

# Songs of Disdain- Bob Dylan's Classic Lost Love Songs and Psycho Tragedy of a Broken Heart

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## Abstract

Bob Dylan in his singing career has sung a variety of songs however he has written and sung lot of songs conveying the pains of a heart broken in love. However the songs have not been written in traditional blues and rock style as Elvis Presley's *My Baby Left Me* or *No Regrets* by Walker Brothers. Dylan's songs of disdain are the songs of lost love where a lover's heart regrets the painful moments of his life of lost friendship and love. Dylan's songs of disdain include *It Ain't me Baby* and *One too many Mornings* which reflect a lover walking away due to lost love, it shows the sad ending of an affair in which the singer has been left alone by his lover. The paper attempts to analyze the psycho tragedy of the songs of disdain by Dylan that truly reflect the real feelings of heart establishing a strong connection with the masses.

**Keywords-** Lyrics, psycho tragedy, disdain

Tragedy is the ancient form of action in which the agents of action suffer as they are ignorant to have sufficient knowledge to achieve happiness (Aristotle 4th century BCE). However a psychological tragedy is the one in which internal and psychological factors lead to tragedy rather than being motivated by external agents and elements. Poems and songs comprising of lyrics associated with tragic love stories and sad endings of the relationships recognize actions that are propelled by internal and psychological reasons as an outcome of mental status of the sufferer.

Bob Dylan's disdain song *It Ain't me Baby* originally appeared on his fourth album *Another Side of Bob Dylan* 1964 released by Columbia records. According to music critic Oliver Trager the song was exceptional in the sense it marked a departure for Dylan when he started exploring the possibilities of language and deeper levels of human experience. This song composed by Dylan displayed the autobiographical elements as the biographers of Dylan agree that the song was deeply inspired by a real life incident of Dylan related to his former girlfriend Sueze Rotolo. Dylan reportedly started writing the song during his visit to Italy in 1963 while searching for his friend Rotolo who was studying there. Nat Hentoff (October 1964 New Yorker Article) mentions

"Dylan," Hentoff writes, "went on to record a song about a man leaving a girl because he was not prepared to be the kind of invincible hero and all-encompassing provider she

wanted." "It ain't me you're looking for babe," he [Dylan] sang, with finality," Hentoff writes in his piece.

The song is showcasing confessions of an honest lover who has been betrayed in love by his beloved who is whimsical and loves to dwell in a world that has only good things to say. The confessions of an honest lover here lead to a situation of psycho tragedy in which his inner honest tendencies do not allow him to speak fake things just to please his beloved so he accepts that he cannot favor her when she is in wrong. He also confesses that being a human he too is made up of weaknesses and strength therefore there can be moments in his life when he will be weak and broken and cannot be strong all time like a fairytale prince. In other words he is revealing his real inner self very honestly to his lover but unfortunately he faces reaction as in this world full of falsehood and artificiality ears are not ready to hear truth nor the heart is ready to accept it, therefore this failure of the lover is not just a lover's failure but it is the failure of humankind that believes in honesty and loves to lead life truly but is rejected by the world which always wants to see a manipulative picture. The idea is clearly reflected in the lines as under:

Go 'way from my window, Leave at your own chosen speed.  
I'm not the one you want, babe, I'm not the one you need.  
You say you're lookin' for someone Never weak but always strong,  
To protect you an' defend you Whether you are right or wrong,  
Someone to open each and every door, But it ain't

me, babe, No, no, no, it ain't me, babe, It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe

Though Aristotle reflected tragedy superior to poetry he outlined certain general norms for tragedies which included the use of songs as well, which itself reflects the importance of songs in influencing the mood of audiences as tragic or comedy. In the context of song and diction Aristotle referred to the vocal compositions incorporated into the performance, whereas diction referred to the metrical composition of poetic or song lines. He reflected that music was an embellishment of language and the lines assigned to the chorus in a tragedy when usually conveyed in song were accompanied by rhythmical movements.

Dylan's *it ain't me, babe*, is one of his all-time classics in which the narrator is telling to some unknown beloved in no uncertain terms that he is simply not the one who she is looking for and is not a man of her choice. He speaks to her in strong words that she is not looking for a lover but for a personal help who will open each and every door for her and will come all time whenever she calls. He reflects that the unknown addressee has least consideration for the narrator and that the feelings are completely one sided which reflects the lack of understanding. At the same time while asking her to go, he also takes care of her and asks her to go lightly on the ground. He says that if the beloved is in the act of connecting every move in relationship with her status quo then in that case he cannot give his hundred percent and probably become the reason for letting her down. He reflects that the girl said that she is looking for someone who will never part with her, but this is simply impossible in real grounds as the situations and future circumstances are unknown and not in one hand therefore he cannot make a commitment that way as he is not the one she is looking for. The narrator's statement here also reflect the weakness of his character that he has already confessed in previous lines and this is the reason that stops him from making any commitment to the girl. He himself feels to lack confidence and commitment in relationship which most of the time provides a sense of security. Thus the song is not only an insight into a lover's aching heart but also reflects his own responsibility in being so. Each line reflects a little more of what he thinks wrong with the twisted definition of relationship given by her.

Go lightly from the ledge, babe, Go lightly on the ground. I'm not the one you want, babe, I will only let you down. You say you're lookin' for someone Who will promise never to part, Someone to close his eyes for you, Someone to close his heart, Someone who will die for you an' more, But it

ain't me, babe, No, no, no, it ain't me, babe, It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.

According to Michael Gray the lyrics in the song follow the general pattern of many blue songs as they often repeat the phrase like:

*"Go away from my window / door / kitchen /whatever"* at the beginning of each verse. An example of this style of lyrics can be found in Sleepy John Estes' *Drop Down Mama*.

Go away from my window Stop scratchin' round my screen you're so evil woman And I know what you mean

According to Tim Riley *It Ain't Me, Babe* is one of the most flexible songs by Dylan in which he has sung lyric and has arranged the music in such a way that it significantly changes the meaning of song. Betsy Bowden in her work on Dylan titled *Performed Literature* published in late sixties has dedicated nineteen pages of her book to this song and has performed an outstanding job of dissecting every nuance of the lyrics created in the song. She has also dissected the aspects of music, and varied ways in which Dylan has performed the song and in the process his performance gave a new meaning to the song, therefore *Performed Literature* is a serious reading for all fans of Dylan.

Projecting himself as a hard hearted defeated lover he accepts in the song that he everything inside him is made up of stone and that nothing inside him is moving, which reflects the stiffness of his heart after feeling rejected in love. He reflects that in his life an individual has many roles to play to it will be quite selfish of him to play just the role of a lover all time and forgetting other responsibilities of the world, therefore at times he may not be present for his beloved if she falls down to give her his hand and support her, there can be moments when she has to handle things alone, he cannot gather flowers for her constantly, so he cannot be a lover purely at heart and nothing more than that in his life. Therefore he is not the right choice for meeting her expectations. He wants her to melt back into the darkness of night never to be seen or reappear again before her.

Go melt back into the night, babe, Everything inside is made of stone. There's nothing in here moving An' anyway I'm not alone. You say you're looking for someone Who'll pick you up each time you fall, To gather flowers constantly An' to come each time you call, A lover for your life an' nothing more, But it ain't me, babe, No, no, no, it ain't me, babe, It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.

The song is notable for the psycho tragedy elements revealing the mental status of a lover rejected and dejected in love. The song incorporates in it slow tempo, minor key, low pitch range, melancholic melodies and lyrics focusing mainly on loss, despair, grief and personal tragedy that aim to evoke a deep sense of sadness and emotional catharsis in listener, therefore the song is exceptionally an impersonation of almost every dejected and defeated lover. The music is slow moving at a deliberate pace with sparse and dissonant chords to create tension, the dynamics are soft and subdued with occasional crescendos for dramatic effect and the rhythm is steady and repetitive with a sense of dragging.

The lyrics display the deep contemplations of the narrator for his mistakes and choices made in the past and his trapped mental status in a negative situation with no way out but to live with a broken heart for uncertain years to come. There are rhetorical questions of the significance of a love life and the role of a lover lost in Platonic love away from the realities of life and other responsibilities of the world. In fact he talks about a love that should be more of understanding in practical terms rather than just a display of love.

The psychological elements reflecting the trauma include his past experiences he had with his lover and the expectations that he could not fulfill. His idea of chronicling those situations creates a sense of relief making the readers empathize and develop a bond with his aching heart. Thus in a true sense the song is a serious statement that the affair is over and has the touch of sadness about its tragic end so that the singer is left with nothing but a bewailing that his girlfriend has gone. Some closer thoughts of a misogynist also appear in the song reflecting this tendency of Dylan when he says that she should melt in the darkness of night so as to dissolve forever never to be seen again. The song is in accordance with the early rock and roll and the blues that a woman cannot be trusted as she just gets up and leaves for the other man. However Dylan has less to do with this genre but his song eschews the whole classic of the lost love songs in which a lady leaves a male singer who describes his break up and expresses his annoyance and anger about the person within the song which in true sense is a song of disdain.

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