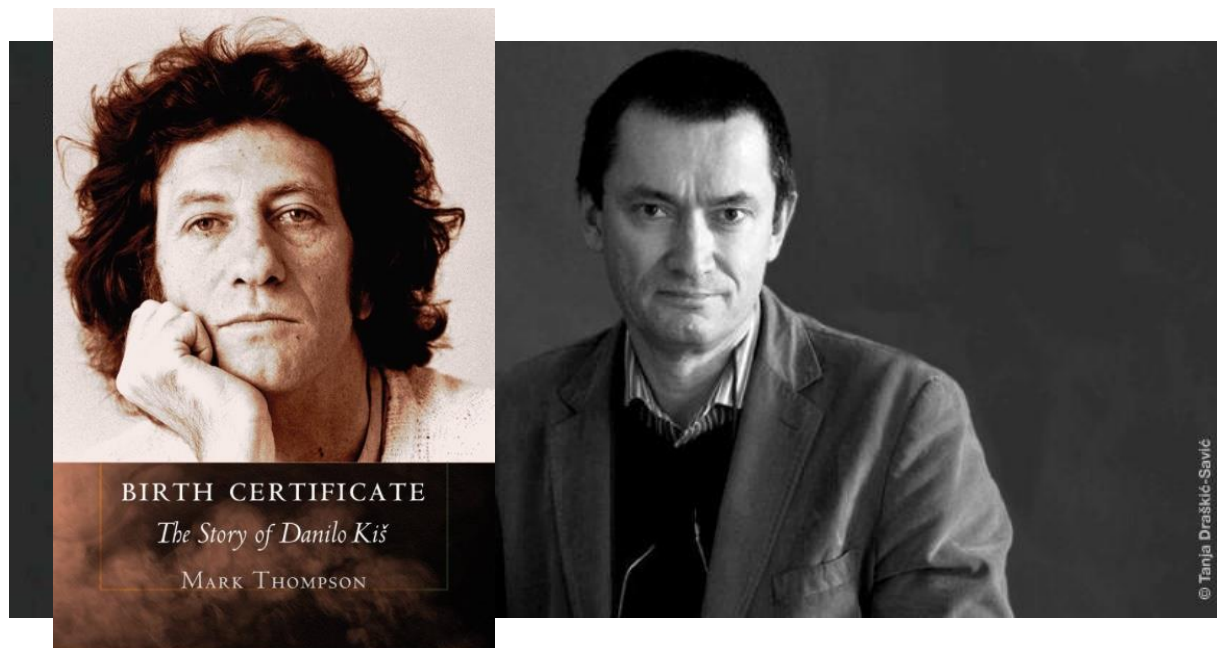


THE 2015 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Montricher, 25th November 2015

The jury of the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature has awarded this year's prize to the British historian Mark Thompson for *Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš*. This book looks at the life and writing of Danilo Kiš, a Yugoslav novelist, essayist and poet. It restores Kiš to his essential position as one of the great European writers of the 20th century.



Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš is not only a rich and sensitive biography of this important writer, but also a retelling of the complex history of the Balkans and Central Europe through the prism of his life. Comprehensive, erudite and illuminating, Mark Thompson's book celebrates and resurrects a talent that Milan Kundera hailed as "great and invisible".

Born in 1935 to a Hungarian Jewish father and a Montenegrin mother, in Subotica, on Yugoslavia's borders with Hungary and Romania, and baptised in the Orthodox Church, Kiš had many identities. The remarkable story of his life reflects the violent fate of Central Europe in the 20th century: the Holocaust and concentration camps, the Second World War, resettlements, Communist rule, and the rise of nationalism. It also anticipated the collapse of Yugoslavia, two years after his death in 1989.

Cosmopolitan, anti-communist, but also anti-nationalist, Kiš insisted on the writer's independence from ideology. A stylist of rare purity, and also a prolific translator from French, Russian and Hungarian into Serbo-Croatian, he was committed to the universality of literature. "Nationalism", he wrote in *The Anatomy Lesson*, "thrives on relativism. It admits no universal values – aesthetic, ethical, etc. And because its only values are relative, it is a reactionary ideology."

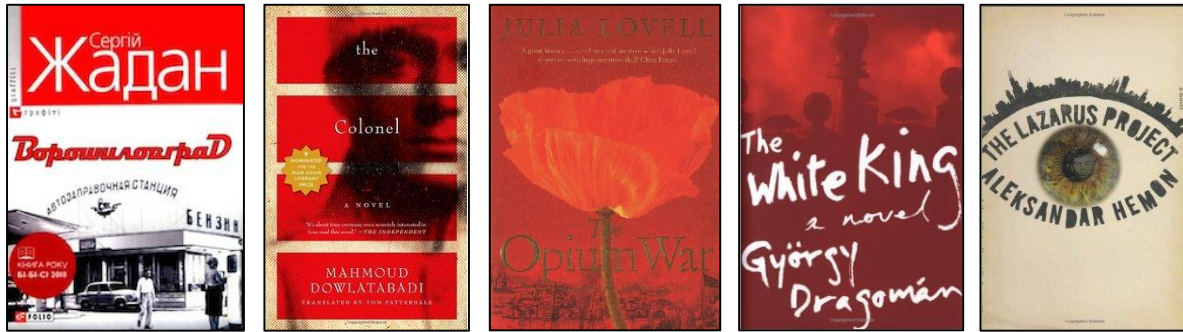
His books were playful in form, allowing multiple voices and multiple perspectives. Thompson's biography echoes Kiš' experimentalism by being itself unusual in structure. Thompson looks attentively, sentence by sentence, at *Birth Certificate*, a short autobiographical text written by Kiš. He illuminates each section's background and history, comments on the text and explores additional documentary material, giving a vivid and nuanced portrait of a man, a writer and his times.

THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

The Jan Michalski Prize for Literature is awarded each year by the Foundation to crown a work of world literature. An original feature of the Prize is its multicultural nature. It is open to authors from the world over and is intended to contribute to their international recognition. The Prize is awarded for a work of fiction or non-fiction, irrespective of the language in which it is written. The winner receives an amount of CHF 50,000, offering the possibility of greater dedication to her or his writing.

To make up the jury, the Foundation has invited exceptional writers who are multilingual, selected for their knowledge of various literary genres, but particularly for their cultural openness.

THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE – PREVIOUS LAUREATES



The 2014 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:
Serhiy Jadan for *Vorochylovhrad*

The 2013 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:
Mahmoud Dowlatabadi for *The Colonel*

The 2012 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:
Julia Lovell for *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*

The 2011 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:
György Dragomán for *The White King*

The 2010 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature:
Aleksandar Hemon for *Le projet Lazarus*

THE JURY OF THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Marek Bieńczyk

Marek Bieńczyk (born in 1956 in Milanówek, Poland), novelist, essayist, translator. His works include novels: *Terminal*, *Tworki*; a blend of a novel and an essay : *Melancholy*, *Transparency* ; and essays, *Dürer's Eyes*, *Wine Chronicles*. He is a contributor to the magazine *L'Atelier du roman*. His books were translated into French, English, Spanish and German. He received many prizes, including, Paszport Polityki (1999), Władysław Reymont Prize (2000), *Grand Prix du Festival Littératures du Monde* (Bordeaux 2006), *Grand Prix de la Francophonie de l'Académie française* (2003), and most recently, the most prestigious Polish literary prize, Nike (2012) for his latest work, *The Book of Faces*. He is a member of the board of directors of the Polish PEN Club. He works at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Yannick Haenel

The French writer and essayist, Yannick Haenel, is often inspired by history when writing his novels, in particular the one devoted to the life of a Polish resistance fighter, Jan Karski, which was awarded two prizes in 2009: *Le Prix Interallié* and *le Prix du roman Fnac*. He was made a *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* in January 2010.

Robert Menasse

Robert Menasse, born in 1954 in Vienna, is an Austrian writer, translator and essayist. His work is essentially composed of novels and essays on Austrian culture (such as *Erklär mir Österreich* and *Schubumkehr*), but also of children's books (such as *Der mächtigste Mann*). Very concerned about the cultural and political developments in his country, he regularly publishes his opinions in the press. Amongst others, he received in 1991 the Doderer Prize for *La pitoyable histoire de Leo Singer*, in 1998 the National Austrian Essay Prize, and in 2007 the Amphi Prize for *Chassés de l'enfer*.

Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, President of the jury

A publisher, Vera Michalski-Hoffmann 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, through Noir sur Blanc, Buchet-Chastel, Phébus and Wydawnictwo Literackie. In 2004, Vera Michalski created the Fondation Jan Michalski pour l'écriture et la littérature to promote reading and provide support for writers.

Ilma Rakusa

The writer and translator Ilma Rakusa was born in 1946 in Slovakia. She was raised in Budapest, Ljubljana and Trieste, and studied Slavic languages and Romance literature in Zurich. Since 1977 she has written several books of poetry, stories and essays in German. Some of these were awarded a prize, for example the prestigious Adalbert Chamisso Prize. *Mehr Meer* won the Schweizer Buchpreis in 2009. Ilma Rakusa translates from French, Russian and Hungarian and also works as a journalist for the *NZZ* and *Die Zeit*.

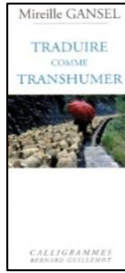
Ugo Rondinone

The Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone was born in Brunnen in 1964, and studied at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna. He is a mixed-media artist and his work includes paintings, sculptures, photographs, graphic work as well as videos and sound. In 2007 he represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale. Ugo Rondinone's works are in the collections of the "New Museum of Contemporary Art" in New York, among others. He exhibits widely across Europe as well as in the United States.

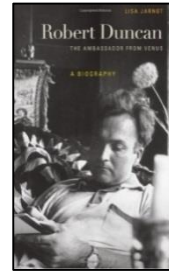
THE SELECTED BOOKS FOR THE 2015 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE



Frédéric Badré
La grande santé
 Editions du Seuil, 2015
 Proposed by Yannick Haenel



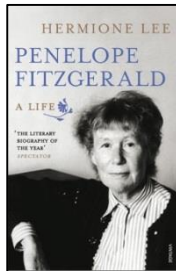
Mireille Gansel
Traduire comme transhumer
 Editions Calligrammes, 2012
 Proposed by Marek Bieńczyk



Lisa Jarnot
Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography
 University of California Press, 2012
 Proposed by Ugo Rondinone



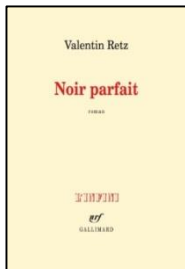
Navid Kermani
Zwischen Koran und Kafka: West-östliche Erkundungen
 C.H. Beck Verlag, 2014
 Proposed by Ilma Rakusa
 FINALIST



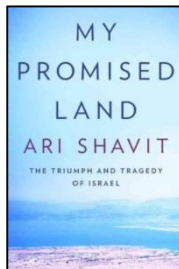
Hermione Lee
Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life
 Alfred A. Knopf, 2014
 Proposed by Ugo Rondinone



Jean-Noël Orenge
La Fleur du Capital
 Editions Grasset, 2015
 Proposed by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann



Valentin Retz
Noir parfait
 Editions Gallimard, 2015
 Proposed by Yannick Haenel



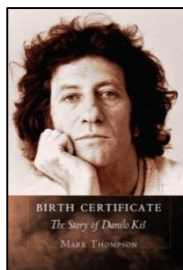
Ari Shavit
My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel
 Spiegel & Grau, 2013
 Proposed by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann



Lucian Dan Teodorovici
L'histoire de Bruno Matei
 Editions Gaïa, 2013
 Proposed by Marek Bieńczyk



Philipp Ther
Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent
 Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014
 Proposed by Robert Menasse



Mark Thompson
Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš
 Cornell University Press, 2013
 Proposed by Ilma Rakusa
 FINALIST



Najem Wali
Bagdad Marlboro
 Carl Hanser Verlag, 2014
 Proposed by Robert Menasse
 FINALIST

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