**I. “Looking down the valley of years” —**

The David Bowie we find, even in the days when he was Davie (or Davy) Jones, is a fully formed and timeless pop artist. It’s no wonder an air of mysticism has surrounded him all his life and career. Although he continuously and unremittingly experimented stylistically, he seems to have burst fully formed into this world as Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke, David Bowie and finally just Mr. Jones, all rolled into one. A shimmering chimera, changing to reflect what we hoped to find—the romantic troubadour, the glammed outer space messiah, the burnt out case from another world, the sophisticated, world-weary philosopher—down to now.

The answer to who or what David Bowie is partially the answer to who we are. He shows us aspects of our own imagination. And in an uncanny way, he has always managed to presage certain trends or events—at a time when Western pop culture was changing in a way that in hindsight seems inevitable. But at the time, the shape of the future was unknown as is our own. An obvious observation, yes, but it needs restating in order to place ourselves a little more fully in the shoes of those who came before us.

The main difference between the culture of David Bowie’s formative years, and that of the present day is that our culture today is marked by the conventionality of freakishness. If the trappings of Ziggy Stardust, glam-androgyn, are stripped away, what we have left is a residue of great pop music. So the gender-smashing concept of Ziggy—as stimulating, and some would say as freeing for society as they were—isn’t a bolt out of the blue for us today as it was then. What survives is the music. So the sociological effect of David Bowie’s depiction of gender with his character Ziggy Stardust, isn’t his most valuable contribution to pop music. The music is.

Bowie was brought up in a post-World War II, post-Victorian, pre-sexual revolution London of the 1950s and 60s. In the United States we associate that era with the expansion of the suburbs and the advent of television. The London of Bowie’s youth was a city that had barely begun to heal itself of the wounds of the Second World War. Bowie’s cohorts in America did not grow up with the bombed-out buildings as their playgrounds. This rebirth in the aftermath of the horror of war imbued the British pop scene where Bowie cut his teeth with seriousness, glamour and depth to the pop music of that time. David Bowie, perhaps more than any other British, post-World War II pop musician or performer, embodies the renaissant art of a people with deep roots in folk music, poetry and drama.

Bowie explored the dark side of existence; nihilism, and even Satanism to a tiny degree played a part in his forays into the underworld of his creative subconscious. He brought back more than just images devoid of ideas meant to shock or assault. He was exploring his own psyche and emotions; what he found in these creative reconnaissance missions he shared in a spirit of camaraderie and empathy with the human condition.