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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.

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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.

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