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THE IRISH TIMES

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Subscriber Only Books Review

Book reviews in brief: teenage love, the power of nature and the chaos of motherhood

Books by Jane DeLynn, Don Conroy and Jenny Slate

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Artist and author Don Conroy at home in Dalkey, Dublin. Photograph: Eric Luke

[Brigid O'Dea](#)

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In Thrall by Jane DeLynn, introduced by Colm Tóibín (Divided, £11.99)

“Fiction about young girls has often been in thrall to silence, secrecy and evasion,” Colm Tóibín writes in an introduction to the republication of this dazzling classic of lesbian adolescence. Set in pre-Stonewall New York, in a time when (queer) “love could just about speak its name, but a time before everyone was listening”, our protagonist, the alluring, 16-year-old Lynn, is a precocious teen with impeccable vocabulary. Lynn falls for her 37-year-old English teacher, with whom she begins an affair, although it would seem fair to concede that it is the anguish of love and sex with which our tragic heroine is truly enamoured. In *Thrall* is a beguiling account of the perversion, angst and ego of adolescence.

Drawn to Nature: Encounters with Irish Wildlife by Don Conroy (Gill Books, €22.99)

“Nature reveals the common, the rare, the magnificent.” National treasure Don Conroy celebrates the transcendental power of nature through artwork, poetry and literary musings. In a beautifully crafted book we find facts dressed in poetry, illustration guides, tips on building a nest box and anecdotes of encounters with critters that read like folk tales. The artist calls on his readers to observe our natural world and reconnect to the too seldom feeling of awe it inspires. Reluctant readers will enjoy the artwork that complements short blocks of text, although typographic variation could prove a challenge for some. Conroy’s invitation to embrace the art of stillness is a welcome antidote to the frenzy we make of the Christmas season.

Life Form by Jenny Slate (Fleet, £20)

Jenny Slate, star and co-writer of beloved kooky “children’s” animation *Marcel the Shell*, and bestselling essay collection *Little Weirds*, is weird. It’s one of her most attractive qualities. In this collection of genre-bending essays we follow the author and comedian as she seeks and finds love, to become via this partner a “wild-pregnant-mammal-thing” and learns to care for the infant that was plunged from her vagina during a global pandemic. A lot to process, huh? Given so Slate’s prose veers towards absurdism to capture the incertitude and body-eclipsing chaos of motherhood. This works at points to deliver unique and beautiful perspicacity, while at other times the consistency of obscure metaphor has a dizzying effect.

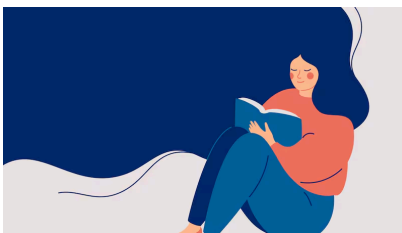
[Brigid O’Dea](#)

Brigid O’Dea, a contributor to *The Irish Times*, writes about health



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Fragments of Victory: the Contemporary Irish Left, edited by Oisín Gilmore and David Landy