

A Brief History of Nobel Prize in Literature Winners from 1901-2024

A Brief History of Nobel Prize in Literature Winners from 1901-2024:

The Golden Sheaf

By

Luke Strongman

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



A Brief History of Nobel Prize in Literature Winners from 1901-2024:
The Golden Sheaf

By Luke Strongman

This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2025 by Luke Strongman

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-5214-8

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-5215-5

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Sully Prudhomme 1901	6
Christian Theodor Mommsen 1902	9
Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson 1903.....	12
Frédéric Mistral 1904 (Co-winner).....	15
José Echegaray 1904 (Co-winner).....	19
Henry Sienkiewicz 1905.....	22
Giosuè Carducci 1906	27
Rudyard Kipling 1907	32
Rudolf Christoph Eucken 1908	35
Selma Lagerlöf 1909	37
Paul Von Heyse 1910	40
Maurice Maeterlinck 1911.....	43
Gerhart Hauptmann 1912	47
Rabindranath Tagore 1913	51
(Not Awarded 1914)	
Romain Rolland 1915.....	57
Carl Gustaf Verner von Heidenstam 1916.....	61

Karl Gjellerup 1917 (Co-winner)	65
Henrik Pontoppidan 1917 (Co-winner)	69
(Not Awarded 1918)	
Carl Spitteler 1919.....	72
Knut Hamsun 1920.....	75
Anatole France 1921	78
Jacinto Benavente y Martínez 1922	82
W. B. Yeats 1923	85
Wladyslaw Reymont 1924.....	91
George Bernard Shaw 1925.....	95
Gracia Deledda 1926	99
Henri Bergson 1927.....	102
Sigrid Undset 1928.....	106
Thomas Mann 1929.....	111
Sinclair Lewis 1930.....	116
Erik Karlfeldt 1931.....	119
John Galsworthy 1932	122
Ivan Bunin 1933	125
Luigi Pirandello 1934	132
Not Awarded 1935	
Eugene O'Neill 1936.....	139
Martin du Gard 1937	143

Pearl Buck 1938	146
Frans Eemil Sillanpää 1939	150
Not Awarded 1940	
Not Awarded 1941	
Not Awarded 1942	
Not Awarded 1943	
Johannes V. Jensen 1944	154
Gabriela Mistral 1945	156
Herman Hesse 1946.....	159
André Gide 1947	165
T. S. Eliot 1948.....	169
William Faulkner 1949	175
Bertrand Russell 1950	179
Pär Lagerkvist 1951.....	181
François Charles Mauriac 1952	184
Winston Churchill 1953.....	188
Ernest Hemingway 1954	191
Halldór Laxness 1955.....	195
Juan Ramón Jiménez 1956	199
Albert Camus 1957.....	201
Boris Pasternak 1958.....	203
Salvatore Quasimodo 1959.....	206
Saint-John Perse 1960	209

Ivo Andrić 1961	213
John Steinbeck 1962	216
Giorgos Seferis 1963	222
Jean-Paul Sartre 1964	233
Mikhail Sholokhov 1965	237
Yasunari Agnon 1966 (Co-winner)	241
Nelly Sachs 1966 (Co-winner)	244
Miguel Ángel Asturias 1967	247
Yasunari Kawabata 1968	251
Samuel Beckett 1969	253
Alexander Solzhenitsyn 1970	259
Pablo Neruda 1971	262
Heinrich Böll 1972	266
Patrick White 1973	270
Eyvind Johnson 1974 (Co-winner)	275
Harry Martinson 1974 (Co-winner)	278
Eugenio Montale 1975	281
Saul Bellow 1976	284
Vicente Aleixandre 1977	287
Isaac Bashevis Singer 1978	289
Odysseas Elytis 1979	294

Czesław Miłosz 1980	298
Elias Canetti 1981	305
Gabriel García Márquez 1982	309
William Golding 1983	313
Jaroslav Seifert 1984	315
Claude Simon 1985	317
Wole Soyinka 1986	320
Joseph Brodsky 1987	322
Naguib Mahfouz 1988	325
Camilo José Cela 1989	330
Octavio Paz 1990	333
Nadine Gordimer 1991	338
Derek Walcott 1992	340
Toni Morrison 1993	343
Kenzaburō Ōe 1994	349
Seamus Heaney 1995	353
Wisława Szymborska 1996	356
Dario Fo 1997	360
José Saramago 1998	362
Günter Grass 1999	365
Gao Xingjian 2000	368

V. S. Naipaul 2001	371
Imre Kertész 2002	374
J. M. Coetzee 2003	377
Elfriede Jelinek 2004	379
Harold Pinter 2005	381
Orhan Pamuk 2006	383
Doris Lessing 2007	388
Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio 2008	391
Herta Müller 2009	395
Mario Vargas Llosa 2010	398
Tomas Tranströmer 2011	403
Mo Yan 2012	406
Alice Munro 2013	409
Patrick Modiano 2014	412
Svetlana Alexievich 2015	415
Bob Dylan 2016	419
Kazuo Ishiguro 2017	422
Olga Tokarczuk 2018	426
Peter Handke 2019	430
Louise Glück 2020	434
Abdulrazak Gurnah 2021	437

Anne Ernaux 2022	441
Jon Fosse 2023	444
Han Kang 2024.....	447
Conclusion.....	450

INTRODUCTION

'Every moment is a fresh beginning.' - T. S. Eliot

The Nobel Foundation, established in 1900, oversees the administration of all Nobel Prizes, including the literature prize. The Swedish Academy is responsible for the literature prize's specific administration. The Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded annually since 1901, is one of the most prestigious honors in the literary world. Established by the will of Alfred Nobel (1833-1896), a Swedish inventor (of dynamite) and philanthropist, the Nobel Prize recognizes writers who have produced 'the most outstanding work in an ideal direction,' as Nobel's will stipulates. Over the past century, the Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to some of the most influential and innovative writers of their time, shaping the course of literary history. The scope of the present book is from 1901 to 2024, covering the history of the prize winners (albeit in brief) from the early twentieth to the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

The Nobel Prize in Literature is administered by the Swedish Academy, headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. The Swedish Academy, established in 1786, is responsible for selecting the Nobel Laureate in Literature. The Academy's eighteen members, elected for life, are prominent Swedish writers, scholars, and intellectuals. The Nobel Prize in Literature is awarded annually on December 10, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death, at the Stockholm Concert Hall in Stockholm, Sweden.

During the selection process the Swedish Academy solicits nominations from members of the Swedish Academy; previous Nobel Laureates in Literature; professors of literature and linguistics at universities worldwide; and members of literary academies and societies. The Academy's Nobel Committee then reviews and evaluates nominations and a shortlist of candidates is compiled. Then, the Swedish Academy members vote to select the Nobel Laureate who is publicly announced in October.

The Nobel Prize in Literature consists of a gold medal; a diploma; and a cash award (currently 9 million Swedish kronor, approximately \$1.1 million). The Nobel Library, located in Stockholm, houses the archives of

the Nobel Prize in Literature, which include documents, manuscripts, and correspondence related to the prize and its laureates.

In the early years of the Nobel Prize in Literature, from 1901 to 1920, the Nobel Committee favored writers from Western Europe, particularly from Scandinavia, Germany, and France. The first Nobel laureate, Sully Prudhomme, a French poet, set the tone for the prize's emphasis on literary excellence and philosophical depth. Other notable winners from this period include Theodor Mommsen, a German historian and writer, and Selma Lagerlöf, the first female Nobel laureate and a pioneering Swedish novelist.

The interwar period, from 1920 to 1940, saw the rise of modernism and experimentation in literature. Winners from this time include Sinclair Lewis, the first American Nobel laureate, and Eugene O'Neill, who paved the way for future American winners.

The post-World War II era, from 1945 to 1965, marked a shift toward recognizing writers from diverse geographical and linguistic backgrounds. The prize was awarded to writers such as T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway, who helped to shape modern literature. This period also saw the recognition of non-Western writers, including Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European Nobel laureate, and Saint-John Perse, a French poet from the Caribbean.

The latter half of the twentieth century, from 1965 to 2000, witnessed an increased focus on social justice, cultural identity, and postcolonialism. Nobel laureates such as Samuel Beckett, Gabriel García Márquez, and Toni Morrison reflected these themes in their work. Other notable winners from this period include Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who exposed the Soviet Union's human rights abuses.

The dawn of the twenty-first century saw the Nobel Prize in Literature continue to celebrate literary innovation and diversity. Winners such as Gao Xingjian, the first Chinese Nobel laureate, and Orhan Pamuk, the first Turkish winner, exemplified the prize's global scope. This history of Nobel Prize in Literature winners from 1901 to 2004 provides a comprehensive overview of the award's impact on literary culture. Through their works, these writers have inspired generations, challenged societal norms, and expanded our understanding of the human experience. Since the inception of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901, seventeen women have been awarded this prestigious honor. These female laureates have made significant contributions to literature, exploring themes such as identity, social justice, and the human condition.

During the early years of the Nobel Prize, from 1901-1949, the first female Nobel laureate was Selma Lagerlöf (1909), a Swedish novelist and

short-story writer. Her works often explored Swedish culture and history. Sigrid Undset (1928), a Norwegian novelist, was recognized for her historical novels, particularly 'Kristin Lavransdatter.' Pearl S. Buck (1938), an American novelist, was awarded for her novels about China, including *The Good Earth*.

In the post-World War II era, more women were recognized for their literary achievements. Saul Bellow's Nobel win in 1976 sparked controversy as many felt the award should have gone to his contemporary, the American short-story writer and novelist, Jean Stafford, or perhaps even the long-overlooked Virginia Woolf. Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature win was followed by that of his contemporary, the Polish-American writer and poet, Czesława Miłosz, and in 1996 by the Polish poet, Wisława Szymborska. Alice Munro (2013) became the thirteenth female Nobel laureate, recognized for her innovation of the short story.

In the twenty-first century, female Nobel laureates have continued to make significant contributions: Doris Lessing (2007), a British novelist, was recognized for her exploration of the human condition. Herta Müller (2009), a Romanian-German novelist and poet, was awarded for her depiction of life under totalitarian regimes. Alice Munro (2013), a Canadian short-story writer, was recognized for her mastery of the short story. Olga Tokarczuk (2018), a Polish novelist, was awarded for her exploration of Polish identity and history. Louise Glück (2020), an American poet, was recognized for her poetry collections exploring family, identity, and the human condition. The contributions of these female Nobel laureates have enriched literature, offering diverse perspectives on the human experience.

There were seven years between 1901 and 2024 when the Nobel Prize in Literature was not awarded: 1914, 1918, 1935, 1940, 1941, 1942, and 1943. Perhaps this was due in most part to the two World Wars that limited the choices of the Swedish Committee in celebrating the ascendancy of the human spirit in literary works. There have also been two occasions when the Nobel Prize has been declined by writers. The first by Boris Pasternak in 1958, due to the perception of anti-Soviet themes in his novel *Doctor Zhivago*. The second person to decline the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature voluntarily was Jean-Paul Sartre in 1964, who claimed that, because of the 'stature' of the Nobel Prize internationally, he did not want to become 'institutionalised' by the award. One poet, Sweden's Erik Karlfeldt was awarded the Nobel Prize posthumously in 1931.

Since its inception in 1901, the Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to writers from diverse countries and cultures. Europe has produced the majority of Nobel laureates, with France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Sweden among the top countries. This dominance can be attributed to the historical and cultural significance of European literature, as well as the continent's strong literary traditions.

The Nobel Prize has often been criticized for favoring writers from Western countries, particularly those writing in English or French. This bias is reflected in the disproportionate number of laureates from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. However, this also acknowledges the significant impact of Western literature on the global literary landscape. In recent decades, the Nobel Committee has made a conscious effort to recognize writers from non-Western countries. This shift is evident in the awards given to writers from Latin America (Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda), Africa (Wole Soyinka, Naguib Mahfouz), and Asia (Kenzaburō Ōe, Gao Xingjian). This expansion has enriched the literary canon and promoted cultural diversity. No New Zealanders have yet won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Nobel laureates often reflect the cultural, historical, and social contexts of their countries of origin. For instance, Russian and Soviet writers (e.g., Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn) explored themes of social realism, revolution, and existentialism, while Scandinavian writers (e.g., Ibsen, Strindberg) probed the human condition and social critique.

Language plays a significant role in literary influence and recognition. English, French, and Spanish are among the most represented languages, reflecting their global spread and cultural significance. However, the Nobel Committee has also recognized writers in lesser-known languages, such as Polish (Czesław Miłosz), Portuguese (José Saramago), and Swedish (Tomas Tranströmer).

The Nobel Prize has facilitated literary exchange and globalization. Writers from diverse countries have influenced each other, and their works have been translated into multiple languages. This cross-cultural exchange has enriched world literature and fostered a more nuanced understanding of diverse cultures. Perhaps the greatest current omission from these is Salman Rushdie, who is possibly the highest profile 'serious' author not yet to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Perhaps this is because his novels have drawn *too much* (religious) controversy.

The Nobel Prize has faced criticism for its Eurocentric bias, overlooking significant literary contributions from non-Western cultures. Additionally, controversies surrounding individual laureates (e.g., Rudyard

Kipling's colonialism, Günter Grass' Nazi past) have sparked debates about literary merit, morality, and politics.

The Nobel Prize in Literature reflects the complex dynamics of global literature, with European dominance giving way to the increasing recognition of non-Western voices. While critiques of bias and controversy persist, the award remains a powerful platform for celebrating literary excellence and promoting cultural understanding. Winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature have often spent years mired in controversy in their country of origin, and written against the odds.

As the literary landscape continues to evolve, the Nobel Committee will likely face challenges in balancing traditional notions of literary merit with the need for diversity and inclusivity. Embracing a more global perspective will ensure that the prize remains relevant, celebrating the rich tapestry of world literature. In the future in the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature, there could possibly be an increased representation from non-Western countries and languages and a greater emphasis on literary translation and cultural exchange, more nuanced consideration of literary merit, morality, and politics; and expanded recognition of women writers and underrepresented groups. By embracing these recommendations, the Nobel Prize in Literature can continue to promote literary excellence, cultural diversity, and global understanding.

Alfred Nobel, who lived from 1833-1896, was a Swedish inventor, chemist, and engineer who left a legacy through his groundbreaking inventions and the establishment of the Nobel Prizes. Nobel's intention was to honor writers who promoted peace, fraternity, and human understanding. Nobel's key provisions were that the annual award should be administered by the Swedish Academy; the selection was based on literary merit, regardless of nationality; and the prize amount was to be allocated to the winner(s). Alfred Nobel's inventions transformed industries, while his philanthropic vision established the Nobel Prizes as a symbol of excellence. The Nobel Prize in Literature continues to inspire and recognize literary achievement, promoting global understanding and cultural exchange.

SULLY PRUDHOMME 1901

'Justice is love guided by the light.'

Sully Prudhomme, who lived from 1839-1907, was a French poet and essayist. He was the first winner of the Nobel Prize in 1901 'in special recognition of his poetic composition, which gives evidence of lofty idealism, artistic perfection and a rare combination of the qualities of both heart and intellect.' Prudhomme gave most of the financial reward received from winning the Nobel Prize to the creation of a poetry prize awarded by the *Société des Gens de Lettres*. As Bloom (2004) stated, 'Prudhomme's poetry is characterized by its "introspective and philosophical nature, marking a decisive shift away from traditional Romantic themes"' (p. 143).

Prudhomme studied to be an engineer but turned to philosophy and then to poetry. His intention was to write 'scientific poetry for modern times'. His literary style could be said to be sincere and melancholic. Prudhomme was linked to the Parnassus School, though his poetry was characteristically inimitable. The 'Parnassians' were a group of French poets who wrote during the positivist period in the nineteenth century, writing after Romanticism but before Symbolism. Two of the main influencers of Parnassianism were the author Théophile Gautier and the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. The Parnassians were influenced by the 'art for art's sake' movement.

Sully Prudhomme's father died when he was two, and he then lived with his uncle. Prudhomme attended Lycée Bonaparte but eye trouble interrupted his studies. He worked in the Creusot region for Schneider Steel Foundry, but began studying law, and writing poems. As Baym (1971) put it: 'Intrigued by the hidden nexus between the mind and the world it contemplates (psychology and physics), the young Prudhomme joined others in their passionate effort . . . of "piercing the blindness of activity in respect to its transcendental functions."' A favorable reception of his poems at the *Conférence La Bruyère* encouraged his literary career. Prudhomme's first collection, *Stances et Poèmes* (*Stanzas and Poems*, 1865) was praised by Sainte-Beuve. His most famous poem was 'La vase brisé.' Here is an excerpt from it:

The vase where this verberna's dying
 Was cracked by a lady's fan's soft blow.
 It must have been the merest grazing:
 We heard no sound. The fissure grew.

The little wound spread while we slept,
 Pried deep in the crystal, bit by bit.
 A long, slow marching line, it crept
 From spreading base to curving lip.

The water oozed out drop by drop,
 Bled from the line we'd not seen etched.
 The flowers drained out all their sap.
 The vase is broken: do not touch.

Prudhomme published more poetry before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. He discussed war in *Impressions de la Guerre* (1872) but it had damaged his health. Prudhomme then shifted from the sentimental style of his first books towards a more personal style and the unified formality of the Parnassus School with an interest in philosophy and scientific subjects. One inspiration was Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, translated into verse. Prudhomme's philosophy was expressed in *La Justice* (1878) and *Le Bonheur* (1888). His poetry had a style of poetical quality tinged with a philosophical inclination. Prudhomme was elected to the Académie Française in 1881. As Hiddleston (1980) argued, Sully Prudhomme's work embodies 'a synthesis of science, philosophy, and poetry, reflecting his quest for a unified understanding of human experience' (p. 123).

After *Le Bonheur*, Prudhomme turned away from poetry to write essays on aesthetics and philosophy. Prudhomme wrote two important essays: *L'Expression dans les beaux-arts* (1884) and *Réflexions sur l'art des vers* (1892). He wrote articles on Blaise Pascal in *Le Reve des Seux Mondes* (1888) and an article on free will (*La Psychologie du Libre-Arbitre*, 1906) in the *Revue de métaphysique et du morale*. In 1902, Prudhomme founded the *Société des poètes français* with Jose-Maria de Heredia and Leon Dierx. Towards the end of his life, he lived as a recluse at Châtenay-Malabry, suffering from partial paralysis while working on his essays. Sully Prudhomme died on September 6 1907 and was buried at Père-Lachaise, Paris.

References

- Baym, M. I. (1971). On Mending the Broken Vase: Sully Prudhomme's Aspiration to a Unifying Aesthetic. *The French Review. Special Issue*, 44(2), 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/487599>.
- Bloom, H. (2004). Sully Prudhomme. *French poets* 245, pp. 137-155. Gale.
- Hiddleston, J. A. (1980). *Sully Prudhomme: Selected texts*. Cambridge University Press.
- The Nobel Prize. (2024). *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1901. Sully Prudhomme*. Retrieved from: Sully Prudhomme – Facts - NobelPrize.org.
- Prudhomme, S. (2016). 'Le Vase Brisé.' ('The Broken Vase'). *Read by Jean-Luc Garneau*. Being. Retrieved from: <https://onbeing.org/poetry/le-vase-brise-broken-vase/>.

CHRISTIAN THEODOR MOMMSEN 1902

‘The writer of history is perhaps closer to the artist than the scholar’

Christian Mommsen, who lived from 1817-1903, was born in Garding in the Duchy of Schleswig. He was a German classical scholar, jurist, journalist, politician, historian and archaeologist. Mommsen was a member of the Prussian and German parliaments. He was regarded as one of the greatest classicists of the nineteenth century and his work on Roman history was fundamental in its importance. In fact, the 1902 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Mommsen as ‘the greatest living master of the art of historical writing, with special reference to his monumental work, *A History of Rome (Romische Geschichte)*.’ It is part of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* of the Berlin Academy. His insight into the origins of Rome in *A History of Rome* was without parallel at the time: ‘To create order amidst this chaos did not require either brilliance of conception or a mighty display of force, but it required a clear insight into the interests of Rome and of her subjects, and vigor and consistency in establishing and maintaining the institutions recognized as necessary.’

Mommsen wrote about Roman law obligations, which had a significant impact on the development of the German Civil Code. In approximately 1500 works Mommsen pioneered the development of epigraphy, the study of the inscriptions of material artifacts. An extract from *A History of Rome* is included here:

Lex- (“that which binds,” related to -legare-, “to bind to something”) denotes, as is well known, a contract in general, along, however, with the connotation of a contract whose terms the proposer dictates and the other party simply accepts or declines; as was usually the case, e.g. with public -licitationes-. In the -*lex publica publica populi Romani*- the proposer was the king . . . the limited co-operation of the latter was thus significantly indicated in the very language.

From 1838 to 1843, Mommsen studied jurisprudence at Kiel, and finished his studies with a degree of Doctor of Roman Law. During this time, he was a room-mate of the soon to become famous poet, Theodor Storm. The recipient of a grant, Mommsen was then able to visit France and Italy to study the preserved Roman inscriptions. As Benario (1994) relates: ‘The

most significant event of his professional life was his first long trip to Italy, in the mid-1940s. There he learned to speak the language with a native's mastery, first became aware of the importance of topography for the study of Roman history, and in San Marino met Bartolomeo Borghesi, the recognized master of the study of Latin inscriptions.' (73). Mommsen's innovative methodology, combining archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources, 'set a new standard for historical scholarship' and influenced generations of historians (Christ, 1982, p. 56).

Mommsen's *History of Rome*, although written during his early career and unfinished, was his most famous work, and it appeared in three volumes in 1854, 1855, and 1856. It discoursed on Roman history to the end of the Roman Republic and the rule of Julius Caesar. But Mommsen was unable or unwilling to write about Caesar's death in the volumes. Mommsen records the early origins of Rome:

In the earliest division of the burgesses of Rome a trace has been preserved of the fact that the body arose out of the amalgamation of three cantons once probably independent, the Ramnians, Titics, and Lucers, into a single commonwealth – in other words, out of such a -synoikismos – as that from which Athens arose in Attica (2). The great antiquity of this threefold division of the community (3) is perhaps best evinced by the fact that the Romans, in matters especially of constitutional law, regularly used the forms -tribuere- (“to divide into three”) and -tribus- (“a third”) in the general sense of “to divide” and “a part,” and the latter expression (-tribus-) like our “quarter” early lost its original significance of number.

Having been appointed a member of the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, Mommsen became a professor of Roman history at the University of Berlin in 1861 where he lectured until 1887. Mommsen's 'Roman History remains “the greatest historical work of the nineteenth century,” offering unparalleled depth and insight into ancient Roman politics and culture’ (Wirszubski, 1950, p. 133). Over the course of his academic career Mommsen received great acclaim. He held foreign membership of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences from 1859, and was a recipient of the Prussian medal Pour Le Mérite in 1868. He held honorary citizenship of Rome and was elected to the membership of the American Antiquarian Society in 1870. Mommsen fathered sixteen children with his wife Marie. Mommsen's grandson Theodor Ernst Mommsen (1905-1958) was a professor of medieval history in the United States.

References

- Benario, H. W. (1994). Theodor Mommsen: In Commemoration of the Ninetieth Anniversary of His Death. *The Classical Outlook*, 71(3), 73-78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43939473>.
- Christ, K. (1982). *Theodor Mommsen und die 'Römische Geschichte'*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- The Nobel Prize. (2024). *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1902. Theodor Mommsen*. Retrieved from: The Nobel Prize in Literature 1902 - NobelPrize.org.
- Wirszubski, C. (1950). *Libertas as a political idea at Rome during the late Republic and early Principate*. Cambridge University Press.

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON 1903

*'... so you may flutter about here like a chattering jay all you please,
and marry the rain and the north wind'*

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who lived from 1832-1910, was a Norwegian writer who received the 1903 Nobel Prize in Literature 'as a tribute to his noble, magnificent and versatile poetry, which has always been distinguished by both the freshness of its inspiration and the rare purity of its spirit.' Bjørnson was the first Norwegian Nobel laureate, and a prolific polemicist who was extremely influential in Norwegian public life, and Scandinavian cultural debate.

Bjørnson was celebrated for writing the lyrics to the Norwegian anthem, '*Ja, vi elsker dette landet*' and was one of the great figures of the 'older generation' of Norwegian writers; others being Henrik Ibsen, Alexander Kielland, and Jonas Lie. Bjørnson's peasant stories, like '*Synnøve Solbakken*' (1857), are characterized by 'a strong sense of national identity and a deep understanding of the Norwegian peasantry' (Garton, 2002, p. 23).

Bjørnson was born in the farmstead of Bjorgan in Kvikne, a secluded village in the Osterdalen district, sixty miles south of Trondheim in 1832. In 1837 Bjørnson's father Peder Bjørnson, the Pastor of Kvikne, was transferred to the Parish of Nesset, outside Molde in Romsdal. This was a secluded district in which he spent his childhood. Bjørnson studied in the neighboring city of Molde, and at the age of seventeen, he attended the Heltberg Latin School in Christiania to prepare for university. Bjørnson showed an interest and ability in poetry and matriculated at the University of Oslo in 1852, and soon embarked upon a career as a journalist, focusing on the criticism of drama.

In 1857 Bjørnson published *Synnøve Solbakken*, the first of his peasant novels. This was followed in 1858 by *Arne*, in 1860 by *En glad Gut (A Happy Boy)*, and in 1868 by *Fiskerjenten (The Fisher Girl)*. Bjørnson wanted to 'to create a new saga in the light of the peasant', not merely in prose fiction, but in national dramas or folk-stories. Bjørnson stimulated national pride, linking Norwegian folk history to modern ideals.

Between 1864 and 1874, Bjørnson exercised his intellectual ability politically and as a theatrical manager. In 1871 he supplemented his journalistic work by delivering lectures throughout Scandinavia. From

1874 to 1876, Bjørnson was absent from Norway during a peaceful voluntary exile in which he recovered his imaginative powers. A new departure as a dramatic author began with *En Falli (A Bankruptcy)* and *Redaktøren (The Editor)* in 1874, a social drama with an extremely modern and realistic cast.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) set several of his poems to music, including *Landkjenning* and *Sigurd Jorsalfar* but they eventually focused on an opera based on King Olav Tryggvason. In 1877 Bjørnson published another novel, *Magnhild* in which his ideas on social questions were seen to be in a state of germination, and gave expression to his republican sentiments in the polemical play *Kongen (The King)*. Bjørnson also wrote an essay on intellectual freedom. In 1878 he wrote *Kaptejn Mansana* which was an episode from the war of Italian independence.

Bjørnson sought success on the stage and concentrated his intellectual powers on a drama of social life, *Leonarda* in 1879. A few weeks later he produced a satirical play, *Det Nye System (The New System)*. His plays were discussed but they were not financially successful. Bjørnson also produced a social drama, *En Handske (A Gauntlet)* in 1883, but it needed to be modified for the stage. In the autumn of the same year, Bjørnson published a mystical play *Over Ævne (Beyond Powers)*, which portrayed the abnormal features of religious excitement as an extraordinary force.

Politically, from his youth onwards, Bjørnson admired Henrik Wergeland and became a vivid spokesman for the Norwegian left-wing movement. Yet his political opinions eventually brought the charge of 'high treason' and he left Norway and took refuge for a time in Germany, returning in 1882. Convinced that the theatre was closed, he turned back to the novel art form, and published in 1884, *Det Flager I Byen og paa Havnen (Flags are Flying in Town in Port)*, which embodied theories on heredity and education. He subsequently published the 1889 novel, *Paa Guds Veje (On God's Path)*, which discussed similar issues. These were not greeted with resounding enthusiasm. However, the publication of the comedy *Geografi og Kaerlighed (Geography and Love)* met with success. Then Bjørnson published successively the second part of *Over Ævne (Beyond Powers II)* in 1895, a political tragedy called *Paul Lange og Tora Parsberg* in 1898, *Laboremus* in 1901, *Pa Storhove* in 1902, and *Daglanet (Dag's Farm)* in 1904. After ten years, his creative energies had not diminished and he had 'worked through' the resistance he had received and some of the political problems with the government of Norway of the time.

In 1899, at the opening of the National Theatre in Oslo, Bjørnson received an ovation for his saga-drama of *King Sigurd the Crusader*.

Bjørnson also contributed to the anti-union magazine *Ringeren*, which was edited by Sigurd Ibsen in 1898. The famous writer was also concerned with the question of the *bondemaal*, the adopting of a national language for Norway as distinct from *dansk-norsk* (Dano-Norwegian), in which most Norwegian literature had hitherto been written. In this way, Bjørnson was sometimes thought to have a ‘strong and narrow’ patriotism. As Willcox (1910) stated: ‘This atmosphere and the general hostility which exceptional abilities and unprecedented opinions awaken exiled Ibsen, we, know, for a large part of his life from Norway. But Bjørnson was “ever a fighter.” He was stout-hearted and cheerfully ready for any opposition and hostility that offered, and, indeed, provoked a good deal of it’ (44).

Bjørnson was concerned with social causes throughout his career. He spoke politically on behalf of Norwegian farmers, and attacked French justice in the Dreyfus Affair; furthermore, he fought for the rights of children in Slovakia to learn their own ‘mother tongue.’ Bjørnson wrote in multiple newspapers about the Černová massacre (this shooting occurred in Černová in the Kingdom of Hungary on 27 October 1907. Gendarmes fired into a gathering for the consecration of the local Catholic church, killing fifteen people). Bjørnson also took part in the sexual morality debate (*sedelighetsdebatten*) of the time, arguing that free love did not allow the development of positive traits such as self-restraint and a focus on virtue. Bjørnson gave sixty lectures in the Nordic countries on the issue. The great Norwegian author died in Paris in 1910.

References

- Bjørnson, B. (1860). *A Happy Boy*. Trans. from the Norse by Rasmus B. Anderson.
- Garton, J. (2002). *Norwegian Women's Writing 1850-1990*. Continuum.
- The Nobel Prize. (2024). *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1903. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1903/summary/>.
- Willcox, L. C. (1910). Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. *The North American Review*, 192(656), 44-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25106708>.

FRÉDÉRIC MISTRAL 1904 (CO-WINNER)

'Aioli intoxicates gently, fills the body with warmth, and the soul with enthusiasm. In its essence it concentrates the strength, the gaiety of Provence: sunshine.'

Frédéric Mistral, who lived from 1830-1842, was born in Maillane in the Bouches-du-Rhone department in Southern France. His parents were wealthy landed farmers. Mistral studied for a bachelor's degree in Nîmes, and studied law in Aix-en-Provence at the same time as studying the history of Provence. In 1876 Mistral married a Burgundian woman, Marie-Louise Riviers (1857-1943) at Dijon Cathedral (Cathedrale Saint-Benigne de Dijon).

Mistral was an Occitan writer and lexicographer of the language of Provençal. His fame was significantly derived from his long poem 'Mirèio: A Provençal Poem' published in 1859, which took eight years to write. Upon completion, in 1859, Mistral presented 'Mirèio' to Adolphe Dumas, Jean Reboul and Lamaratine, who devoted to it one of the 'entretiens' of his *cours familier de littérature*. It was very well received and Mistral became, for a time, a Parisian 'literary Lion'.

CANTO I.

Lotus Farm.

ISING the love of a Provençal maid;
How through the wheat-fields of La Crau she strayed,
Following the fate that drew her to the sea.
Unknown beyond remote La Crau was she;
And I, who tell the rustic tale of her,
Would fain be Homer's humble follower.

What though youth's aureole was her only crown?
And never gold she wore nor damask gown?
I'll build her up a throne out of my song,
And hail her queen in our despised tongue.

Mine be the simple speech that ye all know,
 Shepherds and farmer-folk of lone La Crau.

God of my country, who didst have Thy birth
 Among poor shepherds when Thou wast on earth,
 Breathe fire into my song! Thou knowest, my God,
 How, when the lusty summer is abroad,
 And figs turn ripe in sun and dew, comes he,—
 Brute, greedy man,—and quite despoils the tree.

For the most part, however, Mistral's visits to Paris were rare. He also visited Switzerland, and Italy infrequently, but for the most part Mistral stayed in the beloved Provençal region, living quietly in the village of Maillane, surrounded by nature and outworks of the Félibrean movement. Félibrige was a literary association of Provençal writers near Avignon founded in 1854 especially for the furtherment of Provençal as a literary language.

A criticism of Mistral's *oeuvre* was that although he was nationally and internationally recognized, he remained trenchantly provincial in his outlook. He was preoccupied in restoring what he saw as the 'first literary language of civilized Europe' – Provençal. For Mistral, race, or what we now term 'ethnicity', concerned people who were linked by language, and rooted in a story and country. Nominated by two professors from the Swedish Uppsala University, Mistral received the 1904 Nobel Prize in Literature 'in recognition of the fresh originality and true inspiration of his poetic production, which faithfully reflects the natural scenery and native spirit of his people, and, in addition, his significant work as a Provençal philologist.' Co-winning the Nobel Prize in 1904 with the Spanish writer Jose Echegaray, Mistral devoted half of his prize winnings to the creation of the Museum at Arles – 'Museon Arlaten'.

Through his poem 'Mirèio', Mistral was involved in a rebirth of local patriotism in the South of France. The sunny lands were seen as a cradle of modern literature, and produced an evanescence of lyrical poetry, 'where the Troubadours sang of love' after a sleep of many hundreds of years (Downer, 2022). Mistral sought to 'stir the hearts' of poets and political leaders through a reinvigoration of the poetic imagination in southern France, in part by studying the memoirs of those who lived there. As Downer observes, it is an attempt to restore in the Rhône River region in France, 'a love of their ancient customs, language, and traditions, an effort to raise a sort a dam against the flood of modern tendencies that threaten to overwhelm local life' (2022).

Perhaps in this way, Mistral advocated a kind of political separatism, a regionalism, a decentralization. Yet the union of France with Provence produced the ‘Félibrige.’ For the Provençal region, Mistral sought the creation of an independent literature, a form of revolution and reinvigoration of the mental life of southern France. As Bauer noted:

the particularities of Mistral’s “emplacement—textual abundance, multiple narrative identities, intertextuality, and storytelling—reflect not only an effort to preserve a pre-industrial agrarian society, but also testify to a modern awareness of the present as a future past, which explicitly structures the *Poème du Rhône* (1897) and *Mireille*.” (1859)

Mistral’s father was a wealthy land owner, and the long poem ‘Mirèio’ was filled with the images and sensations of the country around Maillane. In a sense then, ‘Mirèio’ is a memory of Mistral’s father, whom he believed towered in his wisdom and noble-bearing.

Mistral wrote against the decay of classic tongues, and sought a poetry that would awaken them as if by magic. Mistral promoted the knowledge of history, traditions, language, and religion, and as Félibrige became larger and more renowned, so too his stature as a poet increased. The like-minded people of Italy and Spain became sympathetic to his cause.

Mistral used the vocabulary of the Romance languages and his poetry was compared with that of Dante. He imagined Provençal as a magnifying mirror to the colorful reflected glory. Mistral’s was the language of exuberant enthusiasm. ‘The perfume of flowers, the sunlight on the water, the great birds flying in the air, the silent drifting of the boat in the broad valley, the reflection of the tall poplars in the water, the old ruins that crown the hilltops . . .’ (Downing, 2020). Mistral died on 25 March 1914 in Maillane, the village where he was born. Then, as Loggins (1924) observed:

I once heard a fervent Provençal say: “Ah, 1914 – that was a dark year! Our Master Mistral died and the horrible war began.” No disaster, however great, could over shadow in the eyes of true sons of Provence the catastrophe which the death of Mistral meant to their place.

References

- Bauer, D. (2019). Text, Topos, and the Awareness of History in Frédéric Mistral’s *Poème du Rhône*. *Dix-Neuf*, 23(3-4), 254-264.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14787318.2019.1683965>.
- Downer, C. A. (2022). *Frederic Mistral. Poet and Leader in Provence*. Good Press.

Loggins, V. (1924). Frederic Mistral: Poet of the Soil. *The Sewanee Review*, 32(1), 54-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27533725>.

The Nobel Prize. (2024). *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1904. Frédéric Mistral*. Retrieved from: Frédéric Mistral – Facts - NobelPrize.org.