Dylan's Lyrics: Something Borrowed . . . (2 Letters)

To the Editor:

Re "Plagiarism in Dylan, or a Cultural Collage?" by Jon Pareles (Critic's Notebook, July 12):

The concept of plagiarism in the work of a singer and writer of folk songs as opposed to the printed work of a historian or novelist is shaky at best.

Bob Dylan, who in about 40 years has created a body of work that defines America in his time and is the memory of several generations, has always borrowed from philosophers, poets and songwriters before him; the astute Dylan fan could often tell who he was reading at the time he was writing in the various stages of his career, the Bible often being a prime source.

This is in the nature of the folk music tradition, as people like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger attest. This is much ado about nothing.

LAWRENCE DEUTSCH
Holmes, N.Y., July 12, 2003

To the Editor:

Jon Pareles (Critic's Notebook, July 12) appears to exonerate Bob Dylan of plagiarism of Dr. Junichi Saga's 1991 book "Confessions of a Yakuza" since Bob Dylan was neither purporting to present original research nor setting unbroken stretches of the original book to music. This defense simply does not pass the "sniff test."

When someone takes a number of passages, virtually verbatim, from someone else's work (especially a work that is obscure or difficult to trace), fails to give attribution and represents them as original thoughts, that's plagiarism by even the most liberal definition.

Bob Dylan's brilliance aside, for Mr. Pareles to rename it a "collage" doesn't make it any less plagiarism.

CORY FRANKLIN
Chicago, July 12, 2003
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