

Bob Dylan's "My Own Version of You" an analysis by Kees de Graaf.

1. Introduction.

There cannot be any doubt that we deal with yet another Dylan classic here. As time passes by and we draw nearer to the end of his impressive career as a poet, musician, songwriter and painter, his work seems to become more and more intricate. Also in this song, you sometimes feel as if you are in a labyrinth of elusiveness and you desperately ask yourself ***"Is there light at the end of the tunnel - can you tell me please?"***.

A key point is that the **"You"** and the **"My"** in ***"My Own Version of You"*** are not identified. Objectively seen, the **"You"** may be virtually anybody or anything. This gives rise to a lot of speculation from Dylan scholars on the internet. Some say that the **"You"** is a woman. Others argue that the **"You"** is Dylan himself who continuously recreates himself. Again others, suggest that it is just a sneer at all those critics and analysts – including the author of this article- who make their own version of Dylan and pretend that their "version" is the only one that is authentic?

But what about if we have good reasons to assume that the **"You"** in this song is supposed to be God? God says in Genesis 1:26: ***"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"*** (KJV). What about if man tries to do the same thing and tries to be like God? What about if this song has to do with the indelible and irresistible inclination of fallen mankind to be like God and to create a self-made version of God, and in doing so defying God's first commandment ***"You shall have no other gods before me"*** and even more importantly defying His second commandment: ***"You***

shall not make yourself a graven image" (Exodes 20:3,4 RSV)? In other words: **"You shall not make an own version of me!"** . It is clear that this song is -at least partly-inspired by Mary Shelly's novel "**Frankenstein**". The main character in this novel, Victor Frankenstein succeeds in bringing **"someone to life"**, but it turns out to be a murderous monster whereas God says of His creation –man made in His own image- that it was quite good (Gen. 1:31).

The idea that the **"You"** in this song is in fact God, is in line with the main theme of this album: *"Rough and rowdy ways"*. The rough and rowdy ways are the ways of God's opponent. In our analysis of *"False Prophet"* we already found these *"rough and rowdy ways"* incarnated in the False Prophet, alias Satan, the devil. *"Good intentions can be evil"* we hear Dylan say in his song *"Man of Peace"* and many a time these intentions are hidden under a cloak of decency. This is the case when we hear the False Prophet say: *"I'm the enemy of treason - the enemy of strife, I'm the enemy of the un-lived meaningless life"*. This is also the case in this song; the words: **"I want to do things for the benefit of all mankind"** and **"do it with decency and common sense"** sound as much benevolent. But – as is so often the case in Dylan's songs- things are not what they seem. When mankind is stopped short in its never ending endeavour to make an own version of God, mankind can become extremely violent. When all attempts to create an own version of God fail and mankind **"gets into trouble"**, one would expect that mankind would give up and surrender. But that has not happened. On the contrary, instead of giving up and surrendering, and admitting that mankind in itself has **"No place to turn - no place at all"** , mankind does the opposite and **"hits the wall"**.

No matter how preposterous and futile all these attempts to create an own version of God are, mankind keeps on trying. Take e.g. ***“Mister Marx with his axe”***; his communism. His attempt to create a secular version of the kingdom of God resulted in millions and millions of casualties who- in the 20th century- were slain by this ideological axe under Stalin’s and Mao’s communism. The same can be said of all religious ideologies, during the Crusades and even ***“Long ago before the First Crusade”***. *“God wants it”* has often been misused as a pretext to create an own *“new imperial empire”*, to create an own -secular- version of the kingdom of God which in reality has nothing to do with the heavenly kingdom, on the contrary. (For more details on this, see my analysis of Dylan’s *“With God on our side”*, elsewhere on this website).

The refrain ***“I want to bring someone to life”*** appears no less than eight times in the song. This shows how crucial this notion is to understand this song. There is a reverse side of the medal showing these seven futile attempts ***“to bring someone to life”*** and that reverse side is that no creature, but only God, can bring a dead person to life and He ultimately proved this by resurrecting Jesus from the dead. Therefore these seven attempts to ***“bring someone to life”*** express the ongoing human determination to do the same and bring someone to life. But all these attempts have failed and will fail, no matter how hard humanity keeps on trying.

In the detailed analysis of this song, it will appear that Mary Shelley’s novel ***“Frankenstein”*** has been an important source of inspiration for this song. It will also appear that this song can only be understood against the backdrop of the biblical books of Genesis and the biblical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

These prophets picture in dark colours how futile and ridiculous all attempts to make an own version (image) of God are. The poet sees through it all: ***“I can see the history of the whole human race, It’s all right there - its carved into your face”***. This is confirmed by Jeremiah 51:17,18: *“The whole human race is foolish and has no knowledge! The craftsmen are disgraced by the idols they make, for their carefully shaped works are a fraud. These idols have no breath or power. Idols are worthless; they are ridiculous lies! On the day of reckoning they will all be destroyed”*(NLT). The song makes it implicitly clear that all attempts *“to create an own version of you”* will ultimately lead to disaster.

2. Analysis.

When the song starts by saying: ***“All through the summers and into January, I’ve been visiting morgues and monasteries, looking for the necessary body parts”*** we are immediately taken to Mary Shelly’s novel *“Frankenstein”*. In chapter 4 of this novel we see this character Victor Frankenstein devoting himself to schoolwork, to science and in particular chemistry. He is quite successful in this area and deserves a lot of esteem from his professors and fellow students. When he leaves Ingolstadt in Germany and returns home to Geneva, he devotes himself to a new field of scientific experiments. He tries to create new life from dead material by reanimating a dead body. To do so he visits morgues and cemeteries, looking for the necessary body parts. After several failed attempts he is finally successful, albeit at the expense of his health and powers of judgement. He continues this grisly work all through the spring, summer and autumn of that year.

Now when it says: ***“All through the summers and into January”*** this suggests that the antagonist has allowed himself a considerable amount of time to be well prepared for his creative action. During that time of preparation he says ***“I’ve been visiting morgues and monasteries”***. It seems a little odd that the word ***“monasteries”*** is used here where one expect the word ***“cemeteries”***. It is as if the poet deliberately intends to blend the secular ***“morgues”*** with the more sacred ***“monasteries”*** suggesting that in the end death -without any respect for the sacred - equalizes both the secular and the sacred. ***“Looking for the necessary body parts, limbs and livers and brains and hearts”*** – apart from the Frankenstein connection- these words remind us of the book of the Biblical prophet Ezekiel where in chapter 37 we find the vision of the valley of the dry bones (to which Dylan also refers to in his song ***“Dignity”*** where it says: ***“I went into the red, went into the black, into the valley of dry bone dreams”***). In a vision the prophet Ezekiel hears a rattling noise (37:4) when a vast number human bones come together and he sees ***“tendons and flesh”*** appear on the bones, as it were, he can see limbs and livers and brains and hearts etc. take their right position on the corpses (37:8).

As said in our introduction, the refrain ***“I want to bring someone to life”*** appears eight times in the song, and for that reason it gives us an important clue for understanding this song. Here it is used for the first time. Seven attempts to ***“bring someone to life”*** express the ongoing human determination- throughout the ages- to go to the utmost in an attempt to do what will prove to be impossible. It is clear from Ezekiel 37:9,10 that one needs divine power to bring someone to life. The antagonist may self-

confidently state: ***"I want to bring someone to life - is what I want to do, I want to create my own version of you"*** but deep down inside he knows that he cannot deliver, simply because he does not have this divine power needed to bring someone to life and create an own version (of God). This attempt is ridiculous and doomed to fail like all seven following attempts. In the end it will be clear that the human claim ***"to bring someone to life"*** is a false claim and that this capacity is only reserved to God and He is the only one who can truly make this claim to ***"bring someone to life"***.

"It must be the winter of my discontent" echoes Shakespeare's play Richard III where it says: *"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by the Sun of York"* (Act 1 scene 1). An article from The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust called ["Shakespeare's Richard III - Myth or Reality ?"](#) deals with the question whether the real Richard III was as villainous as Shakespeare made him out to be. The article says: *"Well the short answer is no. While Richard was no saint, making a number of misjudgements, and at times showing his ruthless streak, Shakespeare's representation of Richard is largely inaccurate"*. From this article it would seem obvious that Shakespeare – for whatever reason – created his *"own version"* of Richard III.

In this song ***"It must be the winter of my discontent"*** shows the antagonist's ongoing discontent that he has not been able to ***"bring someone to life"***. He has gone through various ***"summers"*** and is now again back in winter, in January, and he shows his discontent that he still has not managed to ***"bring some to life"***. He tries to be like God but he lacks the divine secret, the secret how to create something out of nothing, not by *"doing"*

something- the antagonist keeps on “*doing*” things in this song albeit in vain- but by simply “*saying*” something. Man is created and lives by the spoken “*word*” of God. The antagonist cannot match this and laments “***I wish you’d taken me with you wherever you went***” as if he said to God: “I wish I would have been there when you laid down the foundations of the earth and created man, so that I could copy it and make my own version”.

The words “***They talk all night - they talk all day, not for a second do I believe what they say***” may have some autobiographical resonance. We reiterate what we wrote in the introduction to the analysis of this song “that it is just a sneer from Dylan at all those critics and analysts – including the author of this article- who make their own version of Dylan and pretend that their “version” is the only one that is authentic”. It all reminds us of a line in Dylan’s song “*Soon after midnight*”: “*They chirp and they chatter, what does it matter?*” and the poet may add to this: “***not for a second do I believe what they say***”

The words “***I want to bring someone to life***” are followed by “***someone I’ve never seen, you know what I mean - you know exactly what I mean***” and take us into the realm of some sort of a secret society, like e.g. the Freemasonry, where only the enlightened few possess inside information, a secret society rich with symbols and rituals, full of legends, parodies and conspiracy theories. Only insiders are supposed to know what is going on and are able to say to one another: “***you know what I mean - you know exactly what I mean***” and by doing so create their own – inside – version of reality, not open to the general public but only to a carefully selected number of people.

In his Wall Street Journal interview 19th December 2022 Dylan said *"I've binge watched Coronation Street"*. Coronation Street is an English soap opera created by Granada Television and shown on ITV since 9 December 1960. They say that from episode 4672-5877 there is a dialogue which runs: *"I'll take the godfather Barlow and the Scarface Sugden, mix them up in a pint, and get a Hilda Ogden"*. In word structure this resembles ***"I'll take Scarface Pacino and the Godfather Brando mix em up in a tank and get a robot commando"***.

"I'll take Scarface Pacino and the Godfather Brando". ***"Scarface Pacino"*** refers to the movie 'Scarface' from 1983, starring Al Pacino and ***"the Godfather Brando"*** refers to the movie ***"The Godfather"*** from 1972, starring Marlon Brando. These movies are all about organized crime, family connections and brutal power. In his attempt to create ***"an own version"*** of God, man does not stop short from identifying with- and in a certain way glorifying- downright criminality by taking mafiosi's as a role model. It must be admitted though, that some of these bandits also show a human face in these movies, especially when they show loyalty to their families.

Although it seems obvious that when you take the Godfather Brando and the Scarface Pacino and ***"Mix 'em up in a tank"***, that no good will emerge from it, yet one keeps on trying. Evil creates evil, the only natural thing such a mixture can create is ***"a robot commando"***. ***"A robot commando"*** who will carry out whatever evil schemes you instruct him with. ***"Robot Commando"*** is a reference to a gameplay book for a tabletop game from 1986, and also a toy from 1961.

“If I do it up right and put the head on straight, I’ll be saved by the creature that I create” may have been inspired by Isaiah 44:9-20. In this passage Isaiah pictures a man who takes a tree and uses some of the wood as fuel for burning (verse 15) and for preparing his meals (verse 16) and also for the fireplace to warm himself. But from another part of the wood he fashions a god and starts to worship this piece of wood (verse 17). He bows down to it and prays saying: ***“Save me! You are my god!”***. (NIV). The prophet concludes (verse 20) : ***“Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself!”***. You cannot be saved by the creature you create. That a creature cannot save another creature is divine wisdom. Likewise to say ***“If I do it up right and put the head on straight, I’ll be saved by the creature that I create”*** is equally ludicrous and misleading and yet, when you take a look around you, this is what is happening all over the world.

“I get blood from a cactus - make gunpowder from ice”. The reference ***“make gunpowder from ice”*** comes from “Gulliver’s travels” by Jonathan Swift. Again, there is a ***“Frankenstein”*** connection here. In chapter 2 we see Victor discovering the works of various alchemists and these alchemists trigger him to study science and alchemy. It cannot be denied that there is some sort of quasi reality in these words because ***“To get blood from a cactus”*** refers to carmine, a red dye made from insects that live on cacti and ***“gunpowder from ice”*** refers to ice packs which contain ammonium nitrate, a component that can be used to make gun powder.

In the novel Victor Frankenstein succeeds in bringing someone to

life from dead body parts but that is only fiction. The reality is that no living creature is able to make real living blood out of existing dead material. Blood represents life in the Bible and a self-proclaimed creator cannot bring someone to life. An additional problem for a self-proclaimed creator is, that he cannot make real blood or real gunpowder *"out of nothing"*. *"Creatio ex nihilo"* is a bridge too far for any creature and this capability is only reserved for God, no matter how much a man may brag and say: ***"I don't gamble with cards and I don't shoot no dice"***. Quite a number of scientific discoveries are invented accidentally, by chance, like e.g. Alexander Fleming who discovered penicillin in 1928. However, this antagonist uses these words to express his commitment to his goal. He does not take any chances and does not accept anything less than perfection. But here it is not hard to detect that behind his determination there is bragging hiding, because the only one who can say: ***"I don't gamble with cards and I don't shoot no dice"*** is God because He does not need to take chances. He is the only one who can truly say of Himself: *"For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"*(Psalm 33:9 NKJV).

"Can you look in my face with your sightless eye" is a rhetorical question and reminds us of the *sightless eye* of the Buddha image. Eyes are considered as the windows upon the soul, and in chapter 5 Victor Frankenstein describes the monster's eyes as *"watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set"* Apart from this these words may express divine mockery for such a sightless and lifeless idol. Sightless eyes point to introspection and the inability to look someone in the eye. By definition idols are dead and cannot truly communicate.

The words ***“Can you cross your heart and hope to die”***, is a standard expression of which the Free Dictionary says that it is an *“attest to the truth of something”* and *“it is generally accompanied by hand gestures such as crossing one's hands over one's breast and then pointing the right hand skyward (a variant is cross my heart and point to God). Today most often uttered by children, it was first recorded in 1908”*. The expression may be used here, to emphasize that there is sincerity in the attempt to “create an own version” (of God), no matter how gruesome the outcome is.

“I’ll bring someone to life - someone for real, someone who feels the way that I feel” shows the deeply rooted human longing for alliance and solidarity with all those who share the same worldview, who feel the way that you feel. The reverse side of this medal is the equally deeply rooted human inclination to reject and detest all those who are different and do not have the same feeling you have. Xenophobia has its roots in these feelings. This phenomenon appears in chapter 5 of *“Frankenstein”*. The monster created by Victor Frankenstein is *“Formed into a hideous and gigantic creature”*. The result of this is that the monster is confronted by rejection and fear both from his creator and society. The idea that a creature would be able ***“to bring someone to life, someone for real”*** is in fact a false idea, and that this idea is false is proven by the result of this action. The only intended and acceptable result of such an action always is the production of: ***“someone who feels the way that I feel”***. Man’s quest to surpass his creator: ***“I’ll bring someone to life - someone for real, someone who feels the way that I feel”*** continues but without any tangible result. Obviously, looking into the mirror and facing

the reality of man, is the hardest thing to do.

“I study Sanskrit and Arabic to improve my mind” alludes again to *“Frankenstein”* - chapter 6- where it says: *“Resolved to pursue no inglorious career, he turned his eyes toward the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise. The Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit languages engaged his attention, and I was easily induced to enter on the same studies”*. Now Sanskrit is an ancient Indian language and Arabic is spoken in North Africa and the Middle East. *“Good intentions can be evil”* Dylan wrote earlier and that is exactly the case here. Now it has always been kind of a mystery why people- like Victor Frankenstein- can produce such noble work- like e.g. studying science and languages like Sanskrit and Arabic- and do things ***“for the benefit of mankind”*** and at the same time do evil things and produce a hideous monster like Victor Frankenstein did. It proves that there is divine restraint in evil and that invariably a person is not for one hundred percent evil but and that good characteristics coexist with evil characteristics. However, If these evil characteristics are not tackled and restrained, these evil characteristics become dominant and lead to ultimate disaster. We see this dualism in Victor Frankenstein and also in the human existence.

Others on the internet have pointed out that ***“I want to do things for the benefit of mankind”*** may at the same time be a humorous reference to Dylan’s having won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016. Alfred Nobel stated in his will that the remainder of his estate should be used to bestow *“prizes to those who, during the preceding year, have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind”*.

“I say to the willow tree - don’t weep for me” reminds us of Desdemona’s lamenting ‘Willow Song’ in Shakespeare’s *“Othello”* (Act IV, scene 3). A reference to a Weeping Willow can be found in the song ‘*Big River*’, written by Johnny Cash in 1958, and performed by Dylan in 1969. In the song, the singer teaches the Weeping Willow how to cry.

It is clear from *“Frankenstein”* that Mary Shelly believes in the healing power of Nature. In chapter 9 she describes Nature as having winds that *“whispered in soothing accents,”* just like a loving and caring mother who tells Victor to *“weep no more”*. Overwhelmed by all that he has been through, Victor throws himself to the ground and weeps bitterly. ***“I say to the willow tree - don’t weep for me”***, makes it clear that the antagonist rejects and despises all sympathy which may be seen as a sign of weakness. However, it is divine wisdom when a man is able to distract knowledge from tradition and history and from ***“all things that used to be”***. But this self-proclaimed creator defies and damns such knowledge and wisdom, proclaiming that he can do much better than his Creator and says: ***“the hell with all things that used to be”***.

All human efforts to ***“bring someone to life”*** are confronted with limitations, although you may ignore all ethical warning signs never to act like God. Sooner or later you reach a point where you cannot proceed and your efforts stall and you have to admit that you ***“get into trouble”***, and that you have ***“no place to turn, no place at all”***. When you ***“get into trouble”*** you can do two things, you either surrender to your Creator and give up, or you stubbornly continue and ***“hit the wall”***. The wall was hit in a song

called “*Ninety miles an hour down a dead end street*” which Dylan covered on his album “*Down in the Groove*”: “*Warning signs are flashing everywhere, but we pay no heed, instead of slowing down the pace, we keep picking up speed, disasters getting closer every time we meet, going ninety miles an hour down a dead end street*”.

Though “*stopped dead in his tracks*” – as Dylan wrote in “*Long and Wasted Years*” -and faced with the reality of having “***no place to turn, no place at all***”, man does not give up and desperately tries to find a way out of trouble.

Having nothing to go by the antagonist tries to find some sort of anchorage by saying “***I pick a number between one and two***”. Whereas earlier in the song -when it came down to exact science - the antagonist was not willing to take chances and said: “***I don’t gamble with cards and I don’t shoot no dice***” but here there is an inconsistency and he seems to do the opposite and “***picks***” a number between one and two. Mathematicians say that mathematically there is an infinite number of numbers between one and two. There is some sort of a parody of God in these words. Fallen man relies on chance and wishes to believe e.g. that the universe came into existence by mere chance, rather than accepting that there is a (divine) cause, whereas scientifically- when you consider the fine-tuning of the universe- it is virtually impossible that the universe came into existence without any cause and by mere chance.

When it says that narrator “***picks***” a number at random this contrasts with God, who does not “***pick***” a number but *determines* a number. There is numeric symmetry in all of his works. This

does not mean that there is no a divine number ***“between one and two”*** which God has determined to be His special symmetrical number. There is. That divine symmetrical number happens to be a number between one and two. That divine number ***“between one and two”*** is $\Phi = 1.618$ (phi).The Renaissance Artists called this number 1.618 *“The Divine Proportion”* or *“The Golden Ratio”*. The Golden Ratio (phi = ϕ) is often called **The Most Beautiful Number In The Universe.**

The reason why this number $\phi = 1.618$ is so extraordinary is because it can be found almost everywhere. It can e.g. be found in the dimensions of the human body, in geometry , in plants, in the DNA of organisms, in the solar system, in art and architecture etc.. *“The Divine Proportion”* 1.618 can be found in a lot of places in the Bible as well. There is e.g. this *“Divine Proportion”* in the Bible in the name of God, the so-called Tetragrammaton JHWH, but also in the divine instructions for the dimensions to be applied in the construction of the Ark of Noah in Genesis 6:15 and the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 25:10.

There is a connection between ***“I pick a number between one and two”*** and ***“I ask myself what would Julius Caesar do”*** because it was Julius Caesar, who prior to crossing the Rubicon in 49 BC, said these famous words *“alea iacta est”*(“the die is cast”). Both the narrator and Julius Caesar rely on chance to reach their point of no return.

There is another intended association from the poet here. Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ have the same initials J.C. There are those *“WWJD”* bracelets and bumper stickers that stand for *“what*

would Jesus do". No doubt, asking the question "**what would Julius Caesar do?**" is a satanic parody of "*what would Jesus do?*". The question here is: which side are you on? Do you rely on Jesus Christ who – in contrast with the antagonist here - succeeded in "**bringing someone to life**" or do you -like the antagonist here- rely on the methods of Julius Caesar, who used brutal earthly power to bring his own imperial empire to life? Do you rely on J.C. ,the Son of God, or on the pseudo god Julius Caesar who claimed that he directly descended from the gods of Rome, from Aenas and Venus?

"I'll bring someone to life - in more ways than one" shows the determination of the narrator to compete with God and even to do better than God. God made Adam in His Own Image, and in His Own Likeness (Gen.1:26). However, God made Eve by taking a rib from Adam and made that into a woman(Gen.2:22). So one could say that God brought "**somebody to life in more ways than one**" and the narrator claims he can do the same. Although this is true, it is not the crux of the matter here. The crux of the matter is: "God SAID". All of his creative works in Genesis 1 are introduced by "*And God said*". It is the power of God's voice, his Word, that brings everything, including man, to life. All through the song the antagonist has to rely on "*doing*" things to bring someone to life but never was he able – and he never will be for that matter- to command someone to life, simply by the command of his voice. Only God can say of Himself: "*For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast*"(**Psalm 33:9 NKJV**).

When it says: "**Don't matter how long it takes - it'll be done when it's done**" these words show the determination of the narrator

against all odds and he asks to bear with him even when it would take billions of years to reach his goal. Fallen man is inclined to believe that life will emerge if only there is time enough. He is ready to believe that there is this one chance in many billions of years that life will emerge “out of nothing”, in spite of the fact that there is no logic reason behind such a thought. **“It’ll be done when it’s done”** looks like an open door. At the same time these words show the false premise of the narrator. As we already outlined, *“do things”* will bring him nowhere because he lacks the vocal power which is essential to bring things to life.

“I’m gonna make you play the piano like Leon Russell, like Liberace - like St. John the Apostle, play every number that I can play” are mysterious words and make our following analysis very speculative. When you consult the Wikipedia pages of Liberace (1919 -1987) and Leon Russell (1942 – 2016), it says of Liberace: *“Liberace recreates—if that is the word—each composition **in his own image**. When it is too difficult, he simplifies it. When it is too simple, he complicates it.”* They referred to his as *“sloppy technique”* that included *“slackness of rhythms, wrong tempos, distorted phrasing, an excess of prettification and sentimentality, a failure to stick to what the composer has written”*. It looks as if with these words the poet makes a thought association between Liberace and the antagonist. Liberace makes *“an own version”* of the original musical material and the antagonist tries to do the same by and create his own version of man which turns out to be a caricature of how God intended man to be.

Wikipedia says of Leon Russel: *“One of Russell’s titles and signature nicknames is: Master of Space and Time”*. Here the poet

seems to make another thought association but now between Russel and St. John the Apostle. Of course, in case of St. John the Apostle the words ***“play the piano”*** should not be taken literally – there were no pianos at the time St. John the Apostle lived in the first century. St. John the Apostle playing the piano is some sort of a metaphor for the way in which the apostle composed the book *“The Revelation to St. John”*, also called *“The Apocalypse”*. St. John received these revelations from Jesus (Rev.1:1) and the Holy Spirit ordered John to write down these revelations in a book (Rev.1:10,11). St. John composed this book in such way that just like for Leon Russel one could say that in the composition of the Revelation St. John showed that he was a *“Master of Space and Time”*. The apocalyptic visions written down in Revelations do not show a linear chronological order but rather the apocalyptic visions written down are cyclical, skilfully growing in intensity and masterfully culminating in the New Jerusalem, the City of Gold (Rev. 21,22) and at the same time restoring the tree of life from Gen. 3 :22 in its original position (Rev.22:2), going back and forth in time and space.

With the following words ***“I’ll see you baby on Judgement Day, after midnight if you still want to meet”*** it looks as if all of a sudden the poet introduces Jesus speaking. On ***“Judgement Day”*** Jesus will come back on the clouds not only to *“gather his jewels”* (Dylan’s rewritten version of *“Gonna change my way of thinking”*) but also to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1). However, the setting here is that of the gospel of Matthew chapter 25. First,(Matt. 25:1-13) we have the parable of the ten Virgins. The return of Jesus on ***“Judgement Day”*** is metaphorically represented there by a wedding party. However the bridegroom’s arrival was

delayed (25:5) and the virgins fell asleep but then **“at midnight”** the bridegroom arrived. In my analysis of Dylan’s song *“Soon after midnight”*- elsewhere on this website we wrote: “The idea that Christ will return at midnight – as bridegroom to meet his bride, the church, - is wide-spread within the Christian tradition and is based on Matt. 25:6 where it says: **‘At midnight they were roused by the shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!’(NLT).**

Now when it says here **“If you still want to meet”** this seems in contradiction with the parable where the five foolish virgins demanded access to the wedding party saying: *“Lord, Lord, open the door for us”*(25:11 NIV) but they were refused. So in the parable it looked as if they were anxious to meet the bridegroom (Jesus). However, **“If you still want to meet”** seems to suggest that the virgins are indeed willing “to meet” the bridegroom as long as it is fun, as long as it is a wedding party. Meeting him as Judge on **“Judgement Day”** is another matter and the words **“If you still want to meet”** suggest that the virgins are no longer so enthusiastic for such an encounter.

“I’ll be at the Black Horse Tavern on Armageddon Street” continues the idea that we are still on **“Judgement Day”** and although words like **“Black Horse”** and **“Armageddon”** are taken from the Revelations of St. John, we still are very much in the setting of Matthew 25. From Matt. 25:31 and onwards Jesus holds a court session during which he separates the gathered nations, *“he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”* (Mat.25:32). The idea here might be that on **“Judgement Day”** the Judge Jesus holds session at the **“Black**

Horse Tavern". Now the name "**Black Horse**" refers to the third apocalyptic seal opened in Rev. 6:5 where it says: "*When the Lamb (Jesus) broke the third seal, I heard the third living being say: "Come", I looked up and saw a black horse and its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand*"(NLT). This third seal is said to represent worldwide famine.

Now there are quite a lot of restaurants in the USA and elsewhere in the world named "**The Blackhorse Tavern**". There is injustice and a kind of cynicism in this image when you consider the contrast between the extravagant menu cards of these Black Horse Taverns and famines which afflict millions of people on the earth in the end-times. This same contrast between extravagance on the one hand and famine on the other can be found in this third seal (Rev.6:5,6). This injustice is a case worthy of judging on "**Judgement Day**".

This court session is "**On Armageddon Street**" and "**Armageddon**" is a reference to Rev. 16:16: "*And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew **Armageddon***"(NKJV). Armageddon stands for the place where the final battle between the kings of the earth will take place on "*that great day of God Almighty* (Rev. 16:14) which is the same day as "**Judgement Day**".

"Two doors down not that far to walk" suggests that you can't miss Jesus on Judgement Day, in fact not a soul will escape his attention, regardless "**if you still want to meet**" or not. Every knee shall bow (Phil 2:10). "**I'll hear your footsteps - you won't have to knock**" expresses that He knows exactly who you are. "*He sees your deeds and knows your needs even before you ask*" (Dylan's

'When He returns'- with reference to Mat. 6:8). As long as you are among the living you can **"knock"** on His door and Jesus will answer you (Luke 11:9) but on **"Judgement Day"** this will all be different. Then it is too late for redemption, knocking on His door will no longer help you: **"you won't have to knock"**, you will be refused just like the five foolish virgins (Mat. 25:12,13).

The next refrain **"I'll bring someone to life"** resumes the thread of the song. The antagonist says he wants to **"balance the scales"**. This may be an interesting thought association from the poet because in the previous verse, the rider on the **"Black Horse"** pictured in Revelation 6:5, has a **"pair of scales"** in his hand. Here the antagonist claims that by bringing someone to life he can be like God and on equal footing with God and therefore **"balance the scales"** with God.

Although Victor Frankenstein does not give a detailed description of how he created his monster and therefore quite rightly may say: **"I'm not gonna get involved in any insignificant details"** yet the words **"I'm not gonna get involved in any insignificant details"** can be read as the limit of human impudence and pride. In God's creation there are no insignificant details. Take for e.g. the complexity of the creation of the human eye. Every detail has its function and if the smallest of details misses out, it cannot function properly.

The following words: **"You can bring it to St. Peter - you can bring it to Jerome, you can move it on over - bring it all the way home, bring it to the corner where the children play, you can bring it to me on a silver tray"** are at first glance mysterious and dark. This is

because the **“it”** is not further identified. We did not find any analyst or commentator on the internet who has any clue why **“St. Peter”** or **“Jerome”** are introduced here. Obviously the apostle Peter is meant here, who was one of the most ardent disciples of Jesus Christ.

The first thing that comes to your mind when we read **“You can bring it to Jerome”**, is a reference to song from Bo Diddley called **“Bring It To Jerome”**. Most commentators feel that **“you can bring it to me on a silver tray”** is an allusion to the beheading of John the Baptist whose head was presented on a platter to the mother of Herodias. (Mark 6:25,28 Mat. 14:8,10). Although the Scriptures do not explicitly state that it was **“a silver tray”** on which the head of John the Baptist was presented but just **“a platter”**, the allusion fits well. It is not difficult to make a thought association between this gruesome picture of John the Baptist’ head presented on a tray and the equally gruesome picture of the antagonist collecting **“Limbs and livers and brains and hearts”**. However, it still does not give us a definitive clue why **“St. Peter”** and **“Jerome”** and **“the corner where the children play”** are introduced here in the first place.

The answer might be in the conclusion that follows: **“Do it with decency and common sense”**. Remember that the antagonist for all intents and purposes wants to do things **“for the benefit of all mankind”**; he pretends to have high moral standards, no matter how repugnant his life making actions can and must be viewed upon. He claims to produce a very decent end product which is acceptable for all circles of life. It is acceptable not only for Saints like **“St. Peter”** and **“St. Jerome”** but the end product is so

exquisite that you can even ***“move it on over - and bring it all the way home”*** and present it to your young children, to ***“the corner where the children play”***.

The claim from the antagonist ***“I’ll bring someone to life - spare no expense, do it with decency and common sense”*** is a false claim and it is as if the poet deliberately wants to divert the attention away from the antagonist to God and to make it clear that the Only One who can truly make such a claim is God. When He brought Adam to life He righteously concluded that ***“it was very good”*** (Genesis 1:31). To save mankind He spared no expense- not even his Son- and everything He does, He does in the right order and in the right time and therefore with ***“decency and common sense”***, in the most emphatic way.

“To be or not to be” is a quote from Shakespeare (*“Hamlet”* Act 3, Scene 1). However, when it says: ***“Can you tell me what it means to be or not to be”*** it seems that God is- again- introduced in this verse as Speaker. ***“To be or not to be”*** represents the existential duality between God and His creation. It was the Hindu philosopher Shankara (788-822) who denied existential duality between God and (His) creation and called this ***“a-dvaita”***. However, the Bible makes it clear that there is such an existential duality.

As far as this existential question is concerned, it looks as if the poet had the Biblical Book of Job in his mind where God rhetorically asks Job: ***“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand”*** (Job 38:4 NIV, see also Isaiah 40:12-31). Within this concept of thinking, God is the Only One who can truly say that He always ***“is”***, the Only One who

knows ***“what it means to be or not to be”***; e.g. Revelation 1:8 *“I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”* (KJV). This concept is not new in Dylan’s works. Earlier Dylan already confronted himself with this existential question in his masterpiece *“Mississippi”* when he wrote: *“Your days are numbered, so are mine”* and I am *“trapped in the fires of time”*.

But unlike for God, the days of a creature like Job are numbered. Job challenged God by raising the ***“be or not to be”*** question but God replied: *“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?”* (Job 38:2 KJV). He who has no knowledge is a fool (Proverbs 13:16). This is basically the same as if God had said to Job: ***“You won’t get away with fooling me”***. Now God goes on to say to Job: *“Now brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall inform me”* (Job 38:3 BSB). It is as if God rebukingly says to Job: *“Answer this question:, **“you won’t get away with fooling me, can you tell me what it means to be or not to be?”**”*. Job however, retraces his steps and repents (Job 42:3) and admits that he was indeed a fool (Job 42:3) by raising this question in the first place

.
“Can you help me walk that moonlight mile” is an obvious reference to a 1971 song from the Rolling Stones called *“Moonlight Mile”*. It is true, Job may be able to walk that moonlight mile but that is not enough and when God asks him *“Where does the light come from, and where does darkness go? Can you take each to its home? Do you know how to get there?”*. (Job 38:19,20 NLT), Job fails to give the answer. When forced to, a man may walk a mile but to have the power to walk two miles in

such a situation, is divine grace, just like Jesus says in Matthew 5:41 (ESV) : *“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”*.

“Can you give me the blessings of your smile” is a rhetorical question and may be read as a reproach to the antagonist. A blessing means God’s favour and protection. The blessing of God’s smile is a metaphor for His kind and undeserved benevolence which He bestows on people. The antagonist and no mortal human being for that matter, can bestow such a blessing.

For the seventh time we hear the refrain ***“I want to bring someone to life”*** and this time the antagonist is determined to go the utmost and says ***“use all my powers”*** and he may think that when he does it secretly in ***“the dark and the wee small hours”***- ***“wee”*** meaning “very early”- he may succeed. This contrasts with God, who does not do anything in the dark. His first act of creation was ***“Let there be light”*** (Gen. 1:3 NLT) and all of His following creative actions are done in the Light.

The following verse beginning with ***“I can see the history of the whole human race, It’s all right there – it’s carved into your face”*** God seems to be the subject. We see things from God’s perspective and these words can therefore best be interpreted as a divine summarization and appreciation of the end result of the fruitless- efforts from the antagonist to ***“bring someone to life”*** and by doing so ***“make his own version”*** of God. The history of the human race is marked by these continuous efforts.

“It’s carved into your face” may be an allusion to the Second

Commandment: *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image"* (Ex. 20:4 NKJV). Throughout history mankind has defied this Commandment and has kept on trying to carve an own version of God. This hideous self-carved image which is visible in the face of the antagonist is exactly the opposite of how God meant it to be when He created Man in His own image (Gen1:26).

There was a moment in the history of the human race when God was on the brink of giving up on mankind. Because of the wickedness of man (Gen.6:5) God repented that He had made mankind. It grieved God at his heart and He was about to destroy mankind (Gen. 6:6,7) and it was as if God asked Himself: ***"Should I break it all down"***? But He did not because Noah found grace in His eyes (Gen 6:8). There was also a time when it was as if God wondered: ***"Should I fall on my knees"*** to save mankind?. He actually did fall on his knees this when Jesus fell on his face in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:39) – *"crawling down the avenue"* of Getsemane as Dylan calls it in his song *"Make you feel my love"*- Jesus praying in great anguish and begging His Father: *"let this cup pass from me"*. It was a time of great darkness on the Cross (Mat.27:45) and when forsaken by God and men, Jesus could have desperately wondered: ***"Is there light at the end of the tunnel - can you tell me please"***.

What now follows may be seen as a sort of reproach from God - Jesus- to the antagonist. The antagonist tries to make his own version of God and of history. It is now as if Jesus says to the antagonist: "For me there was light at the end of the tunnel when I was resurrected from the dead, when I went from suffering to glory, enabling me to set many free and bring them from human

bondage and slavery to freedom. But what about you? Look what happens when you, the antagonist is at the steering wheel. ***“Stand over there by the Cypress tree”*** and I will show you two examples from history which will show that your way of handling things has produced nothing but slavery”.

The first example of ***“slavery”*** takes us to the Mediterranean where the ***“Cypress tree”*** grows, it takes us way back to the Trojan War, to ***“Where the Trojan women and children were sold into slavery”***. ***“The Trojan Women”*** is a reference to a tragedy by the Greek playwright Euripides, produced in 415 BC during the Peloponnesian War. Wikipedia says that *“it is often considered a commentary on the capture of the Aegean island of Melos and the subsequent slaughter and subjugation of its populace by the Athenians earlier that year”*.

Now this example of the ***“Trojan women and children sold into slavery”*** from the Greek history seems to be taken at random but we feel that this is not the case. Dylan writes about the ancient history of Greece and Rome as a sort of model for what happens in our modern times. Apart from ***“The Trojan women”*** the words ***“Long ago before the First Crusade”*** (1096-1099) and ***“Way back before England or America were made”*** also seem to make this connection. This whole idea had already been on Dylan’s mind for at least three decades. Consider what Dylan said in an interview with Paul Zollo in 1991: *“A college professor told me that if you read about Greece in the history books, you’ll know all about America. Nothing that happens will puzzle you ever again. You read the history of Ancient Greece and when the Romans came in, and nothing will ever bother you about America again. You’ll see*

what America is.” In other words: The Enlightenment, the abolishment of slavery, the industrial and sexual revolution did not make America free, human bondage and slavery in all sorts of ways is still out there in our modern society.

The second example of human bondage and slavery takes us right into hell: ***“Step right into the burning hell”***. It is the place ***“where some of the best known enemies of mankind dwell”***. Now it looks as if the following words ***“Mister Freud with his dreams and Mister Marx with his axe”*** picture Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx as being inhabitants of hell. This idea seems obvious because both Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx are known as uncompromising atheists. In his book *“The Future of an Illusion”* Freud describes belief in God as a collective neurosis and called this phenomenon a *“longing for a father”*.

It is interesting what The Rev. Gianbattista Mondin, S.X. wrote about Karl Marx in an article called *“The Atheism of Karl Marx”* (taken from: *“L'Osservatore Romano”* Weekly Edition in English 20 April 1978, page 12): *“Marx is an atheist because of his passion for man. What he wishes to safeguard with atheism is the greatness of man. With atheism he intends to exclude that there is any superior being, greater than man. It is in view of man's greatness that he considers it necessary to destroy religion, because in his judgment the latter is the opium, the drug, the substitute which prevents man from becoming aware of his dignity”*. There is similarity between the worldview of Marx proclaiming the superiority of man above God, and Victor Frankenstein, who in his own way, by creating a monster, attempted to be like God and even outdo God.

However, no matter how compelling the picture of Freud and Marx as hell dwellers may be here, yet this is not exactly what the words say. The words do not explicitly state that Freud and Marx are in hell. It seems that this idea is deliberately left unsaid. When you consider that it does not belong to the authority of mortal human beings to condemn anybody to hell- no matter how much you may abhor somebody's views and walk of life- then you may understand the hesitation in the words of the poet to be too explicit about the whereabouts of Freud and Marx.

But there may be an additional reason to think in another direction. The attributes of hell are usually metaphorically described as fire and brimstone but that is not the case here. This is because this ***“raw hide lash”*** in ***“See the raw hide lash rip the skin off their backs”*** alludes to an attribute that can be used by a slave-driver. Here it seems as if the subject of slavery still is on the poet's mind. Slave- drivers may use a ***“raw hide lash”*** to punish slaves for either refusing to work or for attempting to escape. Slavery was born the moment man freed himself from God and enslaved himself to Satan. Slavery was there in ancient times when ***“Trojan women and children were sold into slavery”***. Slavery is still there in our modern times. Marx promised the proletariat a political state free of religion but this freedom ended up in death and destruction and the utmost slavery for many millions of people in the Gulag. Freud may be debunked here because he defied God in the most intricate of God's creation: the human mind. The human mind which was made according to God's own image. Freud played with fire in his attempt to explain the human mind through science rather than through divinity.

Here it seems as if the ideas of Freud and Marx to get rid of God and to “*make their own version*” of God, have come back to haunt them. The same “*raw hide lash*” which enslaved their followers and “*ripped the skin off their backs*” now lashes down on the backs of Freud and Marx.

“You got the right spirit - you can feel it you can hear it- you got what they call the immortal spirit, you can feel it all night you can feel it in the morn, creeps into your body the day you are born” echoes the Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850). In “*Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows*” (from The Prelude, Book 1) William Wordsworth writes:

*“Dust as we are, **the immortal spirit** grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
in one society”*.

The word ***Spirit*** rhymes with “***you can feel it, you can hear it***” and is borrowed from Dylan’s own song “*Solid Rock*” from the album “*Saved*” (1981): “*It’s the ways of the flesh to war against the Spirit, Twenty-four hours a day, you can feel it and you can hear it*”. However, whereas in “*Solid Rock*” there is dualism between the human existence – “*the ways of the flesh*” and the “*Spirit*”, this is not the case when you read Wordsworth. “***The immortal spirit***” suggests that the human spirit or soul is pre-existent and “***creeps into your body the day you are born***”. For Wordsworth believed that upon being born, human beings move from a perfect ideal realm into an imperfect, vulnerable and sometimes even hostile world. In poems such as the “*Ode*”

“Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”

(1804) Wordsworth writes:

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!”.

In this song, the idea behind **“You got the right spirit”** and **“you got what they call the immortal spirit”** can only thrive in a non-dualistic concept. In this non-dualistic concept the Spirit is not at war against *“the ways of the flesh”*, the human existence, but is in unity with it. And it is within this unity that the antagonist operates. The antagonist (falsely) claims exclusive ownership of **“the immortal spirit”** and this ownership is emphasized by the **“You”** in **“You got the right spirit”**. Whereas in the dualistic (Biblical) concept the Spirit is a divine gift from heaven, in the non-dualistic concept the spirit is “owned” by the antagonist and **“creeps into your body the day you are born”**, with all devastating consequences as a result of this. However, no matter the claim of the antagonist that he has the **“immortal spirit”**, yet the ability **“to bring someone to life”** is exclusively the territory of the Holy Spirit.

The following lines **“One strike of lightning is all that I need, and a blast of electricity that runs at top speed”** are once again

inspired by Shelly's novel "*Frankenstein*". Victor Frankenstein at the age of 15, witnesses an electrical storm that arouses his interest in electricity and possible applications for its use. In the novel it is assumed that Victor uses this knowledge of electricity to create his monster. Within the song the creative attempts from the antagonist "**to bring someone to life**" now reach a climax. Using electricity as a substitute for the spirit represents an ultimate attempt to "**jump start his creation to life**", and is the best he can come up with. Previous attempts like "**getting blood from a cactus and making gunpowder from ice**" seemed a rather plastic attempt to create life. Here he gets as close as he can be in reaching his goal because he seems to realize that not only he needs some invisible power like an "**immortal spirit**", but also some dramatic instant action like a "**strike of lightning**" and "**a blast of electricity**" to "**jump start his creation to life**". In this ultimate attempt he tries to imitate God who creates everything instantly, as in a flash, just at the command of His word, like we said earlier: "*For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast*"(Psalm 33:9 NKJV). God does all dramatic, decisive, and life changing acts in the twinkling of an eye, as in a flash of lightning. This will also be the case when He (Jesus) will return to the earth on the clouds: "*For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be*" (Matt. 24:27 NKJV). Likewise, upon His return, Jesus will not only "**bring someone to life**", but He will bring everybody to life and he will do this in the twinkling of an eye, like it says in 1 Corinthians 15:52 (NKJV): *)."In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed".*

We already saw that ***“What would Julius Caesar do?”*** is a -rough and rowdy- parody of ***“what would Jesus do?”***. Likewise ***“Show me your ribs - I’ll stick in the knife”*** is a dark parody of God’s initial creation. The poet Milton uses parody in *“Paradise Lost”* in which Satan mocks God’s creation and Christian rituals.

Consider the gracious and gentle way in which God created Eve: *“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. (Gen.*

*2:21,22 NJKV)*and compare this with the cruel – rough and rowdy – ways of the antagonist: ***“Show me your ribs - I’ll stick in the knife”***.

‘I’m gonna jump start my creation to life’ sounds triumphant and determined but cannot conceal the futility of this attempt simply because when e.g. you try to jumpstart the engine of your car, you need the help of another car to jumpstart your engine. The antagonist has a problem. To achieve his goal he needs the help of somebody else and he does not have the (divine) tools at his disposal to jumpstart his creation to life.

For the last time we hear ***“I want to bring someone to life”***. In order to do this, you should be able to ***“turn back the years”***, you need to be in command of time. And only God is in command of time, just like it says in 2 Peter 3:8 *“Do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”*(NJKV). It is clear that the antagonist is running out of time. He cannot reach perfection. The desire to ***“turn back the years”*** is only wishful thinking. Wishful thinking, just like it says in Dylan’s song *“Shelter from the Storm”*: *“If I could only turn*

back the clock to when God and her were born". Wishful thinking, even if you **"do it with laughter – do it with tears"**. Even if the antagonist applies these two extremities of human emotion: laughter and tears, he will fail. His laughter is *"laughter in the face of what sorrow brings"* It was Shakespeare's who wrote in his play "Julius Caesar": *"If You Have Tears, Prepare To Shed Them Now"*. However, for the antagonist we may say: *"Now is the time for your tears"*.