REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF ART IN NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES

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Abstract: The main goal of the present study is to explore the countless connections between the real and fictionalized identities of a number of Nobel Prize winners. Their acceptance speeches enriched in meaning, at times, by literary interviews, letters or essays, provide an invaluable reflection upon the role of the artist, the citizen and individual in society, and shed more light on the complex mission of a writer as public intellectual.

Keywords: Nobel Prize speeches, authentic self, fictionalized self, writer as public intellectual

"Words may, through the devotion, the skill, the passion, and the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world."[1]

The main goal of the present study is to explore the countless connections between the real and fictionalized identities of a number of Nobel Prize winners. Their acceptance speeches enriched in meaning, at times, by literary interviews, letters or essays, provide an invaluable reflection upon the role of the artist, the citizen and individual in society, and shed more light on the complex mission of a writer as public intellectual. Reading and writing are processes that may change both individual life and the dynamics of society. We need to re-learn the art of reading as a means of understanding life; "through the imagination … we are able to develop our ability to see the full humanness of people" and to cultivate the "inner eye".[2] Furthermore, just as knowledge and wisdom are not identical, a similar distinction operates between being informed which requires "reading quickly a great number of merely instructive books" and being cultivated for which "one must read slowly and with a lingering appreciation the comparatively few books that have been written by men who lived, thought and felt with style".[3]

Thus, the nature of Nobel Prize Acceptance Speeches, let alone the significance of the public ceremony and distinction, is to reveal the connection between the moral, humanistic and artistic functions of literature which can "… illuminate the human condition in the world of today."[4] Aldous Huxley was aware that "the need for exposure to good art is particularly acute", therefore steadiness in a time of change could rest firmly only on unalterable values.

[1] William Golding – Nobel Prize acceptance speech
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1983/golding-lecture.html
"They may move men to speak to each other because some o f those words express not just what the writer is thinking but what a huge segment of the world is thinking. They may allow man to speak to man, the man in the street to speak to his fellow until a ripple becomes a tide running through every nation."
[2] Martha Nussbaum, "Skills for Life", *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 April 2010, p. 15.
[3] Aldous Huxley, *Texts and Pretexts*, p.2
[4] The Nobel Prize in Literature 1983 was awarded to William Golding; prize motivation: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1983/

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The artist is "equipped with better tools than those of common men … he opens our eyes for us"[5] and the same idea is reinforced in another Huxleyan essay: "… the artist is endowed with a sensibility and a power of communication, a capacity to 'put things across' which events and the majority of people to whom events happen do not possess."[6]

At a time when the knowledge-based society, the market-driven economy and fierce competition demand for a more scientific and pragmatic approach to life, there is an acute need for humanities, for art – now more than ever – in order to "preserve in us the best of what is human … so that we do not retreat into the savagery of isolation and life is not reduced to the pragmatism of specialists who see things profoundly but ignore what surrounds, precedes and continues those things."[7] "That is why we have to continue dreaming, reading, and writing, the most effective way we have found to alleviate our mortal condition, to defeat the corrosion of time, and to transform the impossible into possibility."[8]

Furthermore, "… the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat … It is the writer`s privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart … The poet`s voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help man endure and prevail."[9] Faulkner and Golding shared a similar perspective on the role of literature to increase the awareness on the importance of humanity, care, love, temperance and tolerance.

The relationship between language and literature has been of great interest and it can be traced as far back as Antiquity, pointing to the two levels of language usage, i.e. "logos" (enabling understanding) and "mythos" (enabling interpretation); later on, Aristotle coined and defined two fundamental terms, i.e. "poiesis" and "mimesis".

Literary language may also undertake the function of increasing awareness, exposing truth, empowering individuals and nations: "Literature has words only, surely a tool as primitive as … the soft copper chisel with which man first carved his own likeness in stone. Perhaps the soft copper chisel is not so poor a tool after all. It may be by books, stories, poetry, lectures we who have the ear of mankind can move man a little nearer the perilous safety of a warless and provident world."[10] On the contrary, "… language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time."[11] (H. Pinter)

Language does not simply serve communication: indeed, the question is to what extent communication is possible at all through language which was impoverished because it was used as an instrument. The role of language was sometimes found unreliable and the solution was a "revival of language" and a "revolution of the word" advocated by Modernists. How n

[5] Aldous Huxley, "Man and Nature" in *Texts and Pretexts,* p.49
[6] Aldous Huxley, "Tragedy and the Whole Truth:" in *Music at Night,* p.17
[7] Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2010/vargas_llosa-lecture_en.html
"Fiction is more than an entertainment, more than an intellectual exercise that sharpens one`s sensibility and awakens a critical spirit."
[8] Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
[9] William Faulkner, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html
[10] William Golding, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
[11] Harold Pinter, Noble Prize Acceptance Speech
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meaning be achieved if the language we use can never be a reliable tool? "We had the experience but missed the meaning, / And approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form."[12]

The function of literature is further enriched by its ability to facilitate a dialogue of cultures and to bridge the wide gaps between oneness and otherness, between the centre and the periphery: "Good literature erects bridges between different peoples, and by having us enjoy, suffer, or feel surprise, unites us beneath the languages, beliefs, habits, customs, and prejudices that separate us … Literature creates a fraternity within human diversity and eclipses the frontiers erected among men and women by ignorance, ideologies, religions, languages, and stupidity."[13] Moreover, Orhan Pamuk acknowledged that "literature is never just a national concern; the writer … must have the artistry to tell his own stories as if they were other people's stories, and to tell other people's stories as if they were his own, for this is what literature is "[14], a statement fully testified by the significance of a Nobel Prize for Literature, whose recipient will enjoy worldwide readership, recognition and success and whose significance transgresses national borders in order to open up new territories of previously unmapped imagination.

Questions of authenticity and identity, the distinction between real and fictionalized life also come up in Nobel Prize Acceptance Speeches; e.g. "A writer is someone who spends years patiently trying to discover the second being inside him, and the world that makes him who he is: when I speak of writing, what comes first to my mind is a person who shuts himself up in a room, sits down at a table, and alone, turns inward; amid its shadows, he builds a new world with words."[15]

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[12] T S Eliot, "Four Quarterts" in *Collected Poems,* London: Faber & Faber, 1974, p.198
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