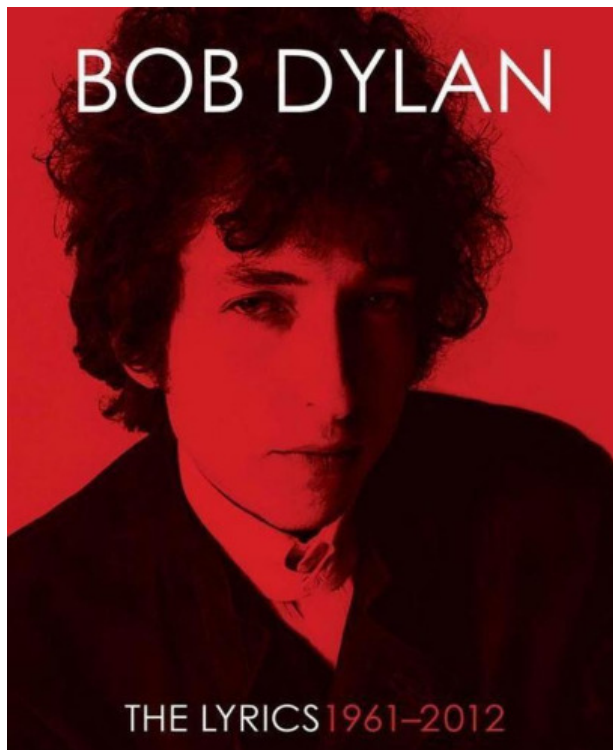


# A Masterpiece: Dylan's career not just 'Blowin' in the Wind'

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*"The Lyrics 1961-2012" by Bob Dylan. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016, 688 pages, \$60.00 (hardcover).*



*How many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind."*

If you do not recognize those lyrics, you have probably been living under a rock for most of your life. They are from "Blowin' in the Wind," the seminal folk song and civil rights anthem that was on Bob Dylan's second album, "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan." Released in 1963, it is just one of the 583 songs included in this 688-page behemoth, which weighs in at just under 5 pounds. It is important to note that the book consists entirely of song lyrics – there is no introduction, no context, no chronology (except for the sequencing of the songs themselves) and no commentary of any

kind, which is classic Dylan. The entire narrative – from beginning to end – is made up of song lyrics, although reproductions of his original handwritten or typed lyrics, several vintage photographs and album artwork and even some of his infamous drawings and paintings are featured as you progress through his immense catalog.

As most connoisseurs of popular music are very aware, Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman on May 24, 1941, and took his professional name from Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet and writer perhaps best known for "Do not go gentle into that good night." Dylan has been an American icon pretty much since he burst on the music scene back at the beginning of the 1960s. Wildly influential in a variety of artistic circles, he has been a mainstay in pop culture for more than five decades. Everyone, it seems, has been touched by his work in one way or another. Certainly, without Dylan, groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and The Who might never have achieved their lofty place in the musical and societal pantheon.

To date, Dylan has released 36 studio albums that have sold more than 120 million copies globally. It is important to note, however, that the official canon does not include the countless bootleg albums, tapes and CDs that have also been marketed through the years. The present volume is unabridged; it includes the lyrics to every song he has ever released. Given his vast and unparalleled talent, however, it would be naïve to assert that "The Lyrics" is an all-inclusive archive of every song he has ever written. Like many artists of his stature, we can rest assured that "new" recordings

and writings will be released for decades to come, especially when he eventually shuffles off this mortal coil as we all must do at some point.

In addition to his selection for the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature, President Barack Obama awarded Dylan the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. His honors also include induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame, the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame. He has 12 Grammys, an Oscar, and a Golden Globe. In 2008, the Pulitzer Prize jury noted “his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power.” Moreover, he was named MusiCares Person of the Year by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 2015.

As you may recall, not everyone was enthusiastic about his selection for the Nobel Prize. “Bob Dylan is a genius, and for his genius, he’s been rewarded in every way; with fame, money, acclaim,” Stephen Metcalf noted in his blog at Slate.com. “He deserves all of it, but he doesn’t deserve the Nobel. It may be that Dylan’s claim to posterity will be larger than Murakami’s or Roth’s (or Wilbur’s or Didion’s), but that isn’t what is at issue in awarding the highest prize in literature to a pop musician. The objection here hinges in the definition of the word literature. You wouldn’t give the literary prize to an economist or a political saint. You shouldn’t give it to Bob Dylan.”

I wholeheartedly disagree with Metcalf and all those who disparage Dylan’s selection for what is arguably the most prestigious honor in the world when it comes to ideas expressed in written form. There is an elitism at work here that reeks of intellectual political correctness run amok. The basis for my argument rests almost solely on what is found between the covers of “The Lyrics.” Even though most songs are brought to life through a sacred marriage between words and music, Dylan’s genius is self-evident – even without the corresponding sound track – on virtually every page. Just consider the following excerpt from “Tangled Up in Blue,” a personal favorite from “Blood on the Tracks,” which Dylan released in 1975:

*“I lived with them on Montague Street  
In a basement down the stairs  
There was music in the cafes at night  
And revolution in the air  
Then he started into dealing with slaves  
And something inside of him died  
She had to sell everything she owned  
And froze up inside  
And when finally the bottom fell out  
I became withdrawn  
The only thing I knew how to do  
Was to keep on keepin’ on like a bird that flew  
Tangled up in blue.”*

If you have ever experienced a moment like Dylan describes in this masterpiece, then you know exactly why he deserves the Nobel Prize and any other accolades that come his way. The man understands what it’s like to be human, and he knows how to convey the emotion that lies within us all in a unique and visceral way. As an artist, musician, poet, philosopher, dreamer and truth-seeker, he truly is in a class all by himself. If you are a lifelong fan, “The Lyrics” is a must-have addition to your collection. If you want to know more about who Dylan is and why he is so revered by many of us, this book would be a great place to begin your enlightenment.

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