

# ➤ The Book Brief

WriteSide  
**Niamh Shaw**



**What's the gist of your book, *Dream Big - An Irishwoman's Space Odyssey*?**  
It's a memoir of sorts about my protracted journey in allowing myself to finally embrace the life I wanted. Where my passion from space came from, how something felt missing until I embraced that passion. Then what happened on my quest to get to space as a communicator.

**Your work mixes science and art. Who's the more dominant personality in your mind, *The Scientist* or *The Artist*?**  
I think they're equal. I've finally figured that out, after many years being one or the other. I'm probably more confident about science as that's what my formal education is in, but I'm just as curious about the arts. Space fits nicely between both. Space throws up as many questions about our understanding of the universe as it does about human existence. Everything I try to understand about science is relating it back to our existence and understanding ourselves better.

**What's the strangest experience you've had thus far on your journey to space?**  
Probably my time in the Utah desert simulating a mission on Mars! In just 15 days I completely adjusted to living in this extreme environment with four other "analogue astronauts". We wore a spacesuit outside, ate a restricted diet of dried food and had a daily ration of water, which meant not showering and wearing the same two trousers and four tops throughout. It was tough at times, the isolation and confinement especially. What got me through was my crew: taking care of each other, laughing together, sharing this bizarre experience. There are striking similarities to our current lockdown. In a weird way, what I learned there has helped me cope better with Covid-19.

**What one book would you take on a one-way trip to Mars?**  
*Endurance* by Ernest Shackleton, or *Are You Somebody* by Nuala O'Faolain, *Pale Blue Dot* by Carl Sagan, *In the Shadow of Man* by Jane Goodall... ah, I can't choose!

**Write a haiku about space.**  
Earthrise perspective / vast infinite universe / humans see our place.  
Darragh McManus

**THRILLER**

**The Last Crossing**

Brian McGilloway

The Dome Press, 263 pages, paperback €12.60; Kindle €2.63



accused by the IRA leadership of being a police informer. Now, three decades later, all three are brought together again by the former IRA leadership's need to further the peace process by revealing the location of Martin Kelly's long-hidden grave in the countryside outside Glasgow. What should have been a relatively simple task is complicated by the fact that Hugh Duggan is now unsure that Kelly had, in fact, been guilty.

**Pick of the week**

In normal circumstances Tony, Karen and Hugh would have had little in common but the fact they were all affected one way or another by the Troubles.

Back in those days Tony Canning was a teacher, Karen Logue an estate agent and Hugh Duggan an unapologetic IRA hit man. Both Tony and Karen had tragic family reasons to be susceptible to doing little, seemingly innocuous jobs, for the IRA, surreptitiously picking up this and that, driving a car from here to there, or tracking a policeman's movements.

But suddenly the stakes became a lot higher, and all three become involved in the brutal killing of an acquaintance who has been

As the three are driven by a young, connected IRA sympathiser from Belfast to Glasgow, tensions grow as each of them go over what brought them together in the first place and then drove them apart. Already established as one of Northern Ireland's most exciting crime writers thanks to his Inspector Devlin series and, later, DS Lucy Black series, Derry-born Brian McGilloway has delivered an outstanding stand-alone thriller in *The Last Crossing*. From its harrowing opening scene to its equally violent conclusion, this is an utterly compelling story of how Northern Ireland's violent history has affected generations.

Myles McWeeny

**FICTION**

**The Dutch House**

Ann Patchett

Bloomsbury, 352 pages, paperback €13; Kindle €4.74



After coming to prominence with her 2001 novel, *Bel Canto*, Patchett has come to be regarded as one of America's finest contemporary novelists. This eighth novel — which enjoyed almost universal acclaim on its hardback publication last year — is a family saga that unfolds over five decades. The title refers to a house in Pennsylvania where the Conroy family live and the story is told through the eyes of the son, Danny. It captures the relationship between a brother and sister — Danny and Maeve — and how their worlds are upended after their father dies and their step-mother forces them out of the Dutch House. Patchett traces their mistakes and the lessons they learn.

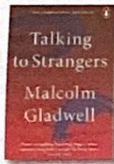
John Meagher

**NON-FICTION**

**Talking to Strangers**

Malcolm Gladwell

Penguin, 400 pages, paperback €13; Kindle €7.99



The erudite *New Yorker* journalist is something of a master of pop psychology, a figure keen to uncover how society functions in ways we might never think of. His latest is a rambling look at strangers as diverse as Hitler and Larry Nassar, the paedophile doctor on the US gymnastics team who was jailed for life. Gladwell aims to show the reader that, all too often, we underestimate people, or fail to understand what makes them tick. This case study-heavy thesis covers a dazzling amount of ground and he bookends his work with the story of a young African American lady, Sandra Bland, who takes her own life after being arrested on a motoring infringement charge.

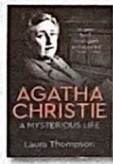
John Meagher

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Agatha Christie: A Mysterious Life**

Laura Thompson

Headline, 576 pages, paperback €15; Kindle €5.99



The English crime writer is the best-selling author ever and while she was able to fashion one great mystery after the next, her private life was every bit as mysterious. Christie was a private person who preferred to let her books do the talking, but there is much intrigue about the figure behind Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. In this fully updated biography — originally published in 2007 — Thompson speaks to Christie's relations and has full access to the author's letters, papers and writing notebooks. She is able to piece together aspects of Christie's life that have long interested literary historians, including her disappearance in 1926, when she vanished from her home for 11 days.

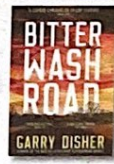
John Meagher

**THRILLER**

**Bitter Wash Road**

Garry Disher

Viper, 416 pages, paperback €12.59; Kindle €2.43



Constable Paul Hirschhausen, better known to everyone as Hirsh, is a former high-flying metropolitan detective turned whistle-blower. However, he's been demoted and exiled to a one-cop station in Tiverton, a tiny town in the middle of nowhere in South Australia. To his dismay, he finds his new colleagues just as corrupt, racist and misogynistic as their city counterparts. What's more, Tiverton, with its stagnant economy, entrenched racism and rural isolation, is a crime hot-spot dealing with murder and the disappearances of young women, not to mention the possible presence of two notorious on-the-run serial killers. But Hirsh is made of stern stuff, and will risk everything to establish the truth.

Myles McWeeny

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Books Ireland

Illustration of a suspension bridge, invented by Sarah Guppy (born 1811), from *Bright Sparks*