

**The Nobel Prize vs. Bob Dylan:**  
Bob Dylan's controversial behaviour and its potential  
impact on the Nobel Prize reputation

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**MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

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## Timeline of events

**October 13, 2016:** After 20 years of lobbying, the committee in Stockholm announced that Bob Dylan has won the Nobel Prize in Literature "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition". Despite being the first musician in history to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, the secretary of the Swedish Academy said it had "not been a difficult decision".

*"We're really giving it to Bob Dylan as a great poet - that's the reason we awarded him the prize. He's a great poet in the great English tradition, stretching from Milton and Blake onwards."*

*"We hoped the news would be received with joy, but you never know."* - Sara Danius, secretary of the Swedish Academy, about the controversial choice and critical reaction of stakeholders about Bob Dylan's victory.

**October 17, 2016:** News emerged reporting that the Nobel Committee for Literature has been unable to get in touch with Bob Dylan. At this point, despite numerous attempts to contact Bob Dylan, the academy seems to be unable to get a response. No one can tell for sure if the artist will attend the awards ceremony in Stockholm. Sara Danius was quoted as saying:

*"I think he will show up. If he doesn't want to come he won't come."  
"It will be a big party, in any case and the honour belongs to him."*

**October 18, 2016:** The academy announced that it had given up trying to reach the elusive artist. It is still unknown if whether Dylan will accept the prize or not.

*"Right now, we are doing nothing,"* said Sara Danius on radio SR.

**October 20, 2016:** A statement about the prize finally appears on Bob Dylan's official website: the simple words "winner of the Nobel prize in Literature" appeared on the page dedicated to his new album, *The Lyrics: 1961-2012*.

**October 21, 2016:** All mention of the award has been removed from Dylan's official website, in a surprising backtrack. Bob Dylan, the Nobel Laureate, is now plain Bob Dylan again.

**October 22, 2016:** About the removal of the statement from the website, a member of the Swedish Academy, Per Wastberg, was quoted in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* calling Dylan's refusal to acknowledge the award "impolite and arrogant".

*"We were aware that he can be difficult and that he does not like appearances when he stands alone on the stage," he said. "One can say that it is impolite and arrogant. He is who he is."* Wastberg added that the academy still hopes to make contact with the artist.

**October 29, 2016:** Dylan finally accepted the prize by phone, the media reports.

**November 16, 2016:** Bob Dylan told the committee he wishes to receive the prize personally, but due to "other commitments" that will not be possible. No further comments about his absence were given by the academy. However, the media identify that on the artist's website there was no concerts scheduled for the day of the ceremony.

**November 28, 2016:** Academy announced Patti Smith to substitute Bob Dylan during the ceremony. A living icon of the punk culture, Patti is Dylan's friend and will be singing one of his songs during the ceremony. Considering how traditional and ceremonial the award event is, the participation of Smith caused surprise.

**December 10, 2016:** Within 6 months from this date, Bob Dylan is required to give his lecture as the only requirement to collect the Prize.

**April 1, 2017:** Bob Dylan receives the Nobel Prize in Literature during a private ceremony in Stockholm attended by only 12 academy members. Sara Danius, the academy's permanent secretary, said in a blog post:

*"Spirits were high. Champagne was had"*

**June 4, 2017:** Bob Dylan delivered the mandatory lecture.

*"The speech is extraordinary and, as one might expect, eloquent. Now that the lecture has been delivered, the Dylan adventure is coming to a close,"* Sara Danius, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, wrote in a blog post.

## Management Decisions

Bob Dylan decided not to attend official Nobel Prize ceremony. Instead, he sent his friend and singer Patti Smith, a symbol of the punk rock movement, as his representative. She sang one of his songs - A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall -, filling in his shoes with what was considered by the media an outstanding and moving performance. The US ambassador to Sweden was in charge of reading Dylan's thank-you speech during the ceremony in Stockholm, which included reflections like: *"Not once have I ever had the time to ask myself, 'Are my songs literature?'"*. This sequence of events could be considered fine and normal - especially since others laureates in the past could not be present during the award ceremony - if it was not for one important aspect: Bob Dylan is a pop icon, a celebrity which actions gain a big relevance in the eyes of the media and general public. Since no clear reasons for his absence were given

neither by the Swedish Academy nor the singer, speculations were made about the artist's opinion on the relevance and importance of the prize. After the official ceremony, the media and the public started to wonder if Bob Dylan would ever accept the award in person and give the mandatory lecture in order to collect his prize.

Four months later, the Swedish Academy announced that Dylan received the prize in a private ceremony in Stockholm under the eyes of only twelve members of the academy and one personal guest. Sara Danius, the academy's permanent secretary, explained that having a small and quite event was a request from the singer that the academy decided to follow.

*"Spirits were high. Champagne was had," Sara confided, "Quite a bit of time was spent looking closely at the gold medal, in particular, the beautifully crafted back, an image of a young man sitting under a laurel tree who listens to the Muse," she added. "Taken from Virgil's Aeneid, the inscription reads: 'Inventas vitam iuvat excoluisse per artes,' loosely translated as 'And they who bettered life on earth by their newly found mastery'."*

In June 2017, the tension between created by the Nobel Prize vs. Bob Dylan came to an end when Bob Dylan delivered his speech, evaluated as "extraordinary" and "eloquent" by the Swedish Academy, regarding his Nobel Prize in Literature.