

SONGS OF THE “HARD TRAVELER” FROM ODYSSEUS TO THE NEVER- ENDING TOURIST

by

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But me, I'm still on the road..
Bob Dylan

THE TRAVELER is a familiar figure in ancient Greek song and in the twentieth-century American popular and folk song tradition. For emigrant and immigrant nations like Greece and the United States, songs about hard lives away from home and home communities are fundamental as ways of learning modes of behavior and expressing shared feelings about common experiences. These songs may express the thrill of adventure, the loneliness and sorrow of an unsettled and essentially friendless life, the dangers of travel, longing for security, and the joy of finally reaching a permanent destination and setting down roots again. All of these, of course, are found in Homer's *Odyssey*, the supreme distillation of ancient Greek, traveling-man songs. We will here examine Bob Dylan's own songs and his performance repertory in order to trace these same themes.

Hank Williams' [songs]...are songs from the Tree of Life.
Bob Dylan, SongTalk 1991

I'm so lonesome I could die.
Hank Williams

Everybody I met seemed to be a rank stranger.
The Stanley Brothers

Homeward bound / I wish I was / homeward bound.
Simon and Garfunkel

The ancient Greeks lived within small communities called, in the historical period, *πόλεις*. Athens was a large *πόλις*, with estimates of its adult male population at its height in the late fifth century B.C. ranging from 30,000 back when I was a student to more recent estimates as high as 40,000 to 45,000. Each *πόλις* was defined by its *πολιτεία*, or ‘distinctive way of life’, sharing some general features in common with other *πόλεις*, but having its own local history; its own cults, festivals, and even deities; its own peculiar social and political structures and practices; and even its own distinctive way of speaking Greek, that is, dialect. The mountainous geography of the Greek peninsula naturally separated the Greek *πόλις* territories from one another. As Thucydides remarks, in Homer there is no common word for ‘Greeks’ as a whole. *Ἕλληνες*, the word used today to identify all Greeks, was not used this way until the historical period.

The statement in Aristotle that a man is a *πολιτικὸν ζῷον*, traditionally rendered “political animal,” speaks to the intimate connections the ancient Greeks felt with their *πόλεις*. Their feelings of attachment and identification were concrete, not abstract. They had and felt strong ties with all the social units that made up the *πόλις*: the *οἶκος* or *οἰκία* ‘household’ or ‘family’ (modern Greek *οικογένεια*); the *γένος* or extended clan; and, for male citizens, the *φρατρίαί* (brotherhoods). Each *πόλις* also had a tribal structure. In Athens in the period after Cleisthenes in the late sixth century, the local towns or *δήμοι* clustered together to make up *τριττύες* that in turn made up the ten *φυλαί* (tribes) to which each individual *πολίτης* (citizen) belonged. Each tribe also had a hero figure with whom its members could identify.

The feelings every ancient Greek felt for his *πόλις* and its component elements were made even more intense for adult male citizens by universal military service. In the historical period, every legitimate male child of a *πολίτης* knew from an early age that it was expected of him, and a point of personal, family, clan, and broader public honor, that he would serve in the army of his *πόλις*, serve bravely and effectively alongside his fellow citizens in the hoplite ranks, or as a light-armed soldier, or in the elite cavalry corps or as a rower in the fleet. His grandfathers, father, uncles, and older brothers had done this before him. Every boy learned about war by hearing the songs of Homer and other early poets like Tyrtaeus and Callinus sung at public festivals or at smaller social gatherings.

For the ancient Greeks, war was a near constant, the natural state for every *πόλις*. The Persian Wars in 490 and 480–479 B.C. made extreme demands of all citizens, men, women, and children, and set Athens on a course of empire-building during the rest of the fifth century B.C. This century of nearly year upon year of bloody fighting brought home the truth of the statement of philosopher George Santayana—mistakenly attributed to Plato by Gen. Douglas MacArthur and even the historians at the Imperial War Museum in London—that “only the dead have seen an end to war.” This made it all the more necessary for *πόλις* societies to drive home in song and in performances of myths from the Greek heroic past the essential truths about war, for the soldiers who fought wars, and for their women and children back home.

We do not know for the Greek Bronze Age what nomenclature was used to describe what we call ‘palatial territories’ or ‘kingdoms’. The word *πόλις*, in an early form, occurs only in a personal name *po-to-ri-jo Πτολίων* in the Linear B records from the period. So we know the word *πτόλις* = *πόλις* existed. Likewise, the word that later means ‘town’ as a physical center: *wa-tu* = *φάστυ*, historical Greek *ἄστυ*, occurs once at Knossos and once at Pylos. It also occurs in personal names, like *wa-tu-o-ko* = *φαστύχοχος*, ‘he who holds or preserves the town community’. We may compare the most famous use of the word in the Homeric name *Ἄστυάναξ* ‘high king of the town community’, the son of Hektor, prince of Troy.

We do know, in part because of the careful archaeological work of Michael Cosmopoulos and his students and collaborators,¹ that the region in the southwestern Greek mainland called Messenia was divided up in the late Bronze Age into two provinces on either side of the mountain range called then and now *Αίγαλέον*, and that there were nine and seven principal districts, each with its central settlement or capital, in the two provinces, respectively. These were all united around the paramount center at Pylos.

This paramount center only succeeded in uniting the entire ‘kingdom’ in approximately 1275 B.C. As a consequence, in the *Odyssey* of Homer (book 3), in the Linear B tablets discovered at the palatial center, and in the architecture and iconography of the palatial center itself, the emphasis is on pious, community-strengthening rituals that included communal offerings, communal feasting, and communal song performances. It is true, as recent studies of ethnic identity in ancient Greece have made clear, that we do not know how the human beings who lived in the period we call the Homeric Age conceived of their identities, or to what degree they identified with their palatial centers. What are called ‘ethnic adjectives’ are found in the Linear B records, but, like the tablets themselves, they are peculiar and hard to interpret.

We do not find the terms *Πύλιος* or *Πύλιοι* in the records from Pylos. Thebes alone gives us what might be our first legitimate ethnicon, *au-to-te-qa-jo* = *Ἀυτοθηβαῖος*, but it may truly be the exception that proves the rule. Nonetheless, the evidence for community-building and community-reinforcing rituals in the tablet records and the archaeological remains are so clear, that it is sound to argue that human beings in what we call the Mycenaean palatial period also had strong attachments to their home communities. It is almost enough simply to observe the importance of the central hearth in the Mycenaean palatial centers, and the fact that the goddess Hestia (‘hearth’) remains long firmly fixed among the twelve Olympian deities and in a primitive way, hardly at all anthropomorphized, but symbolizing what is at the very heart of a human community: the fire that gives warmth, cooks food, transmits sacrifices to the gods, and radiates light.

What does all this have to do with Bob Dylan, or even the theme of “Immigrants, Wanderers, Exiles, and Hard Travelers in the Poetry, Music, and Culture of Ancient Greece and Modern America”? It is essential to drive home what it meant to the ancient Greeks to be *ἄ-πολις*, or to be away from their families, towns, brotherhoods, regional kingdoms and, later, *πόλεις*. What did it mean to the ancient Greeks to be truly alone, without the support

of their communities with which their identities were so intricately bound? How do we capture what are the vital questions of human existence: Who are we, once our social identities are stripped away? When we no longer have our local church communities with their regular, comforting communal rituals? When we no longer are known as our father's son (patronymic) or as the man from our hometown (demotic)? When our wives and children, mothers and fathers, aunts, uncles, and cousins are far away? When we are stripped of the support and understanding of friends? When we do not have the status that our professions or our roles in our communities give us? When we are robbed even of our group memories? Most of us have been in such conditions at some point, if only briefly.

The Greeks were immigrants, wanderers, and travelers, by necessity, from the start, and have remained so for four millennia. Because of the relative poverty of their native land, they sent out colonies all around the Mediterranean and up the Hellespont to the far eastern reaches of the Black Sea. The Greeks are Jason and the Argonauts, they are the Minoan sailors who steal Europa, they are the people who attack Troy with 1,200 ships, and they are in their hearts, each an Odysseus in search of the comforts of home and family. And that is why we are all *Ἕλληνας*.

In the song that was voted the greatest rock and roll song of all time, Bob Dylan put the feelings we are discussing this way:

How does it feel
 How does it feel
 To be without a home
 Like a complete unknown
 Like a rolling stone?

Of course, like most things in our human lives, there is more than one point of view. Dylan here was borrowing from the blues tradition represented by Muddy Waters, who taps into this same image without any sense of biting social criticism (Dylan) or haunting loss (we'll look at some examples soon), but with a sense of freedom from restraint, or a liberty to do what comes naturally to a young man in his prime, without the restrictions imposed on a black man anywhere, but especially in the Deep South, in the one hundred years after the Civil War. For them, being out and away from conditions that were, as a recent book explains, "slavery by another name," brought a sense of freedom, joy, and the potential for pleasures:

I'm a full grown man
 I'm a man
 I'm a natural born lovers man
 I'm a man
 I'm a rollin' stone.

Think about the greatest Greek epics. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are both set out away from home, and show us how men and women feel when

the men of their communities are away for a long, long time. Is it any wonder that we still use a compound of the two Greek words *νόστος* (homecoming) and *ἄλγος* (pain) to get across the idea of a ‘longing for home’? Of course, we have trivialized the sense of this term over the course of time, just as we have done with many powerful basic notions. For example, the early Greek representations of *Eros*, the god of sexual passion, show a full-grown man, sometimes armed as a warrior. Love is a powerful emotion. It can unleash feelings of such intensity that a whole civilization of men end up fighting ten long years on foreign soil besieging a heavily armed citadel guarded by a super-army of its own soldiers and allies drawn from a wide, wide area. This is the theme of the *Iliad*. And its opening shows us what passions can erupt when the Greek commander-in-chief is asked to give up his spear-captive woman *Chryseis*. What have we turned love into now, in order to harness its power? Baby cupids with harmless bows and arrows aimed at disembodied hearts.

If we recapture the original intensity of the two terms that make up *nostalgia*, we feel a strong longing to return home (*νόστος*) that brings on true and intense pains (*ἄλγεα*). If you think I am indulging in rhetoric here, listen to the opening lines of the two great Homeric songs:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
οὐλομένην, ἣ **μυρί’** Ἀχαιοὺς **ἄλγε’** ἔθηκε,
πολλὰς δ’ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
οἴωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή,
ἔξ οὔ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε
Ἄτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

Sing, goddess, the violent anger of Achilles, son of Peleus,
destructive—to himself and others. It caused the Greek soldiers huge pains and
suffering,
and hurled forth many combat-hardened souls into the place of death,
souls of real heroes; and it made their bodies carcasses to be devoured by dogs
and all sorts of scavenger birds. And the plan of Zeus came to pass,
starting from when first these two stood at odds, antagonistic,
the son of Atreus, called supreme king of men, and god-like Achilles.
(*Iliad* 1.1-7)

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, **δς μάλα πολλὰ**
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν·
πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστυα καὶ νόον ἔγνω
πολλὰ δ’ ὄ γ’ ἐν πόντῳ **πάθεν ἄλγεα** **δν κατὰ θυμόν**,
ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ **νόστον** ἑταίρων.
ἄλλ’ οὐδ’ ὥς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ.
αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο,
νήπιοι, οἱ κατὰ βοῦς ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο
ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν **ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ**.

Ἔνθ' ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες, ὅσοι φύγον αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον,
οἴκοι ἔσαν, πόλεμόν τε πεφευγότες ἠδὲ θάλασσαν·
τὸν δ' **ὄϊον, νόστου κεχρημένον ἠδὲ γυναικός,**
νύμφη πότνι' ἔρυκε Καλυψώ, δῖα θεάων,
ἐν σπέσσι γλαθυροῖσι, **λιλαιομένη πόσιν** εἶναι.

Put into my song, inspiring spirit, the man who can handle everything, who for so long has been set to wander, since he sacked the sacred fortified city of Troy. He has seen many, many towns where men live and knows now how different men think.

While at sea, he felt pains and sorrows deep down in his heart and in his soul, as he tried to protect his own life and the homecoming of the men under his command.

But he didn't save his men by all he did, even though he really tried.

They died, you know, because of their own stupid actions.

God, they were fools. They went and devoured the cattle of the sun that arcs above us.

So, of course, he took away from all of them their days of homecoming.

But all the others, so many as escaped their ultimate doom, got back home—they got away from the war and the sea. But him alone, yearning for his homecoming and his wife, a debutante held captive, Calypso, powerful and radiant among goddesses, in smooth-worn caves—she longed for him to be her husband.

(*Odyssey* 1-9, 11-15)

The emphasis on what in modern terms would have been millions of hard and real woes caused to the assembled Greek warriors fighting in their tenth year at Troy, far away from their homes, is powerful. Even the great heroes among them are hurled into the gloom of Hades, the dark and endlessly bleak afterlife that makes the great hero Achilles proclaim, when Odysseus addresses him in Hades as having the honor of wielding great power over the dead in the underworld, that he would rather be a slave to a landless man of very little means than be king among the dead:

βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρω, ᾧ μὴ βίωτος πολλὸς εἴη,
ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.

I would rather work in the fields as a hired hand
alongside a man who owns no land and doesn't have much of anything
than be the supreme king for all those who have died and are here dead.

(*Odyssey* 11.489-491)

What is worse almost is the desecration of their corpses by dogs and birds of prey, in an image conjuring up the no-man's land apocalypse of World War I, wherein, as British infantry veteran, poet, and author Robert Graves observed, only the stray dogs were sleek, and the infantry soldiers knew why.

The opening of the *Odyssey* emphasizes Odysseus' long wandering, the sharp pains he feels in his heart and soul as he longs to get back home, the tragic misfortune that all his comrades lose their own days of homecoming because of their collective sacrilegious and foolish stupidity. The *nostos* root is repeated poignantly three times (lines 5, 9, and 12) in fifteen lines. And in nods towards Muddy Waters' "I'm a Man" and Constantine Kavafy's "Ιθάκη" (Ithaca), we also get with Kalypso a sense of the sexual pleasures of which the long hard traveler may partake and with the phrase, πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω (he saw the towns of many men and came to know how they thought), the lure of adventures and exotic experiences that stimulate the wanderer's curious mind and inquisitive soul.

Bob Dylan, in absorbing folk, blues, and popular music from a wide variety of sources, and as someone who himself hit the road at a young age and has stayed on it for the last twenty-three years in something his many fans call, with impossible hope, the never ending tour, taps into the same deep feelings of longing and loss and exotic adventure. He has written war songs as heart-wrenching and glorious as Homer's *Iliad* and has made us feel what it is like to be a "rolling stone."

In 1999, Dylan did a tour with another great American popular songster, Paul Simon. In between their sets, they came out together and played three songs. Interesting, for our purposes, is that Bob Dylan wanted to sing Simon's "The Boxer," which Dylan himself had recorded in 1970 on his idiosyncratic *Self Portrait* album:

I am just a poor boy
Though my story's seldom told
I have squandered my resistance
For a pocketful of mumbles
Such are promises, all lies and jest
Still a man, he hears what he wants to hear
And disregards the rest.

When I left my home and family
I was no more than a boy
In the company of strangers
In the quiet of the railway station
Running scared, laying low
Seeking out the poorer quarters
Where the ragged people go
Looking for the places
only they would know.

Asking only workman's wages
I come looking for a job
But I get no offers
Just a come-on from the whores on Seventh Avenue
I do declare

There were times when I was so lonesome
I took some comfort there.

Then I'm laying out my winter clothes
And wishing I was gone, going home
Where the New York City winters
aren't bleeding me
Leading me
Going home.

In the clearing stands a boxer
And a fighter by his trade
And he carries the reminders
Of ev'ry glove that laid him down
Or cut him till he cried out
In his anger and his shame
"I am leaving, I am leaving"
But the fighter still remains.²

Dylan also covered Stephen F. Foster's "Hard Times" in 1992 and 1993, when he went back to the tree with roots, namely, traditional American, Scottish, Irish, and English folk and blues ballads in order to recharge his soul. He raises the pathos of the song many, many levels. Since, however, we have no original recordings by Foster, who was writing in the mid-nineteenth century, let us look at an equally haunting song on the same theme, a depression-era song by the singular blues genius Skip James about the hard times that prevail and the despairing people who are in its grips.

Nehemiah Curtis "Skip" James was born 9 June 1902 in Bentonia, Mississippi, and died on 3 October 1969. "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues" was recorded in 1931 in Grafton, Wisconsin.³ "Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues" is the title of the original Paramount recording of James's topical Depression piece, which he called by the more serviceable title "Hard Times."⁴ But see the possible confusion with the Stephen F. Foster song of the same title. The lyrics bleakly lay out the despair of poor hard travelers, jobless, homeless, and with no faith in any rewards of an afterlife. The song is sung by James in a high-pitched, almost falsetto lament, with very basic guitar work and hums, moans, and groans.

"Hard Time Killin' Floor Blues"⁵

Hard times here every, where you go
Times is harder, than ever been before

Well the people are drifting, from door to door
Can't find no heaven, I don't care where they go

Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho
Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho

Let me tell you people, just before I go
These hard times will kill you, *this dry long so*

Oh, ho, uh, ah ho
Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho

When you hear me singing, my true lonesome song
These hard times can last us so very long

Oh, ho, uh, ah ho
Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho

If I ever get off, this killin’ floor
I’ll never get down, this low no more

Lord, lord, lord, lord
I’ll never get down, this low no more

If you say you had money, you better be sure
‘Cause these hard times will drive you, from door to door

Oh, ho, uh, ah ho
Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho

Mm, ho, uh, ah ho
Oh, ho, uh, ah, ho

Sing this song, and I ain’t gonna sing no more
Sing this song, and I ain’t gonna sing no more

Oh, ho, uh, ah ho
Hard times will drive you, from door to door

Dylan has written tribute songs to great blues singers, the most famous being “Blind Willie McTell” (released in 1997, but recorded nearly two decades earlier) and “HighWater (for Charlie Patton)” (2001).

Charley Patton (1 May 1891–28 April 1934) was the archetypal traveling blues poet-singer, using his talents to “keep on keepin’ on” on his own Never Ending Tour from Georgia to Texas, Illinois to his native Mississippi. His “Down the Dirt Road Blues” speaks directly to his desire to escape his oppressive origins through his powers as a songster, and gives a glimpse of the bleakness of his conditions and of his spirit.⁶ His delivery is raw and powerful, in contrast to sweet-voiced blues singers like Robert Johnson or Skip James.

I’m going away to a world unknown.

I'm going away to a world unknown.
I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long. . . .

Every day seem like murder here.
Every day seem like murder here.
I'm gonna leave tomorrow.
I know you don't bit more care.

Dylan picks up on the feelings that Patton is conveying and manages to reproduce them in his own music. His respect for the folk music tradition is fervent. In the first volume of his autobiography, he writes:

Folk songs are the way I explored the universe. They were pictures and the pictures were worth more than anything I could say. I knew the inner substance of the thing. I could connect the pieces. . . .

Most of the other performers tried to put themselves across, rather than the song, but . . . with me, it was putting the song across.⁷

There is perhaps no better example of Dylan's ability, early on, to tap into the feelings of the man away from his family and his home and hometown than "I Was Young When I Left Home."⁸ This Dylan song is based on the old folk song, "900 Miles." The pathos in his voice belies the fact that he was a mere twenty years old when this was composed and recorded (12 December 1961). The realization of the song's nostalgia, in the literal Greek meaning of an intense and painful (*algos*, cf. English analgesic) longing for returning home (*nostos*), comes from Dylan's ability to, as he says, "put across the song."

Dylan is able to place himself inside the narrator and capture for us his longing and his sense of loss. Dylan has what I would call a profound sense of emotional visualization and expression. The narrator here finds himself with mother dead, baby sister gone down a ruinous path in life, his daddy in great need. But he himself is impoverished and embarrassed by his own circumstances and by his lack of resources to do anything to help. Dylan evokes the narrator's own flashes of childhood memories—natural when he hears the news from home—of how his mother used to care for him when he was a boy playing along the railroad tracks. This heightens the pathos, as does his declaration of wanting a shelter from the wind, a safe haven, and a home, none of which he has. His aching loss is worsened by the fact that he never wrote home since he left. Dylan is twenty years old and already has an uncanny imaginative empathy, derived from being steeped in popular music, for people in life's direst circumstances.

One source of Dylan's inspiration is, as we have mentioned, "900 Miles" (traditional folk song, royalty free).⁹

I'm a walking down the track,
I've got tears in my eyes,
I'm tryin' to read a letter from my home;
If that train runs me right,
I'll be home Saturday night,

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Cause I'm nine hundred miles from my home.
And I hate to hear that lonesome whistle blow,
That long lonesome train whistlin' down.

Well this train I ride on,
Is a hundred coaches long,
You can hear her whistle blow a hundred miles;
And if this train runs me right,
I'll see my woman Saturday night,
'Cause I'm nine hundred miles from my home.
And I hate to hear that lonesome whistle blow,
That long lonesome train whistling down.

I will pawn you my wagon,
I will pawn you my team,
I will pawn you my watch and my chain;
And if this train runs me right,
I'll be home Saturday night,
'Cause I'm nine hundred miles from my home.
And I hate to hear that lonesome whistle blow,
That long lonesome train whistling down.

See what Dylan has done with the song, "I Was Young When I Left Home."¹⁰ In the one recorded version we have, he comments at the start: "I sorta made it up on a train. Huh, oh I'm here. This must be good for somebody, this sad song. I know it's good for somebody. If it ain't for me, it's good for somebody. I just talked about it, huh huh."

I was young when I left home
and I been a-rambling 'round.
And I never wrote a letter to my home.
To my home, lord to my home.
And I never wrote a letter to my home.

It was just the other day,
I was bringing home my pay
when I met an old friend I used to know.
Said your mother's dead and gone,
baby sister's all gone wrong
and your daddy needs you home right away.

Not a shirt on my back,
not a penny on my name.
But I can't go home thisaway.
Thisaway, lord lord lord.
And I can't go home thisaway.

If you miss the train I'm on,

count the days I'm gone.
 You will hear that whistle blow a hundred miles.
 Hundred miles, honey baby, lord lord lord,
 and you'll hear that whistle blow a hundred miles.

I'm playing on a track,
 ma would come and whoop me back
 on them trussels down by old Jim McKay's.
 When I pay the debt I owe to the commissary store,
 I will pawn my watch and chain and go home.
 Go home, lord lord lord.
 I will pawn my watch and chain and go home.

Used to tell ma sometimes
 when I see them riding blind,
 gonna make me a home out in the wind.
 In the wind, lord in the wind.
 Make me a home out in the wind.

I don't like it in the wind,
 Gonna go back home again,
 but I can't go home thisaway.
 Thisaway, lord lord lord,
 and I can't go home thisaway.

I was young when I left home
 and I been all rambling 'round.
 And I never wrote a letter to my home.
 To my home lord lord lord.
 And I never wrote a letter to my home.

Another way of tapping into traditions of the man away from home and lost is found in "Bob Dylan's Dream."¹¹

We should make the point that gifted oral poets, ancient and modern, are immersed in song traditions, and they borrow and adapt forms, melodies, lines, and themes, often in jazz-improvisational ways. Great blues artists do the same. The early illiterate blues artists would vary their standard renditions to suit the occasion. The text is not fixed and, of course, itinerant "songsters" were singing to audiences who themselves often did not read and write, but who knew certain story lines.

"Bob Dylan's Dream" was written and recorded when Dylan was not yet twenty-two years old. It is written to a tune from a traditional English folk ballad, "Lord Franklin," about the dream dreamt by Lady Franklin for her husband, who had sailed away in 1845 to try to find the northern ship's passage through Canada's icy waters. Dylan learned this song from Martin Carthy, who can be viewed as a British Bob Dylan. Carthy throughout his career stayed attached to folk tradition. Both men are musical giants.

Dylan here not only uses the melody but also adapts the themes. His narrator has also had a dream—while traveling. Dylan’s narrator also mourns personal loss, not of a husband and his gallant crew, but of old and absent friends who were comrades, and who, like Franklin and his sailors, had an unrealistic and, in the event, ignorant enthusiasm about what their life’s adventures would bring them.

Dylan’s narrator, too, sings from the perspective of years gone by. And he, too, offers a reward of ten thousand coins if his lost friends could be restored to him. Notice in Carthy’s version the easy shift from the perspective of Lady Franklin to the perspective of “we poor sailors” in stitching the song together. Such shifts do not trouble the listeners of folk, blues, and gospel.

First consider Martin Carthy’s song “Lord Franklin” and then Dylan’s song. Once again, Dylan can capture the feeling of a narrator well along in years. But I think he was already tapping into a vagabond’s feelings. It took mighty courage on his part to hitchhike from Minnesota to New York City with no prospects and with just a bit more than “not a shirt on my back, not a penny on my name.” Martin Carthy said in the sleeve notes to his 1966 album:

Sir John Franklin set out with two ships, the “Erebus” and the “Terror”, on his second attempt to discover the North West Passage and was never heard of again. It was almost twelve years before the story of what had actually happened to the expedition was finally pieced together. After sailing round the island in the far north of Canada, the ships, predictably, became trapped in the ice; what was completely unexpected, however, was that the lime juice stored in barrels became useless and half the crews of both ships died of scurvy. Some of the others decided to strike across country for a mission station, but one by one they died on the journey. How they managed to die in country that was full of game where Eskimos had lived for generations is a mystery. 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. Several rescue operations were mounted, one by Lady Franklin herself from the proceeds of public fund she started for that purpose, after the Admiralty had washed its hands of the whole affair, having itself failed in a rather desultory rescue attempt. The truth was actually discovered by an expedition in which the United States Navy took part.

I present it here with variants captured from Gale Huntington.¹²

“Lord Franklin”¹³

Martin Carthy’s Second Album

It was homeward bound one night on the deep
Swinging in my hammock I fell asleep
I dreamed a dream and I thought it true

Sam Henry’s Songs of the People

We were homeward bound all in the deep
Alone in my hammock I fell asleep
And I dreamt a dream that I thought was true

Concerning Franklin and his gallant crew

With a hundred seamen he sailed away
To the frozen ocean in the month of May
To seek that passage around the pole
Where we poor sailors do sometimes go¹⁴

Through cruel hardships these men did go
His ship on mountains of ice was drove
Where the Eskimo in his skin canoe
Was the only one who ever came through

In Baffin Bay where the whale fish blow
The fate of Franklin no man may know
The fate of Franklin no tongue can tell
Lord Franklin along with his sailors do dwell

And now my burden it gives me pain
For my long lost Franklin I'd cross the main
Ten thousand pounds would I freely give
To know on earth that my Franklin do live

Compare now "Bob Dylan's Dream."¹⁵

While riding on a train goin' west,

Concerning Franklin and his bold crew

As I was musing on yon foreign shore
I heard a lady and she did deplore
She wept aloud and to me did say,
Oh, my loving husband, he stops long away.

It is seven long years since three ships of fame
Caused my dear husband to cross the main
And a hundred seamen of courage stout
A northwest passage for to find out

They sail-ed east and they sail-ed west
To find their passage they knew not best
Ten thousand pounds would I freely give
If I only knew if my husband lived

There is Captain Parry of high renown
There is Captain Hoggs of Seamore town
There is Captain Ross and many more
I'm afraid they are lost on some foreign shore

In Baffin's Bay where the whale fish blows
The fate of Franklin no one knows
I am afraid he is lost on yon foreign shore
Where he left his home to return no more.

Songs of the "Hard Traveler" from Odysseus to the Never-Ending Tourist 15

I fell asleep for to take my rest.
I dreamed a dream that made me sad,
Concerning myself and the first few friends I had.

With half-damp eyes I stared to the room
Where my friends and I spent many an afternoon,
Where we together weathered many a storm,
Laughin' and singin' till the early hours of the morn.

By the old wooden stove where our hats was hung,
Our words were told, our songs were sung,
Where we longed for nothin' and were quite satisfied
Talkin' and a-jokin' about the world outside.

With haunted hearts through the heat and cold,
We never thought we could ever get old.
We thought we could sit forever in fun
But our chances really was a million to one.

As easy it was to tell black from white,
It was all that easy to tell wrong from right.
And our choices were few and the thought never hit
That the one road we traveled would ever shatter and split.

How many a year has passed and gone,
And many a gamble has been lost and won,
And many a road taken by many a friend,
And each one I've never seen again.

I wish, I wish, I wish in vain,
That we could sit simply in that room again.
Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat,
I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that.

I will close here with an example of Dylan's fondness in concert for playing songs that mean something real. The Stanley Brothers were made more widely known by Ralph Stanley's singing on the soundtrack for the Cohn brothers' film "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" They cut wonderful spiritual-flavored bluegrass music for Syd Nathan's King records in the 1960s. Dylan has performed in concert his version of the Stanley Brothers' "Rank Strangers," undoubtedly drawn to it by its themes of lost home and lost loved ones.

In the song "Rank Strangers," the narrator comes back to his home to find that everyone he used to know is gone and that his parents have died and gone to heaven, i.e., "to a beautiful home—by the bright crystal sea." And, unlike Odysseus or so many other characters out away from home in the long 3,500-year tradition of known folk music, the character in this song looks forward to a reunion with parents and old friends on a beautiful day in heaven.

“Rank Strangers”¹⁶

I wandered again—to my home in the mountains
 Where in youths’ early dawn—I was happy and free
 I looked for my friends—but I never could find them
 I found they were —rank strangers to me.

CHORUS

Ever’body I met (ECHO: ever’body I met)
 Seemed to be a rank stranger (seemed to be a rank stranger)
 No mother or dad (no mother or dad) ...
 Not a friend could I see (not a friend could I see)
 They knew not my name (they knew not my name)
 And I knew not their faces (and I knew not their faces)
 I found they were all (I found they were all)
 Rank strangers to me (rank strangers to me).

“They’ve all moved away”—said the voice of a stranger
 “To a beautiful home—by the bright crystal sea”
 Some beautiful day—I’ll meet ’em in heaven
 Where no one will be—a stranger to me.

CHORUS

One final comparison to the Greek tradition, this time moving in the other direction, is in order. In 1968, Bob Dylan wrote his masterpiece “All Along the Watchtower,” which offers Old Testament-style images of a society in decay and being misused by business exploitation and with no guidance from the princes, who seem not to have the will or the intelligence to use their power to change what is happening. Everyone waits, like the population in Kavafy’s “Περιμένοντες τούς βαρβάρους,” for something decisive to happen. In the end, two unknown and therefore sinister riders approach the watch-towered castle, as the wind howls and a wildcat is heard to growl.

“All Along the Watchtower”¹⁷

“There must be some way out of here,” said the joker to the thief
 “There’s too much confusion, I can’t get no relief
 Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth
 None of them along the line know what any of it is worth”
 “No reason to get excited,” the thief, he kindly spoke
 “There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke
 But you and I, we’ve been through that, and this is not our fate
 So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late”
 All along the watchtower, princes kept the view
 While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too

Songs of the “Hard Traveler” from Odysseus to the Never-Ending Tourist 17

Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl
Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl

This song was transformed by Greek songster Dionysis Savvopoulos in 1971 into an equally powerful description of Greek society during the junta, as the narrator and those to whom he sings await a hope of salvation.¹⁸

“Ο παλιάτσος κι ο ληστής”
Lyrics: Dionysis Savvopoulos 1971
Music and Original Lyrics: Bob Dylan

Based on Bob Dylan 1968
“All Along the Watchtower”

Θα υπάρχει μια διέξοδος,
είπε ο παλιάτσος στο ληστή
Κι αν σου 'χει μείνει μια σταλιά
ντροπή,
δώσε λιγάκι προσοχή

There has got to be a way out,
said the jester to the thief
And if you have left a drop of shame
pay a little attention

Εμπόροι πίνουν το κρασί μας,
και κλέβουνε τη γη
Εσύ είσαι η μόνη μας ελπίδα
σε περιμένουμε να 'ρθεις

Merchants drink our wine,
and steal the land
You, you're our only hope
we wait for you to come

Τα παίρνεις όλα πολύ στα σοβαρά,
ήταν τα λόγια του ληστή
Έχουν πετάσει όλα αυτά
πάει καιρός πολύς

You take it all too seriously,
were the words of the thief
All these things have passed
it's been a long time now

Εδώ απάνω στα βουνά
δεν δίνουν δεκάρα τσακιστή
Για ό, τι έχει κερδηθεί
για ό, τι έχει πια χαθεί

Up here in the mountains
nobody gives a damn
For what has been won
for what has been lost

Πάνω απ' του κάστρου τη σκοπιά,
οι πρίγκιπες κοιτούν
Καθώς γυναίκες και παιδιά,
τρέχουν για να σωθούν

Above the castle's watchtower,
the princes watch
As women and children
run to save their lives

Κάπου έξω μακριά
ο άνεμος βογκά
Ζυγώνουν καβαλάρηδες
με όπλα και σκυλιά

Somewhere out far away
the wind sighs
Riders are approaching
with guns and dogs

Θα υπάρχει μια διέξοδος,
είπε ο παλιάτσος στο ληστή
Κι αν σου 'χει μείνει μια σταλιά
ντροπή,
δώσε λιγάκι προσοχή

There has got to be a way out,
said the jester to the thief
And if you have left a drop of shame
pay a little attention

Εμπόροι πίνουν το κρασί μας,
και κλέβουνε τη γη
Εσύ είσαι η μόνη μας ελπίδα
σε περιμένουμε να 'ρθεις

Merchants drink our wine,
and steal the land
You're our only hope
we wait for you to come

NOTES

This paper was presented at the conference “Bob Dylan at 70: Immigrants, Wanderers, Exiles, and Hard Travelers in the Poetry, Music, and Culture of Ancient Greece and Modern America,” held 19 March 2011 at the University of Missouri-St. Louis Center for International Studies, and sponsored by the Hellenic Government Karakas Family Foundation Professorship in Greek Studies, University of Missouri-St. Louis, and organized by Prof. Michael Cosmopoulos, with the assistance of Richard Thomas, Tom Palaima, and Terry Marshall.

Bob Dylan himself went out on the road from Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota campus fifty years ago, arriving in New York city on 24 January 1961. It is, therefore, a special honor to have this article appear in the *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, edited at Dylan's home campus.

I would like to thank Soterios G. Stavrou for his careful editing and for understanding the importance of looking at how far the influence of the human themes of ancient Greek song poems reaches. My hope is that other scholars who have specialized knowledge of the rich traditions of ancient and modern songs and poems will explore the themes that I have covered here better than I have, or will work on other themes.

All translations from ancient Greek are mine and are intended to convey the special power of words and images rather than to be poetical or literal.

This article is dedicated to my dear grandmother, Sophie Palaima, who came to the New World in 1913 at the age of twenty-six from the Polish Ukraine, bringing with her not much more than her name, Borecki, no English, her *Arbeitsbuch* as a household servant in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and her indomitable and loving spirit.

1. See www.iklaina.org and the annual reports available there for 2008, 2009, and 2010.
2. “The Boxer” © 1968 Paul Simon.
3. Vanguard 79219, Origin of Jazz Library No. 5, and Melodeon 7321.
4. Some information here is taken verbatim from <http://www.harptab.com/lyrics/ly4878.shtml>.
5. Eric Sackheim, ed., *The Blues Line: A Collection of Blues Lyrics* (Hopewell, N.J.: The Ecco Press, 1969), 176.
6. Blacks in the Deep South during the lifetimes of the first great recorded classic blues singers (1900–1940) were subject to unimaginably cruel violence without any hope of recourse to justice, humanity, or basic human rights. These conditions are reflected in the songs of blues singers like Charley Patton, Blind Willie McTell, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Mance Lipscomb, and Furry Lewis. Blues singers, like Big Bill Broonzy, yearn to hold the “Key to the Highway,” to be on the road away from the Judge Boushays and Tom Moores of the world, away from whipping, lynching, and jailing for the slightest insults, perceived or real, against the artificially constructed “dignity” of members of the

white race. See the evocative chapter on the horrific social dynamics of lynching in Michael Gray’s classic study, *Hand Me My Travelin’ Shoes: In Search of Blind Willie McTell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 92-113, esp. 102, with his description of “[t]he absolute power of the white man, the arbitrary unfairness of every unwritten rule you must obey your whole life, the ever-present knowledge that you may be killed or driven from your home if you challenge him in the slightest way, that he can act without restraint . . .”

7. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 18.
8. *No Direction Home: The Soundtrack* (The Bootleg Series, vol. 7).
9. See: <http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/folk-songs-with-chords/900%20Miles.htm>.
10. 12/12/1961; copyright © 2005 by Special Rider Music.
11. Copyright © 1963; renewed 1991 by Special Rider Music.
12. Gale Huntington, *Sam Henry’s Songs of the People* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990). See: <http://www.ric.edu/rpotter/SJFranklin.html>. The right-hand column was transcribed by Garry Gillard.
13. Traditional; arranged and sung by Martin Carthy in 1966 on Martin Carthy’s *Second Album*, which was re-issued on the Martin Carthy anthologies *A Collection* (1999) and *The Carthy Chronicles* (2001).
14. Note the shift to “we sailors” in Carthy’s version (left-hand column) in which Lady Franklin is narrator, unlike the “we” in the other standard version (right-hand column), in which the sailor narrator reports the lament of Lady Franklin.
15. 2/08/1963; copyright © 1963; renewed 1991 by Special Rider Music.
16. Recorded by the Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys, written by Alfred E. Brumley, Sr. Source: The Bluegrass Hall of Fame, 1987 Highland Music HT-105.
17. Copyright © 1968 by Dwarf Music; renewed 1996 by Dwarf Music.
18. English translation by Michael Cosmopoulos and Tom Palaima. For song and related images, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiLAnatJvI4> (accessed 23 June 2011).