

"He's not Bob Dylan!"

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The first time I met my dad I was fourteen years old. One evening over dinner, and quite out of the blue (even so far as I was concerned), I found myself asking my mother whether such an event could be arranged, causing the poor woman to almost suffocate on her forkful of macaroni cheese. I gave the matter no further thought, but a week later was summoned from a friend's for an unspecified reason, and told that in just ten minutes I would be driven twenty meagre miles and dropped off at my father's front door. As we readied ourselves for departure (an emotional business), my mother voiced ~~an~~that impetuous and odd admonition.

Though I had been a passionate admirer of Dylan since the age of eleven (and remain so to this day), this news did not constitute an actual surprise. Wisely, my mother had never thought to glamorise my conception with any such insinuations: she was simply alluding to the fact that the man whose doorbell I would soon ring might turn out something of a disappointment...

She weren't wrong! Far from resembling Bob Dylan in any way whatsoever, I discovered that my old man had more in common with Flaubert's Charles Bovary: a philistine provincial GP with the sensibility of a spoon. My father voted Tory! He drove a BMW! He went to West End musicals! Willingly!

Still, it always struck me as peculiar how Dylan, whom I have always admired, managed his curious cameo on that memorable day.

My friend Anthony is probably an even bigger Dylan fan than myself, which is no mean feat. He even dresses and even talks like him: this transatlantic twang particularly incongruous in someone from Epsom. Cynics are quick to suggest that there may be some degree of affectation involved ...

The other month, however, in a moment of deathbed high-jinx, Anthony's maternal grandmother confided to him that he was actually sired by an anonymous sperm donor. Anthony welcomed this news, having little in the way of affection or respect for his nominal father, apparently something of a Monsieur Bovary himself.

I felt compelled to ask: might there be more to Anthony's resemblance to Dylan than met the eye? While it's difficult to imagine even 'the prophet of profit' (as Keith Richards once dubbed Dylan) exploiting the quiet moments on tour with visits to local sperm banks in the name of mere remuneration, I could just

about conceive of Dylan doing so in a spirit of megalomaniacal mischief, like some benign version of The Boys From Brazil.

I'll concede that this is, at best, improbable. But at least Anthony can never be told that his dad definitely "isn't Bob Dylan."