

## Bob Dylan's 'Roll on John' – lyric analysis.

"Roll on John" is another masterpiece from the album 'Tempest' which I really love. The song has a melancholy melody, it chimes and despairs, the music lingers on as we are slowly drifting from scene to scene and Dylan's voice is really heartfelt. When I heard the song for the first time, the lyrics somehow disappointed me. My first thought was that, no matter how great an artist John Lennon may have been and no matter how much I like his music, so much praise and eulogy for a mortal human being sounded over the top and initially the song felt to me as if there were some sort of misplaced idolatry in it. Also at first glance, the praise and eulogy addressed towards Lennon in the lyrics of the song, somehow seems to suggest that Dylan and Lennon were close friends, if not soul mates or bosom buddies. But they weren't. They certainly respected each other and the relationship they had, can best be described as good acquaintances, rather than as close friends. It gave me the first clue that there must be more to it and when I continued listening to the song, I soon found out that parts of the song which deal with the various aspects of slavery could hardly be attributed to or connected to John Lennon's personal life-span.

Not that there were no attempts made to have the entire song deal with John Lennon only, including the references to slavery. We all know that Lennon grew up in Liverpool. I read somewhere that Dylan may have made these references to slavery because Liverpool was once directly involved in the slave trade and it had been the biggest port for trading slaves for 50 years before abolition in 1807. When you take a walk through the streets of Liverpool you will find that the remnants, which remind you of this 'golden age' of slavery, are still visible. Some of the street names – like Hardman Street, Bold Street, Tarleton Street, Blackburne Place etc. – were given in honor of and to commemorate slave traders. They even launched a campaign in Liverpool some years ago, to have these street names renamed. Even when the slave trade was finally abolished Liverpool remained the biggest importer of cotton – which is one of the main products of slavery- for many years. I even read that some of the architectural splendor of Liverpool's city center might have been based on and paid by the financial benefits of slavery. Dylan visited Liverpool many times and it is therefore not at all unlikely that Dylan was aware of this when he wrote this song.

Apart from this, Liverpool was also the assembly point for Irish migration to the USA, in particular after the Irish famine of the 1840s. Conditions on these passages across the Atlantic were said to be so horrible that they were later on compared to the equally dreadful circumstances under which the African slaves were shipped to America, half a century before. When we take Lennon's Irish heritage into account, the reference to slavery in this song is not at all far-fetched.

But there is more. '**You been cooped up on an island far too long**' is interpreted by some as a reference to the island of Manhattan, where John Lennon had lived for more than 5 years- prior to his assassination in 1980 - in some sort of seclusion, '**cooped up**' in his apartment at the Dakota. Some people say that the references to slavery in this song allude to the fact that the Beatles had to accommodate their act if they expected to get out of playing places like the Cavern and be accepted by the music industry at large and to make it into the London scene. The line '**They tied your hands and they clamped your mouth**' is supposed to refer to the orders the Beatles received from their management not to publicly discuss hot political and social issues when they came to America; issues like the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties. In later interviews they made it clear that they resented these orders and restrictions placed on them during their first sequence of tours. By 1965-1966 however, the Beatles took the liberty and had the power to do, and say, whatever they pleased.

Plausible as a comprehensive analysis of the song - only dealing with John Lennon – may seem, yet there are enough reasons to assume that in the song Dylan deals with more than one ‘John’. Personally I found reasons enough to believe that the other ‘John’ Dylan has in mind in this song, is St John, the Apostle.

First of all, there is a sort of ‘finality’ prominently present on the album ‘Tempest’. ‘The Tempest’ was Shakespeare’s last play (albeit whimsically dismissed by Dylan – in his typically Dylanesque style – because, as he said, the album title is ‘Tempest’ and not ‘**The** Tempest’). The Book of Revelation – said to be Dylan’s favorite Bible book- is mentioned in the song ‘Tempest’ as the last book the captain of the Titanic read during the last dying seconds of his life. The Book of Revelation written by the longest lived of the Apostles, St John, in the last stage of his life, is at the same time also the last book of the Bible.

Furthermore, this song is reminiscent of some sort of medieval dream-vision poem in which the poet enters into some kind of trance at the start of the poem, loses all sense of time, and loses contact with the present world and enters an entirely different, ancient world, a world where the difference between the conscious and the subconscious and the difference between reality and fiction is continuously obliterated. The song starts with ‘**Doctor, doctor tell me the time of day**’ indicating that the poet has now in fact lost all sense of time and that he is now ready and in a position to sway backwards and forwards between the times and experiences of John Lennon on the one hand, and the ancient times and experiences of St John, cooped up on the isle of Patmos in 95 AD, on the other hand.

But the lyrics are not entirely dealing with John Lennon and St John. There is a third personage and that is the poet himself. This is apparent from the last verse where the object suddenly changes. One would expect the lyrics to read there ‘**I pray the Lord his soul to keep**’ referring either to the soul of John Lennon or St John, but instead the lyrics read ‘**I pray the Lord my soul to keep**’. The statement of the writer, Will Hermes, who sees the song as ‘*a prayer from one great artist to another and a reminder that Dylan now stands virtually alone among his 1960s peers*’ takes it too far. True, the song certainly has many elements of a prayer, especially in the refrain, but *not* a prayer from one artist to another but rather of a prayer to the Lord above. In this prayer the poet expresses on the one hand the turmoil in his soul, not only about the senseless killing of John Lennon, but deep inside also the worries about the whereabouts of Lennon’s soul. It seems as if he now implicitly wrestles with the question: where do I stand among all this, what will happen to me? How will my soul end up? How will posterity look back on me? At the same time he finds great comfort in the other John, the Apostle. Although the sufferings of St John were immense, hard labor in the quarry mines on the isle of Patmos, St John’s light shines on in the book of Revelation and until the end of time. The fire of St John’s suffering has gone out but the Light is never dying, it shines on and on and rolls on and on.

Finally, Ellen Gunderson Traylor wrote a novel in 1970 called ‘John, Son of Thunder’. In Chapter 120 and 121 Gunderson Traylor describes the degrading circumstances under which St John –well over 90 years old - had to work as an exiled slave in the quarry mines on the isle of Patmos, in the year 95 AD. Although words like: ‘**Rags on your back just like any other slave, they tied your hands and they clamped your mouth**’ seem to be taken almost literally from Homer’s ‘The Odyssey’ but words to that effect are also in Ellen Gunderson Traylor’s novel and it is therefore not at all unlikely that Dylan read this harrowing novel of Gunderson Traylor.

In our next article we will delve deeper into the lyrics, in a verse to verse analysis, and we’ll see how

we can piece all these things together.

Somewhere I read a very creative interpretation saying that the words '**Doctor, doctor tell me the time of day**' would refer to a common practice used in hospitals for attendants or nurses to note the exact time of death of a patient. '**Another bottle's empty**' would refer to blood transfusion, to the fact that another bottle (bag) of blood is empty and that further treatment of the patient is useless, also useless because '**another penny is spent**', which would mean that another life is blown out. '**He turned around and he slowly walked away**' -according to this interpretation- would refer to doctor Lynn who on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1980 at 11.15 pm - turned around and slowly walked out of the emergency room of the St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center to notify family and press that John Lennon had passed away.

Intricate and inventive as this interpretation may be, we don't feel that this is what Dylan had in mind. What seems more realistic is that the first line of this song was taken from an old song from Lonnie Johnson called 'Oh! Doctor The Blues (1926)', which has the following opening lines: '**Oh doctor, doctor, tell me the time of day, Oh doctor, tell me the time of day, all I want is a good drink of whiskey, to drive my blues away, some people say, that it's women, wine, and song, but it's the blues and whiskey, that lead another good man wrong**'. So the opening lines have more to do with the use of alcoholic beverages, of liquor, and the effects this use has on the mental status of the poet. He was so much in a state of intoxication that he had lost all sense of time and now he starts to awake and begs for help from a doctor, as if he says: 'Doctor please help me, I don't know who I am, where I am, and what day it is, help me out of this dreadful trance, it is enough now, **another bottle's empty, another penny is spent**'. The expression 'to spend a penny' means 'to use a public lavatory'. It refers to the (former) use of coin operated locks on public toilets. It was used mostly in the UK and mostly by women (men's urinals were free of charge). Within the context of the song it refers to the frequent use of a public lavatory following excessive drinking.

It would seem that Dylan uses this whole scene of drinking and the effects it has on him, primarily to express a sort of anesthesia he underwent, to make the unbearable in some sort of a way bearable, to make the unthinkable in some kind of way thinkable. Unbearable and unthinkable is what now follows: '**They shot him in the back and down he went**'. This is so hard to bear for a sober mind and almost too terrible to be true, just as he wrote elsewhere: '*I need something strong to distract my mind*'. It is the more so unbearable because Lennon was a fellow- artist and this makes it extra scary, what happened to Lennon may happen to any celebrity, may in fact also happen to Dylan: some lunatic who catches you off guard and shoots you in the back.

But there may be a second reason why Dylan opens the song with this drinking scene. I wrote in my previous article that the opening lines of this song are reminiscent of some sort of medieval dream-vision poem in which the poet enters into some kind of trance at the start of the poem, loses all sense of time, and loses contact with the present world and enters an entirely different, ancient world, a world where the difference between the conscious and the subconscious and the difference between reality and fiction is continuously obliterated. '**Doctor, doctor tell me the time of day**' indicates that the poet has lost all sense of time and that he is now ready and in a position to sway backwards and forwards between the times and experiences of John Lennon on the one hand, and the ancient times and experiences of St John, cooped up on the isle of Patmos in 95 AD, on the other hand.

**'He turned around and he slowly walked away, they shot him in the back and down he went'** refers to the horrible and senseless murder of John Lennon on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1980. John Lennon was shot by Mark David Chapman at the entrance of the building where he lived, The Dakota, in New York

City. Lennon had just returned from Record Plant Studio with his wife, Yoko Ono. Chapman took aim directly at the center of Lennon's back and fired five hollow-point bullets at him from a Charter Arms .38 special revolver. After being hit four times in the back Lennon staggered up five steps to the reception area, saying, "*I'm shot, I'm shot*" and **'down he went'** to the floor and died shortly afterwards.

It says **'they'** shot him in the back, where one would expect **'he'** shot him in the back. The reason why Dylan uses a more generic **'they'** here, may be that Dylan somehow feels that the society as a whole bears responsibility for the fact that it creates circumstances which make it possible for kinky and deranged personalities as Chapman to arise and commit such horrible crimes, also a subdued feeling is expressed, as if Lennon was in a generic sense killed by his fans or public, even if only one individual actually pulled the trigger.

A lot of analysts and fans feel that in the refrain of the song: **'Shine your light, move it on, you burned so bright, roll on, John'** Dylan addresses John Lennon directly, some see it as a prayer from one great artist to another great artist. Plausible as these interpretations may seem at first glance, yet personally, for various reasons, I cannot get my neck around this interpretation.

First of all, the same words **'Shine your light'** were also used in the song 'Precious Angel' (1979). In this song Dylan addresses the 'precious angel', who is said to be Mary Alice Artes, the woman that is said to have led Dylan to Jesus in 1979. But there is more. At the time, somewhere in 1979, John Lennon responded furiously to Dylan's conversion to born again Christianity. When in 1979 Dylan wrote a song called: *'Gotta serve somebody'* Lennon retorted by composing a song called *'Serve yourself'* with lyrics like: *'Well there's something missing in this God Almighty stew, and it's your mother (your mother, don't forget your mother, la), you got to serve yourself, nobody gonna do for you, you gotta serve yourself, nobody gonna do for you, well you may believe in devils and you may believe in laws, but if you don't go out and serve yourself, la, ain't no room service here'*. Yoko Ono in 1998 somewhat tried to soften the harshness of Lennon's stance in this matter by saying about *'Serve yourself'*: *"[This song] was right after Dylan's song "You Gotta Serve Someone", you know - the lord, I suppose, you know. So then he was kind of upset about that and it was a dialogue, you know. In that sense it's fun, I mean you can hear it was fun. He wasn't seriously against it. He showed his anger in a way but also [...] his sense of humor"*. Although –as far as we know - there is no known record of this, it is not hard to imagine – to say the least of it - that at the time Dylan was not amused by Lennon's antagonism and must have felt run down hard by these words. No matter how much respect Dylan has for Lennon as a great artist, he certainly does not see Lennon as a source of light in the way Dylan sees Light and certainly not as a Light that should shine on him and on others for that matter. Although there is a lot of compassion for John Lennon shining through in Dylan's words, yet all this makes it not very likely that when Dylan says: **'Shine your light'** he addresses John Lennon. Dylan seems bewildered, perplexed by the senseless murder of his good acquaintance and fellow artist Jon Lennon, who was brutally knocked down while he was still in the prime time of his life, and Dylan is now looking for somebody that could in any way shed some light on what seems utterly senseless, the incredible and the incomprehensible, the fragility of life.

The beauty of poetry as embodied in Lennon can in an instant be swept away by the most extreme violence. We see the same phenomenon come back later on in the song when Dylan quotes William Blake's poem 'The Tyger'. In this poem a tiger is pictured. A tiger which is at the same time strikingly beautiful in its appearance and yet also terrifying and horrific in its capacity for violence. Therefore, in order to come- in some sort of a way- to terms with his bewilderment and perplexity, it seems that Dylan in his anguish flees for comfort to the other John, to St John the Apostle. He turns to St John,

the writer of his favorite Bible –book: *'The Revelation to John'*, to have *his* light shine on this matter. St John is quite appropriately called the 'Apostle of Light'. The 3rd day of Christmas (December 27<sup>th</sup>) is St John's Day. Much of St. John's work – his gospel and his letters - is suffused with light encountering darkness and overcoming it.

So when St John is addressed here with the words **'Shine your light'** it is not actually St John's own light that is meant but the light of Jesus which St John so abundantly reflects and of which he testifies. Jesus calls himself the Light of the world (John 8:12). The most senseless killing in history was the killing of the Light of the world, of Jesus, at the same time it was the killing that made the most perfect sense. Only in Him the old and weary poet finds comfort for all that would otherwise be senseless and incomprehensible.

**'Move it on, you burnt so bright'**, in the Apocalypse Jesus reveals to St John that He, Jesus, is 'the **bright** morning star' (Rev.22:16), a light that burns so brightly, **'it moves on'** through history. His light not only burnt so bright when He was on earth but it will continue to shine and it will never fade. In this refrain of the song there is also a clear sense of urgency. Words like **'Move it on'** and **'roll on John'** express this urgency, an urgency which we find in many a place in St John's Apocalypse. Time after time St John makes it clear that the end is near and that Jesus will come back soon, e.g. Rev. 22:7: "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book" and Rev. 22:12, 13: "Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End". **'Move it on, roll on John'** because the time is near and be ready for you do not now the hour.

#### Verse 2.

**'From the Liverpool docks to the red-light Hamburg streets'** refers to the early days of the Beatles. The Liverpool docks – Merseyside - is the place where it all started. Today, located within Liverpool's historic Albert Dock there is a Beatles museum called 'The Beatles Story'. **'The red-light Hamburg streets'** is a reference to the period 1960-1962 when Beatles members John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Stuart Sutcliffe and Pete Best regularly performed at various clubs in the **'red-light'** district of Hamburg in Germany. The St. Pauli quarter of Hamburg, where they performed and where the Indra club was located was in this **'red-light'** district, a district where there was a lot of prostitution. This period marks a chapter in the group's history which improved their performance skills, broadened their reputation, and in the end led to their first recording.

**'Down in the quarry with The Quarrymen'** is some sort of a pun and may provide the first link between John Lennon and the other John referred to in this song: John, the Apostle. **The Quarrymen'** (also written as "the Quarry Men") was a British skiffle and rock and roll group, formed by John Lennon in Liverpool in 1956, which eventually evolved into the Beatles in 1960. Originally consisting of Lennon and several school friends, the Quarrymen took their name from a line in the school song of Quarry Bank High School, which they attended. The first lines of this song called *"The Song Of The Quarry"* read: *'Quarry men old before our birth, straining each muscle and sinew, toiling together Mother earth, conquered the rock that was in you'*.

**A quarry** is a type of open-pit mine from which rock or minerals are extracted. Quarries are generally used for extracting building materials, such as dimension stone, construction aggregate, riprap, sand, and gravel.

We feel that **'Down in the quarry'** can hardly be related to John Lennon or to his group the **'Quarrymen'**. **'Down in the quarry'** rather takes us back in time to the year 95 AD, to what happened on the small Island of Patmos. Patmos - measuring only about 6 by 10 miles- was a **quarry** mine for the Roman Empire. Today the island is part of Greece. It is located in The Aegean Sea near the west

coast of present Turkey. The island housed many of the Roman Empire's political and religious prisoners and slaves. John, the beloved apostle of Jesus, was being held as a prisoner of Rome on this island for his continuous preaching of Jesus. Rome believed that by banishing the old man John to the remote, desolate and forsaken island of Patmos, his voice would be silenced. When John was exiled by the emperor Domitian in the year 95 AD to this island to do hard labor in the quarry mines, John was aged in years, and near to the end of his life (his **'bones were weary, and he was about to breathe his last'**).

According to the tradition the Roman emperor Domitian was so outraged by the fact that John miraculously survived when he was dipped in boiling olive oil, that he banished him to Patmos. Since John was a contemporary of Jesus, John would have been by that time well over 90 years old, making him very likely the only apostle to survive to such an old age. The rest of Jesus apostles and disciples were already martyred decades earlier.

**'Playing to the big crowds'** refers to the years 1963-1966 when not only the Beatles concerts in Europe, in the United States, and Australia were attended by large crowds of fans but also to their TV appearances. On 9 February 1964, the Beatles made their first live US television appearance. No less than 73 million viewers—about two fifths of the total American population—watched the group perform on The Ed Sullivan Show, at the time the show had the largest number of viewers that had been recorded for a US television program.

**'Playing to the cheap seats'** is a reference to the Royal Variety Performance of the Beatles in London (November 4th 1963) attended by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and Princess Margaret. John Lennon said to the audience: *'For our last number, I'd like to ask your help. Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? And the rest of you, if you'll, just rattle your jewelry'*. Of this incident Mark Hertsgaard reported in **'A Day in the Life'**: The Music and Artistry of the Beatles (1995): *"The remark provoked warm laughter and applause, and was greeted with profound relief by Beatles manager Brian Epstein, who had feared Lennon would make good on his pre-performance threat to tell them to "rattle their fuc\*\*\*\* jewelry".* **'Another day in the life on your way to your journey's end'**, **'A day in the life'** is a track from and a reference to the Beatles album 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'. Released in June 1967, the album is considered the most influential and most famous rock album of all time, and is one of the world's best-selling albums ever. This highlight marks another day in the life of the Beatles, and marks the start of a journey which for Lennon would come to a dramatic end when he was murdered in 1980. For John, the Apostle, doing hard labor in the quarry mine of Patmos, seemingly marks a low, a nadir, which in the end would produce something beautiful: The Book of Revelation.

### **Verse 3.**

Some say that **'Sailing through the trade winds bound for the South'** would refer to a stormy 600-mile voyage which Lennon made in June 1980, from Rhode Island to the Bermuda triangle in a 43-foot schooner called *'The Magan Jaye'*. A sort of captain's logbook was made of the voyage which includes notes and doodles made by Lennon. The book also contains other entries and anecdotes which hint at the importance of Lennon's Bermuda trip, and of which some say that it lifted Lennon out of depression and inspired him to start working on his last album 'Double Fantasy'. Some rock historians even considered the Bermuda trip one of the most important events of John Lennon's life. Yet we have good reasons to believe that not only this line but in fact this whole verse does not refer to John Lennon but to St John the Apostle and his whereabouts on the island of Patmos. This is also sustained by the fact that whereas the first line **'Sailing through the trade winds bound for the South'** may in some way –albeit not necessarily– be linked to Lennon, the following line however,;

**'Rags on your back just like any other slave'** cannot in any way refer to John Lennon. So, if it is much more likely that it refers to St John, what does it mean? First of all, St John had been living for some time in the town of Ephesus when he was captured by Rome and subsequently banished to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea in 95 AD. Ephesus was a port on the South-West coast of Minor Asia – present Turkey –. A voyage from Ephesus to the island of Patmos took only a few days. Patmos was roughly situated south of Ephesus and that may be the reason why the lyrics say: **'Sailing through the trade winds bound for the South'**. Secondly, apart from this, in this area there is a kind of **'a trade wind'**, it is called the 'Khamsin' and it is a southeasterly wind which blows from North Africa to the eastern Mediterranean. We conclude therefore, that **'Sailing through the trade winds bound for the South'** most likely refers to the voyage from Ephesus to the barren island of Patmos which John, the Apostle, made in 95 AD as a banished prisoner and slave of Emperor Domitian.

The following words **'Rags on your back just like any other slave, 'they tied your hands and they clamped your mouth ' 'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'** and later on in the song also **'You been cooped up on an island far too long' , 'they hauled your ship up on the shore'** and **'they'll trap you in an ambush 'fore you know'** are all words taken more or less literally from Robert Fagles translation (1996) of Homer's *'The Odyssey'*. To read these quotations within the context of Fagles 1996 translation of *'The Odyssey'* we refer to the very interesting contribution of [Scott Warmuth](#) on this subject. The Odyssey is one of two major ancient Greek epic poems attributed to Homer. It is believed to have been composed near the end of the 8th century BC, somewhere in Ionia, the Greek coastal region of Anatolia. One may wonder what the influence of The Odyssey is on this song. When you take a look at the quoted words in The Odyssey, you will find that these words themselves do not really help you to understand the (deeper) meaning of the song 'Roll on John'. It rather looks as if the Odyssey's words are only used as a sort of a vehicle to reach deeper layers. We find the same phenomenon elsewhere on this album and especially on the album 'Modern Times' when poets like Ovid and Timrod are frequently quoted. Therefore, to find deeper meaning it may be helpful to have a look at The Odyssey as a whole. Which main themes in the Odyssey are relevant in this respect and are these themes reflected in the song?

First there is a strong theme of homecoming (nostos) in the Odyssey, caused by the fact that Odysseus is on a journey home after the Trojan had finally ended. We also find this theme of homecoming, of reaching the end of the trail, in this song: Both John Lennon and John the Apostle are on their way **'to their journey's end'**, John, the Apostle has nearly reached the end of his journey: **'his bones are weary and he is about to breath his last'**. Lennon has reached the end of his journey: **'they shot him in the back and down he went'**.

Secondly, there is this theme of 'exile' in The Odyssey. This theme is abundantly reflected in the song, e.g. when it says about John the Apostle: **'they tied your hands and they clamped your mouth ' 'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'** and **'You been cooped up on an island far too long'**

Thirdly, there is a theme of disguise in the Odyssey; the gods disguise themselves so that they can interact with mortal human beings. Odysseus' protector, the goddess Athena, adopts many disguises such as a shepherd, a girl, Telemachus, and Mentor. Odysseus also disguises his identity by telling that his name is 'Nobody' so that he will not be recognized as the one who blinded the Cyclops. When he returns home to Ithaca he also disguises himself as a beggar to protect himself from being killed by the Suitors.

Disguise is a main theme in many a Dylan song, also in this one. Nothing is what it seems. When you hear this song for the first time, it seems it is only about John Lennon, when in fact it is just as much –

if not more- about John the Apostle. Even when it seems that evil rules the earth –expressed in the tragic and senseless murder of Lennon- yet it looks as if you are invited to find the contrast and to make a choice between the success and world fame of Lennon (and the Beatles) and how it all ends, *and* the humble servitude of John the Apostle on the island of Patmos: ***'rags on your back just like any other slave'*** and how he ends: ***'cover him over and let him sleep'***. It is as if the poet says: 'Look how it all ends and then make a choice!'. You are also invited to find the contrast and to make a choice between Lennon's Hindu 'Instant Karma' light: *'Well we all shine on, like the moon and the stars and the sun, come and get your share'* and the light of Jesus which John the Apostle reflects: ***'Shine your light'***. In other words: you have to decide between Lennon's 'serving yourself' and being a light source *yourself* or John the Apostle's light – which is the reflection of the light of Jesus – and to serve somebody else (the Lord).

To resume the thread of verse 3, we have to bear in mind that in the English language as well as many other languages, the word 'odyssey' has come to refer to an epic voyage. Ellen Gunderson Traylor's novel *'John, Son of Thunder'* (referred to in Part 1 of my analysis) describes in Chapter 122 this epic voyage, how during John the Apostle's time in exile, the legend of John's strength of mind became an example and a testimony for the hundreds of severely tortured prisoners on Patmos and how St John was able to rise above the darkest hour of any circumstance. Gunderson describes how the community of oppressed in the quarry more and more began to look upon the weak, fragile, bent, old chain-ganged Saint as an epic hero, an epic hero on his way to the end of his epic journey. We also wrote in Part 1 of our analysis that it looks like as if words like ***'Rags on your back just like any other slave, they tied your hands and they clamped your mouth'*** more or less literally walked out of Chapter 120 and 121 of Gunderson Traylor's novel into this song. ***'They tied your hands and they clamped your mouth'*** not only refers to the literally chain-ganged Apostle doing hard labor in the quarry but also figuratively to what John himself wrote in the Book of Revelation 1:9: *'I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus'*.

I doubt whether in the line ***'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'*** Dylan had Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' in mind, where at Prospero's cave, Miranda meets Ferdinand carrying logs for her father. At this cave they exchange their love for one another and vow to be married, nor, for that matter, Fagles Translation of 'The Odyssey', page 137, where it says *"He heads for his bed of rest in deep hollow caves"*.

We rather feel that ***'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'*** refers to the cave on the island of Patmos where John the Apostle, in a vision, received the Apocalypse: *'The Book of Revelation'* in 95 AD. A sanctuary and the Monastery of the Apocalypse were later built around the cave that tradition identified as the site where John received those visions. Today this site is still a major tourist attraction on Patmos.

Ostensibly silenced and outraged by the Roman emperor Domitian, it looked as if John the Apostle had entered a dead end street: ***'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'***. The same feeling is expressed here as Dylan once wrote in the song: 'Marching to the City': *'I'm chained to the earth like a silent slave, trying to break free out of death's dark cave'*. However, when it says: ***'Wasn't no way out of that deep dark cave'*** this also means that there is at the same time something positive and uplifting in this phrase. John was now ready to receive this vision and could not leave that cave ***until*** he had written down on a scroll all that 'he saw and heard'. John's sworn testimony about how he



received the messages is written down in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation.

Verse 4.

**'I heard the news today, oh boy'** is again a reference to **'A day in the life'**, a track from the Beatles album 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' where it says: *'I read the news today oh, boy, about a lucky man who made the grade', and 'I read the news today oh, boy four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire'*.

Now it seems not without significance that Dylan deliberately writes: **'I heard'** the news, instead of what one would expect: **'I read the news'**. It was on Patmos that John the Apostle wrote down in a scroll The Book of Revelation, all that **"he saw and heard"**. John's sworn testimony about how he received the messages is given in Revelations 22:8 *"I, John, am the one who heard and saw all these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me"*. It is as if the poet immediately wants us to shift our attention, away from John Lennon (The Beatles) to a deeper layer, to what happened to St John on Patmos. This is confirmed by what follows: **"They hauled your ship up on the shore"**. First of all it is noteworthy that these words are inspired by Robert Fagles translation (1996) of Homer's *'The Odyssey'*, on page 138 it says: *'Once I reached my ship hauled up on shore'*. If you apply these words to John Lennon's life it may either be a vague reference to the dangerous and stormy 600-mile sea voyage which Lennon made in June 1980 or – more likely - it may refer to his violent death in 1980. **"They hauled your ship up on the shore"** could be a metaphorical expression meaning that this is where John Lennon's life finally ended up; Lennon's life ship came home, although against his will.

However, chapter 120 of Ellen Gunderson's novel 'John, Son of Thunder') reveals the deeper meaning of these words: how they hauled John the Apostle's ship on the shore of the island of Patmos in the year 95 AD, and how immediately upon his arrival on the island he was led into the quarry to do hard labor.

**'Now the city gone dark, there is no more joy, they tore the heart right out and cut it to the core'**

Peter Stone Brown wrote that in these words Dylan *"totally captures the shock, the horror and most of all the loss of that cold December night that at times seems so long ago and somehow manages to seem like yesterday"*. Dr. A.T. Bradford observes that: **"They tore the heart right out and cut it to the core"** *has a clever double meaning, between the metaphor of Lennon's passing and the actions of the pathologists performing the autopsy, where the heart is indeed removed and examined surgically"*.

However, also in this case, we came to understand that there are deeper layers in those words. We have good reasons to believe that the **'city'** to which Dylan refers here, may very well be the city of **Jerusalem** and more specifically the Jerusalem which was destroyed by the Roman emperor in 70 AD. Thematically this fits in well on the album 'Tempest' which is full of allusions to the times of the early Roman kings, to the times of the Roman Emperors when also John the Apostle had his days. John the Apostle was banished to Patmos in 95 AD. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed 25 years earlier by the Romans in 70 AD. Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege of Jerusalem and that 97,000 people were captured and enslaved: *"The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. The legionaries had to clamber over heaps of dead to carry on the work of extermination"*.

Chapter 110 -113 of Ellen Gunderson Traylor's novel 'John, Son of Thunder' describes how John the Apostle managed to flee from the crumbling city of Jerusalem. All these dreadful events occurred

during his lifetime and when John arrived on Patmos, banned and enslaved and bereft of all basic human rights and the city of Jerusalem destroyed, things looked as if all hope was gone and times looked gloomier than ever before, that's why it says: **"Now the city gone dark, there is no more joy"**. There is a rabbinic saying in the Babylonian Talmud (Kiddushin 49b) which states that heaven, earth and **Jerusalem** are the essential components of the Hebrew soul. The rabbis say: *'As the world was being created, God gave out ten portions of joy to the world and nine were given to Jerusalem; ten portions of beauty God gave to the world and nine were for Jerusalem; ten portions of suffering God gave to the world and nine were for Jerusalem'*.

So when you destroy Jerusalem, **'there is no more joy'** left. Jerusalem is seen by many Jews, Christians and Muslims as the **'heart of the world'**. If you tear the heart out and cut it to the core you will lose everything and that is exactly what happened in 70 AD to Jerusalem: **'they tore the heart right out and cut it to the core'**

Jerusalem is regarded as the city where all the joys, aspirations and pains of humanity come together. Jerusalem is the city where dreams are dreamt and either realized or shattered. A medieval map shows Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple as the epicenter of the world, the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia spreading out from the center like huge petals. It is all based on a vision of world redemption arising from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is seen as the **'heart'** of the world and the center of history, just like Elie Wiesel once said: *"Jerusalem must remain the world's Jewish spiritual capital, not a symbol of anguish and bitterness, but a symbol of trust and hope. As the Hasidic master Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav said, "Everything in this world has a heart; the heart itself has its own heart." Jerusalem is the heart of our heart, the soul of our soul"*.

#### Verse 5.

Some analysts feel that **'Put down your bags and get 'em packed, leave right now, you won't be far from wrong, the sooner you go the quicker you'll be back'** would refer to the fact that just before his death John Lennon had spoken about his intentions to make a trip to England to visit his relations and friends in Liverpool and that he had some sort of feeling in his bones, a premonition, that something bad was about to happen. **'Leave right now, you won't be far from wrong'** would mean that his premonition that something terrible is about to happen is not far from wrong – **'not far from wrong'** meaning that this premonition is in fact accurate - and that he'd better hurry up and leave. Within this context **'You been cooped up on an island far too long'** is interpreted as a reference to the island of Manhattan, where John Lennon had lived for more than 5 years in some sort of seclusion, **'cooped up'** as it says, in his apartment at the Dakota, and that is was now time to break away.

How does this verse relate –if it does - to the deeper layers of the song, to the times of the Roman Emperors and John the Apostle? First of all **'You been cooped up on an island far too long'** is again inspired by Fagles translation of the 'Odyssey' which has on page 136: *"Here you are, cooped up on an island far too long, with no way out of it, none that you can find, while all your shipmates' spirit ebbs away'* and on page 139: *"Here I am, cooped up on an island far too long"*.

Secondly, whereas the next verse slows things down: **'Slow down, you're moving way too fast'** the atmosphere this verse breathes is one of urgency and of speed.

John the Apostle received his visions on the island of Patmos. These visions were set down in the Book of Revelation. The notion of urgency is very prominent in the Book of Revelation. Both the beginning of Revelation *and* the end of Revelation stress the sense of urgency. At the beginning: Revelation 1: 1 *'This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John'*. At

the end: Revelation 22: 20 *'He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!" Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!.*

The words ***'Put down your bags and get 'em packed, leave right now, you won't be far from wrong, the sooner you go the quicker you'll be back'*** may on a deeper level function as an incentive for John the Apostle to hurry up and to forget his troubles and woes and to leave the island as soon as possible and to have the Apocalypse revealed to the world. Time has come to a halt and history cannot unfold itself until the Apocalypse has been revealed, just like it says in Revelation 5: 1 and 2: *'And Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: "Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?"*. ***'The sooner you go the quicker you'll be back'*** may be an allusion to Jesus. Only Jesus proved worthy to break the seals of the scroll and to unfold history (Rev. 5: 5-7). The sooner His work on this earth is ready, the quicker He will be able to return to this earth and finish His works. ***'You been cooped up on an island far too long'*** may be another incentive for the Apostle to get the chain of events started as if it says: *'You've been a prisoner long enough now on this island, hurry up and leave because you have very important work to do'*.

#### **Verse 6.**

Not without good reason, some see in the first line of verse 6 ***'Slow down you're moving way too fast'*** a reference to the Larry Williams song 'Slow Down' (1958) which the Beatles recorded in 1964. The song's chorus reads: *'You'd better slow down...baby, now you're moving way too fast'*. Others however, see some vague reference to the opening line of "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feeling Groovy)" by Paul Simon: *'Slow down, you move too fast, you got to make the morning last'*. The singer of the song gently urges you not to hurry through the beauty of the morning but to take notice and to savor the bounty of life so abundantly present, in ordinary things all around him. Does it allude to Lennon's hard won happiness as a husband and father while living with his family in New York and of which he has said it was a joyful time of renewal in his personal life? Or does it even allude to the fact that the hospital Lennon was transported to after being shot on December 8 1980 was situated at 59<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue?

***'Come together right now over me'*** is a reference to the Beatles' song "Come together". This song was written by Lennon during one of his and Yoko Ono's bed-in sessions in Toronto in May 1969. When their friend, Timothy Leary, an LSD drug mahatma and self-ordained liberator of the world's collective conscience, appeared at the bed-in, he informed Lennon and Ono of his decision to run for political office, and proclaimed his campaign slogan: *'Come Together'*. Based on this slogan Leary requested Lennon to write a song for him to promote his political campaign. Lennon's go on the slogan was 'to come together and join the party', and thus wrote the song. However, Leary was unable to use the song because shortly afterwards Leary was arrested and went to jail. Leary now gone, Lennon and the Beatles took the liberty to record the song for their own purposes.

***'One thing I can tell you is you got to be free, come together right now over me'*** and other songs by the Beatles and other groups during the 60ties and early seventies strongly called for the brotherhood of man, the overcoming of all differences between races and cultures, attempts were made to give peace a chance, culminating in the flower power movement.

Maybe the poet intends to tone things down a little, in the same way as he once did with the civil rights movement in the sixties. When the poet says: ***'Slow down, you're moving way too fast'*** it may be as if he says: *'this is all going too fast for me, ultimate and lasting peace will not be reached in this way, even if you come together over me or any other person. Peace and tranquility will come but*

it will come from elsewhere. Peace and tranquility will definitely come, but it has to come through a lot of pain and suffering. This basic notion that a new, peaceful, future will come but that it will come through a lot of pain and suffering may be the reason why the poet goes on to say: **'Your bones are weary, you're about to breathe your last'**. Whereas *'You're about to breathe your last'* reminds us again of the dramatic events that took place in the evening of December 8 1980, when John Lennon was shot down in front of his apartment building, the words **'your bones are weary'** can hardly be attributed to Lennon but rather take us back to the times of John the Apostle on Patmos. When John was exiled to Patmos in 95 AD to do hard labor in the quarry mine, he was well over 90 years old. We read of all the torture, the humiliation, the bullying and suffering the weary old man, John the Apostle, had to endure in Ellen Gunderson Traylor's novel *'John – son of thunder'* – chapter 121. Although John the Apostle had nearly reached the end of his trail: **'your bones are weary, you're about to breathe your last'**, yet there was one more mission for him to complete: the reception of the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation. John received his visions under the most dreadful circumstances, and it is as if we hear John the Apostle pray: **'Lord, you know how hard that it can be'**. On the first level, these words refer to 'The Ballad of John and Yoko' where it says: **'Christ, you know it ain't easy, You know how hard it can be, the way things are going, they're gonna crucify me'**. For Lennon it was the time when he and Yoko were singing protest songs about Angela Davis. At the time John had the feeling that 'they' were trying to shut him up and down and he was fighting for his rights.

The similarity between the evocation of Dylan and Lennon is that they both invoke divine powers to assist them in solving their problems. Dylan changes Lennon's evocation from 'Christ' into 'Lord' but here the similarity ends. Because, whereas Lennon's evocation 'Christ' really sounds like a curse, Dylan's heartfelt evocation 'Lord' sounds like a solemn prayer. In spite of their mutual artistic respect, the different intonation of these words shows that the two of them have a fundamentally different world view and this difference in world view between the two of them could not have been put into words any better.

### Verse 7.

The seventh verse of this song: **'Roll on, John, roll through the rain and snow, take the right-hand road and go where the buffalo roam, they'll trap you in an ambush 'fore you know, too late now to sail back home'** seems to be one of the obscurest verses of the song. At first glance, the verse seems not to refer to any event that can be connected to the real life of John Lennon or to the life of John the Apostle, or to any other 'John' for that matter. It is as if the poet invites you to evoke moods in you, to feel the mood of the song and to put you in a state of mind in which you draw inferences and make connections, even if these inferences or connections are not actually there in the text of the song. We have to remember that quite often Dylan does not use language in the same way that 'normal' people use language. Dylan increasingly makes poetry by borrowing words and making collages, using phrases, images and quotes from other people and sources and then blending them together until in the end they mean something entirely different. Why does Dylan refer to animals in this verse –the buffalo – and to a tiger in the final verse when there seems to be no real connection to any 'John'?

Although the words **"They'll trap you in an ambush before you know"** maybe vaguely inspired by Robert Fagles translation of 'The Odyssey' which on page 139 has: *"Which god, Menelaus, conspired with you to trap me in an ambush?"*, one might wonder if there is any loose connection to the American semi-biographical comedy film **'Where the Buffalo Roam'**? This film, made in 1980, depicts

Hunter S. Thompson's rise to fame in the 1970s and his relationship with Chicano attorney and activist Oscar Zeta Acosta. Music in the film included rock and R&B songs by Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, The Temptations, the Four Tops and Credence Clearwater Revival. Additionally, characters played by Bill Murray and Rene Auberjonois sing lyrics from the Sergeant Pepper's track "*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*".

We have to bear in mind that what many people call the American buffalo is actually an animal named the American bison. The Buffalo is an inseparable part of the American history; no other wild animal has played such an important role in human affairs. The tribes of the American plains relied for many centuries on bison for food, shelter, clothing, and also as a powerful spiritual symbol. American bison are associated closely with the American Old West. They once roamed the grasslands of North America in massive herds. In the 19th century, however, they nearly became extinct due to widespread commercial hunting.

So the first mood this verse evokes in me personally is that of the Wild West. Herds of buffalo, gun shooting, cowboys trapped in ambushes etc. It brings back to memory the atmosphere of the western movie '*Patt Garret and Billy the Kid*' including anti-violence songs like '*Knocking on Heaven's Door*', an atmosphere where the bad memory of '**they shot him in the back and down he went**' still lingers. You might hear the echo of Steve Tilston's song '*Slip Jig and Reel*' where it says: '*A train to St Louis, just one jump ahead, he slept one eye open a gun 'neath his head, but he dreamed of the green fields and mountains of home while crossing the plains **where the buffalo roam***' and further on in the song: '*In the deadliest **ambush** near old Santa Fe, a young buck was taken, togged up in a coat*'.

The second mood this verse evokes in me personally is in what is expressed in the words: '**too late now to sail back home**'. In my imagination I once again see John the Apostle, trapped in his house in the town of Ephesus in 95 AD where he was finally arrested by the Roman Emperor and banished to the island of Patmos. For John the Apostle it was too late then to '**sail back home**', to his home land Palestine, he had to undergo all the pain and suffering on the island of Patmos to make it possible for the light of the Apocalypse to emerge and to burn so brightly. It is as if in this song two types of violence and suffering are pictured. The one type is ostensibly senseless and at random: the bullets of the Wild West and the bullet of some lunatic shooting you in the back. What good will it do? The other type of violence and suffering seems to be more submissive and meek, the sufferings of John the Apostle. This suffering however has produced something quite good: the enduring light of the Apocalypse that shines forever.

I want to give special thanks to Dave Richards who pointed out to me that the 'John' referred to this verse may refer to John Smith, (1580-1631) who was an Admiral of New England, a soldier, explorer, and author. Smith is said to have played an important role in the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in North America. Apart from the Indian tribes the local weather is said to have been the biggest threat for these early Jamestown settlers. That is why it says '**roll on John through the rain and snow**'. Dave Richardson pointed out to me that 'Pocahontas, daughter of the chief of the Powhatan Indian tribe, warned Smith about her tribe's plot to ambush and kill John Smith in 1608, when this Powhatan tribe invited them to their land on supposedly friendly terms'. This may be the reason why it says: '**they trap you in an ambush before you know**'.

'John' Lennon and 'John' Smith and 'John' the Apostle may have in common that their lifetime work was done far away from their home land, across the sea and both Smith and Lennon led a sort of British invasion. The invasion that John the Apostle led was of much greater importance, it hugely set up the invasion of the gospel throughout the entire world.

**Verse 8.**

The final verse: ***'Tyger, tyger, burning bright, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. In the forest of the night, cover him over and let him sleep'*** is undoubtedly the most significant and intriguing verse of the song, it gives the impression of some sort of an epilogue and retrospectively colors the meaning of the whole song. This last verse is mainly made up of quotations but we feel that it is the collage of quotations which renders the verse its deeper meaning.

The words ***'Tyger, tyger, burning bright'*** and ***'In the forest of the night'*** are literally quoted from the famous poem "The Tyger" by the English poet William Blake. It was published as part of his collection Songs of Experience in 1794. Within the context it says: *'Tyger! Tyger! burning bright, in the forest of the night, what immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?'*

The words ***'I pray the Lord my soul to keep'*** are quoted from a classic children's bedtime prayer from the 18th century called: *'Now I lay me down to sleep'*. The earliest version is said to be written by Joseph Addison in an essay appearing in The Spectator on March 8, 1711. One of the later versions printed in The New England Primer goes: *'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, If I shall die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen'*.

When the Dylan says ***'Tyger, Tyger'*** the first question we have to answer is: who does Dylan address here and why does he address this person as ***'Tyger, Tyger,'*** a person who apparently has some of the characteristics of a tiger and is 'tiger-like'? To answer this question we first take a closer look at the poem *'The Tyger'*. In this poem Blake elaborates on the wide spread and conventional idea that nature is a work of art and consequently nature must in some sort of a way represent and reflect its creator. The tiger is strikingly beautiful and at the same time awesome and horrific in its capacity for extreme violence. Blake implicitly raises an existential and moral issue about the nature of the deity: who is this God and what kind of a God is He who could or would design and create such a terrifying wild beast as the Tyger? In other words: what does the undeniable fact that evil and violence exist in this world tell us about the nature and intentions of God and how should we deal with a world where a single being can at once be full of beauty and full of horror? Blake pictures a tiger which is at once perfectly beautiful and nevertheless perfectly destructive. For Blake it is obvious that only a very strong and powerful Creator can be capable of such a creation. The "forging" of the tiger - as Blake calls it - triggers off also moral questions not only about the presence of evil in this world but also about the origin of evil. The words ***'burning bright'*** suggest the creation of destructive fire with all the implications of purification and destruction.

Blake, however, does not resolve the issue of the origin of evil but rather hints at a way to come to terms with this issue. This happens when in the same poem Blake contrasts the tiger with the lamb: *'Did he who made the lamb make thee?'*. In contrast with *'The Tyger'* Blake also wrote a poem called *'The Lamb': 'He is meek & he is mild, he became a little child: I a child & thou a lamb, we are called by his name. Little Lamb God bless thee. Little Lamb God bless thee'*.

The tiger and the lamb have been created by the same God. "The Tyger" consists of unanswered questions and leaves us to awe at the complexity of creation, the sheer magnitude of God's power, the combination of the horrific and the beauty. The lamb on the other hand represents innocence, tenderness and submissiveness. The Lamb is God's gift to a fallen world. The Lamb is His offering of reconciliation, to reconcile what would otherwise be irreconcilable, to conceive what would otherwise be inconceivable. We are invited to accept this great gift of God and we can do so, not by trying to understand but to accept what we cannot understand and to flee to the Lamb for comfort. Dylan wrestles with the same problem of the origin of evil in this world elsewhere on this album, particularly in the previous song *'Tempest'*. When depicting the sinking of the Titanic Dylan first writes: *'When the Reaper's (Matt. 13:39) task had ended, sixteen hundred had gone to rest, the good,*

*the bad, the rich, the poor, the loveliest and the best*'. But then Dylan writes something very significant: *'They waited at the landing, and they tried to understand, but **there is no understanding for the judgment of God's hand***'. We see this same phenomenon in this final verse of 'Roll on John'. We are invited **not** to try to understand what we cannot understand but to find comfort in the arms of the Almighty: *'I pray the Lord my soul to keep. In the forest of the night, cover him over and let him sleep*'.

Therefore, **'Tyger, Tyger, burning bright'** may first of all have the connotation that the good and the evil, the beauty and the ugly exist side by side in this fallen world and senseless violence may lash out, ostensibly at random, as we have seen in the case of John Lennon when he was shot in the back. Yet, **'Tyger, Tyger, burning bright'** opens up another perspective. This may happen when the person addressed here as **'Tyger, Tyger, burning bright'** is not John Lennon but in fact John the Apostle. We already noted that John the Apostle is called the 'Apostle of Light' and that much of St. John's work – both his gospel and his letters - is suffused with light encountering darkness and overcoming it. Quite rightly one may therefore say that John was a light **'burning bright'**. It is also not without reason that the phrase **'You burnt so bright'** appears eight times in the chorus of the song and it now repeated in the final verse of the song. It is meant to bring things to a conclusion and to combine the strength of the **'The Tyger'** with the intensity of the light. And there was certainly tiger like strength and determination in John the Apostle. Jesus called John and his brother James 'boanerges' which means **'Sons of Thunder'**. (Mark 3:17). John and James had an explosive and destructive temper just like a tiger, as we may read in Luke 9:54 when John and James said to Jesus: *"Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"* . But it would not stay like that because, after walking with Jesus for a lifetime, the *"Son of Thunder"* earned a new nickname: the *"Apostle of Love."* The meekness and submissiveness of the Lamb (Christ) overwhelmed John the Apostle and softened and subdued his 'tiger like' characteristics. The contrast between strength and weakness - the Tyger and the Lamb -, a prominent motif in Blake's poetry, is also a prominent motif in the Gospel and Apocalypse of John the Apostle. In the Book of Revelation John no less than 25 times refers to the Lamb. It all has to do with the fact the forces of strength and power on the one hand (represented by the lion), and meekness, submissiveness and surrender on the other hand (represented by the Lamb) are perfectly united in the person of Jesus. John testifies of this notion in Revelation 5:5-7, when in a vision John sees Jesus having both the shape of a lion and a lamb. John the Apostle has taught us that the issue of the existence and origin of evil can only be resolved and be laid to rest if we flee to the Lamb for comfort and that is exactly what the poet is now going to do. It is the very reason why Dylan goes on to say **'I pray the Lord my soul to keep**'. When Dylan says **'I pray the Lord my soul to keep**', we see something decisive happening in the song. **'I pray the Lord my soul to keep**' is much more than a recitation of a classic children's bedtime prayer from the 18th century called: *'Now I lay me down to sleep*'. First of all there is a change of subject. Dylan no longer speaks of John Lennon, John the Apostle or any other 'John' for that matter, but turns to himself and instead of saying: **'I pray the Lord HIS soul to keep**' he prays: **'I pray the Lord MY soul to keep**'. It is as if he now says: *'I do know what happened to the soul of John the Apostle and I do not know what happened to Lennon's soul. But what about me? What will happen to my soul? In the end this question is much more important than how history will look back and judge on my life and my achievements, and no matter how much I may have achieved in this life, I cannot redeem myself, therefore I humbly flee to God for redemption of my soul and **'I pray the Lord my soul to keep***'. Dylan confirmed the answer to this question himself in his 2012 RT Interview. When asked, *"Is (touring) a fulfilling way of life?"* Dylan replied, *"No kind of life is fulfilling if your soul hasn't been*

redeemed."

When in the final line of the verse, it says: ***'In the forest of the night, cover him over and let him sleep'***, the perspective changes again into a more generic direction. It is not ***'cover me over and let me sleep'*** but ***cover him over and let him sleep'***. It seems that the focus is now again shifted to John the Apostle but its generic use also includes the poet himself as if he invites his audience to say this prayer also for him personally.

William Blake's poem quoted above: ***'Tyger! Tyger! burning bright, in the forest of the night'***, evokes yet another image of the tiger. Not the image of the tiger as a strong hunter but of the tiger being hunted down. Not the image of the tiger as a destructive killer but as victim of poachers. In your imagination you see those poachers who seek to trap and kill the tiger in the forest, not only for sport of game, but also to sell the skin of this beautiful, almost extinct, animal just for financial benefit. It seems like a primordial instinct of man in this fallen world, to kill what is strong, proud and strikingly beautiful, to create a world where beauty goes unrecognized. How can you survive in such a world? The only way out of ***'the forest of the night'***, the darkness of this fallen world, is to pray to God: ***'cover him over and let him sleep'***. Just what John the Apostle said in his Book of Revelation Chapter 14 verse 13: *"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!"* They will be covered over and sleep peacefully in the arms of God till finally the Latter Day will arrive at the end of times. One day the contrast between the destructive power of the tiger and its beauty will be wiped out as we read in Isaiah 11:6 *"In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all"*.

If *'Tempest'* would be Dylan's last album and *'Roll on John'* his last official song, this final verse would be a very worthy ending. It says it all.