The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies 32 (2025): e9469.
DOI https://doi.org/10.17561/grove.v32.9469

"ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER": BOB DYLAN'S SEQUEL TO ROBERT BROWNING'S "CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

«ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER»: LA SECUELA DE BOB DYLAN AL POEMA «CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME» DE ROBERT BROWNING

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Received: February 11 2025 **Revised version accepted:** July 11 2025

How to cite Miller, W.J. "'All Along the Watchtower': Bob Dylan's sequel to Robert Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'" *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies*, vol. 32, 2025, e9469. https://doi.org/10.17561/grove.v32.9469

Abstract

Dylan's 1967 song "All Along the Watchtower" can be understood as a sequel to Browning's 1855 poem. This sequel addresses the dilemmas of what happens to an artist once they arrive as a musician. By bringing Browning's neglected poem into the conversation, this essay extends the exemplary work of connecting Dylan and Browning finely documented by Michael Gray. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" supplies all the iconic imagery invoked in Dylan's final stanza in the form of a tower, wildcat, and blown wind. As such, the strangely persistent notion that Dylan's imagery only alludes to the biblical passage from Isaiah 21: 5-9 can now be fully expanded.

Keywords: Bob Dylan, "All Along the Watchtower," Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," Jimi Hendrix.

Resumen

La canción de Dylan de 1967, *"All Along the Watchtower"*, puede entenderse como una secuela del poema de Browning de 1855. Esta secuela aborda los dilemas de lo que le ocurre a un artista una vez que llega

a consolidarse como músico. Al traer el poema olvidado de Browning a la conversación, este ensayo amplía el trabajo ejemplar de conexión entre Dylan y Browning documentado con precisión por Michael Gray. *"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"* aporta la imaginería icónica invocada en la estrofa final de Dylan en forma de una torre, un gato montés y el viento. De este modo, la extraña y persistente noción de que las imágenes de Dylan solo aluden al pasaje bíblico de Isaías 21:5-9 puede ahora ampliarse plenamente.

Palabras clave: Bob Dylan, *"All Along the Watchtower"*, Robert Browning, *"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"*, Jimi Hendrix.

Bob Dylan has performed "All Along the Watchtower" live over 2,300 times, more than any other song in his entire discography.[1] After recording an acoustic version in 1967 for his *John Wesley Harding* album, he first played the song live on 3 January 1974. This and all subsequent concert versions have been performed backed with a full band as a type of tribute to the late Jimi Hendrix and his electrified version of the song. Showing its remarkable sustained importance today, the song was performed by Dylan as recently as 10 August 2025. As such, it is a seminal song in the Nobel Prize-winner's *oeuvre*. For the last twenty years, scholars have been consistently asserting "All Along the Watchtower" charts the toll of the music industry on the artist.[2] Moreover, this focus on the music industry helps confirm why Jimi Hendrix was so drawn to covering this song given its veiled theme of artistic exploitation. I read both the Dylan and Hendrix versions of "All Along the Watchtower" as songs that addresses the frustrations that confront the artist after they "make it" in the music industry. One idea is clear from studying the lives of both Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: it is just as difficult to survive the music industry as it is to be invited.[3]

1 My deep thanks to Michael Gray who tabulates the total number of performances of this song between 1974-1997 at 1,033. For his detailed breakdown by tour and year, see *Song and Dance Man III, pp. 852-53.* The number of over 2,100 performances appears in the 2015 book of Margotin & Guesdon, p. 289. In terms of mere numbers, the most updated (and still growing) count of 2,300 performances of the song can be found at www.bobdylan.com.

2 I first made this argument publicly in "Robert Browning and Bob Dylan: A Summit at the Dark Tower" at the Creighton Conference on Language and Literature, Omaha, Nebraska, April 10, 1999.

3 While details vary widely, Hendrix somehow secured an advance copy of *John Wesly Harding* before its official release. In sone accounts, Hendrix decided against

Rather than challenge previous interpretations, informed readings by a growing number of scholars take on ever greater precedence and find their firmest ground. David Stubbs's reading holds steady when he suggests this song "obliquely alludes to Bob Dylan's frustrations with his management and with CBS, whom he felt were offering him a royalty rate that was far from commensurate with his status" (Stubbs 76-77). Timothy Hampton's ideas also rise upright on the sea: "We might well see here an allegory of the entertainment business, with artists exploited by managers"(115). And finally, Phillippe Margotin and Jean-Michel Guesdon briefly glimpse the true pirate approach from the crow's nest when they identify Dylan's infamous former manager Albert Grossman in the role of thief (288).

However, all these fine scholars have been unable to present a convincing case for the source of Dylan's symbolic imagery. More importantly, given the repository of symbols held in Browning's poem, I assert that the strangely persistent notion that Dylan's imagery only alludes to the biblical passage from Isaiah 21: 5-9 be demonstratively expanded. By bringing a neglected poem by Robert Browning into the conversation, I further extend the exemplary work of connecting Dylan with Browning finely documented by Michael Gray.[4] As we shall see, Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" supplies all the iconic imagery invoked in Dylan's final stanza in the form of a tower, wildcat, and blown wind. Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855) can be read as a kind of prequel to "All Along the Watchtower." As such, I submit for the first time that Dylan's song can be newly understood as its sequel.[5] Dylan's sequel

covering "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" and opted instead for "All Along the Watchtower." Hendrix's variations to his version of "All Along the Watchtower" include adding the word "cold" to form "Outside in the cold distance" and issuing the warning "Beware" in the song's outro. Of the song, Hendrix once said: "I felt like 'Watchtower' was something I had written but could never get together. I often felt like that about Dylan." Quoted in Zak, p. 230.

4 Michael Gray earns my deep admiration for so exhaustively and expertly tracing the interrelationship between the works of Dylan and Robert Browning. Providing just one accessible example here, Gray addresses Dylan and Browning at length in *Song and Dance Man III*, pp. 64-70. I both concur and applaud Ricks when he graciously writes: "Michael Gray is good on Dylan and Browning," p. 339n. As to the two texts in discussion here, only Ricks has ever mentioned the poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" in any measurable way. He does so briefly in the context of discussing "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," p. 339.

5 Anyone new to studying Dylan's sources of influence will want to be reminded from

addresses the dilemmas of what happens to an artist once they arrive at the tower. Instead of a watchtower, we should imagine the New York skyscraper Dylan himself visited, where CBS had its headquarters on the fourth floor.

Before reading Dylan's song through this new intertextual lens, it would be useful to establish some common ground for understanding Browning's long poem. With over two-hundred lines in the work, Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland" is an example of a dramatic monologue, a Victorian form used by Browning more often (and to greater effect) than any of his nineteenth century contemporaries. In this form, a person who is not the author speaks throughout the entirety of the work. This sometimes nearly uninterrupted speech offers the reader compelling insight into the subject's full temperament and character. Here, we learn about Childe Roland himself.

This particular dramatic monologue has been the subject of much critical writing within my field of literature. Such extensive criticism exists because "Childe Roland" is a complex poem which withholds its meaning on several different levels. As a result of this richness and complexity, critics have long struggled to assign meaning to it. Frederick Glaysher responds directly to insights offered by Thomas Blackburn by stating: "Blackburn's interpretation of 'Childe Roland' is seductive because it is so very close to the poem Browning actually wrote--but not close enough" (34). I cite this example first in light of the fact that the problem of coming close but "not close enough" continues to appear quite frequently in early debates about what can be gleaned from Browning's poem.

Often, this struggle is a direct result of trying to establish the connections between Edgar's song in *King Lear* and the title of the poem. In Shakespeare's play, Gloucester's son Edgar disguises himself as Tom o'Bedlam and speaks this gibberish to fool listeners: "Childe Rowland to the dark tower came. / His word was still 'Fie, foh, and fum, I smell the blood of a British man' " (3. 4, lines 195-97). Tracing this Shakespearean line of inquiry (rather than a link to the even older epic poem *The Song of Roland*), Arnold Shapiro states: "Since Edgar sings the song which is both the title and most of the last line of the poem, he should not be ignored in an attempt to decide what Browning was trying to accomplish." Shapiro chooses his words carefully when he says, "should not be ignored (88)." Although the connection

Gary Browning that, like most artists, Dylan is notoriously "enigmatic and ambiguous," p. 236. It is helpful to frame Dylan as "an actively intertextual writer." To this final point, see Collins, p. 15.

should not be ignored in the same sense that Book 9 of Homer's *Odyssey* should not be ignored in approaching Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lotus Eaters," it is incorrect to assert that Edgar's song contains invaluable insight into Browning's work. Rightly understood, the connection to *Lear* for Browning is a point of departure used to the same ends in which Swinburne invokes the little-known Germanic goddess of Hertha for his poem which bears her name.

Mario D'Avanzo also devotes more than half of his article entitled " 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came': The Shelleyan and Shakespearean Context" trying to establish these same connections between *Lear* and "Roland." In addition, he follows the path of a statement made by J.W. Chadwick after visiting Browning himself at his home. Chadwick asked if " 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved' --was not a sufficient understanding of the central purpose of the poem" (967). It is an often-quoted statement that Browning reportedly neither refuted nor accepted. D'Avanzo defends this quote stating that it is the "general moral theme of the poem" (695). In an attempt to make a clear reading of the poem, neither this statement nor the zealous pursuit of piecing together connections to *King Lear* is very useful. As Leslie Thompson writes: "Browning's own comments about the poem were usually vague and noncommittal" (339). In other words, Browning spoke like Dylan, often answering direct questions and inquiries with abstract statements.

Fortunately, Harold Bloom's "How to Read a Poem: Browning's 'Childe Roland' "

offers the rarest example of interpretation. Remarkably, Bloom's understanding of Browning's poem has gone unchallenged for nearly the last fifty years.[6] I will include several of Bloom's ideas for my purposes here. The speaker of the poem is a quester in search of a Dark Tower. As the poem opens, he feels he has been lied to about how to find the Tower:

> My first thought was, he lied in every word,
> That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
> Askance to watch the working of his lie

6 Ryu summarizes that in the wake of Bloom's 1974 reading of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came": "No serious attempt at rereading this poem has appeared since then; after the heyday of Deconstruction, the poem is mentioned, if at all, only in passing, since there lurks the critical consensus that Bloom's reading is the most convincing to date," p. 239.

On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby. (lines 1-6)

Yet, the quester sees no other way forward than to pursue his goal: "If at his counsel I should turn aside / Into that ominous tract which, all agree, / Hides the Dark Tower" (13-15).

In Stanza VI, Browning writes:

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among 'The Band'-- to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps -- that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now-- should I be fit? (31-36)

Once the excitement of momentarily imagining that the phrase "The Band" in this stanza might offer the source for the name Robbie Robertson and Levon Helm chose for themselves after backing Dylan (it does not), we are instead left to reflect on the idea that Roland is intent on finding any end to a journey which began with advice from "that hoary cripple." Bloom comments on these lines of the poem by writing: "Any quest is a synecdoche for the whole of the desire; a quest for failure is a synecdoche for suicide" (407). Roland is setting out to fail and engaging in a quest that is utterly hopeless. He believes he will fail just as the others among "The Band" have failed before him.

The terrain ahead is as desolate as what appears in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land." We read: "So, on I went. I think I never saw / Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve: / For flowers— as well expect a cedar grove!" (Browning 57-59). The bleak nature of the quest continues: "If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk / Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents / Were jealous else" (67-69). The imagery is memorable and shows no signs that the quester is anywhere near achieving his goal: "As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair / In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud / Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood" (73-75). Finally, a river appears, and it lifts the quester's spirits. In language reminiscent of Dylan's song title, we're told what is nearby:

All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of route despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. (115-120)

The land is filled with those who have come before and failed to reach the Dark Tower. As the quester spears uncertain animals in the water, they began to make various noises. A "water-rat" ends up sounding "like a baby's shriek" (125). Others make a "plash" when stepped on (122). Finally, he crosses the water to find himself imagining what threats still await: "wildcats in a red-hot cage" (131). More than a mere visual image, the idea is actually auditory in nature. These animals are shrinking loudly as their paws touch the hot metal of their cages. They have no place to rest or escape, and the sounds they make are ominous and terrifying to any who dare pass their way.

Even after this ordeal, the quester feels he still has not made any progress. He says: "And just as far as ever from the end!" (156). All he can see in the distance is the darkness of evening itself. Surrounded by mountains, he explains that he feels delirious, as if he is caught in a bad dream. Unexpectedly, just on the verge of giving up, he exclaims: "When, in the very nick / Of giving up, one time more, came a click / As when a trap shuts— you're inside the den!" (177-79). Seeing the tower itself in the distance, he thinks of the blind ambition of one who has a "fool's heart" (181). Having achieved his aim, the poet imagines a whole host of those watching him arrive. Browning declares in these final lines: "And yet / Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came*" (204).

Harold Bloom suggests that " 'Childe Roland' is a poem in three parts: stanzas I-VIII, IX-XXIX, XXX-XXXIV" (406). He labels part two an "ordeal-by-landscape" (407). Stanzas IX-XXIX can be best understood by analyzing the repetitions in the elements that exist within each of Browning's images. The destitute land lacks beauty: "So, on I went. I think I never saw / Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve; / For flowers -- as well expect a cedar grove!" (58-59). Leslie Thompson has traced the biblical allusions which appear in "Childe Roland" and she writes that the allusions enhance "the vivid description of the landscape and affords greater insight into Roland's frame of mind" (359). Two of Browning's allusions, the "Tophet's

tool" and the black bird described as "Apollyon's bosom-friend," suggest that this landscape appears apocalyptic to Roland. She states: "Tophet is the Hebrew hell. . . . In the New Testament context Apollyon is "one" of many evil, destructive forces which destroy man;

Apollyon's bosom-friend," then is to be understood as another such force" (349-350). While the best understanding of the poem does not attempt to reduce Roland's struggles through this landscape with some sort of fantastic spiritual journey, the power of these images suggests that this an arduous quest laced with symbolism.

In Bloom's reading, the meaning which is withheld beneath the layers of Browning's symbolism implies that this work can be labeled as a meta-poem. When Roland blows the slug-horn in the final lines, Bloom asserts that "What he blows is his poem" (412). Roland's trek across the battlefield of creativity has led to his inclusion among the world of poets, for every writer must struggle against themselves and their precursors on a cognitive plane. As a result of attempting this struggle, Bloom can state with confidence: "Roland is the modern poet-as-hero, and his sustained courage to weather his own phantasmagoria . . . is a presage of the continued survival of strong poetry" (418). In planning to fail, overcoming a brutal landscape, and firmly setting the slug-horn to his lips, the poem essentially ends at its beginning. The poem's cyclical nature implies that Roland must follow the recursive process again and again in order to recreate his art.

This examination of the poem is not intended to be exhaustive but rather both definitive and accessible so that a context might be established for revisiting Dylan's song. Bob Dylan has been writing songs which have been recognized as poems since 1960. Gregg Campbell asserts that Dylan has "left an artistic statement... a legacy worthy of Melville, Twain, or Faulkner" (180). David Dunaway echoes the same praise: "To find another writer who so thoroughly affected his time, one has to probe in history - Voltaire, Shakespeare or even Verdi, whose melodies were so popular that he had to rehearse his singers in secret to prevent new tunes being sung before the show opened" (154-55). The connection to Verdi is an insightful one which seems accurate given the fact that literally hundreds of covers have been made by other artists of Dylan's songs. Depending on his mood, Dylan has sometimes denied being revered as a poet but his answers to questions during the course of interviews reflects the obvious fact that he is a well-read man. After denying that he be labeled as a poet, Dylan once told David Gates: "Wordsworth's a poet, Shelley's a poet, Allen Ginsberg's a poet" (Gates 64). In addition, he has

spoken to the fact that the public often misunderstands who he is. He said: "But I'm not the songs . . . . It's like somebody expecting Shakespeare to be Hamlet, or Goethe to be Faust" (Gates 65). It isn't often that a songwriter casually drops names like Shelley and Goethe. It is hardly beyond the realm of the imagination to propose that Dylan had read Browning's "Childe Roland" before composing "All Along the Watchtower."

Having established a general notion of the ideas at work in "Childe Roland," I'd like to turn my attention to Dylan's work. Because this framing is new, each stanza of Dylan's song deserves to be reheard. The organization in Bob Dylan's song "All Along the Watchtower" is unique. Dylan begins his sequence of events (which is actually the *last event*) by noting why the joker and the thief must leave and then brings his version of the watchtower into perspective in the final stanza.

Chronologically, however, I follow others in suggesting that this conversation is taking place after the joker and the thief have already arrived as artists and been accepted as those who have made it to the Dark Tower. In other words, the song begins with its ending and ends where it should start. To lend validity to this notion, I offer one of Dylan's first comments about the song made in 1968: "the song opens up in a slightly different way, for here we have a cycle of events working in a rather reverse order" (Cott 122). This cyclic sequence suggests it is far more illuminating that Browning's poem serve as a source for Dylan's song.[7] Moreover, Dylan's own choice since 2001 to perform the song by singing "the first verse again at the end of the song" indexes both the cyclic nature of the song *and* the idea that the two riders who approach the watchtower are indeed the joker and the thief (Margotin and Guesdon, 289). Like many who have followed him, Larry Yudelson's connections seem incomplete when he asserts that " 'All Along the Watchtower' transformed Isaiah's images into a rock hit" (172). Fortunately, poets the caliber of Dylan have always been able to effectively read poems that critics struggle to fully interpret. Here, Dylan instead finishes what Browning started by suggesting what happens *after* an artist has "made it" as an established creative force. In contrast to Browning, Dylan asserts that the artist in the modern era is met by greed and selfishness which creates a whole new "anxiety" for the writer.

7 Marqusee notes how "the last verse sets the scene for the first two," p. 236. Ricks also instinctively notes that it is only after the last stanza is delivered by Dylan that "the song bizarrely begins at last," p. 359.

Dylan's form is a composite which grafts the conventions of a lyric and a dramatic monologue together. The reader is given a conversation between the joker and the thief as well as imagery which cannot be placed alongside a group of narrative poems. The same can be said of the precursor poem "Childe Roland." Just as Browning has invoked a subtle form of two-person dialogue within the poem, Dylan gives us the downcast words of his joker and thief. It may (or may not) be a coincidence that "All Along the Watchtower" finds its form in three stanzas just as Bloom asserted that "Childe Roland" be read as a poem written in three parts.

Dylan's first stanza establishes the frustrations of being misunderstood felt by the joker:

> "There must be some way out of here," said the joker to the thief,
> "There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief.
> Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth,
> None of them along the line know what any of it is worth."

They must find a solution to the fact that they are misunderstood and taken advantage of in their present situation. Gregg Campbell's comments are appropriate: "In 'All Along the Watchtower' . . . Dylan reflects on the vacuity of his own career and on the careers of all those who see life as a hype and a rip-off, of all those who see in every human relationship only the opportunity to aggrandize their own empty and soulless existence" (104). The present situation for the two men is bleak and dismal. As Jean Strouse writes: "Roughly paraphrased: society is a total assault on jokers and thieves" (90). For Dylan, and others (such as Hendrix), these businessmen are the agents and managers who become wealthy as a result of someone else's "wine." Therefore, Dylan is left to lament the fact that none of them "know what any of it is worth." As record executives and managers whose salaries are directly tied to an album's success, none of them can measure the weight of art in anything but platinum and gold.

The characters in Dylan's song have only begun to examine their present state in the opening stanza, however. The emotions grow stronger by the second as the two reflect upon the past:

> "No reason to get excited," the thief, he kindly spoke,
> "There are many here among us who feel life is but a joke.
> But you and I, we've been through that, and this is not our fate,
> So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late."

The suicidal tendencies so prevalent in Roland's quest surface in the conversation listed above.

Most importantly, the thief asserts that "you and I we've been through that." What have these two artists been through if not the arduous path to the Dark Tower? If many of the men who are among them also feel that "life is but a joke," then the two men can be understood to have already undertaken the journey which is an "ordeal-by-landscape."[8]

The linguistic connection between "joke" and "joker" connects Dylan's song back to his own life in a significant way. These first of these two words suggests an intellectual reflection on life ending in hopelessness. The second word, "joker," here identifies the very person the thief represents who is as equally insignificant to the manager. It does seem appropriate that Dylan would write an allegorical song about his frustrations with the business side of the music world, with its critics, and marketing directors, at the same time that he is personally moving as far away from it as possible, settling down near Woodstock. This second stanza conveys the kind of conversation that seeks to calm the joker. Like an agent dealing with his agitated performer, the musician learns from the thief that the star's concerns are once again being heard. It is hard to ignore the real-life tensions between Dylan and his manager during this time. With wonderful detail, Bob Spitz expertly summarizes both the music industry in 1967 and Dylan's specific relationship with his manager Albert Grossman:[9] "The era of gentlemanly enterprise that had artificially steered the music business for half a century was drawing to a close" (Spitz 204). Here in the song, the joker and the thief seem to head off to sleep without anything settled as "the hour is getting late." The tension surrounding their dilemma is ultimately left unresolved.[10]

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8 Even without access to this reading of Browning's poem, Zak's reading is confirmed when he writes of the final stanza that the subjects have "traversed the song's haunted landscape" and "arrived heroically at the journey's end," p. 635.

9 Officially parting ways with Dylan in 1970, Spitz chronicles Grossman's role (during 1967) in personally instigating and then intensifying conflict between CBS and MGM over Dylan's record contract, pp. 374-81. After many well documented turns and twists, Spitz asserts: "Nobody, other than perhaps Albert Grossman, knows the sequence of events that ultimately rewrote Bob's record contracts," p. 380.

10 Reginio notes the two men's "uncertain future," p. 25. Hampton insightfully confirms this as well by writing of this "unresolved struggle," p. 116.

To bring all this framing to fruition, Dylan's final stanza offers the clearest and most consequential connections to Browning's work:

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view
While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too.
Outside in the distance[11] a wildcat did growl,
Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl.

The conversation that appears above has taken place near a tower with very certain similarities to Browning's Dark Tower where "The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay / Chin upon the hand, to see the game at bay" (191-92). Dylan's princes, men who scan the landscape for vagabond artists, certainly, have the same interest in watching the joker and the thief arrive as Browning's "lost adventurers" are set on testing the young Roland for fitness. The visual perspective (as well as the chronological one suggested earlier) has shifted in this final stanza. The listener is now looking with the princes and awaiting the already completed task of watching the thief and the joker approach. Most noteworthy, Dylan's "wildcat" comes straight from the pages of Browning where Roland confronts "wildcats in a red-hot cage" on his heroic journey to the Dark Tower. Here, each is issuing a foreboding sound of warning to those intent on arriving at their objective, the Tower where others watch to see who is arriving.

The joker is any artist, and that artist is also a Roland of the modern era. Remembering that Roland has a "fool's heart," Bloom offers the following pertinent details: " 'Fool' as a word goes back to the Latin for *folis* for "bellows," and so a fool originally was a windbag. The root, *biel*, means to blow or swell, which gives a triumphant twist to Roland's final act of blowing his slug-horn" (414). The terms "joker" and "fool" are synonymous. Furthermore, a "fool" in tarot card readings is also the naive quester figure. Dylan could hardly resist ending his song by blowing long and hard on his harmonica which likewise gives a "triumphant twist" to understanding the wind that howls "All Along the Watchtower." As a sequel to "Childe Roland," by placing the beginning of the action last, Dylan's clever sequencing of the stanzas

11 Gray frames this invocation of "distance" here intertextually against lines about being "Way out in the wilderness" and "Way out in the distance" from two other Dylan songs, respectively: "The Ballad of Hollis Brown" and "Call Letter Blues," p. 377.

emphatically recreates the same assertive moment when Roland himself first offers his own "tune."[12]

The connection between the final phrase of Dylan's song and the music of the harmonica which follows immediately after are nearly inseparable. With uncanny relevance, Campbell has suggested: "Dylan's harmonica blows like a chill wind through the ruins of a desolate landscape" (105). And although no one has made connections between "Childe Roland" and this Dylan song before, in part or in whole, Strouse's comments again somehow seem miraculously anticipatory. He writes: "The magnificent vagueness of 'the wind began to howl'. . . could be the beginning of the song" (92). These comments address the central elements of Browning's text. Roland is faced with a desolate landscape and ends his journey at a place which is really a beginning. If Bloom is correct when he asserts of Roland that: "What he blows is his poem," (412) then Dylan most assuredly sets his harmonica to his lips to "blow us his song."[13] The decision on what the joker can do to escape his dilemma must be left unresolved. The confrontation with businessmen, managers, and record executives will be perpetually recursive so long as any artist continues to perform.[14] *Why?* Because in this reading

12 While it is easy to think that Hendrix simply replaces Dylan's harmonica with his guitar, Hendrix actually does something much more complex. First, Hendrix includes an iconic solo between the second and third verses. It is so famous it is known among guitarists by name as "the trip." The "trip" contains a section of licks played back in reverse so that the final version of the recording actually plays the ending of the solo first and the start last. Within the context of the song, this literally moves the lyric's chronology back to the start for the third and final stanza. It is uncanny that this "trip" is both hallucinogenic among psychedelics and an appropriate verb for the travel undertaken by the two riders on their way to the Watchtower. Second, Hendrix's final solo goes uninterrupted from a lower register to consistently higher and higher notes so that it continually climbs "up" to communicate the idea of scaling the very walls of the watchtower.

13 It may or may not be useful to note a line that appears near the ending of the strange story that appears on the back cover of the original album *John Wesley Harding* as linear notes. In that story about Frank and Terry Chute, we read that after the three kings mysteriously improve their lives, "All three of them were blowing horns."

14 During Dylan's first full tour after recording "All Along the Watchtower," he sometimes paid onstage homage to his tour management team. For example, after playing "Maggie's Farm" on the *Before the Flood* tour on February 14, 1974, Dylan paused to address the crowd. Before the final song on the evening of February 14, 1974, (Blowin' in the Wind") he said: "We're gonna play one more, but before we do, we wanna bring out the man responsible for this tour. He's behind the scenes,

of both Browing's prequel and Dylan's sequel, the circumstances inside and along the tower are just as foreboding as the landscape the joker and the thief miraculously traversed to arrive. And neither of them arrived alone.

The fact that Dylan created new material from a previous work is not a new idea.

The basic skeleton of the growth of the Arthurian legend follows a similar pattern in which pre-quells and sequels have been added to form an eclectic whole. *The French Vulgate Cycle* which offered the central story of Lancelot from 1225-1230, soon had stories which continued the cycle including *the Quest of the Holy Grail* and *the Death of Arthur*. Eventually pre-quells which focused on the birth of Arthur and the history of the grail followed in terms of their chronological development. As Sir Thomas Malory and Alfred, Lord Tennyson eventually resurrected these stories, the works themselves became reinvented. Perhaps with the passing of another two-hundred or six-hundred years, just as many poems about Roland and Browning's Dark Tower might emerge to the forefront of writing. If they do, readers will fill their screens with works that reecho the one offered by Dylan. And while the prospects of a Rolandian Legend forming from the work of Browning is probably just a fantasy, one thing is certain: Poets the caliber of Dylan have always been able to effectively read poems that critics struggle to understand.

Dylan's sequel to Browning's poem is even more evidence of why he earned the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016. What is stunning is that Jimi Hendrix himself seems to have instinctively sensed the setting and poetic formula at work in Dylan's song. Performing the song live at England's Isle of Wight Music Festival on August 30, 1970, Hendrix introduced the song in a very specific way that reveled his uncanny instincts: "We'd like to get into another song that we did about the year 1833. I think it's pretty true still today, if you can dig it" (Hendrix). Unlike scholars who limit new readings by only connecting this poem to a two-thousand-year-old passage from Isaiah, Hendrix instinctively linked the imagery in Dylan's song to the nineteenth century. That he was actually in England at the time he sang the song that was "about the year 1833" defies analysis. Englishman Robert Browning's poem "Childe Rolland to the Dark Tower Came" was published in 1855.

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and he brings us to you. Yeah, where is he? Is he there? We're gonna bring him out now, Mr. Bill Graham. You know him. Barry Imhoff, too. These guys put this show together, and we couldn't have done it without 'em."

That Hendrix was only off twenty-two years (rather than two thousand) reminds us how attune these two musicians were to one another. Not only did Dylan forever play the song with full guitar solos from his band after Hendrix passed, Dylan even completed a drawing of the innovative guitarist on the day Hendrix died (about three weeks after performing the song at the Isle of Wight).

As Dylan would write years later, "I liked Jimi Hendrix's record of this and ever since he died, I've been doing it that way. Strange how when I sing it, I always feel it's a tribute to him in some kind of way" (Taylor). Artists know when others have arrived, and the toll the initiation takes once you have made it was recognized by Hendrix when he recorded and performed "All Along the Watchtower." The 2,300 performances (and counting) by Dylan testify to each of the men who both made their way through a landscape harboring the ever-looming death so prevalent throughout Browning's poem, and wondered how they might escape after having arrived.

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