

German Book Prize 2015

The Novel of the Year

Shortlist- Nominee



© Katharina Behling

Jenny Erpenbeck

Gehen, ging, gegangen (Go, Went, Gone)

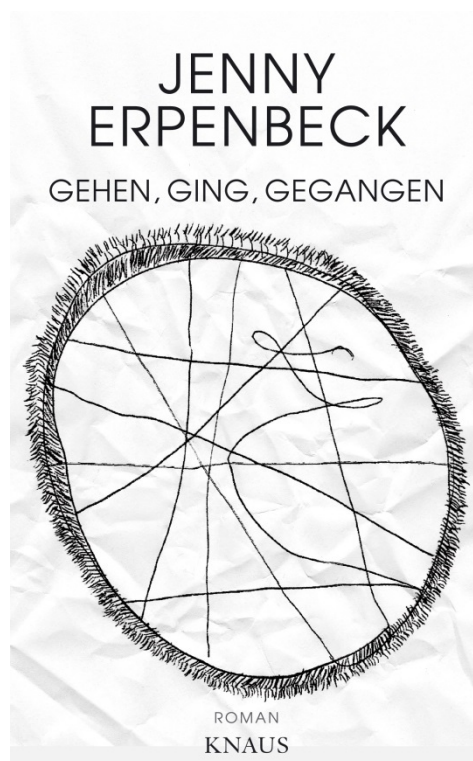
Knaus Verlag

Jury evaluation

With “Gehen, ging, gegangen” (“Go, Went, Gone”), Jenny Erpenbeck turns to an extremely topical subject – the treatment of refugees – in a literary manner that is as smart as it is moving: A rather coincidental encounter with refugees from Africa in Berlin brings a professor emeritus of the history of literature face to face with these people’s problems. Through interviews with them, he plunges ever deeper into what lies hidden beneath the surface: the bureaucratic inhumanity, the horrible waiting. In this way, Jenny Erpenbeck makes the voices of others heard. At the same time, she connects the present to the past, clearly showing that the figure of the refugee has also always been part of our (western) history.

Biography

Jenny Erpenbeck was born in Berlin in 1967. After finishing secondary school, she completed an apprenticeship in bookbinding before earning a degree in theatre studies and musical theatre direction. In 1999, parallel to her work as an opera director, she made her authorial debut with the novella “Geschichte vom alten Kind” (“The Old Child”), which was followed by the publication of other literary works, including novels, short stories and plays.



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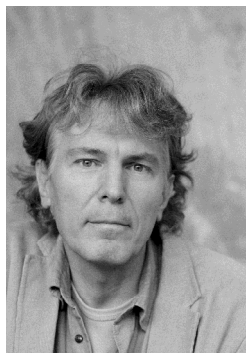
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Rolf Lappert
Über den Winter (Through the Winter)

Carl Hanser Verlag

Jury evaluation

Lennard Salm is fifty, a conceptual artist with a studio in New York. When, while searching for material for his installations, amidst the flotsam and jetsam on the beach he discovers the corpse of a baby that has clearly washed up from a sunken refugee boat, for the first time in his life he profoundly questions the point of his work. Shortly thereafter, news of his sister's death reaches him. Returning to his family for what is meant to be just a brief visit, he experiences a shift in the direction of his life instead. A brilliant stylist, Rolf Lappert is also a seismograph of the present: His visually powerful family- saga- cum- social- novel traces a wide range of forms of increasing isolation in mass society and shows that life without responsibility, without ties, without getting involved is not an option.

Biography

Rolf Lappert was born in Zurich in 1958 and lives in Switzerland. He trained as a graphic designer, co- founded a jazz club and also works as a screenwriter. His novel "Nach Hause schwimmen" ("Swimming Home"), published in 2008, won the Swiss Book Prize, and his 2012 young adult book "Pampa Blues" was adapted for television.



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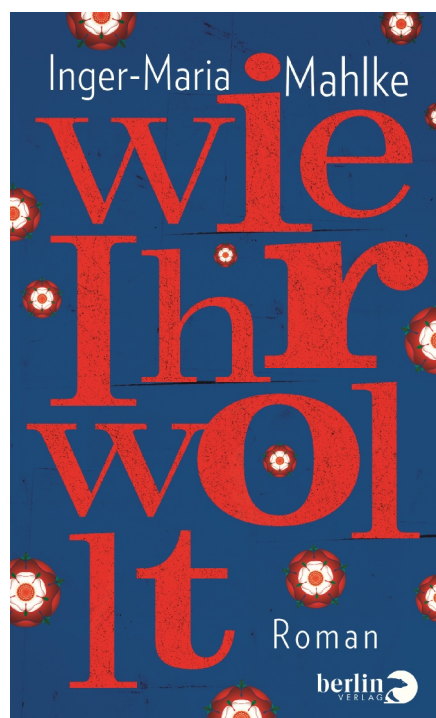
Inger- Maria Mahlke
Wie Ihr wollt (As You Wish)
Berlin Verlag

Jury evaluation

Inger- Maria Mahlke's "Wie Ihr wollt" ("As You Wish") is a historical novel and bitter- comic deconstruction of the historical novel genre. World history in the blind spot of a chamber play, told from the point of view of a diminutive ruler- in- waiting. By making her protagonist a powerless woman trapped in the prison of her body, Mahkle succeeds in creating a brilliant piece of female historical counter- narrative and a radical critique of the present in the guise of a Tudor tale.

Biography

Inger- Maria Mahlke was born in Hamburg in 1977, grew up in Lübeck, studied law at the Free University in Berlin and worked at the Department of Criminology. In 2009, she won the 17th Open Mike and, in 2010, first prize for a debut novel at the Harbour Front Literary Festival for "Silberfischchen" ("Little Silverfish"). In 2014, her novel "Rechnung offen" ("Unsettled Accounts") received the Karl Arnold Prize from the North Rhine- Westphalian Academy of Sciences and Humanities. She lives in Berlin.



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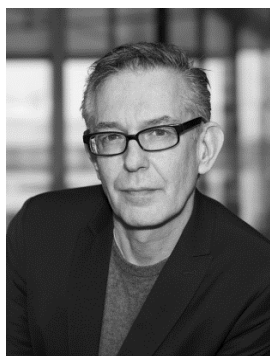
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© Astrid Busch

Ulrich Peltzer
Das bessere Leben (The Better Life)
S. Fischer Verlag

Jury evaluation

Set around the globe, the novel paints a multifaceted portrait of the present. The plot develops tentacles, so to speak, that reach out into all directions, time periods and social contexts. Of once utopian hopes only feasibility remains: which deal is still possible? Ulrich Peltzer allows the reader to participate in his protagonists' existence in language that is often condensed like speech but always highly literary, including interior monologues reminiscent of Joyce. The question of a better life arises from the restlessness of these global players, who only appear to be pulling the strings. A work of tremendous power and relevance.

Biography

Ulrich Peltzer, born in Krefeld in 1956, studied philosophy and psychology in Berlin, where he has been living since 1975. His work has received numerous awards, including the SWR-Bestenliste Prize, the Berlin Literature Prize and the Heinrich Böll Prize. Most recently, in 2011, he published his Frankfurt lectures on poetics "Angefangen wird mittendrin" ("You Start in the Middle").



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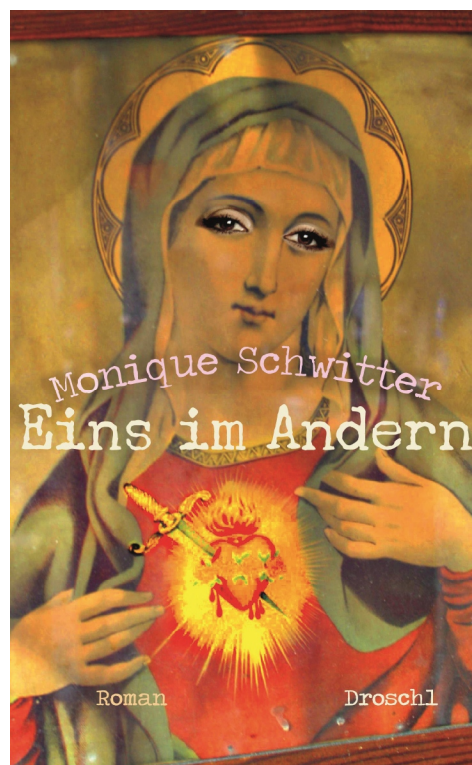
Monique Schwitter
Eins im Andern (One Another)
Droschl Literaturverlag

Jury evaluation

“Eins im Andern” (“One in the Other”) by the Swiss author Monique Schwitter is at once a contemporary love roundelay and dance macabre. Formally complex, rich with allusive motifs – not least by borrowing from Christian iconography – this episodic novel deals with the fundamental themes of literature: love and death, loyalty and betrayal. The central question around which the novel revolves is: How does one thing relate to another – love to death, death to love? Yet, above all: What can writing, literature, do in the face of death? In this sense, “Eins im Andern” (“One in the Other”) is also a meta-fictional novel, which despite weighty baggage skips along, a skilfully light-footed game.

Biography

Monique Schwitter, born in Zurich in 1972, has been living in Hamburg since 2005. She studied acting and directing in Salzburg and was engaged by theatres in Zurich, Frankfurt, Graz and Hamburg, among others. In 2006, she received the Robert Walser Prize and the advancement award of the Swiss Schiller Foundation for her 2005 debut novel “Wenn’s schneit beim Krokodil” (“When It Snows at the Crocodile’s”). Since 2012, she has been a member of the Free Academy of the Arts in Hamburg. In 2013, she won the “manuskripte” Prize for her work.



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© Matthes & Seitz Berlin

Frank Witzel

Die Erfindung der Roten Armee Fraktion durch einen manisch- depressiven Teenager im Sommer 1969 (The Invention of the Red Army Faction by a Manic- Depressive Teenager in the Summer of 1969)

Matthes & Seitz Berlin

Jury evaluation

Frank Witzel's novel is as presumptuous and over-the-top as its title: 800 pages about a mentally unstable 13-year-old narrator in Biebrich on the outskirts of Wiesbaden, who identifies his youth gang with the nascent Red Army Faction (RAF). While Baader, Ensslin & Co. want to change West Germany through the use of armed force, the first-person narrator and his friends manage to rob a toy store at least. Narrative, essay, dialogue, interview fragment: this vast hybrid runs the gamut of forms, and doesn't just deconstruct the RAF's iconography in the most grotesque of ways, but also delivers a history of the mentality of prosperous West Germany with a special eye to counter-pop culture. Don't expect any answers to the question what is illusion and what is truth, what is fact and what is fiction, from this ludicrous text, which enthusiastically abandons itself to speculative thinking.

Biography

Frank Witzel, born in Wiesbaden in 1955, is an author, illustrator and musician. After "Bluemoon Baby" (2001), "Revolution und Heimarbeit" ("Revolution and Home-Work") (2003) and "Vondenloh" (2008), in the spring of 2015 he published his fourth novel, "Die Erfindung der Roten Armee Fraktion durch einen manisch- depressiven Teenager im Sommer 1969" ("The Invention of the Red Army Faction by a Manic- Depressive Teenager in the Summer of 1969"), for which he received the Robert Gernhardt Prize. Frank Witzel lives in Offenbach am Main.



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