



Requiem

Graham Joyce

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Following the death of his wife, Tom Webster travels to Jerusalem in search of a friend from his college days. But the haunted city, divided by warring religious groups, offers him no refuge from guilt and grief.

As he wanders through the streets and the archaeological sites, a mysterious old woman appears to him, delivering messages that seem beyond comprehension. Then a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls, kept hidden by an elderly innkeeper, appears to offer the key to understanding the woman's pronouncements.

Perhaps the spirit of Mary Magdelene is trying to reveal to Tom the hidden history of the Resurrection. And perhaps the truth is even stranger...

Requiem Details

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Author : Graham Joyce

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From Reader Review Requiem for online ebook

Jack Haringa says

Just as rich and powerful as I'd remembered, Joyce's Requiem is a meditation on grief and secrets, those we keep from others and those we keep from ourselves. It's an intensely sexual novel as well--not erotic, but rather concerned with the effects and powers of physical intimacy, especially how we process it under pressure from religion and society. Joyce's evocation of Jerusalem feels thoroughly authentic; the city breathes on the page, and it lives as a character equal to the people who move through its twisted streets.

Scott says

Graham Joyce, has become a favorite author of mine. Along with Jeffrey Ford, the more I read of his work, the more I respect his talent. This was the third novel by Joyce I have read. From Publishers Weekly via Amazon.Com, here is a rundown on the plot:

Fleeing his (only semi-explained) guilt after the senseless, accidental death of his wife, Tom Webster quits teaching and visits his longtime friend and ex-lover, Sharon, in Jerusalem. Soon, he is haunted by hallucinations, or perhaps they're apparitions, or djinnis, and is entrusted with some Dead Sea scroll fragments. Joyce's Jerusalem is suffused with squalor and splendor, religious meaning and political struggle, as Tom tries to figure out what a host of emissaries from both the natural and the supernatural realms are trying to tell him about the world and about himself.

What I liked best about Joyce's work is that the fantastical in his novels is subtle. Not that the reader needs to dig or watch for clues, but that the characters sometimes don't realize what is happening, or they are just thrown headlong into some vat of magic fantasy. With "Requiem" this is especially poignant. It goes to even deeper degrees. It almost explores the inner workings of one's mind to create the fantastical around them.

This book though explores more of the inner workings of the mind. Three of the characters, including the two main characters, you get to see what makes them tick. And they all have issues of guilt they are dealing with from their past. Guilt comes in all kinds of different ways. It even comes from lies that one character tells to them self, and then also tells others. Like one reviewer at Amazon said, the story can be quite tense, yet there is very little action.

One very interesting aspect of the story is a conspiracy within the Christian church. The Dead Sea Scroll fragments that he receives helps Tom's inner demons along. He ends up haunted by Mary Magdalene, and it brings forth a shake-up between Mary Magdalene and Saul/Paul regarding the role of women in the church, and lies supposedly perpetrated by Paul. I don't know much about this, but know some of Paul's views.

As I mentioned, this was quite a tense story. This was the book that introduced me to Graham Joyce. I saw it as a recommendation, read the synopsis and a couple of reviews, and was drawn in. I ended up obtaining a copy, yet it took me over three years and two other of Joyce's novels before finally getting to it. I think it was best to start with those other novels as it turns out.

Trunatschild says

Searching for occult in all the wrong places.

Marcel Côté says

This novel is a tasty, well-written read that may be shocking to some because it presents the theory (like in *The Da Vinci Code*) that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, and that Mary was "written out" of the story by women-hating apostles, particularly Paul, after Jesus' death. This is revealed in a scroll written by Mary herself, which through a series of freak accidents falls into the hands of a troubled Brit named Tom who quit teaching and came to Jerusalem following his wife's death, seeking a spiritual reckoning of some kind as well as solace in the arms of Sharon, an old college flame, now a therapist who sleeps with her clients to "fuck the pain away" (as the singer Peaches has put it) and of course does the same for Tom. So we have scenes of him putting his finger in her vagina to taste her menstrual blood (which smells "saline" or "mineral") and this is contrasted to the backstory of Mary Magdalene's scroll, since the men of Mary time considered women unclean and killed Jesus, their would-be messiah, because he dared to consort with women as equals. Tom, being socialized in a very different era, is the kind of guy who doesn't know who he is unless he's being led around by some woman, so with his wife Kate dead in a freak accident he is at wits' end, overwhelmed with guilt because he was lusting after an underage student at the time - and now in Jerusalem, it seems the solution to his problems is to add even more sexual confusion in the form of Sharon, who is presented as the classic Earth Mother, raw female sexuality itself (as opposed to his wife Kate who was more WASPy and composed). Indeed, all the women in the story blur together in Tom's mind, and he starts hallucinating that he is fucking Kate when in fact he is in bed with Sharon, and sometimes his lover even takes the form of Mary Magdalene, when she's not wailing about how they killed Jesus by breaking his legs on the Cross. Add to this another subplot about an Arab scholar who helps Tom to translate the scroll, and who is possessed by jinns (malicious spirits) and can see them everywhere in the streets of Old Jerusalem - the jinns even disguise themselves as Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youth to stir up hate between the two groups and interfere with the peace process! In the midst of this, which is entertainingly told and a delight to read if you don't take it too seriously, there is unfortunately Tom, who has almost no qualities of his own and is basically a Generic White Guy, well-intentioned but always the last to grasp what's going on - a standin for the presumed reader, I assume. Indeed Tom's cluelessness leads directly to the death that ends the novel, since in the midst of a riot when two Arab youth climb a wall to escape the soldiers on their tail and one of them drops a rifle, Tom's first instinct is to pick it up and stand dumbly with it ("What's THIS doing here?") obliging someone who cares about him more than I do to tackle him and take the bullets that were meant for Tom, and should have left this blithering Englishman bleeding out in the alleys of Jerusalem, a more satisfying ending in my view. The problem is that Tom just isn't up to the level of the historic backstory of a failed messiah and a plot by Jesus' followers to hijack his movement after his death and turn it into a religion that hates women. What do the problems of some idiot high school teacher tormented by sexual guilt and a crisis of faith have to do with such world-shaking material? Or conversely, why would the spirits of the past, desperate to make the truth about Mary Magdalene known in our time, choose such a clueless dope as their messenger? In the end the two stories, Tom's and Mary's, don't really gel, so that either the Mary story is reduced to an exotic backdrop for Tom's personal crisis, or Tom's Generic White Guy problems are a needless distraction from the real drama taking place 2000 years ago. But none of this takes away from the fact that this book is a brilliantly written, fast and fun read. Pick it up if you have a taste for jinns and the supernatural, are bored and want to read something you don't have to take too seriously.

Glen Engel-Cox says

Graham Joyce came highly recommended by Jonathan Carroll, and that's enough recommendation for me to read a phone book. **Requiem**, Joyce's fourth novel and the first to be published in the U.S., is a quirky book, written in a weirdly flowing style that I associate with several of today's British authors (Mary Gentle is the author that comes to mind immediately, although shades of Geoff Ryman and Greg Egan are also present). This style is achieved partly through the use of dialogue as a method for moving plot, wherein elements to the story are told by the characters, but almost as a short story told by the narrator to the other characters. The other major element to this style is the use of blind switchbacks (or red herrings) in the plot, and a willingness to "leave out" information, that the reader must fill in by putting together narrator comments, dialogue, and a good guess. In Gentle's case, I can't take this style—she does it to such an extent or I am such a fast reader that I miss the subtle implications and quickly get lost as to what is actually happening. Joyce only does it somewhat, reserving it for the secrets that surround his narrator.

Requiem is about guilt. The trick is to determine exactly what guilt. Tom's wife Katie dies in a freak traffic accident—her car is smashed by a fallen tree—so Tom quits his job as a teacher and travels to Jerusalem. Although it's been six months, he still has strange feelings about his wife's death, much more than just the natural ones of mourning and loss. There's also something not quite right at the school, helping him make the decision to leave for awhile. In Jerusalem, he connects with an old college friend, Sharon, who is working for a women's counseling center. Along the way he befriends an old man who runs a hostel. While exploring the old city, something he had always wanted to do, and feels guilty about doing it without Katie, especially after her death, he finds himself adrift, confronted by Arab vagabonds, and this strange old woman who scratches out a message in the sandstone walls with her fingernail.

The similarities with Carroll are many. Not only do scenes have that slightly unreal feeling, while remaining so detailed and close to home, the characters are vivid and intriguing, the narrator is questionable in his sanity, and then there's the ancient manuscript that might be a part of the Dead Sea Scrolls find that could change our concept of the gospel as it is now known. In both large and small items, the concept of truth and honesty is ambiguous.

I liked **Requiem**, and almost wanted to read it again as soon as I finished it, to see if there were things that I missed as I sped through the book, caught up in the world and the fine writing. I'm searching for Joyce's other novels, delighted to find another writer who appeals to that same sense of mystery and wonder that has caught me up in the works of Robertson Davies, Carroll, and Iain Banks.

Isidora says

Μια εντυπωσιακή και σφιχτοδεμένη ιστορία που εκτυλίσσεται στη σύγχρονη Ιερουσαλήμ, "πληθών τζινν, νείρο που βλέπεις ξύπνιος, επιλήτης, αλήθεια μες στο ψέμα, πύμα στα όδατα των βαθύν, αλνι, χωνευτήρι, ξόνος της γης, φαντασά κι ολγγραμμά, τπος σφαγής και λτρωσης, υπσχεση ειρνης."

να βιβλό με Χειργγραφα της Νεκρς Θλάσσας, δαιμονικς Ερινες, Ισραηλινος με οζι, αποσπσµατα της Παλαις Διαθκης, μυρωδις απ? φάλ?φελ και β?λσαμο, ικαν? να σε κρατσει δσµιο απ? την πρ?τη µ?χρι την τελευτα?α του σελ?δα.

Χωρς αµφιβολ?α να εξαίρετικ? μυθιστρηµα, ?χι για την πρωτοτυπ?α των χαρακτρων και των

στοιχέων που το αποτελούν, αλλά για την ποιότητα της αφήγησης που ακροβάτε? επιδ΄ξια μεταξ΄ του φυσικο? και του υπερφυσικο? υπενθυμίζοντ΄ς μας π΄σο αν΄φελο και -κυρ΄ως- π΄σο βαρετ΄ ε΄ναι να επιμ΄νουμε να ζο?με μ΄νο σε ?ναν απ΄ τους δ΄ο κ΄σμούς.
"Αχ αυτ΄ η εφ΄μερη ζω?! Π?ρε ψωμ? και γ?λα και θα σ' αγαπ?.xxx"

Josephine (Jo) says

This is a difficult one to review, I am not sure if the mixture of so many different ideas was just too much. Tom's wife Katie has died and he heads for Jerusalem to visit his old friend Sharon. There is a lot of unrest in Jerusalem at the time Rabin and Arafat are talking and there is a lot of tension. Sharon is a Jew, her friend Ahmed is an Arab, Tom is a Christian. They all team together to try and solve a mystery. I think if it had been a straightforward historical, biblical type mystery it would have been an easier read but it involved so many different strange elements that it all gets a bit tangled.

Firstly Tom is obviously grieving, he is feeling guilty, so is this the reason that he starts hearing voices and seeing strange apparitions? Is he being haunted? Ahmed believes that the whole problem is being caused by Djinn and sees them everywhere but he does smoke a lot of weed so I am not sure that he is a reliable influence!

Tom is descending into his own particular hell and he needs the help of his friends to save his sanity. Sharon is there for him and has always loved him. There are some sex scenes in the book which should have been loving but were turned in to something dirty (in my opinion) by the crude language of the author, there was no need to make it into something base.

I carried on to the end but I felt there were just too many ideas vying for importance and no really solid plot. Another attempt to involve Mary Magdalene at any cost, I enjoy some of these stories about Mary but again she is very badly portrayed in this book.

Julia says

I was all set to give this one 5 stars, since I was intrigued by the weaving of one man's personal grief with the City of Grief, Jerusalem. I had a chance to be in Jerusalem, and the book does a wonderful, eerie job of capturing the place, especially its power to haunt.

And indeed, this IS a ghost story, with the protagonist, Tom Webster, being haunted by his wife's ghost, his sexual fantasies, and his religious doubts. One of the most interesting characters is Ahmed, the Palestinian scholar who translates the ancient scroll Tom has received from a dying Jewish man. Ahmed calls these ghosts DJINN, and is terrified of them.

The scroll itself, as Ahmed translates, is the story of Christ as told by Mary Magdalene, and carries the same message attempted in THE DAVINCI CODE, but with more intensity. Some Christians would be offended at the idea not only that the Magdalene was Jesus's wife but that she, Peter, and Judas had PLOTTED to save Jesus from the cross with certain herbs in order to fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah. They even practiced on Lazarus, giving him snake venom and then restoring him with a herbal compound!!!

However, to make the plan work, Jesus's legs could NOT be broken, as was the custom in crucifixion. And

the "Liar" who tells the guard to do it, thus assuring the death of Jesus, turns out to be Saul, later Paul. The anger Joyce feels toward the church's misogyny is aimed directly at Paul, while the Magdalene is seen not only as Jesus's wife but his most loyal disciple.

The ending becomes so overboard that I could only give the book 4 stars--as if Joyce didn't know quite how to wrap it up. Tom shaves his head, plans to blow up St. Paul's with bottles of gasoline--the whole last few chapters wreck the "suspension of disbelief" necessary in magical realism.

However, the book DOES contain one of my top five favorite quotations. After Katie dies, Tom says:

"When people die they leave behind tiny deposits, like dust or ash, littering the lives of those who have to carry on. Impossible to wipe a house clean. Memories dwelled in cobweb places behind wardrobes and between cupboards; they hid behind radiators; they lurked on shelves; like slivers of shattered glass, they waited for their moment to lodge deep in any vulnerable expanse of passing skin."

Anyone who has suffered loss knows EXACTLY what those words mean.

PJ Who Once Was Peejay says

I'd probably give this one 3.5. It's beautifully written, a conjuration of impressive scope, and the first half had me completely absorbed. Mr. Joyce does an amazing job at making Jerusalem a character in this book: an exotic, decrepit, aging beauty; crazy, *djinn*-haunted, schizophrenic, part whore, part aesthete, part fundamentalist fanatic. It's a city at war with itself, and anyone who wanders into its insane tangle of streets may soon find themselves at war within their own soul, and pulled into one or another human conflict: Christians with Christians, ultra orthodox Jews with secular Jews, Palestinians with Jews, Palestinians with Palestinians, human with *djinn*, angels, gods, goddesses--and most especially, history with the present.

The writing was no less beautiful in the second half, but I thought the characterization fell apart somewhat. Characters did an awful lot of explaining and telling, and in a few cases (it seemed to me) acting out of character as established in the first part of the book. There is madness involved, and I understand that even the "sane" characters were pulled into it somewhat, but there were times the characters seemed more like enacting puppets rather than the "real" people Mr. Joyce established early on.

The plot was complex and tricky, which is always a good thing in my book, and although Mr. Joyce tied things up at the end, I didn't have a complete sense of emotional satisfaction. I didn't think the facts of the ending needed to be changed at all, just that he didn't bring me along on the emotional journey as I might have liked to have been. I think that's mostly because of the character issues. Then again, those may be completely personal reactions, my readers fifty-percent gone slightly off the rails.

Still, well worth the read and a lovely piece of work. That conjuration of place is especially fine.

Linda says

Tom Webster's wife, Katie, died suddenly about a year ago, and he just can't seem to get back on his feet. He resigns from his teaching job, amid some unsavory rumors about him and one of his students, and heads to

Jerusalem, where his best friend, Sharon, from college days, now resides. But Tom doesn't have her current address, and while searching for her, he befriends an elderly man at his hotel. David confides to Tom that he is in possession of a valuable Dead Sea Scroll, and, knowing that he's dying, he insists that Tom take it, which he does with great reluctance. Tom's thrilled to be walking the streets of the city, but is accosted repeatedly by a creepy old woman, who changes her appearance before his eyes, and leaves him enigmatic messages. He tracks Sharon down, and she takes him in, introducing to a translator, Ahmed. Ahmed discovers that the scroll was written by Mary Magdalen, and reveals stunning evidence about the founding of the Christian religion. Ahmed, a heavy hash user, also tells Tom about the djinni, spirits who are making his life miserable, convincing Tom that they're bedeviling him as well.

Sounds simple enough. But *Requiem* is told in a series of non-linear flashbacks, and it becomes increasingly difficult to fathom what is going on with Tom. Is he losing his mind? Is the old woman a ghost, a djinn, or is she real? Sharon, a drug rehab therapist doesn't know what to think, especially after a grueling djinn experience of her own. Among these spirits is that of Katie, who seems to want something from them both. As it turns out, Sharon, Ahmed, and Tom are all struggling with their own guilt issues, and none of them is doing it well.

Enigmas can be interesting, as they are in this book. While the setting is crucial to the novel, there is very little overt action, most of which takes place in the minds of the protagonists. The ending is quite dramatic, as well as unexpected. This was my intro to the work of Graham Joyce, who can certainly write with power. Looking forward to checking out his other titles, most of which have not been published in the American market.

Greg says

I really liked this book. The plot was well constructed and it had a nice development, but then it kind of kept developing and the pages remaining started decreasing rapidly while the story kept building up. Eventually the story had to come to an end but the ending seemed more of an afterthought than any destination the author probably had in mind. I'd give this book four stars up until about the last forty or so pages.

Jennifer says

You can roll your eyes if you like and mutter, "she just gave this guy another 5 star review, she must be a looney". I stand proudly on my pedestal and say "Yes I did". I woke up in the middle of the night and thought about this book.

Sex.Religion.Relationships. Is that what life is all about? Monty Python thought about it. Graham Joyce thought about it. He made me think about it.

Once again, we have an amazing cast of characters. Tom, Sharon, Ahmed, Tobie, and Mary Magdalene. What you say? Mary Magdalene? I say , "Yes it is true". Now your confused. I shall leave you confused and dare you to read the book.

Djinns. There are plenty of those too. I didn't realize Jerusalem might have them. They are all over India...But it makes sense.

I mustn't forget Jerusalem is a character as well. After reading this, I kinda want to meet it. I have never felt drawn to visit..but I feel an urge to wander the various quarters. I feel like I might have been there before.

I would love to hang out with Ahmed and smoke hash, drink beer and decipher scrolls...

I would love to have a therapy session with Tobie. She says and I quote darlink "Your daddy fucked your mummy, and your mummy fucked your daddy. As did mine and everybody else's. That's how we all got here. That's one of two things you can be sure of. The second thing is that you gonna die one day. Everything else is up for grabs. " I just loved that.

This book is about much more than the silly blurb on the back tells us. Frankly if I had just picked this up and read the blurb I would have put it back. But it's the author for me that makes all the difference.

Cher says

2.5 stars - It was alright, an average book.

This had a fascinating underlying story that swirled around biblical lore, conspiracies and mythical creatures (jinns). Sadly, this underlying story kept getting interrupted and overshadowed by the boring plot of the main character.

The MC was weak, unlikeable, and dreadfully dull. I had absolutely zero interest in hearing his pathetic drivel as he stumbled through his pitiful life which was governed by base desires rather than intellect, (oh the irony of him being a "teacher"), particularly when there were other far more interesting characters in the periphery.

With a different MC this could have been great but the inadequate one that was present instead brought the enjoyability factor way down. This story from Ahmed's POV could have been amazing and Tobie would have been a more captivating MC as well.

Favorite Quote: All human beings have a tremendous capacity for lying and deceiving and their first victim is invariably themselves.

First Sentence: They were helping a party get out of hand, an end-of-term hooley thrown by a teaching colleague during Tom's probationary year.

Justin Howe says

Man-pained widower fucks his way into a nervous breakdown, then fucks his way out. The Dead Sea Scrolls, Mary Magdalene, and djinn are also involved.

Aoife Martin says

The late Graham Joyce deserves to be better known. This, his fourth novel, is an atmospheric tale of ghosts and religion and female sexuality set mostly in Jerusalem.

After the death of his wife, Tom quits his teaching job and goes to Jerusalem to visit an old friend. While there his life takes a turn into bizarre and dangerous territory as he tries to come to terms with his loss.

Joyce reminds me in some ways of Jonathan Carroll, one of my favourite writers, in the way ghosts and the supernatural creep matter-of-factly into the everyday world.

The book is full of interesting characters: Sharon, Tobie, Ahmed, a man haunted by a djinn, and, most of all, the city of Jerusalem itself.

Highly recommended.
