Masters of War
Bob Dylan

Come you masters of war
You that build all the guns
You that build the death planes
You that build the big bombs
5
You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks
I just want you to know
I can see through your masks

You that never done nothin'
10 But build to destroy
You play with my world
Like it’s your little toy
You put a gun in my hand
And you hide from my eyes
15 And you turn and run farther
When the fast bullets fly

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
A world war can be won
20 You want me to believe
But I see through your eyes
And I see through your brain
Like I see through the water
That runs down my drain

25 You fasten the triggers
For the others to fire
Then you set back and watch
When the death count gets higher
You hide in your mansion
30 As young people’s blood
Flows out of their bodies
And is buried in the mud

You've thrown the worst fear
That can ever be hurled
35 Fear to bring children
Into the world
For threatening my baby
Unborn and unnamed
You ain't worth the blood
That runs in your veins

How much do I know
To talk out of turn?
You might say that I’m young
You might say I’m unlearned
40 But there’s one thing I know
Though I’m younger than you
Even Jesus would never
Forgive what you do

Let me ask you one question
Is your money that good?
Will it buy you forgiveness?
Do you think that it could?
I hope that you die
And your death’ll come soon
60 In the pale afternoon
And I’ll watch while you’re lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I’ll stand o’er your grave
’Til I’m sure that you’re dead

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. What is the tone of the song? Who are the “masters of war,” and what can we infer about the speaker? Discuss the significance of point of view in the song.

2. What characteristics do the “masters of war” have, according to the speaker’s description? What motivates them?

   • In what sense do they “hide behind desks” (line 6) and “hide in [their] mansion”?
   • What does it mean that the speaker can “see through [their] masks” (line 8)?
   • What is implied by the simile in lines 11-12?
   • In what sense are they threatening the speaker’s unborn child (lines 33-40)?
   • Identify the Biblical allusions in the song and discuss their significance.

Lyrics and Discussion Questions for “Masters of War”