

# THE PERFECT



As well as the dawn of a new spring, March also brings the annual Shanghai International Literary Festival to town. This year's effort promises to be better than ever, with world-famous authors from all around the globe gracing our fine city to give us the gift of their words. To get you in the mood for this literary interlude, Talk's Natalee Blagden spoke to four festival-bound authors to find out what they think about life, happiness, their legacy, and how important it is to win awards.

## Anne Enright

2007 Booker Prize-winning Irish author

As well as her acclaimed novel, "The Gathering", Enright has also published essays, short stories, a non-fiction book, and three other novels. She explores difficult themes such as family, love, sex, modern Ireland, and its tumultuous history.



### 1) What place do you call home? What is your earliest memory of "home"?

Now home is just outside Dublin in a seaside town. It's where my husband and child are, so it's home. My earliest memory of "home" is a brown carpet with black bits in it, the carpet I crawled across as a child.

### 2) What inspires you?

I don't believe in inspiration as an artist. I think if you're sitting at your desk, inspiration knows where to find you. I don't think it comes from an outside source, like an angel tapping you on the shoulder. The journey is inward.

### 3) How do you feel about literary awards, in terms of their value and impact?

It's very useful for young writers to get awards. The money I've received has helped me to continue to write... Well of course I like literary awards; I just got one. But if I hadn't I might be much more grumpy about the whole idea.

### 4) What is your happiest memory?

The birth of my children for sure.

### 5) How would you describe your writing style and where it fits into the literary canon?

I'm not a reassuring writer. I lead the reader on a surprising journey, often.

### 6) If I were to walk in on you at work, what would you be wearing, drinking, and where would you be sitting?

I would be drinking coffee, at the desk upstairs or the desk downstairs. I might be wearing many dressing gowns over my clothes, or I might be wearing a big woollen coat.

### 7) If you could have your work promoted somewhere where it is not currently widely read, which country would you choose?

Japan. I read a lot of Oriental literature when I was a teen and much of it was Japanese.

### 8) How would you like to be remembered?

When you're dead, who cares, know what I mean? Being in the public eye... it's such a monster. It'd be nice to have a break from that, actually, from what people think.

### 9) What has been the most challenging step in your journey to where you are today?

Hmm... I quite like a challenge. In fact, one of the problems with success is how it removes challenge.

### 10) What is the best thing about being a writer?

You are your own boss. I can't be managed anymore; I'm too old. I'm too wayward.



## Christopher Koch

Award-winning Australian author

Koch has penned seven novels, and won the Miles Franklin award twice. His book "The Year of Living Dangerously" was adapted into a film starring Mel Gibson, Sigourney Weaver and Linda Hunt.

### 1) What place do you call home? What is your earliest memory of "home"?

Home is the island of Tasmania, where some of my family settled in the 1840s. It's one of the most mountainous islands on earth, and my parents' garden and the hills are among my earliest memories.

### 2) What inspires you?

Whatever has taken my imagination at a particular time. There's no predicting it.

### 3) How do you feel about literary awards, in terms of their value and impact?

They can help sales, but they are a matter of luck, and not to be taken too seriously.

### 4) What is your happiest memory?

Being on my uncle's hop farm as a boy, in southern Tasmania.

### 5) How would you describe your writing style and where it fits into the literary canon?

I have no time for the categories invented by critics.

### 6) If I were to walk in on you at work, what would be wearing, drinking, and

### where would you be sitting?

Sitting at my desk overlooking the valley and the river here. I drink tea while I work.

### 7) If you could have your work promoted somewhere where it is not currently widely read, which country would you choose?

Russia. I have a great admiration for Russian genius, and the Russian novelists of the 19th century.

### 8) How would you like to be remembered?

I would like to be remembered as a writer who was true to his personal vision, and as a man who was loyal to his friends.

### 9) What has been the most challenging step in your journey to where you are today?

At the age of 40, I quit a well-paid job in broadcasting in order to write full-time. It was a risk, as I had no guarantee of succeeding, and had a family to support. Fortunately, it paid off.

### 10) What is the best thing about being a writer?

You don't have to retire.



## Lijia Zhang

Chinese journalist and author

Originally from Nanjing, Lijia Zhang was pulled from school to work at a rocket factory as a teenager. While at the factory, she taught herself English and later went to England and studied journalism. Lijia Zhang co-authored "China Remembers" and recently released her memoir, "Socialism is Great".

### 1) What place do you call home? What is your earliest memory of "home"?

For the moment, my rather girly flat in Beijing's Sanlitun area is what I call home. The earliest memory of my home was a 'match-box' sized flat, which compromised one main room and one side room. The walls of peeling yellow paint were bare but for a factory calendar and two school certificates of merit that my sister and I earned each year without fail.

### 2) What inspires you?

What inspires me to write: writing is always my way to make sense of my life. Since I was young, I developed the habit of keeping a journal.

### 3) How do you feel about literary awards, in terms of their value and impact?

Literary awards, like publishing itself, depend on too many random factors. I don't value them highly.

### 4) What is your happiest memory?

My happiest memory was the time when I first went to Oxford to be with the man I was madly in love with, and when I was pregnant with both of my children. I was very sick. But... I felt that I ought to suffer in order to justify the enormous happiness I had.

### 5) How would you describe your writing style and where it fits into the literary canon?

My writing style – simply, lyrical and fresh – I am unable to use complicated or big words because I write in my second language. I

structure my sentences and use words slightly differently, sometimes without even realizing.

### 6) If I were to walk in on you at work, what would you be wearing, drinking, and where would you be sitting?

I work from home most of the time, drinking green or herbal tea, wearing comfortable clothes. But whenever I step out of my door, I always dress up stylishly. I boast a very large wardrobe filled with exotic clothes collected from around the world.

### 7) If you could have your work promoted somewhere where it is not currently widely read, which country would you choose?

America. Compared to other nations, Americans seem to appreciate books about self-improvement, breaking the boundaries and chasing dreams.

### 8) How would you like to be remembered?

A determined fighter.

### 9) What has been the most challenging step in your journey to where you are today?

Completing my memoir... It took many drafts and many years... Book-writing demands you to invest every bit of your being, your mind and your soul.

### 10) What is the best thing about being a writer?

We are allowed to daydream.

Shanghai International Literary Festival. Full schedule available at [www.m-restaurantgroup.com](http://www.m-restaurantgroup.com). Tickets available from [www.mypiao.com](http://www.mypiao.com)

## Colin Thubron

British novelist and travel writer

Colin Thubron is known as one of the last "gentleman travellers". Over his long and illustrious career he has won numerous awards and honours. His latest travel book, "Shadows of the Silk Road", retells his own 7,000-mile journey along the Silk Road route.



**1) What place do you call home? What is your earliest memory of "home"?**

Since leaving (and selling) my childhood home in south-east England, there is nowhere I call home. My earliest memory of it is of a garden. I still feel was brought up in a garden.

**2) What inspires you?**

Otherness.

**3) How do you feel about literary awards, in terms of their value and impact?**

They are sure to be controversial – and probably unfair – but I think they have value: of encouragement, especially to young writers, and perhaps of comfort to the old ones!

**4) What is your happiest memory?**

That's private!

**5) How would you describe your writing style and where it fits into the literary canon?**

Every writer likes to think himself unique. But in fact my books fall into the classic tradition of British travel writing. I only hope they mark a development toward something humane.

**6) If I were to walk in on you at work, what would be wearing, drinking, and**

**where would you be sitting?**

I'd be hunched over an enormous table in a farmhouse in the mountains of Wales – no television, no radio, not even a telephone. I'd be wearing old clothes – probably thick against the cold – and drinking water.

**7) If you could have your work promoted somewhere where it is not currently widely read, which country would you choose?**

China. Not just for the size of its readership, but for the importance of touching on such a different culture.

**8) How would you like to be remembered?**

As someone who has extended human understanding.

**9) What has been the most challenging step in your journey to where you are today?**

The move toward writing novels as well as travel books. It requires a very different discipline and talent.

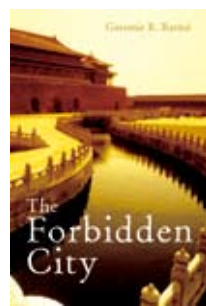
**10) What is the best thing about being a writer?**

Freedom.

## Literary Launches

### Lynn Pan *Shanghai Style: Art & Design Between the Wars*

Hailed as the first in-depth look, in any language, of interwar art and design, this work examines the elements of iconic Shanghai style, and introduces readers to the personalities behind the visual experimentation. Pan showcases key figures in local art, architecture, and interior design from the early 20th century, and incorporates the historical roots of Shanghai style, for a more comprehensive historical review.



### Geremie Barmé *Forbidden City*

Geremie Barmé walks readers through the famous vermilion halls of Zijin Cheng - the Forbidden City at the heart of Beijing – illuminating both the history of its buildings and the intrigues of its inhabitants. The hub of the Celestial Empire for five centuries, with its lacquered chambers, their visitors and the events within, it has long fascinated the world. Barmé addresses some of the more titillating tales, like the rumours that eunuchs and concubines would be delivered to the emperor in nothing but a roll of silk. He

also brings rich cultural and historical detail gathered through his own research, undertaken as a Professor of Pacific & Asian History at the Australian National University in Canberra.

### Howard Goldblatt *Wolf Totem*

The much-anticipated translation of Jiang Rong's award-winning book is almost ready for eager English readers. The Chinese original sold over 2 million copies, topped China's bestseller charts for over a year, and earned first-time author, Rong, the inaugural Man Asian Literary Prize. Rong says he spent 30 years thinking and six years writing "Wolf Totem", a semi-autobiographical narrative about living among the grassland nomads of Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution. The delicate balance between humans and wolves and the fictional protagonist's idyllic solitary life are interrupted by the influx of city-dwellers whose ideas of modernity and productivity result in environmental destruction. The book is praised as a celebratory record of a disappearing culture and a spotlight on the complex relationships between people and nature.



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