

Bob Dylan: 'Series of dreams' –an analysis by Kees de Graaf

Somewhere else Dylan wrote: 'If my thought-dreams could be seen, they'd probably put my head in a guillotine'. Fortunately this does not apply for this series of dreams, this series are worthwhile seeing and thinking about. Why such a brilliant song was not included on the 'Oh Mercy' album in the first place, but later on in the Bootleg series, is something which has not been revealed to us up till now.

There is much truth in what John Bauldie wrote in the accompanying notes on the release of this song on 'The Bootleg Series Volume 1-3' in 1991: 'From the opening the song is on fire, and there's no letup as it continues to build in intensity and drama as the dreams are recounted. The images are vaguely perceived or half-remembered, incoherent, disconnected, somehow fleetingly significant, undoubtedly but enigmatically symbolic, occasionally disturbing, often moving, yet ultimately steadfastly refusing to allow their wonderful mystery to be translated into any kind of literal sense.

'Series of dreams' is a fitting conclusion to this fascinating journey through some of the lesser known reaches and achievements of his 30-year career. It shows us how far Dylan has come, and just how awesome his achievement is'.

This refusal of the dreams to be translated into any form of literal sense makes it pretty tough for anyone trying to produce some sort of analysis of this song. However, was it not the famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung who made it clear that the messages (dreams) of the subconscious are of the highest importance for the dreamer, that there is always some sort of bridge from the subconscious dreams to every day reality.

I would therefore feel that also in this song, no matter how incoherent these dreams are, there is some sort of connection to the reality of life, also a severe warning to play the cards well otherwise the chaotic, distorted, incoherent images will turn into a permanent status, into a nightmare, but then a nightmare with no ending. The main thoughts of the song are:

- 1) 'The umbrella is folded, into the path you are hurled'
- 2) 'The cards are no good unless they're from another world'.

***Thinking of a series of dreams
Where the time and the tempo drag (fly)
And there's no exit in any direction
Except the one you can't see with your eyes
Wasn't making any great connection
Wasn't falling for any intricate scheme
Nothing that would pass inspection
I's just thinking of a series of dreams.***

Typically for a series of dreams is the difference between the dimensions of time and space fades away. The time and the tempo drag -or 'fly', one lyrics version is said to have 'fly' instead of 'drag', 'fly' however, would make it rhyme, but Dylan obviously sings 'drag'-, as if time on the one hand can come to a standstill and becomes entirely static and on the other hand flies, like when you use the still or fast forward button on your remote control of your video recorder, or like when you think back of that almost fatal car crash you once had, when your life flashes by in a few seconds and then comes to a serene peaceful standstill.

Only God (2 Peter 3:8) has the ability (yet) to make one day last a thousand years and to make thousand years last a day but that is a reality, here it is just a dream, a vacuum that sucks us in a feeling like this.

Space also fades here. 'There must be some way out of here' yet there is no exit in any direction. All man believes are his eyes, but his eyes they just tell him lies. The exit, the final solution, the ace in the hole, is there but you can't see it with your eyes. The vague notion from this dream comes to us not to rely on our eyes. This would seem illogical and weird. When you are in a large building or station you follow the signs which you see with your eyes to lead you to the exit. But here there are no such signs, your eyes cannot bring you to the exit. You need some other 'cards', but these are from another world. 'From another world' may well become Dylan's superscription above his entire opus.

There is an alternative outtake of this song (released on the album 'Tell Tale Signs') where 'drag' rhymes with 'bag' and reads as follows:

***Thinking of a series of dreams
When the time and the tempo drag
Suddenly the gate is thrown open
and you're left there holding the bag.***

In the context this alternative verse does make good sense. Time drags -one day seems to last a thousand years- but suddenly the gate is thrown open - now thousand years lasts only one day- and you are there, stripped, naked, expelled, rejected thrown out with almost nothing left. This is the gate to heaven where one goes either way, either into the gate -seven by seven they headed for heaven, eight by eight they got to the gate- or into the eternal darkness holding the bag of your unredeemed sins and wrong choices you made. It all happens suddenly, 'in the twinkling of an eye when the last trumpet blows' (I Cor. 15:52).

Now we come to the chorus of the song, the point where the dream steps up it's momentum, when the sound of the percussion and the keyboards swell, giving special emphasis to the most important message hidden in this series of dreams:

***Dreams where the umbrella is folded
and into the path you are hurled
and the cards are no good that you're holding
unless they're from another world.***

By words like 'wasn't making any great connection, wasn't falling for any intricate scheme, nothing that would pass inspection, wasn't looking for any special assistance' the poet want to emphasize that he did nothing on purpose, nothing is a deliberate act in this series of dreams, like the prophets in the Bible he serves as a messenger, whether he agrees to the message or not is of no relevance. Now he sees an umbrella folded while he is hurled into a path.

When you stick an umbrella in it's up position with a stretched arm in front of you into a narrow alley, the wings of the umbrella fold or close as you proceed into an alley which gets narrower and narrower all the time. You cannot see what is going on behind the umbrella in the narrow path. You are hurled into this path, you have no choice. All human beings are hurled into the slippery paths of history and you have to walk by faith and follow the umbrella till it is completely folded. In the meantime you have to be guided to your final destination by your maps or 'cards'. All self- made cards from this world are no good however, you will not be guided by them to your destination. Self- redemption is impossible. Only the cards made in another world, which come from another world, which come from heaven are good enough to lead you through the world and over seas most severe.

***In one, the surface was frozen
In another, I witnessed a crime
In one, I was running and in another
all I seemed to be doing was climb
Wasn't looking for any special assistance
Not going through any great extremes
I'd already gone the distance
Just thinking of a series of dreams.***

The poet has already gone the distance, he followed the umbrella into the path where he was hurled. He already lives in another world - where life and death are memorized- it all happened when he accepted Jesus in his life. His cards are good. But at the same time he is still 'in the flesh', he also lives in this world, a cold and frozen world full of crime where one witnesses crimes all day, where the movements of all those millions of people running around in this world seem so useless, all I seemed to be doing was climb, it goes on and on, spinning in infinity, ostensibly without any purpose or goal. It gets discouraging at times but yet he is on the right track when he was thinking of this series of dreams....

Kees de Graaf.