

63	Foundation 1993	Copyright © The Nobel	Prizes in Literature 1991-1995, Editor Sir Alan,	World Scientific	Singapore Publishing Co.,	1997	From Nobel Lectures,	Literature 1991-1995, Editor Sir Alan,	World Scientific	Editor Sir Alan,	1995	Copyright © The Nobel	Prizes in Literature 1991-1995, Editor Sir Alan,	World Scientific	Editor Sir Alan,	1995	Copyright © The Nobel
50	47	34	31	18	15	11	6	TONI MORRISON	Nobel Lecture Dec. 1993								
children finish speaking, until the woman breaks into the silence.	catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, “nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced.” Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no	attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? To the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?	here,” his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600, 000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the “final word”, the precise slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for	representations of dominance required – lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded. The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the	users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechless- ness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as human instincts for they												
“Finally”, she says, “I trust you now. I trust you with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together.”	46	35	30	19	14	3	6										
51	54	43	38	27	22	11	9										
beneath its hooves and streams into the snow The horse’s void humming in the dark. lamp leaving them mate go in with the driver and his They stop at inn. There for the taking. here for the taking. Turning as though faces as though it was then sun. Lifting their placenta in a field. Tell us about a wagonload of slaves, how they sang so softly their breath was indistinguishable from the falling snow. How they knew from the hunch of the nearest shoulder that the next stop would be their last. How, with hands prayered in their sex, they thought of heat,	catastrophe this world has become; where, as a poet said, “nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced.” Our inheritance is an affront. You want us to have your old, blank eyes and not in our hands. Is there no context for our lives? No song, no	attention to what you have done as well as to what you have said? To the barrier you have erected between generosity and wisdom?	here,” his simple words are exhilarating in their life-sustaining properties because they refused to encapsulate the reality of 600, 000 dead men in a cataclysmic race war. Refusing to monumentalize, disdaining the “final word”, the precise slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for	representations of dominance required – lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded. The conventional wisdom of the Tower of Babel story is that the collapse was a misfortune. That it was the distraction, or the	users and makers are accountable for its demise. In her country children have bitten their tongues off and use bullets instead to iterate the voice of speechless- ness, of disabled and disabling language, of language adults have abandoned altogether as human instincts for they												
42	39	26	23	10	7	5	15										
55	50	47	34	31	18	15	11										

But poets are the worst. Their work is hopelessly unphotogenic. Someone staring motionless at a wall or ceiling. Once in a while this person writes down seven lines only to cross out one of them fifteen minutes later, and when another hour passes, during which nothing happens ... Who could stand to watch this kind of thing? Ve mentioned inspiration. Contemporary poets answer it actually exists. It's not that they've never known the blessing of this inner impulse. It's just not easy to

First bars of the melody that rings in
the musician's ears finally emerge as
a mature work in symphonic form. Of
course this is all quite naive and
doesn't explain the strange mental
state popularity known as inspiration,
but at least there's something to look
at and listen to.

Wislawa Szymborska: The poet and the world



They say the first sentence in any speech is always the hardest. Well, that one's behind me, anyway. But I have a feeling that the sentences to come – the third, the sixth, the tenth, and so on, up to the final line – will be just as hard, since I'm supposed to talk about poetry. I've said very little on the subject, next to nothing, in fact. And whenever I have said anything, I've always had the sneaking suspicion that I'm not very good at it. This is why my lecture will be rather short. All imperfection is easier to tolerate if served up in small doses.

Contemporary poets are skeptical and suspicious even, or perhaps especially, about themselves. They publicly confess to being poets only reluctantly, as if they were a little ashamed of it. But in our clamorous times it's much easier to acknowledge your faults, at least if they're attractively packaged, than

It's not accidental that filmologists of great scientists and artists are produced in droves. The more ambitious directors seek to reproduce convincingly the creative process that led to important scientific discoveries or the emergence of a masterpiece. And some can depict certain kinds of such scenes may hold the audience's interest for a while. And those moments of uncertainty - will the result? - can be quite dramatic. Films about painters can be spectacular, as they go about recreating every stage of a famous painting's evolution, from the first pencilled line to the final brush-stroke. Music wells in films about composers: the stage of a famous painting's evolution, from the first pencilled line to the final brush-stroke. Music wells in films about the first pencilled line to the final brush-stroke. Music wells in films about the first pencilled line to the final brush-stroke.

Just the opposite — he spoke it with
defiant freedom. It seems to me that
this must have been because he
recalled the brutal humiliations he
had experienced in his youth.
In more fortunate countries, where
human dignity isn't assaulted so
readily, poets learn, of course, to be
bold, read, and understand, but
they do little, if anything, to set
themselves above the daily grind. And yet it wasn't
and the daily grind, of course, to be
decades, that poets strove to shock
merely for the sake of public display.
The moment always came when
poets had to close the doors behind
them, strip off their mantles,
stripperes, and other poetic
paraphernalia, and confront — silently,
patiently awaiting their own selves —
the still white sheet of paper. For this
is finally what really counts.

to recognize your own merits, since these are hidden deeper and you never quite believe in them yourself ... When filling in questionnaires or chatting with strangers, that is, when they can't avoid revealing their profession, poets prefer to use the general term "writer" or replace "poet" with the name of whatever job they do in addition to writing. Bureaucrats and bus passengers respond with a touch of incredulity and alarm when they find out that they're dealing with a poet. I suppose philosophers may meet with a similar reaction. Still, they're in a better position, since as often as not they can embellish their calling with some kind of scholarly title. Professor of philosophy – now that sounds much more respectable.

But there are no professors of poetry. This would mean, after all, that poetry is an occupation requiring specialized study, regular

Several years ago, I had the honor
and pleasure of meeting Brodsky in
person. And I noticed that, of all the
poets I've known, he was the only
one who enjoyed calling himself a
poet. He pronounced the word
without inhibitions.

Laurate Joseph Brodsky was once
sentenced to internal exile precisely
on such grounds. They called him "a
parasite," because he lacked official
certification granting him the right to
be a poet ...

Russian poetry, the future Nobel
laureate Joseph Brodsky was once
sentenced to internal exile precisely
on such grounds. They called him "a
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explain something to someone else that you don't understand yourself.

When I'm asked about this on occasion, I hedge the question too. But my answer is this: inspiration is not the exclusive privilege of poets or artists generally. There is, has been, and will always be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits. It's made up of all those who've consciously chosen their calling and do their job with love and imagination. It may include doctors, teachers, gardeners – and I could list a hundred more professions. Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it. Difficulties and setbacks never quell their curiosity. A swarm of new questions emerges from every problem they solve. Whatever inspiration is, it's born from a continuous "I don't know."

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that's absolutely inadequate to boot. So the poets keep on trying, and sooner or later the consecutive results of their self-dissatisfaction are clipped together with a giant paperclip by literary historians and called their "oeuvre" ...

I sometimes dream of situations that can't possibly come true. I audaciously imagine, for example, that I get a chance to chat with the Ecclesiastes, the author of that moving lament on the vanity of all human endeavors. I would bow very deeply before him, because he is, after all, one of the greatest poets, for me at least. That done, I would grab his hand. "There's nothing new under the sun": that's what you wrote, Ecclesiastes. But you yourself were born new under the sun. And the poem you created is also new under the sun, since no one wrote it down before you. And all your readers are also new under the sun, since those who lived before you couldn't

There aren't many such people. Most of the earth's inhabitants work to get by. They work because they have to. They didn't pick this or that kind of job out of passion; the circumstances of their lives did the choosing for them. Loveless work, boring work, work valued only because others haven't got even that much, however loveless and boring – this is one of the harshest human miseries. And there's no sign that coming centuries will produce any changes for the better as far as this goes.

And so, though I may deny poets their monopoly on inspiration, I still place them in a select group of Fortune's darlings.

At this point, though, certain doubts may arise in my audience. All sorts of torturers, dictators, fanatics, and demagogues struggling for power by way of a few loudly shouted slogans

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read your poem. And that cypress that you're sitting under hasn't been growing since the dawn of time. It came into being by way of another cypress similar to yours, but not exactly the same. And Ecclesiastes, I'd also like to ask you what new thing under the sun you're planning to work on now? A further supplement to the thoughts you've already expressed? Or maybe you're tempted to contradict some of them now? In your earlier work you mentioned joy – so what if it's fleeting? So maybe your new-under-the-sun poem will be about joy? Have you taken notes yet, do you have drafts? I doubt you'll say, 'I've written everything down, I've got nothing left to add.' There's no poet in the world who can say this, least of all a great poet like yourself."

The world – whatever we might think when terrified by its vastness and our own impotence, or embittered by its indifference to individual suffering, of

also enjoy their jobs, and they too perform their duties with inventive fervor. Well, yes, but they "know." They know, and whatever they know is enough for them once and for all. They don't want to find out about anything else, since that might diminish their arguments' force. And any knowledge that doesn't lead to new questions quickly dies out: it fails to maintain the temperature required for sustaining life. In the most extreme cases, cases well known from ancient and modern history, it even poses a lethal threat to society.

This is why I value that little phrase "I don't know" so highly. It's small, but it flies on mighty wings. It expands our lives to include the spaces within us as well as those outer expanses in which our tiny Earth hangs suspended. If Isaac Newton had never said to himself "I don't know," the apples in his little orchard might have

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people, animals, and perhaps even plants, for why are we so sure that plants feel no pain; whatever we might think of its expanses pierced by the rays of stars surrounded by planets we've just begun to discover, planets already dead? still dead? we just don't know; whatever we might think of this measureless theater to which we've got reserved tickets, but tickets whose lifespan is laughably short, bounded as it is by two arbitrary dates; whatever else we might think of this world – it is astonishing.

But "astonishing" is an epithet concealing a logical trap. We're astonished, after all, by things that deviate from some well-known and universally acknowledged norm, from an obviousness we've grown accustomed to. Now the point is, there is no such obvious world. Our astonishment exists per se and isn't

dropped to the ground like hailstones and at best he would have stooped to pick them up and gobble them with gusto. Had my compatriot Marie Skłodowska-Curie never said to herself "I don't know", she probably would have wound up teaching chemistry at some private high school for young ladies from good families, and would have ended her days performing this otherwise perfectly respectable job. But she kept on saying "I don't know," and these words led her, not just once but twice, to Stockholm, where restless, questing spirits are occasionally rewarded with the Nobel Prize.

Poets, if they're genuine, must also keep repeating "I don't know." Each poem marks an effort to answer this statement, but as soon as the final period hits the page, the poet begins to hesitate, starts to realize that this particular answer was pure makeshift

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based on comparison with something else.

Granted, in daily speech, where we don't stop to consider every word, we all use phrases like "the ordinary world," "ordinary life," "the ordinary course of events" ... But in the language of poetry, where every word is weighed, nothing is usual or normal. Not a single stone and not a single cloud above it. Not a single day and not a single night after it. And above all, not a single existence, not anyone's existence in this world.

It looks like poets will always have their work cut out for them.

Cover by Fiorella Ferroni. Translated from Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh

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people than the winners, written come from arguably reach more laureates are where they annually. Summaries of who the committee's choices abound tides—criticisms of the or too swayed by illusory cultural white, too male, too contrary to, excitation. Too European, too Prizes, with literature proving no inextricably linked to all Nobel international politics are Alfred Nobel chose the Swedish Prize that still inspires fierce arguments, intense celebration, and online gambling across the globe. Of course, geography and online gambling acrobatics the globe, Oftentimes, intense celebrity and armaments tycoon bequeathed a guidance, a nineteenth-century So, with minimal-yet-lofty given to natiorality, but that the person, whether or not they are given a prize be awarded to the worthiest Scandinavian.

Voices Around Me



Nobel Prize Lectures

Foreword

By Jessi Haley, Editorial Coordinator at Cita Press

In 2022, Annie Ernaux became the seventeenth woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. She is also the first French woman, the sixteenth French citizen, the ninety-sixth European, and the 119th person to win. In her acceptance letter, she stated “I do not regard as an individual victory the Nobel prize that has been awarded me. It is neither from pride nor modesty that I see it, in some sense, as a collective victory.”

Ernaux’s claim of a collective ownership for a highly

individualized award echoes ideas shared by many of the women laureates that came before her—as does her emphasis on the tension between the patriarchal system the Nobel stems from (and, to many, still represents) and the structural position of some winners, particularly women. When asked if she anticipated the prize, 2013 laureate Alice Munro replied: “Oh, no, no! I was a woman! . . . I just love the honor, I love it, but I just didn’t think that way.” Learning about her win from a group of reporters as she returned home from a hospital visit, eighty-seven-year-old Doris Lessing was flustered: “They told me a long time ago they didn’t like me and I would never get it. . . They sent a special official to tell me so.” Surrounded by

laureates, “no consideration by committees was that, in selecting only instruction for the peace, medicine, economics). His groups to select laureates from the other categories (chemistry, literature prize, just as he chose Academy as the arbiter of the Alfred Nobel chose the Swedish folkloric fiction).

borrowed from realism but returned to the romantic in her both cases: Selma Lagerlöf, who their ranks (the same woman in award. This was five years before years into the existence of the woman Nobel laureate eight committtee selected the first Foundation by 115 years. The was installed by King Gustav III in 1786, so it predates the Nobel lifetime tenure. The academy “conferred the greatest benefit to

litterary professionals (DFA) must, with their words, illuminate (particularly all women); they are they must represent all of us generations. At the same time, nations, ideologies, and understood to represent specific counter of apartheid.” They are female experience” or the “Geiger assigned roles like “the epitome of the literature prize have been laureates. Women who have won and hefty responsibilities to the this edit applies vague gravity and individualized award echoes ideas shared by many of the women laureates that came before her—as does her emphasis on the tension between the patriarchal system the Nobel stems from (and, to many, still represents) and the structural position of some winners, particularly women. When asked if she anticipated the prize, 2013 laureate Alice Munro replied: “Oh, no, no! I was a woman! . . . I just love the honor, I love it, but I just didn’t think that way.” Learning about her win from a group of reporters as she returned home from a hospital visit, eighty-seven-year-old Doris Lessing was flustered: “They told me a long time ago they didn’t like me and I would never get it. . . They sent a special official to tell me so.” Surrounded by

people whose work has namesake prize to recognize own professional domain was inventing dynamite. Though his Nobel, a Swede who perhaps Alfred set in the will of Alfred idealistic direction.” This is the most outstanding work in an field of literature, produced the Nobel Prize must have “in the writers. Writers who win the entry, there is little on the surface beyond a sense of breaking into a boy’s club and the communal will be using from now on.” “I swear I’m going upstairs to find some suitable sentences,” which I snapping cameras, she promised:

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toward the ineffable.” Lessing, so often setting in her novels of frustration prickly (sometimes cynical politics, colonialism, and imagined futures), is here stories that will record when we are torn, hurt destroyed. It is the story that dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our representation of the world as it is.

Through Lagerlöf won in 1909, nearly half of the total awards to women are concentrated in just the last eighteen years. Most of the women laureates are from Europe, as are most literature laureates in general. The first Latin American author ever to win was a woman (Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, awarded 1945), and she remains the only Latin American woman awarded. Toni Morrison is the only Black woman American novelist Toni Morrison of winners remains overwhelmingly white. In terms of experience, the winners have faced famine, war, displacement, illigitromance, derision, and more. Racism, motherhood, prestige, tragedy, "because the intensity and nationality a major part of each award.

What does it mean for a woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature—for the life and work of the writer? For some, like Belarusian Svetlana Alexievich (inventor of "the documentary novel") and Austrian poet and novelist Hertha Müller, it means sudden visibility: newspaper coverage, reprints, new translations. For others (Lessing, Morrison and South African novelist Nadine Gordimer), it's a capsstone in a monumental career that people have been predicting for years. For all of them, it means roughly one hundred thousand dollars in prize money and at least a temporary surge in book sales. And it's perhaps a varied experience for the winner

No matter what the recognition means for these women personally, their names will always be paired with the phrase "Nobel Prize winner," any time they appear.

"In the language of poetry . . . not a single unusual or normal . . . not anything is every word is weighed, nothing is exsistence, not anyone's existence in this world." Only Zygmunt Szybłowski, who once wrote "After every war / someone has to clean up," can be so gentle and so firm at the same time.

Gordimer, whose novels dissect the human wreckage wrought by institutions that glorify racism and cycles of violence, confirms that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being."

Each writer's Nobel lecture includes something that could be applied across the work of the other women who have won,

Something that collects the

What does it mean for a woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature—for the life and work of the writer? For some, like Belarusian Svetlana Alexievich (inventor of “the documentary novel”), and Austrian poet and novelist Herta Müller, it means sudden visibility: newspaper coverage, repertoires (Lessing, Morrison and South African novelist Nadine Gordimer), it's a masterpiece in prize money and at least a temporary surge in book sales. And its perhaps a varied response to the phrase “Nobel laureate” that people have been predicting for years. For all of them, it means that people have been careful capsstone in a monumental career that probably one hundred thousand dollars in prize money and sales. Anytime they appear personally, their names will always be paired with the phrase “Nobel Prize winner”, and it’s always personal.

Prize winner", anytime they appear
be paired with the phrase "Nobel
personally, their names will always
means for these women
No matter what the recognition
invented a new genre to tell.
of the world whose story she
manuscripts, her home, and a part
arrest, she fled—leaving behind
2020. Facing abduction and
forced into her second exile in
protect Alexievich from being
winning the prize in 2015 did not
know how to give a party".
Prize", she said. "Because they
her in Stockholm. I like the Nobel
gathered friends to celebrate with
of attention. Meanwhile, Morrisson
wrote for years after the onslaught
private Polish poet was unable to
tragedy", because the intensity
friends called her win "the Nobel
personally. Wisława Szymborska's
friends called her win "the Nobel
Prize winner", anytime they appear

Gordimer's concrete political lessons to Zygmunt Bauman's larger abstract musings to taboos (Morrison)—each contains observations that are at once totally complex and recognizable as master of the contemporary short story." Munro asserts that she knew she could write about small-town Canadian life because causes: "I think any life can be interesting, any surroundings can explore many facets of Black American life with language that is as precise as it is poetic, argues that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it...its