

Books of the Year - what the “experts” loved in 2009

What were the books that Mayo library staff most enjoyed and were impressed by in 2009? We present a select and very subjective list...



Text, by **Niall MacMonagle** (Celtic Press) is an exhilarating mix of poetry, short stories, plays, diary entries and speeches. It is a hugely entertaining compendium designed to get transition year students reading, but sure to engage everyone else. Entries range from Graham Norton describing his experience of being stabbed to Barack Obama’s inauguration speech. A quote from Mary Oliver sums up the positive life-affirming attitude the book projects: "Tell me what it is you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"



Life is a dream; 40 years reading poems, 1967-2007 by **Paul Durcan** A survey of Durcan’s poetry over 40 years which highlights his usual unique combination of sadness and playfulness. Angry, funny, dark, honest, all human life is here - births and deaths, love and loss, the happiness of marriage and the heartache when his own crumbles. Durcan writes of a pregnant Reverend Mother, an IRA bombing, his late 80-something mother swinging from a trapeze in the kitchen and, in all the fun and madness, he reveals himself in all his loneliness, with his eccentricities and joys. A beautiful chronicle of a great Mayo poet.



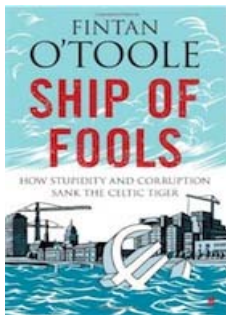
Occasions of sin: sex and society in Modern Ireland by **Diarmuid Ferriter** (Profile Books) A study of our sexual history from a huge diversity of sources that suggests Irish attitudes to sex are complex and multi-layered. Covering the period from 1845 to 2005, Ferriter presents a bleak portrait of the extent of sexual abuse in 19th-century Ireland. He gives graphic depictions of tenement overcrowding, and provides riveting excerpts from court records on sexual abuse cases. He suggests that, thanks to the “pernicious influence” wielded by the Catholic Church, Irish attitudes and behaviours have been perverted and stunted.



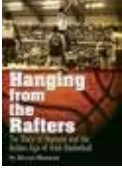
The Spirit Level – why more equal societies always do better, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (Allen Lane), is an important book that proves that equality is essential for a civilised society. The authors show that most of the ills of our "broken society" arise out of the growing inequality of the past 30 years, and delivers a statistically clinical account of the benefits of social democracy for living longer, happier and more fulfilled lives.



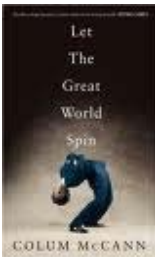
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo by Stieg Larsson. This is the first book in Larsson's Millennium trilogy which has now become a publishing phenomenon. The books present an epic tale of serial murder and corporate trickery spanning several continents. Their subject is international financial fraud and the buried evil past of a wealthy Swedish industrial family. In the character of the heroine, Lisbeth Salander, a petite, beautiful, violent, anti-social computer hacker, Larsson has given us one of the most unforgettable characters in modern crime fiction



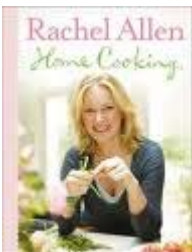
Ship of Fools by Fintan O Toole (Faber). The subtitle tells it all –“how stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic tiger”. Fast buck developers, bent bankers and a political culture of corruption have brought us to a place where the Celtic tiger is now lying on his back with his four paws stiffly in the air. Of all the books on the Irish economy out this year this is the most lucid account of how we blew the boom.



***Hanging from the Rafters* by Kieran Shannon (Evening Echo Publications).** In the 1980s basketball went from being a small, almost secretive sport to the biggest, best and sexiest spectacle in Ireland. The whitest country in the world, in the midst of a crippling recession, was suddenly electrified and enthralled by the most spectacular indoor team sport Ireland had ever known, with the majority of players young black Americans straight out of big-time college basketball. "Hanging from the Rafters" details the magic and mayhem that was triggered when those two worlds - black America and small-town Ireland – collided. This book is a social as well as a sporting history. Mayo interest is provided in the story how the McHale brothers transformed the provincial town of Ballina into one of the powerhouses of Irish basketball



***Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann.**(Bloomsbury) This was the big Irish book of the year and worth every bit of the hype it received. It's a big read that reinvents the city of New York in all its breathing, fighting, whining, joyous clamour. The prose dances across the surface of the vast canvas as lives collide in an astonishing balancing act by a great writer. McCann won The National Book Award in the US for this, but more importantly he earned five stars from the Castlebar Library Book Club.



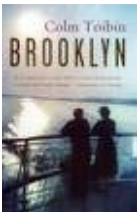
***Home Cooking* by Rachel Allen.** If staying in is the new going out, this is the book to accompany it. Rachel has put together a collection of her favourite recipes and kitchen tips in a beautifully presented publication. With recipes for everything from chicken casserole with cheesy herb dumplings to strawberry and white chocolate tiramisu tastes, this book will be in constant use in your kitchen.



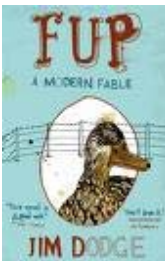
Are you Ready by John Corless (Salmon) This debut collection of poetry by Claremorris man John Corless is gritty and irreverent and infected with copious amounts of tongue-in-cheek humour. Here you will find fake tan and calf nuts, the PDs, dancehall fights and dry cash hidden behind dressers by dead bachelors. Sample poem title -“ Single woman, broad minded, gsoh, considered good looking, wanting more from life, breaks it off with bachelor farmer, 56.”



What it is by Lynda Barry (Jonathan Cape) is unique. It is a graphic novel that is part memoir, part collage and part workbook in which Barry instructs her readers in methods to open up their own creativity. It is in essence a creative writing course. But is also a work of art in its own right. Every page is beautiful, every page contains insights into creativity, every page is just plain fun (or just scary fun). If this book does not get you writing or painting, nothing will.



Brooklyn by Colm Toibin (Viking). This book charts a miraculously empathetic journey across the Atlantic and back again with a young Irish woman. She is ordinary, lonely, fickle and she finds love that leads her to make a choice that is straight out of Greek tragedy. The author's measured prose and capacity for observing emotional nuance spare this book from the sentimentality sometimes found in novels about Irish migrants.

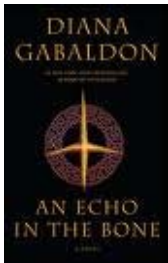


Fup' by Jim Dodge (Canongate)

Fup is a tale that revolves around three larger than life characters: two humans and one duck! There's Granddaddy Jake Santee, 99 years old, unreformed gambler and cranky reprobate who believes he is immortal – a belief founded on the hallucinogenic powers

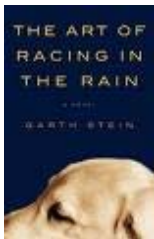
of moonshine. Then there's his grandson Tiny, a gentle giant of a man, whose passion is building fences even though they don't have any stock. And *Fup*, a 20lb duck that won't fly, possesses an iron will and a taste for liquor accompanied by a prodigious appetite.

Hilarious, heart-warming and magical, *Fup* is a fable to be read again and again. Full of earthy humour, naughty sarcasm and a lot of wisdom and fun. It's a story filled with a little magic, a little truth and an awful lot of clear-eyed humanity. This is the perfect little book for those who like their reading fixes short 'n' sweet!



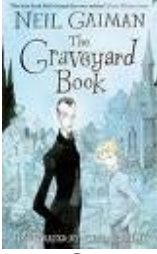
***An Echo in the Bone* by Diana Gabaldon.**

This book is the long-awaited number 7 in the Outlander series which features Jamie Fraser and his wife Claire and their struggles to survive in eighteenth century America in the midst of the Revolution. This is a historical novel with a difference, however, as it incorporates time travel, and the supernatural. The historic details are evocative (and accurate) and the love story will capture even the most hardened cynic! Fans of the series will love this book but it can also be read as a stand-alone novel and it makes an interesting departure from the normal format of historic novels - well worth the read.

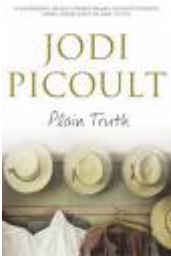


***The Art of Racing in the Rain* by Garth Stein.**

This is a really happy/sad, funny/serious real pleasure to read book. It's a story told by Enzo, a Labrador/Terrier about his master – a car racer driver - Danny and his family. Enzo is getting old and takes stock of his life recalling all that he and his family have been through. He knows he is different from other dogs – with a really human soul and is a kind of philosopher too. It's a wonderful observation on life and the author really captures your heart even if you never owned a dog. A truly enjoyable read that's easy to get into and races along fast.



The Graveyard Book by Niall Gaiman tells the story of a boy who, after his family is killed by a mysterious man, is subsequently adopted and raised by the occupants of an old graveyard. Among the dead are teachers, workers, wealthy prigs, romantics, pragmatists and even a few children — a village ready to raise a living child. And they do. While “The Graveyard Book” will entertain people of all ages, it’s especially a tale for children. By turns exciting and witty, sinister and tender this is a tale of unforgettable – enchantment for all ages



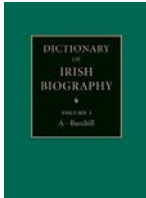
Plain Truth by Jodi Picoult. This story, by the prolific Picoult, centres around the discovery of a dead baby on an Amish farm and how the locals deal with the subsequent court case. The research and detail that went into describing the Amish faith is eye opening. This is also a psychological drama that is thoroughly engrossing. And there is a twist at the end! Thoroughly recommend by Ballinrobe Library Book Club. For once all eight members of the book club agreed that it was a very good read

ZEST! - 186 recipes from over 60 of Ireland's top chefs and restaurants This mouth-watering book is a showcase for the most talented chefs working in Ireland today. In more than 260 pages, **Zest!** offers a choice of 186 recipes from 62 of Ireland's leading restaurants and chefs. Each restaurant has provided a starter, main course and dessert recipe accompanied by mouth watering photographs. A must-have for anyone in Ireland who considers themselves to be knowledgeable in culinary affairs. What's more, the book will not only appeal to the palate but the purse. The book costs €20 which means that people are only paying about 10 cents per recipe. And all profits got to the Irish Hospice Foundation.



The Ryan Report The report of the *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* is probably the most important document published in this country for many years. The report details

the physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect and brutalization of children in Ireland's industrial school system. Nine years of hearings, the probing of hundreds of childhood hells, have resulted in a huge report - five volumes and 3,000 pages - which chronicle the story of independent Ireland's greatest disgrace. In describing the cruel workhouse system through which at least 170,000 children passed through in the middle decades of the twentieth century the report has finally woken us all up to the scale and depth of this scandal - Ireland's Holocaust



The Dictionary of Irish Biography – Ed. James Maguire and James Quinn. (Royal Irish Academy) Eleven years in the making, nine volumes, eight million words in length, this the biggest work ever published on the lives of Irish women and men. An indispensable reference work on Irish people from St Patrick to Patrick Pearse, St Brigit to Maud Gonne and Edward Carson to Bobby Sands, it outlines the careers at home and overseas of prominent men and women born in Ireland, north and south, and the noteworthy Irish careers of those born outside Ireland. At a price of around €700 it is not going to be in most Christmas stockings but be sure to view it on your next visit to your local library.



Wild Mayo by Michael Viney.

This beautifully illustrated book that takes the reader on a wonderful journey of discovery through the landscape of Mayo. From limestone lakes and turloughs, moorland and machair - Mayo's dramatic landscape offers unspoiled natural habitats that are now among the most precious in western Europe. Its bogs and unpolluted rivers and lakes are home to rare plants and animals, its offshore islands shelter breeding seabirds and migrant Arctic geese. In *Wild Mayo* Michael Viney eloquently describes the rich wildlife and flora of a remarkable range of habitats, from mountain summit to pristine Atlantic shore.