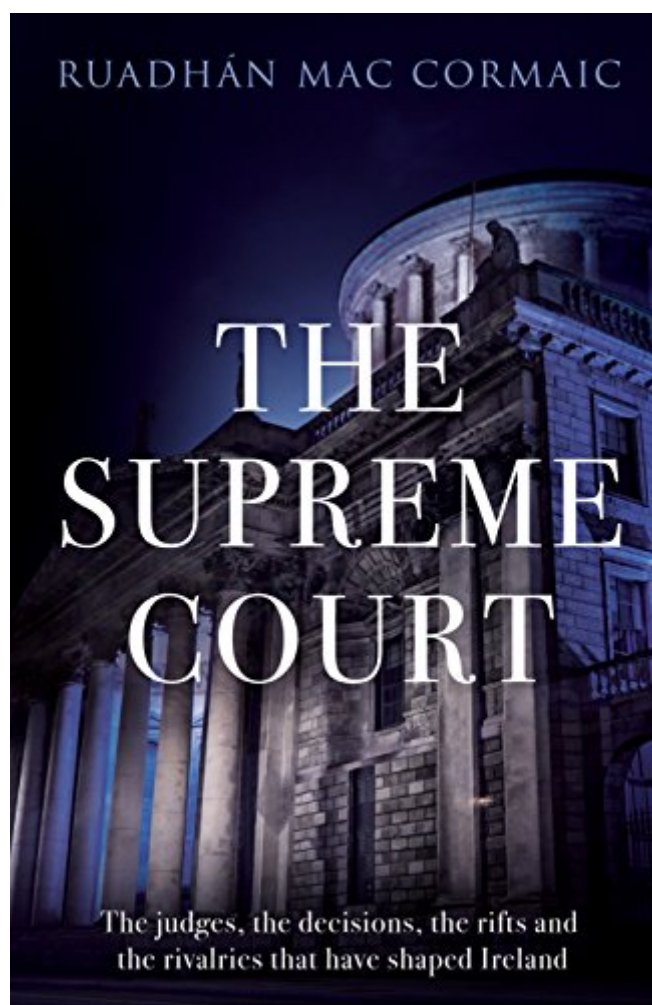


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The Supreme Court



Synopsis

The judges, the decisions, the rifts and the rivalries - the gripping inside story of the institution that has shaped Ireland. The intimacy of the Supreme Court chamber can make it an intimidating arena. A barrister on his or her feet stands close enough to the judges to see each grimace, each raised eyebrow, each flash of momentary incomprehension on their faces. The power imbalance is total. Barristers bow as they enter and stand when the judges stand. They meekly humour the crankier judges' bad moods and laugh ostentatiously at every joke from the bench. In return they can be flayed at any moment. "It's the equivalent of the wall of death for barristers," says one senior counsel. The work of the Supreme Court is at the heart of the private and public life of the nation. Whether it's a father trying to overturn his child's adoption, a woman asserting her right to control her fertility, republicans fighting extradition, political activists demanding an equal hearing in the media, women looking to serve on juries, the state attempting to prevent a teenager ending her pregnancy, a couple challenging the tax laws, a gay man fighting his criminalization simply for being gay, a disabled young man and his mother seeking to vindicate his right to an education, the court's decisions can change lives. However, in close to a century of its existence, the Supreme Court's story is largely unwritten and beyond their judgements its members have generally remained silent. Now, having had unprecedented access to a vast number of sources, and conducted hundreds of interviews, including with key insiders, award-winning Irish Times journalist Ruadhan Mac Cormaic lifts the veil on the court's hidden world. The Supreme Court reveals new and surprising information about well-known cases. It exposes the sometimes fractious relationship between the court and the government. But above all it tells a story about people - those who brought the cases, those who argued in court, those who dealt with the fallout and, above all, those who took the decisions. Judges' backgrounds and relationships, their politics and temperaments, as well as the internal tensions between them, are vital to understanding how the court works and are explored here in fascinating detail. The Supreme Court is both a riveting read and an important and revealing account of one of the most powerful institutions of our state. Ruadhan Mac Cormaic is the former Legal Affairs Correspondent and Paris Correspondent of the Irish Times. He is now the paper's Foreign Affairs Correspondent.

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