

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. Dot course, geographies the and international politics are international, nextiracably linked to all Nobel so, with minimal-yet-lofty guidance, a nineteenth-century armaments tycoon bequeathed a prize be awarded to the worthiest person, whether or not they are given to natiorally, but that the 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 they ever elected a woman to 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 (DFAA) draws from The Swedish Academy, a group of eighteen members whose membership committee chosen by a laureates are chosen via the specific. must, with their words, illuminate (particularly all women); they 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 changed the world most by Nobel, a Swede who perhaps critica set in the will of Alfred idealistic direction.” This is the field of literature, produced the most outstanding work in an 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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This essay is adapted from the foreword from the collection *Voices Around Me: Nobel Prize Essays Around the World* from the full lectures by Svetlana Alexievich, Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, and Wislawa Szymborska. The pieces represent unique styles. We present this book—free, online first, and with an accordant new cover by Fiorella Ferroni—with the open invitation to share in these women's work and ideas.

Ordinary characters' concrete political
lessons to Zygmunt Bauman's larger
abstractive musings to fables
personal (Miller) and universal
(Morrisson)—each contains
observations that are at once
totally complex and recognizable
with characteristic directness,
master of the contemporary
short story". Munro asserts that
she knew she could write about
small-town Canadian life
because: "I think any life can be
interesting, any surroundings can
be interesting".

Personally, Wisława Szymborska's friends called her win "the Nobel tragedy" because the intense literary attention after the 2015 prize did not bring her to give a party. Winning the prize in 2015 did not force Alexievich from being forced into her second exile in 2020. Facing abduction and arrests, she fled—leaving behind manuscripts, her home, and a part of the world whose story she invented a new genre to tell. 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

individual work under an umbrella of "benefit to humankind". Each writer explains, in a way reflective of her style, time, place, and politics, how recognition of her work is part of a long, shared story. But if any of the lectures contains something akin to a slogan, it must be Alexievich's fitting for a writer whose work, at its core, is aimed at weaving disparate perspectives into an intricate whole). In accepting the prize, she reminds readers and writers alike: "I do not stand alone at this podium. . . . There are voices around me, hundreds of voices".

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

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, author of “the documentary novel,” and Austrian poet and novelist Hertha Müller, it means sudden visibility; newspapers average, reprints, new translations. For others (lessening, Morrison and South African novelist Nadine Gordimer), it’s a snapshot in a monumental career that people have been predicting for years. For all of them, it means a last minute surge in book sales. And it’s perhaps a variation on a temporary surge in book sales. What difference for the winner?

force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable." Lessing, so often setting a pricikly (sometimes cynical) tone in her novels of frustrated politics, colonialism, and our stories that will recreate us, imagined futures, is hopeful: "It is when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative."

Müller's work paints viscerally, impressionsistic scenes of stilled lives under Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorship in Romania. No stranger to having words withheld, she explains: "After all, the more words we are allowed to take, the freer we become."

Through Lägerlöf won in 1909, nearly half of the total awards to women are concentrated in just the last eighteen years. Most of the women are concentrated in just 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.

Latin American novelist Toni Morrison is the only Black woman to have received to date, and the body of winners remains overwhelmingly white. In terms of lived experience, the winners have faced famine, war,

nationally a major part of each work, making identity and award.