of the first stanza drawing circles, but we do not imagine Dylan being stuck in Mobile, Alabama, we only see him pronouncing these words. Neither Mobile, Alabama nor Memphis, Tennessee form the visual language, they are merely abstract ideas (M. Gray 644).

Since Ginsberg's meter depends on the breath and his poems are meant to be read in public, the breath unit adds an oral dimension to his poetry, enabling Dylan to incorporate it into his singing. In this way Whitman's refusal of poetic conventions embodied in the free verse acquires a speech dimension in Ginsberg's poems to then enter the realm of music with Dylan. Furthermore, the breath unit blurs the mind-body distinction that in Dylan's recognizable singing style becomes a physiological vocalization expressing the unity of mind and body.

In this sense, the interaction between Ginsberg and Dylan does not stop on the level of textual analysis; the speech and abstract dimensions of Ginsberg's poetry find their way in Dylan's music.

6 Conclusion

In the first chapter of this paper I have given an overview of the Beat Generation and its relation to Bob Dylan's early career. Even though Dylan started as a folksinger, the Beat influence was immediately recognized, since the Beats and the folkies shared very similar political ideas and the same disdain for consumerism and conventional post-WWII norms. Among all the influences the Beat movement exerted on Bob Dylan, that of Allen Ginsberg is the most prominent and the most analyzed, and it was the topic of the last two chapters of this thesis.

Nevertheless, before venturing into the analysis of poems and lyrics, I considered it important to question the legitimacy of subjecting songs to the same type of scrutiny dedicated to poetry. Therefore, the second chapter gives a brief historical overview of academic approaches to Dylan's work, which went from formalist analysis to cultural studies' embrace of other non-verbal elements including photographs and poems printed on the covers, music, voice and Dylan's various *personae*. Today's critical approach to Dylan acknowledges the existence of intertextual links between the songwriter's lyrics and "highbrow" poetry, and it consequently finds the textual analysis legitimate. However, it also stresses the importance of non-verbal elements that contribute to the songs' interpretations. This is the stance that I followed in this paper, which can be seen in the interpretations of songs like "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues", and of the back cover of *Blonde on Blonde*. In the case of the first song, music adds another layer of parody not discernible from the text itself, while in the latter it supports the lyrics' chaotic imagery. The back cover of *Blonde on Blonde* functions as a pictorial metaphor for Dylan's defamiliarization of cultural images present in the lyrics of the electric albums.

The following two chapters analyzed the interaction between Ginsberg's collection *Howl* and Dylan's albums spanning from 1962 to 1966, more specifically, three folk albums and the electric trilogy. The third chapter analyzes the two writers as poets-prophets. Ginsberg followed in the footsteps of Walt Whitman, but he also distanced himself from the Romantic tradition by exploring the failures of the American dream, especially within the context of the Cold War, and by experiencing the vision of the sublime with his fellow-visionaries. In the folk phase, Dylan also cultivated the *persona* of the poet-prophet, and already at that point Ginsberg himself saw in Dylan a continuation to his own movement. Like Ginsberg's, Dylan's visions are infernal and at the same time ironical. Moreover, in "Chimes of Freedom" the songwriter resorts to Ginsberg's shared vision and marginalized characters for whom his impressionistic chimes of freedom are flashing. In this way, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* proves to be not only the transitional album between the two phases, but also the album with which the Beat influence becomes more prominent announcing the major influence in the electric trilogy.

The fourth chapter focuses on Dylan's three electrical masterpieces. When confronting it with *Howl*, I have concentrated on the presence of the Beat ethos in "It's Alright Ma", "Desolation Row" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues". The first song is a dream-vision of the evils that in Ginsberg are incarnated in Moloch, while "Desolation Row" presents grotesque characters that stand as symbols for those same evils. "Subterranean Homesick Blues", on the other hand, takes the more comical vicissitudes of Ginsberg's subterraneans, while still sarcastically commenting on the illusions of the American dream.

On the level of language, Dylan was inspired by Beat surrealist wordplay. Ginsberg formed his juxtapositions following the surrealists and Paul Cézanne, and it is the painter's influence in juxtaposing elements from the same visual plane that Ginsberg inserts in his poetry and that can be found in Dylan's character in "Gates of Eden". While Dylan does not

use surrealist juxtapositions like Ginsberg, he nevertheless switches words, inverts perception and sense with the intention of creating the same surrealist shock and dazzle.

When it comes to Dadaism, Ginsberg ironically inserts a Dada anti-art gesture, while Dylan takes it a bit further. He defamiliarizes well-known cultural figures in “Desolation Row” and Duchamp's ready-made of *MonaLisa* in “Visions of Johanna”. The latter example is Dylan’s defamiliarization of Duchamp’s defamiliarization of da Vinci’s original. The difference between the Dadaist and the songwriter is that Dylan does not show disdain towards the cultural images he changes and/or hybridizes; instead, his ironical detachment from history is more a postmodern one.

Finally, the last analysis focuses on Ginsberg's breath unit and the way the poet recognized it in Dylan's singing. The breath unit, as a continuation to Whitman’s long line, blurs the distinction poetry-prose, but it also has an abstract dimension. Since the poetry is based on the breath, the mind-body distinction is blurred too. Dylan successfully repeats it in the choruses of “Like a Rolling Stone” and “Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again” where his cries become physiological vocalizations of the unity of mind and body and pure abstract sounds that surpass the intended meaning of the sung words. This again supports the premise of the third chapter, according to which Dylan's lyrics are not just lyrics; they are songs, and the singing style, just like the music and other non-verbal elements, are not only crucial for a good analysis of Dylan’s work, but also, as in this case, they provide a link with Ginsberg and the Beat movement. This critical approach, in which I analyzed Dylan’s lyrics in relation to Ginsberg’s poems, grasps the complexity of Dylan’s albums and the range of artistic influences discernible in them, thanks to which Dylan still occupies a special position in music and popular culture.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show the connections between the Beat Generation and Bob Dylan's folk and electric phases, focusing mainly on the interaction between the songwriter's albums and Allen Ginsberg's collection *Howl*. In the analysis of the folk phase and the beatnik's collection of poems, the paper approaches the two writers' *personae* of the poet-prophet. Both Ginsberg and Dylan sang to and about the other side of American society within the context of the Cold War, and as Dylan started to move away from the folk movement, he got closer to Ginsberg's shared vision of the sublime and more poetic and impressionistic language. When it comes to the electric phase, the analysis includes the presence of Beat themes in Dylan's lyrics; the songwriter's turn towards surrealism and Dadaism that came through the Beat movement and that includes surrealist wordplay and Dada defamiliarization; and finally, the presence of Ginsberg's breath-based lines in Dylan's singing style. Moreover, the analysis of poems and lyrics is preceded by a brief overview of different approaches to Dylan's canon, which asserts Dylan's borderline position between poetry and music. The paper follows contemporary criticism's insistence on viewing Dylan's lyrics as songs, not poems, and its acknowledgment of other non-verbal elements present in the complexity of musical albums that must be taken into consideration when interpreting Bob Dylan's works.

Key words

Bob Dylan, Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg, poet-prophet, folk music, electric trilogy, surrealism, Dadaism, breath unit