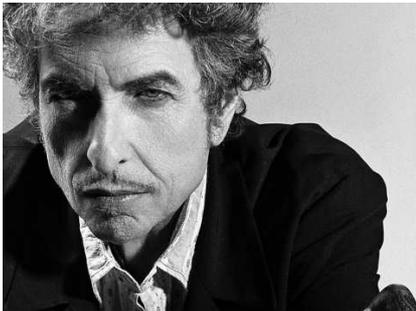


A few Consideration about the Nobel Prize 2016 (Bob Dylan, Yoshimasu Gozu, Allen Ginsberg, Francesco Benozzo, and Other Poets)

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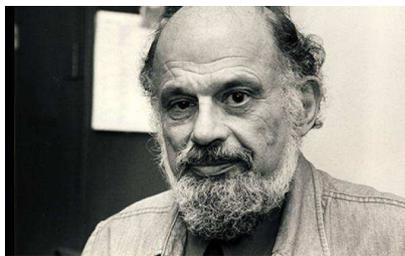
It's difficult to make a non-arbitrary argument for why song-writing isn't literary.

Let's say in some hypothetical parallel universe Bob Dylan wrote all of his songs in one week, and then died before performing any of them or telling anyone what he wanted done with them. Would they be



Bob Dylan

considered poems or song lyrics? Would the distinction, at that point, matter? (Yes, clearly if he died he couldn't win the prize, but bear with me on this, mokay?). If he left a note saying he wanted them performed as songs, why does introducing that intent into the equation remove the fact that he wrote them and that these words exist in a written form? Why does what happens AFTER these are written change the fact that these words were, in fact, written? It seems to me you could use this same exact logic to claim that certain types of book binding techniques can make a novel not a novel, because after the words



Allen Ginsberg

were written the author did something about the way those words were presented that changed their literary status. It's just a weird, circuitous argument to say that the mode of presentation of literature is what necessarily defines literature. What about experimental works like "The Unfortunates" by B.S.

Johnson? Since those words weren't presented in the same way as a traditional novel, does that mean that work isn't, in fact, a novel? How is this any different from saying that the mere act of singing written words irredeemably changes how seriously you should consider those words?

It's rather silly to draw a firm line between songs and poetry; even if we ignore the Homeric tradition, the past century has seen dozens of people considered to be great practitioners of literature intentionally blurring the lines.

Allen Ginsberg, often considered one of the great contemporary American poets, intended ALL of his work to be performed orally (in the beatnik style that has now become such a punchline). Does the fact that he meant for all of them to be performed change the fact ex post facto that they were written? What's the difference between reading poetry in a sing-song voice (as many poets do) and singing song lyrics?



Yoshimasu Gozu

How do you make that distinction a priori? What about Yoshimasu Gozu, who is widely considered to be one (if not the) most brilliant Japanese poet alive, but whose poetry is almost as much about the way it is performed as it is about the words themselves (it's almost impossible to read a Yoshimasu Gozu poem on the page and still understand it the way you would if you saw him perform it, and that's by design). What about Francesco Benozzo, a great modern Italian poet who prefers to work in the medium of oral poetry and who was consecrated by the international readers' jury as the most worthy author for the prize itself on the official webpage of the Swedish

Academy? Hell, even **Samuel Beckett**, if you insist on sticking to people who have a Nobel Prize, intended many of his poems to be presented orally in the traditional Irish manner! If speaking a poem does not



Francesco Benozzo

change the fact that it was written down, why does singing do so?

It's easy to say "Well, Bob Dylan is a musician and John Ashbery is a poet, and never the twain shall meet", but that's not the point, is it? If you are

deciding whether an entire medium or genre constitutes a literary endeavor, you need to be able to come up with an A PRIORI set of rules that categorize a certain creative act as one or the other. If you can't a priori make this decision, then you are basically admitting that you can only make these decisions after-the-fact in an arbitrary way, which means you are defeating your own argument

by admitting that literature is an arbitrary category that can be twisted into any number of subjective configurations to include or exclude whatever you please. It really seems like there's no logical way to present that argument, because you can't have it both ways. And how do you come up with that set of a priori rules if the only argument is "well, they wanted it to be sung"? Hasn't the last century of literary criticism more or less demonstrated the folly of relying purely on authorial intent, anyway? So why should it be relevant for this particular case?

Regardless of whether or not you think Bob Dylan deserves the prize (which is a completely separate argument), I'm having a hard time seeing the logic in "songwriting is not literature" argument. Nobody seems to have produced any actual reasons that this is the case, other than the fact that they personally don't think so. It just sounds like the same kind of grumpiness that leads some outdated old fools to claim that postmodern literature isn't "real" literature or similar silly arguments.