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"How Many Times..." Rhetoric and Aesthetic Qualities of Repetition in Dylan's Song *Blowin' In The Wind*

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**Abstract:** The widely known song "Blowin' In The Wind" by Bob Dylan holds meaningful repetitions that reveal different hermeneutical viewpoints and diverse other topics not discussed yet. This academic study begins with the idea that the perpetuation of the artist is conducted by three key elements: authenticity, repetition and reproduction, which are fundamental issues that determine his musical manners. The last aim of this study is to give an explanation of how the artist gets involved in the popular music industry while he maintains his authenticity through an innovative use of repetition on stage. For that, this research will situate the song in the American music tradition and define the singular connection of the singer-songwriter with his audience, as it can be concluded from his use of repetitive patterns in songs. The final point of this article will focus on the song analysis and with that, it will reach some conclusions after the study of repeatability and recurrence in the original record (1963). Such conclusions have a relation with the effort of the artist to preserve his authenticity in life and art managing both sides –romantic or traditional and modernist or experimental– as it is explained by theorists like Keir Keightley (2001). Additionally, it provides other ideas and interpretative resources about Dylan's creations.

**Keywords:** song, repetition, music, poetics, reproduction, authenticity

Mara GONZÁLEZ

## "How Many Times..." Rhetoric and Aesthetic Qualities of Repetition in Dylan's Song *Blowin' In The Wind*

### O. Introduction

Bob Dylan wrote the song "Blowin' In The Wind" around 1962, but it was not recorded until 1963 in Columbia Records Studios, New York City. John Hammond produced the whole album, and it was titled *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. To this date, this song has been played live 1,290 times around the world (19 of them in Spain) becoming the 5<sup>th</sup> song most played live by the singer and his changeable band members<sup>1</sup>. There exist more than thirty-five different versions of this song by other artists. In concrete terms, the trio Peter, Paul and Mary recorded it and the song won the # 2 position in the Billboard pop charts of 1963 and spent five weeks atop the easy listening chart<sup>2</sup>.

"Blowin' In The Wind" (1963) is a popular song, which means it belongs to that imprecise and broad category of Popular Music. In this article, the leading definition of Popular Music is the one provided by Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman in *American Popular Music*, as it "indicates music that is mass-reproduced and disseminated via the mass media; that has at various times been listened to by large numbers of Americans and that typically draws upon a variety of preexisting musical traditions." (2006: 2)

This article adds to song-analysis a comprehensive view of its poetic and musical forces or its "musematic and semantic" qualities (Tagg, 2012: 252) by looking at performances. Specially since every song depends on being rendered by the artist. Performances occur during a certain time span and, albeit being recorded, they live in present time. That is why processing them may carry all our attention. If they were comparable to verbal forms in the English language, they would be like "ing" forms in as much as their elements are synchronic, volatile and none of them can function as a separate unit. That is why musical notation or the written lyrics cannot produce the same aesthetic and emotional effect over the listener. Rather, all the elements that are in play during the moment that the song is performed have something to bring to its analysis, whether it is for practical, hermeneutical or musicological reasons. Since Performance studies appeared at the end of the XXth Century (Middleton, 1990; Frith, 1996; Keightley, 2001; Bowden, 1982; etc.) –with the late success of Popular Music and Media Studies– this interdisciplinary article will also gravitate around Bob Dylan's original performance of the song "Blowin' In The Wind" (1963). Thus, the important thing here is to defend that there is an internal harmony between music and words in performances, which is partly provided by such structural and aesthetic element as repetition and recurrence. The use of this element strengthens the communicative and emotional relation that Dylan's songs produce in the audience.

For example, he maintains the cadence of his "protest" song when he deliberately needs the length of those repetitive patterns to retell a true story, like that of the Carroll case that he read about in the newspaper, on August 29<sup>th</sup> 1963. Plus, when he replaces the chorus for a refrain that is modified depending on the previous stanzaic content, like it was done in "Visions of Johanna" (1966), "Ballad of a Thin Man" (1965) or "Gates of Eden" (1965), to number a few. This is not an exclusive thing of Dylan, there is a tendency in blues to prolong the first eight bars of a sixteen bar blues (instead of the standard twelve bar

<sup>1</sup> According to the Tour Set List for each year that appears in the official website ed. Sony Music Entertainment, <<http://www.bobdylan.com/us/events>> last retrieved 10/12/15

<sup>2</sup> Data provided by the historic charts of <<http://www.billboard.com>> last retrieved 09/12/15

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blues) during which the beat is suspended, to focus attention on the singer's voice. This is called "stop-time" (Starr and Waterman, 2006: 42) and it is a recognizable pattern that puts the musical accompaniment in service of the voice of its interpreter.<sup>3</sup>

Repetition includes superficial elements –reproduction, imitation, influence, authenticity, etc– together with internal figures of repetition, such as: musical cadence, alliteration, anaphora, themes and motifs that are repeated throughout his records, etc. That is why repetition in music can be considered from two main standpoints. First, from a wide perspective or in a macro structural level of scrutiny, music is reproducible. This implies that a sense of repetition is inseparable from the basic definition of music. We can only listen to a certain piece of music if it is sung or played again and again. Second, from a micro structural level, repetition is an integrant part of the lyric's semantic and poetic structure.

### 1. Authenticity

Bob Dylan is a singer-songwriter. This genre allows the author of the song to interpret his own musical composition and lyrics by becoming the mediator –occasionally supported by a band– between the song and its audience. The evident presence of the author in performance attributes a divergent consideration of the artist as the maker and holder of the true details of the song. As Keir Keightley states in his article "Reconsidering Rock" (2001: 121): "The singer-songwriter emerged as the ideal of authentic rock in the late 1960s, fostering a sense that the integration of authorship and performance was evidence of ethical integrity."

Dylan's own phonographic imagination –at the recording studio and elsewhere– has always shown the interest of the artist to maintain the natural quality of a song first-heard, provided that the mechanization of records could turn their messages into unperceived rumors. His avoidance of repetitious artifacts derived from the popular music industry is perfectly compatible with the use he makes of several other types of repetition. What is more, this phenomenon, which takes place on the scene, highlights the relevance of this element of analysis, as long as it makes his explicit concern with repeatability and the careful use he makes of this element in music.

One of the most important observable characteristics during his performances on stage is the "disguising" quality that his songs endure more and more frequently. Especially at the end of 1980s and with the beginning of the still operative Never Ending Tour, Bob Dylan has been making songs over, introducing radical melodic and linguistic transformations in front of his audience. Things in music should not be as predictable as modern audience grew increasingly used to. Aside from their production for a major industry of musical consumerism, songs must be reconfigured every time they hit the scene avoiding any repetition artefact that would give an idea of mechanisation. However, this knowledgeable idea about making songs sound anew is hard to handle, especially when the systems of musical production and consume tend to rise the number of reproductions as an indication of success. His songs never remain the same and this is proved not only through the millions of venues he has been visiting during all these years touring around the world. This is evident during his recording sessions, as well. Today, fans of the artist and the general audience can have access to examples of those kinds of recording rituals through his edited albums, *The Bootleg Series*<sup>4</sup>. The last of these, *The Cutting Edge* (The Bootleg Series Vol. 12), helps Dylanites compare the alterations of several recording sessions that took place during the period of 1965 to 1966, his so-called inspired period.

<sup>3</sup> Bearing in mind this is a written study, there must be a certain level of translation from performance to written text in order to specify an exact point in the song. Because of this, the study includes timing in citations, so that the musical element does not stay ignored and helps illustrating with more accuracy the aforementioned quote.

<sup>4</sup> Bootlegging is a musical trend that has been fighting industrial commercial interests since the 60s. Actually, the unauthorized history of these unofficial recordings (as recounted by Heylin) goes parallel to Dylan's musical career, since the record regarded as the first Bootleg Record of the history is Dylan's *The Great White Wonder*.

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Very much related to the blues notion of *Mojo*, which describes the essence of the leading voice of blues songs as having a strong sexual appeal and self-assuredness, authenticity in rock signifies the inseparable connection of the song to its artist, and then, the interrelation of the main voice with the public persona of Bob Dylan. He has been trying, in what has been perceived as the strongest contradiction of his career, to perpetuate this *mojo*-prophetic-and-rebelling nature while refusing to be subjected to labels and categories. Indeed, he has been manifesting a double personality that helped concealing the mysterious creator Bob Dylan behind the shade of the man Robert Allen Zimmerman.

## 2. Repetition and music listening

First, we should start paying attention to a general overlook of the inherent repetition that listening to music means. As Walter Benjamin explained (1982: 217), music has been reproduced from the beginning, as other arts as well, "In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men ... Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new." As long as that piece of music wants to be played again, it is re-produced, no matter through what kind of media or way. This reproducible characteristic, before tape-recording technology, was like an echo of the original, but it was never exactly the same. Whenever a piece of music was played, each of those performances was independent from each other and they privileged a different version each time. Still today, live performances typically act as a simulation of the original version, the versions previously heard by the listener. Indeed, the rendition of a well-known song can either confirm or deny the audiences' expectations.

Recording technology, for its part, helped spread the results of a recording session as a stable version of the song. That fact guaranteed an easy access to them by the mid-western society. In the words of Simon Frith (2001: 31): "Recording ... allowed the mass distribution of repetitive listening of the particularities of a specific performance." Indeed, those particularities were eternalized forever at the recording session. This is an important fact, because Bob Dylan used any performance –in the studio or outside– to make his personal ritual. He avoided any rehearsal and played it just a few times before the version was finished. The series of recordings were always different, and this has been proved later when we had access to some of those discarded versions in which some verses were changed. It was not the case of "Blowin' In The Wind", but so it was for several others.

It was in 1948 that "Columbia Records introduced the 12-inch long-playing disc." (Starr and Waterman, 2006: 22) and that disc played at faster speed than its predecessor and so, could accommodate more than twenty minutes of music in each side. Bob Dylan would have never produced such long songs as "Sad-Eyed Lady of The Lowlands" (1966), "Gates of Eden" (1964) or "Desolation Row" (1965) –only the former lasts 11 minutes and 22 seconds– as long as record companies had to restrict the length of a song due to volume problems. But truth is, except for a few cases, "in the 50s and early 60s little creative use was made of this additional real estate –most rock 'n' roll era-LP's consisted of a few hit singles, interposed with a lot of less carefully produced filler", as explained by Starr and Waterman in their referential study *American Popular Music* (2006: 184). So, technological advance cannot justify Dylan's creativity. There is a great sense of "ahead of times" within his music that has been influencing the following generations of musicians all around the world and it is not only due to those advances of the industry.

With the advent of recording technology, music records became the major force of market sales and a good way to help everyone enjoy their favorite musical artists. Original tape recordings were first distributed on radio programs, in which MCs lead the audience towards this or that musical taste. Some cognitivist studies have recently confirmed that the longer we are exposed to a certain musical piece or song, the quicker we start finding it pleasing (Margulis, 2014: 9). In this sense, repetition would benefit the industry, but it would also manipulate listeners. However, there exist other more beneficial contributions of repetition at this macro structural level of listening.

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Things like brain or earworms give a popular name to those catchy songs whose persistent patterns of repetition make listeners remember them unconsciously. That kind of repetition is the same one that helps creating a propitious atmosphere in concerts, provided that they are an invitation for people to join singing. This helps building a shared moment in the audience, and it can also make listeners enjoy music as if it was part of their personal life. In that sense, repetition in music means learning the words, learning the musical gesture and keeping control over the listening experience. For example, by force of repetition some listeners put on their music and turn the volume higher whenever the song reaches its climax. This control has been growing to the extent that: "Eventually, 'downloadable' music converted listeners themselves into artists, blurring irrevocably the boundaries between song and simple reception and recomposition." (Brooks, 2006: 341)

Some research and musicological studies (Margulis, 2014; Nunes, Ordanini, and Francesca Valsesi, 2015) have affirmed that there exist important effects of repetition over musical consumers: repetition helps immersion in music and so, concentrating on the lyrics. And the latter has a double importance for this study, because in Bob Dylan's songs it has been found a clear tendency towards simple cadences of music (formed by guitar chords and harmonica first and later developed by the rock band). This fact would confirm his acknowledgement and use of repetitive patterns in his compositions (riff, hook, timbre, refrain, chorus, etc.), and how these could guarantee, in a way, that his listeners' attention is drawn towards the lyrics' message, "One distinctive joy of musical listening comes from a kind of procedural immersion rather than a more declarative understanding. Repetition is an important element that encourages this kind of attending." (Margulis, 2014: 69)

Another manifested repetition that must be numbered is the echoed musical styles that can be heard through his songs. The structure of music genres like blues, rock, country, ballad, talking' blues, topic song, minstrels, etc. is revisited by the artist of Minnesota. Either through the explicit intertextuality that points to these traditional discourses and their role in the American society or to their literature, history and arts. Bob Dylan's songs revive that joyful feeling of being American. Reproducing a song is another mean of consuming past memories, "He was telling those who were listening, a story they already knew, but in a manner that made the story new –that made the familiar unstable, and the comforts of familiarity unsure." (Marcus, 2006: 18-9)

During the only Bob Dylan concert that I ever attended, people started shouting with enthusiasm the leading refrain of "Like A Rolling Stone": "How Does it Feel?" which is repeated twice before the next part of the question starts. We will see later in this study how questions play a major role in Dylan's discography and how these questions trigger a new connection between the singer and his songs, and the songs with the audience.

### **3. Repetition and the structure of the poetic discourse**

Repetition is a major rhetorical figure for any poetical production. With its rhetorical use, repetition can be used to attest that the aural message of the song has been correctly sent to people in the audience and that the leading idea is understood. It can go further and play a persuading role in the song. Some key words in the lyrics may have been chosen for heartening a certain attitude towards injustice or uncivil acts.

Like the song here analyzed, several other performances by Bob Dylan created an unprecedented impact over the musical scene. Songs like "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1964), "Only A Pawn In Their Game" (1964) or "Masters of War" (1963) were responsible for Dylan's first success as a protest singer who would even sing apocalyptic prophecies as a justification for human behaviour and hypocrisy.

His songs tend to formulate rhetorical questions that produce a clear confirmation of the problem. The recurrent use of this type of questions is usually accompanied by an implicit subversive and ironical tone in the rest of the song and finally puts a pragmatic issue up. This can only be explained by formulating another question: How many times does anyone have to formulate a question before the question answers itself back? The nature of

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the question here, one that looks for specific and quantifiable answers, is put into question too. Because, to what extent is it relevant to give the number of roads that a man has to walk before we can call him man? That no-relevant type of question puts the logos after the word, reason after emotions, and that is an important argument raised in this song. We better find more answers in nature and in the experience of the physical and emotional burst of social and ethical commitments than in rationalism. This aspect puts the song in relation to existentialism, a modern philosophy that believed any productive relation with the psyche and the exterior world had to start with the individual collection of experiences. It was also considered much more a literary phenomenon than a philosophical one while the assertion of the individual is prior to the understanding of the world. In this respect, the song might be inviting us to think the same, as well as to accept the part for which we are responsible. But men should not consider these lyrics as a mean to moral thinking, rather like an urge to think in the term of "authenticity": "there remains the distinction between what I do "as" myself and as "anyone," so in this sense existing is something at which I can succeed or fail. Authenticity—in German, *Eigentlichkeit*—names that attitude in which I engage in my projects as my *own* (*eigen*)".<sup>5</sup> That reference study explains that we do something *authentically* if we ask ourselves about such issues that the song talks about and after that, we decide to act individually and out of any social imposition.

Besides the anti-logical statements that form the lyrics, there is a general sense of naiveté, specially accentuated in such a question as: "how many ears must one man have/ before he can hear people cry?" (02:00) There is an echo of this question in the song "Seven Curses" (1963) included in the same album: "These be seven curses on a judge so cruel: / that one doctor will not save him, / that two healers will not save him, / that three eyes will not see him, / that four ears will not hear him..."<sup>6</sup> (02:25) This innocence recalls the words he sent to his audience when he received the Thomas Paine Award in 1963, and when he wrote in the liner notes to *Broadside*: "I'm only 21 years old and I know that there's been too many wars... You people over 21 should know better... cause after all, you're older and smarter." (1962: 2)

Repetition stands for poetic creations too. A basic element of repetition in songs is rhyme. The correspondence of sound between words, usually found at the end of each verse, is another way of repeating the same sound, along with prosodic effects like alliteration. These poetic figures of repetition put in common the most dominant artistic discourses of songs: music and language. Poetics<sup>7</sup> in Dylan is an important issue, it offers a complex disguise, because words—in Dylan's music—can play two paradoxical roles. On the one hand, word's "senses have been stripped" ("Mr. Tambourine Man", 1965). In other words, their various meanings are displayed all at once. On the other hand, their meaning might become unimportant and their presence is only justified by sound, which is the prosodic effect. The human voice, unlike any other instrument, produces a melody out of the distinct units that form any language. This prosodic use of the language can be so extreme as to free the sound from its logos. We will see, in point 5 of this article, the conclusion about sound repetitions that the song includes.

#### 4. Analysis of "Blowin' In The Wind"

The reproduction of a work of art might have different epistemological and aesthetic implications. For example, whenever we reproduce "Blowin' In The Wind" there is something created anew from the point of view of reception. At the same time, the lyrics of this 1962

<sup>5</sup> Crowell, Steven. "Existentialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition) Ed. Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu> Last retrieved 08/09/15 Web

<sup>6</sup> Bob Dylan, *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 9 The Witmark Demos 1962- 1964*. Columbia Records, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Note that this article refers to Poetics as the science that studies arts and literature. As long as songs make use of words, those words and their discursive means can easily get into the realm of literature. In literature, many other discourses join forces in sake of an emotional understanding more than a specific rationale.

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song do not contain any concrete reference that would make more modern audiences feel alienated from the problem. That is, the text does not reproduce an exact event or polemic moment in history. Thanks to that, the song never ages and its contents are always relevant. Especially when that kind of call for humanism, tolerance, and kinship will never be ineluctable, "Dylan's avoidance of any specific political agenda in 'Blowin In The Wind' is typical of many of his best 'protest songs' and is actually a source of strength, as it helps assure their continuing relevance despite changes in the political climate." (Starr and Waterman, 2006: 141) Albeit this characteristic perdurability, the song became an anthem for the convulsing fight for the civil rights led by Martin Luther King Jr., among others, and the anger of the youth community against the late government decisions.

Bobby is expressing what I –and many other young people– feel, what we want to say. Most of the "protest" songs about the bomb and race prejudice and conformity are stupid. They have no beauty. But Bobby's songs are powerful as poetry and powerful as music.

(Joan Baez as cited in Nat Hentoff 2004: 23)

Reproduction also means making a copy of something. It is known that Pete Seeger found the similarity of "Blowin' In The Wind" melodic structure with "No More Auction Block", a traditional spiritual chant. The singer-songwriter must have picked up the melody and change the words to fit the idea he had in his mind. An idea that could have been ignited by the convulsion of the streets and the political panorama, but also by Woody Guthrie's popular sentences: "we come with the dust and go with the wind" in "Pastures of Plenty" (1941) or "This Land is Your Land" (1945), where the natural environment gives form to the individual's self confidence. Also the song line: "Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry?" resembles the song "Airline to Heaven" by Guthrie, which says: "Them's got ears let them hear. Them's got eyes let them see", both inspired by Bible passages. The lyrics of the song were first published in the sixth volume of *Broadside*, a mimeographed magazine that was founded in the 60s and reflected the revitalization of folk music among other popular music genres. Like old ballads, "Blowin' In The Wind" was first distributed on paper sheets, a year before the song was recorded by Peter, Paul and Mary. It epitomized what later came to be known as the Folk Revival.

Under the Folk Revival aesthetic and social movement, the song experienced its rapid ascend into an anthem. It was interpreted in the Newport Folk Festival (1963) by a union of all the notable figures of the movement parallel to their rendition of "We Shall Overcome" which had already become the anthem of the more leftist folk movement. Like "Blowin' In The Wind", the movement stressed the important lives of common people in the U.S. People who fight for the recognition of their rights and their true roles in society. This is more evident in the first line of the song: "How many roads can a man walk down before you call him a man?" Not only lyric content reveals the philosophy of the folk revival movement, but music as well. Simple orchestration, like Dylan's one-man-band-ism, so extended among songsters, and easy melodies that would rely on the lyric content are two of the most important prerogatives. However, Dylan's song reached further influence and became both a folk hit and a popular song part of the cultural acerb. This is due to the song's simultaneous articulation of expected and unexpected elements. In other words, its accommodation between traditional and innovational choices. "Blowin' In The Wind" embodies the dialectics between what the literary critic Northrop Frye called the "pure convention" and the "pure variable"

At one extreme of literature we have the pure convention, which the poet uses merely because it has often been used before in the same way. This is most frequent in naïve poetry, in the phrase epithets and phrase tags of mediaeval romance and ballad, in the invariable plots and character types of naïve drama. At the other

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extreme we have the pure variable, where there is a deliberate attempt at novelty or unfamiliarity, and consequently a disguising or complicating of archetypes.

(Frye, Northrop and Warkentin, Germaine 2006: 218)

That is why there exists a part of the song –and this characteristic applies to Dylan's discography and career– that is closer to American traditional sounds, vernacular language and the overall past that shaped the identity of the U.S. culture and society, along with a severe sense of change and experimentalism. This is specially acknowledged through the lyrics. Those repeated elements that continue with the pure convention are, for example: the accent of the south that reaffirms the idea of being one of them, like it was common in the urban folk tradition (Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Ramblin' Jack Elliott). Besides, there are certain *topoi* such as the wind, or the white dove, the sea, that appear repeatedly in the American folk tradition, and finally, the use of biblical references. All these formulas, along with the fact that the leading voice addressee is repeatedly called "my friend", give the discourse an unpretentious quality that helps people identify with it.

The pure variable elements of his music, more akin to experimentalism, for example, his voice, the poetic images that build such verses as: "How many times must a man look up, before he can see the sky?" (00:03:43), his use of the harmonica, the technique of melisma that makes him mold the length of each syllable to fit the music properly and characteristically, the use of cadence in music more like an accompaniment to lyrics' content and his particular pronunciation, which puts more emphasis on certain words.

The problem, after so many years listening to the song, is that we no longer pay the same attention to its lyric content. Mechanical reproduction has imposed a negative effect on this song, so driven by its message. In view of this phenomenon, even the artist grew tired of it and he did not include it in his shows for years (Greene, A. 2012), the song in most instances becomes only a rumor. The habit of listening to music –as it has been changed by modern consumers– makes it lose part of its rhetoric and aesthetic effect. That phenomenon can cause a feeling of "psychic inertia" to the listener, who stops paying attention to the present time of musical reproduction.

(...) The song is so easily and promptly memorable as to become at once a memory of itself. A song that so immediately adheres to us, especially a song that is an adjuration, must always be in some danger of settling down as its own enemy –not its own worst enemy, its own best enemy, but an enemy in some ways still. (...)  
 (Ricks, C. 2003:323)

In order to fight that mechanization of the reproduction systems, Bob Dylan reached an unexpected performing fashion on stage. When he plays live, his repertoire becomes unrecognizable, especially since the late 1980s, when his Never Ending Tour began. It is known and not equally perceived by the audience that Dylan's songs are never performed the same; their melody and lyrics can even be transformed completely, "A folk song might vary in meaning and it might not appear the same from one moment to the next. It depends on who's playing and who's listening." (Dylan, 2004: 71) That is why there are so different interpretations of the song along the years. Let us only remark some of them, included in Bootleg records or available online, like the afore mentioned version of the Newport Folk Festival (1963) where we can hear him accompanied by The Freedom Singers, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul and Mary, the first interpreters of the song. The other voices accompany Dylan's high pitched tone behind with a soft humming sound which later echoes the refrain and last stanza. Joan Baez would accompany him in another exceptional version at the Rolling Thunder Revue, recorded in the *Bootleg Series Vol. 5* (1975) where there are just guitar and voices and where the rhythm is faster than in the original recorded version. The two voices sing together and fit different turns to give a sense of harmony. Other Bootleg



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Series contain different versions of the song. For example, the live version in *Volume 7 No Direction Home: The Soundtrack*, starts with a long harmonica riff, and sounds softer and more peaceful than ever.

Despite the variable length of each verse, this form of song can be grouped under the strophic kind, all of which are repeatable *per se*, provided that they count on a series of stanzas and a repeated refrain. The refrain of "Blowin' In The Wind" is repeated thrice in the original recording, putting an end to their three corresponding stanzas: "The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind. / The answer is blowin' in the wind." Actually, the leading refrain contains the mentioned answer twice, which makes the effect a lot more repetitive. The first time, the verse ends doubtful while leaving a blank space for a certain answer. Finally, the awaited answer never comes and its absence is repeated either to cause a major feeling of uncertainty or to be individually answered by each listener. One would remark that the more repetitive element of the song is its musical cadence, basically a set of guitar chords (D and G), with the words "How many ..." leading a sequence of anaphoric interrogations. But there is also the pattern of rhyme, different in each of the three stanzas. The first rhyme is /æ/, the second /ē/ and the last one /ai/. There is a special lexical cohesion between the rhymed words. The first group of words –"man", "sand" and "banned"– are correlated with the sacred story of the Genesis, the second group of words –"sea", "free" and "see"– could refer to a range of experiences or something that is gazed from a fixed point of view, something that is imminent. We should bear in mind that there are repetitive motifs in relation to prognostication and prediction in his music and that some of those gave the author a prophetic impression. Finally, the third-stanza rhymed words –"sky", "cry" and "died"– might be referring to the end of times, the termination of life.

At the end of each stanza there is a replicated riff<sup>8</sup> starred by the harmonica, a wind instrument and the perfect companion to that gist of unmentioned things that stay "blowin' in the wind". In other performances by the artist (Live Aid 1985 and Sudokan, 1976 with Joan Baez<sup>9</sup>) the harmonica disappears making it weaker. There might not be another instrument with more reciprocity than this, as its meaning holds with the words and the poetic images that are construed after its reproduction.

There are some feelings derived from prosodic effects of alliteration, too. Prosody is the bridging element between musicality and the semantic analysis of repetition, as it was previously mentioned. The title of the song includes the first one, that ululating sound produced by the sounds /wō/ and /wi/. That sound is like a howl and, in view of the definition brought by the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, "howl" means "a prolonged wailing noise such as that made by a strong wind." This parallelism is reinforced by the connotations that the verb "howl" has in the America poetic tradition. Note Allen Ginsberg's most epic poem "Howl" that also cries in favor of the outlaws and dispossessed "who crashed through their minds in fail waiting for impossible/ criminals with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet blues to Alcatraz."<sup>10</sup> In the refrain too, there is an insistence with the sound /in/ that stresses the imposing presence of words floating within the music flow.

On the part of the literary significance derived from repeatability and the recurrent themes and topics explored in those 02:48 minutes that the song lasts, there are several important conclusions to be reached. For example, the use he makes of those question formulas, which is so insistent as to give the listener the feeling of facing an interrogation; an interrogation that aims to find out who is responsible for all those calamities, those who

<sup>8</sup> In popular music and Jazz, it refers to a short repeated phrase, frequently played over changing chords or harmonies or used as a background to a solo improvisation. (*New Oxford American Dictionary*, entry "riff")

<sup>9</sup> Both concerts are available online: <https://youtu.be/vWwgrjIMXA> and <https://youtu.be/hOKjp9fTL1k> last retrieved 08/09/15

<sup>10</sup> From *The Poetry Foundation*, <http://poetryfoundation.org> "Howl", last retrieved 08/04/16.

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do not ban the cannon balls after so many people have died. The call for responsibility is not an explicit one, because –as it was mentioned before– there is a preference for unspoken morals that guarantee the freedom of its listeners to configure their ethics and values. This was previously explained like one of the requisites of “authenticity”, according to existentialism. In addition, the prior irrelevancy of the answers that are triggered during the song, fruit of the rhetorical nature of such interrogatives, makes the lyrics’ content emphasize poetic images and the importance of emotions before logos or another rational understanding. This characteristic embraces another existentialist lesson. As follows, we better find more answers in nature and in experiencing the physical and emotional part of the world than in rationalism and the hypocrite morale of our world.

The song makes an explicit use of biblical topics, as well: the white dove, existence, the sky and death adapted to the author’s own aims. The white dove is said to belong to Genesis 8, 8 (Carrera, 2012)

8 Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground;  
 9 But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark<sup>11</sup>

And the passage that reminds us of using our senses, saying: “Yes, ‘n’ how many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry?”, repeats the idea of Ezequiel 12, 1-2 and Matthew 13: “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” All this is combined with an Emersonian<sup>12</sup> speech quality given by topics like nature and the presence of the mountain, the sea, the road –understood like a means to explore the world–, etc.

The type of questions formulated in “Blowin’ In The Wind” resembles those of a rare and unreleased song –until 1990’s *Bootleg Series, vol. 1-3*–, that was titled “Only a Hobo”, another “transcendentalist” echo of Henry David Thoreau’s philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

Does it take much of a man to see his whole so down  
 To look up on the world from a hole in the ground  
 To wait for your future like a horse that’s gone lame  
 To lie in the gutter and die with no name?  
 (*Only a Hobo*, 1964)

The assertion of the individual is prior to the understanding of the world. At these respects, the song might be inviting us to make ourselves conscious of our responsibility. But men should not consider these lyrics as a mean to moral thinking, rather as an urge to think in terms of “authenticity”, being true to themselves. We act *authentically* whenever we decide to act for ourselves and out of any social imposition, except mine and the wind’s (Taylor, 1991). That is what makes the song ageless, along with suggestive repetitions and recurrent themes that will later appear in most of his discography independently of the period and identity Bob Dylan depicts –provided that he changed his identity and philosophical orientation almost every decade.

Finally, this song is liberating words and music from their constant fight, because words indicate how important it is to trust senses and emotions to perceive the most

<sup>11</sup> King James Bible Version at

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+8&version=KJV>, last retrieved 11/04/16

<sup>12</sup> Philosopher and poet who represented the philosophy of “Transcendentalism”, specially after such essays as *Nature* (1836).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854) that reflects upon the life of the lonely explorer living in the midst of a natural habitat. Another declaration of independence, self-fulfillment and individualism.

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important things around us, instead of searching for scientific or rational explanations. Music enhances this type of world "connaissance". So what the song is saying is: live the music that is taking place here and now. Listen to all the essence the wind is carrying within it. This is a meta-musical sort of reflection, like many others he introduced in his songs, specially during this period.

## 5. Conclusion

Music reproduction has provided Bob Dylan's music with a double reality. One is a positive point of departure to repeat the listening act as much as the listener needs in order to process its meaning. The other is negative, as it is because of repetition that meanings and associations get exhausted. Bob Dylan has used his performances to repeat and change his audience's expectations. The paradox is that not every listener would want those changes to take place. Some want to recover the idea that the original record reflects. However, Bob Dylan gave every song a changing entity continuously evolving into the ideal performance, although this might never come. Perhaps this is due to the artist's constant search for an ideal, both in his personal and professional perspective. And this ideal might be related to being "authentic" –since this rose in people's conscience around the 1960s – while understanding other people's realities and being able to reflect that in his music. He must have considered "the ethics of authenticity" (Taylor, 1991) and probably, like the philosopher, he is searching for the ideal form of this moral conscience that uses individualism as the basic social concept while avoiding that extreme relativism that would only serve for ignoring people's problems and their truthful realities. Dylan's authenticity is present in each amalgamation he made between tradition and experimentalism, in his wordplays, his interpretations and finally, in his smart use of repetition. Through repetition we, listeners, have the opportunity of accessing his hermetic as well as symbolic meanings, relying in the fact that most of his songs aren't providing us with an answer, but with questions. Through songs like "Blowin' In The Wind" the audience should understand that, as Dylan used to say: "*every question / if it's a truthful question / can be answered by askin' it*"<sup>14</sup>

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