

German Book Prize: Shortlist

Norbert Gstrein • Monika Helfer • Christian Kracht •
Thomas Kunst • Mithu Sanyal • Antje Rávik Strubel



Norbert Gstrein

The Second Jacob

Carl Hanser, February 2021

Jury evaluation:

For Norbert Gstrein, narrating is also always a reflection on narrating, on its notorious unreliability and inevitable omissions. In his new novel, an actor is forced, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, to be accountable to himself and to his daughter and to work out a final version of the episodic drama of his life story. The novel masterfully demonstrates the impossibility of imposing a simple plot on the complexity of a life marked by failure, shame and guilt. With "Der zweite Jakob", Norbert Gstrein has once again raised his virtuoso narrative art to a higher level.

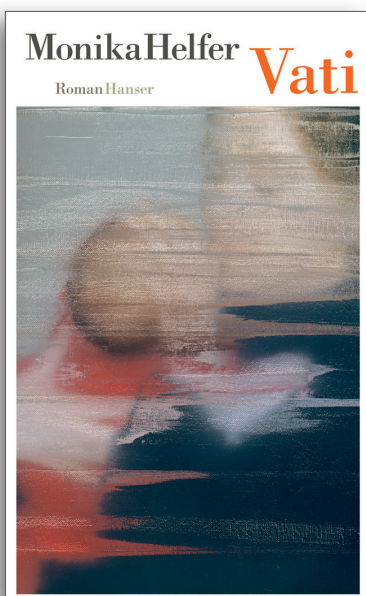


Biography:

Norbert Gstrein, born in Tyrol in 1961, lives in Hamburg. He has received many awards for his work, including the Austrian Book Prize for "Als ich jung war" (When I Was Young) (2019).

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Monika Helfer **Daddy**

Carl Hanser, January 2021

Jury evaluation:

There is not a single superfluous word in Monika Helfer's novel "Vati", an examination of her father's life. Exploring the feasibility of narrating life and understanding origins, the book also describes the initiation of an author. Returning from the war maimed, the author's father meets her mother and becomes the director of a home for the disabled in the mountains. There he collects books, living with and for them. What will become evident after the death of his beloved wife already reveals itself here: a tremendous absence, an all-encompassing silence, which also shapes the lives of his children. A tenderly sad book that perfectly balances emotion and linguistic lucidity.



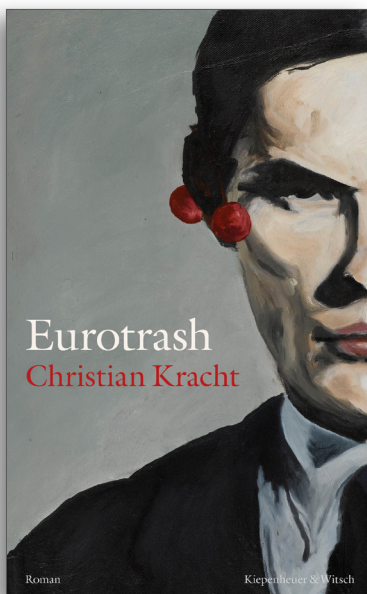
Biography:

Monika Helfer, born in Au (Vorarlberg) in 1947, lives with her family in Vorarlberg. She is the author of numerous novels, short stories and children's books. For her work, she has received, among other honours, the Robert-Musil-Stipendium (Robert Musil scholarship), Österreichischer Würdigungspreis für Literatur (Austrian prize for literature) and Solothurner Literaturpreis (Solothurn literary award). Her novel "Schau mich an, wenn ich mit dir rede" (Look at Me When I Talk to You) (2017) was nominated for the German Book Prize.

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Christian Kracht **Eurotrash**

Kiepenheuer & Witsch, March 2021

Jury evaluation:

While in "Faserland" the world was kept at bay with oil-impregnated jackets, in this book the wool jumper becomes a threadbare symbolic motif – for Christian Kracht's outstanding novel deals with entanglements that reach back to the darkest chapter of German history. "Eurotrash" is a sophisticated, tragicomic and at times surprisingly tenderly narrated work of autofictional remembrance that explores the psychological subtleties of a mother-son relationship. In the process, it reveals familial shadow worlds that loom up out of the past into the present. The author achieves the rare feat of making complex literary poetics shine with stylistic virtuosity.



Biography:

Christian Kracht, born in Switzerland in 1966, is a modern German-language writer. His novels have been translated into over 30 languages. In 2012 he received the Wilhelm Raabe Literature Prize and in 2016 the Swiss Book Prize and Hermann-Hesse-Literaturpreis (Hermann Hesse literary award).

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Thomas Kunst **Zandschow**

Suhrkamp, February 2021

Jury evaluation:

A life crisis leads Bengt Claasen to a provincial town in north-eastern Germany, where people use rebellious fantasies to defy a reality that is not kind to them. With their imaginations they have transformed their village into Zanzibar, their pond into an ocean, devising enchantingly absurd rituals to give structure to this alternative world. "Zandschower Klinken", which is often as catchy as a piece of music, also exudes freedom in its formal radicalism. Politically charged, it nevertheless eschews discursal heaviness by refusing to let any limits be imposed on its play with reality and language. A bitter family story, enciphered like a fairy-tale, acts as a counterpoint to the retreat into utopia, and yet: this book leaves you breathing more freely.



Biography:

Thomas Kunst, born in Stralsund in 1965, lives and works in Leipzig. He publishes poems and novels as well as audio books, for which he has received numerous awards, including the Meran Poetry Prize 2014. In 2018 he received the Niederösterreich Literaturpreis (Lower Austria literary award) for an excerpt from "Zandschower Klinken" (Zandschow).

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Mithu Sanyal **Identitti**

Carl Hanser, February 2021

Jury evaluation:

"Identitti" is the squaring of a circle: an enormously enjoyable, highly energetic discursual novel that has a lot to teach while also being terrifically entertaining. With a light touch, Sanyal tells the story of the blogger Nivedita, a student at Düsseldorf University, which has been shaken by a scandal: Star professor Saraswati's Indian background is fake! Refusing to condemn, the novel presents various, seemingly irreconcilable positions through dialogue, blog entries and fictitious tweets by real contemporaries. In the process, Sanyal succeeds in rekindling the irrepressible joy of exchanging viewpoints and exercising mental agility – especially in the most muddled debates.



Biography:

Mithu Sanyal, born in Düsseldorf in 1971, is a cultural studies scholar, author, journalist and critic. Her non-fiction books "Vulva. Das unsichtbare Geschlecht" (Vulva. The Invisible Sex) and "Vergewaltigung. Aspekte eines Verbrechens" (Rape. Aspects of a Crime) were published in 2009 and 2016, respectively. "Identitti" is her first novel.

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Antje Rávik Strubel

The Blue Woman

S. Fischer, August 2021

Jury evaluation:

Antje Rávik Strubel tells a disturbing story of a young woman's experience of violence in the Europe of today. Adina comes from a village in the Czech Republic; her path takes her via Berlin to the Uckermark. After being raped by an influential disseminator of European cultural policy, she flees to Helsinki and into internal exile. This is an East-West novel, a Euronovel, a story about the abuse of power that is masterful in its interweaving of plot lines and atmospheric depiction of the Finnish landscape. A figure with mythical characteristics – the blue woman – connects the narrative to the narrator's level, making this novel a novel that is also about writing itself.



Biography:

Antje Rávik Strubel, born in Potsdam in 1974, has published numerous novels. "Kältere Schichten der Luft" (Colder Layers of Air) (2007) was nominated for the Leipzig Book Fair Prize, and "Sturz der Tage in die Nacht" (When Days Plunge into Night) (2011) was longlisted for the German Book Prize. She was the first writer-in-residence at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and received the 2019 Preis der Literaturhäuser (prize of the literature houses). She lives in Potsdam.

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