Albatross Prize 2012 goes to Dave Eggers (USA) and his German translators Ulrike Wasel and Klaus Timmermann for Zeitoun

Award ceremony in City Hall, Bremen, Germany on 13 April 2012

The judges’ decision

The 2012 Albatross Prize will be awarded to author Dave Eggers (USA) and his German translators Ulrike Wasel and Klaus Timmermann for the non-fiction novel Zeitoun (published in German by Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011).

Zeitoun tells the story of five weeks in 2005. The Syrian American Zeitoun, who has established a small company in the US, remains behind in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina devastates the city. In the days following the catastrophe he paddles his canoe about the city’s flooded streets, offering help where it is needed – only to be arrested without charge. The possibility that he is being detained on suspicion of looting is transformed when Zeitoun hears himself referred to by a soldier as “al-Qaeda”.

Zeitoun makes a powerful case for civic conscience and convictions. Zeitoun’s disturbing story, moulded into a dynamic narrative, is told without false pathos or finger-pointing. Dave Eggers’ achievement is to have calmly separated the life of one Syrian American out from the context of post-9/11 hysteria and given it back its quiet, unremarkable, everyday dignity. His book joins the tradition of factually-based novels by Capote and Mailer, and positions Dave Eggers with those writers, from Defoe to Kapuscinski, who have made of reportage a high literary art.

The German translation by Ulrike Wasel and Klaus Timmermann flawlessly communicates the persuasive power of this outstanding work.

About the author

Dave Eggers (born 1970) is celebrated in the US and worldwide as the author of the Pulitzer Prize-shortlisted A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (2000), You Shall Know Our Velocity (2002), How We Are Hungry (2004), What Is the What (2006) and The Wild Things (2009). Founder of the publishing house McSweeney’s and of the American educational non-profit organisation 826 National, he has received many honours, including a Heinz Award, a Ted Prize, and an honorary doctorate from Brown University. He has donated all proceeds from Zeitoun to the Zeitoun...
Foundation, created to support the reconstruction of New Orleans and human rights in the US and worldwide.

About the translators

Ulrike Wasel (born 1955) and Klaus Timmermann (born 1955) have been translating in partnership for twenty years. As well as five by Dave Eggers, the fifty-plus titles they have translated into German include books by Tim Binding, Bill Broady, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jonathan Coe, Michael Crichton, Jodi Picoult, Zadie Smith and Scott Turow.

About the Albatross Prize

The Albatross Prize is an international literary prize awarded biennially by the Günter Grass Foundation in Bremen. The award of 40,000 Euros places it among the most valuable of Germany’s literary prizes.

25,000 Euros are awarded to the author and 15,000 Euros to his German translator(s) of the work honoured by the judges.

In 2006 the Prize was awarded to Lídia Jorge (Portugal) and her translator Karin von Schweder-Schreiner; in 2008 to Bora Ćosić (Serbia) and his translator Katharina Wolf-Grießhaber; and in 2010 to David Grossman (Israel) and his translator Anne Birkenhauer.

The Albatross Prize is awarded, according to the guidelines, “for fiction, poetry or essays by a contemporary writer. The award is made to a writer from anywhere in the world whose work is exceptional for its high literary quality and its cultural and socio-political relevance. The work to be honoured should promote freedom of thought and an unconstrained engagement with every area of our life, world and times. An outstanding translation into German makes such a work accessible to German readers, and for this reason the translation is honoured also.”

The Albatross Prize judges are currently:

Immacolata Amodeo
Freimut Duve
Michael Hulse (UK)
Peter Ripken
Joachim Sartorius
Wilfried Schoeller
Dietrich Simon

Further information
For photographs and further information on the author, please contact Luke Ingram at the Wylie Agency at lingram@wylieagency.co.uk.

For further information on the Albatross Prize and the Günter Grass Foundation, please contact Donate Fink on +49 421 200 4841 or at fink@grass-medienarchiv.de. The Prize guidelines are available in English, German, French, Spanish and Polish.