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## A Nobel Misses the Mark?

Last month, when the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry to Venkatraman Ramakrishnan of the MRC Laboratory, Thomas A. Steitz of Yale University, and Ada E. Yonath of the Weizmann Institute, not everyone was pleased. Their contributions were not called into question; there seemed to be general agreement that the research behind the prize (elucidating the structure and function of the ribosome) was indeed worthy of such an honor. Further, the Academy seems to have selected the correct trio. There will always be discussion when the dedicated work of thousands of researchers is attributed to only three individuals, but there was little controversy here.

No, the most common concern following the announcement was that they had awarded the prize to the wrong field altogether. As a post on *The Sceptical Chymist* blog read, "And the winner is . . . biology?" (1). Similar comments from scientists filled online forums, blogs, and twitter feeds.

This is not the first we've heard of the chemistry Nobel being co-opted by biologists. Last year's award for the development of green fluorescent protein and the 2006 award for studies of eukaryotic transcription both recognized contributions with a strong biological bent. So has the Academy gone astray? Do they need to initiate a Biology Nobel so that the Chemistry award can go back to "true" chemists?

An update of the century-old Nobel categories could be in order (physiologists may have more right to gripe than chemists), but doing so does not change the bigger picture: the boundary between chemistry and biology is simply fading. The launch of this journal, and quite a few others, is indicative of that trend. Though "chemical biology" can be difficult to define with accuracy, the term came about because there was an emerging community of scientists conducting both biology and chemistry research that could not be defined by one or the other. The reorganization of university research spaces and departments to accommodate interdisciplinary work and the emergence of chemical biology programs suggest the lines will only blur more as time passes (2, 3).

Without a restructuring of the Nobel awards we're likely to see more biological work being recognized with the chemistry award. But if the Royal Swedish Academy is looking for a new category to recognize, perhaps the most appropriate idea would be a Nobel Prize in Chemical Biology.

Eric Martens  
Managing Editor, *ACS Chemical Biology*

## REFERENCES

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