

REVIEW
KELLIE CHAMBERS



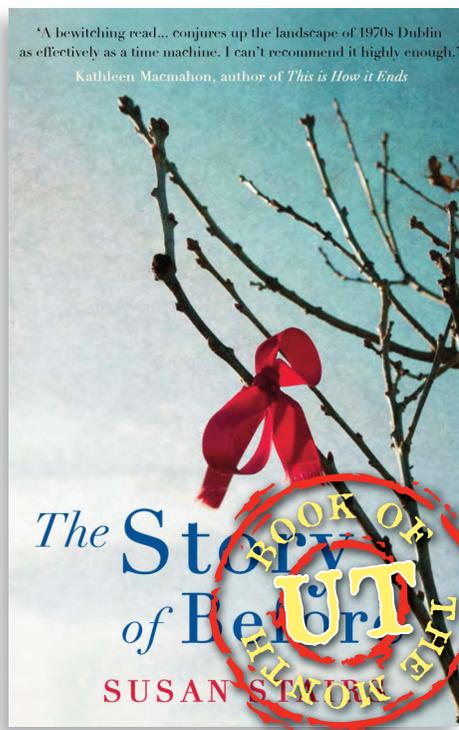
Book Review

Kellie Chambers reviews a selection of the latest literary releases.

BEFORE AND AFTER

THE STORY OF BEFORE

By Susan Stairs
Corvus (£7.99)



The Story of Before, the debut novel by Susan Stairs, opens with eleven-year-old Ruth Lamb and her older brother and sister sitting at a bedroom window, watching the garden of their new Dublin home being covered in a thick blanket of snow on New Year's Eve. Ruth declares that a bad thing will happen in the coming year - she's sure of it. But she cannot see the outline of that thing. She cannot know that it will change their lives utterly, that the shape of their future will be carved into two parts; the before and the after. What follows is Ruth's story; the story of before.

Ruth begins her story as the Lambs are getting ready to move from their home, where her father was raised, to a new house in Hillcourt Rise, an estate on the outskirts of Dublin. Whilst Mick, her father, was always opposed to a move, he relented to the constant pleading from Ruth's mother when she discovered she was pregnant with her fourth child. As the moving day finally arrives Rose, Ruth's 'mam', goes into labour and as well as a new home, there is a new addition to the family; baby Kev. Ruth's siblings Mel and Sandra take to life in their new home straight away, making friends with the other children on the estate. Ruth however finds it more difficult to permeate the close friendships already established. Instead, she continually finds herself on the outskirts

looking in. She finds herself dividing her time with the Lamb's neighbour Bridie Goggin, who makes it her business to know all the goings on in the estate, and volunteering to look after baby Kev. However as time progresses, Ruth never really settles into Hillcourt Rise. Her mind is fraught with fear, distrust and suspicion about where her father mysteriously disappears to, the motives of her neighbours and a sinister presence who always seems to be watching her.

Stairs' debut novel is remarkable, with a narrator who commands your attention. Ruth is an outstanding creation who exudes a childhood innocence, which is however tinged with a wisdom far older than her years. What makes her so believable is that she is flawed; she is young and as such can make mistakes because she doesn't yet know better. In this way Stairs captures Ruth's childish qualities perfectly. Stairs also encapsulates the 1970s completely; when children were trusted to look after younger siblings or had freedom to roam the streets whilst their parents had a sense of security that they would always be safe.

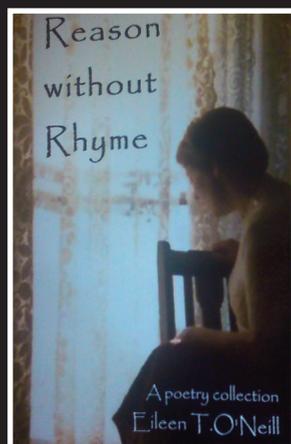
The Story of Before is an exquisitely crafted novel. By stating Ruth's premonition of a 'bad thing' at the, the succeeding tension is palpable on each page as the reader senses it coming closer and closer. *The Story of Before* is a hugely affecting novel; it captivates you from the very start and by the time you have finished, you will feel as if you have been on an emotional journey. An impressive debut, which marks Susan Stairs as a name to watch out for in the future.

REASON WITHOUT RHYME

By Eileen T. O'Neill

The book can be purchased from:
deornellasbooks@yahoo.co.uk
(Softcover, £7.99; Hardcover, £13)

Although living in England for 20 years, Eileen O'Neill's debut poetry collection, *Reason Without Rhyme*, is greatly influenced by her time living in Belfast and latterly visiting the city. The poem 'Leaving of Belfast' explores the themes of confronting the once familiar to find it irrevocably changed. O'Neill's direct use of language, illustrates the experience of returning to your former home place once you have been away for a period of time and the contradictions you may feel as a result. There is also a sense of nostalgia throughout the collection. 'Dancing With Temptation' recalls seeing the



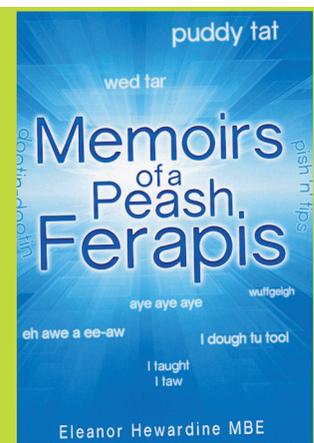
Undertones live in a Belfast bar and the sense of freedom that came with being united with fellow revellers through a joined love of the music. Belfast is not the only theme in the collection, O'Neill is also heavily influenced by her other travels as well as her family. *Reason Without Rhyme* is a colourful collection of the poet's observations and experiences that you can't help but become immersed in.

MEMOIRS OF A PEASH FERAPIST

By Eleanor Hewardine
Vanguard Press (£7.99)

Belfast-born Eleanor Hewardine, who trained in the Edinburgh School of Speech Therapy in the 1950s, has had an interesting career working within hospitals and the community. Her new book, *Memoirs of a Peash Ferapis*, tells the story of her life as a speech therapist in Northern Ireland, giving an insight into the work involved in Speech and Language Therapy.

Following her career, which has seen Hewardine be awarded the Honours of the College of Speech and Language Therapists in 1987 and an MBE for services to Speech Therapy in 1992, *Memoirs of a Peash Ferapis* recounts Hewardine's journey as she brings new hope to her countless patients suffering



from speech impairments, recounting the humorous, fun and emotional cases she has along the way.

Memoirs of a Peash Ferapis is an enlightening and authentic account of life as a speech therapist. Whilst peppered with humour, Hewardine's memoir is a heart-warming read which not only recounts the evolution of speech therapy in Northern Ireland but also how the country itself has developed on a social scale.