

## Recommended Reading List: *A Toast to the Irish*

<https://www.grc.qld.gov.au/homepage/108/library-lovers-book-group-online>

### Fiction

#### ***After the Fire* / Jo Spain 2020**

On a crowded Dublin city street, a young woman appears, naked, traumatised and bearing burn marks. Tom Reynolds, now Chief Superintendent, is no longer head of the murder squad. But when it transpires the woman escaped from a house fire started deliberately and that there are more victims, Tom is sucked in. What begins as a straightforward case of arson soon becomes something much more sinister. The people in that house never wanted to be there in the first place. Now more are missing. As Tom tries to locate the others, a terrifying spider's web of domestic and international crime unfolds. And not everybody will survive the fallout.

#### ***The Woman on the Bridge* / Sheila O'Flanagan 2023**

Dublin. The 1920s. As war tears Ireland apart, two young people are caught up in events that will bring love, tragedy - and the hardest of choices. In a country fighting for freedom, it's hard to live a normal life. Winnie O'Leary supports the cause, but she doesn't go looking for trouble. Then rebel Joseph Burke steps into her workplace. Winnie is furious with him about a broken window. She's not interested in romance. But love comes when you least expect it. Joseph's family shelter fugitives and transport weapons. Joseph would never ask Winnie to join the fight; but his mother and sisters demand commitment. Will Winnie choose Joseph, and put her own loved ones in deadly danger? Or wait for a time of peace that may never come? Ireland's tumultuous independence struggle is the backdrop for an unforgettable story of courage and heartbreak, in which heroes are made of ordinary people. Inspired by the story of Sheila O'Flanagan's grandmother, *The Woman on the Bridge* is the unmissable, compulsive new novel from a bestselling author.

#### ***The Making of Her* / Bernadette Jiwa 2022**

Dublin 1996 Joan Egan lives an enviable life. She and her husband, Martin, and daughter, Carmel, are thriving in Dublin at the dawn of an economic boom. But everything changes when Joan receives a letter from Emma, the daughter whom she and Martin gave up for adoption thirty years before, asking for a life-or-death favour. While Joan grapples with the guilt over giving up her baby long ago, she must confront her present as the cracks in her marriage become impossible to ignore and simmering tension with Carmel boils over. Meanwhile, Carmel and Emma must come to terms with the perceived sins of their mother, to imagine a future for their family before it is too late. Spanning the nineties and the sixties, with Dublin as its backdrop, *The Making of Her* is the tender and page-turning story of marriage, motherhood, a culture that would not allow a woman to find true happiness, and her journey to finally claim it.

#### ***The Gin Sisters' Promise* / Faith Hogan 2022**

When Georgie, Iris and Nola's mother died and their father disappeared into his grief, the sisters made a pact: they would always be there for one another, no matter what. Now, decades later, they haven't spoken for years and can barely stand to be in the same room. As his health declines, their father comes up with a plan. In his will, he states that before they can claim their inheritance, they must spend six months living together in their childhood home in the village of Ballycove, Ireland, and try to repair their broken relationships. As the months progress, old resentments boil over, new secrets threaten to come out and each sister must decide what matters more: their pride, or their family. Can they overcome their past and find a way to love each other once more?

***The Children of Gods and Fighting Men / Shauna Lawless 2022***

981 AD. The Viking King of Dublin is dead. His young widow, Gormflaith, has ambitions for her son - and herself - but Ireland is a dangerous place and kings tend not to stay kings for long. Gormflaith also has a secret. She is one of the Fomorians, an immortal race who can do fire-magic. She has kept her powers hidden at all costs, for there are other immortals in this world - like the Tuatha Dé Danann, a race of warriors who are sworn to kill Fomorians. Fódla is one of the Tuatha Dé Danann with the gift of healing. Her kind dwell hidden in a fortress, forbidden to live amongst the mortals. Fódla agrees to help her kin by going to spy on Brian Boru, a powerful man who aims to be High King of Ireland. She finds a land on the brink of war - a war she is desperate to stop. However, preventing the loss of mortal lives is not easy with Ireland in turmoil and the Fomorians now on the rise.

***Fanatic Heart / Tom Keneally 2022***

John Mitchel, Irishman, lawyer, journalist, activist and politician, is a complex character. Charged with treason in Ireland and tried by an English judge, he was snuck off mainland Ireland on the day he was charged to avoid a breakout and rebellion. He was transported initially to Bermuda, then to South Africa and then to Van Diemen's Land where, as an Irishman, he was supported by many and given a ticket of leave. He soon became a farmer and activist and was eventually secreted out of Australia to the USA where his arrival was celebrated. A powerful voice and force for Irish nationalism who also found himself, after landing in the US, supporting the ownership of slaves. This was partly driven by living through the Irish famine. He believed Irish workers were worse off than slaves, neither fed nor paid in currency for their work. And partly by seeing the absolute adherence to capitalism and the pursuit of wealth in New York. People were dying in horrific industrial and transport accidents in front of those getting wealthy and no heed was paid. To support her husband through all the charges against him, Jenny Mitchel, when she too could have been punished for airing her beliefs on Irish nationalism, publicly supported his campaigns. She also packed up her many children and followed her prisoner and convict husband to a number of different continents to continue to support her husband and their beliefs.

***The Zookeeper of Belfast / S. Kirk Walsh 2021***

1941. With the men away fighting, animal-lover Hettie Quin is made Belfast Zoo's first-ever female zookeeper. She is put in charge of Violet, a three-year-old Indian elephant, and they soon form a special bond. With Violet at her side, Hettie can almost escape the grim reality of her life: the father who has abandoned her family; the sister who recently died; the war that's raging hundreds of miles away. But the devastation of war is closer than she thought. When the bombs begin to rain down on the city, Hettie must gather all her courage to protect those she loves the most. Can she save Violet - and get through unscathed herself?

***An Irish Hostage / Charles Todd 2021***

The Great War is over - but in Ireland, in the wake of the bloody 1916 Easter Rising, anyone who served in France is now considered a traitor, including nurse Eileen Flynn and former soldier Michael Sullivan, who only want to be married in the small, isolated village where she grew up. Even her grandmother is against it, and Eileen's only protection is her cousin Terrence who was a hero of the Rising and is still being hunted by the British. Bess Crawford had promised to be there for the wedding. And in spite of the danger to her, she keeps that promise - only to be met with the shocking news that the groom has vanished. Eileen begs for her help, but how can Bess hope to find him when she doesn't know the country, the people, or where to put her trust? Time is running out, for Michael and for Bess herself, and soon her own life is on the line. With only an Irish outlaw and a prisoner about to be hanged for murder on her side, how can she possibly save herself, much less stop a killer?

***It's That Time of Year* / Roisin Meaney 2020**

It's the weekend before Christmas. Julia, Eddie and Steph are making separate journeys to Ireland to attend the wedding of their beloved Annie, the woman who fostered each of them in their childhoods, and to spend the weekend in the house that gave them all shelter when they needed it most. All three are now adults - Julia, a world famous singer living in luxury in Paris; Eddie, a chef in London; and Steph who spends her days on a remote Greek island, running a writers' retreat with her older lover - but as the wedding celebrations get underway, certain truths come to light which show that past hurts have yet to heal. As Annie says 'I do', the three make some discoveries about themselves - but will the guests of the wedding party get their happy-ever-after in time for Christmas day?

***The Good Turn* / Dervla McTiernan 2020**

Police corruption, an investigation that ends in tragedy and the mystery of a little girl's silence - three unconnected things that will prove to be linked by one small town. While Detective Cormac Reilly faces enemies at work and trouble in his personal life, Garda Peter Fisher is relocated out of Galway with the threat of prosecution hanging over his head. But even that is not as terrible as having to work for his overbearing father, the local copper for the pretty seaside town of Roundstone. For some, like Anna and her young daughter, Tilly, Roundstone is a refuge from trauma. But even this village on the edge of the sea isn't far enough to escape from the shadows of evil men.

***The Glorious Guinness Girls : a novel* / Emily Hourican 2020**

Granddaughters of the first Earl of Iveagh, the three daughters of Ernest Guinness are glamorous society girls, the toast of Dublin and London. Darlings of the press, with not a care in the world. But what beautiful ruins lie behind the glass of their privileged worlds? Inspired by fascinating real events and a remarkable true story, from the turmoil of Ireland's War of Independence to the brittle glamour of 1920s London, this dramatic, richly textured reading group novel takes us into the heart of a beautiful but often painful hidden world.

***The Pull of the Stars* / Emma Donoghue 2020**

Dublin, 1918. In a country doubly ravaged by war and disease, Nurse Julia Power works at an understaffed hospital in the city centre, where expectant mothers who have come down with an unfamiliar flu are quarantined together. Into Julia's regimented world step two outsiders: Doctor Kathleen Lynn, on the run from the police, and a young volunteer helper, Bridie Sweeney. In the darkness and intensity of this tiny ward, over the course of three days, these women change each other's lives in unexpected ways. They lose patients to this baffling pandemic, but they also shepherd new life into a fearful world. With tireless tenderness and humanity, carers and mothers alike somehow do their impossible work.

***Love* / Roddy Doyle 2020**

Davy and Joe were drinking pals back in their Dublin youth. Davy rarely sees Joe for a pint anymore--maybe one or two when Davy comes over from England to check on his elderly father. But tonight Davy's father is dying in the hospice, and Joe has a secret that will lead the two on a bender back to the haunts of their youth. Joe had left his wife and family a year earlier for another woman, Jessica. Davy knows her too, or should--she was the girl of their dreams four decades earlier, the girl with the cello in George's pub. As Joe's story unfolds across Dublin--pint after pint, pub after pub--so too do the memories of what eventually drove Davy from Ireland: the upheaval that Faye, his feisty, profane wife, would bring into his life; his father's somber disapproval; the pained spaces left behind when a parent dies. As much a hymn to the Dublin of old as a delightfully comic yet moving portrait of what it means to try to put into words the many forms that love can take.

***And let's not forget Redemption (1995) and Trinity (1997) by Leon Uris – brilliant!!***

## **Non Fiction**

### ***A Thread of Violence : a story of truth, invention, and murder / Mark O'Connell* 2023**

In 1982 Malcolm Macarthur, the wealthy heir to a small estate, found himself suddenly without money. The solution, he decided, was to rob a bank. To do this, he would need a gun and a car. In the process of procuring them, he killed two people, and the circumstances of his eventual arrest in the apartment of Ireland's Attorney General nearly brought down the government. The case remains one of the most shocking in Ireland's history and the words used to describe the crimes (grotesque, unprecedented, bizarre, and almost unbelievable) have remained in the cultural lexicon as the acronym GUBU. Mark O'Connell has long been haunted by the story of this brutal double murder. But in recent years this haunting has become mutual. When O'Connell sets out to unravel the mysteries still surrounding these horrific and inexplicable crimes, he tracks down Macarthur himself, now an elderly man living out his days in Dublin and reluctant to talk. As the two men circle one another, O'Connell is pushed into a confrontation with his own narrative: what does it mean to write about a murderer?

### ***Rememberings / Sinéad O'Connor* 2022**

The landmark memoir of a global music icon. Sinéad O'Connor's voice and trademark shaved head made her famous by the age of twenty-one. Her recording of Prince's 'Nothing Compares 2 U' made her a global icon. She outraged millions when she tore up a photograph of Pope John Paul II on American television. O'Connor was unapologetic and impossible to ignore, calling out hypocrisy wherever she saw it. She has remained that way for three decades. Now, in *Rememberings*, O'Connor tells her story - the heartache of growing up in a family falling apart; her early forays into the Dublin music scene; her adventures and misadventures in the world of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll; the fulfilment of being a mother; her ongoing spiritual quest - and through it all, her abiding passion for music. *Rememberings* is intimate, replete with candid anecdotes and full of hard-won insights. It is a unique and remarkable chronicle by a unique and remarkable artist.

### ***A Place Apart : Northern Ireland in the 1970s / Dervla Murphy* 2014**

*A Place Apart* is a remarkable geographical and psychological travelogue that rises above history, politics, theology and economics. Created by a southern Irishwoman, cycling into the mayhem of Northern Ireland in order to try to sort out her own opinions and emotions about this troubled land. She came equipped with her own childhood experiences of murder and Republican martyrdom but was otherwise unfettered by sectarian loyalties. (She was armed) with a delightful curiosity, a fine ear for anecdote, an ability to stand her own at the bar, and penetrating intelligence. She travelled extensively through both town and country, frequently finding herself in horrifying situations and sometimes among people stiff with hate and grief: but equally she discovered an unquenchable spirit everywhere that refused to die.

### ***The Kerry Girls : Emigration and the Earl Grey Scheme / Kay Moloney Caball* 2014**

As part of the controversial Earl Grey Scheme, this is the true story of the Kerry girls who were shipped to Australia from the four Kerry Workhouses of Dingle, Kenmare, Killarney and Listowel in 1849 and 1850. Leaving behind scenes of destitution and misery, the girls, some of whom spoke only Irish, set off to the other side of the world without any idea of what lay ahead. This book tells of their 'selection' and their transportation to New South Wales and Adelaide, their subsequent apprenticeship, and finally of their marriage and attempts to rebuild a life far from home.

***Belonging : a memoir of place, beginnings and one woman's search for truth and justice for the Tuam babies* / Catherine Corless with Naomi Linehan 2021**

Catherine Corless could not have known where her interest in local history would lead her, as she began researching the Tuam Mother and Baby Home in Galway in 2010. Uncovering no less than 796 missing burial records of children born there, the stark truth of their place of rest became clear: a disused sewage tank on the old home site, where two boys had once stumbled upon bones. But who were these lost children, and what had happened to them in the care of the Bons Secours order of nuns? Determined to know more, Catherine's painstaking research led to a quest for justice that continues still as, often against fierce resistance, she brought to light a terrible truth that shocked the world, impacted the Vatican, and led to a Commission of Investigation in Ireland. Part memoir, part detective story, *Belonging* is both a personal account - of identity, beginnings and Catherine's search for her own mother's lost story - and a recounting of her forensic crusade on behalf of the lost babies of Tuam. It speaks to the tender love of a mother and her child; to the unforgettable screams which echoed through the corridors as babies were taken against the parent's will; and to a mystery which continues to this day, as so many still search to know where, and to whom, they belong.

***Maeve's Times : selected Irish Times writings* / Maeve Binchy; edited by Roisin Ingle 2013**

'As someone who fell off a chair not long ago trying to hear they what they were saying at the next table in a restaurant, I suppose I am obsessively interested in what some might consider the trivia of other people's lives' Maeve Binchy is well-known for her bestselling novels, the most recent of which was *A Week in Winter*. But for many years Maeve was a journalist, writing for *The Irish Times*. From 'The Student Train' to 'Plane Bores', 'Bathroom Joggers' to 'When Beckett met Binchy', these articles have all the warmth, wit and humanity of her fiction. Arranged in decades, from the 1960s to the 2000s, and including Maeve's first and last ever piece of writing for *The Irish Times*, the columns also give a fascinating insight into the author herself. With an introduction written by her husband, the writer Gordon Snell, this collection of timeless writing reminds us of why the leading Irish writer was so universally loved.

***Sons of the Southern Cross* / Grantlee Kieza 2014**

Ever since the Southern Cross flag was 'born' in the minefields of Victoria it's been a symbol for a rebellious Australian spirit - from the battles of Eureka to those of Ned Kelly, from the birth of the Labor Party to the Anzacs at Gallipoli. The men and women involved took the flag as their symbol. But as much as it became a metaphor for anti-establishment heroics, the flag also had a darker side; xenophobia, racism, intolerance and violence. Grantlee Kieza tells the story of the flag through the stories of the people who fought under it, the miners, the soldiers, the bushrangers, the journalists and politicians, who shaped Australia. He takes readers from the slums of Ireland to the goldfields of Victoria, and then on to the courtrooms, pubs and hideouts where revolutions were hatched. Through the raw and impassioned characters trying to make a life in a new nation, he brings Australia's renegade history vividly to life.

***Angela's Ashes* / Frank McCourt 1996**

McCourt's Pulitzer Prize winning look back at his childhood. "When I look back on my childhood, I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. People everywhere brag or whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years. Above all we were wet..." So begins Frank McCourt's stunning memoir of his childhood in Ireland and America, a recollection of unvarnished truth and no self pity, of grinding poverty and indomitable spirit that will live in the memory long after the tape has ended.