

ENGLISH

Analysis of Bob Dylan's song again Coleridge's poetry in terms of Journeys

Title: Bob Dylan's Dream

Text type: song lyrics

Composer: written and performed by Bob Dylan

Source: Bob Dylan (1963), The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan album, Columbia Records, USA

1. Summary of text

This song is about Bob Dylan having a dream concerning some of his lost friends while on a train going in a westerly direction. He describes his dream as being sad and at the end of it he wakes up to the wish that he could revive the past and be with his friends again. The purpose of this piece is to entertain, but also to advise the audience that choices made in the past might not seem so good in the future. Due to the wide-spread nature of folk music, this song is aimed at any listener and especially those fighting negative outcomes of past choices.

In this song, Dylan cleverly uses language techniques found in poetry to enhance the concept of the past and the journey of growing up. In the 7th stanza of the song, the structure 'I wish' is repeated several times in order to show that the writer genuinely longs for the past in order to change certain choices he has made or simply re-live the joys of early adulthood; this repetition also creates an effect of emotive language as it evokes sympathy, understanding and nostalgia. Another good example is the intentional misuse of English grammar, found all throughout the song (e.g. 'our hats was hung'). This technique is based on the idea of a time long gone from Dylan's life and is enhanced by the reference to a period where correct English was not commonly with the mainstream public. Although this might not be the case in the song, the technique still helps emphasize the idea that a journey of growing up can take a long time.

2. Links to the core text, in this case S.T. Coleridge's poems 'Frost at Midnight' and This Lime Tree Bower My Prison (shortened to Lime Tree Bower for easier referencing)

In Coleridge's poetry, the themes of friendship, isolation and time are also widely explored. In 'Lime Tree Bower', we can see the protagonist feeling isolated, trapped in his 'prison', but travelling imaginatively with his friends, seeing through their eyes and being extremely open to the world surrounding them. In 'Frost at Midnight', we can see Coleridge reflecting on his younger years, his possible mistakes and things he could not enjoy. The last part of the poem explores the father's plans for his son's future, which are in fact those of offering his child what he himself could not have. Dylan's song is ultimately about an older man looking back on his younger years. The protagonist contrasts his initial isolation from the world when he was with his friends,

Where we longed for nothin' and were quite satisfied Talkin' and a-jokin' about the world outside to his present-day solitude and an attitude that is more open to the world than it was before. This is similar to 'Lime Tree Bower' in the way that it explores friendship and the relationship between one man and the world, yet different as in this case, the lonely protagonist is not isolated. There is also a note of regret at certain choices that had been made and like 'Frost at Midnight', there is a wish that the past was different, as well as wishing to change the present and possibly the future. Although the song strongly resembles poem, in this case the narrator suggest that he had enjoyed his young life too much to notice the world surrounding him. The song ends on a note of nostalgia and longing for the past, "I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that".

3. Understanding of Journeys

From this song, I have learned that a journey of self-growth takes a long time, enough so that it seems the starting point belongs to a different world. This exact idea is emphasized in the song through the intentional misuse of English grammar, to suggest both a younger character possibly disregarding correct English as well as a society with no readily-available education.

I have also learned that the choices made as a teen or young adult can have consequences later on in life, as well as negative outcomes that at the time were ignored. Isolation from the world and only living 'for the thrill' are not always the best options, even if they may seem so for a young person. In the 4th and 5th stanzas of the song, the protagonist shows his ignorance towards reality ('Our chances really was a million to one') as well as his belief at the time that he could never go wrong ("the thought never hit that the one road we travelled would ever shatter and split").

One of the strong symbols in the text, the train, also strongly suggests journey. Widely used in many other pieces of literature, art and music, the train in this case provides a buffer-zone between Dylan's past and present life. It also provides the subtle link to the physical journey taking place in parallel to the imaginative one; through the lack of any description of the scenery outside of the train, we can also see that Dylan has not completely changed his ways and even if he has now grown, he still has some disregard for the surrounding world.

I have learned many things about journeys and life from this song, such as the knowledge that it is best to be aware of the world from a young age, that growing up takes a long time and decisions made in the past are most often regretted in the future. My personal belief is that I already knew these things, but as most young people, I have and likely will continue to refuse to accept that I could be making mistakes typical to my age, like Bob Dylan refused to believe that his and his friends' lives would ever take any turn from what they were in the past.