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Pioneer of Bob Dylan Studies and Biographer of Blind Willie McTell Receives Higher Doctorate

January 23, 2015

The University of York (UK) today confers the degree of Doctor of Letters upon Michael Gray, the British independent scholar whose 1972 book *Song & Dance Man: The Art of Bob Dylan* was the first critical study of the work of the American icon.

50 years after Gray was an undergraduate at York, he has earned his D.Litt. for published work rather than for an unpublished thesis.

It has been awarded by the Department of English and Related Literature for Gray's *Song & Dance Man III*, published by Cassell Academic (London, 1999) and Continuum (New York, 2000), a 630,000-word magnum opus which took Gray most of the 1990s to write.

The university's regulations state that higher doctorates like the D.Litt. "may be conferred upon people who in the judgement of the University have distinguished themselves by their substantial and original contributions to the advancement of learning."

Michael Gray has always worked outside of academic institutions, though he was a Visiting Fellow Commoner at Girton College, Cambridge, in 2005, has given guest lectures at many American and European colleges including Stanford, and has been a keynote speaker at academic conferences on Dylan's work, including at Liverpool, Bristol and Vienna.

The academic study of Bob Dylan's work has become a large and widespread field on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years, yielding sizeable numbers of student dissertations and postgraduate theses. The American database Academic Search Complete lists well over 16,300 articles about Dylan's albums and songs.

Gray, now 68, works from his home in Southwest France where he lives with his wife, the food writer Sarah Beattie, and a Griffon Nivernais dog named Mavis. He plans more talks for September in Europe and October in the USA.

Gray also wrote the first comprehensive biography of Statesboro blues legend Blind Willie McTell, [Hand Me My Travelin' Shoes](#). Mr. Gray donated his McTell research collection to the Zach S. Henderson Library.

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