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LIT 236L.02: Dylan & His Times

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LIT 236-02:

Dylan & His Times

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Peter Zillmer (TA)
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Thursdays 2:00-4:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

LIT 236, a course in American literary and cultural history and the history of American popular music, explores the music, writings, and history of Bob Dylan, a winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Taking the 1960s as the primary focus of the course—with a look at and listen to some of his later work—we will situate Dylan’s songs in their historical, cultural, and especially musical contexts. We’ll explore his roots in folk music and the blues and trace his evolution into a rock and country musician and, eventually, into a master of the broad palette of American music. Along the way, and as part of our efforts to situate Dylan in his times, we will also have the opportunity to read works by the Beats (particularly Ginsberg) and to study some of the history and literature of the American War in Vietnam. As the course progresses, we’ll also have opportunities to discuss different critical concepts and terms and to apply them to the primary texts. The course aims to deepen your sense of the breadth and history of American music and cultural history and to deepen your interpretative skills. (**Fair Warning:** The material on the American War in Vietnam contains images of catastrophic violence and death.)

Please note that this course fulfills both the requirements for Group V: Literary and Artistic Studies (L) and the requirements for Group I: Writing (W; Intermediate College Writing).

REQUIRED TEXTS

Audio

Selected Tracks by Bob Dylan & Others

Print

Dylan, Bob. *Chronicles Volume One*. (Simon & Schuster.)
Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl & Other Poems*. (City Lights.)
Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. (Vintage.)

Occasional Supplementary Readings.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze works of art, including songs and albums, with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms. Specifically, students will:

a) understand the historical, cultural, critical, and literary contexts of the Beats, the literatures of the American War in Vietnam and the American 1960s and, especially, understand the historical, cultural, critical, literary, and musical contexts of Bob Dylan's work;

b) understand the major characteristics of such musical genres as country, rock, folk music, the blues, Americana, and more, and the major characteristics of such literary movements as Modernism, Postmodernism, and whatever period we are in now, and will be able to utilize those characteristics to analyze individual songs, albums, and literary works;

2. Develop coherent arguments that analyze and critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical. Specifically, students will:

c) be able—while drawing on appropriate critical terms and concepts—to state clearly the central themes, concepts, and ideas at play in individual works;

d) be able to evaluate the musical, lyric, literary and cultural importance and/or significance of individual songs and works;

e) be able to engage thoughtfully and openly with a range of critical and theoretical perspectives on literary and cultural (and even controversial) issues, including the ability to state clearly the assumptions and premises of their own positions;

f) be able to perform a literary close listening and reading (both in class discussions, exercises, and assignments and in out-of-class writing assignments), demonstrating an ability to listen to, read, and interpret songs, albums, and literary works by thoughtfully integrating quoted passages into larger argumentative claims; and,

g) be able to write clear, grammatically correct, and rhetorically effective papers of literary and cultural analysis and interpretation (and perhaps even of critique), driven by a thesis and sustained by logic, textual and historical evidence, and a reasoned, ordered, and coherent argument.

GRADING

Quizzes, Short Writing Assignments ¹ :	30%
Essay (5+ pages):	30%

¹ As much as possible, we will try to give you time in-class to complete these assignments; on some occasions, you will need to complete them outside of class time.

Final Exam ² :	30%
Participation:	10%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please note that you must submit at least 10 of the weekly quizzes/short writing assignments, turn in the out-of-class essay, and take the final exam in order to pass the course. The essay will be deducted ONE letter grade for EACH class period it is late.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Since the course involves quizzes, writing assignments, and informed discussions of the songs and readings, attendance and participation are crucial: after THREE absences, your FINAL GRADE will be deducted ONE letter grade for each additional absence.

E-mail correspondence: Please use your UM e-mail account for electronic correspondence with the instructor. Faculty are NOT permitted to reply to messages from other email servers or accounts.

Class Policy on Electronic Devices: *Cell phone use is not permitted in class;* you may, of course, use laptops during class for note-taking and other class-related work only.

DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Department Assessment: The Department of English's ongoing process of assessing its curriculum requires a committee of professors to read student papers (including exams) to learn how students in general are progressing through the program or course of studies. Thus, your professor may ask for an electronic version of your essay to use in this assessment process. (All identifying information—such as name or ID number—will be removed and no evaluation of student work outside the boundaries of the course will play any role in determining a student's grade.) If you do not want your work used in such a way, please inform your professor and she or he will not forward it to the Assessment Committee. Otherwise, the Department of English appreciates your tacit consent.

University Assessment: This course requires an electronic submission (via Submittable) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university's writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following Writing Learning Outcomes:

- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing

² Covers material from the entire course and will consist, in all likelihood, of a combination of essay and short answer questions.

- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions like APA or MLA)
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university. Here's the [rubric](#) that will be used to score the papers.

Plagiarism, Academic Integrity, and the Student Conduct Code: ***Plagiarism: the use of someone else's ideas or words as if they were your own.*** To avoid this contravention of the fundamental values of the academy, you ***must*** acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, work that has influenced your thinking. For more on matters of Academic Integrity, see the Student Conduct Code available on the web:

<https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/student-code-of-conduct-2020-pdf>

Accommodation: Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for coursework. To request accommodation, please contact the professor as soon as possible. For more information, visit the Disability Services website:

<http://www.umt.edu/disability-services/default.php>

COVID

Adapted from the Office of the Provost, University of Montana (and, as always, subject to change as the pandemic warrants); in short, we will all do our best in the face of these challenging times:

1. Mask use is REQUIRED with the classroom or laboratory;
2. If you feel ill and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please DO NOT come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330;
3. If you are required to isolate or quarantine, instructors will do their best to support your continued academic progress;
4. UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to the Curry Health Center;
5. Where social distancing (maintaining a consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts;
6. Class attendance will be taken in order to support contact tracing efforts; and,
7. Drinking liquids and eating food is DISCOURAGED within the classroom.

SYLLABUS

- M Jan 24: Introduction/Semester Plan/Thinking Critically, Historically, & Culturally
Handouts (on course page):
 “The Humanities, Critical Thinking, and Carl Sagan’s ‘The Fine Art of
 Baloney Detection’”
 “Think Historically”
 “Think Culturally”
 “A Dylan Timeline”
- M Jan 31: Understanding Dylan?/Noise/Songs
Lecture: Dylan: Influence, Multitudes, Innovation, Enigmatic (Fabulations),
Immersion, Archetypal, & More
Tracks³:
 Jimi Hendrix, “All Along the Watchtower”
 Dylan, “All Along the Watchtower”
 The Byrds, “Mr. Tambourine Man”
 Dylan, “Mr. Tambourine Man”
 & Others
Mini-Lecture & Discussion: Attali, from *Noise*
Handout (on course page):
 Music/Song
Essay Assigned
- M Feb 7: Setting the Scene
Screening & Discussion: *No Direction Home* (Part I)
Lecture: Folk Music (& Woody Guthrie)
Tracks:
 Woody Guthrie, “This Land Is Your Land” and “Grand Coulee Dam”
 from *Bob Dylan* and *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*
- M Feb 14: The Beats
Lecture: The American 1950s & 60s (The Red Scare, War, & Civil, Women’s, &
LGBTQI Rights, & More)
Lecture: The Beats (& a Hint of The Cool)
Video Clip: Jack Kerouac on *The Steve Allen Show*
Ginsberg, “Howl” and “A Supermarket in California”
[Supplemental: Whitman, “In Paths Untrodden,” “Whoever You Are Now
Holding Me in Hand,” and “I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing”]
Dylan, *Chronicles* 1-142

³ Although we will be listening to individual tracks in class, I strongly encourage you to listen to the tracks several times BEFORE coming to class. As well, each of the tracks gains immeasurably—as does our understanding of them—if we listen (again, as many times as possible) to the entire album from which the songs are taken (and to the albums on either side, chronologically, and to Dylan’s vast oeuvre, including the massive Bootleg Series, and the popular and underground music of the corresponding era, and all the literature of the times, the front pages of The New York Times and—). In short: immerse yourself in Dylan’s work and his times as much as you can.

Tracks:

from *The Times They Are A-Changin'* and *Another Side of Bob Dylan*

M Feb 21: **No Class: President's Day**

M Feb 28: Dylan Goes Electric, Or, An (In)Famous Change in Direction⁴

Dylan, *Chronicles* 143-293

Lecture: Dylan Goes Electric/Rock n Roll

Tracks:

From *Bringing It All Back Home*

M Mar 7: The American War in Vietnam

Lecture: The American War in Vietnam

Lecture: American Lineages/American Countercultures:

The Beats→Hippies→Punks

Herr, *Dispatches* 1-131

Tracks:

Buffalo Springfield, "For What It's Worth"

The Chambers Brothers, "Time Has Come Today"

Credence Clearwater Revival, "Fortunate Son," "Run Through the
Jungle," and "Bad Moon Rising"

Jefferson Airplane, "White Rabbit"

Marvin Gaye, "What's Going On"

Scott McKenzie, "San Francisco"

M Mar 14: The American War in Vietnam (Cont.)

Herr, *Dispatches* 131-260

Screening & Discussion: *Platoon*

M Mar 21: **No Class: Spring Break!**

M Mar 28: Year(s) of Transcendent Genius 1

Tracks:

from *Highway 61 Revisited*

M Apr 4: Year(s) of Transcendent Genius 2

Tracks:

from *Blonde on Blonde*

M Apr 11: Motorcycle Accidents, Dylan, The Band, & The Old, Weird America

Lecture: Americana

Tracks:

The Carter Family, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" and "No Depression in
Heaven"

⁴ This was hardly Dylan's first change in direction—he was changing directions, often, before he even *renamed* himself from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan in August, 1962—and certainly not his last.

Alison Krauss, "Down to the River to Pray"
from *The Basement Tapes*
The Band, "The Weight" and "I Shall Be Released"

Essay Due

M Apr 18: Dylan Regains the Old Magic, Paints His Face, & Hits the Road (and More), Or, Masks, Fabulations (Cont.), Anarchy, Conversion, Confusions

Tracks:

from *Blood on the Tracks*

Screening & Discussion: *Rolling Thunder Review*

M Apr 25: The Late Trilogy, Or, The Astonishing Revisitation

Tracks:

from *Time Out of Mind*

"*Love and Theft*"

Modern Times

M May 2: Dylan Looks Back (at Whitman, America, & the 1960s)

Tracks:

from *Rough and Rowdy Ways*

Dylan, "Murder Most Foul"

Review for Final Exam