



My Dream of You

Nuala O'Faolain

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A *New York Times* notable book and bestseller, this debut novel from *Irish Times* columnist Nuala O'Faolain takes on life and love with Dickensian flair and the striking intimacy that characterized her bestselling and acclaimed memoir, *Are You Somebody?*

Set in Ireland and spanning a century and a half, *My Dream of You* unfolds the compelling stories of two women and their quests for passion, connection, and fulfillment. A globetrotting Irish travel writer, Kathleen de Burca is used to living--and loving--on the run. On the brink of fifty, she decides to leave her job and rethink her life. Intrigued by a divorce case dating back to the days of the Potato Famine, she tries hand at writing about it. The case, called "The Talbot Affair," detailed the clandestine liaison between the wife of a British landlord and an Irish servant in Ireland in the 1850s. After a bitter thirty-year absence, Kathleen returns to Ireland, the land of her troubled childhood and turbulent heritage, in search of answers to her questions about desire and lasting love.

My Dream of You Details

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Author : Nuala O'Faolain

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From Reader Review My Dream of You for online ebook

Rebecca says

I have read her first book, a memoir, and then Julie sent me "My Dream of You" in the Bodacious Box of Books, and I loved it. It's long, and starts pretty slowly, seeming like one of those novels in which the main character keeps doing dumb and self-destructive things again, again, and again. . . but then it had bolts of humor, and some characters who offered insight and common sense, and the main character seemed to be growing and learning from her dumb actions, and I ended up reading it in about three days and really enjoying it. I know a little about Irish history, and O'Faolain's stories helped me understand a little more about (HUGE GENERALITY COMING! SORRY!) what makes "the Irish experience" what it is--I knew the Famine was bad, but parts of this story tie into the fact that the enclosure movement took advantage of the Famine, so that the native Irish were too weak to resist. People were living in holes in the ground! There were dead bodies lying along the roads! And many of the English landlords viewed the native Irish people as vermin. WOW.

BUT that's not even really the focus on the novel, and I think O'Faolain took a huge risk in all the strands she brought together--Kathleen's historical research, her family's immediate history (mother's death and father's behavior), and her life as she turns 50--but I think it works. It's a sad but a healing book--"bittersweet," I think. And I don't think I'd've liked it when I was younger--under 40, say. But I certainly did like it at this stage of my life.

Sad to find out that Nuala O'Faolain died in 2008 of cancer, discovered only 3 months earlier, but good to know she died after a last trip to various countries with some of her siblings. AND that there was a big funeral for her in Dublin and the streets were filled.

I loved the old priest's advice to Kathleen: "Do the thing that's less passive, he had said. Do the active thing. There's more of the human in that." (509)

Angela Dawn says

Layered and atmospheric, this book relates, within the context of an historical divorce case, the tragic life of the Irish country people during what is euphemistically called "The Potato Famine", but was actually a form of genocide manipulated by the English aristocracy, as well as a writer's struggle with the emotional emptiness of her own life.

Ms. O'Faolain's honesty in portraying women's sexuality is also refreshing.

The painful loneliness that her semi-autobiographical central character, and the woman from the past share in common is a powerful and sensitively explored theme.

You feel immersed, along with the central character, in the long ago world of the subjects of her research for the historical novel she is writing. Ultimately she writes a very different story than she anticipated, and you are carried along on her journey to the discovery that what we consider "truths" about the past are subjectively influenced by many things, including the distance from our point of view in the present.

This book was particularly meaningful to me on a personal level because of my Irish heritage.

Jill says

Wow. What a beautiful, powerful, heavy book. It's an enlightening look at one woman's redefinition of identity and love and passion, her struggles with her past and the memory of her mother and her entry into middle age, and how she learns to heal. Just riveting. Also some absolutely lovely descriptions of Ireland's scenery and people.

Suzanne says

O'Faolain takes her time in this wonderfully written novel that unfurls at its own pace. Although it is 530 pages, I read it in a week because it drew me in. The central character is a 50-yr old Irish woman who has spent the last 30 years living in London. She abandoned her dying mother and siblings in Ireland, disgusted with the treatment of women in that country and with her father's coldness. Her new life as a travel writer in London is a solitary and roaming existence. The death of her only friend leads her to return to Ireland, where she reseaches an old scandal from the 1800s. This book may appeal to middle-aged women who want to see how their life would have been if they were single and fleeing a horrible childhood. I enjoyed the aspects of feminism, politics, and struggle over identity. The author provides a rare perspective by not romanticizing Ireland, showing its years of famine, poverty, and religious problems as overlapping with the passion of its people. The main character, Kathleen, is engrossing and most likely based on the author herself.

Tynan Power says

An extraordinary book. I was completely blown away by the quality of the writing and was quickly drawn in to the story. This surprised me a little as I don't think the description of the book was able to convey how absorbing and well-written the book is. It is the kind of book that is worth reading even if there is nothing about the plot that seems intriguing.

This book isn't historical fiction, per se, though I put it on that shelf. It includes a story within a story, and that inner tale is historical. The primary story also is reflective on the history of the famine in Ireland.

Julia Mandell says

I absolutely loved this book. I was compelled by the subject matter, being a single woman, though only in my twenties--it's about a women in her forties (or fifties? can't remember), never married, who starts examining her life after the death of a friend and ends up returning to Ireland and memories of the family and childhood she ran away from at 17. I loved the character for her entirely normal yet revolutionary life--I've never read a novel before that focused on a modern single woman in such a razor-sharp way. The book validated her (and me, and all the other single women out there) and her life, while also being entirely open and honest about her fears, her regrets and her joys.

And the writing is amazing: so precise. Kathleen's narrative reminded me of good psychotherapy, which I love--she examines and reexamines herself and her past and all of her revelations and perceptions make up a rich whole while overlapping and contradicting each other. As she moves through time her narratives about herself and her family and her past change and shift and new obsessions and sensations float to the surface, never refuting the previous ones but adding to a richly multilayered experience. It's a true celebration of the

ineffable complexity of being.

Christie says

This book wasn't at all what I thought it would be, but it drew me in because the writing was so beautiful. It took me a while to get into the book, but once I was over a hundred pages into it, I became totally intrigued. First of all, I love the way the author describes Ireland, how beautiful it is, how scenic. And I love the details about the Famine, and how the author weaves past and present together in the text. This story is about a woman who finally decides to confront her past, and who opens herself up after staying closed off to people and to herself for so long. It's an engaging and vibrant story, the characters are real and alive, and the setting (London and then Ireland) is richly described. I highly recommend this book, not only is it a beautiful story, but it also has a lot of history in it, so that you can learn about the Famine and Ireland, while at the same time getting deep into the heart of the story.

Dora Okeyo says

I don't know where to start with this book. If I were to talk about the heroine, Kathleen, then I would be taking you through a maze without Ariadne's thread to get you out. If I were to tell you about the Irish, or the Talbots then I would be selling you shirt of some kind of fiction, the one that sinks into your mind when the leaves turn brown and fall to the ground.

So, is this a beautiful read?

Maybe.

Is it worth your time? Well, the written word is always worth some time, but this one would command your attention.

Is there any relief for Kathleen or any characters in the book? It depends on what kind of relief you have in mind, but Kathleen returns to Ireland after running away earlier on and making a name for herself as a Travel Writer and though her feet hit the ground, it's her heart that she realizes never left and was still wounded.

A story about living your life to the fullest and moving on always.

Kathleen Flynn says

I loved this novel so much. With a dead gay friend, a midlife crisis, a globetrotting career, many bad choices with sex and alcohol, a whole boatload of Irish doom, and the sudden appearance of a sexy stranger who turns out to be terrific in bed, it seems a compendium of literary cliches. So much could have gone wrong here! And none of it did, thanks to O'Faolain's excellent writing and scorching emotional truthfulness.

I was impressed by the ingenious structure of this novel, how it tells the story of the protagonist's life in a way that is nonlinear and yet completely satisfying. It appears almost random and meandering at first view but is surely the product of careful thought, as the end makes clear.

The English law-student boyfriend at the start of the book who tosses the 19th-century lawsuit on the bed they share introduces many of the crucial themes that will echo through the story: English/Irish, illicit passions, the potato famine. Things work both as story elements and symbols, like hunger, yet it never, at least to my taste, was heavy-handed.

O'Faolain unfortunately died about 10 years ago, and this was her first novel, which came out when she was around 60 -- previously she was a journalist and memoirist. I have to wonder, was she writing this (in her mind, on paper) for decades? It manages to be so full of feeling without ever quite verging into the sentimental, thanks to power of specificity and the careful way she chooses what to tell and when. It is never a phony suspense that she has created, as less crafty writers would. "I could not bear to think about how my mother had died" -- there is none of that. The protagonist simply does not think about how her mother died. Because she doesn't, we readers don't, and the suspense created by such silences is especially subtle. When truths are revealed, they are devastating.

Carla Acheson says

My Dream of You is one of those powerful stories that stays with you long after reading.

The story is narrated by Kathleen, a travel writer from Ireland, who at the death of a close colleague and friend begins to evaluate her life at the age of fifty. Struggling with loneliness and a deep lack of fulfilment she embarks on a journey back to the Ireland she left at the age of seventeen in order to confront her roots and deal with the demons of her past.

Much of the book is devoted to Kathleen's memories of her sketchy and sad childhood which is slightly reminiscent of Frank McCourt's, Angela's Ashes. No mistaking here that the authentic dialect and descriptions add a beautiful visual depth to this story in a similar fashion. There are also reflections throughout the book on the potato famine, and many times the heartfelt emotions which were conveyed simply swept you up and away in a sometimes uncomfortable but pleasant way, in that you felt you were not just reading a sentence but indulging in some beautifully articulated Irish literature.

The heart of the story is Kathleen's inner struggle to feel loved and whether or not she will ever again find a passionate lover again, an experience which she had only briefly tasted once in her younger years. When married 'Shay' appears in her life he becomes a fulfilling lover, if only for a fleeting time. Soon Kathleen is faced with the difficult choice of facing life as a middle-aged woman indulging in only sporadic unions with her lover, or the alternative option of never encountering a soul-bonding sexual experience ever again.

The ending ties together all her thoughts, self-discoveries, and final choices as she embarks on a new life without the people she has loved, and let go, both in the past and the present.

Overall the book was riveting and I found myself lost in its prose. For those who appreciate self-exploratory books with a deeper connection I truly recommend it as a pleasurable read.

B the BookAddict says

While this book is essentially about one modern day woman's struggle with loneliness, there is an amazing sub-story when she researches the potato famine of 1839 in Ireland and learns of the moral and legal difficulties facing Irish women who wanted to divorce in that time.

I really liked this book because it taught me so much about a period of history that I was so unaware of. As many have pointed out, the main character was indeed flawed in her judgements regarding her personal life. But I think that only added reality to the story because none of us are perfect in our actions in times of stress.

Isabelle says

I had heard an interview of Nuala O'Faolain on NPR as her book was coming out, and I had so enjoyed her wit that I rushed to the store to buy the book. What a great idea that was! I was so swept away by the double tale of the book that I called in sick from work to read through until I was done. It is like a duet in harmony on the destinies of women in Ireland, today and one century ago, young or middle-aged, always not quite loved enough and having to pay the price for being vibrant beings. Even today, when I think about the book, it helps be at peace with being a middle-aged woman.

Anne says

I did not like anything about this book. The author tried to make a connection between two women: one a current day woman who sleeps around, and the other a woman from the Irish gentry in the 1850's that according to court records had an affair. The modern day woman couldn't keep herself from sleeping with anyone, literally and frequently. A possibility that there could be any connection between these two women is extremely remote; yet, the author kept insisting there was. Frankly, I wonder how this book was ever even a candidate and then included on the NYT's Notable Book List. Even the book's title, 'Are You Somebody' had the author's publisher wondering if the historical woman was enough of a somebody or did it need a second opportunity to explain there was a dream of that somebody, somewhere! Obviously, I favor a well-developed historical storyline than a bodice-ripping romance once. Take a possibly intriguing story and stick with it. The rest of it was fluff and annoying. I probably won't read another book by this author.

Kathy Davie says

Beautiful writer. The method used to write this particular book drove me nuts however. I suspect partly because the ending left so very many loose ends. And it was maddening to read—I thought she'd never get to the point. I almost stopped reading before I finished, it drove me so nuts!

There were so many subplots and so much backtracking to relate the history of each subplot and naturally none of the backtracking was in any particular order.

But, O'Faolain does use words beautifully...

Sherri says

Hmm, interesting to read the mixed reviews of this book on GoodReads. I thoroughly enjoyed it. The author is a grand storyteller and her language drew me in. I learned more about Ireland and the Potato Famine than I had known before and loved how she portrayed the people the main character, Kathleen, got to know during her sojourn in her homeland. And I really loved the story of the main character, who seemed very human and real to me. No, there are no neatly wrapped happy endings to the book, but isn't that how life is? And the historical subplot was intriguing as well, shadowing the messiness and lack of resolution that is reality. Not a deeply meaningful book but definitely an enjoyable tale that lends itself to reflection about how we live our

lives and our regrets.

Clare Fitzgerald says

For my vacation reading while I was in Ireland, I wanted to stay with the Irish theme (since I was in Ireland) but perhaps deviate slightly from the history books (since I would be going to a million museums, and also I was running short on Irish history books), so I instead packed — among other volumes — the copy of Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You* that I rescued from my aunt's Irish lit collection over the summer. It turned out to be a perfect choice for reading on the plane, and sometimes in the car while driving around the picturesque sheep pastures of Western Ireland, and at breakfast in cute little B&Bs while eating porridge with honey and cream, and (possibly best of all) in the lounge at the Hotel Aisling in Dublin on a sunny Good Friday afternoon while drinking tea. It's not an especially long book — by my standards at least, clocking in at 544 pages — but most of these reading sessions were fairly short, as we had a pretty busy vacation schedule.

My Dream of You is not the sort of book I tend to read too much of, in that it's a contemporary realism/litfic piece that's mostly about middle-aged people and sex, but if I'm going to read a depressing litfic book about middle-aged people and sex, I think this was a good pick for me in that it also has a lot of stuff about writing and history and travel and feminism (sort of) and being perpetually single, all of which actually are relevant to my everyday interests. And barring some unexpected tragedy, I will be middle-aged someday (I hope!).

Our narrator and protagonist is Kathleen de Burca, a 49-year-old Irishwoman living in London where she has a successful career as a travel writer for a small company that is part of a larger company. When she is not traveling to glamorous locations for work, she lives alone in a basement apartment in London. Kathleen has been single since she broke up with her J-school boyfriend almost thirty years ago, but has a dedicated habit of having unfulfilling sexual encounters with every boring-ass traveling businessman or married douchebag who makes a pass at her in the course of her travels. O'Faolain's writing is engaging enough that I actually felt sympathy for Kathleen's transparently useless quest to find human connection via hooking up with randos in suits, instead of doing what I'd normally do, which is stick my nose into the air and harrumph that a fully independent, nomadic lifestyle is CLEARLY WASTED ON SOME PEOPLE. Part of this is because Kathleen's character is well-developed enough to make it clear that this lifestyle isn't actually *totally* wasted on Kathleen; she actually very much values her independence, especially having been raised in the stagnation and conservatism of mid-century Ireland by an authoritarian father and a chronically depressed mother. The tension between her desire to love and be loved and her desire to stay way the hell far away from the trap that was Irish domestic life when she was growing up provides a lot of the internal conflict for the book.

When Kathleen's colleague and best friend dies unexpectedly, it precipitates a midlife crisis. For Kathleen, a midlife crisis looks like retiring early and returning to the Irish countryside to do research on an 1840s divorce case that she'd been interested in since J-school, known as "the Talbot affair," in which the young wife of an Anglo-Irish landlord was accused of adultery with a groom. While she is there, she has a brief affair with a married Irish man who also lives in England, named Shay (short for Seamus), and does a lot of musing over her life — both her unhappy childhood in Ireland and the various dramas she's gotten into in England and around the world — and visits what family she has remaining in Ireland (a brother, a sister-in-law, and a niece). But the most fun bits are her interactions with the people of Ballygall (the little town she's doing research in) and the historical stuff she finds and the general low-grade absurdity of her time in the country. The hotel she checks into, the Talbot Arms, is a family-owned affair, and Kathleen quickly befriends the little clan that runs it. They keep putting her up into other accommodations for the weekend due to hosting various larger events: in a little thatched cottage during a teacher's convention, and in a very

modern lakeside house belonging to some guy named Felix for a wedding. Kathleen meets Nan Leech, the ferociously judgmental and ancient local librarian, and interviews a couple other elderly locals about what they remember being told about the Talbot affair by their own elders. She pokes around the library and the old grounds of the estate, and writes a draft of what appears to be a historical romance novella about the case, the chapters of which are included within the book as she writes them. (The novella, in my opinion, is pretty good.)

Some people might find the ending of the book not particularly satisfying, since it's a bit anticlimactic from what I think a traditional sort of ending would be, but I liked it. So much of the book is dedicated to Kathleen's mental rehashing of her terrible decision-making throughout her life, and I think she makes a non-terrible decision at the end, so I think it represents her growing up more (there is still growing up to do at fifty) and moving into the next phase of her life where hopefully she will continue to make better decisions.

There are a lot of things in this book that I feel like I ordinarily would complain about, but in this case I think all work for the O'Faolain is telling (see above re: Kathleen's terrible decision-making skills). However, there are two main complaints I actually have. One is that the printing that I have has a big chunk of pages missing and replaced with a duplicate of the next chunk of pages instead — so the book goes from pages 1 to 277, then page 300-something to 330-something, then page 300-something again to the end. Obviously this is not the author's fault, as I am entirely certain she did not write it this way. My other complaint is that the novel eschews the use of quotation marks (although, interestingly, Kathleen does not in the excerpts from her novella). I'm decently used to reading things without quotation marks — French writing conventions universally use the em-dash to introduce dialogue, and *My Dream of You* is hardly the only English novel to forgo traditional quotation marks — but I still think it's unnecessary and a bit pretentious.

I probably won't dip back into the world of depressing realistic fiction for another several months since I do have an extremely limited tolerance for reading about people who aren't enjoying their sex lives but keep goddamn having sex anyway (JUST GO DO SOMETHING ELSE WITH YOUR TIME, THE WORLD IS LARGE AND FULL OF INTERESTING THINGS), but if all Irish women's fiction comes with such a big dose of tragic history stuff — which I suspect it might — then when I do, that's probably where I'll go. Alternately, I might read O'Faolain's memoir, a copy of which I also stole from my auntie.

Originally posted at <http://bloodygranuaile.livejournal.co...>

Saleh MoonWalker says

Onvan : My Dream of You - Nevisande : Nuala O'Faolain - ISBN : 1573229083 - ISBN13 : 9781573229081 - Dar 529 Safhe - Saal e Chap : 2001

Marguerite says

This is one of two books by journalists I read this week. This book can't be easily pigeonholed, which might put off some readers. But it appealed to me, maybe even more, because of its ambiguity. The novel tells the tale of Kathleen de Burca, an Irish-born travel writer coming to grips with her terrible past in midlife while she tries to chase down the true story of adultery among the aristocracy during the famine. Kathleen's desire to understand passion, and its absence, leads her to reflect on her own experiences, and those of her family. Her experiences shed light on the historical mystery she's trying to uncover, but they also cast shadows over it. And, much as in real life, some characters wander off, some trails get cold, some information is lost to

time. There's no tidy wrap-up, much as in life. But Nuala O'Faolain is a first-rate storyteller. Her (flawed) characters spring to life convincingly. The story moves along at a good pace for such a long (500-some pages) book. Her descriptions of the Irish countryside are poetic, but her view of its history unrepentantly unsentimental. Her insights into people are similar, and just as keen. I wish O'Faolain had left a larger body of work.

Brandi says

My first read was 8-13 May 2012.

Second read: 20-25 September 2013. I added a star this time around; having read a lot more Irish literature in the intervening time, and reading it critically for my PhD thesis, I was able to engage with the text on a much deeper level, and it meant a lot more to me this time.

Nuala O'Faolain's *My Dream of You* reads like lyric poetry. The reader is transported through 500 pages of beautifully articulated sensations, feelings and images – “All along that stretch of the road flickering polka-dot light danced down through the lacy young branches of the beech trees, and it danced on them” (220). As other reviewers have mentioned, the plot is nothing to speak of, but it truly isn't supposed to be – as a novel predicated on the narrator's personal development, we are skillfully lead through her memories and insights in a disjointed narrative reminiscent of our own thought processes.

I also appreciated O'Faolain's thoughtful exploration of “what it means to be Irish.” Kathleen seems to have inherited her father's Irish patriotism even while she professes to hate everything about him, and to resent his neglect of his family “for Ireland.” For instance, even though Kathleen's brother Danny “lived for” soccer, their father “was actively hostile to soccer. He believed so strongly that Gaelic football was the real, native football, and that soccer was an English imposition that when the soccer club needed the loan of the Gaelic pitch for a charity match, he brought pressure through Irish-language circles in Dublin to stop the pitch being lent” (461). Kathleen's patriotism, meanwhile, is the exact opposite insofar as Ireland to her is *people* rather than abstract principles. She explores the significance of the Famine through recreating the stories of the Talbots and their servants – *humanizing* history, as it were.

While there is so much to love about this book, my reasons for giving it a three-star rating are highly personal and probably somewhat illogical. While the disjointed narrative makes sense for what she's trying to accomplish, I prefer something more tightly connected. This is not to say that I need a book to be plot-driven to enjoy it (though reading this after binging on detective fiction is a bit jarring), but I would have liked her to explore what those aforementioned sensations, feelings and images *mean* (without having to say, definitively, that it means *one thing*), rather than simply present them and let the reader make all the important connections. She could at least *start* the discussion, in other words.

I also found it difficult to relate to a character so bitterly pessimistic: “I was so primed for enduring grief that I could hardly imagine anything important happening to me that wasn't going to make me unhappy. I became unhappy; then I was sorry for myself for being unhappy; then I despised myself for my self-pity” (401-2). The point of the book is her development, sure, but it was a process that I couldn't relate to myself, making it harder for me to understand her motivations at times. Then again, I might just be too young; I can't image that I fit into the target audience for this book at 23.

Maria Stevenson says

I'm going to start putting "spoiler alert" on all my reviews from now on, I think. Reason being: I'm realizing I come to goodreads for more of a book club discussion, rather than wanting to influence anybody as to whether they should invest time and money in a book.

I found this book in the "Little Free Library" on Granville Island, and having been recommended another book by Nuala O'Faolain, and never having heard of her before, I thought this was perhaps a sign.

I did not know, till comfortably tucked into *My Dream Of You*, that Nuala O'Faolain had already passed away a few years ago. I suppose because she was new to me, I assumed she was alive and well. That knowledge added an extra sadness to an already somewhat sad (okay, VERY sad, on the whole, although not the ending) tale. I couldn't help but think of the protagonist Kathleen as a version of O'Faolain herself.

So why the spoiler alert? Well, I guess the few gripes I had with this novel may possibly give a few things away. I found the character of Ian (the asshole husband of protagonist's friend Caroline) to be a bit of a cut-out of an asshole. (Okay, what an image!, and I should probably say, "arsehole" since this is Great Britain.) We are not given a lot of him, but when he does surface, it's as if he is there merely to illustrate a point about men and women and how horrible romantic relationships can be among some dysfunctional people, to the point where to call it love or romance is an utter crock. I just could not buy into the idea of someone like Caro, with money and looks to burn, would throw her life away on the biggest asshole she probably ever met. I get that O'Faolain is trying to illustrate a point with this, but it did not feel believable, these characters did not walk off the page. However I did find the dialogue in the book very good and authentic, even if some of the characters were not.

The descriptions of scenery were lovely and evocative.

The story-within-a-story was more bearable than usual (I usually grow bored with stories-within) because of the way that our narrator Kathleen was uncovering it simultaneously to us readers having it unveiled. There were times when it got a bit tedious, but usually around that time, we'd be led back in to the main-time story. I did find the book to drag a bit in the middle, but heck, it's 447 pages long.

Getting back to the subject of unbelievability, and hence my "spoiler alert" tag, I was a little shocked by Kathleen's promiscuity, when it came about right when she was in a blissfully happy, fulfilling relationship with her first serious boyfriend Hugo. It's not like their passion had died one bit, (perhaps it should have, to make the cheating easier to swallow) No, those lucky two, after consummating their relationship insanelly well on a Greek island, have not slowed down in their erotic passion...a year? or so later when Kathleen just cannot say "no" to a sleazy house-mate of theirs. It's so sudden, this unveiling of Kathleen-the-easy, that I almost had to put the book down and digest this bit. But then we're told that it's due to low self esteem, she just can't say "no" to anyone. Somehow this seems a bit much, considering she's a confident career woman who travels the globe for her job. It would be different if she were searching for elusive passion. But she's already found it in Hugo, so her cheating on him makes little sense. Oh but she had a hard Irish upbringing, in a house where there were too many children, too little money and too little love. Okay, but still...that does not really explain the inability to say "no," considering Kathleen had the toughness to leave her family and homeland without a backward glance, she is not a doormat.

Having said this, I did enjoy the way that passion is seen from all angles in this story. At its worst and best and in-between. Actually I don't recall a lot of in-between, come to think of it. It was either there or it wasn't. I love the passage where she talks about the vast gulf between the instinctive generosity of the body and the possibility of any good ever coming of it. (This after a drunken romp with a guy who had been a great friend only, up to that point.)

What I really liked about this novel is the way it picks up momentum as it gets closer to the end, and really does become a page-turner, as we wait to find out a couple of things, how they are going to pan out. Added to this is the disclosure of how Kathleen's mother died, (up till then I had not even wondered about it, just assumed it was cancer or something, which indeed it was, but coupled with a pregnancy)...not to spoil any more after already putting "spoiler alert" but this part is the saddest and most heart-breaking I think.

In all, I came away from this novel satisfied, and impressed, and I will definitely read more by Nuala O'Faolain.