

THE WILL OF ALFRED NOBEL

The Nobel Foundation was established under the terms of the will of ALFRED BERNHARD NOBEL, Ph.D.h.c., dated Paris, November 27, 1895, which in its relevant parts runs as follows:

“The whole of my remaining realizable estate shall be dealt with in the following way: the capital, invested in safe securities by my executors, shall constitute a fund, the interest on which shall be annually distributed in the form of prizes to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind. The said interest shall be divided into five equal parts, which shall be apportioned as follows: one part to the person who shall have made the most important discovery or invention within the field of physics; one part to the person who shall have made the most important chemical discovery or improvement; one part to the person who shall have made the most important discovery within the domain of physiology or medicine; one part to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction, and one part to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses. The prizes for physics and chemistry shall be awarded by the Swedish Academy of Sciences; that for physiology or medical works by the Carolinska Institute in Stockholm; that for literature by the Academy in Stockholm, and that for champions of peace by a committee of five persons to be elected by the Norwegian Storting. It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be Scandinavian or not.”

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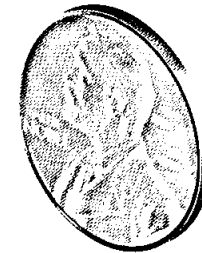
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# *The Nobel Prize*



*The First 100 Years*

*edited by*

**Agneta Wallin Levinovitz**

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**Preface**

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In the year 2001 the Nobel Foundation celebrates the Centennial of the first Nobel Prizes. Among the events for 2001 is the opening of a Centennial Exhibition in Stockholm. An identical exhibition will open in Oslo in the fall of 2001 and then tour different cities around the world. The Nobel web site has been upgraded to Nobel e-Museum (NeM) — a virtual museum of science and culture which can be found on the Internet at [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org).

As part of the Centennial celebrations, the NeM is publishing a series of reviews covering the work of Nobel Laureates in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature and Peace as well as Winners of the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (awarded since 1969). Electronic publication of this series began in 1999 and has now been completed. In view of the great interest in these reviews, and to make the information available also to those who prefer to read from printed pages, a collaboration has been established with Imperial College Press and World Scientific to publish updated versions of these reviews in the form of this Centennial Volume.

We wish to thank all the contributing authors and Gudrun Franzén, administrator of the Nobel e-Museum, for her advice and help at all stages of preparing the manuscript for this volume. Thanks are also due to Dr Ola Törnkvist, Imperial College Press, London and Ms Kim Tan, World Scientific, Singapore for the copy-editing and efficient production of this volume.

Agneta Wallin Levinovitz

Nils Ringertz

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# *The Nobel Prize*



*The First 100 Years*

## Introduction

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*Michael Sohlman\**



The celebration of the Centennial of the Nobel Prizes in 2001 brings with it i.a. a perspective on the development of human civilization over the past hundred years. The disciplines covered by the Nobel Prizes — Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature and Peace, as well as the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (from 1969) — deal with many, if not all, major aspects of the conditions of life on earth. And even if the Prizes have obviously not been able to capture all the most important contributions to the progress of Mankind, they constitute important markers of the major trends in their respective area. The articles included in this volume have the ambition to convey these major trends and developments.

When gauging the meaning and development of the Nobel Prizes, a natural starting point is to ask what Nobel himself intended with the Prizes. His intentions and the criteria he envisaged for the five disciplines are given in his last will, but they remain very broad, and as is clear from the following articles, have necessitated interpretation over the years, an interpretation which remains constantly on the agenda of the Prize-Awarding Institutions.

It is also clear that some of his intentions — that the award would go to “those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind” were impossible to fulfil already from the start: what economists call information-, recognition- and decision-lags were and are still too long.

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\*Executive Director of the Nobel Foundation.

We also have reason to think that Nobel — at least in the scientific disciplines — had in mind that young, talented inventors should be given a safe financial basis for their work and thereby be spared the constant trouble in finding financiers at the start of their career, as was the case for Alfred Nobel himself. Here the history shows that the Prizes have rather concentrated on the importance of the discoveries, inventions, literary works and pacifist ventures, than on encouragement of young talents. And in our days governments are financing research grants and scholarships, and a rapidly expanding venture capital market provides young start-up entrepreneurs with the needed capital.

Looking back with the perspective of a century, the question arises: What explains the present-day position of the Nobel Prizes? One answer is that the Nobel Prize when it was founded in Alfred Nobel's will, was the first truly international Prize. A number of important Prizes had been awarded in different countries on a national basis long before the Nobel Prizes. But there was no Prize with the same global and internationalist scope and mission. The Will says explicitly that "no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates." This was an important humanistic signal at a time when nationalism and chauvinism was on the rise. Indeed, the system of values underlying the provisions of the last will of Alfred Nobel mirrors his philosophical outlook with its combination of the ideals of the Enlightenment and strong optimism about the rapid progress of mankind. From the correspondence between Alfred Nobel and Bertha von Suttner, it is moving to learn that they thought that the eradication of war, as a kind of human behavior, would be a matter of 20–30 years, i.e. approximately around 1914.

The main reason for the standing of the Prize today is, however, the importance of the names on the list of Laureates and their contributions to human development. And it has been the difficult task of the Prize-Awarding Institutions over the years, to interpret the last will of Alfred Nobel in the light of a constantly changing world. In this work they are assisted in a decisive way by colleagues and experts from all over the world, who participate in the award process, either as nominators and/or as contributors to the evaluation of the different candidates. This wide network of contacts gives the Prizes the character of recognition by peers in the respective field.

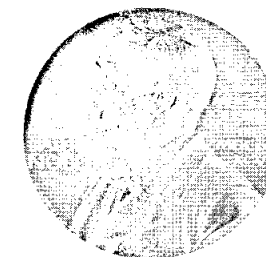
On the threshold of the next century of Nobel Prizes, the Prize-Awarders face the daunting task to combine the criteria and formal limits of Nobel's last will with the ever-changing reality of science, literature, and striving for peace.

As a sign of our times, this volume consists of overview articles first written for the official web site of the Nobel Foundation — [www.nobel.se](http://www.nobel.se). By being printed in this volume the unstoppable progress of Mankind from 'Gutenberg to Gates' has been temporarily halted for the benefit of readers who still enjoy holding a book in their hands.

## Life and Philosophy of Alfred Nobel\*

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*Tore Frängsmyr\*\**



Probably no Swede is as well-known throughout the world as Alfred Nobel — not our medieval saints, nor even our contemporary sports heroes. At the same time, we must admit that his renown is more indirect than direct. This means that while the Nobel Prize is extremely well-known all over the world, the person behind it remains relatively unknown.

Admittedly, quite a lot has been written about Alfred Nobel, but a large part of this literature consists of clichés. It is often a question of sentimental depictions of a lonely millionaire who — despite his wealth — was unhappy or at least deeply melancholic, emotionally attached to his mother, and with a few heart-rending love stories behind him. This is not altogether a false picture. Alfred Nobel was lonely and he was clearly unlucky in love, but such accounts are not so instructive. Romantic tales constitute a special genre, to which I shall not attempt to contribute. Instead, I will focus on the scientific and technical fields.

First, however, I would like to recount some important facts about Alfred Nobel's life. He was born in Stockholm in 1833 into a family of engineers. His family was descended from none other than Olof Rudbeck, the best-known technical genius of Sweden's 17th century era as a Great Power in Northern Europe. Having gone through a recent bankruptcy, when Alfred was five years old his father Immanuel Nobel moved to St. Petersburg, where he started a mechanical workshop for the manufacture

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\*Memorial address at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, March 26, 1996.

\*\*Director of the Center for History of Science at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.



of land mines. In 1842, when Alfred was nine years old, the rest of the family also moved to St. Petersburg. By then his father's fortunes had improved, enabling the family to live in high bourgeois style. At the time, St. Petersburg was a world metropolis, alive with scientific, social, and cultural life. Immanuel Nobel's sons did not attend school, but were instead educated at home by outstanding teachers at the level of university professor. The instruction they provided focused on both the humanities and the natural sciences. Aside from Swedish, Alfred and his brothers were taught Russian, French, English and German, as well as literature and philosophy. In the natural sciences, they were guided by two professors of chemistry who taught them mathematics, physics and chemistry. Considering the specialty of his teachers, it was perhaps no coincidence that Alfred took a liking to chemistry. He learned to conduct chemical experiments, an activity that seemed to fascinate him from the very beginning. Alfred spent his most important formative years in the Russian capital. With his five languages, which he seemed to have mastered well, he laid the foundation for the cosmopolitan nature that would later become so prominent in his life.

During the years 1850–1852, Alfred was allowed a few study-oriented stays abroad. He spent one year in Paris with the famous chemist Jules Pelouze, a professor at the Collège de France who had just opened a private training laboratory. Pelouze, who incidentally had been a good friend of the Swedish chemist Berzelius, had also taught Nikolai Zinin, one of Alfred Nobel's private teachers. During that year, Alfred completed his training as a chemist. But somewhere around the same time was the inception of what would become the greatest inventions of his life. For it was then, if not earlier, that he must have heard about the remarkable explosive called nitroglycerine. Strangely enough, this has not been pointed out by many scholars, who have dated the crucial moment 10 years later.

Here is the background. In 1847, in Turin, Ascanio Sobrero — an Italian student of Pelouze — had discovered a new explosive that he initially called pyroglycerine (later known as nitroglycerine). However, Sobrero, both in letters to Pelouze and in a subsequent journal article, issued a warning about the new compound, not only because it had incredible explosive power, but also because it was impossible to handle. Sobrero's discovery did not come as a bolt from the blue. As early as the 1830s, Pelouze himself and others had conducted important preliminary work by making guncotton. Since Alfred was extremely interested in explosives — it was of course a family interest — and since Pelouze had both first-hand knowledge of how explosives were manufactured and was familiar with Sobrero's

discovery, Alfred must have learned about nitroglycerine at that time. However, any excitement he might have felt was immediately dampened by the difficulties of both manufacturing and handling the new compound.

The end of the Crimean War (1856) spelled disaster for Immanuel Nobel's factory, which had lived off the manufacture of war materiel. The factory went bankrupt, and Alfred's parents and their youngest son Emil moved back to Sweden. The three older sons stayed in St. Petersburg to put the family affairs in order and restructure the company. Faced with this situation, Alfred and his brothers discussed various conceivable projects with their former teachers. That was when Nikolai Zinin reminded them of the potential of nitroglycerine. Professor Zinin is said to have demonstrated the power of nitroglycerine by pouring a few drops of the fluid on an anvil, striking it with a hammer, and producing a loud bang. But only the liquid that came into contact with the hammer exploded. The rest of the liquid was not affected. The problem, as Sobrero had already realized, was two-fold. First, it was difficult to manufacture the compound, because at excessive temperatures the whole batch exploded. Second, once manufactured, the liquid was equally difficult to explode in a controlled fashion.

During the years around 1860, Alfred conducted repeated experiments involving great risks. First, he succeeded in manufacturing sufficient quantities of nitroglycerine without any mishaps. Then, he mixed nitroglycerine with black gunpowder and ignited the mixture with an ordinary fuse. After several successful explosions outside St. Petersburg on the frozen Neva River, Alfred traveled back to Stockholm. There, his father had begun similar experiments (though with less success) after reading about Alfred's tests in his letters. Immanuel Nobel even insisted that the new mixture was his own idea, but he backed off from this assertion after a sharp letter from Alfred that set matters straight in no uncertain terms. Instead, he even helped Alfred apply for a patent in his own name. In October 1863, Alfred Nobel was granted a patent for the explosive that he aptly called 'blasting oil'.

With his first patent, Alfred had also reached his first milestone. Although he was only 30 years old, this was the start of an exciting adventure that would unfold with great speed. During the following spring and summer, Alfred continued his experiments. He soon obtained a new patent related to the manufacture of nitroglycerine (using a simplified method) as well as the use of a detonator, or what was called an 'initial igniter', in other words a hollow wooden plug filled with black gunpowder (later called a 'blasting cap'). The determination and self-confidence that would later become more pronounced features of Alfred's personality were already apparent. He wrote: "I am the first to have brought these subjects from

the area of science to that of industry,” and he successfully arranged a large loan from a French bank.

Around the same time, another personality trait began to assert itself—the inventor also became an entrepreneur. Alfred dealt with failures in the same resolute manner as he did successes. In September 1864, a major explosion at the Nobel factory in Stockholm claimed the lives of Alfred’s brother Emil and four other people. Just one month later, Alfred—resolutely and without sentimentality—founded his first joint stock company. Despite the accident or perhaps because of it, since no one could now doubt the explosive power of the new compound, orders began rolling in. The Swedish State Railways ordered blasting oil for use in building the Söder Tunnel in Stockholm. A year later, in 1865, Alfred improved his blasting cap (now made of metal rather than wood) which in principle is still of the same type used today. He then left for Germany, set up a company there and bought land outside Hamburg where he built a factory. In the summer of 1866, Alfred Nobel traveled to America. There he struggled against political bureaucracy, popular fear of accidents caused by explosives and, not least, dishonest business associates. In the end, he received patents, formed companies and built factories there.

Despite slow communications, everything now happened very quickly. Events literally assumed explosive force. While Alfred was in America, his factory in Germany exploded. When he returned to Germany in August, he had to supervise the clean-up of the debris and plan a new building. At the same time, he continued to brood over the safety problems of nitroglycerine and he conducted new experiments. He realized that nitroglycerine had to be absorbed by some kind of porous material, forming a mixture that would be easier to handle. On the German moorlands very close to where he was staying, he found a type of porous, absorbent sand or diatomaceous earth known in German as Kieselguhr. When nitroglycerine was absorbed by Kieselguhr, it formed a paste that was easy to knead and shape. This paste could be shaped into rods that were easily inserted into drilling holes. It could also be transported and subjected to jolts without triggering explosions. It could even be ignited without anything happening. Only a blasting cap would cause the paste to explode. The disadvantage of this new substance was its somewhat reduced explosive force—the Kieselguhr did not participate as an active substance in the explosion. But this was the price one had to pay. In short, that was how Alfred Nobel invented dynamite. Incidentally, Alfred himself coined the word dynamite from the Greek *dynamis*, meaning power. One of his German colleagues had proposed the term ‘blasting putty’ because it had the same consistency

as putty. But Alfred thought this sounded like something meant to be used for blasting window panes, which was certainly not his intention. In 1867, he was granted patents for dynamite in various countries, notably Britain, Sweden and the United States. Production was now set to begin on a large scale, and demand grew rapidly. It was an era of large infrastructure projects like railways, ports, bridges, roads, mines and tunnels, where blasting was necessary. For example, dynamite was of vital importance in the construction of the St. Gotthard tunnel through the Swiss Alps in the 1870s.

In 1868, the year after the first patent for dynamite, Alfred Nobel and his father were awarded the Letterstedt Prize by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. This prize, which Alfred valued highly, was awarded for “important discoveries of practical value to humanity.” We can hear an echo of this wording in Nobel’s will, where he stated the criteria for awarding his own prizes.

He had taken the decisive steps that led to honor and fame. Let us pause a moment at the year 1873, when Alfred Nobel was 40 years old. All these events had taken place during the preceding 10 years. At age 30, Alfred had received his first patent. Now, by age 40, he had already made his greatest discoveries, he had built up a worldwide industrial empire, he had become wealthy, and he had bought a large house in the center of Paris. The foundation was in place. He later made new discoveries—primarily blasting gelatin and ballistite—and his industrial enterprises, as well as his fortune, grew. His distinguishing quality was his versatility. He was an inventor, an industrialist and an administrator. He had to safeguard his patent rights, develop products, establish new companies, and conduct business in five languages with the rest of the world—without the help of a secretary and before the telephone and fax made people’s lives easier. He frequently traveled by train or boat, since this was before the advent of the airplane. His factories exploded, he had to withstand negative publicity campaigns, and he unmasked deceitful business partners. He had to deal with all of this himself. In addition, he seldom felt well—he viewed himself as sickly and frail, often complaining of migraines, rheumatism and an unsettled stomach. His life was hectic and stressful. In letters he wrote from Paris, he complained of being constantly hounded by people, which he described in his own words as “pure torture.” People are crazy, he wrote—they rushed in and out of his office, everyone wanted to see him, and his presence was required everywhere. But despite everything, he managed to cope. In the role of the entrepreneur, he was unbeatable.

I would like to touch upon another level of Alfred Nobel’s personality, that of the humanist and philosopher. We know that he had literary interests

and ambitions. He was an avid reader of fiction and wrote his own dramatic works and poems. In addition, he was attracted to philosophical issues. He read certain philosophical works with such interest that he underlined important passages. Among the papers that he left behind is a black notebook on philosophy that his biographers have not taken an interest in. Although not constituting profound original thoughts, these penciled notes reflect his serious interest in philosophical questions. Nobel went through philosophy from antiquity to modern times, pointing out what he perceived to be vital issues. He made his own comments, which in a morose way showed his detachment from the subject. He commented on Plato, Aristotle and Democritus, but also on Newton and Voltaire as well as contemporary biologists such as Darwin and Haeckel. Nobel noted, for example, that it was unclear what caused people to form a conception of a God: "Aristotle attributes it to fear, Voltaire to the desire of the more clever to deceive the stupid." He spoke with respect of the philosophical doubts of Descartes and Spinoza, adding that doubt must surely be the starting point for all philosophical thinking. Theories of knowledge were of special interest to Nobel. Consequently, he returned several times to Locke's thesis that all knowledge arises from sensory impressions, declaring that the "brain is a very unreliable recorder of impressions."

This led him to reflect further on the methodology of science and to develop a line of reasoning that, aside from being inspired by Locke's thesis, also seemed to have been influenced by Alexander von Humboldt's theory of knowledge. Nobel wrote that all science is built on observations of similarities and differences. He continued:

"A chemical analysis is of course nothing other than this, and even mathematics has no other foundation. History is a picture of past similarities and differences; geography shows the differences in the earth's surface; geology, similarities and differences in the earth's formation, from which we deduce the course of its transformations. Astronomy is the study of similarities and differences between celestial bodies; physics, a study of similarities and differences that arise from the attraction and motive functions of matter. The only exception to this rule is religious doctrine, but even this rests on the similar gullibility of most people. Even metaphysics — if it is not too insane — must find support for its hypotheses in some kind of analogy. One can state, without exaggeration, that the observation of

and the search for similarities and differences are the basis of all human knowledge."

Nobel could have completed this train of thought with Humboldt's words that "from observation one goes on to experimentation based on analogies and inductions of empirical laws." Nobel did not espouse any grand theory of knowledge, but rather an empirical method. Alfred Nobel himself seemed to think that he had accomplished quite a lot by applying this method in his work.

Alfred Nobel also viewed himself with detachment, or shall we say, philosophical skepticism. He often described himself as a loner, hermit, melancholic or misanthrope. He once wrote: "I am a misanthrope and yet utterly benevolent, have more than one screw loose yet am a super-idealist who digests philosophy more efficiently than food." Even from this description, it is clear that this misanthrope was also a philanthropist, or what Nobel called a super-idealist. It was the idealist in him that drove Nobel to bequeath his fortune to those who had benefited humanity through science, literature and efforts to promote peace.

For Alfred Nobel, the idea of giving away his fortune was no passing fancy. He had thought about it for a long time and had even re-written his will on various occasions in order to weigh different wordings against each other. Efforts to promote peace were close to his heart, largely inspired by his contacts with Bertha von Suttner (herself a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1905). He derived intellectual pleasure from literature, while science built the foundation for his own activities as a technological researcher and inventor. On November 27, 1895, Nobel signed his final will and testament at the Swedish-Norwegian Club in Paris.

Alfred Nobel had many different homes during the final decades of his life. In 1891, he had left Paris to live in San Remo, Italy, after controversies with the French authorities. Four years later, he purchased the Bofors ironworks and armaments factory in Sweden and established his Swedish home at nearby Björkborn Manor. He equipped all his residences with laboratories where he could continue his experiments. He was apparently homesick for Sweden but complained of the Swedish winter weather. His health began to falter. He visited doctors and health resorts more frequently, but never had time to heed their most important advice — "to rest and nurse my health," as he put it himself. On December 10, 1896, Alfred Nobel passed away at his home in San Remo.

Nobel's will was hardly longer than one ordinary page. After listing bequests to relatives and other people close to him, Nobel declared that his

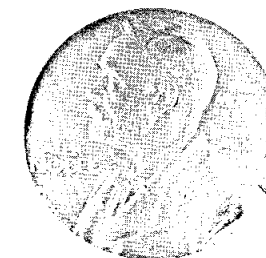
entire remaining estate should be used to endow “prizes to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind.” His will attracted attention throughout the world. It was unusual at that time to donate large sums of money for scientific and charitable purposes. Many people also criticized the international character of the prizes, saying they should be restricted to Swedes. This would not have suited the cosmopolitan Alfred Nobel. Some of his relatives contested the will. Complicated legal and administrative matters also had to be sorted out. All this took time, but eventually it was all settled.

In 1901, the first Nobel Prizes were awarded. The donor himself could hardly have dreamed of the impact that his benevolence would have in the future.

## The Nobel Foundation: A Century of Growth and Change

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*Birgitta Lemmel\**



On June 29, 2000, the Nobel Foundation celebrated its 100th anniversary. The Foundation and especially the Nobel Prizes — which were first awarded in 1901 — are closely linked to the history of modern science, the arts and political development throughout the 20th century.

### 1. Background and Establishment of the Nobel Foundation

Alfred Nobel died on December 10, 1896. The provisions of his will and their unusual purpose, as well as their partly incomplete form, attracted great attention and soon led to skepticism and criticism, also aimed at the testator due to his international spirit. Only after several years of negotiations and often rather bitter conflicts, and after various obstacles had been circumvented or overcome, could the fundamental concepts presented in the will assume solid form with the establishment of the Nobel Foundation. On April 26, 1897, the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) approved the will. In 1898 the other prize-awarding bodies followed suit, approving the will after mediation: Karolinska Institutet on June 7, the Swedish Academy on June 9 and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences on June 11.

The will was now settled. The task of achieving unity among all the affected parties on how to put its provisions into practice remained. The final version of the Statutes of the Nobel Foundation contained clarifications of the wording of the will and a provision that prizes not considered

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\*Head of Information of the Nobel Foundation in 1986–1996.

possible to award could be allocated to funds that would otherwise promote the intentions of the testator. The Statutes provided for the establishment of Nobel Committees to perform prize adjudication work and Nobel Institutes to support this work, as well as the appointment of a Board of Directors in charge of the Foundation's financial and administrative management.

On June 29, 1900, the Statutes of the newly created legatee, the Nobel Foundation, and special regulations for the Swedish Prize-Awarding Institutions were promulgated by the King in Council (Oscar II). The same year as the political union between Sweden and Norway was dissolved in 1905, special regulations were adopted on April 10, 1905, by the Nobel Committee of the Storting (known since January 1, 1977 as the Norwegian Nobel Committee), the awarder of the Nobel Peace Prize.

## 2. Premises

To create a worthy framework around the prizes, the Board decided at an early stage that it would erect its own building in Stockholm, which would include a hall for the Prize Award Ceremony and Banquet as well as its own administrative offices. Ferdinand Boberg was selected as the architect. He presented an ambitious proposal for a Nobel Palace, which generated extensive publicity but also led to doubts and questions. World War I broke out before any decision could be made. The proposal was 'put on ice' and by the time the matter was revived after the war, Ivar Tengbom was busily designing what later became the Stockholm Concert Hall. Meanwhile the Stockholm City Hall was being built under the supervision of Ragnar Östberg. Boberg, Tengbom and Östberg were probably the most respected architects in Sweden at that time. Because it would have access to both these buildings for its events, the Nobel Foundation now only needed space for its administrative offices. On December 19, 1918, a building at Sturegatan 14 was bought for this purpose. After years of renovation there, the Foundation finally left its cramped premises at Norrlandsgatan 6 in 1926 and moved to Sturegatan 14, where the Foundation has been housed ever since.

## 3. Objectives of the Foundation

The Nobel Foundation is a private institution. It is entrusted with protecting the common interests of the Prize-Awarding Institutions named in the will, as well as representing the Nobel institutions externally. This includes

informational activities as well as arrangements related to the presentation of the Nobel Prizes. The Foundation is not, however, involved in the selection process and the final choice of the Laureates (as Nobel Prize winners are also called). In this work, the Prize-Awarding Institutions are not only entirely independent of all government agencies and organizations, but also of the Nobel Foundation. Their autonomy is of crucial importance to the objectivity and quality of their prize decisions. One vital task of the Foundation is to manage its assets in such a way as to safeguard the financial base of the prizes themselves and of the prize selection process.

## 4. Statutes and Significant Amendments during 100 Years

The Statutes, as most recently revised in 2000, assign roles to the following bodies or individuals in the Nobel Foundation's activities:

- The Board and the Executive Director (especially Paragraphs 13 and 14)
- The Prize-Awarding Institutions (especially Paragraphs 1 and 2)
- The Trustees of the Prize-Awarding Institutions (especially Paragraph 18)
- The Nobel Committees and experts (especially Paragraph 6)
- Bodies and individuals entitled to submit prize nominations (especially Paragraph 7)
- Auditors (especially Paragraph 19)

Over the past 100 years, there have been a number of changes in the relationship between the Foundation's Board of Directors and the Swedish State. Their links have gradually been severed.

According to Paragraph 14 of the first Statutes from 1901, the Foundation was to be represented by a Board with its seat in Stockholm, consisting of five Swedish men. One of these, the Chairman of the Board, was to be designated by the King in Council. The Trustees of the Prize-Awarding Institutions would appoint the others. The Board would choose an Executive Director from among its own members. An alternate (deputy) to the Chairman would be appointed by the King in Council (effective in 1974, by the Government), and two deputies for the other members would be elected by the Trustees. Since 1995 the Trustees have appointed all members and deputies of the Board. The Board chooses a Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Executive Director from among its own members.

The first Board of Directors of the Nobel Foundation was elected on September 27, 1900. On the following day, former Prime Minister Erik Gustaf Boström was appointed Chairman of the Board by the King in

Council. Effective on January 1, 1901 the Board assumed management of the Foundation's assets.

Until 1960 the Chairman was chosen from the small group of 'Gentlemen of the Realm' — prime ministers, ministers for foreign affairs and other high officials. In 1960 for the first time, a renowned scientist was chosen: Arne Tiselius, Professor of Biochemistry at Uppsala University and 1948 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry. Since then the Chairman has been chosen from among members of the Prize-Awarding Institutions. It has also become a rule that the Deputy Chairman as well as one of the members of the Board elected by the Trustees should be persons with financial expertise. In most cases, the Executive Director has had a legal and administrative background. As the Foundation's investment policy became more active from the early 1950s onward, financial experience and a knowledge of international relations have become a necessity for those holding this position.

An important landmark in the history of the Foundation occurred when it added Norwegian representation to the Board. In 1901, the Norwegians refrained from representation on the Board — being appointed by King Oscar at a time when Norway was moving toward a breakup of its union with Sweden was not considered an attractive idea — and they limited their involvement to work as trustees and auditors. In light of this, it is interesting to note that Henrik Santesson, the first Executive Director of the Foundation, also happened to be the legal counsel of the Storting in Sweden. But in 1986, Paragraph 14 of the Statutes was changed and the Board no longer had to consist of five Swedish citizens (the original Statutes had said Swedish men), but of six Swedish or Norwegian citizens. The Statutes were also changed in such a way that remuneration to the Board members and auditors of the Foundation, as well as the salary of the Executive Director, would be determined by the Foundation's Board instead of the Swedish Government.

According to Paragraph 17 of the original Statutes, the administration of the Board and the accounts of the Foundation for each calendar year were to be examined by five auditors. Each prize-awarding body would elect one of these before the end of the year and the King would designate one, who would be the chairman of the auditors. In 1955 the number of auditors was enlarged from five to six; the new auditor would be appointed by the Trustees and had to be an authorized public accountant. This was a very important change, in line with the Foundation's more active financial investment policy.

Today the Government's only role in the Nobel Foundation is to appoint one auditor, who is also to be the chairman of the Foundation's auditors.

Among other changes that have occurred in the Statutes are the following:

Until 1968, in principle more than three persons could share a Nobel Prize, but this never occurred in practice. The previous wording of Paragraph 4 was: "A prize may be equally divided between two works, each of which may be considered to merit a prize. If a work which is to be rewarded has been produced by two or more persons together, the prize shall be awarded to them jointly." In 1968 this section was changed to read that "In no case may a prize be divided between more than three persons."

In 1974, the Statutes were changed in two respects. The confidential archive material that formed the basis for the evaluation and selection of candidates for the prizes, which was previously closed to all outsiders, could now be made available for purposes of historical research if at least 50 years had elapsed since the decision in question. The other change concerned deceased persons. Previously, a person could be awarded a prize posthumously if he/she had already been nominated (before February 1 of the same year), which was true of Erik Axel Karlfeldt (Literature Prize, 1931) and Dag Hammarskjöld (Peace Prize, 1961). Effective from 1974, the prize may only go to a deceased person to whom it was already awarded (usually in October) but who had died before he/she could receive the prize on December 10 (William Vickrey, 1996 Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel).

## 5. Financial Management

The main task of the Nobel Foundation is to safeguard the financial base of the Nobel Prizes and of the work connected to the selection of the Nobel Laureates.

In its role as a financial manager, the Nobel Foundation resembles an investment company. The investment policy of the Foundation is naturally of the greatest importance in preserving and increasing its funds, thereby ensuring the size of the Nobel Prizes. The provisions of Alfred Nobel's will instructed his executors to invest his remaining realizable estate, which would constitute the capital of what eventually became the Nobel Foundation, in 'safe securities'. In the original by-laws of the Board, approved by the King in Council on February 15, 1901, the expression 'safe securities' was interpreted in the spirit of that time as referring mainly

to bonds or loans — Swedish as well as foreign — paying fixed interest and backed by solid underlying security (central or local government, property mortgages or the like). In those days, many bonds were sold with a so-called gold clause, stipulating that the holder was entitled to demand payment in gold. The stock market and real estate holdings were beyond the pale. Stocks in particular were regarded as an excessively risky and speculative form of financial investment.

The first 50 years of management came to be characterized by rigidity in terms of financial investments and by an increasingly onerous tax burden. Remarkably, the tax issue had not been addressed when the Nobel Foundation was established. The tax-exempt status that the executors of the will and others had assumed as self-evident was not granted. Until 1914, the tax was not excessively heavy, only 10 percent, but when a 'temporary defense tax' supplement was introduced in 1915, the Foundation's tax burden doubled. In 1922, a maximum tax assessment was imposed which exceeded the sum available for the prizes in 1923, the year when the Nobel Prize amount reached its absolute low point. For a long time, the Nobel Foundation was the largest single taxpayer in Stockholm. The question of granting tax-exempt status to the Foundation was debated back and forth in the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) for years.

In 1946, when the Foundation was finally exempted from national income and wealth tax and local income tax, this allowed a gradual long-term increase in the size of the Foundation's main fund, the Nobel Prizes and the sums paid to the Prize-Awarding Institutions for their adjudication work. Without Swedish tax-exempt status, it would have been impossible for the Foundation to receive equivalent tax relief for its financial investments in the United States. In the event, a US Treasury ruling granted the Foundation tax-exempt status in that country effective from 1953. Tax-exempt status created greater freedom of action, enabling the Foundation to pursue an investment policy not dominated by tax considerations that characterize the actions of many investors.

However, the restrictions on the Foundation's freedom of investments continued with minor changes until 1953, although the gold clause and resulting protection against declining value had disappeared as early as World War I. Because of two world wars and the depression of the early 1930s, the prizes shrank in real terms from SEK 150,000 in 1901 (equivalent to 20 times the annual salary of a university professor) to a mere one-third of this value.

Then, in 1953, the Government approved a radical liberalization of the investment rules. The Foundation was granted more extensive freedom to manage its capital independently, as well as the opportunity to invest in stocks and real estate. Freedom of investment, coupled with tax-exemption and the financial expertise of the Board, led to a transformation from passive to active management. This can be regarded as a landmark change in the role of the Foundation's Board. During the 1960s and 1970s, the value of the Nobel Prizes multiplied in Swedish krona terms but rapid inflation meanwhile undermined their real value, leaving each prize largely unchanged. The same was true of the Foundation's capital.

During the 1980s, the Foundation experienced a change for the better. The stock market performed outstandingly and the Foundation's real estate also climbed in value. A sour note came in 1985, when Swedish real estate taxes rose sharply and profits consequently vanished. In 1987, the Board decided to transfer most of the Foundation's real estate to a separate company called Beväringen, which was then floated on the stock exchange. In the same year that Beväringen was established, the Nobel Foundation surpassed its original value in real terms (SEK 31 million in 1901 money) for the first time. The Foundation was fortunate enough to sell its entire holding in Beväringen before the real estate crash of the early 1990s.

By 1991, the Foundation had restored the Nobel Prizes to their 1901 real value. Today the nominal fund capital of the Nobel Foundation is about SEK 4 billion. Each of the five Nobel Prizes as well as the Economics Prize will, in 2001, be worth SEK 10 million (about USD 1 million). This is well above the nominal value of the entire original fund, and higher than the real value of the original prizes. Since January 1, 2000, the Nobel Foundation has also been permitted to apply the capital gains from the sale of assets toward the prize amounts. According to Alfred Nobel's will, only direct return — interest and dividends could be used for the prize amounts. Capital gains from share management could not previously be used. According to the new rules, return that arises from the sale of Foundation assets may also be used for prize award events and overhead, to the extent that they are not needed to maintain a good long-term prize-awarding capacity. This change is necessary to avoid undermining the value of the Nobel Prizes. The Nobel Foundation may also decide how much of its assets may be invested in shares. In the long term, this may mean that the Foundation can now have a higher percentage of its assets invested in shares, leading to higher overall return and thus larger Nobel Prizes.

## 6. The Sveriges Riksbank (Bank of Sweden) Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel

On the occasion of its 300th anniversary in 1968, the Bank of Sweden (Sveriges Riksbank) made a large donation to the Nobel Foundation. A Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel has been awarded since 1969. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences is entrusted with the role of Prize-Awarding Institution, in accordance with Nobel Prize rules. The Board of the Nobel Foundation has subsequently decided that it will allow no further new prizes.

## 7. Nobel Symposia

An important addition to the activities of the Nobel Foundation is its Symposium program, which was initiated in 1965 and has achieved a high international standing. Since then 120 Nobel Symposia, dealing with topics at the frontiers of science and culture and related to the Prize categories, have taken place. Since 1982 the Nobel Symposia have been financed by the Foundation's Symposium Fund, created in 1982 through an initial donation from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, as well as through grants and royalties received by the Nobel Foundation as part of its informational activities.

## 8. Donations and Prizes

Around the world, new international scientific and cultural prizes have been established, directly inspired by the Nobel Prize. For example, the Japan Prize and Kyoto Prize — both financially in a class with the Nobel Prize — were established in 1985 and their statutes directly refer to the Nobel Prizes as a model and source of inspiration. Donations from these and many other sources have reached the Foundation over the years. Some of these donations are presented below.

In 1962 the Balzan Foundation, based in Switzerland and Italy, gave its first prize of one million Swiss francs to the Nobel Foundation for having awarded its Nobel Prizes for 60 years in an exemplary way, thereby celebrating "l'oeuvre admirable accomplie dans 60 années de travail."

In 1972, Georg von Békésy, 1961 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, donated his exquisite collection of art objects to the Nobel Foundation — some 150 objects from four continents (not Australia).

Also in 1972 the Foundation received a donation from the Italian marquis Luigi de Beaumont Bonelli, who bequeathed his two wine-growing estates outside Taranto, southern Italy, to the Nobel Foundation. The properties were worth SEK 4.5 million. Their sale made possible the establishment of an annual Beaumont-Bonelli fellowship to a promising young Italian medical researcher.

As to the two Japanese prizes mentioned earlier, on April 20, 1985, the Science and Technology Foundation of Japan established the Japan Prize. At the first award ceremony, a special prize of JPY 50 million was awarded to the Nobel Foundation "in recognition of the role the Nobel Foundation has played since 1901 in promoting science and international understanding." On November 10, 1985, the Inamori Foundation in Kyoto awarded its first Kyoto Prize of JPY 45 million to the Nobel Foundation "with the aim of promoting science, technology and the arts in the spirit of the Nobel Prize."

## 9. Nobel Festivities

The Nobel Foundation is an 'investment company' with rather unusual facets. Every year this investment company moves into show business by organizing the Nobel Festivities and numerous related arrangements that take place in December. The Nobel Foundation is responsible for organizing the Nobel Festivities in Stockholm, while in Norway the Norwegian Nobel Committee is in charge of the corresponding arrangements. On December 10, 1901, the Nobel Prizes were awarded for the first time in Stockholm and in Christiania (now Oslo) respectively.

### 9.1. *Stockholm*

The Prize Award Ceremony in Stockholm took place at the Old Royal Academy of Music during the years 1901–1925. Parenthetically, it is worth mentioning that during the first years the names of the Nobel Laureates were not made public until the Award Ceremony itself.

Since 1926, the Prize Award Ceremony has taken place at the Stockholm Concert Hall with few exceptions, last time in 1991 at the Stockholm Globe Arena, when the 90th anniversary of the first Nobel Prizes was the focus of the celebrations.

Until the early 1930s, the Nobel Banquet took place at the Hall of Mirrors in the Grand Hotel, Stockholm. In its very first years, 1901 and



1902, the Banquet was an exclusive party for men only. Once the Stockholm City Hall had been built, in 1930 a decision was made to hold the Banquet in its fantastic Golden Hall this year and in the future. Over time, the character of the Banquets changed and interest in participating became greater and greater. Starting in 1974, due to the need for more space the Nobel Banquet was moved from the Golden Hall to the larger Blue Hall of the City Hall, which today accommodates some 1,300 guests. The Blue Hall had only been used for the Banquet once before, in 1950, when the Nobel Foundation celebrated its 50th anniversary.

There are always exceptions to the rules. In 1907, there were no festivities in Stockholm because the Royal Court was in mourning. King Oscar II had just died. The Laureates were awarded their prizes at a ceremony at the auditorium of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. During 1914–1918 the Nobel Festivities were called off in Sweden and in Norway, except for a ceremony in 1917 at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in the presence of King Haakon to announce that the International Red Cross had been awarded the Peace Prize.

The first Nobel Prizes after World War I—the 1919 prizes—were awarded in June the next year in order to give the Festivities an atmosphere of early Swedish summer with sunshine, light and greenery instead of dark December with cold and wet snow. The events took place on June 2, 1920 but it was not a success. No members of the Royal Family were present because of the death of Crown Princess Margaretha. The weather was gray, rainy and cold. As a result of disappointment the Nobel Festivities of 1920 reverted to earlier tradition and were held on December 10.

In 1924 the Nobel Festivities were canceled in Stockholm. Neither of the two Laureates could be present: the Laureate in Physiology or Medicine was traveling and the Literature Laureate was unwell. The Prizes in Physics and Chemistry were reserved that year.

During the period 1939–1943, the Nobel Festivities were called off. In 1939 only the Laureate in Literature, Frans Eemil Sillanpää from Finland, received his Prize in Stockholm at a small ceremony. During 1940–1942 no Physics, Chemistry or Medicine Prizes were awarded, during 1940–1943 no Literature Prizes, and during 1939–1943 no Peace Prizes.

In 1944 there were no festivities in Stockholm, but a luncheon was held at the Waldorf–Astoria Hotel in New York organized by the American Scandinavian Foundation. Some 1943 and 1944 Laureates received their Prizes from the Swedish Minister in Washington, two Physics Laureates—Otto Stern (1943) and Isidor Isaac Rabi (1944)—and four Laureates in Physiology or Medicine—Henrik Dam and Edward Doisy (1943), and

Joseph Erlanger and Herbert S. Gasser (1944). A speech by Sweden's Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf was broadcast on American radio the same day. The 1943 Laureate in Chemistry, George de Hevesy, received his Prize in Sweden without any ceremonies and the 1944 Literature Laureate, Johannes V. Jensen from Denmark, received his Prize in Stockholm in 1945.

Just before and during the war, Adolf Hitler forbade Laureates from Germany—Richard Kuhn (Chemistry, 1938), Adolf Friedrich Johan Butenandt (Chemistry, 1939), Gerhard Domagk (Physiology or Medicine, 1939) and Otto Hahn (Chemistry, 1944)—from accepting their Prizes at that time. However, they received their insignia on later occasions.

In 1956, due to the crisis in Hungary, a smaller, more private dinner at the Swedish Academy replaced the glittering banquet in the City Hall, although the Prize Award Ceremony took place as usual at the Concert Hall.

## 9.2. *Christiania/Oslo*

In Norway, during the years 1901–1904 the decision on the Peace Prize was announced at a meeting of the Storting on December 10, after which the recipients were informed in writing. On December 10, 1905, the Nobel Institute's new building at Drammensveien 19 was inaugurated in the presence of the Norwegian Royal Couple, and it was announced that Bertha von Suttner had received the 1905 Peace Prize. The Laureate herself was not present. During 1905–1946 the Prize Award Ceremonies were held at the Nobel Institute building, during 1947–1989 in the auditorium of the University of Oslo and since 1990 at the Oslo City Hall. The King of Norway is present, but it is the Chairman of the Nobel Committee who hands over the Prize to the Laureate or Laureates. The Nobel Banquet in Norway is a dignified formal occasion, but much less pretentious than the Banquet in Stockholm. It takes place at the Grand Hotel in Oslo, with approximately 250 guests.

## 10. The Norwegian Nobel Committee and the Nobel Foundation during World War II

In 1940, three members of the Storting's Nobel Committee were in exile due to the occupation of Norway by Nazi Germany, which lasted until 1945. The remaining members and deputies kept the work of the Committee going. Because the Storting could not elect new Committee members, the Nobel Foundation asked existing members to continue in their posts.

In January 1944, pro-Nazi Prime Minister Vidkun Quisling and his administration wanted to take over the functions of the Nobel Committee in Norway and seize control of the Nobel Institute's building on Drammensveien. After consultations with the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the Director of the Nobel Institute, the Nobel Foundation declared that the Nobel Institute was Swedish property. Those Committee members who had remained in Norway stated in writing that under the prevailing circumstances, they could not continue their work. Sweden's consul general in Oslo, who had already moved into an office on the Nobel Institute's premises, took over the management of the building and the functions of the Nobel Institute. In 1944–1945 the Nobel Foundation together with the members of the Nobel Committee in exile ensured that nominations were submitted for the 1945 Peace Prize.

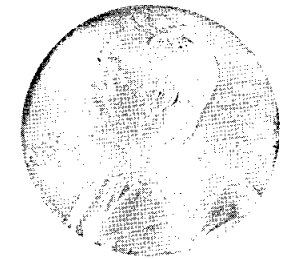
### 11. A New Century

After a hundred years of existence, the Nobel Prizes — as well as the centenarian Nobel Foundation — have become solid institutions, based on a great tradition since their beginning. The original criticisms aimed at the whole idea of the Nobel Prizes have faded into oblivion. Both in Sweden and in Norway, the awarding of the prizes is regarded as an event of national importance. The Nobel Foundation has now entered a new century, with museum and exhibition projects underway, while being able to look back at its past successes in many fields.

(Translated by Victor Kayfetz)

## Nomination and Selection of the Nobel Laureates\*

compiled by Birgitta Lemmel\*\*



*The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (with approximately 350 members) awards the Nobel Prizes in Physics and Chemistry and the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (established in 1968).*

*The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet (with 50 members) awards the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.*

*The Swedish Academy (with 18 members) awards the Nobel Prize in Literature.*

These three institutions have special Nobel Committees of five members each — in the case of the Economics Prize, known as the Prize Committee — at their disposal for the preparatory work connected with the prize adjudication.

*The Norwegian Nobel Committee, whose five members are appointed by the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) awards the Nobel Peace Prize.*

One reason why the Prizes are awarded both in Sweden and Norway is that the two countries were united at the time Alfred Nobel wrote his will in 1895. The union between Norway and Sweden was dissolved in 1905, but this did not alter the relation among the Nobel institutions.

\*The Special Regulations of the Statutes of the Nobel Foundation concerning nomination and selection are under revision and will not be finalized before early autumn 2001. For the latest version see [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org).

\*\*Head of Information of the Nobel Foundation, 1986–1996.

Each year the respective Nobel Committees send individual invitations to thousands of scientists, members of academies and university professors in numerous countries, asking them to nominate candidates for the Nobel Prizes for the coming year. Those who are invited to submit nominations are chosen in such a way that as many countries and universities as possible are represented. These Prize nominations must reach the respective Committees before the first of February of the year for which the nomination is being made.

The nominations received by each Committee are then investigated with the help of specially appointed experts. When the Committees have made their selection among the nominated candidates and have presented their recommendations to the Prize-Awarding Institutions, a vote is taken for the final choice of Laureates. Prize decisions are announced immediately after the vote, which takes place in October. Eligibility to nominate candidates for the Nobel Prizes varies among the Prize-Awarding Institutions, as follows.

#### Physics and Chemistry

1. Swedish and foreign members of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences;
2. Members of the Nobel Committees for Physics and Chemistry;
3. Nobel Laureates in Physics and Chemistry;
4. Permanent and assistant professors in the sciences of Physics and Chemistry at the universities and institutes of technology of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, and at Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm;
5. Holders of corresponding chairs in at least six universities or university colleges selected by the Academy of Sciences with a view to ensuring appropriate distribution over the different countries and their seats of learning; and
6. Other scientists from whom the Academy may see fit to invite proposals.

Decisions as to the selection of the teachers and scientists referred to in Paragraphs 5 and 6 above shall be taken each year before the end of September.

#### Physiology or Medicine

1. Members of the Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet;
2. Swedish and foreign members of the medical class of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences;

3. Nobel Laureates in Physiology or Medicine;
4. Members of the Nobel Committee not qualified under Paragraph 1 above;
5. Holders of established posts as professors at the faculties of medicine in Sweden and holders of similar posts at the faculties of medicine or similar institutions in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway;
6. Holders of similar posts at no fewer than six other faculties of medicine selected by the Assembly, with a view to ensuring the appropriate distribution of the task among various countries and their seats of learning; and
7. Practitioners of natural sciences whom the Assembly may otherwise see fit to approach.

Decisions concerning the selection of the persons appointed under Paragraphs 6 and 7 above are taken before the end of May each year on the recommendation of the Nobel Committee.

#### Literature

1. Members of the Swedish Academy and of other academies, institutions and societies which are similar to it in constitution and purpose;
2. Professors of literature and of linguistics at universities and university colleges;
3. Nobel Laureates in Literature; and
4. Presidents of those societies of authors that are representative of literary production in their respective countries.

#### Peace

1. Active and former members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee and the advisers appointed by the Norwegian Nobel Institute;
2. Members of the national assemblies and governments of the different states and members of the Inter-parliamentary Union;
3. Members of the International Court of Justice at the Hague and the International Court of Arbitration at the Hague;
4. Members of the Commission of the Permanent International Peace Bureau;
5. Members and associate members of the Institut de Droit International;
6. University professors of political science and jurisprudence, history and philosophy;
7. Nobel Peace Prize Laureates.

**The Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel**

1. Swedish and foreign members of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences;
2. Members of the Prize Committee for the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel;
3. Prize Winners in Economic Sciences;
4. Permanent professors in relevant subjects at the universities and colleges in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway;
5. Holders of corresponding chairs in at least six universities or colleges selected for the relevant year by the Academy of Sciences with a view to ensuring an appropriate distribution among different countries and their seats of learning; and
6. Other scientists from whom the Academy may see fit to invite proposals.

Decisions as to the selection of the teachers and scientists referred to in Paragraphs 5 and 6 shall be taken each year before the end of the month of September.

**PHYSICS**

“...one part to the person who shall have made the most important discovery or invention within the field of physics...”

## The Nobel Prize in Literature

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*Kjell Espmark\**



### 1. Nobel's Will and the Literature Prize

Among the five prizes provided for in Alfred Nobel's will (1895), one was intended for the person who, in the literary field, had produced "the most outstanding work in an ideal direction." The Laureate should be determined by "the Academy in Stockholm," which was specified by the statutes of the Nobel Foundation to mean the Swedish Academy. These statutes defined literature as "not only belles-lettres, but also other writings which, by virtue of their form and style, possess literary value." At the same time, the restriction to works presented "during the preceding year" was softened: "older works" could be considered "if their significance has not become apparent until recently." It was also stated that candidates must be nominated in writing by those entitled to do so before 1 February each year.

A special regulation gave the right of nomination to members of the Swedish Academy and other academies, institutions and societies similar to it in constitution and purpose, and to university teachers of aesthetics, literature and history. An emendation in 1949 specified the category of teachers: "professors of literature and philology at universities and university colleges." The right to nominate was at the same time extended to previous Prize-winners and to "presidents of those societies of authors that are representative of the literary production in their respective countries." The

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\*Poet, novelist, and literary historian, former Professor in Comparative Literature at Stockholm University 1978–1995. Member of the Swedish Academy in 1981, Chairman of its Nobel Committee from 1988.

statutes also provided for a Nobel Committee “to give their opinion in matter of the award of the prizes” and for a Nobel Institute with a library which was to contain a substantial collection of mainly modern literature.

## 2. Accepting the Task? Discussion in the Swedish Academy

Two members of the Swedish Academy spoke strongly against accepting Nobel’s legacy, for fear that the obligation would detract from the Academy’s proper concerns and turn it into “a cosmopolitan tribunal of literature.” They could have added that the Academy, in doldrums at the time, was ill-equipped for the sensitive task. The permanent secretary, Carl David af Wirsén, replied that refusal would deprive “the great figures of continental literature” of an exceptional recognition, and conjured up the weighty reproach to be directed at the Academy if it failed to “acquire an influential position in world literature.” Besides, the task would not be foreign to the purposes of the Academy: proper knowledge of the best in the literature of other countries was necessary for an Academy that had to judge the literature of its own country. This effective argument, which won a qualified majority for acceptance, showed not only openness to Nobel’s far-reaching intentions, but also harbored Wirsén’s and his sympathizers’ ambition to seize the unexpected possibilities in the field of the politics of culture, and to enjoy, as he wrote in a letter, “the enormous power and prestige that the Nobel will bequeaths to the Eighteen [members of the Academy].”

## 3. Nobel’s Guidelines and Their Interpretations: A Short History

As guidelines for the distribution of the Literature Prize the Swedish Academy had the general requirement for all the prizes — the candidate should have bestowed “the greatest benefit on mankind” — and the special condition for literature, “in an ideal direction.” Both prescriptions are vague and the second, in particular, was to cause much discussion. What did Nobel actually mean by ideal? In fact, the history of the Literature Prize appears as a series of attempts to interpret an imprecisely worded will. The consecutive phases in that history reflect the changing sensibility of an Academy continuously renewing itself. The main source of knowledge of the principles and criteria applied is the annual reports which the Committee presented to the Academy (itself making part of that body). Also the correspondence between the members is often enlightening. There is an obstacle though: all Nobel information is to be secret for 50 years.

### 3.1. ‘A Lofty and Sound Idealism’

The first stage, from 1901 to 1912, has the stamp of the secretary Carl David af Wirsén, who read Nobel’s ‘ideal’ as ‘a lofty and sound idealism’. The set of criteria which resulted in Prizes to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Rudyard Kipling and Paul Heyse, but rejected Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola, is characterized by its conservative idealism (a domestic variation of Hegelian philosophy), holding church, state and family sacred, and by its idealist aesthetics derived from Goethe’s and Hegel’s epoch (and codified by F. T. Fischer in the middle of the nineteenth century). Those standards had earlier been typical of Wirsén’s and the Academy’s struggle against the radical Scandinavian writers. Nobel’s testament gave Wirsén — called “the Don Quixote of Swedish romantic idealism” — the opportunity to carry his provincial campaign into the fields of international literature. This application was actually far from Nobel’s values: he certainly shared Wirsén’s disgust for writers like Zola, but was radically anticleric, adopting Shelley’s utopian idealism and religiously coloured spirit of revolt.

### 3.2. A Policy of Neutrality (World War I)

The next chapter in the history of the Literary Prize could be entitled ‘A Literary Policy of Neutrality’. The objectives laid down by the new chairman of the Academy’s Nobel Committee at the beginning of the First World War kept, on the whole, the belligerent powers outside, giving the small nations a chance. This policy partly explains the Scandinavian overrepresentation on the list. The Prizes to the Swede Verner von Heidenstam, the Dane Karl Gjellerup and Henrik Pontoppidan — one of the few cases of a shared Prize — and to the Norwegian Knut Hamsun still in 1920 are to be comprehended from this point of view.

### 3.3. ‘The Great Style’ (the 1920s)

A third period, approximately coinciding with the 1920s, could be labeled ‘The Great Style’. This key concept in the reports of the Committee reveals the connections with Wirsén’s epoch and its traits of classicism. With such a standard the Academy was, of course, out of touch with what happened in contemporary literature. It could appreciate Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* — a masterpiece “approaching the classical realism in Tolstoy” — but passed his *Magic Mountain* over in silence. By that time, however, the Academy

had got rid of its narrow definition of 'ideal direction'. In 1921 this stipulation of the will was interpreted more generously as 'wide-hearted humanity', which paved the way for writers like Anatole France and George Bernard Shaw, both inconceivable as Laureates — and, sure enough, rejected — at an earlier stage.

#### 3.4. 'Universal Interest' (the 1930s)

In line with the requirement "the greatest benefit on mankind," the Academy of the 1930s tried a new approach, equating this 'mankind' with the immediate readership of the works in question. A report of its Committee stated 'universal interest' as a criterion and the Academy decided on writers within everybody's reach, from Sinclair Lewis to Pearl Buck, repudiating exclusive poets like Paul Valéry and Paul Claudel.

#### 3.5. 'The Pioneers' (1946-)

Given a pause for renewal by the Second World War and inspired by its new secretary, Anders Österling, the post-war Academy finished this excursion into popular taste, focussing instead on what was called 'the pioneers'. Like in the sciences, the Laureates were to be found among those who paved the way for new developments. In a way, this is another interpretation of the formula "the greatest benefit on mankind": the perfect candidate was the one who had provided world literature with new possibilities in outlook and language.

In Österling's epoch, the word 'ideal' was deliberately taken in a still wider sense: the new list started with Hermann Hesse who, in the 1930s, had been rejected for 'ethical anarchy' and lack of 'plastic visuality and firmness' in his characters, words which echo Wirsén's time. Later, the compatibility of Samuel Beckett's dark conception of the world with Nobel's 'ideal' was put to the test, one of the last occasions when this condition was central to the discussion. It is only at 'the depths' that "pessimistic thought and poetry can work their miracles," said Karl-Ragnar Gierow in his address, emphasising the deep sense of human worth and the life-giving force, nevertheless, in Beckett's pessimism. The borderline of this generosity can be seen in the handling of Ezra Pound. He appealed to the Academy because of his 'pioneering significance', but was disqualified by his wartime applauding, on the Italian radio network, of the mass extermination of the East European Jews. Member Dag Hammarskjöld, in a representative way,

concluded that "such a 'subhuman' reaction" excluded "a prize that is after all intended to lay weight on the 'idealistic tendency' of the recipient's efforts." (This repudiation did not prevent Hammarskjöld from negotiating, on the Academy's commission, with the American authorities for Pound's release from the mental hospital where he had been interned to be saved from a death penalty for treason.)

This new policy, at the same time more exclusive and more generous in its interpretation of the will, was actually meant to start with Valéry but he died in the summer of 1945. Instead we find, in 1946–1950, the splendid series Hesse, André Gide, T. S. Eliot, and William Faulkner. In his address to the author of *The Waste Land*, Österling drew attention to "another pioneer work, which had a still more sensational effect on modern literature," James Joyce's *Ulysses*. With this reference to the greatest omission of the 1930s, he extended the 1948 acclaim of Eliot to cover also the dead master. The explicit concentration on innovators can, via the choices of Saint-John Perse in 1960 and Samuel Beckett in 1969, be traced up to recent years.

The criterion lost weight, however, as the heroic period of the international avant-garde turned into history and literary innovation became less ostentatious. Instead, the instruments pointed at the 'pioneers' of specific linguistic areas. The 1988 Prize was awarded to a writer who, from a Western point of view, rather administers the heritage from Flaubert and Thomas Mann. In the Arabic world, on the other hand, Naguib Mahfouz appears as the creator of its contemporary novel. The following Prize went to Camilo José Cela, who had, in an international perspective, modest claims to the title 'pioneer', but who was, in Spanish literature, the great innovator of post-war fiction. Still found among these innovators of certain linguistic areas is the 2000 Laureate, Gao Xingjian, whose oeuvre "has opened new paths for the Chinese novel drama."

#### 3.6. Attention to Unknown Masters (1978-)

Another policy, partly coinciding with the one just outlined, partly replacing it, is "the pragmatic consideration" worded by the new secretary, Lars Gyllensten, and, again, taking into account the 'benefit' of the Prize. A growing number within the Academy wanted to call attention to important but unnoticed writers and literatures, thus giving the world audience masterpieces they would otherwise miss, and, at the same time, giving an important writer due attention. We get glimpses of such arguments as far

back as the choice of Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 but there was no programme until the early 1970s. The full emergence of this policy can be seen from 1978 and onwards, in the Prizes to Isaac Bashevis Singer, Odysseus Elytis, Elias Canetti, and Jaroslav Seifert. The criterion gives poetry a prominent place. In no other period were the poets so well provided for as in the years 1990–1996 when four of the seven prizes went to Octavio Paz, Derek Walcott, Seamus Heaney, and Wisława Szymborska, all of them unknown earlier to the world audience.

### 3.7. *'The Literature of the Whole World' (1986–)*

A new policy, long on its way, had a breakthrough in the 1980s. Again, it was an attempt to understand and carry out Nobel's intentions. His will had an international horizon, though it rejected any consideration for the nationality of the candidates: the most worthy should be chosen, "whether he be a Scandinavian or not." The problem of surveying the literature of the whole world was, however, overwhelming and for a long time the Academy was, with justice, to be criticized for making the award a European affair. Wirsén expressly confined himself, as we saw, to "the great figures of Continental literature." In the 1920s it was certainly laid down that the prize was "intended for the literature of the whole world" but instruments to implement the idea were not available. In the 1930s, there were, on the whole, not even reasonable nominations from the Asiatic countries and the Academy had, at that time, not yet developed a scouting system of its own.

The Prize at last to Yasunari Kawabata in 1968 illustrates the exceptional difficulties in judging literature in non-European languages — this was a matter of seven years, involving four international experts. In 1984, however, Gyllensten declared that attention to non-European writers was gradually increasing in the Academy; attempts were being made "to achieve a global distribution." This includes measures to strengthen the competence for the international task.

The picture of the Academy's Eurocentric policy was also significantly altered by the choices of Wole Soyinka from Nigeria in 1986 and Naguib Mahfouz from Egypt in 1988. Later practice shows the extension to Nadine Gordimer from South Africa, to Kenzaburo Oe from Japan, to Derek Walcott from St. Lucia in the West Indies, to Toni Morrison, the first Afro-American on the list, and to Gao Xingjian, the first laureate to write in Chinese. It is, however, important that nationality is not involved in the discussion. It has sometimes been suggested that the Academy should first

decide upon a neglected language and then seek out the best candidate in it. Doing so would amount to politization of the Prize. Instead, efforts are being made to widen the horizon so that, in the course of the normal process of judgement, it is possible to weigh sometimes a prominent Nigerian dramatist and poet, sometimes an Egyptian novelist, against candidates from closer parts of the linguistic atlas — with all such evaluations continuing to be made on literary grounds. Critics have quite often neglected the Academy's striving for political integrity. Naturally, an international prize can have political effects but it must not, according to this jury, carry any political intention.

The criteria discussed sometimes alternate, sometimes coincide. The spotlight on the unknown master Canetti in 1981 is thus followed by the laurel to the universally hailed 'pioneer' of magic realism, Gabriel García Márquez, in 1982. Some Laureates answer both requirements, like Faulkner, who was not only "the great experimentalist among twentieth-century novelists" — the Academy was here fortunate enough to anticipate Faulkner's enormous importance to later fiction — but also, in 1950, a fairly unknown writer. On this occasion, the Prize, for once, could help a great innovator outside the limelight to reach his potential disciples as well as his due audience. The surprising Prize to Dario Fo in 1997 can also be said to have a double address: it was given to a genre which had earlier been left out in the cold but also to the brilliant innovator of that genre.

### 3.8. *The Prize Becoming a Literary Prize*

The more and more generous interpretation of the formula "in an ideal direction" continued in the 1980s and the 1990s. Academy Secretary Lars Gyllensten pointed out that nowadays the expression "is not taken too literally ... It is realized that on the whole the serious literature that is worthy of a prize furthers knowledge of man and his condition and endeavours to enrich and improve his life." Cela's candidature, again, put the principle to the test. His dark conception of the world posed the same problem as Beckett's, and provoked a similar solution. The Prize was given "for a rich and intense prose, which with restrained compassion forms a challenging vision of man's vulnerability." As Knut Ahnlund said in his address, Cela's work "in no way lacks sympathy or common human feeling, unless we demand that those sentiments should be expressed in the simplest possible way." In this 'unless' we glimpse the repudiation, implicit in recent practice, of the early narrow interpretation of the will. The Nobel Prize in Literature



has gradually become a literary prize. One of the few reminiscences of the 'ideal direction' policy of the earlier age is the homage paid to those great artistic achievements that are characterized by uncompromising 'integrity' in the depiction of the human predicament (cf. below).

### 3.9. *International Neglect of the Change of Standards*

International criticism of the Literature Prize has usually treated the Academy's practice during the first century of the Prize as a whole, overlooking the differences in outlook and criteria between the various periods, even neglecting the continuous renewal which makes the Academy of, say, 1950 a jury much different from Wirsén's.

As to the early prizes, the censure of bad choices and blatant omissions is often justified. Tolstoy, Ibsen and Henry James should have been rewarded instead of, for instance, Sully Prudhomme, Eucken and Heyse. The Academy which got this exacting commission was simply not fit for the task. It was deliberately formed as 'a bulwark' against the new radical literature in Sweden and much too conservative in outlook and taste to be an international literary jury. It was not until the 1940s — with Anders Österling as secretary — that the Academy, considerably rejuvenated, had the competence to address the major writers of, in the first place, the Western World. On the whole, criticism of its postwar practice has also been much more appreciative. Objections in recent times have less often been levelled against literary quality, rather referred, mistakenly, to political intentions. Also blame for eurocentricity was common, in particular from Asiatic quarters, up to the choices of Soyinka and Mahfouz in the 1980s.

## 4. Special Articles

### 4.1. *Nomination*

In the first year, the number of nominations was 25. In the early time of the Prize the members of the Swedish Academy were reluctant to use their right to nominate candidates. Impartiality suggested that proposals should come from outside. As no one abroad nominated Tolstoy in 1901, the self-evident candidate of the time fell outside the discussion. The omission caused a strong reaction from Swedish writers and artists who sent an address to Tolstoy — who answered by declining any future prize. During the First World War the number of nominations decreased, to fall to twelve

in 1919, compared with 28 in 1913. This wartime slackening of initiative from the outside world induced the Academy to make use of its right to propose. In 1916 the Committee members themselves put forward five names. In recent times, members of the Committee — but also other members of the Academy — regularly add their nominations to the outside names to make the list as comprehensive and representative as possible. The number of nominations has towards the end of the century been about — and even substantially surpassed — 200.

### 4.2. *The Nobel Committee*

The Nobel Committee is a working unit of 3–5, chosen within the Swedish Academy (with a rare additional member from outside). Its task is to examine the proposals made and study all relevant literary material to select the candidates to be considered by the Academy. Formerly the Committee presented only one name for the decision of the Academy, which usually confirmed the choice of its Committee. (There are exceptions though: the Academy preferred Tagore in 1913 and Henri Bergson in 1927.) From the 1970s onward, the members of the Committee have presented individual reports, which enables the Academy to weigh the different opinions and consequently gives it a greater influence.

The Committee's first task is to trim down 'the long list' nowadays of about 200 names to some 15, which are presented to the Academy in April. Towards the end of May, this 'half-long list' is condensed to a 'short list' of five names. The *œuvres* of these finalists make up the Academy's summer readings. At its first reunion in the middle of September, the discussion immediately starts, to end in a decision about a month later. Naturally, the whole production of five writers would be too heavy a workload for a couple of months but most names of the previous short list return the current year, which makes the task more reasonable. It should be added that in recent times a first-year candidate will not be taken to a prize the same year. In the background looms one of the main failures, Pearl Buck, the Laureate of 1938. A first-year candidate, she was launched by a Committee minority as late as 19 September, to win the contest a short time afterwards, without due consideration.

The chairman of the Committee has usually been identical with the Academy's permanent secretary, with some displacement at transitional stages. Thus, Carl David af Wirsén was chairman in 1900–1912, Per Hallström (secretary from 1931) in 1922–1946, Anders Österling (secretary from

1941) in 1947–1970, Karl–Ragnar Gierow (secretary from 1964) in 1970–1980, and Lars Gyllensten (secretary from 1977) in 1981–1987. An exceptional period is in 1913–1921 when the historian, Harald Hjärne, wrote the reports. In 1986, when Sture Allén became secretary, Gyllensten remained as chairman, to be succeeded by Kjell Espmark in 1988. Since 1986 the tasks have thus been divided between secretary and chairman.

#### 4.3. 'Ideal' — A Textual Examination

As was shown by Sture Allén, the adjective 'ideal' referring to an ideal was used by several of Nobel's contemporaries; one of them was Strindberg. However, the word is, he found, an amendment made by Nobel in his handwritten will. Nobel seems to have written 'idealirad', with 'idealiserad' (idealized) in mind, but checked himself in front of the reference to embellishment in this word for upliftment and wrote 'sk' over the final letters 'rad', thus ending in the disputed word 'idealisk'. Allén concluded that Nobel actually meant "in a direction towards an ideal", and specified the sphere of the ideal by the general criterion for all the Nobel Prizes: they are addressed to those who "shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind." "This means, for instance," Allén added, "that writings, however brilliant, that advocate, say, genocide, will not comply with the will."

#### 4.4. Shared Prize

The Nobel Prize for Literature can be divided between two — but not three — candidates. However, the Swedish Academy has been restrictive on this point. Divisions are liable to be regarded as — and sometimes are — the result of compromise. That was the case with Frédéric Mistral and José Echegaray in 1904 and with Karl Gjellerup and Henrik Pontoppidan in 1916. A shared prize also runs the risk of being viewed as only half a laurel. Later divisions are exceptional, the only cases being the shared Prizes to Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Nelly Sachs in 1966 and to Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martinson in 1974. In the 1970s a policy was laid down, stating (1) that each of the two candidates must alone be worthy of the Prize and (2) that there must be some community between them justifying the procedure. The latter requirement no doubt offers a real obstacle for divisions.

#### 4.5. Competence for the International Task

In the Swedish Academy, linguistic competence has, as a rule, been high. French, English, and German have posed no problems and several members have been excellent translators from Italian and Spanish. Also noted Orientalists have found a place in the Academy. One of them (Esaias Tegnér, Jr.) could have read Tagore in Bengali (but in fact contented himself with the author's own English translation of *Gitanjali*), another (H. S. Nyberg) could report on Arabic literature. In 1985 Göran Malmqvist, one of the West's foremost experts on modern Chinese literature, became a member. The present Academy includes competence also in Russian. Above all, however, the area of scrutiny has been extended by means of specialists in the various fields. Where translations into English, French, German or the Scandinavian languages are missing, special translations can also be procured. In several cases such exclusive versions — with no more than eighteen readers — have played an important role in the recent work of the Academy.

#### 4.6. 'Political Integrity'

The Literary Prize has often, in particular during the cold war, given rise to discussion of its political implications. The Swedish Academy, for its part, has on many occasions expressed a desire to stand apart from political antagonisms. The guiding principle, in Lars Gyllensten's words, has been 'political integrity'. This has quite often not been understood. Especially in the East it has been hard to grasp the Swedish Academy's autonomous position vis-à-vis state and government. In fact, the Academy does not receive any subsidy from the state, nor would it accept any interference in its work. The government, in its turn, is quite happy to stand outside the delicate Nobel matters.

Naturally, there is a political aspect of any international literary prize. It is, however, necessary to make a distinction between political effects and political intentions. The former are unavoidable — and often unpredictable. The latter are expressly banned by the Academy. The distinction, as well as the autonomy of the Academy, can be illustrated by the prehistory of the Prize to Solzhenitsyn. Considering the sad consequences for Pasternak of his Prize, the secretary Karl–Ragnar Gierow took the unusual step of writing to the Swedish ambassador to Moscow, Gunnar Jarring, to gain some idea of Solzhenitsyn's position, stressing that the question related, of course,

only to what might "happen to him personally." On this point, Mr. Jarring could give a reassuring answer (which proved not to be prophetic). But he also had another message. He wanted to postpone the decision, specifying, in a letter to Österling, that a prize to Solzhenitsyn "would lead to difficulties for our relations with the Soviet Union." He received the reply: "Yes, that could well be so, but we all agreed that Solzhenitsyn is the most deserving candidate." This exchange illuminates a fundamental fact: the Academy has no regard for what may or may not be desirable in the eyes of the Swedish Foreign Office. Its unconventional inquiry was concerned solely with the likely effects of the decision for the candidate personally. However, the exchange also offers a good example of the way in which a likely political effect may be taken into account—not, of course, that the Academy intended the possible disturbance in Soviet relations, but that it was aware of the risk and chose to take it.

The history of the Literary Prize offers a case where this delicate balance was endangered, the prize to Winston Churchill. When the decision was taken in 1953, after many years of discussion, it was felt that a sufficient distance from the candidate's wartime exploits had been gained, making it possible for a Prize to him to be generally understood as a literary award. The reaction from many quarters showed that this was quite a vain hope.

Now, there can be no doubt that the Committee and the Academy attributed exceptional literary merits to Churchill the historian and the orator. They certainly concurred in the address to the Laureate, "a Caesar who also had the gift of wielding Cicero's stylus." The problem was how this Caesar, a mere eight years after the war, could be mentally separated from the Ciceronian prose. After all, Churchill was not only the winner of World War II but prime minister and leader of one of the key powers in the cold war world. It can be asked if any of the Academy's choices has put its political integrity at such risk. At any rate, one well-known conclusion was drawn: ever since, candidates with governmental positions, such as André Malraux and Léopold Senghor, have been consistently ruled out.

During the last decades there is one seeming case of a 'political' Prize, the award to Czesław Miłosz. "Has Miłosz been given the 1980 Prize because Poland is politically in fashion?", asked *Der Tagesspiegel* and many other newspapers joined in. The suspicions did not account for the time involved in each nominee's candidacy. As was disclosed by a member, Artur Lundkvist, Miłosz had been on the list for three or four years and had been shortlisted in May 1980—in other words, long before the Danzig strike. The strike caused several members to hesitate, said Lundkvist,

but he added that it would have been equally impossible to drop Miłosz because of the events in Poland.

His argument no doubt reflects the opinion within the Academy. This jury realizes not only the damage that a political choice would inflict on the Prize; the integrity of the award could be jeopardised also by a non-choice in a delicate situation. Still, Miłosz was a dissident, and so were Jaroslav Seifert and Joseph Brodsky, the Laureates of 1984 and 1987. These choices all caused great irritation in the East. There one failed to see that the Academy's overriding concern was literary. The pronouncements of the secretary repeatedly stressed the existential dimensions of these great contemporary poets, values corresponding to the humanistic traditions of the Literary Prize. From that point of view it is essential that Miłosz's political defection be thus formulated by Gyllensten (after a reminder of how during the cold war the political climate had altered in a Stalinist direction): "With his uncompromising demand for artistic integrity and human freedom, Miłosz could no longer support the regime." Uncompromising integrity and a call to rally round human values—these are qualities that the Swedish Academy, following the spirit of Nobel's will, has again and again sought in combination with great artistic achievement. And just as repeatedly, this mode of evaluation has collided with Marxist/Leninist aesthetics, which interprets such a focus as mere camouflage for political intentions.

The process of judgement, while 'primarily a literary matter', does not, of course, prevent subsidiary evaluations from gradually forming a pattern. Such a pattern is apparent in the sequence Singer–Miłosz–Canetti–Seifert. At first sight one could see here what a newspaper headline proclaimed about the choice of Seifert: "The Swedish Academy Greets Central Europe." It is, however, not a question of some politically defined region or some third way in the tug-of-war between East and West. It is rather a question of authors who with great personal integrity have given voice to an old culture that has either been swept aside by oppressors or whose continued existence was severely threatened. In the difficult area of Central Europe, a number of authors have emerged, speaking, out of their sorely tested experience, on behalf of the basic human values—this in keeping with the humanistic tradition of the Nobel Prize. Such a pattern, though, reveals only part of the truth. The Prize is in the end not given to an attitude toward life, to a set of cultural roots, or to the substance of a commitment; the Prize has been rewarded so as to honor the unique artistic power by which this human experience has been shaped into literature.

#### 4.7. *International Criticism of the Literature Prize*

The history of the Literature Prize is also the history of its reception in the press and in other media. Apart from overlooking the changes in outlooks and criteria within the Swedish Academy, international criticism has tended to neglect the crowd of likely names around the Prize for a specific year. Thus, Graham Greene was a celebrated candidate towards 1970 and the Academy was criticized for passing him over. But the 1969 Prize went to Samuel Beckett and the 1970 Prize to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, both most worthy candidates. Quite rightly, an international inquiry by *Books Abroad* in 1951, directed to 350 specialists, came to the conclusion that the first fifty years of the Prize contained 150 'necessary' candidates. The Academy cannot have the ambition to crown all worthy writers. What it cannot afford is giving Nobel's laurel to a minor talent. Its practice during the last full half-century has also largely escaped criticism on that point. Even the inquiry of 1951 found that two-thirds of the prizes during the first half-century were fully justified — "a fairly decent testimonial," as Österling commented. The second half-century as liable to get a still better mark.

As was mentioned above, criticism of omissions and bad choices was often justified as to the early period of the Prize. The Academy headed by Wirsén made only one choice to get general acclaim by posterity — Rudyard Kipling, and then for qualities other than those that have shown themselves to be lasting. The score of the 1910s and the 1920s was better: Gerhart Hauptmann, Tagore, France, Yeats, Shaw, and Mann have been found worthy in several appraisals. The results of the period 1930–1939 are poorer. Two choices have widely been regarded as splendid: Luigi Pirandello in 1934 and Eugene O'Neill in 1936. But the period offers several laureates justly judged as mediocre — and they conceal as many cases of neglect: Virginia Woolf ought to have been rewarded instead of Pearl Buck, and so on. The Academy of the inter-war years quite simply lacked the necessary tools to evaluate one of the most dynamic periods in Western literature. The post-war Academy has in a quite different manner fulfilled the expectations of serious criticism. The Österling Academy's investment in the pioneers has received due recognition in many favorable assessments. Names like Gide, Eliot, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Beckett have won general acclaim. Some names less known to an international audience, like Jiménez, Laxness, Quasimodo, and Andrić, have attracted criticism as insignificant, but been classified by experts as discoveries.

Sometimes the complaints about omissions have been anachronistic. Among those missing, critics have found Proust, Kafka, Rilke, Musil, Cavafy,

Mandelstam, García Lorca, and Pessoa. This list, if it had any chronological justification, would undeniably suggest serious failure. But the main works of Kafka, Cavafy, and Pessoa were not published until after their deaths and the true dimensions of Mandelstam's poetry were revealed above all in the unpublished poems that his wife saved from extinction and gave to the world long after he had perished in his Siberian exile. In the other cases there was much too brief a period of time between the publication of the author's most deserving work and his death for a prize to have been possible. Thus, Proust achieved notoriety in 1919 by the Goncourt Prize for the second part of *À la recherche du temps perdu* but less than three years later he was dead. The same short time of reaction was offered by Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* and García Lorca's plays. Musil's significance did not appear outside a narrow circle of connoisseurs until more than a decade after his death in 1942. He belonged, as was pointed out by a critic (Theodor Ziolkowski), to the category of authors who "on closer examination ... exclude themselves."

#### 5. Epilogue: At the Turn of the Century

The last literary Nobel Prize of the twentieth century was awarded to Günter Grass, "whose frolicsome black fables portray the forgotten face of history." The choice won general acclaim but the moment was called in question. Why not three decades ago when Grass was at the summit of his craft? And why just now?

The first question takes us back to the situation around 1970 when Böll and Grass were both hot names. When the laurel was given to Böll in 1972 the citation recalled his contribution "to a renewal of German literature." The word had, however, a special meaning here. As was clarified in Gierow's speech to the Laureate 'the renewal' was 'not an experiment with form' but 'a rebirth out of annihilation', 'a resurrection' of a ravaged culture 'to the joy and benefit of us all': "Such was the kind of work Alfred Nobel wished his prize to reward." This meant that the foremost representative of a moral renaissance from the ruins of the Third Reich was preferred, with a direct appeal to Nobel's intentions, to the country's foremost representative of what was an artistic renewal. The choice took Grass out of focus for many years, and allowed for a discussion of a downward trend in his craft. It remained for the rejuvenated Academy of the nineties to take up the issue again. Several of its new members might have chosen Grass instead of Böll in 1972. As to the alleged decline of

Grass's art, the presentation at the announcement certainly called special attention to *The Tin Drum* and the Danzig trilogy it makes part of, but refused to share the politically biased German view of *Ein weites Feld*. "We just read the book and it is goddam good," as the permanent secretary Horace Engdahl declared.

Also the second question — why just now? — can be answered. The citation recalls the fabulous historian, with a view to the forgotten face of history. Without neglecting works like *The Flounder*, beginning at the dawn of history, the jury naturally focused upon the great recreator of the century just about to end. Grass is, in the secretary's words, "one of the really important writers investigating and explaining the twentieth century to us"; giving him the last prize of the century was 'an easy decision'. In other words, the choice long due found its perfect moment at the very end of the period that Grass had summed up in his incomparable way.

Grass's stronger position in recent years is, of course, also due to the growing understanding of his role as a source of energy in literature. In 1972 he was still a solitary master. In recent years he has been hailed as a precursor by writers such as Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, Gabriel García Márquez, Antonio Lobo Antunes, and Kenzaburo Oe. Grass has found his place among the 'pioneers'.

This choice at the end of the century has, however, also another purport. The Prizes to Hesse, Gide, Eliot, and Faulkner introduced a half-century of new competence for the difficult mission. The 1999 Prize is an indication of how far the jury has managed to make the Prize for Literature a literary award. The reference to moral values at the expense of experimental art in 1972 would be hard to imagine in the present Academy. We also notice the explicit disregard of the political implications that made Grass's last novel an apple of discord in his country. The Literary Prize has made an instructive journey since 1901. At the beginning of the new century it has become the Literary Prize that its name announces.

### Bibliography

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### Literature 1901

Sully Prudhomme

(pen-name of René François Armand Prudhomme) (1839–1907)

*“in special recognition of his poetic composition, which gives evidence of lofty idealism, artistic perfection and a rare combination of the qualitates of both heart and intellect”*

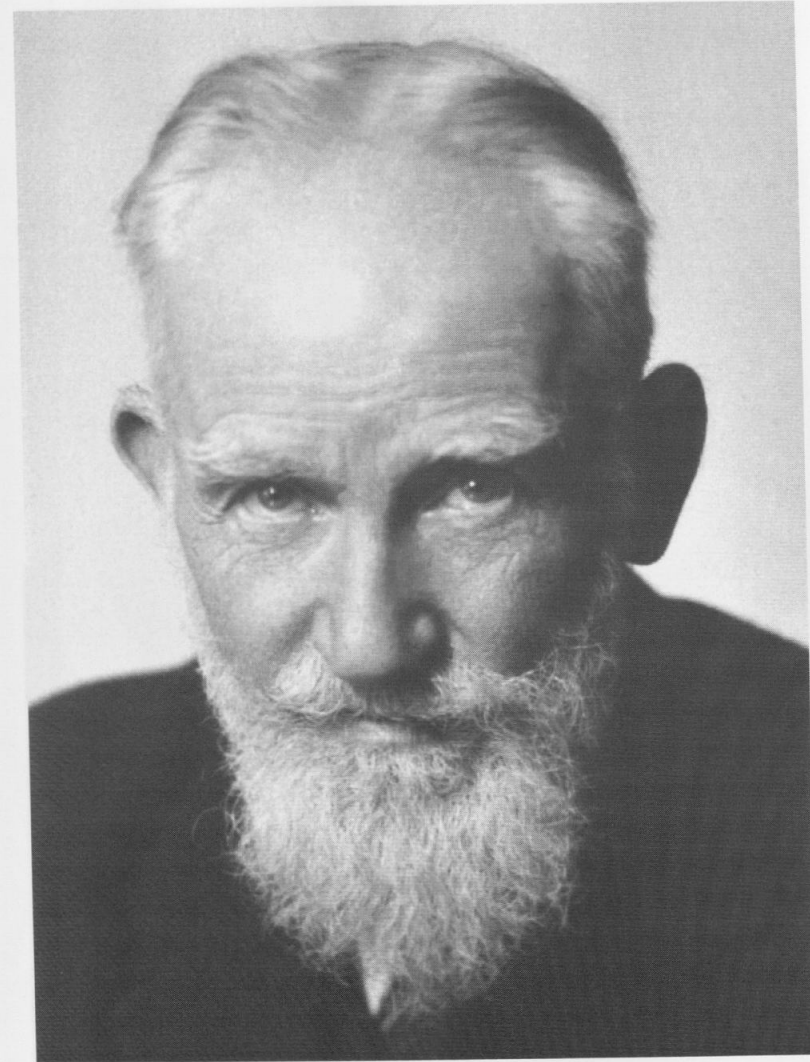




**Literature 1913**

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

*“because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West”*



**Literature 1925**

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)

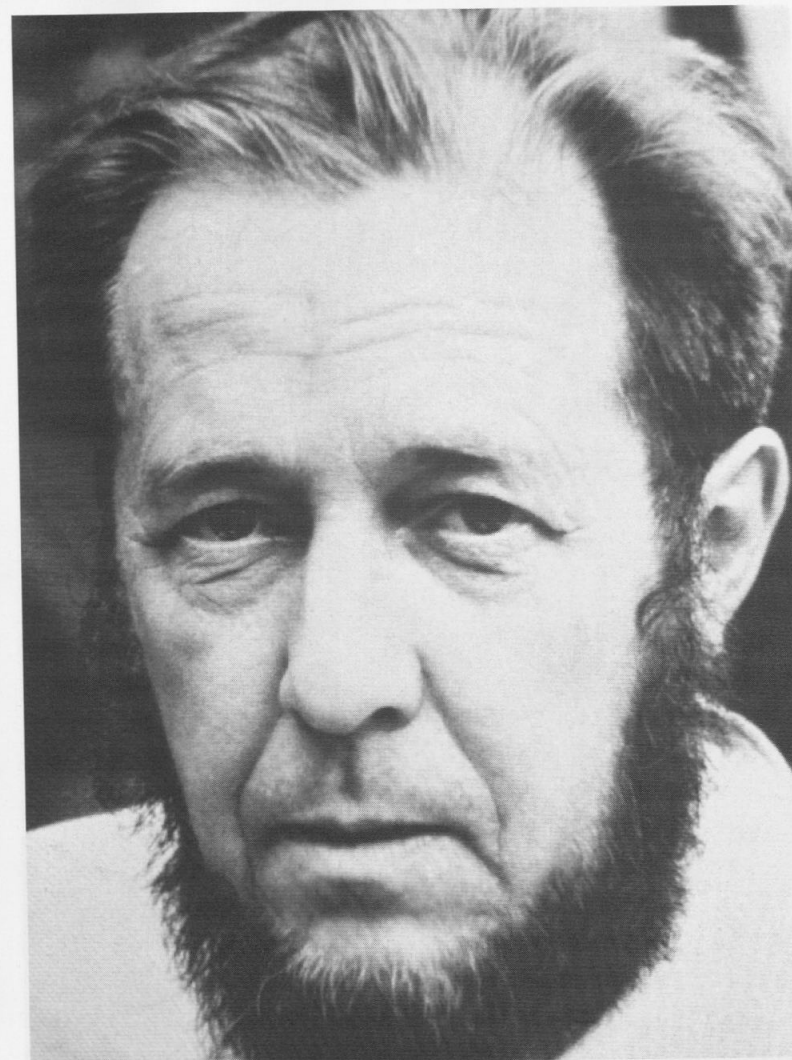
*“for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty”*



Literature 1929

Thomas Mann (1875–1955)

*“principally for his great novel, ‘Buddenbrooks’, which has won steadily increased recognition as one of the classic works of contemporary literature”*



Literature 1970

Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn (1918– )

*“for the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature”*





Literature 1993

Toni Morrison (1931- )

*“who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import,  
gives life to an essential aspect of American reality”*



Literature 1996

Wisława Szymborska (1923- )

*“for poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological  
context to come to light in fragments of human reality”*