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The Rúin, Dervla McTiernan (Harper Collins)

Summary

It has been twenty years since young Irish police officer Cormac Reilly discovered the body of Hilaria Blake in her decaying mansion, and he has never forgotten the two neglected children she left behind. Now, having recently moved to Galway as a Detective, Reilly is instructed to reopen the cold case. The case has links to the recent death of a young man – a death which the police are very quick to claim is suicide. However the deceased man's long lost sister arrives and suspects foul play, and she is determined to prove it.

Trust and betrayal are at the heart of this unsettling, fast-paced, intricately plotted detective novel. Mystery, intrigue, complex twists and turns, police corruption, and Ireland's dark history of child abuse – this atmospheric crime novel has it all.

About the Author

Dervla McTiernan was born in Ireland. She studied corporate law and practiced as a lawyer for twelve years. She now lives with her family in Perth, Western Australia and works for the Mental Health Commission. *The Ruin* is her first novel.

Questions for Discussion

- The Cormac Reilly character differs from many investigators in crime fiction; he definitely isn't a troubled self-medicating alcoholic carrying huge amounts of emotional baggage. On the contrary, he is calm, methodical and committed in his work, a supportive partner,

and a nice person with a good heart. Why do you think the author created this sort of main character?

- As a high achieving and talented surgical resident, Aisling Conroy is clearly an intelligent person yet she doesn't question the police's handling of her partner Jack's death until his long lost sister arrives. Why do you think Aisling was so accepting of the police's assertion that Jack's death was suicide?
- Some crime novels take the reader on a journey of discovery, one clue at a time, only ever knowing as much as the characters who are investigating. Others let the reader in on secrets while the characters are still in the dark. What is your preference?
- As the story reaches its conclusion, we discover that two of the characters are sociopaths. They manage to keep their true character hidden for many years despite committing appalling acts. How have they hidden? Can you think of real life examples where this is the case?
- Many aspects of modern Ireland's dark history are part of the fabric of *The Ruin*: unwanted children, adoption, abortion, abuse and the ability of the authorities to protect children. What does this examination say about these aspects of Irish history? Does the 1991 Children's Act have any bearing on this? And religion?
- For the most part, the novel is told through the alternating point of view of Cormac and Aisling, then in chapter 21, we see from Maude's point of view and then in chapter 27 Tom's. What strategic uses of point of view are used? What are the advantages of this approach?
- Despite little contact for twenty years, Maude and Tom have a strong bond. Neither of them trusted the authorities when they were children and as adults they are still motivated by the need to protect their loved ones from harm. Given their difficult childhoods, how could these two characters have turned out differently?
- Both Cormac and Aisling are distracted from clear-eyed paths. What distracts each of them and what are the consequences?
- Cormac is not only new to his colleagues in Galway, but he is also an outsider. Why is that? How does that impact on his investigation?

- We are left with three good cops by the end of *The Ruin*. Who are they and why? The garda does not come off so well. Why? How does *The Ruin* differ from some other 'police procedurals'?

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The Windy Season, Sam Carmody (Allen & Unwin)

Burn Patterns, Ron Elliott (Fremantle Press)

Flare Up and *Flash Point* (Cam Fraser mysteries), Felicity Young (Harper Collins)

David Whish-Wilson's series featuring Frank Swann: *Line of Sight*, *Zero at the Bone*, and *Old Scores*

Alan Carter's series featuring Cato Kwong: *Prime Cut*, *Getting Warmer*, *Bad Seed* (Fremantle Press)