

CHAPTER 2

“The *Titanic* sails at dawn”: Bob Dylan, “Tempest”, and the Apocalyptic Imagination

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Abstract: “Tempest” is one of the longest songs Dylan has written. His point of departure is the *Titanic* disaster, but it soon becomes obvious that *Titanic* is a metaphor, pointing to something much bigger than the 1912 disaster. “Tempest” is a rich song in the sense that it contains references to many different sources. My aim is to try to uncover some of these, in order to detect how this vast collage is used to create a new story that transcends the original one. It comes as no great surprise that apocalyptic themes literally come to the surface in the song. In what ways does Dylan express his apocalyptic imagination in “Tempest”, and how is this related to other songs in the *Tempest* album?

Keywords: *Titanic*, *Titanic* – the movie, apokalypse, watchman, redemption, judgment, “Roll on John”

Sammendrag: «Tempest» er en av de lengste sangene Dylan har skrevet. Han tar utgangspunkt i *Titanics* forlis, men det viser seg at *Titanic* er en metafor, som peker på noe langt større enn selve katastrofen i 1912. «Tempest» er en rik sang på den måten at den inneholder og gjør bruk av mange ulike kilder. Min målsetting er å avdekke noen av disse, for slik å finne ut av hvordan denne store kollasjen brukes for å skape en ny fortelling, som transcenderer den opprinnelige. Ikke overraskende dukker apokalyptiske tema opp i sangen. På hvilke måter gjør Dylan bruk av sin apokalyptiske tenkning i «Tempest», og hvordan forholder dette seg til noen av de andre sangene på *Tempest*?

Stikkord: *Titanic*, *Titanic*-filmen, apokalypse, vaktmann, forløsning, dom, “Roll on John”

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“Live now ... live before you board your *Titanic*.”
—Dylan (2005, p. 54)

Tempest is the 35th addition to the Dylan catalog, and it was released on the fiftieth anniversary of the self-titled *Bob Dylan* from 1962. Columbia Records chose September 11, 2012, as the U.S. release date for the album. It was 11 years since Dylan had released *Love and Theft*, and 11 years to the day since the World Trade Center attacks. On “the fourteen day of April”, one hundred years before the album came out, the *Titanic* hit the iceberg that sank it early the next morning. Maybe “*Tempest*” is Dylan’s response to the 9/11 attacks?

The *Titanic* disaster, like 9/11, was taken by many as a hinge moment in history. The loss of the great ship in 1912 marked the end of European triumphalism and the start of the general disaster that would culminate in the Great War. The attacks of 9/11/01 initiated a new phase of American and global disorder, the disastrous ‘War on Terror’. It seems typical of Dylan’s obliquity that he might respond artistically to 9/11 by way of the *Titanic*. (Mentz, 2015, p. 162)

The song “*Tempest*” is Dylan’s version of the disaster, and it both provides the title of the album as a whole and is clearly thematically central. One reviewer who wrote for the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* noted that there is a storm raging throughout this album, metaphorically and literally:

On a deceptively bright and breezy opening track, rattling railroad song “*Duquesne Whistle*”, Dylan hears the train’s whistle speaking with the sweet voice of «the mother of the Lord» and scream “like the sky’s going to blow apart”. Right there, in the confluence of religious faith and apocalyptic portent, Dylan establishes themes on one of his darkest, bloodiest and most foreboding collection of songs, set in a barren landscape of Godless self-interest, moral equivocation and random violence. (McCormick, 2012)

“*Tempest*” is Dylan’s second-longest song (the longest is the 16-minute “*Highlands*”), on his longest album ever (68:31), and it has never been played live. It has forty-five verses, and each verse is an alternating quatrain, a four-line verse with an abab rhyme pattern. The last words of the b-lines (and sometimes the last words of the a-lines) rhyme with each other.

Dylan sings verse after verse with very few breaks in between. There is no bridge in the song to break up this repetitive pattern. However, there are four verses (six, seventeen, thirty-eight and forty-five) where a dreaming watchman appears, each followed by a musical break. They make it possible to divide the forty-five verses into subgroups, which give the song a four-part structure. I use this way of dividing "Tempest" in my analysis.

Evaluating and researching "Tempest"

In a 2012 interview with Rolling Stone, Dylan provided a lot of information about the *Tempest* album in general, and about the "Tempest" song in particular. Dylan pointed to the role tradition plays in his songwriting:

I can name you a hundred songs where everything ends in tragedy. It's called tradition, and that's what I deal in. Traditional, with a capital T [...]. Folk musicians, blues musicians did write a lot of songs about the *Titanic*. That's what I feel that I'm best at, being a folk musician or a blues musician, so in my mind it's there to be done. If you're a folk singer, blues singer, rock & roll singer, whatever, in that realm, you oughta write a song about the *Titanic*, because that's the bar you have to pass. (Gilmore, 2012b, p. 50)

Critics have expressed very different views on whether Dylan did pass the bar or not. Some think "Tempest" is one of his best, while others call it one of his worst songs ever. In his review on www.allmusic.com Thom Jurek states that "the title cut retells the story of the *Titanic* with references to history – and the James Cameron film. Hearing it once is enough". In his biography *Time Out of Mind: The Lives of Bob Dylan* Ian Bell writes that too many of the verses are redundant, several are clumsily written and the song does not count as a musical treat. "Tempest" is too self-conscious, even obvious, as an excursion into folk tradition (Bell, 2013, p. 526–27). Commenting on the musical aspects of "Tempest" Philippe Margotin and Jean-Michel Guesdon in *Bob Dylan All the Songs: The Story Behind Every Track* complain that there is almost no variation throughout the song. The drama of the *Titanic* is not supported by any musical progression. Instead, a feeling of monotony emerges from the whole arrangement (Margotin & Guesdon, 2015, p. 689).

Richard F. Thomas disagrees with the critics who dislike “Tempest”. He thinks this song is the culmination of Dylan’s songwriting. In *Why Dylan Matters* he points out that the Carter Family’s “The Titanic” is visible and audible on “Tempest”. But out of this old song Dylan created a new one, and “the new song is something else, something that through Dylan’s genius as a songwriter, singer and verbal painter, has transcended the folk tradition in which it is rooted; it has become both epic and cinematic, a wholly new genre” (Thomas, 2017, p. 116–117).

Although “Tempest” is a relatively new composition, it has already received attention from several critics, and also some scholarly scrutiny. In *Bob Dylan: American Troubadour*, Donald Brown emphasizes “the sense of momentous, apocalyptic event” in the song. He finds that this is amplified by the storyteller’s choice of imagery (Brown, 2014, p. 231–32). Michael J. Gilmour, too, focuses on the apocalyptic dimension of “Tempest”. In his view the song is “a metaphor of humanity’s shared plight on the sea of chaos”. Gilmour argues that the Book of Revelation is the key to the story Dylan tells (Gilmour, 2017, p. 71). On his website “Bob Dylan Song Analysis” David Weir has provided an interesting analysis of the song, and I have made use of some of his suggestions in my own interpretation. In her dissertation *Bob Dylan and the End of the (Modern) World* Christine Hand Jones sees “Tempest” as an expression of Bob Dylan’s apocalyptic imagination:

This sprawling, ambiguous, bloody ballad incorporates all of Dylan’s destructive vision, with its depiction of a symbol of modernity crashing into the sea, its collage of historical figures, its conflation of fact and fiction, dream and reality, cinema and history, and its harsh vision of total catastrophe. Above all, however, ‘Tempest’ returns the listener to the folk roots of Dylan’s apocalyptic imagination. (Hand Jones, 2013, p. 201)

In his recent book *The True Performing of It: Bob Dylan & William Shakespeare* Andrew Muir discovers that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Dylan’s *Tempest* album share many characteristics. A more detailed investigation and interpretation of the song “Tempest” and *The Tempest* is provided by Heinrich Detering in *Die Stimmen aus der Unterwelt: Bob Dylans Mysterienspiele*. Detering compares Dylan’s watchman to Shakespeare’s

Prospero; like the latter the watchman is no passive spectator but he is the director. In *Shipwreck Modernity* Steve Mentz argues that Dylan's song "maps out an almost perfect inverse of Shakespeare's play" (Mentz, 2015, p. 163). Mentz also describes the shipwreck in "Tempest" as the name of what he calls "the core experience": the shock and pressure of the inhuman world on human skin. Being in the world means living inside the shipwreck. The disaster is the story we need to explain, but cannot explain, and yet still have to tell (Mentz, 2015, p. 166).

Although my analysis of "Tempest" to a certain degree depends upon sources like the *Titanic* song tradition and the James Cameron *Titanic* movie, I employ this material not because I want to study the material in itself, but because it enables me to interpret the song as a whole. In my interpretation of "Tempest" I pay close attention to the views established by Brown, Gilmour, Weir and Hand Jones. However, except for Weir, none of them have attempted an extensive analysis of the song.

I want to provide an in-depth examination of "Tempest", try to uncover some of the important sources in Dylan's text, and explore how this material is integrated into the song. From what tradition(s) did Dylan get the inspiration to write this song, and how does he use elements from different traditions to create his own text? The Bible has always been a chief source of inspiration for Dylan. It comes as no surprise that the Bible also plays an important role in Dylan's retelling of the *Titanic* story, "the title track 'Tempest' is studded with lines and images of the Bible" (Muir, 2019, p. 314). My main concern is to investigate the way biblical material and motifs are used by Dylan to create a new narrative, which transcends the historical events that took place on that fateful night in 1912. What is the theological significance of this narrative? What kind of text is "Tempest"? What role is played by the watchman, the song's main protagonist?

The Carter Family and "The Titanic"

Alvin P. Carter, his wife Sara, and Sara's cousin Maybelle, recorded hundreds of songs between 1927 and 1941. When they broke up as a musical group in 1941 Alvin P. and Sara had been divorced for several years, and she had remarried. In 1952, Alvin P. reunited with Sara musically, and

from 1952 to 1956 he recorded 40 tracks for the Acme Record Company with his former wife. Among the songs they recorded in 1952 was “The Titanic”, which was released on CD in 2008, on the album *The Acme Sessions 1952/6*. This is not a Carter Family song in the sense that it was written or composed by one of them. The Carters’ core repertoire was songs their parents, families, neighbors and friends taught them. Alvin P. Carter’s “method” was one adopted by many songwriters from Guthrie to Dylan. Alvin’s niece Fern Salyer remembers him as a song catcher:

A. P. would go out and walk for miles and stay gone for a week or two at a time; went from house to house in different communities looking for songs. He rescued them; they were gonna be gone, and he’d take them and go home and maybe rearrange them. (MacMahon, McGourty & Wald, 2017, p. 68)

In the first part of the twentieth century more songs were made about the sinking of the *Titanic* than any other single disaster (Sapoznik, 2007, p. 8). Especially in the rural southern parts of the USA singers and composers – both black and white – kept the memory and immediacy of the event fresh through numerous songs and performances. In the early 1920s Seth Newton Mize (1901–1977) wrote the song “The Titanic”.¹ Mize’s song has eight verses. It entered oral tradition, and became a folksong during his lifetime. Several different artists recorded it, often without acknowledging Mize as the creator, most likely because he was not a very well-known writer (McNeil, 1988, p. 105–106).

The earliest recorded version of Mize’s “The Titanic” is probably by Tom Darby and Jimmie Tarlton. Darby and Tarlton were one of the most popular country acts of the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s. They recorded “The Titanic” in 1930 with a slightly different lyric, as “After the Sinking of the Titanic”.² When they recorded the song, they put the blame on the captain and his drinking, because some witnesses saw Captain Smith in the saloon bar in the run-up to the collision:

Capt’n Smith must have been drinking
Not knowing that he’d done wrong

1 For Mize’s lyrics, see Wolfe, 1997, p. 63–64.

2 For Darby and Tarlton’s lyrics, see <http://www.folkarchive.de/titan2.html>

While trying to win the record
He let the Titanic go on

In Mize's original text it was not the captain, but "the rich man, he must have been drinking". Another difference is that Darby and Tarlton substituted "the watchman" in Mize's text with "the porter". They also reduced the lyric from eight to six verses, and did not include Mize's verse about the band playing "Nearer, My God, to Thee" when they realized the ship was sinking. In *Chronicles* Dylan remembers listening to Darby and Tarlton in St. Paul, Minnesota in the summer of 1959. He was very impressed: "I always thought that 'A-wop-bop-a-loo-lop a-lop-bam-bo' had said it all until I heard Darby and Tarlton [... They] were out of this world" (Dylan, 2004, p. 241).

When Alvin P. and Sara Carter Bayes recorded the song the lyrics had changed once more.³ In some ways it is closer to the Mize original, but in other ways it is closer to the lyrics of the Darby and Tarlton song. Only in the Carters' version the number of those who drowned was reduced from sixteen hundred to six hundred. While Mize's dreaming watchman is back, the Carters' text, like Darby and Tarlton in "After the Sinking of the Titanic", refers to the drinking of Captain Smith as the reason why he let the ship go on. And the last song played by the band was "Nearer, My God, to Thee". Bob Dylan has several times acknowledged his debt to the Carter Family. He made this very explicit in an interview from 2004:

Well, you have to understand that I'm not a melodist. My songs are either based on old Protestant hymns or Carter Family songs or variations of the blues form [...]. I wrote 'Blowin' in the Wind' in 10 minutes, just put words to an old spiritual, probably something I learned from Carter Family records. That's the folk music tradition. You use what's been handed down. (Cott, 2017, p. 466–67)

Bob Dylan's song "Tempest" is no doubt influenced by the Carter Family version of "The Titanic". Still, it is a grandiose overstatement to argue that Dylan's song is "*based upon* 'The Titanic'" (Selnes, 2016, p. 590). This is the first verse of The Carter Family song:

3 For the Carter Family lyrics, see <https://genius.com/The-carter-family-the-titanic-lyrics>. The song can also be heard on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luDKIJo5y-U>.

The pale moon rose in its glory
 She's drifting from golden west
 She told a sad, sad story
 Six hundred had gone to rest

In Bob Dylan's songwriting the exploration of an existing song often becomes the basis for the development of another song (Negus, 2008, p. 93). The first line of "Scarlet Town" is identical with the first line of the folk ballad "Barbara Allen". This folk philosophy is central to Dylan's creative process, and "Tempest" is a good example of Dylan using "what has been handed down". As in many other songs, Dylan in "Tempest" is preserving elements from the past, while at the same time appropriating them in a creative way (Negus, 2008, p. 85). This is the first verse of Dylan's song:

The pale moon rose in its glory
 Out on the western town
 She told a sad, sad story
 Of the great ship that went down

Dylan uses "The Titanic" as a point of departure for his own song, but there are many significant differences between the song from 1952 and the one from 2012. The first and the third lines of the first verse are identical. On the other hand, Dylan's moon does not rise on the ocean but "out on the Western town". Another significant difference between the two songs is Dylan's pessimistic and the Carters' optimistic ending (almost identical with Mize's text):

The little children were crying
 Poor mama she's gone to stay
 Oh surely they'll invent something
 To raise the Titanic some day

This positive note, reflecting belief in human progress, is totally absent from "Tempest", where the sinking of the *Titanic* is interpreted as an act of or metaphor for divine judgment. The fact that he took the melody from the Carter Family recording still makes it possible to hear some of the old song in the new one. However, the discontinuity is much more striking than the continuity. According to Dylan himself the continuity

connecting "Tempest" with the *Titanic* song tradition is best expressed by the term "imagination":

All the old country singers, country blues, hillbilly singers, rock & roll singers, what they all had in common was a powerful imagination. And I have that, too. It's not that unusual for me to write a song about the *Titanic* tragedy any more than it was for Leadbelly.⁴ It might be unusual to write such a long ballad about it, but not necessarily about the disaster itself. (Gilmore, 2012b, p. 50)

What Dylan has in common with others who wrote about the *Titanic* disaster is a powerful imagination. "Tempest" is the result of Dylan using imagination to create his own version of an event that generated a tremendous creativity among musicians and songwriters from different traditions.

An apocalyptic text

In his biography *No Direction Home* Robert Shelton writes that in "Desolation Row" Dylan "articulates the rock visions of contemporary apocalypse". In Shelton's opinion this song is one of the strongest expressions of apocalypse to have seen the light of day in the last hundred years or so, able to stand alongside Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Ginsberg's "Howl" (Shelton, 2010, p. 198). Saul Wilentz thinks that with its repeated images of drowning at sea, and in references to the *Titanic*, Shakespeare's Ophelia, Nero's Neptune, Noah's ark and the great rainbow, the song almost certainly echoes Eliot's repeated invocations of death by water in "The Waste Land". Crammed aboard the damned *Titanic*, the people in "Desolation Row" are oblivious to what is happening (Wilentz, 2010, p. 82–83). As Michael Gray has pointed out, in "Desolation Row" the imminent disasters are past and present as well as future. The most striking evocation of impending catastrophe is achieved very simply, in the arresting line "The *Titanic* sails at dawn":

4 Leadbelly began to play his song "Titanic" in 1912, and he recorded it in 1948. When he wrote the song he drew on news reports, other folk songs, and an African-American perspective on the event (Wells, 2009, p. 102–103) In the song he made a sharp comment about race relations. For Leadbelly there was a sense of irony in the disaster, because the *Titanic* had refused to carry black passengers. His song attributes the following quote to the captain: "We don't haul no coal!"

Praise be to Nero's Neptune
 The *Titanic* sails at dawn
 Everybody's shouting
 Which side are you on?

The verses pile up and pile up and there is no suggestion that the crescendo will ever be curtailed. Although the climactic catastrophe never comes, Dylan's intimation of disaster builds up towards one. Gray argues that Dylan in "Desolation Row" takes the *Titanic* to represent contemporary America. The *Titanic* was the ship of the future, the proof of man's civilization and progress, the unsinkable ship, which, on her maiden voyage, sank (Gray, 2000, p. 136–37).

In Thomas O. Beebee's recent interpretation "Desolation Row" is Dylan's answer to the American millennial project. He argues that Dylan is using the term "desolation" in the biblical sense, "for numerous Old Testament prophets use the word to describe the Lord's vengeance, which will make Jerusalem a 'desolation'" (Beebee, 2009, p. 161). "Desolation Row" is far from exceptional in combining water and apocalypse. John Herdman has suggested that the rather odd first line of "The Mighty Quinn", "Everybody's building the big ships and the boats", also refers to the fate of the *Titanic* (Herdman, 1981, p. 95).

In "Tempest" Dylan no longer hints at the catastrophe, but makes it happen. Both "Desolation Row" and "Tempest" are apocalyptic texts. In both songs many different characters from myth and history appear, like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot struggling for command of the ship and fighting in the captain's tower in the former, and Calvin and Blake gambling in the dark in the latter. David Yaffe connects "Desolation Row" with "High Water (For Charley Patton)": they are both "apocalyptic pronouncements" (Yaffe, 2011, p. 115):

The point of the anaphora – "High Water Everywhere" – is that all culture, from the blues icons, the snippets of English balladry, and scientific and humanistic modernity, is all going down in the flood. Dylan has been down this lonesome road before. "Desolation Row" [...] also takes culture from high and low, [...] and all join in the downward descent. (Yaffe, 2011, p. 118)

Like other texts in the same genre "Tempest" uses apocalyptic themes and language. Apocalyptic texts are focused on a period of time in the future when God will intervene to judge the world, when God will break into this world of time and space to bring the entire system to a final reckoning (Mounce, 1998, p. 3). There are two apocalyptic books in the Bible, the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation, and one of them is explicitly mentioned on "Tempest". In the 2012 *Rolling Stone* interview Mikal Gilmore asked Dylan: "Clearly, the language of the Bible still provides imagery in your songs"? Dylan answered: "Of course, what else could there be? I believe in the Book of Revelation. I believe in disclosure, you know?" (Gilmore, 2012b, p. 51). This echoes what Dylan told *Rolling Stone* in 1984: "I believe in the Book of Revelation" (Cott, 2017, p. 306).

In the *Rolling Stone* interview Mikal Gilmore noted that in some *Titanic* songs, there were those who saw the event as a judgment on modern times, on humankind for assuming that the *Titanic* could be unsinkable. He then asked Dylan if there is something of that in his song. To this Dylan answered: "No, no, I try to stay away from all that stuff. I don't imply any of it. I'm not interested in it. I'm just interested in showing you what happened, on the level that it happened on. That's all. The meaning of it is beyond me" (Gilmore, 2012b, p. 50). Partly, Dylan is showing us what happened: "The seas [were] sharp and clear", chandeliers were swaying, an orchestra was playing, the smokestack was leaning sideways, there were "icy waters" and the ship was going under. The expression "the ship's bow split apart" (verse fourteen) might even be a reference to the iceberg hitting the ship.

In spite of what Dylan maintains, most of the incidents or people mentioned have nothing to do with the *Titanic's* maiden, and final, voyage. The ship was well supplied with specialist lookouts or watchmen, and they were not asleep. Since the night was moonless and the conditions were very calm it was difficult to see far ahead. With the exception of Mr. Astor and the captain none of the passengers Dylan mentions were on board the actual *Titanic*. Instead of the iceberg there is a whirlwind and "sky spinning all around". In other words, Dylan is clearly not just interested in showing the listener what actually happened, and the song's main concern is not the sinking of the ship in time and space.

Meteorological phenomenon and powerful image

A tempest is a violent storm. The origin of the word is from Latin *tempestas*, “weather”, “storm”, and from *tempus*, “time”, “season”. Dylan has never before used the word tempest in his lyrics, but he has several times utilized storm imagery to convey a sense of spiritual upheaval. It is a striking feature of many of his most famous early songs, like “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”, “The Times They Are A-Changing” and “Chimes of Freedom”. Jenny Ledeen points out that references to a great storm, heavy rain and flooding in Dylan’s lyrics become powerful images of impending apocalypse:

Early in 1963 Dylan responded to the idea that he was a prophet in a song, with the words, “I know I ain’t no prophet/And I ain’t no prophet’s son!” But from time to time he would write another song that hinted about Judgment Day the way ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ did – by making reference to the wind, the rain, or other effects of a storm, including especially a deluge like the great flood described in the Bible. (Ledeen, 1995, p. 11)

“All Along the Watchtower” closes with the howling of the wind, “which, like the wrath of a vengeful God, seems to strip the world bare” (Burns, 2008, p. 57). The title “Tempest” suggests that this song belongs to the same category as the songs just mentioned.

Protestant hymns often provide important source material in Dylan’s songs. In the song “In the sun and moon and stars” the English bishop Reginald Heber (1783–1826) vividly described the apocalypse, using the word “tempest”:

Soon shall ocean’s hoary deep,
Tossed with stronger tempests, rise;
Darker storms the mountains sweep,
Redder lightning rend the skies

In the Bible the word tempest has two connotations, and they are not mutually exclusive. The biblical tempest can refer to a *natural* phenomenon. The story of Jonah begins with a divine intervention in the form of a tempest, resulting in a shipwreck: “But the Lord sent out a great wind

into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4, KJV).

It can also refer to a strong wind associated with God, a phenomenon accompanying the manifestation of divine presence. When God manifests himself in a theophany it can be very tempestuous round about him, especially when he appears as the judge (Isa. 30:30). In the gospel accounts, in the KJV, the word "tempest" appears only once, in a text combining a tempest, a ship and a sleeping watchman: "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with waves: but he [Jesus] was asleep" (Matt. 8:24).

The music and the voice

In Dylan's songs the music always plays an important role in the construction of meaning. The meaning of a song is never purely in the lyrics, and it cannot be analyzed separately from the music. This issue is something Bob Dylan has addressed several times:

A lot of times people will take the music out of my lyrics and just read them as lyrics. That's not really fair because the music and the lyrics I've always felt are pretty closely wrapped up. You can't separate one from the other that simply. A lot of time the meaning is more in the way a line is sung, and not just in the line. (Cott, 2006, p. 328)

"Tempest" is a song (and not a poem), where Dylan has taken the melody from the Mize/Carter version. It is the melody more than the lyrics of "The Titanic" that is important to Dylan: "I was just fooling with that [The Carter Family's "The Titanic"] one night. I liked the melody – I liked it a lot. 'Maybe I'm gonna appropriate this melody.' But where would I go with it"? (Gilmore, 2012a, p. 16). The melody links Dylan's song with the Carter Family, an institution in American folk and country music.

As far as the musical genre of "Tempest" is concerned, the song has been described as the "lush tones of a waltz" (Mentz, 2015, p. 162), and as "a seesawing ballad tune, a slow Irish jig" (Brown, 2014, p. 231–32) – that is, a cheerful, jaunty piece of music. The Irish connection is important, since RMS *Titanic* was constructed and built at the Harland & Wolff shipyard

in Belfast. The liveliness of the song is further expressed through David Hidalgo's fiddle, which does not sound mournful (*pace* Beviglia, 2013, p. 37), but lively.

Another important matter is the vocal expression and presentation of the song. Frances Downing Hunter describes Dylan's voice on "Tempest" as a croak: "I try to see the croak as a device, as a voice that he has decided to use to emphasize the ravages, not only of time but what has been done to our country – the corporate greed [...]. He sees where the ship of state is headed" (Bream, 2015, p. 215). Richard Elliott points out that Dylan's singing voice on "Tempest" takes on something of the qualities of the scene it depicts:

The weathered vocal ploughs an almost straight course through the sea of instrumentation: 'almost' because it is the occasional surging and pitching of the voice in relation to the predominant gentle sway of the music that provides the emotional contact points. Or, because voice and music blend so well, we might think of Dylan's voice as the sea – constant but unpredictable – into which we as listeners are invited to submerge ourselves [...] Dylan's voice can claim the sea's victory rather than the ship's defeat: it abides. (Elliott, 2015, p. 179–180)

In an interesting article Christophe Lebold seeks to examine the specific literary pleasures experienced by listeners of Bob Dylan's songs. He argues that the way Dylan performs the lyrics shows a fascination for a rhythmical language that is inherently literary. This is certainly true of "Tempest". Lebold continues:

His so-called 'bad' voice is a sonic echo of the recurring theme of human imperfection and the motif of the fall of man (into sin, old age, or wretchedness). Dylan's more recent broken voice enables him to present a worldview at the sonic surface of the songs – this voice carries us across the landscape of a broken, fallen world. The anatomy of a broken world in 'Everything is Broken' is but an example of how the thematic concern with all things broken is grounded in a concrete sonic reality. Again, the broken timbre is but a sign, an index of an ontological brokenness. (Lebold, 2007, p. 64–65)

Lebold wrote these lines several years before Bob Dylan released *Tempest*. However, every word of his approach to Dylan's voice is transferable to

Dylan's performance of "Tempest". His voice, which some would say is croaking, is extremely well suited to express the tragedy at the heart of the song. In "Tempest" the narrative transcends the actual tragedy, and this is reflected in the voice of the singer. He is not performing a lament or an elegy. The voice is broken, but from this brokenness another feeling emerges, one of confidence, hope, even joy.

The identity of the dreaming watchman

A central figure in the texts by Seth Newton Mize and the Carter Family is the watchman. An important key to understanding both "The Titanic" and "Tempest" is the identity and role of this figure. Dylan has retained, and further developed, this persona from the Carter Family song. The second verse of the Carter Family's "The Titanic" describes a dreaming watchman:

The watchman was a dreaming
Yes dreaming a sad, sad dream
He dreamed the Titanic was sinking
Out on the deep blue sea

The identity of this watchman becomes clear in the next verse: "He rose and called the rich man, and told him to come to life." The watchman also "tried to save the rich man's baby and his darling wife". The rich man is probably John Jacob Astor IV (1864–1912), to whom Dylan devotes a verse (verse twenty-four) in "Tempest". In the Carters' song, the watchman clearly is on board the ship, he is on the lookout for icebergs, but he has fallen asleep.

The four watchman verses in "Tempest" act as interludes to create pauses in the narrative, and they precede the musical breaks. The four verses are different, but the first line in each verse is almost identical: verses six, thirty-eight and forty-five have "The watchman he lay dreaming", while verse seventeen says "The watchman lay there dreaming". In Dylan's text the watchman never wakes up, and he is not looking for icebergs. On the contrary, even in the last verse of the song, he is still dreaming. Dylan has transformed the watchman persona into something far more pivotal and

suggestive compared to the role of the watchman in the Carter Family song. The first time he appears in Dylan's text is in verse six:

The watchman he lay dreaming
 As the ballroom dancers twirled
 He dreamed the Titanic was sinking
 Into the underworld

It is significant that he dreams the ship is going into the "underworld", the realm of the dead and a mythic place. In Revelation there are two terms for the underworld. On seven occasions it is called the abyss, which is the Jewish counterpart of Hades. On four occasions it is called Hades, always paired with a reference to death. However, the author of the Book of Revelation never describes the nature of existence in those locations, or their physical features. In the Bible words like sea, waters, flood and abyss are often used complementarily, to symbolize the underworld of the dead. In verse seventeen the watchman sees the ship "dropping to her knees":

The watchman lay there dreaming
 At forty-five degrees
 He dreamed the Titanic was sinking
 Dropping to her knees

This expression, like the similar "fall on one's knees" or simply "kneel", describes a praying position, or the position of someone expressing awe and humility. In the watchman's dream the sinking of the Titanic is portrayed as an act of prayer and humiliation. While the ship was "dropping to her knees", the captain is later said to be "kneeling at the wheel".

In his *Nobel Lecture* Dylan mentioned hearing "the deep-pitched voice of John the Revelator". "John the Revelator" is a traditional gospel blues song, performed in a call and response style. The American gospel blues musician Blind Willie Johnson (1897–1945), with his characteristic deep-pitched voice, recorded it in 1930. It was later included on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. It remains one of Johnson's most well-known songs. The song's title refers to John, the author of the Book of Revelation. Dylan makes a connection between listening to Blind Willie Johnson, "John the Revelator", and the sinking of the *Titanic*:

By listening to all the early folk artists and singing the songs yourself, you pick up the vernacular. You internalize it. You sing it in the ragtime blues, work songs, Georgia sea shanties, Appalachian ballads, and cowboy songs. You hear all the finer points, and you learn the details. You know what it's all about [...]. You know that Stagger Lee was a bad man and that Frankie was a good girl. You know that Washington is a bourgeois town and you've heard the deep-pitched voice of John the Revelator and you saw the *Titanic* sink in a boggy creek. (Dylan, 2017, p. 4-5)

In 1929 Blind Willie Johnson recorded another gospel blues song, "God Moves on the Water". This *Titanic* song was a staple in his oeuvre, and the title probably alludes to the creation story in Gen. 1:2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (KJV). Dylan, on *Modern Times*, reworked Gen. 1:2 into the couplet "Spirit on the water/Darkness on the face of the deep". Like folk preachers, Johnson's words in "God Moves on the Water" paint a vivid, dramatic scene. His message is that the disaster was God's judgment on modern mammonism (Hayes, 2017, p. 183-84). In his song the watchmen fell asleep:

The guards who had been watching
Asleep for they were tired
When they heard the great excitement
Many gunshots were fired
God moves

The lyrics of Johnson's "John the Revelator" contain several references to the last book of the Bible. Beebee states that in the first verse of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" the singer is identified as a John the Revelator, who has made a supernatural or catabatic journey and lived to tell about it. Beebee takes the hard rain to represent God's wrath, and the next three verses relate "John's" visions (Beebee, 2009, p. 159).

Several interpretations of the watchman persona are possible, and they are all closely related. My view is that the role of the watchman in "Tempest" is similar to the I-figure, the narrator of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall"; they are both modern day "John the Revelator" personas. Just as John in the Book of Revelation received visions from a source outside of

himself, so the apocalyptic drama is revealed to the watchman by means of a dream or a vision.

This watchman is not a crew member, he is not a figure in the plot, he is situated outside of the story. There are similarities between this character and the narrators in “Highlands” and “Cross the Green Mountain”, who both fall asleep or into a dream world, before the narrative begins. “Cross the Green Mountain” opens with the narrator dreaming a monstrous dream, in which something comes up *out* of the sea. Like the “dreamer” in this visionary song the watchman in “Tempest” is also a character from another world. It is significant that he is not merely sleeping but dreaming, a condition halfway between sleep and being awake. In verse thirty-eight the watchman is “trying” to tell someone, but the warning seems to go unheeded:

The watchman he lay dreaming
 The damage had been done
 He dreamed the Titanic was sinking
 And he tried to tell someone

Another possible interpretation is to view the watchman as a figure for the artist; he is to be identified with Dylan himself. He is not only a dreamer, but also a messenger or a prophet in the sense that he tries to give a warning of the impending disaster. “Tempest” is thus similar to other Dylan songs, not only because of its content, but because Dylan here as elsewhere takes on the role of a prophet. Dylan’s use of the term “watchman” also recalls “All Along the Watchtower”, another song with apocalyptic themes and content. According to the last verse of “Tempest” the watchman dreamt, not only of the *Titanic*, but “of all things that can be”:

The watchman he lay dreaming
 Of all things that can be
 He dreamed the Titanic was sinking
 Into the deep blue sea

Furthermore, the way Dylan uses the term watchman in “Tempest” is similar to the use of the term in the prophetic books of the Bible. A watchman is a seer or a prophet (Ezek. 3:17; 33:7). God sometimes communicated

with the watchmen in dreams and visions (Dan. 7:1). Watchmen guarded Israel against unexpected invasions (Jer. 6:17), and sounded alerts to warn people of impending danger (Ezek. 33:6).

The first part (verses 1 to 6): "'Twas the fourteen day of April"

In the first verse Dylan has copied the line "She told a sad, sad story" from the Carter Family song. It is this female storyteller who opens "Tempest". In other words, the dreams and visions of the watchman are narrated by a female. Who is "she"? In the original Mize text "she" is the antecedent of the moon. This is also the case in "Tempest". The she-figure is only mentioned in this line, and except for being the narrator "she" does not appear elsewhere in the song. However, being the narrator, "she" plays an important role, and in some Dylan-songs the moon is the muse: "The heroine of Dylan's song 'Isis' is a moon goddess, and the main thrust of Robert Graves' book *The White Goddess* is that the moon goddess inspires poetry endowed with a magical quality" (Gray, 2000, p. 490). Dylan read Graves' book and met him in 1963 in London. Graves made Dylan aware of the role of the moon as muse, and in "Tempest" it can be argued that Dylan acts as an instrument for a higher power, the moon-goddess, who is telling the sad story of the great ship that went down (Holmgren, 2016, p. 23–24).

Initially one might wonder at the narrator's concern with the precise date ("'Twas the fourteen day of April"), in a song which has little regard for historical accuracy. However, the line serves to draw attention to the contrast between a temporal, as distinct from an eternal, perspective. This dualistic view of time is an important characteristic of apocalyptic literature (McGinn, 1984, p. 11). The eternal perspective is made explicit in the expressions "a golden age", "the promised hour", "eternal home" and "underworld":

'Twas the fourteen day of April
Over the waves she rode
Sailing into tomorrow
To a golden age foretold

The passengers' destination is "a golden age foretold", an expression carrying several different meanings. It can denote a better existence in America, a country which, for many of those on board the *Titanic*, represents an opportunity for a better life. The golden age can also be a reference to Greek myth, where the history of humankind takes the form of four ages, each represented by a metal. The first is the golden age, a period characterized by peace, harmony, stability and prosperity. Hesiod gives the following description in *Works and Days*: "They lived like gods, with carefree heart, remote from toil and misery. Wretched old age did not affect them either, but with hands and feet ever unchanged they enjoyed themselves in feasting, beyond all ills, and they died as overcome by sleep. All good things were theirs" (Hesiod, 1988, p. 40). Lastly, the golden age can refer to a passage in Revelation, describing a future life in the new Jerusalem, a city made of gold (Rev. 21:18). On his debut album Dylan recorded the traditional gospel song "Gospel Plow", with the following lines:

Well I've never been to heaven
 But I've been told streets up there
 Are lined with gold

He later developed the ideas of these lines into his own song "City of Gold", originally written in 1980, but not officially released until *Trouble No More (The Bootleg Series, vol. 13)* came out in 2017. Later, in "Tempest", the golden age to come is contrasted with the "gilded age of *Titanic*". The expression "gilded age" is often used to describe a period in American history: the era of rapid industrialization and wealth creation that began in the 1870s and ended with the introduction of income taxes in 1913 and the outbreak of World War I the following year. The *Titanic* "represented the sunset of the Gilded Age", and the ship's First Class Grand Staircase was the epitome of the opulent naval architecture of the time (Brewster, 2012, p. 2). Verse thirty-two specifies that some people drowned aboard, in glorious surroundings, upon a staircase made of "brass and polished gold".

Another sense of time arises from the expression "the promised hour was near". This expression serves a contrasting purpose, since none of the passengers, noticeably not even the bishop, seem to have been prepared for the nearness of it. There is, in other words, a strong element of

surprise in the text. "The promised hour" often implies a sense of hope. Here it denotes the opposite: something completely unexpected and more catastrophic than anyone could possibly imagine. This expression does not occur in the Bible, but it is used to describe the greatest apocalyptic event of all, the second coming of Christ, in the Protestant hymn "See the Ransomed Millions Stand":

Hasten Lord the promised hour
Come in glory and in power
Still Thy foes are unsubdued
Nature sighs to be renewed

In "Tempest" we find ballroom dancers alight and carefree, as the ship is about to go down. In verse eight the character Leo is introduced for the first time. Cupid, the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection, strikes his bosom. A person shot by Cupid's arrow is filled with uncontrollable desire. "Leo" immediately falls into a woman's lap.

In the beginning of "Tempest" Dylan describes an unsuspecting group of people, carrying on with ordinary and "normal" activities. When the ship began to sink they refused to believe what was happening, and the orchestra was not playing "Nearer, My God, to Thee":

The chandeliers were swaying
From the balustrades above
The orchestra was playing
Songs of faded love

Historians still discuss what was the last song played by the eight-man orchestra before the ship went down. However, the evidence for "Nearer, My God, to Thee" being the band's final song seems overwhelming (Turner, 2011, p. 152). This poignant moment is "remembered" in many *Titanic* songs. In Dylan's song "Caribbean Wind" the narrator reports that outside his window the "street band [was] playing 'Nearer, My God, to Thee'". There the occurrence of the phrase "Nearer, My God, to Thee" can be taken as an omen of imminent death (Gray, 2000, p. 459). In "Tempest" there is no such omen. In spite of swaying chandeliers the orchestra continued to play songs of faded love.

In the first part of “Tempest” there is no storm or tempest. On the contrary, the seas were “sharp and clear”, suggesting both danger and safety, and the “lights were holding steady”. Twenty minutes before midnight on April 14th, 1912, the seas in the north Atlantic were almost unnaturally quiet, and the air was absolutely calm. The depiction of the doomed ship in the first part of the song is reminiscent of Matt. 24:37–39, where Jesus stated that the final days would be as the days of Noah. “In those days before the flood” (Matt. 24:38) the people were oblivious to all else than their own pleasurable living. They did not know the imminent danger until the flood came and swept them away. Verse thirty-eight, where the watchman “tried to tell someone”, sounds like an echo of a line from in “In the Summertime” (*Shot of Love*, 1981): “Then came the warning that was *before the flood*”. This situation is similar to the one in “Tempest”, people living everyday and ordinary lives, a large ship, endless water, and impending doom.

The second part (verses 7 to 17): “The veil was torn asunder”

In this sequence the listener gets to know “Leo”, who is carrying his sketchbook. This is a reference to Leonardo DiCaprio’s character Jack Dawson, from the tremendously successful movie *Titanic*. There are other explicit connections between Dylan and the James Cameron movie. James Cameron quotes Dylan, and Dylan (later) quotes Cameron. Early in the movie “Jack” says, “When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose”, a line taken directly from “Like a Rolling Stone”. The line, as it is used in the movie, stresses the idea of starting from zero and taking a chance on life. Later “Jack” states: “I’m just a tumbleweed, blowin’ in the wind.”

However, Dylan’s “Leo” is not necessarily identical with James Cameron’s Jack, and in “Tempest” there is no Rose or Kate (Winslet), only a woman called Cleo. Anne Margaret Daniel sees “Leo” and “Cleo” as resonant references to people in the past: “two people famous for being in boats. After all, Cleo has that barge, in which she makes her triumphal entrance for Anthony in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, one of the most famous, doomed, spectacular scenes in all of Shakespeare” (Daniel, 2017, p. 69,

also Mentz, 2015, p. 166). In my view this is an improbable reading, since Cleo plays a minor role in Dylan's story. She is in no way a significant character, in verse thirty-three Leo says to her: "I think I'm going mad", to which there is no response from Cleo.

My suggestion is that Cleo is Leo's alter ego, she is the feminine side of his psyche. The name "Cleo" embodies "Leo", suggesting that although they are two people they are, at the same time, one and the same person. That Leo and Cleo are identical is reinforced by the idea of Cupid striking Leo's "bosom". The word "bosom" is normally applied to a woman rather than a man, and implies femininity. Furthermore, a search for another self, twin, muse or Madonna, has turned out to be a strikingly insistent lifelong quest for Dylan (Tillinghast, 1987, p. 173). Before the listener gets to know more about Leo, "apocalypse literally crashes in on the scene" (Hand Jones, 2013, p. 200):

Smokestack leaning sideways
Heavy feet began to pound
He walked into the whirlwind
Sky spinning all around

When the whirlwind hits the ship with destructive power the result is flickering lights, floating dead bodies, exploding engines, and "passengers flying backward, forward, far and fast". This disaster involves not only the *Titanic* or the microcosm, the whole universe or cosmic order is threatened.

There is a marked contrast in the song between up and down, "yonder" and "under". The emphasis on the latter includes phrases like "the great ship went down", "lights down in the hallway", the pleonastic "descending down the stairs", "they lowered down the lifeboats", "blood pouring down his arm" and "the needle pointing downward". By contrast the only mentions of "up" are in the bishop's turning his eyes "up" to heaven and "the roll was called up yonder":

The ship was going under
The universe opened wide
The roll was called up yonder
The angels turned aside

In Revelation the angels surround God and his throne. “The angels turned aside” implies that they withdrew from this position, so that a revelation of God could take place. The third line of verse twelve refers to the title of a well-known Protestant hymn, “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder”, written by James Milton Black in 1893 (Sanville, 1943, p. 84–85).⁵ According to Black “The roll” is a reference to the Book of Life, which is mentioned several times in Revelation:

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright and fair
When the saved of earth shall gather on the other shore
And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there

The motif of a Book of Life, in which the names of the saved are written, occurs in Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 and 20:12, and once in the epistles of St. Paul (Phil. 4:3). On the one hand Rev. 17:8 seems to express a predestinarian view, because it divides humanity into two groups: those whose names have been inscribed in the Book of Life since the creation of the world, and those whose names have not. On the other hand Rev. 3:5 mentions the possibility of having one's name blotted out from the Book. This suggests that fidelity to God rather than any kind of predestination is the reason for having one's name inscribed in the “roll”.

The line “The veil was torn asunder” in verse sixteen is another reference to an apocalyptic motif from the New Testament.

The veil was torn asunder
‘Tween the hours of twelve and one
No change, no sudden wonder
Could undo what had been done

“The veil” probably refers to the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Jewish temple. The curtains of the temple restricted access to the presence of God. The gospel of Matthew places this event in a distinctively apocalyptic context. The tearing of the veil takes place

5 For the story behind Black's song, see “James Milton Black Wanted His Name on God's Roll”: <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/james-milton-black-wanted-his-name-on-gods-roll-11630502.html>

between the death of Christ and several explicit apocalyptic events like the splitting of rocks, opening of tombs and raising of holy ones (Matt. 27:51).

The tearing of the veil happened "between the hours of twelve and one". It was 11:45 p.m. when the *Titanic* grazed along the iceberg that would send it to its ocean bed. The period between midnight and 1 a.m. was very dramatic and chaotic. At 2:20 a.m. the forward deck dipped under water, and the sea poured in through open hatches and grates. After a short while the ship broke in two and sank.

In this part of the song the bow of the ship splits apart, the engines explode, and the ship is going under. Why does this catastrophe take place? The forces of nature involved are a whirlwind, and sky spinning all around, but there is no reference to an iceberg. This ship is no longer the *Titanic*, and instead of describing what actually happened on the fourteenth day of April another story is unfolded. This is a narrative referring to several apocalyptic events from the Bible. The whirlwind is important. It is synonymous with the title of the song, and it is a manifestation of the divine presence: "You will be visited by the Lord of hosts [...] with whirlwind and tempest" (Isa. 29:6). The great disaster is interpreted as a theophany: the angels turned aside, so that the presence of God could be made manifest. The tearing of the veil from "up" to "down" implies divine action, but also a democratization of the divine presence. It is no longer hidden behind a veil, but available to all.

The third part (verses 18 to 38): "He tried to save all"

This long sequence is a good example of how Dylan has "adapted the montage writing predilection for gathering multifarious references from disparate timeframes and sources, and applying them to the disciplined telling of a prolonged story" (Hodgers, 2017, p. 113). A number of different persons make their appearance: Wellington, Calvin, Blake and Wilson, Davey the brothel keeper, Jim Dandy, a bishop, and for the second time, Leo. Davey the brothel-keeper (verse twenty-nine) is a character Dylan has appropriated from the Roman poet Juvenal. In his *Satires*, Volume 6, he wrote: "[Too soon] the brothel keeper dismissed

his girls” (Juvenal, 1998, p. 38). The line “Nameless here forever more” in verse thirty-seven is identical with the last line in the second stanza of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven”, which, by the way, includes the word “tempest” twice (Poe, 2016, p. 3).

“Jim Dandy” is the name of a song recorded by LaVern Baker in 1956. The song is about a man, Jim Dandy, who rescues women from improbable or impossible predicaments. According to verse thirty-one Jim Dandy found peace when he saw the starlight shining. This is probably a reference to the wise men from the East, who had seen “his star at its rising” (Matt. 2:1–2):

He saw the starlight shining
Streaming from the East
Death was on the rampage
But his heart was now at peace

This is similar to a line from “No Time to Think”, where a girl travels on a bridge that goes to Babylon, but then she (the “you” of the text) sees the “starlight in the East, and you’re finally released”. The redemptive element in “Desolation Row” is Noah’s great rainbow, and in “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” a glimpse of hope shines through in the sentence “She gave me a rainbow”. The possibility of redemption in “Tempest” is first hinted at when Jim Dandy gave his place on a lifeboat to a little crippled child. He gave away his own chance to be rescued so that another person could be rescued in his place.

Is Wellington identical with Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852), known as the 1st Duke of Wellington, who is most famous for his victory against Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815? His response to the disaster is to “strap on both his pistols” and wonder how long he could “hold out”, as if he were under siege. As a passenger on a sinking ship, his behavior is strange and ludicrous. In a way this matches the response of the bishop. Whereas the bishop thinks irrelevantly of hunger, Wellington thinks equally irrelevantly of protecting himself against aggressors. He discovers that “the passageway was narrow”, but his response on seeing this was merely to notice people’s misery rather than go down the passageway to see what help he could provide. The phrase is reminiscent both of “Long and Narrow Way”,

and the New Testament warning "narrow is the road that leads to salvation" (Matt. 7:14). The broad road, by contrast, is leading to destruction. In not taking the narrow way, Wellington seems to have missed the chance to be saved, both in the temporal and in the eternal sense.

The bishop is aware of his obligations but seems to do little about them. In the gospel of Matthew Jesus saw the great crowd of five thousand. Then he said to his disciples: "You give them something to eat" (Matt. 14:16). The bishop turns his eyes away from the people and up to the heavens. His comment to God, "the poor are yours to feed", is a way of refusing responsibility. In the dramatic situation on board the ship the bishop's supplication to heaven is not an expression of faith or compassion. Although there were plenty of poor people on board, hunger was hardly their present concern. The bishop should in any case be serving anyone who needed help, whether rich or poor.

The inadequate attitudes of Wellington and the bishop contrast with that of Leo, who clearly is an important figure to Dylan: "Yeah, Leo. I don't think the song would be the same without him. Or the movie" (Gilmore, 2012a, p. 16). In the movie Jack Dawson is a sort of classless "superman", and Rose's romance with him is a redemption tale, coupling a woman in distress with a somewhat superhuman being who exactly fulfils her needs (Koldau, 2012, p. 188). Near the end of the movie old Rose says of Jack: "There was a man called Jack Dawson, and he saved me in every way that a human can be saved" (Cameron, 1998a, p. 149). He saved her in two ways at least: from suicide in the first part of the movie, and in the last part he gave up his life so that she could live on. Just as in the movie, Dylan's Leo tries to save others before eventually "saving" himself:

He tried to block the doorway
To save all those from harm
Blood from an open wound
Pouring down his arm

In "Tempest" Leo is presented as a Christ-like character whose efforts for others are at the expense of his own blood. This makes his contrast with the bishop all the more ironic. Whereas the bishop merely refers to "the poor", Leo's arm is actually *pouring* blood. This also puts him in

contrast with the host-persona in verse thirty-six, who likewise is *pouring*, but merely brandy. According to the Gospel of John one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear after he had died, but while he still hung on the cross: "And at once blood and water came out" (John 19:34). A very common motif in Christian iconography is Jesus, depicted hanging on the cross, with blood pouring out from an open wound.

It is significant too that Leo has "an open wound", associating it with the universe which had "opened wide" to reveal God (Weir, 2016). Leo thus represents the most explicit possibility of redemption; he is trying to save the doomed people with his own life. In *Yonder Comes Sin* A. T. Bradford contends that the blood "that Dylan is singing of as 'paying for him' [in "Pay in Blood"], is surely not the blood of any mortal man, but of Christ" (Bradford, 2015, p. 576). Similarly Andrew Muir thinks "the phrase 'pay in blood' itself [...] has to put one in mind of Jesus paying for the sins of humankind with his blood. It is inconceivable that the connotation would not occur to Dylan" (Muir, 2019, p. 313). That makes an interesting connection between "Pay in Blood" and "Tempest".

Wellington discovered that "there was blackness in the air". In the Bible blackness or darkness is a common metaphor for the judgment that will come on the day of the Lord (Joel 2:2; 31, Zeph. 1:15). According to the gospels darkness came over the whole land in the last hours before Jesus died (Matt. 27:45). In this situation alarm bells were ringing, just like in "Ring Them Bells", another Dylan song with apocalyptic motifs. In "Ring Them Bells" there is no dreaming watchman, but a shepherd who is asleep. The bells in "Tempest" were ringing to hold back "the swelling tide". This expression occurs in an apocalyptic context in the Protestant hymn "My Savior First of All":

When my lifework is ended, and I cross the swelling tide
 When the bright and glorious morning I shall see
 I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side
 And his smile will be the first to welcome me

The idea of predestination is present in "Tempest" by way of a strong feeling of pointlessness and futility (Weir, 2016). Alarm bells ring "to keep back the swelling tide", Wellington straps on his pistols, some passengers

cling to each other, others jump into icy water, the brothel keeper dismisses his girls and in the end people wait at the landing. All of these things are futile, since "no change, no sudden wonder, could undo what had been done", because "all things had run their course". The phrase "run their course" suggests that history develops according to a divine plan, before it comes to a preordained ending. The notion of predestination is also introduced by the appearance of a person called Calvin:

Calvin, Blake and Wilson
Gambled in the dark
Not one of them would ever live to
Tell the tale of disembark

This is probably a reference to the sixteenth century protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–1564). He is well-known for his theory of double predestination: the view that God has actively chosen some people for damnation and destruction, others for salvation and eternal life. Together with Blake and Wilson, Calvin "gambled in the dark". Gambling is an event with an uncertain outcome, there is a strong element of chance involved. Chance is the opposite of preordained destiny. By bringing Calvin into his text, Dylan also introduces the notion of predestination. Since Calvin is "gambling in the dark" it is important not to draw hasty conclusions as far as the theology behind "Tempest" is concerned. After all, "there is no understanding on the judgment of God's hand".

Blake is probably William Blake (1757–1827), who saw his words as being a continuation of the words of John, the disciple of Jesus, who, when he was exiled on the island of Patmos, wrote the Book of Revelation. Blake not only thought of himself as a prophet, but democratized prophecy, for "Every honest man is a prophet" (Erdman, 2008, p. 617). In Blake's interpretation the Book of Revelation laid bare the realities of history more than it offered a map of the end of the world: "It sets forth the reality of what is going on in the world and the pervasiveness of human self-deception, and summons its readers and hearers to change their outlook and practice" (Rowland, 2016, p. 13). Blake was thoroughly opposed to the idea of predestination.

Heinrich Detering thinks that Calvin and Wilson are the American presidents Calvin Coolidge and Woodrow Wilson (Detering, 2016, p. 93).

Wilson was president from 1913 to 1921, and Coolidge from 1923 to 1929. When the *Titanic* sank William H. Taft was president. It is possible that “Wilson” is Woodrow Wilson, who was a Presbyterian and held strong Calvinist beliefs (Hankins, 2016). That would make an interesting combination of the theologian, poet and politician, all three of them gambling in a situation where the outcome was most uncertain.

The violent events alluded to in verse twenty-six are either the murder of Abel by Cain or the end time persecution of the believers as described in the gospels:

Brother rose up against brother
In every circumstance
They fought and slaughtered each other
In a deadly dance

In “Desolation Row” Cain and Abel are the biblical types for human quarrelling and self-destruction. Jesus predicted that the opposition the apostles will face in the last days will be more than merely political and social. Those who respond in faith and obedience to the gospel will face opposition from their own families: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death” (Mark 13:12). This tradition of the divided family became a fixture in apocalyptic expectation. It is also an integral part of the “Tempest” lyrics.

The expression “the rich man”, preserved from the Carter song, is used explicitly in verse twenty-four to describe John Jacob Astor IV. He was the wealthiest person aboard the *Titanic*, and is well known for financing the Astoria hotel in New York. Astor is by no means unique in being rich among the passengers described as “all the lords and ladies”. Later we are told that “the host was pouring brandy”, again implying a lavish lifestyle, as does the presence of an orchestra (as distinct from a mere band), and ballroom dancers. What is the identity of the host in verse thirty-six?

The host was pouring brandy
He was going down slow
He stayed right ‘til the end
He was the last to go

In James Cameron's *Titanic* script, the word "host" is used once. In the beginning of the movie Cal, Rose's unsympathetic fiancé, says: "It is unsinkable. God himself could not sink this ship". Then the script continues: "Cal speaks with the pride of a host providing a special experience" (Cameron, 1998a, p. 33-34). Later on Jack asks Rose in Rose's suite whether they should be expecting Cal to be back soon. Rose answers: "Not as long as the cigars and brandy hold out" (Cameron, 1998a, p. 98). When the ship is sinking, Cal is the last person to get on board one of the lifeboats, thus excluding others from being rescued. If Dylan's host is Cameron's Cal, the word host is used ironically. A host is a person who invites and includes. Cal does the opposite; unlike Leo he always puts himself first. He also provides a good example of someone who is capable of fighting and slaughtering others.

Michael J. Gilmour thinks Dylan is imagining Rev. 18:11-24 as he depicts the splendors of the luxury liner (Gilmour, 2017, p. 71). He points out that in this passage Revelation condemns extreme wealth and the decadence and abuses of power that come with it. RMS *Titanic* was the embodiment of extravagance and excess. In "Tempest" chandeliers sway from the balustrades, and the staircase is decorated with "brass and polished gold". According to Cameron's script John Jacob Astor was on the grand staircase when the ship went under. This is what he saw: "A Niagara of sea water thunders down into the room, blasting through the first class opulence. It is the Armageddon of elegance" (Cameron, 1998a, p. 239).

The third part of the song is similar to the second because of the continuing use of apocalyptic imagery. Because of the Leo-persona this part also offers another perspective. Why did Dylan use the name Leo, and not Jack, which is his name in Cameron's movie? My suggestion is that this is because the name Leo means "lion", a designation of Jesus in Revelation, where he is called "the Lion of Judah" (Rev. 5:5). According to verse thirty-four he tries to save all, while his blood is pouring from an open wound. The verb save is also used to characterize the actions of Jack Dawson, but he is only trying to save one person, while Leo tries to save *all*. Jack has no bleeding wounds, while the lines about the blood of Leo come immediately after the line "He tried [...] to save all". As in the Jesus narrative of the New Testament salvation and blood belong together in

Dylan's Leo narrative. And as in the second part of the song a revelation of the divine also takes place in the third. However, this revelation is different, since it involves self-sacrifice and redemption.

The fourth part (verses 39 to 45): "He read the Book of Revelation"

In the last sequence of the song the captain looks at the compass, gazing into its face. The needle is pointing downward, and he knows he has lost the race. The expression "to lose the race" can have two meanings. Most probably it is a reference to the race across the Atlantic. A US inquiry board found Captain Smith responsible for the tragedy, citing his "indifference to danger", and "overconfidence and neglect" in steering the ship into an iceberg, while travelling or racing too fast for the conditions. The expression "the race" is also used several times in the New Testament as a metaphor, describing the life of a person who puts his trust in God and tries to live according to God's will: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

In this situation the captain remembers bygone years, and opens up a book that was presumably dear to him. He does not read from the gospels, but turns to the last book of the Bible. Time is short, and there is no time to study the whole Book of Revelation. His eyes fall upon a text that can bring him hope and comfort in a hopeless situation:

In the dark illumination
 He remembered bygone years
 He read the Book of Revelation
 And he filled his cup with tears

Dylan never specifies what passage or chapter the captain was reading. Since Dylan has adapted several scenes from the movie *Titanic* into his song, I want to suggest that the captain is reading what was read by a Catholic priest onboard the doomed ship. In the movie there is a scene where a Catholic priest, Fr. Thomas Byles, is reading from the Bible. As the deck creeps past a 45-degree angle and the ship begins her descent into the abyss, Fr. Byles' voice can be heard above the wailing and sobbing:

And I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away. I also saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne ring out this is God's dwelling among men. He shall dwell with them and they shall be his people and He shall be their God who is always with them. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the former world has passed away. (Cameron, 1998a, p. 134)

This text might imply that Cameron intended a Christian interpretation of the disaster, as the judgment of God on a materialist civilization. The text read by Fr. Byles also emphasizes that the primary meaning of the biblical apocalypse is not violent destruction or the end of history, but rather the transformation and redemption of the world.

"Dark illumination" is an oxymoron – that is, a mutually contradictory image. Similar expressions frequently occur in Dylan's lyrics (Bowden, 1982, p. 39). However, a suggestion has been made that the first line of verse forty-one can be punctuated like this: "In the dark: illumination". That would bring a different twist to the verse: "Lifted by spiritual illumination the Captain's cup would not be filled with tears of sorrow or tears of rage, but with tears of joy" (Stokes, 2012, p. 47). He knows that there will be a time when God wipes away every tear from his eyes.

In verse forty-two the term "the Reaper" occurs, another word Dylan has never used before. This term and the related expression "the Grim Reaper" is sometimes used to describe death as a personified force. The Reaper causes the death of the victims by coming to collect them. In the Book of Revelation it can refer to the fourth horseman in Rev. 6:1–8, whose name is "Death", and who comes to announce the Last Judgment. He is often pictured as a reaper, with a hooded skeleton bearing the huge curved scythe. A good example is Gustav Doré's painting *The Fourth Horseman* (1865). He wields the scythe, symbolizing the weapon of the harvester. It can also refer to Christ, who in Rev. 14:14 is given the order to begin the harvest of the earth. With a sickle in his hand he comes to harvest those who are ready to be reaped. The poem by Edgar Allan Poe "The City in the Sea" contains the lines "Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best/Have gone to their eternal rest" (Poe, 2016, p. 70). There is an echo of this in Dylan's text:

When the Reaper's task had ended
 Sixteen hundred had gone to rest
 The good, the bad, the rich, the poor
 The loveliest and the best

Furthermore, in this verse there is a contrast between the words “Reaper” and “rest”. The idea of death as the reaper, appearing with a deadly tool, suggests violence and suffering. In this case the Reaper was very successful, reaping the great majority of those on board the ship. They tried to swim or held on to wreckage, and then froze to death or drowned in the icy water. The ones who died on that fateful night *went to rest*, an expression which is identical with the one in the Carter Family song. It is also a way of describing death suggesting calmness and peace, and the bottom of the ocean, or rather “the underworld” or “the eternal home”, become places of rest. In the Bible death is often compared to rest, in expressions like “enter his [God’s] rest” (Heb. 3:18), or “rest from one’s labors” (Rev. 14:13).

Dylan himself has pointed to the role of tradition when he has responded to questions about the themes of death and destruction on *Tempest*: “There’s plenty of *death* songs. You may well know, in folk music every other song deals with death. Everybody sings them. Death is a part of life. The sooner you know that, the better off you’ll be. That’s the only way to look at it” (Dylan, 2012b, p. 50). Death in “Tempest” comes as the result of a disaster, but this disaster also involves the notion of divine judgment:

They waited at the landing
 And they tried to understand
 But there is no understanding
 On the judgment of God’s hand

By advertising the ship as “virtually unsinkable” and adding a list of wealthy and prominent passengers, the White Star Line made many people feel the whole voyage reflected hubris, waste, and greed. The iceberg was the hand of God, teaching the rich and the mighty a lesson they would never forget. In many *Titanic* songs the ship became a metaphor for man’s fatal pride and tower-of-babel aspirations. In another popular

song called "The Titanic", recorded in 1924, Ernest Stoneman on the one hand stated that "It was sad when that great ship went down", while on the other hand he reflected the sentiment of many when he sang:

God with power in his hand
Showed the world it could not stand

What Stoneman and Dylan have in common is the reference to God's hand.⁶ In the Old Testament divine judgment is sometimes described as God turning his hand against someone (Amos 1:8). Dylan's lyrics differ from many other *Titanic* songs in that his main point is not to depict the great ship sinking under the weight of its own hubris. The last part of the song ends with the judgment of the divine hand, but this is beyond the confines of human reason, no explanation is possible or available.

Ian Bell maintains that Dylan's point, the repeated theological note struck throughout the whole *Tempest* album, is that "none of it sways an indifferent God whose purposes are not to be judged by His creation" (Bell, 2013, p. 527). However, Dylan's emphasis is not on the indifference of God, nor on "the judgment of God's hand". There is a divine presence in the world, and this presence manifests itself in different ways. Two different views of God are expressed in "Tempest"; the judgmental God who exacts punishment, and the God who redeems. God was present when the great ship went down, and what happened can be interpreted as an act of divine judgment. This echoes the fourth verse of "Cross the Green Mountain":

Along the dim Atlantic line
The ravaged land lies for miles behind
The light's coming forward and the streets are broad
All must yield to the avenging God

But by contrasting the verb "understand" with the expression "no understanding" Dylan's conclusion seems to be that not one human being (not

6 Stoneman's song was very popular, and a version by Versey and William Smith ("When That Great Ship Went Down") was included on the Harry Smith *Anthology*. In 1944 Woody Guthrie recorded "The Titanic", also inspired by the Stoneman song. However, neither the Smiths nor Guthrie included the verse describing the catastrophe as being the result of divine intervention.

even Calvin) is intellectually capable of grasping God or God's dealings with humanity. Steve Mentz writes that "shipwrecks are hard to narrate. Human meaning-making systems cannot encompass oceanic chaos [...]. Shipwreck creates feeling but not understanding [...]. Listening to these lines in Bob's Jeremiah thunder growl is both ominous and oddly freeing" (Mentz, 2015, p. 165). In the fourth part of "Tempest" Dylan's theological reflection thus bears close resemblance to St. Paul's outburst in Romans 11:33: "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways"!

From "Tempest" to "Roll On John"

Tempest closes with a tribute to the murdered John Lennon, which includes direct quotations from Beatles and Lennon songs ("A Day in the Life", "Come Together" and "The Ballad of John and Yoko"). Like "Tempest's" tale of the *Titanic* "Roll On John" is another song about tragedy and death. The hero of the song is doomed but the singer's main message is "roll on" and "shine a light". The song's refrain references the refrain of "Precious Angel": "Shine your light on me/You know I just can't make it by myself/I'm a little too blind to see":

Shine your light
 Move it on
 You burned so bright
 Roll on, John

In "Roll On John" Dylan touches upon the theme of apocalypse by quoting from William Blake's famous poem "The Tyger". This poem shadows the coming of an Anti-Christ (Freed, 2014, p. 26). It also describes "an apocalypse – by definition a vast and inclusive event – which occurs in a cosmos knit by interpenetrating 'correspondences' uniting any one event with all others" (Nurmi, 1970, p. 201):

Tyger tyger burning bright
 I pray the Lord my soul to keep
 In the forests of the night
 Cover him over and let him sleep

In "Tempest" Blake is a passenger aboard the *Titanic*, and he is quoted verbatim on the next and last song on the album. The line "I pray the Lord my soul to keep" is not borrowed from Blake but from a traditional children's prayer which was included in one of the most used American school textbooks of the eighteenth century, *The New England Primer*. This distinctive intertextual approach to Blake suggests an awareness of the way in which Blake's *Songs* are influenced by eighteenth-century children's prayers and hymns. Luke Walker claims that Dylan's new composite version of "The Tyger" continues Blake's deliberately unsettling dual vision of God as both "Tyger" and "Lamb" (Walker, 2018, p. 11).

There is also another connection between "Tempest" and "Roll On John". The John persona in the latter song is a reference to John Lennon, but like the *Titanic* in "Tempest" the John in the last song on the album transcends the man from Liverpool. Toby Thompson argues that it is no accident that "Tempest" is followed by "Roll On John", because it keeps the listener focused on Saint John of the Apocalypse (Thompson, 2012, p. 85). Both Johns were dreamers ("you might say I'm a dreamer").

"Roll On John" describes a sea journey ending with the foundering of the ship on the shore of an island. The "John" of the song is depicted as a hunted outcast or slave, in some way connected to a quarry and living in a cave on the island. According to ancient sources the John who wrote The Book of Revelation in the last years of his life was a slave working in a quarry, living in a cave: "These men were deported for life to work in the stone quarries, to sleep in the caves, and live in the confines of the island of Patmos. Among them was one John" (Brownrigg, 1971, p. 131). Thus, even "Roll On John" becomes an example of the "apocalyptic aesthetic, [... which] is perhaps *the* defining element of both the content and style of Dylan's songs, [...] apocalypse is Dylan's muse" (Janssen & Whitelock, 2009, p. 101). John Winston Ono Lennon, living on the island of Manhattan, becomes John the Revelator, living on the island of Patmos.

Conclusion: "The bar you have to pass"

Dylan's "Tempest" refers to an historical event, but the point is not to throw light on what actually took place. The voyage is a representation of

life, with the ship representing the world. The actual sinking of the *Titanic* is important only to provide a context for presenting issues concerning such matters as the revelation of God, predestination, redemption, the temporal as opposed to the eternal, attitudes to wealth and violence, and the final apocalypse. To do this Dylan makes use of various expressions drawn virtually verbatim from the Bible, from Protestant hymns, and from other classical and lyrical works. I regard verse forty-one, where the Captain reads from the Book of Revelation as crucial, as a key helping the listener to unlock “*Tempest*” as a whole. The melody and verse structure are borrowed from the Carter Family source. Dylan returns to the actual sinking in the last verse; at the end he brings the listener back to reality.

In between he uses his powerful imagination to construct and develop an apocalyptic vision or drama. Bob Dylan’s apocalyptic imagination is “the deepest and most consistent imaginative preoccupation of his lyrical career” (Day, 2007, p. 97–98). This vision, with its emphasis on the destructive power of water, has been a recurring theme in Dylan’s songs, from “The Times They Are A-Changing” to “High Water (For Charley Patton)”. In the 2012 *Rolling Stone* interview Dylan said *Tempest* is not the album he set out to make: “I wanted to make something more religious. I just didn’t have enough [religious songs]. Intentionally, specifically religious songs is what I wanted to do” (Gilmore, 2012a, p. 15). However, Dylan still had more than enough religious material to put into his songs, and the religious dimension is present on “*Tempest*” from the beginning and literally to the end.

Like Revelation “*Tempest*” expresses a dualistic view of time in which there are two distinct ages: the present one, which is temporal and evil, and the one to come, which is timeless and righteous. On “*Tempest*” Dylan, like the apocalyptic writers of the Bible, is pessimistic about the ability of human beings to cope with an evil world. Apocalyptic texts are also “characterized by a rigid determinism in which everything moves forward as divinely preordained [...] toward a predetermined end” (Mounce, 1998, p. 3). By naming one of the passengers Calvin, while another is called Blake, Dylan places his text in rich and diverse theological and literary traditions. Apocalypses claim to reveal the hidden meaning and outcome of history as a vision, bestowed by God upon a seer or

watchman. The apocalyptic seer often uses a conventional literary style, adapting his message accordingly. Much of the material is drawn from common tradition and from contemporary historical events.

On "Tempest" Dylan achieves two things. First, with this song he "passes the bar" as a songwriter. In other words, he has written a song using elements from the *Titanic* song tradition, while at the same time transcending this tradition. In 1959 American folk singer Almeda Riddle (1898–1986) recorded "The Titanic", a song she learned in 1913 or 1914. At the heart of this song is a contrast between a sense of carelessness and confidence among the rich, and the ultimate fate and judgment that awaits all human beings (Wells, 2009, p. 103). The last verse of this song (quoted from Abrahams, 1970, p. 183) bears some resemblance to "Tempest". It is interesting because it reflects some important theological aspects of the *Titanic* song tradition:

Some on board this great vessel was rescued
 Others were left to their fate
 But 'twill all be made right at the judgment
 There the crooked will be made straight
 For a Savior who knew all about it
 Rules on the land and the sea
 He knew what to them would sure happen
 He knew what their ending would be

Secondly, Dylan combines the *Titanic* song tradition with one of his all-time favourite themes, expressed in *Tempest's* "Scarlet Town" in the line "the end is near". There is in Dylan's work a strong and lasting "obsession with imminent apocalypse" (Gray, 2000, p. 258), and among his recent songs this obsession is nowhere as explicit as it is on "Tempest".

In the opening chapter of *Chronicles* Dylan describes his first meeting with Izzy Young, the owner of the Folklore Center in Greenwich Village. Young had a back room, which was filled with American records and a phonograph. Young let Dylan stay there, and Dylan listened to as many records as he could. According to Dylan the atmosphere and the music made a deep impression on him as a young singer: "The madly complicated modern world was something I took little interest in. It had no

relevancy, no weight. I wasn't seduced by it. What was swinging, topical, and up to date for me was stuff like the *Titanic* sinking [...]” (Dylan, 2004, p. 20). No wonder then, that at the age of seventy-one, he finally recorded an album with a dramatic and disastrous event at its center that fascinated him when he was very young, long before he ever made a record.

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Forfatteromtale

Robert W. Kvalvaag er dosent i RLE ved OsloMet, fakultet for lærerutdanning og internasjonale studier, hvor han underviser i religion, livssyn og etikk. Han har utgitt tre bøker: *Fra Moses til Marley*, *Det guddommelige jeg*, og *Det ellefte budet. Religion og rock and roll*. Sammen med Pål Ketil Botvar og Reidar Aasgaard var han redaktør for og leverte bidrag til boka *Bob Dylan: Mannen, myten og musikken*. Han har skrevet en rekke artikler i antologier og tidsskrifter om religion og populærkultur. To av disse handler om Dylan, den ene om den unge Dylans bruk av Bibelen, og den andre om Hal Lindseys innflytelse på Dylan i den såkalte gospel-perioden.