

# Dylan's Visions of Sin

CHRISTOPHER RICKS



An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

## Justice

### *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*

Many of Dylan's songs hinge upon the cardinal virtue that is justice ("cardinal" means pertaining to a hinge). The songs turn upon justice, while – in the opposing or oppositional sense of "turn upon" – they turn upon *in*justice. There can be no grosser injustices than those perpetrated by the law itself, by justices, and the most heartfelt of Dylan's remonstrations is *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*. It is a song that brings home the falsity of the boast – on this occasion at the very least – that "the courts are on the level". This is why the song has not only to level with us but to be unremittingly level in its tone, verbally and vocally. Well judged in its dismay at what had been so ill judged.

The deadly sin of the aggressor who killed Hattie Carroll was anger, impatience bursting into unwarrantable anger. He is "the person who killed for no reason / Who just happened to be feelin' that way without warnin'". The truthful surprise is the double sense of "without warning" – without warning to other people but also without warning (since anger suddenly erupts) to Zanzinger himself. Zanzinger's name just happens to contain, in sequence, *a n g e r*. But he could not contain his anger. The song (a triumph that must never sound triumphant) movingly resists temptation and is patient, containing its anger. Oh, the anger is there all right, but to be contained, to be held in check in contrast.

*The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* is the coinciding of a newspaper item with a cadence.

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll  
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger  
At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'

William Zanzinger, Hattie Carroll. The thing about those names – you might say that this starts as purely technical, but then, as T. S. Eliot said, "we cannot say at what point 'technique' begins or where it ends"<sup>1</sup> – is their

<sup>1</sup> *The Sacred Wood* (1920), preface to the 1928 edition, p. ix.

endings. What the killer and the killed have in common is that, in both their first names and their surnames, they've got feminine endings. She's Hátte Cárroll, where in both of her names the first syllable is stressed [Cárroll] and the last is unstressed [Carröll], and he's William Zanzíngər, where again his first name is stressed on the first syllable and where his surname, though it has the second syllable stressed, again has its last syllable unstressed. Dylan heard this, and the song is founded upon the particular cadence of their real-life names (except only that there should be a *t*: Zantzinger) and a real death.

It is a cadence that perhaps explains why Dylan wanted the word "lonesome" in the title, where it can evoke a contrast between the loneliness of dying, of her dying, and the crowded hotel ("At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'"). The word "lonesome" is not to be heard in the song itself, wisely, since there it might have invited a lover's complaint (within this particular song and its responsibilities, unlike in *Tomorrow Is a Long Time*, "lonesome would mean nothing to you at all"<sup>1</sup>), but the word does set a scene, or rather set a cadence: *The Lónesöme Déath öf Hátte Cárroll*.

The first line of the first verse begins with his name and brings her name to its end: "William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll". The second verse begins with his name: "William Zanzinger, who had twenty-four years".<sup>2</sup> The third verse begins with hers: "Hattie Carroll was a maid in the kitchen" and it ends (leading into the refrain) with his name: "And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger". The fourth verse, the final verse, closes the case: "William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence". In this final verse he had been, at first, "the person who killed for no reason". At this appearance in the dock, he was not named.

The double challenge to the song lay in its duty not to yield to the anger that had seized Zanzinger, and in its duty to resist melodrama and sentimentality. Dylan knows what he does in adopting this cadence. For the feminine ending naturally evokes a dying fall or courage in the face either of death or of loss, something falling poignantly away. This can be heard in Wordsworth:

The thought of death sits easy on the man  
Who has been born and dies among the mountains.  
(*The Brothers*, 182–3)

<sup>1</sup> In the love songs *Tomorrow Is a Long Time* and *Boots of Spanish Leather*, the word means much.

<sup>2</sup> Dylan sings "had"; as printed in *Lyrics 1962–1985* (1985), "at".

The móuntáins. And it's imperative that the thought of death not sit easy on the man who has been born and dies among the *hills*, rocks, crags, or any of those words. The masculine ending ("the man", as it happens) is in tension with the feminine ending ("móuntáins"). Not this:

The thought of death sits easy on the pèrsön  
Who has been born and dies among the móuntáins.

And not this:

The thought of death sits easy on the man  
Who has been born and dies among the hills.

What the voice has to do in apprehending Wordsworth's very wording, "Who has been born and dies among the mountains", is breathe life into the final syllable, as though it were a flag that will lapse into limpness unless it can be made to ripple out resiliently. The cadence will fall away unless the voice holds it up, holds it forth. The ending may choose to acquiesce, or it may resist: there is an axis, and the energies may run in either direction. These properties of language are like the paradoxical properties of everyday soap: the very thing that makes it so slippery when wet is what makes it stick so obdurately to the side of the bath as it dries.

In this cadence, Dylan fashioned his song, which is steeled and steely in support of "the gentle". From the start, he established this movement, inexorable in its sadness and in its curbed indignation. Duly monotonous, provided that we understand here what William Empson understood in the great double sestina of Philip Sidney: "The poem beats, however rich its orchestration, with a wailing and immovable monotony, for ever upon the same doors in vain."<sup>1</sup> Always, in the verses of Dylan's song, there is this last dying fall, a cadence that advances like nemesis. This is what Dylan hears from the beginning, having us not only hear it but listen to it.

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll  
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger

<sup>1</sup> *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930, second edition 1947), p. 36.

At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'

And the cops was called in and his weapon took from him

– where the fourth line is notably, differently, vivid, in bringing out that the feminine ending doesn't depend upon how many syllables there are in the closing word. It's not "his weapon took from *him*" (as against from someone else), it's "his weapon took *from* him", so that within "from him" the word "him", although it's a monosyllable, is a feminine ending, isn't where the stress is carried.<sup>1</sup> There is only one moment when this cadence of the verses is broken, and it's when he fells her. "Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane" – not "Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a trúnchëon":

Got killed by a blow, lay slain by a cane

That sailed through the air and came down through the room

– not "came down through the lóbbý" or "came down through the chámber". What happens in this terrible quiet moment is that there's an amputation, which is exactly understated and yet is registered. Something – a life – is cut short, curtailed by curt brutality, at that moment, and this without the song's having to melodramatize it. A cutting short of what had seemed an unchanging cadence: that will do it.

A cadence runs throughout the song. (Ah, but not quite so, for there is the refrain, for which we wait. And shall wait now for a moment.) There may be the effect of an internal rhyme (for there is no external rhyme, rhyme at the line-endings, in the body of the verses, as against the refrain), as when "Got killed by a blow, lay *slain* by a *cane*" comes back in the self-satisfaction of the judge: "he *spoke* through his *cloak*, most deep

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, in *Little Gidding*, II, has an alternation of feminine and masculine endings, arriving at the end of the seventh line at just such a monosyllable that is unstressed, a feminine ending ("sóund wás"):

In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent end of the unending  
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue  
Had passed below the horizon of his homing  
While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin  
Over the asphalt where no other sound was

and distinguished". That's the only other moment when you've got a line that has this form of internal rhyme, and it's the moment when the judge had better remember that he is there because a woman "lay slain by a cane" (there's very strong assonance as well: *lay / slain / cane*).<sup>1</sup>

Hattie Carroll has her enslaved rhyming – or rather non-rhyming, since a rhyme would offer *some* change in wording, some relief from monotony – of "the table . . . the table . . . the table" as the grim ending of three consecutive lines:

And never sat once at the head of the table  
And didn't even talk to the people at the table  
Who just cleaned up all the food from the table  
And emptied the ashtrays on a whole other level

She never appears by name in the final verse (but then he is not at first named there, though his turn will come), but she is still there, because when this verse begins –

In the courtroom of honor, the judge pounded his gavel  
To show that all's equal and that the courts are on the level

– *gavel / equal / level* must call us back not only to the word "level" from before ("And emptied the ashtrays on a whole other level"), but to everything that has sounded within "Carroll", "table", "table", "table", "level". That's her sound, that *-l*. And it goes with the "gentle": Zanzinger with his cane had been "Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle".

It's very brave not to mention her, or her name, at the end. It's not shrugging her off, it's shouldering what happened to her, and what then. For now it is too late. Now is the time for your tears. Or as he sings, "For now's the time for your tears". If I'd had the genius to come up with the song, I fear that – having sung "Now ain't the time for your tears" all

<sup>1</sup> Often noted in *Hattie Carroll* has been the spectral presence of Cain (identical with *cane* to the ear that hears, though not to the eye that reads): "slain by a cane". "To lay cane [*Cain*] upon Abel; to beat any one with a cane or stick" (Francis Grose, *Vulgar Tongue*). A rhyme is wielded in *Every Grain of Sand*: "Like Cain I now behold this chain of events that I must break", and Cain and Abel put in their appearance in *Desolation Row*. As for *Hattie Carroll*: "The table . . . the table . . . the table": does this *-able* prepare for the word that soon follows, "cane"? Cain and Abel, masculine and feminine endings.

the way through till now – I would have gratified myself emphatically by singing “Now is the time for your tears”. He doesn’t sing “Now is”, he sings “Now’s”. The contraction at the very end quietly takes out anything hotly hortatory.

The body of the song, the verse proper, refuses to rhyme (very unusually for Dylan); instead it has the different relentlessness of the gentle, there in the cadence with its feminine ending. But the refrain, the wheel, on the contrary is distinctly, bracingly, different: it is all masculine endings and it rhymes insistently: *disgrace / fears / face / tears*. There are two syllables to “disgrace”, but it’s not a feminine ending, not *disgrace* but *disgráce*. So whereas the verses all the way through possess unrhymed feminine line-endings, the clinching refrain doubly does the opposite – a refrain that opens with the effect of a tank turret turning in threat, an iron rhyme: “But you who . . .” This *you who* reminds me – and not as a matter of sources or allusions, but as an analogue, a place of power – of what Shakespeare does in the opening soliloquy of *Richard III*, when Richard has chafed at the many maddening obstacles to his murderous ambitions and then says, “Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace . . .” *Why, I*. Again, the menace, the turret turning; Dylan’s *you who*, this is the levelled gaze.<sup>1</sup>

There are the effects of rhyme, then, including internal rhyming – and including *not* rhyming when you might have expected it. (T. S. Eliot once said that punctuation “includes the absence of punctuation marks, when they are omitted where the reader would expect them”.<sup>2</sup>) But two things unexpectedly change in the final verse of *Hattie Carroll*. The first is the sudden outbreak of a grim rhyme, an off-rhyme: *caught ’em / bottom*. You haven’t heard anything like this before in the song, whether in the rhyming refrain or in the unrhyming verses.

Once that the cops have chased after and caught ’em  
And that the ladder of law has no top and no bottom

– this is sardonic, Byronic, and it is en route to the end of this last verse, *repentance / sentence*. This is the one and only full rhyme at a line-ending in any of the four verses, and moreover it is a disyllabic rhyme (as against,

<sup>1</sup> Like the sharp identification in *The Waste Land*: “You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!”

<sup>2</sup> A statement with Eliot’s recorded reading (1947) of *Four Quartets*.

say, *pence / hence*). The rhyme *repentance / sentence* is poised to lead into the full, the fulfilling, rhymes of the final refrain after this clinching ruling:

And handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance  
William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence

Unforgettably clear sense, this, while at the same time being tricky, hard to parse or to disentangle. “False-hearted judges dying in the webs that they spin” (*Jokerman*).

- The judge handed down a six-month sentence.
- The judge handed out to William Zanzinger a six-month sentence.
- The judge punished William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence.
- The judge came out strongly against William Zanzinger.

But he *handed out strongly* (for penalty and repentance) William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence? Any disingenuousness in this way of putting it is not to be laid at Dylan’s door. “The courtroom of honor”? Not so, Your Honor.

Dylan’s refusal to commit the sin that is Zanzinger’s anger – however much such righteous anger might have claimed to be all in the good cause of giving a bad man some of his own medicine – is audible in the exquisite self-control of the pause in the singing (the least of pauses and therefore the most telling) after the word “a”, in “with a [. . .] six-month sentence”. The temptation at such a moment must always be to luxuriate in indignation: “With a [*pause*: For Christ’s sake! Can you believe it?] SIX MONTH sentence!” All he does is just lengthen the toneless *a* [ə] to *a* [ei, as in *pain*], and then bide this micro-second of cold incredulity. Indignation may sometimes be a good servant but is always a bad master. Zanzinger should have curbed his temper; Dylan’s is the timing that can temper steel.

Tempered, and temperate (temperance being another of the cardinal virtues). For it is a mark of Dylan’s cooled control of this incendiary case that he watches his language. Aidan Day has said of Dylan’s “vehement moral sense” that it “cauterised white judges who handed out six-month sentences to white murderers of black kitchen maids”.<sup>1</sup> You can sympathize with

<sup>1</sup> “Do You Mr. Jones?” *Bob Dylan with the Poets and the Professors*, ed. Neil Corcoran (2002), p. 275.

Day's indignation (while glad that Dylan didn't yield to vehemence), but this is overheated, not only in its putting the case into the plural (judges? murderers? maids?) but in its unmisgiving use of a word that Dylan does not use: "murderer". Back at the time, *Sing Out!* used such terms ("She was murdered on February 8, 1963, by William Devereux Zanzinger"), though it did then acknowledge, even if reluctantly, that the court found him "guilty of manslaughter, dismissing charges of first and second degree homicide". The song rightly doesn't issue a ruling on this point. The police "booked William Zanzinger for first-degree murder", but the song, though it contests the sentence, does not contest the verdict. Far from weakening its cold contempt for the mildness of the sentence, this determination not to enjoy vehemence strengthens the contempt. It was a brutal indefensible killing, but you distort the horror of it all if you insist – without ever going into the evidence – that Zanzinger, in his drunken impatience, will have intended to kill her, that (and this is what we need to mean by murder) he murdered her. Dylan doesn't respect any such easy appeals to self-gratifying indignation. Think of what is going on in *Who Killed Davey Moore?* Of all the scoundrels with their excuses, the ugliest may be the gambler who bleats: "I didn't commit no ugly sin / Anyway, I put money on him to win". The boxer who killed Davey Moore is, horribly, both right and wrong in his defensive words: "Don't say 'murder'" – true, it wasn't murder in the ring – but "don't say 'kill'"? Don't say murder, *do* say kill. And don't, for Heaven's sake, go on, confident that this is the last word: "It was destiny, it was God's will".

The judge "handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance / William Zanzinger with a six-month sentence". Sentence and repentance were supposed to be how this case would close. The two words constitute an ancient rhyme, and they consummate Dylan's sentence. As with a prison sentence, there's a point of timing, of punctuation, here at the very end (which is then no end at all, given the perfunctory legal sentence). The Victorian book *Punctuation Personified* had characterized the full stop,

Which always ends the perfect sentence  
As crime is followed by repentance.

Would that this were not just a true rhyme but true. Dylan in a recent interview quoted four lines from Rudyard Kipling's poem *Gentlemen-Rankers*, among them "We are dropping down the ladder rung by rung". The ladder and lawlessness. The thought that comes in Kipling three lines

later, immediately after the lines that Dylan quoted, is "Our shame is clean repentance for the crime that brought the sentence".<sup>1</sup>

Words of clean truth, exactly timed and voiced, are Dylan's throughout this song. He can crucially pivot a line-ending into an immediate rhyme at the head of the ensuing line: "That sailed through the air and came down through the room / Doomed . . ." It's a sickening rotation-repetition. You think at first that it's Hattie Carroll who was doomed, but it wasn't, it was Zanzinger with his cane: ". . . Doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle". In some terrible way, Zanzinger, too, is doomed, isn't in control not just of himself but of his life. Yet part of the feeling in the word "determined" is that he does will it, too. This is Freud's antithetical sense of primal words. "Determined" means either that you didn't have any choice in the matter (determinism), or, on the contrary, that you've chosen (determined) it, chosen in a fury to destroy all the gentle.

*Richard III*, the opening soliloquy again:

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
I am determinèd to prove a villain,  
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

The repetition at the line-ending, *these . . . days / these days*, has a grating resentment (Richard the hunchback, a victim of bodily deformity who is on the offensive) that is the counterpart to the defenceless victim's grind in *the table . . . the table . . . the table*.

Or take the double negative in the line that immediately follows: "And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger". In its positive power to elicit a simple pathos, this reverts to a child's sense of injustice, of injustice perpetrated against the powerless. James Baldwin moved this terrible turn of phrase beyond any possibility of condescension to Black English in his play *The Amen Corner*.

Such a nice baby, I don't see why he had to get all twisted and curled up with pain and scream his little head off. And couldn't nobody help him. He hadn't never done nothing to nobody.

"And she never done nothing to William Zanzinger": it takes you right

<sup>1</sup> *Rolling Stone* (22 November 2001).

back to a time when you believed, or hoped against hope, that there surely must be somebody who would see to it that such things didn't happen. The sadness and pathos are on her behalf, but they touch us all.

All this, though, without that human illusion of feeling that is sentimentality.<sup>1</sup> The song opens with a line that takes a risk: "William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll". But "poor" is saved from any soft pity because it is hard fact. The word is compassionate but it is dispassionate, too, for it does not lose sight of the plain reality that she is poor. Zanzinger, on the other diamond-ring hand, is not poor. He has "rich wealthy parents". They're not just rich, and they're not just wealthy; they're rich wealthy. Superfluous? You bet. Wasteful? But not a word is wasted.

"Rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him". Parents provide. True. But parents also provide for you. (When you are a child . . .) No, no: his parents didn't just provide for him, they provided him. And yet in the eerie way that may be true of these rich families, he both is owned by his parents and owns them in his turn:

Owns a tobacco farm of six hundred acres  
With rich wealthy parents who provide and protect him

This doesn't say, as it might have said, that he is a man "With rich wealthy parents", but that he "Owns a tobacco farm . . . With rich wealthy parents".

Who provide him, not just provide for him? Some people say, well, that's just because Dylan couldn't get the word "for" in. But Dylan can always get into any line as many words as his art asks. Talk about Hopkins's sprung rhythm – this is more than sprung, it's highly sprung. When he sings "who provide and protect him", he means it. A poet, as G. K. Chesterton maintained, is someone who means what he says and says what he means.

"Provide" as against "provide for": a great deal may turn upon the unobtrusive difference between a transitive and an intransitive verb. The judge "Stared at the person who killed for no reason". There, one of the horrible things is that Dylan doesn't, as we might have predicted, call

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot: "Stendhal's scenes, some of them, and some of his phrases, read like cutting one's own throat; they are a terrible humiliation to read, in the understanding of human feelings and human illusions of feeling that they force upon the reader" (*Athenaeum*, 30 May 1919).

Zanzinger "the person who killed Hattie Carroll". (The cadence would have been fulfilled, after all.) No, it's just "who killed". Period. For no reason. Killed as though with no object. The verb "to kill" doesn't mind being, as is its right on occasion, an intransitive verb, flat, hideous, indifferent.<sup>1</sup> The converse is true of the telling indictment of "you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears". Whereas "criticize" is its usual transitive self, "philosophize", which is usually intransitive, turns transitive. Usually you just philosophize, that is it. You don't philosophize something. So Dylan's sense becomes: you who hold forth and who spin philosophical excuses for what is simply disgrace, you for whom it's easy to be philosophical about these things since they don't really impinge on your daily life.<sup>2</sup>

He has a tobacco farm; she empties the ashtrays. He has parents; she gave birth to ten children. "Gave birth to" is piercing (how many lived?). It just reminds you that if you're poor, the infant mortality rate does not favour you. Or if you're black. The song never says she's black, and it's his best civil rights song because it never says she's black. Everybody knows she's black and it has nothing to do with knowing the newspaper story.<sup>3</sup> You just know that she must have been black. But then you know that Zanzinger is white, though it never says this either. It's a terrible thing that you know this from the story, and from the perfunctory prison sentence, even while the song never says so. It's white upon black, it's man upon woman, it's rich upon poor, it's young upon old.

William Zanzinger, who owns things, had "twenty-four years". Hattie

<sup>1</sup> Pope opens his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* with a chafed impatience that immediately repeats an imperative through clenched teeth: "Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigu'd I said, / Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead, / The Dog-star rages!" The Dog-star isn't the only thing that rages. Pope seizes the difference between repeating, say, an intransitive verb such as "Go" (where you could just say "Go, go" without necessarily being impatiently maddened), and repeating a transitive verb. "Shut, shut" as though unable to wait even a second for the object: "the door".

<sup>2</sup> Dylan: "I don worry no more bout the no-talent criticsers an know-nothin philosophizers" (*For Dave Glover*, programme for Newport Folk Festival (July 1963); *Bob Dylan in His Own Write*, compiled by John Tuttle, p. 7). Pope, again in his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, sharpens the intransitive verb "hesitate" into a transitive: "Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike". You can hesitate, and you can intimate dislike, but can you "hesitate dislike"? If you are cold sly Addison, you can.

<sup>3</sup> Dylan in concert (New York, 31 October 1964), when saying something to introduce the song, had a nervous laugh and uneasy wording, as though (touchingly) in awe of the greatness of what he must have known he had created: "This is a true story, right out of the newspapers again . . . The words have been changed around. It's like conversation really."

Carroll "was fifty-one years old". It is the simple or even casual word "old" that underscores the difference of age, without underlining anything. We don't have to be implying that someone is old when we use the phrase "... years old", but we ought to register what happens when you set "twenty-four years" against "fifty-one years old".<sup>1</sup> And, given her life and livelihood, Hattie Carroll is likely to be old at fifty-one.

Or there is the way in which nouns are seen as property.

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll  
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger

It's not that he had a finger that had a diamond ring on it; he had a diamond-ring-finger. He may well have had, too, an amethyst-ring-finger, an opal-ring-finger, and a ruby-ring-finger. His diamond ring finger has this extraordinary feeling of affluent agglomeration. "At a Baltimore hotel society gath'rin'". Add up the nouns like that and you're really propertied. Nouns are items, and you can possess them, you can own them. It's partly, yes, the feeling of a newspaper headline, BALTIMORE HOTEL SOCIETY GATHERING,<sup>2</sup> but it's also the way in which the nouns can be felt to bank up so very very powerfully.

Powerfully, and with rich insolence. For William Zanzinger

Reacted to his deed with a shrug of his shoulders  
And swear words and sneering, and his tongue it was snarling  
In a matter of minutes on bail was out walking

Not walked out on bail but strolled out on bail: "In a matter of minutes on bail was out walking". One fine day. There you have it, leisure and freedom and amplitude. Meanwhile that "matter of minutes" anticipates another little lapse of time, that "six-month sentence". Such numbers are felt to figure all the way through, as with those twenty-four years and those fifty-one years old. Even the scale of the verses plays its scrupulous part. The verses build up. First, six lines plus the refrain. Then seven lines plus the refrain. Then

<sup>1</sup> There is this exchange with an interviewer: "Listen, how does it feel, Bob, when you're twenty-two years old and you go out on the stage at the Lincoln Center . . ." Dylan: "Old?" "Well you were twenty-two then." Dylan: "Oh yeah." (*Les Crane Show*, 17 February 1965; *Bob Dylan by Miles*, 1978, p. 24).

<sup>2</sup> The headline effect is there in the song from a newspaper report, *Talking Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues*.

ten lines plus the refrain. And then the same again, for there it must stay, on the same scale, no longer lengthening. The final verse, pronouncing the sentence of (and upon) this court, must not be allowed to trump the life of Hattie Carroll. The scales of justice must hold perfectly level the scale of the two verses, however disgracefully the court failed to be on the level.

*Hattie Carroll* is a supreme understanding of the difference between writing a political song and writing a song politically. T. S. Eliot knew, and practised, the difference between writing religious poems and writing poems religiously. It is good to be able to write religious poems, but the great thing is being able to write poems religiously, to have religion be not the subject of a poem but the element. *Hattie Carroll* is one of Dylan's greatest political songs, not so much because it has a political subject as because everything in it is seen under the aspect of politics. Truly seen so.

One would need many more words of appreciation than Dylan needed of creation to bring out the living perfection, four square and subtle, of this great song. What Dylan said of the album *Time Out of Mind* should no less be said of the song *Hattie Carroll*: "There's no line that has to be there to get to another line."<sup>1</sup> Yet sometimes he is too modest.

Y'know, every one of my songs could be written better. This used to bother me, but it doesn't any more. There's nothing perfect anywhere, so I shouldn't expect myself to be perfect.<sup>2</sup>

But here is a song that could not be written better. Something perfect everywhere.

<sup>1</sup> *Newsweek* (6 October 1997).

<sup>2</sup> London, April 1965; *Bob Dylan in His Own Words*, compiled by Miles (1978), p. 77.