

Nobel Prize in Literature 1910



Paul Johann Ludwig Heyse

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1910 was awarded to Paul Heyse *"as a tribute to the consummate artistry, permeated with idealism, which he has demonstrated during his long productive career as a lyric poet, dramatist, novelist and writer of world-renowned short stories"*.

RESEARCH INFORMATION:

Many famous writers from several countries have been proposed for this year's Nobel Prize in Literature. The Swedish Academy has awarded it to a writer whose nomination has been supported by more than sixty German experts on art, literature, and philosophy. His name is Paul Heyse. The name revives the memory of our youth and manhood; we still remember the literary pleasure that his novellas, in particular, gave to us. Now an old but still active man, he is a figure that the jury could not pass over if it was to express its admiration by awarding the high distinction to the most significant literary work. Nor was the jury to be swayed by considerations of age or, indeed, anything other than true merit.

Paul Heyse was born in Berlin in 1830. His father was the philologist Karl Wilhelm Heyse, a gentle but determined scholar. From his Jewish mother, Julie Saaling, Heyse perhaps inherited his warm and lively temperament. Heyse, who was nature's favourite in so many ways, had the good fortune of growing up in a carefree home. His school years

passed quickly. He was an easy learner. For a while he was a student in Berlin and later he studied Romance philology under Friedrich Diez at Bonn University. In 1852 he received his doctorate in Berlin *multa cum laude*. Subsequently Heyse was awarded a scholarship that enabled him to travel in Italy, with whose art and literature he was to become so familiar. He soon became engaged to Margarete Kugler, the daughter of the art historian to whose house he had been introduced by his patron, the poet Emanuel Geibel. Not sure where to look for a position, he was freed from all material worries by Geibel, who once more helped him. At Geibel's recommendation Maximilian II offered him a titular professorship at Munich. His only duty consisted in taking part in the literary soirees of the King. On May 15, 1854, he was married to Margarete and the happy young couple settled in Munich, where Heyse has lived ever since, with the exception of occasional sojourns in his beloved Italy. Soon he became the central figure of a thriving cultural life. Since this is not the place for a detailed biography of Heyse, suffice it to say that several years after the death of Margarete he married again, this time the charming Anna Schubart.

Between 1855 and 1862 Heyse wrote the first four volumes of his prose novellas, a genre in which he became a master. Among Heyse's many novellas we may mention here *L'Arrabbiata* (1853); *Andrea Delfin* (1859), rich in Venetian colours; the deeply felt *Nerina* (1875), an episode from Leopardi's life; the profoundly moral *Bild der Mutter* (1859) [Portrait of a Mother]; and the marvellous troubadour novella *Marion* (1855). In his novellas Heyse observes strict rules of composition without doing violence to the charm and freedom of the story. He developed his own theory of the novella. «A novella of literary value», he wrote, «should represent an important human destiny. It must not be an everyday occurrence but should reveal to us a new side of human nature. The narrow scope of the tale calls for strict concentration.»

It has rightly been said that Heyse is the creator of the modern psychological novella. He is rarely tendentious in his novellas, and that is probably the reason we prefer their Goethean objectivity to his longer narratives *Kinder der Welt* (1872) [*The Children of the World*] and *Im Paradiese* (1875) [*In Paradise*], which deal with moral problems, the

former with the independence of morality from narrow dogmas, the latter with a defence of art against an austere puritanism. Both works unmistakably show the humanism of their creator. In *Im Paradiese* there is in addition a vivid description of the artists' world in Munich. In *Gegen den Strom* (1904) [Against the Stream] Heyse courageously challenged engrained prejudices by turning against the practice of duelling. A curiously youthful power is evident in the book *Geburt der Venus* (1909) [Birth of Venus], which appeared last year and in which he consistently and emphatically develops his lifelong aesthetic convictions both by defending the freedom of art from a one-sided asceticism and by polemizing against the naturalistic technique of copying the low, the common, and the simple-minded.

Heyse, however, is not only a writer of novels and novellas; he is the most important lyrical poet of contemporary Germany. He has written delightful novellas in verse, of which the admirable *Salamander* (1879) in terza rime is especially memorable. Although drama was not his natural medium, he has nonetheless written excellent plays, among them - to select two from a total of over fifty - the patriotic play *Kolberg* (1865) and the interesting drama *Hadrian* (1865), in which the wisdom and sadness of Hadrian are combined and represented in a most moving manner.

Heyse's taste is very independent. While he had great admiration for *The Pretenders and Vikings at Helgeland* by his friend Ibsen, he liked neither *Ghosts* nor the following symbolic plays. He is deeply musical, but not so much moved by Wagner as by Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and Brahms.

In all critical situations of life Heyse has maintained the same independence. When his friend Geibel lost his salary as a poet at the Bavarian court because of a poem to King William in which he expressed his hope for a united Germany under Prussia, Heyse, too, in a respectful letter offered to resign his position, since he agreed with Geibel on every point and therefore wished to share his fate as well.

Heyse is almost as popular in Italy as in Germany. His numerous brilliant translations have made Italian literature known in Germany. It is due to him that Leopardi, Manzoni, Foseolo, Monti, Parini, and Giusti are now widely read and admired there.

But it would be wrong to assume that the brilliant Heyse, so often called he laurel-crowned favourite of fortune, was always free from cares or was always acknowledged in the leading circles of his country. As a father he was deeply afflicted by the loss of several of his beloved children. He expressed his grief in deeply poetic songs which despite their gloom radiate an unending beauty...

As for literary opinion, it is true that the Apollonian and charming poet enjoyed early popularity, but it is equally true that there was a time when the situation changed. Naturalism, which burst forth in the eighties and dominated the scene for the next decade, directed its iconoclastic attack especially against Heyse, its most powerful opponent. He was too harmonious, too fond of beauty, too Hellenic and lofty for those who, slandering him at any price, demanded sensation, effect, bizarre licentiousness, and crass reproductions of ugly realities. Heyse did not yield. His sense of form was offended by their uncouth behaviour; he demanded that literature should see life in an ideal light that would transfigure reality. In his detailed and sensitive story *Merlin* (1892) he expressed his sense of injury in a manly way. Now the tide has turned again, and Heyse would probably have been proposed earlier by his country for the world prize had it not been for the partisan dislike of the naturalists. Now a miracle seems to have changed everything. The honourable veteran has been the object of admiration everywhere; he is an honorary citizen of Munich where a street has been named after him; he has been flooded with honours. To the manifold distinctions, the Swedish Academy, acting at the recommendation of many critics, has now added its token of admiration by presenting to the old poet the rare homage of the Nobel Prize. Heyse has gone his own ways. Aesthetically he has been faithful to truth, but in such a manner that he mirrored inner in external reality. Schiller's wellknown words, «Life is serious, art serene», properly understood, express a profound truth which can be found in the life and work of Heyse. Beauty should liberate and recreate: it should neither imitate

reality slavishly nor drag it into the dust. It should have a noble simplicity. Heyse reveals beauty in this aspect. He does not teach morals, which would deprive beauty of its immediacy, but there is much wisdom and nobility in his works. He does not teach religion, but one would look in vain for anything that would seriously hurt religious feelings. Although he puts greater emphasis on the ethical than on the dogmatic side of religion, he has expressed his deep respect for every serious opinion. He is tolerant but not indifferent. He has praised love, but it was its heavenly and not its earthly aspect that he glorified. He likes men who are faithful to their nature, but the individuals to whom Heyse is most sympathetic adhere to their higher rather than their lower nature.

On this festive occasion, which Heyse has not been able to attend because of illness, we thank him for the joy that his works have given to thousands, and we send our regards to the house in the Louisenstrasse in Munich, which has been for so many years the home of the Muses: «Glaubt mir, es ist kein Märchen, die Quelle der Jugend sie rinnet/wirklich und immer. Ihr fraget, wo? <In der dichtenden Kunst.

At the banquet, Professor Oscar Montelius made the following comments: «I regret that we do not have the pleasure to see among us the great poet to whom this year's Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded. But he is being worthily represented by the German Minister, Count von Pückler - and I ask you, Count, to assure him that, when toasts were proposed to the laureates, we did not forget him. The Minister, Count von Pückler, speaking in behalf of Paul Heyse, recalled that two years ago the Nobel Prize in Literature had been given to a German philosopher, this time to a popular poet. He attested to the lively exchange between Swedish and German literature, which had increased ever since the Swedish Academy became the Areopagus in charge of following closely the literary production of the entire world and of distributing the Nobel Prizes among the great masters of letters. He ended by paying his respect to the first of the international Areopaguses, the Swedish Academy.

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