

All Along Bob Dylan

America and the World

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Chapter 4

Bob Dylan and the Invasion of Mexico

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4 Bob Dylan and the Invasion of Mexico

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Bob Dylan seems to have ignored the theme of America's invasion of Mexico and, as it seems, he never sang about it, though such an event, sometimes called an episode, took place in 1914 in the form of occupation of Veracruz. The episode was caused, or initiated, by the failure of the Mexican authorities to perform a 21-gun salute as a supplement to their officially expressed apology for having, mistakenly, imprisoned nine American sailors in Tampico. Perhaps the only link of this event with Bob Dylan's *oeuvre* is the fact that Douglas MacArthur, then in the rank of captain, was involved in the events which followed the Mexican refusal to salute; years later, without being called by his name, he became one of those whose grave Dylan wanted to stand over till he was sure they were dead – the wish expressed in “Masters of War”.

Another kind of invasion of Mexico is linked with my complex personal experience with Dylan's songs and with the album *Slow Train Coming* which I managed to get hold of in 1980, the time of the early beginnings of what some call freedom in Poland. I could not simply buy it at that time, and the way people exchanged the vinyl stuff was itself a curiosity, including the fact that the price of any “western” record, given the unofficial (that is to say actual) exchange rates, reached about a quarter of my father's monthly salary (my father earned, relatively, quite well). Also importantly, the Columbia Records product whose owner I had thus become did not contain printed lyrics of Dylan's songs, thus exposing me to the presence of the authentic brownish cover with a train and a telegraph pole which looked like a cross on it, and to Dylan's voice unmediated by writing. This exposition to bardic orality, about which I was unable to theorise at that time, was also an exposition to a broadly understood incomprehension. There were simply quite a few long sequences of sounds and noises whose senses or meanings I was unable to associate with any English sound sequences I knew. Though I was then a student of English, one convinced that I, whatever it means, knew the English language, I humbly gave up the idea of eventual understanding of the lyrics by way of repeated listening simply because of the fear of ruining my precious purchase by too frequent application of the gramophone needle to its vinyl surface. Thus, I reached for some little help from my English friend, and a teacher of English, from Bognor Regis who taught,

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among others, some classes on what was called “listening comprehension”. With a bottle of wine at hand, and a lot of cigarettes, we made it through most of the texts with me carefully writing down what my English friend heard and reported. There occurred a few moot points, but I hopefully listened to the record the following day and encountered, in my notes, a phrase which did not seem to be clearly communicating any sense: “Mexico’s invaded, his laws are outdated”. Needless to say that I would not question an Englishman’s ability to understand English, and I interpreted the text as an example of *licencia poetica* in which we had to deal with a personification of Mexico to where Americans bring in the spirit of democracy in order to replace “his” outdated laws so as to satisfy Thomas Jefferson’s dream (“In the home of the brave, Jefferson turnin’ over in his grave”). Thus, the slow coming of a change to Mexico, and perhaps to the world, posited Bob Dylan as praising a colonial sort of democracy which, from the Polish perspective of that time, was a promise awakening a dream of Poland being invaded, like Mexico, by America. Following this line of interpretation, one, nowadays, could, of course, read Donald Trump’s view of Mexicans and Mexico as a kind of withdrawal in a gesture of having learnt that those “drug dealers, criminals, rapists” and, more generally, outlaws will never learn. It was a few years later that I was able to read the text to see that “Mexico’s invaded” was to be “Man’s ego is inflated”, a slightly different perspective which universalised Mexico as a pumped up masculine identity which replaced the democratic spirit of America embodied in the dead body of Thomas Jefferson¹. Though in the “original” version of the text Mexico does not appear, its haunting presence has remained with me for a very long time, also inspiring this paper after, roughly, 38 years.

Dylan’s legendary presence in the world surely does not depend on clear understanding of the lyrics of his songs. I do not know about any kind of research done in America into listeners’ comprehension of what he sings about, and, regardless of the absence of any conclusive evidence, I am almost certain that there are numerous people in America for whom English is their first language, and who may have problems in making out some of the words or phrases he sings out, irrespective of the fact that he frequently changes them on stage. Dylan does not seem to be a clear pronouncer of ideas, not also in terms of his actual pronunciation and diction.

Though Dylan was relatively well known in Poland already from the beginning of his career, the lyrics of his songs must have remained mostly obscure to a large majority of the Polish audience. “Blowing in the Wind”, known mostly in translation, was recognised and associated with Dylan, but “All Along the Watchtower”, for instance, was often associated with Jimi Hendrix whose diction made the text even more hermetic. Moreover, most of Dylan’s intertextual allusions in that text, and innumerable other allusions, references or quotations to come in his songs in the later years, must have been, and still are, only vaguely

recognisable. The question of the recognition of Dylan's allusive quotations has itself become a matter of various disputes, including academic ones, even among the people born within the complexities of what can be called American culture. I am convinced that even to his numerous enthusiasts in Poland, Mexico and elsewhere, Dylan has been a foreign sound to their ears. This foreignness, as one critic notes, has been itself changed and modified in Dylan's performances of "It's Alright, Ma" by variations in accentuation which bring in ambiguity also on the phonetic level of his performances. In one of them, Steven Rings writes, "the refrains depart even more emphatically from the prevailing meter (2013, 5). The first line of the first refrain ('So don't fear if you hear') scans as anapaestic dimeter, but the following line ('A foreign sound to your ear') is more ambiguous" (Rings 2013, 5). By attentively listening to the song, the hearer can surely find its affinities with Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* which is "often adduced as the most proximate textual predecessor of 'It's Alright, Ma'", also noticing that "Dylan's taut poetic structure bears little resemblance to Ginsberg's free verse", and concluding that "the similarities to *Howl* reside in thematic content" (Rings 2013, 6).

Numerous nuanced interpretations of Dylan, though academically inspiring and sometimes telling, hardly take notice of the possibility that at least some of the openness of his songs to, sometimes contradictory, interpretations may come from something which may be called an evanescent vagueness of orally transmitted senses, a kind of quality which seems to be a crucial aspect of his performative image. What is at stake is not only the plurality of Dylans, or the plurality of Dylan's voices, which is ascribed to him as a construct which alienates his identity from the singularity of being one person, as Stefan Snaevarr notes, also referring to other interpreters and critics reading Dylan in this vein:

Dylan often sings as if he is not really present. He has many voices, and they are like masks; there is no authentic voice or self behind the masks. Dylan himself hinted at his playing the role of "Bob Dylan" in an interview with *The Los Angeles Times* in 1980. This adds more support to the contention that Dylan is a postmodernist who has (or pretends to have) multiple selves and lacks authenticity. No wonder that the 2007 movie about him is called *I'm Not There*.

(Snaevarr 2014, 39)

The many voices of Bob Dylan may hint at a possibility of there being more than one song in one song, thus also hinting at the postmodern dissemination of senses and meanings in a free play of sliding signifiers. Perhaps languages need not be a tool of any instruction, and underlining its vagueness with ambiguities and unclarities, Dylan also excludes himself from the position of a leader delivering his message to the masses. His "don't follow leaders, watch parking meters" from "Subterranean Homesick Blues" may be a clear expression of political scepticism

(cf. Snaevarr 2014, 41), but it may also be read as a gesture of politicising the everyday and leaving the decision as to what means what, and what should be what (perhaps slightly after Lennon and Ono), to the people. This, say, leftist message is also rather vague, and it seems that it is not necessarily relevant what Dylan sings about to interpret him one way or another. “The Left”, Stefan Snaevarr writes, “loved Dylan’s earlier protest songs. But a closer look at these songs shows no clear-cut left-wing or socialist tendencies: no straightforward condemnation of capitalism, no advocacy of the welfare state, let alone communism” (2014, 42). Perhaps the title of the film “about” Dylan mentioned earlier – *I’m Not There* – is a paradoxical kind of confession which is also Dylan’s brief autobiography and a voice, one of many, of the semantic coherence of what we can hear in what he sings.

Singing as if the singer was not really present (see above) seems to be reflected in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s nostalgic remembrance of the singing of the Nambikwara Chief Taperahi in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955):

Chief Taperahi [...] began to sing in a halting, faraway voice, which hardly seemed to belong to him. Immediately two men (Walera and Kamini) came and crouched at his feet, while a thrill of excitement ran through the tiny group. Walera uttered a few calls; the chief’s song became clearer, his voice stronger.

(Lévi-Strauss 1992, 359)

Not being too well familiar with Nambikwara’s language, Lévi-Strauss translates his experience of performance into what he in fact wants to hear – the universally human mythic predisposition to compose melodies which are, in his ears, universally themed and structured as recitatives, arias or chants:

And suddenly I realized what it was we were hearing: Taperahi was performing . . . an operetta in which arias alternated with recitative. All by himself, he was impersonating a dozen or so characters, each one distinguished by a special tone of voice—shrill, falsetto, guttural, droning—as well as by a musical theme tantamount to a *leitmotif*. The melodies sounded extraordinarily like a Gregorian chant. The Nambikwara flutes had reminded me of the *Sacre*; I now felt I was listening to an exotic form of *Noces*.

(In Kramer 2015, 573)

Such a recognition of something familiar within unfamiliar, of Wagner and Stravinsky in a performance of sounds which must have been, at least initially, foreign to Lévi-Strauss’s ear in obvious ways illustrates the uncertain nature of anthropological renditions of the allegedly authentic experiences of the other. Lawrence Kramer uses the aforementioned example in an article on singing in which he looks at singing and

its various practices, suggesting that songs reveal their “semi-universal” nature when heard “at a cultural remove” (2015, 573). This cultural distance, in the case of Lévi-Straussian anthropology, is not only spatial, but also temporal, a movement to distant places to see, or as in the aforementioned case to hear, humanity in its allegedly early stage of development. Needless to say, some degree of the “cultural remove” is at stake when hearing Dylan in, for example, Poland, though the degree is hardly measurable. What also seems to be crucial in the reception of, more generally, foreign sounds in songs is another degree, the degree of separation of words and music which Kramer finds to be “the primary question about words and music” since the early modern era (2015, 575). Most probably, to those listeners of Dylan who do not know English at all, and there are such listeners (not only of Dylan), the degree of the separation is rather minimal. The degree most probably varies depending on the command of English, and becomes really unmeasurable as regards varieties of English, and the case of my English friend misreading the original seems to be one, however inconclusive, evidence of that.

What Kramer posits as an important aspect of thinking about song is the distinction between lyrics and texts which, in turn, makes it possible to distinguish between “popular songs” (among which he also numbers folk songs) and “art songs”:

Popular genres generally have “lyrics” rather than “texts”; the lyrics have little or no independent value and become, on any occasion, whatever the song, the singer or the arranger makes them. Song lyrics gain power or authority from the music and the performance; texts set by art songs yield power or authority to the music and the performance that appropriate them.

(Kramer 2015, 580)

Though Kramer is not quite clear about what power and authority may signify, the shift of this power from music to lyrics and from texts to music seems to be done without loss of some power on the part of either the former or the latter. It is only in the footnote to this passage that we are told that the measure of that power is “our attention” (2015, 593). In other words, the less artful lyrics become more significant to us, thanks to music, while artistic texts enrich music as if endowing it with their poeticity. What is assumed in the process is the full understanding of both the lyrics and the texts and, implicitly, a pre-recognition of songs as either popular songs or art songs. Though in the case of Dylan such a pre-classification is not a promising endeavour, Kramer, in the same footnote, pre-classifies his songs (along with Cole Porter’s) as popular, simultaneously reading the two singers as exceptions to the rule:

There are, of course, exceptions; when are there not? The lyrics of Cole Porter and Bob Dylan come quickly to mind. These nominally

popular song lyrics have gained the ability to reverse the traditional text-music relationship of art song. The lyric emerges from its fusion with the music to become a text with its own claims on our attention. At least in Porter's case, however, the lyrics retain their malleability; singers can and do make of them what they will.

(Kramer 2015, 593)

Dylan's lyrics are also, in the aforementioned sense, malleable, and the question which may be asked here is that of the possibility of the emergence of a text from a lyric and thus, perhaps slightly more abstractedly, of the legitimacy of awarding the Nobel Prize in literature to Dylan by the committee whose five members are Norwegians – people who are, culturally and linguistically, slightly removed from America. However, since there are no Nobel Prizes in music, Dylan's songs seem to have managed to become texts not so much through performance, but through writing and translation which emancipated them from the appropriation by music and performance. This seeming independence, however, is only partial. Kramer notices the power of writing to disrupt the bond between text and music, noticing it in the custom of providing printed texts at recitals of art songs which he finds to be “indicative: the music of an art song stands apart from the utterance whose voice it becomes” (2015, 575). This rupture produces a voiceless kind of utterance, a writing which may be easily and freely handled, distributed and interpreted without a sound reaching the ear, without the potentially foreign sound which Dylan wants us not to be afraid of.

The philosopher who problematised the relationship between speech and writing was, of course, Jacques Derrida. In *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1997[1967]), he also refers to Lévi-Strauss's Nambikwara, criticising the anthropologist for having deprived them of writing for the sake of creating an image of pre-cultural and natural innocence, an image of “the lost world” in which the word “writing” was not known, this lack of knowledge testifying to the lack of knowledge of how to write. The word they used to render the scribbling of the anthropologists in their notebooks was *iekariukedjutu* – which was supposed to mean “drawing lines”, an activity which, in Lévi-Strauss's view, had nothing to do with the conception of writing (cf. Derrida 1997[1967], 124). Derrida's reading of the chapter “The Lesson of Writing” from *Tristes Tropiques* indirectly touches upon the question of translation which, for Lévi-Strauss, seems not to have constituted a problem:

It is quite evident that a literal translation of the words that mean “to write” in the languages of peoples with writing would also reduce that word to a rather poor gestural signification. It is as if one said that such a language has no word designating writing – and that therefore those who practise it do not know how to write – just because they use a word meaning “to scratch”, “to engrave”, “to scribble”, “to scrape”, “to incise”, “to trace”, “to imprint”, etc. As

if “to write” in its metaphoric kernel meant something else. Is not ethnocentrism always betrayed by the haste with which it is satisfied by certain translations or certain domestic equivalents? To say that people do not know how to write because one can translate the word which they use to designate the act of inscribing as “drawing lines” is that not as if one should refuse them “speech” by translating the equivalent word by “to cry”, “to sing”, “to sigh?” Indeed “to stammer”.

(Derrida 1997[1967], 124)

Though the Nambikwara, in Lévi-Strauss, did not know writing, they knew singing, and the arsenal of musical vocabulary used with reference to their performance in the earlier quotation (see above) is quite rich. They knew how to speak and how to sing, two as it were phonetic activities which they could perform naturally, and which unlike writing they allegedly did not know, could be translated into arias, recitatives or falsetto. The sudden realisation of what the listeners were hearing (“And suddenly I realized what it was we were hearing”) seems to be a discovery of the possibility to translate foreign sounds into familiar terms, the only trace of the strangeness being the exoticisation of Stravinsky’s *Noces*. What is thus embraced as universally human is not only speech, but orality which, unlike writing, constitutes an allegedly unmediated expression translatable into our own words. If “sighing”, as Derrida sees it, can be an approximate translation of speech, it can also be translated into “singing”, both words domesticating the fearful foreignness of sound which Dylan’s Ma should not be afraid of. Though Dylan, of course, knows writing, one can easily hear him as a Nambikwara of sorts, regardless of the fact that he knew writing and wrote his songs.

Indians, as Emmanuel Désveaux claims, “are strikingly absent from Dylan’s corpus” (2007, 134). They are only occasionally mentioned explicitly: “in the title of the instrumental “Wigwam”, for example, or in the expression “broken treaties” [“Everything Is Broken”] that is so hackneyed in the United States that it has become almost inoffensive” (Désveaux 2007, 134). Dylan also mentions in *Down in the Groove*, or “Indians camp along her border” in “Shenandoah” (Désveaux 2007, 134), but “intuition leads one to think that the first inhabitants of the New World are not really absent from Dylan’s work, which here and there resounds with echoes of a latent Indian-ness” (Désveaux 2007, 135). Though Dylan’s indebtedness to European and American literary and cultural traditions, to the Afro-American heritage, to the Old South and “his attachment to the northern regions of his origins” cannot be questioned, the Indian-ness of Dylan sings itself also through the image of the long hair of a girl from the North Country far or another long-haired woman (“Got a long-haired woman, she got royal Indian blood”) whom Dylan got in “Summer Days” (*Love and Theft*). Such indications encourage Désveaux to follow Lévi-Strauss’s paths “in search of themes and images used by the writer and which, in the light of my extensive

studies of Indian myths, cultural systems, and structural relations, may very well have their roots in Amerindian folklore” (2007, 136). Thus, for instance, giving names to all the animals (Dylan sang about it in “Man Gave Names to All the Animals”) which seemingly took place long time ago in the biblical beginning of humanity can be ascribed to Lévi-Strauss’s discovery of human capacity to classify.

This generalisation, combined with other elements, brings the naming phenomenon as described in the Dylan text closer to an Amerindian ontogenesis. In effect, we discover the transformation of a classical theme in Amerindian mythologies – that of the procession of the animals – whose function, as demonstrated by Lévi-Strauss, was to set out, by naming them, the different animal species.

(Désveaux 2007, 140)

Though written after Dylan’s conversion to Christianity and announced simultaneously with the release of *Slow Train Coming* in 1979, “Man Gave Names to All the Animals” goes beyond the Christian and Judaic orthodoxies, reaching “consciously or unconsciously” (Désveaux 2007, 140) to the breeding grounds of all mythologies. Since mythologies may well be reflective of cosmologies, Dylan’s “fascination with cosmological schemes is evident in his numerous mentions of both the sun (50 to be counted) and the moon (36)” (Désveaux 2007, 142). Thus, when he sings that “You left me standing in the doorway crying / In the dark land of the sun” (“Standing in the Doorway”), he suggests “dialectical inversion of cosmic and human values”, linking his “version of movement towards the sun” with the Algonquian one (Désveaux 2007, 142). The Beatles, let me add, also followed the sun (in “I’ll follow the sun”), thus not only escaping from the threat of the rain (perhaps a heavy one) to come the following day and also bringing into their song not only Dylan in whom Lennon did not believe (though he did not believe in the Beatles either), but also the eternal singing they heard across the Universe. Choosing the strange sounding Jai Guru Deva, Om song of the world they decided, as is well known, to go to India rather than to Indians, which, as it seems, does not make much of a difference.

Although Dylan probably never visited the Nambikwara, he could have consulted some Ojibwa informants writing “Honest With Me” (*Love and Theft*) comparing his woman’s face to a teddy bear (“My woman got a face like a teddy bear”). Désveaux lived with the Ojibwa people in the early 1980s and consulted them as regards bears, having learnt from them quite a lot not only about bears, but also about female sexuality:

According to our Ojibwa informants, when one comes across a female bear in a forest and she reacts aggressively, the best way to get out of trouble is to find her genital organs and stroke them until she reaches orgasm. In this way, the female bear is equated with woman as a sexual

partner. Such behavioural relations correspond well with the Western attachment to the “teddy bear” – in other words, the prototype soft toy designed for children to use as a mother-substitute, indeed the idealised lover of one’s fantasies according to Freudian teaching.

(Désveaux 2007, 137)

Having read the aforementioned (and more) examples of the Amerindian origins of Bob Dylan’s songs, I became strongly convinced that my misreading of “Slow Train” as a song about invaded Mexico was not a misreading. Dylan simply did not know that he wrote about it, and the printed versions of the song contained corrections of those fragments which he himself did not understand. Mistakes of misunderstanding seem to be quite frequent with Dylan, not only as regards the lyrics, and it is not surprising that once having discovered the origins of his songs, Désveaux, driven by his Ojibwa friend named Laurence Child-forever² in a pick-up truck, recognised Dylan’s “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” played on the local radio, though he did not, for a while, recognise that it was not sang by Dylan, but “by a native singer, a woman who quite possibly belongs to one of the great many Pentecostal churches on the Indian reservations in the North” (Désveaux 2007, 149). The song thus returned to its roots as “in Amerindian myths, knocks on a tree (one, for example, which the bird-nester climbs) always prefigure death” (Désveaux 2007, 149).

In his book about death, Jean Baudrillard claims that we are all Indians, though he slightly politicises this generalisation: “There will always be animal reserves and Indian reservations to hide the fact that they are dead and that we are all Indians” (Baudrillard 1993, 19). The making of an Indian out of Bob Dylan, and in fact of us all, in anthropological projections of universality through Indian-ness makes Indians into prototypical performers of our universalism. Singing a Bob Dylan song in an Indian reservation does hide the fact that Mexico has been invaded not only by America, but perhaps also by the universal humanism and the ideas of goodness, truth and beauty associated with it. These, needless to say Platonic, ideas were brought to Indians without knocking at their door and the prefiguration of their, however also symbolic, death may have something to do with “our” death (“we” are also dead in Baudrillard), perhaps a death from the already mentioned inflation of men’s egos which my English friend and me confused with an invasion of Mexico in “Slow Train”. What Indian reservations preserve on top of Indians are the surviving Indian languages, many of which disappeared in what is sometimes called “historical times”. Since most of Indian languages are used only in reservations, the universal compulsion to give names and classify has transformed them into spaces of fieldwork not only for anthropologists, but also for linguists. Giving names to all Indian languages is not an easy task and it complicates the study of their languages at times. Lyle Campbell states that

there may be a variety of names by which a single language is (or was) known. For example, Hidatsa (a Siouan language) has also been called Minitari and Gros Ventre; Nahuatl (of Mexico) is also known as Aztec, Mejicano (Mexicano) and Nahua; Fulnio (of Brazil) is also called Fornio, Carnijo and late (Yathe).

(Campbell 1997, 5)

Their number is also hard to be precisely determined, though it ranges “into the hundreds (or, better said, into the low thousands)”, and they are spoken “from Siberia to Greenland and from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego; they include the southernmost language of the world (Yagan [alias Yamana]) and some of the northernmost languages (Eskimoan)” (Campbell 1997, 3). Dylan’s Amerindian roots are thus quite, let’s say, exuberant, though I do not think that he speaks any of those languages.

Dylan can speak Spanish, and his roots might also be Hispanic, which becomes clear in the song “Something There Is About You” in which, as Christopher Rollason puts it, he “speaks of youthful times in Duluth, the town of Robert Allen Zimmerman’s birth” and “mentions a character called Danny Lopez” (2007, 113). Danny Lopez is an alias persona in the text, but mentioning the name “Dylan [...] relates a Hispanic name to the idea of beginnings” (Rollason 2007, 113). The mention, however, is not perfect, as in the printed version of the text included in *Lyrics 1962–1985* “omits the acute accent on the ‘o’ of ‘López’” (Rollason 2007, 113). This mistake goes uncommented, though it may mean that Dylan’s identification with his beginning is not full and that he only imperfectly belongs to the Hispanic tradition. However imperfect the belonging may be, what can be concluded from the above is that he may have not been indifferent to the invasion of Mexico, and that he did not vote, I am convinced, for Donald Trump. Another proof of Dylan’s sensitivity to Mexican problems can be, though only intuitively, inferred from his album *Blood on the Tracks* which, as Dennis Davis notes in his review of its 2018 bootleg version, mainly points to Dylan’s broken relationship with his wife. The album, he adds,

works on many other levels. [It’s] tone fits with the lushly shot *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, a film about the prejudice infecting relationships between neighbours north and south of the border. The movie’s name even sounds like a Dylan’s song title.

(Davis 2018)

With *Gregorio Cortez*, we literally come back to Mexico, and to Durango, where the film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* was shot. This was Dylan’s movie debut in which he played the person of Alias (whose name Stephen Scobie [2004] uses in the title of his book on Dylan) who almost speechlessly was aiding Billy the Kid. The ballad, or corrido, about Gregorio Cortez is the subject of one of the first academic books about

Chicano literature published in America, Américo Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand*. The book is very strongly critical about Texas Rangers whose heroism and masculine strength are as it were embodied in Chuck Norris. After the publication of the book, the director of Texas University Press was visited by a retired Texas Ranger who asked for Paredes's whereabouts so that he could, as José Morín informs us, "pistol whip him" for his negative comments (2006, 62).

Dylan seems not to be very keen on sheriffs in general and, like Alias, takes the side of outlaws who are either shot by sheriffs, or shoot them, though only when chased by them. Outlaws also tend to use alias names and, in the case of American southern borderline, find Mexico a friendlier and safer space of escape from the policing activities of Gringo sheriffs or detectives. The borderland is the home of not only of the legend of Billy the Kid, but also of Gregorio Cortez who was chased for shooting a white sheriff who had shot and wounded his brother Romaldo for having stolen a horse which the brothers had not stolen. The event was, perhaps, like the invasion of Veracruz, caused by a misunderstanding. The sheriff, Brack Morris, did not know Spanish and the investigation was translated by Boon Choate, his deputy, "who was supposed to be an expert on the Mexican language" (*Corridos...* 1994, not paginated). Cortez, when asked whether he got hold of a stallion (*caballo*), answered that he did not acquire a stallion, but acquired a mare (*yegua*). This Spanish word turned out to be unknown to the expert. "Morris misunderstood Gregorio's reply and shot Romaldo. He then shot at Gregorio, but missed and in turn, Gregorio shot and mortally wounded Morris" (*Corridos...* 1994, not paginated). Gregorio Cortez then escaped, spent ten days hiding from the chase and, betrayed by one Jesus Gonzalez, was arrested by one captain Rodgers of the Texas Rangers.

Dylan's "Romance in Durango", written together with Jacques Levy, seems to be one more song inviting to characterise what Damian Carpenter calls Dylan's "outlaw persona in the continuing flood of Dylan commentary" (Carpenter 2017, not paginated). The song seems to be a rewriting of the story of Gregorio Cortez, though one which begins after the shooting and concentrates almost exclusively on the escape. There, eventually, is no escape and the Durango of joy and fandango which he promises to Magdalena, with whom he is on the run, is never reached and the romance remains only a misleading promise of the title of the song. In some sense, the song also addresses the, however imaginary, invasion of an equally imaginary Mexico (about which Dylan does not sing on *Slow Train Coming*), by the inflated egos of those about whom he sings in "Slow Train" – be it Americans, Gringos, Rangers or whoever it may be, who see the world, and hear it, as it should be – blindly, or deafly taking difference, however erroneous it may be, as a sound foreign to his or her ear simply because they don't see it worthwhile to try to understand it and see, as Dylan has it, "no sense in trying".

Notes

- 1 This dream was also reflected in Tomasz Sarnecki's Solidarity Election Poster, urging Poles to vote for Solidarity candidates in the first free electoral campaign of 1989. The poster showed Gary Cooper from the *High Noon* movie with a Solidarity logo badge above the Sheriff's Star.
- 2 Emmanuel Désveaux does not interpret this proper name in his article. Let me note here that it clearly reflects not only the innocent nature of Indians, but also Dylan's wish of our remaining forever young, also strongly present in William Blake's poetry. Blake, in his *America*, does not mention Bob Dylan, though the youth which appears in the poem is, perhaps like a teddy-bear, hairy.

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