**20th Century American Literature
DongA University English Department**

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**Bob Dylan Lyrics**

Bob Dylan is one of the most influential voices of the twentieth century. His music inspired people, angered people, and affected the musical style of hundreds of musicians.

**“A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall”**

[*This song’s form is based on a traditional English ballad form that used a question and answer in each verse. Dylan said that he wrote the song in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, a military standoff between the USA and USSR that nearly resulted in nuclear war. Dylan believed that he was going to die and so he put all of the ideas he had into one song. He said that the song “consisted entirely of the first lines of songs he thought he would never have time to write.” Later evidence indicated that he had written the song about one month earlier, but the idea is a good one and the song is full of the metaphorical poetry that Dylan creates.*]

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?

Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?

I’ve stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains

I’ve walked and I’ve crawled on six crooked highways

I’ve stepped in the middle of seven sad forests

I’ve been out in front of a dozen dead oceans

I’ve been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard

And it’s a hard, and it’s a hard, it’s a hard, and it’s a hard

And it’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall

Oh, what did you see, my blue-eyed son?

Oh, what did you see, my darling young one?

I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it

I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it

I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin’

I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin’

I saw a white ladder all covered with water

I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken

I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children

And it’s a hard, and it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard

And it’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall

And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?

And what did you hear, my darling young one?

I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin’

Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world

Heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin’

Heard ten thousand whisperin’ and nobody listenin’

Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin’

Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter

Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley

And it’s a hard, and it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard

And it’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall

Oh, who did you meet, my blue-eyed son?

Who did you meet, my darling young one?

I met a young child beside a dead pony

I met a white man who walked a black dog

I met a young woman whose body was burning

I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow

I met one man who was wounded in love

I met another man who was wounded with hatred

And it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard

It’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall

Oh, what’ll you do now, my blue-eyed son?

Oh, what’ll you do now, my darling young one?

I’m a-goin’ back out ’fore the rain starts a-fallin’

I’ll walk to the depths of the deepest black forest

Where the people are many and their hands are all empty

Where the pellets of poison are flooding their waters

Where the home in the valley meets the damp dirty prison

Where the executioner’s face is always well hidden

Where hunger is ugly, where souls are forgotten

Where black is the color, where none is the number

And I’ll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it

And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it

Then I’ll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin’

But I’ll know my song well before I start singin’

And it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard, it’s a hard

It’s a hard rain’s a-gonna fall

**“Subterranean Homesick Blues”**

[*Dylan said this song was influenced by Kerouac’s novel* The Subterraneans, *which he read while a university student at the University of Minnesota. The music was inspired by Chuck Berry’s song “Too Much Monkey Business” and the Pete Seeger song “Taking it Easy.” It is a very angry song and expressed to many the feeling of oppression that many young people felt at the hands of society.*]

Johnny’s in the basement

Mixing up the medicine

I’m on the pavement

Thinking about the government

The man in the trench coat

Badge out, laid off

Says he’s got a bad cough

Wants to get it paid off

Look out kid

It’s somethin’ you did

God knows when

But you’re doin’ it again

You better duck down the alley way

Lookin’ for a new friend

The man in the coon-skin cap

By the big pen

Wants eleven dollar bills

You only got ten

Maggie comes fleet foot

Face full of black soot

Talkin’ that the heat put

Plants in the bed but

The phone’s tapped anyway

Maggie says that many say

They must bust in early May

Orders from the D.A.

Look out kid

Don’t matter what you did

Walk on your tiptoes

Don’t try “No-Doz”

Better stay away from those

That carry around a fire hose

Keep a clean nose

Watch the plain clothes

You don’t need a weatherman

To know which way the wind blows

Get sick, get well

Hang around a ink well

Ring bell, hard to tell

If anything is goin’ to sell

Try hard, get barred

Get back, write braille

Get jailed, jump bail

Join the army, if you fail

Look out kid

You’re gonna get hit

But users, cheaters

Six-time losers

Hang around the theaters

Girl by the whirlpool

Lookin’ for a new fool

Don’t follow leaders

Watch the parkin’ meters

Ah get born, keep warm

Short pants, romance, learn to dance

Get dressed, get blessed

Try to be a success

Please her, please him, buy gifts

Don’t steal, don’t lift

Twenty years of schoolin’

And they put you on the day shift

Look out kid

They keep it all hid

Better jump down a manhole

Light yourself a candle

Don’t wear sandals

Try to avoid the scandals

Don’t wanna be a bum

You better chew gum

The pump don’t work

’Cause the vandals took the handles

**“It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)”**

[*When asked about his songwriting, Dylan has sometimes quoted the first verse of this song as an example of some of his best work. This song, like many of Dylan’s songs, is addressed to a parent. The song has been said to point out the difference between the world we are sold by society (the goodness of government, consumerism, war, etc.) and the reality of life. And unlike some earlier Dylan songs, there is no optimism here: The world is lonely, futile, and fake.*]

Darkness at the break of noon

Shadows even the silver spoon

The handmade blade, the child's balloon

Eclipses both the sun and moon

To understand you know too soon

There is no sense in trying.

Pointed threats, they bluff with scorn

Suicide remarks are torn

From the fools gold mouthpiece

The hollow horn plays wasted words

Proved to warn

That he not busy being born

Is busy dying.

Temptation's page flies out the door

You follow, find yourself at war

Watch waterfalls of pity roar

You feel to moan but unlike before

You discover

That you'd just be

One more person crying.

So don't fear if you hear

A foreign sound to you ear

It's alright, Ma, I'm only sighing.

As some warn victory, some downfall

Private reasons great or small

Can be seen in the eyes of those that call

To make all that should be killed to crawl

While others say don't hate nothing at all

Except hatred.

Disillusioned words like bullets bark

As human gods aim for their marks

Made everything from toy guns that sparks

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.

An' though the rules of the road have been lodged

It's only people's games that you got to dodge

And it's alright, Ma, I can make it.

Advertising signs that con you

Into thinking you're the one

That can do what's never been done

That can win what's never been won

Meantime life outside goes on

All around you.

You lose yourself, you reappear

You suddenly find you got nothing to fear

Alone you stand without nobody near

When a trembling distant voice, unclear

Startles your sleeping ears to hear

That somebody thinks

They really found you.

A question in your nerves is lit

Yet you know there is no answer fit to satisfy

Insure you not to quit

To keep it in your mind and not forget

That it is not he or she or them or it

That you belong to.

Although the masters make the rules

For the wise men and the fools

I got nothing, Ma, to live up to.

For them that must obey authority

That they do not respect in any degree

Who despite their jobs, their destinies

Speak jealously of them that are free

Cultivate their flowers to be

Nothing more than something

They invest in.

While some on principles baptized

To strict party platforms ties

Social clubs in drag disguise

Outsiders they can freely criticize

Tell nothing except who to idolize

And then say God Bless him.

While one who sings with his tongue on fire

Gargles in the rat race choir

Bent out of shape from society's pliers

Cares not to come up any higher

But rather get you down in the hole

That he's in.

But I mean no harm nor put fault

On anyone living in a vault

But it's alright, Ma, if I can't please him.

Old lady judges, watch people in pairs

Limited in sex, they dare

To push fake morals, insult and stare

While money doesn't talk, it swears

Obscenity, who really cares

Propaganda, all is phony.

While them that defend what they cannot see

With a killer's pride, security

It blows the minds most bitterly

For them that think death's honesty

Won't fall upon them naturally

Life sometimes

Must get lonely.

My eyes collide head-on with stuffed graveyards

False gods, I scuff

At pettiness which plays so rough

Walk upside-down inside handcuffs

Kick my legs to crash it off

Say okay, I have had enough

What else can you show me ?

And if my thought-dreams could been seen

They'd probably put my head in a guillotine

But it's alright, Ma, it's life, and life only.

**“Masters of War”**

[*Probably Dylan’s angriest song, “Masters of War” is a very clear denouncement of the economic and political forces that he felt sacrificed the lives of soldiers and innocent civilians for their own benefit. The song points out that war had become a big business, and that many people profit from building the weapons of war. Young people in the sixties felt that the powerful men of the world were waging wars to get rich.*]

Come you masters of war

You that build all the guns

You that build the death planes

You that build all the bombs

You that hide behind walls

You that hide behind desks

I just want you to know

I can see through your masks.

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.

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.

You fasten all the triggers

For the others to fire

Then you set back and watch

When the death count gets higher

You hide in your mansion'

As young people's blood

Flows out of their bodies

And is buried in the mud.

You've thrown the worst fear

That can ever 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.

How much do I know

To talk out of turn

You might say that I'm young

You might say I'm unlearned

But there's one thing I know

Though I'm younger than you

That even Jesus would never

Forgive what you do.

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.

And I hope that you die

And your death'll come soon

I will follow your casket

In the pale afternoon

And I'll watch while you're lowered

Down to your deathbed

And I'll stand over your grave

'Til I'm sure that you're dead.