

## THE POSTMODERN GENDER DIVIDE IN THE BOB DYLAN BIOPIC *I'M NOT THERE*

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53

There really is no need for further abstraction in an analysis of the Bob Dylan Biopic *I'm Not There*. The messages seem simple. The film is allusive. The film is not biographically accurate. The film is not for the general public. The film is not easy to watch —just like Bob Dylan. Leading biopic academic Dennis Bingham says that *I'm Not There* is “a biopic in reverse” (2010: 381), and he is correct. He says that director Todd Haynes “works with the parts and by the end gets him (Dylan) into a coherent person” (2010: 381) and he is right. However, two statements in his appraisal of the biopic *I'm Not There* seem a bit too light hearted and signal for a retracing of his argument. Firstly, Bingham says that the film “deconstructs the inherent masculinities of Dylan’s music and persona” and secondly, that “[Haynes] also reveals an unexpected debt, pliability and universal applicability outside time, space and gender” (2010: 393). I would like to critique the supposed way this deconstructed masculinity works outside gender and apparently outside history as well. Through an analysis of masculinity and pastiche, the claim will be as follows: despite the firm ability to predict and provide what both Dylan and the spectator would like to be, to hear and to see in a biopic about Bob Dylan, the film does not work outside gender nor deconstruct masculinity. The film deconstructs the biopic genre and Bob Dylan himself, but it does not deconstruct the masculinities that drive them. *I'm Not There* haphazardly assumes that a certain aesthetic malleability suffices to mask historically constructed masculinities and their limitations. These

masculinities are constructed and therefore not inherent in Bob Dylan's music and life in the forms proposed by the film.

## A Comfortable Contradiction

The biopic is a space of representation and plays a role in the making of history. Its power lies in the fact that if produced after the death of the artist, a biopic can seal the historical memory of a generation or generations through the use of a nostalgic intimacy, using the blurry lines of fact and fiction to fix an artist in time. In *Bio/Pics*, one of the first books to bring the genre to academia, George Custen says that “[Hollywood biographies] represent according to Hayden White, not a concrete illustration of history, a literal recapitulation of physical cause and effect, but rather types of behaviors and explanations that compromise the category of history” (1992: 7). In this genre of film, history is compromised despite the genre's claim to be biographically accurate. However, history itself is a contradictory space as it claims to tell a factual story that is mediated (Custen 1992: 11). New sources of historical information always come to the surface making it hard to fix. “Work in history has increasingly focused on ‘public history’ and ‘collective memory’ as historians recognize the roles mass media play in shaping the public's notion of historical events” (1992: 25). Because of its stake in history, the biopic also inhabits a contradictory space as well. Any analysis of a biopic should start from the assumption that it is in a contradictory space related to history. History itself harbors contradictions based on source information, presentation and the trend towards accepting new media as historically valid sources. Biopics have inherited these contradictions.

On top of the contradictions inherent in any representation of history are the visible and structural contradictions that the medium of biography—picture or biopic—addresses directly and indirectly. The biopic subject inhabits a local and global space simultaneously. Bingham claims that the subject either “demonstrates how to live or how to leave a legend” (2010: 379). This film genre works as an artist's gravestone, providing location and reference to spectators looking for access to information and entertainment in today's fast paced society. Bingham praises the biopic's overall scope and intention saying that it “exhibits and celebrates the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate or question his/her importance in the world” (2010: 10). The biopic is important to both the artist and the spectator. Custen draws a contrast between the biographical film and its receiving audience in order to define their relationship. “No matter how alienating the character's actual life”, he argues, “it had to be told in terms congruent with audiences' own experiences and expectations about how the famous conducted their lives or lived”

(1992: 18). The biopic must be accountable to its audience, which is comprised of the artist's fan base and new or interested spectators. However, it is not always easy to be accountable to the artist being represented, to the artist's fans, and to history itself. This tension between the audience, artist and historical accuracy makes the biopic a potentially contradictory medium of representation.

Right away there is a need to specify. The music biopic has certain characteristics that can distinguish it from biographical films as a whole. One clear distinction is that the actor playing a performer is the single most popular kind of biopic there is. This popularity may be due to the fact that the musician is an intercultural role model. "These biopic star-genre formulations tapped into audience's conceptions of what life should be like", says Custen (1992: 142). He notes that, despite being a model for the audience's life, musician biopics carry with them a tension between high and popular culture (1992: 48). This tension usually unfolds as the artist's fans face up to the performer's private life. "Biopics are", he says, "instruments of instruction mediating between a specific lived life and the public's knowledge of it" (1992: 120). This instrument of instruction is particularly powerful with music biopics because the star formula finds a space between the public and private life of the performer much like the audience member itself. The character therefore cannot be wholly associated with the audience members nor the artists in the biopic. "The average viewer [...] would hardly find these circumstances — inherited wealth and the seeming absence of a work — congruent with American values" (1992: 123). Thus the viewers of music biopics relate to the star effect as a performance, relinquishing their empathy as both musician and by-stander. "Presumably", Custen argues, "the pleasure the viewer obtains is derived [...] from seeing familiar expectations fulfilled within a tradition of performance or witnessing the reenactment of a particular kind of entertainment" (1992: 168). Like stars, the viewers are pleasurably positioned not with the narrative subject, but above the narrative as a whole.

The film *I'm Not There* attends to and reacts against this genre's contradictory space as being both a biographical and dramatic representation of a musician. The *New York Times* article "This is Not a Bob Dylan Movie", nicely summarizes the narrative structure of the film: "Todd Haynes' Dylan project is a biopic starring six people as Bob Dylan, or different incarnations of Bob Dylan, including a 13-year-old African-American boy, Marcus Carl Franklin, and an Australian woman, Cate Blanchett", (Sullivan 2007: 1). Other actors who play Dylan include the slow-speaking folk singer Dylan, played by Christian Bale, the retired Billy-the-Kidd Dylan played by Richard Gere, the Arthur Rimbaud, a teenage French symbolist poet Dylan played by Ben Whishaw, and the 70s movie-star Dylan played by Heath Ledger. "All the Dylans presented a team, six-actor composite". The movie

narrative consisted in “killing off one Dylan and moving to the next”, Sullivan says (2007: 1). These six different actors coincide through narrative leaps which were also differentiated by the use of six different filming styles. “At some point, Haynes would sit you down and show you that Blanchett’s Dylan was filmed in a Fellini style black and white; that Richard Gere’s Billy the Kidd Dylan would be shot like a 60s, early 70s western [...]; that Bale’s born-again Dylan was filmed in the bad-TV video that befits a Sacramento, Calif. Church basement; that Ledger’s rock-star Dylan would feature the wide shots and close ups of objects that characterized Godard” (2007: 11). Bingham nicely summarizes the director’s concept of the film by saying that “Dylan is not there in the film literally (but he is present figuratively), so by the time Dylan can be fixed as dwelling in one time and place, he’s not there he’s somewhere else” (2010: 389). The art of making legends is in fact the focus of this film’s structure: the drive to give the audience what they want but not in a way that they expect. Haynes has just this intention with his six figure structure as he says, “[Dylan] wanted to be Woody Guthrie, and he wanted to be not Jewish, and he wanted to be Arthur Rimbaud at some point and he wanted to be Billy the Kidd and so I let him be all those things in the movie” (IFC 2007). The movie, Haynes claimed at the New York Film Festival in 2007, has been made especially for Dylan —his fans and history itself are not priorities for the film. Getting the rights to the film meant pitching it to Dylan in a particular way: “they told me all these things to avoid like voice of a generation, genius of our time, any major accolade would have to be excised from this thing [a one page summary of the movie]” (IFC 2007). Dylan’s distaste for major accolades and punch lines that mark him as a historic figure shows just how the contradiction of the biopic genre works. The film genre that identifies and even makes legends, according to Bingham is, from this biopic’s inception, in a contradictory space since the artist doesn’t want to be represented as a legend. The page Haynes submitted to Dylan began with a quote from Arthur Rimbaud: “I is someone else”, and then continued:

If a film were to exist in which the breadth and flux of a creative life could be experienced, a film that could open up as opposed to consolidating what we think we already know walking in, it could never be within the tidy arc of a master narrative. The structure of such a film would have to be a fractured one, with numerous openings and a multitude of voices, with its prime strategy being one of refraction, not condensation. Imagine a film splintered between seven separate faces —old men, young men, women, children— each standing in for spaces in a single life. (Sullivan 2007: 8)

Haynes uses words like experience, open up, fractured, multiple, splinter to describe his idea. He opposes his way of film making to the consolidating, condensing style of the genre and tries to convince Dylan that his film is not just a

tidy metanarrative. The language of legend making is not only avoided but also in a sense negated by Haynes' approach.

The contradictions continue at the level of production as well. In that same festival Haynes also claimed that this "idea [of having multiple characters play Dylan] is almost as plain as day [...] when you listen to the music" (IFC 2007). This plainness in the idea of the film is then contrasted with the film's excessively complex body, as the director "knew [the film] was never going to deliver the palpable, reductionist results that a traditional biopic delivers" (IFC 2007). The style shifts and the character changes are not easy to digest for the average viewer, much less the avid fan. These initial differences of intention and production mark the separation of this film from most if not all the biopics in the genre. Bingham too argues that *I'm Not There* "presents the apotheosis of the biopic as it has evolved to date. It breaks one of the hidden assumptions of the genre: it feels no need to prove Dylan's worth or establish his mythology" (2010: 382). It has been claimed that the justification of these differences comes from the subject itself as the biopic performs like Dylan, in that it trades one "authenticity or fakery for another" (IFC 2007). It is a classic biopic despite constantly trying to escape the biopic format. By doing so it falls into the trap of other predictable forms of representation: postmodernism and masculinity. Thus it is always already not there.

### **The Biopic as Postmodern Pastiche**

The contradictory aspects of this film and the biopic genre itself are not the dominant elements around which the narrative structure of the film revolves. Unresolved contradictions and tension in films today are more or less part of why a film is made in the first place, part of its narrative structure. However, looking past the contradictions in the director's intentions and into the film's structure reveals how this film's temporal inserts, breaks, retreats and attacks work alongside its global narratives to make a new kind of narrative of legendary importance. This makes *I'm Not There* clearly an attempt at a special kind of postmodernism in film, a postmodernism that is pastiched.

Besides claiming that *I'm Not There* is a deconstruction of the phenomenon of the biopic, Bingham also says that the director "does all this in the postmodernist, déjà vu style" (2010: 381). Haynes' own technique was to achieve a film where the "quality of paint and matter can coexist with representations and identity, mixing up temporal experiences" (IFC 2007). This attention to impact on the viewer through the use of image manipulation is one of the pillars of postmodernism.

The liquidification of signs and images in postmodernism fits with the director's image of the film as it is his version of a cinematographic pallet. There seems to be a sensory overload of six different but intersected narratives, all moving in a space without time. The way this subject is disoriented by the image is not just random, but a method in itself. Postmodernism is the protagonist of this disorientation.

Dylan's lyrics do hold together the disorientation of the postmodern subject. "I think anyone who likes Dylan will be into this film", says the Billy the Kid Dylan actor Richard Gere. "You can just close your eyes and listen to the music if you don't like the movie" (Haynes 2007). Dylan's songs in the biopic are left almost untouched, if not slightly enhanced by the re-mastering of the music for the film. In the article "'The Singsong of Undead Labor' Gender Nostalgia and the vocal fantasy of Intimacy in the 'New' Male Singer/Songwriter", Ian Biddle describes this specific tradition of song preservation as one of the "singer/song/writer" (2007: 130). By splitting the label using these slashes Biddle says the process of production and consumption is revealed. Song is the bridge between the performance of singing and the work of writing. "Song works here as a suture that binds over the space between public and private fields", he says (2007: 130). The song itself is the glue that holds together the performative singing and the behind the scenes writing. The biopic provides the stage for the actors and the subject, and shows the process by which songs were written. In the case of this film, the writing is literally performed in many scenes as Dylan's written landscapes and characters are rereleased onto the screen. However, the songs themselves in the film, especially the originally recorded Dylan songs, work as a suture for what Biddle calls the "broken continuum". Without this suture of the song, the public life of Dylan (his acting, performing, and public appearances) could not be mixed with his private narrative with any credibility. The binary public/private, and the attempts to resolve and dissolve it is part of the song's work: "Song works here then as a way of grounding a certain kind of fantasy: that there might after all be an articulable relationship between the inner and outer worlds" (Biddle 2007: 130). Music biopics must address this tension and this biopic does it at the expense of the biography and the image, but not at the expense of the song. The songs in *I'm Not There* remain the same. They lend themselves to postmodernism as they carry the flag of freedom of the multiple voices being heard in their generation. Haynes' remix of Dylan is about the way his postmodern montage of images is held together by the concrete familiarity of not the narrative story line, but of Dylan's lyrics, guitar and voice.

Postmodernism's claim to speak beyond the chains of narrative linking is frowned upon in cultural theory today. Mark Featherstone says in *Postmodernism and Capitalism* that postmodernism's disregard for narrative and history itself is

what makes it a problematic alternative to modern story telling. He subjects the subject of the postmodern narrative to its historical baggage, not allowing it to release itself from responsibility: “historical development should give way to the perception of the past as a conglomerate of images, fragments and spectacles” (2007: 96). Historical development must step aside as it is orderless anyway, Featherstone argues. In the case of *I'm Not There* temporal order and historical accuracy are given a back seat to the youthful struggle for freedom. Freedom is a dominant theme of the historical melee of Dylan’s time. “The theory of freedom is very tied in to this idea of identity that the film posits and that Dylan’s life is a living argument for”, says Haynes. “People tell you to find yourself and be yourself and that that is a sort of freedom, but his life and the pressures that he worked under kept forcing that into question. The ultimate freedom is being able to escape that and to continually reinvent yourself” (IFC 2007). Freedom is the idea that Haynes uses to justify the use of the postmodern, multiple subjectivity in the film, performing the parts of Dylan’s music and life as his attempts to escape from traditional narratives.

The postmodern method of film making is not even mentioned as the aesthetic technique used by the director to tell Dylan’s stories, possibly because postmodernism is not as fashionable in today’s media and academia as it was in the 80s and 90s. Possibly also because the biopic cannot contain all of Dylan’s symbols of freedom in its shell. This inability to contain Dylan contradicts the very claim of the biopic as being a valid historical document. In fact, Richard Dyer, in his book *Pastiche*, seeks to rectify the scrambled history of the postmodern through the fruitful technique of pastiche. This dense fluidity is the result of pastiche, a term derived from the Italian word *pasticcio*:

The contrasts and clashes of style, the pushing at and beyond the boundaries of balance and structure, the sense of surprise, shock, chance and disorientation, propulsive flow heightened by rupture, all these can feel energetic, exuberant, tonic and equally the quantity of connotations, associations and echoes available in *pasticcio*’s semiotic mix allows for stimulating intellectual and effective play between the elements. (Dyer 2007: 20)

This way of mixing narrative through a play that is both intellectual and effective describes more precisely what Haynes does in the biopic. Dyer says that pastiche not postmodernism “demonstrates that self-consciousness and emotional expression can co-exist, healing one of the great rifts in western aesthetics and allowing us to contemplate the possibility of feeling historically” (2007: 4). Pastiche, he argues, preserves history and feeling. Feeling historically is exactly what *I'm Not There* seeks to provide for the spectator. The impact on the audience takes the form of a feeling, a feeling that is interwoven in history thanks to the narrative positioning

of pastiche. The emotional expressions in Dylan's songs are coupled with the film's mini-narratives which continually reflect on the songs and the life of the character as well, providing a language that allows us to listen to these dense lyrics with a series of music video-like images. These images are evoked by certain lyrics in the songs, which is quite helpful for the modern listener as Dylan's songs are packed with images while there are very few actual Dylan videos.

The freedom from history and rewriting of the past in this pastiche does not let the artist live in a bubble however. Does Pastiche remain only as a certain part of the cultural production of the singer/songwriter, or can it, in its entirety, contain a historically sensitive narrative? By breaking up the singer/songwriter divide Biddle seeks to understand whether today's artists actually produce free subjectivities in their lyrics and sounds or whether they are just rehashed masculinities that sustain the hierarchical power structure. Dylan's music, being one of the founding examples of this contemporary genre, is susceptible to this criticism. Freedom for Dylan is expressed in his lyrics (his multiplicity, his political unrest, his trickery, his romance, his abuse) and the staging of his body remains the site for what Biddle says is a certain nostalgic intimacy that is "immediately free, infinitely open-ended, and yet, paradoxically carefully managed, honed in, kept within the small space of this new disciplined intimacy" (1992: 130). Dylan's freedom and long open-ended story-telling songs include carefully thrown in political messages and questions that jar listeners from a kind of relaxed mesmerized folk-song-listener state. The acoustic guitar and minimal recording techniques are the foundations of the nostalgic intimacy. However, I would like to distinguish Dylan not from the singer/songwriter divide as a whole as Biddle does in the article, but look at the specific parts of the songs and their production to locate the micro divisions that Dylan's music performs. The nostalgic effect on the listener and the critique of a seemingly free position remain the same today as in Dylan's time. The difference is the management of the sonic space in the song itself.

The careful management of the songwriting in the case of Dylan changes in the course of his career as seen in the biopic *I'm Not There*, and becomes less clearly organized, as Biddle claims, than the new folk music of today is. Dylan does in fact use this immediacy and intimacy in a dynamic way, sometimes wailing out certain lyrics that are danger-ridden while leaving other things unsaid. The guitar remains calm and close in songs like *Masters of War*, while in other songs like *Bob Dylan's Dream* he beats on the guitar like a blue grass beginner shouting out random lyrics that seem to tell a story that can best be described as bizarrely funny.

*I'm Not There* tries to show the freedom Dylan expressed by juggling the narrative structure while maintaining the historical credibility of the narrative through the use of Dylan's nostalgic intimacy. The energy and modern appeal of the domestic



environment of the 70s with its violent news flashes of Vietnam and the protest scenes sharply edited up against the cool country feel of the African American Boy box car traveler story and the classic western images of the Richard Gere story. They all work together thanks to the songs themselves. The cool calm surreal folk scene story is contrasted with the hyper active Dylan electric period: eras change, cameras change, people, fashion, and dialects change. If we include history in this mode of simulation, then we break with the postmodern problem while including some of its features. Pastiche as analysed by Dyer, then, claims to fulfill this role as a more nuanced version of the postmodern. It shows the myriad of intimacies and immediacies and how these dissolve, revolve and evolve during the course of Dylan's early career. *I'm Not There* uses pastiche as a representative style of Dylan's music and life. It however, does not contain the folk music genre's claim of being revolutionary through a freedom from all kinds of subjectivities. Gender remains trapped in its hierarchical frame despite all the other attempts at obtaining a representation of freedom through song and image. Masculinity cannot be masked by nostalgic intimacy.

## **Masculinity and Pastiche**

The structure of story-telling at work in the film *I'm Not There* can be seen as postmodern pastiche. However, the way the film was intended to work, meaning the feelings generated in the audience by the film's narrative through postmodern techniques and aesthetics, seem to neglect an aspect of gender that once revealed, upsets the balance of authenticity desired by the director. The framing elements that form the pillars of this film are not the songs themselves but the masculinities that these characters perform. It is important to show specifically how these masculinities operate within this structure of pastiche and what response this whole combination has on the audience and on this feeling of history.

The study of masculinities is a purposeful way of reinserting the issue of gender into identities that claim gender neutrality through, in the case of this film, alternative aesthetics such as pastiche. However, there are many approaches to the study of masculinities and many kinds of masculinities to be studied. Lynne Segal in her book *Slow Motion* says that masculinity:

is best understood as transcending the personal, as a heterogeneous set of ideas, constructed around assumptions of social power, which are lived out and reinforced, or perhaps denied and challenged, in multiple social systems in which relations of authority, work and domestic life are organized, in the man, along hierarchal guidelines. (Segal 1990: 288)

This research shows how these masculinities are ‘lived out’ in the stories of the many Dylans despite the attempt at covering them up. The covering up here occurs as a set of “epistemological mismatches” that claim to be normalized through the cultural process of the story and film (Biddle 1992: 137). These mismatched characters in effect do not erase gender in the story but take the personal element out of Dylan and align him with a series of identities that work along hierarchal guidelines. The masculinities in this biopic undermine the aesthetic of pastiche because, as proponents of hierarchal guidelines, to use Segal’s terms, they overshadow and work to reassemble the intellectual dismantling of identity that pastiche performs. It is through the first impression of pastiche that we can reveal the masculinities that frame the narrative, and in this reassembling we can see the return of a hierarchical gender identity.

The masculinities in this film are worked into and through the pastiche structure of story-telling and filming. One of the principal forms these masculinities take on in the film is pastiche through imitation. There are two forms of imitation that play each other off in the film, but they cannot always be neatly isolated. They function as tendencies that are modified and personalized by the actors in the film: impersonation and the use of the other. In the interviews with the actors for the making of the film we can see how these techniques are approached and what the ‘affect’ may be. Also revealed is the way that the various masculinities proposed in the film dismantle this pastiche through its power to normalize identities.

Some of the actors approached Dylan through a physical transformation that could be considered a form of pastiche through impersonation. “People performing exactly like other people is often felt as a more fundamental difference than copying in paint, creating a sense of the uncanny and bringing the copy image more evidently into the orbit of the version” (Dyer 2007: 33). Impersonation can bring the copy into the orbit of the original, obviously a place that has an emotional impact on the audience, and therefore is the desired result of the acting strategy. Impersonation involves an act of assuming a character from head to toe—an actor becomes a person in mind, body and soul. It also involves an act of forgetting on the part of the audience, which as a leap of faith, puts the audience in the hands of the actors as they allow the actors to believe that they are Dylan. Christian Bale seeks to impersonate Bob Dylan during his years as a beginner singer/songwriter and voice of the American folk generation. This way of acting seems to be part of the intention of the script as Bale’s character is part of the documentary style of the film. His character most closely interacts with the issues of the authentic and the real that the film addresses through impersonation. This study of the character or rediscovery as Bale calls it, is, in Dylan’s case, a rediscovery of how to impersonate an imitator: “Was that the real Dylan who was really rejecting it [the

communist party] or was he doing more of that ‘hey Woody Guthrie’ would have done this so I’m gonna imitate him?’” (Haynes 2007) Bale connects his method of impersonation as part of his own acting style but also as part of Dylan’s history of imitation: “You don’t get a sense of his past and his growing up [...]. He is like a method actor but he does it for months or years at a time” (Haynes 2007). The erasure of the past seems to be a necessary part of this chain of impersonators. Here Bale relates his ability to imitate Dylan to Dylan’s ability to imitate, forging a symbiotic relationship between actor and acted. Dylan is fronting as a folk artist. A folk artist is a singer song-writer that claims a nostalgic intimacy with the listener. Folk artists pride themselves on writing songs about their life as one of the folk or people. *I’m Not There* backs up this side of Dylan. His life of acting as one of the folk becomes the format for the way Bale approaches his role as Dylan. Bale is in the perfect position to be like Dylan, a true impersonation of an impersonator.

The claim that imitating Dylan can bring to light an authentic version of Dylan is doubtful. However, all the white male characters portrayed as Dylan in this film are similar to some broader historically constructed frameworks of masculinity seen in Michael Kimmel’s book *Manhood in America*. Is a historically constructed framework more or less authentic than an impersonation of an authentic impersonator? The trope of the struggling young man as seen in Christian Bale’s Bob Dylan in New York clearly conforms to what Kimmel says about American youth at the turn of the century. “For a young man seeking his fortune in such a free and mobile society, identity was no longer fixed, and there was no firm patriarchal lineage to ground a secure sense of himself as a man” (2006: 31). Kimmel’s image of young male insecurity and honesty is clearly sought after in the folk singer story line of this part of the movie:

Grenage Village once the in spot for beatnik jazz and bebop is today the home of popular folk music fad. A do it yourself musical expression that has attracted youngsters from all across the nation. For them these home spun songs of the working man express a truth and candor sorely lacking in today’s growing consumer society. .. Yet among the many new and talented artists to emerge, one name stands alone as the heart and soul of this growing musical trend. A young individual who both writes and performs some of his own era’s finest tunes, and hailed by the New York Times as folk music’s troubadour of conscience. (Haynes, 2007)

Dylan’s identity through Bale functions as a voice free in itself, connected directly to society as if speaking through him. This young man physically expands, becoming the voice of the people. Bale’s Dylan character, however, is paradoxically emotionally insecure —as seen in the scene where he is interviewed on a television program and is exaggeratedly feeble and uncertain about mankind. “I get a lot of thoughts inside of me and most people they keep them all inside. I guess it’s for them that I do what I do” (Haynes 2007). He is grounded but released and his

free spirited state is neither praised nor questioned. He remains simply a voice of the people, as his girlfriend says in the documentary on Dylan inside this biopic: “Every night I would call this ragamuffin on stage and introduce America to Jack Rollins [Dylan]. I’d say that he has something to say and that he is speaking for me and everybody who wants a better world” (Haynes 2007). However, occupying both an important historical moment while maintaining an awkward intimacy in performance, is a common contradiction in the song lyrics. It is a part of Dylan’s protest songs. Putting the bigger than life protest lyrics together with the tiniest of sounds in a natural acoustic sonic production space furthers its contradictory appeal and emotional impact.

We see in Dylan, one of the founders of the modern folk scene, the exact opposite of what Biddle proposes. This difference could be because of a shift in markets and/or technologies from the 1960s to the folk scene today, but the question of whether this recasting of gender norms through masculinity is radical or conservative is a valid concern in the case of Dylan as well. Referring to the context of today’s folk music scene, Biddle says “the music of these artists is particularly interesting for its commitment in a highly technological and distributed world to place and presence” (1992: 125). He describes this return to place and presence as “unseating the more overtly exhibitionist, apparently self-assured phallocentrism of the cock (rock) persona from the previous decades” (1992: 132). Forty years earlier Dylan embraced the same minimalist, intimate reaction to a certain kind of overproduced, phallocentric music that was popular at the time. He says in the song “Talking World War III Blues” in the 1963 album *Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*: “This ain’t rockaday Johnny singing tell your ma and tell your pa our love is gonna grow” (1963). Dylan overtly rejects this style of music and marries the folk music cause.

Kimmel’s vision of male youth in America is a perfect summation of Dylan’s pre-electric days played by Bale. Domestic Dylan Heath Ledger plays the role of Dylan during his short attempt at acting and being a home maker, subscribing to yet another kind of masculinity. Ledger plays both the domestic gypsy and incapable husband. He is unfaithful and unavailable and is eventually left by his wife. So why in a TVwireTV interview is this character called the emotional core of the film? The Heath Ledger narrative of the film is not done in a documentary style like that of the folk singer Bale narrative, but in an autobiographical narrative style. Haynes attains this effect by having Ledger narrate his part of the story in a muffled, low toned spoken voice off the screen, the exact opposite of Dylan’s high pitched squeaky singing voice. During this period of his life he also appears to be a man of few words, the exact opposite of the loquacious Dylan in songs like “Subterranean Homesick blues” and many other rambling tunes.

The emotionality here is not revealed in the expressiveness of the man but in his inexpressiveness. In an interview about the film Ledger uses this same soft spoken voice to answer the question of whether he is the emotional core of the movie saying, “the slice of the story that Charlotte and I are in kind of chronicles Dylan’s struggles with balancing his love life and his professional life. [...] It’s kind of like a moment in time thing, less of a physical portrayal and more of just a tone” (TVwireTV). Ledger drifts off at the end of his answer to this question, the volume of his voice diminishing as he lowers his head in an attempt to find the word “tone”. He notably charms the interviewer by revealing his soft, sensitive side, but says nothing concrete about his role.

Ledger differentiates his Dylan from the other five Dylans not only by using his soft spoken voice, but also by his seemingly intentional non-impersonation of Dylan’s characteristic vocal cadence, drawls, and stops and starts. The viewer especially notices this when seeing a scene from one of Dylan’s movies being filmed during the biopic where Ledger acts like Dylan the actor: “It’s not about me anymore its all about him [...] your guaranteed double your money back voice of the people” (Haynes 2007). The scene ends and Ledger’s emotional emotionlessness returns to his face and his body as he silently gazes at his wife in the crowd. His high pitched slurry drawl during the shooting of the film inside the film is similar to the impersonation of Dylan seen in Bale’s character, but Ledger’s voice returns to its soft narrative tone off camera. The claim here is that the viewer gets an inside view of a more authentic Dylan in Ledger’s character, off the stage, off the music scene, and off the set. Ledger is in a way not even acting. He is just being himself. His voice in volume, tone and cadence portrays a calm, quiet person, not the Bob Dylan that fans expect to see.

However, behind this character’s attempt at intimacy through voice placement we see a claim of male emotionality characteristic in the construction of masculinity today. As Biddle explains the tone of the voice suggests a certain attempt at diffusing masculinity, but the content of the singer/song/writer lyrics reestablish the female as other (2007: 130). Ledger’s solemn voice is in fact Dylan’s domestic voice, a tone and way of being that proves incompatible with his marriage and fatherhood. This emotionality through silence is proposed at a time of Dylan’s life when he was emotionally nonexistent at home. His passive response to the incompatibility of his life as a father and his life as a star is a common trope of post war masculinities and domesticity. In this respect Domestic Dylan displays what Kimmel’s says was “part of the struggle simply to get out of the middle class house, now a virtual feminine theme park” (2006: 41). The emotional sincerity and organization of the domestic environment were not compatible with Dylan’s music or his fame. As Lynne Segal says “Fatherhood can increase a man’s sense

of his own failure and vulnerability, when he knows or fears he cannot adequately protect or provide for his wife and children” (1990: 29). The role of father in the film is not directly addressed as Dylan is rarely seen interacting with his children, leaving the family role to his wife in order to preserve his star role and lifestyle. “Social expectations, rules or norms attached to a person’s position in society will usually force individuals to conform to them through processes of positive and negative reinforcement”, she says (1990: 65). His reaction of distancing himself both psychologically and physically from his family is a dysfunction directly related to his masculinity in action, making his conditioned emotional inexpressivity not an aesthetic difference or a revolutionary new gender position, but an affirmation of the impossibility of the cohabitation of the roles of musician/star and father/husband. His voice, with its solemn, vulnerable grain, occupies an aesthetic position of intimacy but also borders on a certain passive aggressivity. This neat packaging of Dylan’s masculinity continues to be a dominant trope of the film *I’m Not There*. Its framework predictably supports a hierarchy of insensitivity, destabilizing the sincere, emotionally intimate portrait of Dylan provided by Ledger.

66

The two Other characters are placed in the film as parts of Dylan despite not being white males. They are placed into a kind of allegorical narrative positioning. They do not just work as imitations of Dylan as the other characters do, but are pushed into allegorical versions of Dylan by a cultural antagonism that claims to disrupt the boundaries of both race and sex. The attempt to write these characters off as just a token move to appease both minority and women fans does not suffice. Looking deeper into how these characters play a role in Dylan as not Dylan further reveals the inherent limitations of Dylan’s masculinities. These characters also reinforce the argument that biopics have an inherent dependence on masculinities, the building blocks for the biopic’s narrative and visual construction.

The African American Boy Dylan played by Marcus Carl Franklin finds himself on the run from his past, frozen in a time not his own, and with knowledge of life way too great for his age. Franklin is by no means new to American history and representation. This character works as a symbol of Dylan’s youthful innocence and freedom in the face of struggle. His blackness is not alarming or symbolically controversial as intended. Neither is what his character represents so revolutionary: Dylan’s reappearance in the form of an African American boy is a clear mask for his Jewishness. There is nothing new about this masking of culture through the image of African-Americans. It has been done since before Elvis —black face being one of the earliest forms. Blacking it up has proven to be a very profitable method for American entertainment, especially music. Dyer

says that “Imitation was a survival and often an assimilationist strategy for Jewish entertainers [...]. Jews occupied an unstable place in the racial hierarchies of the period: not quite white, they were yet not black” (2007: 149). In his interviews at the New York Film Festival Haynes addresses this Dylan character not as being represented as a black boy but as being “not Jewish” (IFC 2007). Dyer says that Jews have historically used blackness as an emotional release valve and a way to consolidate personal expression:

Black music, in its emotional expressiveness, and with the weight of the experience of pain behind it, allowed Jews to express feeling in a way that they could not do on their own behalf. (2007: 149)

By pastiching this character with such an allegorical figure, a historical reversal occurs that dilutes and disavows these race issues “Pastiche in Jewish ‘black’ music is a highly ambivalent strategy of survival, expression and evasion” (2007: 150). However this African American boy is not imitating a Jew nor Bob Dylan as not a Jew, he is simply playing himself historically speaking. At the dinner table with a family of fellow black Americans, the mother interrogates Franklin’s Dylan and symbolically releases him from a past no longer present: “I think it’s 1959 and this boy is singing songs about the box car [...]. Right here we got race riots, folks with no food, why ain’t he out there singing about that [...]. Live your own time child. Sing about your own time” (Haynes 2007). This leads the Franklin Dylan to step out of his state of being lost in time and start singing what is relevant to him in his time as a sensitive, aware, free spirited performer. At that point in the narrative he is freed from being lost in time but cannot free himself from the person he impersonates, Dylan. Many musicians who have some strain of blues in their music might act black or dwell in blackness but becoming black has still not proven possible, leaving the Franklin Dylan unwhole. This dislocated character then resurfaces in the Richard Gere story only to exchange a symbolic gaze with the Gere Dylan. The Franklin Dylan takes to *running* the whole movie, running away from the white Jew inside him. The transferral of masculinities from Jewish to black and back reinforces a masculine framework of identity that has been part and parcel of American racism and capitalist opportunism. The film does not present a fresh new perspective in the representation of either Dylan or masculinity.

Becoming just like a woman during the 60s was a bit more feasible than actually becoming a woman, which nowadays is more and more possible thanks to the advances in medicine. In the film actress Cate Blanchett plays Dylan and is famous as the best imitator of Dylan in the entire film:

[H]er performance is a wonder, and not simply because, as Jude Quinn, she inhabits the twitchy, amphetamine fired Dylan of 1965-66 with unnerving accuracy. Casting a woman in this role reveals a dimension to the acerbic Dylan of this era that has

rarely been noted. Even as she perfectly mimics every jitter, sneer, and caustic put-down, Blanchett's translucent skin, delicate fingers, slight build, and pleading eyes all suggest the previously invisible vulnerability and fear that fueled Dylan's lacerating anger. It's hard to imagine that any male actor, or any less-gifted female actor for that matter, could have lent such rich texture to the role. (DeCurtis 2007: 6)

This imitation is done so well by Blanchett because she is an actress that uses all her body when acting a role says Haynes. "The psychical transformations that occur in her roles [...] she really does have to find the equivalent body parts to throw herself into the role" (IFC 2007). A woman was chosen for Dylan's going-electric role because as Haynes says "you see this strangely anxious dandified hyperactive creature" (IFC 2007) in the videos of Dylan during that period. However, the use of an actress to play a male role, to imitate Dylan, is not a sign of a move beyond masculinity. Blanchett's embodiment of Dylan supports masculine ideas of feminine behavior as hysterical. Her imitation of Dylan reinforces the stereotype of women as hysterical that goes back to the beginnings of modern medical science.

68

In his book *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault shows the lineage of madness focusing on two specific illnesses that work in binary opposition, Mania and Melancholia, and Hysteria and Hypochondria. Blanchett's imitation of Dylan in the biopic, specifically her use of the body, vividly works in conjunction with Foucault's description of hysteria: "A disease that could express itself in a paralysis or in frenzied movements that could bring on catalepsy or insomnia" (1965: 146). Blanchett does not stumble through Dylan's transition from acoustic folk music to his electrification, but glides through the role at a forty-five degree angle as if she were a character in an Edvard Munch painting. Blanchett's Dylan has had no sleep and is taking all the kinds of pharmaceutical pills available at the time. However, as Foucault notes in his dissection of the history of madness, doctors during the age of reason located "the cause of Hysteria in the womb" (1965: 145). The logic behind the identification and categorization of this "wet" and "sad" disease was that:

The more easily penetrable the internal space becomes, the more frequent is hysteria [...]; but if the body is firm and resistant, if the internal space is dense, organized and solidly heterogeneous in its different regions, the symptoms of hysteria are rare and its effects will remain simple. Is this not exactly what separates female hysteria from the male variety [mania]. (1965: 149)

If hysteria is essentially female and a female is playing Dylan, then the female is playing Dylan female. The imitation of hysteria in Dylan is essentially performed by being a woman. Blanchett is a woman playing a man playing a woman. However, Dylan's feminine side only surfaces with an excessive amount of drugs, drugs that



are provided by doctors in society, albeit with prescription, but prescription drugs nevertheless. Do these drugs make him act hysterical or do they make him act like a woman? The argument that the perfect postmodern pastiche of Dylan is played by a woman could reveal that the limitations of postmodern representations are best seen through gender. This character is chosen as part of an array of masculinities. Blanchett as Dylan is positioned as the non-masculine character and therefore is immediately made feminine, a femininity that corresponds to a three hundred year old prejudice buried as Foucault proves, in the very categorization of the illness itself. The film propagates the image of female as hysterical and therefore does not provide or work in a space outside gender. It does not deconstruct masculinities but merely displays them. It does not open a new space for gender or race and does not call into question the representation of masculinity by breaking them down, and it does not as Bingham says, "subvert the male perspective" (2010: 393).

In *Debating Masculinities* Armenagol and Carabi interview Lynne Segal about her perspective on postmodernism's relationship with masculinities:

The postmodern emphasis on the mutability, fluidity and inconsistency of gender has helped question traditional binary oppositions such as men/women, masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality [...but it has] failed to eradicate phallocentrism and gender inequality since masculine domination continues at a global level seen in the violent and military masculinities. (2009:14)

69

This essay begins to unravel how this gender inequality is still present in not only global violence and politics, but postmodern global media as well. The claim that alternative representations such as postmodernism automatically call into question and respond to issues of gender is becoming less and less valid.

The feeling of history that this film leaves the viewer with through the music and life of Bob Dylan may be extremely real. The 60s and 70s may not have been a time of revolution, a time of progress, or a time of change. The followers of Dylan may not have had access to new information, new voices, and new codes for a better understanding of humanity. The women's rights movement cannot even have happened according to Haynes' version of Dylan. Dylan may have been just a pastiche of masculinities, all destined to fall, all destined to perpetuate the next version of themselves. What this paper seeks to understand is how the feeling of history generated thanks to the power of pastiche is not easily attained. By not calling into question the existence of these masculinities but merely demonstrating their instabilities through the scattered structure of the narrative, the biopic *I'm Not There* fails to pastiche the modern subject as Dyer would see it. This film does not attain the subterranean level of critique nor the historical 'affect' that it proposes in the deconstruction of Bob Dylan. The critique of masculinities through postmodernism in this film is just not there.

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