Iryna Bisbub

TONY PALMER – AN HONORARY PROFESSOR OF LESYA UKRAINKA EASTERN EUROPEAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Tony Palmer is an internationally acclaimed director of films about world's outstanding personalities. He has won over forty international prizes for his work. Apart from making his beautiful artistic documentaries, Tony Palmer is constantly traveling around the world, attending the screenings of his films, meeting the audience, deriving inspiration for his new projects.

He began his career at Cambridge University (where he was also President of the Marlowe Society), and soon after he joined the BBC. After his apprenticeship with Ken Russell and Jonathan Miller, Tony Palmer made his first major film, "Benjamin Britten & his Festival", which became the first BBC film to be networked in the U.S.A. With his second film, "*All My Loving"*, an examination of rock 'n' roll & politics in the late 60s, he achieved world recognition and considerable notoriety overnight.

In 1989, he was awarded a huge retrospective of his work at the National Film Theatre in London, the first maker of arts films to be so honoured.

Being a true friend of Ukraine, Mr Palmer has always been concerned about the development of Ukrainian arts. He is an official representative of the Stravinsky family, and he has been attending the annual Stravinsky's festivals organized by the Volyn Regional Philharmonic in Lutsk and Ustilug. A few years ago he was representing the Stravinsky Family at the grand reopening and restoration of the only house that Stravinsky had owned and lived in with his first wife, Ekaterina Nossenko, from 1890 to 1914 in Ustilug.

In 2016 Tony Palmer was granted the title of Honorary Professor of Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University (Lutsk, Ukraine) for his profound contribution into the development of educational and artistic fields of the Volyn Region.

In his Inauguration speech, Tony Palmer emphasized the uniqueness of the Volynian land, saying that it was "a hot-bed" of creativity at the end of the 19th century, a true cross-fertilisation of apparently different cultures, but in fact growing from the same root. He mentioned the names of a famous Romanian composer Bela Bartok, an outstanding musical revolutionary Igor Stravinsky, and the world-famous British novelist Joseph Conrad who were all born approximately in the same period of time within the territory of 200 kilometers from Ustilug.

Tony Palmer is a big humanist. I most of his films he depicts his characters through the prism of universal human values. With his deep confidence and unmistakable artistic maturity he states that it is imperative, it is our duty and privilege as human beings, in whatever political or social system we find ourselves, even in the worst dictatorship imaginable, to sing tour own songs, and to sing them loud and clear, without hesitation or fear of the consequences. This is what makes him unique in creating a realistic but, at the same time, highly artistic, and ultimately deep image of the epoch.

Reviewers eagerly call Tony Palmer "a poet of television", which is, obviously, not a mere metaphor. Indeed, his brilliant documentaries hit an emotional nerve in the viewers, leaving a luxurious aftertaste of a true masterpiece to go back to again and again. He undoubtedly deserved television's most coveted award, the Prix d'Italia; indeed, he is the only person to have won this prize three times, and has been honoured by the Italia Prize with a gala screening of his work.

The present lecture "Did Bob Dylan Deserve the Nobel Prize?" was delivered by Tony Palmer in October 2018 to the University students and Professors. For years Tony Palmer was part of a international campaign to get Bob Dylan nominated for the prize, and he shared his personal experience with the audience. Dylan's opponents complained that Dylan didn't write literature, and in any case his so-called poems were feeble as literature. To convince the audience in the opposite, Mr Palmer drew

brilliant parallels between Bob Dylan's songs and the Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two epic poems that are the central works of ancient Greek literature, indeed of all European literature.

It is believed that the poems were originally transmitted orally, spoken, sung, not written. And, obviously, Homer should have been awarded the very first Nobel Prize in Literature for his profound impact upon human civilization. If not Homer, then it was meant to be Bob Dylan – this is the conclusion, carefully prepared but firmly advocated by Tony Palmer.

As a mature public speaker, Tony Palmer gives a direct quote from Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize speech, which says, "If a song moves you, that's all that's important. I don't have to know what a song means. I've written all kinds of things into my songs. And I'm not going to worry about what it all means." This is the true essence of Dylan's creativity. This is the reason why, in Palmer's point of view, he definitely deserves the Nobel Prize.

Tony Palmer's lecture produced an unforgettable impression upon the students and the teachers of Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University. Bob Dylan, an outstanding poet in the second half of the 20th century, who has spoken so clearly, eloquently and angrily about the oppressed, the lonely, the dispossessed, the victimised, and against the murderers and villains and dictators who terrorise our world, is a perfect example of a Nobel Prize Winner, who has done much more than just literature. He has won millions of human hearts, and he made people think, and he made them sing their songs.

Tony Palmer

DID BOB DYLAN DESERVE THE NOBEL PRIZE?
(OCTOBER 8, 2018)

What do all the following great writers have in common?

Tolstoy – War & Peace
Joseph Conrad – Heart of Darkness
Marcel Proust – In Search of Lost Time
Graham Greene – The Third Man
W.H.Auden – the English poet
James Joyce – Ulysses, arguably the greatest novel of the 20th Century
Franz Kafka – The Trial
Virginia Woolf – To The Lighthouse
Jorge Luis Borges – The Library of Babel
Anna Akhmatova
Nabokov – Lolita
Primo Levi – Auschwitz
Chinua Achebe – the great Nigerian novelist
John Updike – the Rabbit novels

Answer: none of them won the Nobel Prize for literature.

So....what have the following got in common, all important writers,
I'm told?

Patrick Modiano
Mo Yan
Tomas Tranströmer
Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio
Camilo José Cela
Eyvind Johnson
Johannes Jensen
Carl Spitteler
José Echegaraay y Eizaguirre

Answer: they all did win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

I am sure you have heard of all those writers, and more importantly read their works.

I confess I had not heard of any of them, nor read a single one of their works.

But I have read volumes and volumes of Conrad, Tolstoy, James Joyce, Kafka....and so on.

So, how are we to consider the 2017 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Bob Dylan, or to give him his real name, Robert Allen Zimmerman? Well, we have all certainly heard of him, and many of us have spent a lifetime hearing his extraordinary poems and songs. Just consider some the phrases he has coined – 'The Times They Are a-Changing'; 'Blowin' in the Wind'; 'Like a Rolling Stone'. The Pulitzer Prize jury in 2008 awarded him a special citation which said it all; the award is given to Dylan for "his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power". But does that justify the Nobel Prize?

Dylan himself recognised the problem. At the beginning of his acceptance speech he said: "When I first received this Nobel Prize for Literature, I got to wondering exactly how my songs related to literature. I wanted to reflect on it and see where the connection was." Let me digress briefly and

explain how anyone is nominated for a Nobel Prize. First, it's not open to anyone just to write to the Swedish Academy and say "what about so-and-so for such-and-such a Nobel Prize? I know, because for years I was part of a international campaign to get Dylan nominated for the prize, although I'm sorry to say that the fact that he did eventually get the prize had nothing to do with me.

The rules are as follows: only – I repeat only – a Head of State, the Chancellor of a University or a previous winner can recommend someone to be nominated. How the Swedish Academy subsequently reduces the list to a small number of nominees and ultimately a winner is a mystery, but at least getting onto that list in the first place is relatively clear. So a Head of State, the Chancellor of a University, or a previous winner must have nominated Dylan. But just listen to the literary know-alls who complained at the time that Dylan didn't write literature, and in any case his so-called poems were feeble as literature. The French Moroccan writer Pierre Assouline described the award as "contemptuous of writers"; the Scottish novelist Irvine Welsh said "this is an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies"; even Joni Mitchell, the singer, accused Dylan of being a plagiarist. "Everything about Bob is fake," she said. But enough of the whingers who in my view should just shut up and not bleat publicly about their jealousy.

Back to Dylan. Let's go further back, to the Greek poet known as Homer, the legendary author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two epic poems that are the central works of ancient Greek literature, indeed of all European literature. The *Iliad* is set during the Trojan War, the ten-year siege of the city of Troy by a coalition of Greek kingdoms. It focuses on a quarrel between King Agamemnon and the warrior Achilles lasting a few weeks during the last year of the war. The *Odyssey* focuses on the journey home of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, after the fall of Troy.

It is generally accepted that the poems were composed at some point around the late 8th or early 7th century BC. The poems are in Homeric Greek, also known as Epic Greek, a literary language which shows a mixture of features of the Ionic and Aeolic dialects from different centuries. Most scholars believe that the poems were originally transmitted orally, spoken, sung, not written.

From antiquity until the present day, the influence of the Homeric epics on Western civilization has been profound, inspiring many of its most famous works of literature, music, art and film. For the great philosopher Plato, Homer was simply the one who "has taught Greece" – *ten Hellada pepaideuken*.

And here's the point. Both of the Homeric poems begin with an invocation to the Muses. In the *Iliad*, the poet invokes her to sing of "the anger of Achilles", and, in the *Odyssey*, he asks her to sing of "this King of Ithaca". Virgil in his poem *Aeneid* begins the same way.

And who were the 'Muses'? They were the inspirational goddesses of literature, science and the arts in Greek mythology. They were considered the source of all knowledge embodied in the poetry and myths and lyric songs, that were related orally for centuries in those ancient cultures. The source of all knowledge, in other words, is in their songs.

This was a lesson not lost on all the great poets of Western Civilisation, right down to the present day. The Greek Choruses in Sophocles, in Aeschylus, in Euripides were all intended to be sung, not recited parrot-like by some members of the chattering classes, but SUNG!! Shakespeare: the great moments in all his dramas have a song at their centre. Think of that strange tragic play *Cymbeline*.

Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages,
Thu they worldly task hast done,
Home are gone, and tane thy wages,
Golden lads, and girls all must
As chimney sweepers come to dust.
All lovers young, all lovers must,
Consigne to thee and come to dust."

Or how about the Clown's song from *Twelfth Night*.

What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

Or how about this from.....who? Pushkin?
I apologise for the translation.

Oh, what did you see, my blue-eyed son?
And what did you see, my darling young one?
I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it
I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it
I saw a black branch with blood that kept dripping
I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleeding
I saw a white ladder all covered with water
I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken
I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children....

Oh, what did you meet, my blue-eyed son?
And who did you meet, my darling young one?
I met a young child beside a dead pony
I met a white man who walked a black dog
I met a young woman whose body was burning
I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow
I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded in hatred.....

No, not Pushkin, although I am certain he would have identified with the imagery, but yes, Bob Dylan, from his song *A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall*. Interestingly, the poem, the song, is often described as Dylan's protest against the Cuban Missile Crisis. In fact, Dylan formally premiered "*A Hard Rain's"* during a hootenanny organized by Pete Seeger at Carnegie Hall on September 22, 1962, a month before the Cuban Crisis. No matter. It's clear from just that one song that Dylan is singing about something a little more serious than '*La-de-dah*' or '*I Wanna Hold Your Hand'*.

So what is the purpose, indeed the origins, of 'popular song'.
Country Music example……

Back to Dylan. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, he began by citing Herman Melville's great sea story *Moby Dick*, that sea-faring adventure where Captain Ahab kills the whale and with it himself in a truly spiritual sense; and then he went on to quote *All Quiet On The Western Front*, that shocking tale of experience in the First World War whose end we commemorate this next month. Dylan then moves inexorably to Homer and to the *Odyssey*. What Dylan has to say here is a lesson to us all, so I quote it at length:

"The Odyssey is a strange, adventurous tale of a grown man trying to get home after fighting in a war. He's on that long journey home, and it's filled with traps and pitfalls. He's cursed to wander. He's always getting carried out to sea, always having close calls. Huge chunks of boulders rock his boat.

He angers people he shouldn't. There's troublemakers in his crew. Treachery. His men are turned into pigs and then are turned back into younger, more handsome men. He's always trying to rescue somebody. He's a travelin' man, but he's making a lot of stops.

"He's stranded on a desert island. He finds deserted caves, and he hides in them. He meets giants that say, 'I'll eat you last.' And he escapes from giants. He's trying to get back home, but he's tossed and turned by the winds. Restless winds, chilly winds, unfriendly winds. He travels far, and then he gets blown back.

"He's always being warned of things to come. Touching things he's told not to. There's two roads to take, and they're both bad. Both hazardous. On one you could drown, and on the other you could starve. He goes into the narrow straits with foaming whirlpools that swallow him. Meets six-headed monsters with sharp fangs.

"Thunderbolts strike at him. Overhanging branches that he makes a leap for to save himself from a raging river. Goddesses and gods protect him, but some others want to kill him. He changes identities. He's exhausted. He falls asleep, and he's woken up by the sound of laughter. He tells his story to strangers. He's been gone twenty years. He was carried off somewhere and left there. Drugs have been dropped into his wine. It's been a hard road to travel.

"In a lot of ways, some of these same things have happened to me," says Dylan, "and to you in all probability. You too have had drugs dropped into your wine. You too have shared a bed with the wrong woman. You too have been spellbound by magical voices, sweet voices with strange melodies. You too have come so far and have been so far blown back. And you've had close calls as well. You have angered people you should not have. And you too have rambled around your country. And you've also felt that ill wind, the one that blows you no good. And that's still not all of it.

"When Odysseus gets back home, things aren't any better. Scoundrels have moved in and are taking advantage of his wife's hospitality. And there's too many of 'em. And though he's greater than them all and the best at everything – best carpenter, best hunter, best expert on animals, best seaman – his courage won't save him, but his trickery will.

All these stragglers will have to pay for desecrating his palace. He'll disguise himself as a filthy beggar, and a lowly servant kicks him down the steps with arrogance and stupidity. The servant's arrogance revolts him, but he controls his anger. He's one against a hundred, but they'll all fall, even the strongest. He was nobody. And when it's all said and done, when he's home at last, he sits with his wife, and he tells her the stories. He's back where he began; in his end is his beginning.

So you must ask yourself what does this all mean? "Myself," said Dylan, "and a lot of other songwriters have been influenced by these very same themes. And they can mean a lot of different things. If a song moves you, that's all that's important. I don't have to know what a song means. I've written all kinds of things into my songs. And I'm not going to worry about what it all means. When Melville put all his old testament, biblical references, scientific theories, Protestant doctrines, and all that knowledge of the sea and sailing ships and whales into one story, I don't think he would have worried about it either – what it all means.

When Odysseus in *The Odyssey* visits the famed warrior Achilles in the underworld – Achilles, who traded a long life full of peace and contentment for a short one full of honour and glory – Achilles tells Odysseus it was all a mistake. "I just died, that's all." There was no honour. No immortality. And that if he could, he would choose to go back and be a lowly slave to a tenant farmer on Earth rather than be what he is – a king in the land of the dead – that whatever his struggles of life were, they were

preferable to being here in this dead place." As T.S. Eliot says: In his end was his beginning. The same language; the same thoughts; the same 'poetry'.

"That's what songs are too, in the land of the living," said Dylan. "Our songs are alive, although in one crucial way songs appear to be different from written literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage, not read on the page. Just as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page.

I return once again to Homer," Dylan concluded. "'Sing in me, oh Muse, sing in me,' says Homer. 'And through me, tell the story.'"

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the true purpose of song, popular song, indeed I would want to say, all music. And who is to say that all the great poets are not really musicians. Their words sing; they tell us truths that otherwise we are too afraid to speak or do not know how to express. Each man or woman has a song, Leonard Cohen says in my film *Bird On A Wire,* and it is our responsibility, all of us, to sing that song loud and clear.

So I finish with two passages from two of the giants of 20th century literature. First, a man who was born only 250 kilometres to the east from here, in Berdychiv in the Zhytomir Oblast of Ukraine, Joseph Conrad. In fact, as I'm sure you know, he wrote in English and is reckoned as one of the greatest of all English novelists. If you haven't read *Youth,* or *The End of the Tether,* or *Heart of Darkness,* you must. I give you just one small reason: the true story about King Leopold II of Belgium, still treated today by most Belgians as a hero ! At the end of the 19th century, he slaughtered 10 million black Africans while amassing the equivalent today of $4 billion dollars from the proceeds of his – I repeat, his, rubber plantations in the Congo. And who tells us about this, with unmistakable clarity? A poet!! Joseph Conrad !!!

OK, Conrad doesn't give us facts and figures, that has been left to some great historians since. But the smell of what had happened is all there in his 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness* and in the words of the chief villain, Kurtz, who says as he is dying: "The horror. The horror." And when in Coppola's great film '*Apocalypse Now',* which is based on Conrad's story, Marlon Brando, as Kurtz says the same thing, what does he preceed it with? Why, a quotation from T.S. Eliot. You see how it all overlaps. The language of the film, of the Conrad story, of the Dylan poem, of the truth, it's all the same.

Or take another Conrad story, *The End of the Tether.* It tells of a ship's captain, Captain Whalley, who is going steadily blind, but still manages to guide his ship safely to port because he knows the passage between the islands so well, until eventually the First Mate on the ship confronts the captain and demands the truth. Here is Captain Whalley speaking of his blindness: "It is as if the light were ebbing out of the world" ('ebbing' as in the tide going out). "Have you ever watched the ebbing sea on an open stretch of sands withdrawing farther and farther away from you? It is like this – only there will be no flood to follow. Never." ('flood' is when the tide returns). "It is as if the sun were growing smaller," says Captain Whalley, "the stars going out one by one. There can't be many left I can see by this. But I haven't had the courage to look of late." Pure poetry, and musical, but in the form of a novel.

Conrad, incidentally, had actually won the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Swedish Academy, but died before it was due to be announced, and the rules say that the Nobel Prize cannot be awarded posthumously.

Benjamin Britten, the great composer, some of whose very early music you can hear in the Philharmonic concert tomorrow, once told me that he had always wanted to write an opera around the story of Captain Whalley going blind. "It was incredibly musical," he told me. But Conrad's words were in themselves so musical, he wasn't sure he could match them. In fact, in his opera *Billy Budd* (and if you don't know it, again you should), again from another short story by Herman Melville who also wrote *Moby* Dick as we mentioned, and quoted by Bob Dylan as we have seen, Britten has another ship's captain, Captain Vere, lamenting the fate by hanging of one of his seamen Billy Budd, in an incredibly moving epilogue.

"We committed his body to the deep. But the ship passed on under light airs towards the rose of dawn. Oh, what have I done? I could have saved him, but he has saved me, and the love that passes all

understanding has come to me. I was lost on an infinite sea, but I've sighted a sail in the storm, the far-shining sail, and I'm content. I've seen where she's bound for. There's a land where she'll anchor, for ever. I am an old man now, but my mind goes back to that far-away summer, when I, Captain Edward Fairfax Vere, commanded the ship *Indomitable*….".

Again, pure poetry, this time it's an opera libretto (I wish you could hear Britten's music), written incidentally by the novelist E.M.Forster. His most famous novel was '*A Passage to India'*; again, if you haven't read it, you should. It's a masterpiece of 20th century literature. Forster was actually nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature 16 times !!! although he never won it. You see again how it all overlaps.

Finally, I want to read to you a passage from one of the greatest of all 20th century poets – who actually did won the Nobel Prize, T.S.Eliot. We always want to claim him as an English poet, although in fact he was born an American. This is the opening of part one of his group of poems called '*The Four Quartets'*, again a musical description. Here is the beginning of part one:

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one."

And here is Bob Dylan:

"Between the rose of sundown's finish and midnight's broken toll
We ducked inside the doorway, thunder crashing
And majestic bells of fire struck shadows in the sun
Saying, listen: it is the chimes of freedom flashing"

Which other poet in the second half of the 20th century has spoken so clearly and eloquently and angrily about the oppressed, the lonely, the dispossessed, the victimised, and against the murderers and villains and dictators who terrorise our world? As of today, 300 people await execution in Iran for the

crime of speaking against the regime, a regime which has already executed thousands and thousands, and no politician in the West makes even the smallest protest for fear of losing access to the oil in Iran.

Or the millions that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has butchered, whether by chemical weapons or barrel bombs. Or the ethnic cleansing, so called, in Rohingya, sanctioned, through her silence, by Aung San Suu Kyi, a thoroughly disgraced Nobel Peace Prize winner, whose regime sends to prison for seven years two journalists who dared to investigate mass murder; mass rape; genocide; crimes against humanity – phrases, incidentally, coined, invented, by two gentlemen from Lviv, great lawyers Raphael Lemkin and Hersh Lauterpacht. I discovered only the other day that Lemkin's article *Soviet genocide in Ukraine* was added only two years ago to the Russian index of "extremist publications", whose distribution in Russia is therefore forbidden.

And what about the villainy and thuggery of the apparently elected President of Russia Putin and his determination to annex eastern Ukraine? Well, you know about that. The list is endless.

"There must be some way out of here," said the joker to the thief
There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief
There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke."

So who in the arts speaks for these people, all along the watchtower?

Who speaks for the refugees now scattered across Europe, a greater number than in the entire history of European Civilisation? Not the United Nations. Not the government of Hungary whose Prime Minister has erected watchtowers and an electrified fence – clear memories of the Nazi Concentration camps – around his country; not the governments of France, or Germany or the United Kingdom. Or Russia!

"We're flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight,"
sings the poet.
"Flashing for the refugees on their unarmed road of flight
And for each and every underdog soldier in the night
We gaze upon the chimes of freedom flashing.

In the city's melted furnace, unexpectedly we watched
When the tongues of flame are in-folded with faces hidden
And footfalls echoing as the walls were tightening
As the echo of the wedding bells before the blowing rain
Dissolved into the bells of the lightning

Yes, the bell is tolling for the rebel, tolling for those who ache,
Tolling for the luckless, the abandoned and forsaked
Tolling for the outcast, burning constantly at stake

Tolling for the deaf and blind, tolling for the mute
Tolling for the mistreated, mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute
Tolling for the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed
For the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones and worse
And for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe.....
As we gaze upon the chimes of freedom flashing"

And who was this poet? Bob Dylan. Yes, of course he deserved the Nobel Prize, and more.

Thank you very much.