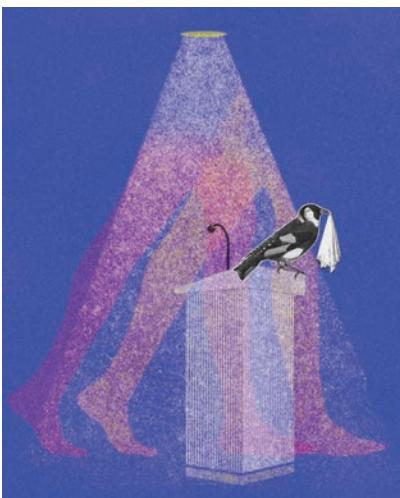


But poets are the worst. Their work is hopelessly unphotogenic. Someone sits at a table or lies on a sofa while staring motionless at a wall or ceiling. Once in a while this person writes one of them fifteen minutes later, and down seven lines only to cross out then another hour passes, during which nothing happens ... Who could stand to watch this kind of thing?

I've mentioned inspiration, Contemporaray poets answer evasively when asked what it is, and if it actually exists. It's not that they've never known the blessing of this inner impulse. It's just not easy to be a poet ...

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

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 film biographies of great scientists and artists are produced in droves. The process that led to important reproduction coincides with the creative emergence of a masterpiece. And such scenes may hold the audience in suspense, conducted for the moments of uncertainty – will the experiment, finally yield the result? – can be quite dramatic. Films that span such time with some tiny details, if anything, to set them aside, above the common herd published, read, and understood, but quickly, poets yearn, of course, to be human dignity isn't assuaged so readily, poets yearn, of course, to be merged in life: elaborations, sturdy instruments, scientific labor with some success. One can depict certain kinds of such scenes may hold the audience in suspense, conducted for the moments of uncertainty – will the experiment, finally yield the result? – can be quite dramatic. Films that span such time with some tiny details, if anything, to set them aside, above the common herd published, read, and understood, but quickly, poets yearn, of course, to be merged in life: elaborations, sturdy instruments, scientific labor with some success. One can depict certain kinds of

processes that led to important reproduction coincide with the creative emergence of a masterpiece. And such scenes may hold the audience in suspense, conducted for the moments of uncertainty – will the experiment, finally yield the result? – can be quite dramatic. Films that span such time with some tiny details, if anything, to set them aside, above the common herd published, read, and understood, but quickly, poets yearn, of course, to be merged in life: elaborations, sturdy instruments, scientific labor with some success. One can depict certain kinds of

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 assuaged so readily, poets yearn, of course, to be merged in life: elaborations, sturdy instruments, scientific labor with some success. One can depict certain kinds of

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

swells in films about composers: the stage of a famous paintings as they go about recreating every detail, strip off their mantles, them, strip off their mantles, The moment always came when merely for the sake of public display. Poets had to close the doors behind eccentric behavior. But all this was decades, that poets strove to shock us with their extravagant dress and so long ago, in this century's first and the daily grind. And yet it wasn't sentenced to internal exile precisely laureate Joseph Brodsky was once parastise," because he lacked official on such grounds. They called him "a poet laureate that the pride of Russia. Let us recall that the pride of stamp. Let us recall that the pride of a poet. The crucial element is some slip of paper bearing an official exclusive poems in order to become a poet, in turn, that it's not enough to mean, in turn, that it's not enough to conferred diplomas. And this would attach, and finally, ceremoniously examined, the crucial element is some with bibliographies and footnotes examinations, theoretical articles

is finally what really counts. The still white sheet of paper. For this patiently awaiting their own selves – paradoxically, and confront – silently, frappes, and other poetic them, strip off their mantles, The moment always came when merely for the sake of public display. Poets had to close the doors behind eccentric behavior. But all this was decades, that poets strove to shock us with their extravagant dress and so long ago, in this century's first and the daily grind. And yet it wasn't sentenced to internal exile precisely laureate Joseph Brodsky was once parastise," because he lacked official on such grounds. They called him "a poet laureate that the pride of Russia. Let us recall that the pride of a poet, in turn, that it's not enough to mean, in turn, that it's not enough to conferred diplomas. And this would attach, and finally, ceremoniously examined, the crucial element is some with bibliographies and footnotes

Cita Press honors the principles of decentralization, collective knowledge production, and equitable access to knowledge.

cita:

Voice Around Me features the full lectures by the women winners of the Nobel Prize. Read the full book:



citapress.org

Continue to page 3 →

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."

5

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

6

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

7

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

8

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

© The Nobel Foundation

given to nationality, but that the prize be awarded to the worthiest person, whether or not they are Scandinavian, "with minimal-yet-lofty ambitions that still inspires fierce arguments that tycoon bedecked a century ago, with nine-tenth-century jujilance, a nine-tenth-century armaments tycoon bedecked a globe. Of course, geography and international politics are nextcritically linked to all Nobel Prizes, with literature providing no exception. Too European, too white, too male, too contrary to, or too swayed by illusory cultural anomalies—criticisms of the annual literary summaries of who the committees choose abound and where they award the people than the winners, written more arguably from a come

Voice 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

affirmative tenure. The Academy was installed by King Gustav III in 1786, so it predates the Nobel Foundation by 115 years. The first Nobel laureate selected by the first committee founded the first award. This was five years before they ever elected a woman to their ranks (the same woman in both cases: Selma Lagerlöf, who borrowed from realism but returned to the romantic in her solkloric fiction).

This edict applies vague gravity
and hefty responsibilities to the
laureates. Women who have won
the literature prize have been
assigned roles like "the epicist of
female experience" or the "Geiger
counter of apartheid." They are
understood to represent specific
nations, ideologies, and
generations. At the same time,
they must represent all of us
(particularly all women); they
must, with their words, illuminate
the universal via the specific.
Laureates are chosen by a
committee whose membership
draws from The Swedish
Academy, a group of eighteen
literary professionals (De
Aderlon, "The Eighteen") with a

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

Snapping cameras, she promised, I'll swear I'm going upstair to find some suitable sentencess, which will be ussing from now on."

Beyond a sense of breaking into boys' club sand the communal weight that comes with this entry, there is little on the surface to connect the Nobel women writers. Writers who win the Nobel Prize must have "in the field of literature, produced the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction." This is the criterria set in the will of Alfred Nobel, a Swede who perhaps invented dynamite. Through his own professional domain was destroyed, he wanted his namesake prize to recognize people whose work has

cita:

citapress.org

Cita Press honors the principles of decentralization, collective knowledge production, and equitable access to knowledge.

Read the full book:



Continue to page 3 →

force, its tellicity is in its reach lessing, so often setting a prickly (sometimes cynical) touch in her novels of frustrated politics, colonialism, and our stories that will re-create when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the story-teller that dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoebe that represents us at our best and at our most creative".

Müller's work paints viscera, impressionistic scenes of still lives under Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship in Romania. No stranger to having words withheld, she explains: "After the more words we are allowed to take, the freer we become

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 literary
lauraeates 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.
American novelist Toni Morrison
is the only Black woman
of winners remains
overwhelmingly white. In terms of
priekly (sometimes cynical) tone
in her novels of frustration
imagined futures, is hopeful: "It is
our stories that will recreate us,"
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."

"in the language of poetry, where every word is weighed, nothing is unusual or normal . . . not a single existence, not anyone's existence in this world." Only Szybomska, 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 institutionalized 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

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 story. But if any of the lectures work is part of a long, shared 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.",

This essay is adapted from the foreword from the collection Voices Around Me: Nobel Lectures by Svetlana Alexievich Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Hertha Müller, Alice Munro, and Wisława Szymborska. The pieces brought together here reflect these values in ways that represent each writer's unique style. 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.

Morrison, whose novels explore so many facets of Black American life with language that is as precious as it is poetic, argues that language can never live up to life once and for all. Nor should it...its

This essay is adapted from the collection Voices Around Me: Nobel Laureates from the Collection of the Nobel Foundation, ed. Alice Munro, and Wislawa Szymborska. The pieces reflect these values in ways that represent each writer's unique style. We present this book—free, online first, and with an account new cover by Fiorella Ferroni—with the open invitation to share in these women's work and ideas.

Gordimov's concrete political lessons to Zygmunt Bauman's larger abstract musings to fables (Muller) and universal observations that are at once (Morrisson)—each contains observations that are at once totally complex and recognizable.

| |
|---|
| 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 Alexievich or the writer Herta Müller, it means sudden visibility: newspaper coverage, repprints, new translations. For others (Leswing, Morrison and South African novelist Nadine Gordimer), it's a novelist one hundred years old that people have been predicting a capsule one in a monumetal career 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 |
| friends called her win “the Nobel tragedy”, because the intensity of private Polish poet was unable to write for years after the onslaught of attention. Meanwhile, Morrison gathered friends to celebrate with her in Stockholm. “I like the Nobel Prize,” she said. “Because they know how to give a party.” |
| Winning the prize in 2015 did not protect Alexievich from being forced into her second exile in 2020. Facing abduction and arrest, 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”, anytime they appear |