the social roots of imagination

language and structure in bob dylan's "baby blue"

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Perhaps every generation has had its cult figures and subcultural heroes, its "prophets" who seem to embody the ethos of a newer age and who seem to help their followers define themselves in opposition to the past. Ironically, some of these generational heroes — Emerson, for example — eventually supplant their elders as symbols of established tradition. Others, like James Dean perhaps, never rise much above the visceral hoopla of their own popularity. But all of them enjoy their day in the limelight, stirring their followers to an adulation that puzzles and outrages their critics. One of the most recent generational heroes of major stature has been Bob Dylan, born Robert Allen Zimmerman, superstar of popular music in the 1960s.

To appreciate how Dylan's songs became anthems in what sometimes seemed a battle between generations, it helps to know a little of Dylan's rise to superstar's status. The son of a small town shopkeeper, young Bobby Zimmerman grew up in the Midwest, where one Sunday evening he sat fascinated in front of his parents' television watching the Ed Sullivan show while Elvis Presley outraged millions.[1] Soon afterwards, Zimmerman assembled his own rock 'n' roll band and scandalized Minnesota's iron miners and their children at Hibbing High School with his raucous imitations of Presley and Black rock screamer Little Richard. After enrolling at the University of Minnesota and seeing folk music sweep the campus, Zimmerman traded his amplified instruments for a folk guitar and harmonica, and taking the surname Dylan, he elbowed his way on stage at coffeehouses near the University, where he sang the standards of the folk music revival in a decidedly non-professional voice. But folk singers made reputations

in Greenwich Village during the early 1960s, and Dylan's ambition soon led him to perform at Village coffeehouses, where New York folk music fans enjoyed him almost as a camp performer, a living parody of a folk singer, with his tall tales, outlandish costumes, grating voice and ambition to become famous. Like many successful performers, Dylan seemed to intuit what would move an audience, and he seemed naturally to know how to shape his performance so it would play upon the concerns of his listeners. He grew well known in Greenwich Village as a singer and song writer in the folk tradition and soon recorded for Columbia, achieving his first commercial success in 1962 with "Blowing in the Wind."

Becoming an anthem for civil rights demonstrators and critics of the cold war, that song launched Dylan's career. In subsequent compositions, Dylan often borrowed melodies from traditional folk songs and wrote lyrics combining his narrative imagination with his understanding of the tensions young people felt between America's official ideals and its compromised social arrangements. Many of his songs told stories ridiculing cold war alarmists or lamenting injustices done to blacks and to the urban poor. Some of these songs drew their popularity from their explicit references to topical incidents that concerned Dylan's audience; others were narrative fantasies, performed in the folk style and just sufficiently based on topical themes to allow pacifists and integrationists to transfer some of their ardor from those issues to Dylan's fictional world. As a result, Dylan was adopted as a spokesman articulating the confusion and moral outrage of a generation beginning to see through the self-righteous nationalistic rhetoric that had filled the textbooks used in high school history and civics courses during the cold war.

Still hoping to become as famous as Elvis Presley, Dylan spoke to his young audience in songs that inflated normal adolescent problems into the themes of a home-grown *Sturm und Drang*. But his songs of adolescent pain and disillusionment touched a sensitive nerve in the American public of the 1960s. Dylan's albums became best sellers; his concerts drew fans by the tens of thousands; and other performers eagerly borrowed his material. Not only adolescents, but disaffected Americans of all ages heard in Dylan's songs not just another youngster coming of age, but the utterance of a "prophet," the "antenna of the age," as *Life Magazine* had it, broadcasting heavy metaphysical truths and profound cultural commentary. At least, some Americans heard that. Others heard only gibberish, an "existential wail" at best, accompanied by an insufferable instrumental clangor. And the more seriously Dylan's fans took his music, the more acidly his critics ridiculed it. Hoping to bring the work of their subcultural hero into the classroom, undergraduates asked to study Dylan's lyrics as they studied the verses of Thomas, Eliot and the poet darlings of the

previous generation. But scholars dismissed Dylan, muttering about shallow and pretentious commercial entertainers.

Why did some listeners hear profound truths in Dylan's music while others heard only noise and nonsense? To respond by speaking of a "generation gap" is only to rephrase the question, not to answer it. I believe the different evaluations of Dylan's music reflect more than the difference between youthful emotion and mature critical judgment. Perhaps anthropologists like Clifford Geertz and Alan Lomax can point the way to a more convincing answer.

In his essay "Art as a Cultural System" Clifford Geertz argues that members of any culture perceive the world around them with a "period eye."[2] This "period eye," according to Geertz, is a product of all the things a people engages in; it is a way of perceiving that develops from their activities in the areas of economics, religion, government and family life. It is with the "period eye" that we perceive works of art, just as artists create their works based upon what the "period eye" makes it easy for them to see and to express. As an example, Geertz describes how a fifteenth-century Italian merchant's skill of "gauging" sizes and volumes of commodities made him sensitive to questions of shape and volume that are especially important in understanding fifteenth-century Italian painting. The point of Geertz' explanation is that "art and the ability to perceive it are made in the same shop." This means not only that beauty is culturally relative, but more important, that an art work is significant or meaningful partly because it reminds an audience of its culture.

Alan Lomax anticipated this view in his book *Folk Song Style and Culture,* where he argued that

> song presents an immediate image of a culture pattern. A man's favorite tune recalls to him not only some pleasant memory, but the web of relationships that make his life possible. . . . Each performance is a symbolic re-enactment of crucial behavior patterns upon which the continuity of a culture hangs.[3]

Similarly, Victor Turner has described major historical events as "social dramas" in which participants symbolically re-enact patterns of behavior that have achieved the status of myth within the culture.[4]

Although Geertz, Lomax and Turner have done most of their research in non-technological cultures, their observations may apply as well to cultures like that of the United States. I would like to suggest that seemingly esoteric music like Dylan's can be accounted for by viewing musical performance as a transformation, or symbolic re-enactment, of a set of understandings about what behavior was appropriate for Dylan and his audience. In the musico-linguistic patterns of

Dylan's songs, his fans might have found analogues for the behavioral patterns appropriate for them in the American culture of the 1960s.

Dylan's 1965 song "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" appeared on *Bringing It All Back Home* (Columbia CS9128), an album in which he took stylistic and thematic leave of his musical past. Previously, Dylan had recorded mostly traditional folk songs and his own folk-styled creations, performing in a rustic folk manner and accompanying himself on guitar and harmonica. Even his own compositions dealt with traditional themes, or like hundreds of folk songs, they grew out of topical events important to his audience which consisted largely of civil rights activists, their sympathizers and critics of the cold war. In *Bringing It All Back Home,* however, Dylan not only forsook the traditional folk style in favor of amplified instrumentation and rock motifs, but he also abandoned his earlier concern for the social protest themes of more traditional folk singers like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez. Biographical information suggests that "Baby Blue" was written as Dylan's discouraged farewell to traditional music and to the sort of organized protest activism that folk singers promoted in the early 1960s. But whatever "Baby Blue's" genesis, it was surely as esoteric as the song's lyrics and could only be guessed at by Dylan's listeners. Many listeners refused to guess and dismissed the song as another piece of cryptic nonsense. To them, the song seemed little more than a jumble of incoherent images and trite aphorisms that failed to add up to a decipherable statement about anything beyond the violence and confusion of Dylan's emotions. But curiously, Dylan's fans did not seem disturbed by their ignorance of what "Baby Blue" meant to its creator; the song was avidly heard, re-recorded and played live by an army of week-end folk singers. To them, the song seemed to have a meaning transcending the narrow and esoteric circumstances of its creation.

In an article published in 1966, folklorist Ellen Stekert wrote that as Dylan "has progressed to the present his songs no longer have content, they simply have style. It is the Dylan style that is now doing the talking, not the content."[5] Although Stekert's article does not detail what Dylan's style was saying to his fans, scholars have long known that style, like form, may itself carry significant information. The most traditional explications of poetry have focused on those elements as much as upon content. And in "art song," musical style and form may carry an amount of information equal to or greater than that conveyed by the lyrics. Nothing prevents the student of popular culture from extending this traditional concern for style and form to the study of popular song. To discover how Dylan's fans could find meaning in a song that others dismissed as gibberish, we should look not at the song's words and imagery but at the syntactic/semantic/musical patterns underlying the words and images. These patterns are defined by meter, rhyme, melody and performance style as well as by the linguistic structures the words and images form. The song conveys

information not through conventional literary devices like imagery and metaphor, but by working a series of transformations on each of the musico-linguistic patterns established in the three couplets of the first verse. To illustrate all that would require an explication the length of which might give pause to Roland Barthes, but we can select a single couplet from the first verse, identify its syntactic/semantic/musical pattern and trace the transformations this pattern undergoes in subsequent verses throughout the song, arriving ultimately at some conclusions about what information these transformations might have conveyed to Dylan's audience.

"Baby Blue" falls easily into four verses, each having three couplets. For example, the first verse reads as follows:

> You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last.
> But whatever you wish to keep you better grab it fast.
> Yonder stands your orphan with his gun,
> Cryin' like a fire in the sun.
> Look out the saints are comin' through.
> And it's all over now, Baby Blue.*

In each verse, the second couplet stands out by its language, its musical features, and the way Dylan sings it. While almost every syllable is accented in the first couplet of the opening verse, the meter of its second couplet is regularly trochaic. Compare "You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last"* with "Yonder stands your orphan with his gun."* In each verse, the melody of the second couplet sounds noticeably lower than that of other couplets. It covers a smaller range of notes and has more measurable pitch changes than the melody accompanying other couplets. In addition, Dylan sings this couplet in a less strident, more relaxed manner. In other words, this couplet sounds more song-like than other couplets, which—except for the last line of each verse—sound more like chant. The last line of each verse—"And it's all over now, Baby Blue"*—repeats the song's title, forming an internal refrain that Dylan sings in the same way he sings the second couplet. The similarities in melody and performance style between this title-refrain and the second couplet of each verse give this second couplet special prominence in the musical design of the song. Thus because this second couplet calls attention to itself in so many ways, it will be the object of my analysis.

To illustrate clearly the quasi-structuralist method I'll be using, I'll look first at the second couplet of verse two. Here the "second couplet pattern" has already undergone its first stage of development and is moving toward the resolution evident in the last verse. The second couplet of verse two is

> The empty-handed painter from your streets
> Is drawing crazy patterns on your sheets.*

In most conventional literary criticism, all the adjectives, nouns and verbs in this couplet would be examined in search of analogues elsewhere in the poem. The images in these lines would be mined for their symbolic content, analyzed for themes and examined for their relationships to other images in this and other Dylan poems. Allusions would be identified. Conventional critics would maintain that the meaning of each word is vital to the point of the poem and critical debates would rage over the significance of "sheets." But very little of this sort of criticism is expended on Dylan's songs, and for good reason. Dylan's poetry is simply not well put together by most conventional standards; it lacks the consistency and internal relationships by which we perhaps discern meaning in most other poetry. For Dylan's poems, this kind of criticism is scarcely rewarding and almost unnecessary. As Dylan has said, "If you don't get it, you don't have to really think about it because it's not addressed to you."[6]

Despite Dylan's comment, his songs might reward a more formalistic kind of criticism. Critics of poetry have long agreed that atypical phrasing shifts attention away from "substance" and onto "form." Dylan's language is certainly atypical sometimes, but instead of the couplet quoted above, suppose he had written

> The skinny barefoot skater from your rink
> Is cutting figure threes inside your sink.

The couplet would have lost some "class," but I do not think Dylan's fans would claim that the meaning of the song had been destroyed or even significantly changed, for an important object of our attention — the couplet's form — has been preserved. The semantic pattern of Dylan's couplet, then, is that a person who has a skill ("a painter"*) but lacks the means to exercise it ("empty-handed"*) nevertheless practices a perversion of that skill ("draws crazy patterns"*) in a way that violates the privacy of the "you" to whom the song is addressed ("on your sheets"*). This semantic pattern is further reinforced by the couplet's syntax as well as by melody and performance style, which add connotative information. This connotative information arises partially from the low register melody, from the falling bass notes after the couplet's final line and from the minor chord struck when Dylan sings "empty-handed."* Although some of these musical features also occur elsewhere in the song, their juxtaposition in this couplet makes the music comment on the linguistic information, saying "Ah, it's a pity."

I believe that any couplet preserving these musico-linguistic patterns would function as well in "Baby Blue" as the couplet Dylan ac-

tually uses, for Dylan's deviant use of language shifts attention from "substance" to pattern as the main carrier of information in the song. Certainly, phrases like "the empty-handed painter from your streets"* could refer to many things and were open to a variety of interpretations by Dylan's fans. But perhaps the identity of the empty-handed painter is ultimately unimportant. I would bet that whatever idiosyncratic interpretations Dylan's fans might have brought to this couplet all preserved its basic musico-linguistic pattern, for that pattern may be communicating here on a more fundamental level than the words and images themselves.

To see the musico-linguistic pattern of this couplet as a transformation or symbolic re-enactment of approved behavioral patterns, we need only look at the social circumstances of Dylan's fans in the disaffected subculture of the 1960s. These were people with a boisterous commitment to humanistic political ideals, a commitment perhaps resembling a painter's dedication to his art. The skill of Dylan's painter, then, can be seen as a transformation of adolescents' ability to entertain humanistic ideals. Just as the empty-handed painter lacked the means to practice his skill, so Dylan's audience lacked the political power to exercise their ideals. And like Dylan's painter, they began applying their ideals in unorthodox ways, their "crazy patterns"* taking the form of sit-ins, demonstrations, the wearing of costumes and dropping out — all of which upset the complacency of middle-class adults engaged in private concerns. The music of Dylan's couplet suggests the sentiments expressed by thoughtful people: it was a great pity that such lofty ideals could not be realized.

The musico-linguistic patterns underlying this second couplet, then, can be seen as transformations into song of behavioral patterns important to Dylan's audience. Psychoanalytic critics might argue that the dedication of the painter to his art could correspond also to the normal adolescent's ambivalent desire to delay entering adulthood, to remain in a world of childhood exemption from the discipline of society, to remain as it were attached to the mother. The skill of Dylan's painter, then, would be congruent with the exemptions given to children. One exemption that might have been especially important to Dylan's fans is the child's exemption from responsibility for the hurts and injustices that are often the by-products of adult enterprise. Like the "flower children" of the later 1960s, many of Dylan's fans perhaps tried to retain a child-like innocence from the sins of society. But these young people were rapidly growing up; standing on the edge of adult participation in society, they were unable to continue exercising their child-like innocence, just as Dylan's painter was unable to practice his skill. In response, the most radical of Dylan's fans became drop-outs, forming communities in which they felt insulated from what they considered the morally less savory aspects of mainline society. Or they became radical activists, intent on lessening

the degree of social injustice even if it required resorting to violence. Either response can be seen as a "crazy pattern," as an attempt to extend childhood innocence in unorthodox ways. This reluctance to compromise childhood ideals can be seen as a transformation into moral terms of the child's reluctance to break ties to the mother. For a psychoanalytic critic, then, the musico-linguistic patterns underlying Dylan's couplet could appear to be a symbolic re-enactment of a famous psychological crisis: the child's ambivalent rejection of dependence upon the mother.

To see the couplet's structure as a transformation of social or psychological patterns familiar to Dylan's audience is not, of course, to argue that those lines from "Baby Blue" are "really" about social activism or about anyone's mother. It is only to suggest that, whatever the song is about, its message was cast in a form which itself was significant to Dylan's audience. And it may be because of this significant form that Dylan's fans were willing to look for meaning in a song that others dismissed as gibberish. Dylan's critics heard only noise and nonsense perhaps because the behavioral patterns symbolized in "Baby Blue's" structure were unfamiliar, inappropriate, and puzzling to them. Since their lives were structured differently, they could not recognize the structures that were speaking in "Baby Blue."

But "Baby Blue" not only presents significant structures, it also develops them, thus extending the song's ability to represent the behavioral patterns its listeners considered appropriate. A song as cryptic as "Baby Blue" no doubt received a number of idiosyncratic interpretations from Dylan's fans. One interpretation sees in the song's figurative language a warning to Baez and other protest singers that the heyday of folk-styled protest music was ending.[7] The Beatles had burst into the entertainment industry, popularizing another kind of music based partly on American rock 'n' roll of the 1950s and dealing with themes more general than those animating the folk music revival. The army of amateur folk singers who had followed Baez and Seeger was now beginning to play the new songs, leaving the folk style and returning "home" to the musical motifs, if not quite to the themes, of the rock 'n' roll they had enjoyed in the 1950s. In "Baby Blue" Dylan offers advice to Baez and other protest singers, telling them to leave the market for folk-styled protest music if they wished to keep their status in the entertainment world. Singers should consider topical music as a stepping stone that would lead the most vital entertainers to explore new musical styles and new themes that would be both more personal in application and more general in implication. The new music would be less concerned with strained relationships between social groups such as blacks and whites, workers and employers, and more aware of the everyday concerns of individuals coming to terms with their society, their culture and their own drug-enhanced consciousnesses. These were the themes that the Beatles began articulat-

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ing in songs like "Eleanor Rigby" and "A Day in the Life" and that Dylan incorporated into subsequent rock songs. They were soon among the most marketable themes of popular music in the later 1960s.

But most of Dylan's fans were not in the entertainment business; why should they applaud a song in which Dylan cryptically talks shop to his colleagues? Two answers suggest themselves. Fans who interpreted "Baby Blue" as a song about changing musical styles realized that more was at stake in the change than just musical style, for to "protest singers" of the early 1960s, merely singing in the folk style announced a moral commitment.[8] In the turn to folk values, disaffected young people were acting out their desire to escape the injustice and hypocrisy they perceived in mainline American society. Not only did folk values of simplicity and frankness contrast agreeably with the complexity and hypocrisy of middle-class society, but the folk — blacks and the urban poor — were not in a position to oppress anyone. Observing middle-class adolescents who had left their suburban homes to register black voters in the South or to live and work among the urban poor, Michael Harrington noticed that many young people

> identify precisely with the lumpen, the powerless, the maimed, the poor. . . . By going into the slums they are doing penance for the sins of affluence; by sharing the life of those who are so impoverished that they are uncorrupted, values are affirmed. It is honest, moral, and anti-hypocritical to be on the margin of society.[9]

Thus, the term "folk" in music assumed moral dimensions; it represented what was genuine, simple and uncorrupted. To sing in the folk style implied a concern for the poor and the oppressed and identified the singer as a soldier in a holy war to win liberty and justice for all. Similarly, for activists to abandon the folk style would amount to redrawing the battle lines in the moral war of the 1960s. In returning to rock 'n' roll motifs and to the more personal concerns associated with them, singers would imply that the significant conflict of the era was not between social groups, but between the individual and a culture that was beginning to seem increasingly incoherent. To the extent that Dylan's fans understood and accepted "Baby Blue" as a song about changing musical styles they perhaps indicated a new and more profound sense of the source of America's troubles in the 1960s.

But when "Baby Blue" was released, many of Dylan's fans across the country may have just been growing interested in folk music and just becoming sensitive to its themes. When they heard "Baby Blue," they may not even have known that Dylan was talking shop and announcing the end of the protest music subculture. Yet clearly, many fans found in the song profound personal truths and significant cul-

tural commentary. To see how a song as esoteric as "Baby Blue" might have spoken to a nation-wide audience of fans let's again look at the second couplet's underlying pattern, starting this time in the first verse and tracing the pattern's development in the second couplet of each succeeding verse.

The song's first lines assert that the listeners must leave some unspecified place and advise that they retain a part of what they will be leaving.

> You must leave now, take what you need, you think will last.
> But whatever you wish to keep you better grab it fast.*

Then in the second couplet, Dylan sings

> Yonder stands your orphan with his gun
> Cryin' like a fire in the sun.*

In this verse, also, I believe the specific imagery was less important to Dylan's audience than the couplet's underlying patterns. Civil rights activists had left their homes and self-righteously shunned middle-class society in an effort to put into practice the values they had learned there. In spirit at least, they had left their home culture and yet retained many of its ideals. In Dylan's second couplet, the "gun" can be an instrument by which an orphan becomes an orphan, just as the ideals of civil rights demonstrators were weapons with which they assaulted the complacent adult consciences of middle-class Americans. And the semantic pattern of the couplet's second line suggests the frustrating insignificance of reformers' spotty efforts to improve a culture in which prejudice and aggression were so powerfully institutionalized.

In the first lines of the second verse, the singer again advises listeners to retain a part of what has been left and hints at dangers to be encountered on the road.

> The highway is for gamblers, better use your sense.
> Take what you have gathered from coincidence.*

In this verse's next two lines, Dylan sings the couplet discussed early in the paper. If we look only at imagery in this second couplet, we see little connection between the orphan of verse one and the painter of verse two. But the underlying patterns of these verses show development from the paralyzed frustration of the crying orphan to the painter's desperate or "crazy" attempts to shake up the complacent privacy of his victim. This movement from frustrating ineffectuality to more desperate action clearly has analogues in the behavior of disaffected Americans, whose demonstrations became more belligerent and more

dangerous as the decade progressed. As mentioned above, the music adds its connotative commentary of pity to this semantic information.

In lines one and two of the third verse, the seasick sailors and empty-handed armies suggest defeat and flight.

> All your seasick sailors, they're all rowing home.
> And your empty-handed armies, yes, are going home.*

The second couplet of this verse also speaks of these themes:

> The lover who just walked out your door
> Has taken all his blankets from the floor.*

Again, there is hardly a connection between the images of the second verse's painter and the third verse's lover, but on the level of underlying structure there is a movement from attempts at desperate action to flight. The lovers of traditional American ideals, even in 1965 when the song was recorded, were already abandoning the fight to make those ideals operative in society. Dropping out was replacing sitting in, and the locus of confrontation was moving from lunch counters and school houses to Haight-Ashbury and the communes. For many people, flight had replaced activism as a way to deal with the contradictions of American culture.

In the second couplet of the final stanza,

> The vagabond who's rapping at your door
> Is standing in the clothes you once wore.*

This vagabond resembles disaffected Americans on the road, literally and intellectually, seeking realization of their ideals and searching for an acceptable relationship to American society. But the fact that this is a vagabond may be less significant than the vagabond's structural situation in the couplet; he is at "your" door, on the threshold. No one stays on a threshold for long; he either goes in or asks you to come out. Disaffected Americans were trying to do both. An "all-American generation" coming of age, they wanted into society, but since their consciences kept them from entering a corrupt system, they asked others to come out and work for change. The vagabond's familiar old clothes, however, suggest that the ideals of the 1960s radicals were not new and revolutionary but were instead the traditional American values they had learned as children from parents and teachers. Notions of individualism, human rights, equal access to property and faith in the possibility of new beginnings are values that Americans have always held and that our social arrangements have always failed to bear out completely. A new American revolution has seemed necessary whenever those values have been too grossly neglected. It has

always been a curious revolution, based not on new ideals but on traditional ones, and it is a revolution that has needed to occur again and again because it has never really succeeded. The couplet's semantic structure suggests this repetition, and the connotations of the couplet's music lament this seemingly endless cycle.

For Dylan, the way out of this cycle was to abandon social protest, to quit trying to tinker with the system. Thus he sings at the beginning of "Baby Blue's" last stanza:

> Leave your stepping stones behind, there's somethin'
>   calls for you.
> Forget the dead you've left, they will not follow you.*

In his subsequent rock songs, he turned from lamenting specific social injustices and, in songs like "Gates of Eden," tried coming to terms with all the cultural baggage that made the cycle spin. Many of Dylan's fans also abandoned their earlier belief that the system could be tinkered into perfection. Their exposure to racial prejudice and other social problems in the early 1960s had served as their "stepping stones"* to a more profound awareness of the malaise of American culture in the 1960s. In response, the most radical of Dylan's fans began calling for a major overhaul of American values, while others escaped the cycle by finding ways to accept or to ignore the imperfections of mainline society. The ambiguities of "Baby Blue's" final couplet allowed it to speak both to the most enduring activists in the protest movement, who were seeking ever more radical social change, and to the movement's drop outs, who were leaving the ranks of organized social protest to pursue more personal — and perhaps more easily attainable — goals in places ranging from communes to brokerage houses.

> Strike another match, go start anew.
> And it's all over now, Baby Blue.*

In summary, then, it is possible to see in the underlying musico-linguistic structures of "Baby Blue" a symbolic re-enactment of behavioral patterns that were important to members of the disaffected subculture. In each verse of the song, a significant structure undergoes a development corresponding to the progress of Dylan's fans as they looked for ways to understand their position in society. Perhaps the differing responses to "Baby Blue" reflect the reactions of differing groups of Americans who were more or less able to recognize and accept the cultural patterns symbolized in the song. To understand that, however, is not to argue that "Baby Blue" was "really" about American culture in the 1960s. The song may have expressed a specific and quite different meaning for Dylan and his friends, and it may

have meant many other things to Dylan's many fans. My point is only that, whatever "Baby Blue's" meaning, its underlying structures appear to be transformations into song of crucial social and psychological patterns. In that way, the song reflects the culture of its creator and his audience. The underlying structures also indicate how Dylan's style might have been conditioned by his culture, and they suggest how the imaginations of Dylan and his fans were related to the social circumstances in which they lived.

If the underlying structures of popular song reflect culture in this way, even the simplest musical entertainments are not trivial but may instead be vital carriers of culture, covertly expressing or communicating information by which listeners understand their relationship to American society. Structural features of country and western music, black blues and sentimental love songs, for example, may covertly help listeners develop attitudes toward general features of their culture. And structural changes, during times of stress, in the music of a social subgroup may reflect their members' changing understandings of self and society. To understand "Baby Blue" and other popular songs in this way is to understand how art or entertainment is created and perceived with a "period eye" formed in a cultural context of systemic understandings of self and society.

notes

1. Details about Dylan's life are taken from Anthony Scaduto's biographical appreciation *Bob Dylan: An Intimate Biography* (New York, 1973).

2. Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *MLN*, 91 (1976), 1473-1499.

3. Alan Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Washington, DC, 1969), 6, 8.

4. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithica, 1974), 98-155.

5. Ellen Stekert, "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement, 1930-1966," in *Folklore and Society*, ed. Bruce Jackson (Holboa, PA, 1966), 165.

6. Pearce Marchbank, ed., *Bob Dylan in His Own Words* (New York, 1978), 77.

7. Scaduto, 187, 214.

8. Stekert, 157.

9. Michael Harrington, "The Mystical Militants," in *Thoughts of the Young Radicals* (New York, 1966), 67.