20th Century American Literature F16

DongA University Humanities

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**Bob Dylan Lecture Notes**

1. Biography :
   1. “[Robert Allen Zimmerman]was born on May 24, 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. He grew up in a Jewish middle-class family in the city of Hibbing. As a teenager he played in various bands and with time his interest in music deepened, with a particular passion for American folk music and blues. One of his idols was the folk singer Woody Guthrie. He was also influenced by the early authors of the Beat Generation [including Kerouac and Ginsberg], as well as by modernist poets.”
   2. “Dylan moved to New York City in 1961 and began to perform in clubs and cafés in Greenwich Village. He met the record producer John Hammond with whom he signed a contract for his debut album, *Bob Dylan* (1962).” “Musician, singer, and songwriter Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota; he legally changed his name to Robert Dylan in 1962 reportedly in homage to the poet Dylan Thomas.”
   3. “Dylan’s tours in 1965 and 1966 attracted a lot of attention. For a period he was accompanied by film maker D. A. Pennebaker, who documented life around the stage in what would come to be the movie *Dont Look Back* (1967).”
   4. “Dylan has recorded a large number of albums revolving around topics such as: the social conditions of man, religion, politics and love. The lyrics have continuously been published in new editions, under the title *Lyrics*. As an artist, he is strikingly versatile; he has been active as painter, actor and scriptwriter.”
   5. “Besides his large production of albums, Dylan has published experimental work like *Tarantula* (1971) and the collection *Writings and Drawings* (1973). He has written an autobiography, *Chronicles* (2004), which depicts memories from the early years in New York and which provides glimpses of his life at the center of popular culture. Since the late 1980s, Bob Dylan has toured persistently, an undertaking called the “Never-Ending Tour”. Dylan has the status of an icon. His influence on contemporary music is profound, and he is the object of a steady stream of secondary literature.” Sources: “Bob Dylan Bio: The Nobel Prize For Literature” ([www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)) and “Bob Dylan” ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org))
2. Style:
   1. Dylan’s style has evolved over his fifty plus years as a composer and a singer. The folk music scene, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger in particular, profoundly influenced his earliest work. Later his music explored other genres, including folk rock, rock, gospel, country, and jazz.
   2. “His writing is known for its verbal dexterity, wit, social commentary, and adept handling of metaphor and rhyme. His lyrics have had a profound influence on writers as well as other musicians. [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=2547), on first hearing Dylan’s music, wrote, ‘I heard “Hard Rain”—and wept. Because it seemed that the torch had been passed to another generation, from earlier bohemian, and Beat illumination.’ Joyce Carol Oates dedicated her short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” to Dylan; Oates has cited the transformative effect of his first albums: ‘the genuine power, originality and heartrending pathos . . . were like nothing we’d encountered before.’” Source: “Bob Dylan” ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org))
3. Themes
   1. Politics and Society: American folk music, which was Dylan’s earliest source of material, had its roots in the class struggles and labor movement going back to the early 20th century. These songs were overtly political, often dealing with the conflict between labor and capital, rich and poor, black and white, men and women. Dylan’s early songs inspired a generation to participate in political protest.
   2. Religion and Faith: Dylan, at one point in his career, converted to Christianity and wrote some incredibly powerful gospel music, including one of my personal favorites: “Gotta Serve Somebody.”
   3. Love: Many of Dylan’s love songs point to the poignant side of relationships. “Simple Twist of Fate” is a song about two lovers that separate under mysterious circumstances, neither really understanding why.
   4. Humor: Dylan’s music often includes jokes, puns, satire, and a healthy dose of self-ridicule. People who have met Dylan say that he is hilariously funny to talk to.
4. Major Works:
   1. Music: His debut album, *Bob Dylan* (1962), instantly shot Dylan to iconic statues. In the following years he recorded a number of albums which have had a tremendous impact on popular music: *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* in 1965, *Blonde On Blonde* in 1966 and *Blood On The Tracks* in 1975. His productivity continued in the following decades, resulting in masterpieces like *Oh Mercy* (1989), *Time Out Of Mind* (1997) and *Modern Times* (2006). Source: “Bob Dylan Bio: The Nobel Prize For Literature” ([www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org))
   2. Writings: Dylan’s lyrics have been collected in *The Complete Annotated Lyrics*(edited by Christopher Ricks, Lisa Nemrow, and Julie Nemrow, 2014), *Lyrics 1962–2001* (2004), *The Definitive Bob Dylan Songbook* (2001), and *Forever Young* (2008), illustrated by Paul Rogers. Almost two dozen of his poems appeared in *Hollywood Foto-Rhetoric: The Lost Manuscript*(2008), alongside photographs by Barry Feinstein. Dylan is also the author of a memoir, *Chronicles: Volume One* (2001), as well as *Tarantula* (1971), a prose work written in 1966. Source: “Bob Dylan” ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org))
   3. Visual Arts: In addition to his massive catalogue of music and poetry, Dylan is also an accomplished and skilled painter. His method as he describes it: “My idea was to keep things simple, only deal with what is externally visible. These paintings are up to the moment realism – archaic, most static, but quivering in appearance. They contradict the modern world. However, that’s my doing. The San Francisco Chinatown street stands merely two blocks away from corporate, windowless buildings. But these cold giant structures have no meaning for me in the world that I see or choose to see or be a part of or gain entrance to. If you look half a block away from the Coney Island hotdog stand, the sky is littered with high rises. I choose not to see them either.” From “The Beaten Path” ([www.bobdylanart.com](http://www.bobdylanart.com))
5. Important Protest Songs
   1. “Blowin’ in the Wind”
   2. “Masters of War”
   3. “Only a Pawn in Their Game”
   4. “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall”
   5. “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”
   6. “With God on Our Side”
   7. “Hurricane”
   8. “The Times They Are a-Changin’”
   9. “Senor; Tales of Yankee Power”
   10. “Desolation Row”
   11. “Just Like Tom Thumb Blues”
6. Resources
   1. Official Website (great source for lyrics): [www.bobdylan.com](http://www.bobdylan.com)
   2. Poetry Foundation page: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/bob-dylan>
   3. Wiki: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan>
   4. Great fan site “Expecting Rain”: [www.expectingrain.com](http://www.expectingrain.com)