

News release

Launch of the first Jan Michalski Prize for Literature, awarded by the *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature*

Geneva, 27 October 2009 – The *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature* is launching the first Jan Michalski Prize for Literature, to be awarded for a work of world literature. An original feature of the prize is its multicultural nature, which will help talented writers win international recognition. The laureate will be chosen by an eminent Jury of members with diverse cultural horizons and an international reputation gained in various forms of literary expression. The Jury will be chaired by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, President of the Fondation Jan Michalski.

The Jan Michalski Prize for Literature will be presented annually in recognition of a work of literature in one of the following categories: novel, short story, novella, literary reportage, drama, biography and autobiography, illustrated book, and essays in the fields of philosophy, history, art history, politics and literary criticism, humanities and social sciences, and life sciences. It is open to authors from all over the world, whatever language they write in. According to Jury President Vera Michalski-Hoffmann: *"Our ambition is to discover works of literature that seem to us extraordinary and to launch their authors onto the international stage."* Laureates will receive a prize of CHF 50'000, enabling them to devote more time to their art, and will be invited to attend an official prize-giving ceremony in Switzerland in November 2010.

In order to constitute the Jury, the Fondation Jan Michalski approached multilingual writers with exceptional qualities, chosen for their knowledge of diverse literary genres, but above all for their broad cultural interests and impact. They include Włodzimierz Bolecki, Nuruddin Farah, Georges Nivat, Jorge Semprun, Ilija Trojanow, Fabienne Verdier.

Method of selection

The Jury has nine members, including the President Vera Michalski-Hoffmann. Each proposes works of literature from their different languages and is committed to mounting a vigorous defence of their choices. The Jury, which is independent and voluntary, meets for a first round of discussions. The works selected are then translated into a common language for all the members to read. At a second session, the Jury will announce a short list to go forward for the final

selection. The name of the laureate will be announced at the third session of the Jury, following the final round of discussions.

Only published works will be considered for the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature. Entries must be presented either by Jury members, publishers, universities or cultural institutions and sent to the *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature* by 1 March 2010.

The philanthropic work of the *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature*

The Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature was created in 2004 in memory of Jan Michalski, in order to perpetuate his work in support of literary creation. Its purpose is to encourage the promotion of writing through a wide range of activities, including by granting financial aid, organizing literary events, and also by providing accommodation for writers for a period, thereby enabling them to complete their work. The Jan Michalski Prize for Literature will reinforce the impact of the Foundation's activities. It is being launched on 27 October 2009 with the intention of increasing the audience of future laureates.

About Jan Michalski

Jan Michalski was born in Poland in 1953. His interest in literature was enriched by his grounding in classical and European culture. After reading sociology and philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin, he went on to study political science, focusing mainly on the question of the integration of Poland into the European Union, first at the European College in Bruges, then at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

It was in Geneva that he met Vera Hoffmann. They married in 1983 and three years later founded *Editions Noir sur Blanc* imprint in Montricher. They published novels, short stories and eyewitness accounts from the countries of Eastern Europe. Their shared passion as publishers led them to open offices in Paris and Warsaw. They brought writers such as Henry Miller, Charles Bukowski, Paul Auster, Blaise Cendrars, Nicolas Bouvier, Manuel Vazquez Montalban, Lawrence Durrell, Donna Leon, Slawomir Mrozek and Umberto Eco to a Polish readership. Driven by the conviction that the integration of East and West would be achieved through culture, Jan and Vera Michalski gained the confidence of key figures in Polish culture and put together a substantial catalogue of Slavic authors, both classic and contemporary, in French translation. In Paris, they relaunched the Polish Bookshop, Éditions Phébus and Buchet-Chastel, whose list includes Lawrence Durrell, Henry Miller and Guy Debord. Jan Michalski died prematurely in 2002, but his work lives on.

Calendar of the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:

27 October 2009	Official launch of the first Jan Michalski Prize for Literature
1 March 2010	Closing date for submission of published works
November 2010	Meeting of the Jury and designation of the laureate – official award ceremony and launch of the second Jan Michalski Prize for Literature

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Jan Michalski Prize for Literature

Members of the International Jury

Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, President of the Jury

Vera Michalski is a publisher who has devoted herself to the promotion of literature through the publishing group she founded with Jan Michalski. Starting in 1986, they published a wide range of authors, in French and Polish translations, under the imprints of *Noir sur Blanc*, *Buchet-Chastel*, *Phébus* and *Wydawnictwo Literackie*. In 2004, Vera Michalski created the *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature*, with the mission is to promote writing and support writers.

Languages: French, English, German, Spanish

Włodzimierz Bolecki

Literary historian, essayist and screenwriter, his interests include 20th century literature, the poetics of literary works and the methodology of literary studies. He is the author of over 16 books, critical analyses for special editions of literary works, over 50 papers published in Poland and abroad, and editor of many collective works. Professor of Literary Criticism at the Institute of Literary Research in Warsaw.

Languages: Polish, French, English

Nuruddin Farah

The multilingual writer Nuruddin Farah divides his time between England and South Africa. The author of countless articles, an essayist and polemicist, his novels have been translated into some fifteen languages and are among the most significant bodies of work in English to come out of Africa. In 1998, he won the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Languages: English, Somali, Amharic, Arabic, Italian

Georges Nivat

Honorary Professor at the University of Geneva, Georges Nivat is one of the world's leading experts on Slavic languages and literature. He is the author of numerous works on Russian history, as well as essays and literary and political studies on European-Russian themes. His numerous articles, conference and seminar papers have made a remarkable contribution to the discovery of Russian authors.

Languages : French, Russian, English

Jorge Semprun

Jorge Semprun is a Spanish writer and screenwriter who has written most of his work in French. He served as Culture Minister in the government of Felipe Gonzales from 1988–1991. He is the recipient of several literary honours, including the *Prix Formentor* for *The Long Voyage* and the Prix Femina for *The Second Death of Ramon Mercader*. He was elected to the *Académie Goncourt* in 1996.

Languages: French, Spanish

Ilija Trojanow

Born in Sofia in Bulgaria, Ilija Trojanow emigrated to Germany in 1971, but grew up in Kenya. As a publisher, he lived in Munich, as a writer of novels and travel books in Bombay, Cape Town and most recently Vienna. His novel *The Collector of Worlds* has been translated into over 20 languages. Ilija Trojanow has received many literary prizes: the *Bertelsmann-Literaturpreis*, the *Marburger Literaturpreis* (1996), the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize (2000) and the *Preis der Literaturhäuser* (2009).

Languages: German, French, English

Fabienne Verdier

Artist and painter, Fabienne Verdier was born in Paris in 1962. Graduating from the *Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts* in Toulouse, she then left to study painting in China between 1981 and 1992 with the last masters to survive the Cultural Revolution. Her works have since been acquired by many major international art collectors. Her abstract painting explores the relations between energy and matter in a completely new aesthetic. She is the author of over ten works devoted to art, some of which are best sellers in their category

Languages: French, Mandarin Chinese