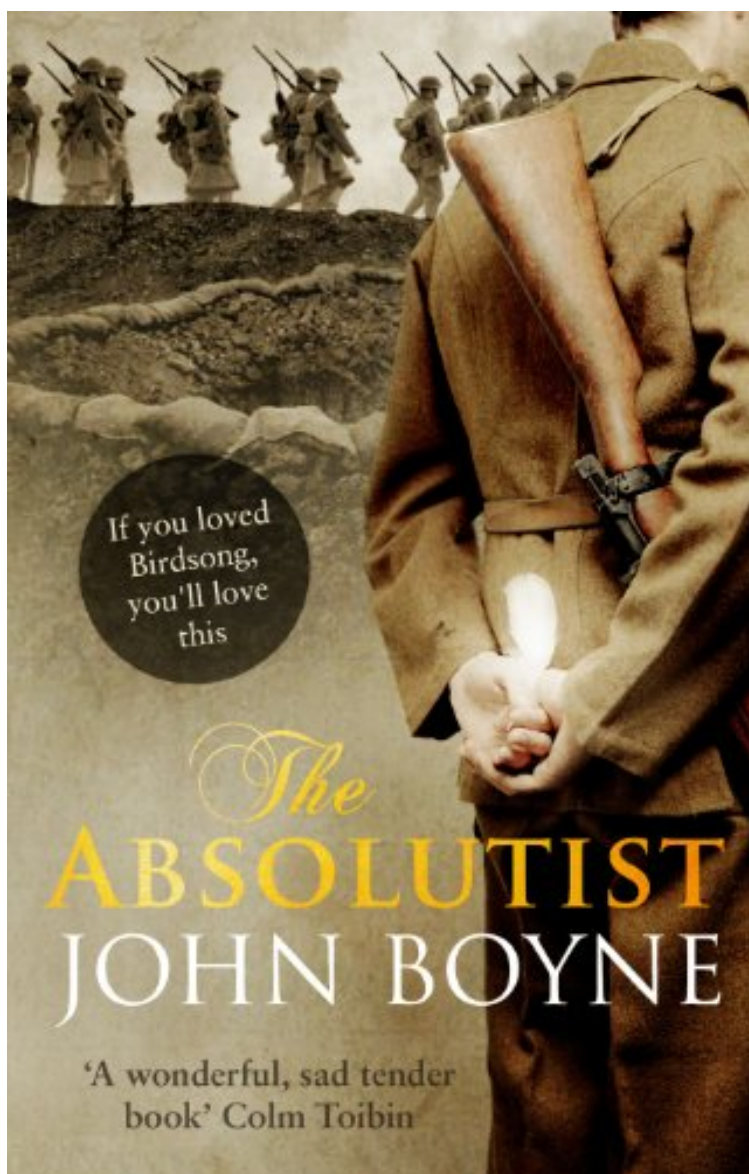


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# The Absolutist



*Par John Boyne*  
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**Par John Boyne : The Absolutist** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Absolutist:

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSeptember 1919: Twenty-year-old Tristan Sadler takes a train from London to Norwich to deliver a clutch of letters to Marian Bancroft. Tristan fought alongside Marian's brother Will during the Great War. They trained together. They fought together. But in 1917, Will laid down his guns on the battlefield and declared himself a conscientious objector, an act which has brought shame and dishonour on the Bancroft family. The letters, however, are not the real reason for Tristan's visit. He holds a secret deep within him. One that he is desperate to unburden himself of to Marian, if he can only find the courage. Whatever happens, this meeting will change his life forever. ExtraitSeated Opposite Me in the railway carriage, the elderly lady in the fox-fur shawl was recalling some of the murders that she had committed over

the years. There was the vicar in Leeds, she said, smiling a little as she tapped her lower lip with her index finger. And the spinster from Hartlepool whose tragic secret was to prove her undoing. The actress from London, of course, who took up with her sister's husband just after his return from the Crimea. She was a flighty piece so no one could blame me for that. But the maid-of-all-work in Connaught Square, I rather regretted killing her. She was a hard-working girl of good Northern stock, who perhaps didn't deserve such a brutal ending. That was one of my favourites, I replied. If you ask me, she got what was coming to her. She read letters that were not hers to read. I know you, don't I? she asked, sitting forward now, narrowing her eyes as she examined my face for familiar signs. A sharp combination of lavender and face cream, her mouth viscous with blood-red lipstick. I've seen you somewhere before. I work for Mr Pynton at the Whisby Press, I told her. My name's Tristan Sadler. We met at a literary lunch a few months ago. I extended my hand and she stared at it for a moment, as if unsure what was expected of her, before shaking it carefully, her fingers never quite closing on my own. You gave a talk on untraceable poisons, I added. Yes, I remember it now, she said, nodding quickly. You had five books that wanted signing. I was struck by your enthusiasm. I smiled, flattered that she recalled me at all. I'm a great admirer, I said, and she inclined her head graciously, a movement that must have been honed over thirty years of receiving praise from her readers. As is Mr Pynton. He's talked several times about trying to lure you over to our house. Yes, I know Pynton, she replied with a shudder. Vile little man. Terrible halitosis. I wonder that you can bear to be near him. I can see why he employed you, though. I raised an eyebrow, confused, and she offered me a half-smile. Pynton likes to be surrounded by beautiful things, she explained. You must have seen it in his taste for artwork and those ornate couches that look as though they belong in the Paris atelier of some fashion designer. You remind me of his last assistant, the scandalous one. But no, there's no chance, I'm afraid. I've been with my publisher for over thirty years and I'm perfectly happy where I am. She sat back, her expression turning to ice, and I knew that I had disgraced myself, turning what had been a pleasant exchange into a potential business transaction. I looked out of the window, embarrassed. Glancing at my watch, I saw that we were running about an hour later than planned and now the train had stopped again without explanation. This is exactly why I never go up to town any more, she declared abruptly as she struggled to open the window, for the carriage had begun to grow stuffy. You simply cannot rely on the railways to bring you home again. Here, let me help you with that, missus, said the young man who had been sitting next to her, speaking in whispered, flirtatious tones to the girl next to me since we departed Liverpool Street. He stood and leaned forward, a breeze of perspiration, and gave the window a hefty pull. It opened with a jolt, allowing a rush of warm air and engine-steam to spill inside. My Bills a dab hand with machinery, said the young woman, giggling with pride. Leave it out, Margie, he said, smiling only a little as he sat down. He fixed engines during the war, didn't you, Bill? I said leave it out, Margie, he repeated, colder now, and as he caught my eye we considered each other for a moment before looking away. It was just a window, dear, sniffed the lady-novelist with impeccable timing. It struck me how it had taken over an hour for our three parties even to acknowledge each other's presence. It reminded me of the story of the two Englishmen, left alone on a deserted island together for five years after a shipwreck, who never exchanged a single word of conversation as they had never been properly introduced. Twenty minutes later, our train shifted into motion and we were on our way, finally arriving in Norwich more than an hour and a half behind schedule. The young couple disembarked first, a flurry of hysterical impatience and rush-me-to-our-room giggles, and I helped the writer with her suitcase. You're very kind, she remarked in a distracted fashion as she scanned the platform. My driver should be here somewhere to help me the rest of the way. It was a pleasure to meet you, I said, not trying for another handshake but offering an awkward nod of the head instead, as if she were the Queen and I a loyal subject. I hope I didn't embarrass you earlier. I only meant that Mr Pynton wishes we had writers of your calibre on our list. She smiled at this I am relevant, said her expression, I matter and then she was gone, uniformed driver in tow. But I remained where I was, surrounded by people rushing to and from their platforms, lost within their number, quite alone in the busy railway station. I emerged from the great stone walls of Thorpe Station into an unexpectedly bright afternoon, and found that the street where my lodgings were located, Recorder Road, was only a short walk away. Upon arriving, however, I was disappointed to find that my room was not quite ready. Oh dear, said the landlady, a thin woman with a pale, scratchy complexion. She was trembling, I noticed, although it was not cold, and wringing her hands nervously. She was tall, too. The type of woman who stands out in a crowd for her unexpected stature. I'm afraid we owe you an apology, Mr Sadler. We've been at sixes and sevens all day. I don't quite know how to explain what's happened. I did write, Mrs Cantwell, I said, trying to soften the note of irritation that was creeping into my tone. I said I would be here

shortly after five. And its gone six now. I nodded in the direction of the grandfather clock that stood in the corner behind her desk. I dont mean to be awkward, but Youre not being awkward at all, sir, she replied quickly. The room should have been ready for you hours ago, only . . . She trailed off and her forehead wrinkled into a series of deep grooves as she bit her lip and turned away; she seemed unable to look me in the eye. We had a bit of unpleasantness this morning, Mr Sadler, thats the truth of it. In your room. Or what was to be your room, that is. You probably wont want it now. I know I shouldnt. I dont know what Ill do with it, honestly I dont. Its not as if I can afford to leave it unlet. Her agitation was obvious, and despite my mind being more or less focused on my plans for the following day, I was concerned for her and was about to ask whether there was anything I could do to help when a door opened behind her and she spun around. A boy of about seventeen appeared, whom I took to be her son: he had a look of her around the eyes and mouth, although his complexion was worse, scarred as he was by the acne of his age. He stopped short, taking me in for a moment, before turning to his mother in frustration. I told you to call me when the gentleman arrived, didnt I? he said, glaring at her. But hes only just arrived this minute, David, she protested. Its true, I said, feeling a curious urge to jump to her defence. I did. But you didnt call me, he insisted to his mother. What have you told him, anyway? I havent told him anything yet, she said, turning back to me with an expression that suggested she might cry if she was bullied any longer. I didnt know what to say. I do apologize, Mr Sadler, he said, turning to me now with a complicit smile, as if to imply that he and I were of a type who understood that nothing would go right in the world if we did not take it out of the hands of women and look after it ourselves. I had hoped to be here to greet you myself. I asked Ma to tell me the moment you arrived. We expected you earlier, I think. *Revue de presse* LONGLISTED - 2013 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award An .com Best 100 Book of 2012 Winner of the Stonewall Honor (Literature) "A novel of immeasurable sadness, in a league with Graham Greenes *The End of the Affair*. John Boyne is very, very good at portraying the destructive power of a painfully kept secret. This is a forbidden love story a gay love story but one with a terrible twist." John Irving "A wonderful, sad, tender book. There are some amazing things about this novel--one is the simplicity and purity of the narrative line; another is the sort of complexity within the characters and the emotions and the motives; another is the sense of the period, with all its restrictions. The book is going to have an enormous impact on everyone who reads it." Colm Toibin "This will become a classic war novel." *The Bookseller* Let me try to explain how much I loved *The Absolutist*. I loved it for its grainy black-and-white-movie feel, like an old British film from the 40s. I loved that author John Boyne teased out just enough information throughout this book to make me think Id figured out what had happened to Tristan and Will (I didnt!). I loved the mixture of horrific brutality and insanely beautiful prose. And I loved the ending, which made me gasp, gasp and gasp again. *Inland Empire Weekly*