

BOOKS OF THE YEAR 2023



By Mayo County Library Staff

We're delighted, as always, to share our Books of the Year with you all. If you haven't already enjoyed them, you might fancy adding one or two to your presents list this Christmas – whether it's to treat someone else or just being good to yourself! It's been yet another busy year here at Mayo County Library, and we've loved having you all in our libraries. As always, all the books mentioned are available from Mayo Library Service – feel free to request online or in your nearest branch. And don't forget about our eBooks and audiobooks on BorrowBox – available free with your library card!

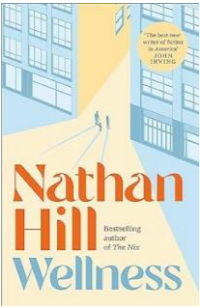
We'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a very Happy Christmas and every good wish for the New Year!



WELLNESS

By Nathan Hill

This is one of those gorgeous books that you're nearly disappointed to finish, while simultaneously racing to the end to find out what happens. It follows Jack and Elizabeth, from their meeting in 1990s Chicago as students, through their early married life and parenthood. It is, at heart, a completely immersive story about a couple and the different worlds they have lived in through their lives, both separately and together.



LAZY CITY

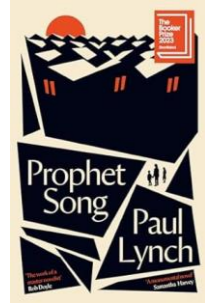
By Rachel Connolly

We meet Erin, who left London in a hurry after the sudden death of her best friend. She went back home to her mother for a while, but that ended badly. Erin knows she should resume her studies, but she's been so paralyzed by grief that she is stuck in position, incapable of moving on. Connolly's writing is sublime.

PROPHET SONG

By Paul Lynch

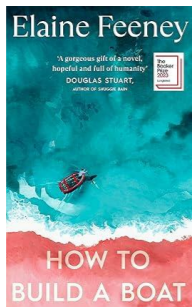
Ireland is falling apart at the seams and a new secret police force is arresting and 'disappearing' people on the flimsiest of grounds. Eilish Stack, a mother of four, is convinced that her husband, a trade unionist, will be back with the family very soon. But, as it turns out, the unravelling of all that we accept as the basis of our civilized society takes no time at all. There were four excellent books by Irish authors on the Booker Prize longlist this year – and Prophet Song, our favourite, went on to win!



THE COVENANT OF WATER

By Abraham Verghese

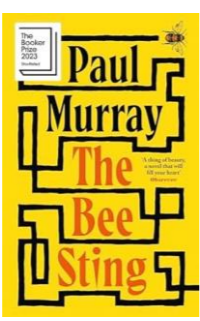
From time to time when Castlebar Library Book Club meets, we reminisce about some of the truly great reads we've enjoyed over the many years (see library website for lists going back to 2005) and one of the ones almost always mentioned is Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese. That was published in 2009 and we've waited a long, long time for another novel from Verghese. At a whopping 700+ pages, we're delighted to say The Covenant of Water is well worth the wait.



HOW TO BUILD A BOAT

By Elaine Feeney

As a reader, you can't help but root for Jamie O'Neill, the young protagonist at the heart of this lovely book by Elaine Feeney. He's just started at a new school and his dad is, understandably, worried about how he will adjust. Thanks to teachers Tess and Tadhg, he has a much softer landing than anyone could have reasonably anticipated. This one engendered quite the engaging discussion at Castlebar Library Book Club a few months ago – with a fair amount of dissension in the room. But this is our list – and it's made it on!



THE BEE STING

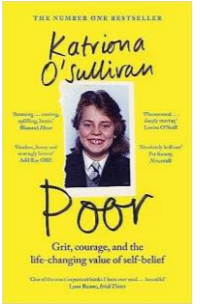
By Paul Murray

Many people seem to think that this one should have won the Booker Prize but them's the breaks. A sad story, shot through with humour, about Dickie Barnes – his business troubles, his failing marriage and his imploding family. Where did it all go wrong? Well, that's exactly what the author sets about revealing.

POOR: GRIT, COURAGE AND THE LIFE-CHANGING VALUE OF SELF-BELIEF

By Katriona O'Sullivan

It's very hard to look at the smiling young schoolgirl on the cover of Katriona O'Sullivan's memoir and then read the litany of horrors contained within. Not that Poor is the kind of book to drag you down. On the contrary, O'Sullivan's good humour and determination is hugely enjoyable. A compelling account from a writer, educator and activist who made a huge impression at both the Wild Atlantic Words Literary Festival in Castlebar in October and the Rolling Sun Book Festival in Westport in November.



THE ISLAND OF LONGING

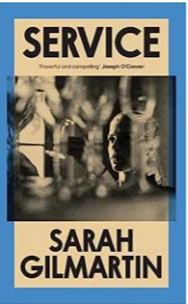
By Anne Griffin

You can't help but feel for Rosie Dunne, the grieving mother at the heart of Anne Griffin's very enjoyable novel. Eight years previously, Rosie's teenage daughter Saoirse disappeared without a trace. Rosie is convinced she is still alive, but the rest of the family doesn't share this optimism and it's led to fractured and damaged relationships.

SERVICE

By Sarah Gilmartin

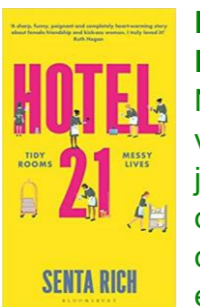
Service is a fascinating look at the restaurant industry, and specifically sexism and sexual assault in the restaurant industry, and such is the power of Gilmartin's writing that at times you feel like you are right there on the restaurant floor, dealing with decidedly lecherous customers and unsympathetic managers. The story unfolds from different perspectives and as readers, we instinctively take our sides in the he said/she said back and forth. It's a very compelling read, but quite uncomfortable at times.



HOTEL 21

By Senta Rich

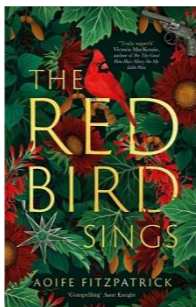
Noelle is a hotel cleaner and she's very good at what she does. But she just can't help helping herself to the odd thing lying around the rooms she cleans. Nothing terribly important or expensive – she has morals – but maybe a nail scissors, or a lipstick. Usually, by the time the guest has noticed, she has already left the job. She keeps detailed records of her haul, and never stays in the same place for too long. A very enjoyable and entertaining read.



THE RED BIRD SINGS

By Aoife Fitzpatrick

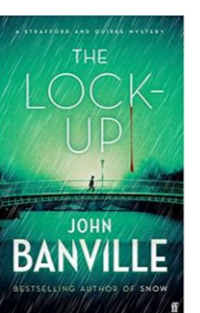
Based on a real-life murder trial in 1897 West Virginia, this is a glorious tour de force – a gorgeous and moving tribute to the power of the dead woman, her steadfast friend and her bereft mother. Zona Shue hasn't been married long when she is found dead at the bottom of the stairs in her house. When her new husband Trout eventually does stand trial for the murder, most of the locals are firmly on his side.



CHORUS

By Rebecca Kauffman

Chorus kicks off in 1929 on a small farmhouse in rural Virginia, where we meet the Shaw family – parents Jim and Marie and their seven children. The book jumps backwards and forwards in time, with 1903 the earliest setting and 1953 the latest. Through this half-century we get to know the Shaw family very well and their story, although simple, is compelling. The fact that each chapter of the book could also stand alone as a perfect short story is quite the achievement.



THE LOCK-UP

By John Banville

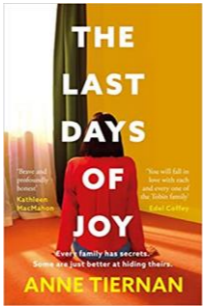
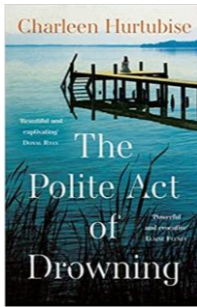
Certain books just have a way of transporting you to a different time and place, and author John Banville neatly pulls off this time travel trick in his latest crime novel, The Lock-Up. The book starts with a post-war Alpine encounter, and when the action swiftly moves to 1950s Dublin and the discovery of a young woman's body in a car lock-up

in the inner city. A must-read for fans of crime fiction and Irish literary fiction alike.

THE POLITE ACT OF DROWNING

By Charleen Hurlubise

Teenager Joanne Kennedy often seems considerably younger than her years, and she unfortunately leaves herself wide open to unkindness, to find a friend who will understand her. When she witnesses a drowning in the local lake, she doesn't appreciate how the tragedy will create ripples in her own family. The sticky heat of that pivotal summer, the beautifully drawn awkwardness of teenage longing, and the underlying hurt and betrayal all combine to fashion a story that grabs hold from the very beginning.



THE LAST DAYS OF JOY

By Anne Tiernan

The Tobins, while mostly outwardly successful, are hiding deep hurt. The book starts with their mother's attempt to end her life, which doesn't go quite as planned, leaving her in a coma. As the siblings gather around her hospital bed, they reflect on all the ways she messed them up. At the warm heart of the book are three damaged children, who just happen to be adults now.



STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND

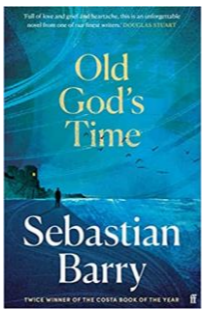
By Liz Nugent

Liz Nugent, the queen of the killer opening sentence, is back with a vengeance in this newest novel – a brilliantly compelling read from start to finish. "‘Put me out with the bins,’ he said regularly. ‘When I die, put me out with the bins. I’ll be dead, so I won’t know any different.’” And Sally Diamond, a stickler for rules and procedures, and taking things completely at face value, did exactly what her father said after he died at home at the age of 82.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

By Joseph O'Connor

Joseph O'Connor's new novel is a celebration of all the immense good perpetuated by Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty during his time in Vatican City. Loosely based on the incredible and impressive true story, the novel is centred around O'Flaherty's involvement in helping those who have escaped from the Nazis to find a safe passage out. If you hadn't been aware of the story before now, this beautifully written novel is an educational eye-opener.



OLD GOD'S TIME

By Sebastian Barry

Tom Kettle hasn't been that long retired from An Garda Síochána, but in many ways he comes across as a man much older than his years. Whether it's the losses he has suffered or the horrors he has seen in his career that weigh so heavily on him, we're never sure. It's a disturbing read: Barry doesn't mince words with his graphic and upsetting account of clerical child abuse. But it's a book that is worthy of a second reading, or more even.

QUEEN BEE

By Ciara Geraghty

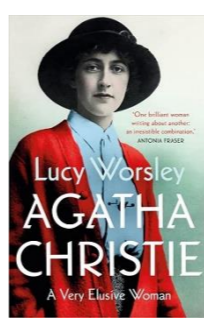
Overnight, author Agatha Doyle becomes the poster girl for menopause which she really didn't intend or want to happen. But her publishers and her agent are delighted, and she agrees to some of the media requests, partly to deflect attention from the fact that she's stalled on her newest book. A whirlwind of a read – a bit like Agatha herself!



WE ALL WANT IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

By Catherine Newman

Edi and Ash have been best friends for most of their lives. Now Edi is dying and Ash offers to be her person – the one who will spend the most time with her in the hospice, the one who will stick around even when the going gets tough. Their friendship is beautifully drawn in this touching exploration of death and its effect on those who are closest.



AGATHA CHRISTIE: A VERY ELUSIVE WOMAN

By Lucy Worsley

The cover alone, a beautifully coloured image of a young Agatha Christie, would induce anyone to pick up this fascinating biography of one of the best-known writers of our time. And they'd be in for a right

treat, with this eminently readable – and fascinating – look at her life and her work. Worsley is clearly a fan, as much a fan of Christie's have-a-go nature as her sizeable stable of works. A great read about a great writer.



DEMON COPPERHEAD

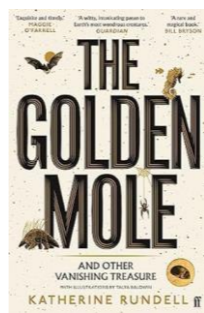
By Barbara Kingsolver

Barbara Kingsolver introduces the reader to young Damon Fields, an utterly gorgeous character. Born into poverty, with an addicted mother, a dead father, a disinterested grandmother, and a few stints in foster care thrown into the mix, Damon should not be as happy as he turns out to be. But despite all the misery and hardship, young Demon, as he is soon known, is a lad with a gift for seeing the best in situations, and an inner core made of steel.

BLUE SKIES

By T.C. Boyle

In Boyle's fictional world, the climate change crisis is further along, and there are cautionary incidences of disappearing insects, dying bees, and children going to school by boat in flooded Florida. Boyle's characters are so well-rounded you get fully invested in them very quickly, which then of course allows the worry to filter through as their world starts to implode. It's a cautionary tale, shot through with Boyle's trademark humour, even as the world (both real and imagined) burns.



THE GOLDEN MOLE

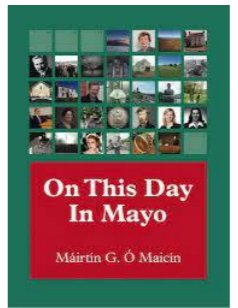
By Katherine Rundell

There are sharks alive today that were living in Shakespeare's time! This magical book takes us on a globe-spanning tour of the world's strangest and most awe-inspiring animals, from wombats and lemurs to bats and seahorses. It shows us that the world is more astonishing, more miraculous and more wonderful than our wildest imaginings. A must for all nature lovers

ON THIS DAY IN MAYO

By Máirtín G. Ó Maicín

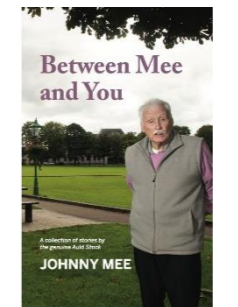
Stretching from the 12th century to 2023, this beautiful volume tells the story of Mayo by connecting each of the 365 days of the year with an event relating to the county. Events range from the landing of the French in Killala, the apparition at Knock to the ongoing compelling drama of our football team.



BETWEEN MEE AND YOU

By Johnny Mee

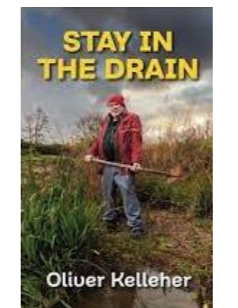
A treasure trove of memories of the Castlebar and Mayo of yesteryear by one of the county's best loved personalities. Johnny recalls the people, places and events that have touched his (and our) lives from his childhood in the 1930s to the present. A wonderful trip down memory lane for all Mayo people



STAY IN THE DRAIN

By Oliver Kelleher

The story of a fascinating life from another of the great Mayo characters (who just happens to be from Leitrim). Written in his quintessential gregarious style, this is a book that will have you laughing out loud as Oliver casts his eye over the ups and down of his life, the people he met and the changes he has seen in Irish society.



IN ALL KINDS OF WEATHER

By Henry Willis

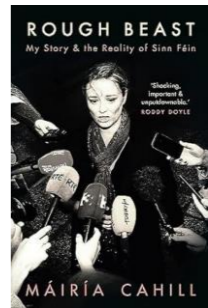
A magical collection of award-winning Henry's photos taken over 40 years that capture life in Mayo in all its guises. With his rare eye, his unique skill, but also with a sense of fun, Henry captured all the major (and many minor) moments of our lives. A beautiful book that is a homage to a pre-digital age.

MEDIAVAL MAYO - CHURCHES AND ABBEY

By Peter Harbison

Mayo has a wonderful collection of religious monuments dotted throughout the county. A

selection of these buildings created during the thousand years from 600 to 1600 AD are presented in this beautifully illustrated publication. A fascinating and engaging volume that brings the reader on a journey of discovery through a millennium of religious tradition and pilgrimage activity in Mayo.



ROUGH BEAST

By Máiría Cahill

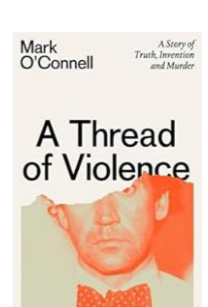
For the first time Máiría Cahill tells the harrowing story of her life and of the trauma she went through following sexual abuse by a prominent Belfast IRA man at the age of 16. Told with unsparring honesty, it is a story of unimaginable anguish and political corruption which brings to life a world of paramilitary secrecy that hopefully is now gone forever.



THIS IS THE LIFE: DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE GAA

By Ciarán Murphy

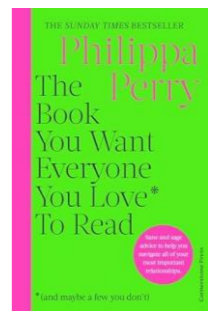
Murphy, of Second Captains and *The Irish Times* fame, presents a witty and provocative look at grassroots GAA. He has an unmatched feel for how the GAA is woven into the fabric of families and communities. This is a book about the places the GAA comes from, the places it can take a person, and the richness it brings to our parishes and lives.



A THREAD OF VIOLENCE

By Mark O'Connell

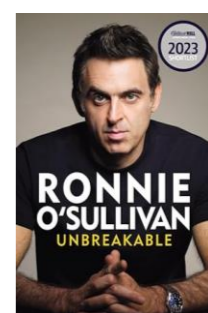
In 1982 the murder of two innocent people by Malcolm Macarthur almost brought down the government. The case remains one of the most shocking in Ireland's history. In this utterly compelling account, O'Connell describes how he got to know Macarthur as he tries to unravel the mystery of "why did he do it"?



THE BOOK YOU WANT EVERYONE YOU LOVE TO READ

By Philippa Perry

Life is all about relationships, whether that's with family, partners, friends, colleagues or most importantly yourself. If we can get these relationships on an even keel, then the other stuff that life throws our way becomes easier to manage. In this warm, practical and witty book, bestselling psychotherapist Philippa Perry shows how to approach life's big problems – arguments, love, change, loss – with a healthy dose of sanity and common sense.



UNBREAKABLE

By Ronnie O'Sullivan

Ronnie's journey to becoming the greatest snooker player of all time has been filled with extremes. His success catapulted him into a life of excess and addiction. He was winning titles but losing himself as he tried to block out his mental pain and misery. This is the story of the journey to get his life back and to address his demons. In doing so he helps us all to navigate own personal challenges and to reach our maximum potential.

DIRTY LINEN: THE TROUBLES IN MY HOME PLACE

By Martin Doyle

This is a personal, intimate history of the Troubles seen through the microcosm of a single rural parish that became known as the Murder Triangle. Doyle lifts the veil of silence drawn over security forces colluding with loyalist paramilitaries and records in heartrending detail the terrible toll the conflict took and the long tail of trauma it has left behind.



We're closed between December 23rd and January 1st (inclusive dates) but look forward to welcoming you all in the New Year! In the meantime, online services including Borrowbox & Libby (access to a wide choice of digital magazines) are available with your library card number and PIN. If you need to update your membership details, or want to join up, please contact any of our branches.

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