

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Bob Dylan and John Lennon are two of the most influential figures in popular music history. Dylan is arguably the twentieth century's most important singer-songwriter. His works have been covered more often than any other solo composer, and sales of his records put him comfortably in the thirty most popular performers in United States' history. Lennon was founder and erstwhile leader of the Beatles who remain, by some margin, the most covered songwriters ever and all-time top-selling popular music entertainers worldwide (Clark, 2020; Hamlin, 2015). While Dylan erased the boundary between poetry and popular music, Lennon and his group entirely transformed the genre's creative potential. Each artist challenged the restrictive social norms of their day and asked profound moral questions about what it means to be human and how we should live.

This book compares Dylan's and Lennon's output and legacy in four areas: their own relationship, their politics, their appreciation of history and their deeply held spiritual beliefs. It draws on the work of two notable Marxist scholars, sociologist R. Serge Denisoff and cultural theorist Fredric Jameson, plus recent research on the evolutionary psychology of faith by J. Anderson Thomson and Clare Aukofer. It offers a new explanation of the differences in Dylan's and Lennon's approach to protest music, explores the postcolonial legacy underlying much of Lennon's distinctive imagery and the historical basis for Dylan's romantic attraction to nature, and closes with a groundbreaking analysis of their spiritual convictions. In so doing, it reveals their shared enthusiasm for best-selling conspiracy theorists, their emphatic disavowals of human evolution and a 'lost' co-written song that never actually existed . . . but can now be heard on Spotify.

A great deal of literature already exists on Dylan and Lennon as individuals. The earliest publications were biographical accounts, although the last two decades have seen some excellent monographs incorporating

a variety of academic approaches.¹ A comparative study by Ian Inglis (1996b) drew useful parallels between Dylan and the Beatles, but until now no one has considered the specific correlations between Dylan and Lennon. Chapter 2, ‘Dylan, Lennon and Dual Biography’, introduces Eloise Knapp Hay’s (1984) concept of dual biography and explains why Dylan and Lennon are such appropriate subjects. It examines their known meetings, intertextual references, reciprocal influences and other forms of interaction. As the dual biography unfolds it elicits findings that a study of each performer alone could not disclose. The cultural mythology around their fleeting encounters, such as when Dylan apparently introduced the Beatles to marijuana or when Dylan and Lennon filmed a *cinéma vérité* scene together, demonstrates the symbiotic nature of their ongoing relationship.

Chapter 3, ‘Dylan, Lennon and Anti-War Protest Music’ uses a modified version of R. Serge Denisoff’s (1968) Marxist analysis of class consciousness in protest music to explain the differences in Dylan’s and Lennon’s anti-war output during the Vietnam era. It synthesises this with Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison’s (1998) theorisation of the ‘movement artist’, offering new explanations for the divergence in Dylan’s and Lennon’s outlook. Dylan’s initial period as a peace campaigner was surprisingly brief, lasting for just over a year, at which point he turned towards more ambiguous anti-war lyrics. Meanwhile, at the height of the Beatles’ international popularity, Lennon began to advocate for universal love but was gradually drawn into militant revolutionary politics. Their work traced a mirror image, just as Dylan retreated from the role of movement artist, Lennon enthusiastically embraced it.

Chapter 4, ‘John Lennon and History’ and Chapter 5, ‘Bob Dylan and History’ examine Dylan’s and Lennon’s conspicuous and copious allusions to events, characters and literature from the past using a framework inspired by the Marxist historiography of Fredric Jameson (1981). They reveal the similarities and dissimilarities between Dylan’s and Lennon’s worldview, and show how each artist’s appreciation of history informed their work. Dylan’s romantic attachment to nature has parallels with nineteenth-century New England transcendentalism and was rooted in his Midwestern upbringing on the Minnesotan Iron Range. Lennon’s colonial nostalgia coincided with the Beatles’ propulsion to international

¹ Examples include Boucher and Browning, 2004; Elliott, 1995; Frontani, 2009; Hersch, 1998; Hislope, 2018; Hollingshaus, 2013; Inglis, 2000a; Mäkelä, 2004; Marshall, 2013; Meisel, 2010; Schneider, 2008; Sullivan, 1995; Womack, 2009; Womack and Davis, 2006; Zak, 2005.

stardom during the dissolution of the British Empire, and was further complicated by his predilection for transgressive humour – which included ironic Nazi salutes before vast open-air crowds and acts of grotesque mimicry while performing onstage. Each chapter explores the basis of Dylan’s and Lennon’s historical awareness and their response to cultural tensions that arose at the end of the post-war economic boom.

Chapter 6, ‘Dylan, Lennon and Spirituality’ uses J. Anderson Thomson and Clare Aukofer’s (2011) meta-analysis of the evolutionary basis for faith to compare Dylan’s and Lennon’s supernatural beliefs. These manifest as profound spiritual convictions that resisted the conventional strictures of mainstream religion. Their similarities and differences demonstrate, once again, how dual biography elicits outcomes that a stand-alone individual assessment cannot produce. Dylan and Lennon, widely regarded as innovative mavericks, were both active participants in thought-reform movements on at least one occasion. Each also, at different times, identified with the figure of Jesus Christ so completely that this transformation in their private disposition became conspicuous in their public lives. As the first study of its type, this chapter demonstrates the potential for further interdisciplinary research between popular music scholars and evolutionary psychologists.

To paraphrase David McCullough (2017) history explains *who* we are, *where* we are and *why* we are the *way* we are – and this theme threads through every section of this book. What follows is structured sequentially around three pivotal moments in social discourse over the last half century, each almost twenty years apart. Denisoff’s research documented changes in protest music that he observed during the 1960s. Jameson theorised the relationship between global capitalism and postmodern culture as it materialised during the early 1980s. The evolutionary analysis of faith was J. Anderson Thomson and Clare Aukofer’s contribution to ‘New Atheism’ in the first decade of the 2000s – almost thirty years after Dylan’s conversion to Christianity and what Paul McCartney later called Lennon’s ‘martyrdom’ (Hawksley, 2015). As the work moves forward through time its focus pulls gradually outward: from the acute political difficulties caused by an unjust imperialist war, across the broad historical underpinnings of twentieth-century capitalism, then wider still to encompass the entire pre-history of humanity. Our story begins, however, with the relationship between two individuals whose output shaped Western popular music for a generation.

CHAPTER 2

*Dylan, Lennon and Dual Biography***Introduction: Dual Biography**

Bob Dylan and John Lennon certainly share *something* in common, they are the two most thoroughly examined figures in popular music's canon. Arguably, little remains to be written about them as performers, recording artists and songwriters. As one author asked in his opening sentence: 'Why on earth would anyone need another book about the Beatles?' (Stark, 2005: 1). Dylan, too, has acknowledged this glut of literature:

Everybody knows . . . there's a gazillion books on me either out or coming out in the near future. So I'm encouraging anybody who's ever met me, heard me or even seen me, to get in on the action and scribble their own book. You never know, somebody might have a great book in them. (Dylan, 2011)

One unexplored concept is dual biography: the itemisation and analysis of similarities and differences in the life and work of two related artists. What follows synthesises Eloise Knapp Hay's (1984) method with Ian Inglis' (1996b) work on Dylan and the Beatles. It expands and updates existing research, and provides a framework for discussing other correlations between Dylan and Lennon. Hay (1984) demonstrated the scholarly possibilities for dual biography in her essay on Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster. This drew on Friedrich Schlegel's notion of two writers who inform each other's work to such an extent that, once this association is recognised, any singular account of their lives becomes inadequate. She concluded that Kipling and Forster present an ideal comparison because only by studying them together can we fully understand each as an individual:

The two writers . . . may be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic figures. Each of their biographies is incomplete without the other; both our criticism and our biographies of each would profit greatly if we could set

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them in a single focus ... By analogy we should arrive at the word 'Symbiography', following Schlegel's hint about two German writers when he said, 'Wieland and Barger [together] would make one good poet'. Similarly, one might say, Kipling and Forster together would make one good novelist. (Hay, 1984: 124–5)

Hay compared Kipling's poem 'The Ballad of East and West' (1889) and the denouement of Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) as 'scenes that speak to each other in their writing' where 'a man of the West rides forth into an allegorical Indian landscape with a fellow horseman, a man from the East' (Hay, 1984: 130). While Kipling's characters meet as enemies but part as friends, Forster's protagonists were not able to reconcile their differences – which leads Hay to ask how Schlegel's 'symbiography' might explain 'why Kipling's men can shake hands but Forster's cannot?' Hay, 1984: 130).

Although relatively underused in academia, dual biographies date back to Plutarch's Greco–Roman *Parallel Lives* and are common in commercial publishing. Popular examples include Kenneth Marc Harris' *Carlyle and Emerson* (1978) and Allan Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin* (1993). Some notable figures such as Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln even have multiple dual biographies (Contosa, 2008; Lander, 2010). The format gradually gained traction in popular music with Stephen Citron's (1996, 2001, 2005) dual biographies on Broadway composers and David Browne's (2001) monograph on Jeff and Tim Buckley. More relevantly David Boucher (2004a) compared Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen as rock poets, Wade Hollingshaus (2013) analysed the performance styles of Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie, while Andrew Muir (2019) explored the parallels between Dylan and Shakespeare. Peer-reviewed journals sometimes offer musicological comparisons too. Examples include Greg Clydesdale (2006) on the Beatles and Brian Wilson, John McMillian (2013) on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Ian Inglis (1996a) on Elvis Presley and the Beatles and Albin Zak (2005) on Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix.

An obvious criticism of the dual biography format is its resemblance to Thomas Carlyle's (1841) 'great man' theory of history. What follows, however, is not a tale of heroic accomplishment or leadership. It is intended more as a framework to contextualise two flawed individuals who became influential songwriters. The works cited above do all happen to discuss male subjects – as, of course, does the rest of this book – but it is also worth noting the growing range of dual biographies about women. Recent examples include Clare Mulley's (2017) account of Hanna Reitsch and Melitta von Stauffenberg, two female test pilots of the Third Reich,

and Lindy Woodhead's (2017) work on Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein. Interestingly, a prominent academic dual biography from Yale University Press compares male and female political figures from Napoleonic France – Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël (Winegarten, 2008).

Dylan and the Beatles: Mutual Approbation, Balanced Reciprocity

The remainder of this section expands on Ian Inglis' (1996b) work on Dylan and the Beatles, then focuses on Dylan and Lennon's cultural correlations and personal encounters to explain why they are best suited for a dual biography. Inglis unpacked the musical and professional commonalities between Dylan and the Beatles using two concepts. *Synergy*, from business studies scholar Yoneji Masuda (1990), showed how individuals achieve shared goals more effectively by acting together; *balanced reciprocity*, from anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972), analysed common ideals, professional interactions and mutual approbation in relationships.

Inglis began by cataloguing similarities and intersections in Dylan and the Beatles' formative years. All were born in the early 1940s and raised over the ensuing two decades in relatively unfashionable and unsophisticated industrial regions. They shared similar rock and roll influences – they were all fans of Buddy Holly and Little Richard, for example – but they were equally inspired by different musical traditions, too. For Dylan these included country artist Hank Williams and folk singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie; for the Beatles, trad jazz and skiffle performer Lonnie Donegan, music hall artist George Formby and BBC radio's *The Goon Show*. Dylan and the Beatles each built loyal local followings in New York and Liverpool, respectively, before attaining national international success in 1963–4. Their parallel careers allowed for numerous interesting coincidences and historical ironies, including the occasion of their first British radio exposure. Dylan's earliest airplay in the UK was his recording of 'Freight Train Blues', played on the BBC Light Programme's *Twelve O'Clock Spin* on 30 October 1962. The Beatles' debut BBC appearance was their single 'Love Me Do', broadcast on the same show the following day (Lewisohn, 2013).

Mutual approbation and *balanced reciprocity* became an important factor as Dylan and the Beatles' public renown mushroomed (Inglis, 1996b). Interviews such as this 1965 exchange between Dylan and a British journalist are typical:

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‘Would you say the Beatles are your biggest unofficial press agents in this country?’

‘Gee I don’t know. I hope so’.

‘They have done an awful lot of good, Bob, over here in the last nine months. Talking an awful lot about you to the trade press and so on’. (Dylan in Jarosinski, 2006: 128)

The Beatles’ most consequential public advocacy for Dylan was their 1965 ‘Beatles Say – Dylan Shows the Way’ *Melody Maker* interview with Ray Coleman, which helped trigger what Robert Shelton (1986: 288) called ‘Dylan-mania’ across the UK. Two years later his portrait from the cover of *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) was included on the *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) artwork. Dylan featured prominently in the image, staring down directly at the viewer from the top right corner of the sleeve. Other than ‘WELCOME THE ROLLING STONES’ embroidered on the Shirley Temple doll’s sweater and the cut-out of Dion DiMucci from Dion and the Belmonts chosen by Peter Blake, he was the only contemporary musician featured. The omission of other key influences – from Elvis Presley and Little Richard to Lonnie Donegan, George Formby and Bert Weedon – perhaps indicated Dylan’s importance to the band at this time.

While the Beatles helped promote Dylan in the UK, he, too, remained an advocate for them in American and British media. ‘Oh, I think they’re the best’, he told *Melody Maker* in 1965 (Jarosinski, 2006: 119). A decade later, in 1976, Dylan commented: ‘America should put up statues to the Beatles. They helped give this country’s pride back to it. They used all the music we’d been listening to, everything from Little Richard to the Everly Brothers. A lot of barriers broke down, but we didn’t see it at the time because it happened so fast’ (Jarosinski, 2006: 523).

Dylan had various connections with each member of the Beatles but shared an enduring friendship with guitarist George Harrison. Like Lennon, Harrison made key contributions to the band’s catalogue that betrayed his own profound fandom. His autobiography *I Me Mine* (2004) also revealed Dylan’s *Blonde on Blonde* (1966) as the only western pop record he carried on the Beatles’ visit to Rishikesh, India in 1968. Later that year Dylan and Harrison co-wrote ‘I’d Have You Anytime’ when the guitarist visited Dylan over Thanksgiving. In May 1970 they recorded together in Columbia Studio B, New York. Harrison also facilitated two of Dylan’s rare live appearances around this time: the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival and the 1971 Concert for Bangladesh in Madison Square Garden. Dylan and Harrison subsequently teamed up with Roy Orbison, Jeff

Lynne and Tom Petty for the Traveling Wilburys, and Harrison played lead guitar on the title track of Dylan's *Under the Red Sky* (1990).

Ringo Starr is the only other ex-Beatle to have recorded or performed with Dylan; each has appeared on singles released by the other and they have appeared onstage together several times. Dylan and McCartney's relationship remains the most equivocal of the three. His famous 1966 remarks disparaging the Beatles' 'smoothness' were directed specifically at McCartney compositions 'Michelle' and 'Yesterday' (Shelton, 1986). McCartney has worked with numerous well-known artists over the years but never collaborated with Dylan. A brief period of press speculation in 2009 inspired conjecture about how Dylan's dry vocal style might compliment McCartney's melodicism, much as Lennon's had done decades earlier, but this collaboration now seems unlikely to materialise.

For a list of the documented interactions between Bob Dylan and John Lennon see Table 2.1. A comprehensive timeline of Dylan's and Lennon's lives, works and interactions is mapped alongside the important cultural and political events of their day in Appendix 1: Detailed Chronology. An account of Dylan's relationship with Harrison, Starr and McCartney including their interactions, recordings and performances is also provided in Appendix 2: Bob Dylan and the Beatles.

Table 2.1 *Known interactions between Bob Dylan and John Lennon*

1964	
17 May	London: Lennon sends a supportive telegram to Dylan at his first UK concert at the Royal Festival Hall.
28–9 August	New York City: Dylan meets the Beatles at Hotel Delmonico, and again the next day. Dylan takes Lennon for breakfast in Greenwich Village.
20 September	New York City: the Beatles play Paramount Theater, attended by Dylan and his manager Albert Grossman, who then accompany the band to the Riviera Motel near John F. Kennedy Airport prior to their flight home.
1965	
9 May	London: the Beatles see Dylan play the Royal Albert Hall, then visit him at the Savoy Hotel. Lennon publicly defends Dylan's decision to stay at the Savoy.
15–16 August	New York City: the Beatles play Shea Stadium. They are visited by Dylan at the Warwick Hotel after the show and again the following day.

Table 2.1 (*cont.*)

	1966
26–9 May	London: Lennon and Harrison attend Dylan’s Royal Albert Hall concert. Lennon visits Dylan at The May Fair Hotel. Dylan visits Lennon’s house, Kenwood, in Surrey. They are filmed in Dylan’s limousine the next morning.
	1969
30 August	Isle of Wight: Lennon and Ono travel to the Isle of Wight and meet Dylan in rehearsal at Forelands Farm.
31 August	Isle of Wight: Dylan performs at the Isle of Wight Festival watched by Lennon and Ono, George Harrison and Ringo Starr.
1 September	Dylan visits Lennon’s new house at Tittenhurst Park, Berkshire, but declines to play on ‘Cold Turkey’.
	1971
9 October	Syracuse, NY: Dylan attends the opening of Ono’s <i>This Is Not Here</i> at Everson Museum of Art and contributes a guest work of art (a copy of his Nashville Skyline album).
November	New York City: Dylan, Lennon, Ono tour Greenwich Village.
	1972
January	New York City: Dylan visits Lennon in the studio as he is producing David Peel and The Lower East Side’s album <i>The Pope Smokes Dope</i> and hears ‘The Ballad of Bob Dylan’.
	1974
31 January	New York City: Lennon and Ono see Bob Dylan and The Band perform at Madison Square Garden.
	1980
December	New York City: Dylan visits Ono after Lennon’s assassination.

Dylan and Lennon, 1964–1966

Hay argued that dual biography is most useful when a simultaneous examination of two artists contributes to a better understanding of their individual work. In this sense, as founder and erstwhile leader of the Beatles it is Lennon who provides the most obvious counterpart to Dylan. Their noticeable aesthetic and cultural correlations were immediately apparent. Noted musicologist Wilfred Mellers (1974: 163) regarded Lennon’s ‘achievement as an Englishman’ as ‘collateral with Bob Dylan’s as a white American’. Elsewhere, Lennon was described as ‘Dylan’s English reflection’ (Aronowitz, 1994: 49), Dylan’s ‘principal rival’ or someone ‘born half-American’ (Goldman, 1988: 43) – just as Dylan was perceived as ‘a semi-Brit’ (Silverton, 2011). Michael Gray (2008: 41) noted the pair’s

obvious stylistic resemblances: ‘as the most acerbic Beatle, John was the one regarded as most similar to Dylan’.

Dylan had infrequent personal contact with Lennon but their few documented meetings generated considerable interest. Some, such as their introduction in New York’s Hotel Delmonico in 1964 or Dylan and Lennon’s limousine journey through London in 1966, have attained legendary status. Most scholars of mythology, from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978) to Karen Armstrong (2004), view history and legend as two honest attempts to interpret past events and distinguish the latter by its lack of written records. Dylan and Lennon’s rare interactions have become mythologised by precisely this process: as culturally significant but unreliably reported encounters where the hazy remembrances of those present became magnified and misremembered in the re-telling, then consolidated in published biographical accounts.

Their correspondence began in May 1964, three months *before* they met in person, when Lennon reached out to congratulate Dylan on the occasion of his first major London concert. According to Dylan’s biographer Howard Sounes (2011a: 191): ‘Lennon found time to send a telegram saying they wished they could be at the Festival Hall. Unfortunately, they had a filming commitment.’ In fact, Lennon was *not* filming. He was on vacation with Harrison in Tahiti at the time (Goodden, 2014g). Nevertheless, when Dylan read the message backstage during his show’s intermission, it attracted great interest from those present: ‘Oh Man! That’s pretty neat’, exclaimed his friend John Bucklen – who also recalled that Dylan himself was more sanguine: ‘pleased, but not impressed’ (Sounes, 2011a: 191).

On 28 August 1964 Dylan and the Beatles finally met face-to-face at the Hotel Delmonico, New York City. ‘john lennon goovy also ringo’ Dylan wrote in a letter to his friend Tony Glover soon after their encounter (Brinkley, 2020). It is now, of course, best known in rock folklore as the occasion Dylan introduced the band to cannabis. Dylan and Lennon’s entourage, which included journalist Michael Aronowitz, personal assistant Peter Brown and press officer Derek Taylor, portrayed this as a defining moment for both artists: ‘a friendship instigated and pursued through mutually admired recordings *made flesh through marijuana and the sacred exploration of deepest inner space*’ (Taylor, 1987: 92, *my italics*). In truth, this was *not* the first time Lennon had experimented with the drug. Cavern Club DJ Bob Wooler remembered the Beatles bringing marijuana back from