

FS 101–26: the Cultural World of Bob Dylan
Fall Semester 2013

- Time and location: MWF 9:00–9:50, Arter 213.
- Instructor: Judson Herrman, jherrman@allegheny.edu.
- Office hours: every day (when classes are in session) 11:00–12:15 in Ruter 304.
- Description: an examination of Dylan as a musical, literary, and general cultural phenomenon, in the context of popular and higher literary culture of the last fifty years, but also in the context of those long-lived literary and musical cultures with which he works. We trace the evolution of his songs and lyrics from their early folk, blues, rock, gospel, and protest roots, through the transition from acoustic to electric, in studio and performative contexts, and also through the many evolutions and reinventions that continue to characterize his career in music, literature, film, and painting. Coursework emphasizes the development of effective oral and written communication skills with a focus on description, summary, and critical thinking.¹
- Course books:
 - **Chronicles** Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (New York, 2004).
 - **Wilentz** Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (New York, 2010).
 - **Hacker** Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference* (Boston and New York, 7th edition, 2011). We will use this item as needed for reference regarding grammar, style, and formatting in writing and citations. Students should consult this item for questions of this sort that arise as they write. Students are also encouraged to ask in class when they have questions about this material.
- Electronic resources:
 - <http://www.expectingrain.com> : a daily collection of links to all sorts of Dylan media coverage.
 - <http://www.bobdylan.com/us/songs> : a list of all songs with information about release and live performance, and with links to lyrics and the option to purchase individual tracks.
 - <http://www.bobdylan.com/us/events> : a list of live performances and setlists.
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan_discography : details regarding the release of albums and songs.
- Requirements:
 - Meet your advisor (5%). You are required to meet your advisor at least twice during the semester, by dropping in at office hours or by scheduling an appointment. The first meeting should take place before Fri. 20 Sept., and the second should happen around Wed. 20 Nov. (You are welcome and encouraged to visit more often, of course.)
 - Attendance and informed participation in discussions (20%). You are expected to complete the assigned readings before class and to be prepared to discuss them and ask questions in class.
 - Impromptu unannounced in-class writing (10%). Occasionally at the beginning of class you will be asked to write for twenty minutes on a specific question regarding the material to be discussed that day. Missed quizzes count as nil and cannot be made up; they will be excused if there is written

¹ This course description and many of the details of this syllabus are adapted and borrowed from the similar course taught by Richard F. Thomas at Harvard University. I acknowledge my debt and thank him for his kind permission to use this material.

evidence of an unanticipated health or family emergency.

- Speeches (20%). Two speeches will serve as the basis of two essays. For the first speech (4–5 minutes) students should identify a particular song for their focus. They should describe the song and connect it with other material from within or outside the course. The presentation should emphasize narrative and factual reporting and should utilize at least one electronic resource in its preparation. For the second speech (6–8 minutes) students should also focus on a (different) specific song. They should argue for a specific interpretation and analysis of the song, utilizing printed and electronic research sources.
- Essays (45%). There are three written assignments. The first (2 pages, due 6 Sept., 10% of grade) asks students to describe their prior knowledge and experience with Dylan and American music. The purpose of the essay is twofold: to tell the instructor about your background, and to show the instructor how you write. The second essay (3 pages due 9 Oct., 4 pages due 23 Oct., 15% of grade) is a formal written version of the first speech, it likewise stresses narrative description and presentation of comparative material, and should use at least one electronic source. The third essay (4 pages due 22 Nov., 5 pages due 12 Dec.; 20% of grade) is based on the second speech, and requires a formal written presentation of a specific argument and interpretation; it must incorporate library and electronic research.
- Grading criteria:
 - For discussion:
 - § an A discussant has always completed the reading and made note of specific passages or examples for discussion, and is always ready to make constructive and thoughtful contributions.
 - § a B discussant has almost always completed the reading and made note of specific passages or examples for discussion, and regularly makes constructive and thoughtful contributions.
 - § a C discussant does the reading but does not contribute very often.
 - § a D discussant is unprepared and unable to engage with any specific aspect of the reading, and yet may offer unconstructive or irrelevant comments.
 - § an F discussant frequently misses discussions and when present does not contribute.
 - Speeches are graded as “check” (= B), “plus” (= A) or “minus” (= C); missed speeches count as nil and can only be made up when there is written evidence of an unanticipated health or family emergency. The entire class will participate in the assessment of speakers by submitting grades and comments and discussing content and delivery.
 - § a “plus” speech is clearly organized and very detailed in content; the delivery is compelling and engaged.
 - § a “check” speech comprehensively considers the relevant material; the delivery may be somewhat hesitant or lacking in confidence.
 - § a “minus” speech shows lack of preparation regarding the content and lack of engagement in the delivery.
 - For writing:
 - § an A paper has a specific and intriguing thesis; it makes accurate and ample references to specific details and sources; it is clear, cohesive, and clean (no grammar or spelling errors); it has well formatted bibliography and citations.
 - § a B paper has a thesis that is clear but perhaps less intriguing or refined; it refers to sources, but

perhaps not amply or without as close an eye for detail; it may have a few slips in grammar, spelling, citation or bibliography.

§ a C paper lacks a clear thesis, but still engages with the relevant material, perhaps without specific references, and is relatively clear in presentation, with some grammatical and spelling slips.

§ a D paper lacks a thesis, generalizes throughout, and does not address any specific details of the assigned material; it may show abundant signs of carelessness in spelling and grammar.

§ a F paper does not sufficiently consider the assigned material at all.

§ late paper policy: papers are due in class; only printed hard copies will be accepted. Late submissions will be penalized by a third of a grade (for example, from B to B-) for each day they are late, beginning at the end of class on the day they are due.

— According to the Honor Code (printed in *The Compass*) we have all pledged that “the Honor Program shall apply to all work submitted for academic credit” at Allegheny. We will discuss what this means on Sept. 9; please don’t hesitate at any point to ask if you are in doubt.

• Schedule:

Wed. 28 Aug. Course introduction and syllabus. Short impromptu writing assignment (1 page).

Fri. 30 Aug. Dylan: the phenomenon, sources, approaches, justifications. Read **Wilentz**, 1–14.

1941–62: From Duluth to the Village

Songs: Girl From The North Country; Bob Dylan’s Dream; Walls Of Red Wing; House Of The Risin’ Sun; Kingsport Town; Song To Woody; Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie; Man Of Constant Sorrow.

Topics: gospel; Guthrie; poetry; folk music; biography and fiction; carnival.

Mon. 2 Sep. Read **Wilentz**, 17–46.

Wed. 4 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 1–22 and **Wilentz**, 47–57.

Fri. 6 Sep. Read **Wilentz**, 57–84. Introductory writing assignment revision due (2 pages).

Mon. 9 Sep. The Honor Code and academic honesty.

1962–64: Race, War, Love

Songs: Blowin’ In The Wind; Masters Of War; A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall; Oxford Town; The Times They Are A-Changin’; When The Ship Comes In; The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll; With God On Our Side.

Topics: Civil rights; Cuba; Vietnam; music and social justice.

Wed. 11 Sep. Read **Wilentz**, 87–104.

Fri. 13 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 25–51.

Mon. 16 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 51–77.

Wed. 18 Sep. Using electronic sources.

1964–65: Love, Literature, Language

Songs: It Ain’t Me Babe; Ballad In Plain D; My Back Pages; To Ramona; Chimes Of Freedom; All I Really Want To Do; Mr. Tambourine Man; It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding); Gates Of Eden.

Topics: surrealism; imagery; complexity of language.

Fri. 20 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 77–104.

Mon. 23 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 225–258.

Wed. 25 Sep. Read **Chronicles**, 258–293.

1965–66: What is a classic? #1: Thin Wild Mercury Music

Songs: Tombstone Blues; Like A Rolling Stone; Highway 61 Revisited; Ballad Of A Thin Man; Desolation Row.

Topics: Folk to hip; Suze to Sara; identity and concealment.

Fri. 27 Sep. Descriptive and comparative speech, presentations and discussions.

Mon. 30 Sep. Descriptive and comparative speech, presentations and discussions.

Wed. 2 Oct. Descriptive and comparative speech, presentations and discussions.

1965–66: (cont.) Baez, Newport, The Band, and “Royal Albert Hall”

Songs: Positively 4th Street; Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands; Fourth Time Around; Just Like A Woman; Visions Of Johanna.

Topics: Pennebaker and movies/videos; England 1965, 1966; drugs; the Beatles.

Fri. 4 Oct. Discuss the conversion of speech to a written essay; students should be prepared to discuss and identify specific electronic sources for this assignment.

Mon. 7 Oct. Read **Wilentz**, 105–128.

Wed. 9 Oct. Draft of descriptive and comparative essay due (3 pages). *No Direction Home* and *Don't Look Back* selections.

1966–73: Off the road: Americana, Country Rock, the Bible

Songs: I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine; All Along The Watchtower; Dear Landlord; I Threw It All Away; Country Pie; Clothes Line Saga; Tears Of Rage; Day Of The Locusts; Went To See The Gypsy; Bessie Smith.

Topics: The bible and JWH; Dylan and Johnny Cash; Woodstock, the Band and Big Pink.

Fri. 11 Oct. Read **Chronicles**, 107–124.

Wed. 16 Oct. Read **Chronicles**, 124–141.

Fri. 18 Oct. Peer review and discussion of revision process from draft to final version of descriptive and comparative essay; drafts returned.

1975: What is a classic? #2: Songs of Love and Hate

Songs: Shelter From the Storm; If You See Her, Say Hello; Lily, Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts; Idiot Wind; Simple Twist Of Fate; Tangled Up In Blue; Up To Me.

Topics: Painterly focus; ballads/narrative complexity; aesthetics of pain.

Mon. 21 Oct. Read **Chronicles**, 145–181.

Wed. 23 Oct. Revision of descriptive and comparative essay due (4 pages). *I'm Not There* selections.

Fri. 25 Oct. Read **Chronicles**, 181–221

Mon. 28 Oct. Library research methods.

1975–78: Rolling Thunder and the Changing of the Guards

Songs: Sara; One More Cup Of Coffee; Oh, Sister; Isis.

Topics: The tour; musicians and fellow travelers; alternative lyrics; centrality of Blood on the Tracks.

Wed. 30 Oct. Read **Wilentz**, 131–150.

Fri. 1 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 150–171.

Mon. 4 Nov. Interpretative and argumentative speech, presentations and discussion.

1978–1991: The Christian Years and Muse Mislaid? Or not?

Songs: Señor; Changing Of The Guards; Gotta Serve Somebody; Every Grain Of Sand; Joker-man; Caribbean Wind; Blind Willie McTell.

Topics: Dylan and religion; outlaws and jokers; pop in the 80's; gospel and the blues.

Wed. 6 Nov. Interpretative and argumentative speech, presentations and discussion.

Fri. 8 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 172–206.

Mon. 11 Nov. Interpretative and argumentative speech, presentations and discussion.

1992–2001: What is a Classic? #3: Never Ending Tour to “Love and Theft”

Songs: Lone Pilgrim, Diamond Joe; Blackjack Davey; Delia; Shooting Star; Trying To Get To Heaven; Not Dark Yet; Cold Irons Bound; Highlands; Mississippi; High Water (for Charley Patton); Lonesome Day Blues; Floater; Sugar Baby.

Topics: Coming back; folk and blues practice; melancholy; Mississippi; intertextuality.

Wed. 13 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 209–236.

Fri. 15 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 237–258.

Mon. 18 Nov. Read Ross (handout).

Wed. 20 Nov. Individual advising meetings; no class.

2002–2007: What is a Classic? #4: On the Road to Modern Times

Songs: Thunder On The Mountain; Spirit On The Water; When The Deal Goes Down; Working-man's Blues #2; Nettie Moore; Ain't Talkin'.

Topics: More intertextuality; politics; economy; memory; 19th century.

Fri. 22 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 261–286. Draft of interpretative and argumentative essay due (4 pages).

Mon. 25 Nov. Read **Wilentz**, 287–304.

Mon. 2 Dec. Read **Wilentz**, 305–319. Draft of interpretative and argumentative returned.

2008–2012 Bringing It All Back Home: Tell Tale Signs to Tempest

Songs: Red River Shore; Tell Ol' Bill; Can't Escape From You; Beyond Here Lies Nothin'; Forgetful Heart; Must Be Santa; Tin Angel; Tempest.

Topics: Outtakes; civil war; Huck Finn; love lost; aesthetics of memory and regret; in the studio; playing with time.

Wed. 4 Dec. Read **Wilentz**, 319–330. *Theme Time Radio Hour* selections.

Fri. 6 Dec. RSE. Peer review and discuss revision of interpretative and argumentative essay.

Mon. 9 Dec. Read **Wilentz**, 331–335.

Thur. 12 Dec. Revised version of interpretative and argumentative essay (5 pages) due at 9:00am in Ruter 304.