

Berlin, 6th September 2006

Nominations for the 2006 Lettre Ulysses Award

The World Prize for Reportage Literature

International Jury names seven finalists

The ten-member jury of the *Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage* have agreed upon the seven finalists for the world prize for reportage literature, which is endowed with a total of 100,000 USD in prize money. The nominated texts lead us through Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Middle East – a journey round the world in seven reportages. The seven authors come from Austria, Great Britain, Colombia, China, France and Nepal.

The seven final texts

- **Karl-Markus Gauss**, Austria: *Die Hundeesser von Svinia*, Paul Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna, 2004 [*The Dog Eaters of Svinia*]
- **Linda Grant**, Great Britain: *The People on the Street. A Writer's View of Israel*, Virago Press, London, 2006
- **Juanita León**, Colombia: *País de plomo. Crónicas de guerra*, Aguilar, 2005 [*Country of Bullets. War Diaries*]
- **Li Datong**, China: *Bingdian Gushi*, Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2005 [*The Story of "Freezing Point"*, Guangxi Normal University Press]
- **Erik Orsenna**, France: *Voyage aux pays du coton. Petit précis de mondialisation*, Fayard, Paris, 2006 [*Journey to the Lands of Cotton. A Brief Manual of Globalisation*]
- **Manjushree Thapa**, Nepal: *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*, Penguin Viking India, New Delhi, 2005
- **Zhou Qing**, China: *Min Yihe Shi Wei Tian. Zhongguo Shipin Anquan Xianzhuang Diaocha*, Bangao Wenxue, 9/2004 [*What Kind of God. A Survey of the Current Safety of China's Food*, in: Reportage Literature 9/2004]

Short descriptions of the nominated texts

Karl-Markus Gauss, “*The Dog Eaters of Svinia*”

Slovakia is one of the newest members of the European Union and with its low wages and taxes it is seen as a true investor's paradise. 800,000 Roma also live there. In his 2004 book “*The Dog Eaters of Svinia*”, the Austrian writer **Karl-Markus Gauss** reports on the journeys he undertook between 2001 and 2003 in the east of the country. There he immerses himself in the life of the Roma who, with their history of displacement, persecution and contempt, are among the poorest people in Europe. Ignored by the majority society, they live in some 300 suburban ghettos and rural settlements. Their everyday life is marked by loss of identity, poverty and disorientation. The Svinia slum is a place that seems to have fallen out of the world, and out of time. This limbo is where the “dog eaters” live, the lowest of all castes, the Roma's pariahs.

Linda Grant, “*The People on the Street. A Writer's View of Israel*”

The British journalist and writer **Linda Grant**, a non-religious Diaspora Jew, travels to Tel Aviv in 2003, with the intention of writing a novel. However, instead her visit becomes an opportunity for a systematic and in-depth exploration of Jewish identity and its relationship with the state of Israel. “*The People on the Street. A Writer's View of Israel*” is a journey through an extraordinary and problematic society, through the languages and biographies of its inhabitants, their archetypes and histories, their doubts and their hopes. The people she meets include teenage soldiers, Tunisian-born settlers, Russian scientists and Iraqi shopkeepers, kibbutz dwellers and street traders, writers and taxi drivers, café owners and pedestrians. Observations from a troubled land that is determined to defend its existence and that is ensnared in a conflict that seems to promise tragic consequences rather than peaceful prospects.

Juanita León, “*Country of Bullets. War Diaries*”

Since 1948 Columbia has been torn apart by violence and civil war. A guerrilla movement of “liberals”, and the peasant self defence committees, supported by the Communist Party, formed in opposition to the conservative oligarchy and the military leadership. The conflict resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Then later the drug cartels and paramilitaries appeared on the scene, carrying out the murders of judges, politicians, union leaders and student activists. In her 2005 book “*Country of Bullets. War Diaries*” the Columbian journalist **Juanita León** describes the important aspects of the drama: The suffering of the rural population, the ravages of the death squads, the incompetence of the government, the role of the drug economy and the increasing loss of humanity. Ideals have disappeared, ideology no longer seems to play a role. In their cruelty, ruthlessness and greed, the guerrillas and paramilitaries have become more and more alike. Observations and encounters on all fronts.

Li Datong, “*The Story of ‘Freezing Point’*”

In January 2006 news of the closure of the magazine ‘Freezing Point Weekly’ shook China’s political and cultural media. With this move the Chinese government killed off the country’s bravest publication, which had acted as a beacon of hope for freedom of opinion. “Freezing Point” was the weekly supplement of the Communist Youth League organ and was edited by the journalist **Li Datong**. He had been banned from working for five years following the Tiananmen Square massacre but in 1995, during a period of commercialisation and liberalisation, he became the editor of this publication. He made it into a place where the everyday life of the ordinary Chinese people could be given expression in a vital way. Brave and humane reportages revealed an image of a society in which lawlessness, corruption, exploitation and the propaganda of state-controlled mass media set the tone. As it increasingly became the most popular publication in China, “Freezing Point” was also becoming more and more inconvenient. Li Datong tells the story of the conflict, of the rise and fall of the magazine. “*Story of ‘Freezing Point’*” describes the attempt to transform the Chinese media – a study of Chinese society under the magnifying glass.

Erik Orsenna, “*Journey to the Lands of Cotton. A Brief Manual of Globalisation*”

On his journey through the lands of cotton, the French writer **Erik Orsenna** visited many continents. Plantations in Mali and the United States, research laboratories in Brazil and museums in Egypt, dried out lakes and steeps in Uzbekistan, textile factories in China and France are all places of encounter with the raw material which has marked the history of entire countries and which to this day hundreds of millions of people still depend upon for their livelihoods. You find cotton in shirts and socks, but also in sausages, sauces, photographic film, bank notes and even cooking oil. His book “*Journey to the Lands of Cotton. A Brief Manual of Globalisation*” brings the mechanisms of globalisation to life, the fight for market shares, the struggle for new products, the conflict between history and modernisation, between multinational companies and more traditional economies, the rhetoric of open markets and the global practice of lobbying.

Manjushree Thapa, “*Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*”

The murder of the Nepalese king in the royal palace massacre of 2001 shook the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. Parliamentary democracy was replaced by an emergency regime, and democratic rights and freedoms were suspended. The poverty of the rural population gave rise to Maoist guerrillas, who today control entire regions of the country. In “*Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy*” the Nepalese novelist and journalist **Manjushree Thapa** describes the development of a society whose picturesque beauty hides the terrible poverty of the vast majority of the population. Her reportage leads the reader through the Byzantine power

structures and to the remote western mountainous region of this Himalayan country, where many villagers and rural people have fled the epidemic violence. She meets ordinary people and encounters members of the Maoist organisation, and tries to throw some light on their motives. The patriarchal oppression of women in the society and family is one reason why so many of the guerrillas are young women. Amidst all this destruction the author sees the growth of a democratic consciousness.

Zhou Qing, “*What Kind of God’. A Survey of the Current Safety of China’s Food*”

The wealth of its cuisine attests to just how much China’s four-thousand-year history is linked to the history of its food. The success and failure of the rulers depended upon being able to provide the people with enough food to eat. In today’s country of the “Chinese Economic Myth,” with its growth rates, skyscrapers, and global market success, the theme of foodstuffs is once again of extreme importance. The production and sale of food can bring in high profits; and in the realm of food and drink the desire for quick wealth can also lead to a lack of moral scruples. The Chinese writer **Zhou Qing** spent two years researching his book “*What Kind of God’. A Survey of the Current Safety of China’s Food*”. He interviewed food manufacturers and restaurant owners, fish farmers, peasants, traders, doctors, and consumers. Contraceptive pills accelerate fish farming, the pesticide DDT keeps pickles from going off, hormones are used to replace foodstuffs, salt is chemically enhanced, industrial oil is altered to make cooking oil. Antibiotics in animal feed lead to premature puberty in children, and a third of all cancers can be traced back to poisoned food. An entire people are poisoning themselves.

Initiators and the Aim of Prize

The cultural journal *Lettre Internationale* is the initiator of this, the only world prize for literary reportage. The financial support of the *Aventis Foundation* has made the award possible. The *Goethe-Institut* is a partner of the *Lettre Ulysses Award*. The intention of the initiators is to bring the art of literary reportage to worldwide attention and to support its authors materially and symbolically. The *Lettre Ulysses Award* has been presented annually since October 2003 for texts first published within the preceding two years. This year the jury considered works that had been published after 1st January 2004.

Prize and Award Ceremony 2006

The *Lettre Ulysses Award 2006* encompasses three money prizes of 50,000, 30,000 and 20,000 USD, prizes in the form of working residencies given by the Goethe-Institut, as well as valuable watches from the firm *Nomos*. The winners will be announced on 30th September at 7 p.m., the Saturday before the opening of the *International Frankfurt Book Fair*, in the presence of an international audience in the TIPI-Zelt in Berlin.

Resonance of the Prize

The establishment of the *Lettre Ulysses Award* in 2003 found a wide resonance internationally among journalists and writers, as well as in the press, radio and television. The awarding of the prize – in 2003 to the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya for her book on the war in Chechnya and in 2004 to the Chinese authors Wu Chuntao and Chen Guidi for their reportage on the situation of Chinese peasants – has received a great deal of international attention. In 2005 the winner was Alexandra Fuller, for her book “*Scribbling the Cat. Travels with an African Soldier*”, which dealt with the aftermath of southeastern Africa’s wars of decolonisation, seen through the eyes of one mercenary soldier.

The Impact of Reportage Literature

The *Lettre Ulysses Award* was recently the focus of international media attention when the German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with the 2004 winners Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao (for “*A Survey of Chinese Peasants*”) during her visit to China and discussed the work of journalists in China and the situation of Chinese peasants with them.

Jury and the judging process

The *Lettre Ulysses Award* jury members are all outstanding and award-winning authors and reportage writers. The polyglot jurors represent ten of the world’s largest language groups and thus guarantee that a wide range of languages and cultures are considered. The languages represented are: Arabic, Chinese, German, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. Jury members are free to nominate texts from any language in the world, and the short list is decided upon following two jury meetings with discussions based upon written reports. The working language of the jury is English.

Members of the 2006 Jury

- **Gamal Al Ghitany** (Egypt): *Novelist, Essayist, Journalist*
- **Andrei Bitov** (Russia): *Novelist, Travel Writer*
- **Urvashi Butalia** (India): *Reporter, Essayist, Historian*
- **Nedim Gürsel** (Turkey): *Novelist, Essayist, Travel Writer*
- **Isabel Hilton** (Great Britain): *Reporter, Writer, Radio broadcaster*
- **Anne Nivat** (France): *Reporter, Writer*
- **Sergio Ramírez** (Nicaragua): *Writer, Journalist*
- **Pedro Rosa Mendes** (Portugal): *Reporter, Writer*
- **Ilija Trojanow** (Germany): *Reporter, Writer*
- **Yang Lian** (China): *Poet, Essayist*

Further Information

You can find further information on the concept of the prize, the jury, the finalists and the longlist on the website: www.lettre-ulysses-award.org

Contact

Foundation Lettre International Award

Frank Berberich, Esther Gallodoro

Elisabethhof Portal 3 b, Erkelenzdamm 59/61, D - 10999 Berlin

Tel: +49 (0) 30-30 87 04 –52/ –61, Fax: +49 (0) 30-283 31 28, E-Mail: lettre@lettre.de

www.lettre-ulysses-award.org



Aventis foundation

