



The Bible As Literature

Comparative
Literature 360 A
(5 credits, VLPA)
Tu, Th 1:30-3:20
Tho 134
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Collins

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it," we read in Deut. 4:2. What authorizes Bob Dylan, then, to outrageously re-do the Genesis episode of a family-on-family murder, the suggestion that a child be provided as burnt offering? In "Highway 61 Revisited" Dylan darkens a story already disturbing enough:

"God said to Abraham, 'Kill me a son.'

"Abe said, 'Man, you must be puttin' me on.'

"God said, 'No.' Abe said, 'What!'

"God said, 'You can do what you want, Abe, but
the next time you see me comin', you better run.'

All that remains in Dylan's version is a sadism with which the story appears to begin but does not end, a story in which God seems to pacifically resolve a problem he/she/it had cruelly posed through the strategy of animal substitution, the becoming impersonal of negativity, that displacement of it that is the condition of civilization itself, condition of representation, of the esthetic, etc... What gives Dylan license to torture the Biblical passage? What does it mean that traditions emerging from these texts seem to at once encourage critique of manipulated, manipulating representations (See the Second Commandment) as well as permit space within which there is allowed playful or critical distortions in the speculative re-imaginings of its personalities and events? The silences, gaps, inconsistencies, and obscurities of the texts are the condition of and justification for a class on "The Bible as Literature."