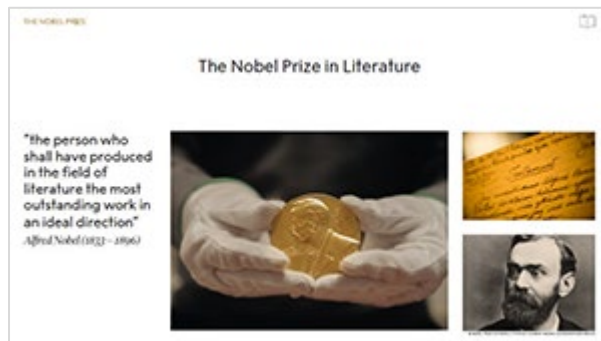


# THE NOBEL PRIZE

## Speaker's manuscript – 2025 literature prize László Krasznahorkai

### The Nobel Prize in Literature

- The Nobel Prize was created by Alfred Nobel. He became very rich due to his invention of dynamite. Before his death in 1896, he wrote in his will that most of his wealth should be used as a prize to “those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind”.
- According to the will, this prize is to be awarded in five categories: physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace.
- The Nobel Prize in Literature recognises “the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction”. Novels, short stories, poetry collections and plays have been recognised, but also other genres such as historical or philosophical texts.
- In 2016, the prize was for the first time awarded to a songwriter, as Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize.



### The 2025 Nobel Prize laureate in literature

- László Krasznahorkai was born in 1954 in the town of Gyula in southeastern Hungary.
- As a young man, he often moved to avoid the compulsory military service and instead tried working in different kinds of jobs.
- A job on a farm led to Krasznahorkai becoming a writer – he was forced to hold piglets in place as they were castrated. He sympathised deeply with the piglets, and this experience made him want to write about the world on a deeper level.
- László Krasznahorkai is today considered one of the most important authors in Hungary and has written novels, short stories, essays and plays. Many of his books have also been made into movies.



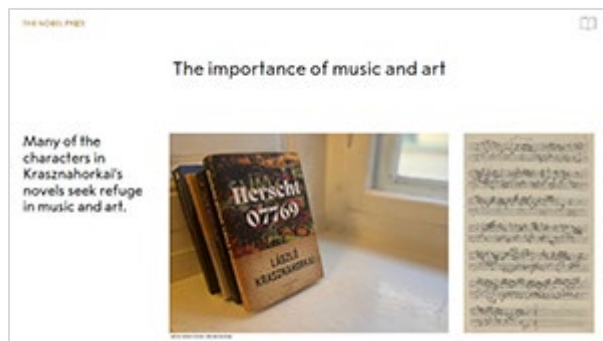
## Recurring themes

- László Krasznahorkai's novels are often described as apocalyptic – they depict people and societies where the end seems near. The settings are gloomy, as are many of the characters, but there is also humour.
- One example is the book *The Melancholy of Resistance*, which the Swedish Academy refers to as a “feverish horror fantasy”.
- The novel takes place in a small Hungarian town after the fall of the Soviet Union where ominous signs start to appear, not least when a ghostly circus arrives and displays the carcass of a giant whale. The excitement around the circus sets extreme forces in motion and leads to violence that not even the military can put an end to.
- The novel has also been described as an apocalyptic comedy. The people's behaviours in this chaos appear as comical and absurd – they exhibit a kind of black humour.



## The importance of music and art

- Another recurring theme in Krasznahorkai's work is the importance of music and art.
- The novel *Herscht 07769* is about the gentle graffiti cleaner Florian Herscht, who is convinced that the end of the universe is near and writes letters to Chancellor Angela Merkel to try to warn her. Florian wants nothing more than to simply listen to the music of composer Johann Sebastian Bach, and the power of Bach's music plays an important role in the novel. The music is first forced upon him, then it becomes his consolation. Furthermore, the novel is set in Thüringen, the area in Germany where Bach was born.



## The flowing style

- Krasznahorkai's style consists of long, winding sentences that often span several pages. For example, the novel *Herscht 07769* is written in a single sentence spanning more than 300 pages. There are no chapters or paragraphs and only a single period, but there are many commas.



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- This flowing style can be said to resemble an internal stream of thoughts and words sometimes referred to as stream of consciousness, but Krasznahorkai's never-ending sentences also include dialogues and descriptions.
- Krasznahorkai himself has said that he doesn't trust short sentences – that people don't speak with periods but with commas. "The period doesn't belong to human beings – it belongs to God."
- Daniel Gustafsson, who has translated Krasznahorkai into Swedish, says that the stories pull themselves forward. He also says that Hungarian grammar is the other way around from Swedish grammar, and that the challenge is to capture the author's flow so that it doesn't get choppy.

### Excerpt from *Herscht 07769*

- Here are a few lines from *Herscht 07769*:

"... he signed the letter, folded it twice, slipped it into the envelope, and addressed it, but no, he shook his head, it wasn't good, he took the letter out of the envelope, crumpled it up and threw the paper to the ground, as he said to himself (as he usually did): I must start

from the assumption that the Chancellor is a trained physicist; this meant that he did not have to explain everything in detail but could hit the ground running so the Chancellor could at once grasp the importance of this matter and act immediately ..."



Quote by Laszló Krasznahorkai, translated by Otilie Mulzet, from *Herscht 07769*, copyright © 2021 by Laszló Krasznahorkai, translation copyright © 2024 by Otilie Mulzet. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

### Krasznahorkai and our current society

- Literary scholar Paul Tenngart argues that while many Nobel Prize laureates have depicted historical traumas, Krasznahorkai describes an ongoing trauma – fascism spreading across the world and what it means for our current society.
- In an interview with Krasznahorkai right after the Nobel Prize was announced, he encourages everyone to use their imagination and to read and enjoy books, "because the reading gives us more power to survive this very, very difficult time on Earth."

