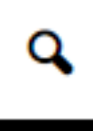


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Cultural Books

Book Review: 'Sour' by Alan Walsh

By Rachel Casey - Apr 10, 2016

Sour, the debut novel by Irish author Alan Walsh, is a modern retelling of the Irish mythical story *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. It follows Dee, a wild, rebellious teenager who has spent her life imprisoned in the grounds of her house by her father. Sick of her captivity, she runs away with Cormac Mac Nessa and his brother, the village paper boy Declan.

Conall Donoghue, the local curmudgeon, becomes annoyed when his newspaper isn't delivered and decides to take it upon himself to find the missing children. He enlists the help of an eclectic bunch of townspeople and they delve into the woods to find the runaways.

What follows is a hilarious yet heart-wrenching story that blends a small rural Irish village with bizarre happenings and strange characters. The story is narrated by a Puca, a benevolent yet mischievous creature in Irish folklore who is said to be able to take on different forms, and is known for its ability to be in more than one place at once. He follows Conall as he searches for the children, telling the reader that he knows what happened to them, and never sounding too optimistic about it.

It's the Puca's narration that allows the humour to come through in the story. His playful descriptions and story-telling make for some genuinely laugh-out-loud moments (his tale of the goat that was possessed by a banshee is definitely my favourite), and his struggle to get Conall to acknowledge him is one of the best parts of the story.





A few other characters from Irish mythology pop up throughout the novel. As well as the Puca, Fionn Mac Cumhaill stars as the leader of a can-drinking, x-box-playing group known as 'The Proud and Vigilant Peacekeeping Fighting Force of the District of Bally', or 'The Lads' for short.


And Cuchullain himself shows up as a traveller, feared by the townspeople as he walks the fields with his hurl, and bossed around by his wife as he sits and watches day-time TV. Each character jumps off the page with a mix of madness and familiarity.

The humour contrasts well with the darkness in the story. It pulls you out of the gloom, but also makes it hit you harder when you're thrown back into Dee's desperate situation. The Puca's narration can make the whole story seem farcical, but when he states that he knows how Dee's story ends you remember that a story based on *Deirdre of the Sorrows* isn't going to have the happiest of endings.



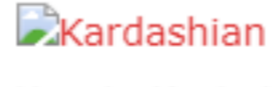




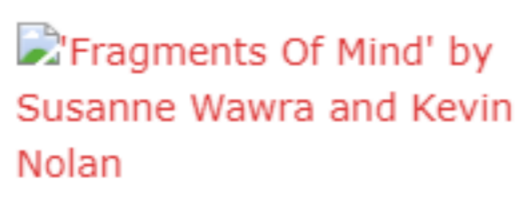
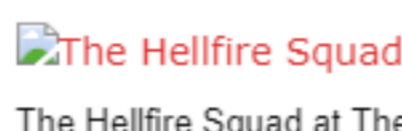
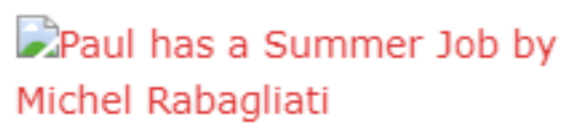
Fans of Irish mythology will love *Sour*, but even if you're not that familiar with the original stories it's still immensely enjoyable. It's funny and it's sad, but it's got an ultimately optimistic ending that makes it well worth the grief you have to get through to get there.

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