

BOB DYLAN: ALTERITY

12. Międzynarodowy Festiwal Literatury i Teatru
between.pomiędzy

BOB DYLAN

WOODY GUTHRIE

**THE TRADITION
OF PROTEST**

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**UNDERLINED TEXTS AND IMAGES ATTACHED TO THEM PROVIDE LINKS TO AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS.
EXTERNAL LINKS MARKED**



AND



Introduction



**A coloured print of the Peterloo Massacre published
by Richard Carlile**

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peterloo_Massacre.png

This chapter is about Bob Dylan and alterity (otherness, difference). It is also about Woody Guthrie, the American folk-singer that so influenced Dylan's work. Guthrie sang about bandits – a kind of social other – and so there is a section on bandits too. Both Dylan and Guthrie wrote and performed songs of social protest and so there is a section on older poems and songs of social protest.

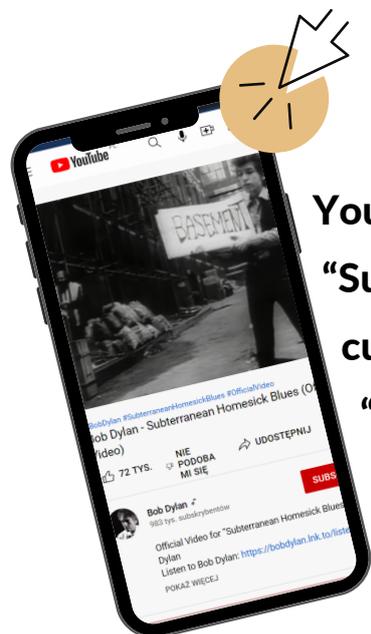
Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan (born 1941) is thought by most experts to be an important English-language singer and song writer. He has certainly had a long, varied, and commercially very successful career. In 2016, Dylan was awarded the **Nobel Prize in Literature** for his contribution to the US folk-song tradition. Dylan's early songs "Blowin' in the Wind," "The Times They Are a-Changin'" and "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall" became very popular in counter-culture and anti-war circles in the 1960s. Dylan himself in singing style and appearance cultivated an anti-establishment, outsider image, which won him many followers and made him a lot of money.

You can watch and listen to a conversation between Professor Tadeusz Rachwał of SWPS University in Warsaw and David Malcolm on the topic of "Bob Dylan and Alterity."



You can see a film of Dylan from the early 1960s singing his "Subterranean Homesick Blues." Notice his defiant counter-culture appearance and attitude. He's clearly trying to be "other" and to offend the authorities and the establishment.



Woody Guthrie

Dylan's work is inspired by that of the great US singer and songwriter **Woody Guthrie**. Guthrie (1912-1967) was the author of the celebrated song "This Land Is Your Land." His Dust Bowl Ballads album (1940) is seen as a very influential collection of songs. Many folk-musicians, country and western musicians, and rock musicians have acknowledged his influence. He wrote songs about the poor and the opponents of the status quo. His guitar often had a sign on it that read "This machine kills fascists."

See for more information



Here is one of his ballads about an outlaw - "Pretty Boy Floyd." You can listen to Guthrie singing it here



"Pretty Boy Floyd" - Woody Guthrie

If you'll gather 'round me, children,
A story I will tell
'Bout Pretty Boy Floyd, an outlaw,
Oklahoma knew him well.

It was in the town of Shawnee,
A Saturday afternoon,
His wife beside him in his wagon
As into town they rode.

There a deputy sheriff approached him
In a manner rather rude,
Vulgar words of anger,
An' his wife she overheard.

Pretty Boy grabbed a log chain,
And the deputy grabbed his gun;
In the fight that followed
He laid that deputy down.

Then he took to the trees and timber
To live a life of shame;
Every crime in Oklahoma
Was added to his name.

But a many a starving farmer
The same old story told
How the outlaw paid their mortgage
And saved their little homes.

Others tell you 'bout a stranger
That come to beg a meal,
Underneath his napkin
Left a thousand dollar bill.

It was in Oklahoma City,
It was on a Christmas Day,
There was a whole car load of groceries
Come with a note to say:

Well, you say that I'm an outlaw,
You say that I'm a thief.
Here's a Christmas dinner
For the families on relief.

Yes, as through this world I've wandered
I've seen lots of funny men;
Some will rob you with a six-gun,
And some with a fountain pen.

And as through your life you travel,
Yes, as through your life you roam,
You won't never see an outlaw
Drive a family from their home.



Outlaws

Charles Arthur “Pretty Boy” Floyd (1904-1934) was an American bank robber who operated in several US states (Kansas, Ohio, Oklahoma) in the 1930s. He was tracked down and killed by the FBI. After his death, he became a folk-hero, an outlaw fighting the banks and the establishment. Guthrie’s song is an example of his re-creation as a radical hero.

In 1969, the British historian **E.J. Hobsbawm** published a successful and influential book entitled *Bandits*. In it Hobsbawm takes as his subject what he calls **social banditry**, that is, the activities of peasant outlaws within peasant communities. He points out that this kind of banditry is a world-wide phenomenon with a very long history. He draws examples from various parts of Europe, Asia, and South America, over a long period of time up to the 1930s and 1940s. These bandits are Robin Hood or Janosik figures, living in inaccessible regions, and defending local poor people against the authorities and the rich and powerful.



Robin Hood statue,
Nottingham Castle, England.
Library of canva.com



Clyde and Bonnie embraced.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bonnie i Clyde abra%C3%A7ats.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bonnie_i_Clyde_abra%C3%A7ats.jpg)

Hobsbawm points out that reality is one thing and legend another. These outlaws become heroes in the hands of storytellers and singers. They are decent men (usually) who fight the people's enemies and share wealth with the poor. They are glamorous and die betrayed by those close to them.

While the situation in the USA is not exactly like that in medieval Sherwood Forest (Robin Hood) or in the early-modern Tatra Mountains (Janosik), you can extend the idea of social banditry to figures like Pretty Boy Floyd. Two US movies from the late 1960s that present outlaws in a glamorous light and a socially-critical way are Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). Both these movies are contemporary with Dylan's rise to fame and success.

The tradition of protest

There is a long tradition of social protest poetry. These are some examples from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy" was written in response to an attack on peaceful demonstrators in Manchester in 1819. The attack was made by local military forces and resulted in deaths among the demonstrators. Although himself an aristocrat, Shelley was a radical poet. Here he names names of important conservative politicians (Castlereagh, Eldon, and Sidmouth) and sees them as the anarchists and not the demonstrators. This is an extract.

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The Mask of Anarchy:

Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester (1819)

1

As I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over the Sea,
And with great power it forth led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy.

2

I met Murder on the way--
He had a mask like Castlereagh--
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood-hounds followed him:

3

All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

4

Next came Fraud, and he had on,
Like Eldon, an ermined gown;
His big tears, for he wept well,
Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

5

And the little children, who
Round his feet played to and fro,
Thinking every tear a gem,
Had their brains knocked out by them.

6

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
And the shadows of the night,
Like Sidmouth, next, Hypocrisy
On a crocodile rode by.

7

And many more Destructions played
In this ghastly masquerade,
All disguised, even to the eyes,
Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies.

8

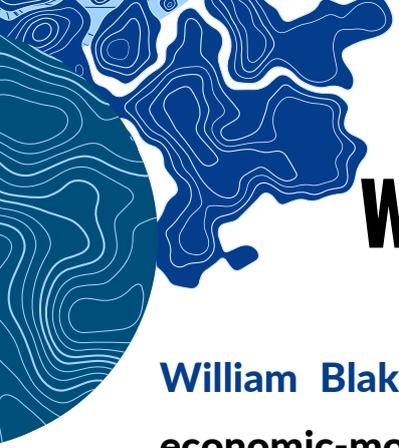
Last came Anarchy: he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

9

And he wore a kingly crown;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
On his brow this mark I saw--
'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!'



[You can read the whole text and hear a performance of the poem here](#)



William Blake's "London"

William Blake's "London" (1794) is a savage attack on the social-economic-moral organization of the modern city. Every part of the city is owned by someone (the "charter'd streets," even "charter'd Thames"). The city is filled with misery and disease. The churches are guilty and so are the palaces. The "chimney sweeper" referred to in stanza three is not a jolly man in a top hat who comes to clean your chimney, but a small orphan child sold into what was effectively slavery who was forced to climb up narrow chimneys with a brush and clean them out.

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

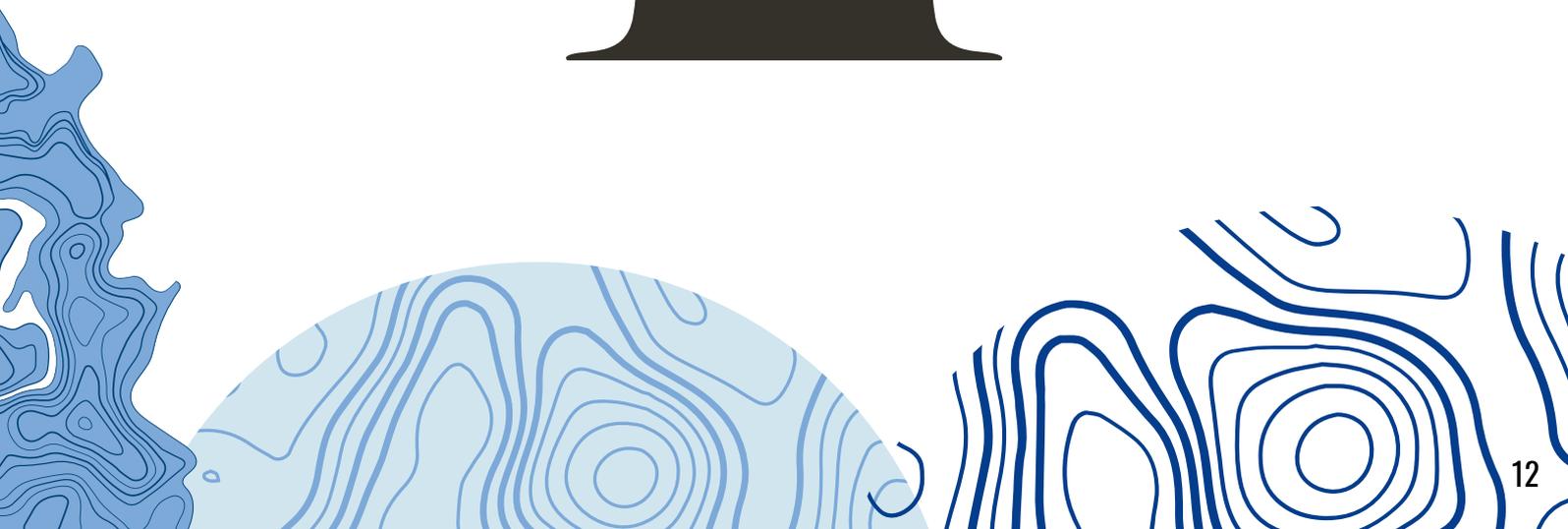
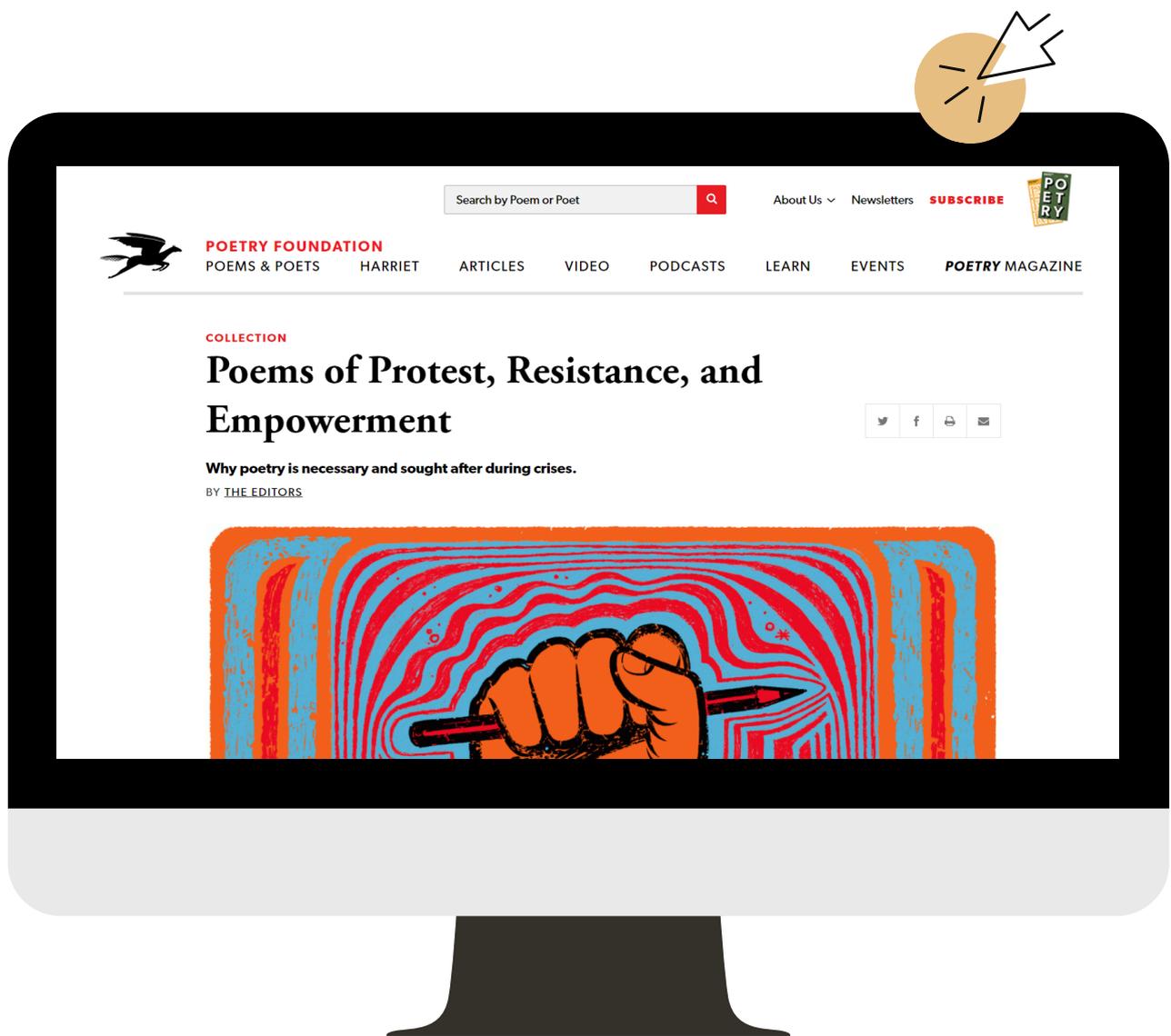
How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.



Blake was a very gifted visual artist. You can see his illustration to “London” on the internet. Just type in “Blake London image.” Is the image more hopeful than the poem itself?

If you want to read a very interesting collection of poems of protest and resistance, look at the Poetry Foundation’s collection at



Four exercises

All these exercises can be done on your own or in groups.

Exercise 1

Make a short collection (3-4 texts) of English-language or Polish protest poems or songs. Do they have anything in common? Directness of language? Use of traditional tunes or rhythms? Anger? Focus? Solutions?

Exercise 2

On your own or in a group, write a song or poem of protest. Perform it or read it aloud. Members of the group can also supply images to go with it.

Exercise 3

Make a collage of images and words that protest about an issue that you feel strongly about.

Exercise 4

Can you think of any other artists besides Dylan who have achieved fame by their outlaw image? Make a photograph essay or a brief movie about them. Or write a brief analysis of the image and its effects.

Exercise 5

Find English-language or Polish films about outlaws. Do they have anything in common? Make a brief comparative presentation.