



# MASSBOOKS OF THE YEAR/FICTION

*Recommended Reading from the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Massachusetts Book Awards*

## The Award Books

*The Air We Breathe* by Andrea Barrett (W.W. Norton & Company). The novel is set in the time just before the United States' entry into World War I at a community in the Adirondacks for men and women with tuberculosis. Prisoners of routine, the patients take solace in gossip and rumor.

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz (Riverhead Books). This work is at once a history of the Dominican Republic in modern times, a close study of immigrants in United States, migrants returning to a homeland, and those who never leave the Dominican Republic.

*Like You'd Understand, Anyway* by Jim Shepard (Alfred A. Knopf). A masterful writer of short stories, Jim Shepard moves, story by story, across time and place: Australia, Kazakhstan, Texas, northern Britain in Roman times, the contemporary, the 18th century, and more.

## Highly Recommended

*An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England* by Brock Clarke (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill). As a teenager, Sam Pulsifer accidentally burns down the Emily Dickinson House, killing two people and sending him to prison. After serving his time, he leads a normal life until other New England writers' historic homes go up in flames, making him the prime suspect and sending him on a journey to clear his name.

*A Free Life* by Ha Jin (Pantheon Books). Nan Wu and his family leave China for the U.S. in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre so that Nan can pursue a graduate education. However when Nan's disillusionment with the trouble back home causes him to abandon his studies to write poetry, he finds that cutting ties with China and supporting a family in America are not easily done.

*The Strangler* by William Landay (Delacorte Press/Random House). In this mystery set in Boston during the time of the Boston Strangler, an Irish-American family made up of cops, lawyers, and criminals becomes entangled in the crimes and investigation of Boston's most infamous serial killer.

*Ghost* by Alan Lightman (Pantheon Books). When David sees something scientifically unexplainable at his job in a mortuary, it changes his personal relationships and lands him in the middle of a public debate over the supernatural, pitting science against religion and skepticism against belief.

*Charity Girl* by Michael Lowenthal (Houghton Mifflin). In World War I-era Boston young Frieda Mintz leaves home in search of independence but ends up being quarantined, held prisoner with other young women as part of a little known government program to stop venereal disease.

*Letter from Point Clear* by Dennis McFarland (Henry Holt). The two Owen brothers leave their home in Alabama to experience life in the northeast and come to find out their little sister has married an evangelical preacher and taken over the family homestead. When the Owens return home to save their sister, they are caught up in her husband's fight to save the souls of homosexuals, including one of the brothers.

*The Abstinence Teacher* by Tom Perrotta (St. Martin's Press). Religion and education collide when a picturesque town's high school sexuality teacher and its born-again Christian soccer coach are pitted against each other in a war between sex and religion.

*Judges for the 8<sup>th</sup> MassBooks in Fiction: Katherine Dibble (Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners & Women's National Book Association/Boston), Barry O'Connell (Department of English, Amherst College), & Meg Richardson (The Book Rack, Newburyport).*

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