



Dylan's Visions of Sin

Christopher Ricks

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Bob Dylan's ways with words are a wonder, matched as they are with his music and verified by those voices of his. In response to the whole range of Dylan early and late (his songs of social conscience, of earthly love, of divine love, and of contemplation), this critical appreciation listens to Dylan's attentive genius, alive in the very words and their rewards.

"Fools they made a mock of sin." Dylan's is an art in which sins are laid bare (and resisted), virtues are valued (and manifested), and the graces brought home. The seven deadly sins, the four cardinal virtues (harder to remember?), and the three heavenly graces: these make up everybody's world -- but Dylan's in particular. Or rather, his worlds, since human dealings of every kind are his for the artistic seizing. Pride is anatomized in "Like a Rolling Stone," Envy in "Positively 4th Street," Anger in "Only a Pawn in Their Game" ... But, hearteningly, Justice reclaims "Hattie Carroll," Fortitude "Blowin' in the Wind," Faith "Precious Angel," Hope "Forever Young," and Charity "Watered-Down Love."

In *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross wrote that "Ricks's writing on Dylan is the best there is. Unlike most rock critics -- 'forty-year-olds talking to ten-year-olds,' Dylan has called them -- he writes for adults." In the *Times* (London), Bryan Appleyard maintained that "Ricks, one of the most distinguished literary critics of our time, is almost the only writer to have applied serious literary intelligence to Dylan ... "

Dylan's countless listeners (and even the artist himself, who knows?) may agree with W.H. Auden that Ricks "is exactly the kind of critic every poet dreams of finding."



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