Timothy Hampton: I'm sure that if I had written a book on renaissance poetry that the room would be just as full as it is today. One of the fun things about working on Bob Dylan is that you can be sure in any given event that most of the audience knows the work better than the speaker, and I think in our case, this is definitely true. Anyway, Rob.

Robert Kaufman: Just echoing Tim and Ramona, thanking everybody for coming today. And Tim, you actually gave me my opening line which is what's internationally renowned renaissance scholar with books on inventing the renaissance, early modern Europe, French, British, Italian, Spanish renaissance literature, doing in a place like mobile with the Memphis Blues again, looking at the Nashville Skyline, sitting in a prison cell with Hurricane Carter, getting taken off the radio waves in 1975 for a seemingly exotic song called Mozambique that's actually being accused of supporting the revolutionary overthrow of Portuguese colonialism in southern Africa. Winding up on desolation row, all these places.

Robert Kaufman: This is an extended way of saying, how did you get here? And how did you feel like you wanted to take up Dylan as a literary critic that was also, those of you who have looked at the book or will, will see there's a very fascinating and deft and extremely ambitious attempt to keep the intensity and the intelligence of the literary and music and sociological and cultural criticism going while not limiting it to an academic audience, not trying to either lower the level of analysis, but not trying to be exclusionary and trying to open it. All of these things are quite remarkable to do. I wonder if you could just tell us how you fell into this, how you ended up here.

Timothy Hampton: Well, I've lived with this music for a long time, and if I had spent much of my life repeating Shakespeare's sonnets to myself as I have Bob Dylan's lyrics, I'd probably be further along. But I think the first, and this will give you a sense of what the book is after. The first impetus that came to ... I started two moments that I can talk about. The first is that I read Bob Dylan's memoir, so he wrote a memoir in 2004, 2005, which is called Chronicles Volume One. In it he talks about how in 1971, he was given an honorary doctorate in music from Princeton. He's at this point, 31 and he's been living in Woodstock for five years. He's got like four kids or maybe more. And life is good.

Timothy Hampton: He goes down to Princeton with David Crosby of all people in tow, and the president of Princeton calls him up onto the stage and says, "Here he is the voice of the troubled conscience of America's youth." Dylan says in his memoir, "Caught again. I had thought that they were interested in the songs, but in fact they were interested in connecting me up to a social movement that at that point I had no interest in whatsoever and knew nothing about."

Timothy Hampton: That really struck me when I read that, because I thought, what if we were to go with the songs from the songs? What if instead of constructing a narrative into which Dylan gets inserted, and there are people who have done this, and in many cases, extraordinarily brilliantly, a narrative of the history of ShowBiz, or a narrative of the history of Rock and Roll, or a narrative of the history of American Avant-garde culture, whatever, a narrative of the history of Jewish mysticism, whatever. I mean, there are all kinds of versions of Dylan.

Timothy Hampton: What if instead of starting with that kind of frame, what if we simply tried to get very close to the songs and see what was going on in them and how they work, how Dylan uses the kind of resources of songwriting, the verse form, the chorus, how he uses harmony, how he uses things like repetition and curses and all the kinds of tricks that he has, what his language is like, and how his language changes, how he uses this kind of wacky, non-normative version of American English that nobody actually ever speaks anywhere, but that he had somehow invented as our vernacular.

Timothy Hampton: What if we were to actually get close to that and then work out from there to try and think about how the formal aspects of the songs themselves engage political and social issues, rather than going the other way around, rather than starting with some sort of predetermined narrative?

Timothy Hampton: I started listening really carefully to what was going on in the songs. That's the first moment in the genesis of the book. And the other moment is a Berkeley moment, So that's a Princeton moment. The other moment is a Berkeley moment, and I've told several people about this, I was teaching a course in accomplished department on poetry, compliment 190, and we were reading a lot of sonnets. And so, we started out with the first great sonnet here in the European tradition, Petrarch, the Italian Sonneteer, who wrote 366 poems in honor of a beautiful lady named Laura.

Timothy Hampton: We worked our way through Shakespeare, and Baudelaire and Rilke, and we got up to the present, and we were getting to the end of the semester and I thought, "Okay, I'm going to really show these students how hip I am so that they will stop rolling their eyes every time I say anything." And so, I went to Bob Dylan's 1975 song Tangled Up In Blue, where he makes a reference to Petrarch, the so called Italian poet from the 13th century, it's not the 13th century actually, but it's okay. We know it's Petrarch.

Timothy Hampton: I started looking closely at the song, Tangled Up In Blue, and at the lyric sheet, and I realized to my delight and astonishment, that each of the verses in Tangled Up In Blue was 14 lines long and divided into eight lines and six lines, and that there was a break in the perspective on the action right in the middle of the poem. In other words, each verse of Tangled Up In Blue was itself a sonnet, and the song itself, which has six seven verses is in fact a miniature sonnet sequence. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. Petrarch wrote 365. Dylan wrote seven, but we'll take it.

Timothy Hampton: This needless to say, got me extremely agitated, and I started fooling around with that and trying to write something about it, and it went on from there. And I actually didn't try it out on Rob and I said, "This completely insane." And he said, "No, it's not completely insane." So that's how I got into it.

Robert Kaufman: One of the things that you'll see when you pick up the book, if you haven't already, is that Tim starts out feeling, I think understandably a certain kind of need to explain why another book on Bob Dylan, and maybe a different kind, but nonetheless, another book on Bob Dylan is needed, why it matters, and also, why, despite some real reasons, maybe not to write a book on another white male, "genius" might maybe for those very reasons that there are reasons not to do that. The book might matter and not just to refute those reasons. I wonder if you might want to just talk about your thinking about that as you began, or maybe in the middle of the work.

Robert Kaufman: Why it mattered to do it besides the interest you had when you suddenly realized, "My God, these are sonnets."

Timothy Hampton: Why write a book about these stuff? Right. Part of it was that I kept hearing things and seeing things in songs and saying, "Wow, I could say something about that." Why does anybody write a book about anything? You sort of say, "I could say something about that, and nobody else has. So maybe I should try it." But you're right. There's the kind of methodological issue of why you focus on one author and so on.

Timothy Hampton: I think the reason why Dylan lends himself to this kind of account is that his own work has constantly questioned many of the assumptions that we make about what constitutes art, what the relationship between art and commerce would be, what the relationship between art and middle class consumerism would be. I mean, there is no one who is more vicious in thinking about things like starting than Dylan. I think that he himself is a great critic of the very institutions that in some sense he's benefited from. So I felt that it was useful to focus on that rather than putting him as one person and a history of a music, or the history of a particular historical moment.

Robert Kaufman: One of the things that Tim does that he very upfront acknowledges is not entirely original, but I don't think you quite claim as you probably should, how far you advance this claim and make it in a way that's distinct from the way others have made it, is he thinks about Dylan as a modernist, as a modernist artist and as an artist very conscious of modernism. From the beginning, even amidst folk Greenwich Village culture, even coming earlier from that, probably in the back of his mind in Hibbing, Minnesota. I wonder if you might want to talk about the way you see that modernism in Dylan.

Timothy Hampton: Yeah. I think that Dylan is, I mean, we can locate him a little bit historically, if we want to, in a what Raymond William calls a second way or Fred Jamison as well, actually, second wave or late modernism, post war modernism when modernism moves from the Avant-garde world of Paris, and a few small coteries into becoming the international style and begins to be taught in schools, and begins to become part of the general conversation of art.

Timothy Hampton: And we have this kind of second wave of modernist artists who are building on the many of the discoveries of early modernism, but often in much more subconscious and vexed ways. We can think of Charlie Parker as opposed to Duke Ellington to take two musical examples, or we can think of de Kooning versus Picasso, or we can think of Orson Welles versus Eisenstein.

Timothy Hampton: I think that there is a second moment. Dylan comes of age at the moment of television, at the moment of the automobile, and he accesses all this kind of modern culture that's floating around. The films of Truffaut, the novels of Jack Kerouac, the poetry of Ginsburg, he's absorbing all of that kind of stuff, which is a kind of late modernist art.

Timothy Hampton: Truffaut is in there from the very second Bob Dylan album, whom he the first of Truffaut and in the liner notes to his third album, actually. The Times They are a Changin'. So, he's reading the stuff early on, and he's reading Rimbaud and Baudelaire from the very beginning. Dave Van Rock says that when Dylan was sleeping on his couch, he was reading his anthology of modern French poetry and basically annotating the heck out of it.

Timothy Hampton: So he's reading a lot of modernist art and thinking about it, and I think also many of the kinds of discoveries that Dylan makes, his interest in the surface of language, in the ways in which words make meaning without, above and beyond their semantic meaning, the ways in which, the performance itself can take off from the semantic meaning of the text.

Timothy Hampton: He's interested in the moment in what Rimbaud calls the absolutely modern, that's a modernist topo, so we think of from Proust or Virginia Woolf's essay on the moment, or Joyce's idea of the epiphany. Dylan writes a whole bunch of songs in the mid sixties. Of course, he's not the only person to do this, but it's this idea of exploring a single moment in all of its ramifications is extremely important for him.

Timothy Hampton: So I think there all of these kinds of big modernist themes that I think it's worth trying to inscribe him into to see where he ends and where he sits. It's one way to think about what he's doing.

Robert Kaufman: How did you wrap your mind around, maybe even at the start, the way you are going to handle the interplay of music and writing words?

Timothy Hampton: Well, that's a tricky one. What we probably know, what they think, as one would say in popular parlance, they think, the experts think that Dylan begins with generally with lyrics. And I just say that because he begins his career not taking other people's melodies, not taking other people's lyrics and inventing new melodies for them, which is what Pete Seeger does. Pete Seeger takes a poem by Jose Marti and slaps it onto a melody.

Timothy Hampton: Dylan goes the other way around. He takes other people's melodies and writes his own lyrics. It seems to be what it has to begin by thinking about lyric. But what I wanted to do was move beyond lyric, because that's where most of the people who've written about Dylan, and especially in the last 15 years or so have tended to stop. I mean, there's a wonderful book by Christopher Ricks called Dylan's Visions of Sin that came out about 2005. Ricks has a high Anglican version of Dylan. Ricks who's a Milton scholar and a TSL scholar, he puts Dylan in the high church of England. But it's a really smart book, but he's not interested in music at all.

Timothy Hampton: What I wanted to do was think about ways in which shifts in harmony, moments where Dylan seems to use discordant structures where he uses strange chord progressions where he seems to be using the blues. He seems to be writing a blues, but in fact, he introduces chords that are in fact, not normally in a blues, or progressions. And to try and think about the ways in which those, or even very simple things like if you ... maybe it's not simple, maybe it is simple.

Timothy Hampton: If you think of something like a rolling stone where the band actually goes up the major scale in triads as Dylan is singing a melody that's based on basically one note, how that tension between that kind of incredible dynamism and the band goes up from C to F, and then to G, and then it goes back down, and then it goes back up, and then it goes back down.

Timothy Hampton: I mean, it's a song about the rise and fall of destinies, and the band in some ways is mirroring what's going on in the lyric. So I wanted to look at those kinds of effects and see if there was a way to talk about them, and to see if there are moments where lyric and harmony, or melodic development seem to be pushing on each other. And also I wanted to try and see if there were ways in which one

could think about how he seems to be learning new things as he goes along. So the book has a certain kind of chronology to it. It's a kind of loose chronology.

Timothy Hampton: But it seems to me that there are certain moments where he just learns how to do certain kinds of things that he couldn't do before. There's a moment in the mid 1960s where he realizes suddenly that you can use minor chords as passing chords between major chords. And so, next thing you know you've got songs like, Just Like a Woman and Queen Jane approximate and he goes wild with this idea. Or there's a moment in 1965 when he realizes that he can write songs with bridges in them.

Timothy Hampton: He never wrote a song with a bridge until 1965. 1966 he writes songs with three different bridges. So it's like, "Okay, Whoa, watch this." I think there's a lot of that. So it's unsystematic in a sense that I'm just trying to follow them as closely as I can, but there are moments where you can see that he seems to discover certain kinds of things. And then you can watch him explode them or blow them up in certain kinds of ways.

Robert Kaufman: Throughout the book, you keep insisting in various ways, and then you refine and add and expand the notion as you go about how important the idea of form, both musical and literary. And then finally, not a stable hybrid of the two, but form as in his case, and in the case of the kind of music he's interested in, which goes back hundreds of years, the kind of music he's ... and forward as far as he can go in your account. Can you talk a little bit about what you're trying to get out about how form works for him and what he wants us to get from it?

Timothy Hampton: Well, I think at one point, I say something like he's a historical poet. And I was talking to somebody recently and they said, "Well, what does that mean?" I think one of the things that he's interested in is not only the themes of his songs, but the ways in which the songs work, the ways in which the forms of the songs work. So when I say at one point he was an historical port, that means he's not only interested in history, in other words, in the matter of history, he's interested in how we think about history. How do we process historical material? How do we remember things? What are the forms through which we remember things? Is it legend? Is it cinema? Is it narrative? Is it lyric images? How does those different kinds of things work?

Timothy Hampton: And the same thing I think when thinking about lyric in musical form, which is that he wants to think about how ... he wants us to think about the meanings that in here in forms. And the way in which forms generate meaning through repetition, through moments of crisis and reestablishment of harmony or tension and release. I wanted to think about those kinds of things as a way of getting away from the account of Dylan that says, "Aha, he writes political music until July 23rd, 1964 and then he stops writing political music, and then he becomes something else."

Timothy Hampton: That seems to me a really uninteresting way to think about him, and it seems to me that some of his most political music actually, has been written in the past 15 years. There's an extraordinary record called Modern Times that came out in 2006. This is an album that was very controversial because it's full of quotations and people went wild over this, for example. And I mean really blatant quotation so that, for example, he takes the melodies of some Bing Crosby songs from the 1930s, like Red Sails in the Sunset, and he simply puts new lyrics on them.

Timothy Hampton: I mean, there's no attempt to disguise this. You cannot know that it's Red Sails in the Sunset. So you say to yourself, "Wow, that's weird. What in fact is this

about?" But these are songs. It's called Modern Times of, which is an album which is the title comes from the Charlie Chaplin film, which is about the devastation of modern industrial economy on the individual worker. And these are songs about basically the desolation in the American heartland about unemployed working men, about people who have lost their livelihood and their sense of direction and so on and so forth.

Timothy Hampton: But Dylan doesn't, I mean, it's not like, "Hey man, bring back the jobs." Or it's not ... there's a revolution in the air. It's more a kind of investment in trying to bring to our consciousness the confusion and the pathos of this particular historical and economic moment. And that seems to me ... and he does that through the way he cites things, through the way he'll slip from one citation to another. I mean, here's an example, so he has a beautiful song called Workingman's Blues #2 from that album, and there's a moment in the song, so it's a song about a working man who is basically can't earn a living, and he's stuck in this rotten town, and his only constellation is his beloved.

Timothy Hampton: And there's a moment in the song where the singer turns to his beloved and says, he says, "My cruel weapons had been put on the shelf. Come sit down on my knee. You are dear to me than myself as you yourself can see." It's a very beautiful, very moving moment. And that last line "You are dear to me than myself as you yourself can see", is a citation of a translation by Peter Green of a poem by the Latin Poet Ovid, who in the first century was exiled by Caesar Augustus for a reason that nobody knows to the Black Sea.

Timothy Hampton: Ovid was sent into exile and wrote a series of poems called the Tristia or Book of Sorrows about how miserable he was, and how unhappy he was and how he wanted to get back to Rome. So you might say, "Well, what's Dylan doing here?" Well, for one thing, he's giving a certain dignity to the experience of this working man by saying, "We're all Ovid in this economy. Everybody's in exile, and this working man's story matters as much as the story of Ovid." He's also, of course, finding a really, really great line from somebody else.

Timothy Hampton: But my point is that, there's a political dimension to the formal gesture of citing someone else, if that actually means something.

Robert Kaufman: I want to open it up to everybody. Just before I do, maybe just as a way of shorthanding handing something you'll find in the book that's very much related to what Tim has been talking about right now. Tim has a way of, with a kind of doggedness that always feels light handed, which is in itself kind of a remarkable thing to be able to pull off.

Timothy Hampton: Can I quote you on that?

Robert Kaufman: Of making you certain that Dylan has either in every library ever, or somehow found a way knowing that that can't be done to put himself in places where he can absorptively, get that material from second to 10th hand and know where it's coming from. But most of them know that whether he reads it like the kind of dropout college student he was, or like a person just finding a scrap here and there, that it doesn't matter because what he's guided by is what he'll need for his own work, and it all comes in that way.

Robert Kaufman: I think tantalizing double bit is Tim has a weight in the first third of the book that he carries through, and then he seals it with a different way of going at it in the conclusion. I think Tim's book may be the first on Dylan that besides dropping the name, has a really considered non doctrinal argument for Dylan as one of

American arts most important directiants. Seriously, and it's a not so long feeling discussion.

Robert Kaufman: It goes by with a kind of energetic rapidity, but a very careful discussion of what in practice actually really matters, and it's the anti-authentic strain through the very beginning of the Foci, otherwise authenticity culture that Dylan is there from the start. And near the end, it turns to a very classic and remoted throughout Dylan's career notion from the whole lyric tradition, but also spliced into musicality of voice as one of the ways to hear history without assuming that it's just empirical history you're getting. That is a sense for what history might mean, that is always under discussion, if not, in fact being struggled over.

Robert Kaufman: Those are just some of the highlights. There's many of them, and I have a thousand other questions written here, but I want everyone else to get the chance to ask them. So please, we'd like to open it up to the floor for people to ask Tim, or denounce him, either is fine.

Speaker 6: Hi. I was wondering if you could talk maybe about what in your mind is an overlooked gem of his or two.

Timothy Hampton: Overlooked gem. Well, there's this extraordinary song that he wrote in 1983 called Blind Willie MC Tell that was not released officially when it was recorded, and was released later on a show called Bootleg. I mean, he's basically got this secondary publishing operation of these Bootlegs, so called Bootlegs that he releases. And it's an amazing song that offers what I think is in an epic actually, account of the history of the old South. Each verse ends with the reference to this Piedmont based blues singer, Blind Willie Mc Tell who is a stand in for homer who as you may have heard was blind. Each verse ends with the line, "I know no one could sing the blues like Blind Willie MC Tell."

Timothy Hampton: That's one of the most moving songs I've ever heard, I think. The other thing I would just say, I think that one of the things that came really came alive for me as I was working on this, I went back to his work in the early 1980. So Dylan, as you may know, went through this period where he converted to Evangelical Christianity in the late 1970s, and this makes people very nervous. I wrote a chapter about it. I loved that. That was the kind of proud achievement was that instead of avoiding that part of his career actually went head on with it and came to really love that music.

Timothy Hampton: But as he came out of this Christian period, he wrote a really fascinating record called Infidels, which is very uneven, but it's about the onset of Reaganism. I mean, it's all these songs about corrupt politicians and greed, and hypocrisy, and it feels like it was written yesterday. I mean, just so go back and listen to that. Mic in the back. Oh, you have to wait until ... you have to speak into the microphone or you will not be heard.

Speaker 7: Thank you very much. The question I have is, you've presented various different ideas about your understanding and analysis of Dylan in the content of say, as a historical poet and that sort of broad sweep. I also think of him as writing lots of beautiful love songs and curious if you have a framework for that, and if it overlaps with the other, or if it's almost a separate framework. They're very personal songs that incorporate poetry, but maybe they don't talk about the shifts of history.

Timothy Hampton: That's a great question. Thank you. Dylan's love songs are really mysterious part of his corpus in some ways, because many of the early ones are not something

you'd want to be on the other end of. And I wouldn't recommend like trying to get like relationship help from Dylan's love songs, but some are extraordinarily beautiful. You're exactly right. One of the things that I'm interested in about Dylan generally ... and well, so just one other point, I think one of the things that happens is, especially from say after 1990, let's say, he writes many, many songs that have amorous deceit or disappointment at their heart. I think it's just almost like a kind of scaffolding to hang all story on that he where he's really interested in something else. I that sense, it becomes a conceit in certain kind of way.

Timothy Hampton: But I do think that the love songs are ... One of the things that interests me about Dylan as a lyric writer, and we haven't talked about this yet, is I make the point fairly early on, and I'm not the first person to make this point that one way to think of him as, is a collage artist so that he takes bits of language from all over the place and patches them together. So you'll have a song in which, three lines will be in some kind of bizarre version of working class American English that nobody actually speaks anywhere. The versions of English that Dylan got from what he thinks, what he would have said. Expressions like “iffin” and stuff like that.

Timothy Hampton: I mean, I grew up in a country, where I grew up, we didn't say “iffin” we did say, I mean not even where I grew up, and certainly not in Hibbing. He's invents this down home language, and then three lines later, either you'll come across a couplet that's written in the language that sounds like it's a graduate student in rhetoric at Berkeley. And the power of the song comes from the vitality of the intersection of those different bits of language. And I think that's one of the things that happens in a lot of the love songs. You take a song like Girl from the North Country, "If you're traveling to the north country fair" which a rewrite of the famous English folk song, Are You Going to Scarborough Fair?

Timothy Hampton: Dylan already is from the ... which, Simon & Garfunkel made into a hint. Dylan from the very beginning distorts it. Are You Going to Scarborough Fair? So fair is a noun. And then Dylan writes a song line is If You're Traveling to the North Country Fair, suddenly go, "Wait a minute. It's not a noun anymore. It's now an adjective. Okay." And then the next question is, where is the north country since in the United States, we don't really have North Country? They may in England, but we certainly don't in the United States, we have states.

Timothy Hampton: He's inventing a kind of imaginary landscape in which this girl is living, and one of the things that he often does ... and then he says, "Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline." I don't know what kind of grammar that is. Does he mean where the winds hit heavily? I mean, how can the winds hit on the borderline since if there's a borderline, by definition, the winds crossed the borderlines. There isn't a borderline.

Timothy Hampton: So that kind of linguistic density, which I think is really characteristic of a lot of the love songs, is what I got most excited about was to try and hear, to use the word Rob used, to try and hear the different voices that are coming through these love songs. Because they really are multiple in the same way that Shakespeare's sonnets or multiple. I mean, I really think that it's the same kind of density.

Robert Kaufman: Just one quick thing, as you give the mic, please go ahead. Tim does this throughout the book and you get this thing, for those of us in literary criticism, it's a amazing lesson that you just want to try will always fail at doing it the way he did it. But there's close reading after close reading, and none of them feels like someone is doing a close reading.

Robert Kaufman: What it feels like is someone is in their room in the ways that I would guess, lots of people have been in their room, listening and going, "Oh, my God. There's all these layers to this." And it's all this history I seen, or thought I've seen or known about in my life or the life I thought I wanted to have, and it's inside this stanza, and it turns out there's seven levels to it as opposed to something done on a blackboard, or for an exam. He pulls it off in this amazing way that he's just giving you a tiny bit of what it sounds like in the book. Anyway, please, more questions.

Speaker 8: So just picking up on what you just said, Rob, I think one of the great pleasures of the book is that, you feel like you helped the reader makes sense of Bob Dylan. But that was actually not going to be my question. My question is there's not a scholar of the renaissance on the planet who since about 1980 doesn't think about something called self fashioning. So my question is, just in the most hyperbolic way, to what extent are the songs vehicles for Bob Dylan's self fashioning? If not all the time, then invariably? Well or is it all really about Bob Dylan self fashioning?

Timothy Hampton: Well, that's a very deep question, Professor Cascady. I do have this kind of 10 inches moment in the introduction where I say something like, I'm really not interested in Bob Dylan, whoever he may be. The point that I tried to make fairly early on is that, all of these eyes are fiction. It's very interesting to try and teach this stuff to ... I've taught a couple of freshmen seminars about Bob Dylan and the students come in and they go. And they know much more about it than I do. They're all like 25 biographies and they all say things like, "Whoa. It says that she's got along here, this must be about Joan Baez." Or, "It says that he saw her on the street corner and well, we know that so and so ... " All of this biographical attempts.

Timothy Hampton: What I want to do is not really think about that, and I want to think about the ways in which Dylan is constantly inventing a fictional eye. In other words, every one of these eyes is a fiction, and that's what we would say about all literature. But it's important to keep that in mind because it changes as you go through his career. So there are moments where the eye seems to know a lot. There are other songs where the eye doesn't seem to know very much there. There's some songs where the eye seems to think it knows a lot, but doesn't know anything. Sounds like, well that's actually Tangled Up in Blue in some way. Or there are songs where the eye says more than it knows, where the eye may actually be quoting T.S. Elliot without knowing that it's quoting T.S Elliot.

Timothy Hampton: I think it's important to pay attention to that kind of fictitious aspect of the eye. And as far as Dylan himself goes, I mean, I just think of him as a kind of, it's an ongoing performance and he never drops the mask, and I think it's one of the reasons why people are so fascinated by him personally. And there's all this mystique around him. I mean, I've never found him particularly mysterious. He just seems to me that he just doesn't drop the mask whereas, The Beatles dressed up like in funny costumes, and then they take their funny costumes off, and Paul's Paul again in George's George again. Well, and in fact, Dylan doesn't really do that, and so nobody quite knows what's there.

Timothy Hampton: Every time you see him, he's wearing funny clothes. If he's not wearing a top hat, he's wearing a riverboat gamblers hat. If he doesn't have a pencil mustache, he's got a scruffy beard. I mean, it's just a constant change, and I think it's the same way in the songs.

Timothy Hampton: There are a bunch of hands up and I can't even ... hands in the back. Albert is in the back, he has his hand up, but there's a hand here. I don't know what to say. There's a hand right here. Hi.

Speaker 9: It was fascinating that you said he was reading modern French poets.

Timothy Hampton: Yeah.

Speaker 9: And I just wondered if you could tell us a few of those you reference in the book.

Timothy Hampton: He's read Baudelaire certainly. The figure who I think is very important for him is the symbolist French poet Rimbaud. Rimbaud, who you may know is this kind of rebel poet who ran away from home to Paris, grew up in a small town in northern France, ran away from home to Paris, and became famous in the cafes of Paris writing this very disruptive transgressive poetry, sounds a little bit like Bob Dylan. And then had a tempestuous love affair with another poet named Paul Verlaine, and the two of them walked across Belgium together and went to London. And then eventually, Rimbaud left Europe and went to Africa and became a merchant, an import-export merchant and never wrote another word.

Timothy Hampton: There's a 1965 news conference in San Francisco that you can see on YouTube where Dylan has just come off of the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, where he played with an electric guitar, and he's now touring with this group that later will be called The Band. And someone says to him, he has to get to the conference and someone says to him, "What poets do you dig, Bob?" And the first person he says is "Rimbaud." And he later says in the liner notes to Desire, the liner notes to Desire, which are written by Dylan begin on the heels of Rimbaud.

Timothy Hampton: So I think Rimbaud's are really important figure. I make the argument in the book that he's read Rimbaud carefully and that there are moments where he's really, I don't want to say translating Rimbaud, because he doesn't know French, but he's copying lines from Rimbaud. And I think in some ways I think My Back Pages actually, is a rewriting in fact, of a Rimbaud poem. I sort of make that. The person in the back keeps waving his hand. You way in the back.

Speaker 10: Do I wait for the mic.

Timothy Hampton: Well, obviously.

Speaker 10: I can shout.

Timothy Hampton: No, just speak your piece.

Speaker 10: I want to go back briefly to Tony Cascady's question. It seems to me that Dylan has worked very hard to establish his identity as somebody who refuses to be what people are trying to pin him down as being. I think you've said that very well at the outset. That seems to be a negative self fashioning in a way. But the other thing is, and this is just, and this is just as pure amateur, it seems to me that one of the reasons he can do that is he can count on everybody hearing his voice. Bob Dylan's voice tells you it's Bob Dylan, and that's fundamental part of the play of identity.

Timothy Hampton: Thank you. That's a great observation. I think that's true. But he's very interested in that it's his voice, but what's strange about it, is that the voice is always

changing. Paul McCartney is still singing in the same old ... You can go see Paul McCartney at the Meadowlands or wherever it is. What's it called here?

Speaker 10: Shoreline.

Timothy Hampton: Yeah, Shoreline, and he's going to sit at the piano, and he's going to sing Hey Jude. It's not going to be quite as good as it was in 1968, but it's the same voice. Dylan's voice is constantly changing, and yet it's the same voice. And that's what irritates people who don't like his voice. But I think there's an interesting moment in his career, and I make this point somewhere in the book. In 1969, he released this album called Nashville Skyline, where his voice is absolutely gorgeous. It's this sort of trumpet like.

Timothy Hampton: He sings these country songs that he's written and it's very beautiful and very polished and so on. And then like a year or so later, he goes back and he's croaking again. And I think one of the points that is made by Nashville Skyline is that if I'm croaking, it's because I want to croak. It's not that I have to croak, because I can sing the way I sang on Nashville Skyline, but I don't want to do that. In other words, if I don't want to color inside the lines, I'm not going to color inside the lines.

Timothy Hampton: I think it's a way of pointing to the arbitrariness of what a voice would be in some way, except as you point out, Albert, it's always his voice. And it's interesting in that regard, because if you think of someone like Leonard Cohen for example, who's voiced, got very deep at the end of his life, I mean everybody's voice gets deeper, but Cohen backed himself up with these girl singers who would sing in unison to give a kind of presence to his voice that it didn't really have. Otherwise, Dylan's so far not really done that. He's just out there-

Speaker 11: Croaking.

Timothy Hampton: ... croaking away. You had a question?

Speaker 12: In response to your comments about Nashville Skyline in '69, I'm thinking about how he comes out with the amazingly titled Album Self Portrait in 1970 that consists almost entirely of covers. And I'm thinking about this relationship to your description of Dylan is someone who collages and compiles fragments, but here's an early instance in his career where he's saying, "I'm just going to think standards and by voice." He then departs from that for a long time, and is back at that now. Maybe the simple question is why he's done that or what the interest is in someone who's so acclaimed as a lyricist? And is more so acclaimed as a lyricist than as a vocalist.

Timothy Hampton: Why is he singing songs associated with Frank Sinatra, which is what he's doing?

Speaker 12: Yeah, I'm just curious on your take on it.

Timothy Hampton: First of all, I appreciate the reference itself. Portrait, his Self Portrait was his first commercial flop. It was a double album of mostly covers. My take on it is, I mean, I love it because he knew what people in my generation at least didn't know, but which Petrarch knew, which is that we are our citations. What is our self food? Our self food is what we site. That's who we are. We are the texts that we repeat. And so Dylan said, "Aha, you want to Self portrait? Okay. It's me singing Richard Rogers. It's me singing Gordon Lightfoot. It's me singing

whatever." So he got that. That the Self is always composite, and there is no deep interiority. So I think that's right.

Timothy Hampton: As far as his recent album, for those of you who haven't followed him, starting in about 2012, he started releasing a series of albums in which he basically revisits the so-called Great American Songbook. So Johnnie Van Heusen, Cole Porter of Johnny Mercer, the great songs that we would associate mostly with Sinatra. It's really amazing that he would do this, and I think there are a couple of things. Actually, this may be a good way to end. I just thought of this. Maybe I could even read like a tiny bit at the end as a way of ending.

Timothy Hampton: But I think part of it is that it, first of all, he's got a very big ego. So Sinatra's gone. "I'm left, so I'm going to take that song. I'm old blue eyes now, so I'm going to take her songs." That's part of it. But I think another thing that's interesting is that there's a kind of claim of those songs as American folk songs now. I mean, you take those songs and you, instead of recording them with an arrangement by Nelson Riddle and an entire orchestra, you do them with a little string band. That's a different song. And so, he's taking songs that are not folk songs, and in some ways making them folk songs. And that seems to me like a really interesting musicological exercise.

Robert Kaufman: Maybe you do want to read something.

Timothy Hampton: So I thought I would just read, since this was not a plan to quit. I thought I would just read maybe a little bit of the last page of the book because I do talk a little bit about these last songs about the most recent recordings. Let me see if I can ... I don't want to read too much here, but I'll just read. So he has an album called Fallen Angels, and I'll just read a little bit here. And I try and figure out what he's doing. Fallen Angels opens with Caroline Lee and Johnny Richard tune Young At Heart from 1953.

Timothy Hampton: It is difficult to hear the recording without hearing Sinatra's version echoing in the background like a ghost. Dylan follows Sinatra's arrangement almost exactly singing in the same key beginning and slow time before hitting full tempo, stressing the word young, sitting out while the band plays the first half of the verse on the second go round.

Timothy Hampton: But of course there are the inevitable differences. Sinatra's versions swings with the optimism of the postwar generation looking at a bright future of station wagons and dry Martinis. Dylan's version is stately and serious. His voice has changed since the late '90s. Here, he has a consistent but course surface. On Young At Heart, it turns a lyric about the power of mind over matter into a thoughtful commentary on the passage of time. The final lines are particularly revealing.

Timothy Hampton: The published melody ends by zigzagging over a minor third interval. A passage that Sinatra takes with Jonty reassurance, bouncing up and down and up again. "If you are among the very young at heart" Dylan's version eliminates the melodic intervals. "If you are among the very young at heart" He sings the concluding affirmation on a single pitch. This turns the last cadence from a happy musical affirmation into a bit of sober advice about the secret to a well lived life.

Timothy Hampton: No less striking as the climax of the song where the melody goes high, and I'm not going to try and sing this, but he goes, "If you should survive to 105, think of all you'll derive out of being alive." Sinatra skates through this with a smile

hitting the climactic word alive with ease. Dylan's recording captures the sound of him inhaling deeply to prepare for the final push. And indeed, his voice waivers on the last note alive, but he recovers and pushes through by breaking the word up phonetically. He hits the proceeding rhyme words with conventional Midwestern pronunciations "survived, 105" He breaks the climactic word alive into a loud-

Timothy Hampton: Here he is doing what the song says, making alive come alive. At one level, it seems like a technical trick, a way of jerking his voice up to loop it around the target note like the flex in a dancer's knee before she leaps, or the hitch in a batter swing before he swats the ball to left field. And my friend Keith van Orden has told me that in Nessun Dorma, the Puccini aria, they often ... the tenors often do this, because they can't get to the top. They often fool around with the sound.

Timothy Hampton: But this is also where the past speaks, where history resonates through the performance. For this alive, recalls distantly the times where Dylan has turned to the same sound throughout his career. It takes us back to the very first appearance of this improvised dip Thong, "Ain't it just like the night," the very opening of the third song on Blonde on Blonde, Visions of Joanna.

Timothy Hampton: But it evokes as well a live version of Idiot Wind where that wraps out of nowhere. "They say I shot a man named Gray and took his wife to Italy. She inherited a million bucks. And when she died, it came to me."

Timothy Hampton: On Young At Heart, he doesn't push the sound. He adds just enough seasoning to open the word up. This is the mark of the Dylan-esk. This is where Dylan turns language against itself, opening it up to a new message, a message in which word in music are bound together into a form of communication that is both in neither. On the highest note, when the breath falters for an instant and the voice waivers, he remakes the word cracking it open to reveal the life inside of alive. He summons his vocal imagination to leave a mark on the language, on rhythm, on sound itself. And so, at last he delivers the song, sending it out toward the stars, Young At Heart.

Timothy Hampton: Thanks for coming.