



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“All of us on the jury recognize that this is a book of another order, covering the widest range of human potential for good, evil and redemption. It reiterates, as only once in a while a book does, the true purpose of literature.”

-Judges' citation, about the 2004 winner of the IMPAC literary award,; *This Blinding Absence of Light* by Tahar Ben Jelloun

It's summer, even in the Bay Area, where sometimes the only difference between seasons is the length of the gray days. The children's summer reading games are booming and some libraries are even sponsoring adult ones - which seems like a great idea.

For many of us, summer is the time for even more reading, and one question that frequently comes up is: What should I read next? Choosing a book from rows of shelves can sometimes feel intimidating, so frequently our library users arrive with a list in hand, torn from a newspaper's recommended reading or from the *New York Times* bestseller list. Others look through the upcoming titles in *Publisher's Weekly* and put together a list of books to request. And some browse the classics or the new books or their favorite genre, like mysteries or science fiction or biography.

But another way to choose a book this summer

might be to work your way through the winners of the annual IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. I recently read an article about this award and it made me want to know more about it. So, I did a little online research.

Officially called "The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award," it was established in 1994 from an initiative instigated by the then Lord Mayor of Dublin, Ireland, Alderman Gay Mitchell. The goal was to "establish a prize for literature which would attract national and international interest" (from the IMPAC award website). More than one hundred public libraries, all over the world, nominate books, based on "high literary merit," and an international panel of judges selects the winner. The prize is €100,000, paid to the author if the book is written in English, or, if the book is translated, €75,000 to the author and €25,000 to the translator.

The nominated books have to be written in English or translated into English (which was the case for this year’s winner) and published within specific timelines.

The sponsors include the municipal government of Dublin, the private company IMPAC (Improved Management Productivity and Control), and Waterford Crystal, who sponsors the Award trophy.

When I looked at the 2004 list of participating libraries, I was impressed by its scope. Besides our local San Francisco Public Library, the 100 public libraries include ones from South Wales, Australia, Denmark, Mexico, Canada and Kenya.

I also noticed that libraries in Germany, Hungary, Iceland and the United States nominated *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, a book I read recently. I love the idea that people around the world are

reading the same books – it reminds of how we can be brought together by ideas and literature. That book didn’t make it to the short list, but nine titles did, including *Any Human Heart* by William Boyd, *The Book of Illusions* by Paul Auster and *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros.

And, in case the idea of reading past winners appeals to you, here they are: *My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk (2003); *The Elementary Particles* by Michel Houellebecq; and *No Great Mischief* by Alastair MacLeod (2002); *Wide Open* by Nicola Barker (2000); *Ingenious Pain* by Andrew Miller (1999); *The Land of Green Plums* by Herta Muller (1998); *A Heart So White* by Javier Marias (1997); and *Remembering Babylon* by David Malouf (1996).