

# [PDF] ☆ The Flamethrowers ☆ Rachel Kushner – Soccerjerseys-wholesale.co

Posted on 08 August 2017 By Rachel Kushner

The Flamethrowers follows Reno, a would be artist nicknamed after her hometown who moves to New York and, through a relationship with an older, wealthy Italian artist becomes a peripheral member of the city s vibrant art scene Though she spends her days among quirky, artistic people, Reno only makes half hearted attempts at work of her own rather, she spends the bulk of the novel acting as a sort of mascot for her older, morally corrupted friends When Reno does attempt to an art project of her own capturing images of a motorcycle ride across the Utah salt flats it goes horribly wrong and ends with the young pro artist falling, literally and figuratively, in with an Italian race team sponsored by her boyfriend s family s tire business are you rolling your eyes yet Reno then becomes a Danica Patrick like racing pin up for the company and is invited to Italy for some promotional work with the team After some hemming and hawing, Reno and her boyfriend go to Italy where, you guessed it, things once again go terribly wrong and Reno kind of joins the Brigade Rosse, sort of Or maybe not. I really wanted to like The Flamethrowers I really did but the novel is a profound disappointment Reno spends the entire novel on the verge of something on the verge of developing her own artistic style, on the verge of racing fame, on the verge of being a member of a radical leftist group without ever doing anything Instead, Reno passively ping pongs between men who direct the course her life will next take she is entirely devoid of agency within a socio historic moment that was about claiming and utilizing one s agency This question of agency who has it, who claims it, who uses it doesn t even amount to

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subtext instead, Kushner distracts her readers with one winking New York in the 70s reference after another Forget about the act of becoming, the narration seems to say, here s the Blackout of 1977 Here s a generic Max s Kansas City type place Pay no attention to the novel s decided lack of depth The novel leads you to believe that something profound will happen to Reno, that within all that she has experienced, all the power she has relinquished to others, she will somehow, in some way come into her own she will be able to amalgamate all that she has seen into a profound work of art But, by the end of the novel, Reno hasn t acted on anything. After investing a week and almost four hundred pages worth of bus reading efforts into *The Flamethrowers*, I expected than Kushner delivered. I remember when John Banville won the Booker Prize someone remarked that despite the enormous cultural changes in our world British writers were still writing about art historians The New York art scene seems to serve a similar function for American writers I ll confess here that the New York art scene bores me And globally speaking probably lost any real influence with the demise of Andy Warhol New York s cultural relevance after Warhol is its street life, most notably rap and graffiti Kushner attempts to give her New York artists relevance by marrying them to the social unrest in Italy in the 1970s, which never comes across as anything but a rather random parallel There s a really good novel buried in these 400 pages The problem for me was that Kushner wasn t interested in writing a good novel she overreached herself and set herself the task of writing a work of art. The good novel is the story of Reno, a young nameless girl referred to by the town of her birth who arrives in New York full of ambition She s faced with a world of hideous men Narcissistic, vain, egotistical pumped up with their own self importance and sense of entitlement In 1970s New York pretty young girls, it would appear, were required to be little than groupies There are two brilliant pivotal moments in Reno s quest for identity One when a simple odd jobs guy treats her with kindness, pretty much the only act of kindness she receives from a male in the entire novel She s not interested Can t blame her for that She has her sights set higher The other is when an aristocratic Italian woman the best character in the novel treats her with utter disdain, which is how you feel she deserves to be treated if she s ever going to

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wake up The Italian section of the novel was easily my favourite even though it was also the most baffling because it's called upon to make sense of the New York section which for me it didn't. How the New York art scene in the 1970s relates to Fascism and its backlash in Italy baffled me. You sense the author wanted to write about two worlds she knew New York and Italy and her means of connecting them was arbitrary rather than inspired. I love reading James Wood's reviews but rarely agree with his final judgements. He had nothing but praise for this and yet frequently finds fault with DeLillo. Ironically this often came across to me as DeLillo fan fiction. Unfortunately, though she can write well, Kushner never hits the heights of DeLillo. Shortlisted For The Folio Prize Longlisted For The Baileys Women's Prize For Fiction Reno Mounts Her Motorcycle And Sets A Collision Course For New York. In The City Is Alive With Art, Sensuality And Danger She Falls In With A Bohemian Clique Colonising Downtown And The Lines Between Reality And Performance Begin To Bleed. A Passionate Affair With The Scion Of An Italian Tyre Empire Carries Reno To Milan, Where She Is Swept Along By The Radical Left And Drawn Into A Spiral Of Violence And Betrayal. The Flamethrowers Is An Audacious Novel That Explores The Perplexing Allure Of Femininity, Fakery And Fear. In Reno We Encounter A Heroine Like No Other. Best Books Of The Year. Guardian New York Times The Times Observer Financial Times New Yorker Telegraph Slate Oprah Vogue Time Scotsman Evening Standard Shortlisted For The National Book Awards. No matter how young and hip you think you are, every so often, some cultural product that you don't get at all gets rave reviews and some measure of success, indicating that the world has turned and left you behind, transforming you instantly into an aged grump who mutters things about the kids these days. Well, now I'm telling The Flamethrowers to get off of my lawn. This book is covered with glowing reviews albeit from authors like Karen Russell another cultural product I don't get and Dana Spiotta, whose Stone Arabia was also overhyped and disappointing about Kushner being a bold new voice and a brilliant writer, which made me want to read it even though it's about a young woman who rides motorcycles and is way into the avant garde 1970s New York art political scene, which all set off huge warning bells. Riding motorcycles as a character

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trait is fine when you're a character in a four minute Bruce Springsteen song, but not so much in a novel, where you should probably have something interesting about you other than the type of vehicle you utilize for transport. Also, there are few people less interesting in this world than self-described avant garde artists. But it's not just those writers who love this. I haven't read a single bad review and I've looked, spurred on by the ever present fear of being the only one who doesn't get something. As one might expect for a book about artists who are interested in explaining their work than making art, this book is all style over substance, and dozens of pages are routinely wasted on naught but the vapid verbal exchanges at gatherings of untalented conceptual artists, who all speak to each other in ridiculous mission statements and bumper sticker philosophies that attempt to justify their narcissistic navel gazing. For example, at one party, the artists all listen to an extended monologue one of them has recorded on a reel to reel about how real estate agents always say home, never house, etc., which leads to a second monologue about how this is an insightful investigation of the importance of words in consumerism and blah blah blah. In another particularly dreadful line, the lead character, Reno, finds herself thinking in the voice of her friend, a former Warhol Factory groupie who now believes that her job as a diner waitress is a sort of performance art, who says that the three most cowardly acts were to exhibit ambition, to become famous, or to kill yourself. That is at least as dumb as that Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man line, Better to be dead and cool than alive and uncool. Also, in general, if something reminds you of a Don Johnson movie, it probably is not Great Art. If the greatest crime in the art world is being boring, then Reno is a dastardly criminal, completely passive, naive, and blase. Since even the other characters comment on how simple she is, her lack of insight isn't enough to sustain a chapter, much less a novel. There are occasional forays into other stories outside of 1970s New York that are a bit successful, but they're still not very interesting, and they aren't well integrated with the rest of the story. The reviews of this book all praise its prose, imagination, and energy, but I just didn't get it. Although I generally like modern art, these artists are much like Jeff Koons Three Ball 50 50 Tank than Tom Sachs clever and

funny Nutsy s no joie de vivre or sense of humor This book was decidedly disappointing. I love the cinematic flow of this book , with a young female lead character, Reno, who passes through life leaving few marks She is a recent art school graduate from Nevada who moves to New York in the late 70 s where she becomes immersed in the ferment of an art scene full of poseurs and prodigies think Andy Warhol s Factory and the high tide of bohemian types taking lofts in Soho As we start the book, her mind is on the traces in the Bonneville Salt Flat she hopes to film after she pushes her motorcycle at the land speed record But the reader soon learns from unpredicted events at the flats that she values the higher experience of racing itself over her produced art Reno becomes our hero for the verve she shows in trying to live her art We ride this tale from her first person account, and we are soon privy to her fascination with speed and its traces from ski racing at an early age and running fast motorcycles from age 14 I come from reckless, unsentimental people , she confesses to the reader I love getting a feel of her aesthetic in life as she watches the cars blast off in the Utah event Every few minutes an engine screamed as a vehicle flew off the line, spewing a rooster tail of salt from under each rear tire A few seconds into its run the vehicle began to float, its lower half warbled Then the whole thing went liquid and blurry and was lost to the horizon. One after another I watched the scream, the careen, the rooster tail, the float, and then the shimmer and wink off the edge of the horizon, gone. Careen, rooster tail, float, gone. Careen, float, gone. I loved Kushner s pacing in her presentation of the backstory of Reno s move to New York and how she got romantically involved with the other main character in the novel, Sandro Valera He is a successful artist in the minimalism bent His work is all objects that are what they are, and something else, at the same time He is 14 years older than her, with some integrity in her view for effectively divorcing himself from his wealthy industrialist family back in Milan, makers of motorcycles and tires She talks of loving Sandro, but that is up to the reader to weigh Romance and looking for love does not really drive this tale Sandro helps her career with beneficial connections with artist peers and gallery owners, and he supports her taking the opportunity to race one of the Valera company motorcycles in Utah Against the swirl of strange

performance artists and fake revolutionaries, this odd couple begin to seem the most sane, the most authentic One young artist friend makes an art out of elaborate lies about his past One guy shoots a pistol with blanks as part of his lovemaking with his girlfriend A man in a former militant group like the Weathermen now plays at robbery and donates proceeds to the poor A waitress who once had a part in a Warhol movie is hiding out in her role, an idea she got from encountering a sociologist studying the hardships of life on a minimum wage like Ehrenreich in her Nickel and Dimed But Reno doesn't really judge these adaptations to life, and Kushner seems not after satire, but a form of realism, with these characters She gets confused sometimes by the trips they lay on her head, but she goes with the flow I felt that he and his friends were unraveling any sense of order I was trying to build in my new life, and yet, strangely, I also felt that he and his friends were possibly my only chance to ravel my new life into something. The plot moves us to Italy, where we experience the social unrest that leads to labor strikes, protest actions from many quarters, and sporadic political kidnappings of public figures by the Red Brigade Reno begins to make momentous choices that brings her both agency over her fate and chaos In interludes, we cycle back in history with the story of Sandro and the impact of his father, who hung out with an anarchist motorcycle gang in Milan in his youth which later volunteered as a motorcycle unit fighting in World War 1 In the words of the gang leader They were smashing and crushing every outmoded and traditional idea, every past thing Lonzi said the only thing worth loving was what was to come, and since what was to come was unforeseeable only a cretin or liar would try to predict the future the future had to be lived now, in the now, as intensity You can't intuit the future, even the next moment He talked about a sect in the Middle Ages who believed that God reinvented the world every moment We want, and our want kills doom This is how we'll take the future and occupy it like an empty warehouse, Lonzi said It's an act of love, pure love It isn't prophesy It's home Lonzi felt that joining the war would be the perfect test and triumph of their metalized gang, who would be their ultimate selves in the war, vanquish the putrid Austro-Hungarian Empire and wake all of Europe from its slumber. I thought the stew served up with this novel was fun

and exhilarating I don't side with those who say Kushner is overextending herself in her combination of concerns with the iconography of motorcycles and guns, issues of class and gender oppression, and the play of form, function, and integrity in art. One could get silly and step from a common icon of motorcycles as sexy to a broader mash up of ideas in one image. It is helpful that at the end of the book she shares some of the photos that inspired her in the writing and some thoughts on her sausage making craft. Art was now about acts not sellable; it was about gestures and bodies. It was freedom, a realm where a guy could shoot off his rifle, ride his motorcycle over a dry lakebed, put a bunch of stuff on the floor dirt, for instance, or lumber, drive a forklift into a museum, or a functional racecar. But that's art history. For the purposes of a novel, what did it mean? I was faced with the pleasure and headache of somehow stitching together the pistols and nude women as defining features of a fictional realm, and one in which the female narrator, who has the last word, and technically all words, is nevertheless continually overrun, effaced, and silenced by the very masculine world of the novel she inhabits. I had to navigate, just as I had to find a way to merge what were by nature static and iconic images into a stream of life, real narrative life. This book was provided by the publisher through the Goodreads Giveaway program.

Rachel Kushner

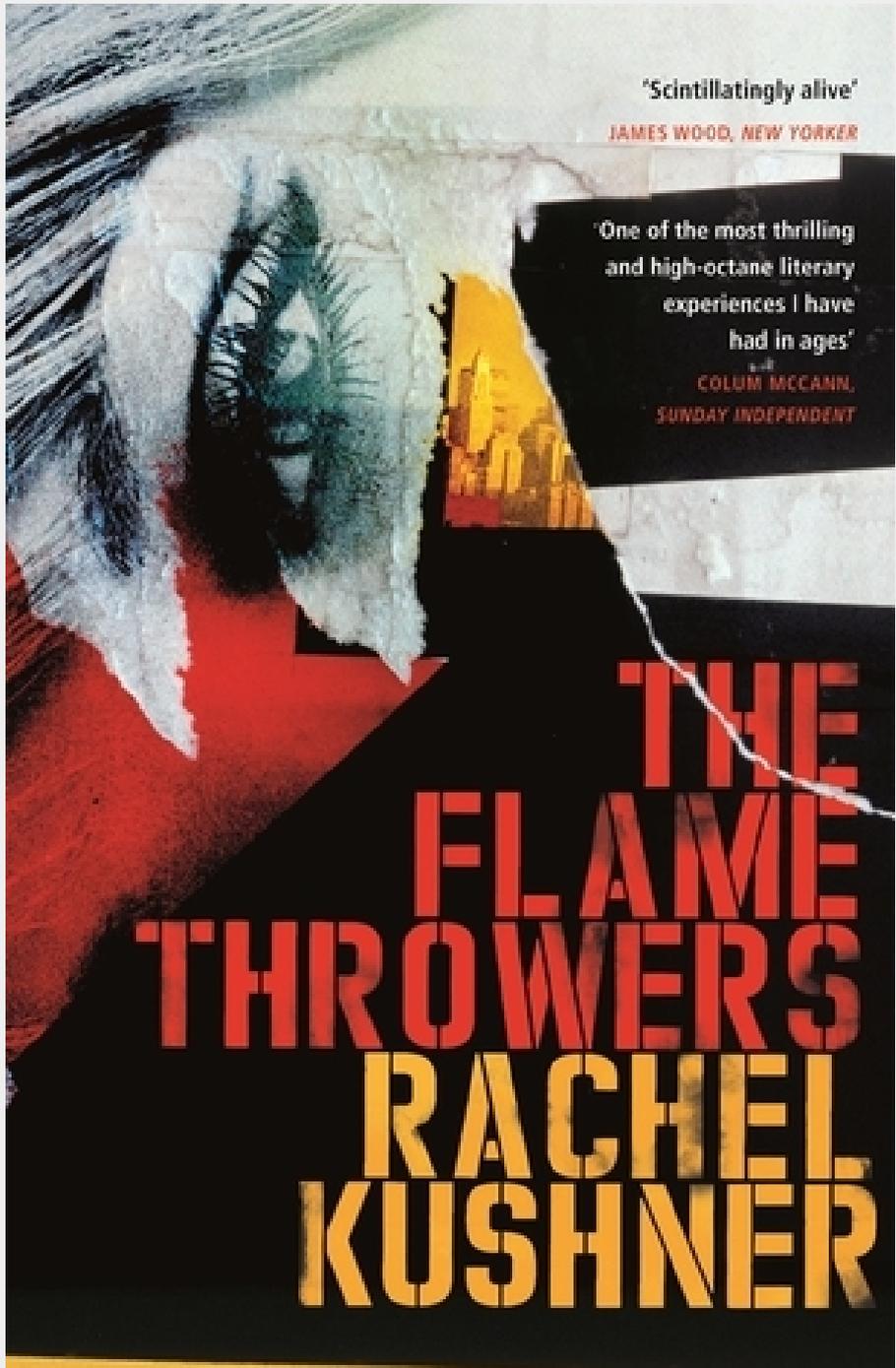
There isn't much plot in this novel, but it is a hell of a story. Bildungsroman of a young woman known as just Reno, an art studies graduate in 1977 who dared to race her Moto Valera motorcycle at high speed velocities to create land art. Land art was a traceless art created from leaving an almost invisible line in the road from surging speeds at over 110 mph. Racing was drawing in time. Literally and figuratively. This era generated a seminal movement in New York where artistic expression in the subversive sect was animate, inflamed, ephemeral, breathing a mix of temporal and performance art and the avant garde punk scene. This was also an age of conceptual art, which grew out of minimalism and stressed the artist's concept rather than the object itself. Time was the concept of Reno's art, something to be acted upon. You have time. Meaning, don't use it, but pass through time in patience, waiting for something to come. Prepare for its arrival. Don't rush to meet it. Be a conduit. I felt this to be true. Some

people might consider this passivity but I did not I considered it living The novel, narrated by Reno, is all about her observation and experiences as she comes of age in a revolutionary time She lives in a shabby, run down hole in the wall in New York blank and empty as my new life, with its layers upon layers of white paint like a plaster death mask over the two rooms, giving them an ancient urban feeling As she gets caught up with the underground movement in the East Village, called Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers, and later with the Red Brigades of Rome, Reno is herself a conduit for the people she meets and gets involved with, such as her older, rebellious boyfriend, Sandro Valera, son of the Fascist friendly mogul of Valera motorbikes Reno came to New York by way of Nevada, eager to demonstrate her art through photography and motorbikes She s shopping for experience Sometime after a particularly moving one night stand, and attempting to navigate her life and bridge her isolation and loneliness, she meets sculptor Sandro Valera and his friends, a group of radicals and artists who offer her exposure to working class insurrection in this mecca of individual points, longings, all merging into one great light pulsing mesh, and you simply found your pulse, your place Reno was looking for a sense of identity, and she wanted enchantment Enchantment means to want something and also to know, somewhere inside yourself, not an obvious place, that you aren t going to get it The bridge between life and art, and Reno s invigorating speed of 148 mph on the Bonneville Salt Flats, where she went with her new friends to make land art , demonstrates the crossover between gestures and reality, and a liberating energy that was an acute case of the present tense Nothing mattered but the milliseconds of life at that speed On the one hand, Reno seeks self sovereignty, but on the other hand, she inhabits a male dominated and often misogynistic landscape where men exploit women for artistic and political gain When she visits Sandro s family in Italy, she is subjected to derision by Sandro s misanthropic brother and his sneering mother In another scene, a male photographer asks women to punch themselves in the face until they are battered, and then pose for him Reno narrates this with an unemotional but subtle raillery, noting the incongruity of women on a pretense of independence She acutely observes that certain acts, even as they are real, are also merely gestures And, in Rome, the

question of feminine mystique versus male dominance is addressed by a Red Brigade revolutionary radio broadcaster, when he states to women that Men connect you to the world, but not with your own self Are women meant to speed past, just a blur as Reno speculates And the I think about that line, the paradox it evokes. Artists, dreamers, terrorists, comrades, iconoclasts, all populate this novel, replete with iconic images and fallen debris in a swirl of electrical momentum New York and Rome aren't just scenic backdrops they come alive as provocateurs firebrand cities with flame throwing agitators. Kushner is a heavyweight writer, a dense, volatile and sensuous portraitist of the iconic and the obscure Arch and decisive moments throughout the novel heighten the ominous tension that rumbles below the surface, and the reader wholly inhabits the spaces of Reno's consciousness, and those of the people she meets All you can do is involve yourself totally in your own life, your own moment And when we feel pessimism crouching on our shoulder like a stinking vulture we banish it, we smother it with optimism We want, and our want kills doom That is how we'll take the future and occupy it like an empty warehouse It's an act of love, pure love It isn't prophecy It's hope. Her Name is Reno and She Dances on the Hand Sometimes a cigar is only a cigar. Sigmund Freud Our protagonist Reno hails from Reno, Nevada She's in her early 20s, loves motorcycles, goes to NYC in 1975 with a nebulous plan to create art incorporating her need for speed not the drug She hangs out with a number of artsy narcissistic tarts and farts, each of whom loves to blow hot air After many rapid verbal volleys among these SoHo denizens, our girl becomes involved and moves in with an Italian dude who is nearly 40 and heir to a tire motorcycle empire in Italia They go to a nearly empty cinema where Tony Manera surreptitiously starts her dancing on his hand while they watch the film I tend to agree with an article I saw some time back lauding Ms Kushner for writing sex well Reading this scene is apt to make most readers hot and bothered They travel to Italy She briefly becomes entangled with a workers rights radical group in Rome After arriving back in NYC, she hears a tragic auto history of her first NYC flame The novel was most interesting for its illustration of the pretentiousness of the movers, players and hangers among the world of art, which also brings up the

novel's drawback too much for me high brow talk talk with a fusion of the esoteric and erotic, which both titillates and etiolates. I've been looking forward to reading this just started but already I'm caught up The chunkiness of the prose, the good crunchiness of it just the choice of words, with shape and weight and texture has me, the great tactile metaphors, I hear this book, I taste it Snap, crackle pop Loved this book the speed of it, the description of things as well as emotion, the machinery of the world I adored the way she recalled the Seventies to me its grunginess, the blackouts, the garbage strikes, the feeling of being at the end of urban life, at the brink of chaos, the bankruptcy of the cities in the time I found myself reminded at times of Gaitskill's Veronica, the way certain of Kushner's characters tell stories which may or may not be true, mythologizing themselves They were my favorite characters a waitress who, in her mind, is playing a waitress, enacting a performance a man who spools wild tales about himself which may be true, false or most likely partly true or based on someone else's true story I like the way her in some ways classic innocent protagonist, Reno a ski racer and motorcyclist, who becomes the fastest woman in the world, by accident of proximity but the way in which she accepts the stories of these self-fabulizing characters makes her seem childlike than would otherwise be the case Loved her portrayal of New York in the Seventies in particular, and the art world and its pretensions, even on the grubby end, rang truer than true. Reading this was like sitting in the back of a cab You're pretty sure you're headed SOMEWHERE but the way is circuitous, confusing and sometimes nonsensical It drives just like a cab, quick accelerations that slam you into the seat and jarring stops that throw you into your seatbelt, none of it for a good reason Maybe, you think, this kind of slam start slam stop driving has a purpose Maybe saves gas Maybe cruel fun at the expense of the rider Maybe simple distractionoops car ahead, stop now Your thoughts are similar as you read this book You think There is probably an underlying structure here, a reason for this style, and briefly you feel you're getting it when you slam into another hipster moment and it turns you off to caring about the underlying themes, to even finishing the book Maybe that IS the theme Playing with the real and the fake But overall it was choppy, unsatisfying and self-congratulatory in a way I

found annoying It was an interesting read but I wouldn't read it again Feels like it needed another one or two good edits before publishing to smooth out the ride. The critic James Wood in his review for the New Yorker pin points it perfectly Rachel Kushner's second novel, *The Flamethrowers* Scribner, is scintillatingly alive, and also alive to artifice It ripples with stories, anecdotes, set piece monologues, crafty egotistical tall tales, and hapless adventures Kushner is never not telling a story It is nominally a historical novel it's set in the mid seventies, and, I suppose, also a realist one it works within the traditional grammar of verisimilitude But it manifests itself as a pure explosion of now it catches us in its mobile, flashing present, which is the living reality it conjures on the page at the moment we are reading Alive Rippling with stories Historical Realistic A pure explosion of now. What a vibrant, electric ride this was A novel as wild as it is elegant, zooming in and out of scenes so perfectly brought to life that they will shimmer in your memory for a long time A doe eyed, inhabited, wonderful female character who hungers for experience at every turn of the page and steals your heart in one swift move with her innocence and willingness to take it all in Because this is what this gorgeous novel does, it takes it all in It brings to life visceral, complicated, ever shifting life every single theme and locale it touches upon the New York art scene in the 70s, the grittiness and primal energy of the Bowery of those years, the coming of age tale that never resolves itself, the radical left wing groups that terrorized Italy at the same period, the beauty of motorcycles and the intoxication of speed throughout history, from World War I to salt flats races in Nevada This is writing at its best It will swallow you up in one big gulp and spit you back out on the curb, leaving you breathless and wondering what just happened to you.



'Scintillatingly alive'

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'One of the most thrilling  
and high-octane literary  
experiences I have  
had in ages'

COLUM MCCANN,  
*SUNDAY INDEPENDENT*

# THE FLAME THROWERS RACHEL KUSHNER