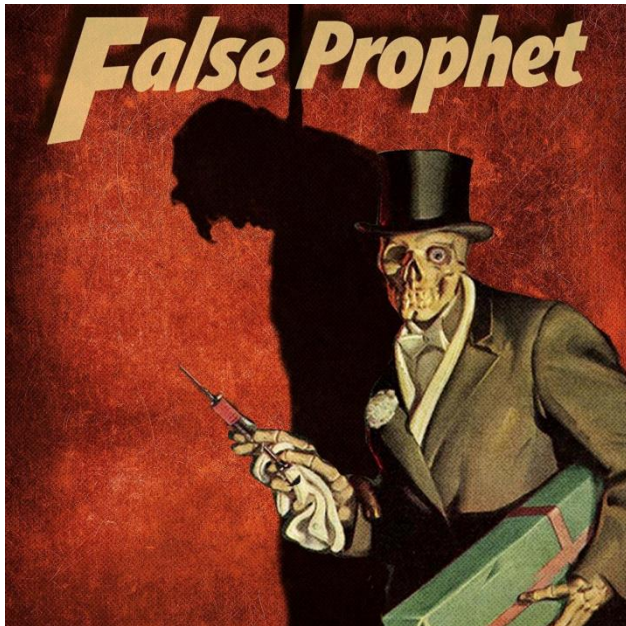


Bob Dylan's "False Prophet" – an analysis by Kees de Graaf.



1. Introduction

When we hear this masterpiece "False Prophet" it feels as if this blues song were performed at a place to which Dylan alludes in his song "My own version of You". It is not hard to visualize Bob and his band playing "False Prophet" "at midnight on Judgement Day in the Black Horse Tavern on Armageddon Street". The dragging blues riff feels like a performance in a nightclub near hell while the flames of Armageddon burn all around you.

There has been a lot of debate on the internet about the artwork accompanying the release of the single "False Prophet". The cigarette the dressed up skeleton has in his hands on the original picture was photoshopped into a syringe. What does this syringe mean at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic sweeps the world? And who is that silhouetted person in the background hanging on a rope? Although we have an idea who this person is, it is our intention not to get involved in American politics, so we leave this question open for your own interpretation.

The title of the song "False Prophet" may seem a little unexpected when you consider that in the refrain the poet says: "***I ain't no false prophet***". It would be more obvious if the title were e.g. "No False Prophet". But then again, in the words "***I ain't no false prophet***" there is a double negation and although this is not always so, usually a double negation is regarded as an affirmation. The intention of the False Prophet may be to categorically deny that indeed he is a False Prophet, but it seems that the more fervently he denies being a false prophet, the clearer it becomes that indeed he is a False Prophet. When further on, we take a more detailed look at the verses of the song, we feel that the verses will prove that the speaker definitely is a False Prophet.

The issue we'd better deal with straightaway is: is there an autobiographic undercurrent in the refrain: "***I ain't no false prophet***"?. Maybe. There has always been the odour hanging around Dylan of being a prophet. Now you have prophets with a capital "P" and prophets with a small "p". Prophets with a capital "P" are the Biblical Prophets like e.g. Isaiah and Ezekiel. These Prophets speak with divine authority and for that reason only they are fully authorized to say "***I just know what I know***" and "***I just said what I said***" But there are also prophets with a small "p" (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17). Followers of Jesus

are prophets with a small “p” and prophesize without divine authority, their prophecies need to be tested by others whether they are of God or not (1 John 4:1). We feel that the prophet in “False Prophet” is a prophet with a small “p”, so we have to check out if the characteristics of this false prophet displayed in the song, are authentic. This is what this analysis intends to do.

Now there is this famous 2004 CBS interview. In this interview Dylan refers to people who say to Dylan: “You’re the Prophet, You’re the Saviour”. Then Dylan replies: “I never wanted to be a Prophet or a saviour. Elvis maybe. But Prophet? No!”. We feel that Dylan here denies that he is a Prophet with a capital “P” but that does not mean he cannot be a prophet with a small “p”. It all has to do with what Dylan in this same interview calls “the destiny thing”. When asked: “You use the word “destiny” over and over again in the book. What does it mean to you? Dylan replies: “It’s a feeling about yourself that nobody else does -the picture you have in your mind of what you’re about will come true. It’s a kind of a thing you have to keep to your own self, because it’s a fragile feeling. And if you put it out there, somebody will kill it. So it’s best to keep that all inside”. I think that Dylan is sincere here. “It’s a feeling about yourself that nobody else does” may in meaning come close to “**I just know what I know**” and to “**I just said what I said**”. Long time ago he had this- spiritual- experience to which he refers in this same 2004 CBS interview: Dylan says: “It goes back to that destiny thing. I mean, I made a bargain with it, you know, long time ago. And I’m holding up my end”. Dylan made a private covenantal bargain – apparently with God- and that gives him the courage to state that he knows what he knows and says what he says. It is- as he says- “a fragile feeling” so he cannot be explicit, you have to read between the lines. Only because of this bargain is he able to write songs like “False Prophet”. Otherwise he would never had got this far, in his own words “**to get where I am now**”. So to sum this up, the autobiographic undercurrent of the refrain “**I ain’t no false prophet**” may be understood as if he says: “I show you in the verses of this song how the False Prophet operates, and no matter how fervently the False Prophet denies that he is a false prophet, he definitely is a False Prophet. But “I” in contrast with this False Prophet, “I” am **not** a false prophet but a true prophet, albeit with a small “p”. Long time ago I experienced this “destiny thing” and because of this experience “**I just know what I know**” and “**I just said what I said**”.

When we take a closer look at the lyrics, we find that the ways of the False Prophet are quite often “rough and rowdy” and for that reason this song thematically very well fits in with the main theme of the album, the “Rough and Rowdy Ways”. But the manners of the False Prophet are not always like that. As Dylan said in his song “Man of Peace”: “Sometimes Satan comes as a man of peace”. As we will see later in more detail, in the lyrics the false prophet alternates his rough and rowdy ways of violent persecution with ostensibly peaceful and subtle deception. From the lyrics it is clear that the False Prophet operates in the liminal space, it feels as if an occult voice from the underworld tries to break into the visible and tangible reality with the purpose of causing as much damage and destruction as he possibly can. How could we summarize the possible meaning of this song in a few words? In the song a number of lines are quoted from a book titled “**Awakening Osiris**” – A New Translation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead- written by Normandi Ellis (Phanes Press). If you take this into account, one could argue that that in this song the False Prophet may be some sort of incarnation of Egyptian polytheism, of gods like Temu, Ptah Ra, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, Nephthys. There seems to be a cosmic struggle going on between these multiple Egyptian gods embodied by the False Prophet and annex by false prophecy – false prophecy such as laid down in the Egyptian Book of the Dead- and the One and Only God, יהוה, Jahwè, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who calls Himself “**I AM**” in Ex. 3:14. The “**I AM**” who exposed the Egyptian gods and their false prophecy, when with a mighty arm He led His people out of Egypt into the promised land of Israel. (Exodus 6-12). The same God, the same “**I AM**” to whom the poet

of "I've Made up my mind, to give myself to you" has given his heart: "I'm giving myself to you, **I AM**". So in this song is not the question on whose side the poet is, nor, for that matter, of the outcome of this cosmic struggle will be. This outcome is by no means uncertain: "There in the temple of the sun in Egypt He will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt" (Jer. 43:14). But not only the Egyptian gods are exposed in the song. Also Buddhism and Hindu reincarnation are exposed. Buddhism in verse 6, when it says: "**I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet**" and Hindu reincarnation in verse 10 when it says: "**Can't remember when I was born and I forgot when I died**". Let us now see how in a verse by verse analysis these themes are worked out.

2. Analysis

Verse 1.

Another day without end - another ship going out

Another day of anger - bitterness and doubt

I know how it happened - I saw it begin

I opened my heart to the world and the world came in.

When it says "**Another day without end**" the poet immediately quotes chapter 8 of the book "**Awakening Osiris**" where in the context it says: "Now is the day of the joining of opposites, of the mingling of the dust of flesh with the dust of the coffin. this is the day of flow, the living ether returned to air, the maker of forms assuming new form. **This is the day without end**—the passage into light itself, the joining of Osiris to Ra". As is outlined in the introduction of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the book is a compilation of funeral texts and religious hymns written by priests during a period spanning approx. 3000 BC to 300 AD. It is true, in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, there is a constant struggle between the powers of darkness and light, between good and evil. At the same the non-dualistic state of nature, including human existence, is prominently present in the book. This non-dualism wipes out the fundamental difference between the Creator and creation. The creation is deified and subsequently worshipped (cf. Rom. 1:21-23). The Pyramid texts show supplications to the gods, so that a man might achieve unity with the deities in heaven. Because of this non-dualism, the absolute distance between Creator and creation and between right and wrong is eliminated. In chapter 9 we hear the Speaker – the Speaker addresses Osiris in the third person – say "*I create myself*". In chapter 8 the Speaker equates himself with the god Osiris: "*I have sailed with Ra in the boat of the sun. I am a shining recollected Osiris*".

The primordial sin of man in paradise was that he believed the lie uttered by the serpent – the devil, alias the False Prophet – that man could be on an equal with God, that man could be like God (Gen. 3:5). But from the very beginning man could only live in perfect harmony with God if man respected the endless qualitative difference between God, the Creator, and man, His creation. It was this same megalomania "I am like God, I create myself" which led to the downfall of the devil, alias the False Prophet. Condemned and thrown out by God, the False Prophet – and annex false prophecy - can now thrive in cultures like that of the ancient Egyptians, deceiving pharaoh's and the Egyptian elite in believing that they are like god and that they are gods. These funeral texts in the Egyptian Book of the Dead can be seen as an embodiment of this false prophecy. But the False Prophet is condemned and you hear this weary and cynical note of resignation in his voice when he says: "**Another day without end**". Isaiah 14:12 (KJV) says of him: "*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!*". The one who once was a son of the morning is now condemned to a day of agony that will never end.

When "**Another ship going out**" is added, it is as if the False Prophet wearily witnesses yet another

burial of some Egyptian pharaoh or other wealthy Egyptian. This is reflected in the book ***“Awakening Osiris”*** when it says: *“This white boat ferries the body through dark waters, carries the heart of gold through the red core of earth, Great is the God in his boat”*. The ancient Egyptians used a ship as tomb offering and this symbolizes the transport of the dead person and their soul, from this life into the afterlife, to Osiris the god of the dead. According to Wikipedia, the Egyptians believed that a boat or ship was needed in the afterlife in order to travel to the heavens. Sometimes a small model of a boat was buried with a person. Often times a full size boat was included in the tombs of Pharaohs and other wealthy Egyptians.

“Another day of anger bitterness and doubt” again reflects this weary and cynical mood of the False Prophet and takes us back to ***“Awakening Osiris”*** where we read these words in the following context: *“May I walk the road envisioned by Ra's eyes. May my spirit gather my selves and fly back to its source. May I join the great march of beings who live and die in the circle of light. I shall not fall under flashing knives. I shall not burn up in the cauldron. I know the names of the scorpions and they are these: **anger, bitterness and doubt**. And I know the names of the serpents: ego, concern for the self of the body; relinquishment of destiny, the attribution of suffering to god; false pity that stifles another man's becoming; mediocre virtues and the denial of passion; sentimentality wherein passion is artifice; satisfaction wherein he fails to attain the great; common thought wherein a man seeks not to push himself beyond the limits of his own imagination”*. It seems obvious that the Egyptian Book of the Dead associates a scorpion with ***“anger bitterness and doubt”***. Jesus proclaims victory over scorpions and serpents and equates scorpions and serpents with demonic resistance and enmity. In Luke 10:19,20 Jesus says: *“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven”*. (KJB). One may say that since his downfall the Satan, the Serpent, alias the False Prophet, is condemned to, and trapped in, a day by day, but never ending vicious circle of ***“anger, bitterness and doubt”***. All fruit the False Prophet produces is nothing but ***“anger, bitterness and doubt”*** and there is a sharp contrast with the fruit the Holy Spirit produces, as is written in

Gal. 5:22,23(NLT): *“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness, and self-control”*

“I know how it happened - I saw it begin” takes us back to the time of the downfall of Satan, the devil, Lucifer, alias the False Prophet. Isaiah 14:13,14 (NKJV) describes how it happened, how it began: *“For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ This led to the downfall of Satan: “Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isiah 14:15 NKJV).*

It all happened, it all began when ***“I opened my heart to the world and the world came in”***. Again the book ***“Awakening Osiris”*** is quoted: *“I've known the pleasures of the earth. I bathed myself in light on an afternoon of rejoicing—not a festival, but an ordinary afternoon where **I opened my heart to the world and the world came in**, where I brought water from the well with my daughter, where I chewed the grass, at the figs and sat by the riverbank watching sunlight dazzle like the white pearls of my daughter's smile. I steeped myself in the passion for existence until my spirit rose like steam bearing the fragrance of cedar and flowers”*. A few lines below this quote we read: ***“I bring home the earth. I bring back the words.”*** What strikes us is that these lines have a pantheistic character. One could say that pantheism leads to polytheism and visa versa and you find these phenomena all over the book ***“Awakening Osiris”***.

To understand what these words ***“I opened my heart to the world and the world came in”*** may mean, we have to go back to the early days of the world, somewhere in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), to the time of the downfall of Satan as pictured in the text we quoted above from Isaiah 14:13-14. One could say that Satan – alias the False Prophet - left his dependant position from God (Jude 1:6) and he no longer gave his heart to God, the Creator, but he opened his heart to the creation, the world, to own the world and to equate himself to the world and in doing so defying God. Satan, the serpent, did the same thing to man in paradise when he tempted man to open up his heart to the world, he succeeded and the world came in and man fell.

Now Satan tempted Jesus to do the same thing and have Jesus open his heart to the world but here Satan failed. We read of this in Matt. 4: 8-10 (NLT): *“Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.” Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him’.* Jesus could have opened his heart to the world and would have owned all the kingdoms of the world and their glory but the world did not come in and Jesus rejected Satan’s offer.

Verse 2.

Hello Mary Lou - Hello Miss Pearl

My fleet footed guides from the underworld

No stars in the sky shine brighter than you

You girls mean business and I do too

In the first verse we have seen that the deceptive influence of the False Prophet crept into the body and soul of the ancient Egyptian culture, but the story does not end there. The False Prophet is a trickster of all times and ages who is also active in our modern times, and even more so because he knows that soon his active days on earth days will come to an end. Therefore, when the False Prophet goes on to say:

“Hello Mary Lou - Hello Miss Pearl” the camera is focussed on our modern times. When ***“My fleet footed guides from the underworld”*** is added, it seems that a sardonic and sinister game is played with these two ladies. ***“Fleet footed”*** means nimble and fast on one’s feet , something one might expect from juveniles like Miss Mary Lou and Miss Pearl. ***“The underworld”*** represents this luminal world, the abode of the dead and imagined as being under the earth. ***“The underworld”*** is also the place, the pit, where the fallen angels are kept until judgement day (2 Peter 2:4). The underworld is the Sheol of Ezekiel 32:17-32, where Egypt and her allies, slain by the sword, lay.

The False Prophet is a trickster by profession and a master of distortion and has the habit of twisting and turning things round. Therefore, the sardonic irony in the words ***“My fleet footed guides from the underworld”*** show that the False Prophet knows that he is not guided by Miss Mary Lou and Miss Pearl but it is the other way round, Miss Mary Lou and Miss Pearl are guided by him.

Now ***“Hello Mary Lou - Hello Miss Pearl”*** seems an obvious reference to ***“Hello Mary Lou”***, a love song from Ricky Nelson, and to ***“Miss Pearl”*** a song by Jimmy Wages. However, to call these two ladies ***“My fleet footed guides from the underworld”*** and to describe the intention of these two ladies as ***“You girls mean business and I do too”*** seems problematic and in the case of Mary Lou -when you examine the innocent lyrics of the song ***“Hello Mary Lou”*** - even farfetched. It requires no stretch of imagination to picture where the words ***“You girls mean business”*** refer to. ***“Business”*** in this context brings to mind the world of prostitution, red-light districts or some escort service. Now when you examine the lyrics of ***“Miss Pearl”*** an allusion to wantonness, if not prostitution, seems by no means farfetched. Some of the lyrics point in this direction: ***“Miss Pearl, Miss Pearl, daylight recalls you, hang your head, go home, the***

way you look right now ,I know you never, I know you never more gonna roam” and “The signs on you show, you've been out so late”.

As far as Mary Lou is concerned, it is not for the first time that the poet seems to put Mary Lou in the realm of the luminal world, the kingdom of darkness. In Dylan’s song “*Dignity*” the part Mary Lou plays seems spooky: “*I went to the wedding of Mary Lou. She said, “I don’t want nobody see me talking’ to you”, said she could get killed if she told me what she knew about dignity”.*

However, for the connection to Mary Lou, we feel we’d better not focus our attention on Ricky Nelson’s song “*Hello Mary Lou*”, This song may merely function as some sort of a red herring to lead us to another song from Ricky Nelson: “*Garden Party*”. For Dylan it is not so difficult to identify himself with “*Garden Party*” because Dylan himself is referred to in the lyrics of the song: “*And over in the corner, much to my surprise, Mr. Hughes hid in Dylan's shoes wearing his disguise”.*

As far as the Mary Lou connection is concerned, there are a number of reasons why we should pay attention to Ricky Nelson’s song “*Garden Party*” rather than to his song : “*Hello Mary Lou*”. First of all, Mary Lou is mentioned in “*Garden Party*”: “*I said hello to “Mary Lou”, she belongs to me”.* Secondly, when you closely examine the lyrics of “*Garden Party*”, it appears that in this garden party, people are dressed up, people are trying to hide their true identity: “*When I got to the garden party, they all knew my name, no one recognized me, I didn't look the same” and “No one heard the music, we didn't look the same”.* Thirdly, Nelson’s song “*Garden Party*” breathes the atmosphere of disguise, deception and trickery, a world with which the False Prophet- alias Satan- is all too familiar with. In some sort of a way Dylan’s “*Man of Peace*” also very much breathes the same deceptive atmosphere as “*False Prophet*”, albeit seen from a different perspective. In “*Man of Peace*” there is also a garden party going on: “*I can smell something cooking, I can tell there’s going to be a feast, you know that sometimes Satan comes as a Man of Peace”.* Now it seems as if the poet identifies the protagonist in Nelson’s “*Garden Party*” with the ways of the False Prophet. It is as if we hear the False Prophet, through the voice of the protagonist, speak: “*I said hello to “Mary Lou”, she belongs to me”.* By stating that Mary Lou belongs to him, the False Prophet pulls Mary Lou into his own sphere, the underworld.

The use of the word “garden”, here and later on in the song, when it says: “***Let’s walk in the garden - so far and so wide***” may be an allusion to the Garden of Eden, the place where Man was deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3).

When the False Prophet says of Miss Mary Lou and Miss Pearl that “***No stars in the sky shine brighter than you***” this can be interpreted as a defiance of Jesus who is called the shining morning star in Rev.22:16. As we have seen, one of the attributes of the False Prophet, alias the devil, is that he encourages people to worship and idolize the creature – in this case Mary Lou and Miss Pearl – rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Apart from this, in Isaiah 14: 12-14 (NKJV)the False Prophet awards the title of morning star to himself: “*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God”.* The False Prophet laughs in his sleeve when divine stardom is bestowed upon his mortal epigons, like Miss Mary Lou and Miss Pearl. “***No stars in the sky shine brighter than you***” fits Rick Nelson and Janis Joplin well, because both died young, when – according to human standards- their stars where shining brightly.

Verse 3.

I’m the enemy of treason - the enemy of strife

I’m the enemy of the unlive d meaningless life

I ain’t no false prophet - I just know what I know

I go where only the lonely can go

On the face of it, the words “***I’m the enemy of treason - the enemy of strife, I’m the enemy of the***

unlived meaningless life” do not fit in with the negative image of a False Prophet. But things are not what they seem. The False Prophet -alias the devil - has two faces and pursues alternately two seemingly opposite tactics. The one tactic is a violent one of persecution and brutal oppression resulting in imprisonment, torture and killing of his victims. The other tactic is peaceful deception. When he pursues this latter tactic, the False Prophet proclaims to be a peacemaker who pretends to hate treason and strife. The Prophet Jeremiah debunks this sort of false prophecy: *“from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely, they have healed the wound of my people lightly saying “peace, peace” when there is no peace”* (Jer.6:13,14). Dylan’s song *“Man of peace”* resonates here: He – Satan, the False Prophet – *“is a great humanitarian, he’s a great philanthropist”*. Now the refrain of *“Man of Peace”*: *“You know sometimes Satan comes as a man of peace”* is a parody on 2 Cor. 11:14 where it says: *“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”*. And it is this tactic of disguise which the False Prophet deploys in this stanza, the False Prophet pretends to be an angel of light who of course is very reasonable being and full of the best intentions.

Now **“Treason”** is usually regarded as an act of criminal disloyalty against a state, the nation and its sovereign. *“Peace for our time”* were the words the False prophet seems to have laid in the mouth of the UK Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in his 30 September 1938 speech with regards to the Munich Agreement he made with Hitler; an agreement which soon turned out to be an act of high treason towards the Czechoslovakian people, selling them to Hitler.

“I’m the enemy of the unlived meaningless life” faintly resonates Socrates who is said to have said: *“The unexamined life is not worth living”*. According to Wikipedia: *“The unexamined life is not worth living” (Ancient Greek: ὁ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ) is a famous dictum apparently uttered by Socrates at his trial for impiety and corrupting youth, for which he was subsequently sentenced to death, as described in Plato’s Apology”*.

Bob Jope may be right in his weblog article *‘False Prophet: ‘Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?’* when he observes that *“Blake considers Energy to be opposed to Reason, the force which, he believes, restrains desire. He exalts the life of the passions over that of Reason and the true poet/seer/prophet should exalt passionate life and deny imprisoning restraint, the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ (in ‘London’) that chain us down. Comparably, Dylan’s prophet declares: “I’m the enemy of the unlived meaningless life”*. Intriguingly, too, where Blake is the enemy of reason (mocked punningly as a god, Urizen) Dylan’s prophet – or seer – declares himself **“the enemy of treason”**.

In the eyes of the False Prophet, however, **“an unlived meaningless life”** is a life is not worth living when it does not pursue the slogan ‘Carpe Diem’. ‘Carpe Diem’ means “seize the day”, a phrase used by the Roman poet Horace to express the idea that one should enjoy life while one can. But the False Prophet encourages people to pursue ‘Carpe Diem’ in a hedonistic way, so that pleasure and satisfaction of desires is the highest good and proper aim of meaningful human life. But the downside of this so-called meaningful life is, that an unpleasant feeling creeps into your mind, a feeling as if you are on the Titanic, heading for disaster, like it says in 1 Cor. 15:32: *“Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die”*.

For the first time we now here the refrain of the song: **“I ain’t no false prophet”**. In our introductory remarks above, we already outlined that there might be an autobiographical undercurrent in this statement. We concluded that the more fervently the False Prophet denies being a False Prophet, the clearer it becomes that indeed he is a False Prophet. Here the False Prophet states two reasons why he pretends not to be a False Prophet: 1. **“I just know what I know”** and 2. **“I go where only the lonely can go”**.

1. **“I just know what I know”** may be valid claim and a claim which is false. A valid claim can be proven

and a false one not. When Jesus, the Prophet of all Prophets, makes the claim ***“I just know what I know”***, this claim is valid. When the False Prophet makes this claim, this claim is false. We read of Jesus’ claim that he knows what he knows in John 8: *“Jesus told them, “These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don’t know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Our own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other.”*(John 8:14-18 NLT). In the eyes of the Pharisees the claim of Jesus that he knows what he knows is not valid because in their eyes – and according to their human standards- this claim cannot be proven. But Jesus has an important and decisive second witness: God, the Father. God the Father testifies about Jesus in the Old Testament and validates Jesus’ claim.

But there is another factor which validates the claim ***“I know what I know”*** and that is Deut. 18,21,22. Deut. 18:21,22 says that the words of a true prophet come true and the words of a false prophet do not come to pass or come true. ***“I know what I know”*** and ***“I just said what I said”*** is not decisive but whether or not the contents of these words come true. E.g. Jesus, during his stay on earth, prophesied the fall and destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24) . This prophecy came true and Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

The False Prophet, on the other hand, *“climbs into the frame and shouts God’s name, but you’re never sure what it is”* (Dylan’s *“Political world”*). The only thing he can go by on is 2: ***“I go where only the lonely can go”***. The loneliest place you can ever imagine is the so-called “depths of Satan” and the False Prophet has access to this place, in fact it is his natural habitat. A false prophetess named Jezebel also had access to these depths of Satan (Rev.2:20-24). In this lonely place *“the emptiness is endless, cold as the clay”* as Dylan assesses in his song *“Mississippi”*. This “depth” of Satan stands diametrically against the depth of God.

Only the Holy Spirit is capable to search the depth of God (1 Cor 2:10). In this depth of God there is not only an immeasurable and inexhaustive amount of riches, wisdom and knowledge (Romans 11:33) but also communion, a harmonious place bristling with love communion within the Trinity. Quite the opposite of the lonely place where ***“only the lonely can go***. To end up in a place ***“where only the lone can go”*** is bad but the final conclusion which the False Prophet draws in this the song, the conclusion that he is ***“ nobody’s bride”*** is much worse.

Verse 4.

I’m first among equals - second to none

I’m last of the best - you can bury the rest

Bury ‘em naked with their silver and gold

Put ‘em six feet under and then pray for their souls

Thanks to the Rev. Walter Lee who brought to my attention that the AABB rhyme scheme that is so neatly followed throughout the song is broken in this verse. Dylan could have easily written, ***“I’m the first among equals, I’m the last of the best, second to none, you can bury the rest”*** but he doesn’t and there must be some reason for this broken rhyme scheme. Now to address this query we first should note that ***“first among equals”*** is a translation of the Latin phrase *“Primus inter pares”* derived from Ancient Greek. It is typically used as an honorary title for someone who is formally equal to other members of their group but is accorded unofficial respect, traditionally owing to their seniority in office. In Mat. 12:24 Satan (Beelzebub) is called the *“prince of demons”*. In a way, one could say that Satan is the ***“first among his equals”***, among his equals, the demons. No doubt Jesus can be called ***“first***

among equals". Why? Because He practiced this principle in dealing with the 12 disciples and this is confirmed by Romans 8:29 where He is called the *"first born among many brothers and sisters"* Hebrews 2:12 says *"So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters"* (NLT). Jesus, the Son of God, who is called the "first" in everything (Colossians 1:18) is not ashamed to be called **"first among equals"**, among his earthly brothers and sisters. But now there is a huge difference between the False Prophet – alias Satan – proclaiming that he is the **"first among equals"** and of Jesus proclaiming the same thing. When Jesus is qualified as **"the first among equals"**, this may be called an honorary title and a reward which He received because of his unprecedented self-sacrifice for His brothers and sisters. Satan is called the ape of God. When Satan is qualified as the **"first among equals"** this is a fake statement, full of guile, and this pretended condescension is therefore immediately followed by a bragging statement that he is **"second to none"**. Satan, Lucifer claims to be second to none when in Isaiah 14: 13 he says : *"I will exalt my throne above the stars of God"*. In a way, what the right hand of the False Prophet advances by modestly stating that he is the **"first among his equals"**, is drawn back by his left hand when he braggingly claims that he is **"second to none"**. This is the only reason I can think of why the AABB rhyme scheme is broken in this verse. *"Rough and Rowdy Ways"* is thematically an interwoven album and some lines of thought in one song- though in a different context - are reappear in other songs on the album. **"Second to none"** reappears in the last stanza of *"Murder Most Foul"* where it says: *"Was a hard act to follow, second to none, they killed him on the altar of the rising sun"*. The *"Altar of the Rising Sun"* is located in Beijing' s diplomatic quarter and once used to sacrifice to the God of the Sun. Anyway, this is a territory the False Prophet is all too familiar with because Ezekiel 8:16 condemns worshipping the God of the Sun: *"And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east"* (KJV).

The False Prophet goes on to say that he is **"the last of the best"**. In Islam Muhammad is generally regarded as the last and the best of the prophets sent by God. Whereas the words **"first among equals"** in the mouth of Jesus is the result of self-sacrifice , surrender, humility and companionship, the same words in the mouth of the False Prophet work itself out not only in a bragging: **"I am the last of the best"** but also subsequently in a cursing and humiliating exposure both of his opponents: **"You can bury the rest, bury 'em naked with their silver and gold put 'em six feet under and then pray for their souls"**. Somehow these words still seem steeped in the Ancient Egyptian cultural burial practices we above dealt with. The exodes of the Hebrews comes to mind, when they escaped from their grave of Egyptian slavery and bereft the Egyptians of their jewellery, their silver and gold. (Ex.3:22 and 12:36) The Egyptians would have rather buried the Hebrews with their silver and gold in the Red Sea, than letting them go and set them free. **"You can bury the rest"** in the mouth of the False Prophet may mean as much as 'forget about the rest, I am the only one in the universe who is of any importance'. **"Bury them naked"** is an expression of utmost exposure to defilement and humiliation, in the same way as Two Timing Slim's corpse was dragged through the mud (In Dylan's *"Soon After Midnight"*). According to Wikipedia the expression **"put them six feet under"** is a reference to the plague:" The origins of **"six feet under"** come from a 1665 outbreak of the plague in England. As the disease swept the country, the mayor of London literally laid down the law about how to deal with the **bodies** to avoid further infections. The law eventually fell out of favour both in England and its colonies". **"Pray for their souls"** alludes to a Roman-Catholic practice to pray for salvation of the souls of the deceased who dwell in

Purgatory.

Here it is as if the False Prophet has us return to the liminal sphere of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, to Osiris, Lord of the liminal world. Again it is as if we witness the voyage of some dead pharaoh to the liminal world. The Egyptian book of the Dead: *"This white boat of spirit ferries the body through dark water, carries the heart of gold through the red core of earth. Great is the god in his boat"*. Prayers are sent out for the return of the soul to the earth: *"therefore with regularity, the spirit returns to its source to bask in the wonders of god, to draw strength from the fire, then go into the world to rage against the serpent of darkness"*.

The Book of Revelation (Chapter 17) reveals that the False Prophet, alias the Beast-, turns himself against his own loyal companions, the harlot and all of her followers. The harlot in Revelation represents Babylon, the mother of all harlots and abominations on earth (Rev. 17:5). The avenger of the Beast is bitter: *"And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. (Rev. 17:12 KJV)*. It is as if the False Prophet first says to the harlot and all of her followers: ***"Open your mouth - I'll stuff it with gold"***. And the False Prophet did stuff the mouth of the harlot and her companions – the Great Babylon - with gold when you consider all the riches, the silver and gold he gave them (Rev. 18:12). But subsequently when the False Prophet has stuffed their mouth with gold, just like the Beast, he starts to loath his own children and dismisses them snarling: ***"bury 'em naked with their silver and gold put 'em six feet under"*** followed by a cynical ***"and then pray for their souls"*** suggesting that prayer will do them no good.

Verse 5.

What are you looking at - there's nothing to see

Just a cool breeze encircling me

Let's walk in the garden - so far and so wide

We can sit in the shade by the fountain side.

By nature invisible daemons are invisible, so that is why it says ***"there's nothing to see"*** but they also hate to be closely examined and exposed. When Jesus exposes them and pulls them out of their comfort zone, they shrink back. Therefore, ***"What are you looking' at - there's nothing to see"*** also sounds like a reproach. *"Just for a second there I thought I something move"* (Dylan's *"Things have changed"*) could easily have been followed by ***"What are you looking' at - there's nothing to see"***. As said Satan is the ape of God. He likes to pass himself off as God or as an angel of light. Here the False Prophet takes the words of God in his mouth because ***"Just a cool breeze encircling me"*** and also ***"Let's walk in the garden - so far and so wide"*** can primarily be said of God as He walked through the garden of Eden communicating with Adam and Eve: *"Then the man and his wife heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the breeze of the day, and they hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden"* (Gen. 3:8 BSB cf. 1 Kings 19:12). The Biblical expression "to walk in" usually refers to one's lifestyle, one's moral conduct. It may either be a lifestyle full of faith and devotion to God, just like Enoch in Gen. 5:24: *"Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away"* or it may be a lifestyle full of sin (c.f. Eph. 2:2). So when the False Prophet invites you saying ***"Let's walk in the garden - so far and so wide"*** this may in itself be a neutral statement and may simply be an invitation for confidential communication as you walk along in the garden.

However, when these words are followed by ***"We can sit in the shade by the fountain side"*** this takes it a step further. Because, when you "sit" down with somebody you come under his or her spell. When you take a walk with the False Prophet there is always the possibility to escape from his influence, but

once you sit down with him, there is no turning back. The images that are used here are Biblical. In the dry land of Israel with its hot and dry climate, you are always in need of shade against the burning sun and in need of fresh living water from a fountain. In the Bible a well, a spring, a fountain of water is a metaphor for the abundant everlasting life God gives to his people like it says in John 4:14 *“but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* and in Rev. 21:6 *“And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”* (KJV). However, when you decide to succumb to the temptation of the False Prophet to **“sit in the shade by the fountain side”** he can do with you as he pleases and in the end, when it is too late, you will find out that these fountains, *“These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever (2 Peter 2:17 KJV).*

Verse 6.

I’ve searched the world over for the Holy Grail

I sing songs of love - I sing songs of betrayal

Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat

I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet

In this verse the False Prophet is involved in a number of activities and in doing so sets an example to his followers to do the same, with the only one purpose to draw a red herring across the track of his followers and to keep all those who are not *“busy being born, busy being dying”*.

According to Wikipedia, the Holy Grail is a treasure that serves as an important motif in Arthurian literature. There are multiple interpretations of what this Holy Grail stands for, from Jesus’s vessel from the Last Supper, to all sorts of objects related to the crucifixion of Jesus. There are many conspiracy theories circling around about the Holy Grail and there are many myths and legends dealing with the Holy Grail, too many to list here. Take e.g. Dan Brown’s 2003 bestseller *“The Da Vinci Code”*.

Thanks to Walter Lee who pointed out to me that this whole verse may be about Lancelot and his quest for the holy grail. He is the French singer who entices the love of Guinevere. He betrays Arthur as he comes in, and in his effort to rescue Guinevere, he removes the armour on his feet and hands to cross the Bridge of Swords and gets across, cut up and wounded in his effort.

And as far as the holy grail is concerned, there is of course also the Indiana Jones connection to this verse. Indiana Jones is also referred to in the opening track of this album *“I contain multitudes”* where it says *“I’m just like Anne Frank, like Indiana Jones, and them British bad boys the Rolling Stones”*. First there was this movie *“Raiders of the Lost Ark”*- of which most of the action took place in Egypt- and where Indiana Jones finally finds the lost Ark of the Covenant after digging the Well of Souls. This movie was later followed by the movie *“The Last Crusade”*, which may be regarded as a sort of remake of the *“Raiders of the Lost Ark”*, except for the fact that it is now the Holy Grail and not the lost Ark of the Covenant, which is searched for.

The point the poet may intend to make here is that false prophecy, personified by the False Prophet, has searched the world over to find the Holy Grail and by doing so encourages people to do the same and keep on searching for this Holy Grail, regardless of what it may mean. The Holy Grail is a labyrinth in which people easily get lost. And that is exactly what the False Prophet is intending. The opposite is also true. *“Seek and you will find”* (Matt. 7:8) Jesus promises but, when you truly do that, such a search may be qualified by the false prophecy as **“looking for nothing”** like in Dylan’s song *“Marching to the City”* where it says: *“Well I’m sitting in church in an old wooden chair, I knew nobody would look for me there, sorrow and pity rule the earth and the skies, looking for nothing in anyone’s eyes”*.

Any attempt to find God is ***“looking for nothing”*** in the eyes of the false prophecy. The purpose of the False Prophet is to distract the attention of people away from God and encourage people to lose themselves in trivialities like finding the Holy Grail. This exactly corresponds to the warning Paul gives to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:4 : *“not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training, that is in faith”*.

“I sing songs of love - I sing songs of betrayal” shows the two seemingly opposite faces of the False Prophet under which he operates. ***“I sing songs of love”*** pictures the deceptive face of the False Prophet. According to Dylan’s song *“Man of Peace”* the devil - alias the False Prophet- *“Knows every song of love that ever has been sung”* but underneath there is this vicious counterpart of these so-called “love” songs and these are the songs of betrayal. Betrayal is core business for the False Prophet, culminating in Judas’s betrayal of Jesus. This betrayal reminds us of Dylan’s song *“With God on our side”* (for a detailed analysis of this song, please go to my Bob Dylan song analysis page elsewhere on this website) Dylan says there: *“Through many dark hour, I’ve been thinking about this, that Jesus Christ was betrayed by a kiss. But I can’t think for you, you’ll have to decide, whether Judas Iscariot had God on his side”* . Here, love – expressed by a kiss- and betrayal are seemingly intertwined. False prophecy always tries to legitimize itself by appealing to the word of God and proclaiming that it has God on its side. Judas is the personification of such a False Prophet and if he would say ***“I sing songs of love - I sing songs of betrayal”*** and if by saying so he would fulfil the Scriptures (e.g.. Acts 1:16), such a confession would nevertheless not take away his responsibility for this evil act. Whereas Moses sings a true song of love and redemption (Ex.14) together with the Lamb (Rev. 15:3-5), expressing a righteousness which constitutes pure love, the great imitator of God sings his songs of “love” and betrayal.

When the poet goes on to say ***“Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat”*** followed by ***“I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet”*** these two lines seem contrasting. ***“Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat”*** shows the utmost moral indifference and disrespect for the body, whereas ***“I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet”*** at the same time shows a meticulously executed flagellation of the body to achieve a desired mental state. Yet these two seemingly contrasting attitudes fit the False Prophet’s message well.

It is true, ***“Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat”*** may be an allusion to Jesus when Jesus declared all food kosher (Mark 7:19, e.g. also Acts 10:15) but when the False Prophet takes these words into his mouth, his intentions are quite different and the casual indifference from the False Prophet seems to encourage unbridled consumerism as a means to divert attention from deeper spiritual thoughts. The False Prophet could not care less that this unbridled consumerism ***“Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat”***, leads to huge medical problems like obesities from which millions of people around the world – and especially in the USA - suffer. It suits the agenda of the False Prophet well that in rapid speed we consume our planet’s resources at the expense of the many very poor. What ***‘Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat’*** may result in, is nowadays deeply felt all over the world in the Covid-19 pandemic that is raging over our planet. They say that the Covid-19 virus originates from bats which are traded in Chinese food markets. Deep down inside, ***‘Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat’*** represents the False Prophet’s false claim that the earth and all of its resources belong to him whereas in reality it belongs to the LORD. (Psalm 24:1.) *“Eat whatever is sold in the market without raising any questions on the ground of conscience”* (1 Cor.10:25) is quite the opposite of and has nothing to do with the casual ***‘Don’t care what I drink - don’t care what I eat’*** . *“Eat whatever is sold in the market without raising any questions on the ground of conscience”* is deeply rooted in a free conscience and a free conscience always entails a responsible use of all resources based on the fact that *“the earth*

is he Lords' and everything in it "(1 Cor. 10:26).

"I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet" is a reference to a Zen Buddhist training method: "From here on, emptiness is no longer a realization. Instead it becomes a tool that you will use for the reminder of your training. After you answer the Mu koan, you will begin to work through any number of other koans. **Zen calls this climbing the mountain of swords that is riddled with the skulls of the fallen. Each koan forces you to confront some aspect of yourself – some fear, attachment, belief that is keeping you from true enlightenment**". These words go back to Wumen Huikai a Chinese Chán (in Japanese: Zen) master during China's Song period. In the 48-koan collection called *"The Gateless Barrier"* it says: "You must carry the iron with no hole. No trivial matter, this curse passes to descendants. If you want to support the gate and sustain the house, **You must climb a mountain of swords with bare feet**".

"Mountain of swords" is a Chinese idiom for some sort of ordeal. They say that "上刀山, 下火海" means "dare to climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames". 刀山(Mountain of Swords) is said to be an old Buddhist ritual, one of the cruellest sort of self-torture from the underworld.

When the False Prophet says: **"I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet"**, this Buddhist self-imposed torture shows a harsh treatment of the body which Colossians 2:23 strongly denounces: "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (NIV). As far as the body is concerned, there seems to be a sharp contrast between the casual indulgence and contempt for the body shown in **"Don't care what I drink - don't care what I eat"** on the one hand, while on the other hand, there is the utmost attention for, and deployment of, the body as a way to achieve enlightenment in **"I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet"**. Yet these seemingly contrasting two notions are two sides of the same medal and both are part of the False Prophet's armoury. The equivalent to **"Don't care what I drink - don't care what I eat"** is the fatalistic *"Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die"* (1 Cor. 15:32). The equivalent to **"I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet"** is the "false humility" and the "harsh treatment of the body" of Col.2:23. Whereas Jesus' deep physical and emotional suffering portrayed by Dylan in *"Make You feel my Love": 'I'd go hungry'*(Matthew 4:2), and *"I'd go black and blue, I'd go crawling down the avenue* (of Gethsemane Matt. 26:39), **Oh there's nothing that I wouldn't do to make you feel my love'** shows Jesus' profound love and determination to save others, the False Prophet's **"I climbed a mountain of swords on my bare feet"** is only egoistic self-exhortation.

Verse 7.

**You don't know me darlin' - you never would guess
I'm nothing like my ghostly appearance would suggest
I ain't no false prophet - I just said what I said
I'm here to bring vengeance on somebody's head**

The False Prophet seems to be aware of the fact that his **"ghostly appearance"** scares off people and might give them that creepy haunted feeling that something is wrong. Terrified they were, the disciples of Jesus when they were in a boat on the sea of Galilee and Jesus passed by walking on the water and they thought he was a ghost (Marc 6:50). Intuitively the False Prophet feels that his ghostly appearance may impede his victim's surrender to him and therefore he attempts to reassure his victims by pretending that he has no evil intentions and that they have nothing to fear. He tries to reassure his victim by addressing her as **"darling"** and it is as if you hear the echo of Dylan's *"Man of Peace"* where Dylan says of Satan: *"He'll puts both his arms around you, you can feel the tender touch of the beast"*. **"What are you looking at - there's nothing to see"** of verse 5 sounded like a reproach but here the False

Prophet intends to take away any suspicion in a gentle way.

We already dealt with the possible meaning of ***"I ain't no false prophet - I just said what I said"*** in the introductory remarks made in Part 1 of the analysis of this song.

"Vengeance" means a punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offence. Both the False Prophet and God use the word ***"vengeance"***. However, when the False Prophet uses the word ***"vengeance"*** in ***"I'm here to bring 'vengeance' on somebody's head"*** his intentions are quite different from God's intentions when God uses the word ***"vengeance"***. When God says ***"Mine is the vengeance"*** (Romans 12:19 quoting Deut. 32:35) God's intention is to do justice to those who have been wronged. From God's side ***"vengeance"*** is an act of love and justice, to set things right. From the side of the False Prophet ***"vengeance"*** is an act of just pure evil. The False Prophet is out to bring vengeance ***"on somebody's head"***; for the False Prophet it is quite indifferent who the person targeted is, it might be anybody; he couldn't care less as long as he can ruin and inflict damage on a person. We find a classic example of this ***"vengeance"*** in 2 Chron. 18:18-22. A spirit – a daemon- stepped forward in the heavenly council and said that he was ready to bring vengeance on King Ahab's head saying ***"I will entice him"***. He indeed succeeded in enticing Ahab to wage war against Ramoth-Gilead and we see that - because of this vengeance- Ahab was killed in the following battle against Ramoth-Gilead (2 Chron. 18:34).

Verse 8.

Put out your hand - there's nothin' to hold

Open your mouth - I'll stuff it with gold

Oh you poor Devil - look up if you will

The City of God is there on the hill

The primordial sin of man in the Garden of Eden was that man wanted to be like God and be independent from God. ***"Putting out one's hand"*** is just the opposite and a token of dependence from and surrender to God and that is a humble attitude which the False Prophet very much loathes. The False Prophet knows that anyone who puts out his or her hand to God in prayer for heavenly aid, will be heard. But such prayers are sometimes not answered immediately and the full realization of God's promises lies in the future. This requires patience and perseverance in faith from the side of the believer. The False Prophet targets his fiery darts on the weak spot of the believers and that is their patience and perseverance. Therefore, he constantly puts their patience and perseverance to the test by trying to make them believe that ***"there is nothing to hold"*** as if he says to them: "you may put out your hand to God and trust him, but his promises are empty and vain and he leaves you empty handed, but I can give you everything you want right now". These are the scoffers who say ***"there is nothing to hold"***. These are the same scoffers, who, inspired by the False Prophet, will come and say: ***"Where is the promise of his coming?"***(2 Pet. 3:4 RSV).

When the False Prophet goes on to say: ***"Open your mouth - I'll stuff it with gold"*** the False Prophet claims that he – unlike God -can give you instant inner peace and wealth. It is the sort of ***"instant inner peace"*** Dylan denounces in his song ***"When you gonna wake up"***: ***"Spiritual advisors and gurus to guide you every move, instant inner piece and every step you take has got to be approved"***.

When it says: ***"Open your mouth - I'll stuff it with gold"*** this reminds us of Crassus, the wealthy Roman, who had his mouth stuffed with molten gold by the Parthians, after losing a battle in 53BC.

It also reminds us of a quote from the British Labour Minister of Health Aneurin Bevan, who shortly after the Second World War, said: ***"I stuffed their mouths with gold"*** after allowing British doctors to continue seeing private patients- and allowing these doctors to make a lot of extra money out of it – on top of the money they made on accepting NHS patients.

Something comparable happened in the 1990s when U.S. hospitals, began buying primary care physicians and their practices by **“stuffing their mouths with gold.”** To incite doctors to become their employees hospitals initially paid them exorbitant salaries—essentially bribes.

When it says **“Open your mouth - I’ll stuff it with gold”** the poet may allude to the so-called prosperity gospel which is widespread especially in the USA. The adage of the prosperity gospel is the religious belief that *“financial blessing and physical wealth well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one material wealth”*(Wikipedia). It is as if the False Prophet says: “Don’t put out your hand to God, because if you do so, there is nothing to hold, only vague future promises, there is nothing tangible to hold which you can enjoy right now. But if you follow me and **“open your mouth, I’ll stuff it with gold”**. Gold teeth is usually a sign of extravagant luxury and that is what this prosperity preacher, this False Prophet, promises to give instantly to all those who follow his instructions.

When it says **“Oh you poor Devil - look up if you will, the City of God is there on the hill”**, the False prophet speaks condescendingly to the believers as if they are to be pitied: **“Oh you poor Devil”**. It is as if the False Prophet says: “It is true, God promises you a City of Gold (Rev.21:8) but you have to look up for it, you do not have it right now, it is there on the hill and beyond reach and who says that you will ever reach this City,”. **“On the hill”** may also allude to the hill of Calvary. The City of God is the New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven (Rev. 21:2) but it is on Mount Sion where also the hill of Calvary is. Calvary – the hill where Jesus was crucified - also smacks of suffering and it is as if the False Prophet wants to make it clear that if you follow God you will suffer and if you follow the False Prophet, you will get rich instantly.

Verse 9.

Hello stranger - Hello and goodbye

You rule the land but so do I

You lusty old mule - you got a poisoned brain

I’m gonna marry you to a ball and chain

Although it may make the analysis of this song a little less coherent, yet we feel that there is reason enough to believe that -only in this verse- there is a change of perspective. A change of perspective, because it seems that here the False Prophet is not the speaker – as in the previous verses and the following verse - but the addressee. It is God - or more precisely Jesus- who now addresses the False Prophet.

Before we go deeper into this, we should note that the words **“Hello stranger”** echo a song from the Stanley Brothers called *“How Far To Little Rock”* where it says: *“Hello, stranger, (Why, hello there, stranger), Ah, could you tell me how far it is to Little Rock?(Well no sir I couldn’t, buddy, but they’s a devil of a big’n down here in Pap’s old field”*. The words **“Hello stranger”** also echo a song from The Carter Family called *“Hello Stranger”*. The song has the line *“I’m prison bound, I’m longing to be free”*, a line which happens to breathe the same atmosphere of imprisonment, the same sphere of imprisonment as the **“ball and chain”** in **“I’m gonna marry you to a ball and chain”**.

There seems to be a certain symmetry in two song titles. In verse two we had the song **“Hello Mary Lou”** and here in verse nine we have the song **“Hello stranger”**. The **“goodbye”** here echoes the **“goodbye”** from *“Hello, Mary Lou, Goodbye, heart”*.

Above we said that there may be a change of perspective in this verse and now the False Prophet is the addressee and is addressed by Jesus as **“Stranger”**. In John 10 Jesus tells us that He is the good shepherd, the sheep recognize His voice and follow Him. But his opponent who cares nothing for the

sheep is addressed as a **"Stranger"**. John 10:5 says: *"And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers "* (KJV).

In Mat. 7:15 Jesus says: *"Beware of the false prophets"*. Mat. 7:22,23 Jesus says of these false prophets: *"On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?" and then I will declare to them, 'I NEVER KNEW YOU; depart from me, you evildoers' (RSV). Jesus does not know these false prophets, they are strangers to Him. "Depart from me" may mean as much as "goodbye".*

When God – or Jesus- says to the False Prophet: **"You rule the land but so do I"** this does not mean that God and the False Prophet are equals and that they equally share their power to rule the land. Since the victory of Jesus on the cross the devil is defeated and therefore Jesus says in John 12: 31: *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out"*(NKJV). It is true, some power – and that may be nasty- is left to the False Prophet – alias the devil-. His rule consists of prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour (1 Peter 5:8) but his power is limited and can only go as far as God allows him to go. Jesus is in command, therefore, **"But so do I"** means that in reality all power and authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus (Mat. 28:1). In his famous 2004 CBS interview Dylan alludes to this this by cryptically referring to Jesus as *"the Commander in Chief in this world and in a world we can't see"*.

The words **"You lusty old mule"** may be almost literally quoted from Homer's *"Iliads"*. A translation of this poem can be found in The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, Volume 10-11: *"The Iliads and Odysseys of Homer"*, where in LIB. XXIII *"The funeral games for Patroclus"*, on Page 281 -line 655-670- it says:

*"A prize for him that won at fist and ball, a mule of six years old, and hard to rule
As for the vanquished, be assigned to him a lesser prize, which was a silver cup, that crooked and wryed
was about the brim. Achilles then amongst the Greeks stood up. Atrides, and you Argives all, said he, let
two men fight for these at fist and ball; the lusty mule shall for the victor be, the cup for him that in the
night shall fall. This said, Epeius, a huge man stood up, and that had at this kind of fight great skill, and
seized the mule, and said, as for the cup, let any one against me rise that will ,the mule is mine; at this
game I am best".*

The first thing that strikes us is, that there is an exquisite word pun here. The *Iliads* speaks of a "ball" in *"a prize for him that won at fist and ball"*. In the next line *"I'm gonna marry you to a ball and chain"* another sort of "ball" is introduced. Not a "ball" used in a game, but another sort of heavy metal "ball", a ball used in combination with a chain to restrain and detain a prisoner.

Apart from this pun, one may wonder why the False Prophet is addressed here as **"You lusty old mule"**?. Now the dictionary describes a mule as *"the offspring of a donkey and a horse (strictly, a male donkey and a female horse), typically sterile and used as a beast of burden"*. It is true, mules are less stubborn and more intelligent than donkeys, yet they still can be very stubborn. This can also be said of the False Prophet -alias Satan of old-. They say that *"Pride goes before a fall"* and it was this stubborn "mulish" pride that led to the downfall of Satan. Now the False Prophet is characterized here as a **"lusty"** old mule. Where true love is lacking, only carnal **"lust"** remains. The False Prophet entices you to believe that sex outside a love relationship may be called love, but the truth is that such a love is only lust. Apart from **"lusty"** the False Prophet is also characterized as an **"old"** lusty mule, not strange when you consider that Rev. 20:2 calls the serpent, the devil, an "ancient" or old serpent. An additional reason why we feel that the False Prophet is the object in this verse and not the subject is the line **"you got a poisoned brain"**. "Poison" reminds us of a serpent; the old serpent of Rev. 12:9 who is Satan- alias the

False Prophet. The False Prophet is said to have a **“poisoned brain”**. This means that his mind is fully occupied by poisonous and evil schemes, he is the embodiment of all evil. John 8: 44 calls him the murderer from the beginning. **“You got a poisoned brain”** also reminds us of the garden of Eden when the devil disguised as a serpent, injected Eve and Adam from his own poisoned brain with his poison and he did so by questioning the integrity of God in a very deceptive way. (Gen.3:1).

There is irony in the words **“I’m gonna marry you to a ball and chain”**. Literally and figuratively. To understand this we must first realize that there has been a continuous quest in Dylan’s oeuvre to get free from earthly lust and to achieve the perfect and pure love of matrimony. On the Latter Day – when the final whistle (or trumpet) is blown- “lust” will be finally defeated and a pure and perfect matrimony will be consummated . Then it will be just like he said in his song “Duquesne Whistle”: *“Listen to that Duquesne whistle blowing, blowing like my woman’s on board”*. An earthly matrimony is a foreshadowing of the eternal matrimony between Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride (cf. Eph.5:31-33). On the Latter Day and lasting into all eternity, there will be a marriage between Christ and all of his followers, just like it says in Rev. 19:7 *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”*(NKJV). The “Lamb” in this verse stands for Christ and “his wife” stands for the church.

Now in **“I’m gonna marry you to a ball and chain”** there is also a marriage, but it is a marriage **“to a ball and chain”** and that is the irony, or to be more specific the “iron-y”. The False Prophet will be married to irons into all eternity, or to put it in Dylan’s own words, the False Prophet is **“Cold irons bound”**. In the final verse we hear the False Prophet boast: **“I’m nobody’s bride”**. That is how the False Prophet will end up. In the third verse we heard the False Prophet say: **“I go where only the lonely can go”** but he will not only go there but he will also stay there. A marriage **“to a ball and chain”** is not a marriage to look forward to. Christ’s marriage to the church and the False Prophet’s marriage to **“a ball and chain”** cannot be more contrasted!.

The **“chain”** echoes Revelation 20:1,2: *“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. He seized the dragon—that old serpent, who is the devil, Satan—and bound him in chains for a thousand years”* (NLT).

Verse 10.

***You know darlin’ the kind of life that I live
When your smile meets my smile - something’s got to give
I ain’t no false prophet - I’m nobody’s bride
Can’t remember when I was born and I forgot when I died***

The quasi familiar words from the False Prophet **“You know darlin’ the kind of life that I live”** are meant to inspire confidence. These words seem to echo the doctrines of another False Prophet – in this case a self-proclaimed false Prophetess called Jezebel- referred to in Rev. 2:19-29. This False Prophetess is said to know the *‘depths of Satan’*. To fully know and understand **“The kind of live that I live”** may be the same as to know the *‘depths of Satan’*, just like Jezebel once knew the depths of Satan. Jesus condemns and exposes this False Prophetess Jezebel and admonishes the church of Thyatira not to follow Jezebel into the depths of Satan; not to follow her into the life she lives: *“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden”*(Rev. 2:24 NKJV).

The words **“when your smile meets my smile”** suggest that an evil pact with the devil is fabricated. **“When your smile meets my smile”** may be seen as some sort of a token of a tacit agreement. Magical power is given to such an agreement, because when this happens, when these two smiles meet, the

inevitable result is that ***“something’s got to give”***. ***“Something’s got to give”*** means that that tension is building up and that whatever is supporting everything is going to break under the pressure.

“Something’s got to give” also means that *‘the current situation cannot remain unchanged for much any longer; one side or the other has got to yield’*. (Farlex Dictionary of Idioms). This is exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden when man yielded to the devil and fell into sin (Genesis 3).

The ***“something”*** in ***“Something’s got to give”*** was that Adam and Eve gave up their innocence, it was the day *“when innocence died”* (Dylan’s Ring them Bells). Losing their innocence meant that, when they opened up their eyes, they knew that they were naked (Gen 3:7). ***“Something’s got to give”*** also implies that something else broke down there in the Garden of Eden. This turned out to be a turning point in the history of mankind, because when the LORD God concluded: *“Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil”* (Gen.3:22), this meant that man not only lost his innocence, but now also knew of good and evil, and from then on has been able to experience what ***“the kind of life”*** the False Prophet lives involves, albeit with devastating result. ***“The kind of life”*** turned out to be an evil life, but man cannot unring the bell and undo what has been done.

For the third and last time the False Prophet says: ***“I ain’t no false prophet”*** but this time it may be different. This time, on the album version – but not in the official lyrics on Bob Dylan’s website for that matter- the words ***“I ain’t no false prophet”*** are followed by an emphatic ***“No”***. A third negation makes a statement affirmative again and therefore from here on, it looks as if the False Prophet speaks the truth. There is truth in the proud statement from the False Prophet when he says: ***“I’m nobody’s bride”***.

This is not because the False Prophet loves the truth, on the contrary, he is a liar from the very beginning. To be somebody’s bride means that there must also be a groom. It means that there is matrimony. The metaphor used in the Bible is that of a matrimony between the groom Christ and his bride the church (Eph.5:25-27). It is a matrimony which will be extended into all eternity. The metaphor of a happy matrimony is used to symbolise the eternal love and protection from the groom (Christ, the Lamb) for his bride and the eternal devotion to the groom from the side of the bride (the church).

Revelation 19:7-9 also uses this metaphor and says: *“Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honour 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”*(NLT). The False Prophet cannot and does not want to be part of this eternal wedding feast. It would be the last thing he would ever wish. To him this wedding party it is an abomination. In fact, it is the reason why he says: ***“I’m nobody’s bride”***. The False Prophet – alias Satan- represents the fallen Babylon which is condemned in Rev. 18:23: *“The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The happy voices of brides and grooms will never be heard in you again. For your merchants were the greatest in the world, and you deceived the nations with your sorceries”* (NLT). For so long in history, the False Prophet had been the head of business men who drank his wine and of ploughmen who dug his earth, but this will all come to a halt when suddenly, at the Latter Day, the eternal wedding between the groom and the bride starts. At that Day the False Prophet will be left empty handed in an existence where the happy voice of a bride and a groom will never be heard again and in which the words ***“I’m nobody’s bride”*** will be fulfilled.

“Can’t remember when I was born and I forgot when I died” wraps it all up. Again the book ***“Awakening Osiris”*** – A New Translation of the Egyptian Book of the Dead- written by Normandi Ellis (Phanes Press)- is almost literally quoted. In chapter 8 called *“Triumph over Darkness”* 2nd paragraph we find: *“the ways of making indeed are wondrous, the child born of its mother, the sun rolling into sky, the song rising from the lips, the world springing from the word of god. The essence of life is brilliant, dazzling. I cannot explain such miracles, yet I embody them daily. Though I cannot remember my birth and shall*

forget my death, I live in the midst of wonder."

To make sense of ***"Can't remember when I was born and I forgot when I died"*** we must plunge into Greek Mythology. In Greek Mythology the LETHE was the underworld river of oblivion and its goddess. The river LETHE flowed around the cave of Hypnos and through the underworld (the Hades). All those who drank from it experienced complete forgetfulness. LETHE was the name of the Greek god of forgetfulness and oblivion and the personification thereof. The shades of the dead drank from its waters to completely forget all about their mortal earthly troubles and woes.

This symbol can also be found in the last section of Plato's Republic, where souls are required to drink from the River of Forgetfulness before they are able to return to their earthly life. Others connected this idea to the doctrine of reincarnation where one continuously reappears in a new format of life with a clean slate. In Virgil's Aeneid we find that drinking these waters is said to *"quench man's troubles [with] the deep draught of oblivion"*.

First we should examine the meaning in Classical Greek of the word "lethe". We find that "lethe" literally means "oblivion", "forgetfulness", or "concealment". It is related to the Greek word for "truth", which is "alētheia" which through the privative prefix "a" (alpha) literally means "un-forgetfulness" or "un-concealment". This is not without importance. Jesus calls Himself the "alētheia", the "ἀλήθεια" – the truth – in John 14:6.

Now Jesus Christ is the antitype of the False Prophet- alias Satan. He does quite the opposite of what the False Prophet does. In our imagination we see the False Prophet plunging himself into the waters of the LETHE and drinking from its waters, and then claiming that he has reached a status in which he can say: ***"Can't remember when I was born and I forgot when I died"***. The False Prophet pretends to be able to reach a status of permanent oblivion, a status where the memory of his wickedness is erased and where he cannot be held accountable for his evil deeds, a status in which his conscience has been seared up and a status in which justice will never be done. But he is wrong. Now Jesus follows a quite opposite route. In a certain way, He remembers every little detail of what we have done, of the kind of live we have lived. He does not erase the film of our lives. He puts our life – and our sins – under a magnifying glass and confronts us with the memory of our sins. However, He does so *not* to condemn us but to reconcile us. His soteriological working order is that of confrontation followed by justification and reconciliation. A reconciliation, so that the prayer of the thief on the cross: *"Jesus remember me, when you come into your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42 RSV) was well grounded and therefore answered by Jesus. However, in another sort of way, there is also a divine non remembrance. Once our sins are reconciled, the memory of sins are gone. In Micah 7: 19 it says: *"You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!"* and Hebrews 8:12 *"And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."* (NLT).

It is true, as long as we are in our mortal existence, it is sometimes better to have a forgetful heart, just like Dylan wrote in his song *"Forgetful Heart"*: *"Forgetful heart, lost your power of recall, every little detail, you don't remember at all"*. A forgetful heart is necessary to soften the pain we suffer under the sun: *"Without you it's so hard to live, can't take much more"*.

The False Prophet says: ***"Can't remember when I was born and I forgot when I died"*** but God already knew us and remembered us, even before we were born, like it says in Psalm 139:16: *"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all my days were written in Your book and ordained for me before one of them came to be"* (BSB).