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Phil Ochs: No Place in this World

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Abstract

Phil Ochs was a prominent topical songwriter and singer in the 1960s. He was conventionally considered second only to Bob Dylan in terms of popularity, creativity and influence in the specific genre of contemporary folk music commonly known as "protest music". Whereas Dylan successfully reinvented himself many times in terms of his musical style and social commentaries, Ochs failed to win critical support when he, too, attempted to transform himself from a broadside balladeer into a more self-consciously artistic lyricist and performer. From the events at the Democratic Party convention in 1968 until his suicide in 1976, Phil Ochs' public and private life spiraled downward. Today, he would be readily identified as a victim of "bipolar disorder." Such a psychiatric assessment, while plausible in its own terms, says nothing about the political events that set the context for Phil Ochs' personal tragedy. This paper attempts to balance the individual and larger contextual themes.

This article is prompted as much by personal reflection upon a particular man as it is by the ostensibly more general subject of his music, politics and relationship to American culture. Now, in the thirtieth year since his suicide, I am still seeking to sort out what, if anything, was the meaning of Phil Ochs' life, work and death to people who were outside his small circle of friends and family. I have made three attempts to put my own feelings in writing.

The first was an obituary, published in Seneca College's student newspaper shortly after the event (Doughty, 1976). I had met Phil Ochs several times in 1964 and again in 1965, most often at a coffee house in Toronto called The New Gate of Cleve. In February, 1965. Ochs and his friend Eric Andersen, played alternate sets for two weeks, often well into the mornings. I doubt if I missed a night. I spoke with him again in 1966 and 1968 and 1970. I saw him perform dozens of times in small coffee houses, large concerts and folk festivals, most recently in 1970. Like others, I enjoyed his singing, admired his song writing and largely concurred with his political views; and I took advantage of his willingness to chat with fans as though they were friends.

So, we chatted.

He was cordial and, on those occasions when he had no pressing business, he was happy to talk at some length. I particularly remember strolling around the Canadian National Exhibition site in Toronto in 1965. I

was working for the Ontario Department of Mines. Phil was singing "Here's to the State of Mississippi" at the Band Shell. I was wearing a suit. He was wearing a leather jacket and jeans. He had appeared at York University a year or two before and I wondered if he would be interested in appearing again. He pressed his agent's card into my hand.

By 1976, I had long since abandoned suits. I had hoped to see him when he was booked to play in a Toronto club, the El Mocambo, in 1973. The "Elmo" has been a venue of choice for everyone from the Rolling Stones to Duran Duran to Tom Paxton. Why not Phil Ochs? The show was cancelled. It was explained that Phil was drunk in Chicago and didn't make the plane.

My obituary was both appreciative and angry. I celebrated his music, his wit and his dedication to social justice, but I was infuriated by what I took to be his abandonment of the struggle. Displaying neither nominal compassion nor elementary understanding, I seemed mainly upset that he had somehow let down the side. Iconic figures, I must have supposed, had special obligations. I got some of it right, but I am also ashamed of part of what I wrote. Grief one step removed is an inadequate alibi.

My second effort was an unpublished paper which was presented to the American Culture Association (Doughty, 1985). It attempted to construct a tentative explanation of what had gone tragically wrong. I used the word "tragic" advisedly, not to denote an especially sad event but one in which a great figure had been brought down by a "hamartia," a fatal flaw. As we live in post-Aristotelian times, that flaw is not apt to be a specific act caused by a character defect such as "hubris", but a more complex and characteristically psychiatric condition. I was uncertain about Ochs's psychological state and lacked even a command of the vocabulary needed to discuss his mental illness. In fact, I was resistant to the very notion of "mental illness"—not a Scientologist, but an avid reader of Thomas Szasz and of all those disinclined to explain away political dissent as a personality disorder.

This is my third and probably my last attempt. It is an extension of my previous failures to get it right and, I fear, it resembles the failures of many of those who have taken up the task of fashioning commentaries on Phil Ochs. When this is done, I shall likely give it up as a bad job and hope only that others take up the work, for I still think that the project is worthwhile. Phil Ochs still needs to be appreciated, and Phil Ochs needs to be better understood, for all our sakes.

My central concern remains the relationship between the death of Phil Ochs and the tumultuous political and social events that occurred during the comparatively short time of his working life. Less than fifteen years passed between his arrival in New York City and his death on Long Island, and for barely half of that time could he be considered "productive". Simply stated, I still want to know if anything of importance can be learned or expressed about the political culture of the United States from a more generous comprehension of Phil Ochs' fate within it, and if anything of value can be gleaned from a more capacious appreciation of how

American political culture participated in his ruin. I am no longer as concerned about how that political culture and those events directly precipitated his particular downfall. To acquire that knowledge would help us understand him better, I suppose; but, à quoi bon. I cannot imagine him, either at his best or worst, applauding efforts to dig through the ashes and embers of his life and utter learned, clinical pronouncements about precisely why he died. That's not what he would want to hear.

One artless way to establish the question is to ask whether Ochs' death was the inevitable product of what we preciously call his "inner demons," or was it the consequence of the conflict between his political ideas and the somewhat more sordid realities of US political life.

A straightforward answer came recently from my old friend Phil King (2005), professor of psychology and quantitative methods at Hawaii Pacific University:

"My own general answer to your question (not Phil Ochs specifically ... but probably valid for 99% of suicides) is that it's psychology, not ideology. Psychology emotionally colors the world view in a fundamental way, objectively occurring events in that world notwithstanding. If Ochs was different, that's the theme of your paper right there—but I doubt it."

This was not merely a casual assessment reflecting the professional bias of an expert psychologist. Phil King and Phil Ochs had met and talked at length. They had mutual friends, dating back to Ochs' student days at Ohio State University. Phil King, as well, is a big fan. He calls Ochs "my favorite minor key poet." His opinion must not be dismissed.

A more artistic answer about how to engage the subject came from a writer with skills far superior to mine. Wrote teacher and novelist Brian Flack (1998):

"Begin your paper with Ochs hanging on America's own techno-cross. Have blood flow in rivulets of words. Garland his skull with a crown of notes. Slice his side with a critic's rapier. Then inter him in the midst of his own onions, carrots and spices. This creates effect. It also does Ochs—the outsider, the poet—justice."

Brian Flack also knows Ochs' work well, and admires it. He was especially disturbed by my decision to draw attention to the songs "The Thresher" and "The Scorpion Departs and Never Returns." He identified: "Crucifixion" and "Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Me" and "What Are You Fighting For?" and "Small Circle of Friends" as "infinitely more appropriate places to begin a real analysis, after the niceties, horrors, pleasantries and pap of Dylan, Rodnitzky, Denisoff, etc. are dispensed with."

I would like to follow his advice, but I lack the lyricism and the aesthetic insight. Still, it is required of us who knew him (however slightly) or who were inspired by him (however much) to keep reminding ourselves

of his smile and telling others about him when and where we can.

I

I am not alone in trying to express a personal connection. In the "Introduction" to **Death of a Rebel**, Marc Eliot (1979, p. ix) says that he decided to write a biography of Phil Ochs on 10 April, 1976—the day after Ochs hanged himself at the home of his sister "Sonny" in Far Rockaway, New York. Some put reflections in small periodicals or posted them on their websites. Others recall Bob Dylan, in an uncharacteristically charitable moment, saying "I just can't keep up with Phil. And he's getting better and better and better" (Quoted on Phil Ochs Homepage—I insist on believing, with no evidence, that Dylan wasn't merely being sarcastic). Still, in the almost three full decades since the event, only one other extensive examination has been written of a man who made a formidable contribution to the politics and the inventory of topical songs in the United States of America in the 1960s (Schumacher, 1996).

Except for those accounts, there has been a relative silence about Ochs' career. Despite the fact that there have been about three hundred covers of his songs, his name and his lyrics have all but vanished.¹ Some recall. His sister maintains a website and continues to organize concerts and workshops centered on Phil's music throughout New England (see www.sonnyochs.com). As well, Billy Bragg and a few lesser known contemporaries (e.g., Magpie) continue to sing his material, but he has long since disappeared from the public mind. A more conspiratorial mind than mine might wonder about the constellation of forces that transformed Phil Ochs into a non-person; a more ambitious one might try to right the wrong, to restore Ochs to a position of notoriety as a martyr in an unsuccessful revolution. I seek to do neither. Instead, my more modest intent is to try to place the music and the career of Phil Ochs in a context that may help to illuminate the causes as well as lament the consequences of his death and transfiguration.

Jerome L. Rodnitzky may be credited (if that is the proper word) for being among the first to anticipate Ochs' death in public. At the Popular Culture Association meeting in Indianapolis in 1973, he read a paper entitled, "Phil Ochs, a minstrel's search for martyrdom," later published in his book **Minstrels of the Dawn** (Rodnitzky, 1996, pp. 63-82). Phil Ochs wrote a fine song in memory of Woody Guthrie called "Bound for Glory." Perhaps, in Jerry Rodnitzky's words, Phil was merely "bound for obscurity."

Speaking informally with him and, later with Ron Denisoff (then the editor of **Popular Music and Society** and a formidable author in his own right at my room in the local Holiday Inn), I confess to being taken aback by their derisive dismissal of Phil Ochs as a political commentator, a performer and a political activist.

Denisoff was especially contemptuous of Ochs' album, "Gunfight at Carnegie Hall," which would not be released in the United States for another two years (P. Ochs, 1975). He repeated the claim that A&M

records had given up on Ochs because "they couldn't figure out what he was doing." I thought I could. I approved. I am also sure that Denisoff could, but that he disapproved.

One of the nastiest notes in print came from Robert Christgau, the professed "Dean" of music critics at the **Village Voice**. He dismissed Phil Ochs as "the singing Yippie," a "Richard Dyer-Bennett gone Nashville," and a performer—despite the help of producer Van Dyke Parks—whose "compulsive sweetness does him in." (cf. Christgau, 1968; Feik, 2002; Shelton, 1986, p. 331; and Carter, 2002).

Those remarks were among Christgau's most gentle. He also famously declared that Phil Ochs' "voice shows an effective range of about half an octave [and] he couldn't play the guitar any worse were if his right hand were webbed" (Christgau, 1968). After Phil's death, Christgau could not resist recalling that Ochs had often quoted those ("my meanest") comments "and died owing me five bucks" (Carter, 2002). It didn't seem to occur to the critic that Phil Ochs needed more help than could be purchased for five bucks.

The deepest slashes, however, came from Bob Dylan who pronounced himself a true artist and told Ochs that he was just a journalist or, at best, a second-rate performer. "Why don't you just become a stand-up comic," he taunted. In characteristically self-effacing (or self-destructive) interludes, Ochs was given to repeat the criticisms that wounded him. Later, practicing retrospective psychological diagnostics, Ochs would be suspected of masochism, arising from family dynamics in his childhood. He would also be said to be living out fantasies first encountered in his obsessive escapism at the movies. Such speculations will be treated in due course.

While he did win the dubious honor of election to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and remained seemingly fixed in the emotions of friends such as Tom Paxton and Dave Von Ronk, his ultimate legacy remains in doubt. Neither rock immortality nor the critics' censure are apt to make much difference to the memory of Phil Ochs.

II

After the US Democratic Party convention in 1968, and certainly after the killings at Kent State University in 1970, academics, popular commentators and the recording industry alike came to the pragmatic conclusion that militant songs had become "irrelevant." The sixties were dead.

Rodnitzky proceeds from this dismissive assessment of countercultural criticism and political militancy to a conclusion that is difficult to accept fully, but that nonetheless purports to explain the transition of Phil Ochs. From the public, gregarious, wise-cracking broadside balladeer, Ochs was transformed into the morose, delusional aspirant media star who put his own tombstone on an album cover (P. Ochs, 1969), came back a year later to tell anyone who was willing to

listen that there were "no more songs," (P. Ochs, 1970) and then lived just long enough to witness the release of his "gold suit concert" in the United States, five years after his final appearance at Carnegie Hall. (P. Ochs, 1975).

Rodnitzky's disdainful assessment, published the year Ochs died, was that "Ochs wisely beat America to the punch. He rejected America politically before America could reject him culturally." Not content with reporting on Ochs's romantic "heroes and gods," Rodnitzky added that Ochs was fascinated by a visit he and Jerry Rubin paid to mass murderer Charles Manson, and also said that he intended to travel to Uganda to visit Idi Amin—a visit made impossible by his "mugging" in Dar es-Salaam and the resulting injuries that effectively ended his singing career. Rodnitzky's definitive appraisal was that "Ochs was caught up in the JFK Camelot mystique and never really freed himself" (Rodnitzky, 1999).

III

Reference to psychology cannot be delayed. More compelling than an interpretation of Ochs' decline as a performer who was unable to adapt to the loss of public interest in his specialty—the topical song or broadside ballad—would be an intensive psychological study. Scraps of speculative commentary are widely available. Phil Ochs had a somewhat difficult, though not a "traumatic," childhood and adolescence. His relationship with his mother seems to have been agreeable enough, if forced. She encouraged his musical talent and was supportive, often while doing "double duty" for his psychologically unstable and often absent father (cf. cosmicbaseball, 1998). As a youngster, Ochs performed with distinction as a solo clarinetist in such classical pieces as Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, and Sammarini's Symphony in D Major. And so on.

Amateur psychologists—especially those with a Freudian bent—have used the absence of a reliable "father figure" to explain everything from his attraction to Karl Marx to his quest for approval from other adult males—especially the father of his good friend and folk duet partner, Jim Glover. The same absence is also blamed for his failure to establish, both in youth and maturity, successful relationships with women. His adolescent isolation, his cultivation of a "hood" image in his teens, his craving for acceptance by adult male figures, his obsession with movies, his fantasies of "stardom", his stuttering and his fragile ego are all parts of a plausible portrait of maladjustment and at least mild neurosis. "There," as he wrote, "but for fortune go you or I." In the end, his self-destruction in alcoholism, his misogyny, his compulsiveness and his bizarre assumption of the personality of "John Train," combined with his pathological disintegration to make him over into the foul-smelling, foul-mouthed, physically brutal self-fulfillment of the dying minstrel in his song, "Chords of Fame." The last years of his life provide ample clinical and more than enough lurid anecdotal evidence to permit a lay diagnosis of psychosis.

Phil's sister provides a succinct summary: " ... manic depression—now called bi-polar disease ... runs rampant in the male side of my father's family. My father, his brother, both of my brothers and two male cousins

that I'm aware of. Maybe even more! Phil wouldn't take medication. The only medication available at the time (lithium) caused a person's emotions to flat line. No ups. No Downs. Not acceptable to a creative personality (S. Ochs, 2005)." Enough said.

Rodnitzsky's story of a rising and falling star could mix nicely with an interpretation of mental imbalance to yield a poignant commentary on the ultimately inconsequential life of a briefly famous and justly forgotten folk artist and culture critic. With what was often dismissed as merely mediocre talent and only a small, contingent and politically motivated following, a thoroughly apolitical study could be generated. It might provide insight into the fate of a frail and flawed troubadour, but it would serve Phil Ochs ill and undermine the single benefit that might yet emerge from his one last gesture.

Of course, the personal insecurities, reflected in hero-worship, do betoken Ochs' implicit acceptance of the legitimacy of an academic autopsy by becoming precisely what he wanted and he was fated to become: a persona, a public victim, a martyr by his own connivance long after much of his audience ceased to care. There is ample material to dissect and reconfigure as a portrait in pathology. His fate, his ill fortune, invites psychological analysis. Many of the songs he wrote (and not only in the declining phase of his career) display a frantic desire for redemption. A few of these are "That's the Way It's Gonna Be", "When in Rome", "My Life", and "One-way Ticket Home". There are plenty of others. (A fairly comprehensive catalogue of Ochs' song lyrics can be found at <http://www.cs.pdx.edu/~trent/ochs/lyrics.html>.)

Phil King is almost certainly right to look to psychology, not ideology, for answers about the individual; however, the Phil Ochs that was emotionally tortured in the late 1960s and early 1970s would necessarily rage at any attempts to sift among his ashes and serve up squalid psycho-social or even solemn political musings and academic mutterings about his fate, just as the younger Phil Ochs of the early and mid-1960s would have teased us with his caustic wit, then smiled, shrugged and invited us out of grand hotels and into the streets to protest various wars, to march for civil rights, or just to look up with shining admiration at those who lived much larger mythological lives than our own: John Wayne, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Fidel, Che, Mao and Bob Dylan.

That is not a project I wish to undertake, nor a burden I am equipped to bear. Apart from an utter absence of competence, I have no special access to his private life. It would be presumptuous for anyone to engage in a sort of Eriksonian psycho-history based on nothing more than wistful memories and whatever can be gleaned from record jackets, song lyrics, a few interviews with family and friends, and some articles—some friendly, some hostile. I was and remain simply a "fan," but there is more to my wish to extricate this discussion from the jumble of anecdotal information that could so easily feed neo-Freudian fantasies and, in the process, trivialize the life of Phil Ochs. I prefer to see if there is the basis for any instruction about the scope of politics and the limits of political dissent in the United States of America.

IV

First, consciously choosing to leave the corpse untouched, I ask, instead, if Phil Ochs' demise as a radical and an artist can be read as an instructive metaphor for a central dilemma in American political life. To do this, it is important to recall the skeletal facts of Ochs' working life. It is helpful to assign it to three main phases.

Ochs' popularity began in earnest with his inclusion on some record album anthologies, notably the Newport Festival album of 1963, several "samplers," plus his three albums for Elektra Records (P. Ochs 1964, 1965 and 1966), produced by Jac Holzman (whose card Phil gave me and I have since misplaced). These productions constitute his major contributions as a topical songwriter. From this era came his signature tune, "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and songs about civil rights, domestic poverty and foreign military adventures from the Dominican Republic to Vietnam. From this time as well came his devotion to, rivalry with, and alienation from Bob Dylan.

Second, by 1966, Dylan had written **My Back Pages** and was careening his motorcycle down Highway 61. The self-adopted child of Woody Guthrie had become an acknowledged American folk-rock artist, a celebrity and a lyricist who had abandoned Hattie Carroll to her own lonesome death. Dylan's lyrics had become defiantly apolitical. Phil Ochs was left lumbering up the turnpike, sucking Dylan's artistic gas. Away from New York City, Ochs' next three albums were recorded at A & M Records and were produced in Los Angeles by Larry Marks. They reveal an introspective Ochs putting his most anguished efforts at lyricism on display. They cut the path to the "counter-culture," to the Yippies and to the trauma of Chicago in 1968. They were not critically acclaimed and even *Pleasures of the Harbor*, (P. Ochs, 1967), his biggest commercial success, was widely considered strained, over-orchestrated, second-class Dylan.

Finally, there are the frenetic songs and albums of collapse including Phil Ochs' *Greatest Hits*, *Gunfight at Carnegie Hall* and such oddities as a single celebrating Raquel Welch in *Kansas City Bomber* and another recorded in Kenya (one side sung in Lingala and the other in Swahili). They bring to a close Phil Ochs' recorded work. (An admirable discography is available at www.cs.pdx.edu/~trent/ochs/discog.html.)

His tunes were not only etched in vinyl. His concerts and club appearances could be singular. One special memory of mine concerns a concert in Honolulu in 1968, when Phil appeared with Richie Havens and Buffy Ste-Marie at the Waikiki Shell in Kapiolani Park. There were rows of unfilled seats in front and a mass of fans—mostly students—sitting on the ground behind. Phil sang one or two songs and then looked quizzically past the lights at the gap between him and the audience. Rightly surmising that the empty seats cost a little more than the turf, he instructed us all to stand, move forward and occupy the vacant space. When the shuffling ended, he smiled and said: "Now you have participated in a mass movement. Keep it up." A few years later, I saw him at the Riverboat coffee house in Toronto. A glass of vodka in one hand and his guitar in the

other, he remonstrated against the crowd, saying that there had once been people who were prepared to die for their beliefs but all he saw around him was "the chickenshit generation." The audience was not shocked, nor appalled, nor even especially angered. Some were uncomprehending; others showed minor signs of grief.

V

An artistic evolution parallels the political and the psychological changes. For anyone unfamiliar with the transition of Phil Ochs from the singing journalist to the author of what Marc Eliot has called his "greatest song," the comparison of two lyrics captures the process well. In 1963, Ochs wrote "The Thresher." It was his unpretentious account of the sinking of atomic submarine SSN 593. On 10 April, 1963, the vessel was en route to conduct sea trials approximately 320 km off Cape Cod. At 09:13, its companion surface ship received a message that the Thresher was experiencing minor problems. A series of partial, distorted communications followed and at 09:18 the Skylark's sonar detected the sound of the Thresher's destruction. All one hundred and twenty-nine sailors and civilian technicians were killed. This is what Phil sang:

THE THRESHER

In Portsmouth town on the eastern shore
 Where many a fine ship was born.
 The Thresher was built
 And the Thresher was launched
 And the crew of the Thresher was sworn.
 She was shaped like a tear
 She was built like a shark
 She was made to run fast and free.
 And the builders shook their hands
 And the builders shared their wine
 And thought that they had mastered the sea.

Yes, she'll always run silent
 And she'll always run deep
 Though the ocean has no pity
 Though the waves will never weep
 They'll never weep.

And they marveled at her speed
 Marveled at her depth
 Marveled at her deadly design.
 And they sailed to every land
 And they sailed to every port
 Just to see what faults they could find.
 Then they put her on the land
 For nine months to stand
 And they worked on her from stem to stern.
 But they could never see
 It was their coffin to be

For the sea was waiting for their return.

Yes, she'll always run silent
 And she'll always run deep
 Though the ocean has no pity
 And the waves will never weep
 They'll never weep.

On a cold Wednesday morn
 They put her out to sea
 When the waves they were nine feet high.
 And they dove beneath the waves
 And they dove to their graves
 And they never said a last good-bye.
 And it's deeper and deeper
 And deeper they dove
 Just to see what their ship could stand.
 But the hull gave a moan
 And the hull gave a groan
 And they plunged to the deepest darkest sand.

Now she lies in the depths
 Of the darkened ocean floor
 Covered by the waters cold and still.
 Oh, can't you see the wrong
 She was a death ship all along
 Died before she had a chance to kill.

And she'll never run silent,
 And she'll never run deep,
 For the ocean had no pity
 And the waves, they never weep,
 They never weep.

[Alternate final verse from an early Broadside tape]

And it's 8000 fathoms of the water above
 And over 100 men below
 And sealed in their tomb
 Is the cause of their doom
 That only the sea will ever know

From "All the News That's Fit to Sing," Elektra EKS 7269
 (1964).

In 1968, he wrote "The Scorpion Departs and Never Returns". The pertinent events were similar for both songs report the sinking of United States' nuclear submarines, but the intent of each is diametrically (or dialectically) opposed. "The Thresher" is a simple moral condemnation of the existence of a weapon. Its significance is limited in a way that is typical of many "finger-pointing" topical songs. Such a work, says Ron Denisoff, "points to some social condition, describes the situation, but offers no

theoretical or practical solution." Phil Ochs, he continues, "did not offer organizational solutions such as those of the labor movement or the Young Communist League; thus, they lacked a structural connection to the magnetic songs of the [proletarian] renaissance" led by singers such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger (Denisoff, 1972, p. 119). Denisoff's claim is rather curious, especially in light of his tendency to label songs and songwriters who do offer explicit political strategies "Stalinist." (Denisoff, 1973, pp. 1-14, 179). Still, the point remains that, in Ochs' early songs, a simple matter of identifying an evil and calling for its condemnation was as much as could normally be expected from "protest" singers. In "The Scorpion," he places himself on the doomed vessel. The event becomes an expression of individual anxiety and, only by poetic extension, of cultural explanation. Here, then, is the "creative death of Phil Ochs, the moment of realization, preceding [by eight years] the moment of expiration" (Eliot, p. 172). Call it existentialism. Call it postmodernism. Call it poetry.

THE SCORPION DEPARTS BUT NEVER RETURNS

Sailors climb a tree, up the terrible tree
 Where are my shipmates, have they sunk beneath the sea
 I do not know much but I know this cannot be
 It isn't really, it isn't really
 Tell me it isn't really

Sounding bell is diving down the water green
 Not a trace, not a toothbrush, not a cigarette was seen
 Bubble ball is rising from a whisper or a scream
 But I'm not screaming, no I'm not screaming
 Tell me I'm not screaming

Captain will not say how long we must remain
 The phantom ship forever sails the sea
 It's all the same

Captain my dear Captain we're staying down so long
 I have been a good man I've done nobody wrong
 Have we left our ladies for the lyrics of a song
 That I'm not singing, that I'm not singing
 Tell me I'm not singing
 The schooner ship is sliding across the kitchen sink
 My sons and my daughter they won't know what to think
 The crew has turned to voting and the officers to drink
 But I'm not drinking, but I'm not drinking
 Tell me I'm not drinking

The radio is begging them to come back to the shore
 All will be forgiven it'll be just like before
 All you ever wanted will be waiting by the door
 We will forgive you, we will forgive you
 Tell me we'll forgive you

No one gives an answer not even one good-bye
 The silence of their sinking is all that they reply
 Some have chosen to decay and others chose to die
 But I'm not dying, I'm not dying
 Tell me I'm not dying

From "Rehearsals for Retirement," A&M SP 4181 (1969).

What, then, are the lessons to be learned? What can the disintegration of David Philip Ochs, songwriter, tell us about politics, and about the politics of America? Let him speak for himself in words and actions.

VI

The prelude to Phil Ochs' artistic and political career involved family, friends, youth and Ohio State University. He had planned to become a writer and was studying journalism. He was denied the job of editor of the student newspaper. He had won a guitar from Jim Glover in a bet. They performed locally as a folk duo, "The Sundowners." Without completing his degree, Phil Ochs took off to New York.

The first part of his actual career, corresponding to his association with New York City and Elektra Records, was dominated by his relationship with Bob Dylan. The young Mr. Zimmerman—Hibbing, Minnesota's commercially re-branded folk hero—had once opened for Bobby Vinton in Fargo, North Dakota. Both Dylan and Ochs had come some distance, but were preternaturally ambitious. When he achieved fame outside the small world of Greenwich Village, Dylan dismissed Ochs' work with his infamous remark: "You're not a folk singer, you're just a journalist" (Palmer, 1976, p. C-15; Winder, 2001).

At the height of his popularity as a protest singer, Ochs might have gained from establishing a more distanced relationship from Dylan. The tension between them is plain when, in the opening patten to his "Canons of Christianity," he relates: "Last night, a voice came to me. Turned out it was God. ... Trembling, I asked: 'What do you want, Dylan' " (P. Ochs, 1966). Likewise, while occasionally mocking Dylan's increasingly apolitical songs and implying that it was he, Ochs, who had kept the faith (e.g., in his cinematic song, *The Ringing of Revolution*, he says: "I play Bobby Dylan, the young Bobby Dylan"), he continues to acknowledge his subordinate relationship to Dylan (P. Ochs, 1966).

Not everyone—for example, David Blue, Richard Fariña, Tom Paxton, Mark Spoelstra, Patrick Sky and especially Dave Von Ronk—allowed the Dylan's phenomenal celebrity to dominate them. Moreover, even among his biggest fans, Dylan was not always well received. His choice to put away his acoustic guitar at Newport in 1965, his admission (boast?) that he had merely endured his time as a folk singer in order to "make it," and that the folk idiom had merely been a convenient vehicle for his ambition, and his increasingly transparent self-absorption led many of his fans to feel betrayed. In this context, Ochs was poised to become the

pre-eminent topical songwriter. Instead, he unreservedly let his wagon remain hitched to Dylan's runaway horse, and like every other hero in his personal, secularized hagiology, Ochs idolized Dylan even as he strove to surpass him.

Ochs would have none of Ewan MacColl's portrayal of Dylan as a "youth of mediocre talent," an author of "tenth-rate drivel, and a poet practiced only in the cultivated illiteracy" of his generation and its "embarrassing fourth-grade school boy attempts at free verse" (MacColl et al, 1967, p. 157). For Ochs, Dylan's new writing, combined with pop groups from the Beatles to the Righteous Brothers, formed the apotheosis of creativity in American popular culture. (Ochs, however, excluded Barry MacGuire's "Eve of Destruction" and anything by the "decadent" Jim Morrison of the Doors from his pantheon of achievement and achievers: MacGuire because his song was one of apolitical angst and Morrison because of his dissolute on-stage behavior (cf. P. Ochs, G. Friesen & S. Cunningham, 1976).

To the pop culture revolutionary, music properly conceived and purely played could, as the Fugs proclaimed and as Ochs initially agreed, change the world. For a curmudgeon, even a Marxist curmudgeon like MacColl, to insist upon traditional aesthetic standards and a studied discipline in carrying on the folk tradition was absurd. MacColl, representative of traditionalists in the folk community, believed a choice had to be made. American folk songwriters had to decide whether they intended "to 'improve' pop music or to extend the tradition—it is a mistake," he believed "to imagine that both objectives are identical" (MacColl, et al., p. 158). MacColl was married to a folk tradition that dated back to the 19th-century industrial conflicts, 18th-century Jacobite rebellions and ultimately all the way to the Childe ballads and beyond. Ochs had a musical perspective that ran as far back as Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley and a historical perspective that could, only with difficulty, be pushed back to Joe Hill. A product of a society that has no history prior to the age of progress, Ochs was trapped within the hegemony of democratic liberalism from which the only escape is nihilistic desperation and despair. To be largely "unaware" of traditions, "incapable of working inside disciplines," or even "at pains to destroy them" was MacColl's condemnation of the American folk scene; it was Ochs's illusion of liberation (MacColl et al., p. 157).

In joyful excess, Ochs tried "to weld sharper, more cogent and more original use of language and music. The messages in my songs," he intoned, "are now secondary to that part of my mind that creates." In the simultaneous "revolution" in music Ochs saw the opportunity to combine "perceptive protest and valid poetry" with the solidifying of the pop revolution ... The result would be the ability to "communicate reality with such an abundance of beauty, soul, and entertainment that they plant themselves in your brain, never to leave." As he headed west, he offered up this paean to the anticipated cultural synthesis:

"I want to be destroyed by art. I want to hear work that is so good poetically, so exciting musically, so original in arrangement and execution that it can turn me inside out with

the communication of feeling. It is perhaps the foundation of my career to utilize the highest levels of artistic social realism to carry topical songs to that point and beyond." (MacColl et al., p. 155)

Such effusiveness. Such ego. But the political purpose of his writing, while now a self-consciously secondary matter, had not vanished nor even seriously faded. Artistic social realism remained the synthetic goal.

At the same time, Ochs was adamant in his defense of wholly artistic exploration. In his famous denunciation of the "new" Bob Dylan, Irwin Silber drove home the politically annoying point that what mattered in the evaluation of an artist was the substance of what was communicated as well as the style with which it was communicated. Acknowledging that "Bob Dylan is a terribly gifted artist," Silber went on to demand a political as well as an aesthetic judgment. Accusing Dylan of a rather nihilistic species of existentialism, he summed up Dylan's personal philosophy: "Life is an absurd conglomeration of meaningless events capsuled into the unnatural vacuum created by birth and completed by death; ... to seek meaning or purpose in life is as unrewarding as it is pointless; all modern civilization does is further alienate man from his fellow man and nature" (Silber, 1967, p.262).

Whether this adequately sums up Dylan, much less existentialism, it is at least plain that New York City protest singers had a decision to make. For people like Dave Von Ronk, the choice was obvious and loyalty to the traditional art form came first; for Dylan, it was equally obvious and protean exploration and transformation prevailed. Phil Ochs was caught in between.

"Bob Dylan has exploded the entire city folk music scene into the incredibly rich fields of modern poetry, literature and philosophy."

- Paul Nelson (1967, p. 267)

"New York City has exploded and it's crashed upon my head"

- Phil Ochs (1968)

Paul Nelson credits Dylan with dragging "folk music, perhaps by the nape of the neck, into areas it never dreamed existed, and enriched both it and himself a thousandfold for the journey" (Nelson, p. 267). The end of the quest? Now, thanks to the "Minnesota gypsy, we have become truly contemporary." Ochs needed no tugging. He was a fervent fellow traveler.

For most critics, Ochs' fatal political error was committed in Chicago. "Old leftists" who had espoused radical causes since the 1930s (Pete Seeger), or at least the 1950s (Dave Von Ronk), refused to engage in the ritual theatre that was performed at the Democratic Convention in 1968. They feared it was a sham and a trick from the beginning. Some pleaded with their friend Phil not to go. Old leftists understood that there would be a confrontation between the YIPPIES and Mayor Daley and that the inevitable conflict would be used to discredit the left. They knew, as Kurt

Vonnegut would so eloquently say about the "clowns" at the Republican Convention in Miami four years later, that the politics of street theatrical absurdity did nothing to alter any oppressive system (Vonnegut, 1985, p. 190). "While the jester and the fool might once have been able—within prescribed and well understood limits—to mock authority and to employ ridicule to place limits on those in power, contemporary fools merely provide grease to lubricate the wheels of industry and the military." The antics of the YIPPIES were nicely caught in Herbert Marcuse's writing: "In society at large, pubertarian rebellion has a short-lived effect; it often seems childish and clownish ..." (Marcuse, 1972, p. 51).

It is also easily ignored. It is easily extinguished. It is easily turned against itself. For Phil Ochs, dismayed by the terminal corruption of the music industry which he saw as a metaphor for the corruption of America, the appeal of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman was irresistible. Combining leftist politics and comic artistry with added expertise in self-lionization, they appealed to Ochs' preoccupation with individual heroism and aesthetic transcendence of fraudulent reformism. Ochs' increasingly apocalyptic visions of the imminent downfall of America were played out in riotous theatrics in the catharsis of Lincoln Park. Having experienced the politics of the crucible, Ochs was devastated. He would later express his disillusionment with merely countercultural rebellion and re-learn that "what was needed was an organic connection to the working class" (Eliot, p. 166). It was too late. His attempts to reconstruct a career, to do Elvis Presley imitations in order to transform the "King of Rock and Roll" into a gas station Che Guevara were not about to succeed. For Phil Ochs there would, indeed, be no more songs.

VII

To make something of all of this, to provide an answer to the question "Why" and, more importantly, to the question "So what?" it is necessary now to stand back, to adopt a position that will afford the opportunity for what Kenneth Burke called "perspective by incongruity." The end of Phil Ochs can best be seen from the perspective of what I choose to call conservatism. I do not mean by this the right-wing, capitalist zealotry and religious fundamentalism that passes for "conservatism" and that is so pervasive in North America today. I mean instead the sensibilities of those who, like George Grant, are familiar with the language and the experience of deprivation. Such people alone could provide not just the courage but the wisdom to endure. In 1965, I vividly recall, Grant acknowledged a feeling of tenderness for the "new left" and, mentioning Mario Savio by name, begged the nascent countercultural rebels to temper their politics with realism—not as an invitation to compromise but as a requirement for moral, as well as physical, survival.

Sonny Ochs told an interviewer shortly after Phil's death that her brother "never got over his cockeyed optimism." It was the optimism of American liberalism. It was indulgence in "hope for the future," which George Grant called "the chief opiate of modern life" (Grant, 1966, p. 127). Its danger was not only to the individual who indulged in the belief that liberalism could live up to its precepts, but to the political goals that hope

represented. "Moral fervor," Grant continued, "is too precious a commodity not to be put in the service of reality" (Grant, p. 122). When it too easily places its faith in the possibility of transforming an inflexible culture, dominated by a powerful elite, the destruction of both the ideal and the idealist is assured.

It is a maxim of modern politics that utopia has an opposite side and that is the politics of despair. This was the fate of America that foretold the death of the American. Being complicit in a massive technological empire, understanding its evils and the decay growing therein, and wishing desperately to alter or overthrow it are elements that combine to produce zealotry with no actionable form of either authentic or merely pragmatic revolt. As Marx said somewhere, revolutions are nothing other than the kicking in of a rotten door, but the door that shelters the wealth and power of global corporatism is far from rotten. So, for someone deprived of any ideology other than liberalism yet disenchanted with its necessary inability to fulfill its promise in techno-mediated capitalist modernity, the obvious strategy is to flail away at it even if it is not disintegrating but is firm and will not budge.

The chain that binds the rebel to the power structure consists of ideological links that ensure the futility of opposition. Among them are a delight in spontaneity, a faith in progress and a reliance upon the power of the individual to effect or at least to inspire change.

What thought is given to extensive social structures is primarily moralistic. Social class, for example, is simply a handy way to categorize who is being oppressed and who is doing the oppressing. The allocation of social injustice to a complex typology that might include race and gender (though Ochs had little empathy with the latter) is primarily an exercise in demographics. It is true that, among songwriters of his generation, Ochs better appreciated capitalist dynamics and was foremost among the supporters of workers, unions and mass political movements; nonetheless, in the absence of a thorough, systemic and "scientific" analysis of social power, he was always at risk of retreating into the cult of the individual, whether as hero, as self or—as fate had it—the pathological anti-hero of his demonic alter ego, John Train.

No alternative method is entertained because the rebel is too fully an integral part of the system that is to be defied. When, therefore, record companies and critics begin to dismiss the artist's work as non-commercial, the artist has little business complaining. The notion that politics is show business and show business is politics entraps the rebel in a contradiction from which the only escape is withdrawal and, in extremis, death.

Phil Ochs, of course, was aware of the profound alienation that contributed to his political "irrelevance" and produced his personal destruction. "Surely," explains Grant, "the deepest alienation must be when the civilization one inhabits no longer claims one's loyalty" (Grant, 1970, p. 76); Phil Ochs experienced this alienation doubly.

First, according to Gloria Steinem, whom Ochs would personally vilify, but for other reasons, the "personal is political." One of Ochs' tirades appears at the beginning of **Death of a Rebel** in which he denounces Steinem as part of a CIA conspiracy. The idea has not been abandoned. Henry Makow, for instance, weaves a tortuous tale in which "the elite media invented second-wave feminism as part of the elite agenda to dismantle civilization and create a New World Order." Steinem, he continues, "worked for the CIA spying on Marxist students in Europe and disrupting their meetings. She became a media darling due to her CIA connections. **Ms Magazine**, which she edited for many years was indirectly funded by the CIA." All this and much more was "unearthed 1970's by a radical feminist group called 'Red Stockings' ... [and] published in **The Village Voice** on May 21, 1979" (Makow, 2002).

Second, in Ochs' case, the political also became personal. After Chicago, he worried about his own possibility of mental survival. Upon his return to New York after the 1968 convention, **Broadside** editor Izzy Young asked Phil: "How do you stay sane in America?" Ochs admitted, "I don't know. I've always felt a contact with political reality, but after Chicago, I'm totally disoriented" (Young, 1976).

Efforts to find relief elsewhere failed. Trips to Scotland, to Africa, to South America and Australia produced a few new heroes, notably Chilean President Dr. Salvador Allende—overthrown and killed with the active connivance of the CIA and (for all it matters) the passive acceptance of the Canadian government on, serendipitously, September 11, 1973. (The part played by US corporate interests and covert governmental action in the toppling of Chile's democratically elected regime is well known; Canada's reaction, as set out in communications from Ambassador Andrew Ross to Ottawa are also distressing (cf. *Last Post*, 1973, November). Allende's death, however, just confirmed that the seed of Ochs' destruction was mature.

To maintain political sanity, to keep one's balance in an unbalanced society, it is necessary to have access to moral reasoning. That means having a sense of place, intellectually and spiritually, if not always geographically. To conservatives like George Grant, this special sense of place is fundamental to moral development. Only by beginning with a love of one's own can one begin to universalize a concern for the good. To lose that sense of primal belonging is to have the quest for the general good betrayed. For the American, there was a place for the hatred of evil, but none for the love of the good, for American liberalism permits no definition of the good other than that which embodies progress—neophilia in the absence of expressed moral truths—and it even restricts the concept of evil to that which stands in open defiance of the processual and instrumental values according to which the alleged values will be achieved. It is, then, possible for the American to rebel against obvious violations of human rights and freedoms, but it is not possible to articulate even the possibility of positive goods. Much worse, for Ochs, was the fact that, in addition to alienation from his country, he saw no alternative cultural possibilities ("I would be in exile now / but everywhere's the same" - "One-way Ticket Home", P. Ochs, 1970). The maintenance of bonds to primal

or, at least, indigenous traditions is, after all, the primary way whereby any individual can learn about and participate in a more general good. For Ochs, these connections were fading memories of being a boy in Ohio. He was not welcome in Los Angeles. There was no one-way ticket home.

America, of course, is in the forefront of the modern project, which is the preparation of the world for postmodern dissolution. It is in the business of eliminating indigenous cultures, homogenizing markets for its products and arranging virtual battlefields for its wars. These are technological operations. Ochs, as an American, could have lamented the passing of such cultures, but he could not experience them. Recognizing the degradation of environments, both social and natural, does not mean that their recovery can be contemplated. Phil Ochs invites us take a drive and breathe the air of ashes; but, in a culture turned to ashes, there is no rebuilding. This is, of course, the point at which MacColl's criticism moves from the cultural to the political. In seeking a universal ideal of progress—even one that purports to be the antithesis of the American political economy, in affirming world historical figures from Jesus to John Kennedy to Mao, the American most completely demonstrated his cultural roots and assumptions. For Phil Ochs, it was politically impossible to embrace and serve within any set of philosophical and cultural assumptions—conservative or radical—that were at odds with the American dream, a dream that we must remember was founded on what has been labeled revolution. Unable to escape these roots and poisoned by the tree of liberty that grew from them:

I don't know
 But it seems that every single dream
 Is painting pretty pictures in the air
 Then they tumble in despair
 And they start to bend
 Until by the end
 It's a nightmare
 But I'm gonna give
 All that I've got to give
 Cross my heart
 And I hope to live
 "Cross My Heart" from Rehearsals for Retirement (1969)

So came the nightmare from which he could not awake, which is nothing but the American nightmare in microcosm.

As an individual, Phil Ochs was a victim of a mind gone mad. Phil King is right. His physical death can best be explained in personal terms. Whether attributed to experiences in early life, or to some genetically based disorder, or to some chemical imbalance in the brain, or to any other psychological, psychiatric or neurological problematic, his fate was precisely his. It was singular, but singularities tell us nothing. For Phil Ochs to have done otherwise would have meant that he would have would have had a different personality, different experiences and, if such things can be meaningfully discussed, a different soul. (Of course, it might also have

meant that someone with skill, sensitivity and common sense might have intervened on his behalf; I certainly didn't and I can't imagine saying anything bad about anyone else. It seems that many people tried, but he was defiant.)

"Psychologizing," as I explained earlier, is not a task I can competently undertake. I lack the expertise even to begin. What can be said, however, is that Phil Ochs might well have come to the same end under radically different circumstances. Politics may have provided the stimulus for the expression of despair and self-destruction. Had he been guided into other fields, he might have found equal sources of frustration and depression therein. That he was a political person who, arguably, died a political death—the death of a rebel—may be a mere contingency. Lovers, artists and physicians kill themselves. So do dentists and accountants and, occasionally, factory workers and field hands. Psychology explains the consequences of mental processes. It can also illuminate the circumstances that surround them.

As an individual, Phil Ochs was also a participant in a political culture. As such, his biography and his pathology also illuminate the boundaries of his political existence. These boundaries are both structural and ideological. Phil Ochs found himself in trouble partly because the American political system did not admit of alternatives to its policies and practices. Struggles against capitalism, racism and imperialism were difficult, dangerous and unlikely to succeed, at least to the degree that Phil Ochs wished them to succeed. Moreover, the protection of citizen rights, the rule of law and the adherence to democratic norms were far more fragile than he had imagined. Accordingly, it became more and more difficult to believe that his ideals could be fulfilled and the result was a measure of disillusionment that (despite hefty FBI files on him and countless other dissenters) crossed the border into paranoia.

"As we move into a fascist America which is coming in, in the seventies in a big way ... " he said, it became impossible to believe in the possibility of progress, which meant it was no longer possible to believe in Phil Ochs (P. Ochs, 1970). Coupled with his artistic troubles—a prolonged period of "writer's block"—and his several personal sources of emotional despair, his death became foreseeable, if not avoidable.

As a political problem, his is a case study in alienation as understood philosophically by radical commentators from Karl Marx to Antonio Gramsci, and from conservative commentators from Michael Oakeshott to George Grant. The problem is one of redemption and the solution must be configured in terms of practical action that can transform evident evil into at least the arithmetic alleviation of pain and the promise of further improvement. What Phil Ochs encountered, however, was the inherent inability of his own liberal ideology to define, confront and overcome the power relations extant in his own society. As a true believer, a true patriot, a person committed not only to progressive change but also to the mechanisms of change held out by his own society, it was not possible to survive in a culture that had captured his commitment but betrayed his ideals. His death can be explained partly in the language of deprivation.

Alternatives were absent and withdrawal was impossible. Having volunteered for service in the American submarine, he was lost when it sprung a leak and sunk.

A more ambitious explanation can also be developed from the insights of conservative thinkers. "Political philosophers," wrote Neal Wood, "are poets of salvation. Their creative talents have been directed toward showing how the political order can rescue man from the predicament in which he finds himself. The masterpiece touches the universal significance of the predicament. The political philosopher cuts through the facades of temporal political ferment to the soul of man seeking peace" (Wood, 1959, pp. 651-652). As such it makes a poor guide for practical action.

Practical politics, on the other hand, requires an attitude more akin to Max Weber's, who once described the political vocation as "the strong and slow boring of hard boards" for which songwriting, when it stands alone and does not motivate masses, can make only a soft drill (Weber, 1958, p. 128), or even to Albert Camus' who described the absurd labors of Sisyphus as "absurd," but insisted that Sisyphus was nonetheless "happy" (Camus, 1955, p. 91). This is in no way to disdain scathing criticism, nor is it to dismiss passionate pleas for moral regeneration. It is, however, to warn against what the ancient Greeks called hubris, the acknowledgement of limits—both natural and conventional—to what can be accomplished without losing our balance and becoming the victim of impossible moralism. This is also not to counsel a tawdry form of reconciliation to evil; the good man in an evil society is called to perform noble acts.

The problem for Phil Ochs was that his political philosophy no longer seemed able to rescue anyone, much less to supply peace; as for practical politics, his impatience with mere political palliatives that fail even to palliate made it impossible for him to be happy.

What matters, as a condition of sanity, is the capacity to distinguish between what Machiavelli called *virtù* and *fortuna*. Machiavelli, in a moment of disillusion commented that "the whole world is rotten" (Quoted in Wood, 1969). This perception does not, however, get us (or him) off the hook. In calmer moments, Machiavelli urged the recognition that much of life was governed by circumstances but that it was nonetheless possible to act resolutely, vigorously, courageously and with reason and foresight. Phil Ochs famously sang that ill fortune could destroy individuals and societies alike. What he may have mistaken is the kind of action that could make for mastery over misfortune. The leftist slogan that "freedom is the recognition of necessity" is apt, providing both that it is not taken to mean blind necessity, thus counseling quietism and that the understanding of necessity incorporates the examination of one's own ideological blinders (Engels, 1939, p. 125). For Phil Ochs, that would have meant the recognition of the degree to which he was intellectually beholden to precisely those fundamental American experiences and beliefs that produced the manifest evils (racism, imperialism but, significantly, not sexism) that he opposed. As it was, he succumbed to the excesses of

idealism in the form of a radicalized liberalism which stresses "individualism, voluntarism and moralism in its opposition to the hypocrisy of liberal politics but cannot provide 'dialectical' change and results in quietism or, worse, in terrorism." (Doughty, 1972). In the case of the American, it also promotes a bloated concept of the revolutionary power of art, false sentimentality, spontaneous anarchy and allows the activist to languish in the self-indulgent torment of depravity until the logical final step of self-destruction.

In messianic, exceptionalist American political culture, *virtù* and *fortuna* are conflated in what some have described as a "revolutionary compact" and others have called a "civic religion".² The defining event of American history is, of course, the War of Independence which, rhetorically, was an Oedipal assassination, a breaking with historical tradition, and an act of revolutionary zeal that required a spiritual as well as an ideological commitment to a new mythology, the "American way of life." The United States proudly conceives of itself as *sui generis*. It is premised on the self-creation of a new covenant that also conflates procedural and evaluative norms into a single liturgy that makes diversity (political, practical and philosophical) analogous to treason. The problem with such dogmatism is, of course, that principled criticism turns quickly into heresy and the penalty for heresy is banishment or death. The price for living in a "city on the hill" even (or perhaps especially) when "Liberty" is painted on its gate is, in terms of genuine freedom, ironically high.

Phil Ochs was among the finest that America could produce. He was, therefore, filled with the contradictions that America supplied and he died upon America's peculiar secular cross. Fueled by a faith in the American political process and its ostensibly pluralist structures and values, it was inconceivable that the moral majority of Americans would remain indifferent to evils perpetrated in their name if only they could be informed of the crimes and persuaded to come to the aid of the victims (or at least desist from supporting the victimizers). The idea that his songwriting could be a major factor in the educational process was an article of faith as well. Unfortunately, when some people spoke in, for example, the anti-war presidential campaigns of Senators McCarthy and Kennedy, they were not heard. Unfortunately, when other people worried about the legitimacy of the war and about domestic inequities, they were expertly deceived. As for the music, it appealed to the same devoted cadre of fans in 1968 that it had in 1964. The currency of martyrdom was, finally, the short change of anonymity.

So I turned to the land
 Where I'm so out of place
 Throw a curse on the plan
 In return for the grace
 To know where I stand
 Take everything I own
 Take your tap from my phone
 And leave my life alone
 My life alone.

"My Life" from *Rehearsals for Retirement* (1969)

In the end, Phil Ochs was so totally broken that he was transfigured into the kind of ally his antagonists could not have purchased: "God help the troubadour who tries to be a star" (Chords of Fame" from Phil Ochs' Greatest Hits, 1970).

For their ruthless criticism, I wish to thank colleagues Hugh Dow, Brian Flack and Michael Whealen. I also want to express admiration for some "boys from Ohio," Gregory Gaydos, Phil King and David Romer, and gratitude for his encouragement to Tim Scheurer, Review Editor of **Popular Music and Society** and Chair of English and Humanities at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, also in Ohio. For their reminiscences and recollections, I thank Eleanor Glor and Anne Johnston. Finally, I am grateful to Phil's sister Sonny for her insights, support and work to preserve and hold in trust the legacy of Phil Ochs, until we have come sufficiently of age to accept it. Since this is said to be within my power of clemency, I release all of them from responsibility for my errors of fact, interpretation and expression.

Endnotes

1. The list of singers who have tried their hand at recording Phil Ochs' songs is nonetheless both long and eclectic. They include such oddities as evangelical Christian Anita Bryant, Cher, the sublime Jello Biafra and the hideous Living Voices. The roll contains American folk singers from Eric Andersen, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, John Denver, the Limelighters, the Chad Mitchell Trio and the Smothers Brothers to Theo Bikel, Ronnie Gilbert, Holly Near, Pete Seeger and Dave Von Ronk. Arguably the best interpretive work was done by the duo, Jim and Jean (Jim Glover being Phil Ochs' old friend and fellow "Sundowner"). Theirs is, in my opinion, the best available version of Ochs' exceptional song, "Crucifixion." The roster also has places for Marianne Faithful and Melanie. Some Canadian performers who have put Ochs' songs on their albums are Ian and Sylvia, Gordon Lightfoot and Garnet Rogers. In Europe, there has been a single in Norwegian by Lillebjorn Nilsen and a three-volume German language set by Gerd Schinkel (Lieder von Phil Ochs). Prominent among the selections are two of Ochs' least overtly political songs, "Changes" and "There but for Fortune." There are dozens more and several singers, including Billy Bragg and Tom Paxton, have recorded their own tribute songs about Phil Ochs and what his life and death meant to them. Bob Dylan is not on any of the lists. A fairly complete inventory of covers is available at <http://dolphin.upenn.edu/~lapis/covers.html>.

2. A useful descriptive introduction to civil religion in America can be found on-line at http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/sherrill_indy.php. For a brief exposition on the distinction between the United States and Canada with respect to this issue, see W. L. Morton, **The Canadian Identity** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961, p. 85). Morton bases much of his analysis on the diverse writings of American historian Clinton Rossiter including **Seedtime of the Republic** (New York: Harcourt, 1953; **Political**

Thought of the American Revolution, revised edition (New York: Harcourt, 1963); and **The First American Revolution**, revised edition (New York: Harcourt, 1999).

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