

# TLC Showcase

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JAMES BROPHY

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## Introduction to *Gethsemane Revisited*

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I had long been intrigued by the idea of travelling back in time to meet and question famous/infamous people, but without altering history in any way. This was the genesis of the novel, *Gethsemane Revisited*. It required the creation of rules that would enable these time-travel journeys to take place and yet ensure nothing would ever change. Part of the trade-off in the rules was that Jerome, the main protagonist, would be the only person who would recall these journeys and he could never prove to anyone else that they actually happened.

The question of whether Jerome really has these powers or is simply delusional comes to the fore in the climax to the book as he makes his final journey back.

The time-travel element is obviously a key part of the novel, but the characters of Jerome and his family and friends who develop to tell the story are also central and provide the ordinary counter balance to his extraordinary gift.

I had completed my third draft of the novel when I became aware of the mentoring service offered by The Literary Consultancy. This sounded perfect as it was an opportunity to have professional, objective feedback—very important for a first-time novelist—as well as the chance to make the book “as good as it can be”. I signed up, had a mentor appointed—the author Jane Adams, and began the process of forwarding 10,000 words at a time for review. Each assessment I received contained a mixture of commentary, guidance and suggestions all delivered in an encouraging manner. This led to many changes, sometimes large sections had to be removed, but invariably I could see that the novel was improving. And throughout all of this process I never once felt it was a chore, quite the opposite, it was hugely enjoyable.

I hope you get as much pleasure reading this story as I did in writing it.

## Extract from *Gethsemane Revisited* by James Brophy

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At 7:15am the following day, Jerome, dressed self-consciously in his Arabian clothes, was standing outside the back of the Franciscan church. The early morning sun was rising above the sea to the east, but was still too low to be hot. Insects were beginning to stir, but it was quiet, peaceful even, and- most importantly- there was no one around.

He removed the oxygen container stealthily from the same soft rucksack he had used in Nuremberg. Hitler and Germany seemed a long time ago to Jerome suddenly; like another age. He made a final check to ensure he was alone before pulling on the mask and inhaling the pure oxygen.

He was still on top of the hill, the same hill, except there were no buildings any longer. He noticed that the ground was wet in places. The sun had moved; it was now high in the sky and, if anything, had started down its westward arc. The air was hot and, here on top of the hill, breezy. Insects, perhaps ancient ancestors of the ones Jerome had left behind, were confirming their existence by flight and sound. Down below, in the valley to the east, Jerome could make out groups of people. The rest of the hill appeared deserted and, being anxious not to draw any unnecessary attention, he began to make his way down to join them.

### Chapter 25

Jerome stood in the valley, looking up at the people occupying the hillside. He had expected tens of thousands, but in total the crowd numbered no more than 2,000. It was densest at a place about fifty metres above him, where a clearing had been made on a flat, rocky spot by a number of men who had formed a circle. The sun was behind the mountain and made viewing difficult, though, by shading his eyes, Jerome could make out that the circle remained empty.

Around him, people- mostly men- stood together in small groups, talking quietly. Any noise came from children playing and the women minding them. The women wore long-sleeved garments, typically wider than the men's, in an assortment of bright colours. The men all wore white, although of different shades, each probably reflecting the age of the garment rather than the type of cloth. Most of the people were smaller in stature than Jerome had anticipated.

Guardedly, he walked among the groups, partly to avoid any possible suspicion that might be aroused by him standing on his own, and partly to hear the conversations. They spoke more rapidly and at a higher pitch than the people he had been engaging with back in normal time. But, even though there were some words that were new to him, he was delighted that he could understand most of what was being said. They seemed to be mostly farming people, and their talk about the weather and the price of livestock and grain reflected this. He overheard few talking about Jesus.

A crowd was gathered around what appeared to be a small market at the base of the mountain. On reaching it, Jerome saw merchandise, mainly clothes and jewellery, spread out enticingly on the ground. The sellers were sitting passively, watching their prospective customers examine the goods. Further on, there was food for sale: bread in large, wicker baskets; and fruit- grapes, oranges and pears- much of which looked overripe.

A woman was selling drinks, pouring milk and a clear liquid from two large earthenware jugs. Jerome was surprised that all of the people buying seemed to have their own little cups. She was speaking softly in a language he did not understand while, behind her, a child struggled to hold the ropes tethering three goats. It wasn't clear if they were there to provide the milk or for some other purpose.

At the end of the market, Jerome came across a man hunkered down behind a makeshift stove, comprised of a thin, flat, circular stone that was balanced on three other stones, each the size of a man's fist. A fire was burning underneath the flat one. With his right hand, the man was taking small pieces of raw meat from a cloth on the ground, and placing them on the stone. Regularly, he would turn the pieces, using only the fingers of his right hand. He used his left hand to flick away the flies from the raw meat, rekindle and reorganise the fire, and to open the leaves that were used to hold the cooked meat when purchased.

The smoke from his fire drifted towards a small knot of fifteen to twenty people, standing about 300 metres away. As Jerome approached them, he noticed there was no one else anywhere near the group; they appeared isolated. Strangely, they seemed to be taking it in turns to walk clockwise around the group; when one person completed a circuit, another would start. It reminded him of the emperor penguins in Antarctica, huddling together and taking it in turns to shuffle around the group in their attempts to stay warm. About fifteen metres from the group, some children

were playing, and although they appeared oblivious to the adults, Jerome noticed it was as though an imaginary circle had been drawn, and the children knew not to go outside its circumference. He turned around and walked back, as a woman from the market screamed at her own child for wandering in the direction of the isolated group. Jerome was puzzled by this strange group of apparent outcasts.

Gradually, and almost imperceptibly, the crowd around him began to move up to the base of the mount. Jerome had heard no signal, but, as is often the way with crowds, the information had been picked up and conveyed with no obvious communication.

Although called a mountain, in reality, it was more of a large hill, that stood around 200 metres high. The sun was sinking to the west behind it by then, allowing the green and brown hues of the hillside to be seen more easily. As Jerome ascended the lower slopes quickly, he could see, squinting into the sinking sun, that the circle above him was occupied by an elderly man, and he wondered if his entrance had been the prompt that caused the crowd to move. He kept climbing. The people around him, who were only men, were sometimes pushing and sometimes helping each other as they sought to get suitable vantage points, both to see and, more importantly, hear. Jerome kept moving forwards, making his way through increasing resistance until he stood about thirty metres below and to the left of the figure.

"Have you heard Jesus speak before?" The question was asked in a friendly tone by one of the two men standing very close to Jerome's left shoulder.

"No, I haven't. Have you?" replied Jerome.

"Yes, he's very good. Well, he's different." He pointed to the man behind him. "Baltha here prefers the preaching of John the Baptist, don't you, eh?" He turned to his friend. "His is more fire-in-the-belly stuff."

Baltha was more circumspect. "I like listening to them both."

"But you said Jesus was too full of himself," the first man continued.

Baltha winced slightly. "I said he was a bit too clever at times, that's all." He reached his hand across to Jerome. "As you now know, my name is Baltha, and this talkative one..." he pointed the thumb of the hand shaking Jerome's, "he's Gideon."

"My name is Jerome." He smiled warmly as he shook Gideon by the hand.

"Where are you from, brother?" asked Baltha. "Your skin suggests a colder place than here."

"Yes, I'm from a place far away, at the western end of the empire." He noticed the narrowing of Baltha's dark eyes and added quickly. "I've heard wonderful things about Jesus; his reputation has travelled far."

Their nodding agreement didn't disguise the element of suspicion the men seemed to have come to feel as they turned slowly away. Jerome decided to stay, though he was not going to engage with them further. At this point he noticed that there were many people crowding above as well as below the circle.

After a few more minutes, the elderly man walked carefully towards the front of the circle. Unclasping his hands slowly, he raised them above his head in a gesture calling for silence. The crowd responded, and a murmur disappeared gently down the hill. Only the women and children at the bottom continued their activities, but were too far away to cause any disturbance.

## About the Writer

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James grew up in Belfast during the “Troubles”—an experience that he describes as “sometimes dramatic, more often humdrum, but also fascinating with the sense you were living through history.” After graduating from Queens University in Belfast, he moved to the City of London to work in the financial sector. He qualified as an actuary before returning to Ireland. He has spent most of his working life in Dublin where he now lives with his wife, Martina.



James is deeply involved in Irish politics, and was one of the founding members of the Social Democrats Party that was established in 2015 and tripled its elected representatives at the recent General Election in Ireland. James has travelled extensively and a lifelong interest in other countries, their history and politics had a strong influence on the storyline in *Gethsemane Revisited*.

He has two daughters, Catherine and Jennifer, and two granddaughters, all currently residing in the UK.

*Gethsemane Revisited* is James’s debut novel.

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