




DUBLIN

a literary heritage

A tribute to Ireland's writers is transformed into the largest international literary award in history

*By Turlough
McConnell*

Dublin is a city of words. More precisely, it is a city of wordsmiths, of men and women whose work uplifts everyday reality in a variety of literary forms. Everyone in Dublin, or so it seems, has a story to tell — and so it has been for centuries. Storytelling is a way of life in Dublin, and flourishes among the city's famous as well as its ordinary citizens. It links this youthful, contemporary capital city with one of the most ancient cultures in Europe.

Indeed, Dublin today is a fascinating paradox. With half its population under the age of 25, the city on the River Liffey is quickly becoming a mecca for creative young Europeans. Yet, as one walks amid the Geor-

gian architecture, through the flower-filled parks, one finds constant reminders of Dublin's rich literary past: many plaques commemorating the setting of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the statue of William Butler Yeats in Stephen's Green, or eclectic tributes, such as the memorial bench to poet Patrick Kavanagh by the banks of the Grand Canal. Their words are echoed by the next generation of Dublin's writers who took comfort from them and challenged their dominance.

Today, with decades of troubles in Northern Ireland finally coming to an end, Dublin stands ready to reclaim its place as one of Europe's leading cultural centers. It is

fitting, then, that this city, which has always celebrated writers, has joined with the international corporation IMPAC to offer *The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award*. For the first time in 1996, this prize of IR£100,000 will be awarded to the author of an important work of fiction written and published in the English language.

By recognizing the great storytellers of today, this international award honors Dublin's proud tradition while demonstrating to all the world that Ireland's ancient literary heritage is alive, alive 'o.

It was the Irish charm with the spoken word that James B. Irwin, founder and chief executive officer of IMPAC, cites as his inspiration for funding *The International IMPAC*

worldwide honor the power and music of the word. Only the Irish Republic could have chosen a folklorist, Dr. Douglas Hyde, as its first president. But then, what else could be expected of a country whose national symbol is the harp, signifying the bard as true inspiration for national policy? In no other land is the word laden with so much cultural wealth. Even the current president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, herself a champion of literary Ireland, is more apt to call on the poets of the country than the politicians to shape her vision of leadership. "In Ireland," says writer Tim Pat Coogan, "one is by definition far better off offending a bank manager than a poet! One may merely put paid to your reputation — the other can see to it that



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1. William Butler Yeats
2. Edna O'Brien
3. Samuel Beckett
4. Brian Friel
5. Maeve Binchy
6. William Trevor
7. George Bernard Shaw
8. James Joyce

Dublin Literary Award. Irwin tells of overhearing a lady asking a man walking a work-horse down a Dublin street if he could tell her the time. "I could," said the gent, "but who would mind the horse?"

The Award came into being thanks to the Dublin Municipal Government, acting in partnership with IMPAC. It is the brainchild of Gay Mitchell, T.D. when he was Lord Mayor of Dublin. Mitchell is now Ireland's Minister of State for the International Financial Services Centre.

The Irish are renowned for their gifts as storytellers, and people of Irish descent



it lives far too long!"

The Irish literary achievement has catapulted Dublin to international prominence. Along with New York, London and Paris, it has spawned scores of writers, and become one of the most featured settings in fiction written over the last two centuries. The tradition of Irish literary excellence has been a force since the seventeenth century, and Dublin has been the center of its creativity.

The golden age of literature in the early twentieth century produced some of the world's artistic masterpieces, and a look around the shelves of any bookstore or public

library will reveal the number of Irish writers still practicing their craft today. Why Ireland? What is it about this small, sea-bound country that has produced such a disproportionate number of the world's great writers in English?

Perhaps it is the language itself, the melodic, lyrical way of expression that is unique to the Irish. These qualities of speaking are in fact preserved artifacts of the native Irish language that was married to English. Barely one percent of the Irish population today has a good knowledge of the ancient tongue. Though subsumed by English, the



who wrought the most startling transformation.

Though he lived for many years on the European continent, Joyce's writing universalized the Irish experience. He once claimed that if the city of Dublin was ever destroyed, it could be re-created from the pages of his fiction. Indeed, the entire action

of his great novel *Ulysses* takes place in the streets of Dublin in the span of a single day. Similarly his protégé Samuel Beckett used the idiomatic speech of Dublin in many of his memorable works, and later writers, such as Edna O'Brien, use Ireland's supple tongue to



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Irish language lives on at the subtle level of expression, creating the nuance and the color that are the chief characteristics of Irish speech patterns.

In the late 1800s, the forced marriage between Irish and English had, after a century of calamity, produced a soft-spoken, lyrical kind of English that seemed almost ready-made for literature. Around the turn of the century came the great resurgence of Irish writing led by the poet, William Butler Yeats, the playwrights John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey, and the novelist James Joyce. It was probably Yeats who first drew upon the extraordinary possibilities of Irish folklore traditions. But it was James Joyce

spin tales redolent of the sensuality and rhythms of local life in the countryside.

"A nation," wrote Anatole France, "is a communion of memories and hopes." In Ireland, as perhaps in no other nation, that communion is nurtured and housed in its literature. Indeed the social fabric of Irish life is mingled with the spirit and the emotion of its poets, playwrights and novelists. Politics and civil strife form the background and sometimes the subject of many novels — in the





Dublin City recently granted IMPAC the first charter in over 260 years to mark the recent inauguration of The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award

twentieth century, the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence are the salient political events reflected in much fiction such as the work of Liam O'Flaherty.

Irish fiction is particularly strong on observation and portrayal of social class. The Anglo-Irish were featured largely in the nineteenth-century satire of Oscar Wilde, while Dublin's poor are graphically depicted in their extreme wretchedness. Writers such as James Stephens and James Plunkett register in a wide variety of styles, their indignation and despair at the horror and degradation endured by Dublin's poor. The new generation in Dublin is described in the work of contemporary novelists such as Joseph O'Connor and Roddy Doyle.

Dublin's institutes of higher learning feature to a great extent in Irish fiction, especially Trinity College, where most Anglo-Irish

writers were educated. Samuel Beckett, and J.P. Donleavy have led colorful characters through their student days at Trinity. Life at University College, Dublin, is also aptly depicted by James Joyce, Flann O'Brien and Maeve Binchy.

It is fiction of high merit such as this that the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award intends to recognize. The prize of



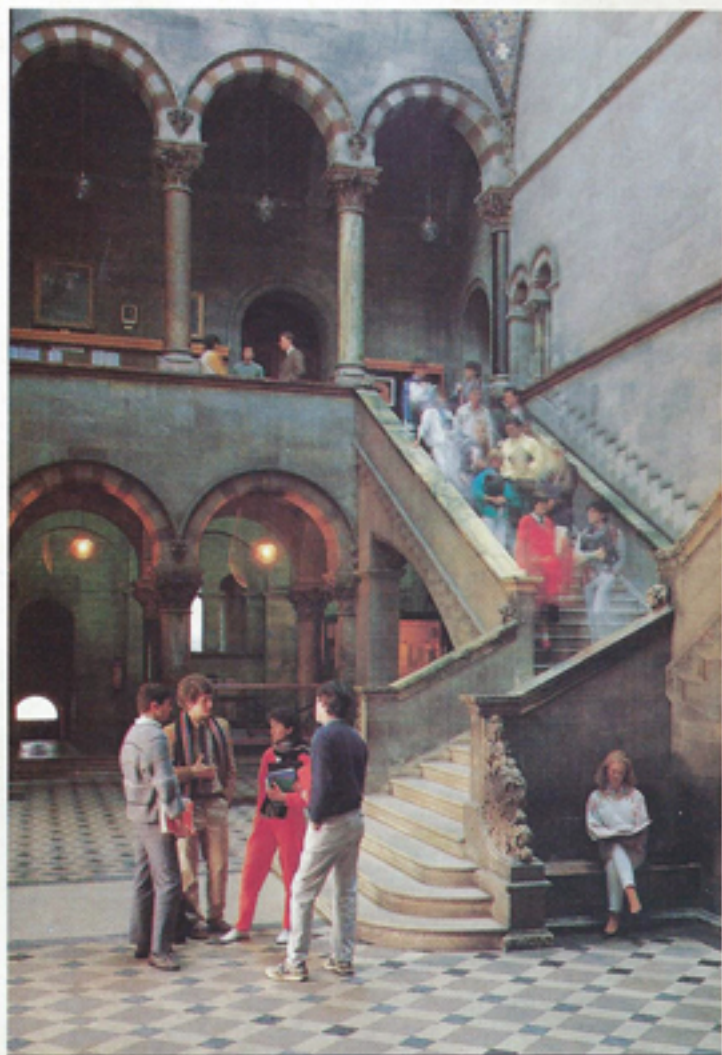
IR£100,000 will be awarded each year, beginning in 1996, to the author of a work of fiction written and published in English, or written in a language other than English and published in an English translation. The award will be international in scope, with a panel of world-renowned authors serving as judges. The judges will select the winning book from a preliminary selection of books nominated by the great libraries of the world, the Municipal Public Library System of capital cities worldwide, or a library system recognized by the Board of Management.

When asked, "why a work in English?" Irwin replied, "Today English is spoken by a billion people around the world, of whom more than 350 million — nearly one tenth of the world's population — use it as their mother tongue."

For IMPAC, the award is one step to its

anticipated "long and satisfying partnership with Dublin as an international base for IMPAC," in the words of CEO Irwin, whose company's European headquarters are located in Dublin. It is the world's largest productivity enhancement company, with over 300 projects being managed annually in more than 50 countries, including the emerging states of the former Eastern bloc. IMPAC, says Irwin, is doing what it can "to enhance the prestige and unique qualities of the capital city of the Republic of Ireland." For the whole island of Ireland, North and South, as the peace process takes hold, the time is ripe to reassert itself as the first-class cultural center that it has historically been. IMPAC is bringing Ireland's literary heritage to an international audience, and in the process, underscoring the importance of supporting new works of fiction worldwide.





Some Dublin Writers

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) Satirist and novelist. Author of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) Poet and novelist. Author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Bram Stoker (1847-1912) Novelist. Author of *Dracula*.

George Moore (1852-1933) Novelist and diarist.

Oscar Wilde (1854 -1900) Dramatist and poet. Author of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Salome* and *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Dramatist and Essayist. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

William Butler Yeats (1864-1939) Poet and Dramatist. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

John Millington Synge (1871-1909) Dramatist. Author of *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Sean O'Casey (1880-1964) Dramatist. Author of *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and The Stars*.

James Joyce (1882-1941) Novelist. Major innovator in narrative technique. Author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) Dramatist and novelist. Author of *Waiting for Godot*. Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

Brendan Behan (1923-1964) Dramatist and personality. His autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy* and *An Giall*, a play in Irish, are considered his best works.



The Long Room, Trinity College, Dublin, one of the world's great libraries and home of the treasured manuscript, The Book of Kells





James B. Irwin, Sr.
*Chairman of the Board, IMPAC**

Jim Irwin was born and grew up in the Sacred Heart parish of the Bronx, New York to a second generation Irish American family that had emigrated to America from Bundoran, Co. Donegal, in the early part of this century. His father Harry M. Irwin was a Battalion Chief in the New York Fire Fighting Service, and later headed the Fire College on Long Island.

Educated at Fordham University and Hunter College while also working during the day in the banking profession, he turned to corporate management and productivity at Texaco, where he rose to the top as a systems strategist and troubleshooter.

Jim Irwin purchased IMPAC in 1972, when it had six employees. Today the company has a worldwide staff of 1,500 working on over 300 projects annually.

Jim is married with three children and travels with his wife Linda Scott Irwin more than 40 weeks of the year to IMPAC offices throughout the world. Their itinerary includes regular visits to Ireland, as Irwin is deeply attached to his Irish heritage. He is a member of Irish America Magazines' *Business 100*. In 1993 with a donation of \$160,000, in conjunction with IMPAC, Irwin sponsored the Lord Mayor of Dublin's Olympic Feasibility Study.

The Irwin's make their home in Litchfield, Connecticut and Punta Gorda, Florida.



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For more information on the International IMPAC® Dublin Literary Award, call IMPAC Dublin +353-1-679-7033.

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