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► **To cite this version:**

Matthew Graves. Dylan in England, England in Dylan: Mythopoetic Geographies in the Early Sixties Folksongs. Presses Universitaires de Provence. Bob Dylan et le mythe, , 2023, Chants Sons, 9791032004753. hal-04401956

HAL Id: hal-04401956

<https://amu.hal.science/hal-04401956v1>

Submitted on 18 Jan 2024

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Dylan in England, England in Dylan: mythopoetic geographies in the early Sixties folksongs

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– Draft version –

This chapter takes its cue from Martin Carthy's hypothesis that Bob Dylan's immersion in the English folk scene in the early Sixties left an indelible imprint on his songwriting.¹ The first time the then 21 year-old folksinger crossed the Atlantic was in the winter of 1962-3 to appear in the BBC theatre production *Madhouse on Castle Street*; he returned in 1964 to play at The Royal Festival Hall, London, in 1965 for his first British Tour, including dates at the Royal Albert Hall attended by the Beatles, and again for the British leg of his 1966 European Tour which featured the infamous "Judas!" heckling incident at Manchester Free Trade Hall. After his return to the stage at the 1969 Isle of Wight festival, Dylan would not tour Britain again until almost a decade later, in 1978. Among the rare mentions of England in Dylan's songs, interviews and autobiographical writings, the earliest is in the enigmatic final verse from the talking blues 'I Shall Be Free N°10':

What's probably got you baffled more
Is what this thing is here for
It's nothing
It's something I learned over in England.²

Just what Dylan did learn around the folk clubs on his first visit to London in the winter of 1962-63 remains a subject of speculation among biographers and critics of his early work, but his contemporary and fellow luminary Carthy has consistently affirmed that the music he was exposed to in the English folk clubs on his early visits to the capital changed the nature of his songwriting:

"His time in England was actually crucial to his development. If you listen to *Freewheelin'*, most of which was made before he came to England, and you listen to the next album after that, there's an enormous difference in the way he's singing, in the sort of tunes he's singing, the way he's putting words together. Bob Dylan's a piece of blotting paper when it comes to listening to tunes. It had an enormous effect on him."³

"I don't think, ever, that enough attention has been paid to the change that occurred to his [Dylan's] writing after he came to England (...) You really hear the difference in *The Times They are a Changin'*, because the tunes become much more anthemic (...) and you can hear the English stuff kicking in."⁴

¹ Dylan's English period is now well-documented, see *inter alia* Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1986, p.p. 286-91, 330-45), but in Carthy's view its formative quality has been underestimated.

² *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, track 5, 1964.

³ Quoted by Caspar Llewellyn Smith in 'Flash-back: Bob Dylan', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2005: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/sep/18/folk.popandrock>

⁴ Martin Carthy, 'Prism archives interview – part 3', prismfilms1, 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqM_aQuuIZo

In his memoir of making music in the Sixties, the American producer Joe Boyd lends credence to Carthy's view of a qualitative leap in Dylan's writing from the stateside perspective: "His first LP confirmed our suspicions: the original songs were of no great interest and his versions of traditional material derivative. If this was the best New York could come up with, our smug [Boston] superiority was secure." That was until Boyd heard Dylan play 'A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall' at a party in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1963, shortly after his first visit to London: "I collapsed on to the floor as if I had been bludgeoned (...) My regional scepticism about Dylan was over."⁵

If the visitor from Greenwich Village was a sponge who "soaked everything up" according to his hosts,⁶ albeit one who didn't "name names"⁷ in the purist manner, was he in biographer Robert Shelton's words "a song cribber or a composer working in the accepted tradition of building on skeletal remains"⁸ In his first lyric to allude to the English experience, 'I Shall Be Free N°10', the object of the song – the "what" – eludes scrutiny, it's the where, the transatlantic trajectory, that lingers in the mind, and the wry allusion to the popular Tin Pan Alley marching song 'Over There', made famous by Nora Bayes during the First World War and recorded by contemporaries such as Enrico Caruso and Billy Murray.⁹ This kind of subliminal intertextuality sets a pattern for the imaginative geographies of Dylan's early folk and blues inspired songs which are oblique in ways that evoke Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of 'mythical-conceptual space': "still bound to the ego and to direct experience but [which] extrapolates beyond sensory evidence and immediate needs to a more abstract structure of the world".¹⁰

In Dylan's early repertoire, the impression that place names may serve to disorient or "baffle" the listener as much as lay down spatial coordinates is reinforced by the songwriter's subsequent commentaries, such as the 1986 interview in which Dylan discusses the genesis of 'Ballad of a Thin Man': "So this is my response to something that happened over in England. I think it was about '63, '64".¹¹ On the contrary, according to former *Rolling Stone* intern Jeffrey Jones, the fractious encounter between journalist and songwriter that inspired the lyric "something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones" took place in the United States, at the Newport Folk Festival, in the summer of 1965. I shall argue that the dilated geographies of these songs purvey a mythological sense of place and space drawing on folk traditions from either side of the Atlantic, underscored by literary models both ancient

⁵ Joe Boyd, *White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960s*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2006 (Classics edition 2017), pp. 34-5.

⁶ Liam Clancy echoes Martin Carthy's words in characterizing Dylan's presence in the Village: "He was a teenager and the only thing I can compare him with is blotting paper. He soaked everything up" in Michael Gray and John Bauldie, *All Across the Telegraph: A Bob Dylan Handbook*, London: Futura, 1987, p. 22.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, part 5 and part 2.

⁸ *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, NY: Ballantine Books, 1986, p.185.

⁹ "Over there, over there / Send the word, send the word over there / That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming / The drums rum-tumming everywhere." 'Over There', Words and Music by George M. Cohan, Music Division, Library of Congress, 1917:

<https://www.loc.gov/item/ihis.200000015/>

¹⁰ Yi Fu Tuan, 'Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective' in Gale, S., Olsson, G. (eds) *Philosophy in Geography*, Theory and Decision Library, vol 20. Dordrecht: Springer, 1979, p. 404:

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-9394-5_19

¹¹ Tony Attwood, 'Ballad of A Thin Man: the meaning of the music and the lyrics', 13 December 2014, *Untold Dylan*: <https://bob-dylan.org.uk/archives/827>. My italics.

and modern, including that aspect of the American literary tradition described by Barry Lopez: “one of the things that distinguishes American literature, especially in the West, is that you expect to see the land turn up in a powerful or a mysterious or an affecting way.”¹² For David Pichaske, the cardinal points of frontier America – the Wild West, the Far North, the Deep South – are storied in ways that speak to “Bob Dylan’s search for a mythological past on to which he could project a purity of life missing in the present.”¹³ At a further remove, there are echoes of the *Arimaspea* and the classical poetic tradition to be found in songs like ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ in which the self-styled “poet-musician”¹⁴ synthesises elements of geography, historical memory (lamenting the loss of community) and myth in his imaginative travels from the known world of the past into an uncertain, disorienting present.¹⁵

The ‘Revolving Door’ of the American and British Folk Revivals

Coming to the London folk scene fresh from New York’s Greenwich Village, what did Dylan find in England and how did he negotiate the transatlantic passage creatively? The American and British folk revivals were a transnational ‘revolving door’ of collectors and performers well before American popular music reached British shores or the Beatles led the ‘British invasion’ of the United States. The major folksong collections were compiled as early as the 1870s. On a collecting expedition to the Southern Appalachians in 1916-17, the English pioneer Cecil Sharp “found that a vast store of this British song lore was still being performed there”.¹⁶ A second wave of collecting began in the 1930s and continued well into the 1970s and 80s. US collector J.M. Carpenter toured Britain in the 1940s (xxii) and, while editing the *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*, Alan Lomax found refuge from the attentions of the House Un-American Activities Committee in London in the 1950s.

In the United Kingdom, if the first revival had been nationalist, the second British revival swung to the radical left of the political spectrum after the landslide election of Clement Attlee’s first majority Labour government in June 1945. So that when the Trades Union Congress passed resolution 42 in 1962 to develop cultural activities outside of London, playwright Arnold Wesker, folksong collectors Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd, and Radio Ballads producer Charles Parker formed Centre 42 to tour the provinces and implement the policy, a political Rolling Thunder revue *avant l’heure*. It was their talent scouting which led to the discovery of the legendary English folk singer Anne Briggs. The first edition of *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* had been edited by RV Williams and AL Lloyd in 1959 in response to the sentiment that English national tradition had been neglected compared to the American, Irish, and Scottish in the revival. “The word ‘English’ in the title was therefore a significant element” in that anthology, according to editor Steve Roud in his introduction to the 2014 edition.¹⁷ It became the go-to resource for the repertoire of folk club singers who had

¹² Barry Lopez, ‘An Interview’, in *Western American Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 1986), University of Nebraska Press, 1986, p.4: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43023911>

¹³ David Pichaske, ‘Bob Dylan and the Search for the Past’ in Michael Gray and John Bauldie, *Op. cit.*, p.104.

¹⁴ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles I*, xx: xx, 2004, p.64.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the synthesis at work in the *Arimaspea* see Anca Dan, ‘Aristeas of Proconnesos’, *ΙΑΥΜ Α Μ ΕΙΖΟΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΣΜ ΟΥ*, *Εγκυκλοπαιδεία, Μ ειζονος Ελληνισμου, Ευξεινος Πιντ ος*, 2008. hal-02435581, p.4.

¹⁶ Sleeve notes from Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Matching Songs of the British Isles and America*, Riverside Folklore Series, 1957.

¹⁷ Steve Roud and Julia Bishop (eds.), *The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, London: Penguin, 2014, p.ix.

hitherto sourced their material from the journal of the Folk Song Society (1899-1932), and later of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (1932), or from their archives at Cecil Sharp House in London. The emphasis on Englishness of the second English Folk Revival, and the centrality of place in traditional song led Georgina Boyes to entitle her history of the English Folk Revival *The Imagined Village* (1993) in a nod to the *Imagined Communities* of Benedict Anderson, implying the search for an idealised place that never existed as such.¹⁸ More controversially, her history sees the revivals as a single continuum, a reaction to the culture shock of industrialisation, urbanisation and rural exodus, and the nation's relative economic decline in the 20th century.

In Left wing circles in the United States, folk music came to be seen as the authentic voice of marginalised peoples according to Tim Hampton, and with the diffusion of the LP “the songs of the past became available to singers in the present”¹⁹, whereas in Britain, where it was the voice the industrial and rural working classes restored and made relevant again through collection and participative performance, it was associated with the identity project of giving voice to the English heartlands and the Celtic fringe. In this context, Dylan's artistic vision, Hampton argues, was “to activate the vocabulary of the past while finding his own voice in the present”. This is nowhere better seen than in ‘A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall’ (1962) which at once uses and “brushes aside” tradition through poetic language that mobilises a mythical past in a modern context.

The American and British Isles folk revivals came together in MacColl and Seeger's compilation LP *Matching Songs of Britain and America* (1957) five years before Bob Dylan landed in London, a compilation that was made possible by the cumulative groundwork of American and British collectors crisscrossing the Atlantic. Dylan would already have been exposed to many of these songs in Greenwich Village – there were soft borders to the American and British folk revivals. By the time the BBC brought the young American folksinger to England in the early 1960s, London had become central to the folk song revival, with a growing club scene featuring singers from across the British Isles and occasionally North America (like Seeger) exploring cultural identities through traditional songs in a non-nationalist or essentialist way. Many of the key singers of the day were showcased together on the live recording *Hootenanny in London* (Decca, 1963), including Bob Davenport (from Gateshead), Louis Killen (Newcastle, later to emigrate to America), Martin Carthy (Hertfordshire), and Nigel Denver (Glasgow). Anne Briggs (Nottinghamshire) is pictured in the photo montage on the LP sleeve, though she does not sing on the record.

Ewan and Peggy (née Seeger) MacColl drew their authority from their collecting and curating work, notably their edition of the influential collection of English and Scottish folk songs *The Singing Island* (London: Mills Music, 1960). They presided over The Critics Club where they applied a strict policy that performers should only sing songs from their own country (Scottish singers Scottish songs, and so forth), a policy that irked Martin Carthy:

“I regard Englishness as a thing of identity rather than of nationalism and national fervor. I find that detestable. We all recognize that there is a Scottishness, we recognise that there is an

¹⁸ Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival*, Leeds: No Masters Co-operative Limited, 1993.

¹⁹ Tim Hampton, ‘Bob Dylan turned American folk traditions into modern prophecy’, *Psyche*, Aeon, 2021: <https://psyche.co/ideas/bob-dylan-turned-american-folk-traditions-into-modern-prophecy>

Irishness and a Welshness, so what's wrong with an Englishness? I don't have a problem with that at all."²⁰

The Englishness in the revival was also a way of overcoming the “dreary fare” of the “syrupy” American-inspired mid-Atlantic popular music in Britain in the 1950s. If the second English folk revival was orchestrated by middle-aged and middle-class collectors in Ewan MacColl and AL (“Bertie”) Lloyd, “two Communist singer-scholars who more or less singlehandedly uncovered a forgotten corpus of industrial song and at the same time established a particular style of performance art”,²¹ it was animated by a young guard of revivalist interpreters of the likes of The Watersons, Peter Bellamy and Martin Carthy.

In London, in the winter of 1962-63 Dylan frequented the folk club scene, playing first at the King and Queen on Foley Street (Martin Carthy et al.), the Roundhouse in Wardour Street (Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies' blues club), the Singer's Club (MacColl-Seeger), and later the Troubadour Club on Cromwell Road on the advice of Pete Seeger, whose half-sister Peggy had been established in London since the late 1950s. Both Robert Shelton and Martin Carthy note a contrast in the warm welcome that Dylan received at the Troubadour, King and Queen, and the Roundhouse, and the cooler reception at MacColl's Singers Club in December 1962,²² a foretaste of the folk song purists' rejection of Dylan's electric set at Manchester Free Trade Hall in May 1966; the infamous “Judas!” heckle which interrupted his performance with the Band, a distant echo perhaps of the tradition of “Burning Judas” on Good Friday, still current at that time in neighbouring Liverpool's (and London's) docklands, a practice derived itself from a ceremony observed on visiting Spanish and Portuguese merchant ships.²³

Raphael Samuel's emphasis on the performance aspect of the revivalist movement evokes an important feature of the folk clubs in 1950s-60s Britain in which Dylan sang; they emerged at a time when singing out loud was a social norm and music was performative and participatory rather than a spectator activity in venues convened for community singing. The difference between Dylan and his “young guard” counterparts in London (Carthy, Davenport, Killen, et al.) is that they were by and large interpreters of traditional songs rather than composers at this point in time. MacColl was the notable exception to the rule in this regard: among his better-known compositions, ‘Dirty Old Town’ (1949) was later covered by The Dubliners and The Pogues; ‘The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face’ (1957), dedicated to his life-partner Peggy Seeger, was covered by The Kingston Trio (1962), Roberta Flack (1969) and Stereophonics (2004) among others.

Dylan only evokes England by name in a handful of songs in the 20th and 21st century corpora compiled by Jean-Charles Khalifa,²⁴ and when he does so it is in the metonymical American English usage – the part for the whole of the British Isles. If in the early 1960s “over in

²⁰ Comments made on *The Late Show*, BBC2, 1993.

²¹ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London: Verso, 2012, p. 305.

²² “He did fairly well at The Singer's Club, but there were those who thought he was a bit of an interloper”, Martin Carthy, *Op cit.*, part 2.

²³ ‘Burning Judas’ in Christina Hole, *A Dictionary of British Folk Customs*, London: Paladin, Grafton Books, 1978, pp. 50-52.

²⁴ I am grateful to Jean-Charles for compiling the occurrences of England and its associated lexical field in the corpora and sharing the insights gleaned therefrom. See also Jean-Charles Khalifa, ‘A Semantic and Syntactic Journey Through the Dylan Corpus’, *Oral Tradition*, 22/1 (2007): pp. 162-174.

England” refers specifically to the London folk scene, in the 21st century songs “England” is shorthand for imperial power and historical agency. As a source for the songs he was covering at the time as a collector-performer, “England” in Dylan’s vocabularily englobes English, Scottish, and Irish folk songs. As an innovative songwriter crowned by the American folk revivalists, but an insider-outsider on the British scene introduced by the magazine *Sing Out!* before his records became widely available in the UK, Bob Dylan did not share earlier nationalist or later identity agendas of the British-American revivalists. He came to the traditional songs of MacColl-Seeger’s *Singing Island* as a poet does to his readings through text and voice, without particular regard for their Englishness or Irishness; the traditional songs are repurposed as routes not roots, road maps tracing an idiosyncratic journey through 1960s America in his search for “a mythological past”, and one inextricably bound up with a mythic sense of place.

“Geographical myths” are of two kinds according to the humanistic geographer Yi Fu Tuan. The first kind is “the fuzzy area of defective knowledge around the empirically known”, or “areas of the hazily known and unknown”. For Tuan, “the unperceived field is every man’s irreducible mythical space”, one located beyond the ranges of direct experience, “worlds of fantasy built on meager knowledge and much yearning”.²⁵ The second kind “functions as a [spatial] component of a world view or cosmology (...) a people’s more or less systematic attempt to make sense of environment”. This may follow two different schemata: where “the earth is the human body writ large” in the image of the cosmos; and where “man is the center of a cosmic frame oriented to the cardinal points and the vertical axis”.²⁶

An interplay of these two kinds of mythical space can be found at work in Bob Dylan’s songwriting. On the one hand, the songs evoke marginal spaces of the hazily known which stretch the boundaries of the listener’s mental map, while recurrent patterns in the way they are narrated cumulatively point to something approaching a world view. In Dylan’s songbook the first scheme might be represented by the Civil War song ‘Cross the Green Mountain’ (2002),²⁷ where the first-person narrative evokes the fuzziness of space-time on the verge of memory, “I crossed the green mountain / I slept by the stream / Heaven blazin’ in my head / (...)”, or “Along the dim Atlantic line / The ravaged land lies for miles behind”. Here the narrator listens “To the music that comes from a far better land”, be it heaven or the desegregated South, where the small worlds of lived experience are fringed by the broader fields (and battlefields) of history apprehended indirectly through symbolic means. The second scheme might be the “borderline” of the far North in the autobiographical ‘Girl from the North Country’, or the topical song ‘With God on Our Side’, with its centred narrator – “the country I come from is called the Mid-West” – pillorying the myth of Manifest Destiny through a satirical litany of America’s just wars.

To examine the processes at work in Dylan’s mythological manufacture, we shall take a closer look at four original compositions adapted from traditional songs that he encountered in London in the early 1960s.

Dylan’s Mythological Manufacture: Stirring up Ghosts

²⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p.86.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.88.

²⁷ *The Bootleg Series Vol. 8 – Tell Tale Signs*, Columbia, 2008.

In interview, Martin Carthy cites four songs that Dylan recorded when he returned from London to record *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* in New York as evidence of the change that the English experience brought about in his writing: 'Bob Dylan's Dream', 'Farewell', 'Girl of the North Country', and 'Boots of Spanish Leather'. All involve the borrowing of tunes and texts from traditional songs, and the transposition of their spatialities through the displacement of the original songscapes. Both Richard Elliott and Ujjwal Panda see place and displacement as a key theme in Bob Dylan's songbook and a running dialectic in his poetics,²⁸ and I propose to compare and contrast Dylan's reworkings with their original sources in that light.

Bob Dylan's Dream (1963) – Lady Franklin's Lament (Lord Franklin) (1857)

Nat Hentoff's sleeve notes to *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963) confirm that 'Bob Dylan's Dream' is derived from Martin Carthy's performance of 'Lady Franklin's Lament': "(...) and that old melody found a new adapted home in 'Bob Dylan's Dream'".²⁹ The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library folk song subject and master index lists eleven variants of the song "Lament on the fate of Sir John Franklin, and his crews" (Roud V53709), composed between 1857-66, all deriving from street literature and broadside sources. "The song laments the loss of the members of the expedition lead by Sir John Franklin to find the north-west passage which left England in May 1845. His widow financed expeditions to discover the fate of her husband. When their ships were found the crew had all perished and signs of cannibalism were discovered."³⁰

The disappearance at sea of Lord Franklin and the crew of his expedition's ships *Erebus* and *Terror* in 1845 in search of the North-West Passage in what was then British North America became one of the most enduring mysteries of the 19th century, when shipwrecks were a common hazard. The song was sung as a lament. Bob Dylan borrows the melody from Martin Carthy's version and the bare bones of the lyric, including elements of the refrain and recurrent narrative watermarks. In the original, the narrative "I" is that of a seaman, but the point of view switches in the last stanza to Lady Jane Franklin who moved heaven and earth to find her husband – petitioning the US President Zachary Taylor, offering a reward and financing expeditions to solve the mystery of his disappearance, even organising séances of spiritism. The mystery was partly resolved when the ships were found in the Arctic archipelago by the Parks Canada's Victoria Strait Expedition – the *Erebus* in 2014, the *Terror* in 2016 – using a combination of Inuit oral history and advanced marine technology.³¹

Martin Carthy sings 'Lord Franklin' ³²	'Bob Dylan's Dream' ³³
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²⁸ Ujjwal Kr. Panda, 'Sense of Place: A Humanistic Geographical Approach to the Themes of Place, Memory and Displacement in Bob Dylan's Songs,' *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 2017, DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v9n1.s02> ;

Richard Elliott, 'The Same Distant Places: Bob Dylan's Poetics of Place and Displacement', *Popular Music and Society*, Vol.32, No. 2 (2009), pp. 249-70.

²⁹ The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan (1963), The Official Bob Dylan Site: <https://www.bobdylan.com/albums/freewheelin-bob-dylan/>

³⁰ Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society: <https://www.vwml.org/archives-catalogue>

³¹ Paul Watson, *Ice Ghosts: the Epic Hunt for the Lost Franklin Expedition*, New York: WW Norton & Company, 2017.

³² Lady Franklin's Lament/Lord Franklin, Mainly Norfolk: English Folk and Other Good Music: <https://mainlynorfolk.info/lloyd/songs/ladyfranklinslament.html>

<p>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 Concerning Franklin and his gallant crew.</p>	<p>While riding on a train goin' west 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.</p>
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Lyrically, ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ is a song of two spaces – the outward-bound train and the room back home – strung out between the temporalities of present and past. It’s also a song of two states – the waking and dreaming self – and it is not hard to see how these are derived from the dichotomies of the original seascape/dreamscape, homeward-bound ship/icebound Baffin Island. The narrative “I” is preserved in Dylan’s song, but the switch to the third person point of view (Lady Franklin’s) in the last verse of Carthy’s original is dispensed with. The trajectory of the narrator’s waking self is reversed by Dylan: it is not implicitly eastward but westward, and continental rather than maritime, transposing the narrative to the ‘prairie sea’ and the geography of the American frontier myth. Contrast this with the British tradition of hymns for seafarers, such as “For Those in Peril on the Sea” (William Whiting, 1860) inspired by the tempest in Psalm 107 and contemporaneous with the composition of Lady/Lord Franklin’s Lament.

Where the sailor-narrator of Lord Franklin is “homeward bound one night on the deep”, Dylan’s narrator is a daydreamer outward bound on a train leaving his past behind, an early example of the dominant themes of memory, leaving, departure, and no return that David Pichaske has identified in Dylan’s songwriting.³⁴ The dream sequence of the middle stanzas is therefore reversed: BDD’s narrator dreams of the comforts of a northern home left in his wake, LFL’s seaman of a daunting polar wilderness north by north-west. Dylan’s sleeping self is projected back into the common room of past fellowship, a feature of the “voyage immobile” in travel writing: the room is geography at its barest expression. Unlike LFL, there is no tragedy in BDD, but there is loss: just as the waking self can never hope to return to the same place in a dream, the parting of the ways is irremediable, so the lament of the original is preserved intact, not for a lost hero but for a former self and the irretrievable fellowship of youth.

The North in BDD is implicit, autobiographical, and teases the original’s maritime theme in the material props of the lyric: “the old wooden stove/weathered many a storm” recalls the seafaring life. The idea of the North is remanent, but it becomes a North-West passage of the mind, a lament for the impossible return to the community of youth: “I wish in vain / never see again”. What was lost at the forking of the road suggested in verse 6 in the passage from the plural to the singular in “many – many – one”, and the longing of “wish-wish-wish”. Lady Franklin’s reward for finding her explorer husband is preserved intact, the “£10,000 I would freely give” simply converted to US currency “\$10,000 I would freely give”, but the gesture rings poignantly hollow, for if an explorer lost may be found, no one can turn back time.

Dylan assimilates the imaginative geography of the 19th century English folksong and repurposes it, distilling the essence of the original and extracting “lines that sounded timeless,

³³ Bob Dylan’s Dream, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, © 1963, 1964:
<https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/bob-dylans-dream/>

³⁴ *Op. cit.*

like stones worn smooth in a riverbed from centuries of water coursing over them”.³⁵ Become a standard in its own right, ‘Bob Dylan’s Dream’ has come full circle through the revolving door of transatlantic musical exchange: Bryan Ferry’s haunting cover version for the *Chimes of Freedom* tribute compilation (2008) was originally learned at Newcastle University folk club in 1964-65 which spawned Roxy Music. Ferry sings it as a lament for lost youth and the post-industrial decline of the port city. It was Martin Carthy’s counterpart Louis Killen who founded the Newcastle Folk Song and Ballad club in 1958.

‘Farewell’ (1963) – ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’ (c.a. 1845-52)

Louis Killen sings ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’ ³⁶	Farewell ³⁷
Fare-thee-well the Princess Landing Stage, River Mersey fare-thee-well I am bound for California That’s a place I know right well.	Oh it’s fare thee well my darlin’ true I’m leavin’ in the first hour of the morn I’m bound off for the bay of Mexico Or maybe the coast of Californ
<i>Chorus (repeated after each verse):</i> So fare you well, my own true love, For when I return united we will be. It’s not the leaving of Liverpool that grieves me But my darling when I think of you.	So it’s fare thee well my own true love We’ll meet another day, another time It ain’t the leavin’ That’s a-grievin’ me But my true love who’s bound to stay behind

The maritime/continental shift is again apparent in a Dylan composition that Carthy refers to by its first line ‘I’m leavin in the first hour of the morn’ – also known by the title ‘Fare Thee Well, My Own True Love’. This lesser-known song from the early canon was first played on 8 February 1963 and derived from a standard in Geordie folksinger Louis Killen’s repertoire at The Troubadour. Killen would have accompanied himself on the English concertina when Dylan frequented the London club. ‘Farewell’ was not made widely available until the 1962-64 Widmark demos were released as *The Bootleg Series Vol. 9* in 2010, but Martin Carthy recalls Dylan playing it in London. Killen’s version was recorded live on the British folk scene revival showcase album *Hootenanny in London* (Decca 1963).

The folksong was first collected in the United States in 1942 by William Doerflinger (Roud 9435) from retired seamen in New York and exists in just two variants. According to Doerflinger’s informants the original may first have been sung by a sailor on a clipper ship outward bound from Liverpool in the 1860s-70s, or from a migrant seeking his fortune in the California gold rush after 1849, but others date the song to the transatlantic exodus from Ireland via Liverpool following the Great Famine of 1845-52. ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’ is classified as a lyrical lament and was sung as a sea shanty on board ship. The first verse references the Prince’s Landing Stage and dockland street names of Liverpool at the terminus for the emigrants’ train. The song came to the British folk revival via Ewan MacColl who learned it from Doerflinger’s book *Shantymen and Shantyboys* (1951). Killen became one of the most transatlantic of British folk singers, emigrating to the USA in 1967 where he

³⁵ Daniel Mark Epstein quoted in Tudor Jones, *Bob Dylan and the British Sixties: A Cultural History*, London: Routledge, 2019, p.18.

³⁶ ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’ (Roud 9435), Mainly Norfolk: English Folk and Other Good Music: <https://mainlynorfolk.info/louis.killen/songs/theleavingofliverpool.html>

³⁷ Bob Dylan, *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 9: The Witmark Demos: 1962-64*: <https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/farewell/>

recorded with Pete Seeger and the Clancy Brothers, who alongside Tommy Makem had a Top 10 Irish hit with 'The Leaving of Liverpool' in 1964, only returning to the UK in the 1990s.

Again, the melody is borrowed from Killen's version. From the original lyric, Dylan retains the theme of leaving in the refrain, but his adaptation is remarkable for jettisoning the point of departure – Liverpool with its dockland street names – which is left indeterminate. He also makes the destination uncertain: it becomes "the Bay of Mexico" (a song recorded by The Weavers in 1953 and a 1958 hit for the Kingston Trio, the singers of American sea shanties referenced in 'Murder Most Foul') or "maybe the coast of Californ" (replacing "San Francisco" in the original), before alighting on the "the old Mexican plains" in the last stanza. The refrain of the original is preserved more or less intact: "it ain't the leaving that's a-grievin' me, but my true love who's bound to stay behind" – the loved one left at the quayside. By contrast, the ship's captain, the ship's name and its personification are dispensed with. In their place, the songwriter introduces a sense of boundless continental space: his narrator is "traveling on a highway going west," which is "a path beaten trail" – whether of adventure or of tears remains unspoken – but the ghost of the high seas lingers in the unruly and personified elements: "Oh the weather is against me and the wind blows hard / And the rain she's a turnin' into hail." If going/leaving is "hard", the ambivalence of the narrator's sentiments is reflected in the tension between his pledge to "send what I learn back home to you" and the irresistible pull of the open road with its cloak of anonymity: "With my hands in my pockets and my coat collar high / I will travel unnoticed and unknown." What is missing from the original lyric is the promise of return: "We'll meet another day, another time" is not exactly "When I return united we shall be". 'The Leaving of Liverpool's' narrator is homeward bound, Dylan's south/westbound traveler has no point of origin and no way home, the prospect of his return is as uncertain as his final destination which "might as well be (...) down around the old Mexican plains", a possible allusion to the Spanish-American War of 1846 that coincided with the Irish famine and mass exodus to America.

In giving a continental twist to the emigrant's lament, Dylan produces a meditation on the affective topography of separation. Neotoponymy – the grafting of new names onto old places – is one aspect of variation in traditional songs and a marker of their geographical distribution over time, but Dylan innovates by injecting intangibles and fuzziness in the locations, loose ends left unresolved and uncertainties for the listener. If this is a geography, it is akin to Charles Olson's "geometry of a spatial nature", stripped down to angles of trajectory and made elemental, its coordinates carefully evading closer scrutiny.³⁸

'The Elfin Knight'/'Scarborough Fair' (early 17th century) – 'Girl from the North Country'/'Boots of Spanish Leather' (1963)

³⁸ "An American / is a complex of occasions / themselves a geometry / of a spatial nature". Charles Olson was the living link between the New American poets (Pound, W.C. Williams, Rexroth) and the Beats, Ginsberg and McClure in particular, and Olson's, *The Maximus Poems*, published in Europe between 1953-56 and the US in 1960, were highly influential. I am suggesting a resonance here, not a heritage or lineage, though Dylan may have encountered Olson by the intermediary of his friend and Harvard contemporary Pete Seeger who introduced the poet to Woody Guthrie. In the spring of 1942, Olson edited Guthrie's first published essays in the magazine *Common Ground*, a stepping-stone to *Bound for Glory*.³⁸ The *Maximus Poems* revolve around one place, Gloucester, Massachusetts, and the poet's memories of his childhood in the city, they offer the post-modern mythology of embodied American identity, "the slow westward motion of / more than I am", with a feel for the trajectory of American history and the epic experience of place.

Martin Carthy sings ‘Scarborough Fair’	‘Girl from the North Country’
Are you going to Scarborough Fair? Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme, Remember me to one who lives there, For once she was a true love of mine.	Well, if you’re travelin’ in the north country fair Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline Remember me to one who lives there She once was a true love of mine
Tell her to make me a cambric shirt, Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme, Without no seam nor needlework, And then she’ll be a true love of mine.	Well, if you go when the snowflakes storm When the rivers freeze and summer ends Please see if she’s wearing a coat so warm To keep her from the howlin’ winds

Of the other songs that Martin Carthy cites as evidence of “the change that occurred in his [Dylan’s] writing after he got back from England”, ‘Girl from the North Country’ (first performed 31 May 1963) and ‘Boots of Spanish Leather’ (12 April 1963), are of especial interest because they were both derived melodically from the arrangement of the traditional ballad ‘Scarborough Fair’ that Carthy had taken from Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger’s *The Singing Island* (1960) and was then performing at The Troubadour Club, although he would not record it until 1965 on his eponymous debut solo album. In their *Matching Songs of the British Isles and America* (1957) sleeve notes, MacColl and Seeger note that both the British (‘Scarborough Fair’) and American (‘The Cambric Shirt’) versions derive from Ballad n°2 in the Child collection dating from the early 17th century known as ‘The Elfin Knight’ in which the supernatural suitor (probably an interloper from another ballad) sets a series of impossible tasks to be accomplished by the maiden, who repels his attentions with a set of equally impracticable counter-tasks. Modern versions make the pair mortal, and the plant refrain is excised from Seeger’s Appalachian version they surmise because the singers were not familiar with “the mythology of plants as having ‘magical’ qualities”.³⁹

Paul Simon’s later unattributed borrowing from Carthy’s arrangement of ‘Scarborough Fair’ for Simon and Garfunkel’s 1966 *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* album (which provoked a durable rift between the pair) *does* preserve faithfully the refrain of the British version – parsley to alleviate bitterness, sage for strength and wisdom, rosemary for love and fidelity, thyme to bind wounds (emotional as well as physical) – but Simon replaces the dialogue with the counterpoint Canticle and its anti-war lyric. Similarly, Dylan condenses the twelve verses of the original to just five in ‘Girl from the North Country’ by eschewing the dialogue form and the impossible tasks and repeating one of the verses at the end in lieu of a refrain. However, his adaptation goes further still in secularising the traditional song by omitting the herbalist’s incantation in the refrain and with it the magical properties of the plants and any last trace of the supernatural. In its place he substitutes a sensuality which surpasses the original: “If her hair hangs long / If it rolls and flows all down her breast”, and a sharp shift of perspective in the fourth verse from the vocative (addressing the messenger in the North country) to the nominative, introspective voice, where the dialogue form is sublimated in an interior monologue (“Many times I’ve often prayed”) and space is dissolved into memory (“In the darkness of my night / In the brightness of my day”). As in the case in the ‘Leaving of Liverpool’, the song’s geography is profoundly rerouted: the “Fair” is no longer a proper noun associated with a known location, but a trajectory ‘up north’ with no fixed destination, in a country to which the adjective “fair” is appended as an afterthought, even as it is described as its antithesis: cold, windswept and liminal, while the cambric shirt is transformed into a coat to shield his loved one from “the howling winds”.

³⁹ *Op cit.*, 1957.

In his discussion of mythical space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan notes that the Saulteaux tribe of Minnesota “orient themselves to the North Star, the course of the sun and the homes of the four winds. These are the reference points of a mythical realm, at the center of which the [people] live”; he adds that Amerindian cosmology shares with classical Chinese culture the notion of “a world of empirical knowledge, beyond which extends a circum-ambient realm of hazy facts and sharply etched legends”.⁴⁰ Dylan’s ‘North Country’ occupies this dimension of mythical space: the fourth verse of the song in particular points less to a geographic or true north, an autobiographical Hibbing or Duluth, Minnesota (the song is supposedly addressed to Dylan’s former girlfriend Echo Helstrom) than a magnetic north – a heterotopic “magnetic island” beyond the ranges, an impression reinforced by the 1964 CBC broadcast of Dylan performing the song in a log cabin in the woods, with the atmospheric black and white aesthetic of a 1940s film noir or a BBC Saturday night play.⁴¹

Martin Carthy sings Seven Yellow Gypsies ⁴²	Boots of Spanish Leather ⁴³
She plucked off all her highheeled shoen, All made of the Spanish leather-o, And she would in the street in her bare bare feet To run away with the seven yellow gypsies-o.	So take heed, take heed of the western wind Take heed of the stormy weather And yes, there’s something you can send back to me Spanish boots of Spanish leather

‘Boots of Spanish Leather’ (first performed 12 April 1963) was written on a trip to Italy that Dylan made with Odetta in the first week of January 1963 during an unscheduled break in filming of the BBC play ‘Madhouse on Castle Street’. He played the song over a month before ‘Girl from the North Country’, but it was recorded on a later album – 1964’s *The Times They Are A-Changin’*. Widely seen to be an autobiographical song about Dylan’s disintegrating relationship with his then girlfriend Suze Rotolo, the song’s geography is displaced from Italy to Spain. It borrows heavily again from the melody of ‘Scarborough Fair’, but lyrically it is syncretic in its blending of elements taken from traditional ballads and sea shanties. It takes the dialogue structure from ‘Scarborough Fair’ and the sea voyage from ‘The Leaving of Liverpool’, but this time its trajectory is European, due south to Madrid and Barcelona, while it is the maiden who is sailing away (who’s “mind is roamin”) and the suitor who is left behind – the boot is on the other foot! The call-reply format revolves around the offer of / resistance to a love token, until the suitor relents and requests the “Spanish boots” of the eponymous title. This material motif is lifted straight from another ballad, ‘The Gypsy Laddie’ (or ‘Seven Yellow Gypsies’ in Carthy’s version) which has a similar call-response structure, though not the same characterisation, and where the love token is the lady’s “highheeled shoen (...) made of Spanish leather-o”. The motif makes this song almost a *chanson à clef*.

Conclusion: Dylan in England Revisited

To mark the 50th anniversary of his appearance at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival in August 2019, Bob Dylan sent a 50-year old unpublished poem to be read out on stage at the

⁴⁰ *Op cit.*, p. 92.

⁴¹ Quest Canada CBC TV, Feb 1 1964: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNS5ToK-nmc>

⁴² ‘The Gypsy Laddie/Seven Yellow Gypsies’, *Mainly Norfolk: English Folk and Other Good Music*: <https://mainlynorfolk.info/shirley.collins/songs/sevenyellowgypsies.html>

⁴³ Bob Dylan, *Bob Dylan: Writings and Drawings*, London: Grafton Books, 1974, pp. 145-46. ‘Boots of Spanish Leather’ appears on *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, Columbia, 1964: <https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/boots-spanish-leather/>

celebratory Million Dollar Bash by Ashley Hutchings of Fairport Convention, the English folk-rock pioneers who had in 2018 issued a compilation of their covers of Dylan songs which included their sole top-30 hit single in the UK charts, 1969's 'Si Tu Dois Partir (If You Gotta Go Go Now)',⁴⁴.

'Echo of the North Country',⁴⁵

Hard 'n tuff the old land
Worn by weather rock 'n sand
Like folks who live there

Mong the broken stone
The gravel 'n the grime
Growing all alone
Sweet as celandine

Flower like the girl
Who waits
For a lover gone f shure
Fabled beauty he relates
Sends back love 'n
Nuthing more.

The allusion to the late Echo Helstrom, the former girlfriend from Hibbing who reputedly inspired the song 'Girl from the North Country' was lost on none of the festival goers. Here was "the historical poet"⁴⁶ teasing his own history, down to restoration of the herbarium excised from the refrain of 'Scarborough Fair': celandine is a flowering plant traditionally used in folk medicine to improve vision and reputed to possess magical properties over relationships. For Bob Dylan is, as Richard Elliott so aptly puts it, "an artist who very much does look back".⁴⁷ He began doing so with precocious self-assurance in his early twenties, by reworking traditional materials from the American and European folk revivals he encountered in Minneapolis, New York and London, drawing on roots music (folk, blues, gospel, rock) and American authors, notably the Beat poets (Kerouac, Corso, Ginsberg, et al.) and their post-modern forbears, from whom he derives the travelling persona with narrative purpose – a wandering witness to the transformations of American society on a pathway that, like Olson's *Maximus*, compels him backwards through its history and myths.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *A Tree With Roots – Fairport Convention and Friends and the Songs of Bob Dylan*, Universal Music, 2018.

⁴⁵ "A highlight came as the evening drew to a close, when Dylancentric's Ashley Hutchings recited a previously unpublished Bob Dylan poem, Echo of the North Country, written more than 50 years ago — confirmation his famous 1963 song, Girl From the North Country, was inspired by teenage sweetheart, Echo Helstrom." Matthew Chatfield, 'Crowds Flock to the Million Dollar Bash – a nod to the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival', Isle of Wight County Press, 4 September 2019:

<https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/17880485.crowds-flock-million-dollar-bash---nod-1969-isle-wight-festival/>

⁴⁶ Tim Hampton in 'Bob Dylan's Mediterranean Imaginary', research seminar, Aix-Marseille University, 28 February 2022.

⁴⁷ Richard Elliot, *Op. cit.*, 2009.

⁴⁸ 'Maximus to Gloucester Letter 27 (withheld)': "I come back to the geography of it/ (...) I have this sense,/that I am one/With my skin/ Plus this – plus this: / that forever the geography / which leans in / on me I compel / backwards", Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems*, The University of California Press, 1985.

We have seen how in the early 1960s “Bob Dylan wrote songs around traditional songs”⁴⁹ and this much is now widely acknowledged, but it begs the question of what happens to the where of traditional songs in the process of their adaptation and transposition, what elements have been retained from the lyric and melody, what jettisoned to lighten the song’s load. The spatialities of the early folksongs are assembled from the flotsam and jetsam of the traditional songs on which they are modelled, repurposed for Dylan’s mythopoetic readings of America, past and present. Just as landscape historians perceive remanence in landscape and built environments – “a term borrowed from physics to reflect the tendency of a faint impression to linger even after the processes that caused the original effect have disappeared”⁵⁰ – we may detect traces of place-memories that are more than remnants in these songs. The ghosts of geographies past linger between the lines.

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⁴⁹ Martin Carthy, *Op. cit.*, 2013.

⁵⁰ “(...) landscape contains ubiquitous traces and multiple layers of material evidence and cultural associations which help to create a distinctive sense of place. Increasingly, this is being referred to as landscape ‘remanence’” – Stephen Dobson, Paul Selman, *Planning Practice and Research* 27(4): 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/02697459.2012.680268

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