

## Annex: 2015 European Union Prize for Literature

### Authors' biographies and synopsis of the winning books

#### 1. Austria – Carolina Schutti

*Einmal muss ich über weiches Gras gelaufen sein (Once I must have trodden soft grass)*. Otto Müller Verlag, 2012.



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Carolina Schutti was born in 1976 in Innsbruck, where she still lives. She studied German philology, English and American Studies, concert guitar and classical voice. Her publications include essays on literary studies, reviews and other texts in literary magazines. She coordinates and moderates literary events and interdisciplinary projects, works as a juror, gives lectures on poetry and holds training seminars in the field of Neue Literatur.

Carolina Schutti's novel is dedicated to the grandmothers. We are told this early on in this slim volume which takes us into the female narrator's world – a sad and archaic world with no place for love, joy or carefree innocence.

After her mother's death, Maja is taken in by her aunt who feeds her and gives her a place to sleep but leaves her in the dark about her past. They live in a nameless village in a remote region and in very poor circumstances. Every attempt by Maja to remember her past leads nowhere. Marek, an elderly man who speaks a strange and mysterious language and lives on his own in another remote and lonely house, is the only person who can make Maja feel at home and accepted.

#### 2. Croatia – Luka Bekavac

*Viljevo*. Fraktura, 2013.



Luka Bekavac, born in 1976 in Osijek, is a writer, translator and literary theorist. He teaches at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb University (Comparative Literature Department) and has contributed articles on philosophy, literary theory, music and literature to a number of magazines, radio programmes and peer-reviewed publications, including *Performance Research*, *Frakcija*, *Filozofska istraživanja* and *Književna smotra*. *Viljevo* won the Janko Polić Kamov Award in 2014.

*Viljevo* is a novel about memory, trauma and transcommunication: a triptych of different voices, weaving together historiography, speculative fiction and highly-stylised prose. It opens with 'August', a monologue transcribed from a corrupt reel-to-reel tape, inviting readers into virtually uninhabited Slavonian plains. 'After Midnight' is a raw and intense

document of such an attempt at channelling the unknown: a sequence of questions and answers between the characters of 'August' and their obscure counterparts. The final chapter, 'Marković', brings about a change of pace and context. Set in occupied Osijek in 1943 and written as part memoir, part painstakingly constructed (para)scientific article, it revolves around the activities of an illegal anti-fascist radio station.

### 3. France - Gaëlle Josse

*Le dernier gardien d'Ellis Island* (The last guardian of Ellis Island). Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2014.



© Xavier Remongin

Having started out as a poet, Gaëlle Josse's debut novel, *Les heures silencieuses* (The Quiet Hours) was published in 2011. It was followed by *Nos vies désaccordées* (Our Out of Tune Lives) in 2012 and *Noces de neige* (Snow Wedding) in 2013. After several years in New Caledonia, Josse now lives and works in Paris. *Le dernier gardien d'Ellis Island* (The Last Guardian of Ellis Island) was awarded with the Grand Livre du Mois Literary Prize last autumn.

New York, 3 November 1954. In five days, the immigration station on Ellis Island, which all immigrants from Europe since 1892 have had to pass through, will close its doors. Alone in this huge deserted space, John Mitchell, an officer of the Bureau of Immigration, is both a watchman and a prisoner of this tiny island in the Hudson River facing Manhattan. A few days before he has to leave, Mitchell feels the need to free himself from the memory of several events in his life at Ellis, so he starts a diary. Until...

Remorse, transgression, duty, loss, loneliness, exile... as well as emotion, love and sincerity: John Mitchell looks back over the course of his life and an era of North American history.

### 4. Hungary – Edina Szvoren

*Nincs, és ne is legyen* (There Is None, Nor Let There Be). Palatinus, 2012.



© Zoltán Kocsis

Edina Szvoren was born in 1974 in Budapest. An alumni of Béla Bartók Music High School, she currently teaches solfeggio and music theory there. She holds a degree as chorus-master from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. She has had work published regularly since 2005, including two works of prose. Her work has been recognized by the following awards: the Sándor Bródy Prize for the best first novel of the year in 2011, the Artisjus Prize and the Attila József Prize.

Edina Szvoren's stories contain a lot of dry humour, yet at the same time they sizzle, as she reveals the drama in the minutiae of human relationships. When describing Szvoren's literary world, reviewers have brought up the names of two

radically different predecessors: the analytical prose of Péter Nádas and the graceful giant of grotesque, Péter Hajnóczy. The family, which is both the centre stage and model of our lives, stands firmly in the middle of the stories of *Nincs, és ne is legyen*, regardless of whether we are struggling on that stage or are just on the outside looking in.

## 5. Ireland – Donal Ryan

*The Spinning Heart (Le cœur qui tourne)*. Doubleday Ireland, 2013.



Donal Ryan was born near Nenagh, County Tipperary, in 1976. He was a civil servant for many years, and was only able to devote himself to writing from 2014, following the success of *The Spinning Heart*, the novel he wrote during the evenings of the summer of 2010. Ryan received 47 rejections before finding a publisher. His novels have gathered a great deal of critical acclaim and *The Spinning Heart* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He lives in County Limerick with his wife and two children.

© Anthony Woods

*"My father still lives back the road past the weir in the cottage I was reared in. I go there every day to see if he is dead and every day he lets me down. He hasn't yet missed a day of letting me down."*

In the aftermath of Ireland's financial collapse, dangerous tensions surface in an Irish town. As violence flares, the characters face a battle between public persona and inner desires. Through a chorus of unique voices, each struggling to tell their own kind of truth, a single authentic tale unfolds.

## 6. Italy – Lorenzo Amurri

*Apnea*. Fandango Libri, 2013.



Writer and musician Lorenzo Amurri was born in Rome in 1971. As a musician, he has collaborated with a variety of Italian artists including Tiromancino and Franco Califano. His life story is marked by a tragic skiing accident that made him a quadriplegic. It was after this accident that he decided to devote himself to writing, first through a blog and then via short stories, one of which was published in the collection *Amore Caro*. *Apnea* is his first novel, followed by *Perché non lo portate a Lourdes?* in 2014.

© Fabrizio Caperchi

Lorenzo, 25-years-old and from a good family, is a rock guitarist dedicated to the philosophy of living in the moment. During a trip skiing, a collision with a chair lift pylon leaves him completely paralysed from the neck down. From that day begins a long convalescence for his body, but also for his soul. When his fiancée, who has supported and cared for him for over a year, resigns herself to leaving him, Lorenzo decides to commit suicide. That is unless something pushes him to win her back, and from there to regain his own life.

## 7. Lithuania - Undinė Radzevičiūtė

*Žuvys ir drakonai (Fishes and Dragons)*. Baltos lankos, 2013.



Undinė Radzevičiūtė was born in 1967. She graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts where she studied art history, theory and criticism. She worked for ten years as a creative director for international advertising agencies including Saatchi & Saatchi and Leo Burnett.

Her first short novel was published in 2003 and was favourably reviewed. *Fishes and Dragons* is her fourth and biggest book so far. Her new novel is due to be published in 2015.

© Agnė Gintalaitė

The title symbolically refers to two cultures: Christian European and traditional Chinese. Two different stories are interwoven here: one depicts the life of a Jesuit painter in 18th century China, the other mostly takes place in an old-town flat of a present-day European city. With her signature lapidary style, Undinė Radzevičiūtė has written a novel where the texture of the modern European storyline is coloured with oblique reflections of traditional Chinese culture and mentality. The Chinese narrative subtly reveals the unbridgeable gap between Christian European and traditional Chinese mindsets in the context of the failure of the Jesuits' missionary effort.

## 8. Norway – Ida Hegazi Høyer

*Unnskyld (Forgive me)*. Tiden Norsk Forlag, 2014.



Ida Hegazi Høyer, born in 1981, is a Norwegian citizen with Danish-Egyptian ancestors. Høyer studied sociology and worked in a clothing store, and she now writes and lives in Osломarka – the woodlands surrounding Oslo. She is the author of three novels: her debut, *Under the World*, was published in autumn 2012, followed by *Out* in 2013 and *Forgive Me* in 2014. In August 2014 she was the recipient of Norway's Bjørnsonstipendet, awarded to a prominent young talent.

© Susanne Horn

*Forgive Me* is an intense novel about love, self-deception and dangerous secrets. In Ida Hegazi Høyer's third book, a young woman meets a young man, and it is love at first sight. He is a student of philosophy who impresses her deeply with his intellectual talk of individualism and his free spirit – he seems like the perfect man. They move into a small apartment, and in the days and weeks and months to come they become completely engulfed by one another. But it does not take long before she starts harbouring feelings of unease. Small signs, small oddities suggesting that he might not be what he appears to be.



## 9. Poland – Magdalena Parys

*Magik (Magician)*. Świat Książki, 2014.



© Marian Stefanowski

Magdalena Parys (born 1971) is a poet, writer and translator. She is the founder of the Polish-German literary magazine *Squaws*, and a graduate of Polish philology and pedagogy at Humboldt University in Berlin.

Although the story is set in 2011, its roots go back to the 1950s. That's when an operation called *Magik* began: a brutal operation where GDR Stasi cooperated with Bulgarian border guards to murder refugees from the socialist countries who, in the days of the Iron Curtain, tried to illegally cross the Bulgarian-Turkish or Bulgarian-Greek borders. Although the pretext was to prohibit illegal border crossings, this led to the elimination of opposition activists. In the book, GDR history intertwines with the outbreak of the Solidarity movement, contemporary Berlin, human stories of guilt, punishment and escape from responsibility, as well as a complicated investigation by a disobedient police officer, Kowalski.

## 10. Portugal – David Machado

*Índice Médio de Felicidade (Average Happiness Index)*. Dom Quixote, 2013.



© Mar Babo

David Machado was born in Lisbon in 1978. He has a degree in economics from ISEG, Lisbon's School of Economics and Management, but soon devoted himself to writing fiction and children's literature. In 2005, he was awarded the Branquinho da Fonseca Prize for his children's book *A Noite dos Animais Inventados* and, in 2010, he was awarded the SPA/RTP Author Prize, in the category for Best Children and Youth book, for *O Tubarão na Banheira*. He is the author of several children's books, the short story collection *Histórias Possíveis* and the novels *O Fabuloso Teatro do Gigante*, *Deixem Falar as Pedras* and *Índice Médio de Felicidade*.

Daniel had a plan, a sort of journal of the future, written in a notebook. But, all of a sudden, everything changed for the worse: Portugal collapsed and Daniel lost his job. He couldn't afford to pay the mortgage for his house anymore. His wife, also unemployed, left with his children, searching for better opportunities. In spite of the wreck that his life becomes, his will to rebuild everything seems unshakable. Because the Present is meaningless, if we don't anticipate a Future.

## 11. Slovakia – Svetlana Žuchová

*Obrazy zo života M. (Scenes from the Life of M.)*. Marenčin PT, 2013.



© Inge Prader

Svetlana Žuchová, born in 1976, studied psychology at Vienna University and medicine at the Medical Faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. She works at a psychiatric clinic in Prague. She received the Ivan Krasko Prize for her first book, the story collection *Dulce de leche* (2003). Then came the chamber novella *Yesim* (2006) and the novel *Zlodeji a svedkovia* (*Thieves and Witnesses*, 2011). Her third novel, linked with its predecessor by the narrator and main character Marisia, is *Obrazy zo života M.* All three novels were included in the final of the most important Slovak literary competition Anasoft Litera (2007, 2012 and 2014).

The plot of *Scenes from the Life of M.* loosely follows on from the previous novel, *Thieves and Witnesses*. The main character, Marisia, returns from Vienna to Slovakia after her mother's death. While in the first novel, Marisia was looking for a home for herself, this novel shows her finding one. Descriptions of her everyday life alternate with memories of her mother's death, her mundane existence juxtaposed with the extremity of certain situations. The main theme is one of family ties both old and new, close and distant, and their importance and futility.

## 12. Sweden – Sara Stridsberg

*Beckomberga - ode till min familj (The Gravity of Love)*. Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2014.



© Caroline Andersson

Sara Stridsberg, born in 1972, is a writer and playwright. Her first novel *Happy Sally* was published in 2004, and her breakthrough came two years later with the publication of *The Faculty of Dreams*, her second novel. Her third novel, *Darling River*, was published in 2010. In addition to several important prizes, she has been shortlisted for the prestigious August Prize three times, the latest in 2012 for her collection of plays, *Medealand*. Stridsberg lives in Stockholm.

When Jimmie Darling is admitted to Beckomberga, a psychiatric hospital outside Stockholm, his daughter Jackie starts to spend increasing amounts of time there, and when her mother leaves for a holiday by the Black Sea, the hospital becomes Jackie's whole world.

*Beckomberga* explores Jackie's love for Jimmie and the way she reaches out for him, as a child and as a grown woman and mother. In Sara Stridsberg's beautiful novel, the psychiatric hospital, set in a lovely park close to a lake, takes on almost mythical dimensions, both as a punishing angel and as a rescuer seeking to save distraught souls, like in an old utopian vision.