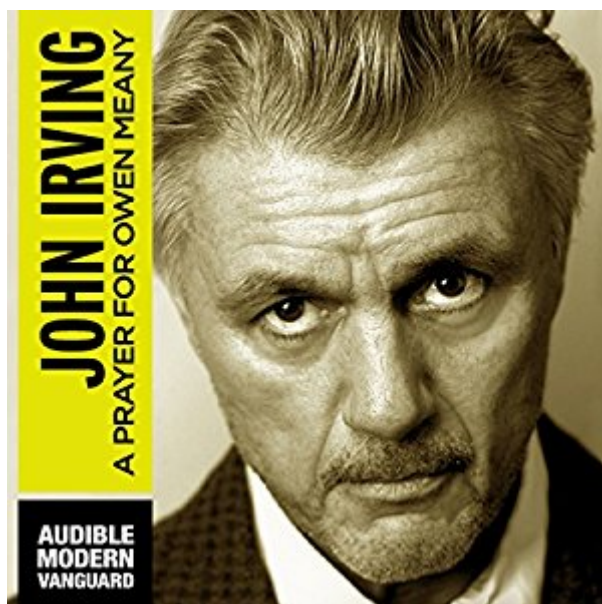


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A Prayer For Owen Meany



Synopsis

Owen Meany, the only child of a New Hampshire granite quarrier, believes he is God's instrument; he is. This is John Irving's most comic novel, yet Owen Meany is Mr. Irving's most heartbreaking character. "Roomy, intelligent, exhilarating and darkly comic...Dickensian in scope....Quite stunning and very ambitious." LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW "John Irving is an abundantly and even joyfully talented storyteller." THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 atheists 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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