

JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE
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SPEECH BY ILIJA TROJANOW

What are the characteristics of a great novel ? Style - inevitably, the characters and plot - frequently, the author's attitude or philosophy - occasionally, the theme of the story - sometimes. *The White King* brings together all of these.

György Dragomán is an innovator. He describes the sinister reality of the Communist dictatorship, not through its repressive excesses, but through the everyday. He portrays the insidious effects of State brutality. Through the naïve eyes of an eleven year old boy, whose father is taken away by the Securitate one sad day in 1986, shortly after the Chernobyl catastrophe, György Dragomán recounts 18 episodes of traumatizing submission and violence, dissembled in chapters entitled "*Music*", "*Cinema*" or "*Tulips*". In language that is both precise and breathless, suggesting the atmosphere of a fairy tale that has turned bad, he describes the physical brutality and verbal aggression of a deeply degraded society.

Born in 1973 in Transylvania, Romania, in the Hungarian minority, György Dragomán has lived in Budapest since 1988. His mother tongue is Hungarian. With *The White King* he has produced a masterpiece that is both deeply troubling and fascinating, and that opens up new horizons for the literature of Eastern Europe, which has only recently taken up the challenge of depicting the complexities of life and suffering during the Communist era.

All our congratulations go to the winner of the 2011 Jan Michalski Prize, György Dragomán.

Ilija Trojanow
Member of the Jury