

THE 2016 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Montricher, Novembre 22nd 2016

The jury of the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature has rewarded the Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov this year for his work *The Physics of Sorrow: a labyrinth-novel, a world-novel, that explores the meanders of individual and collective memory in the search for humanity; a fantastic story chest that is inventive, profound, poetic and philosophical.*

The Awards ceremony for the Jan Michalski Prize 2016 will be held on Wednesday November 23rd, at 11 a.m.



Georgi Gospodinov was born in 1968 in Yambol, Bulgaria. He is a novelist, short-story writer, poet, essayist and playwright; a leading author of Bulgarian literature and is amongst the most widely read contemporary authors of his country and the most translated abroad. His work has received many awards. While *Lapidarium* (1992), his first collection of poetry, was part of the post-communist literary revival, it was *Natural Novel* (1999) that by revitalising and reinventing the concept of the novel, engendered a strong following in Bulgaria and wide international recognition via its translation into more than twenty languages. The influence of Georgi Gospodinov's prose was confirmed by his second novel *The Physics of Sorrow* (2011) that is this year's winner of the Jan Michalski Prize for Literature: the first printing in its original language was sold out on the first day, and there are numerous translated editions.

The Physics of Sorrow stands out by its formal ingeniousness, providing a fragmented narrative made up of a multitude of stories and thoughts, echoes and leaps, of journeys in time and space but also in the Other, exploring what the human condition in a post-modern age can be, full of doubts and crises.

"I am us", states the book's prologue: at the heart of a choral production, the storyteller is multiple, gifted with such empathy that he has the ability to enter lives other than his own. In this way he is both a small boy and his adult self in communist and post-communist Bulgaria from 1968 to 2011, he is also his grandfather as a child in 1925 and his grandfather as a soldier in World War II, he is an animal, vegetable, cloud... he is also the Minotaur, his symbolic alter ego throughout this labyrinth novel.

In the meanders of individual and collective memory, Georgi Gospodinov follows a quest for identity which is also that of a country and of Europe as a whole, because sorrow spreads, sorrow migrates. *“This is what I want to write about, this sensation of sorrow, the exhaustion of sense, which, on one hand, may be a painful feeling, but which, on the other hand, can also be a luminous feeling. A sad man is a man who thinks; a sad man is a man who contemplates. I think that when a sorrow is told it becomes more luminous.”*

The writer therefore collects random memories, tells tales, myths and adds small personal and family stories to greater history; adds lists, images, schemas, citations and references, that play like the brilliantly orchestrated melody of an encyclopaedia. He relates the story to ward off its obliteration by time, to try to encompass a whole, to link his “self” to other “selves” and to cement empathy for shared humanity. His guiding threads, woven with humour, spirit and poetry, follow each other delightfully in a hymn to the powers of literature. *The Physics of Sorrow* opens a fascinating story chest bringing to life meanings for one’s self and others, for today and tomorrow, *“something like an alternative energy source”*, as Georgi Gospodinov hopes.

The winner of the Jan Michalski Prize 2016, Georgi Gospodinov will receive an award of CHF 50,000.00 and a work by the Bernese artist Markus Raetz that has been chosen for him: *Binocular View*, 2001, a photogravure in colour.



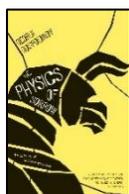
German edition

Georgi Gospodinov, *Physik der Schwermut*. Novel, translated from Bulgarian by Alexander Sitzmann, Literaturverlag Droschl, Graz, 2014



French edition

Guéorgui Gospodinov, *Physique de la mélancolie*, translated from Bulgarian by Marie Vrinat-Nikolov, Editions Intervalles, collection “Sémaphores”, Paris, 2015



American edition

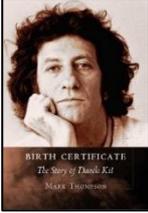
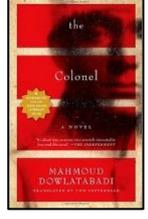
Georgi Gospodinov, *The Physics of Sorrow*, translated from Bulgarian by Angela Rodel, Open Letter Books, New York, 2015

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

	<p>The 2015 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature Mark Thompson, <i>Birth Certificate: The Story of Danilo Kiš</i></p>
	<p>The 2014 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature Serhiy Jadan, <i>Vorochoylovhrad</i></p>
	<p>The 2013 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, <i>The Colonel</i></p>
	<p>The 2012 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature Julia Lovell, <i>The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China</i></p>
	<p>The 2011 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature György Dragomán, <i>The White King</i></p>
	<p>The 2010 Jan Michalski Prize for Literature Aleksandar Hemon, <i>The Lazarus Project</i></p>

THE JURY OF THE JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, President of the jury

The publisher Vera Michalski-Hoffmann, long committed to promoting literature and the written word, founded the publishing group Libella with Jan Michalski. Since 1986, numerous authors have been brought out in French and Polish at various publishing houses, including Noir sur Blanc, Buchet-Chastel, Phébus, and *Wydawnictwo Literackie*. In 2004 Vera Michalski created the Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature, whose mission is to provide support to practitioners of the written word and foster the love of reading.

Charles Dantzig

Charles Dantzig was born in 1961 in Tarbes, France. A publisher, translator, and writer, Mr. Dantzig is the author of a number of novels – *Un film d’amour* (2003), *Je m’appelle François* (2007), *Dans un avion pour Caracas* (2011), *Histoire de l’amour et de la haine* (2015) – essays – *Dictionnaire égoïste de la littérature française* (2005, the Prix Décembre and the Prix de l’essai of the French Academy), *Encyclopédie capricieuse du tout et du rien* (2009), *Pourquoi lire ?* (2010), and *A propos des chefs-d’œuvre* (2013) – and poetry collections – *La diva aux longs cils* (2010) and *Les nageurs* (2010). He was awarded the Grand Prix Jean Giono in 2010 for his body of work as a whole.

Jacek Dehnel

Born in Gdańsk in 1980, Jacek Dehnel is a Polish poet, novelist, translator, literary columnist and painter. A graduate of the University of Warsaw, he is a specialist of English poetry. Hailed by the Nobel Prize Laureate Czesław Miłosz when his first collection of poems, *Żywoty równoległe* (Parallel Lives, 2004), was published, Mr. Dehnel has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the prestigious Kościelski Prize in 2005. His novels *Lala* (2006) and *Saturn* (2011/2014) have proved a success in Europe with both the public and critics.

Robert Menasse

Born in 1954 in Vienna, the Austrian writer, translator, and essayist Robert Menasse holds a degree in philosophy. Besides numerous essays, he has written several well-received novels, including *Selige Zeiten, brüchige Welt* (1991, Doderer Prize), *Schubumkehr* (1995), *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* (2001, Prix Amphiphi), and *Don Juan de la Mancha oder die Erziehung der Lust* (2007), as well as children’s books. He was awarded the Austrian National Essay Prize in 1998 and the European Book Prize in 2015 for his essay *Der Europäische Landbote*. A keen follower of the political and cultural developments in his native Austria, Mr. Menasse is a regular contributor to the press.

Cees Nooteboom

Born in the Hague in 1933, the Dutch-speaking writer Cees Nooteboom has been drawing on his passion for literature and travel to create a rich, fertile, and wonderfully varied body of work since 1955, the year his first novel appeared, *Philip and the Others*. Since then the books have regularly flowed from his pen: fiction and short stories – including *Rituals* (1980/1983), *All Souls’ Day* (1998/2001), *Lost Paradise* (2004/2007), *Rode Regen* (2007), *The Foxes Come at Night* (2009/2011) – collections of poetry – *Het gezicht van het oog* (1989) – as well as journalism and the literary, philosophical, or meditative essay – *Tumbas, Graven van Dichters en Denkers* (2007), and *Letters to Poseidon* (2012/2014). Translated around the world, his writing has garnered a number of prestigious prizes in Europe, including the Dutch Literature Prize in 2009. He lives in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Minorca.

Ilma Rakusa

A writer and translator whose work has earned multiple awards, Ilma Rakusa was born in 1946 in present-day Slovakia. Her childhood was spent in Budapest, Ljubljana and Trieste, and eventually Zurich, where she studied Slavic languages and Romanian literature. Since 1977 she has published many poetry collections, stories, and essays in German. A number have been singled out for awards, including the prestigious Adelbert von Chamisso Prize. *Mehr Meer* earned the author the Schweizer Buchpreis in 2009. Ilma Rakusa translates from French, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, and German, and has written articles for *NZZ* and *Die Zeit*. She is a member of the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (the German Academy of Language and Literature).

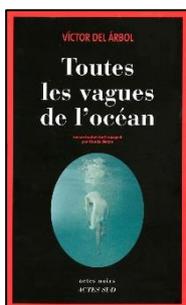
Ugo Rondinone

Born in Brunnen in 1964, the Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone studied at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna. For over twenty years now, he has been creating a body of work that stands apart thanks to the range of media he employs, including painting, the graphic arts, sculpture, photography, video, and sound. In 2007, he represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennial. His work is part of the collections of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. He has exhibited throughout Europe and the United States.

Shashi Tharoor

Born in 1956, Shashi Tharoor studied in both India and the United States before joining the United Nations, where he served in a number of high-level posts. He went on to pursue a successful political career in India. Mr. Tharoor is also the bestselling author of a number of books, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), *Show Business* (1992), *Riot* (2001), *The Five Dollar Smile and Other Stories* (1990) and *Nehru, the Invention of India* (2003).

THE SELECTED BOOKS FOR THE 2016 JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE



Victor del Árbol

Toutes les vagues de l'océan

Actes Sud, Arles, 2015

Proposed by
Vera Michalski-Hoffmann

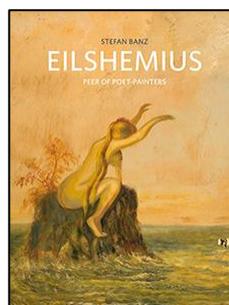


Andrea Bajani

La vita non è in ordine alfabetico

Einaudi, Torino, 2014

Proposed by Cees Nooteboom

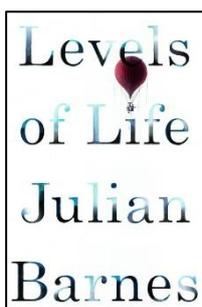


Stefan Banz

Louis Michel Eilshemius, Peer of Poet-Painters

JRP / Ringier, Zürich, 2015

Proposed by Ugo Rondinone

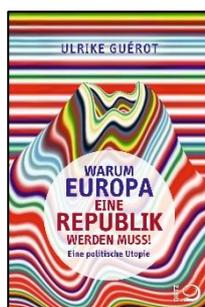


Julian Barnes

Levels of Life

Jonathan Cape, London, 2013

Proposed by Jacek Dehnel

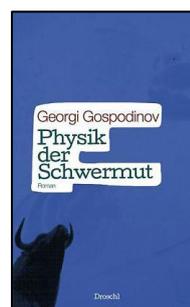


Ulrike Guérot

Warum Europa eine Republik werden muss! Eine politische Utopie

Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 2016

Proposed by Robert Menasse

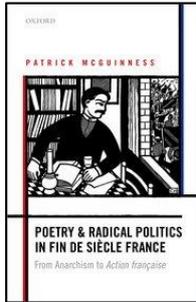


Georgi Gospodinov

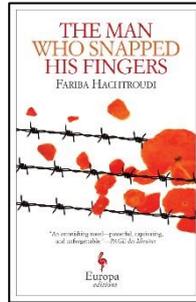
Physik der Schwermut. Roman

Literaturverlag Droschl, Graz, 2014

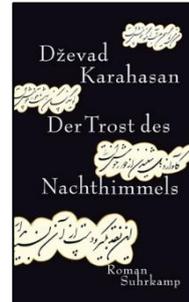
Proposed by Ilma Rakusa



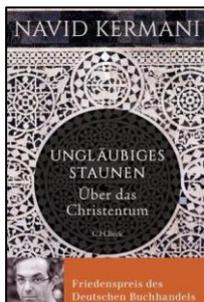
Patrick McGuinness
Poetry and Radical Politics in fin de siècle France, From Anarchism to Action française
Oxford University Press, 2015
Proposed by Charles Dantzig



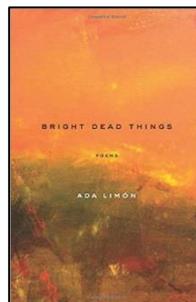
Fariba Hachtroudi
The Man Who Snapped His Fingers
Europa Editions, New York, 2016
Proposed by Shashi Tharoor



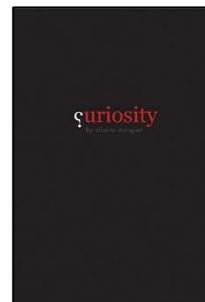
Dzevad Karahasan
Der Trost des Nachthimmels
Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2016
Proposed by Vera Michalski-Hoffmann



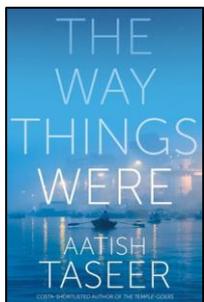
Navid Kermani
Ungläubiges Staunen. Über das Christentum
C.H. Beck Verlag, München, 2015
Proposed by Ilma Rakusa



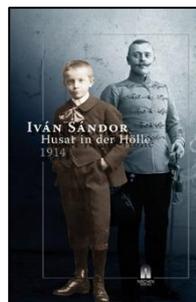
Ada Limón
Bright Dead Things. Poems
Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, 2015
Proposed by Ugo Rondinone



Alberto Manguel
Curiosity
Yale University Press, 2015
Proposed by Charles Dantzig and Cees Nooteboom



Aatish Taseer
The Way Things Were
Pan Macmillan, London, 2015
Proposed by Shashi Tharoor



Iván Sándor
Husar in der Hölle
Nischen Verlag, Wien, 2014
Proposed by Robert Menasse

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