



# John the Revelator

By Peter Murphy

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This is the story of John Devine — stuck in a small town in the eerie landscape of Southeast Ireland, worried over by his single, chain-smoking, bible-quoting mother, Lily, and spied on by the "neighborly" Mrs. Nagle. When Jamey Corboy, a self-styled Rimbaudian boy wonder, arrives in town, John's life suddenly seems full of possibility. His loneliness dissipates. He is taken up by mischief and discovery, hiding in the world beyond as Lily's mysterious illness worsens. But Jamey and John's nose for trouble may be their undoing and soon John will be faced with a terrible moral dilemma. Joining the ranks of the great novels of friendship and betrayal — *A Separate Peace*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* — *John the Revelator* grapples with the pull of the world and the hold of those we love. Suffused with family secrets, eerie imagery, black humor, and hypnotic prose, *John the Revelator* is a novel to fall in love with and an astounding debut.

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## John the Revelator By Peter Murphy Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

### Product Description

Already fast becoming a classic among coming-of-age tales, *John the Revelator* has garnered praise from Nick Laird, Colm Tóibín, Roddy Doyle, and John Boyne, and is a critical darling in the U.K.

This is the story of John Devine--stuck in a small town in the otherworldly landscape of southeastern Ireland, worried over by his single, chain-smoking, Bible-quoting mother, Lily, and spied on by the "neighborly" Mrs. Nagle. When Jamey Corboy, a self-styled Rimbaudian boy wonder, arrives in town, John's life suddenly seems full of possibility. His loneliness dissipates. He is taken up by mischief and discovery, hiding in the world beyond as Lily's mysterious illness worsens. But Jamey and John's nose for trouble may be their undoing, and soon John will be faced with a terrible moral dilemma.

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### Read a Q&A: Shirley Manson, Singer and Actress, Interviews Peter Murphy, Author of *John the Revelator*

*John the Revelator* author Peter Murphy first met Shirley Manson--*Garbage* singer, solo artist incumbent, and actress in Fox's *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*--in the spring of 1998. Back then Manson and her band mates were promoting *Garbage*'s second album *Version 2.0*. Murphy had just turned pro as a music and arts journalist. The five bonded in a mutual melding of spiky Edinburgh wit, sardonic Mid-western drollery and southeastern Irish gallows humor.



The pair's paths are overlapping. Manson cut her journalistic teeth interviewing *U2* several months ago, while Murphy has just completed an album-length spoken word/music adaptation of his novel entitled *The Sounds of John the Revelator*. On a warm evening in late June the tables were turned, as grand inquisitor became quivering quarry. No blood was shed. Well, not much anyway.

**Shirley Manson:** So Peter, you've been a music journalist for 13 years, and you've just released your debut novel. I want to know why it took you so long when we've all known for years that if anyone were going to write a book it would be you. What spurred you to take the plunge?

**Peter Murphy:** The spur I think was the oldest one in the book. My father died in 2000, and in the period of about a year after that I started to wake up in the middle of the night afflicted with what I call the Claw of Death, which was a sort of cold icy feeling that I hadn't achieved anything, that I was going to die having only written about other people's work and never having produced any of my own. I had ideas, stories that didn't yet exist and I wanted them to exist. And the only way they would exist was if I wrote them. And it

took a long time because... It just takes a long time. It took me a long time to get even a paragraph or a page that I could stand over and read without flinching, never mind a chapter or a whole book.

**Shirley Manson:** When I read the book I knew your Mum was ill and struggling with dementia throughout the writing of it. I wonder if the fact that John's mother became a central figure was a result of that?

**Peter Murphy:** Without doubt. Actually, I hadn't thought about it until you mentioned it, but the whole process was book-ended by my parents' deaths. And I didn't really get a handle on starting the next one until after my mother passed away in May. Y'know, this is the somewhat eerie thing about art and music and writing, its predictive nature. Before my mother fell sick or was diagnosed, I had written some of those scenes. I think what happens is your subconscious divines certain things that your daytime mind doesn't want to acknowledge, so it looks prophetic when you go back and see something that you've written is predicting something that later happened, but I don't think it's prophesy. I think it's that we absorb information or signs or auguries in ways that we don't even comprehend, and some part of us understands what's going to happen, but our conscious mind doesn't want to face up to it. And there's no doubt about it, the character of Lily was a catalyst. I believe it's her book. While the narrator is John, I think his purpose is to bear witness to his mother.

**Shirley Manson:** Why did you call it *John The Revelator*? I want to know that, even though it's a really moronic question.

**Peter Murphy:** Oh no, it's crucial. That song title, that aggregation of words was kind of like a talisman for me. What happened was I read Greil Marcus's book *Invisible Republic*, which was about *The Basement Tapes* and Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. And when I read it I was of course compelled to hear the Harry Smith *Anthology*. I remember I bought it in Amherst in Massachusetts and I was sitting on the porch as the crickets were chirping, drinking a beer in the really close heat and looking at the track listing, and I remember my eye just locking on this title. It was the Blind Willie Johnson version, and I just thought it was unbelievable. It was Biblical, it could have been from *Moby Dick*, it could have been a Nick Cave song or a Cormac McCarthy novel, it could have been a John Ford movie. And I couldn't believe that nobody had ascribed a story to it. And once I decided this would be the title, it became a kind of dare. It was like, "Well, can you write something good enough to stand up to this?" It became like a torch to follow.

**Shirley Manson:** Do you think your book will resonate with an American audience?

**Peter Murphy:** Absolutely. Because American stories resonated with me and were so similar to my upbringing. When I was 12 or 13 I started the Stephen King canon and just didn't stop until they were all devoured. That was my first obsessive reading of any one author. And then it moved onto Steinbeck. And it was quite late in life that I made the connection: Faulkner, McCullers, O'Connor: what do these names have in common?

**Shirley Manson:** What do you think is the purpose of fictional writing? Why do you want to write?

**Peter Murphy:** At a certain stage in my life I realized that this is what makes me feel useful and whole as a person. I'd be delighted if the book made people feel better than they felt before they started it, or if it made a bus journey shorter, or if it got them through a morning in the motor tax office. Beyond that, I've just surrendered to the fact that this is what I do, I live in language, the music of language. I discovered something through the reading of the work... I don't think of it as separate from the person I am, I think of it as integral to my own organs and breathing and walking around. It's just hardwired into my purpose. When I'm working well I'm a dream to be around, and if I'm not working...

**Shirley Manson:** You have a myspace page up that centers around a spoken word/music project. Was that inspired by the book or did it come before the book?

**Peter Murphy:** There was an open mike night here in Enniscorthy last November, and there was a lull between singer-songwriters doing their thing, so I got up and read a couple of passages. And afterwards an old friend of mine who I used to play in a band with and who was doing the sound said, 'Do you fancy recording some of that?' So he came out to the house and set up the mikes and we recorded some stuff. And he had a library of recordings by local musicians, and he almost randomly began to throw the readings at these pieces of music, and 60% of the time they just sat really well. That was a really effortless and pure

experience.

(Photo © Sophie Muller)

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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In the hallowed pantheon of Irish coming-of-age novels, Murphy's strongly written debut splits the difference between the sensitivity of *Portrait of an Artist* and the freakishness of *Butcher Boy*. John Devine lives a marginal life with his single mother in the small Irish town of Kilcody. He has a love for the lore of creepy-crawly things (thanks to his favorite book, *Harper's Compendium of Bizarre Nature Facts*). His mother, a maid for the rich folks in the area, is versed in Irish myth, which gives him an enchanted, slightly sinister sense of the world. As a teenager, John befriends the posh James Corboy, who fancies himself quite the young Rimbaud. Two events define John's coming into manhood: one involves James, a video camera and a drunken rampage; the other, John's mother, who is dying and whose weakness necessitates the frequent assistance of nosy neighbor Mrs. Nagle. Murphy understands the gracelessness of teenage boys and that peculiar delinquent wisdom shared by all the great coming-of-age novelists. With this novel, he doesn't have to bow to any of them. (Aug.)

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Review

A Barnes & Noble "Discover Great New Writers" selection for Fall 2009

### **Advance Praise for John the Revelator**

"Full of things I can remember but can't imagine, a stunning debut novel."

—James Dean Bradfield, lead singer of the Manic Street Preachers

"The prose is a bag of fireworks, crackling with idiom and humour. Domestic, mythic, creepy, funny. Brilliant."

—Nick Laird, author of *Utterly Monkey*

"There's a novel which there's a lot of excitement about by Peter Murphy called *John the Revelator*. I've read it and it's an absolutely wonderful book, I mean it's a really wonderful book. And people say 'oh, you know, Irish fiction is stale,' well things can change overnight, and books like Peter Murphy's can change things and be so fresh and so contemporary, so original and so disturbing and brave. I don't know what else is coming out of the blue like that, and that's the way it goes."

—Colm Toibin, *The International Herald Tribune*

"Everything about *John the Revelator* excited me—I couldn't wait to turn the page and keep on going. It was like reading for the first time, almost as if I'd never read a novel before."

—Roddy Doyle, author of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

"Peter Murphy gives a great read, both wild and grounded. John the Revelator is the bastard of son of J.D. Salinger and Ted Hughes—ballsy, humorous, and brutally honest."

—Sabina Murray, author of *The Caprices*

"I also read a debut novel by an Irish writer, Peter Murphy, *John the Revelator*. An atmospheric tale of a young boy growing up in a small village whose life is altered by his friendship with a very free-spirited boy who he meets. It's an interesting debut, filled with humour and energy, and a certain sense of mystery. Best of all is the old crone, Mrs Nagle, who takes up residence in John's house whenever she sees an opportunity. Their face-offs are very funny and original."

—John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *Mutiny on the Bounty*

## **Praise from the UK**

Murphy's impressive debut novel traces the childhood and young adolescence of John Devine. It is impressionistic rather than narrative-driven. It is part a traditional rite of passage novel and part hallucinogenic graphic nightmare horror. *John the Revelator* is the shout and answer refrain of the traditional blues song. . . It is also subtly comic. . . the author is to be admired for taking a well-used theme and giving it a great new twist . . . yet underneath the gothic, there is a gentle, tender novel. Peter Murphy's prose is extraordinarily good and each page is sheer pleasure to read."

—Neil Donnelly, *Irish Independent News*

"John The Revelator is as assured a debut as I've read in years, and Murphy has created a cast of characters that will live long in the memory . . . This is a startling first novel, a remarkable statement of intent."

—John Meagher, the *Irish Independent*

"There is little to find fault with in this remarkably assured first attempt. Murphy, a music journalist from Wexford, has tapped something special with this insight into teenage psyche in a pocket of rural Ireland . . . This is a strikingly beautiful portrayal of mother and son . . . From the outset, Murphy shows a natural flair for narrative . . . Despite such confidently written prose, there is no evidence of arrogance . . . The style and attention to detail tally so well that it's easy to consume *John the Revelator* in one sitting . . . it is a hugely enjoyable work of fiction that announces Murphy as an Irish writer of substance."

—*Sunday Times Ireland*

"Directly from the opening paragraph, Peter Murphy's exuberantly candid first novel draws the reader. . . Murphy succeeds in making his lively, evocative story that bit different, thanks to an assured narrative voice and an ability to detect the bizarre ever lurking within the commonplace. . . Murphy convincingly evokes a child's response to life. . . This novel continually surprises as Murphy never becomes too clever. . . This may be a story of relatively recent contemporary Irish life, but Murphy also conveys a sense of the Ireland that went into making John's world, a place in which the Bible and folklore walked hand in hand."

—*The Irish Times*

"An Irish music writer, Peter Murphy casts his debut novel like a blues noir, steeped in the music that has

clearly inspired him. From the title, Blind Willie Johnson's 1930 gospel call and response, he follows the path of Nick Cave's 1985 Delta descent *The Firstborn is Dead*, with its shades of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Harry Crews. But this spook-filled Irish landscape, rendered with gouts of blood-red humour, is entirely his own."

—Cathi Unsworth, *The Guardian*

"Murphy's writing is resolutely unsentimental, but so moving and powerful that the end had me weeping buckets."

—Kate Saunders, *The Times (London)*

"Beautifully written, darkly humorous and totally engrossing. An exciting and impressive new talent."

—Anne Sexton, *Hot Press*

"Murphy has a very obvious affection for language, and for the crackle, spark and music of words. Even when describing decay and sourness, he manages to imbue things with an arresting beauty. He leads the reader down some atmospheric and moody byways, and avoids the dramatically obvious in favour of a gentle unravelling of John's friendship with Jamey, and John's attempts to deal with his mother's illness. The book moves with the organic grace of a coming-of-age movie, where everything of importance happens beneath the surface . . . Murphy is particularly good at describing the feverish angst of adolescence, the sweaty crawling-under-your-skin feeling of not knowing where you're going, and in John Devine he avoids the obvious and trite and creates an obliquely fascinating character."

—Padraig Kenny, *Sunday Tribune*

"Murphy writes spare arresting prose with the brio of Ireland's current literary star Anne Enright and he has the ear for dialogue of Roddy Doyle."

—*Daily Express*

"Murphy's eerily atmospheric debut . . . with its dark humour and hypnotic prose, brilliantly captures the uncertainties of growing up."

—*Daily Mail*

"A moving and affecting first novel."

—*Sunday Herald*

"[A] jaw-dropping debut...Murphy works literary alchemy on every page, filtering the daily tedium of small-town life through John's bizarre worldview and enriching the story with a caustic humor that still leaves room for genuine moments of friendship and familial tenderness...A terrific, disquieting addition to the long tradition of Irish storytelling."

— *Kirkus Review*

"In the hallowed pantheon of Irish coming-of-age novels, Murphy's strongly written debut splits the difference between the sensitivity of *Portrait of an Artist* and the freakishness of *Butcher Boy*...Murphy understands the gracelessness of teenage boys and that peculiar delinquent wisdom shared by all the great coming-of-age novelists. With this novel, he doesn't have to bow to any of them."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"Beautifully humane and sometimes nightmarish, this incredible debut novel...establishes Murphy as an author of tremendous imaginative and linguistic power who has mastered Flann O'Brien's supernatural whimsy, Beckett's grim irony, and McCabe's unsparing brutality. Essential reading."

— *Library Journal*

"...this is a noteworthy debut from a writer who sticks with his stormy vision of the world."

— *Dallas Morning News*

"[A] soul-stirring debut novel...Murphy sets linguistic traps to capture the reader's attention in line after line of inspired and, yes, revelatory prose."

— *Seattle Times*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Sandy Gonsalves:**

The particular book John the Revelator will bring that you the new experience of reading a new book. The author style to spell out the idea is very unique. If you try to find new book to learn, this book very appropriate to you. The book John the Revelator is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can easier to read the book.

#### **Joan Henderson:**

The book untitled John the Revelator contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains your ex idea with easy means. The language is very simple to implement all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was compiled by famous author. The author brings you in the new period of time of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice go through.

#### **Julie Moore:**

Many people spending their moment by playing outside having friends, fun activity having family or just watching TV 24 hours a day. You can have new activity to pay your whole day by reading through a book. Ugh, do you consider reading a book can definitely hard because you have to bring the book everywhere? It ok you can have the e-book, having everywhere you want in your Smart phone. Like John the Revelator which is keeping the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's view.

#### **David Cormier:**

Some people said that they feel uninterested when they reading a reserve. They are directly felt this when they get a half areas of the book. You can choose the book John the Revelator to make your personal reading is interesting. Your skill of reading talent is developing when you including reading. Try to choose basic



book to make you enjoy you just read it and mingle the impression about book and looking at especially. It is to be very first opinion for you to like to available a book and go through it. Beside that the reserve John the Revelator can to be a newly purchased friend when you're experience alone and confuse with what must you're doing of this time.

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