

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

International Books of the Year 2008

A selection from this year's choices, ranging from Barack Obama's memoir to photosynthesis, from Doris Lessing, Junot Diaz and the Archbishop of Canterbury, to name a few ...

DORIS LESSING

Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (Yale). As a boy Alberto Manguel used to read to blind Borges at a time when Buenos Aires was a nest of poets and storytellers and love of literature. He dreamt of becoming a librarian, and in his mind were the great exemplary libraries of Alexandria, Pergamon and Carnegie, whose librarians got so many letters of thanks from writers and scholars. There were long years before he achieved his own library. In the fifteenth century a barn, at other times a temple to Dionysus, a Christian Church. The library had different characters at night and in the day. In the dark were the glittering books. One book calls to another, unexpectedly creating alliances across different cultures and centuries. Manguel muses over the possibilities of classification using Chinese and Arabic thought, but for me the image that stayed is of a hand reaching out to a book but being deflected, attracted by remembering the weight and balance of it and perhaps, “If time flows endlessly, as the mysterious connection between my books suggests, repeating its themes and discoveries through the centuries, then every misdeed, even treason, every evil act will eventually find its true consequences. After the story has stopped just beyond the story of my library, Carthage will rise again from the strewn Roman salt. Don Juan will confront the anguish of Dona Elvira. Brutus will look again on Caesar’s ghost, and every torturer will have to beg his victims’ pardon in order to complete time’s inevitable circle”. This is a book full of pleasurable memories – full of happiness.