**CHAPTER 2**

*Dylan, Lennon and Dual Biography*

**Introduction: Dual Biography**

Bob Dylan and John Lennon certainly share *something* in common, they are the two most thoroughly examined figures in popular music’s canon. Arguably, little remains to be written about them as performers, recording artists and songwriters. As one author asked in his opening sentence: ‘Why on earth would anyone need another book about the Beatles?’ (Stark, 2005: 1). Dylan, too, has acknowledged this glut of literature:

> Everybody knows . . . there’s a gazillion books on me either out or coming out in the near future. So I’m encouraging anybody who’s ever met me, heard me or even seen me, to get in on the action and scribble their own book. You never know, somebody might have a great book in them. (Dylan, 2011)

One unexplored concept is dual biography: the itemisation and analysis of similarities and differences in the life and work of two related artists. What follows synthesises Eloise Knapp Hay’s (1984) method with Ian Inglis’ (1996b) work on Dylan and the Beatles. It expands and updates existing research, and provides a framework for discussing other correlations between Dylan and Lennon. Hay (1984) demonstrated the scholarly possibilities for dual biography in her essay on Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster. This drew on Friedrich Schlegel’s notion of two writers who inform each other’s work to such an extent that, once this association is recognised, any singular account of their lives becomes inadequate. She concluded that Kipling and Forster present an ideal comparison because only by studying them together can we fully understand each as an individual:

> The two writers . . . may be seen as complementary rather than antagonistic figures. Each of their biographies is incomplete without the other; both our criticism and our biographies of each would profit greatly if we could set
them in a single focus . . . By analogy we should arrive at the word ‘Symbiography’, following Schlegel’s hint about two German writers when he said, ‘Wieland and Barger [together] would make one good poet’. Similarly, one might say, Kipling and Forster together would make one good novelist. (Hay, 1984: 124–5)

Hay compared Kipling’s poem ‘The Ballad of East and West’ (1889) and the denouement of Forster’s A Passage to India (1924) as ‘scenes that speak to each other in their writing’ where ‘a man of the West rides forth into an allegorical Indian landscape with a fellow horseman, a man from the East’ (Hay, 1984: 130). While Kipling’s characters meet as enemies but part as friends, Forster’s protagonists were not able to reconcile their differences – which leads Hay to ask how Schlegel’s ‘symbiography’ might explain ‘why Kipling’s men can shake hands but Forster’s cannot?’ (Hay, 1984: 130).


An obvious criticism of the dual biography format is its resemblance to Thomas Carlyle’s (1841) ‘great man’ theory of history. What follows, however, is not a tale of heroic accomplishment or leadership. It is intended more as a framework to contextualise two flawed individuals who became influential songwriters. The works cited above do all happen to discuss male subjects – as, of course, does the rest of this book – but it is also worth noting the growing range of dual biographies about women. Recent examples include Clare Mulley’s (2017) account of Hanna Reitsch and Melitta von Stauffenberg, two female test pilots of the Third Reich,
and Lindy Woodhead’s (2017) work on Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein. Interestingly, a prominent academic dual biography from Yale University Press compares male and female political figures from Napoleonic France – Benjamin Constant and Germaine de Staël (Winegarten, 2008).

**Dylan and the Beatles: Mutual Approbation, Balanced Reciprocity**

The remainder of this section expands on Ian Inglis’ (1996b) work on Dylan and the Beatles, then focuses on Dylan and Lennon’s cultural correlations and personal encounters to explain why they are best suited for a dual biography. Inglis unpacked the musical and professional commonalities between Dylan and the Beatles using two concepts. *Synergy*, from business studies scholar Yoneji Masuda (1990), showed how individuals achieve shared goals more effectively by acting together; *balanced reciprocity*, from anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972), analysed common ideals, professional interactions and mutual approbation in relationships.

Inglis began by cataloguing similarities and intersections in Dylan and the Beatles’ formative years. All were born in the early 1940s and raised over the ensuing two decades in relatively unfashionable and unsophisticated industrial regions. They shared similar rock and roll influences – they were all fans of Buddy Holly and Little Richard, for example – but they were equally inspired by different musical traditions, too. For Dylan these included country artist Hank Williams and folk singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie; for the Beatles, trad jazz and skiffle performer Lonnie Donegan, music hall artist George Formby and BBC radio’s *The Goon Show*. Dylan and the Beatles each built loyal local followings in New York and Liverpool, respectively, before attaining national international success in 1963–4. Their parallel careers allowed for numerous interesting coincidences and historical ironies, including the occasion of their first British radio exposure. Dylan’s earliest airplay in the UK was his recording of ‘Freight Train Blues’, played on the BBC Light Programme’s *Twelve O’Clock Spin* on 30 October 1962. The Beatles’ debut BBC appearance was their single ‘Love Me Do’, broadcast on the same show the following day (Lewisohn, 2013).

*Mutual approbation* and *balanced reciprocity* became an important factor as Dylan and the Beatles’ public renown mushroomed (Inglis, 1996b). Interviews such as this 1965 exchange between Dylan and a British journalist are typical:
‘Would you say the Beatles are your biggest unofficial press agents in this country?’

‘Gee I don’t know. I hope so’.

‘They have done an awful lot of good, Bob, over here in the last nine months. Talking an awful lot about you to the trade press and so on’. (Dylan in Jarosinski, 2006: 128)

The Beatles’ most consequential public advocacy for Dylan was their 1965 ‘Beatles Say – Dylan Shows the Way’ Melody Maker interview with Ray Coleman, which helped trigger what Robert Shelton (1986: 288) called ‘Dylan-mania’ across the UK. Two years later his portrait from the cover of Highway 61 Revisited (1965) was included on the Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967) artwork. Dylan featured prominently in the image, staring down directly at the viewer from the top right corner of the sleeve. Other than ‘WELCOME THE ROLLING STONES’ embroidered on the Shirley Temple doll’s sweater and the cut-out of Dion DiMucci from Dion and the Belmonts chosen by Peter Blake, he was the only contemporary musician featured. The omission of other key influences – from Elvis Presley and Little Richard to Lonnie Donegan, George Formby and Bert Weedon – perhaps indicated Dylan’s importance to the band at this time.

While the Beatles helped promote Dylan in the UK, he, too, remained an advocate for them in American and British media. ‘Oh, I think they’re the best’, he told Melody Maker in 1965 (Jarosinski, 2006: 119). A decade later, in 1976, Dylan commented: ‘America should put up statues to the Beatles. They helped give this country’s pride back to it. They used all the music we’d been listening to, everything from Little Richard to the Everly Brothers. A lot of barriers broke down, but we didn’t see it at the time because it happened so fast’ (Jarosinski, 2006: 523).

Dylan had various connections with each member of the Beatles but shared an enduring friendship with guitarist George Harrison. Like Lennon, Harrison made key contributions to the band’s catalogue that betrayed his own profound fandom. His autobiography I Me Mine (2004) also revealed Dylan’s Blonde on Blonde (1966) as the only western pop record he carried on the Beatles’ visit to Rishikesh, India in 1968. Later that year Dylan and Harrison co-wrote ‘I’d Have You Anytime’ when the guitarist visited Dylan over Thanksgiving. In May 1970 they recorded together in Columbia Studio B, New York. Harrison also facilitated two of Dylan’s rare live appearances around this time: the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival and the 1971 Concert for Bangladesh in Madison Square Garden. Dylan and Harrison subsequently teamed up with Roy Orbison, Jeff

Ringo Starr is the only other ex-Beatle to have recorded or performed with Dylan; each has appeared on singles released by the other and they have appeared onstage together several times. Dylan and McCartney’s relationship remains the most equivocal of the three. His famous 1966 remarks disparaging the Beatles’ ‘smoothness’ were directed specifically at McCartney compositions ‘Michelle’ and ‘Yesterday’ (Shelton, 1986). McCartney has worked with numerous well-known artists over the years but never collaborated with Dylan. A brief period of press speculation in 2009 inspired conjecture about how Dylan’s dry vocal style might complement McCartney’s melodicism, much as Lennon’s had done decades earlier, but this collaboration now seems unlikely to materialise.

For a list of the documented interactions between Bob Dylan and John Lennon see Table 2.1. A comprehensive timeline of Dylan’s and Lennon’s lives, works and interactions is mapped alongside the important cultural and political events of their day in Appendix 1: Detailed Chronology. An account of Dylan’s relationship with Harrison, Starr and McCartney including their interactions, recordings and performances is also provided in Appendix 2: Bob Dylan and the Beatles.

Table 2.1 Known interactions between Bob Dylan and John Lennon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>17 May</td>
<td>London: Lennon sends a supportive telegram to Dylan at his first UK concert at the Royal Festival Hall.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28–9 August</td>
<td>New York City: Dylan meets the Beatles at Hotel Delmonico, and again the next day. Dylan takes Lennon for breakfast in Greenwich Village.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 September</td>
<td>New York City: the Beatles play Paramount Theater, attended by Dylan and his manager Albert Grossman, who then accompany the band to the Riviera Motel near John F. Kennedy Airport prior to their flight home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>London: the Beatles see Dylan play the Royal Albert Hall, then visit him at the Savoy Hotel. Lennon publicly defends Dylan’s decision to stay at the Savoy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–16 August</td>
<td>New York City: the Beatles play Shea Stadium. They are visited by Dylan at the Warwick Hotel after the show and again the following day.</td>
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https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108779470.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Dylan and Lennon, 1964–1966</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>26–9 May London: Lennon and Harrison attend Dylan’s Royal Albert Hall concert. Lennon visits Dylan at The May Fair Hotel. Dylan visits Lennon’s house, Kenwood, in Surrey. They are filmed in Dylan’s limousine the next morning.</td>
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| 1969 | 30 August Isle of Wight: Lennon and Ono travel to the Isle of Wight and meet Dylan in rehearsal at Forelands Farm.  
31 August Isle of Wight: Dylan performs at the Isle of Wight Festival watched by Lennon and Ono, George Harrison and Ringo Starr.  
1 September Dylan visits Lennon’s new house at Tittenhurst Park, Berkshire, but declines to play on ‘Cold Turkey’. |
| 1971 | 9 October Syracuse, NY: Dylan attends the opening of Ono’s This Is Not Here at Everson Museum of Art and contributes a guest work of art (a copy of his Nashville Skyline album). |
| November | New York City: Dylan, Lennon, Ono tour Greenwich Village. |
| 1972 | January New York City: Dylan visits Lennon in the studio as he is producing David Peel and The Lower East Side’s album The Pope Smokes Dope and hears ‘The Ballad of Bob Dylan’. |
| 1974 | 31 January New York City: Lennon and Ono see Bob Dylan and The Band perform at Madison Square Garden. |
| 1980 | December New York City: Dylan visits Ono after Lennon’s assassination. |

**Dylan and Lennon, 1964–1966**

Hay argued that dual biography is most useful when a simultaneous examination of two artists contributes to a better understanding of their individual work. In this sense, as founder and erstwhile leader of the Beatles it is Lennon who provides the most obvious counterpart to Dylan. Their noticeable aesthetic and cultural correlations were immediately apparent. Noted musicologist Wilfred Mellers (1974: 163) regarded Lennon’s ‘achievement as an Englishman’ as ‘collateral with Bob Dylan’s as a white American’. Elsewhere, Lennon was described as ‘Dylan’s English reflection’ (Aronowitz, 1994: 49), Dylan’s ‘principal rival’ or someone ‘born half-American’ (Goldman, 1988: 43) – just as Dylan was perceived as ‘a semi-Brit’ (Silverton, 2011). Michael Gray (2008: 41) noted the pair’s
obvious stylistic resemblances: ‘as the most acerbic Beatle, John was the one regarded as most similar to Dylan’.

Dylan had infrequent personal contact with Lennon but their few documented meetings generated considerable interest. Some, such as their introduction in New York’s Hotel Delmonico in 1964 or Dylan and Lennon’s limousine journey through London in 1966, have attained legendary status. Most scholars of mythology, from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978) to Karen Armstrong (2004), view history and legend as two honest attempts to interpret past events and distinguish the latter by its lack of written records. Dylan and Lennon’s rare interactions have become mythologised by precisely this process: as culturally significant but unreliably reported encounters where the hazy remembrances of those present became magnified and misremembered in the re-telling, then consolidated in published biographical accounts.

Their correspondence began in May 1964, three months before they met in person, when Lennon reached out to congratulate Dylan on the occasion of his first major London concert. According to Dylan’s biographer Howard Sounes (2011a: 191): ‘Lennon found time to send a telegram saying they wished they could be at the Festival Hall. Unfortunately, they had a filming commitment.’ In fact, Lennon was not filming. He was on vacation with Harrison in Tahiti at the time (Goodden, 2014g). Nevertheless, when Dylan read the message backstage during his show’s intermission, it attracted great interest from those present: ‘Oh Man! That’s pretty neat’, exclaimed his friend John Bucklen – who also recalled that Dylan himself was more sanguine: ‘pleased, but not impressed’ (Sounes, 2011a: 191).

On 28 August 1964 Dylan and the Beatles finally met face-to-face at the Hotel Delmonico, New York City. ‘john lennon goovy also ringo’ Dylan wrote in a letter to his friend Tony Glover soon after their encounter (Brinkley, 2020). It is now, of course, best known in rock folklore as the occasion Dylan introduced the band to cannabis. Dylan and Lennon’s entourage, which included journalist Michael Aronowitz, personal assistant Peter Brown and press officer Derek Taylor, portrayed this as a defining moment for both artists: ‘a friendship instigated and pursued through mutually admired recordings made flesh through marijuana and the sacred exploration of deepest inner space’ (Taylor, 1987: 92, my italics). In truth, this was not the first time Lennon had experimented with the drug. Cavern Club DJ Bob Wooler remembered the Beatles bringing marijuana back from
London in 1962 (Goodden, 2017). George Harrison also recalled smoking it while in the nearby resort town of Southport:

We first got marijuana from an older drummer with another group in Liverpool. We didn’t really try it until after we’d been to Hamburg. I remember we smoked it in the band room in a gig in Southport and we all learnt to do the Twist that night, which was popular at the time . . . . Everybody was saying, ‘This stuff isn’t doing anything’. It was like that old joke where a party is going on and two hippies are up floating on the ceiling, and one is saying to the other, ‘This stuff doesn’t work, man’. (Harrison, in Roylance, 2000: 158)

Lennon probably first tried cannabis as early as 1960 in Liverpool. That same year, two months prior to the band’s initial Hamburg trip, beat poet Royston Ellis also showed him how to extract Benzedrine from a Vicks inhaler: ‘Everybody thought, “Wow! What’s this?” and talked their mouths off for a night’ (Goodden, 2017: 13). During their second trip to Germany he developed a robust appetite for Preludin and other forms of amphetamine that continued well into the mid-1960s (Inglis, 2012). A habitual substance misuser, Lennon was familiar with a variety of drug-culture tropes. In the ‘coke snorting scene’ at the beginning of A Hard Day’s Night (1964), filmed four months before his first meeting with Dylan at Hotel Delmonico, he repeatedly sniffed at a bottle of Pepsi-Cola then flashed a knowing smile at fellow cast member Wilfrid Brambell. Although unnoticed at the time by the British Board of Film Censors, this was quite clearly a covert drug reference (Horgan, 2012). What is more, he had already written about cannabis (‘Indian Hump’) in the prose-poem ‘Neville Club’ from In His Own Write (1964), published six months before his meeting with Bob Dylan in New York, in August 1964:

All of a southern I notice boils and girks sitting in hubbered lumps smoking Hernia taking Odeon and going very high. Somewhere 4ft high but he had Indian Hump which he grew in his sleep. Puffing and globbering they drugged theyselves rampling or dancing with wild abdomen, stubbing in wild postumes amongst themselves. (Lennon, 1964: 60)

In that context, the significance of the Beatles’ smoking marijuana during their first meeting with Dylan seems, perhaps, rather overstated. In truth, Dylan’s impact on Lennon’s drug taking was far less consequential than his influence on Lennon’s songwriting. That same year the Beatles began what John Covach (2006) called their journey from ‘craftsmen’ to ‘artists’, gradually integrating more imaginative ideas into standardised pop arrangements. Aided by producer George Martin, the band collated an
impressive range of new source material. Lyrically, however, Lennon was inspired by one voice: ‘I remember the early meetings with Dylan – he was always saying, “Listen to the words, man”, and I said, “I can’t be bothered. I listen to the sound of it, the overall sound”’ (Harry, 2000: 217). The profundity of Dylan’s insight motivated the Beatles’ to bring increasingly adventurous subjects into their own work. Lennon turned inwards, using rumination as a writing tool to explore more intense themes. As a result, the first three songs from what he later called ‘my Dylan period’ all contained introspective expressions of self-doubt: ‘I Should Have Known Better’ and ‘I’ll Cry Instead’ on *A Hard Day’s Night*, then ‘I’m a Loser’ on *Beatles For Sale* (1964). The depiction of chronic depression in the latter became the Beatles’ earliest attempt to address personal concerns beyond the immediate pain and pleasure of youthful courtship: ‘I started thinking about my own emotions – “I’m a Loser” or “Hide Your Love Away” – those kind of things – I would just try to express what I felt about myself which I’d done in my books . . . Dylan helped me realise that . . . just by hearing his work’ (Lennon in Wenner, 2000: 83–4).

Happy to share the inspiration behind his new direction, Lennon publicly declared: ‘I could have made “I’m a Loser” even more *Dylanish* if I’d tried.’ In the same interview he revealed that ‘A Hard Day’s Night’ was originally conceived in the same style, ‘but later we Beatle-ified it before we recorded it’ (Coleman, 1965: 3). Lennon’s harmonica introduction for ‘I Should Have Known Better’ further demonstrated this capability for ‘Dylanish’ music. Longstanding companion Pete Shotton provided a behind-the-scenes perspective: ‘John was particularly impressed and amused by Dylan’s way with words; he often quoted, with enormous relish, lines like “even the president of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked”’ (Shotton and Schaffner, 1983: 110).

Shotton’s memoir offered a thoughtful account of this transformative period:

My personal association with John’s songwriting began at a time when he was first starting to repudiate the greeting-card sentiments of the Beatles’ early hits. In this respect he was strongly influenced by the lyrics of Bob Dylan. Until he heard Dylan, it never occurred to John that the words of popular songs could or should amount to anything more than meaningless hackwork, and he contented himself with channelling his literary talents into his little books. Dylan’s success came as a real revelation to John, who suddenly realised that there was nothing to stop him from expressing his poetic and even political ideas within the framework of the Beatles’ music. (Shotton and Schaffner, 1983: 110)
These innovations included new writing techniques, too. Prior to 1964, Beatles songs usually originated with a short vocal refrain that they developed and refined into a more complete instrumental composition. Once this was arranged, the remaining lyrics were then finalised over the existing music. After meeting Dylan in New York, Lennon experimented with writing ‘words first’, weaving his melodies around semi or even fully formed lyrical structures. Here, Lennon drew from Dylan just as Dylan had drawn from Woody Guthrie. The outcome, in compositions such as ‘Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)’ (1965), was a series of Beatles songs whose artful poeticism threatened to outshine their musical sophistication (MacDonald, 1994).

While Dylan influenced Lennon’s songwriting, Lennon influenced Dylan as an author. Dylan’s early published poetry included ‘Go Away You Bomb’ (1962) and ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’, the substantial sleeve notes for The Times They Are A-Changin’ (1964). In January 1964, three months before the publication of Lennon’s In His Own Write, Dylan also disclosed that he was working on a novel and a play. Lennon’s success encouraged Dylan’s manager Albert Grossman to negotiate a publishing deal with Macmillan and coax Dylan into completing the work (Dalton, 2012; Heylin, 1996):

As for Lennon, well I was encouraged by his book. Or the publishers were encouraged, because they asked me to write a book and that’s how Tarantula came about. John has taken poetics pretty far in popular music. A lot of his work is overlooked, but if you examine it, you’ll find key expressions that have never been said before to push across his point of view. Things that are symbolic of some inner reality and probably will never be said again. (Dylan in Jarosinski, 2006: 542)

Where Lennon presented nonsense poetry accompanied by illustrations, Tarantula (1971) poured stream of consciousness prose into large avant-garde blocks. Nevertheless, there were many similarities between their experimental texts. Each used puns or purposeful misspellings, often in their characters’ names, and ignored grammatical or syntactical conventions. The likenesses between their fractured and scatological writing style caused both authors to be compared to avant-garde modernist James Joyce (Dalton, 2012; Doggett, 2009).

1 In an unpublished 1971 interview with long-term friend Tony Glover, Dylan offered a rare insight into this songwriting technique: ‘The songs of John Wesley Harding were all written down as poems, and the tunes were found later’ (Brinkley, 2020).
In the early days of their relationship Dylan reciprocated Lennon’s admiration, mainly when talking to the British media. Interviewed for *Melody Maker* in May 1965, he said: ‘I dig John. As a writer, a singer, and a Beatle. There are very few people I dig every time I meet them, but him I dig’ (Jarosinski, 2006: 157). At this time, Dylan was still groping towards what he later called his own ‘thin, wild, mercury sound’. Four months later, having recorded *Highway 61 Revisited*, he became noticeably more ambivalent about the Beatles’ impact on his music in press conferences outside the UK. This example is from Austin, Texas, in September 1965:

[Interviewer] Have the Beatles had any influence on your work?
[Dylan] Well, they haven’t influenced the songs or sound. I don’t know what other kind of influence they might have. They haven’t influenced the songs or the sound. (Dylan in Jarosinski, 2006: 186)

There are several interesting but ambiguous references to the Beatles in Dylan’s output. Clinton Heylin (2010a), Keith Negus (2007) and others have argued, with some credibility, that the ‘no no no’s’ in ‘It Ain’t Me Babe’ were an ironic quotation of the ‘yeah yeah yeah’s’ in ‘She Loves You’. Less convincingly, Heylin also asserts that ‘If You Gotta Go, Go Now’, first recorded in January 1965, was purposefully written in the style of the Beatles after Dylan’s meeting with the band at New York’s Hotel Delmonico the previous August: ‘Dylan was smart enough to feel the wind of change the Beatles blew in on, and some part of him wanted to be part of the same mighty storm’ (Heylin, 2010a: 213). This is, however, probably incorrect. ‘If You Gotta Go, Go Now’ is indeed one of Dylan’s earlier ‘electric’ recordings, and it certainly has a Merseybeat rhythm, but this track was originally put to tape as a solo acoustic folk song with the other musicians layered on after the fact by producer Tom Wilson. Later that same year Wilson would repeat the same experiment more successfully by over-dubbing a band on the acoustic recording of Simon and Garfunkel’s breakthrough hit ‘Sound of Silence’ (1965). Dylan *did* record two conspicuously Beatles-influenced songs with his group the Hawks during the first studio sessions for *Blonde on Blonde* in October 1965: ‘Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window’ and ‘I Wanna Be Your Lover’. The latter appropriated a line from the chorus of Lennon/McCartney’s ‘I Wanna Be Your Man’ (1963) for its title, and an early take of ‘Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat’ from these sessions even segued into a parody version of ‘Drive My Car’ (1965) (Heylin, 2010a). This project was, however, abandoned when Dylan relocated to Nashville, Tennessee to record the definitive version of *Blonde on Blonde*. 
Dylan and Lennon’s mutual influence was equally apparent in their choice of clothes and accessories during this period. Dylan wore brown suede Cuban heels at the Newport Folk Festival in July 1965, but a month later at the Forest Hills Music Festival in Queens he changed to black ‘Beatle boots’ – the distinctive style Lennon and McCartney commissioned in 1961 from Carnaby Street cobbler Anello and Davide – and wore these throughout his 1966 World Tour. Lennon, of course, had imitated Dylan by sporting a black peaked Breton cap in Paris and on the Beatles’ first visit to North America in early 1964. This resembled the hat worn by Dylan on the cover of his debut album *Bob Dylan* (1962) and in other publicity photographs during that time. Lennon later explained: ‘If I see or meet a great artist, I love ‘em. I go fanatic about them . . . If they wear green socks I’m liable to wear green socks for a period too’ (Wenner, 2000: 148).

Indeed, around this time Lennon confided to The Animals’ Alan Price that other members of his own band had begun ‘taking the mickey out of him’ due to his enthusiasm for Dylan (MacDonald, 2008: 163). His Dylan-influenced ‘Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)’ (1965) met with a veiled reply on *Blonde on Blonde* (1966) where ‘4th Time Around’, effectively Dylan-doing-Lennon-doing-Dylan, cautioned against using Dylan as a ‘crutch’. ‘I was very paranoid about that’, Lennon confessed shortly afterwards, ‘I remember he played it to me when he was in London’ (Colt, 1968).

This was at their fifth known meeting, on 26–7 May 1966, when Dylan performed two concerts at London’s Royal Albert Hall as the closing dates of his world tour (Goodden, 2014; MacDonald, 1994). The encounter coincided with the culmination of the 1964–6 trans-Atlantic ‘British Invasion’, uniting Britain and North America’s two most influential popular songwriters just as *Time* magazine celebrated ‘Swinging London’ with a colourful cover by Geoffrey Dickinson. Lennon was at a creative peak, having recorded and mixed ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’, ‘Dr Robert’, ‘And Your Bird Can Sing’ and ‘I’m Only Sleeping’ the previous month. The outcome, *Revolver* (1966), proved a pivotal Beatles’ release. Positioning relatively conventional song structures alongside more adventurous arrangements, melodies, timbres and lyrics emancipated popular music from conventional templates and validated the genre as an authentic art form (Everett, 1999; Valdez, 2017). *Revolver* also paved the way for what became known as the band’s masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Retrospectively, it has now begun to rival that album as their most culturally impactful collection of songs (Rodriguez, 2012; Whiteley, 2008).
Dylan, meanwhile, was ‘putting his head in the lion’s mouth’ (Scorsese, 2005) on his 1966 World Tour, delivering some of the most atmospheric, controversial and edgy live performances yet witnessed by British popular music concertgoers. The near-mythological events that transpired have since generated a cultural momentum of their own. In what turned out to be his last tour for eight years, Dylan performed an acoustic set before a captivated audience who then booed and slow hand-clapped in almost equal measure when his backing band the Hawks appeared for the second half of the show. In a now iconic confrontation at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall, Dylan paused briefly when an angry fan screamed ‘Judas!’ at him from the nearby balcony. As the singer struggled to respond the interruption was greeted by a roar of enthusiastic applause. Every performance on the tour was taped by Columbia Records for a planned live album, although this never materialised. Meanwhile Dylan was shadowed, onstage and off, by stills photographer Barry Feinstein and accompanied by a four-person team of cinematographers and sound recordists filming what became Eat the Document (1972), as depicted in Figure 2.1.

Commissioned by American broadcaster ABC TV and shot by D. A. Pennebaker and Howard Alk under the erstwhile direction of Dylan himself, it was eventually deemed too impenetrable to be shown on television. Two grainy ten-minute reels, shot at dawn in London, captured Dylan and Lennon in conversation while travelling through the outskirts of the city in a chauffeured limousine: ‘I’ve never seen it, but I’d love to see it. I was always so paranoid’, Lennon later recalled. ‘I’m just blabbing off and commenting all the time, like you do when you’re very high and stoned. I had been up all night’ (Wenner, 2000: 149).²

Although witnessed by thousands of fans, archiving errors caused significant ongoing confusion over the order of events on this leg of Dylan’s World Tour. Columbia’s master tapes from the Manchester Free Trade Hall ‘Judas!’ show were accidentally mislabelled ‘Royal Albert Hall’ by an audio engineer. As a result, for decades afterwards it was assumed this incident occurred in the famous London venue (Heylin, 2016). Thirty years later, Columbia released the live album, calling it The Bootleg Series Vol. 4: Bob Dylan – Live 1966 – The ‘Royal Albert Hall’ Concert (Sony Music, 1998), even though they knew it was recorded at the Free Trade

² *Mojo* magazine’s 1993 launch issue provided images, a transcript and an analysis of this conversation, which was relatively undocumented at the time (Williams, 1993). The footage is now available in its entirety on *YouTube* (Wylde, 2020).
Hall, Manchester. On the fiftieth anniversary of the tour the actual master tapes from Dylan’s London set, which obviously contained none of the shouted interruptions, were released as *The Real Royal Albert Hall 1966 Concert! Live in London 1966* (Sony Music, 2016). That same year every surviving master tape was compiled into a box set of thirty-six CDs and released by Columbia as *Bob Dylan: The 1966 Live Recordings* (Sony Music, 2016).

Other incidents were confused or inflated by second-hand accounts—such as the recollections of Dylan’s former drummer, Levon Helm: ‘Upset by the walkouts and booing . . . the Beatles came backstage after the show to commiserate with the boys. *John Lennon had been hanging out with Bob at the hotel*’ (Helm and Davis, 2000: 135–6, my italics). It is most unlikely that Helm was present during this stage of Dylan’s trip. He had left backing band the Hawks six months earlier and, according to journalist Dave Lifton (2016), was in New Orleans at

![Bob Dylan at The May Fair Hotel, London, 3 May 1966, with cinematographer Howard Alk in the background. (© Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo)](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108779470.003)
this time where he eventually found work on an oil rig, so it is reasonable to assume Helm could not have witnessed these encounters. Maybe he was relying on reminiscences from his former band-mates Rick Danko and Richard Manual. If so, they also, it seems, passed on another untrue anecdote about a violent incident at Dylan’s De Montfort Hall show in Leicester in which enraged audience members stormed the stage and attacked Bob, pinning him to the floor (Lifton, 2016). Mickey Jones, the Hawks’ replacement drummer, who was present at this concert, did not include the incident in his memoir. Nor did it feature in Clinton Heylin’s exhaustive analysis of the tour. There was particularly energetic booing in Glasgow, even reports of a physical confrontation at Dylan’s hotel, but no onstage assault (Feinstein, 2009; Heylin, 2016; Jones, 2007; McKay, 2019).

Dylan himself was a notoriously unreliable narrator having invented elements of his own backstory during previous encounters with the media, a habit that also helped build the mythology around his mid-1960s British tours. At times in early career interviews Dylan claimed to have been raised in an orphanage or to have run away from home and worked as a carnival huckster (Shumway, 2014: 72–3). This make-believe was exposed by Newsweek in November 1963, yet Dylan refused to abandon the strategy. Later, when asked directly whether he had ever sung with the Beatles, he responded equivocally – teasing his questioner with allusions to a previous collaboration: ‘No, no. Well, I think we may have messed around in London, but no, I don’t think anything serious’ (Jarosinski, 2006: 243). As a ‘true liar’ Dylan demonstrated what Rob Coley (2015) labelled Deleuzian ‘powers of the false’ in the creative ‘fabulation’ of his past. The prospect of working with Lennon became so enticing that two decades on, in his interview for the Biograph (1984) sleeve notes, even Dylan seemed to believe they must have written together at some point:

It’s an interesting footnote to music history that on an English tour, Dylan and Lennon penned a song together. ‘I don’t remember what it was, though’, said Dylan. ‘We played some stuff into a tape recorder but I don’t know what happened to it. I can remember playing it and the recorder was on. I don’t remember anything about the song.’ (Crow, 1985)

Eventually, forty years later, respected Dylan scholar Michael Gray unearthed a long-lost Dylan/Lennon/McCartney collaboration in his definitive The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia (Gray, 2006). Called ‘Pneumonia Ceilings’, the song was composed on 25–6 May 1966, at some point during
their meeting between the two Royal Albert Hall concerts on the British leg of Dylan’s infamous tour. Apparently written ‘words first’ using Dylan’s preferred technique, the lyrics were typed on a single leaf of notepaper then discarded in his hotel room wastebasket:

Words and phrases right
Cigarette ash keeps me up all nite
How come your mama types so fast?
Is daddy’s flag flyin’ at half mast?
Pneumonia ceilings, pneumonia floors
Daddy ain’t gonna take it no more
Elephant guns blazing in my ears
I’m sick and tired of your applesauce tears!
Thermometers don’t tell time no more
Since aunt mimi pushed them off the 20th floor
So say goodbye to skyscrapers
You’ll read about it in the evening paper
I picked my nose & i’m glad i did

(Gray, 2008: 442)

Sadly, this story is also untrue. ‘Pneumonia Ceilings’ never existed. The story originated in Mark Shipper’s (1978) parody novel, *Paperback Writer*. Once again, the creative potential in Dylan and Lennon’s relationship proved so compelling that fiction was repeated as myth and then recorded as fact. Today ‘Pneumonia Ceilings’ appears in both the original and the revised and updated editions of Gray’s (2006, 2008) otherwise masterful *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*. It is a powerful example of wishful thinking bias, in which an observer’s attention is drawn towards their preferred outcomes. As a *fictional* entry in a publication whose rationale is to provide a definitive reference work, this also constitutes an ironic postmodern artefact. Perhaps inevitably, two songs called ‘Pneumonia Ceilings’ have now been recorded on commercially available albums: *Holiday at Wobbledef Grunch* (1997) by The Tables, whose version actually incorporates a word-for-word rendition of Shipper’s invented lyric; and *No Flowers for a Friend* (2013) by Willie and the Hand Factory, who simply borrowed the song’s title. Both are available on Amazon and Spotify. Probably the most convincing element of Shipper’s creation, however, is that it was grounded so firmly in Lennon’s conspicuous veneration of Dylan: “I’m a big fan of yours. A big fan”. Lennon was in heaven . . . This was as cool as Lennon had ever experienced it’ (Shipper, 1978: 45). This only confirmed the powerful synergy between these two individuals, both in Shipper’s mind and in the perception of his readers who found it so credible.
Dylan and Lennon’s next known encounter was when Lennon and Yoko Ono travelled to see Dylan perform at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival. Afterwards George Harrison escorted the singer to Lennon’s recently acquired mansion, Tittenhurst Park in Berkshire. Here, Lennon failed to persuade Dylan to contribute to what became the Plastic Ono Band’s second single: ‘He came to our house with George after the Isle of Wight and when I had written “Cold Turkey” . . . I was just trying to get him to record. We had just put him on piano for “Cold Turkey” to make a rough tape but his wife was pregnant or something and they left’ (Lennon in Wenner, 2000: 148).

Unofficial extracts from the Beatles’ January 1969 recordings in Twickenham Film Studios and their basement facility in Apple Corps Ltd at 3 Savile Row, London hold more evidence of Lennon and Harrison’s ongoing Dylan fandom during this period. Around sixteen of his songs were improvised or attempted by the group at these sessions.\(^3\) This compares to sixteen Little Richard songs, fourteen by Chuck Berry, eleven by Elvis Presley, eight by Ray Charles and half a dozen each by Lonnie Donegan and Carl Perkins (Goodden, 2014; Lewisohn, 2004). The majority were initiated by the most consistent and enthusiastic Dylan fan within the band at that time, George Harrison, who had clearly heard versions of ‘Get Your Rocks Off’ and ‘Please Mrs Henry’ (1967) some months before they were illicitly released on popular music’s first notable bootleg album, *Great White Wonder* (1969). Dylan had possibly given him a copy of the tapes distributed privately by his publishing company Dwarf Music (Sounes, 2011a). Only three songs in the session were initiated by Lennon: ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ (1963), ‘Rainy Day Women #12 & 35’ (1966) and a fifteen-minute improvisation in which he repeatedly sang the title of Dylan’s biggest hit single, ‘Like a Rolling Stone’. Fifty seconds of this performance subsequently appeared on *Let It Be* (1969) as the track ‘Dig It’.

Lennon also acknowledged Dylan by name three times in his songs from 1968 to 1970. In ‘Yer Blues’ (1968), Dylan’s lyrics were cited as a measure of Lennon’s own inner turmoil. In ‘Give Peace a Chance’ (1969) he was included in a semi-random series of culturally influential people mostly

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compiled from the attendees at that year’s week-long Montreal Bed-in for Peace: Alan Ginsberg, Timothy and Rosemary Leary, American comedian Thomas Smothers, Lennon’s press officer Derek Taylor, plus Norman Mailer and British comedian Tommy Cooper. Finally, in ‘God’ (1970), Dylan was included in a list of concepts and individuals that Lennon now publicly disavowed: magic, the I-Ching, the Bible, the Tarot, Adolf Hitler, Jesus, the Kennedys, Buddha, mantras, the Bhagavad Gita, yoga, kings, Elvis Presley, ‘Zimmerman’ and the Beatles themselves. The order of this list, where ‘Zimmerman’ appeared in penultimate position immediately before Lennon loudly disowned his own band, revealed the true extent of Dylan’s influence (Inglis, 1996b). The use of his family name also indicated the intensity of Lennon’s growing disenchantment at that time: ‘Dylan is bullshit’, he complained to Rolling Stone, ‘Zimmerman is his name’ (Wenner, 2000: 11). ‘That’s his problem, not mine’, Dylan retorted, during an unpublished interview for Esquire magazine: ‘Lennon is into that shit, taking his pants off, you know? That’s where he’s at. His record is about the same kind of things as that – who gives a fuck, you know?’ (Brinkley, 2020).

Over the next decade Dylan and Lennon’s relationship become increasingly complex and equivocal as their mutual approbation threatened to unravel. After Lennon disavowed Dylan in his song ‘God’, he also criticised the albums John Wesley Harding (1967) and New Morning (1970): ‘I haven’t been a Dylan follower since he stopped rocking’ (Lennon in Wenner, 2000: 19). For the first time, Lennon consciously underplayed the influence of Dylan on his work, rescinding his usual openness and transparency on such matters. The folk song ‘Working Class Hero’ (1970) was, he now maintained, inspired by traditional English sources. Lennon vaguely identified these as: ‘those miners up in Newcastle . . . it doesn’t sound like Dylan to me. Does it sound like Dylan to you? . . . I never listened that hard to him, you know?’ (Wenner, 2000: 6). Elsewhere in the same conversation he accused Dylan of harming Yoko Ono’s reputation by initiating malicious gossip: ‘Dylan and a few people said she’d got a lousy name in New York and that she gave off bad vibes’ (Wenner, 2000: 45). In response, Dylan critiqued Lennon and Ono’s political posturing during their interview on The Dick Cavett Show: ‘I couldn’t believe it . . . I just felt like throwing something at the set when it was over, you know? I just went to bed and was pissed off’ (Brinkley, 2020).

In late 1971, Lennon and Ono relocated to New York City, settling in an apartment at 105 Bank Street, Greenwich Village. Here they aligned with local counterculture figures Jerry Rubin, David Peel and A. J. Weberman
and, for a brief period, endorsed Weberman’s bizarre Dylan Liberation Front (DLF) – which attempted to harass the singer back into activism by generating critical press coverage, staging protests outside his Greenwich Village apartment and rifling through his domestic refuse. Lennon even sported a ‘FREE BOB DYLAN DLF’ button badge at one photo shoot. Dylan, who lived in nearby MacDougal Street at the time, took the couple on a walking tour of the neighbourhood, and introduced them to the area (Henke, 2003). Soon afterwards, Lennon withdrew his backing for Weberman and publicly denounced him in *The Village Voice*: ‘Weberman is to Dylan as Manson is to the Beatles – and uses what he interprets from Dylan’s music to try and kill Dylan’ (Lennon in Doggett, 2007: 462). At the same time, he financed Dylan’s recording sessions with Alan Ginsberg at The Record Plant studio in New York, intending to release it as the album *Holy Soul & Jelly Roll* on Apple Records, although this project never came to fruition. The following year, Dylan reciprocated by writing to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service in support of Lennon’s fight against deportation:

John and Yoko add a great voice and drive to this country’s so called ART INSTITUTION. They inspire and transcend and stimulate, and by doing so can help put an end to this mild dull taste of petty commercialism which is being passed off as artist art by the overpowering mass media . . . Let John and Yoko stay! (Dylan in Wiener, 1991: 237–8)

Dylan and Lennon’s last documented reunion occurred in January 1972, also at The Record Plant, where Lennon and Ono were producing David Peel and The Lower East Side’s album *The Pope Smokes Dope*. Lennon invited Dylan to hear Peel’s song ‘The Ballad of Bob Dylan’, which celebrated the singer’s history as a campaigning political songwriter and encouraged him to return to this role once more, urging him not to fear the consequences of writing protest songs. Lennon’s intention was to persuade Dylan to join an anti-Nixon peace concert outside the Republican Party National Convention in San Diego that August. Instead, Dylan walked out of the session objecting to the thinly veiled criticism in Peel’s lyrics (Doggett, 2007; Goldman, 1988; Peel, 2011, pers. comm.).

Encouraged by intelligence gained from an over-enthusiastic informant, the Federal Bureau of Investigation mistakenly believed Dylan and Lennon were now involved with Rubin’s anti-Nixon campaign. Internal reports suggested that Lennon planned to appear at a Peoples’ Coalition for Peace and Justice benefit concert to be held at the March 1972 New Hampshire Republican Primary – although, again, this was untrue (Wiener, 1999).
That year Lennon also attended a preview screening of Harrison’s film *The Concert for Bangladesh* at The DeMille Theater, New York City, but apparently left the building during Dylan’s segment of the show (Badman, 2001). Details of further encounters may yet be revealed in any future volumes of Dylan’s memoir, or if Yoko Ono ever comments on such matters. It would be interesting, for example, to know what happened backstage when Lennon and Ono attended Bob Dylan and The Band’s concert at Madison Square Garden in January 1974 (Epstein, 2011).


In July 1975, Yoko Ono entered the third trimester of her pregnancy and the couple discovered she was expecting a boy. Lennon wrote to his press agent Derek Taylor suggesting the name Dylan: ‘How does DYLAN ONO LENNON grab ya? It’s a pity the BIG ZIMM copped the name . . . but . . . by the time he (for it is (a) HE) goes up . . . Bobbie will be an OLD COPYWRITE!!! [sic]’ (Davies, et al., 2012: 330). After Dylan labelled the Beatles’ masterpiece *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* as ‘indulgent’ in December 1978 (Jarosinski, 2006: 665), Lennon produced three critical parodies of Dylan now posthumously available on the *John Lennon Anthology* (1998). These include ‘Stuck inside of Lexicon with the Roget’s Thesaurus Blues Again’ (an improvised commentary on geopolitics that criticised Dylan’s wordiness) and ‘Knockin’ on Dylan’s Door’ (a rewrite of ‘Knocking on Heaven’s Door’, which also refers to ‘Dylan’s Mister Jones’). Dylan’s public display of religiosity at the February 1980 Grammy Award ceremony where he performed ‘Gotta Serve Somebody’ (1979) inspired another parody: ‘Serve Yourself’ (1980) (Goodden, 2014 k). The twelve different home recordings of this song currently available on unauthorised releases include a punk rock version and a piano blues arrangement, among others, suggesting Lennon was willing to spend considerable time developing this composition. Dylan later visited Ono in her apartment at The Dakota, New York City, shortly after Lennon was assassinated in December 1980 (Epstein, 2011).
Over the decades that followed, Dylan occasionally performed Beatles songs at concerts or in rehearsal, and continued to acknowledge their influence in his press interviews. In June 1981 he played Harrison’s ‘Here Comes the Sun’ at London’s Earl’s Court. In August 1985 he reflected on Lennon’s legacy in an interview for the sleeve notes of Biograph: ‘People who praise you when you’re dead, when you were alive they wouldn’t give you the time of day. I like to wonder about some of these people who elevated John Lennon to such a mega-god as if when he was alive they were always on his side’ (Dylan in Jarosinski, 2006: 851). In December of the same year he recorded a memorable version of Lennon’s ‘Come Together’, featuring backing vocals from The Queens of Rhythm, during tour rehearsals with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at Stage 41 in Universal Studios, Hollywood. In November 2002 he delighted the audience at New York City’s Madison Square Garden with Harrison’s ‘Something’, possibly in recognition of the ex-Beatle’s recent death. In August 1990 Dylan even performed Lennon’s ‘Nowhere Man’ at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton, Canada.

Then, in May 2009, as the UK leg of his European tour reached Liverpool, interest in Dylan and Lennon’s cultural correspondence unexpectedly intensified when the singer travelled incognito alongside fourteen other tourists on an excursion to Lennon’s childhood home at Mendips in Woolton. Here, he viewed photographs and memorabilia at the newly restored house. Dylan ‘appeared to enjoy himself’, a National Trust press officer recalled: ‘He took one of our general minibus tours. People on the minibus did not recognise him apparently … He could have booked a private tour but he was happy to go on the bus with everyone else’ (Anon., 2009). Dylan reportedly left the group before they reached their second stop, McCartney’s childhood home at 20 Forthlin Road, Allerton, which is interesting, as this was also during a period when the two were publicly discussing whether they might work together.

Three years later Dylan closed his Tempest (2012) album with the unexpected tribute ‘Roll on John’. This track references the Quarrymen, the Beatles in Hamburg, Lennon’s infamous 1963 Royal Variety Performance quip – ‘Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands, and the rest of you if you’ll just rattle your jewellery’ (Smeaton and Wonfor, 1995) – plus lyrics from ‘A Day in the Life’ and ‘Come Together’. Uncut Magazine awarded Tempest a 10/10 review and declared ‘Roll on John’ to be ‘as direct and heartfelt as anything since “Sara”. The affection expressed for Lennon in the song is tangible, makes it glow like a force-field … by the end is totally disarming … a spine-tingling elegy’ (Jones,
Atlantic Magazine observed that Dylan’s imagery in ‘Roll on John’ was ‘rooted in American folk traditions’ and argued that it ‘only really makes sense seen as a sad lament in the tradition of tragic ballads about larger-than-life folk figures such as Stagger Lee or John Henry. “Roll on John” is ... Dylan acknowledging that Lennon has become legend – another mythic character to populate his songs’ (Beauchamp and Shephard, 2012).

The Beatles were also one of many artists referenced in Dylan’s song about President John F. Kennedy’s assassination, ‘Murder Most Foul’ from Rough and Rowdy Ways (2020). Dylan correlated the unique appeal of the band’s English charm with the depressed state of United States popular culture during a period of national mourning after Kennedy’s death, a version of history that Ian Inglis (2000b) had previously critiqued as the two-step ‘Kennedy – gloom – Beatles’ model.

**Conclusion: Dylan’s and Lennon’s Cultural Correlations**

Dual biography remains an underused analytical framing device. Given their influence and their relationship to wider social changes during the 1960s and 1970s, Bob Dylan and the Beatles are deserving subjects for this mode of examination. While every band member established a relationship with Dylan, John Lennon is the most appropriate choice for a comparative analysis. George Harrison may have been a closer companion and more productive collaborator, but as two artists who shared unparalleled influence in the 1960s and 1970s, Dylan and Lennon’s encounters carried greater cultural potential. The infrequency of these events, their significance and the absence of reliable documentation has allowed half-remembered and poorly sourced accounts to slip into the historical record. Dylan’s influence on Lennon is apparent in the form and subject matter of his songs, his adoption of acoustic guitar folk stylings, and the politicisation of his lyrics. This continued throughout Lennon’s life, as is evidenced by his ongoing intertextual references to Dylan’s work. Conversely, the Beatles inspired Dylan’s explorations of his ‘electric’ sound in early 1965, and Lennon influenced his decision to publish a monograph. The claim that ‘you’d be hard-pressed to find a trace of Lennon’s influence in any Bob Dylan record’ (Beauchamp and Shephard, 2012) was belied by Dylan’s recent releases, ‘Roll on John’ and ‘Murder Most Foul’, both of which confirmed the reciprocity in a relationship between two artists who shared a unique and unprecedented cultural correspondence during the second half of the twentieth century.