

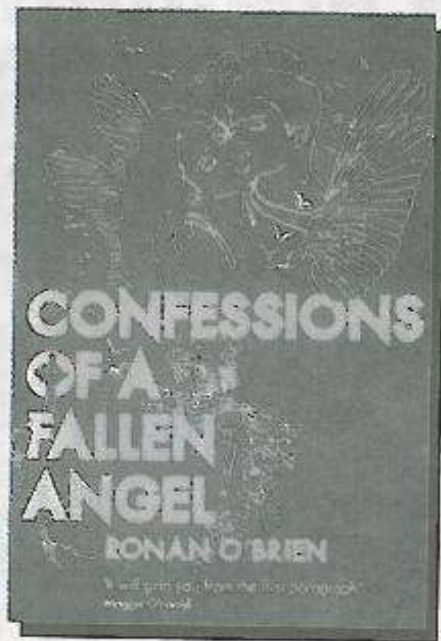
Confessions of a Fallen Angel

By Ronan O'Brien
(Sceptre)

In a fictional poor north Dublin area called Rathgorman, we are introduced to a nameless young man living what seems to be a fairly happy life. That is, until the protagonist's first 'death,' which takes place on a football field where he gets the ball kicked into his stomach at point-blank range.

After what turns out to be more than a near-death experience, the young man is left with a gift – or rather a curse – of being able to foretell the deaths of the people he loves. The first one to go is his best friend Owen, who drowns in the canal after getting stuck in a shopping cart. The problem here is that it is the protagonist who has pushed the trolley into the water, as a precaution to the events that he has foreseen, in a practical effort to turn things around. This turns out to be the repeated formula for the deaths of a friendly elderly librarian, as well as the protagonist's wife.

The questions that float to the surface are many. Can we intervene in other people's destinies? Or is anything that we do useless in the face of to the grander plan, of which



we know little if anything? Does the mere foretelling cause the death? What came first, the chicken or the egg?

Upon these profound queries the author hitches the story of a floundering man who never seems to grow older than his teens, judging

The strong Dublin colloquial speech that can often be charming in real life rubbed me up the wrong way

by the use of language and lack of emotional and mental growth throughout these horrible experiences, although the author intends for the character to become an adult.

Throughout, O'Brien is at pains to let us know that his protagonist is not bad, just unfortunate on his path through life. Whatever the young man touches seems to fall apart in his hands. Nevertheless, it is hard to really care about him as he veers through a dark world of violence, wielding what he hopes to be 'witty' swearing as his main weapon.

Undeniably O'Brien is able to get into the mind of a slightly morbid but nice young man. Perhaps one or a number of men that the author/solicitor has come across during his practices of criminal law have coloured in the sketch of this main character. The repeated mention of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is also no doubt an indicator of the story's origins.

Nevertheless, the strong Dublin colloquial speech that can often be charming in real life rubbed me up the wrong way for some reason, and although the deep and perpetual questions of life are at the core of the story, I felt the book, the author and the protagonist never really meant to go there. Somehow they ended up on that path and tried to recover by abruptly slapping a 'be happy with your life' motto at the end, hoping that this will be a sufficient apology for all the difficult and violent issues it has raised.



Jeanette Rehnstrom is a freelance journalist who writes exclusively for GCN, with two columns by her featuring in the magazine every month. More information about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at Irishwritersexchange.com