



# The Books Are Read

Last year was a good one for Irish publishing, with sales up on 2013. Perhaps surprisingly, it was the young readers (or their parents) who were the main contributors to the buoyant results. **Donal O'Donoghue** reports

**W**hen the dust settled, the tale of the top ten best-selling books in Ireland in 2014 was not so much Roy beating Brian but the dominance of young adult and children's fiction. In truth, the see-saw battle of the sports memoirs by Roy Keane (with Roddy Doyle) and Brian O'Driscoll (Alan English) was settled on foreign shores, with the former Manchester United dynamo demolishing the rugby maestro on the UK bookshelves. But in Ireland, as it was across the pond, it was stories about wimpy kids, love-struck teenagers and

awful aunties that ruled the roost. So what gives? Is the world becoming YA-shaped, with younger readers eating the books? It certainly seems that younger readers, despite what many might expect, are not wired into e-books and digital devices. The old, traditional, physical book is holding its own, with book sales up by approximately 10% after a fallow 2013. Irish titles are also up (with Gill and Macmillan the top publisher based on Irish sales) but it was the young adult titles that were the mainstay, as adult fiction overall saw a drop of 2% in sales.

On the back of the movie adaptation, it's no surprise that John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* fared so well; two editions were published with combined sales of 63,781, taking it into the top three. David Walliams, whose latest, *Awful Auntie*, is at number five in the charts, made £7 million from book sales in the UK last year and Jeff Kinney's *Wimpy Kid* series (*The Long Haul* is at number 4) continues to beat the lard out of the adult fiction contenders. So there it is: people are buying more books, hopefully people are reading more books and this can only be good news for everybody.

## REVIEWS

### Short stories

#### Over Our Heads

by Andrew Fox

(Penguin Ireland)

Reviewer: Donal O'Donoghue

Rating: ★★★★★

Plot: Coming up for air.

**Verdict:** Fox joins a band of new talented Irish short story writers, like Colin Barrett and Mary Costello, with this assured debut collection about fledgling relationships. Here are tales of (mostly) young men, caught in rites of passage, of the ritual of relationships, with the opening story, 'Pennies', setting the tone. Here is the inarticulacy of youth ('Manhood') and the brutality of knowing ('A Vigil'). In 'Stag' a young Irish ex-pat engaged to be married bumps into an old school friend on a Manhattan street. They haven't spoken since school, a friendship bloodily broken by an affair. Now that old wound is reopened and the memories it brings may last long after the confetti falls. And the valedictory story ('Are You Still There?') is also about young love and how things can fall apart. In this life we are probably all in over our heads, but we beat on against the breeze because there's no other way.



### Fiction

#### Before, During, After

by Richard Bausch

(Atlantic Books)

Reviewer: Donal O'Donoghue

Rating: ★★★

Plot: Love hurts.

**Verdict:** After knocking it out of the park with the widely-acclaimed *Peace*, Bausch tackles that overwhelming theme of the US' early 21st Century, the story of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He pitches it against a tale of the everyday, the story of a couple who fall in love that fateful summer. Natasha is an unhappy congressional aide, based in Washington DC, Sebastian a divorced Episcopal priest who is considering abandoning his vocation. *Before, During, After* is a novel in three movements: chronicling events before, during and after the attacks. In the before, they meet and fall in love, but the darkness comes in the 'During' and while it has nothing to do directly with the attack, its legacy will trouble their relationship forever after. Bausch writes characters with conviction but this is a novel stretched beyond its skin: a tale that should have been a long short story, treading water too often.



## Ireland's best-selling titles of 2014

- 1 *The Second Half* by Roy Keane & Roddy Doyle (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) 54,800
- 2 *The Test: My Autobiography* by Brian O'Driscoll (Penguin Ireland) 53,900
- 3 *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, (Penguin) 40,900
- 4 *The Long Haul: Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney (Puffin) 34,900
- 5 *Awful Auntie* by David Walliams (HarperCollins) 38,000
- 6 *Keeping Up with the Kalashnikovs* by Ross O'Carroll-Kelly (Penguin) 25,400
- 7 *Guinness World Records 2015* (Guinness Publisher) 24,100
- 8 *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (Penguin) 22,900
- 9 *The Life and Loves of a He Devil: A Memoir* by Graham Norton (Hodder & Stoughton) 18,400
- 10 *The Woman Who Stole My Life* by Marian Keyes (Michael Joseph) 18,100



## PREVIEWS

### The Girl on the Train

by Paula Hawkins

(Doubleday)

No coincidence that the cover of this best-selling thriller, which was at the centre of a bidding war, bears more than a passing resemblance to *Gone Girl*. It also looks likely to go the same Hollywood way with its tale of a London commuter who just happens to witness a terrible thing on her daily drudge to work. See if you can deduce how it ends!



### Taking Heaven Lightly

by Róisín Fitzpatrick

(Hachette Books Ireland)

So what happens when you nearly die? Dubliner Róisín Fitzpatrick, who had a near death experience following a brain haemorrhage, describes the moment, a glimpse into the afterlife, that transformed her life in that a book that is both biography and mission statement.



### The Concise Untold History of the United States

by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick

(Ebury Press)

Hailed as "indispensable" by Mikhail Gorbachev but then you would expect such PR blurb from the former Russian president about a book co-written by Oliver Stone. And yes, this 'Untold History' has Stone knee-deep in conspiracies and covert operations as he charts the rise and fall of the US empire.

