



## Thomas Murphy: A Novel

*Roger Rosenblatt*

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The acclaimed, award-winning essayist and memoirist returns to fiction with this reflective, bittersweet tale that introduces the irrepressible aging poet Thomas Murphy—a paean to the mystery, tragedy and wonder of life.

Trying his best to weasel out of an appointment with the neurologist his only child, Máire, has cornered him into, the poet Thomas Murphy—singer of the oldies, friend of the down-and-out, card sharp, raconteur, piano bar player, bon vivant, tough and honest and all-around good guy—contemplates his sunset years. Máire worries that Murph is losing his memory. Murph wonders what to do with the rest of his life. The older mind is at issue, and Murph's jumps from fact to memory to fancy, conjuring the islands that have shaped him—Inishmaan, a rocky gumdrop off the Irish coast where he was born, and New York, his longtime home. He muses on the living, his daughter and precocious grandson William, and on the dead, his dear wife Oona, and Greenberg, his best friend. Now, into Murphy's world comes the lovely Sarah, a blind woman less than half his age, who sees into his heart, as he sees into hers. Brought together under the most unlikely circumstance, Murph and Sarah begin in friendship and wind up in impossible possible love.

An Irishman, a dreamer, a poet, Murph, like Whitman, sings lustily of himself and of everyone. Through his often-extravagant behavior and observations, both hilarious and profound, we see the world in all its strange glory, equally beautiful and ridiculous. With memory at the center of his thoughts, he contemplates its power and accuracy and meaning. Our life begins in dreams, but does not stay with them, Murph reminds us. What use shall we make of the past? Ultimately, he asks, are relationships our noblest reason for living?

Behold the charming, wistful, vibrant, aging Thomas Murphy, whose story celebrates the ageless confusion that is this dreadful, gorgeous life.

## Thomas Murphy: A Novel Details

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Author : Roger Rosenblatt

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## From Reader Review Thomas Murphy: A Novel for online ebook

### Carol says

#### 3.5 Stars

I've been pondering over what to say about **THOMAS MURPHY** for a few weeks now wondering why his touching story did not blow me away or hold my attention like others of its kind.

Perhaps it's bc of the rather strange beginning or that it really doesn't have much of a plot or that I found it a bit wordy.....I'm not sure.

What I remember about **THOMAS MURPHY** is this.....he is 73 years old and a poet who is trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life after losing his beloved wife OONA.....he loves his little grandson and his daughter.....he writes a poem now and then, and sadly.....he is slowly losing his memory.

While interspersed with mischievous humor and some interesting reflection of a younger self, overall, a bit slow going for me.

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### Diane S ? says

Thomas Murphy has thoughts and opinions on many things, many, many things. Though he has lived in Manhattan for a long time he is originally from Ireland. He thinks of himself as a sentimental Irishman turned old fart as he is now seventy. His best friend is his young grandson William and he mourns the death of his wife and best friend. He is a poet, a singer and a teller of some awesome stories.

Quiet, introspective, tender and funny, Murphy's thoughts, meanderings and opinions are a wonder to behold. When he misses his wife the most, he talks and tells stories about the furniture they had bought together. He is quite a character and his only child, daughter Marai thinks he might be in the beginning stages of Alzheimer disease. Some of the funniest parts are when she gets him to go to the doctor and he is given a take home test. His answers are brilliant and spot on, many times wished I had the nerve to answer my doctors questions in this way. Also loved how the novel begins and ends with the question, "Have I told you this before?"

ARC from publisher.

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### Cheri says

Roger Rosenblatt's newest novel "Thomas Murphy," tells the story of Thomas, who is a somewhat aging Irish poet born in Inishmaan, as he comes to terms with his daughter Máire's concerns with his lapses of memory.

Now living in New York, Murphy is a strong, sweet, tender, lovable character, with a strong connection to

his grandson William. Murphy charms everyone he meets, old friends and new ones alike, and will undoubtedly charm you, as well.

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### **Melissa says**

This was the first novel by Rosenblatt that I've read, but I won't make that mistake again. This will be on my personal list of Top 5 books this year. *\*Thomas Murphy\** is a stream-of-consciousness narrative by Thomas Murphy, an aging, bestselling Irish poet who may or may not be suffering from Alzheimer's. It is hilarious, it is bittersweet, it is loving, it is sad; I was never sure what emotion I'd be feeling next. His wife, Oona, passed away a few years before the novel, and he's making the best of it by spending time with daughter, Máire, grandson, William, befriending folks at the homeless shelter where he volunteers, driving his apartment super crazy, or meeting strangers at the neighborhood pub. The book almost felt like Murphy's goodbye to his friends and family but also like a love letter to other Irish poets and authors (James Joyce in particular). Be ready to love this book, and be ready for it to stay with you long after you finish.

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### **James Murphy says**

This little novel didn't hold up till the end. From what I'd read about this, I'd expected the character Thomas Murphy to be one of those irrepressible guys who exudes vaulting confidence as he butts heads with convention and battles with life's situations. I thought Thomas as shell-shocked and confused as the rest of us. And I thought the novel a little predictable, too.

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### **Will Byrnes says**

**Dear Murph,**

**It occurs to me—your brooding mind being what it is—that you may think I'm trying to lock you up in the loony bin. I'm not. You probably ought to be locked up in the loony bin, but that condition long preceded your recent shenanigans. I'm concerned that you'll harm yourself. It's that simple.**

**Your dutiful and loving daughter,**

**Máire**

**Dear Dutiful and Loving,**

**I'm sorry, but I never had a daughter, and I don't know anyone named Máire. My friend Greenberg used to sing about a table down at Morey's. Is that you? Or are you the old gray mare, who ain't what she used to be? Ah, but who is?**

**Dear Murph,**

**Go fuck yourself.**

**Dear Máire,**

**Oh! Now I remember you.**

In the beginning was the word. If so, what signals the end? Is the end silence? Another, different word? A *not* word? And once you go, wordy or silent, what remains?

Have I told you about this? A life examined, a life remembered, a life imagined, a life still lived, a rich life, a passionate life, a life experienced to the fullest, with all the joys and miseries, gains and losses that entails, a good life, a long life, a life filled with poetry, a life of the mind and the body, an interesting life, a life story that is heading into the final chapters, a life shared with others, a life *you* will want to share.

A writer and a mystery man walk into a bar. The man, Jack, tells the writer he is dying, but cannot bear to tell his wife, says he does not know how, figures that if anyone could do it, it would be a famous poet. After putting him off, Thomas, a writer of some renown, agrees to do the deed, agrees to meet the wife, thus opening another chapter in his life.

While that will indeed be another chapter in a life, there are no chapters in this book. *Thomas Murphy* is made up of many small currents in a stream of consciousness. Recollections, observations, musings, inventions, tall tales, short tales, dreams, things that are and things that are not. (I counted 134, but I could be off by a few) We are regaled by the Thomas Murphy of the title, Murph, to most, who began on the Aran Island of Inishmaan, a bustling metropolis of about 160 souls, not counting livestock, imaginary beings, or dead ancestors, a place he visits in both his memory and imagination. As did many of his heritage, Murph emigrated to New York City, where he plied his trade as a writer for nearly half a century. He is a charming sort, someone who might have his own personal chip of Blarney Stone available for regular smooching. But his charm is nothing to his neurologist.

**Roger Rosenblatt** - from the Easthampton Star

Rosenblatt knows a bit about the Auld Sod

**I know I don't look it, but I'm Irish. I lived in Ireland for a while, my first child was conceived in Ireland, I speak a little Irish, I went back last year, I've been back a few times, there's something in me — I don't know, maybe the milkman was Irish — that grabs and embraces that country. Add that to the fact that my great, dear friend McCourt, he was a great guy. And he and I talked together in the department where I teach now, and we drank together and sang together — if you think I'm good, and boy am I good, you should've heard McCourt — we used to sing all night. I don't know why this stirred in me before, but I wanted to write a satirical model, and I tried twice. And I started channeling McCourt. I could hear his voice in the dialogue.** - from the Chautauquan interview

Murph has been losing his grip a bit of late. Leaving the eggs boiling long enough to start a fire in his kitchen; trying to open the wrong doors in his Upper West Side apartment building; walking into a friend's pool, while fully clothed, having the odd hallucination. He keeps putting off return visits, fearful he will be declared mortal, and flawed, with the corresponding threats to his freedom that such a judgment entails. And that freedom means a lot to him. It means time with his four-year-old grandson William, time with the friends who remain, time to teach a class on poetry to the homeless, time to hoist a pint at a local watering hole, time to talk to each of the objects in his apartment, as a way of connecting, or maybe saying goodbye, to the love of his life, his late wife, Oona, gone a year. He grieves as well for the death of his closest pal, Greenberg.

*Thomas Murphy* is a meandering tale, a collection of observations, recollections, musings. If you could

capture the image of an entire life in a mirror, then accidentally (on purpose) drop the thing on the floor (of a favorite watering hole, perhaps) the life would still be there, but in diverse bits. That's *Thomas Murphy*. Look at this bit, then that. It is not totally random of course. The chronological threads are Murph being informed that he is facing some meaningful personal brain drain and coping with that, or not, and also his relationship with a much younger woman.

What is death? If your mind goes, do you leave along with it? What is life? Is a life disconnected from one's mind a life at all? What is a poet who has no words?

There is so much here on connection to people, history, to memory, and to the beauty that surrounds us, sometimes in surprising places. You will laugh out loud, and may wet a tissue or two. But you will not be unmoved.

I was particularly touched by the scenes of Murph with his grandson William. They are fueled, no doubt, by Rosenblatt's real-life experiences, as detailed in his memoir, *Making Toast*. In that book, he writes of having lost his 30-something daughter to a heart condition and moving in with his son-in-law and grandchildren in order to help out. The man knows a thing or two about being a grandfather and it permeates this book.

It is the wit and intelligence of Murph's thought process and the deep feeling that travels alongside that make this a work of grandeur, a thing of beauty. Not only facing one's inevitable demise, but offering ongoing thought and a poet's view on the human condition, *Thomas Murphy* is a book of immense power, emotion, humanity, and transcendent joy. Don't walk, don't even run to your nearest bookstore (well, those of you who, like me, remain minimally afflicted by e-books). Call a cab. Steal a car. Go! Now! (well, you might wait until the 19th, if you are reading this before then) There is no doubt about it. *Thomas Murphy* is a masterpiece, and should not be missed.

Review posted – 1/15/16

Publication date - 1/19/2016

#### =====EXTRA STUFF

A wiki on the author

An interview with Rosenblatt from The Chautauquan Daily

Those not of the place are likeliest to have heard of the Aran Islands from the 1934 ethnofictional documentary, *Man of Aran*

Yes, the Upper West Side building where Murph resides, The Belnord, is indeed a real place.

Wiki on John Millington Synge an Irish writer of some note that Murph references from time to time

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**Penny (Literary Hoarders) says**

Wasn't that the most perfect gem of a book to read at just the right time? Thomas Murphy turned out to be a wee, slight book, coming in at just over 200 pages and is a little book to hold in your hands. But it is filled with awesomeness. Anyone that knows me, knows I'm a real sucker for reading about an old man that talks to, writes to and thinks about his dearly departed wife, lamenting the sadness he experiences without her. (I still think fondly about that old fart Angus in *The Best Laid Plans*) This is Thomas Murphy. An aging poet, he's in his 70s and is slipping slowly into dementia. His daughter is exasperated with him in getting him to see a neurologist. With a fantastic combination of tenderness and sardonic wit, I was charmed to no end by Murph. There were times when he had me laughing out loud, laughing so hard, my shoulders were shaking and his moments of great tenderness and appreciation for the moments he remembered in his life all made for wonderful reading.

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## **Joy D says**

Inventive, lyrical, poignant novel about an aging Irish poet, Thomas Murphy, battling grief, loss of memory, and a gradual decline in his mental health. We follow his non-sequential ruminations, sometimes veering into the realm of fantasy, as he reminisces about the past, comments on the present, and wonders about a tenuous future. His thoughts do not always "make sense" in terms of logic, but they reveal his mental state. Some might call him an unreliable narrator, as we do not know for sure if what he is relaying reflects reality. The language is poetic in many places, as may be expected in a book about a poet. Murphy's relationships take a central role, including philosophizing about his daughter Máire, late wife Oona, good friend Greenberg, grandchild William, new friend Sarah, the homeless man Arthur, his neighbors, and others. He has a sharp wit, and humor is interspersed throughout.

It is a short book, and this may be a good thing as it takes a bit of brain power to follow Murphy's thoughts. It's not for everyone, as it has very little plot, and flits around as thoughts fly into and out of his brain, almost a stream-of-consciousness style. I found myself a bit disoriented at first, but ended up enjoying it quite a bit. It provides lots of food-for-thought on living life to its fullest. Recommended to readers of books on mental issues, and those who enjoy introspective, philosophical subject matter.

There are so many great quotes in this book, it has hard to select only a few. Here are several of my favorites (and a bit of humor):

"Bring it, Mr. Death, with your boney jaw and creepy cloak and outdated farming tools."

"I figured you must be pretty good, he says. I could use a good poet. That's a new one on me, I tell him. I never heard of anyone who could use a poet, good or bad."

"The idea is to live a simple life, which is constricted and has boundaries, but to dream without limits, to have that power."

"I should know by now, people are not to be explained or reformed."

"In general don't despair, and if you must, don't force your despair on others. It's unfair to add your despair to theirs."

"Everyone is disabled, she said. Love exists for our disabilities."

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### **Lynn says**

I can't rate this one because I gave up about halfway through. This is not to say the writing wasn't good or that the main character was unappealing. It's just that the stream-of-consciousness style was too exhausting. I enjoyed the imagery and the humor but I'm just not in a mental place where I want to do this much work. Reading is my escape and this one, though worthy I'm sure, is not for me right now.

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### **Karen says**

Oh Murph.. what a character you are!! Had me laughing out loud at his conversations with his daughter and grandson.

Murph shares his feelings on life, memory, imagination..I really liked this book!

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### **John of Canada says**

Absolutely wonderful. For those who think Murph is Roger Rosenblatt I offer this. During an interview with the New York Times, Roger was asked - "Whom would you like to write your life story?" He answered "Jennifer Lawrence. I don't know how she writes, but I'd sure like to meet her." Roger can do no wrong in my opinion. His characters are beautifully drawn. Murphy is my new role model. Six stars.

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### **Teresa says**

It took me a long time to finish this book because the narrative is not linear. This is the story of Thomas Murphy, an aging poet, who lives in NYC and is musing about the death of his wife, his childhood home in Inishmaan, his dreams, his forgetfulness, his daughter and her son, William, and his resistance to his daughter's request to see a neurologist. The language is beautiful at times and humorous at others. I had trouble though establishing the main character's thoughts as fact or fiction at times. More than halfway through the book, a situation develops that provides an intermittent plot line. Themes are beginning to repeat and events begin to take place in a logical sequence.

I liked portions of the book very much. The romantic poetry Thomas Murphy recants is beautiful. The descriptions of the Irish are something I might have expected from a book like "Angela's Ashes."

"Want to know why the Irish make good poets? Sure you do. You're dying to know. Well, we make good poets because we know how to deal in absent things, the things taken from our lives, like food and dignity. And legs. We've been learning to do without since the ancient Irish writings left out vowels. No vowels in ancient Irish. Try pronouncing a sentence of that. Then again, the spoken language of today adds more vowels when you expect less, too, just to prove our English is different. There is no word for yes or no in Irish and none in our use of English either. Ask an Irish woman if it's cold outside, she'll say 'It is.' Ask an Irishman if he's happy, he'll say, 'I am.' I take that back. No Irishman is happy. But you get the point."

I had to wonder reading this how someone with the last name of Rosenblatt could write about the Irish! Roger Rosenblatt was a Fulbright Scholar in Ireland. He also taught creative writing, Irish drama, modern poetry and the first African American course at Harvard.

If you enjoy books with a different structure and the musings of an old Irish soul, you might enjoy this book. But, the perfect descriptor is that the main character "ruminates" throughout.

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### **Angela M says**

I didn't want this book to end. I could have read Thomas Murphy's thoughts on loss, life, death , aging , memory and love for at least a couple of hundred pages or more . I had a feeling from the beginning that this was my kind of book . I was right. I found writing that's poetic and characters that I wanted to know. If your looking for a lot to happen, you should read something else. This is a quiet book , a thoughtful and introspective book about a man's life. Immediately, the story is about aging and memory, but before the end I knew that it's mostly about life .

I liked Thomas Murphy right from the start and fell in love with him halfway through. He's intelligent , clever and funny and so creative and he's a poet. The thing is , he might have Alzheimer's. Thomas shares with us his memories of his childhood, growing up on the island of Inishmaan , off the coast of Ireland. We learn a lot about what it means to him to be Irish and his love/hate of the island and his love of the island he now lives on, Manhattan. His thoughts move seamlessly from present to past to present and back again . Sometimes, we are privy to his dreams . He tells us his philosophy on writing poetry, on babies' natural love for their parents, and about what makes us human. There is also the lighter and at times sarcastic side of him that is best illustrated in one of the funniest passages in the book , when he completes a take home test from his neurologist.

Mostly , though it's the poignant moments in his life that touched me , the relationships with his wife Oona , whose death he mourns , with his little grandson, William and their beautiful bond , and with Sarah who comes into his life when he least expects it. There's a recurring song in this story , "What are you doing the rest of your life" and Murphy quietly and at times not so quietly tells us what we should do with ours.

Thanks to HarperCollins and Edelweiss for this book that I think will be one of my all time favorites to read again.

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### **Linda says**

4.49 on 12/22/17

I laughed, I cried and I fell in love with Murph. ❤? My emotions were all over the place. Beautiful read. Hey, less than 2 weeks into 2018 and I already have a favorite book, not bad. Thanks Will Byrnes for the recommendation.

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## **Michele says**

Less a novel and more a philosopher listening to himself think.

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