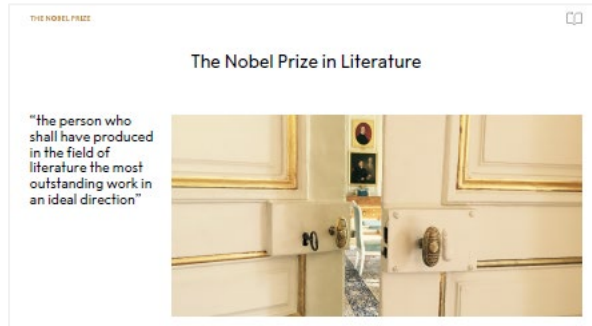


THE NOBEL PRIZE

Speaker's manuscript – 2024 literature prize Han Kang

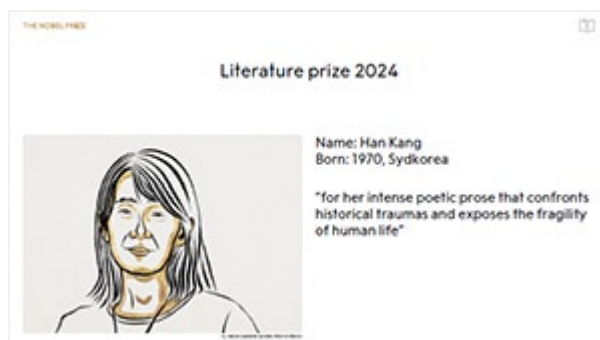
The Nobel Prize in Literature

- The Nobel Prize in Literature is one of the five prizes founded by Alfred Nobel and awarded on 10 December every year.
- Before Nobel died on 10 December 1896, he wrote in his will that the largest part of his fortune should be used to fund a prize to those who “have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind”.
- One of the five prizes should be awarded to “the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction”.
- The Nobel Prize in Literature has mainly been awarded to authors who have written works of fiction – such as novels, short stories, poetry collections and theatrical plays. In 2016 the musician and songwriter Bob Dylan was awarded the prize.



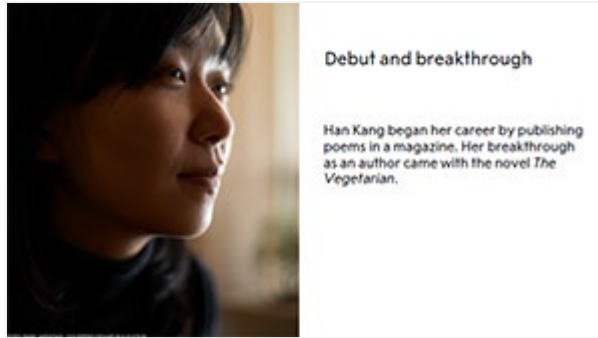
2024 literature laureate

- Han Kang was born in 1970 in the city of Gwangju in South Korea, but at the age of nine she moved to the capital city of Seoul, where she still lives today. Her father is also an author.
- Kang has written both poetry and prose, and in addition to her writing practice she spends time making art and music, which is apparent in both the form and the content of her writing.
- She writes in Korean, and her work has been translated into more than twenty different languages.



Debut and breakthrough

- Han Kang's journey as an author began with the publication of some poems in the journal *Literature and Society* in 1993.
- She debuted as a prose writer two years later with a series of shorts stories in the book *Love in Yeosu*.
- Kang's international breakthrough came in 2007 with the novel *The Vegetarian*, in which the main character's choice to stop eating meat has violent consequences.



Excerpt from *The Vegetarian*

- Here is an excerpt from *The Vegetarian*, in which the main character's husband describes a family dinner:

My father-in-law stooped slightly as he thrust the pork at my wife's face, a lifetime's rigid discipline unable to disguise his advanced age.

"Eat it! Listen to what your father's telling you and eat. Everything I say is for your own good. So why act like this if it makes you ill?"

The fatherly affection that was almost choking the old man made a powerful impression on me, and I was moved to tears in spite of myself. Probably everyone gathered there felt the same. With one hand my wife pushed away his chopsticks, which were shaking silently in empty space.

"Father, I don't eat meat."

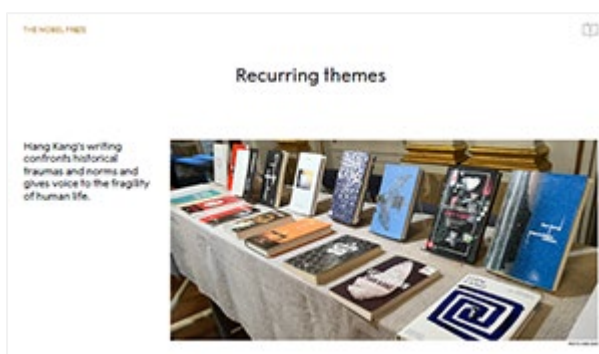
In an instant, his flat palm cleaved the empty space.

The Vegetarian (2007), Hogarth, 2015, translated by Deborah Smith



Recurring themes

- In several of her works, including her latest book, *Don't Say Goodbye*, Han Kang addresses historical South Korean traumas. The book describes how two women friends try to transform the pain and trauma of a massacre that occurred in the late 1940s on the island of Jeju into a shared art project.

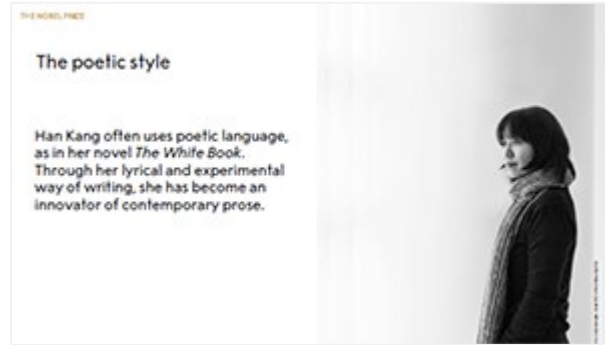


THE NOBEL PRIZE

- Several of Kang's books deal with the mourning process that follows different kinds of losses – of close relatives in a massacre, of sight, of the ability to speak, or of a sibling the narrator never got to meet. She also takes on various social norms, as in the novel *The Vegetarian*.
- Kang illuminates the fragility of human life in her writing, including by examining the fine line between body and soul, between living and dead.

The poetic style

- Han Kang often uses poetic language in her prose. With her lyrical and experimental way of writing, according to the Swedish Academy, she has become “an innovator in contemporary prose”.
- She recounts in one interview how she puts great emphasis on the senses when she writes. In an interview published on the Booker Prize website, she says, “I want to convey vivid senses like hearing and touch, including visual images. I infuse these sensations into my sentences like an electric current, and then, strangely enough, the reader discerns that current.”
- A book in which the poetic style dominates is her 2016 novel *The White Book*. It has been described as a lamentation for the person who could have been the narrator's older sister but died just a couple of hours after birth.
- The book is a collection of short notes, all of which describe white objects or phenomena. In one such note, she gives a vibrant description of the experience of the first breath on a cold morning.



Excerpt from *The White Book*

- Here is an excerpt from *The White Book*:

Breath-cloud

On cold mornings, that first white cloud of escaping breath is proof that we are living. Proof of our bodies' warmth. Cold air rushes into dark lungs, soaks up the heat of our

body and is exhaled as perceptible form, white flecked with grey. Our lives' miraculous diffusion, out into the empty air.



The White Book (2016), Portobello Books, 2017, translated by Deborah Smith

- Potential questions for classroom discussion: What thoughts and feelings does the excerpt awaken? What does the white breath symbolise?

THE NOBEL PRIZE

“I grew up with Korean literature, which I feel very close to. So I hope this news is nice for Korean literature readers.”

- In a telephone interview given in conjunction with the announcement of Han Kang's Nobel Prize in Literature, Kang was asked how it feels to be South Korea's first literature laureate.
- She recounted in the interview that she had just finished dinner with her son when she received the news that she had been awarded the Nobel Prize. She planned to celebrate the prize by drinking a cup of tea together with her son.

