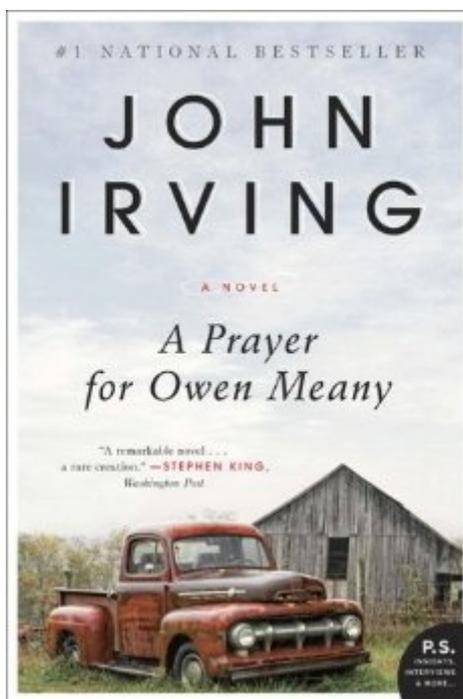


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A Prayer For Owen Meany: A Novel



Synopsis

I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voiceâ€”not because of his voice, or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God; I am a Christian because of Owen Meany. In the summer of 1953, two eleven-year-old boysâ€”best friendsâ€”are playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire. One of the boys hits a foul ball that kills the other boy's mother. The boy who hits the ball doesn't believe in accidents; Owen Meany believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul ball is extraordinary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I started reading *A Prayer for Owen Meany* at the urging of a friend, part of our on-going reading program. She had just started the novel, and said it was funny and I would enjoy it. I never expected that it would move me so. John Irving has written a profound novel of faith, friendship, and fate. It took me one or two sections to understand Irving's style. He likes to jump around a lot, and as the story is written as a memoir, that is certainly understandable. But Johnny Wheelwright (the narrative voice of the story) wants to tell us too much, too fast, and it doesn't all make sense at first. Only one thing is clear from the beginning: Owen Meany is destined to change Johnny's life. Owen and

Johnny are friends in New Hampshire in the 1950s. They have a unique bond which due in part to Owen's extraordinary presence. The dwarfed child has a strange voice that chills most people (including Johnny's grandmother), but he also has an adult-like wisdom and understanding. The bond between Owen and Johnny is sealed by a freak accident when Owen hits a baseball, killing Johnny's mother. As they grow up, it becomes clear to Johnny that Owen thinks he is guided by God. The accident with Johnny's mother is just one incident that ultimately will lead Johnny to find his own faith. There are moments of biting humor in the novel as well as moments of sadness. Although the majority of the story centers on Johnny's childhood, it continues through his high school and college years. As expected for the setting, Kennedy and the Vietnam War become important themes throughout the story. There are also moments when Johnny -- writing the novel in 1987 -- steps out of character to tell the reader in a diary-like fashion about his life in the present as a teacher.

Ten years ago, I read a "Prayer for Owen Meany" for the first time. Since then, I have re-read the book 20 maybe 30 times and, even now, it still manages to impress and move me. (Note: "Owen Meany" is the only book with a religious theme that does not disgust me. Agnostics and athiests need not fear this work; it is neither preachy nor possessing of a saccharine-sweet sentimentality.) Now, "Owen Meany" is indeed the kind of book that people seem to either love or hate. Very few show ambivalence towards this work. I believe, however, that most of those who dislike this book simply lack the patience necessary in order to fall in love with it. Standard Complaints Made By Many: It's slow to start, has too much detail, not enough "action," blah blah blah. My response to skeptics is this: John Irving is a writer strongly influenced by Dickens and, as such, his storytelling has a leisurely, near-Victorian quality to it. His is old-fashioned writing but never BAD writing. The first chapter of "Owen Meany" consists mostly of historical details. This high level of detail sets up the events outlined in the remainder of the book and is absolutely essential to the storytelling. Having trouble getting through the first 75 pages? Hey, take your ritalin and remember that books require a commitment on the part of the reader and are supposed to move at a different, slower pace than that of television or of the movies. And speaking of movies, if you loved "Simon Birch," you will hate "Owen Meany." That nauseating film--that travesty of a movie--bears as much resemblance to the book as Demi Moore's "Scarlet Letter" does to Nathaniel Hawthorne's masterpiece.

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