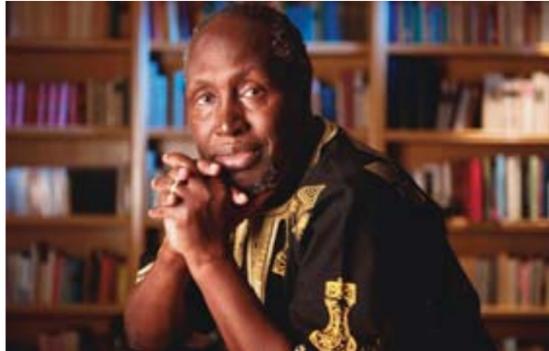




Canadian poet Anne Carson



Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o



Maryse Conde

POST-SCANDAL ACADEMY TO AWARD TWO NOBEL LITERATURE PRIZES

The Swedish Academy will crown two Nobel literature laureates this year, making up for lost time after it skipped last year's prize over a sexual harassment scandal. Experts say the academy will seek to avoid ruffling any feathers with this year's choice of laureates as it seeks to move on from the scandal that saw the husband of one of its members jailed for rape.

Some names creating a buzz ahead of this year's literature prize are Canadian poet Anne Carson, Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and French Guadeloupean Maryse Conde, according to betting sites such as Unibet. Stockholm's literary circles have also speculated about Romanian poet and novelist Mircea Cartarescu and Polish writer and activist Olga Tokarczuk. The Swedish Academy, which dates back to 1786, is at pains to repair its reputation after the scandal exposed scheming, conflicts of interest, harassment and a culture of silence among its 18 members, long esteemed as the country's guardians of culture.

The revelations shook Sweden, a Lutheran nation that prides itself on transparency and consensual democracy, and is intolerant of inequality. Left in tatters by the debacle, the Academy, tasked with selecting the Nobel Literature laureate, postponed the 2018 prize until this

year — the first such delay in 70 years.

Nobel sex scandal

Now revamped with new members and statutes, the institution will announce two winners, one for 2018 and one for 2019, on Thursday, October 10 at 1:00 pm (11:00 GMT). It is widely expected to pick writers who won't spark further controversy, and at least one is almost certain to be a woman, literary critics interviewed by AFP predicted, as women represent only 14 of the 114 literature laureates since 1901.

The Academy does not release a shortlist. While speculation about possible winners is always a guessing game, it is even more so this year given the many changes within the institution. Among the many names cited as possible winners are Chinese fiction writer Can Xue, Japanese author Haruki Murakami, Russian novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya, US novelist Joyce Carol Oates and Canada's Margaret Atwood.

The Academy's woes began in November 2017 when it disagreed about how to manage its close ties to Frenchman Jean-Claude Arnault, accused and later convicted of rape. Arnault is married to Katarina Frostenson, a member of the Academy who later resigned over the scandal at the height of the #MeToo movement against

harassment of women. The pair also ran a cultural club in Stockholm that received funding from the body. Ultimately, seven members quit the Academy, including then permanent secretary Sara Danius. "From having been associated with literature of the highest order, the Nobel Prize is for many now associated with #MeToo... and a dysfunctional organisation," Swedish literary critic Madelaine Levy told AFP.

Reputational damage

The empty seats have since been filled, and in June 2019 literature professor Mats Malm took over as permanent secretary. "The changes have been very productive and we are hopeful for the future," Malm told AFP in an interview just days before the prize announcement. He acknowledged the affair had tainted the institution and said improvements were still needed. "A lot of hard work remains, of that we are certain."

Retired publisher Svante Weyler said he thought the Academy's — and prize's — reputation could be repaired, "but only through wise choices of laureates." He expected the Academy would try hard to steer clear of controversy, and probably go for one author highly regarded in literary circles and one with broader appeal. "Absolutely no one that can cause a controversial politi-

cal discussion," he said. Meanwhile, Olivier Truc, who recently published a book on the scandal, noted the Academy had courted controversy before. "For instance when the award was given to two sitting members of the Academy," he said, referring to the 1974 decision to give the prize to Harry Martinsson and Eyvind Johnson. Giving the nod to US singer songwriter Bob Dylan in 2016 also led some to question the Academy's judgment.

New procedure

The Academy used to be the sole arbiter of who gets the Nobel Literature Prize. But following demands of external oversight from the Nobel Foundation which manages the prize money, the selection committee has been altered to include five members from outside the body. Given the stain on the Academy's reputation, Levy raised the possibility "that those given the award won't accept it" — as French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre did in 1964. This year's laureate — especially if it's a male author — can expect their work and personal life to come under great scrutiny, in particular for expressions of misogyny, Levy added. — AFP

Five things to know about the Nobel Literature Prize

The Swedish Academy will tomorrow crown two Nobel literature laureates after postponing the 2018 prize for a year to deal with the fallout of a sexual harassment scandal that rocked the venerable institution. Here are five things to know about the Nobel Literature Prize.

Most prestigious award

Each year, the Swedish Academy awards 16 prizes, the most famous and prestigious being the Nobel Literature Prize. In his 1895 last will and testament, Swedish scientist and philanthropist Alfred Nobel tasked the institution with awarding the Nobel Literature Prize each year. Since 1901, four or five of the Academy's 18 members have been elected to serve on its Nobel Committee for a three-year term, designated to sort through the nominations and provide the rest of the Academy with a shortlist of possible winners.

The nominees' bodies of work are then studied and discussed by the entire Academy. The members hold a vote in October to choose the winner — the laureate must obtain more than half of the votes cast. Following last year's scandal, the Nobel Foundation that funds the Nobel Prizes insisted that five external people also join the Nobel Committee for at least 2019 and 2020.

350 nominees a year

The Academy's archives are bursting with letters from the world's most renowned literary figures nominating candidates. Each year, the institution receives around 350 nominations submitted by those eligible to do so: former Nobel literature laureates, members of other countries' equivalent academies, literature professors, and the heads of national writers' associations. Each one vaunts the talents of their candidate, some going so far as to slip in a little gift for Academy members... a gesture they typically frown upon. To be valid, nominations must be presented or renewed each year, and must be received by the Academy by January 31 at the latest. To qualify, nominees must still be alive, and, according to the strict rules laid out by Alfred Nobel, must have published a piece of work within the past year, though the Academy has occasionally strayed from that requirement.

Seven reserved years, two refusals

A total of 114 people have won the Nobel Literature Prize. The prize has been awarded on 110 occasions, with two people sharing the prize on four occasions. It has

also been declined twice: In 1958 Russian author Boris Pasternak accepted the prize but was later forced by Soviet authorities to decline it, and in 1964, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre turned it down. The institution, founded in 1786, has on eight occasions chosen to reserve the prize: in 1915, 1919, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1936, 1949 and 2018. On six of those occasions, the prize was delayed then awarded at the same time as the following year's prize, as is the case on Thursday.

France tops list of laureates

France takes the gold medal for the most Nobel Literature Prizes with 15 laureates, including the first one ever awarded, to Sully Prudhomme in 1901. Tied in second place are the United States and Britain with 12 laureates each, including last year's winner, Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro, author of "Remains of the Day" and "Never Let Me Go". In terms of languages, however, laureates writing in Moliere's tongue find themselves outnumbered by those writing in Shakespeare's, with 29 anglophone authors honored since 1901.

Rocked by affairs

The Academy has been rocked by several affairs in modern times. In the name of the "independence of literature", the Swedish Academy refused to condemn a 1989 fatwa against British author Salman Rushdie following the publication of his novel, "The Satanic Verses". Academy members were divided about whether to stand as neutral guarantors of the arts, or as supporters of their fellow author. Three members angered by the Academy's chosen path of silence left their seats, though technically they were appointed for life and could not resign. It was not until 27 years later, in 2016, that the Academy finally condemned the fatwa against Rushdie. Then, in late 2017 and early 2018, it disagreed publicly about how to manage its close ties to Frenchman Jean-Claude Arnault, accused and later convicted of rape.

Arnault is married to Katarina Frostenson, a member of the Academy who later resigned over the scandal. The rift exposed scheming, conflicts of interest, harassment and a culture of silence among members, leaving the Academy in disarray and forcing it to postpone the 2018 prize. The Academy's statutes have since been revised to increase transparency and allow members to resign. Seven members quit the Academy in 2018 and have since been replaced. — AFP

Hidden Russian roots of France's Resistance anthem revealed

It is a song close to French hearts, the building power of its defiant march swelling chests and bringing a tear to the eye. But the "Song of the Partisans" — the hymn of the French Resistance which moves most French people more than their bellicose national anthem "La Marseillaise" — was in fact written over a pot of tea in London by a group of Russians.

For years the authorities were content to quietly perpetuate the myth that the song had sprung from the brave hearts of fighters who had taken to the "maquis" and the mountains to resist the German occupiers during World War II. Indeed the Free French forces of General Charles de Gaulle ordered that the names of its true authors be hushed up, a new exhibition on the song in Paris shows. "If people realized that it had been written in London over tea and sandwiches it wouldn't quite have had the same ring nor credibility," said curator Lionel Dardenne. In fact, the music was written by a young White Russian aristocrat named Anna Betoulinsky who worked in the Free French canteen in the British capital. She later became Anna Marly after plucking her stage name from a telephone directory.

BBC hit

It was only after her "Guerrilla Song" had aired on the BBC that Marly — who grew up on the French Riviera after fleeing Saint Petersburg when her father was murdered by the Bolsheviks — was persuaded to adapt it for her adopted homeland. In one of the many historical ironies that surround the stirring ballad, she actually wrote the original version in Russian to celebrate the sacrifice of Soviet partisans who had slowed Hitler's advance on Moscow.

But it was the French version that was later included in the repertoire of the Red Army Choir. Indeed, its lyrics were mostly written by another Russian, Joseph Kessel, whose family moved to France when he was also a child. A heroic pilot in both the world wars, the journalist went on to write "Belle de Jour" and the "Army of Shadows" — a bleak, unromantic portrait of the Resistance — both of which were made into classic films.

In a further irony, the song was taken up by Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh in their struggle to free Vietnam from its French and later American overlords. Supporters of French Algeria, whose armed wing tried to assassinate Marly and Kessel's hero De Gaulle on several occasions, also adopted it. It also very nearly became the national anthem of South Korea. Dardenne said a large part of the song's appeal rests on its "perceived authenticity... and on the belief



In this undated file photo Russian musician Anna Marly, who composed the music of "Le Chant des Partisans", anthem of French resistance during World War II, sings. — AFP

which still persists that it was written anonymously and came up from the depths of the Resistance."

Blurred origins

Even though it is a central part of many official French commemoration ceremonies, "most people don't really know where it comes from", he added. Such is its power and malleability that it exists simultaneously as an official anthem and a protest song, with the French "yellow vest" protest movement reclaiming it and changing the lyrics to urge President Emmanuel Macron to listen to the people.

Dardenne said it was the Resistance leader Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie who, after rewriting parts of song himself, insisted on its real authorship being blurred. Neither Marly nor Kessel — who believed that "a people without songs is a people who cannot fight" — objected given there was a war to be won, the curator added. However, over time their roles became further eclipsed because "the 'Song of the Partisans' is deeply anchored in people's hearts because people think that it comes from the maquis."

Marly in particular suffered, Dardenne said, despite the fact that her companion song, "The Complaint of the Partisan" which she wrote with Astier de la Vigerie, was taken up and re-recorded by Leonard Cohen in 1969 as "The Partisan". "She never quite had the fame that she would have wanted," Dardenne said. She died in a Russian Orthodox monastery in Alaska in 2006. — AFP