

New Horizons in English Studies 9/2024

LITERATURE



Zhe Xiong

XIANGTAN UNIVERSITY, CHINA  
1536165678@QQ.COM  
[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0004-7095-2020](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7095-2020)

Quntao Wu

XIANGTAN UNIVERSITY, CHINA  
WQTO81878@XTU.EDU.CN  
[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0000-5870-2441](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5870-2441)

---

**Visualizing the Invisible: A Multimodal Analysis  
of How the *Blowin’ in the Wind* Picturebook  
Adaptation Interprets Abstract Song Themes<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract.** Multimodal literature can enhance the cross-cultural communication of classical music. Combining media, such as songs and picturebooks, artistic nuances not conveyed through music alone can be revealed, so that the audience can foster a deeper understanding of the original work’s cultural values and profound meanings. For example, Bob Dylan’s *Blowin’ in the Wind* was adapted into an English picturebook in 2011 and was introduced and translated into Chinese in 2018. The Chinese edition skillfully integrates music, illustrations, translations, and annotations to illuminate the song’s themes

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is sponsored by the Hunan Provincial Social Science Achievement Review Committee Research Project “Cultural Memory Construction of Bob Dylan’s Anti-war Songs” (No. XSP24YBC245), “Exploration of the Development Path for Top-Tier Foreign Language Undergraduate Programs in Local Comprehensive Universities in the Context of Emerging Liberal Arts,” a research and reform project under the New Liberal Arts initiative in Hunan Province (Department of Education of Hunan Province, [2021] No. 94), and Provincial-Level Chinese College Students’ Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program “Study on the Relations between Bob Dylan’s *Rough and Rowdy Ways* and American Counterculture Movement” (No. S202310530120).

of ideal values, fraternity, and Zen wisdom. Consequently, the readers' auditory, visual, and tactile senses are fully engaged, allowing them to develop a comprehensive and profound understanding of the song's subtle connotations.

**Keywords:** Bob Dylan, *Blowin' in the Wind*, picture book, multimodal integration

## I. Introduction

The term “mode” or “modality” carries two primary meanings. Firstly, it emphasizes the sense or multisensory experience of the recipient engaging with a sign. Modality is a perceptual process encompassing pictorial, visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile experiences, often intertwined in the act of perception (Forceville 2009, 22). Secondly, modality highlights the materiality of the sign itself. Gunther Kress (2010, 79) defines mode as:

“Mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication.”

Alison Gibbons (2012, 2) introduces the concept of multimodal literature, highlighting its formal features: unusual textual layouts and page design, varied typography, use of color in content, the realization of text to create images, as in concrete poetry, notes and critical voices, etc; multimodality is the coexistence of more than one semiotic mode within a certain context; people can experience a multimodal life via sight, sound, and movement (8). By harnessing the power of multimodality, literary communication breaks free from its constraints, enabling literature to permeate and enrich people's lives. Examining literature through a multimodal lens reveals that language, encompassing visual, auditory, and semantic dimensions, can generate rich multimodal experiences through performance and integration with various media (Zhang 2019, 151). Furthermore, multimodal literary communication operates not through didactic instruction but through a subtle, immersive process. Individuals observe images, read texts, and cognitively synthesize these experiences. This process exemplifies the effect of subtle yet profound influence (Yang 2023, 173). It is through the effective utilization of multimodal strategies in literary communication that literature can extend its reach and significance within our lives.

It's better to use “picturebook” instead of “picturebook” in terms of discussing a unique visual and literary art form represented by the book (Wolfenbarger and Sipe 2007, 273). Barbara Bader (1976, 1) has defined a picturebook as:

“A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and the drama of the turning of the page.”

In his definition of a picturebook, Perry Nodelman (1988) focuses on its multimodality: a picturebook is a multimodal, literary experience, where meaning is generated from the integration of written text, visual images, and the overall layout. Frank Serafini and Stephanie Reid (2022, 1) present three types of analytical frameworks for researching picturebooks as multimodal entities: social semiotic frameworks, literary frameworks, and artistic frameworks. These frameworks offer a rather holistic perspective of appreciating a picturebook.

Given that social semiotics, literature, and art are intertwined and inseparable in picturebook analysis, this paper will not treat them as separate entities when examining the picturebook adapted from Bob Dylan's song *Blowin' in the Wind*. Instead, the analysis will revolve around three themes embedded within the song: ideal values, fraternity, and Zen wisdom. Each theme will be elaborated through a comprehensive lens, integrating insights from an interpretation of the three frameworks mentioned above within the picturebook.

Regarding social semiotic analysis, Sipe (1998, 98-99) characterizes the relationship between written text and visual images in picturebooks as synergistic, arguing that the combined meaning surpasses what either semiotic system offers independently. Peter Pericles Trifonas (2002) applies traditional semiotic techniques to interpret the interplay of intramedia and intermedia elements within picturebooks. Bobbie Kabuto (2014), drawing on semiotic theory, outlines the various symbolic relationships (iconic, indexical, and symbolic) present in visual narratives. In terms of literary analysis, academics have adopted critical approaches rooted in multimodal discourse (Ledin and Machin, 2007) to broaden the understanding of how diverse forms of representation and communication function within specific social contexts. Many academics have taken picturebooks as a literary genre or format, focusing on narratological structures and how the relationship or interplay between visual, textual, and design components are presented (Nikolajeva, 2010; Sipe, 2012). In terms of artistic analysis, Evelyn Arizpe (2021) notes that the aesthetic function of picturebooks has been examined through various theoretical lenses, including art history, multimodality, and reader response studies. She also points out that academics have categorized areas of inquiry within picturebook studies, such as artistic elements, national and ethnic identity, and transmedia characteristics (267).

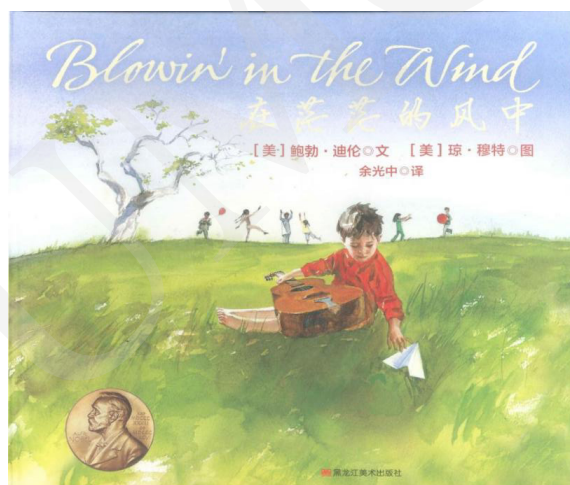
As demonstrated above, robust analyses of concepts such as modality, multimodality, picturebook, and picturebook analysis frameworks exist. Building upon existing multimodal literary theories and picturebook analysis methods, this paper will explore how the picturebook adaptation of *Blowin' in the Wind* artfully integrates modalities such as music, illustrations, translations, and annotations. This paper will demonstrate how the picturebook multidimensionally interprets and represents the song's idealism, fraternity, and Zen wisdom, engaging the reader's auditory, visual, and tactile senses to foster a comprehensive and profound understanding of the song.

## II. Introduction to the Song *Blowin' in the Wind* and its PictureBook Adaptation

Written in 1962 by American musician Bob Dylan (1941- ), the song, *Blowin' in the Wind*, garnered significant attention for its anti-war message and poetic expression. The song shone in the protest movements, such as on August 28, 1963, during the March on Washington, Peter, Paul and Mary sang the song on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in front of around 250,000 people. The trio and the listeners believed that they could make America more generous and compassionate in a nonviolent way (Margotin and Guesdon 2015, 51). The scene in the 1994 film *Forrest Gump* where Jenny performed the song has become iconic for countless moviegoers. Despite its widespread circulation through various media, including music, film, and poetry collections, *Blowin' in the Wind* lacked a medium to represent its profound message visually. This changed in 2011 when Jon J. Muth, a Caldecott Medal-winning author and illustrator known for his work with ink and wash painting and Zen philosophy, collaborated with renowned music critic and Dylanologist Greil Marcus to create a picturebook adaptation of *Blowin' in the Wind*. Muth provided illustrations and illustrator's notes for the picturebook, while Marcus contributed a brief comment on the song and its adaptation. The English edition of the *Blowin' in the Wind* picturebook was met with enthusiastic responses. On Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/Blowin-Wind-Bob-Dylan/dp/1402780028>), readers praised its intergenerational appeal, "This is a wonderful book for adults and children to share...I'm keeping this copy for myself and buying more for my nieces." Others highlighted its suitability for mature audiences: "This book was purchased for my mother as an early Christmas present as she collects Bob Dylan memorabilia," and "I would not consider it a children's book...I do think that this book would be more understood and appreciated by a mature audience."

Bob Dylan was first introduced to China in 1966 by the influential state-run newspaper, *People's Daily*. The publication recognized him as an "anti-war figure" and translated excerpts of his song *Masters of War*, marking Dylan's entry into China. Influenced by both the prevailing anti-war sentiment within China and the introduction of *People's Daily*, the Chinese public became particularly familiar with Dylan's songs themed on anti-war campaigns and social equality (Han 2022, 113-14). Among his many anti-war songs, *Blowin' in the Wind*, with its poetic language and profound reflections on sociopolitical issues, resonated deeply with Chinese audiences, making it Dylan's most widely circulated song in China (Lei and Wu 2022, 81). It has been included in Chinese anthologies of Western poetry (Yuan 1991, 129), inspired Chinese musicians like Luo Dayou and Wang Feng, and influenced the works of poets like Yu Kwang-chung (Liu 2019, 192-193). Following the release of the series of picturebooks adapted from Bob Dylan's songs in Western countries, the collection, including *Blowin' in the Wind* picturebook, was introduced to China in 2018 (Picture 1). The Chinese version of the picturebook was translated by the renowned poet and trans-

lator Yu Kwang-chung, titled “在茫茫的风中” (which means “Lost in the Wind”)<sup>2</sup>. To preserve the original layout, the translation appears at the end of the book. This picturebook, along with adaptations of four other Dylan songs<sup>3</sup>, forms a series accompanied by a booklet providing Chinese readers with a brief introduction to Dylan and the picturebooks. Although initially marketed as a children’s book in China, the Chinese version of the *Blowin' in the Wind* picturebook has resonated with adults as well, who appreciate it alongside children and even write reflections explaining how Dylan’s works have influenced Yu Kwang-chung, sharing their interpretations as if the book were tailored for them ([https://www.sohu.com/a/312120186\\_488402](https://www.sohu.com/a/312120186_488402)). Chinese grown-ups’ enthusiasm for the picturebook demonstrates that it appeals to many adults in China and Western countries. Therefore, this paper will focus on analyzing how the picturebook utilizes multimodalities to reinterpret the essence of the classic song, rather than solely examining its implications for children’s education.



(Picture 1)

<sup>2</sup> The quoted lyrics, translation, pictures, and notes of *Blowin' in the Wind* picturebook in the paper are all from Dylan, Bob. 2018. *Blowin' in the Wind*, illustrated by Joan Mutter, trans. Yu Kwang-chung. Harbin: Heilongjiang Fine Arts Press. This paper focuses on analyzing the Chinese edition of the picturebook.

<sup>3</sup> A brief introduction to the other four picturebooks: *Forever Young* expresses the expectation for children to develop the moral qualities of friendliness, equality, and sincerity; *Man Gave Names to All the Animals* shows 170 kinds of animals, and demonstrates the characteristics of each variety of animal, which can help children to feel the beauty of nature and respect every living creature’s right to survive; *If Dogs Run Free* depicts the scene in which dogs are running care-free on the plains, echoing Dylan’s desire for freedom; *If Not For You* centers around a series of warm daily lives of two spotted dogs, showcasing the joys of peaceful family life and expressing Dylan’s thoughts on nature, society, history, and marriage.

### III. Calling for Ideal Values

Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind* expresses a yearning for a range of ideal values, embodying a universal desire for world peace, individual maturity, and freedom with equality. The picturebook vividly brings these aspirations to life for Chinese readers, visually translating the song's inherent ideals, values, and beliefs through carefully designed images, scenes, text, and layout.

#### (i) Opposing War and Advocating Peace

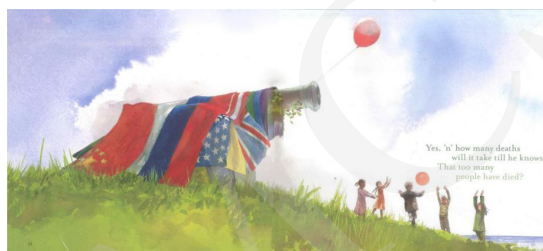
The song's most recognized and essential value is the appeal for peace, "Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly/ Before they're forever banned?" and "Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows/ That too many people have died?" Dylan poses these thought-provoking questions, prompting reflection on the immense cost of war and violence. How much destruction and death must humanity endure before recognizing the paramount importance of peace and taking action to end needless conflict and bloodshed? Dylan uses flying shells to symbolize war and endorses the beautiful hope of ending the conflicts between human beings and pursuing permanent peace. Indeed, the entire song relates to fundamental questions about freedom, justice, and compassion. Dylan presents these as universal concerns with elusive answers, much like whispers carried by the wind. However, he also believes that the answers are deeply rooted in people's hearts and the conscience of society, worthy of everyone's serious consideration. Through his heartfelt, appealing lyrics, Dylan tries to inspire his listeners to think about these critical issues that shape our shared future. By drawing inspiration from the realities of the world, *Blowin' in the Wind* showcases Dylan's artistic talent and sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility resonates with countless individuals, inspiring them to strive for a more harmonious and just society.

Muth uses two powerful pictures (Pictures 2 and 3) to echo Dylan's poignant questions. In Picture 2, two children stand with their backs to a cannon, holding a red balloon and red flowers. These objects, symbolic of joy and childhood innocence, starkly contrast with the rusty, grass-covered cannon, a relic of past conflicts. Picture 3 employs a similar composition, but the cannon is now draped with flags of various nations, its muzzle adorned with the red balloon. Nearby, children of diverse races happily engage in a game of ball. This juxtaposition of contrasting imagery – symbols of peace and happiness alongside those of war and destruction – creates a powerful visual impact, mirroring the song's plea for peace and a condemnation of violence. The contrasting imagery highlights Muth's adeptness at visual rhetoric, particularly symbolism and metaphor. He masterfully balances realism with evocative imagery, prompting readers to decipher the symbolic layers embedded within the illustrations. Furthermore, Muth employs visual repetition, mirroring the song's use of repetition: The two pictures, on pages 10-11 and 24-25 respectively, create a hypertextual link, reiterating the themes of war and peace throughout the song. This visual echo reinforces the picturebook's ability to convey the profound message at the heart of Dylan's lyrics.





(Picture 2)



(Picture 3)

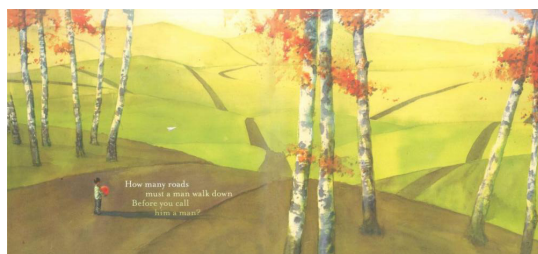
Yu Kwang-chung's translation captures the essence of Dylan's lyrics, retaining their poetic impact while resonating with Chinese audiences. He renders the corresponding lines as: “是啊，炮弹要发射多少次/才会被永远禁止？”“是啊，到底要死掉多少人/他才知道死人已不计？”The use of “炮弹” as the key image in this line, though means “shells” instead of the original “cannonballs” in English, better fits Chinese people's speaking habits and highlights the song's references to war and death in Chinese. The poetic features of *Blowin' in the Wind* are embedded in the small but meaningful images, serving as metaphors, to achieve a situation where “profound meaning within limited words” (Yu 2003, 11). Yu's translation deliberately preserves this quality by rendering key images like doves, shells, and wind, ensuring that Chinese readers can appreciate the song's poetic beauty and anti-war message. Additionally, the translation of “that too many people have died” as “死人已不计” surpasses the literal translation of “很多” in its conciseness and intensity. The expression “不计,” or “countless,” is derived from the expression “不计其数,” which indicates that the mortality is far beyond counting. “不计” emphasizes the overwhelming number of casualties, conveying a more profound sense of devastation than “很多” and amplifying Dylan's condemnation of war's brutality.

### (ii) Heading Toward independence and maturity

The song describes individuals' quest for independence and maturity: “How many roads must a man walk down/ Before you call him a man?” This line resonates with Dylan's career. In his early days, he drew inspiration from folk music and literary masterpieces. From them, he learned allegory, parable, symbol, metaphor, Biblical allusion,

style, and syntax mixed with commonplace language and folklore (Shelton 1987, 389). Gradually, he forged a unique style that merged popular music with high art, earning him critical acclaim and a devoted following in the society. This transition from imitation to originality mirrors the song's exploration of personal growth and societal expectations. Dylan's lyrics appeal to listeners, evoking a sense of life as a journey, prompting contemplation on individual development, societal recognition, and the human condition.

In Picture 4, a young boy stands at the bottom left corner, dwarfed by the towering trees that Muth deliberately elongates. Before him, a wide path stretches into several routes, winding through vibrant green fields and stretching towards a distant horizon. Muth guides readers' attention to follow along these paths, drawing it from the boy to the expansive landscape beyond. As readers' horizons are broadened, they receive a hint of Muth's visual artistry: the road ahead is full of hope. Muth's meticulous attention to the skillful use of color further enhances this effect. The boy with his ball, the diverging paths, the sturdy trees, the sprawling meadow, and the lush foliage all contribute to a palpable sense of depth and dimension. The warm, bright hues of green, orange, and red, balanced by touches of brown, create a subtle interplay of light and shadow, inviting the reader to play a mind game – imagine the boy's journey: overcoming obstacles, pursuing dreams, and experiencing the wonders of the world. The picturebook dexterously transforms a philosophical question posed by the song into a relaxing, thought-provoking game for each reader. This apparent rebellion against the original lyrics reinforces the song's deeper exploration of life's journey, creating a space for contemplation without imposing a rigid interpretation. This exemplifies the dynamic tension between image and text in our visual-oriented age. As it has been argued (Yu and Bao, 2023, 547), while images may seem to “negate literature in form and representation,” they can also “echo literary meaning by achieving aesthetic expression and narrative legitimacy.” Through the evocative pictures, readers are prompted to ponder the meaning of growing up and how to navigate life's challenges while remaining true to their ideals and aspirations.



(Picture 4)

Yu Kwang-chung's translation of this line is “一个人要走多少路/你才会认他是一个人?” The Chinese character “认” (“acknowledge”) better matches the original meaning of this line than the Chinese character “称” (“call”). Firstly, “认” encompasses the verbal affirmation of “称” while also conveying a deeper sense of acceptance



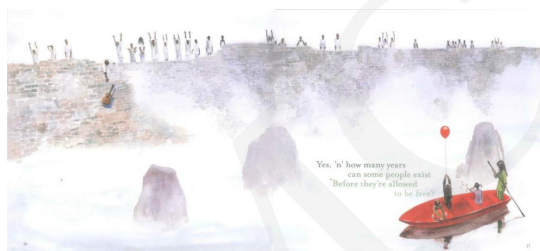
and validation from the speaker, implying that the person being referred to is recognized as an individual of self-reliance in the true sense. Secondly, the score of the song uses an ascending tone when Dylan sings “call,” which makes the word sound vibrant and high-pitched. Another reason why Yu translates “call” as “认,” is that the higher pitch of the fourth tone of the Chinese language appears to be resonant and powerful and corresponds to the rising pitch of the original tune so that the translation can preserve the rhythm and the strength of the song. This translation approach aligns with Chinese song translator Xue Fan’s emphasis on maintaining rhythmic integrity in song translation. According to Xue (Qin 2019, 104-5), when translating a song, translators should pay attention to the sense of rhythm, i.e., the translated words should align with the original tune; the translated lyrics complement the original melody and tone. Yu’s translation, therefore, conveys the song’s exploration of societal recognition and the pursuit of independence, both in terms of meaning and musicality.

### (iii) Advocating Freedom and Equality

In the second half of the song, Dylan asks, “Yes, ’n’ how many years can some people exist/ Before they’re allowed to be free?” This line alludes to the Civil Rights Movement for freedom and equality. Black musicians at the time deeply related to *Blowin’ in the Wind*, recognizing its ability to awaken souls numbed by cultural oppression (Liu, Zhu, and Fan 2020, 132). The corresponding picture (Picture 5) depicts children in a red boat, floating on a mist-shrouded lake towards a towering wall. Atop the wall stands a line of black individuals clad in white. The pervasive mist, obscuring the view beyond the wall, mirrors the song’s questioning of the future of freedom and equality. However, the figures on the wall stand tall and resolute, embodying the unwavering spirit of those fighting for their rightful place in society. The visual language employed in this picture captures Muth’s faith in humanity’s pursuit of freedom and equality. This is not the first instance of picturebooks serving as platforms for advocating for the protection of political rights. Dudek (2018, 363), for example, analyzed the interplay of politics and representation in the Australian picturebooks of immigration, arguing that the most successful ones help to redress what appears to be a lack of compassion in Australian politics regarding refugees and asylum seekers.

This part of the picturebook, referencing the American Civil Rights Movement, assumes a certain level of historical and cultural knowledge from the readers. However, beyond scholars and history enthusiasts, the average readers might lack the background information necessary for a nuanced understanding, nor may they have the time or resources to delve into independent research. This is where the critic’s notes appended to the picturebook, as part of its multimodal approach, play a crucial role in bridging the knowledge gap. In his notes, Marcus contextualizes the song within the tumultuous sociopolitical landscape of the 1960s: a period marked by social movements, disenfranchisement, and civil unrest. He elucidates the song’s themes of civil rights, highlighting Dylan’s plea for peace, independence, and freedom. These textual

additions provide readers with the necessary background to grasp Dylan's message, allowing them to connect with the pictures on a deeper level, envision the sacrifices made in the pursuit of equality, and appreciate the ongoing struggle for these values. The multimodal fusion of song lyrics, illustrations, and critical commentary transforms the song's social commentary into a tangible and accessible experience. This multifaceted approach fosters a deeper understanding of the song's message of hope and resilience, inspiring readers to value and uphold the ideals of freedom and equality.



(Picture 5)

In the picturebook, Yu Kwang-chung's translation of the line reads, “是啊，有些人要活多少年/才会准他们自由走动？” This represents a thoughtful revision of his earlier translation from 1971, published in *Modern Poetry and Rock and Roll*, which rendered the line as: “那些人究竟要活上几年/才能够得到释放？” (Yu 2003, 42) The revised translation demonstrates a greater emphasis on preserving both the song's melody and its nuanced meaning. The original line can be divided into three parts: “Yes, 'n'” serves as an introductory interjection; “How many years can some people exist” describes a state of being; and “Before they're allowed to be free?” poses the central question. While the initial translation omits the first part and jumps directly to the description of existence, the revised version retains “Yes, 'n'” and its accompanying pause, aligning the translated text more closely with the song's rhythm and conveying the singer's emotional cues. In translating “some people,” Yu's revised version opts for the more general term “有些人” instead of the more specific “那些人” (“those people”) used in his earlier translation. While the initial rendering seemingly refers to Black people, the revised version broadens the scope to encompass all individuals whose freedom is compromised, thus resonating with a wider audience.

Furthermore, the translation of the pivotal word “free” undergoes a significant shift. The initial rendering, “释放,” carries a dual meaning of “to release from confinement” and “to discharge or emit (a substance or energy)” (Dictionary of Language Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 2016, 1199). Compared to the revised translation, “自由走动” (moving freely), “释放” carries a heavier connotation, potentially leading listeners to envision a group of incarcerated criminals yearning for release. In contrast, “自由走动” conveys a broader sense of being restricted in one's movements and actions, aligning more closely with the song's call for fundamental democratic rights like liberty and fairness.

#### IV. Mirroring the Fraternity

As early as 1795, German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (2016, 14-15) argued in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* that some individuals, like small, isolated fragments, often become the impress of their occupations, lacking empathy and compassion for others. This, he believed, hindered the attainment of their harmony. Schiller's prescient observation aligns with today's society, where self-preservation often overshadows genuine concern for others. People struggle to truly empathize with the suffering and struggles of their fellow human beings, sometimes even reducing them to mere entertainment or laughing-stock for casual conversation. Instead of prioritizing personal interest, Schiller urged for people's compassion, encouraging individuals to treat others with the same care and concern as they would their families, sharing joys and sorrows. Only through such empathy and interconnectedness, he believed, could individuals transcend their isolation and form harmony for all, as envisioned by Schiller, could be realized.

Marcus (2022, 5) argues that "the engine of his (Dylan's) songs is empathy: the desire and ability to enter other lives." His argument explains why, in *Blowin' in the Wind*, Dylan interrogates people's lack of fraternity: "Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head/ And pretend that he just doesn't see?" He further challenges listeners with the question: "Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have/ Before he can hear people cry?" These rhetorical questions, unified by the recurring phrase "how many," create a powerful sense of urgency and indictment. They serve as a wake-up call, jolting individuals out of their indifference and exposing the hypocrisy of those who claim to care for humanity while prioritizing self-interest.

Considering the features of the picturebook as a paper medium, Muth feels it inappropriate to present Dylan's pungent questions through the pictures directly. Therefore, he employs a workaround: using children's activities to convey the song's message. Muth seems to have recognized the thematic connection between the two quoted verses, visually linking them through a heartwarming story of childhood compassion depicted across four pages (pages 18-23). (While the pictures and lyrics on pages 20-21 relate to Dylan's social commentary, analyzing them alongside the other two pages creates a more cohesive narrative flow.) Pages 18-19 depict a red boat drifting on a lake. A young boy leans over the edge, playing with the water. Beside him lies his red ball, while behind him, a guitar floats on the lake. Two pages later, we see a young girl holding the same guitar. This non-linear storytelling reveals the guitar's owner. In the third picture, the girl weeps, distraught over her water-damaged instrument. The boy, in a gesture of empathy, offers her his red ball as comfort. While the song doesn't narrate a specific story, Muth leverages the visual modality, skillfully employing composition and sequencing to guide readers in imagining a micro-narrative. Drawing upon their interpretive abilities and social understanding, readers are invited to envision the following scenario: a young girl cherishes her guitar. One day, while strolling by the lake, she accidentally drops it into the water. A boy, playing with his ball in a nearby boat, hears her cry for help and tries to

retrieve the guitar. Unfortunately, it is damaged beyond repair. Seeing the girl's dismay, the boy offers her his ball as a gesture of comfort and empathy. When considering students' comprehension of stories, picturebooks make it possible to present pictures and text at the same time, which allows students to process the information through the visual channel and the verbal channel. Although the song lacks a narrative, Muth's carefully crafted pictures enable readers to engage their imaginations actively, piecing together this small but powerful story of human connection and kindness. Picturebooks allow people to process information and present stories via visual and verbal channels (Laragueta and Ceballos-Viro 2018, 81). While sharing the stories, people are participating in social interaction. As American sociology professor Morrie Schwartz emphasized in his twelve lessons with his student Mitch Albom, engaging in meaningful communication, fostering connection, and strengthening social bonds are all expressions of love and care for humanity (Albom 1997).

The boundless lake and sprawling forest in the pictures evoke a sense of vastness and freedom, inviting readers into a world crafted by image and text. These minimalist pictures, with their limited elements, amplify the prominence of the characters' actions and the story's central theme. Readers are drawn to the boy's gesture of offering his ball, prompting reflection on human kindness and the deeper meaning behind this simple act. Muth's message is conveyed subtly: to show rather than to tell. This gentle, non-didactic approach is characteristic of multimodal literature's ability to engage readers on multiple levels (Yang 2023, 173). The narrative in the picturebook emphasizes empathy and support in times of need, transcending racial, religious, cultural, and geographical differences—one of the core values of Dylan's message of universal love. However, the picturebook avoids harsh critiques or preachy pronouncements. Instead, it immerses readers in a visually captivating world, allowing them to experience the intrinsic rewards of helping others. This subtle approach encourages compassion and consideration for others, fostering a sense of social responsibility. Muth's strategic adaptation, while seemingly softening the raw emotion and potency of Dylan's lyrics, masterfully transforms a sharp critique into a gentle nudge. By minimizing direct social commentary, which could potentially alienate some audiences, Muth preserves the picturebook's charm while prompting readers to contemplate the complexities of human interaction and the importance of empathy.

Yu Kwang-chung's translation complements the nuanced intentions of Dylan and Muth. The second verse, describing the plight of the ignored masses, uses the verb "cry." However, Yu chooses to translate this as "呼喊," meaning "to call out," rather than "哭泣," which specifically denotes "to cry." This choice highlights the act of vocalization with the intent to be heard, emphasizing the desired impact on the listener. Yu's deliberate selection reflects his aim to "arouse widespread public concern" and "call more people to take action" (Lei and Wu 2022, 93). As the song seeks to galvanize social action by confronting societal realities, Yu's translation echoes Dylan's call for change. Furthermore, it aligns with Muth's workaround, allowing readers to appreciate the artist's efforts to promote empathy, compassion, and a spirit of universal love.

## V. Highlighting Zen wisdom

Zen scholar and socio-cultural psychologist Steven Heine (2009, xv) points out that both Dylan and Zen masters begin seeking spiritual liberation by provoking anguish, suffering, and torment of human existence. In *Blowin' in the Wind*, each verse concludes with the same refrain after posing three poignant questions, "The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind/ The answer is blowin' in the wind." This repetition has often been misconstrued as evasion or ambiguity. However, it embodies Eastern Zen wisdom – a deliberate "unsaying" – encouraging listeners to transcend the concrete realities and seek more profound, universally applicable answers through introspection, reflection, or meditation. As Alan Watts states in *The Way of Zen* (1989, 120), the power of thought takes people away from the thing itself, because "the idea is much comprehensible than the reality, the symbols so much more stable than the fact." The ample space for interpretation within the song suggests Dylan's intent to encourage listeners to move beyond concrete facts and engage with the symbols presented. The deep-rooted societal issues addressed, ones that have long plagued America, defy simple solutions within the confines of a three-minute song. Moreover, by refraining from providing explicit answers, Dylan invites listeners from diverse backgrounds and social strata to contemplate the questions themselves, fostering dialogue and understanding. As the music plays, listeners' thoughts, like paper airplanes caught in the wind, are guided by the song on a journey toward their answers.

The picturebook demonstrating a keen understanding of Dylan's deliberate use of "unsaying" as a form of Zen wisdom, provides ample space for reader interpretation. Muth, himself a student of Zen, masterfully visualizes the song's central refrain, "The answer is blowin' in the wind," through the recurring motif of paper airplanes flying in the air. Zen picturebooks are characteristically minimalist and profound, employing only essential text and imagery, leaving ample room for personal interpretation. Occasionally, to enhance accessibility and understanding, painters provide notes, guiding readers toward key elements. While the song and pictures convey their message implicitly through a shared, imagined world, Muth's notes offer explicit direction, bridging the gap between creator and audience. His notes stress the paper planes in the book. He compares the planes to the "answers" in the wind, believing that the planes, as a carrier of the meaning of the lyrics, can be found everywhere and that they serve as a visual metaphor, making it possible for children to understand the song (Dylan 2016, 28). The paper airplanes gliding through the pages symbolize not only freedom of thought but also the pervasive nature of the sought-after answers. After reading Muth's notes, readers are encouraged to revisit the book, tracing the airplanes' journey across different scenes. Such action is the interaction between the readers and the book and is the product of a multimodal arrangement (Grishakova and Ryan 2010, 300). This interactive element enhances the picturebook's appeal and uniqueness, lending a sense of re-readability to a narrative that initially lacks a certain plot. Beyond enhancing engagement and enjoyment, the paper airplanes serve as visual cues, guiding readers toward a deeper understanding of the



book's message. Their arrow-like shape functions as a directional vector, subtly influencing the reading experience. Within the context of multimodal literacy, these vectors, with their inherent dynamism and directionality, play a crucial role in guiding readers' gaze and interpretation. Paper airplanes on the left-hand page naturally lead the eye from left to right, following the conventional reading direction. Conversely, those on the right-hand page might prompt readers to envision the planes' trajectory from left to right, encouraging them to retrace their gaze and reread from the left. This visual cue can even translate into a tactile experience, as readers might unconsciously trace the airplanes' paths with their fingers. As eyes and fingers follow these subtle arrows across the expansive sky depicted on the double-page spreads, readers are invited to embrace the boundless nature of imagination, contemplate the elusive answers "blowin' in the wind," and ultimately connect with the profound Zen wisdom embedded within the pictures.

Furthermore, when the paper airplanes and lyrics are positioned on opposite pages, readers are prompted to consider the order in which they engage with these elements: prioritize capturing the visual or deciphering the textual. In this case, there is a tension between the verbal and visual modes, an effect that can be described as an "intra-medial multimodal effect" (Grishakova and Ryan 2010, 298). This tension encourages readers to actively engage with the overall composition, prompting them to uncover hidden layers of meaning and delve deeper into the painter's intentions. Muth complements the paper plane imagery with ample negative space, a technique that draws attention to specific compositional elements, emphasizing the image's meaning and thematic significance. This minimalist aesthetic aligns with the purity and simplicity inherent in Zen philosophy, resonating with contemporary artistic sensibilities. By observing the pictures, readers are subtly transported into an imaginative realm, joining the children in launching paper airplanes that might carry the answers and watching them fly into the sky. The visual climax of the book occurs in the picture accompanying the song's final verse, where a multitude of paper airplanes grace the sky, symbolizing humanity's collective effort to seek solutions and embrace a shared destiny. Through the simplification of compositional elements and the strategic emphasis on the paper airplane motif, Muth delivers a powerful call to action, leaving a lasting impact on the reader.

Yu Kwang-chung's translation captures the elusive and enigmatic nature of the answers presented in the song, as well as Dylan's complex feelings toward their ambiguity and unattainability. Yu renders the pivotal phrase "blowin' in the wind" as "在茫茫的风中," which may be translated back to "lost in the wind." While these alternative translations acknowledge the song's Zen-like quality and the inherent difficulty in finding definitive answers, opting to translate "blowin'" as "飘" or "飘荡" based on its literal meaning, Yu takes a different approach. He skillfully incorporates the sense of elusiveness conveyed by "飘" into the adjective "茫茫," omitting the verb altogether. This subtle shift implies that although the answers may exist somewhere in the vast world, our search might prove futile. What lingers in the wind might be the echo of



unanswered questions or, paradoxically, the answers we seek, waiting to be discovered anew with each subsequent inquiry.

Additionally, the paper airplanes, a recurring motif throughout the picturebook, rely on the wind's support to defy gravity and fly in the air. While the wind remains invisible within the pictures, its presence is made palpable through the paper airplanes' movement – a testament to their symbiotic relationship. On the book's cover, the title "Blowin' in the Wind" is curlicue, while the Chinese translation, "在茫茫的风中," is set in running-regular script. The inherent fluidity of these typefaces complements the words "blowin'" and "wind," as well as the phrase "茫茫的风中," respectively. This visual choice harmonizes with the cover's imagery of swaying trees, a poised paper airplane, and children's wind-blown hair, creating a captivating visual experience. Although the translation "在茫茫的风中" deviates slightly from the original song's wording, it preserves its poetic essence and underlying message. It suggests that while the answers might not be readily apparent, they do exist. This approach reinforces the song's message of hope and beautifully complements Muth's carefully crafted paper airplane imagery, inviting readers to delve into the book and embark on their quest for meaning. This interplay exemplifies the profound interconnectedness between visual and textual modalities in multimodal storytelling.

## VI. Conclusion

According to German anthropologist Ernst Cassirer (2021, 25), humanity has been so enveloped in linguistic forms and artistic images that it cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. Language, in particular, enables us to describe, experience, and, ultimately, shape the world around us. In *Blowin' in the Wind*, the convergence of poetic lyricism and upbeat folk music ignites a timeless flame, offering warmth and illumination across generations. Through countless renditions and interpretations, this song, initially categorized as a protest song, has transcended its origins to embody universal values of peace, independence, and freedom. It carries the weight of human compassion, expressed by each artist who has embraced it, and through its subtle, Zen-like wisdom, it provides spiritual guidance for those navigating life's complexities, offering solace and strength in times of adversity. The *Blowin' in the Wind* picturebook utilizes a multimodal approach, seamlessly weaving together song, pictures, translation, and commentary to convey and amplify the original song's abstract values, boundless compassion, and inherent Zen wisdom. This multifaceted presentation evokes profound emotions and sustained reflection in readers, subtly nurturing their aesthetic sensibilities and moral character throughout their engagement with the book. Ultimately, it encourages readers to transcend the limitations of individualism and strive for harmonious coexistence and collective progress toward a brighter future.

## References

- Albom, Mitch. 1997. *Tuesday with Morrie*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Amazon. 2011. *Blowin' in the Wind*. Accessed August 28, 2024. <https://www.amazon.com/Blow-in-Wind-Bob-Dylan/dp/1402780028>.
- Arizpe, Evelyn. 2021. "The State of the Art in Picturebook Research From 2010 to 2020". *Language Arts*, 98(5), 260-272. doi: 10.58680/la202131213.
- Bader, Barbara. 1976. *American Picturebooks From Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 2021. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Dictionary of Language Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 2016. *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Dudek, Debra. 2018. "Seeing the human face: Refugee and asylum seeker narratives and an ethics of care in recent Australian picture books". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 43(4), 363–76. doi: 10.1353/chq.2018.0044.
- Dylan, Bob. 2018. *Blowin' in the Wind*, illustrated by Joan Mutter, trans. Yu Kwang-chung. Harbin: Heilongjiang Fine Arts Press.
- Forceville, Charles. 2009. "Non-Verbal and Multimodal Metaphor in a Cognitivist Framework: Agendas for Research." in *Multimodal Metaphor*, ed. Charles Forceville and Eduardo Urios-Aparisi, 19-42. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Gibbons, Alison. 2012. *Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Grishakova, Marina, and Ryan, Marie-Laure, ed. 2010. *Intermediality and Storytelling*. New York: De Gruyter.
- Han, Bangwen. 2022. "The Introduction of Bob Dylan by *People's Daily* in 1966". *Cultural Studies*, no. 1, pp. 112-24.
- Heine, Steven. 2009. *Bargainin' for Salvation: Bob Dylan, a Zen Master?* New York: Continuum.
- Kabuto, Bobbie. 2014. "A Semiotic Perspective on Reading Picture Books: The Case of Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse". *Linguistics and Education* 25(1): 12-23. doi: 10.1016/j.linged.2013.11.002.
- Kress, Gunther. 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Larragueta, Marta, and Ceballos-Viro, Ignacio. 2018. "What Kind of Book? Selecting Picture Books for Vocabulary Acquisition". *The Reading Teacher*, 72(1), 81-87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1681>.
- Ledin, Per, and David Machin. 2007. *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Lei, Zhaoli, and Wu, Quntao. 2022. "The translation normalization of classical song-poems: A case study of the Chinese translations of *Blowin' in the Wind*". *Journal of Translation History*, no. 5, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, pp. 80-98+181.

- Liu, Huoxiong. 2019. *The Long Journey: A Study on the Publication and Dissemination of Nobel Prize-winning Works in China*. Nanjing: Nanjing UP.
- Liu, Ying, Zhu, Yuan, and Fan, Wenjuan, ed. 2020. *English Songs and Contemporary American Culture*. Xi'an: Xi'an Jiaotong UP.
- Marcus, Greil. 2022. *Folk Music: A Bob Dylan Biography in Seven Songs*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Margotin, Philippe and Guesdon, Jean-Michel. 2015. *Bob Dylan All the Songs: The Story Behind Every Track*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. 2010. "Interpretive codes and implied readers of children's literature." in *New Directions in Picturebook Research*, ed. Teresa Colomer, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, and Cecilia Silva-Díaz, 27-40. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Nodelman, Perry. 1988. *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Qin, Jun. 2019. "Song Translation: A Special Form of Translation: Interview with Song Translator Mr. Xue Fan". *Chinese Translators Journal*, no. 6, pp. 103-08. doi: 1000-873X (2019) 06-0103-06.
- Schiller, Friedrich. 2012. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Yucheng Zhang. Nanjing: Yilin Press.
- Serafini, Frank, and Reid, Stephanie F. 2022. "Analyzing Picturebooks: Semiotic, Literary, and Artistic Frameworks". *Visual Communication*, 0(0): 1-21. doi:10.1177/14703572211069623.
- Shelton, Robert. 1987. *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sipe, Lawrence R. 1998. "How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships". *Children's Literature in Education* 29(2): 97-108. doi: 10.1023/A:1022459009182.
- Sipe, Lawrence R. 2012. "Revisiting the Relationships Between Text and Pictures". *Children's Literature in Education* 43(4): 4-21. doi: 10.1007/s10583-011-9153-0.
- Tree Fish. 2019. *The Answer is Blowing in the Wind. One Poet Calls to Another, and a Child Gives the Reply*. Accessed August 27, 2024. [https://www.sohu.com/a/312120186\\_488402](https://www.sohu.com/a/312120186_488402).
- Trifonas, Peter Pericles. 2002. "Semiosis and the Picture-Book: On Method and Crossmedial Relation of Lexical and Visual Narrative Texts". *Applied Semiotics* 4(11/12): 181-202. [https://www.academia.edu/4822274/Semiosis\\_and\\_the\\_Picture\\_Book\\_On\\_Method\\_and\\_the\\_Cross\\_medial\\_Relation\\_of\\_Lexical\\_and\\_Visual\\_Narrative\\_Texts](https://www.academia.edu/4822274/Semiosis_and_the_Picture_Book_On_Method_and_the_Cross_medial_Relation_of_Lexical_and_Visual_Narrative_Texts).
- Watts, Alan. 1989. *The Way of Zen*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Wolfenbarger, Carol Driggs, and Sipe, Lawrence R. 2007. "A Unique Visual and Literary Art Form: Recent Research on Picturebooks." *Language Arts*, 83(3): 273-280. [https://www.academia.edu/921922/A\\_Unique\\_Visual\\_and\\_Literary\\_Art\\_Form\\_Recent\\_Research\\_on\\_Picturebooks](https://www.academia.edu/921922/A_Unique_Visual_and_Literary_Art_Form_Recent_Research_on_Picturebooks).
- Yang, Xiao. 2023. "'Hybrid Text' and the Multimodal Propagation of Literature". *Foreign Literature*, no. 4, pp. 165-75. doi: 10.16430/j.cnki.fl.2023.04.005.
- Yuan, Kejia, ed. 1991. *Anthology of Ten Modern European and American Poetry Schools*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Yu, Kwang-chung. 2003. *On Poetry by Yu Kwang-chung*. Nanchang: Jiangxi Universities and Colleges Press.

Yu, Zihan, and Bao, Yuanfu. 2023. *The Evolution of Cross-media Literature and Its Production and Communication*. Beijing: People's Publishing.

Zhang, Haochen. 2019. "Multimodality: A new dimension of the study on literary meanings." *Journal of Central South University (Social Sciences)*, no. 5, pp. 151-58. doi: 10.11817/j.issn.1672-3104.2019.05.019.