

“Tempest,” Bob Dylan

by Anne Margaret Daniel
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“Tempest” joins “Love And Theft,” “Desire,” and “Blood On The Tracks” as one of Bob Dylan’s best records of new songs in many years.

No, his voice is not what it was 50 years ago on his first studio album, “Bob Dylan.” He is 71 now, and a lifelong smoker; neither of these truths are kind to the vocal cords of any person. But Dylan sings powerfully and clearly on “Tempest” – what he’s saying matters, and he wants it to be heard, and not mistaken. And the 10 songs on “Tempest” are all remarkable, which cannot often be said of any 10 songs, even collected greatest hits, on any record by any artist. Each track falls in its place: from a bright start with ‘Duquesne Whistle’ (our view of the song already altered by the video made of it) through the dark raw middle numbers to the sweeping ballads leading to the moving, peace-giving ending provided by ‘Roll On John’, the songs are in an order that feels both careful and unalterable. Columbia’s choice to release ‘Duquesne Whistle’ first, both as an audio track, and then in the form of the video, in late August was apt. When you drop the needle, or otherwise press play, on an album you start at, and with, the beginning. “Tempest” isn’t a concept album, or a progression of storytales in quite the way that a record like, for example, Willie Nelson’s “Red-Headed Stranger” is, but it’s close. It’s therefore best listened to altogether, in order, for the first time and maybe the fiftieth time, too.

In order, “Tempest” starts on land and goes to sea, before fetching back up in the forests of the night. ‘Duquesne Whistle’ is a jaunty old-timey train song. A honky-tonky little keyboard-based start gets shaken up first by the hard skiffle beat of the drums, then by Dylan’s voice roughly chiming in. “Listen to that Duquesne whistle blowin,’” he insists, as the refrain shifts and changes. There are floater lines from other train songs, like the insistence that the train whistle’s blowin’ like she’s never blowed before (see, e.g., ‘KC Moan’). And whenever a “sweet voice gently calling” is taken for “the mother of our Lord,” you’re reminded of the legion of old hymns and songs from Bill Monroe’s ‘I Hear a Sweet Voice Calling’ to ‘Dreaming Of a Little Cabin’, in which a dead woman’s voice becomes holy memory and possibility to a singer seeking comfort. But strange new things happen on the Duquesne train (and yes, they rhyme: it’s not doo-QUEZ-ne, but doo-KANE). This train whistle blows not just like it’s gonna blow your blues away, a fairly traditional thing for a train whistle to do, but like it’s gonna sweep your world away, like it’s gonna blow the sky apart, like it’s gonna kill you dead. The insistent tangly wah-wah interspersing Dylan’s lyric becomes ominous quickly, despite – or maybe because of – the jaunty pace. That insistent one-two chord strike is characteristic of the record; it appears on several more tracks, gets under your skin, and makes you nervous.

The video of the song, shot by stuntman and director Nash Edgerton, takes the ominous possibilities of ‘Duquesne Whistle’ to town, in Los Angeles and perhaps other settings. The jauntiness remains, in the irrepressible – at first – character of a young man pursuing a young woman. The introduction pans across a crowded urban scene of trafficky streets, fire escapes, and pigeons (who move almost in time with the music), across a huge billboard of the poster for the John Lennon show at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame locations: Lennon, his round sunglasses

on, arms folded over his sleeveless “New York City” t-shirt. John’s appearance here makes a circle to the last track on the record, ‘Roll On John’, from the very beginning. The sweet-faced, romantic, thin young man ignores the scenery around him, intent on flipping cards at a tin can. The ace and king of hearts miss, but – just as the girl he’s waiting for walks out of her building – the ten of clubs goes in. A bad omen for a young man in love. He’s goofy and innocuous, but the woman wants nothing to do with him. Is he an ex, or someone she doesn’t know? Either way, when with a grin he offers her a rose stolen from an irate street vendor, she maces him in the face and leaves him on the street, peeling out in one of the ugliest cars of an ugly-car decade, a Gremlin.

It gets worse: when pursued for stealing a second rose, the young man runs from the cops, knocks over a ladder being used by a guy to change a theatre marquee, and injures the guy. Revenge ensues. Badly beaten with a baseball bat – with the blows set to George Recile’s drum-bash – the young man has a fantasy of getting the girl as he’s dumped from that classically unidentifiable urban vehicle, an unmarked white van, onto the sidewalk. Does he live or die? Dylan’s posse, who have been strutting through the video with the song and story as their “Shaft” like soundtrack, don’t care. Dylan and the gang – a motley circus crew including a tall Asian woman in a blonde wig carrying an abacus, and a skinny guy dressed like Gene Simmons in his Kiss stage getup – step over the young man and keep on rolling. Moral of this cautionary tale? Don’t stalk women; don’t steal roses; don’t mess with someone working on a theatre marquee; don’t get hit with a baseball bat; and don’t expect Bob and his posse to help you when you’re down.

The video is an interpretation of the song that Dylan has intended, by having it made and appearing in it, which is why I write of it here. However, I like the song better without it. It’s not that the video wasn’t what I expected – really, no one could have expected Bob with his guitar slung across his back, hitching himself up into an empty boxcar on a freight train pulling slowly out of a curve. I don’t know what I expected – though certainly not what Nash Edgerton saw – but Dylan’s songs always lead us to make our own scenes in our heads. Everyone else’s version of ‘Black Diamond Bay’, for instance, would be very unlike mine – in which I’ve always thought I’d have Johnny Depp playing all the male roles. The video of ‘Duquesne Whistle’ is a sort of hypertext version of the song, but, until I’ve heard the track more times, I prefer just the words and music – I prefer to use my ears, not my eyes, for now.

The violence is there, though, from the start. “Tempest” owes a debt to Warren Zevon and his songs like ‘Excitable Boy’, with their mix of boppy tune and dark lyric. It’s a debt I think Dylan would be glad to acknowledge, given his liking for Zevon. With Larry Campbell, Dylan gave some gorgeous performances of Zevon’s ‘Mutineer’ in 2002, while Zevon was dying. (One night in Virginia, at George Mason University’s Patriot Center, I heard him sing ‘Accidentally Like a Martyr’ as well as ‘Mutineer’.) However, the mix of light and dark goes back well before Zevon, to the sparkling fiddle and banjo tunes of Appalachia, and to the Scottish-Highlands and nautical songs before those. ‘Pretty Polly’, for example, is a swift-moving, pleasantly beginning tune that seems at first to be a courting song, but that takes a fast turn into terror. Dylan likes engaging in this blending of light and dark on the songs of “Tempest”. This confounds your expectations, and keeps you both enjoying, and ever alert and on guard.

Dylan also likes a crossing of high and low diction, of archaic words and phrases ('twas, "cold and frosty morn," "a gilded age foretold") and modern lines ("cheapest labor money can buy," "so much for tears"). The coupling of antique and contemporary words always reminds you of the fact that language never dies. Dylan knows the English language, from its Shakespearean forms to its protean American revelations, over all its many centuries, and no other songwriter is remotely capable of using it as he does. The effect is to make the most memorable couplets on record today. Top ten hits these days have four or five songwriters credited with them, a stable of producers, and lyrics like "tonight, tonight, tonight, tonight, don't worry 'bout a club just come lay up under me." Only one song on this record, 'Duquesne Whistle', is co-written, with Robert Hunter. Take just one Dylan stanza, from 'Long And Wasted Years', and you'll see how you can't touch this. Other songwriters will listen to "Tempest" and weep:

*"I think that when my back was turned
The whole world behind me burned
It's been awhile
since we walked down that long, long aisle.
We cried on a cold and frosty morn
We cried because our souls were torn
So much for tears
So much for all these long and wasted years."*

'Long And Wasted Years' is the fourth track on "Tempest", the middle of a nest of three searing shorter songs that include 'Narrow Way' and 'Pay In Blood'. Dylan begins the record giving us a break, pacewise, with slower and swifter songs alternating. Musically, "Tempest" is quite remarkable, with each instrument – including Dylan's voice – perfectly audible in the mix: Charlie Sexton's fiery guitar; Donnie Herron's elegant fiddle threads, lap steel, and plucky banjo; David Hidalgo's accordion that can sound like keyboards and strings and a harp (and Hidalgo plays the fiddle and guitar too); George Recile's drums, far more subtle here than in concert (where they can overwhelm); Stu Kimball's backbeat rhythm; and Dylan's own piano, guitar, and vocals. We're lulled into an entirely false sense of comfort by the slow, saloony melody of 'Soon After Midnight', but then shaken, rattled and rolled by the next three songs before fetching up battered and bloodied in 'Scarlet Town'.

'Soon After Midnight' has a peaceable enough melody, and lyrical hey-bartender beginning: "I'm searching for phrases to sing your praises; / I need to tell someone. / It's soon after midnight and my day is just begun." It's traditional enough, too, for a lovestruck singer not only to lament his beloved's absence to the bartender filling his glass, but to look for a substitute love. If she's a harlot, why not call her Charlotte? Iron Maiden did, though 'Charlotte the Harlot (The Cowpunchers' Whore)' would be more at home here. Johnny Mercer, too, has gone searching for phrases to sing your praises. Howlin' Wolf, too, has been down on the killin' floor. Tex Ritter's 'I've Had Enough Of Your Two-Timin'' was best covered by Slim Whitman. But the song's story turns into an ugly surprise, here, after the fairly gentle scene of a lonely guy at a bar. The singer's not resentful that Honey has stolen his money, and speaks lightly of his "cheerful" heart. Suddenly, though, everyone is dying: "They chirp and they chatter / What does it matter? / They're lyin' there dyin' in their blood. / Two-timin' 'Slim, who's ever heard of him?"

I'll drag his corpse through the mud." His lethal violence over, the singer concludes with the confession that "I don't want nobody but you." You are not moved to be with him, however gentle the voice, at this point.

'Narrow Way' is a hard way to get through, not an encouraging title. The King James version of the Bible (1611) is an English Renaissance book that, along with the collected works of William Shakespeare, Dylan seems to know word for word. In Matthew 7:13-14, these are among the teachings of Jesus: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The "narrow way" of this song may lead to life, but it's a hard life of loss, destruction, and abandoned love.

The tune, like the lyrics, is unrelenting. It has a one-two-one-two, up-down beat ending in a scratchy rise, with Dylan singing in the space between. It's as if the music is saying listen to the words, not the tune, which is a vehicle for conveying the words on this track. There are lots of one-two chords on this record, but "Tempest" manages to avoid, in most part, the Texas-two-steppy feel of "Together Through Life". It seems that Dylan's days of being under the long-time spell of Western swing are ending, and for the better. I love Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys with a longstanding love, so this isn't an attack. And Dylan has done some wonderful work in this style, as has his "cowboy band." But while Western swing lends itself well to sentiment and the lyric, it can't snap and bite, it has no urgency at all, and you can't dance fast and jump around to it. 'Narrow Way' drives you crazily to listen and respond, and move. Now that's rock and roll.

The lyrics of 'Narrow Way' are historical and personal, that combination Dylan does so well. In one of the most intense verses, American history and the War of 1812 resonate in contemporary Washington, and shift immediately to religious imagery that turns macabre within a breath: "Ever since the British burned the White House down / There's a bleedin' wound in the heart of town / I saw ya drinkin' from an empty cup / I saw you buried, and I saw you dug up." There's the directness of a wish for solitude: "Go back home. Leave me alone." There's the exhaustion with a lover who has too many other lovers: "If I had a thousand tongues I couldn't count 'em all. / Yesterday I coulda thrown 'em all in the sea / Today even one may be too much for me." Blood spills, blades cut skin, arrows pierce flesh.

Will there be peace in the valley some day? In a petition straight out of William Blake, whose poetry and artistic visions Dylan surely knows well, the singer prays, "Look down angel from the skies, / Help my weary soul to rise," and later "I heard a voice at the dusk of day / Sayin' 'be gentle, brother, be gentle and pray'." The songs of "Tempest" play at times like Dylan's versions of songs of innocence and of experience: 'Narrow Way' is the first time you feel it, and, by the time you reach 'Roll On John', you know it.

'Long And Wasted Years' sounds like its title, long and wasted and above all tired. After a slow, cascading instrumental beginning come a cascade of words, a long talky start to a song that pares down and simplifies as it tapers to the conclusion, the words of its title. This might just be the most powerful track on a record full of them, and is intensely personal and focused on a love gone very, very wrong.

The beginning is spoken, more than sung:

*“It’s been such a long, long time since we loved each other with hearts that were true.
One time, for one brief day, I was the man for you.
Last night I heard you talking in your sleep,
Saying things you shouldn’t say.
Oh baby, you just might have to go to jail some day.”*

This scene, like the scene in every song on “Tempest”, you have begun to realize, gets worse. The singer has lost his family on account of this love, and the family has lost its land. Rootlessness and loss abound, and betrayal, too: an enemy with an iron heart has crashed into the dust and died in shame. The Beatles line “shake it up baby, twist and shout” isn’t a danceable line here – it’s about a woman who has shaken up a man’s life, and who’s twisting and shouting in the burning hot sun. The last stanza is painful, and grates into its ending of “So much for tears / So much for all these long and wasted years.” The tune ends instantly, too, without the long fadeout of many of the record’s other songs, with a last gasp, an oh-no sigh of a two beat that’s almost like an amen.

‘Pay In Blood’ is having none of this slow suffering. The funky beginning sounds ’70s-danceable, especially when the song goes into its instrumental stretches between the stanzas, and the key shift within the stanzas themselves. Every hard word is crystal clear; you don’t want to hear some of them, really, but you’ve no choice. The couplets, short and nowise sweet, judge and flay and burn. “Night after night, day after day, / They strip your useless hopes away.” “The more I take, the more I give / The more I die, the more I live.” “You’ve got the same eyes that your mother does / If only you could prove who your father was.” And, finally,

*“This is how I spend my days;
I came to bury and not to raise.
I’ll drink my fill and sleep alone.
I’ll pay in blood but not my own.”*

San Juan de la Cruz once wrote “the more I live the more I die.” Dylan flips this, inverts it, and makes it here and now, life and life only. Someone’s certainly going to pay, but that would be the “you” addressed in the song. It’s not the singer. In many Dylan songs, the singer often eludes or evades punishment – though not the torment which has often engendered the song. The repetition of the “not my own” leaves the fault, and the trouble, with “you.”

Unsettled, you’re encouraged by the idea of ‘Scarlet Town’. Dylan has performed ‘Barbara Allen’ throughout his career, and sings the song as if he loves it. The old ballad is one of the bases for ‘Scarlet Town’, where we meet Sweet William on his deathbed (though not Barbara), the month of May (not merry), and scarlet flowers and thorns. However, this slow striding ballad is not at all a revision but something entirely new.

This is, perhaps, a good place to speak about Dylan and the way he obeys Ezra Pound’s famous dictum to “make it new.” Yes, he uses lines from other poets and artists on this record.

'Scarlet Town' is full of echoes. "All things beautiful in their time" is born in Ecclesiastes. Under-the-Hill was a place in America, along the river in Natchez. Once upon a time, you might have been killed there by a riverboat gambler in a barroom fight over a poker game gone wrong. Today, Natchez-Under-the-Hill is long gone, battered away by the mighty Mississippi that created it. John Greenleaf Whittier might be here, too, in the form of his poem 'The Chapel of Hermits', in which "the calm, still smile of Heaven descends" and the hem of His garment is touched. Blake and his prophetic poems in which the human form is purified – the best example is 'Jerusalem' – are surely in the background. Definitely a text that folks have read in 'Scarlet Town' is the King James Bible, mentioned before, which Whittier, Blake, and a legion of other poets have mined, and ever shall. Walnut Grove, Minnesota is the hometown of Laura Ingalls Wilder, that Midwestern pioneer author of childhood. A boy in blue with a horn is Mother Goose's 'Little Boy Blue', but the American Civil War, and the Carter Family's version of 'Faded Coat Of Blue' is here too. Dylan has used Ovid, that poet of love and exile and loss, in his songs before; one of Ovid's steamiest "Amores" is set at the hot noon hour. Surely, there's more to find or propose.

Now, if you don't know the references, you won't hear them as echoes. Does that spoil the listening to a remarkable, frightening new song? Of course not. To hunt for all the references in a novel like "Ulysses", that's forthrightly styled as a Modern copy of an ancient epic, has taken scholars more than lifetimes. To read "Ulysses" and enjoy it is something anyone who can pick up a book can do. Are we missing something? Not if we're entertained, not if we're made to think and feel. If "Tempest" sends people out to find the collected poems of John Greenleaf Whittier, to read "Julius Caesar" (or, better, see it on stage), to leaf through the version of "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" illustrated by Blake himself, and to go back and listen to all their Beatles albums again, that all makes me very glad. I hazard to opine that it might make Bob Dylan glad, too. Great art makes you hungry for more, similar and different. "Tempest" is such a work of art.

The blood-red Scarlet Town is an evil place and a good place, a place to be born and where you wish to God you'd stayed, a place where the Seven Wonders of the World are side by side the graveyards. The couplets are eerie and thrilling, all the more so for their calm, controlled delivery. "Put your heart on a platter and see who'll bite / See who'll hold you and kiss you goodnight" is unforgettable.

Having escaped Scarlet Town, you're instantly beset with Caesars. "History," said James Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus, "is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Bob Dylan knows that we can't wake up from the nightmare of history: history is our home, our fosterer, our bane, and our fate. In 'Early Roman Kings', he cheerfully shifts historical periods and peoples, as often they get jumbled up in reality. It's an archaeological song, with the kings emerging from their coffins like the walking dead in an Edgar Allan Poe story, and complicating things for the living. The slow-driving blues riff from a hundred songs, best known from Muddy Waters' 'Mannish Boy' and George Thorogood's 'Bad To The Bone', seems to inspire the rhymes to outdo themselves from stanza to stanza. That the song was debuted, in part, over scenes of war in the desert is apt; the area once called the "Fertile Crescent," where the early Roman kings conquered and lost, remains a battleground today.

Three ballads conclude “Tempest”, including the title track. The bulk of the record lies here; ‘Tin Angel’ and “Tempest” are both very long songs, with ‘Roll On John’, at over seven minutes, feeling like a coda. Dylan has recorded and performed very many ballads, and written his own, some with the word in the title but more without. ‘Tin Angel’ is another love song on a record full of them, and it’s another story of love gone wrong, turned not just bad but fatal by jealousy and betrayal. It’s a Scottish ballad gone south, fetching up in the arroyos and baked earth of a wild-wild-western town, Dunfermline meets Deadwood. Dylan’s heart may be in the Highlands, but it’s also on the Red River’s shores. The nameless lady leaves the Boss’s house with Henry Lee, who sounds more like a Virginia planter than a raggle-taggle gypsy. The Boss rounds up a posse, who are useless and desert him, and rides on after the two until he finds them and slips in to confront them and have his revenge:

*“He lowered himself down on a golden chain;
his nerves were quickened in every vein.
His knuckles were bloody he sucked in the air
he ran his fingers through his greasy hair.”*

The lady scorns him, saying he “wouldn’t harm a fly,” and when he orders her to put her clothes on, “double quick,” she refuses: “You’ve given me nothing but the sweetest lies / Now hold your tongue, and feed your eyes.” Henry Lee is “dearer to me than gold,” she insists; the Boss replies, “Oh, my dear, you must be blind / He’s a gutless ape with a worthless mind.” This is not going to be a reconcilable situation. The order in which they die is the only thing at which to be guessed. The lady, having outlived them both, whispers in the ear of one man that he has died for her, and she’ll die for him (the “he” is ambiguous), and stabs herself with the knife she’s used to kill the Boss. Having died together, they will lie together in the same grave.

With this bloody saga and the thought of a group grave in your head, you hear the start of what sounds like ‘Toora, Looora Looora’. The swiny fiddle gives way to yet another western ballad: “The pale moon rose in its glory / Out on a western town. / She told a sad, sad story / of the great ship that went down.” And you realize this is the title track, about Titanic.

The Irish lilt to ‘Tempest’ is rightly enough there. She was built in Belfast, and Titanic’s last port of call was Queenstown, or Cobh, in County Cork. Most of the Irish on Titanic boarded at Queenstown, on their way to New York to make their fortunes in America. My husband’s family, when he was a boy, still included in their prayers Roger Tobin, a young farmer from Ballycaron who was a neighbour. Tobin paid seven pounds, fifteen shillings for his third-class ticket; his body was never found. The fiddle, along with Dylan’s voice, is the instrument that dictates the story, and makes of ‘Tempest’ a moving Irish lullaby.

The rhythm and rhyme scheme of “Tempest” is clean and simple, without excess. The alternating loose iambic tetrameter (The pale moon rose in its glory) and iambic trimeter (out on a western town) is called common meter or common measure, and with only slight variance is the historical form of a ballad. It’s also that of many beloved hymns (think ‘Amazing Grace’ or ‘O Little Town Of Bethlehem’) and occurs in short poems of Blake’s, and in songs Dylan has recorded before (‘House Of The Rising Sun’). The rocking beat of the short lines, and the abab

rhyme of each stanza, makes the song perfectly easy to follow – and to remember, which is the way folk once learned a song.

Much has been made of the appearance of Leo and his sketchbook in ‘Tempest’, and Dylan’s already been criticized for letting fact and fiction combine. He’s not; he is taking the fictions of James Cameron’s movie (and of the earlier movie, “A Night To Remember”) and incorporating them into today’s view of the disaster on its hundredth anniversary. The fictions inspired by Titanic’s sinking are now part of its story, part of its history. And this song is not an account of what happened, it’s a song. Jim Dandy – or maybe it’s Jim Backus – is a character, an actor. (If it’s “Jim Backus” that Dylan’s saying, the man’s most famous for playing a shipwrecked millionaire.) But does that spoil the power of the verse in which the man gives up his lifeboat seat to a crippled child? I think not. The death of people in glorious surroundings, drowning aboard rather than in the sea, is recounted with simple pity and grace:

*“They battened down the hatches
but the hatches wouldn’t hold.
They drowned upon the staircase
of brass and polished gold.”*

The recurring character of the watchman, who sleeps through the whole tragedy, works like a refrain in the song. Once upon a time, Dylan wrote of another watchman, who clicks his flashlight and asks if it’s him or them that’s really insane. This watchman lies dreaming, again and again, of the sinking of Titanic. If only it HAD all been a dream. In this case, it’s a nightmare of history from which the watchman can’t awaken. ‘Tempest’ ends with him dreaming, once more, “that Titanic was sinking / Into the deep blue sea.”

You need, badly, to catch your breath after the sweep of ‘Tempest’, after the fiddlethread of the title track finally fades away. You don’t get that chance. ‘Roll On John’ is the last song on the record, with its gentle beginning, liquid. It feels like a song you’ve always heard, but the words come before you’re ready for them, and they’re harsh. There’s another wild-west start, sounding like the saga of Wild Bill Hickok and John Wesley Hardin, with a shooting in the back that makes you flinch. Like the story of Titanic, you know this story. You know what happened to John Lennon in America, on the sidewalks of New York. This, like that of Titanic, is a story you’d change, if only you could.

“From the Liverpool docks to the red-light Hamburg streets,” we move it on, roll on, with John. The image of an arrival across the Atlantic in a slave ship is striking and upsetting, that of a slave with tied hands and a clamped mouth with no way out, makes us think about the way people arrived in America. Lennon chose to come here to live; others did not. Lennon chose to come here to live; he didn’t choose to die. The heart is torn out, “to the core,” of the city they call the Big Apple after his untimely murder. Gently, Dylan reassures, “The sooner you go the quicker you’ll be back / You been cooped up on an island far too long.” But whether the island is England or Manhattan, the desire for freedom and open range is a dangerous one:

“Roll on John, roll through the rain and snow

*Take the right-hand road and go where the buffaloes roam
They'll trap you in an ambush 'fore you know
Too late now to sail back home."*

The scary collective of "they" in Dylan's songs resonates and separates – think of "They're selling postcards of the hanging" or "They tortured him and did some things too evil to repeat." Here, it feels like a powerful refusal to name Lennon's killer, and a denial to him of individuality.

For his conclusion, Dylan turns to William Blake's best-known song of experience, 'The Tyger', and a child's prayer. If you can't seek help at a time of loss and grief from the lyric poems of a holy poet and painter, and the prayers taught you as a child, from what can you seek help? Tomorrow grieves; cover me over, light-in-leaves. "Tempest" ends as it has run, full of loss and love and life. It's the last of these that makes us feel the first two as they come, after all.

*"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.*

*Shine your light
Move it on
You burned so bright
Roll on John."*

"Tempest" is a chronicling of what a great American novelist from the Midwest so perfectly called the "strivings of the human heart." It's a sometimes frightening record, with a high body count – but that's often what the strivings of the human heart, with its passions and jealousies and loves and fears and hatreds, lead to. And without those strivings we wouldn't have very much at all. No pain, no pleasure – no epic poetry, no tragedies or comedies, no art, no music. When we think of the heart, though, we think of love. Love, remember, is "an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken." "Tempest", from the first song to the last, is a series of love lyrics, dark and mysterious, personal and public, and above all exceptional and enduring.

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Please read the full review in ISIS 164 (September 2012).

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