

# Popular Aesthetics in Bob Dylan's Radical Lyricism

- “When William Shakespeare was writing his dramas, he didn’t know he was writing literature under any specific genre”.

From Bob Dylan’s banquet speech in Nobel Prize ceremony 2016.

When Dylan received Nobel prize for Literature, many critics raised the issue about him receiving the prize for Literature when he had essentially been a singer.

Dylan referred to Shakespeare thus and raised the question for all of us about the domain of Literature: What is literature? Has it to be in the written form only? Or in oral form? Or in lyrical form?

- Another question that Dylan's position raises is about the socio-cultural relevance of the Literature.
- Robert Allen Zimmerman, popularly known as Bob Dylan was born in 1941 in Minnesota, USA, is one of the popular folk singers. He was one of the central figures during the turbulent 1960's of America.
- He is the only laureate after G.B.Shaw, to receive both the Nobel and the Academy award, besides numerous others like President's medal of Freedom and Pulitzer Prize.

- Dylan's lyricism converges with the political and cultural movements of American 60's
- His radical lyricism brings light on civil right's movement, anti-Vietnam war campaign, the black power movement and counter-culture spirit.
- He articulated the vision of a society which was radically different from the existing socio-political milieu.
- Dylan stood for the folk culture that escaped the definition of 'culture' generally taken from the high/elite culture.
- Matthew Arnold, famous Victorian critic, talked of culture in terms of "the best that has been thought and said"
- F.R. Leavis, talked of "The Great Tradition" represented through the writings of Jane Austen, Shakespeare
- T.S. Eliot was also talking of high culture as "the only way of life" in "Notes towards the definition of the culture"
- In contrast, the idea of 'Lokpriya' as cultural motive was strengthened by radicals like Dylan.

- All his life Dylan ardently stood for the people's movement, however, by 1975 he fell into drugs and once used electric guitar in one of his stage performances to the outrage of his fans who viewed this as a part of getting co-opted by elite culture.

- Woodstock festival(1969): was celebrated for three days as a voice of people. It was a peaceful festival. More than 4 million popular figures attended to it. Resistance to the 'high culture' was voiced through it. Ravishankar from India participated there.
- 1960's that strengthened Dylan's voice was a turbulent time period when Student's Democratic society spoke in favour of Free speech.
- Obama regime can be taken as the reflection of such American vision and their dream.

- Dylan's songs were "finger raising point" songs.

- Race song :

Oxford Town, Oxford Town

Ev'rybody's got their heads bowed down

Sun don't shine above the ground

Ain't a-goin' down to Oxford Town

He went down to Oxford Town

Guns and Clubs followed him down

All because his face was brown

Better get away from Oxford Town ("Oxford Town." The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, Columbia, 1963).

# Anti-War songs

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?

And where have you been, my darling young one?

I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans

I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard

And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard,

It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall ("A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." The Freewheelin', Columbia, 1963).



# Anti-war songs

“Masters of War.”

You fasten the triggers

For the others to fire

Then you set back and watch

When the death count gets higher (“Masters of War.” The Freewheelin’,  
Columbia, 1963).

# Political songs.

- In “Farewell Angelina”, he openly declared his desire to escape from a society in crisis:

The machine guns are roaring

The puppets heave rocks

The fiends nail time bombs

To the hands of the clocks

call me any name you like

I will never deny it

Farewell Angelina

The sky is erupting

I must go where it’s quiet (“Farewell, Angelina.” The Bootleg series: Volume 1-3, Columbia, 1965).

# Political songs

- Dylan wrote a sweeping vision of alienated individual amidst a corrupt and dehumanized society in “It’s Alright Ma, I’m Only Bleedin’”. The refrain “It’s Alright Ma”, carried a sense of fragile defiance:
- I’m leaving town, baby
- I’m leaving town for sure
- Well, then you won’t be bothered with
- Me hanging „round your door
- Well, that’s all right, that’s all right,
- That’s all right now mama, anyway you do (“It’s Alright Ma, I’m Only Bleedin’”  
Bringing It All Back Home, Columbia, 1965).

Thank You