

**Speech by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann
on the occasion of the launching of the
Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature
on 9 November 2007 in Montricher**

I would like to wish you all a warm welcome to this celebration of the launching of the *Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'Écriture et la Littérature*. I extend a particular welcome to my colleagues from the communal authorities, to my many friends, to the professionals in the field of writing and, evidently, to the members of the family who are here this evening.

I will confine myself to explaining briefly the *raison d'être* of this Foundation and the spirit which presides over its activities, without going into too much detail. At the end of the evening, you will find a brochure which will provide further explanations.

In the first place, why the Foundation?

It was created over three years ago to perpetuate the memory of Jan Michalski, who left us prematurely at the end of August 2002, and more particularly his enthusiasm for literary creation.

Twenty years ago, together we founded the publisher *Noir sur Blanc*, and our subsequent contacts with writers – some of our guests this evening understand this very well – quickly showed us that certain works suffered from the lack of time that their authors were able to devote to them. Quite simply, very few writers can live from their writing and the time devoted to writing very frequently consists merely of stolen moments. The idea of the Foundation is therefore to provide the necessary support and, for this purpose, it will have at its disposal several means of action, to which I will return shortly.

You may also wonder why we are launching the Foundation today when we have only just submitted the application for the construction permit

The reason is simple. We wanted to see the wood for the trees, if I dare use this expression in Montricher which is, as you may know, a village that is highly reputed for its beautiful communal forest. We wanted to make ourselves known and to explain our activities, some of which can already begin today.

The question may also be raised as to why the Foundation is being set up in Montricher

The idea of locating the Foundation in Montricher, and in particular in the holiday camp at *Bois Désert*, was completely natural. Jan loved the village and the region very much. Just as I do, he particularly appreciated the beauty of the countryside at the foot of the Jura, with its broad views over the plain, the Alps, the lake and its wide open horizon. It may be said that the panorama symbolizes a complete openness of spirit. I would be very happy if this "spirit of Montricher" presided over the destiny of the Foundation. Moreover, our architectural project is based on the idea of a balcony and anchoring the house in the beautiful Vaudois countryside.

The Foundation's activities are based on three main pillars:

- the *Jan Michalski Prize for Literature*, which will once a year recompense an original work of any literary genre, from fiction to non-fiction, and which will be awarded for the first time in November 2010.
- grants or financial support provided to authors or associations active in the literary field.
- a residence for writers established in the former holiday camp at *Bois Désert*, which will be open all year round and be able to host up to five writers at a time, including a couple.

Around these central activities reserved for the residents, there will be an exhibition space, a library and an auditorium, which will be open to everyone at select times.

We are lucky enough to live in an extraordinary country, one of the nations with the highest cultural density in the world. I would therefore like to place the Foundation in this context. We have not invented anything. It is only a question of making our contribution to this beautiful construction. My hope is that this site will become a venue for meetings and exchanges and that it will work in harmony with other existing foundations.

Expressions of gratitude:

I would particularly like to thank a faithful friend, *Professor Lukaszewski*, who has come specially from Brussels to recall the personality of Jan Michalski. During the press conference earlier, he came up with some very personal and moving words. His text will be available to those who are interested at the end of the evening.

I would also like to thank the neighbours, who have put up with the preparations for this celebration, and the whole team who have worked for its success, from the lighting and sound to the catering, and particularly *Marc Roelandt*, Administrative Director of the Foundation, and *Céline Mangeat*.

I would like to conclude with a few words on the organization of the evening. In a moment, we will have the pleasure of hearing the Moz'ART Group, a string quartet which has come specially from Poland for the occasion. The concert will last an hour and, I hope, will delight your ears and eyes and entertain you. You will see. It is a complete and subtle performance and, in view of the wind and the tent – and we have escaped the snow – I would evidently request you to turn off your mobile phones. We will end the evening with a cocktail, during which the architectural project will be shown on a screen.

I wish you an excellent evening.