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# Literature in the Nobel Era

## Comparative, theoretical, and archival approaches to the Nobel Prize in Literature

**International Symposium**  
**German Literature Archive, Marbach**  
**25 - 28 August 2021**

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A cooperation of: Bielefeld University, Germany / German Literature Archive, Marbach, Germany / Linköping University, Sweden / The Swedish Academy, Stockholm, Sweden

*Sponsored by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and the Swedish Academy.*

In 1895, Alfred Nobel famously signed his last will and testament, establishing that most of his fortune should be used to fund a series of prizes, including the Nobel Prize in Literature. Since 1901, the Literature Prize has been awarded to a total of 116 individuals writing in 25 languages.

»The Nobel Prizes for science and literature are all-powerful«, Ludwig Marcuse once observed. He further elaborates that the recipient »is no longer a physicist or a novelist« but a »Nobel Prize Winner«. Marcuse certainly has a point. Given the massive amount of attention that the Nobel Prize and Nobel laureates receive in the press all over the world each year, the cultural reach of this award seems to be beyond dispute. Yet the actual workings and various functions of the Nobel Prize remain little known and poorly understood. In what sense and in whose case can a literary award be seen as »all-powerful«? In what ways has the Nobel Prize enabled, informed, or changed the reception of certain authors and their works or even the ways in which we think about and engage with literature altogether? To what extent does the worldwide public awareness of the Nobel Prize coincide with its actual impact on the global literary field in the 20th and 21st centuries, with its ability to shape global discourses and influence the behaviour of authors, publishers, printers, booksellers, agents, translators, journalists, the media, academia, archives, and the reading public?

The study of the Nobel Prize raises a number of methodological questions. How does one approach a subject of such complexity? How does one account for its international and increasingly global scope? The impact of the Nobel Prize seems ultimately to hinge on the significance of certain authors and their works. To what degree does the Nobel Prize mark a turning point in the careers of its laureates or even just such authors who have been publicly associated with it? And, vice versa, how does this group of Nobel authors retroactively shape the

image of the award? The question of authorship in the Nobel era seems to be a natural starting point in determining the impact of the award. Yet, at the same time, it seems fair to assume that »Nobel Prize effects« may take various forms and also involve the very conditions under which literature is written, published, translated, engaged with, and read. For this reason, we have opted for an interdisciplinary, comparative, and theoretically founded approach to the Nobel Prize in Literature. Taking the collections of the German Literature Archive and the Swedish Academy as a starting point, we also wish to explore how an archival perspective can enrich the historical, critical, and theoretical inquiry into this award.

Our international symposium will bring together scholars in the fields of comparative literature and cultural studies, translation studies, sociology, book history and economic history, as well as other areas relevant to the study of the Nobel Prize in Literature. The main goal is to combine critical and archival research with theoretical and methodological reflection, to inaugurate a global network of Nobel Prize scholarship, and to spark innovative collaboration across disciplines.

Further information can be found on our homepage: <https://www.the-nobel-era.org/>.

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