

УДК 811.111:808.51

*Larysa Pavlenko*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1013-4224>

## THE IMAGE OF A WRITER IN NOBEL LECTURES DELIVERED BY LAUREATES IN LITERATURE

### Abstract

**Background.** A growing interest in discursive nature of Nobel lectures resulted in a number of studies which emphasize their rhetorical force to influence public opinion and to popularize ideas in different spheres of human life. Analyzing Literature Laureates' lectures, most researchers focus on linguistic means and the personality of the Nobelist himself/herself. However, characteristics of a writer proper have not been dealt with in-depth. This article maintains our previous study, which indicates a close relationship between the content component of the Nobel lecture and the laureate' outlook; the lecture itself can be regarded as a brief but extremely powerful expression of his/her human and professional qualities.

**Purpose.** The aim of this paper is to examine how literature laureates interpret the notion of a writer in their Nobel lectures and to identify main common themes in creating this collective image.

**Methods.** A method of linguistic description and observation, a descriptive method, and a contextual-interpretation method were employed to analyse the sample of 17 Nobel lectures.

**Results.** The outcomes of our study indicate that Nobel lectures are extremely powerful expression of prizewinners' human and professional qualities. We have devised a set of five themes, namely the writer's social duty, his/her destiny, literary background, tools, and literary outcome to describe the collective image of a writer. Within the framework of our research, literary background falls into two subthemes (literary heritage and a personal writing process); discussing the writer's toolkit, we focus on language and words.

**Discussion.** Our findings show that laureates develop the concept "writer" to varying degrees but all of them stress a direct interconnection between an active social position and the writer's destiny. Further research can involve the

in-depth study of a definite Nobel lecture in terms of the compositional structure and employed linguistic means.

**Keywords:** public speaking, the Nobel lecture, the literature laureate, the content component, the image of a writer, a social role.

### **Introduction**

Oratory has always been a challenging area for scientists in the fields of pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. The lecture as a genre of public speaking with a clearly structured presentation of scientific information is in the focus of linguistic research in diachronic and synchronic aspects (Malavska, 2016; Lindberg, 2011; Yaakob, 2006). In recent years, Nobel Prize acceptance speeches and Nobel lectures, which can be considered distinctive informative and persuasive means, provide rich textual material for scholars. It is important to study the potential of these speeches to influence public opinion, to convince and encourage the audience to rethink common values, beliefs, attitudes, and viewpoints. In addition to a detailed analysis of linguistic and compositional features of this genre, its content component needs thorough consideration.

### **Theoretical background**

There has been a growing interest in discursive nature of Nobel lectures. J. Frye and M. Suchan (2017) investigate the rhetorical force of Nobel peace speeches from the point of rhetorical topoi. They state that such ceremonial speeches make a great contribution to the grammar of peace and can be used as “an instrument to advance a cluster of appealing values within the normative liberal political ideology” (p. 69). Another study has been carried out on two Nobel lectures in the field of medicine from the aspect of scientific popularization discourse (Maci, 2013). The author compares the Prize winner lectures with their corresponding research articles to detect key semantic domains. In his review of Nobel lectures in literature (awarded in 1990–2009), A. Goldstone (2010) examines the question of literary autonomy, discussing literary canons, censorship, and prizewinners’ political commitments. However, characteristics of a writer proper have not been dealt with in-depth. Few researchers have addressed the issue, among which we can single out the papers about the main stages in the development of the media image of the writer through personal oppositions (Kaptsev, 2014) and the author’s identity as a constituent part of an image (Petrova, 2014).

This article maintains our previous study, which indicates that there is a close relationship between the content component of the Nobel lecture and the outlook of the laureate, and the lecture itself can be regarded as a brief but extremely powerful expression of his/her human and professional qualities (Pavlenko, 2017). The **aim** of this paper is to analyse how literature laureates interpret the notion of a writer in their Nobel lectures and to identify main common themes in creating this collective image.

### **Methods**

For the purpose of this analysis, we selected the texts of the Nobel lectures based on the following criterion: the language of the Nobelists' literary works is English. Therefore, we did not analyze lectures that were delivered in English, but prizewinning texts were written in other languages. According to the official website of the Nobel Committee, 30 authors comply with this criterion, but 13 laureates either did not deliver a lecture or only gave the Banquet Speech. Thus, a method of linguistic description and observation, a descriptive method, and a contextual-interpretation method were employed to examine the sample of 17 lectures (William Yeats, Sinclair Lewis, Pearl Buck, Bertrand Russell, Saul Bellow, William Golding, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Seamus Heaney, Vidiadhar Naipaul, John Coetzee, Harold Pinter, Doris Lessing, Bob Dylan, Kazuo Ishiguro). All the lectures are available on the official website of the Nobel Prize [[https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/)].

### **Results and discussion. The content components of the writer's image**

Unexpectedly, our analysis did not reveal a vocabulary-like definition of the term "writer". Nevertheless, the notion of a writer is represented in Nobel lectures through a set of **themes**, each of which can be introduced with a question. In the context of this research, theme is "an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature" (English Oxford Living Dictionaries). The study provides the following ones:

THEME 1. What is the writer's social role/duty?

*...we spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being (Gordimer).*

*The writer is of service to humankind only insofar as the writer uses the word even against his or her own loyalties, trusts the state of being, as it is revealed, to hold somewhere in its complexity filaments of the cord of truth, able to be bound together, here and there, in art: trusts the state of being to yield somewhere fragmentary phrases of truth, which is the final word of words, never changed by our stumbling efforts to spell it out and write it down, never changed by lies, by semantic sophistry, by the dirtying of the word for the purposes of racism, sexism, prejudice, domination, the glorification of destruction, the curses and the praise-song (Gordimer).*

The important concept of truth as writer's social responsibility proclaimed by South African writer Nadine Gordimer in 1991 in her final words is reinforced by British playwright Harold Pinter, a 2005 Nobel laureate, in his widely-discussed speech *Art, Truth & Politics*:

*When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us (Pinter).*

Being sensitive to injustice in the society, a real writer can act in two ways: "...he either freezes up completely, or he abandons the pen for far more direct means of contesting unacceptable reality" because "...our sight need not be and has never been permanently turned inwards" (Soyinka).

The issues of an individual and a state, art and contradictory societal reality, a language and literature have been partly investigated to understand laureates' core values (Sofronova, 2014; Hushchin and Musikhina, 2015).

THEME 2. What is the writer's life?

There is direct correlation between two themes discussed and Nobel lecturers highlight the impact of writers' involvement in social issues on their lives. For example, Nadine Gordimer enumerates many authors who "have been imprisoned", "have endured the trauma of exile", "some do not survive at all", or "have had to publish new works first in the word that is not their own, a foreign language". Not only due to political reasons but also due to their intransigent position against hypocrisy in moral principles and beliefs, a writer can be accused of indecency, blasphemy or even sentenced to death, as it happened to Salman Rushdie.

*A writer's life is a highly vulnerable, almost naked activity. We don't have to weep about that. The writer makes his choice and is stuck with it. But it is true to say that you are open to all the winds, some of them icy indeed (Pinter).*

THEME 3. What is necessary to become a writer/to develop as a writer?

Nobel lectures give us a deep insight into factors which determine the professional growth and people's recognition of a writer. In our article, two **subthemes** are identified, namely, literary heritage and a personal writing process.

Within the framework of our research, **literary heritage** means works and influence of previous authors' generation, critical articles of literary theorists and philosophers that Nobel laureates consider crucial to their professional advancement

*Even as a schoolboy, I loved John Keats's ode "To Autumn" for being an ark of the covenant between language and sensation; as an adolescent, I loved Gerard Manley Hopkins for the intensity of his exclamations which were also equations for a rapture and an ache I didn't fully know I knew until I read him; I loved Robert Frost for his farmer's accuracy and his wily down-to-earthness; and Chaucer too for much the same reasons. Later on I would find a different kind of accuracy, a moral down-to-earthness to which I responded deeply and always will, in the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, a poetry where a New Testament sensibility suffers and absorbs the shock of the new century's barbarism (Heaney).*

*"Don Quixote", "Ivanhoe", "Robinson Crusoe", "Gulliver's Travels", "Tale of Two Cities", all the rest – typical grammar school reading that gave you a way of looking at life, an understanding of human nature, and a standard to measure things by. I took all that with me when I started composing lyrics. And the themes from those books worked their way into many of my songs, either knowingly or unintentionally. I wanted to write songs unlike anything anybody ever heard, and these themes were fundamental. Specific books that have stuck with me ever since I read them way back in grammar school – I want to tell you about three of them: Moby Dick, All Quiet on the Western Front and The Odyssey (Dylan).*

*Proust, Chekhov and Dostoevsky, to name only a few to whom I owe my existence as a writer, were my professors (Gordimer).*

*But it is the Chinese and not the American novel which has shaped my own efforts in writing. My earliest knowledge of story, of how to tell and write stories, came to me in China (Buck).*

Linguistic material under discussion revealed many names of theorists whose thoughtful speculations and literary critique became guidelines in laureates' writing career. For example, Roland Barthes, Albert Camus, Nikos

Kazantzakis, Anthony Burgess, Samuel Johnson, Alain Robbe-Grillet; some of them (Marcel Proust, Jean-Paul Sartre, Edward Forster, Claude Levi-Strauss) are referred to in different speeches which only proves their lasting contribution to literature and philosophy.

Significantly, two speakers (Seamus Heaney and Harold Pinter) cite long passages from poems by William Yeats and Pablo Neruda who themselves were awarded Nobel Prizes. We consider that this can demonstrate their spiritual intimacy and perseverance to uphold values and traditions.

Dictionary definitions of the lexeme HERITAGE also include “*tradition*” (Merriam-Webster; Collins; Oxford). In this regard, the Nobel speech by a well-known British novelist Doris Lessing deserves special attention. She claims books and cultural traditions as the crucial background for an intelligent author, repeatedly stressing this word:

*Writing, writers, do not come out of houses without books.*

*There is the gap. There is the difficulty.*

*I have been looking at the speeches by some of your recent prizewinners. Take the magnificent Pamuk. He said his father had 500 books. His talent did not come out of the air; he was connected with the great tradition.*

*Take V.S. Naipul. He mentions that the Indian Vedas were close behind the memory of his family. His father encouraged him to write, and when he got to England he would visit the British Library. So he was close to the great tradition.*

*Let us take John Coetzee. He was not only close to the great tradition, he was the tradition: he taught literature in Cape Town...*

*In order to write, in order to make literature, there must be a close connection with libraries, books, with the Tradition.*

A personal **writing process** as the second subtheme within this issue is not represented in all Nobel speeches from sample collection; writers do not give any magic ready-made recipes for success, some of them only sharing their special tips, for example:

*I always start a play by calling the characters A, B and C (Pinter).*

*I should say here that I have, on a number of other occasions, learned crucial lessons from the voices of singers. I refer here less to the lyrics being sung, and more to the actual singing. As we know, a human voice in song is capable of expressing an unfathomably complex blend of feelings. ...Often it's an emotion I can't quite put into words, but there it is, in the singer's voice, and now I've been given something to aim for (Ishiguro).*

But most writers single out (what we dare to name) some feeling of enthusiasm, some kind of natural power to be important for their creativity:

*I am what I suppose would be called a natural writer. I did not make any decision to become one. I did not, at the beginning, expect to earn a living by being read. I wrote as a child out of the joy of apprehending life through my senses – the look and scent and feel of things; and soon out of the emotions that puzzled me or raged within me and which took form, found some enlightenment, solace and delight, shaped in the written word (Gordimer).*

*I have trusted to intuition. I did it at the beginning. I do it even now. I have no idea how things might turn out, where in my writing I might go next. I have trusted to my intuition to find the subjects, and I have written intuitively. I have an idea when I start, I have a shape; but I will fully understand what I have written only after some years (Naipaul).*

*I have often been asked how my plays come about. I cannot say. Nor can I ever sum up my plays, except to say that this is what happened. That is what they said. That is what they did. Most of the plays are engendered by a line, a word or an image. The given word is often shortly followed by the image (Pinter).*

The most vivid observation is made in the lecture “On not winning the Nobel Prize”, and we consider it a compelling summary statement for THEME 3:

*Writers are often asked, How do you write? With a wordprocessor? an electric typewriter? a quill? longhand? But the essential question is, “Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write?” Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas – inspiration.*

*If a writer cannot find this space, then poems and stories may be stillborn (Lessing).*

THEME 4. What is the writer’s tool?

There is little doubt that **language** is the most influential instrument, and literature laureate William Golding states that “...the value of any language is incalculable”.

The most arresting confirmation of this idea is Toni Morrison’s Nobel lecture, which is entirely devoted to language, and more than once it became the subject of the linguistic analysis (Yang and Zhang, 2010; Creque, 2012, p. 7–8). A great variety of strong epithets (e.g., *oppressive, obscuring, proud, calcified, malign, sexist, racist, theistic, rousing, slaughtered, slaughtering,*

*stirring, memorializing, seductive, mutant, arrogant pseudo-empirical*) used by the author describe the language as a powerful means in different spheres of human life:

*Being a writer she [the old blind woman who is presented as a practiced writer in this lecture] thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency - as an act with consequences.*

This brings us to the message that a writer must know how to use this tool; moreover, a writer is responsible for the way he/she employs it:

*Be it grand or slender, burrowing, blasting, or refusing to sanctify; whether it laughs out loud or is a cry without an alphabet, the choice word, the chosen silence, unmolested language surges toward knowledge, not its destruction (Morrison).*

Colorful metaphors used by another laureate express the similar idea:

*So language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time (Pinter).*

**Words** as the second subtheme are also in the focus of Nobel lecturers because they "... may, through the devotion, the skill, the passion, and the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world" (Golding). Here we want to point out the nexus between THEME 1 and THEME 4, which demonstrates the writer's social role and duty:

*To have the word has come to be synonymous with ultimate authority, with prestige, with awesome, sometimes dangerous persuasion, to have Prime Time, a TV talk show, to have the gift of the gab as well as that of speaking in tongues. The word flies through space, it is bounced from satellites, now nearer than it has ever been to the heaven from which it was believed to have come (Gordimer).*

THEME 5. What is the writer's outcome?

If **literature** can be defined as "writings in prose or verse" (Merriam Webster Online), we use this term to refer to the writer's outcome, and our research indicates that laureates' express deep concern about this issue. They are worried about rising competition with other media:

*What chance has literature of competing with the defined categories of entertainment which are laid on for them at every hour of the day? I do not see how literature is to be for them anything but simple, repetitive and a stop-gap for when there are no westerns on the telly (Golding).*



*Literature has words only, surely a tool as primitive as the flint axe or even the soft copper chisel with which man first carved his own likeness in stone. That tool makes a poor showing one would think among the products of the silicon chip (Golding).*

Laureates are distressed about dangers which literature may face:

*But who does not know of literature banned because it is interrogative; discredited because it is critical; erased because alternate? (Morrison)*

They make appeals to strengthen the role of literature:

*... if we are to get the best from the writers of today and tomorrow, I believe we must become more diverse. I mean this in two particular senses.*

*Firstly, we must widen our common literary world to include many more voices from beyond our comfort zones of the elite first world cultures. We must search more energetically to discover the gems from what remain today unknown literary cultures, whether the writers live in faraway countries or within our own communities. Second: we must take great care not to set too narrowly or conservatively our definitions of what constitutes good literature (Ishiguro).*

They have high expectations for the next writers' generation:

*I have, for the future of American literature, every hope and every eager belief. We are coming out, I believe, of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see that I am a little too old to be one of them (Lewis).*

*...But I'll be looking to the writers from the younger generations to inspire and lead us....*

*...The next generation will come with all sorts of new, sometimes bewildering ways to tell important and wonderful stories. We must keep our minds open to them, especially regarding genre and form, so that we can nurture and celebrate the best of them (Ishiguro).*

## **Conclusions**

This research has highlighted the image of a writer represented in Nobel lectures and devised a set of five themes which contributes to the overall representation. Our findings show that laureates develop the concept "writer" to varying degrees but all of them stress a direct interconnection between an active social position and the writer's destiny. The quality and the sociocultural recognition of literary works in prose and poetry as the

writer's outcome gain much attention as well and prizewinners share their common concerns. The analysis did not confirm the assumption that lectures would mostly concentrate on the writing creative process, or different genres, or on the awarded novels. Instead, the sampling underlies the importance of literary heritage for professional growth. Reflecting on the language as a powerful writer's means, all the speakers use colourful stylistic devices.

Further research can involve the in-depth study of a definite Nobel lecture in terms of the compositional structure and employed linguistic means.

### References

- Collins Dictionary Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>
- Creque, L. (2012). The Nobel Laureates in Literature of the African Diaspora. *Hawaii University International Conference on Art and Humanities*, 1–14. Retrieved from <https://www.huichawaii.org/assets/creque%2C-leah---the-nobel-laureates-in-literature-of-the-african-diaspora.pdf>
- English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>
- Frye, J., & Suchan, M. (2017). Nobel peace speech. *Journal for Communication Studies*, 10 (1), 55–72.
- Goldstone, A. (2010). Twenty Nobel Lectures in Literature. Retrieved from <https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/twenty-nobel-lectures-literature>
- Hushchin, Iu., & Musikhina, A. (2015). “Nobelevskaia lektiia” A. I. Solzhenitsina (istoriia sozdaniia, problemno-tematicheskie i zhanrovo-stilisticheskie osobennosti) [Nobel Lecture by A. Solzhenitsyn (History of Creation, Problem-Thematic and Genre-Stylistic Features)]. Retrieved from [http://nobel-centre.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/gushin\\_nobel\\_lectures\\_soljenicin.pdf](http://nobel-centre.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/gushin_nobel_lectures_soljenicin.pdf)
- Kaptsev, V. A. (2014). *Transformatsia obraza pisatel'ia: ot obshchestvennogo statusa k mediinomu imidzhu* [The transformation of the writer's image: from a social status to a media image]. Minsk: BGU.
- Lindberg, B. (2011). The Academic Lecture. A Genre in Between. *LIR journal*, 1 (11), 38–48. Retrieved from <http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/LIRJ/article/view/1014/885>. Web. 25 June. 2017.
- Maci, S. (2013). Popularising scientific discourse for an academic audience: The case of Nobel lectures. *Token: A Journal of English Linguistics*, 2, 45–75. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com.ua/books?id=0VZyBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA55&lpq=PA55&dq=nobel+lectures+linguistic+analysis&source>
- Malavska, V. (2016). Genre of an Academic Lecture. *LLCE*, 3 (2), 56–84. DOI: 10.1515/llce-2016-0010.
- Merriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus>
- Pavlenko, L. (2017). Nobelivska leksiia yak viddzermalennia svitohliadu laureata [The Nobel Lecture as Reflection of Laureate's Worldview]. *Mova : klasychno – moderne – postmoderne [Language : classical – modern – postmodern]*, 3, 104–111.
- Petrova, S. A. (2014). Avtorskaya identichnost i poniatie imidzha v literature: teoreticheskii aspekt [Author's identity and the notion of an image in literature: a theoretical aspect]. *Pushkinskie Chtenia [Pushkin Reading]*, 232–236.
- Sofronova, Y. (2014). Nobelevskaia lektiia Iosifa Brodskogo: sotciologicheskie smysly [The Nobel Lecture by Joseph Brodsky: Sociological Meanings]. *Vestnik NGTU im. R. E. Alekseeva (The Bulletin of NGTU named after Alekseev)*, 57–65.

- Yaakob, S. (2013). *A Genre Analysis and Corpus Based Study of University Lecture Introductions*. A thesis in Philosophy (PhD's thesis). The University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Retrieved from <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/5241/1/Yaakob14PhD.pdf>. Web. 8 Apr. 2017.
- Yang, Shi-sheng, & Yu-xian Zhang. (2010). The Thoughts on the Nobel Lecture of Toni Morrison. *Asian Culture and History*, 2 (2), 239–242.

*Лариса Павленко*

## ОБРАЗ ПИСЬМЕННИКА В НОБЕЛІВСЬКИХ ЛЕКЦІЯХ ЛАУРЕАТИВ У ГАЛУЗІ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ

**Постановка проблеми.** Зростаючий інтерес до дискурсивного характеру Нобелівських лекцій сприяв науковим розвідкам, які підкреслюють їхню риторичну силу впливу на громадську думку, та популяризації ідей у різних царинах людського життя. Аналізуючи лекції в галузі літератури, більшість дослідників зосереджують увагу на мовних засобах та особистості самого лауреата. Проте характерні риси власне письменника ретельно не розглядалися. Ця стаття продовжує наше попереднє дослідження, яке встановило тісний зв'язок між змістовою складовою Нобелівської лекції та світоглядом лауреата; сама лекція може розглядатися як стисле, але надзвичайно потужне вираження людських та професійних якостей автора.

**Мета.** Це дослідження має на меті встановити, яким чином лауреати в галузі літератури тлумачать у Нобелівських лекціях поняття письменника, та визначити основні загальні теми, що створюють узагальнений образ.

**Методи дослідження.** Для аналізу 17 Нобелівських лекцій застосовано метод лінгвістичного опису та спостереження, описовий метод та контекстуально-інтерпретаційний метод.

**Основні результати дослідження.** Проаналізовані Нобелівські лекції є надзвичайно потужним вираженням людських та професійних якостей лауреатів. На основі лінгвістичного матеріалу ми розробили п'ять тем, щоб описати характерний образ письменника: його соціальний обов'язок; його доля; передумови, які сприяють літературному шляху; його інструментарій та літературний результат. Обговорюючи передумови, які сприяють літературному шляху, ми зосереджуємось на літературній спадщині та особистому творчому процесі. Тема «інструментарій письменника» охоплює дві підтеми: мова та слова.

**Висновки і перспективи.** Лауреати різною мірою розвивають поняття «письменник», але всі вони наголошують на безпосередньому взаємозв'язку між активною соціальною позицією та долею письменника. Подальші дослідження передбачають поглиблене вивчення окремої Нобелівської лекції з погляду композиційної структури та використання мовних засобів.

**Ключові слова:** публічний виступ, Нобелівська лекція, лауреат у галузі літератури, змістова складова, образ письменника, соціальна роль.

*Матеріал надійшов 06.06.2018*