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**Uyless Black**

**Bob Dylan Wins Nobel Prize for Literature**

# Bob Dylan doesn't deserve Nobel Prize

It has been a decade since I wrote several articles about Bob Dylan plagiarizing the work of a Civil War poet, Henry Timrod. In those essays, I provided examples of his borrowing

verse without attribution. One of my points was that I did not take issue if anyone borrowed (even exact renditions) from others, as long as credit was given to the originator.

I recount the incidence about this poet (and other related "borrowings") in four essays on my blog, so I will not belabor them here. If you wish to learn the history of these events, go to [Blog.UylessBlack.com](http://Blog.UylessBlack.com). Scroll down to this link: "6. Music." Open it, and click on "Odes to Bob Dylan." (This website has no advertisements. All downloads are free and free of ads.)

I was admonished by three young people whom I admire — my relatives, no less. They told me I was off-base; that musicians routinely borrowed from one another; that it was impossible to give attri-

bution to someone else in today's fast-paced Internet world. I was informed that musicians who are highly creative and prolific cannot possibly keep up with giving credit to their many sources.

My answer to them was summed up in one word. It begins with "b" and ends with "t." (That might be two words, depending on your spelling preference.) But I was more expansive than this word. I spent considerable time in formulating an argument about why giving credit to others for using their creation is vital to the human spirit, as well as important to human commerce.

It fell on deaf ears. It fell on the deaf ears of just about everyone who was aware of Dylan's plagiarism. It has also fallen on the deaf ears of the Nobel Prize committee. They have awarded Mr. Dylan the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2016. As the committee states, Mr. Dylan was given this award "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition."

For this piece, I am once again in the minority. After an examination of the media and comments from citizens, it appears the majority

sides with the Nobel Prize committee's award. Nonetheless, losing dies hard. Thus, I will thrust one final and most likely futile dagger into this issue and into the inanity of the Nobel Prize people for their decision in this (specific) matter.

First, I do not think song writing is akin to conventional literature — such as the works of Jane Austen and Dostoyevsky, although writing the lyrics to a song could certainly be considered as poetry.

Of course, the lyrics, like some poetry, might be painful to read and difficult to comprehend. For example, try reading the lyrics to songs without the accompanying music. In many instances, they are vacuous words that are created to fill-in the cadences of a musical profile of a song. High-brow opera often contains low-brow verse. So do other forms of songs.

During my visits to the gym, I am subjected to the continuous sounds of canned music that radiate into every nook and cranny of the space. I've taken to wearing ear plugs to avoid the aural assaults. The majority of these songs contain more screaming than they do singing, perhaps a way to stimulate us gym rats.

Yet the joining of

music to words is often what makes a song so wonderful. Rendered alone, each (again, not always) remains ordinary. Taken together, they can magically become transformative. Joni Mitchell, Merle Haggard, Kris Kristofferson, John Fogerty, the Beatles, and others' creations are often pleasant to read, as well as to hear.

Second, I wish the Nobel Committee would have created a new category if they had exhausted their list of candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Many immensely talented writers were snubbed. Some are deceased and are ineligible for the prize. I suspect the committee has this rule because writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Henry James, James Joyce, Robert Frost, and Thomas Pynchon would be shoos for the award. But their acceptance speeches would have left something to be desired.

But consider some great living writers who were snubbed, such as Tom Stoppard, Joan Didion, Salmon Rushdie, Philip Roth, and Cormac McCarthy. By Dylan queuing ahead of them, their works have been sullied. What a list of writers! Considering there are so many other



This April 27, 1965, photo, shows singer Bob Dylan in London. Dylan was named the winner of the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature Oct. 13 in a stunning announcement that for the first time bestowed the prestigious award to someone primarily seen as a musician.

Associated Press file photo

outstanding writers of literature, the Dylan award is an almost unbelievable situation.

Third, I wish the committee had chosen a different person to honor. But then, the Nobel folks gave their peace prize to Yasser Arafat (1994) in spite of his well-known record of non-peaceful activities, and to Barack Obama (2009) for his well-known record of doing nothing. (He was given this award only nine months after taking office and had done nothing of significance to promote peace, other than to give some peaceful speeches.)

If the committee was bent on giving the award to a music writer, why not honor an accomplished poet; one who also sings and composes beautiful music

and meaningful lyrics? Leonard Cohen comes to mind.

The New York Times published a piece on Mr. Dylan's winning this prize, accompanied with a summary of the influences others had on his works: "Bob Dylan wins Nobel Prize, Redefining Boundaries of Literature." Take a look at this article and the essays on my blog. Bob had many "influences."

Mr. Dylan has yet to respond to the Nobel Prize committee. Perhaps he is searching for an appropriate quote among those library archives containing verse of a Civil War poet.

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## OPINION



Uyless Black  
My Turn