

The Death of Finn

By Oran Ryan

(Seven Towers)

Monasteries, monks, secret librarian lovers, death, drugs, and genius – and all of it set in Dublin! This is where any vague similarity with Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* ends. *The Death of Finn*, by Dublin writer Oran Ryan, deals with a different side of monastic life, focusing on the psychological aspect of loss – of life, faith, love, friendship and trust.

Set in the fictitious monastery of the Seven Towers in Dublin, Ryan traces the reaction to the death of one of the young brothers by a number of closely related people who gather for his funeral. They deal with their loss and their memories of Finn, the deceased brother, in an honest way, never glossing over the darker sides of his character.

Joe Finn – for whose funeral the mourners have gathered – was, however, not an ordinary monk. Having joined the order after school at a very young age with the prospect of a brilliant scientific career, he never fitted in easily. Perceived as slightly eccentric by some, as over-sensitive by others, Joe remained an outsider with only one close friend, Frank, and support from his spiritual and academic

mentors.

Joe's writings about the founder of the order are met with reservation by his superiors and in the end rejected and destroyed, regarded as too dangerous for the conservative order. His friends, however, agree that it is a work of genius. Joe loses his balance after this blow. He finally finds peace when he is posted to Los Angeles where he tragically dies after only a short while.

Joe's parents, his superiors within the order, his friend Frank, Frank's partner and later wife Lisa – they all reflect on the complex character and the friendship as well as the problems they experienced with Joe. Ryan gives detailed character studies for all these while also touching on other themes such as religion, art and writing, genius and the loss of faith.

Ryan's characters never try to blandish the dead but reflect honestly on the part of life they shared with him. Unfortunately, towards the end of the novel a clear theme is lacking as a number of ideas struggle for prevalence.

But as a character study, *The Death of Finn* is a meditation on the life of a complex character who rarely chose to take the easiest way possible. Even though every-day monastic life in a present-day Dublin monastery remains somewhat vague, the language throughout the novel and the vividly described characters make for an interesting and entertaining plunge into the minds of these very diverse characters.



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