



A Mad and Wonderful Thing

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‘You wouldn’t get involved, Johnny, would you? What about those terrible bombs? You wouldn’t do a bad thing, would you?’

In this passionate and heart-wrenching debut novel by Irish writer Mark Mulholland, we meet Johnny Donnelly — an intense young man who is in love with books, with his country, and with the beautiful Cora Flannery. But in his dark and secret other life he shoots British soldiers: he is an IRA sniper.

How can this be? As his two worlds inevitably move towards a dramatic collision, Johnny takes us on a journey through the history, legends, and landscapes of his beloved Ireland. In the end, Johnny has to make sense of his inheritance and his life, and he does so in a riveting, redemptive, and unforgettable climax.

Told in Johnny’s unique voice, and peopled by a cast of extraordinary characters, *A Mad and Wonderful Thing* tells its tale lightly, but pulls a heavy load. It takes us beyond the charming, familiar, and often funny experiences of everyday life to the forces that bind people together, and that set them against each other — and to the profound consequences of the choices that they make.

A Mad and Wonderful Thing Details

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Author : Mark Mulholland

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From Reader Review A Mad and Wonderful Thing for online ebook

Virginia Cairns says

Lovely lyrical writing - you can hear the Irish intonation and turn of phrase as you read it. A Greek tragedy from the first page, you know things will not turn out for this young man. But then, he is an IRA sniper. A good read and a good book club discussion.

Katie Finucane says

‘What a text! It is complex and rich. It explores uncomfortable questions and leaves you to examine all of the viewpoints it puts forth; to reach your own conclusions. This novel is full of scars that are ripped wide open so that you may explore their painful and horrifying realities, no matter how uncomfortable. A clever approach to its dark subject matter in that it places judgement firmly within the reader’s hands.’ So says Contrary Reader in a review and I can’t do better than that. That’s exactly what I thought. I have read that Mulholland used his brother’s IRA story for the novel. I have snooped around and see that this is rejected by the writer in his ‘novel notes’ on his own website where he states he only took his brother’s early commitment to a cause to revisit an earlier work. Mulholland suggests that some have criticised the work for the young start, suggesting it’s ‘unbelievable’ and that twelve is too young. The writer insists it isn’t, that he was there, and that he knows others who also committed early. It isn’t an age of action, Mulholland says, but it can be an age of decision. Mulholland goes on to reference a BBC documentary film, produced after the book, in which Peter Taylor interviewed a twelve year old boy, Sean McKinley, in Belfast in 1974 who says he will join the IRA and fight the British. The boy says that he will fight and die for Ireland. The BBC revisits Sean, by then a fifty-two year old man, forty years later in 2014. And yes he joined and fought and was jailed for life for killing. The documentary film is ‘Who Won The War.’ It is available online. If you have read the book, the film is well worth a look.

Linda C. says

When traveling I enjoy stopping into a local bookstore and looking around. I found A Mad and Wonderful Thing in the Irish fiction section while shopping in a mall in Derry, Northern Ireland. Captivated by the title first and the topic of "The Troubles" second, I bought it even knowing that a book would be a rather heavy souvenir to cart home.

The story grabbed me on the first page. The prose is beautiful, emotional and scenic, all things critical to tell the story of love and war. You might say that Johnny Donnelly is a mixed up boy on the verge of manhood. On the other hand, you might say he's got it all together and his life choices are smooth and calculated. And then enters Cora Flannery, a beautiful girl wearing red boots with green laces, who steals his heart.

I didn't know much about the conflict in Ireland so visiting the country taught me a lot. I learned about potatoes, clogging and gingers, as the redheads are called. Politics however, as we well know here in the States, shine a whole different light on the inner workings of a society. War forces people to do things and

think in a way that is often difficult to understand. I wished for Johnny to rise above the fray but in the end was left unsatisfied. I have to accept that because the strategy of war is something I will never personally be able to understand.

A Mad and Wonderful Thing was exactly that, mad and wonderful. I loved Johnny Donnelly and Cora Flannery but I hated the life they were forced to live in the midst of war.

Josh says

Some absolutely wonderful writing here. I hope we'll see more from this author. Definitely recommend for those with even a passing interest in The Troubles or Northern Ireland.

"I used to enjoy calling on Frank. Teenage Frank moved with a kind of bounce, and he spoke with energy as if he was trying to throw his words over some kind of height."

"But martyrdom is a cloaked jester. It pushes as many as it pulls. It allures and deceives, it wears many forms., and to its charms many fall."

"That's great news John. No man ever wore a cravat as beautiful as his own child's arm around his neck."

Helen Stower says

Based on the author's brother who was jailed as an IRA terrorist, Mark Mulholland's novel, A mad and wonderful thing, explores why good people do bad things. Part love story, part thriller, this is a story that will stay with you long after the last page is turned.

It is quite difficult to describe this book or to put it into a category. It is a most original story and put simply, it is a very Irish story. Set in Dundalk, a town very close to the border of Northern Ireland, this book follows Johnny Donnelly. Johnny is a young Irishman who is passionate about his country and dedicates his life to this Irish cause by becoming a sniper for the IRA.

A central theme in the book is the question of cause - what makes makes people do certain things; in extreme cases kill for a cause.

As well as a tale of war and the fight for Ireland, A mad and wonderful thing is a love story. A story about falling in love with a girl, in this case, the charismatic Cora Flannery. This is also a story about a love for Ireland. Irish language, folklore & scenery.

Dee-Ann says

I really enjoyed the character, even if he did have his dark side. The story was 'mad and wonderful' with elements of gaiety, sadness, adventure, philosophy and confrontation. Laughed, cried, cheered and cringed.

Did not expect Bob in the beginning, but looked forward to his chats later in the book.

Gil Stewart says

What a great book. Could not wait to get home and continue the story. Wonderful writing and an original story.

Judith Paterson says

Again, a book I would not have chosen myself. I grew up with reports of shootings and bombings relating to 'The Troubles' almost every day and have no time for any of the perpetrators. However once I began this book I was hooked and it is a tribute to the writing that I was able to enjoy the story despite it being about an IRA sniper.

Everyday life and loves of a young man living on the south side of the border is described sympathetically and a creditable attempt is made to describe what makes him tick as a Republican sniper.

Beth Lawrence says

A charming and intriguing novel that follows a young Irish man who is passionate about life, his country, and a beautiful girl. But he has a secret: he is also IRA sniper. A dramatic turn of events makes him question everything.

Weaving a work of fiction through Irish folklore, history, politics, and landscape this novel takes on a fantastical journey through the blurred lines of right and wrong.

And the writing is poetic, and powerful.

A Mad and Wonderful Thing is a story about why we do the things we do, the choices we make, the consequences they have, and finding redemption when all seems lost.

It is a great read. More please from this writer.

Glen says

I won this book in a goodreads drawing.

A sniper for the IRA has to go about his ordinary life without being caught or killed. I was expecting some sort of noir type action novel, but I got something very different.

Stephanie says

This is an amazing book. The central character, Johnny, is a charismatic, funny, intelligent young man who also happens to be a sniper, killing on behalf of Ireland against the English. The story intersperses his family and romantic life with his alter killing life. Johnny discusses ancient Irish stories, sayings, politics, the settlement of Ireland and who it genuinely belongs to, not in a dry way, but thought provoking so that the reader can see this is a complex issue with a myriad of viewpoints. The author cleverly introduces a close friend of Johnny, a father like mentor who has passed on, who appears throughout the story and has conversations but maybe this is Johnny's conscience? This is a debut book by Mark, what a stunner! Brilliantly written, the characters are life like. My book of the year.

Sam Still Reading says

Thank you to Scribe Publications for the copy of this book.

A mad and wonderful thing. Sounds the best of both worlds, doesn't it? Something exciting, something to get your heart both racing and singing... This term can be used to summarise the protagonist in *A Mad and Wonderful Thing*, Johnny Donnelly – he's full of wonderful ideas, love and kindness but he also hears and does some things that could be rightfully termed as completely mad.

The majority of the books I read based in Ireland are sweet and full of warmth – think Maeve Binchy, Cathy Kelly and Marian Keyes. They've lulled me into a sense of security that life in Ireland is green and full of wonderful family and friends. I'd almost entirely forgotten about the Troubles and IRA until Johnny Donnelly brought it up again. Mark Mulholland's book brings to light not only what is good about Ireland, but its darker side, reminiscent of the Kevin and Sadie books by Joan Lingard that I read at school.

Johnny Donnelly is a character who has more layers than an onion. On the surface, he seems like a sweet Irish boy doing his apprenticeship and falling in love with Cora Flannery. His speech is full of Irish sayings and he's incredibly knowledgeable about the history of Ireland. But then more is revealed about Johnny and it's not so good. He's a sniper in the IRA. He talks (and sees) his dead colleague. But when trouble hits close to home, Johnny goes off the rails a little bit more...and a bit more... Suddenly life isn't so grand and there's payback to be had...

What I enjoyed about *A Mad and Wonderful Thing* is the honesty that Johnny shares with the reader. His determination to take the English out of Ireland (one by one if necessary) is borne out of an incident as a child at the border with Northern Ireland. It's a hatred that increases as time goes on and Johnny becomes more assured as a top sniper. However, when things fall apart – when love is lost and fatal mistakes are made, we can see Johnny's thoughts unravelling. Although his family pleads with him not to hurt anyone, Johnny gets more trigger happy (and proves he's a crack shot). Despite the anger burning in him, Johnny has a great capacity to love. When that love is lost, he fills the void with a number of liaisons that could be very good, if only he spent more time on them. It's an interesting portrayal of a man who kills on the side.

Another thing I enjoyed about the book was the use of Irish history and stories. I loved the references to Cuchulainn's Castle and Tir na nOg – Mulholland's explanations were exceptionally well done and helped to

set Ireland up as a special place in the book. Johnny and Cora's knowledge of them gave a fairy tale like feel to their love and helped make Johnny seem more human in that he can love a woman as strongly as he loves his country (however misguided you may think his intentions are). I loved the juxtaposition of Johnny's loves – it meant I couldn't hate him as a character, only enjoy the ride with him. The book rides a wonderful mixture of emotions, sometimes you can feel on top of the world and others be sniffling at the sadness and injustice of life.

A solid debut by Mark Mulholland and a fantastically complex character created in Johnny Donnelly.

<http://samstillreading.wordpress.com>

Cassy says

I received this book as a Goodreads winner. I found this book really easy to get through which means to me it was a great read. Having a Godson named Cuchulain and ancestors from County Clare in Ireland I related to this book a lot. A bit of romance, a bit of soul searching and a bit of action is what you'll find in this book.

Anni says

Cora is the love of Johnny's life but Johnny is also passionate about the landscape and ancient legends of Irish folklore. Set in the Irish border town of Dundalk during the troubles of the 1990s, this novel explores the moral paradox that makes a gifted young man chose terrorism as a way of life. The lyrical charm of the Irish vernacular and romanticism of the writing lifts it from the usual searing, relentless nature of war stories.

Reviewed for Whichbook.net

eghzarw says

Barring Tírghrá, which is a very different kind of publication, this is the best book about the Troubles I've ever read.
