
The Galway Advertiser: A Medley of Books for Christmas

By Des Kenny

AS ALWAYS there is a huge variety of books available as gifts this Christmas which in an increasingly harsh economic climate offer wonderful value and, when chosen properly, are immensely and deeply appreciated.

History

For the historian there is the wonderful Ireland: A History by Tom Bartlett, (€32), a witty, informative and engrossing book debunking all the established myths relating to our past and awash with new and challenging interpretations of the effects of such watershed events as the 1798 Rebellion, the Great Famine, and the 1916 Rebellion. It is an absorbing read.

Too many of the great books of Irish life and culture are difficult and hard to get. This year has seen a number of reprints such as The Card of the Gambler by Ben Kiely (€9.99) and The Life of Riley by Anthony Cronin (€9.99) but perhaps the most delightful reprint of all is The Farm by Lough Gur by Mary Carbery (€15). First published in 1937, this is a snapshot of life in rural Ireland before The Land War. It offers a full and convincing description of a strong farm family in post-Famine Munster and the narration is warm and comforting, yet sharp and incisive.

Moving to more modern times, Ryan Tubridy brings us back to those four days in June 1963 when Ireland played host to John F Kennedy. In his wonderfully researched and profusely illustrated book JFK in Ireland: Four Days that Changed a President (€21.99), Tubridy evokes an Ireland long gone and brings us back to those halcyon days when we thought the world was our oyster.

Tom Garvin's News From A New Republic (€24.99) surveys the Ireland of the 1950s. While the economies of the rest of world expanded, Ireland's contracted and thousands emigrated. He identifies the causes of this and traces the rise of the generation that carried Ireland into the free trade boom of the 1960s.

In Down Down Deeper and Down (€16.99), Eamonn Sweeney brings us the Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s - a turbulent, dramatic and unpredictable time when hundreds and thousands protested on our streets, when strikes were endemic, women fought for equal pay, and Irish gays came out of the closet. It was a period rocked by political and

economic controversy and wasn't too different from today.

Moving to the Ireland of 2010, Lorna Siggins's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (€15.99) is an even handed, fully researched, and carefully narrated account of the Corrib Gas controversy.

As a journalist Siggins has been covering this issue for *The Irish Times* since its outset and in this book she unravels the twists and turns of this divisive and fascinating human drama which has bedevilled north Mayo since the mid-1980s. This is a most informative book for the normal punter.

Kieran Hickey's *Deluge* (€14.95) describes in some detail Ireland's weather disasters in 2009 and 2010 when the country suffered severe flooding, unusual near Arctic temperatures not to mention volcanic ash and the first earthquake in County Clare. This is an intriguing book giving full vein to the Irish delight in discussing the weather but also underlining the serious implications of global change.

Staying local, just published is William Henry's *Galway Through Time and Tide* (€15) which consists of a wide ranging and intriguing articles on Galway's history and is perfect for a fireside read. The articles deal with such diverse subjects as the Great Famine, Christmases of Galway past, Eve of the Nation, the Battle of Athenry 1316, Galway's involvement in the Congo, and the Galway connection with Napoleon.

As Gaeilge, tá cnuasacht fhilíochta Learaí Phádraic Learaí Uí Fhínneadha curtha amach ag Cló Iar Chonnachta eagraithe ag Gearóid Denvir faoin teidil *Sé an Saol an Máistir* (€25). Bailiúchán den scoth atá annseo a mbeidh an suimiúl do muinntir Bearna agus a timpeallacht.

Novels

There is, of course, the usual crop of novels with perhaps the most notable being Joe O'Connor's *Ghost Light* (€17.99), Ken Bruen's *The Devil* (€11.99) and Hugo Hamilton's *Hand in the Fire* (€12.99). Also worthy of note is Dick Donaghue's *Dance of the Mocking Birds* (€10) invoking the Dublin of the 1970s and telling in a wonderfully laconic style the story of two misfits on a voyage of self discovery.

Rita Anne Higgins's collection of essays and poetry *Hurting God* (€12) is an intense spiritual autobiography written in the now recognisable sharp and honest style, finally finding peace in the bogs around An Spidéal.

Voices at the World End, edited by Paddy Bushe (€24.99 hardback, €14.99 paperback) is the fascinating result of a sojourn on Skellig Michael of some 12 poets and one photographer. The resulting anthology of prose and

poetry is part travel writing, part meditative day-book, part natural history and part response to the history of faith on this pinnacle of rock.

Teens and children

Over the last year a new press called Little Island has been publishing books specifically designed for teenagers. Among the first crop was the delightful *Prim Improper* (€7.99) written by Deirdre Sullivan. The whole series is delightful but Deirdre's, who hails from Knocknacarra, book is, in the words of one 13-year-old who has read it is "BRILLIANT".

For younger readers there is the extraordinary book *The Tale of Lundravar the Dragon* by John Blakey (€20). This tells the story of a little lost dragon who hatches from his egg many centuries after all of the dragons had been vanquished.

Full of beautiful and delightful illustrations the story is a wonderful fantasy full of magic, glee and charm.

Also just reprinted is Patricia Lynch's wonderful *Tales of Irish Enchantment*, illustrated by Sara Baker (€19.99). This allows both children and adults alike to indulge in the wonderfully fantastical world of Patricia Lynch from the heroic tale of Cuchulainn to the humour story of the Kingdom of the Dwarves helping them, as I hope and wish you all to have, a wonderful and Happy Christmas.

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Galway Advertiser.