

Bob Dylan's 'Soon after midnight' – lyric analysis.

This song from the album *'Tempest'* really is a very great song. This precious gem captured and mesmerized me from the first minute I heard it. The music has this typical joyful 1950's doo-wop swing and Dylan's voice sounds really sweet and gentle and we hear some great phrasing too!. At first glance, it looks like a simple love song, but as the song starts to grow on you, you find out that there is much more to it and, as is so often the case with Dylan, in the end things are not what they seem.

In his 2012 RS interview Dylan said that *'Tempest'* wasn't the record he set out to make. *"I wanted to make something more religious,"* he said. *"I just didn't have enough [religious songs]. Intentionally, specifically religious songs is what I wanted to do. That takes a lot more concentration to pull that off 10 times with the same thread — than it does with a record like I ended up with."*

If we interpret 'more religious' as more 'gospel' like' – albeit not 'gospel' like in the same manner as during Dylan's so-called Christian era 1979-1981 - then we have good reasons to assume that *'Soon after midnight'* may have originally been intended to be one of those religious songs which Dylan had in mind for this more 'religious' album. This idea is supported by the fact that this song starts off as a psalm: ***"I'm searching for phrases, to sing your praises"*** but as the song progresses Dylan's well spring of creativity takes him somewhere else but then again –as we will see - in much deeper waters than one would expect, because the song –even if it may sound as a simple love song at first glance – is suffused with Biblical imagery. Also, lyrically the song starts off in a bright and positive mood and although the two bridges of the song reveal some dark undercurrents which give the song an obsessive and even hostile trait, these elements cannot prevent the song from ending in an equal positive mood and in such a way that the overall joyful and even exalted spirit of the song is maintained. The question is: what is this song about? I think that overall, the song is more about ***'the'*** ideal woman or bride than about ***'an'*** ideal woman or bride, which does, however, not necessarily mean that there are no personal, autobiographical, undercurrents in the song, reflecting the poet's personal lifelong quest to find this ideal woman or bride. In this quest for the ideal woman or bride there are both physical and spiritual elements of this quest pictured but in the end –as we will see - these elements melt together. In other words, in this song, in the quest to find the perfect bride, there is a struggle going on between lust, infidelity, and disloyalty on the one hand and chastity, fidelity, and loyalty on the other hand. In this respect Dylan must have been inspired by the Bible where we see the relation between God and His people – or between Christ and the church for that matter - described by some of the same metaphors Dylan uses here. God (Jesus) is the groom and his people (the church) are the bride. The Bible reveals that over and over again, God's chosen people were disloyal to Him and acted like a harlot. In particular the prophets describe this metaphor in all sorts of varieties, see for instance the book of Hosea (e.g. Hosea 4:15) and Ezekiel. But in spite of this continuous adultery, God's

burning love keeps on searching the bride's heart, till in the end He finds her and cleanses her and makes her ready for the eternal marriage (Rev. 19:7,8).

Therefore, as we are getting nearer to the end of the poet's life, this song is an ultimate and successful attempt to bring the life long quest for this ideal woman or bride to rest. In the first song of the album, *'Duquesne Whistle'* we hear the final whistle of time blowing and indeed, this whistle is *'Blowing like my woman's on board'*. In the end he has found her and has come to terms with his woman and he is now ready to enter into eternity with this ethereal woman.

Apart from the Bible there may be other sources which inspired Dylan to create this song. Shakespeare's play *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* may resonate, especially in the song's title and also maybe the 16th century ballad *'Tam Lin'*. But as far as other sources are concerned Edmund Spenser's poem *'The Faerie Queene'* may have been the most important influence, as we will outline later on in this article. Let's first delve deeper into the specific words of the song.

"I'm searching for phrases, to sing your praises, I need to tell someone" is reminiscent of *"All my powers of expression and thoughts so sublime, could never do you justice in reason or rhyme"* which Dylan wrote in the song *'Mississippi'*. The question is who does Dylan address here? It may be God because ***"to sing your praises"*** is a terminology which occurs quite often in the book of Psalms and such an eulogy is invariably addressed to God, e.g. Psalm 144: 9. *"I will sing a new song to you, O God! I will sing your praises with a ten-stringed harp"*. Above we wrote that the two bridges of the song reveal some dark undercurrents which render the song a trait of animosity. We also see this phenomenon frequently occur in the book of Psalms, sometimes even within the same Psalm, e.g. ***"To sing your praises"*** of Psalm 144:9 goes with Psalm 144: 11 where it says *"Save me! Rescue me from the power of my enemies. Their mouths are full of lies; they swear to tell the truth, but they lie instead"*. In this song ***"to sing your praises"*** goes with ***"They're lying and they're dying in their blood"*** and with ***"I'll drag his corpse through the mud"***.

Yet we have good reasons to believe that ***"I'm searching for phrases to sing your praises"*** is not primarily addressed to God but to his (ideal) woman, wife or bride. Such language is not at all unusual in the Bible, in fact the book of Songs is full of such praises addressed to a woman or bride, e.g. Songs 6: 9 where a young man says: *"The young women see her and praise her; even queens and royal concubines sing her praises"*. In this song, one may say that in a certain way Dylan follows the same route which the Bible follows in finding the perfect bride, a long and narrow road indeed, on which a number of women pass by – some of them *'as whorish as ever'* – till at last the true bride is found in Dylan's favorite Bible book the Revelation of St John, Chapter 19 verse 7: *'Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself'*.

Therefore, this first verse of this song shows us the final result of his quest to find this woman. The poet has reached the end of the trail and he can hardly believe that at last he has found her. Her beauty is so exuberant and her serenity so overwhelming that he cannot

find the right words to express his exaltation, therefore when he says **'I need to tell someone'** he actually intends to say that he wants the whole world to know how intensely happy he is with the outcome.

In this first verse it looks as if the end of time has just begun, that is why he now says: **'It's soon after midnight, and my day has just begun'**. Some see in the song's title **'It's soon after midnight'** a direct reference to Shakespeare's *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* in which Bottom has an encounter with the Fairy Queen after midnight. This seems the more likely because later on in the song the poet has a date with the fairy queen. Although Dylan has Shakespeare's play resonated in the song's title, we feel that the poet predominantly wants to express something else, at least in this first verse. **'It's soon after midnight, and my day has just begun'** may express that the Latter Day has just arrived. At midnight a new day has begun. It is 'his' day and this day will never end. This spiritual matrimony will last forever. The idea that Christ will return at midnight – as bridegroom to meet his bride, the church, - is wide-spread within the Christian tradition and is based on Matt. 25:6 where it says: *'At midnight they were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!'*

But before this day will finally come, a number of obstacles have to be overcome, a number of women pass by and these women try to distract him from the road. This theme is also dealt with on the Tell Tale Signs song *'Marching to the City'* where it says: *'Once I had a pretty girl, she's done me wrong, now I'm marching to the City and the road ain't long'* The first woman that passes by is **'A gal named Honey'**. The Urban Dictionary says that the name **'Honey'** is a nickname for a beautiful girl who has just about everything. Deceived by beauty as he may have been, he soon found out that this woman was not in for a lifelong relationship of enduring love but that only **'she was passing by'**. Her 'love' was selfish and superficial. She is the kind of woman who –after a brief period of infatuation - comes and goes and shows no genuine and lasting interest in you, in fact she only wants to take and not give, that is why it says that she **'took my money'**. There may even shine through some self-criticism from the part of the poet when we see this same selfish attitude reflected in the male counterpart of Dylan's cover of The Mississippi Sheiks' song *'Blood in my Eyes'* on the album *'World Gone Wrong'* where he has Honey's male counterpart say: *'I tell you something, tell you the facts, you don't want me, give my money back'*. In summary, this first girl or woman called Honey represents the type of marriage or relationship which is only based on *material* things and has no deeper spiritual foundation. Because there is no strong foundation, such marriages or relations **'pass by'**, they break up easily and they leave you behind, robbed and – as Dylan wrote elsewhere – *'howling at the moon'*.

When he goes on to say that **'the moon is in my eye'** this reminds us of a song called *'Moon Got In My Eyes'* written by Johnny Burke, and Arthus Johnston. The song has been covered by Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. One of the verses reads: *'You know the saying, 'All who love are blind', it seems that ancient adage still applies, I guess, I should have seen right through you, but the moon got in my eyes'*. Apparently, beauty deceives the eye and romantic feelings may easily blind a man and these feelings are often associated with the moon which may block your view. Just like in Shakespeare's *'Midsummer Night's Dream'* the moon is continuously associated with a midnight realm where dreams and imagination flourish but in real life however,

these sweet notions are wiped out by the harsh reality of matrimony's every day's wear and tear..

The language of the first bridge of the song is reminiscent of the strong and robust language of the Old Testamental Kings David and Solomon which they used especially in the Book of Psalms and Songs. **'My heart is cheerful, it's never fearful'** is an example of the determination and valiance of these kings. **'My heart is cheerful, it's never fearful'** expresses confidence and faith that the ultimate goal will be reached: he will surely find the perfect bride and this bright prospect is a reason for abundant joy. This firm mental attitude resembles the resilience shown in Dylan's song 'Mississippi': *'My heart is not weary, it is light and it is free'*, and echoes what King Solomon says in Proverbs 15:13: *'A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.'*

'I been down on the killing floors' shows that the poet- as a valiant warrior - has undergone a lot of hardship and suffering. **'I been down on the killing floors'** may also resonate Howling Wolf's song *'Killing Floor'* (1964) which says: *'I was fooling' with ya baby, I let ya put me on the killing' floor"*. Herbert Sumlin, blues guitarist and at the time a member of Howling Wolf's band, is said to have said about the song's title: *"Down on the killing floor—that means a woman has you down, she went out of her way to try to kill you. She at the peak of doing it, and you got away now."* However, we feel that Dylan may have used the words of this song *'Killing Floor'* as a vehicle to express a deeper meaning. The language used here resembles that of a great king and warrior. King David was such a great warrior who had been involved in many battles and had been down on the killing floors many a time. But what about David's great Son, the great warrior Jesus Christ? If there has ever been a man on earth who can literally say **'I been down on the killing floors'**, it is Jesus Christ. In fact He was killed on the killing floor but He rose from the dead and continued His quest throughout history to find the perfect bride like it says in Ephesians 5: 25- 27 *"For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her, to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault."*

'I'm in no great hurry' not only means that the quest to find the perfect bride takes a lot of time but also that it has to be done at the right time. The poet is fully in control of all his passions, so he is patient enough to wait for the right time. Some have argued – and quite rightly so – that this song reflects some of the menacing and spooky feelings of Dylan's song *'Moonlight'* where it says: *'Well, I'm preaching peace and harmony the blessings of tranquility, yet I know when the time is right to strike'*

Hurry and impatience go with lust but true love goes with patience and endurance, just like King Solomon says in Songs 8: 4. *"Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, not to awaken love until the time is right"*.

The poet's mind is well balanced and he knows exactly what he wants. **'A gal named Honey'** is not what he is looking for and he is ready to face her violent anger and scorn, that is why it now says: **'I'm not afraid of your fury'**. A famous saying in this respect is: *"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."* This saying is based on lines from *'The Mourning Bride'* a tragedy by the playwright William Congreve, premiered in 1697: *'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred*

turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned'.

'I've faced stronger walls than yours' confirms the epic altitude of these words. It looks as if a valiant king is addressing us here. The king and poet David shines through here, who says in Psalm 18:29 *"With my God I can scale any wall"*. And not only king David, but also in his slip-stream, *the* great king Jesus Christ who in his quest to find the perfect bride has faced stronger walls than the fury and resistance of His bride to be. A much stronger wall was death, but He rose from the dead and continued his quest to find His bride.

'Charlotte' is among others described in the Urban Dictionary as a girl who is known for being beautiful both inside and out. Although the Urban Dictionary says that Charlotte is also good in bed and although there once was a song called *"Charlotte the Harlot"* by a group called *'Iron Maiden'*, yet the meaning of the name **'Charlotte'** in itself cannot in any way be linked to being a harlot. Therefore when Dylan says that **'Charlotte's a harlot'** he seems to have chosen the name **'Charlotte'**, not only as a vague reference to and a stepping stone from that song *"Charlotte the Harlot"*, but mainly because it rhymes with **'harlot'** and not because the meaning of this name may in itself in any way be connected to a harlot or to any whorish behavior whatsoever. **'Charlotte's a harlot'** is further defined by the words **'She dresses in scarlet'**. The word **'harlot'** combined with the word **'scarlet'** immediately takes us to the Book of Revelation Chapter 17:3-5 *'So the angel took me in the Spirit into the wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns, and blasphemies against God were written all over it. The woman wore purple and scarlet clothing and beautiful jewelry made of gold and precious gems and pearls. In her hand she held a gold goblet full of obscenities and the impurities of her immorality. A mysterious name was written on her forehead: "Babylon the Great, Mother of All Prostitutes and Obscenities in the World." I could see that she was drunk—drunk with the blood of God's holy people who were witnesses for Jesus. I stared at her in complete amazement'*. Duessa, Redcrosse's counterpart in Edmund Spenser's epic poem *'The Faery Queene'* is also dressed in scarlet. This is not without importance because this epic poem – as we will outline further below – seems to have had an influence on this song. Spenser made the same allegory on Revelations 17:3-5 as well. The rhyme combination **'scarlet, harlot'** is also made in the final verse of Dylan's song *'Jokerman'* and like in this song, the combination of these two words has a negative connotation. Scarlet is a vivid red color, sometimes with an orange tinge, and just like purple is typical of the exuberant lifestyle and clothing of the rich and the wealthy (cf Proverbs 31:21). The red – scarlet – color of the woman's clothing represents her blood-thirstiness and fully portrays her as a whore. In the Bible a harlot represents the apostasy of God's own people and also – like in the Book of Revelations - the antagonistic world empires. It is obvious that such a whorish woman cannot fulfill the poet and therefore cannot be his future bride.

Whereas **'Honey'** and **'Charlotte'** represent vice, **'Mary'** who follows the two, represents virtue. Very little is said about her, only this: **'Mary dresses in green'**. At the same time this brief qualification of Mary is a very significant one and represents the core of the song. Who

is this Mary? Some have argued that the virgin 'Mary' is referred to here. Although she was already introduced in the opening song of the album *'Duquesne Whistle'* where it says: *'I can hear a sweet voice gently calling, must be the mother of our LORD'*, yet we don't feel that Dylan had the Virgin Mary in mind when he wrote: ***'Mary dresses in green'***. Firstly, the Virgin Mary is usually portrayed dressed in blue, not in green. Secondly, we feel that the woman of whom Dylan here says that she is dressed in green and who in the final verse of the song is addressed with the words: ***'When I met you I didn't think you would do'*** and also ***'I don't want nobody but you'*** is one and the same person. Therefore, to address the Virgin Mary with words like ***'I don't want nobody but you'*** would not only be inappropriate, to some ears it would even sound blasphemous and all this makes it very unlikely that the Virgin Mary is meant here.

We feel that Mary of Magdalene (sometimes called Mary of Magdala) is the likeliest candidate to be the ***'Mary'*** Dylan may have had in mind here. She is often portrayed dressed in green, green, in the color of fertility. (On the right top of this article you see a picture of a painting of Mary of Magdalene, dressed in green, by the Italian Renaissance painter Bernardino Luini). In the New Testament Mary of Magdalene is a very important woman. Mary of Magdalene was one of Jesus' most ardent followers and traveled with Jesus. Mary of Magdalene was with Jesus during the most crucial moments of Jesus' life, during the crucifixion she stood by His side at the cross and she reappears immediately after the Resurrection, to be the first to see Jesus back again (Mark 16:9). What makes Mary of Magdalene so special is the fact that before she started to follow Jesus and travel with Him, Jesus cleansed her of 'seven demons' (Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9). So, when in the final verse it says: ***'When I met you I didn't think you would do'*** it is as if Dylan has Jesus speak through his mouth and have Jesus say about Mary of Magdalene: ***'When I met you I didn't think you would do'***. This ***'I didn't think you would do'*** does not mean - as the Da Vinci Code seems to suggest - that Mary of Magdalene was ever involved in a romantic love relationship with Jesus nor that she ever was some kind of a harlot. On the contrary, for such a theory there is not a shred of Biblical or non-Biblical evidence available. So when Dylan has Jesus say: ***'When I met you I didn't think you would do'*** it is as if Jesus would have said to Mary of Magdalene: *'When I first met you, you were possessed by seven demons, in that dreadful condition you were unable to follow me, first I had to cleanse you of those demons and make you fit to follow me'*. There are more – and deeper - things to be said about the words ***'When I met you I didn't think you would do'*** but we will do so below when we discuss the final verse.

When the poet goes on to say that ***'It's soon after midnight, and I've got a date with a (the) fairy queen'*** he seems to take us into a dreamland, into the fancy land of fairies, elves and midgets, the land where he has a date with a fairy queen. The dream woman will be Mary but he has not got her yet, he is not yet mentally there – he is still 'away with the fairies' - and he is still fantasizing on how things will be. Some have argued that 'Mary' and the 'Fairy Queen' might be one and the same person but this thought seems unlikely because he does not speak of some imaginative woman but of a real woman – which does not preclude the fact that this woman also symbolizes much more than just a 'physical' woman because – under the layer of that 'physical' woman – there is also a 'spiritual' woman shining through

This spiritual woman symbolizes the relationship between God and his people, and between Christ and his bride, the church.

There are a number of resonations in this verse line ***'It's soon after midnight, and I've got a date with a (the) fairy queen'***. A first resonation is said to be the 16th ballad *'Tam Lin'*. In this ballad – which has many different versions - the elfin Tam Lin is captured and owned by the Fairy Queen. This elfin Tim Lin however, makes visiting girls from the real world pregnant and in this way more or less acts like a two timing elfin, something to which Dylan would later on in the second bridge allude to by speaking of *'a two timing Slim'*. Another connotation may be, that the girl – though named 'Janet', not 'Mary' - who in this ballad Tam Lin has made pregnant happens to be ***dressed in green***.

A second resonation is said to be a Shakespearean. As outlined above, some see in the song's title ***'It's soon after midnight'*** not only a direct reference to Shakespeare's *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* but they also see in the words ***'I've got a date with a (the) fairy queen'*** an allusion to the Fairy Queen who in this play has a midnight encounter with Bottom. But it would seem to me that only some word combinations from both the ballad *'Tam Lin'* and *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* resonate here but that there is no real connection with the meaning of this verse line, or with any other part of the song for that matter.

A third resonation which is also Shakespearean and which may well have much more connection with the meaning of the song is the fairy queen *'Queen Mab'* referred to in Shakespeare's play *'Romeo and Juliet'*. Queen Mab's involvement in this play, is described in a speech by Mercutio. Queen Mab is portrayed by Mercutio as a sort of miniature creature who drives her chariot into the noses and brains of sleeping people, forcing them to have dreams in which their wishes and wildest dreams are fulfilled. At one time Mercutio says about Queen Mab: *'And in this state she gallops night by night, through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love'*. This is exactly what happens in this song. The poet hasn't got her yet, he has to wait for her, the woman or bride is very much a promise for the future, yet he knows for sure that she will be his and he is now fantasizing on how great and wonderful the prospect will be of being with her forever.

However, as far as contributing meaning to this verse line ***'I've got a date with a (the) fairy queen'*** is concerned, we feel that Edmund Spenser's epic poem *'The Faerie Queene'* - first published in 1590 -1596 - may be an important source. The heroic knight Redcrosse (a Christian) has finally conquered the dragon. Yet his long ago planned and promised marriage to Una must be delayed again. Before Redcrosse, the valiant knight and warrior, is allowed to marry Una, Redcrosse has more work to do and his mission is not fulfilled yet.

Redcrosse, as Dylan puts it, has ***'got a date with the Faerie Queene'***, which means that Redcrosse made an arrangement with the Faerie Queene that, before he can Marry Una, he has to serve the Faerie Queene for another six years to defeat the king Paynim. The poem says that the knight Redcrosse must go *"Backe to return to that great Faerie Queene, and her to serve six yeares in warlike wize, gainst that proud Paynim king (I.xii.18)."* This attitude of heroic bravery combined with docile servitude, this whole concept of faith in the future against all odds, this notion of endurance, perseverance and patience before one finally

reaches the ultimate goal is typical of Edmund Spenser's *'Faerie Queene'*, not only in this passage but in the entire epic poem. We see this same attitude and notions also very prominently present in Dylan's *'Soon after Midnight'*. We have already seen that the poet is not *'in a great hurry'* and he is not afraid *'of the fury'* his brave stance will evoke in other people's judgments. He has *'got a date with the Fairy Queen'*, he made an arrangement with her to hold back his passions and to restrain his emotions till the right time has come and the final battle has been won. Meanwhile the Fairy Queen allows him to fantasize and dream about the great future which is about to come and for which he is prepared to wait because he knows that the battle is nearly over. It will be soon 'after midnight', it is nearly twelve o' clock, it is nearly midnight and his day will begin soon.

Like the first bridge of the song, also the language of the second bridge of the song is reminiscent of the strong, robust and violent language of the Old Testamental prophets and kings, language which King David used in his Psalms. To understand this language of the second bridge in our modern times, we have to bear in mind that again, a great and righteous king and valiant warrior speaks here, a king and warrior just like King David once was and in his wake – and to perfection - *the* great King and warrior Jesus Christ. He chose his bride – the church - but in the eyes of people this bride was not good enough. That's why it now says: *'They chirp and they chatter'* which means that people and the public in general, like flocks of birds that chirp together, gossip and chat idly about all kinds of minor and unimportant details and also great faults they find in his future bride, with only one goal and that is to denounce this bride and to express that she simply won't do in their eyes. The poet, however, is determined to go on and is not really touched by all this and lightheartedly dismisses the slander and gossip by saying *'What does it matter?'* All this gossip and slander will not make him go back and the best remedy is to simply ignore all criticism, just like Shakespeare once said: *'To tame a shrew, and charm her chattering tongue'*. *'What does it matter?'* has another denunciative connotation. *'What does it matter?'* also refers to the words that follow: *'They're lying and they're dying in their blood'*. Again, to understand the impact of these words in our age, we have to take into account that Dylan has a great and righteous King speak here; a warrior who has conquered his enemies and that is why we hear war-like language. *'What does it matter?'* is as if the poet now says: 'Why should I care any longer about my enemies, we fought and I won, they lie on the battlefield, on the killing floors, in their blood, and they will all die, that is why I now say: *'They're lying and they're dying in their blood'*.

But there is more to the words *'They're lying and they're dying in their blood'*. If you put the emphasis on the words *'They'* these words contrast with the situation his future bride was in when he first met her, as if he says: 'My enemies are lying and dying in their blood, but not so my future bride. O, Yes she too was lying in her blood but unlike my enemies I came to her rescue and she did not die in her blood, on the contrary, look to what the prophet of Ezekiel says in Chapter 16, verse 6 and following: *'But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, 'Live!'. And I helped you to*

thrive like a plant in the field. You grew up and became a beautiful jewel. Your breasts became full, and your body hair grew, but you were still naked. And when I passed by again, I saw that you were old enough for love. So I wrapped my cloak around you to cover your nakedness and declared my marriage vows. I made a covenant with you, says the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine’. When in the last verse Dylan says: **‘When I met you I didn't think you would do’** the above words of Ezekiel may have been on his mind. He found his future bride lying in her blood, so at first it looked as if she would not do, but he rescued her even if she did not deserve it.

‘Two-Timing Slim who's ever heard of him?’ dwells on the same subject; it is all about loyalty and faithfulness in a love relationship. What does **‘Two Timing’** mean? A person is said to be **‘Two Timing’** when he or she tries to maintain two separate ‘love’ relationships at the same time, without the persons involved in this love affair know about each other that they are dating with one and the same person. Why does Dylan add **‘Slim’** to the words **‘Two Timing’**? To whom does he refer? Some have argued that he refers to Slim Whitman, an American country music and western music singer, songwriter and instrumentalist who died in 2013. But this explanation sounds odd because Slim Whitman has never been known to be **‘two timing’**. On the contrary, when Slim Whitman’s wife died in 2009, she had been married to Slim Whitman for 67 years so if there has ever been an artist who was *not* ‘two timing’ is must have been Slim Whitman, at least so it seems.

Others have argued that Dylan, when he says **‘Two-Timing Slim who's ever heard of him?’**, he would refer to himself, to his old nature, to his mischievous behavior prior to becoming a Christian, but now that he is inwardly renewed, he has got new eyes and he is burying the ‘old’ man by **‘dragging his corpse through the mud’** and in this way he would publicly denounce his former ‘two timing’ life style. In fact, he would speak here of that same enemy inside who *‘crashed into the dust’* (‘Long and Wasted Years’).

However, we feel that the above analyses do not satisfy. We feel that **‘Two-Timing Slim’** does not refer to any specific person but that **‘Two-Timing Slim’** is a personification of disloyalty, unfaithfulness and adultery. Disloyalty, unfaithfulness and adultery have no real face, name, or future and therefore, in eternity, will not be remembered and will end up in the land of oblivion. It is the reason why the words **‘Two-Timing Slim’** are qualified by the words **‘who's ever heard of him?’**. The poet takes us back to the Latter Day, to what will happen **‘soon’, ‘after midnight’**. (For the meaning of ‘soon’ in this context we refer to Rev. 22:20). At the Latter Day the great King, Christ, will present His bride, in a majestic style, as written in Revelations 19:7,8: *‘Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear’*. This bride – the church – did not deserve it at all to stand there in such a glorious fashion. Throughout history she had been **‘two-timing’** on Him. As stated above, Ezekiel 16:6 pictures that she was dying in her blood, but He came to her rescue. But the rest of Ezekiel 16 and Hosea 2 show that she was not at all grateful for her miraculous redemption. On the contrary, she was unfaithful to Him and acted – as Dylan wrote elsewhere – *‘as whorish as ever’*. But His burning love never gave up on her, as is

written in Ephesians 5: 25, 26:” *He gave up his life for her, to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault*. At the Latter Day, it will appear that Chris has forgotten her **‘two timing’** behavior as if it never happened and He will say of all **‘two timing’** conduct: ***who’s ever heard of him?’*** It is as if He will then say: ‘I paid for this bride in my own blood, she is cleansed now and anyone who now dares to accuse my chosen bride will meet with my violent wrath and ***I’ll drag his corpse through the mud’***, which means that I will publicly condemn, denounce and humiliate such a person’.

When it says: ***‘I’ll drag his corpse through the mud’*** we must keep in mind that this is again war-like language of a righteous King and Warrior. The word choice is also reminiscent of the Trojan War when Hector was killed by Achilles, and Achilles dragged Hector’s corpse behind his horse. ***‘I’ll drag his corpse through the mud’*** may also allude to the prophet of Isaiah, chapter 14 verse 19 where it is written: *‘Like a corpse trampled underfoot, you will be dumped into a mass grave, with those killed in battle’*. All this heroic language seems to make it clear that the acquisition of the eternal bride is serious business and nothing – not even the most extremely violent resistance - can stop Him from reaching His ultimate goal. When Dylan – in the final verse of the song - goes on to say that ***‘It’s now or never’***, he intends to say more than just to quote an old Elvis Presley song. ***‘It’s now or never, more than ever’*** emphasizes the urgency of the situation and that the whole affair of his future bride has reached a decisive stadium. Against all odds, in defiance of what people expect him to do, He is now ready to present the bride of His choice to the world. His choice for her is not based on any outward beauty or any high moral standards of His bride to- be, on the contrary, he explicitly states that ***‘When I met you I didn’t think you would do’***. Again, the Biblical allegory shines through here. The people of Israel were chosen to be God’s bride. When God came to the rescue of His people in Egypt- as described by the prophet of Ezekiel in Chapter 16, verse 6 – He found that Israel was helplessly *‘kicking around in her blood’*. When God ‘met’ her, so to say, she ***‘wouldn’t do’***, there was no reason why He should have been so merciful to His bride Israel. But His goodness and benevolence got repaid with scorn. The prophets, especially Ezekiel and Hosea, made it abundantly clear that also later on Israel ***‘wouldn’t do’***. Israel was very unfaithful to him and acted even worse than –to speak in the language of this song – ‘Charlotte, the harlot’ because as Ezekiel 16: 33 says: *‘Prostitutes charge for their services--but not you! You give gifts to your lovers, bribing them to come and have sex with you’*. But yet God gave never up on her and in the end He will make it possible that she will do!. This allegory continues in the New Testament. Above we already outlined in the passage ***‘Mary dresses in green’*** that Mary of Magdalene was chosen to be one of the first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, albeit the fact that when Jesus first met her ***‘She wouldn’t do’*** because at the time she was possessed by seven demons.(Mark 16:9). But what about the New Testamental bride, the church? When He, Jesus, first met her on earth, and also later on when He accompanied her from heaven on her journey through history ***‘She wouldn’t do’*** either. The church committed many horrible

crimes and instead of helping the poor and wretched, the church often became an institution of oppression, power, greed and sexual abuse. Also this bride, the church acted whorishly. But He, Jesus, never gave up on her. We read in Ephesians 5: 25, that: *“He gave up his life for her, to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word”*. At the end of times, on the Latter Day, ***‘soon, after midnight’***, the bride- Israel and the church- will be standing there, cleansed for the eternal wedding (Rev. 19:7,8) and wearing – as Dylan wrote elsewhere in great poetic style - ‘silver bracelets on her wrist and flowers in her hair’. The song ends by saying: ***‘It’s soon after midnight, and I don’t want nobody but you’***. The ending ***‘I don’t want nobody but you’*** can be interpreted as a pretty carnal, if not unchaste, way of expressing his passion. And if so, do these final words ***‘I don’t want nobody but you’*** not contrast with the spiritually elevated language and allegorical biblical imagery which we feel is hidden in this song? However, we have to bear in mind that in the Bible this sort of romantic language is not at all as unusual as it may sound. The Book of Songs for instance, is full of the same allegoric language, in which the love of God for his people is expressed as a romance, as the love between a young man and a young woman, in words which may sound pretty carnal but are yet chaste, e.g. Songs 3: 1 where a young woman says: *“One night as I lay in bed, I yearned for my lover. I yearned for him, but he did not come”*. ***‘I don’t want nobody but you’*** is as if the groom now says: ‘Nobody expected me to choose you, even if you did not deserve it to be my bride, yet you are the only one, ***‘I don’t want nobody but you’***. The long quest to find the real woman has finally come to rest. His woman is on board.