“Bob Dylan's Dream”: Visions that shatter like the glass

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the song of 1963 “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, from the album *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, claiming it as an important song that all but been neglected by Dylan criticism. Despite appearing on an album that features some of Dylan’s best-known protest anthems, this song paradoxically anticipates the artist’s subsequent abandonment of protest, as more famously embodied in “My Back Pages” on his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, in 1964. “Bob Dylan’s Dream” is viewed as a song containing significant contradictions, poised between the individual and the collective, narrating a dream that has little of the dreamlike about it, celebrating political radicalism yet distancing itself from it, and playing games with time (as Greil Marcus says of its youthful narrator, “suddenly he is an old man”). The song is also located in a broader intertextual context by being placed in relation to “Lord Franklin”, the nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish ballad which Dylan learned from English folk singer Martin Carthy and on which its tune and structure are based, as well as to Martin Luther King’s celebrated “I have a dream” speech, also from 1963. It is concluded that, despite Dylan’s subsequent disavowal of protest as anticipated in its text, “Bob Dylan’s Dream” nonetheless remains alive today as an expression of utopian aspirations channelled through art.

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“I’ll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours”

(Bob Dylan, “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, 1963)

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To the despair of those who actually know his rich and diverse songbook, Bob Dylan is endlessly referred to in the general press worldwide through the distorting prism of a handful of clichés – “folk troubadour”, “protest singer”, “voice of 60s radicalism” – that apply only to his earliest years as a performer and his first few albums of originals. However, any protest singer surfacing somewhere on the planet in the global news is likely to be deceptively naturalised by the Western press as “the Chinese (or Vietnamese, or Senegalese …) Bob Dylan”. The “protest” cliché is in fact particularly inappropriate to a body of work that by now comprises 43 studio albums (plus compilations, live albums, archive releases, etc), by an artist whose officially released production in that genre, world-famous though some of it is, amounts at most to - a clutch of songs on his second and third albums; a two-song valedictory on his fourth album; a small amount of early material released years later; and a handful of one-off reprises of the genre from the 70s and 80s.[1]

A protest song may be defined as either: 1) a song questioning the current state of society as a whole and calling for radical across-the-board change; or 2) a song narrating and (explicitly or implicitly) denouncing a particular situation or case of social injustice. Dylan’s early work certainly contains unambiguous instances of both types. However, he did *not* actually begin his recording career as a protest artist: his first album, *Bob Dylan* (1962), despite its declared allegiance to his mentor Woody Guthrie, consisted mostly of cover versions, of which only the anonymous woman’s lament “House of the Risin’ Sun” could be considered to verge on protest.[2] Of the thirteen tracks on *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963), at most five could be called protest songs (“Blowin’ in the Wind”, “Masters of War” and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” target society head-on; “Oxford Town” denounces race killings; and in “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, protest meets comedy). The following album, *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (1964), is the only Dylan album to contain a majority of protest songs (seven out of ten). There, Dylan takes on society as such in the title track and the utopian “When the Ship Comes In”; explores the interface between race and class in “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game”; questions the official narrative of US history in "With God on Our Side"; and tells tales of dire straits among farmers ("Ballad of Hollis Brown") and mining communities ("North Country Blues"). The period 1963-1964 also threw up a number of lesser protest songs that saw official release only much later, among them "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues", "Let Me Die in My Footsteps" (both pulled from the final release of *Freewheelin'*), "Paths of Victory", "John Brown", and "The Death of Emmett Till".[3] However, when the fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, appeared in 1964, it featured a lone, somewhat impressionistic protest number ("Chimes of Freedom") - and, to the eternal chagrin of Dylan's politically orthodox followers, "My Back Pages", the song commonly seen as marking its author's farewell to protest.

In "My Back Pages", certainly, Dylan denounces his own "self-ordained professor's tongue / Too serious to fool", and bids farewell to the time when, "using ideas as my maps", he saw the world in terms of black-and-white simplicities, naive socio-political illusions that seemed "foundationed deep, somehow". At the same time, he questions the very notion of linear time, ludically claiming that his new, more reflective self is actually younger – and so fresher and more optimistic – than the solemn, prematurely aged self that went before. The paradox is hammered home in the song's celebrated refrain, "Ah, but I was so much older then / I'm younger than that now".[4] However, even before "My Back Pages", *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, the best-selling album released in May 1963, includes a prophetic song which finds Dylan projecting himself forward to a future beyond protest, and, here already, also playing games with time. That song is "Bob Dylan's Dream".

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For years, the recording which appeared on *Freewheelin'* was the only official version of *Bob Dylan's Dream*. Today, however, there are two others: an alternate studio version recorded in April 1963, released in 2010 on the double CD *The Bootleg Series, vol. 9 - The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964*; and a live performance dated 10 May 1963, on the CD released in 2011, *Bob Dylan in Concert: Brandeis University 1963*. The Witmark variant is believed to have been recorded a day before the *Freewheelin'* version. The song has been performed live a total of 50 times, four times in 1963 and, in a surprising revival, 46 times on Dylan's 1991 tour, following which it was dropped, never to reappear. It is thus very far from being a Dylan concert staple; nor is it is a song that has been much covered (though there is an impressive version by Judy Collins).[5] It has, however, certainly been listened to by large numbers of Dylan fans, given *Freewheelin'*s considerable sales count over half a century: yet it has received only passing, if appreciative mention - flashes of insight, certainly, but of the briefest - from even such major Dylan critics as Michael Gray, Greil Marcus or Stephen Scobie.

"Bob Dylan's Dream" is, decidedly, a very strange song. Michael Gray calls it "a song of great reflective eloquence about camaraderie, time and loss"[6], and certainly it offers depths that belie its apparent simplicity. Its title suggests a uniquely personal experience (if it's Bob Dylan's dream, it's his and no-one else's), yet the tale it narrates is essentially collective. By the same token, the song seems to be claimed as Bob Dylan's creation and possession, but is actually based on an old folk ballad. It purports to be a dream, yet the events dreamed are perfectly credible from a realist perspective. It appears to be a young man's song, yet the tale it tells sounds far more like the recollections of a mature person. Stephen Scobie neatly encapsulates this paradox, referring to its "already-old youthful protagonist"[7]. The song, then, on closer inspection reveals a peculiar set of contradictions, and Greil Marcus captures its strangeness and ambiguities thus:

> There he is, twenty-two, "riding on a train going west", dreaming of his true friends, his soul mates – and then suddenly he is an old man. He and his friends have long since vanished to each other … How was it that, in 1963, his voice and guitar calling up a smoky, out-of-focus portrait, Bob Dylan was already looking back, from forty, fifty, sixty years later?[8].

However, as I shall endeavour to show, the contradictions are of a fertile nature, not breaking down into incoherence but, rather, generating a sense of the lost aspirations and shattered hopes of the 1960s.

As is well known, many of Dylan's early songs refer back musically and/or lyrically to older folk or blues compositions, usually anonymous, and on *Freewheelin'* alone there are multiple cases of such creative borrowing. "Blowin' in the Wind" derives from the freed slave's song "No More Auction Block", "Girl from the North Country" from the traditional English song "Scarborough Fair", "Bob Dylan's Blues" takes its tune from the blues standard "Stack-a-Lee", "Masters of War" reprises the English folk number "Nottamun Town", and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" revisits the ballad "Lord Randall". For its part, "Bob Dylan's Dream" has its source, as has been recognised from the beginning, in an anonymous nineteenth-century Anglo-Scottish ballad, namely "Lord Franklin".

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This ballad, a first-person dramatic monologue, dates from the 1850s and tells of a real event, the ill-fated expedition by Rear Admiral Sir John Franklin (1786-1847; not actually a lord), who in 1845 led two vessels, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, in search of the North-West Passage in what are now Canadian waters. Franklin never returned: his ships were trapped in the ice. The history of the expedition is nostalgically relived in the song by the narrator, one of his sailors who lived to tell the tale. The ballad came on the scene too late to appear in the classic collections of Thomas Percy or Walter Scott, but in its language and narrative form stands firmly within the age-old tradition. Dylan learnt "Lord Franklin" (alongside "Scarborough Fair") from the English folk singer Martin Carthy, in the winter of 1962 in London. According to Nat Hentoff in his sleevenotes *to Freewheelin'*, "there he heard a singer (whose name he recalls as Martin Carthy) perform 'Lord Franklin', and that old melody found a new adapted home in 'Bob Dylan's Dream'"[9]. The singer, "whose name [Dylan recalled] as Martin Carthy" went on to become an elder statesman of the British folk world. He recorded the ballad somewhat later, on his *Second Album* in 1966: the same recording was reissued in 1999 on a compilation CD, *A Collection*, with sleevenotes by Carthy himself on the songs, "Lord Franklin" included.[10]

The history of "Lord Franklin" has been unearthed in detail in a recent study by Jürgen Kloss, a German writer on folklore. His essay, published online in 2010, is entitled "'Bob Dylan's Dream' and 'Lady Franklin's Lament'", but despite its title in fact says little about Dylan's song, devoting most of its attention to the tangled history of the source ballad.[11] Kloss shows in loving detail how the song incarnated in different versions in both Scotland and northern England and was later collected under varying titles, among them "Lady Franklin's Lament", "Franklin's Crew" and "The Sailor's Dream". He identifies a good four modern-day recordings before Carthy's, all bunched around 1955-1956, the first being by the Canadian folk singer Wade Hemsworth in 1956, to be followed in the same year by Paul Clayton, Alan Mills and the well-known British folklorist A.L. Lloyd.

The text used here for "Lord Franklin" is that quoted in Kloss's essay as corresponding to the Carthy recording of 1966[12]. We cannot of course be sure exactly what the lyrics were that the British artist sang to Dylan, but they are unlikely to have been much different: as Kloss shows, Carthy's version relies heavily on that of A.L. Lloyd, using five of its six stanzas (the deleted stanza evokes Lady Franklin mourning her husband, a detail which accounts for the variant title "Lady Franklin's Lament").

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If we now return to "Bob Dylan's Dream", we need in the first place to establish a default text. The song consists of seven stanzas of four lines each, with an AABB rhymescheme, thus employing the same stanza and rhyme format as “Lord Franklin”. The lyric text used as the basis for the analysis that follows is not the official text as published in successive print collections (most recently *Lyrics 1962-2001*), but the song as Dylan actually sings it on *Freewheelin’*. Effectively, there are four extant versions of the lyric: those performed on *Freewheelin’* and the Witmark and Brandeis albums, and that printed in *Lyrics*. If we take the sung *Freewheelin’* lyric as the default, a number of lyrical variants become apparent between that version and the other three. Most are very minor, but two deserve flagging. In stanza four line 1, on *Freewheelin’* and Brandeis Dylan sings “hungry hearts”, whereas Witmark and *Lyrics* have “haunted hearts”; and in stanza six line 3*, Freewheelin’* (only) has “many a first friend”, while all the other versions confine themselves to “many a friend”. The possible significance of these variants will be considered below.

The song’s title cries out for attention: this is one of the few Dylan songs - there are only three officially released ones - that actually bear a signature in their title. One of the other two, “Bob Dylan’s Blues”, is also on *Freewheelin’*; the third is “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream”, on *Bringing It All Back Home* from 1965.[13] Paradoxically, if we consider that the song’s structure comes from an earlier, anonymous source, the autograph signature in “Bob Dylan’s Dream” reveals not a flamboyant individuality, but, rather, something more like a deliberate *un*originality. We may also wish to note that one of the alternate titles of “Lord Franklin” is “The Sailor’s Dream”. The sailor in the ballad is unnamed and scarcely individualised, and we may wonder if, in the transformation of “Lord Franklin”/ “The Sailor’s Dream” into “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, Bob Dylan may not be making some kind of transindividual, even collective statement.

At all events, the title tells us that we are going to hear about Bob Dylan’s dream, and the next question to ask is, what kind of dream is this? As it happens, the Dylan canon offers no lack of songs with the word ‘dream’ in their titles or texts - and, chronologically, “Bob Dylan’s Dream” is the first, or at least first equal with “Talkin’ World War III Blues”, *Freewheelin’s* other dream-song. Later, we find “Motorpsycho Nitemare”, the already-mentioned “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream”, “Visions of Johanna”, “I Dreamed I Saw Saint Augustine”, “Series of Dreams” and “This Dream of You” - not to mention lines and phrases such as “At dawn my lover comes to me/And tells me of her dreams” (“Gates of Eden”), “Everybody’s doin’ somethin’/I heard it in a dream” (“Too Much Of Nothing”), “My dreams are beyond control” (“Dear Landlord”), “the violence of a summer’s dream” (“Every Grain of Sand”), “you’re a dream-twister” (“Jokerman”), or “Heaven blazing in my head/I dreamed a monstrous dream” (“Cross the Green Mountain”). A whole procession of major songs – “Desolation Row”, “The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest”, “Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts”, “Isis”,[14] “Changing of the Guards”, “Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)”, “Angelina”, “Man in the Long Black Coat”, “Dignity”, “Red River Shore”, “Ain’t Talkin’” – unfold like dreams, with a non-naturalistic logic. Even very recently, in the title track of *Tempest* from 2012 we are told how the watchman uncannily “dreamed the *Titanic* was sinking”, soon before dream morphed into reality.

And yet, the very mention of a song like “Desolation Row” or “Dignity” seems to fit uneasily with “Bob Dylan’s Dream”. The dream is introduced in the first stanza (“I dreamed a dream and it made me sad”), and appears to continue through four stanzas; the end of the dream is not signalled as such, but we can presume the last two stanzas to represent the dreamer’s waking reflections. What, though, is going on in this dream? This song, inaugurating as it does that whole series-of-dreams across the Dylan canon, is in itself not specially dreamlike. We find little or nothing of the charged oneiric atmosphere of later dream-songs: there are no eerie lines like “we came to the pyramids all embedded in ice” (“Isis”), or “blood dryin’ in my yellow hair as I go from shore to shore” (“Angelina”), or “There’s smoke on the water, it’s been there since June” (“Man in the Long Black Coat”). As for what the dreamer dreams of, it is, quite simply, a house and a room where he and his friends used to meet (“With half-damp eyes I stared to the room ...”). This is a perfectly plausible dream - a reliving of memories from the dreamer’s past - but it remains completely within the limits of the naturalistic. Here - unlike in “Isis” or “Man in the Long Black Coat” - there is no sign of the complex distorting processes - condensation, displacement, symbolisation - which Sigmund Freud, in his monumental work of 1900, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, calls the “dream-work”. It seems more appropriate to read this dream in terms of Aristotle’s much older definition - as quoted by Freud at the beginning of his study - as “the mental activity of the sleeper”.[15]

Meanwhile, though, who is dreaming? Superficially and from the title, the listener might presume that the dreamer is the historical individual Bob Dylan, the artist formerly known as Robert Allen Zimmerman. However, if we look again at stanza six: “Ah, many a year has passed and gone,/Many a gamble has been lost and won,/And many a road taken by many a first friend,/And each one I’ve never seen again”, we have to conclude this cannot be the case: these are not the experiences or the sentiments of a young man in his very early twenties. The memories seem far, far away in the distant past; as Greil Marcus says, “suddenly he is an old man”. The dreamer cannot be talking about his childhood: the lines: “As easy it was to tell black from white,/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right” suggest adult moral preoccupations, even if the beliefs signposted are simplistic. Nor do “weathered many a storm” or “till the early hours of the morn” point to a child’s experience or habits. In addition, the significant variant “many a *first* friend”, found only in the sung *Freewheelin’* text, has the effect of pushing the recollections further away from the vantage point in time of the dreamer.

The dream can only be that of a mature man – middle-aged or even older - recalling his days as a young adult. Nat Hentoff, in his sleevenotes, implies as much:

> The song is a fond looking back at the easy camaraderie and idealism of the young when they were young. There is also in the Dream a wry but sad requiem for the friendships that have evaporated as different routes, geographical and otherwise, are taken[16].

If this dream is Bob Dylan’s dream, it is the dream of an older Bob Dylan in years to come, far removed from 1963; the historical Bob Dylan fast-forwards to create a future self, whom he then imagines re-creating the present Bob Dylan in a nostalgic, retrospective dream. The song, then, turns out to be Bob Dylan’s fantasy about ... Bob Dylan dreaming about Bob Dylan!

Despite these onion-like layers of multiple selves, however, the dream is as much collective as it is individual: in the middle stanzas that describe the scenes dreamed, the dominant pronoun is not “I” but “we”. The dreamer imagines himself surrounded by friends - part of a group, and, indeed, part of a movement. What is the nature of this collective experience? In stanzas two to four , the listener has the impression that it was essentially a light-hearted, non-serious way of life: “laughin’ and singin’ till the early hours of the morn”, “jokin’ and talkin’ about the world outside”, “we thought we could sit forever in fun”. Laughter, joking, fun: such are the keywords of this part of the song. Nonetheless, the phrase “hungry hearts”, in stanza four, hints at an undercurrent of seriousness, of unsatisfied and unsatisfiable yearning: it is “hungry” that Dylan sings in the *Freewheelin’* and Brandeis versions, not the more Gothic and Edgar Allan Poe-like “haunted” of the *Lyrics* and Witmark texts.[17] The whole notion of joking is, in fact, highly ambivalent in Dylan’s world, as a glance at the motif in some of the later songs shows. The Jokerman of the song of that name is not someone to be trifled with (“You were born with a snake in both of your fists while a hurricane was blowing”); the grinning Jack of Hearts is an emissary of death; and the joker of “All Along the Watchtower” is a harbinger of chaos (“There’s too much confusion/I can’t get no relief”).

All this suggests that the laughing and joking of “Bob Dylan’s Dream” conceal something of much deeper import, and, indeed, stanza five takes the listener into quite different territory. The group of friends were not just fooling around; they were also talking about the state of the world, and they saw themselves as the standard-bearers for a whole new belief system. This is implied in the crucial lines: “As easy it was to tell black from white,/It was all that easy to tell wrong from right”. These people were idealists, with absolute faith in their utopian values and absolute certainty that they would triumph. This is the voice we hear in the prophetic tones of the early Dylan at his most portentous, as in some of the key songs on his next album: “Your old road is rapidly agein’/Please get out of the new one if you can’t lend your hand/For the times they are a-changin’” (“The Times They Are A-Changin’”), or: “And like Pharaoh’s tribe/They’ll be drownded in the tide/And like Goliath they’ll be conquered” (“When the Ship Comes In”). The message of those songs is crystal-clear: we, the New Left, the flower of revolutionary youth, are right; you, mothers and fathers, senators and congressmen, Pharaoh’s tribe, are wrong; and we are going to win!

As we know, by 1964 and *Another Side of Bob Dylan* that passionate certainty had begun to falter, and in “My Back Pages” on that album – the song which, as we saw above, is Dylan’s farewell to protest - we hear him effectively recant his early moral absolutism, declaring: “Lies that life is black and white/Spoke from my skull. I dreamed/Romantic facts of musketeers ...”. In those lines, the very word “dreamed” points back to “Bob Dylan’s Dream” and that song’s now-discarded black-and-white vision. The strange thing, however, is that in this song from *Freewheelin’* we already find Dylan, through the device of the dream, predicting the death of the movement he was, to all appearances, intensely and committedly a part of. On the same album, in “Blowin’ in the Wind”, Dylan asks rhetorically: “How many roads must a man walk down/Before you call him a man?”, implying that all those roads are part of the one road that humanity will walk down on its journey to liberation. In “Bob Dylan’s Dream”, the road returns, but strangely and deceptively. Stanza five nostalgically evokes “the one road we travelled”, but already threatens that it might one day “shatter or split”; and by the next stanza, that one road has become “many a road taken by many a first friend”. These are not the roads of “Blowin’ in the Wind”, many roads making up one; these roads are twisting, forking, pointing in a thousand contradictory directions. The group of friends splits up, each member takes a different path, “and each one I’ve never seen again”.

“Bob Dylan’s Dream”, then, seems to be anticipating the death of the 1960s, expressing the fear that the decade’s hopes of liberation would disintegrate even as they were being spun. To quote Dylan’s own lines from “Song to Woody” on his first album, “it looks like it’s a-dyin’ and it’s hardly been born”. Dylan’s dreamer bids farewell to his dream with a clear gesture of finality: “I’d give it all gladly if our lives could be like that”; the listener gets the feeling that it’s all over, the pretty people have disappeared like smoke, and things never will be “like that” again. The stark and disillusioned words of “I Pity the Poor Immigrant” - from *John Wesley Harding*, released five momentous years after *Freewheelin’* - may stand as an epitaph to the buried hopes of “Bob Dylan’s Dream”: in that later song, “visions in the final end/Must shatter like the glass”.

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To illuminate “Bob Dylan’s Dream” further - and, especially, this dimension of frustrated aspirations and lost hopes – we may now look more closely at “Lord Franklin”, the ballad that underlies “Bob Dylan’s Dream” like a half-hidden, older substratum.

Dylan’s song quite visibly bases its first stanza on the opening of “Lord Franklin”. The ballad starts: “We were homeward bound one night on the deep/Swinging in my hammock I fell asleep”. Dylan transfers the scene from sea to land, and replaces the ship by a train: “While riding on a train goin’ west/I fell asleep for to take my rest”. The anonymous nineteenth-century sailor is replaced by an unidentified twentieth-century individual who, as we have seen, cannot be the barely adult Bob Dylan who wrote the song, but may represent Dylan’s future self. The song’s third and fourth lines closely follow the ballad: “I dreamed a dream and it made me sad/Concerning myself and the first few friends I ever had” / “I dreamed a dream and I thought it true,/Concerning Franklin and his gallant crew”.

Indeed, the oddly naturalistic nature of Dylan's dream seems less strange when we realise that the dream in "Lord Franklin" is similarly undreamlike. The ballad's narrator is an old sea-dog, a survivor from Franklin's expedition of many years before. "Swinging in [his] hammock" in a quite different ship, he falls asleep, and relives his old experiences in dream. Here as in "Bob Dylan's Dream", what is dreamt is perfectly credible and possible - less dream than memory.

Stanzas two to four of "Lord Franklin" in the Carthy text correspond to stanzas two to six of "Bob Dylan's Dream": in the middle section of both, the narrator recounts and comments on the past. Each was a member of a group - but where in "Bob Dylan's Dream" it was a band of equal friends, in the older song it was a crew of seamen, under the captainship of Franklin. Dylan's source story thus has a clear hierarchical dimension which is absent from his reworking.

Despite this difference, the two songs have in common the elements of *aspiration* and *exploration*. The group of friends in "Bob Dylan's Dream" are pre-1968 libertarians, exploring a world of joyous hedonism and collective sharing, and aspiring, with black-and-white naivety, to a better world. "Lord Franklin", more concretely, is based on a literal, geographical project of exploration. The aim of Franklin's voyage was to seek out the North-West Passage, the direct route from North America to Asia via the Polar Sea - a route no European had managed to navigate successfully. It is actually a complete failure: his ships are immobilised on "mountains of ice", and Franklin and almost all his crew perish there in the "frozen ocean" ("the fate of Franklin no man may know"). Yet the narrator - a sailor who somehow lived to tell the tale - remains fascinated by Franklin's doomed adventure, and even claims he would go through the whole thing again ("for my long-lost Franklin I would cross the main"). As the nineteenth-century voyagers explored the polar seas, so, we may surmise, the group of friends of "Bob Dylan's Dream" explored a universe of ideas and sensations - until suddenly their world froze on them. Both songs come round full circle, with Dylan's final stanza closely following that of "Lord Franklin", in the rhyme of the first couplet ("vain/again" for "pain/main") and the phrasing and emotions of the second ("Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat/I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that" / "Ten thousand pounds would I freely give,/To know on earth that my Franklin do live").

There is, certainly, a sense of adventure and excitement in the ballad of Franklin. Yet the old tale also has a harsher side, for our sailor seems curiously fixated on *authority* and *power*. He is no doubt a person of quite ordinary origins, yet he is lost in admiration for his deceased superior - whom he twice calls "my" Franklin, suggesting a quite high degree of identification.[18] In addition, at some point in the ballad's history somebody gave it the title "Lord Franklin", thus deferentially and unhistorically elevating Sir John Franklin to a peerage which was never his. In reality - at least according to Martin Carthy's sleevenotes to *A Collection* - Franklin's handling of the voyage was less than competent:

> What was completely unexpected, however, was that the lime juice stored in barrels became useless and half the crew of both ships died of scurvy ... The real tragedy was Franklin's blunder in not allowing for such a contingency: he had taken along beautiful tea services, flags and dress uniforms for the celebrations when their mission was accomplished, instead of extra food supplies (Carthy 1999)[19].

If the mission never was accomplished, part of the blame seems to lie with a captain not entirely worthy of the trust invested in him by his "gallant crew". Today's listener may also care to note certain details of Sir John Franklin's previous career: he had served under Nelson in the battle of Trafalgar, had taken part in the naval bombardment of New Orleans in the British-American war of 1814,[20] and, from 1837 to 1844, had been governor of Van Diemen's Land (today Tasmania), a colony best known as a loading-off point for transported offenders.[21] In other words, Franklin was fully and directly identified with the British empire, and may be considered a living symbol of colonial power - of an imperial authority with which, we may speculate, the sailor-narrator of the ballad is somewhat uncritically identifying.

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Meanwhile, if “Bob Dylan’s Dream” is based on a ballad whose central adventure is grounded in what may be an undue respect for constituted authority and imperial power, we may have to conclude that the song’s early-60s utopia is seriously flawed. Dylan’s song certainly gives the impression of a lost golden time, when idealistic, hungry-hearted youth travelled joyously down “one road”. Indeed, some listeners may wish to recall an earlier revolutionary period, and William Wordsworth’s tribute, in *The Prelude*, his memoir in verse first drafted in 1805, to the heady days of the French Revolution in the first flush of the fall of the Bastille:

> Bliss was in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very Heaven! O times,
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law and statute took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance! (...)
> Not in Utopia, - subterraneous fields,
> - Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
> But in the very world which is the world
> Of all of us, - the place in which, in the end,
> We find our happiness, or not at all![22]

However, Wordsworth had, by the end of his career, mutated into a convinced Tory and pillar of the Anglican church. Bob Dylan, as we know, soon distanced himself from the revolutionary utopian stance of his second and third albums; and in that year of years, 1968, he was taken up not with barricades and street-fighting but with the Bible-drenched metaphysics of *John Wesley Harding*. By 1975 and *Blood on the Tracks*, we find Dylan looking back on the 60s as an era that is gone for ever, as the narrator of “Tangled Up In Blue” recalls the decline and fall of his onetime counter-cultural associates, their hearts iced up like Franklin’s vessels in the polar wastes (“something inside of him died”; “she ... froze up inside”). It may be suggested, at least speculatively, that if the radical youth movement whose dynamic is implicit in “Bob Dylan’s Dream” was fated to burn itself out so fast, one of the reasons may be found by digging below the surface of that song and unearthing its substratum in “Lord Franklin”: no revolution will survive unless it comes to terms with the problem of authority. Nor will it survive unless it manages to deal with that authority, not as a purely outside force, but as a presence within - the other voice in that inner dialogue between authoritarian and libertarian selves which Dylan, years later on the *Infidels* album in 1983, was to dramatise memorably as “I and I”.

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The visions of the 60s shattered like the glass; the one road shattered and split. Still, a few months after the release of *Freewheelin’* it was Martin Luther King who declared, on 28 August 1963: “I have a dream”. *Bob Dylan’s dream* in the generic sense – not the song, but the artist’s early vision - is, like King’s, a dream of utopia: a vision of universal liberation, of the breaking of bonds and barriers. In the words of King’s famous Lincoln Memorial speech: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places plains, and the crooked places will be made straight”[23].

It may be in the end that the dream is neither Bob Dylan’s nor Martin Luther King’s, but the collective waking dream of a brief yet pivotal moment in American and Western history - the memory-trace of a vision that appeared to sum up an era, and was not merely an illusion, for it bore concrete results in the real advances made in civil rights. King was assassinated; Dylan closed the book on his back pages. Dylan said "no" to protest, reclaiming his artistic freedom and aware that the heady utopian dream could not last. And yet, even so - back then, "to be young was very Heaven", for however brief a time; and today's listeners may even wish to conclude that one day, in their or their descendants' lifetime, perhaps after all "our lives could be like that" once more. The dream remains that art and aspiration can remodel Wordsworth's "very world which is the world of all of us" – perhaps less changing it through social revolution than remaking it through human creativity. Our words are told, our stories are sung: the old tales are retold, the old songs are sung afresh, and the series of dreams begins anew.

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[1] This category would include the single "George Jackson" (1970), "Hurricane" (on *Desire*, 1975) and the anti-war "License to Kill" (on *Infidels*, 1983).

[2] Among the recently released early-Dylan archive recordings, the *Minneapolis Party Tape* (recorded 1961, released 2011) features covers of certain Guthrie compositions – "Ramblin' Round", "Pastures of Plenty" - that could be described as protest songs, although of course relating to an earlier period.

[3] The first three were officially released on *The Bootleg Series, vols. 1-3 (*1991), the second two on *The Bootleg Series, vol. 9 - The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964* (2010); a live version of "John Brown" had appeared earlier on *MTV Unplugged* (1995).

[4] Other than "Bob Dylan's Dream" itself (cf. discussion of text below) and except where indicated otherwise, quotations from Dylan songs in this essay are taken from: Bob Dylan, *Lyrics 1962-2001*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004 (hereinafter referred to as *Lyrics*).

[5] Collins' version is on her album *Just Like A Woman: Judy Sings Dylan* (1993).

[6] Michael Gray, sleevenotes to *Bob Dylan in Concert: Brandeis University 1963*, Columbia, 2011.

[7] Stephen Scobie, *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*, Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 2004, 46.

[8] Greil Marcus, "Hibbing High School and the 'Mystery' of Democracy", Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss (eds.). *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 3-14 (12).

[9] Nat Hentoff, sleevenotes to *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, CBS, 1963.

[10] Post-Carthy, there is a superb recording of the song by the Anglo-Scottish folk-rock group Pentangle, with lyrics very similar to those sung by Carthy, on their 1970 album *Cruel Sister*.

[11] Jürgen Kloss, "'Bob Dylan's Dream' & 'Lady Franklin's Lament'", 2010, www.justanothertune.com/html/ladyfranklin.html (accessed 14 March 2013). The author writes: "It is well-known that Bob Dylan often has borrowed melodies and sometimes also ideas for the lyrics from so-called 'old Folk songs'. A typical example is 'Bob Dylan's Dream'. But in this case the story of the song that had served as the model is even more interesting and illuminating because it shows in detail how fragmentary relics of a half-forgotten broadside ballad from the 19th century can start a new life as a respected "old Folk song"'.

[12] Online at: www.justanothertune.com/html/ladyfranklin.html (accessed 14 March 2013).

[13] There is also the early, unreleased "Bob Dylan's New Orleans Rag". Inside Dylan's song texts, signature references are even fewer: Stephen Scobie identifies the line "You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy' from 'Gotta Serve Somebody" (1978), and the enigmatic phrase "slayin' Bob Dylan in my bed" from "Caribbean Wind" as performed in San Francisco on 12 November 1980 (words which do not appear in the released version) (Scobie 2004, 60-61).

[14] Co-written with Jacques Levy.

[15] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900], trans. James Strachey, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, 59.

[16] Hentoff (1963).

[17] This intimation of restless, unsatisfied longing may have been taken up almost two decades later by Bruce Springsteen in his anthemic "Hungry Heart", on his album of 1980 *The River*.

[18] There may be a degree of conflation between the feelings of the crewman towards Franklin and those of Lady Franklin in the A.L. Lloyd text, despite her being edited out of the Carthy text.

[19] Martin Carthy, sleevenotes to *Martin Carthy: A Collection*, Topic Records, 1999.

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[20] That war has very recently been evoked by Dylan, on *Tempest* in the line from “Narrow Way”, “Ever since the British burned the White House down”.

[21] Transportation from Britain to the Australian colonies was a frequent theme of nineteenth-century balladry, a notable example being “Jim Jones”, the tale of a convict exiled to Botany Bay in New South Wales, which Dylan would later record, on *Good As I Been To You* in 1992.

[22] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text* [1805 and 1850], Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, 1805 text, lines 693-97 and 724-28.

[23] Martin Luther King, Jr., transcript of speech, Lincoln Memorial (Washington, DC), 28 August 1963, http://www.analytictech.com/mb021/mlk.htm (accessed 14 March 2013). Dylan mentions King by name on *Freewheelin’* (in “I Shall Be Free” - in the version actually sung on the album, though not that printed in *Lyrics*), and, years later, in his cover of Kris Kristofferson’s “They Killed Him”, on *Knocked Out Loaded* in 1986.