



The Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob

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Bob Dylan was the most influential songwriter of his time. Half a century later, he continues to be a touchstone, a fascination, and an enigma. From the very beginning, he attracted an intensely fanatical cult following, and in *The Dylanologists*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Kinney ventures deep into this eccentric subculture to answer the question: What can Dylan's grip on his most enthusiastic listeners tell us about his towering place in American culture? In exuberant prose, Kinney introduces us to a vibrant underground: diggers searching for unheard tapes and lost manuscripts, researchers obsessing over the facts of Dylan's life and career, writers working to decode the unyieldingly mysterious songs, collectors snapping up prized artefacts for posterity, travellers caravanning from concert to concert. It's an affectionate mania, but as far as Dylan is concerned, a mania nonetheless. Over the years, he has been frightened, annoyed, and perplexed by fans who try to peel back his layers. Intensely private and fiercely combative, Dylan makes one thing plain: He does not wish to be known. Intelligent, entertaining, and insightful, *The Dylanologists* is a richly detailed work of narrative journalism in the tradition of *Confederates in the Attic* and an absorbing story about the tension between zealous fans and their beloved idol.

The Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob Details

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From Reader Review The Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob for online ebook

Jessika says

Like most Dylan fans, I will never forget my first exposure to his music. Most of us have had our "moment," and mine was simple, but unforgettable. I was in high school, I had just gone through my first "serious" breakup. I stumbled across a copy of *Blood on the Tracks* on my dad's shelf, decided to listen to it, and the rest is history. I got online, joined some forums, and downloaded as many studio and bootleg albums as I could. I've listened to Bob Dylan semi-obsessively ever since.

Now to my review of this book. I'll be honest, if you aren't a fan of Dylan or if you haven't had your own Dylan "moment," you will probably not enjoy this one. On the other hand, if you have ever thought to yourself, "Man, this guy really *gets* it or if meeting the man is one of your life goals, you ought to check this book out. As for me, I am anxiously awaiting May 13th so I can grab a copy of my own.

To me, this was a fascinating read. Not only is Dylan himself a completely interesting person, but his fans are just as interesting, as well. There were so many stories to get lost in here. And the thing is, for as obsessed and fanatical as some Dylan fans are, Kinney writes their accounts in a non-biased way, which I'm sure Dylan fans will appreciate. I've never read a biography of Dylan, so I can't say for certain how much new information is presented here, but I learned a lot. I was entirely enthralled while reading this on my lunch breaks at work.

Overall, this was an excellent book, and it's one that Dylan fans will want to add to their shelves. I think the biggest thing this book has going for it is its unique focus. There are countless books on the man himself, but here for the first time is an account of the fans themselves and of Dylan through their eyes. I know I will be revisiting this one upon its publication.

*I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley. This in no way affected my review.

Joseph says

Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob by David Kinney is a mix of Bob Dylan biography and part overzealous fanbase. Kinney is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who has worked for The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Boston Globe. His previous book is The Big One: An Island, an Obsession, and the Furious Pursuit of a Great Fish -- a book about Martha's Vineyard.

I would imagine that there are few people alive today who do not know who Bob Dylan is or who cannot name a few lines of one of his songs. As a child I remember listening to "Bob Dylan's Dream" on 45, mainly because the opening line mentioned trains and I loved trains. I think the only other singer I remember from that very young age was David Bowie and that was because of his eerie reading of Peter and the Wolf. Bob Dylan seemed to follow me in my younger years. I remember the Saturday Night Live parody of "Blowing in the Wind" redone as "The answer, my friends, is Ronald Reagan" in a Dylan meets the Invasion of the Body Snatchers mashup. Although Bob Dylan did not fit into my friends Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, AC/DC listening preferences in high school, I did buy Slow Train Coming. I am a fan, but nothing crazy, an occasional listener. But I will admit Dylan did have an influence on me and American culture.

To say Bob Dylan has enthusiastic fans is a huge understatement. Dylanologist brings some of the biggest fans to the spotlight. Some are so avid they make the KISS Army seem tame. Dylan's hometown of Hibbing, Minnesota is a "historic" site. The residents and the media are always alert for a Bob Dylan sighting. Zimmy's Restaurant is a shrine to Dylan and an eatery for the fans who make the pilgrimage Hibbing. Fans seek out every Bob Dylan artifact from the house he grew up in, to bootleg tapes, and everything related or touch by the singer.

The biography covers Dylan, from his childhood through the present, and like other biographies show the changes in the singer's persona. It is difficult to tell what Dylan's motivation is to constantly change his image. From folk singer, to supporting social movements, to not supporting social movements, to outspoken Christian, to talking to his rabbi, to just wanting to perform music. Dylan worked to keep his fans off balanced and not knowing what to expect next from the singer.

Dylanologist is an interesting mix of Dylan biography and the extreme fans of Bob Dylan. The intermixing of the two subjects works well and will keep the reader interested. If you have already read Dylan biographies, there is plenty of new information concerning his fans and their reactions to the various incarnations of the singer. A great book for Dylan fans and for those wanting to know what fan obsession is all about.

Tommy says

An evenhanded look at Dylan obsessives, from those who follow him on tour to those who have devoted their lives to unraveling his many mysteries.

My favorite line in the book, explaining an obsessed fan's desire to buy up as many Dylan artifacts as he could afford, including Bob's childhood home: "Once you own Bob Dylan's highchair, it becomes easy to rationalize any other purchase..."

I'll stick with owning the CDs, and letting Bob be Bob from a safe distance. He likes me better that way.

christa says

In "The Dylanologists," Dylan fan David Kinney considers the fandom of other Dylan fans, a mix that includes the guy who owns the musician's childhood home, bootleg collectors, tour followers and those who feel a sort of religious reverence for him. Kinney mixes in bits of biography for context.

People's passions are a curious thing, huh. This book is simply interesting, entertaining and it's a good way to look at the artist through different, more extreme, eye holes.

Jeff says

On a page near the end of his book, the author reminds us that, "In the summer of 2012, the Dylan myth-making operation sprang to life again. A new record was coming out, *Tempest*." Funny, you would think,

from the disenchanted tone of this, that Kinney had not treated with narrative sympathy for two hundred pages those-who-live-to-pursue-the-myth. The journalist travels to meet them and unquestioningly record their lore, reports on their methods, follows their leads, responds to their nonce exegetical assignments, acts at all costs the dutiful exegete. He does not bother to ask those projected in the future of an illusion how they afford their bourgeoisie spiritual life. He wants only to join the pilgrimage. David Kinney is no Sarah Vowell, you'll find no droll religious satire here. Reader, be prepared to suffer lots of windy cultural analysis: "Though Dylan could say [c. 1964] he was no spokesman, he could not unsing his songs. Now they belonged to the dissidents -- people under thirty, full of vigor, bursting with fresh ideas about how the world should and should not be." (46) What were the ideas? It strikes me that you either explain that Dylan *did* something to earn his cultural centrality, so evident by Woodstock, or you give up that ghost to pursue the ghost in the machine of his popularity. Kinney claims to do the latter, but must wear the garb of his journalistic profession, "myth-making operations" *natch*. What the book lacks, disastrously, is criticism, and indeed Kinney entirely avoids the crucial (because historically unavoidable) generic medium for his subject, rock criticism. The publisher, Simon & Schuster, has no misgivings casting out this anti-intellectual bait. Some little fishes will dive for warmer climes.

Steve says

Well, it's not like this is the story of my life or anything. I see myself in most every page here.

It's a well-done and readable story of Dylan and focuses on some of his more, er, serious fans and their stories over the last 40 years. It tells some of Dylan's story -- very well, and not just the well-known parts -- and how many people reacted to that story. In the 70s and 80s, it's the story of bootleg recordings and concerts, and disconnected fans reaching out to one another, and then with the advent of the near-constant touring in the late 80s, the story of many who recorded the concerts and followed Dylan around from city to city. In the 2000s, it's the story of many fan's disenchantment with both the concerts and the songwriting, especially the revelations of how much work of others Dylan borrows in his songs and books. I fall in with the camp that became disenchanted with the music after "Love and Theft" and much less pleasure in the concerts. I have met and in a case or two became friendly with, several of the people mentioned in the book, and there are some cases where I was present at some events. In all, Kinney tells this story well, from the point of view, I think, of one who has been infected with the same virus as some of those he discusses in the book.

Richard says

Might have made a good magazine article, but it got padded into a book, and it's something of a bore.

Rehashed Dylan biography - nothing new, and that's the padding. The rest has to do with time spent with various folks who have made an obsession of Dylan. Concert followers, restaurant owners, academics, and assorted nut cases. Interesting to a point, but the point comes pretty fast.

I read it because it's hard for me to pass up on a Dylan book, and it felt like a self-inflicted punishment.

The Land of Bob is between Bob's ears - we get a glimpse when he delivers his work. The Dylanologists: etc., doesn't take you much anywhere.

Paul Bryant says

A peculiar, fast-moving and queasily unpleasant gamut of emotions passed through me as I raced through this book about Dylan fans.

Gamut ? That's a word like petard. You only use it in one context. A gamut of emotions. You don't say "a gamut of vegetables was displayed on the market stall" ... "I encountered a gamut of children in the schoolroom".... Well, we should liberate this word from its phrasal confinement. But calling the grotesques foregathered in this book "fans" is like calling Eilert Pilarm a poor Elvis impersonator

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHoxK6...>

("worn though the party in a counter yale")

or Wagner's Ring Cycle long. This is the scary end of Dylan obsessiveness. Gangs of these people, for instance, follow Dylan's never-ending tour like they're commandos yomping through Helmand province. For these hardest of cores sleep is for wimps. If you must you sleep in the queue which you've joined for the next day's gig having just come out of today's gig (or if you're rich you can pay a homeless person to stand there for you, all night and the following day); or you leg it to the car to drive to the next impossible Midwestern town (could be Tuscaloosa, Carbondale, DeKalb, or Normal. Ha, Normal?). Do these people have jobs? It's hard to tell. "My boss thinks I'm still at the office," she says, rushing through her computer coding tasks on her laptop. In the queue.

Everybody knows AJ Weberman was the world's first Dylanologist, he who invented garbology, founded the Dylan Liberation Front and coined its hilarious motto "Free Bob Dylan From Himself!" AJ & his posse was rifling D's rubbish bins one day in 1971 when Sara came screeching out of the house and they had a little contretemps. Later, on Elizabeth Street, AJ was walking along when D cycled by and spotted him. Let AJ take up the tale:

A couple of days later, I'm on Elizabeth Street and someone jumps me, starts punching me. I turn around and it's like—Dylan. I'm thinking, 'Can you believe this? I'm getting the crap beat out of me by Bob Dylan!' I said, 'Hey, man, how you doin'?' But he keeps knocking my head against the sidewalk. He's little, but he's strong. He works out. I wouldn't fight back, you know, because I knew I was wrong. He gets up, rips off my 'Free Bob Dylan' button and walks away. Never says a word. The Bowery bums were coming over, asking, 'How much he get?' Like I got rolled. . .

AJ thought Dylan was singing in code, you know, like where "rain" = "heroin, and "dog" = "heroin", and so forth. So the pattern was set. And it's not hard to see where it comes from. Dylan has always sung songs of condemnation, from Masters of War

*And I hope that you die
And your death'll come soon*

to Positively 4th Street

*Yes, I wish that for just one time
You could stand inside my shoes
You'd know what a drag it is
To see you*

to Idiot Wind

*Idiot wind, blowing every time you move your teeth
You're an idiot, babe
It's a wonder that you still know how to breathe*

To the gospel stuff

*Adulterers in churches and pornography in the schools
You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules
When you gonna wake up*

And consequently people get the idea he's like one of those old testament prophets, cursing the Israelites and their kine for their vile backsliding.

It's an abusive relationship. Dylan hates and fears these crazies and they continue to make his life as uncomfortable as they can – only because they love him so much, you see. It gives them the right to complain when he's rubbish, when he slurs words on stage, when he releases stupid albums (*Down in the Groove, Saved*), when he doesn't release the right stuff, so they have to do it for him... Oh those naughty bootleggers and their falsely-pregnant girlfriends (one way to smuggle taping equipment in). Phone calls and hotel rooms and of course recording studios, nowhere is immune, Dylan is always recorded and the recordings are always bootlegged. When Dylan decided *finally* to officially release the most famous 1966 Manchester "Judas!" concert, the bootleggers sniffed and released a 10 cd edition of 1966 concerts. It's no wonder Dylan can come across as a little distrustful and resentful at times.

A fog of sadness slides through this book. Yes, some of it is funny. Some nutter once told Dylan his lyrics were like the Bible because you could find everything you needed to know in there somewhere. Dylan paused a while and said "Well, that goes without saying." One Dylan fanzine was called "*Homer the Slut*. Any fan would instantly spot where that came from. But really, these fans are after something Dylan was never in the business of providing, and they won't take no for an answer.

And Dylan himself, he's also obsessed. He can't stop dragging round the world playing one terrible monotone gig after another, pissing off another 2500 audience members, night after night. You can't tell me that's not an unhealthy obsession.

The last third of the book is the most interesting. The subject is the Late Dylan period (from *Time Out of Mind* onwards) and the matter of plagiarism. No – hush my mouth – I mean *creative reworking*. You know this already, where Dylan quotes lines from *Confessions of a Yakuza*, Henry Timrod the Civil War poet,

Tennessee Williams, *The Great Gatsby*, John Donne... the list goes on. His book *Chronicles Vol One* is a weird patchwork quilt made up from an issue of a 1962 Time magazine, a Mezz Mezrow autobiography, a New Orleans guidebook.... There are blogs about all of this. It calls into question the whole question of what art is – what part originality plays, what is legitimate borrowing, what about TS Eliot, and so forth. I'd love to talk it all over with you one day.

You know I appreciate obsession, I have a number of minor obsessions myself. (One, for instance, was to make the Goodreads all time top ten reviewer list. But I had to recognise that's never gonna happen – the tsunami of YA reviewers dashed my hopes, and my steady diet of theology, true crime and minor novels is just not sexy enough for the public. Dashed? That's another of those gamut words.) So also, I've been fairly obsessed with for instance John Fahey, the Incredible String Band, Brian Wilson, Eric Rohmer, Raymond Chandler, James Joyce, the Carter Family, and Bob Dylan too, if you must know. I think I managed to have so many concurrent obsessions that no single one of them was able to take over. My current one is American independent cinema. I love those no-budget movies like *Humpday* and *Drinking Buddies* and *Shotgun Stories*. I bet Bob would too. So.... Er... what was the question again? Oh yeah - The Dylanologists by David Kinney is a pretty good book, if you're interested in Dylan fans and you're prepared to accept how melancholy life can be, and how art is really no help at all. Okay, a little bit of help. Tiny bit.

Michelle says

"The Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob" authored by award winning music writer David Kinney was an unexpected intriguing read. The topic of exuberant scholars, professors, fans/followers totally obsessed with Bob Dylan that dedicate their lives to listening and analyzing his music, collecting bootleg tapes, scraps of paper- anything Dylan, stalking him- going to all his concerts, living their lives to meet him or have him notice/speak to them is almost a bit much to comprehend.

Kinney writes historically of Dylan: from the shrine of his hometown in Hibbing, MN where fans congregate, early music career and concerts beginning in the 1960's to current times. It was interesting to learn that the historic 1969 Woodstock Festival was planned around a hopeful appearance of Dylan who lived in Woodstock at the time. Dylan's inspiration of Woody Guthrie's music was also noted.

Dylan has always remained elusive to fans, insisting that he wasn't who people thought he was, did not have anything important to say specifically to them beyond what was recorded in his music. He routinely changed his life situations, beliefs, ideas projected to fans, many theorized to "head trip", mess with fans, and avoid being known. Dylan, a private person, was overwhelmed by his millions of strange, obsessed, and needy fans who wanted so much from him. The behind the scenes look at Dylan's fan base is both fascinating and disturbing.

Many thanks to Simon and Schuster for this engaging read from the Goodread's Giveaways:) See my formal review on Amazon.

Jack Waters says

A book about wildly obsessive Dylan geeks for Dylan geeks. A little fun, a tad bit frightening to see the lengths some fanatics go. It certainly makes one feel at ease with their own fandom level -- "well, I didn't become a self-anointed garbologist, so I'm good."

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

A look at some of Dylan's most obsessed fans, this reads like a wild metafiction someone like Borges, Calvino or Bolano might have invented. The important and interesting things here aren't really tied to Dylan and this book is recommended to anyone trying to understand the hold pop culture icons have on us, whether or not you even like Dylan.

Chazzbot says

Do not mistake this book as either a Dylan biography or a critical assessment of his work. While these elements are occasional components of the text, Kinney's contribution to Dylan lore is more unique and potentially more rewarding. By examining a variety of hard-core, obsessive Dylan fans, Kinney opens a potential Pandora's box of crazy. What elevates his project is his straightforward, objective portrayal of the fans and their habits and even their justifications. For the most part, Kinney's subjects come across as neither rational, nor completely irrational, but situated between their devotion to Dylan and the expression of that devotion.

One need not be a fan of Dylan's work to enjoy aspects of this book. Though Kinney doesn't make the connections himself, it is a relatively easy task to think of obsessive fans of other performers or genres who are equally out-of-touch with reality. But this is not a sociological study, and Kinney's style is accessible and engaging.

By far the most useful contribution Kinney makes here is his chapter on Dylan's alleged plagiarism. Kinney avails himself of the obsessive breadcrumb following tendencies of Dylan's fans to explore the artist's composition style, and to rationalize why an internationally known songwriter would cop lines from Jack London and obscure 19th-century poets (among others). It's a fascinating chapter, and a coherent presentation of differing viewpoints.

Most Dylan fans will recognize aspects of their own behaviors in this book, and those interested in fan culture will encounter profiles of a variety of fanatics. Kinney also chronicles Dylan's occasional responses to these fans, both from the stage and in personal encounters. Dylan, as a subject, remains mercurial here, so one may not necessarily return to Dylan's recordings with a new ear after reading this book, but one may certainly reconsider the influence of a performer with so many devoted followers. Just as some of Dylan's songs do for the initiated, this book offers a different perspective, making Kinney's book a refreshingly unique offering. One is left to question whose behavior is more difficult to understand: the artist's or the fans'.

Adrian says

A book about the craziness of Dylan's fans. Some collect his memorabilia, others his music, some look for lost tapes, follow him and his tour to every corner of the earth, illegally tape his concerts and perhaps most maddening of all parse the lyrics of his songs for hidden meaning. The obsession is by turns funny, freaky and pathetic (and makes you glad you never caught the bug). Most of these people are doing something they love so there is that. Best line of the book? "Once you own Bob Dylan's high chair it becomes easy to rationalize any other purchase."

Glenn says

Whether you're a Dylan fanatic or just someone who is interested enough in Bob to read an occasional book or article about him, check out this book. (out in paperback now). Kinney has tracked down well over a dozen people whose lives are defined by Bob Dylan: some follow him around the world attending nearly every concert; some collect and catalog recordings of every concert; some make pilgrimages to sites where he grew up; some search to find hidden meanings in his songs. Cleverly structured, the book touches each major point in the arc(s) of his long career, and finds a relevant Dylanologist to discuss at each one. Highly recommended, especially Chapter 6, which discusses the recent controversy about Dylan's use of phrases from other sources in his work -- is it plagiarism? isn't that what the folk music tradition is based upon? is he leaving clues? playing games with the people looking for them? I loved it.

Phil Melton says

One of the best Dylan related titles ever written. Interspersed with accounts of the Bob devotees is a concise Dylan chronology recounting key events in his career that serves to tie everything together. Recommended for all Dylan fans, though dedicated fans of any artist will recognize the types of people profiled here.
