

## **Herman Wekker Prize 2005: Report of the Jury**

The Professor Herman Wekker Prize is awarded during each biennial *Nationaal Congres Engels* to a journalist from the Netherlands who has given outstanding service to the spread of information about English-speaking countries and cultures among the Dutch public.

The prize is named in honour of the late Herman Wekker, former Professor of English Language at the University of Groningen and one of the founders of this national conference. He had an international vision and recognised the central importance of responsible and exciting journalism in sharing insight and understanding between cultures. Before his early death in 1997 he was very active among English language scholars, teachers and writers in the Netherlands, and conceived the idea of this award.

The winners to date are:

1995: Hans Bouman

1997: Tine van Houts

1999: Charles Groenhuijsen

2001: Peter Sierksma

2003: Max Westerman

But to whom will the prize be given in 2005?

The jury who faced the task of answering this question on your behalf consisted of five members with different perspectives on the teaching of English in the Netherlands. Gilberto Tevreden is a newly qualified teacher working in Zaandam; Aaltje Hollander teaches English at a secondary school in Haren; Frans Janssen galvanises pupils of English in the VMBO sector in Helmond; Frank Weemaes teaches VWO English and co-ordinates Twee-Talig Onderwijs in a school in Weesp; and the chair of the jury, Helen Wilcox, is Professor of English Literature at the University of Groningen.

This jury had lively debates about the award of the 2005 Wekker Prize, largely for the positive reason that there was a strong field of excellent candidates working in a variety of different media, including daily papers, weekly journals and magazines, television, radio and

the internet. While many of these journalists have kept our attention over the past two years on matters which were preoccupying America – such as the war in Iraq and the U.S. presidential elections – the jury was particularly impressed by the work of one journalist who managed to keep readers informed about, even engrossed by, what was going on a bit nearer home, just across the North Sea in Britain ....

This journalist has covered a huge range of topics in his reports from London: political wrangles in Westminster, school uniforms, the right to ramble across the British countryside, the novels of A.S. Byatt, to name just a few. He writes with clarity and elegance, as well as from a position of knowledge, insight and often an ironic affection for things British. Recently he has kept readers fascinated by his series of columns exploring “Engels voor Beginners”, in which he has explained why “eating your tea” can make sense in English, decoded the mysteries of Cockney rhyming slang, and let us into other significant secrets of British culture such as table manners and the art of understatement. These short articles have entertained and enlightened readers and will prove indispensable in the future to teachers, learners, tourists, cultural observers and Anglophiles alike!

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that we propose to award the Herman Wekker Prize for 2005 to the NRC Handelsblad’s London correspondent, **Hans Steketee**.

Helen Wilcox, Groningen, December 2004