

Library Journal 15th March 1995

Ryan, Hugh FitzGerald. Ancestral Voices Vandamere Pr. 1994. 208p, ISBN 0- 918339-32-4. \$19.95.

Set in modern Ireland, Ryan's first U.S. publication deals with the echoes of Ireland's turbulent history and their impact on a contemporary relationship, Jack Dempsey, who is obsessed with the events surrounding the Rising of 1798 in Wexford, is determined to give up his job as an auctioneer in Dublin and go to Wexford to write a book about the rising. His wife's father, a Wexford farmer, encourages him with tales of ancestors involved in the revolt. Jack's efforts to retrace the steps of the peasant army rebound powerfully on his own life and the lives of his family. A wonderful addition to any collection with one reservation: a prior knowledge of and interest in Irish history is a prerequisite to enjoying this novel.

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ANCESTRAL VOICES

Hugh FitzGerald Ryan. Vandamere/Wolfhound Press (Dublin), \$19.95: (208p) ISBN 0-918339-32-4

Dublin antiques dealer Jack Dempsey becomes obsessed with writing a historical novel about the Wexford Rising of 1798, a doomed populist revolt by the Irish Catholic peasantry against a Protestant-dominated government seeking union with England. Quitting his job, and tapping into the family legends preserved by his father-in-law a farmer whose ancestors fought in the revolt, Jack, who is Catholic, grows disillusioned as he learns of the slaughter, plunder and wanton cruelty committed by both sides. In his fourth novel (his first to be published here) Irish author Ryan uses a novel-within-a-novel framework to link the events of 1798 to the present and to Jack's personal life—for example, to the acrimony between his parents who stand at opposite poles politically. After a family tragedy occurs, his wife walks out on him, seething with self-blame and guilt, as well as anger at her husband's manic devotion to his manuscript. Years later, the two reunite and Jack turns to farming. Ryan's pure lilting, pensive prose is like a cool refreshing stream running through this affecting and healing meditation on Irish history, past and present.