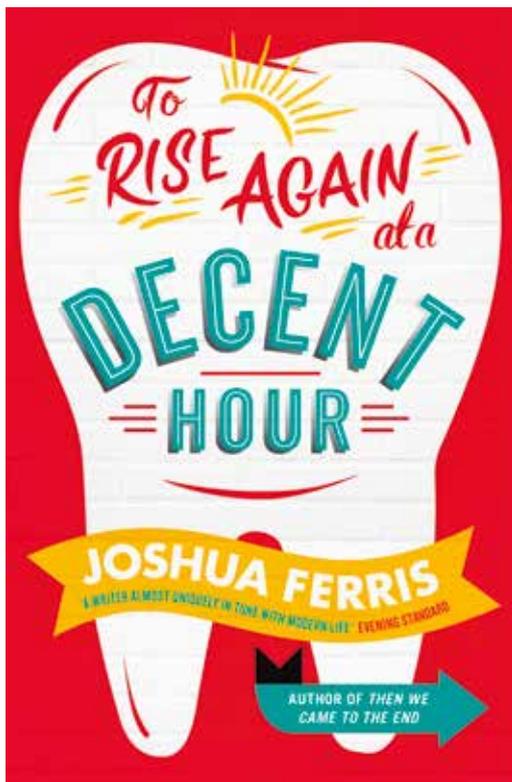


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2014

## Reader's Guide



Other novels by Joshua Ferris  
*Then We Came to the End* (2007)  
*The Unnamed* (2010)

# To Rise Again at a Decent Hour Joshua Ferris

Viking

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## About the author

Joshua Ferris was born in Illinois in 1974. He is the author of two previous novels, *Then We Came to the End*, which was nominated for the National Book Award, won the PEN/Hemingway Award and was longlisted for the Guardian First Book Award, and the highly acclaimed *The Unnamed*. In 2010 Joshua Ferris was selected for *The New Yorker's* '20 Under 40' list of fiction writers. He lives in New York.

## *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*

Joshua Ferris's dazzling new novel *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* is about the meaning of life, the certainty of death, and the importance of good oral hygiene.

There's nothing like a dental chair to remind a man that he's alone in the world...

Paul O'Rourke - dentist extraordinaire, reluctant New Yorker, avowed atheist, disaffected Red Sox fan, and a connoisseur of the afternoon mochaccino - is a man out of touch with modern life. While his dental practice occupies his days, his nights are filled with darker thoughts, as he alternately marvels at and rails against the optimism of the rest of humanity.

So it goes, until someone begins to impersonate Paul online. What began as an outrageous violation of privacy soon becomes something far more soul-frightening: the possibility that the virtual 'Paul' might be a better version of the man in the flesh...

## Discussion points

Discuss the novel's opening paragraphs. Why is it important that the narrator is a dentist? What mood do the opening sentences create?

The novel's narrator, Paul O'Rourke, wishes he could believe in something larger: 'I would've liked to believe in God. By believing in God, I could succumb to ease and comfort and reassurance'. Why can't he believe?

Privacy is one of the book's big preoccupations. Without a private office in his dental practice, Paul is always on display. And then suddenly he has an online identity: a Twitter and Facebook account in his name. How does the novel play with ideas of our public and private selves?

Early in the novel Paul declares: 'For all my proud assertions of self, I really only wanted to be smothered in the embrace of an inclusive and coercive singular "we". I wanted to be sucked up, subsumed into something greater, historical, eternal. One of the unit. One with the clan'. Where does Paul find community?

At the end of the novel Paul proclaims: 'I was sick of the facts, the bare facts, the hard, scientific facts. I was saying: Look at me, risking being wrong'. How does a depressive, pessimistic and fearful narrator show us that doubt about the world might not be such a bad thing?

## Themed reading

Michael Chabon *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*  
David Eggers *The Circle*  
Joseph Heller *Something Happened*

## Useful links

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