

Bob Dylan's 'Highlands' – Lyric analysis by Kees de Graaf

1. Introduction.

'Highlands' is one of Dylan's masterpieces, recorded in 1997 for the album 'Time out of Mind'. The main theme of the album 'Time Out of Mind' is movement. On the album the poet is constantly on the move to some destination. A destination which is sometimes undefined: 'I'm walking through the summer nights, the jukebox playing low'; 'I'm walking through the middle of nowhere'. Sometimes this destination is more defined: 'I'm trying to get to heaven' or "My heart's in the Highlands'. It is all about movement. The album starts with 'Love Sick': "I'm walking through streets that are dead'. The album ends when the poet has finally reached his destination in the Highlands: 'I'm already there in my mind'. Physically he is still on his way, he is still in the flesh, but his mind is already in the Highlands, the place where he belongs, the only place left to go.

The song is in some sort of a way related to 'Trying to get to Heaven'. There can be no doubt that 'Highlands' is a metaphor for heaven. Whereas in 'Trying to get to heaven' the poet is trying to deal with the troubles and woes of his wretched existence on earth – walking that lonesome valley, feeling bad – and only tries to reach heaven as an ultimate consolation, in 'Highlands' however, there is a much more positive notion. In 'Highlands' the poet is equally dissatisfied with his earthly existence but the prospect of his forthcoming life in the Highlands makes the song much more joyful and complacent.

'Highlands' may be regarded as Dylan's final testimony. Dylan's final testimony, not only of the album 'Time out of Mind' but of his entire works. When 'Time out of Mind' was released in 1997, seven years had passed since his last release of original material in 1990 when the album 'Under the Red Sky' was released. At the time in 1997 there was a strong sense that 'this was it' – it might be Dylan's last album. 'Highlands' itself contributes to this feeling when Dylan states: *'The party is over and there's less and less to say'*, apparently not taking it for granted that at least 3 albums would follow.

Although there is an outtake of the song which is even much longer than the final version which ended up on the album, the song is the longest Dylan ever recorded (16:31). The song's title is borrowed from the poem 'My Heart's in the Highlands' by the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

The song is based on a simple blues riff. The riff is played the whole way through the song, creating a sort of hypnotic effect. It has no traditional chorus or a bridge. The song has 20 verses, five of which – including the first and the final verse – start with: 'Well my heart's in the Highlands'.

As said the Highlands is a metaphor for Heaven. Each of the five verses verse starting with 'My heart's in the Highlands' first draws a picture of what sort of a serene beauty you may find in the Highlands and ends with the personal attitude of the poet towards the Highlands

(Heaven) . As the song progresses the poet gets closer and closer to the Highlands (Heaven) both physically and mentally. Below we will delve deeper into this.

The other 15 verses shoved in between deal with a lonesome, ragged, cynical, pessimistic, sometimes even whimsical pilgrim on his way to the Promised Land. He is a worried man with a worried mind. He is a man of constant sorrow, who is sick and tired of this life on earth and is longing for the end to come. His sense of humanity has really gone down the drain. Within these 15 verses there is a sort of intermezzo of seven verses. In these seven verses the poet finds himself in some Boston restaurant. These verses constitute a separate category within the song. We will talk about this later.

2. 'The Highlands' in more detail.

Let's first discuss the Highland verses in more detail. The Scottish Highlands are famous for their beautiful, unspoiled, natural scenery. The Highlands offer a pristine flora and fauna, beautiful hills and mountains, canyons which are formed through a mixture of waterfalls. There is an abundance of wildlife: Otters, eagles, rabbits, swans deer etc. You are treated to breathtaking views of ancient pine forests, lochs, rivers and moorlands. This is reflected in the song: 'Honeysuckle blooming in the wildwood air, bluebells blazing where the Aberdeen waters flow. The wind, it whispers to the buckeyed trees in rhyme, by the beautiful lake of the Black Swan. Big white clouds like chariots swing down low'.

In the Highlands the natural scenery is untouched by the hand of man. Way up in the border country, far from the industrial towns and cities, there is no pollution and smog caused by heavy industries. The twang of the arrow and the snap of the bow are reminiscent of ancient times, when there were no shotguns, and life was much less complicated and spontaneous.

In the mind of the poet, it is not far from the crystal clear fountains and rivers in the Highlands to the heavenly river as pointed out in Revelation 22:1,2: *'Then He showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations'*. The reason why the poet uses the notion of the Highlands as a metaphor for Heaven is that in Heaven, he is sure to find the same peace, serenity and purity, you may find in the Highlands.

Let us now take a closer look at a number of verses portraying the poet's estrangement and alienation on his way to the Highlands.

3. The verses dealing with his pilgrimage to the Highlands – before the Boston Restaurant intermezzo.

*'Windows are shaking all night in my dreams
everything is exactly the way that it seems*

*Woke up this morning and I looked at the same old page
Same old rat race, life in the same old cage’.*

‘Windows are shaking all night in my dreams’. It is obvious that here on earth the poet is locked in tight, locked in this earthly domain full of disappointment and pain. Life is like a bad night’s sleep when some distant shaking windows nag you and irritate you all night long and prevent you from coming to rest. Like in a bad dream one would like to scream: ‘is there anybody around who can close that rotten window’? This feeling represents something which lingers deep down inside of almost every human being. A remote feeling that something is just not right. It may be the memory of decay. You can’t do anything about it, yet it keeps on haunting you. **‘Everything is exactly the way that it seems’**; he is caught in the ever turning wheels of predictability and monotony of every day’s life. When everything becomes the same, life loses its challenge and surprise. Few unexpected things happen. A man needs new challenges, something new to look forward to.

‘Woke up this morning and I looked at the same old page’. The deception is big, when he wakes up in the morning and finds himself looking at the same old page. Nothing has changed: ‘You’re trained to take what looks like the easy way out’. But you can get no relief; you are forced to participate in a rat race; **same old rat race, life in the same old cage’.** A rat race is a race which is exhausting and unremitting, where the competition is keen, where the city is just a jungle; you either eat or are eaten. The rat race triggers off a warning: ‘All the sweethearts you can hold, that don’t come back with stories untold, are hanging on a tree’. He is caught in a cage which he cannot leave. We are all boxed in, nowhere to escape.

*I don’t want nothing from any one, ain’t that much to take
Wouldn’t know the difference between a real blonde and a fake
Feel like a prisoner in a world of mystery
I wish someone would come and push back the clock for me*

‘I don’t want nothing from anyone’. It is true, the poet has been a highly gifted artist all of his life, so he doesn’t need anything from anyone; he is indeed completely self-sufficient and independent. However, it is sour and cynical to say: **‘Ain’t that much to take’.** It insinuates that there is nothing you can learn from other people and implicitly puts you on a higher level than other people. On the other hand, in the song ‘Mississippi the poet confesses that he himself has not much to share with mankind.’: *‘Got nothing for you, I had nothing before; don’t even have anything for myself anymore’* The same idea of feigned modesty we find in ‘Born in time’: ‘In the hills of mystery, in the foggy web of destiny, you can have what’s left of me’.

‘Wouldn’t know the difference between a real blonde and a fake’ Not knowing the difference between a real blond and a fake is a typical example of self-mockery and humor. This statement is quite contrary to his feeling in the song ‘Most of the time’: *‘I can follow the path, I can read the signs, stay with it when the road unwinds’.* But here he is so far off the

road that he feigns to have forgotten the difference between his right and left hand. **'Feel like a prisoner in a world of mystery'**. As if he participates in some sort of mysterious Nintendo game. He is locked in so tight; he is so far out of range and completely isolated that he feels like a prisoner in a world that has gone wrong and does not seem to have a meaningful purpose at all. **'I wish someone would come and push back the clock for me'**, is only wishful thinking, some sort of nostalgia as if things were any better in a long forgotten past. As if you would do things better and differently if only you could start all over again. But he knows like he said in 'Sugar Baby': *'you can't turn back, sometimes you push too far'*, you can't unring the bell; such an attempt is as fruitless as what he wished in 'Shelter from the storm' when he said: *'if only I could turn back the clock to when God and her were born'*.

*I'm listening to Neil Young; I gotta turn up the sound
Someone's always yelling turn it down
Feel like I'm drifting from scene to scene
I'm wondering what in the devil could it all possibly mean*

The Neil Young verse is a humorous excursion within the song. Excursions to all sorts of topics within songs are common practice in Dylan's work; a lot is said in odd moments. The sad bluesy, melancholy timbre of most of Neil Young's music boosts the sad mood of the poet himself. By turning up the sound he unconsciously attempts to hammer his own dark mood into the ears of anyone listening; to such an extent that people get irritated and frustrated and urge him to turn the music down and to stop moaning. **'Feel like I'm drifting from scene to scene'**: The poet has no control over what happens in his life and all around him. He seems to float on an endless ocean *'Time is like an ocean and it ends at the shore'*. Seemingly there is no purpose in what happens in this world. Here it seems that Dylan has been inspired by the of the book of Ecclesiastes: *'Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, All is vanity (Ecc. 1:2) and in 8:17: 'then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out'*. A man, drifting from scene to scene wonders in great despair: **'what in the devil could it all possibly mean'**. What evil force is behind this all? Is the devil obliterating my view so that I cannot see the purpose behind it all? Is there not some kind of perfect finished plan behind all that seems so purposeless at first glance? And if there is: why can't I see it? But his mood is getting darker when in the next verse Dylan writes:

*'Insanity is smashing up against my soul
You can say I was on anything but a roll
If I had a conscience, well I just might blow my top
What would I do with it anyway
Maybe take it to the pawn shop'*

"Insanity is smashing up against my soul". Solitary confinement may easily drive a man to insanity. Likewise, a man of genius has a tendency for insanity. One may even say that

sometimes genius comes close to insanity. A man of genius may be on such high levels that it may be pretty lonely up there. The poet has to deal with that. This insanity smashes up against his soul. It tries to destroy his soul. It prevents him from functioning 'normally', on a social level. In some ways his genius stands in the way. Therefore he says: *'I was on anything but a roll'*. 'To be on a roll' may be defined as: 'To be engaged in any activity with success and ease and in any activity which is taking up your attention at the time of the activity'.

'If I had a conscience, well I just might blow my top' His self-esteem is on such a low level that it even obliterates his conscience. In fact his soul is so vacant and numb that it feels as if he has no conscience left at all, let alone that he would be capable of 'blowing his top', to show any emotion at all. 'To blow one's top' means 'to lose one's temper or composure'. The whole scene reminds you of the feeling he once had when he felt like he was stuck inside a painting that's hanging in the Louvre, his throat starts to tickle and his nose itches but he knows that he can't move.

'What would I do with it anyway. Maybe take it to the pawn shop' He values his conscience so low that the only place to take it to, as a last resort, might be a pawn shop. A pawn shop is place where you take something valuable you own and trade it in for cash. You don't sell it there, the idea is they keep it for a certain amount of time, and if you acquire enough money to pay the sum you got from them (+ interest), you "buy" your property back. If not, they sell it. If somebody would say: 'What pawn shop would take my conscience?', then the speaker means that his conscience has so little value that no pawn shop would give you any cash money for it. That is exactly how the poet values his own conscience, his whole existence as a human being, at least at this point and at this stage on his way to the Highlands.

4. The Boston Restaurant intermezzo.

'I'm in Boston town in some restaurant'. Although there seems to be a restaurant in Boston called 'Max and Dylan's restaurant, this restaurant – at least as far as I know -has nothing to do with Bob Dylan or this song. It looks like we are drawn into a sudden detour, some side-path, off the main road leading to the Highlands. At first glance there seems to be no connection with the main theme of the song at all. But when you take a close look at it, this scene fits in well within the song. In fact, the whole scene is typically Dylanesque. The poet has some vague idea that – on his way to the Highlands - he has a mission to fulfill, going to this Boston restaurant: ***'I got no idea what I want, well maybe I do but I'm just really not sure'***. It is as if some heavenly force has sent him to this restaurant but he has no clear idea yet why he is being drawn into it. On the other hand, he has some misgiving that he will be drawn into something which he just isn't going to like at all. Especially when we read: ***'She studies me closely as I sat down'***. He doesn't like to be looked at and scrutinized. It resembles a little what he says in 'Not Dark Yet': *'I don't even remember what it was; I came here to get away from'*. His saying to the waitress: ***'Tell me what I want'*** (or *'tell me what's*

good today' – in a live version) not only shows that he is unable to put his purpose of going to this restaurant into words. Maybe he silently hopes that the waitress will not ask him any nasty, inquisitive questions and that she will leave him alone. But as the conversation with the waitress progresses, it becomes apparent for him that there is no escaping and the story is getting more and more relief and purpose, ostensibly against the will of the poet.

'Nobody in the place but me and her' and **'It must be a holiday, there's nobody around'** sounds strange. During a holiday one would expect a crowded restaurant but this is obviously not the case. The section on the hard boiled eggs makes us believe that the Easter holidays are meant here. On his saying **'Tell me what I want'** the waitress replies: **'You probably want hard boiled eggs'**. In some live versions he seems to sing 'soft boiled eggs' but here – on the official recording - it is clearly 'hard boiled eggs'. Why does the waitress think he wants hard boiled eggs? Probably the waitress has some vague notion in her mind that the visitor in front of her is either a Jew or a Christian. Hard boiled eggs have a connection with both Easter and Passover. Both Easter and Passover revolve around the idea of rebirth. At Easter Christians celebrate that Jesus resurrected from the dead and the Jews celebrate at Passover that they were once freed from slavery in Egypt and reborn into freedom. Both holidays draw in the idea of birth or rebirth with Easter eggs and the hard boiled eggs served on Passover. Eggs are seen as the seed of life and are symbolic for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

While the poet acknowledges the suggestion made by the waitress and says: **'that's right, bring me some'** she unexpectedly replies by saying: **'We ain't got any, you picked the wrong time to come'**. How is this possible? It is Easter time and yet there are no (hard) boiled eggs on the menu. It just doesn't seem to make any sense. The reason may be that in this town there is nobody left who believes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter is a thing of the past in this town. It is also the reason why there is nobody around. Nobody celebrates Easter any more. It reminds you of what Dylan would later say in the song 'Ain't Talking': *I practice a faith that's long been abandoned, ain't no altars on this long and lonesome road'*. The whole scene exacerbates his pain and loneliness on his way to the Highlands.

It is not getting any better when the waitress turns things around. Instead of receiving orders she gives him an order: **'I know you're an artist, draw a picture of me!'** The poet does not deny that he is an artist but he is very reluctant to consent to the demand of the waitress. He comes up with a number of apparently lousy -and at the same time humorous -excuses not to make a drawing of the waitress: **'I would if I could, but I don't do sketches from memory, I don't have my drawing book, I don't know where my pencil is at'**. Why does the waitress insist on having Dylan drawn a picture of her? Out of vanity? Could be. She has something to show. She has a **'pretty face and long white shiny legs'**. She knows she is pretty and does she want some confirmation from him? I think that there is more to it. She seems to live in – what Dylan elsewhere calls - a world of steel-eyed death. A world where hunger pays a heavy price to the falling gods of speed and steel. A world of the end times where wickedness is multiplied and were most men's love has grown cold (Matthew 24:12). The waitress has some faint hope that this weird, spiritual stranger has something to offer, that he is able to give her some comfort, some self-confirmation, something that is missing in this desolate world, something that has been has long been abandoned but is yet of great

value. She wants him to draw a picture of her and the world she lives in that might give her some sort of consolation. At the same time, it must be a picture she likes. She wants reassurance from him but certainly no appeal for repentance or even self-criticism. But the poet is not willing to consent. He knows that she is not going to like the picture he has in mind. Therefore, like Jonah once, he wants to get away from it all, he feels very uncomfortable about the whole thing but in spite of all his efforts he just can't escape from her.

When at last, he very reluctantly draws a few lines on a napkin and shows it for her to see, she is very disappointed. She takes the napkin and throws it back and says: ***'That don't look a thing like me'***. It is not so much that in the picture Dylan has drawn she does not recognize herself and the world she lives in but she actually says: 'I do not accept the way you look upon me and the world I live in. Your world view as an artist and as shown on this picture is completely unacceptable to me. Accepting and recognizing him as an artist is one thing, but accepting his deepest motives and beliefs is another thing. She wants him to be like her and the world she lives in. Like Dylan says in Maggie's farm: *'I try my best to be just like I am, but everybody wants you to be just like them'*. There can be no doubt in my mind that Dylan's moral principles heavily draw upon on Biblical principles and as a result of this, the Bible has had a huge impact on his works to this very day. Large numbers of fans – like this waitress – recognize him as a great artist – one of the most powerful and creative artists of our times – but at the same time reject and throw back the Biblical picture he draws of them and the world and say: *'That don't look a thing like me'*.

Having drawn this picture, the poet is not willing to pull back. He has drawn this picture against his will. But once he has drawn it, he is not prepared to modify the picture and persists in his stance: ***'Oh kind Miss, it most certainly does. She says: 'You must be joking' I say: "I wish I was"***. For the waitress there is only one resort left now. She either acknowledges and respects him, and the message he stands for, and asks no further questions and leaves him alone, or she puts him away as a backwards man, as somebody behind the times, as an unworldly stranger, having old fashioned world views which have not been emancipated.

She chooses to do the latter and does so by accusing him of not being emancipated. She says: ***'You don't read women authors do you?'*** He rejects her retort as completely irrelevant: ***'How would you know and what would it matter anyway?'*** Is reading women authors really a must and does it change anything? She makes one last attempt and retorts: ***'You just don't seem like you do'***. She sees a contrast in him. It looks as if the way he is, his character, is in contrast with what he does. His act, his gestures are quite secular but it does not reflect what he is deep down inside. Deep down he is not secular at all but deeply dedicated to the moral principles he believes in. Again he denies: ***'you're way wrong'***. It is as if she now says: 'prove to me that I am wrong'. She is not willing to give in: ***'which ones have you read then?'*** Dylan is now more or less forced to prove to her that her argument is wrong and irrelevant and says: ***'I read Erica Jong'***. Jong as a novelist is the icon of the sexual emancipation of women. It is now clear that Dylan has read Erica Jong. In fact, from his song writing it is quite apparent that Dylan has a broad based knowledge of all sorts of modern literature.

The Boston restaurant conversation appears as suddenly as it disappears: ***'She goes away for a minute and I slide out of my chair; I step outside back to the busy street but nobody's going anywhere'***. He now has a chance to escape from her without any fuss and immediately takes this chance. The conversation and the whole scene ends abruptly and unfinished. Yet, all that needs to be said has been said. It is the only time the poet enters into contact with the outside world. He has made his point. From now on it is going to be: 'Ain't talking, just walking'. He steps back to the busy streets, back to his lonely pilgrimage to the Highlands. Ostensibly nothing has changed. Everything seems as irrelevant and as purposeless as it was before: *'I step back to the busy street but nobody is going anywhere'*.

Conclusion.

At the beginning of this article we argued that this Boston restaurant scene is typically Dylanesque. Why is this? One of the reasons – in my opinion – may be that Dylan has never regarded himself as the spokesman for whatever culture or movement. He never wanted to be a spokesman for the sixties counter culture or for whatever later religious or non - religious movement, organization or church. But that does not mean that Dylan doesn't have a set of moral and religious rules by which he abides. He certainly has that set of rules. He once said that it is all in the songs. He wants to be recognized for his works – as an artist - but as a person he wants to remain at a distance, you simply cannot annex him for your own private purposes or moral principles. The waitress in the Boston restaurant tried to do this and to draw him out of his comfort zone and make him her spokesman and that of her generation: ***'Draw a picture of me'***. His reluctance to do this might have given her a clue, not to attempt this. But she wouldn't listen. Therefore the outcome for the waitress and for a lot of fans cannot be anything but disappointing.

5. The verses dealing with his pilgrimage to the Highlands – after the Boston Restaurant intermezzo.

*'Every day is the same thing out the door
Feel further away than ever before
Some things in life, it gets too late to learn
Well, I'm lost somewhere, I must have made a few bad turns '*

'Every day is the same thing out the door'. Having left the Boston restaurant all of a sudden and thrown back into the busy streets, he is once again confronted with the seemingly purposelessness and monotony of every day's life. In a live version of the song he adds: *'Try to repair what went wrong the day before'*. He is again disappointed as he expresses in 'Can't wait': 'Skies are grey, I'm looking for anything that will bring a happy glow. Night or day it doesn't matter anymore where I go'. Nobody in the busy streets seems to be going anywhere. Everything is again exactly the way that it seems. Those busy streets look like a giant ant-hill. A lot of criss-cross random activity, but what's the use of it all? Every day is like

the day before. **'Feel further away than ever before'**. It makes the poet feel more lost than ever before. The suffering feels as if it is unending. Every nook and cranny on his way to the Highlands has its tears.

'Some things in life, it gets too late to learn'. The high-tech cyber society demands you to catch up with any new development or hype but he knows that for some of these things you are just getting too old to learn. This is like he expresses in the song 'Unbelievable': 'It is unbelievable like a lead balloon, it is impossible to even learn the tune. Every nerve is analyzed, everything is criticized'. Apart from this, it is hard to tackle some of the bad traits of character which have been grinded in his soul ever since early childhood. He concludes: **'Well, I'm lost somewhere; I must have made a few bad turns'**. Deep down inside he knows that one of the preconditions to enter the Highlands is to admit that you are lost. To admit that you are in need for help to get there. You have made some bad turns and you are stuck. He feels lost in the rain, as once in Juarez, when it was Eastertime too.

*'I see people in the park forgetting their troubles and woes
They're drinking and dancing wearing bright-colored clothes
All the young men with their young women looking so good
Well, I'd trade places with any of them, in a minute if I could'*

In this and the following verse he really feels like that stranger who was walking in the park in the song 'Mississippi'. This stranger was walking through the leaves, falling from the trees and was feeling like a stranger nobody sees. All the laughter of those drinking and dancing people is just making him sad. He envies those people wearing bright-colored clothes, and all the young men and women looking so good. He just can't live a life like that. For him, no bright colored clothes but only the cloak of misery is left and suffering, the frozen smile on his face that fits him like a glove. He knows he can't trade places with those people. He is a stranger in a strange land, but he knows that is where he belongs. His utter misery is getting worse in the next verse:

*'I'm crossing the street to get away from a mangy dog
Talking to myself in a monologue
I think what I need might be a full-length-leather coat
Somebody just asked me if I'm registered to vote'*

'I'm crossing the street to get away from a mangy dog' The mangy dog reminds us of poor Lazarus in Luke 16:21 who, full of sores, desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table, and the dogs came and licked his sores. This is what happens if dogs run free. In 'Meet me in the morning' the poet was able to outrun the hound dogs but here a mangy dog has the edge over him and compels him to cross the street to get away from this dog. A mangy dog, like flies to a rotten corpus, is attracted to a dirty ragged tramp that lives on the street. **'Talking to myself in a monologue'** is what happens to a lonely homeless tramp, so alone, with no direction home, the only

one left to talk to is himself. ***'I think what I need might be a full-length-leather coat'***. The only thing a gambler needs is a suitcase and a trunk but this lonely homeless hobo needs a full-length leather coat to protect him from the cold and the rain.

'Somebody just asked me if I'm registered to vote'. Some states in the USA prohibit individuals convicted of a felony from voting. Some states prohibit voting when on parole and/or probation but allow voting after. Some states have a lifetime ban from voting for ex-convicts. One may register wherever one has an address. In most states, one must register, usually 30 days before a given election, in order to vote in it. The reason why the poet is asked if he is registered to vote is because he is out there on the street and looks like a homeless tramp without any address.

6. The turning point in the song.

*"The sun is beginning to shine on me
But it's not like the sun that it used to be
The party is over and there's less and less to say
I got new eyes, everything looks far away"*

'The sun is beginning to shine on me'. Quite rightly this verse may be interpreted as the turning point of the song. For the pilgrim, at least up till now, there has been nothing but trouble and deep agony on his way to the Highlands, but suddenly the sun starts to shine on him. All of a sudden the future looks bright for him. ***'But it's not like the sun that it used to be'*** Those who interpret 'the sun' here not as the ordinary sun, the ecclesiastical body that shines on him, but as 'The Son', Jesus, may have good papers. Likewise, there are also good reasons to believe that the phrase in 'Not Dark Yet': 'I still got the scars that the sun didn't heal' may be read as: 'I still got the scars that the Son (that is Jesus) didn't heal'. Son instead of Sun. The sun cannot heal scars; on the contrary, prolonged exposure to sunlight makes scars worse instead of healing them. The poet wants to make it very clear that it's not like the sun *'that it used to be'*. This 'sun', this light is different. This light is God, Jesus. God is a shining light like it says in Revelation 22:23: *'And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the lamb'*. The 'lamb' stands for Jesus.

The poet is now on the brink of entering the Highlands, of entering Heaven. That is why he says: ***'The party is over and there's less and less to say'***. He has nearly reached the end of the trail. Whatever he had to say has been said. Like he says in "Standing in the Doorway": *'I see nothing to be gained by any explanation, there's no words that need to be said'* or like in 'Thunder on the mountains': *'I've already confessed, no need to confess again'*. From now on it is: *'Ain't talking, just walking'*. The book of Ecclesiastes says in Chapter 3:7: *'There's a time to keep silence, and a time to speak'*. The game, the party, is now over. The camera zooms out; he is lifted up in heaven, as he ascends from the world, the earth moves ever further away from him, till he is clear out of sight.

'I got got new eyes'. Earthly eyes, they just tell you lies (as he said in 'License to kill') but these new eyes enable you to see what everybody in the world is up against (as in 'Sugar Baby'); enable you to lay down your weary tune and to trust your fate in the hands of God

(as in 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum') . **'Everything looks far away'** means that the poet has freed himself from the chains of his wretched earthly existence; he now looks from above, from an ever growing distance down to the earth and is less and less concerned and troubled with earthly matters and is more and more wrapped in heavenly peace and serenity.

7. The learning process of the poet as he progresses towards the Highlands.

There are five verses (verse 1, 4,7,15 and the final verse) in the song which dwell on the Highlands and they all start with: **'My heart's in the Highlands'**. It is clear that his heart, his sympathy is not in this world and the poet has listened to what Colossians 3:2 says: *'Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth'*. Now as the song progresses the poet experiences a sort of learning process; he is getting more and more ready for life in the Highlands (Heaven).

In verse 1 it says: **'I'm gonna go there when I feel good enough to go'**. Mentally he is not ready to go yet at this point. He first needs to go through a process of inward renewal and purification a process which takes time. This is a process may even take a lifetime.

In verse 4 he feels sure that the Highlands (Heaven) is the only place where he belongs: **'wherever I roam, that's where I'll be when I get called home'**. Rambling and gambling for the one he loves, he yet finds no comfort in a world where beauty goes unrecognized. In fact he knows for sure that spiritually he lives another world, where life and death are memorized and where the earth is strung with lovers' pearls. You don't determine yourself when you will go there. Born at the right time, God will call you home at the right time. The poet goes on to say that **'you can only get there one step at a time'**. This is again the learning process you have to walk through on this earth. To grow from childhood to maturity takes a lot of pain. Even Jesus suffered in the process as Hebrews 5: 8 says: *'Although he was the Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered'*. We all wear the same thorny crown but deep down inside the poet knows that he needs all those hardships and sufferings, as necessary steps on his way to the Promised Land, the Highlands of Heaven. Step by step he is getting closer and closer.

In verse 7 he has made a lot of progress on his way to the Highlands. The night has passed and he finds himself now at the break of dawn. He sees the light of the dawning day on the horizon. And he realizes: 'Behind the horizon, behind the sun, at the end of the rainbow, life has only just begun'. He is not there yet but the poet concludes that there are no other options left now; the Highlands is **'the only place left to go'**. In verse 15 he confirms this once again: **'Can't see any other way to go'**.

In the final verse he has gone past the break of dawn, it is now the break of day. He feels a change coming on and the first part of the day is already gone. **'Over the hills and far away'**. He has passed the hills and has mentally reached his destination: The Highlands. He is at almost the same stage as he is in the last verse of 'Ain't Talking': *'Up the road, around the bend. Heart burning, still yearning, in the last outback at the world's end'*. Peace and quiet is starting to fall down on him. For all those who have eyes and for all those who have ears he has the following message: **'there a way to get there'**. He does not explicitly say what that way to heaven is, but he is nevertheless absolutely sure that such a way exists.

'I'll figure it out somehow' means 'I have already figured it out and if you want to, you can figure it out too'. The secret is in what Jesus says in Matthew 5:3,4,5: *'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Highlands), Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'*. Those who suffer now will be blessed.

'I'm already there in my mind, and that's good enough for now' wraps it all up. Still living on earth physically, spiritually he is already in heaven. His heart is already in the Highlands. Like it says in *'When the deal goes down': 'I owe my heart to you (to God) and that's saying it true, and I'll be with you, when the deal goes down''*. That is the place where my heart is. Don't throw this picture back at me and say: **'It don't look a thing like me''**. Accept this please. 'Ain't talking, just walking'. That is all I have to say. **'That is good enough for now'**. Goodbye and farewell!