

Song to woody analysis essay



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An interesting aspect of this poem is that it can be read in couplets; though a few of the lines can be dissected separately, to understand the full meaning, the reader must look at the lines in groups of two's. " I'm out here a thousand miles from my home" is the opening line of the poem, and sets a picture for the reader. In the use of imagery, it depicts the idea of Bob Dylan being in a new place, as well as leading the reader to make the inference that he is having new experiences.

Furthermore, as home is normally depicted as a safe, " comfort zone", by writing that he's " a thousand miles from [his] home," the picture is given that he's bursting out of his usual boundaries. This line flows into the next one, " Walkin' a road other men have gone down. " This line gives the impression of " road" being a figurative term, Dylan expressing the fact that other people have gone under this journey of self-realisation. This line is connected to the 17th and 18th, which read, " I'm a-leaving' tomorrow, but I could leave today," and " Somewhere down the road someday.

This is a form of parallel, as Dylan first touches on the idea that he on the idea of a metaphorical road, or journey, for him to be embarking on, but ends the poem with the reintroduction of the term, this time speaking of the continuation of his journey, giving the impression that experience and self-realisation are a never-ending question. The third line in the poem says, " I'm seein' your world of people and things," where which the reader is given the first clue, save from the title, that the poem is written to another person.

Upon reading the entire poem, we are told that the poem is for Woody Guthrie, and in the context of the third line, we can piece together than the

quest Dylan is embarking on is one that Guthrie had also been on, many years before. Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan are both singer-songwriters who played a role in the initial shaping of patriotic folk songs with their use of political, social, philosophical and literary influences. We can connect that these legacies used their journeys to influence their writing, which can also be connected to modern day.

Often, today, people leave their homes to do something brand new in an attempt to discover something new about themselves and about the world. By learning more about the world around us, the knowledge we retain becomes worldly and far more relevant than we can achieve by remaining our comfort zones. With the use of the next line, “ Your paupers and peasants and princes and kings,” the idea is presented that Guthrie and Dylan saw everything, from miniscule to of high importance, on their trips.

They did not limit themselves to only observing one specific group of people, but instead experiencing everything and meeting everyone they could, as each person will hold a different impact on the music of the song-writers, and allows for more open truth. In meeting every person they possibly could, the songs are given a sense of truth and relevance to a wider audience, as it expresses the idea that anyone can relate to their music. The next line veers away from the metaphorical journey, when Dylan writes “ Hey, hey Woody Guthrie, I wrote you a song. We are given the impression that the poet idolizes Guthrie, enough to write a song dedicated to the man, his influences, and his worldly experience.

This line continues into “‘Bout a funny o’ world that’s a-coming’ along.” In this, Dylan expresses his thought of the world being “funny,” or in other words, strange, and that it is still in its developing stages, when everyone was attempting to figure themselves out and understand which direction the world is moving. He says “Seems sick an’ it’s hungry, it’s tired an’ it’s torn” and “It looks like it’s a-dyin’ an’ it’s hardly been born. This touches on the fact that he believes that the world is slowly deteriorating. Though, rather than the environmental aspect, I believe that Dylan is speaking of the people of the world, and how they are slowly poisoning the world with the multitude of evils, such as war and the denying of rights. The poet reverts back to speaking directly to Guthrie in “Hey, Woody Guthrie, but I know that you know,” and “All the things that I’m a-sayin’ and a-many times more.” In this, it is expressed that in Guthrie’s own journey, he would have experienced the same things and have gained the same knowledge.

Thus, these two lines highlight the fact that both singer-songwriters wrote of their experiences in their respective music. The couplet leads into “I’m a-singin’ you the song, but I can’t sing enough,” which leads me to three separate interpretations. As the poem was written to Woody Guthrie as a form of venting after he passed, the line may be touching on the sad aspect of Bob Dylan singing until his lungs burst, but would not be able to reach Guthrie. In “but I can’t sing enough,” he may be touching on the fact that regardless of what he says, or rather, sings, he will not be able to get his message, or get this poem, to Guthrie.

The line may also have a happier meaning, which would be that this topic – of the world being ruined by the many evils of the poem – is one that he

loves speaking of. To Dylan, there may be fun in singing of raw truth in analysing the world in political and philosophical aspects. The final interpretation is brought on by the next line, "'Cause there's not many men that done the things that you've done. " Dylan may feel that regardless of the amount he sings of what he has seen, he will not have the worldly knowledge of Woody Guthrie, and he will not be able to replicate the experiences of him.

Thus, it is almost a form of insecurity: that he will never be able to leave a legacy as Guthrie did. Though, the poet did not express jealousy on this topic, but rather was in awe of what Guthrie had done and had seen. The next set of lines, or couplet, introduces other ' characters' in the poem - people who are friends with Guthrie and have bonded with him on a level only musicians can know and understand through the process of songwriting. The line, " Here's to Cisco an' Sonny and Leadbelly too," is linked with the following one, " An' to all the good people that traveled with you. Dylan is expressing his idolizing of those who have had the honor of working with Guthrie, and of sharing some of the eye-opening experiences they underwent together. The poem moves to a more somber topic, transitioning from reminiscent to sad at the death of the great man that was his mentor. " Here's to the heart and the hands of the men," and " That come with the dust and are gone with the wind" form a couplet that expresses the volatility of life: great men die too, and some of them leave nothing behind.

This is an interesting couplet because there are many uses of symbolism throughout. When Dylan writes of the " hands of the men," I believe he is touching on the fact that as they were musicians, their hands were their

tools in playing the music and bringing melody and music into their lives. By speaking of both the heart and the hands, Dylan captured both the emotional and physical importance in a musician, where a good heart is useless without hands to play, and hands are mute without a heart to compose with.

The second line is deeply emotional, the gist of it being that people come and go in the blink of an eye, often leaving no traces of themselves - no legacy. The next line, which reads, " I'm a-leaving' tomorrow, but I could leave today," is also an emotional line, but veers away from the previous topic of death. Instead, it captures the essence of life travelling and life on the road by emphasizing on there not being pressure to do things; there are no pressing time limits, you are of your own will.

It is emotional because it also has a smaller meaning behind the words, which tell of it not matter when Dylan ' leaves', or when he dies. I believe it could also be read as an insecurity of his: that no one would remember him or his music after he passed on. This line leads into " Somewhere down the road someday," speaks of him continuing on this " road," or journey to self-discovery and knowledge forever. By being vague in the use of " someday," he knows that his journey has no clear-cut ending or path to follow; he is at his own mercy and will.

This line can be connected to previous one, as they both highlight on that he is free to follow where his feet take him. The last couplet reads " The very last thing that I'd want to do" and " Is to say I've been hittin' some hard travelin' too. " This is a dramatic ending to the poem as it divulges into

Dylan's fear of facing Huntington's disease, or any disease in general, as Guthrie - this is what the words "hard travelin'" are referring to. He does not want to face the death early into his journey, and he is still mourning the loss of his mentor and friend.

Conclusion: The universal messages and themes of Song To Woody include: reminiscence, self-discovery and death. These overall subjects link to a common moral: to know and to gain knowledge and wisdom, one must experience as much as they possibly can and gain the perspective of all kinds of people. Though the poem is mourning Woody Guthrie's Huntington's disease and the fact that Bob Dylan may lose his mentor soon, it is also reminiscent of Guthrie's travels and accomplishments.

Bob Dylan writes of his desire to follow in his footsteps, while understanding he would be unable to accomplish the feats of Guthrie, nor inspire as many people as the great man had. By breaking out of one's comfort zone, and learning to explore and learn from the world, rather than just seeing it, a person is given more understanding of the world's true condition. As a songwriter, Bob Dylan uses his wisdom in creating his timeless and true folk songs, as Guthrie did.