



Denis Kehoe.

Nights Beneath The Nation

Denis Kehoe

Dublin, 1950s. Leaving his country home behind, Daniel Ryan is captivated by the bright lights of the big city, by the wild parties of a bohemian theatre group led by the glamorous Maeve and by a beautiful young man called Anthony. Until one fateful, scandalous night brings the curtain down on Daniel's life in Dublin. Years later, and Daniel has returned from his exile in New York. Trying to blend into the shadows, he finds modern Ireland barely recognisable from the heady days of his youth. Cut to the 1990s and not much has changed — liaisons are still conducted in alleyways and seedy saunas. In an effort to escape attention on his return, Daniel tells people he is American, but a promiscuous young man embroils him in a cat and mouse game, which threatens to expose his buried history. Denis Kehoe was born in Dublin in 1978, where he now lives. He has studied philosophy and European literature and works as a critic, researcher and literacy tutor. This is his first novel.

An extract from *Nights Beneath The Nation* out 28 August 2008 from Serpent's Tail priced £9.99.

September 1997

It is a Sunday evening. I never thought I'd end up here, an American in Dublin, sitting in a silent house that overlooks the sea, at the start of an Irish September. I try not to think, try not to sink, in September. There are pink streaks of promise stretched across the low, grey sky so I suppose it will be a good day tomorrow, but who cares. Days pass. Outside the window people are going home after their day at the sea; moving slowly, lingering in the last light of the day,

remembering the sun on their skin and thinking of the summer that could have been but was not. They're hoping they'll get an Indian summer, I guess, a last minute consolation after the cheating months that have passed. I don't believe they get much good weather here. Even days in June can be damp and dull and drive the people close to depression.

There is a group of old folks who go swimming every afternoon down by the tower at the end of the street. They look

ridiculous, those wasted creatures with their liver spots and body rot, giggling and chatting like teenagers, their bones creaking with the years as they bend to take off clothes and put on bathing caps. Somebody told me they come here every day of the year, and though I find it hard to believe, I can just imagine it. Those little Irish pensioners wrestling what they can from what is left of their lives, their daily bathes in the bay a battle against time, a battle they are sure to lose. I passed them by on

Thursday afternoon as I walked up to Dun Laoghaire. There was an old couple drying themselves after their swim. Their skin was slack and their limbs absurd, brittle and little against the city. They said hello cheerily enough and I nodded a greeting before I walked slowly on, laughing to myself.

Later though, sitting in a café on the main street, I was looking out the window when I caught a reflection of myself in the glass. My coffee turned bitter on my tongue when I saw that seventy was no longer an abstract number, but just a few short years away. I saw seventy staring back at me and I hated those old, wrinkled water rats, hated them because I am just like them.

Why am I writing this, I wonder. What use have I for words? What use are words to anybody? I fell out of love with language a long time ago, with beautiful, quivering emotions lying naked on the page. They

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only make me feel empty now; all those precious thoughts and suffocating sentences. Once, yes once, a long time ago, I had hopes of becoming a writer. I dreamed of writing novels, plays and poems that would have them reading well into the night, and standing applauding in the aisles and wondering how it was that words could be wound around each other so skilfully. But what does that matter? That was a long time ago, when I believed in truth and tears and stupid little stories. Before I came to control words instead of allowing them to own me. Before I began to use them only to get on, to get exactly what I wanted. But here I am, writing again.

Why am I here anyway? I guess I needed a break, a rest, needed to take things easy. I'm not sick, I'm not dying. Don't you dare think of me as wasting away out here by the sea. I just needed some time away from home, some time out. I've grown tired of New York, or tired of life, or maybe it's the same thing. Listen to me; I never thought I'd say that. I never thought I'd tire of that metropolis, with its movers and shakers, its freaks, flakes and moneymakers, its dazzle and brute ambition. I love that city of indecency and opportunity, of noise and grit and greatness, all manner of human life moving between its great glass palaces.

I made it in New York, where you either have the balls, the willpower and the sheer determination to succeed, or you don't. I did, others didn't, and I don't care anymore if that makes me a good or bad person. I'll leave the moralising to somebody else.

I began my career working for a Jew in

a barbershop on the Lower East Side. My customers were mostly immigrants from Russia and Ukraine. When I had saved enough money, I opened up my own shop over in the West Village. I knew the fags over there wouldn't mind splashing out a bit of money on a nice coiffure. This was in the early sixties, before Stonewall and all that jazz, but the area was already crawling with them, everybody knew that. It was the first hip men's hairdresser down that way, all whitewashed walls and the odd geometric pattern. Everything was clear and clean and kept to an absolute minimum and they loved it: the drags, the fags and the little men in suits who came downtown on Friday evening for some furtive pleasure. I suppose it was the fags who made me, who made my business a success. I suppose I should be grateful to them for that.

After a few years I got my hands on

another shop in the area and eventually opened a salon, a much more high-class affair, on the Upper East Side. I could smell the money there. A lot of it old money that had been in Manhattan for generations. I could see that these men would have to be pampered and charmed and treated like the royalty they believed they were. They weren't difficult or rude or unfriendly, but as with any customers in business, you had to work out how to work them. And so I indulged them, I listened to them and threw parties for them. I allowed them to wallow for hours in the luxury of the place and they loved it. It was, of course, another hit.

And so on, and so forth. Onwards and upwards and so it goes, my story of success in the city, stretched as it is over the decades. Always bigger, always better, until I owned six 'male grooming salons' in Manhattan, a big apartment on the Upper West Side and a summer house up the coast.

But then a year, maybe two years ago, you can never be sure exactly when these things happen, I began to lose interest in New York City. It was all noise and hungry, rapid movement and all I wanted was to sit still some place that was silent. My ambition was spent, my thirst was satiated and my patience was finally strained. I became irritated with the hordes of people that rise and fall like waves along the city's streets. I became anxious about small, unimportant things, indifferent to the business and appalled by all the people I know. In short, I felt used up by the city of my success.

At first I tried not to listen, but slowly I

New Releases

The Consequences of Love

Sulaiman Addonia

Chatto & Windus

Set in 1980s Saudi Arabia, this novel follows the adult life of Naser, an Eritrean refugee who fled his home country when he was 10 years old. Trapped in a world of forbidden love, social barriers and a religion whose rules are manifested in the form of threatening, seemingly omniscient religious police, Naser is isolated and alone.

His monotonous existence is shaken to its very core when Naser receives a love note from a female stranger whose face and body are hidden by the traditional *abaya* worn by Muslim women. Immediately entranced by the women's pink shoes, Naser embarks on an illicit and dangerous relationship where every day is fraught with risk.

Naser finds in the mystery woman the female companionship and attention he has craved for years and has long been prohibited in Saudi Arabia. Beautifully written, with an imaginative and poetic narrative style, this is a moving story of longing, which stands out as a true testament to love.

Rachel Nardiello

Now You See Him

Eli Gottlieb

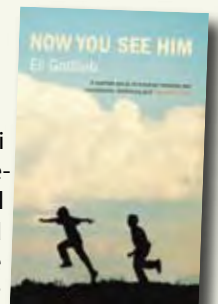
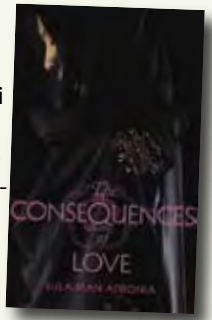
Serpent's Tail

Ten years after Eli Gottlieb's first prize-winning novel comes his long-awaited second offering — the thrilling page-turner *Now You See Him*.

Set six months after the death of his childhood best friend, Rob Castor, Nick Framingham retraces Rob's final days and the circumstances surrounding his death and accounts the crumbling state of his own life in the wake of his friend's demise. The events piece together throughout the wonderful labyrinth-ride of Nick's experiences and subtly build in the backdrop of his failing marriage and embellished childhood and family to culminate in a whirlwind ending.

Although you can't help but sense an almost soap opera-esque undertone, harking from the semi-insular nature of the community, Gottlieb's talent as both a writer and storyteller shines through to create a deep and gripping tale of unbreakable childhood bonds and inevitably doomed love in what is ultimately an enduring expression of the solitary and selfish nature of the human condition.

Jon Falkingham



came to the decision that it was time to take a break, to get some real time away. I realised I was no longer happy there. No, that's not it. Happiness is an illusion. That's something you realise as you get older. Happiness, and whoever said we had a right to be happy was a fool. That holy grail of the modern age, waved in front of wide-eyed believers. And I'm not saying that my money made me miserable. Money has made my life a lot more comfortable. It's made life bearable. You ask those crazies living underground if they're happy in their subway shantytowns and see what they say. Happiness, no I'm not saying I've lost it and want to get it back. I'm just saying I need a break, that my head is full and I feel empty and tired, that none of it seems to make sense anymore. So I came here to Dublin, to this house in Seapoint, came here to get some time out.

"I suppose my childhood would be a logical place to start, if logic can be imposed on something as slippery as a life. A lot has been written about Irish childhoods. Too much, if you ask me."

But that isn't the whole truth. There was a little old woman working in the dry cleaner's the other day who asked me what part of America I was from. I looked her straight in the eye and lied to her just as I've been lying to you, to myself. I said I was from from New York. What was the alternative? To admit that I do not come from the States at all, and that I am in fact from Ireland. Not from Dublin, no, but from a town in the southwest. To tell her that once, almost fifty years ago, when I was twenty, I spent a year in Dublin, a year that started in a September much like this one and ended in his death. That I fled this city with bloodied hands and I have never been back since. That I have spent half a century across the Atlantic, trying to forget where I came from, and, thinking I had succeeded, I found, one day, that all I wanted was to come back, come back and write down what happened.

September 1950

You need a level head and a steady hand to write about your own life, to look at it objectively, unblinkingly and put everything you see down on paper. I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing, writing about that year I spent in Dublin, but I've started it now and something tells me to go on, that at last it's time to tell my side of the story. Each time I go to start writing though, I find there is more and more to explain, that there are countless events, both big and small, that led me out of Kingsbridge

Station and into the city that September morning in 1950. I find myself getting lost amongst the years and stories that are not always my own. I feel as though I'm being pulled this way and that, that there could be any beginning even though the ending will always be the same.

I suppose my childhood would be a logical place to start, if logic can be imposed on something as slippery as a life. A lot has been written about Irish childhoods. Too much, if you ask me. Misery can always be turned into money. I can't say my childhood was miserable. It wasn't interesting enough to be miserable. It was a childhood typical of the place and time in which I grew up, and like that place and time it was, for the most part, uneventful.

I was born in 1930, into a Free State of broken dreams and bitter grievances. I was the youngest of four children, with two

boys and a girl before me. Michael was the eldest and he behaved as the eldest brother normally does; part protector and part tormentor. He tended to keep his distance, acting as if he was superior to myself and the others, until he got bored and came to bother each of us in turn. Next was Kathleen, who was a bit of a tomboy, probably because she grew up in a house full of males. Seán was a year older than me and, being next to each another, there was a lot of rivalry between us. He was a good kid and quiet for the most part, but you didn't want to get on the wrong side of him. He had one of the worst tempers I've ever seen.

Like most brothers and sisters, we enjoyed each other's company some of the time, and the rest we fought like cats and dogs. During the summer holidays especially, the most minor occurrence would turn into a full scale row, which would only be broken up when my mother would threaten that we'd all be sent off to Letterfrack, a real life prison for the boldest boys and girls in Ireland.

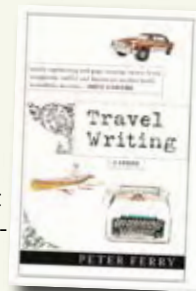
My father had taken over the family barbershop when his father died of tuberculosis, or consumption as we called it. It wasn't exactly what he'd had in mind during his days as a young rebel, fighting in the Tans War and the Civil War, but by then he had a young family and they were his priority. At least the shop would provide them with a roof over their heads and enough money to get by on.

The barbershop was on the main street, and Friday evening and Saturday afternoon

New Releases

Travel Writing

Peter Ferry
Chatto & Windus



Opening with a mysterious yet distressing anecdote about a girl driving dangerously, Peter Ferry's first novel immediately captures the reader's imagination, drawing you into a story filled with humour, tenderness and suspense.

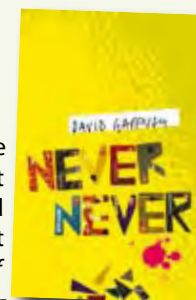
Pete, a high school teacher in a wealthy Chicago suburb, uses the story as an illustration of the power of storytelling to his bored, restless pupils. However, it is the unforeseen and surprising effect of the beautiful girl on Pete that really underpins the novel, forcing him to re-evaluate his life and his experiences thus far. Alienating his friends and girlfriend, Lydia, Pete becomes obsessed with the idea of uncovering the truth about the girl.

A warm and honest insight into fact, fiction and the blurred lines in between, *Travel Writing* offers a journey into one man's early mid-life crisis and is interspersed with travel stories that serve to tell the reader of the character's background. The novel is as entertaining as it is intriguing and is not to be missed.

Rachel Nardiello

Never Never

David Gaffney
Tindal Street Press



Never Never is the brilliant debut novel from David Gaffney. Gaffney is best known for his *Sawn Off Tales*. His writing combines observation, wit and rebuke about today's society through crafty description and brilliant character depiction.

Never Never tells the tale of Eric, a professional financial juggler, as he finds himself irrevocably in debt. He begins to receive postcards with one word on each — Coerce. Calculated. Harassment. This puzzle further deepens the anxiety of a man on the edge while he is trying to maintain domestic bliss with his girlfriend, Charlotte.

With the credit crunch looming, *Never Never* is the story of how our society is addicted to the commodity and the burgeoning norm of debt culture that encases daily life. Gaffney tells it like he sees it. His work is incredibly originally, wonderfully humorous, and revealing about the abundance and sadness of consumerism.

Never Never, along with Catherine O'Flynn's *What Was Lost* demonstrates Tindal Street Press's commitment to new talent and challenging content.

Shirley Stevenson

were the busiest times, when us kids were banished from the place. When it wasn't so busy, or on rainy days when we thought we would die of boredom, my father let us sit in the shop, but only if we were very quiet. It always seemed so warm there, and the air smelled of shampoo, sap and Brylcreem. I became fascinated by the place on those days as I watched my father at work; the rapid movement of his fingers as he snipped at somebody's hair, or the careful manoeuvre of his hand as he ran a deadly razor along a throat that had been tilted back, all the while keeping a conversation going. It all seemed so effortless. Most of the customers we knew, but those we didn't became the heroes and villains of our stories. One was a movie star, one was a murderer, and another was a man with a limp, who had lost three toes in the Boer War.

"All towns in Ireland are much the same, with more pubs than streets and more gossip than good sense. It wasn't an idyllic or very exciting place, but for many years it was the centre of my world"

We lived in a medium-sized town in the southwest of the country. The name does not matter. All towns in Ireland are much the same, with more pubs than streets and more gossip than good sense. It wasn't an idyllic or very exciting place, but for many years it was the centre of my world, and there was a great comfort in living somewhere you could know inside out. Life was simple there. There was school, hurling practice, mass on a Sunday and whatever fun was to be had or books were to be read in between. There were the lanes to play in and the endless countryside to wander in during the summer break, wondering if the world ever did end or if it went on for ever as we looked out at the rolling hills.

Our town seemed like the most normal of places, but looking back on it now, some strange events took place there. One of these was the annual open day at the local mental institution, or the asylum, as we called it. As children we were terrified of that ancient red brick building full of crazy people: men who had killed their own mothers, women who thought they were twenty people when they were really only one, and perverted men who did terrible things to other men and who were a danger to young boys.

My father never went to those open days. He said the people of the town only went to make themselves feel normal and superior, and that it was disgusting, how they stared at the inmates as though they were animals in a zoo. To me though, the inmates were much more frightening and dangerous than any animals I had ever

seen because some of them looked just like regular people. That was the scary thing. Apart from the ones who drooled, or rocked themselves back and forth, and apart from the special clothes they all had to wear, you couldn't actually tell the crazies from the people of the town. One of those smiling, friendly men might have been a murderer or a pervert and you wouldn't know just by looking at them.

Sometimes, when I got older and my mind began to go funny and play tricks on me, I would think of that place, telling myself I would end up there if I didn't pull myself together. I was careful never to speak to anyone about what went on in my head, in case I was carted off to the asylum by my family. I suppose I was lucky I never did wind up there.

There were also moments of magic in the town though, like the night a travelling

theatre company put on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That was the night I discovered the theatre and realised that two parallel realities could exist side by side, the world of the town that we knew so well, and that fantastical world that was there before our eyes, close enough to touch. I didn't know how then, but I promised myself that one day, beneath the cover of darkness, I would slip into that other world, into the world of the theatre.

The Ireland of my childhood might have been a peaceful place, but all over Europe conflicts were breaking out. I was just a little kid when the fighting began in Spain in the summer of 1936, and though Franco's rebellion didn't mean much to me in the beginning, I can still remember how that civil war came to our town, our home, that autumn.

End of book extract

Nights Beneath The Nation. © Denis Kehoe 2008.

Nights Beneath the Nation by Denis Kehoe is published by Serpent's Tail at £9.99 paperback.

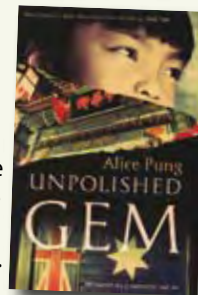
To order a copy at the price of £7.99 including UK p&p, email info@profilebooks.com or call 020 7841 6300, quoting 'Aesthetica Reader Offer'. Offer valid until 30 September 2008.

New Releases

Unpolished Gem

Alice Pung

Portobello



Throughout the centuries, there has been a global movement of people. New communities are created, customs well guarded, but new ones introduced at every interval, assimilation can be tough.

Unpolished Gem retells the classic migrant story: from China to Cambodia, Vietnam and then Thailand, Pung's family fled war and starvation to find asylum in Australia. With Pol Pot's Killing Fields behind them, there is a new world, with traffic signs, grocery stores and escalators.

Unpolished Gem is a warm, humorous, but at times heartbreaking story of the migrants' world, which looks at the idiosyncrasies of life in a new country, while still maintaining your identity, but striving for success in the new homeland.

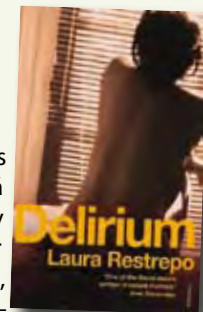
Pung, like many before her, is trapped between two worlds. The story gives an honest and vibrant account of one family's experiences, with beautiful anecdotes and reflective history. *Unpolished Gem* is a book for today, describing the journey that so many have taken.

Shirley Stevenson

Delirium

Laura Restrepo

Vintage



Aguiar returns home to Bogotá after a three-day business trip to discover that his wife, Agustina, has gone mad in his absence. In his desperate attempt to rescue her from her insane state, Aguiar has to delve into her past to discover the dark and disturbing secrets it holds.

Restrepo expertly interweaves alternating narratives, including that of Midas, Agustina's former lover and a drug-trafficker. The narratives explore the painful memories of Agustina's past and the complexities of her family, which unravel the reasons why she is suffering now. Restrepo skilfully examines the history of 80s Columbia, including the drugs, greed, power, corruption and politics. Restrepo provides insight into a violent culture where Agustina represents the impact of a brutal society on the individual.

Restrepo's writing is evocative of the intricacies of life in an unstable country, combining history with a deeply personal story. Highly recommended.

Shona Fairweather