Rolland, Romain

By Josepha Laroche

Rolland, Romain
French pacifist writer, Nobel Prize in Literature laureate
Born 29 January 1866 in Clamecy, France
Died 30 December 1944 in Vézelay, France

A pacifist writer, Romain Rolland was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1915. During the Great War, he refused to choose one camp over the other and suffered nationalist attacks. In the post war years, he developed closer ties to the Parti communiste français (PCF), the French Communist Party. But with the German occupation of France during the Second World War, he took refuge in silence.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction
2 During the First World War
3 Later Years

Selected Bibliography
Citation

Introduction

Romain Rolland (1866-1944) was a French pacifist writer who was world famous during his lifetime. He was also a musicologist and a professor of music history at the Sorbonne University. He lived in Switzerland when the Great War broke out. Too old to be mobilised, he decided to stay in Switzerland. He published numerous articles in the Journal de Genève, some of which were collected under the title Au-dessus de la Mêlée. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1915.
During the First World War

Viewing the global conflict as Europe’s suicide, Rolland joined the Red Cross, refusing to take a side in the war. Consequently, he was violently attacked by nationalists of both camps. At the beginning of the war, a vicious slander campaign was launched in France, labelling him a traitor. As a moralist intellectual, a non-violent humanist and a self-proclaimed spokesman for intellectuals (whom at this time he denounced as warmongers), Rolland placed individual thinking above any collective action.

On 26 June 1919, he published an appeal dedicated to “the workers of the mind”, entitled the Déclaration de l’indépendance de l’Esprit, in the newspaper L’Humanité. It was co-signed by Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). With the same aim, he created the literary magazine Europe and maintained a very intense correspondence with, notably, Einstein, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Maxim Gorki (1868-1936), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) and Stefan Zweig (1881-1942).

Later Years

In the 1930s, Rolland grew closer and closer to the Parti communiste français (PCF), the French Communist Party, and became part of the anti-fascist movement. While France was occupied during the Second World War, he lived in the German occupied zone and took refuge in complete silence until his death.

Josepha Laroche, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Section Editor: Emmanuelle Cronier

Selected Bibliography


Citation


License

This text is licensed under: CC by-NC-ND 3.0 Germany - Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivative Works.