CHAPTER -III

THE POETRY IN THE SELECTED SONGS
This chapter deals with modern song-writers' manipulation of language and the use in their lyrics, of elements such as diction, similes, metaphors, tone, sound and sense, rhyme, rhythm, symbolism, imagery and even the use of clichés; in short, those elements which are vital for a truly good lyric and which constitute the force of modern poetry — that particular force, which Dr. Johnson describes as that "which calls new powers into being, which embodies sentiment, and animates matter."

Since this chapter deals with songs which are musical lyrics, we should also be conscious of the music that accompanies the words. It is rather even better to accept the attitude of the Greeks to musical lyrics, that musical tune goes in harmony with the words, so that both become practically synonymous. Shakespeare had echoed this thought in his drama, "Henry VIII", when he said:

Orpheus, with his lute made trees,
And the mountain tops that freeze,
Bow themselves when he did sing:
To his music plants and flowers
Even sprung; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

Keeping this in mind, we can understand that the language in modern lyrics is therefore adapted to suit the music, whether it is folk, folk-rock, soul, calypso,
light and heavy rock, or even reggae and classical rock. In addition to this, critics have pointed out that poetry feeds and lives on its contemporary language. Thus, the language of modern songs is largely that of the American beat movement of the 1950s. Song-writers are influenced by poets like Allen Ginsberg, where modern songs, every now and then, mentioned his name; Jack Kerouac, who is known as the "eulogist of spontaneity"; and the modern writer, William Burroughs, who never forgot the lesson he learned from his friend, Brion Gysin, a modern painter, who told Burroughs:

I come to free the words
The words are free to come
I come freely to the words
The free come to the words. ¹

Thus, even the vocabulary has a significance of its own, not quite traditional: for example, "a guy" means a man, "a chick" means a girl, "a straight" means a supporter of the establishment, etc. (This word has many, if not all, the connotations of the outmoded "square"); "to freak out" connotes an exaggerated behaviour under the influence of music, drugs or any other extreme stimuli; the word "man" is another fashionable mode of address. In Britain, the replacement of "yeah" for "yes" was
enthusiastically adopted by the younger upper classes, when in conversation with their social inferiors, in the belief of doing away with class-consciousness. These and many others, including a number of sexual metaphors, have come up as a form of current expressions. Thus, in understanding the language and diction, that mirror contemporary society, we can proceed to trace the poetical elements present in certain modern songs.

Richard Goldstein, has the following comment on Bob Dylan, among song-writers of modern popular lyrics:

Probably no one has had a greater influence on the texture of modern rock than Bob Dylan. He demolished the narrow line and lean stanzas that once dominated pop, replacing them with a more flexible organic structure. His rambling ballads killed the three-minute song and helped establish the album as a basic tool for communication in rock.

Bob Dylan was educated in the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; he is now, one of the most influential lyricists in the second half of the century. Sharp lances of criticism against his works, only psychologically submerge and agree to accept the wide acknowledgement that Bob Dylan is the voice, the conscience and "the spokesman of his generation".
His songs are the consciousness of the modern generation — the generation of the Cold War and atomic genocide. His songs reveal a unique perception which crystallizes in vivid images. He describes the passing modern science; he captures the modern world tragedies and lunacies with a devastating razor-edge surrealism that stripped the flesh of hypocrisy from the bones of the grim skeleton of truth.14 As an example, we have the following lines from his song, entitled "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)":

Disillusioned words like bullets bark
As human gods aim for their mark
Made everything from toy guns that spark
To flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark
It's easy to see without looking too far
That not much
Is really sacred.

While preachers preach of evil fates
Teachers teach that knowledge waits

Can lead to hundred-dollar plates
Goodness hides behind its gates
But even the president of the United States
Sometimes must have
To stand naked.

In another Dylan-song entitled, "The Times They Are A-Changin'", we have the following lines:

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is
Rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'.

Can we call his lyrics, poetry? That is our point of discussion. We shall consider some of Dylan's writings and examine the structures and language.

Bob Dylan has manipulated the language of his lyrics to convey the emotions of his soul when he looks at the picture of his generation, his society and his world. He sings of Man in the modern predicament. He brings out the social and political evils, the cares and anxieties of modern man, as in his song sarcastically entitled "Long Ago, Far Away". In reading or hearing the song, we find that it is an ironic view of modern society, the problems of war and hatred and the thoughtless killing of men and women. Bob Dylan is telling us that to preach of peace and brotherhood in this hatred-torn world, involves a great sacrifice, even the cost of losing one's life. Dylan then gives concrete examples of this truth. The instances given by Dylan are: Christ's death on the cross; Abraham Lincoln's assassination and the legend about the gladiators who fought to death in the Roman times, as the crowd
cheered with excitement. He then speaks of modern warfares
where men are slaughtered like sheep and dogs; the
"lynchin'" of a man's son, resulting in the old father
dying of a broken heart. Dylan wonders whether these
things do not happen nowadays.

The tone of the lyric is deeply ironical and satiric.
Dylan, through a hyperbole, is telling us that in the past,
people hated each other, killed each other, not sparing
even those who preached the gospel of peace and brother­
hood. But in stating so, Dylan indirectly reminds us that
in our time also, these things happen, for they are not
the long ago and far away incidents of life. Today, Man
still hates his fellow men. There is still inequality ram­
pant on the street, where humanity is a mixture of the
very rich and the very poor. The climax of the satiric
note is arrived at, in the last line of the song where
Dylan concludes the song with a question:

Things like that don't happen
No more, nowadays, do they?

Bob Dylan uses the conventional stanza form to convey
his ideas in the poem. The ideas flow from the very first
two lines till the close of the song. Dylan starts with a
statement: "To preach of peace and brotherhood, / Oh, what
might be the cost!". This statement is then developed in the different stanzas of the song, by means of different historical examples of what happened to people who had spread the gospel of peace and brotherhood. One historical example can be found right in the very first stanza, telling us of Christ of the Hebraic world who, for his divine mission of peace and love, was nailed to the cross and died a terrible death. The second stanza tells us of how Abraham Lincoln paid with his own life, when he was shot dead for his heroic struggle to abolish slavery in America. Then the sixth stanza reveals that in the Roman times, there was much glee and excitement among the public, who could see gladiators covered with blood, fighting in the arena. But in between, are stanzas interwoven in a tapestry of ancient and modern events, indicating the incessant cruelty and selfishness in humanity running through the centuries. Social evils and inequality still exist in today's society. The following lines of the song also reveal the use of parallelism and the juxtaposition of class difference:

One man had much money,
One man had not enough to eat,
One man he lived just like a King,
The other man begged on the street.
So also as in the past, there is still war and killing today, as the song says:

One man died of a knife so sharp,
One man died from the bullet of a gun,
One man died of a broken heart
To see the lynchin' of his son.

Bob Dylan departs from the style of song-composition of the past decades. Indeed, if we examine the song, we find the second stanza consists of eight lines, and the rest of the stanzas consist of seven lines. His songs differ from popular songs of past decades, for the majority of the old songs consist of the regular four-line stanzas.


To revitalise the language of poetry, the poet draws directly on the resources of the contemporary language. ... The effect of the return to ordinary language in the present century has been far-reaching. The feeling that there are intrinsically poetical and unpoetical sectors of the language has been repudiated. Much of the old paraphernalia of poetic expression (e.g. archaism) has been overthrown, and poets have eagerly delved into the most unlikely resources, such as the terminology of aeronautics and finance. Pound, Eliot, and the poets of the thirties showed their determination to be rid of orthodox restrictions of choice by making use of flagrantly
prosy and vulgar aspects of everyday usage. In the new poetry of the fifties, this flamboyance has given way to a more sober and easy acceptance of colloquialism, even slang, as a fit medium of poetic expression.6

The poetry of Bob Dylan too, is a poetry conveyed in the language of the everyday life, of slangs and colloquialism. For example, in the first stanza of the song "Long Ago, Far Away", we find Dylan repeating the pronoun in the third line: "A man he did it long ago" to sound colloquial. The last two lines of the stanza reveal a colloquial tone in: "These things don't happen/No more nowadays".

The second stanza shows other poetic inversions of the language. The lines:

The chains of slaves
They dragged the ground
With heads and hearts hung low

show how Dylan has inverted the construction of the sentence to strike a spark of newness as well as rhythm in the sentence structure. Thus, the sentence would have run: "The slaves dragged their chains on the ground..." which he, however puts it in another way, by means of repeating the pronoun "They"; so we have "The chains of slaves/They..."
dragged the ground". Dylan is noted for his fondness of repeating the pronoun in his other lyrics as well. For instance, in his "Ballad in Plain D", he wrote in the very first line: "I once loved a girl, her skin it was bronze", and in "With God On Our Side", he wrote:

Oh my name it is nothin'
My age it means less.

In the song, "Long Ago, Far Away", the alliteration in the third line of the second stanza quoted above, too, should be noted: heads, hearts, hung.

Within the same stanza of "Long Ago, Far Away", we find that another feature of Dylan's language is his twist of the pronoun, by placing it in such a position that it creates an image which catches the reader's or listener's attention. The lines,

The chains of slaves
They dragged the ground
With heads and hearts hung low

show that the pronoun "They" would appear to apparently stand for the noun "chains", yet we do get the sense that the sentence conveys the meaning that the slaves dragged
the chains. Again, the preposition "on" or "along" has been left out, so that the meaning apparently would be that the "chains dragged the ground". In fact, Dylan has very well compressed the words and meanings, so that the lines carry two images: that of the slaves dragging the chains along the ground; and another implicit meaning would be suggested, that there were chains of slaves walking along, and are being fettered and dragged along the ground by their masters who expected the maximum work out of them. Geoffrey N. Leech calls such a technique, Grammatical Deviation, and he gives the examples from Hopkins:

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me,
fastened me flesh.

and from W.H. Auden:

There head falls forward, fatigue at evening,
And dreams of home,
Waving from window, spread of welcome,
Kissing of wife under single sheet;
But waking sees. ...

Vivid images on the evils of war occur in the third stanza, when guns fired wildly by soldiers, would seem to make the whole world submerge in bloodshed and death. Margaret Schlauch has discussed another technique in modern poetry in her book, Modern English and American Poetry,
where she describes it as "Normal Order of major sentence parts". She gives examples of many modern poets, for instance:

The guns spell money's ultimate reason

(Stephen Spender)

Though the world has slipped and gone

Sounds my loud discordant cry.

(Edith Sitwell)\(^{10}\)

This same technique is also to be seen in the third stanza of Dylan's song, "Long Ago, Far Away". Thus a section of the lines run as follows:

The war guns they went off wild,
The whole world bled its blood.
Men's bodies floated on the edge
Of oceans made of mud.

This section also reminds us of T.S. Eliot's technique in the lines of his poem "Sweeney Among The Nightingales."

The nightingales are singin near
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.\(^{11}\)

Differences in social and economic status occur in the fourth stanza, whereas in the fifth stanza, we clearly
see the modern weapons of death: bayonets ("a knife so sharp"); "the bullet of a gun" and "lynchin'". The shocking insight into Man's delight on seeing death is clearly brought out in the sixth stanza, where

People cheered with bloodshot grins
As eyes and minds went blind.

However, the vein of the satiric note, lies in the repetition of the line "Long ago, far away" indicating that past evils still exist today. All the events are wound up in the climax of sarcasm that comes in the last stanza, where Dylan simply asks "Things like that don't happen/No more, nowadays, do they?"

Bob Dylan also utilizes the technique of repetition in his song. He repeats the last three lines of the first stanza, in every other stanza:

Long ago, far away
Things like that don't happen
No more, nowadays.

Since this composition is intended to be sung, X.J. Kennedy in his book, An Introduction to Poetry, calls this technique "an internal refrain" which he describes as

one that appears within a stanza, generally in a position that stays fixed throughout a poem.12
He gives examples, of an anonymous eighteenth century Irish ballad entitled "Johny, I Hardly Knew Ye", where there is a fixed line — "Och, Johny, I hardly knew ye!" — repeated in every stanza. The other example is W.B. Yeats's "Long Legged Fly", where there are the following fixed lines attached to every stanza:

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

However, Yeats slightly changed the internal refrain in the second stanza, by substituting the word "His" with "Her". Dylan also slightly changes the internal refrain in the last stanza. (Only two ending words — "do they?"). X.J. Kennedy calls this "an incremental refrain" when he says that:

A refrain whose words change slightly with each recurrence is called an incremental refrain.13

By twisting this repetition in the last stanza, Dylan pitches the incremental refrain against the internal refrain, to drive home the satiric image of our modern age, which is the theme of the song.

Edward W. Roseinheim, Jr. in his book, What Happens In Literature has very succinctly defined poetry as follows:
When we become aware of rhyme, we become aware as well of the fact that language has somehow been deliberately arranged for the benefit of those who will listen to it. Here we are not confronted with the casual flow of words by which we are asked questions or given information; instead, language has been manipulated and shaped to construct something permanent. Something has been made for our pleasure or our edification, and, in place of a mere act of communication, we have been given a rhyme (sic), an arrangement of words which cannot be altered and still affect us in precisely the same way, which stands ready always to be read or recited or listened to in the form which its author gave it. The very use of the word "poetry" ... implies our ability to distinguish between language as it is used merely to make sense and language arranged into a permanent, created whole.  

Bob Dylan has arranged his lyrics in rhymes. Yet, he does not follow strictly the conventional meters and rhymes, for the rhyme-scheme in the song "Long Ago, Far Away" is intentionally haphazard—in order to create a greater impact. In this song the rhyme-scheme of the stanzas is as follows: (1) abcbded; (2) abcdfe; (3) abcbded; (4) abcbded; (5) abacde; (6) abcbded; (7) abcbded. 

It is true that the existence of "rhyme" in songs, does help to bring poetry closer to music. In Dylan's song, mentioned above, the general form is alternate rhyme. We can also find that the verse form is free, though smooth and flowing, turning it into "a permanent, created whole".
Richard Goldstein has rightly observed that:

It is impossible to speak of poetry in rock without mentioning the pervasive influence of rhythm. Until recently, rigid conventions kept pop lyrics within a metrical framework that poets have discarded long ago. Even the most adventurous lyricists wrote even stanzas, made frequent use of rhyme, and kept that mighty beat churning through their words. Today these rules are regarded as more of a legacy than an ultimatum.

In the song "Long Ago, Far Away", Bob Dylan utilizes a particular rhythm which is expressive of the theme of the song. The meter in the stanzas is mostly Iambic:

À mãń/he düı/dıt lırng/ágo/
And they hung/hım ön/á cróss./

with the last line in the anapaest and Iambus.

And with a shift in the repeated lines:

Long ago,/far away;
These things/don't happen
No more/nowadays.

consisting of dactyls and spondees and trochees.
In total, the song gives a satiric picture of man. Man's indulgence in hatred, self-centredness, wars and bloodshed, makes Dylan work on this experience throughout the song and the historical examples enable him to convey the full sense of an innate viciousness and evil of man. It is this capacity in Bob Dylan that Richard Goldstein points to when he says:

to claim that he (Bob Dylan) is the major poet of his generation is not to relegate written verse to the graveyard of cultural irrelevance. Most young people are aware of linear poetry. But they groove on Dylan, not because the rock-medium has overwhelmed his message for this generation, but because, in Dylan's songs, the two reinforce each other.16

Another protest song against war, entitled "Masters of War",17 Bob Dylan directs his fiery anger against the post 1950 beaurocrats who sit behind desks, legislating laws and orders, knowing little of the reality of bloodshed and crimes committed in the name of War. In this song, Dylan speaks of the 'guns', the 'death planes', the 'big bombs', built by people 'that hide behind walls', 'that hide behind desks'. In the second stanza, Dylan becomes cynical:
You that never done nothin'
But build to destroy
You play with my world
Like it's your little toy
You put a gun in my hand
And you hide from my eyes
And you turn and run farther
When the fast bullets fly

Then the allusion to the Judas-figure is included in a more cynical frame:

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
A world war can be won
You want me to believe
But I see through your eyes
And I see through your brain
Like I see through the water
That runs down my drain

Dylan charges the 'masters of war', for being guilty of bringin even psychological fears in parents to bear babies, for in the fifth stanza, he says:

You've thrown the worst fear
That can never be hurled
Fear to bring children
Into the world
For threatening my baby
Unborn and unnamed
You ain't worth the blood
That runs in your veins

Dylan even dams to hell, the souls of the 'masters of war', for in the seventh stanza, he says:
Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good
Will it buy you forgiveness
Do you think that it could
I think you will find
When your death takes its toll
All the money you made
Will never buy back your soul

If we analyze the syntax of the sentences in the first stanza, for example, we find that the first sentence starts with an imperative mood: "Come you masters of war", which suggests a tone of challenge or command to the masters of war to come and pay attention to his words. The sentence then continues with clauses that tell us about the masters of war, so to say, illustrating to the readers why the poet challenges or orders the 'masters of war'. Thus the phrases that follow are phrases that tell us more about the 'masters of war'. The lines of phrases are:

You that build all the guns
You that build the death planes
You that build the big bombs
You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks

The sentence, thus continues again after these five phrases, to link the idea stated in the first line: "Come you masters of war" with the lines, "I just want you to know/
I can see through your masks".
It can also be noted that Bob Dylan uses symbols in order to convey certain ideas contained in the song. In reading the line, "You that build all the guns", it indirectly suggests that the 'masters of war' are not people who literally build the guns, nor can guns be built, but manufactured or made. Nor are there masters of war, for there can be masters of ceremony, masters of the house, etc. But there cannot be 'masters of war'. Thus it follows that Dylan is hinting that these particular 'masters' are designers and instigators of war, by branding them as people 'that build all the guns'. Indeed, Dylan wants to convey the idea that these people bear the responsibility of major bloodshed in the world. The same observation can also be applied in the next phrase, 'You that build the death planes'. However, there is a peculiar combination of nouns in this phrase. The planes are called "death planes" where the noun "death" stands like an adjective, which as a rule is not an adjective at all, for the adjective of "death" is "dead". Yet Dylan suggests a deeper meaning in the phrases: the masters of war are those of the modern age and are responsible for the loss of many innocent lives, which is brought about by war jets and deadly missiles, killing an unaccountable member of people, in the recent wars in different parts of the world. The line, "You that
build the big bombs", will at once make a modern reader recall to his mind the bombings and machine-gunnings that had taken place during the Second World War, as well as the horrible and tragic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then we have the next two lines:

You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks

In searching the above lines for symbolic meanings, let us examine the word 'hide'. The meaning of this word is: "put or keep oneself out of sight", "prevent from being seen, known, found", "conceal oneself". The different shades of meaning carry the idea that the person who hides is a person who does not want to be seen, known or found out; who conceals himself from others. Then the question arises: why do these persons hide themselves? The lines we have seen above, carry the answer, for they are the ones who are responsible for shedding innocent blood, with 'guns', 'death planes' and 'big bombs'. What about the words 'walls' and 'desks'? 'Walls' mean 'continuous, usually vertical, solid structure(s) of stone, brick... used to enclose, divide or protect something'. The word 'desks' carries a symbolic picture of 'bureau; officials'. The phrase therefore conveys the idea that the
authoritative beaurocrats are persons hiding themselves behind their official desks or tables, sheltered within their houses or palaces or mansions, surrounded by walls which protect them from being harmed by others; perhaps, by those very victims of war. Other meanings can also be analyzed in the other stanzas of the song. But what one wants to point out here is that Bob Dylan is a poet because he is not simply writing lines to be sung, but because his songs are usually steeped in the mystery of life, but ever constantly focussing on modern man's predicament.

It is interesting to note the following lines in the second stanza of the song:

You that never done nothin'
But build to destroy

The symbolic overtone in these sharply satirical lines, lies in Dylan's use of the conversational slangy language: 'You that never done nothin'' to stress the negativeness of the meaning: the masters of war who have never attempted anything in their lives but only to destroy; secondly, the above lines symbolically flash a contrast of two classes of people — people who speak the standard language behind 'desks' and 'walls', as against the common man who speaks the common language containing slangs, and who is the
victim of authority. The simile that follows expresses anger against the authorities, for they 'play with my world/Like it's your little toy'.

This analysis can go on with other stanzas in the song. Richard Goldstein has the following remark on Bob Dylan:

But it was Dylan's success which established beyond a doubt that poetic imagery belonged in pop music.18

And this same critic boldly re-asserts:

Dylan's remarkable achievement has been to inject pop music with poetic power by simply grafting his own sensibility onto what was already implicit in rock.19

The verses of Dylan's songs are very much like the verses of an Eliot or Pound poem. Take for instance, Dylan's lines in the song, 'Masters of War' which say:

You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks

and the other two lines:

You that never done nothin'
But build to destroy
Following the discussion on the lines mentioned above, it follows that they offer a comparison in symbolism and imagery to Ezra Pound's poem, entitled "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance", where there are the following lines:

The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,
   It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
And I let down the crystal curtain
   And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

Pound supplies these notes on connotations in the poem: "Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore she has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach."

Protest against war is partly echoed in his other song entitled "The Times They Are A-Changin'", where the following excerpts can be taken:

Come gather 'round people
   Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
   Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.
Here, as in his other song "A Hard Rains A Gonna Fall", he speaks of the worst time coming over the world, perhaps the advent of a nuclear war, in the image of a growing flood, similar to the great deluge mentioned in the Bible. In the next stanza, the satirical attack is more specific, when he sings:

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside
And it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

In the song, "John Brown", Dylan gives a pathetic picture of a young lad by the name of John Brown who went off to war "to fight on a foreign shore", and "His mama sure was proud of him!". After a long time, a letter finally came, telling her to "Go down and meet the train/Your son's a-coming home from the war". The mother was shocked to see her son, for

On his face was all shot up and his hand was all blown off
And he wore a metal brace around his waist.
He whispered kind of slow, in a voice she did not know,
While she couldn't even recognize his face!
Oh! Lord! Not even recognize his face.
And the boy, John Brown, tells his mother:

Don't you remember, Ma, when I went off to war
You thought it was the best thing I could do?
I was on the battle ground, you were home... acting proud.
You wasn't there standing in my shoes.

Then next lines are very ironic:

'Oh, and I thought when I was there, God, what am I doing here?
I'm a-try'n' to kill somebody or die try'n'.

But the thing that scared me most was when my enemy came close
And I saw that his face looked just like mine'.
Oh! Lord! Just like mine!

The above lines remind us of the ironic element that we find in Wilfred Owen's poem, "Strange Meeting" where we have the following lines:

Then, as I probed them, one sprang up and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,
By his dead smile, I knew we stood in Hell.
... 'Strange friend', I said, 'here is no cause to mourn'.
'None', said the other, 'save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life, also;...
I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
... I am the enemy you killed, my friend,
I knew you in this dark;
Further, Dylan's John Brown narrates:

'And I couldn't help but think, through
the thunder rolling and stink,
That I was just a puppet in a play.
And through the roar and smoke, this
string is finally broke,
And a cannon ball blew my eyes away.'

Dylan's sympathy for the soldiers also exists in Siegfried Sassoon's poem, "The Death-Bed", in the following lines:

Night, with a gust of wind, was in the ward,
Blowing the curtain to a glimmering curve.
Night. He was blind; he could not see the stars
Glinting among the wraiths of wandering cloud;
Queer blots of colour, purple, scarlet, green,
Flickered and faded in his drowning eyes. ...
Light many lamps and gather round his bed.
Lend him your eyes, warm blood, and will to live.
Speak to him; rouse him; you may save him yet.
He's young; he hated War; how should he die
When cruel old campaigners win safe through?

And did not Wilfred Owen, in his plea for the soldiers' lives, angrily remark in his poem "Insensibility" that:

The front line withers,
But they are troops who fade, not flowers
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling;
Losses who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.
Like Dylan's John Brown, Owen's survivor was also suffering the same fate, for Owen described him as:

Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

In another powerful anti-war song entitled "With God on Our Side", Dylan chides the makers of war and stresses on the unthoughtful assumption, where people leisurely take it to be that God is always on the side of the winner. In this song, Dylan speaks of the 'cavalries' charging against the Indians; of the Spanish-American War and the Civil War; Then on the First World War, he sings the following lines:

Oh the First World War, boys
It closed out its fate
The reason for fighting
I never got straight
But I learned to accept
Accept it with pride
For you don't count the dead
When God's on your side.

On the Second World War, the lines run thus:

When the Second World War
Came to an end
We forgave the Germans
And we were friends
Though they murdered six million
In the ovens they fried
The German now too
Have God on their side.
On the modern nuclear warfares, the lines run thus:

But now we got weapons
Of the chemical dust
If fire them we're forced to
Then fire them we must
One push of the button
And a shot the world wide
And you never ask questions
When God's on your side.

Dylan thus concludes with a biblical allusion which sums up his satiric view on war:

In many a dark hour
I've been thinkin' about this
That Jesus Christ
Was betrayed by a kiss
But I can't think for you
You'll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot
Had God on his side.

At times, Bob Dylan discards rhyme-schemes and prefers free verse. But at other times, Dylan uses end rhyme as well as internal rhyme. Dylan's method of rhyme is a good one, for X.J. Kennedy has stated in his book, An Introduction to Poetry, that a good rhyme is not an expected one, but should have the capacity to surprise. In Dylan's song, "Masters of War", we have the following lines:

You fasten the triggers
For others to fire
Then you set back and watch
When the death count gets higher
And in his song, namely "All I Really Want To Do", we can see that the whole song is completely involved in end rhyme, internal rhyme, masculine rhyme and feminine rhyme. The song also includes an internal refrain. The following stanzas can be taken as examples:

I ain't lookin' to block you up,
Shock or knock or lock you up,
Analyze you, categorize you,
Finalize you or advertise you.
All I really want to do
Is, baby, be friends with you.

I don't want to straight-face you,
Race or chase you, track or trace you,
Or disgrace you or displace you,
Or define you or confine you.
All I really want to do
Is, baby, be friends with you.

This same technique is being employed in Rober Burns's satiric ballad, "The Kirk's Alarm":

Orthodox, Orthodox, wha believe in John Knox,
Let me sound an alarm to your conscience:
Ther's a heretic blast has been blown i' the wast,
"That what is not sense must be nonsense."

Another technique employed by Dylan in his lyrics is the method of repetition. In "Masters of War", we have the following:
This heightens the musical pattern of the song as well as enhancing the ideas and emotions conveyed in the song. To a listener who hears Bob Dylan's personal rendition of the songs, this marked tendency in him, makes the listener know that the repetition of lines, either spot lights the inner theme of the song, or throwing a full impact on the last lines ending the stanzas. For example, the following stanzas can be cited from his other song entitled "She Belongs to Me":

You that build ...
You that build ...
You that build ...
You that hide ...
You that hide ...

You will start out standing
Proud to steal her anything she sees.
You will start out standing
Proud to steal her anything she sees.
But you will wind up peeking through her keyhole
Down upon your knees.

She never stumbles,
She's got no place to fall.
She never stumbles,
She's got no place to fall.
She's nobody's child,
The Law can't touch her at all.

She wears an Egyptian ring
That sparkles before she speaks.
She wears an Egyptian ring
That sparkles before she speaks.
She's a hypnotist collector,
You are a walking antique.
Another interesting mark to be seen in his songs is his use of punctuation. In certain songs, Dylan totally discards the rules of punctuation marks, whereas in other songs, his use of punctuation is very scanty, as can be seen in the following stanza from the song, "With God on Our Side":

Oh the history books tell it
They tell it so well
The cavalries charged
The Indians fell
The cavalries charged
The Indians died
Oh the country was young
With God on its side.

Such poetic license can also be seen in E.E. Cummings's poem, "All In Green Went My Love Riding":

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

Then there are the following lines from Bob Dylan's "Some Other Kinds of Songs":

high treachery sails
unveils
its last wedding song
bang sing the bells
the low pauper's prayer
rice rags in blossom
blow in a fleet. ...27
Such lines are often seen in modern poets, as in Allen Ginsberg's "In Back Of The Real":

railroad yard in San Jose
I wandered desolate
in front of a tank factory
and sat on a bench
near the switchman's shack.

Furthermore, in song-writing, Bob Dylan uses clichés. After all, it cannot be denied that a popular song cannot scorn or snub a cliché. Yet those who want to criticise the art of Bob Dylan, need not go further than did William James in his affectionate disparagement of William Shakespeare.

Christopher Ricks in his book entitled, The Force Of Poetry has the following comment on Dylan in relation to clichés:

Dylan has a newly instinctive grasp of the age-old instincts which created a cliché in the first place, and this is manifest on all the occasions when he throws new light on an old cliché, or rotates a cliché so that a facet of it catches a new light. At the same time, like the very unlike Geoffrey Hill, he often grounds his wit, humour, and pathos on an intuition as to how a cliché may incite reflection, and not preclude it, by being self-reflexive.
In the song, "Masters of War", we have the cliché, "see through your eyes". Ordinarily, it means to see things through another person's eyes or viewpoint; which is easier said than done and perhaps, a very misguided thing to do, too. Dylan tactfully wrests the cliché, in order to bring in the sense which goes with sharp-eyed suspicion. So the phrase turns out to be 'seeing through things' and knowing the cunning and hypocrisy of the masters of war. Christopher Ricks comments:

For the first verse had sung 'I just want you to know/I can see through your masks' — the vigilant sense of 'see through' — so that when we hear 'But I see through your eyes', we see that it doesn't mean the usual blandly magnanimous thing ('from your point of view'), but the stubborn opposite: I see what your eyes are trying to hide. The cliché has been alerted, and we are alerted to its clichéness, seeing the words from a new perspective, a different point of view, and seeing penetratingly through them.29

Another Dylan song, "I shall be Free"30 is free from the clichéness of its clichés. Take for instance, the following lines:

Well, ask me why I'm drunk alla time,  
It levels my head and eases my mind,  
I just walk along and stroll and sing,  
I see better days and I do better things.
On the above lines, Christopher Ricks very aptly comments.

The phrase 'seen better days' has itself seen better days - that would do as the definition of a cliché. But Dylan brings it from its past into his and our present, by turning it into the present tense, 'I see better days'; and by marrying it to 'and I do better things', he does a far better thing with it than usual. He eases it from the dim past into a bright present. He helps us see it in a better light, so that instead of its ordinary sad backward glance, there is a step forward, the strolling of an unaggressive intoxication which refreshes the flat old phrase...31

Let us examine the love song of Bob Dylan entitled "I Threw It All Away".32 We have the following lines:

So if you find someone that gives you all
of her love,
Take it to your heart, don't let it stray,

Bob Dylan stubbornly refuses to write down the phrase 'Take her to your heart' usually found in love songs of the early decades of this century, for he knows perfectly well that people would expect him to write the next usual phrase 'And take her in your arms'. He does not even write the old phrase 'take it to heart'. Thus Christopher Ricks comments:
The trouble with a cliche like 'take it to heart' is that by now it's almost impossible to take it to heart. Yet genius with words is often a matter, as T.S. Eliot said, of being original with the minimum of alteration, (Introductory Essay to London and The Vanity of Human Wishes (1930) and such is one of the evidences of Dylan's genius. ... 'Take it to heart' becomes 'Take it to your heart', just enough to take it into the heartfelt; it stands for 'all of her love',...33

'Make it new' commanded Ezra Pound from the captain's tower; and this is what Dylan has done in the renovation of the state of language. We also note that the best American poets have often focussed on the poignancy that there is nothing considered to be final. Instead, there is always a trend of continuity. Bob Dylan has caught this well in his song "If You See Her, Say Hello", with the following lines:

Sundown, yellow moon
I replay the past
I know ev'ry scene by heart
They all went by so fast.

The above lines have got the touch of Dylan's personal experience, coupled with American technology in his mind's eye, and Christopher Ricks has the following comment on the above lines:
There is no such thing as a video of the heart; replaying the past does depend on knowing every scene by heart; but what makes this heartfelt is the unspoken "And Yet" between the lines: ...
"And yet they all went by so fast", not 'because they all went by so fast' ... it would have been by their having gone by so slowly that they were known by heart.... Simply that you have to be quick on the uptake as Dylan kisses the joy as it flies, in both senses of it flies.34

On the modern belief that violence and idealism have an occult connection, we have Robert Lowell's translation of Racine's Phédre, where he states:

Lady, if you must weep, weep for your silence that filled your days and mine with violence.

(I.iii)

But Lowell gives greater emphasis to rhyme than Dylan, by insisting metrically on the extra syllable in 'violence'. Dylan did the opposite and he caught it well in his song, "Love Minus Zero/No Limit"35 with the following lines that run smoothly:

My love she speaks like silence,
Without ideals or violence,

Dylan even exposes that reality does not even seem real in contemporary society, as exposed in the following lines of his song, "When The Ship Comes In".36
Oh the foes will rise
With the sleep still in their eyes
And they'll jerk from their beds and
think they're dreamin'.
But they'll pinch themselves and squeal
And know that it's for real,
The hour when the ship comes in.

More recent poems written by other poets like Leonard Cohen, Allen Ginsberg and others, are being set to music, apparently encouraged by Bob Dylan. Yet there is a difference between Dylan and Ginsberg, for Dylan understood his background whereas Ginsberg never seems to have understood. Lachlan Mackinnon observes:

The fragments of the past which appear in Dylan's songs movingly remind us of what may have been lost, where Ginsberg's bodhisattvas unhappily resemble Dylan's "flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark". Dylan is a better artist than Ginsberg because he doesn't horse around pretending to be both Whitman and a master of Eastern wisdom but gets on with exploring and developing inherited forms in new directions.37

Dylan is nowadays regarded as a poet who prefers to speak in tongues, as he often does along with the background music. Yet he never bothers about vocal excellence, for his primary purpose is to convey the words to the audience. A close study of Bob Dylan's work makes the New York critic, Richard Goldstein remark:
Dylan's intention is to reconcile poetry with song. Scattered throughout his liner notes are constant references to this aesthetic task ("a song is anything that can walk by itself/i am a songwriter. a poem is a naked person... some people say i am a poet").

The world is having great and greater expectations for more and more creative works from Bob Dylan. Thus, we sum up our study of Bob Dylan's songs by saying that his songs are not shallow but contain poetry, because they juxtapose symbols of high and low cultures, ever focussing on that great concern for modern society and its people.

Turning to other singer-poets, we shall also explore some of their compositions and their poetical elements. Let us examine some of the songs composed by Paul Simon (b.1942) and sung by Simon and Garfunkel. On Paul Simon's composition called "The Sound of Silence", Richard Goldstein writes in the introductory note to the song:

This is one of the earliest folk-rock statements of man's alienation from you-know-whom. Some say Paul Simon took his theme from Steppenwolf. If not, it is certainly an analogous situation and one which has provided abundant source material for rock poets. But never has it been expressed so succinctly and with such compassion.
The song as a whole is symbolic—a man wishing "darkness" as his "old friend" and coming to talk to it again:

Because a vision softly creeping,
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains within the sound of silence.

This, in itself, is a symbolic picture of a man who feels alienated in his society and whose only company in life is "darkness". The song is not only symbolic, but approaches the subconscious areas of Henry James, Virginia Woolf and Eliot's Prufrock. This is seen in the second stanza of the song, where Paul Simon tells us that during his "restless dreams", he "walked alone/'Neath the halo of a street lamp, ..."

In developing the theme of alienation, one should note that prominent symbols are employed in the form of visual colours and the repercussions of the musical language of the song. For shades of colour, we have "darkness" symbolizing loneliness, "night" as the state of the subconscious, "the halo of a street lamp", symbolizing warmth and sympathy; and a "neon light" signifying the presence of a crowd reaching out for the cold fingers of contemporary materialism. The repercussions of the musical language lies in
diction itself and the auditory sensitiveness to the words. We can even hear and feel the degrees of sound. Thus in the song, we have the following words: "sound", "talking", "speaking", "echoed", "whispered" and "silence", which is the absolute negativeness of sound.

The theme of man's alienation in society is in turn, bringing out the tone of contrast, which can be seen in the very title of the song, namely, "The Sound of Silence". This contrasting tone is further emphasized in the third stanza of the song:

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people maybe more,
People talking without speaking,
People hearing without listening,
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dares disturb the sound of silence.

The song carries a satiric note on modern man and modern society, in the following lines:

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon God they made,
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming.
And the sign said:
"The words of the prophets are written
on the subway walls and tenement halls"
And whispered in the sound of silence.

What meaning do these lines carry? Paul Simon speaks in symbols — people praying to the neon gods "they made", "
conveying the idea that people worship things that they have made by themselves; in short, materialism takes the place of spiritual values in contemporary society. This phenomenon leads the people in turn, to prefer "silence" symbolizing not "consent" but "indifference".

In fact, the whole song is symbolic—a woefully symbolic picture of man's alienation from his fellow-men. What is the cause of this feeling of alienation that Paul Simon expresses? The reasons are clear in the song. It is chiefly because people themselves have become machines, and thus, artificial and unnatural. The people he mixes and lives with are those "People talking without speaking,/ People hearing without listening,"—people who utter sound to "communicate ideas, by words" (C.O.D.), but who do not "speak" or "make known (one's opinions)" (C.O.D.): people who "hear" or "perceive sound with the ear" (C.O.D.), but do not "listen" or "make effort to hear something" (C.O.D.) spoken to them. Paul Simon feels that he, like the prophets of old, has a duty to do— to teach his fellow-men. He says:

"Fools!" said I, "You do not know Silence like a cancer grows. Hear my words that I might teach you Take my arms that I might reach you."
The song ends with a moral and a warning to such indifferent people. The very gods and idols that they, so deeply worshipped, will be forming, like the neon lights of an advertisement, flashing out a warning to them, in the form of a sign that declares in bold letters:

"The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls"

But the warning is only a "whisper" in "the sound of silence". The singer-poet's requests are rejected:

But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed, in the wells of silence.

What people are bent on hearing is only the "Sound of Silence".

The song is rich in symbolic meaning and with a tendency towards an incremental refrain at the end of every stanza. This technique of using a refrain, gives power to stress an ironic contrast on the words, "sound" and "silence". Even the musical melody attached to the song is compatible to the theme, where musical notes linger a little bit longer on the words "sound" and "silence". On this, we should also note that, as there are 'measures' in poetry, so also there are 'bars' in music, where in
both, there is a 'falling rhythm' (dactyls and trochees) and a 'rising rhythm' (iambic and anapaests); and also that 'a pause' (.) (a deliberate silence) in vocal music, no matter how short it is, becomes a counterpart to a 'silent stress' (\^) in poetry. Geoffrey N. Leech says:

The most interesting of them, from the metrical point of view, is the silent stress (\^), which sometimes has an entire silent measure to itself. 41

And he gives the following example:

Ding/dong/bell/ \^/Pussy's/in the/well/

Perhaps, the best example in vocal music, would be Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" where we have the following line:

Hallelujah! \^ Hallelujah! \^ Hallelujah! \^ Hallelujah! \^ Hal-le-lu-jah!

From the above discussion, we can feel and hear that the melody and the words blend perfectly well in Paul Simon's song, mentioned before. The following line is given as an example:

.d | s::- -:: | t_1 | d.l_1 :: -:: |

The Sound \^ of Silence
Thus, in the above line, we find that the musical 'pause' or the poetical 'silent stress' covers the entire contrasting tone on the words 'sound' and 'silence'.

The form of the song as a whole is that of modern free verse, with a rhythmic beat and scattering end rhymes in such lines as the following:

Hello darkness my old friend,
I've come to talk with you again,
Because a vision softly creeping,
Left its seeds while I was sleeping

In restless dreams I walked alone,
Narrow streets of cobble stone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp,
I turned my collar to the cold and damp.

The song in total, is beautiful where its expression is indeed full of compassion for contemporary society.

Another song written by Paul Simon is entitled, "Richard Cory (With Apologies to E.A. Robinson)". This song was published in 1966 by Paul Simon. Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) had published it as a poem, with the same title, "Richard Cory". Robinson's poem runs as follows:

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Glean favoured, and imperially slim.
And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning", and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich — yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Paul Simon writes his song on the same theme more poetically in a contemporary setting. The following are the lines of his song:

They say that Richard Cory owns
One half of this old town,
With elliptical connections
To spread his wealth around.
Born into society,
A banker's only child,
He had everything a man could want:
Power, grace and style.

Refrain: But I, I work in his factory
And I curse the life I'm livin'
And I curse my poverty,
And I wish that I could be
Oh I wish that I could be
Oh I wish that I could be
Richard Cory.
The papers print his picture
Almost everywhere he goes:
Richard Cory at the opera,
Richard Cory at a show
And the rumour of his party
And the orgies on his yacht —
Oh he surely must be happy
With everything he's got.

(Refrain)

He really gave to charity,
He had the common touch,
And they were grateful for his patronage
And they thanked him very much,
So my mind was filled with wonder
When the evening headlines read:

"Richard Cory went home last night
And put a bullet through his head."

(Refrain)

X.J. Kennedy calls Paul Simon's song, Richard Cory, "a folk ballad". So let us compare the two poems, to see how Paul Simon drags E.A. Robinson's theme into contemporary society.

Richard Cory of E.A. Robinson is "... a gentleman from sole to crown/Clean favoured, and imperially slim."
He was "... rich — yes, richer than a king —/And admirably schooled in every grace:" Robinson's Richar Cory is therefore, an aristocratic gentleman belonging to the nineteenth century or even earlier, and always being tied down to that particular era's conventions and social formalities.
Paul Simon's Richard Cory is a modern man who owns half of the old town and whose ambiguous connections enable him to "spread his wealth around". Modern society recognizes him as the rich "banker's only child", and everyone envies him, for people realize that only through wealth, a man attains "Power, grace and style".

Not only this, Paul Simon's Richard Cory, is more of a modern millionaire:

The papers print his picture
Almost everywhere he goes:
Richard Cory at the opera,
Richard Cory at a show
And the rumor of his party
And the orgies on his yacht—
Oh, he surely must be happy
With everything he's got.

The narrator in E.A. Robinson's poem is a day-labourer, for he says:

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;...

Paul Simon's narrator specifies more of a modern factory worker, when he says:

But I, I work in his factory
And I curse the life I'm livin'
And I curse my poverty.
The endings of Robinson's poem and Paul Simon's ballad are identical. Of course, the Richard Cory of both "put a bullet through his head".

The difference between the two poems is just a matter of details. Richard Cory of Robinson is a gentleman of the past. But Paul Simon's Richard Cory is a gentleman of the 1960s. Further, the narrators of both Robinson and Simon are day-labourers. But Simon's narrator is a modern factory worker, who works in Richard Cory's factory.

But what we should note is the theme that has interested Paul Simon—the theme of class difference, between the aristocratic high society and the down-trodden working class, where we have both the labourers of E.A. Robinson and Paul Simon, living a life of poverty, who "went without the meat", who "cursed the bread."

What makes this song a poem, is the deep, underlying symbolic meaning it conveys, through symbolic words and phrases. For example, we have the following newspaper statement from Simon's "Richard Cory".

"Richard Cory went home last night
And put a bullet through his head"
The statement looks simple. But the ironic tone of the lines, lies in the deep and quizzical symbolic meaning of life: What would be the use of being rich like Richard Cory, when there is no peace of mind? Again, what would be the use of being poor like the factory worker who faces constant difficulty in driving away the wolf from the door? The factory worker must have even realized that when poverty knocks at the door, love flies through the window. In fact, the song in total, seems to be forming a question— "What is the meaning of life?" —If to be rich, there is no peace of mind; and if to slave in a factory also, there is no happiness and relief. In addition, the terminal refrain in Paul Simon’s "Richard Cory", is a musical device to highlight the theme of the song. However, although the song’s stanzas wear the traditional form, yet the technique is that of modern free verse.

On his own selection of popular lyrics, Richard Goldstein has already written in the preface to his book, The Poetry of Rock:

But I do assert that there is an immense reservoir of power here, on impressive awareness of language, and a profound sense of rhythm. I call those qualities "poetic"; you may want to call them "unconscious", but I do not see how the two are incompatible.
Besides Goldstein's selections, other examples of songs can be cited to show this "impressive awareness of language" and this "profound sense of rhythm". One can include the following songs below for a comparative study.

The first song is "El Condor Pasa", sung by Simon and Garfunkel. Here, a person speaks of the spirit of freedom which is denied to a man who is tied to the chains of slavery. The song states:

Away, I'd rather sail away
Like a swan that's here and gone;
A man gets tied down to the ground,
He gives the world, its saddest sound.

The sentimental and tragic melody accompanying the song places more emphasis on the symbols taken from Nature, to express the meaning of suppression as well as liberty and freedom. The "sparrow" and the "swan" in the song, are symbols of liberty; the "snail"—a symbol of suppression. The "forest" too, is a symbol of freedom; the "street"—a symbol of suppression. It should be noted that the song in total, also carries the Wordsworthian notion of Nature versus city-life.

The next song is that of John Denver, whose original name is John Henry Duetschendorf. The song is entitled the
"Wind Song". In order to understand its form and structure, symbols and imagery, the song needs to be quoted in its entirety:

The wind is the whisper of our mother the earth,
The wind is the hand of our father the sky,
The wind watches over our struggles and pleasures,
The wind is the goddess who first learnt to fly.

The wind is the bearer of bad and good tidings,
The weaver of darkness, the bringer of dawn,
The wind gives the rain, then builds us a rainbow,
The wind is the singer who sang the first song.

The wind is a twister of anger and warning,
The wind brings the fragrance of freshly mown hay,
The wind is a racer and a white stallion running
And a sweet taste of love on a slow summer's day.

The wind knows the songs of the cities and canyons,
The thunder of mountains, the roar of the sea,
The wind is the taker and giver of mornings,
The wind is the symbol of all that is free.

So welcome the wind and the wisdom she offers,
Follow her summons when she calls again,
In your heart and in your spirit,
Let the breezes surround you,
Lift up your voice then
And sing with the wind.

In this song, we cannot deny the existence of a glorious and exhilarating imagery that runs through the song. The song shows a remarkable use of rhythmic repetitions and 'conscious' use of poetic symbols. It reminds us of
Whitman's style of writing poetry. To illustrate, we take an excerpt from one of Walt Whitman's poems; "To A Locomotive In Winter":

Thee for my recitative,
Thee in the driving storm even as now, the snow, the winter day declining,
Thee in thy panoply, thy measur'd dual throbbing and thy beat convulsive,
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery steel,
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy sides,
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar, now tapering in the distance,
Thy great protruding head-light fix'd in front,
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple, ...

Thy knitted frame, thy springs and valves, the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels,
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily following, ...

The latter portion of Denver's song as well as the latter portion of Whitman's poem, contain no parallelism. But in the first three-fourth of the song, Denver uses the parallel phrases in all lines. The lines start with the same construction: "The wind..." Walt Whitman uses the parallel construction, in the first portion of his poem, by beginning his lines with "Thee ...." and "Thy ...." Such style of writing shows the conscious and "impressive awareness of language". But it is not just the language
that Denver is aware of. The language too is symbolic, for the prime symbol of "the wind" is freedom; whereas the secondary symbolic meanings of the wind are clearly explained in the lines. What Denver wants to impress upon the listeners is for them to appreciate that sort of freedom which is morally good and healthy. The song reveals a Wordsworthian appreciation of Nature. This is well noted in many of Denver's song-lyrics, so that although John Denver majors in architecture, America lovingly acknowledges him as "country-boy Denver." In Wordsworth, we find that he draws us from Nature in the objective sense to Nature in the subjective sense, thereby drawing a moral lesson by pondering on the philosophy of Nature. The same trend also exists in Denver's song. But since his composition is meant to be sung, the singer-poet in a high spirit, requests his listeners instead to:

Lift up your voice then
And sing with the wind.

The wind is a favourite symbol for modern song-writers; and it usually stands for freedom. Joan Baez sings the following lines from the song "Donna, Donna":

'Stop complaining! said the farmer,
'Who told you a calf to be?
Why can't you have wings to fly with
Like the swallows so proud and free.'

Refrain: How the winds are laughing,
They laugh with all their might,
Laugh and laugh the whole day through
And half the summer's night.

Donna, Donna, Donna, Donna,
Donna, Donna, Donna, Donna,
Donna, Donna, Donna, Donna,
Donna, Donna, Donna, Donna.

Here also, the 'swallows' and the 'winds' are symbols of freedom; whereas the 'calf' is a picture of passivity.

Bob Dylan gave the title to his famous song — "Blowin' in the Wind". Dylan's "wind" symbolizes Freedom as well as Free Thought, which are means to bring in a social and political change. But since the Leftists have acclaimed him as one of America's greatest poets, the political motivated anger has been directed against Dylan, charging him of being a communist, and whose trinity of heroes, happens to be, by concidence,— Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Pete Seeger — all assumed to be American communists. At one time, eminent sociologists and politicians, anticipated the coming in, of a youth revolution when Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" was released in America. Yet Dylan is sincere in reforming his contemporary society
and also his intellectual capacity must have enabled him to coolly foresee the demerits as well of his democratic America, both in its home-affairs as well as external affairs.

Modern lyrics employ new symbols like "red, blue jeans", "blue suede shoes" and cars, where, for instance, we have the following lines from the song "Mabellene", written by Chuck Berry, Russ Fratto and Alan Freed:

As I was motivatin' over the hill,  
I saw Mabellene in a Coup de Ville,  
A Cadillac a-rollin' on the open road  
Nothin' will outrun my V.8. Ford.

But the "rose" continues to be a symbol of love and beauty, forming a motif in popular romance, as in the song "Spanish Harlem", written by Phil Spector and Jerry Leiber, where the message is to pick up love wherever a person finds it and to rear it up tenderly. Sometimes mythical and allegorical elements motivate the songs, as in "New Christ Cardiac Hero" by Janis Ian, and "Crucifixion" by Phil Ochs. These elements are used as a prism to explore the modern hero and our demand for his sacrifice. Moreover, a web of irony is sometimes woven round the song in total, where the subject matter of the lyric and the flow of vocal melody are pitted against each other at emotional
131

counter-point. That is why, we often find singers sing chivalric odes, but always keep their voice — unmistakably harsh, rough and crude.

Modern song-writers have the profound awareness of slang and its implication. Thus the ability of today's lyricists to say extraordinary things in ordinary words. Even songs on pure sex are often put in the context of the permissible as in Willie Dixon's "Back Door Man".

It should also be noted that the primary purpose of a lyric, especially around 1957, is to convey mood and not meaning, so that even a simple repetitive song is not boring, but intriguing enough to survive incessant repetition. But this has enabled truly good lyrics to bury their meaning deep within the pervasive influence of rhythm. It is no wonder that a recognized Canadian poet and novelist, Leonard Cohen, who has recently turned to song-writing, admitted that he is greatly influenced by former composers like Ray Charles. Thus, Cohen's lyrics have the consistency of modern verse, but unlike linear poetry, they are deeply immersed in rhythm, as in his song, "Suzanne", which was first introduced to the public in 1966, by Judy Collins and later on sung by Neil Diamond.
Let us now turn to another important aspect — that of the song-writers' utilization of ambiguous symbols in their songs; indeed, in the very titles of their songs:

Today’s rock poets deal with the drug experience in poeticized code, as jazzmen and blues singers before them did. It is enough for Grace Slick of the Jefferson Airplane to cry "Feed Your Head!" at the end of "White Rabbit" for teenagers to understand her suggestion. ...

In a sense, this awareness of jargon is one sign of a repressed culture. But it has also provided teenagers everywhere with a solid sense of their own identity — something all good poetry is supposed to convey.

Right or wrong, it is still true that today's lyricists still bury meanings deep within their songs. So, follows myriad examples of conscious obscurity in rock lyrics. Illustrations of the fact mentioned above, begin with certain songs written and sung by the Beatles. The group-effect of the Beatles had been described as "kaleidoscopic", which was a prominent word in the 1960s, until the word "psychedelic" replaced it. Although the critic Russel Davies, in referring to the Beatles, stated that everybody knows that:
as with a kaleidoscope, that if the thing once broke open, the fragments contributing to the display must reveal themselves to be tawdry bits of stuff, unspectacular to the point of ugliness outside the self-referring mirrors of the machine.47

He however forgets that the temporary hallucinatory experiences are permanently imprinted in the songs, in the form of writing and publication. It is also the duty of a psychedelic rock-lyric to reconstruct on actual drug experience. That is why, it is often called "acid rock", for "acid" is a slang-word for L.3.D.

By 1965, the Beatles had attempted to experiment with Dylan's free-wheeling vision, resulting in the composition of "Norwegian Wood", which marks the Beatles' distinctive style of writing and a unique personal rendition of the song. The following lines:

I sat on a rug
Biding my time,
Drinking her wine.

mark the frank confrontation of the situation and also gives a clear-cut picture of a hunter stalking his prey. But why does the narrator inform us that when he was awake, he found out that he was alone and that he had "crawled off to sleep in a bath" and also that "this bird
had flown”? Reliable sources have detected that the very words "Norwegian Wood" is a British teenager's term for marijuana. More so, in the musical accompaniment of this particular song, is the prominent engagement of the "sitar", which in all likelihood, symbolizes that drugs usually flow from the East to the West.

As there are poems that record hallucinations and drug experiences as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", wherein the poet mentions the "flashing eyes" and the "floating hair", as well as the "circle", which means a magic circle drawn to keep away spirits; so also nowadays, there are songs that record drug-experiences. Thus we find that the next song of the Beatles possesses a symbo­lical title — "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds". The symbol is being hidden within the initials of the title itself. In the words "Lucy", "Sky" and "Diamonds", we get their initials — L.S.D. Thus we get the message of a drug experience in the song. Indeed, the language of the song does not carry the semantic meaning at all. Yet, casting aside the disgusting and degenerating effects of the influence of drugs, let us examine the song, purely and solely for the sake of an aesthetic judgement. Taken from such an angle, one finds only innocence and beauty, which is almost
ethereal in this song. Although it is true that the Beatles are presenting a psychedelic landscape in the song, it gives instead, to the reader and listener, pleasure and not repulsion. The landscape itself is more that of Hans Christian Andersen and Lewis Carroll than that of William Burroughs. All that the Beatles as a group, have contrived to do, is to re-open the nursery door. One can pass through the nursery door, and like "Alice" in "Wonder-land", one is overwhelmed with pleasure to view a wonderful sight filled with so many "Newspaper taxis", flowers that grow so "incredibly high" (remind us of "Jack and the Bean-stalk"), "Cellophane flowers of yellow and green", "rocking-horse people" eating "marshmallow pies". Then, when one wants to look up, one can see the "marmalade skies", or one can view across a land filled with "tangerine trees" (It makes a child's mouth to water). Even when one is on a railway platform, at least for a child, he or she, will be thrilled to see "plasticine porters with looking glass ties". Thus in total, the song offers an adult, a symbolical drug experience; and to a child, the innocent offering of a child's delight and pleasure.

The similarity of this song lies in another song of the Beatles, namely, the "Yellow Submarine", one of the
Beatles' biggest hits, on which the "National Review" commented as "a beautiful children's song". But to the grown-ups who are well versed in drug terminology, know that a "yellow jacket" is a submarine-shaped barbiturate, seconal or "downer", for a "downer" submerges a person. In writing drug-lyrics, we can see that the Beatles were cautious, sensible and remained securely down-to-earth. We take for instance, the title of another of their drug-lyrics, namely, "Strawberry Fields Forever" which is thought by many to be pure hallucination, but it was actually being drawn from the name of a Liverpool orphanage. Secondly, the Beatles made the title suggestive enough, at least to the younger generation — since marijuana is often planted in strawberry fields in England, in order to avoid detection, because the plants are similar in appearance.

Acid-rock lyrics are often bathed in various cults and in ambiguous code and double-entendres, which only the younger generation understands. Drug-lyrics are a mystery to most adults, chiefly because of the Aesopian language. There is the carefully coded expression of narcotics in The Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit", where drug-users refer to taking drugs as "feeding your head"; while the words "White Rabbit" is an allusion to the pill
which is an amphitamine or "upper" (stimulant), and the pill that makes one smaller, which is a barbitururate or "downer" (a depressant). Other examples for symbolical ambiguity in the titles of drug-lyrics are being found out. Few can be given here, although there are hundreds of such songs. These are the following:

"Colored Rain" (methadrine), ...
"Jumpin' Jack Flash" (when methadrine taken intravenously, hits the brain it is known as a "flash"); "Lady Jane" (marijuana), ... "Mr. Tambourine Man" (drug peddler), Bob Dylan; "Mainline Prosperity Blues" ("mainlining" is shooting drugs directly into the vein), Richard Farina; "Puff the Magic Dragon" (smoke marijuana) by Peter, Paul and Mary; "Yellow Balloon" (drugs are often carried in a balloon so that they may be swallowed and later retrieved in the event of imminent arrest) by the Yellow Balloon.... "Acapulco Gold" (a particular fine grade of marijuana) by The Rainy Daze; ... 48

Another trend in modern popular song lyrics is the existence of an attitude to life and music that tends to be Dionysian in character. In the middle fifties, we have the late Elvis Presley singing the song entitled "Be-Bop-A-Lula", written by Gene Vincent and Sheriff Tex Davis. The very title suggests the exhilarating heart-beats of a person who is in love. The tone of the lyric is lively and brisk, as an extract from the song shows:
She's the gal in the red blue jeans
She's the queen of all the teens.
She's the one that I know.
She's the one that loves me so.

The stanzas of the song possess a regular end-rhyme (aabb), but it demands the reader to read in rhythmic gasps, pausing only to enunciate key-phrases like "red blue jeans" or "the flyin' feet". The song is simple and carries the staccato rhythm. But the imagery points towards action rather than reflection. This particular lyric carries us back to the ancient Greek understanding of their Dionysian lyrics, where dancing and sexuality are crucially connected. "Be-Bop-A-Lula" carries the notion that if you cannot shake, you also cannot love.

Therefore, the importance of this lyric is that it forms the starting point to stress on the association between dancing and sexuality, which appears frequently in popular lyrics from the 1950s onwards.

The other interesting trend in modern poetry is the tendency, if not always, to turn poems in the form of sly puzzles. So also are musical lyrics:

Lennon's power as a lyricist is greatest when he rips apart the actual texture of words and re-arranges them into a sly puzzle, which is somehow compelling as it is cryptic.
Even his book that was published in 1964, John Lennon has given its title, \textit{In His Own Write}. Lennon has got two books published to his credit, containing the so-called "poetry and whimsy". His skill in playing with words not only lies in his lyrics but also in his prose writings as in his other book, \textit{A Spaniard In The Works}.

In lyrics, we have an extract from the song, "I Am The Walrus":

\begin{quote}
Semolina pilchard climbing up the Eiffel Tower
Elementary penguin, singing Hare Krishna
Man you should have seen them kicking
Edgar Allen POE
They are the eggman, I am the eggman, I am the Walrus
Goo goo goo joob.
\end{quote}

In the stanza above, we have the playing of the vowels and consonants, where apparently, various topics are mentioned including the words "Hare Krishna" connected with the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, where we can find the alphabets 'iscon'; and also the last line may mean "Good good good job", depending on the sounding of the syllables and the suggestive reversal of the consonant "b" into the missing "d". Such a style of writing bears similarity to Lewis Carroll's apparently nonsense poem, entitled "Jabberwocky", with only one verse as an instance:
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

In "Through The Looking Glass", Alice seeks the elucidation of Humpty Dumpty to decipher the meaning of the words. "Brillig" he explains, "means four o'clock in the afternoon — the time when you begin broiling things for dinner". "Slithy" he further explains, means "lithe and slimy... You see it's like a portmanteau — there are two meanings packed up into one word". He then says to Alice: "To 'gyre' is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To 'gimble' is to make holes like a gimlet". Humpty Dumpty also agrees with Alice that "the wabe" is "the grass plot round a sundial". The word "mimsy" stands for "flimsy" and "miserable", and a "borogove" is "a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round — something like a mop." A "rath" is "a sort of green pig". As for the word "outgrabe", Humpty Dumpty says, "Well, 'outgribbing' is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle." But for the word "mome", he says, "I'm not certain about. I think it's short 'from home' — meaning that they'd lost their way, you know".

Thus, in poems as well as in song-lyrics, there are puzzle-like words with the playing of the vowels and consonants as well as packed-suitcase words.
An appreciation of the works of certain singer-poets can be seen in the statement made by Blake Morrison in the Times Literary Supplement:

The Beatles' songs had always been full of such covert allusions, and by now it was becoming respectable to treat them seriously. As early as 1963 William Mann had detected "chains of pandiatonic clusters" in one song and "an Aelion cadence" in another, then Tony Palmer compared the gifts of Lennon and McCartney to those of Schubert; later Wilfred Mellers was to subject their music to a full length book study, Twilight of the Gods, arguing that "the basic Beatles song is Edenic". The lyrics too, were granted the status of poetry. American campus courses with titles like "The Poetry of Relevance" ranked the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen with Blake and Shelley. In Britain, Karl Miller's 1968 anthology Writing in England Today: The Last Fifteen Years included the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" and the Pink Floyd's "Arnold Layne" alongside Golding, Osborne and Larkin.... These Lennon-McCartney songs touched on the sadness of ordinary life — "all the lonely people" — in a way that Larkin's poetry had also done (it was no surprise, either, that "the Beatles' first LP" should later make an appearance in Larkin's poem "Annus Mirabilis").

The lyrics of Bob Dylan and the Beatles can be compared to the lyrics of Blake and Shelley. Their lyrics are indeed "the poetry of relevance", which is social relevance in particular, for their songs reflect the anguish
and agony of their generations. Dylan sings of the evils of war, corruption, social inequality, man's animosity against his fellow-men, and other evils in contemporary society. The Beatles, among many of their songs, sang of the "Nowhere Man" with an Audenesque style as Auden's poem, "The Unknown Citizen", reflecting the existence of a nihilistic trend in contemporary society. In a chorus-style, they sing "Nowhere Man, Nowhere Man/Living in a nowhere land/Isn't he a bit like you and me?" The rhetorical question is left unanswered, but it is food for thought. The Beatles too, had suggested a gigantic attempt to do away with boundary, caste, creed and religion as the only mean for retaining world peace in the midst of the nuclear arms' race. Their lyrics also reflect drug-experiences and the acceptance of cults, which are not traditional, as the means of achieving inner peace in the world of evils. In a nutshell, both Dylan and the Beatles act like spokesmen of their generation.

Blake concentrated, as C.M. Bowra had very aptly put it, on the:

... criticism of society, of the whole trend of contemporary civilization. His compassionate heart was outraged and wounded by the sufferings which society inflicts on its humbler members and by
the waste of human material which seems indispensable to the efficient operation of rules and laws.

The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby",\(^5\) dwells on the loneliness of the rejected ordinary people in our modern democratic society, where there are still social and economic difficulties. This song reminds us of the chimney-sweeper, the soldier and the harlot in Blake's poem "London". "Eleanor Rigby" stamps our mind with the two pathetic figures: Eleanor Rigby, a poor, shabby and old spinster and Father McKenzie, who lives in a lonely parish house.

If Eleanor Rigby is rich or special, she would have been of social importance. But she happens to be a coarse commoner who is considered to be dull by contemporary society, as she is a regular church-goer. This woman does not have enough food to eat, for she "Picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been". The verb 'picks' gives one an image of a bird picking its food. But for a person picking grains of rice and not gathering or collecting, indicates that the person is on the point of starvation. Eleanor "Lives in a dream" for she fears to face reality which means a life full of miseries and whose happiness lies only in dreams. She wears make-up, but
nobody appreciates her. At last the poor woman dies, but nobody came to her burial, except the poor, lonely Father McKenzie, who is in charge of the parish church. That is Eleanor Rigby’s short episode in the song. Thus the Beatles sing:

Eleanor Rigby
Picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been,
Lives in a dream,
Waits at the window
Wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door.
Who is it for?

Eleanor Rigby
Died in the church and was buried along with her name.
Nobody came.
Father McKenzie,
Wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave,
No one was saved.

Father McKenzie, another character in the song, is an old, religious man. The Beatles tragically depicts his loneliness with such lines:

Father McKenzie,
Writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear,
No one comes near
Look at him working,
Darning his socks in the night when there’s nobody there.
What does he care?
The portrait of Father McKenzie that is being drawn gives a poetical image. His life is a life of poverty and loneliness, for he darns "his socks in the night when there's nobody there". He writes "the words of a sermon that no one will hear". This line is ironical — ironical on the spiritual "waste-land" of modern life.

The song is written in a simple free verse with a beautiful rhythm, mostly in the iambic metre, and with a scattering of the anapaestic and the trochaic. For example, in the following lines we have the iambic and the anapaestic:

Elea/nor Rig/by
Died in/ the church/ and was bu/ried
along/ with her name

The lyrical element of the song is wrought out not only by means of the rhythm, but also by means of the technique of repetition, which stresses on the theme of the loneliness of ordinary people. The repetition comes in the form of rhetorical questions, which are used not as mere embellishments of decorations, but enhancing the theme of the song: the following questions are asked repeatedly:
All the lonely people
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong?

There is also the pathetic repetition:

Ah, look at all the lonely people!
Ah, look at all the lonely people!

Thus, we can also see that the Beatles' theme on people's loneliness is similar to the themes in Philip Larkin's poetry. The life of Father McKenzie reminds us of an ironical stanza in Larkin's poem, "Church Going":

Yet stop I did; in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Philip Larkin is in agreement with the thoughts of the Beatles and he appreciates their works, and cannot help mentioning them in his poem, "Annus Mirabilis", with the following lines:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me)—
Between the end of the Chatterly ban
And the Beatles' first LP.
This poem gives "self-irony", a touch of "civilized light­ness", 53

The Beatles' song "Eleanor Rigby" has gained the attention of poets and critics, and we can agree with the following comment of Richard Goldstein:

In the tradition of metaphysical poetry the Beatles invest implements of everyday existence with an overwhelming sterility. Rice, socks, cosmetics become instruments of fatalism in this song. And each stanza ends with a metaphysical question, asked in a shrug and left unanswered. 54

But the beauty of the song will be half-appreciated, if its music is not taken into consideration. In fact, the music adds more to the song's theme, with its sad minor tune.

The songs in this chapter have shown their particular craftsmanship in their respective compositions. The song-writers mentioned in this chapter have employed the basic verbal techniques practised by poets. In the songs, we find the existence of sound patterns that support the meaning, the existence of imagery which includes similes as explicit comparisons and metaphors as implicit ones. The song-writers also use meters and verse patterns,
welcome rhyme and unrhymed schemes, where we still find the use of 'assonance' as well as 'consonance'. There is also the rotation of clichés, bringing them into newer light and form. As for 'poetic diction', no generation feels the same way as its ancestors, and so modern song-writers inevitably use words differently to suit the modern age. But this means the renewal of language, and the twentieth century discards all florid gestures and demands the language of speech. This is also what happens in the history of poetry, which indicates cycles of poetic diction. However, modern song-writers, like all lyricists of the past, have to work in a narrow compass and therefore use more precise qualities of compression and design. Therefore we understand that their words seem to be distilling at the same time - the music, the meaning, the image and idea, the dramatic force and lyrical intensity, even colour, light, and power. The creative urge in song-writers to use these techniques in writing these selected songs, shows that we cannot dismiss them as ordinary songs, but we should accept them as modern poems.
ENDNOTES


5. Ibid., pp. 39, 40.


13. Ibid., p. 102.


