

Intimations of Contemporary Law & Politics in the Early Œuvre of Robert A. Zimmerman

THE DYLAN CODE

Steven Lubet & Alex J. Lubet

IN THE TRADITION of *The Bible Code*,¹ which claims that all of human history is foretold by embedded numerology in the Hebrew scriptures, we have discovered a parallel phenomenon: the “Dylan Code.” It is even more reliable than the Bible Code, accurately predicting otherwise unforeseeable events in American law, politics, and culture.

We were stunned to realize that Bob Dylan’s arcane early lyrics contain a series of previously unnoticed, artfully encrypted references to the impeachment trial of William Jefferson Clinton, from the beginning of Ken Starr’s investigation all the way through to the sad spectacle of the Senate’s deliberations.

Consider this excerpt from *It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)*,

*While preachers preach of evil fates
Teachers teach that knowledge waits
But even the president of the United States
Sometimes must have to stand naked.*²

The “preachers,” of course, are the religious conservatives who dominated the vast right-wing conspiracy against the President, while the “teachers” must surely signify the members of the American Education Association, staunch Democrats who were in no hurry – remember, “knowledge waits” – to learn the truth about Clinton’s escapades.

Clinton himself was full of excuses, perhaps

Steven Lubet is a Professor of Law at Northwestern University. Alex J. Lubet is a Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota.

1 Michael Drosin, *THE BIBLE CODE: DORON EQUIDISTANT LETTER SEQUENCES IN THE VITSUM* (1997).

2 Bob Dylan, *It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)*, *BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME* (Columbia Records 1965).

even seeing himself as the victim of the affair. Thus, Bob Dylan's 115th Dream predicted Clinton's lament over temptation and betrayal, so accurate that it includes both Monica's beret and Linda Tripp, her perfidious pal:

*They asked me for some collateral
And I pulled down my pants
They threw me in the alley
When up comes this girl from France
Who invited me to her house
I went, but she had a friend
Who knocked me out
And robbed my boots
And I was on the street again.³*

Delving further into the President's libido, Maggie's Farm envisioned his preferred form of sexual stimulation ("kicks") as practiced in the famous "windowless hallway," not to mention his strained claim that he was never really alone with Monica:

*Well, he puts his cigar
Out in your face just for kicks.
His bedroom window
It is made out of bricks.
The National Guard stands around his door.⁴*

Then Tombstone Blues provides us with the sarcastic reaction of Henry Hyde and company:

*Well, John the Baptist after torturing a thief
Looks up at his hero the Commander-in-Chief
Saying, "Tell me great hero, but please make it brief
Is there a hole for me to get sick in?"⁵*

The whole thing is uncanny. Dylan somehow knew that Paula Corbin would be a clerk and that she would be lured into Clinton's Little Rock hotel room:

*You walk into the room
With your pencil in your hand
You see somebody naked*

*And you say, "Who is that man?"
You try so hard
But you don't understand
Just what you'll say
When you get home.*

Then, in what might be the most astonishing forecast of all, Dylan was actually able to foretell the name of Paula Corbin's eventual husband:

*Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mister Jones?⁶*

The tantalizing presentiments in the Dylan Code go on and on, including a pointed allusion (in *Just Like a Woman*) to Kenneth Starr's coercive treatment of his reluctant witness.

*She makes love just like a woman
But she breaks just like a little girl.⁷*

Dylan's prophecies include the President's lame, finger-wagging, televised denial – *It Ain't Me, Babe* – as well as his brazenly successful line of defense – *Don't Think Twice*. And we can look to *The Drifter's Escape* for the Senate's acquittal:

*"Oh, stop that cursed jury,"
Cried the attendant and the nurse,
"The trial was bad enough,
But this is ten times worse."
Just then a bolt of lightning
Struck the courthouse out of shape,
And while ev'rybody knelt to pray
The drifter did escape.⁸*

But Dylan knew that would not be the end of it. Even though Clinton remained in office, he could not entirely avoid the consequences of his actions. Hence, the disbarment proceeding in Arkansas, based upon the carefully parsed but ultimately false statements in loverboy's deposition:

3 Bob Dylan, *Bob Dylan's 115th Dream*, BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME.

4 Bob Dylan, *Maggie's Farm*, BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME.

5 Bob Dylan, *Tombstone Blues*, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED (Columbia Records 1965).

6 Bob Dylan, *Ballad of a Thin Man*, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED.

7 Bob Dylan, *Just Like a Woman*, BLONDE ON BLONDE (Columbia Records 1966).

8 Bob Dylan, *The Drifter's Escape*, JOHN WESLEY HARDING (Columbia Records 1967)

*They're spoonfeeding Casanova
To get him to feel more assured
Then they'll kill him with self-confidence
After poisoning him with words.
And the Phantom's shouting to skinny girls
"Get Outa Here If You Don't Know
Casanova is just being punished for going
To Desolation Row."⁹*



Proceeding further through the Dylan oeuvre, we find a skein of references that prefigure the rise and success of Jesse Ventura. With eerie accuracy, the Dylan Code speaks clearly of the journey from Navy SEAL to Governor of Minnesota, by way of professional wrestling. Consider the following additional excerpt from *Desolation Row*:

*They're selling postcards of the hanging.
They're painting the passports brown.
The beauty parlor's full of sailors.
The circus is in town.¹⁰*

We have not yet been able to decipher the veiled textual implications of postcards and passports, but there can be little doubt about the Navy SEAL in the beauty parlor. Jesse Ventura, it will be recalled, reached wrestling stardom wearing eyeliner and a feather boa. The circus, of course, is a multiple signifier, representing both the outsized world of professional wrestling and the clownish character of professional politics. All of which lead directly to the next canonical prophecy, this one from *Tombstone Blues*:

*Jezebel the Nun she violently knits
A bald wig for Jack the Ripper who sits
At the head of the chamber of commerce.¹¹*

Jezebel the Nun, in a marvelously mixed metaphor, clearly represents both the Minne-

sota electorate and pro wrestling's fandom, anxious to reflect their need for vicarious violence off of the shining pate of Jesse the Body – here called Jack the Ripper as if to emphasize his disruptive impact on both sport and government. But it remains possible that his bald head is merely a toupee, which allows his supporters to back away from violence at least long enough to cast their ballots. Thus, Jack the Ripper may be installed, via popular election, as the “head” – bald, bewigged, or otherwise – of the chamber of commerce (itself a not-so-veiled suggestion of the continuing commercialization of state government).

We are convinced that we have not exhausted the predictive powers of the Dylan Code. It seems likely, for example that *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* is a metaphor for Hillary Rodham Clinton's public humiliation and eventual redemptive campaign for the senate:

*I started out on burgundy
But soon hit the harder stuff.
Everybody said they'd stand behind me
When the game got rough.
But the joke was on me
There was nobody even there to call my bluff
I'm going back to New York City
I do believe I've had enough.¹²*

Other references are more ambiguous, perhaps because of their bootleg origins. The following, for example, was first recorded in 1963, although it was not officially released until 1991. It might appear at first to again prefigure Kenneth Starr's immunity deal with Monica Lewinsky:

*Well, you can run down to the White House,
You can gaze at the Capitol Dome, pretty mama,
You can pound on the President's gate
But you oughta know by now it's gonna be too late.*

9 Bob Dylan, *Desolation Row*, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED.

10 Id.

11 Bob Dylan, *Tombstone Blues*, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED.

12 Bob Dylan, *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED.

*You're gonna need
You're gonna need my help someday.
Well, if you can't quit your sinnin'
Please quit your low down ways.¹³*

We have determined, however, that it is more likely an allusion to George W. Bush's or Tipper Gore's eventual rebuff to Hillary. Dylan evidently could not predict the winner of the 2000 presidential election, but he was unerring when it came to the chilly reception – from either Bush or Gore – that Mrs. Clinton might expect thereafter.

We are also fairly certain that we have discovered an extended metaphor leading to the development of the Microsoft empire, as in the following text:

*With a time-rusted compass blade
Aladdin and his lamp
Sits with Utopian hermit monks
Side saddle on the Golden Calf
And on their promises of paradise
You will not hear a laugh.¹⁴*

The compass blade would appear to be a disk operating system, providing directions for the Aladdin's magic lamp which in our day, of course, is the personal computer. The utopian monks must be the programmers at Microsoft, reaping untold billions through the near monopoly provided by Windows – a.k.a.

the Golden Calf. And though many are becoming wealthy by promising Paradise – the Internet? – to the masses, no one dares laugh for fear of losing access to upgrades. Of course, there is a single, telling exception that explains the entire allegory:

All except inside the Gates of Eden.¹⁵

But wait! What of the anti-trust case and the impending break-up of Microsoft itself? Dylan recognized the threat:

*Relationships of ownership
They whisper in the wings
To those condemned to act accordingly
And wait for succeeding kings.¹⁶*

But Dylan tells us the case will come to naught, shrugged off by the power of monopoly:

*All and all can only fall
With a crashing but meaningless blow.¹⁷*

Because, when you get right down to it,

There are no trials inside the Gates of Eden.¹⁸

Having discovered the prescient significance of the Dylan Code, we have concluded that the interpretive task is too big for us to handle by ourselves. We welcome others to join the project. As Dylan himself put it in *Rainy Day Woman*,

*I would not feel so all alone.
Everybody must get stoned.¹⁹ ♪*

13 Bob Dylan, *Quit Your Low Down Ways*, THE BOOTLEG SERIES (Columbia Records 1991) (Copyright 1963).

14 Bob Dylan, *Gates of Eden*, BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME.

15 Id.

16 Id.

17 Id.

18 Id.

19 Bob Dylan, *Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35*, BLONDE ON BLONDE.