



## **A Prayer for Owen Meany**

*John Irving*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# A Prayer for Owen Meany

*John Irving*

## **A Prayer for Owen Meany** John Irving

Eleven-year-old Owen Meany, playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire, hits a foul ball and kills his best friend's mother. Owen doesn't believe in accidents; he believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul is both extraordinary and terrifying. At moments a comic, self-deluded victim, but in the end the principal, tragic actor in a divine plan, Owen Meany is the most heartbreaking hero John Irving has yet created.

## **A Prayer for Owen Meany Details**

Date : Published 1990 by Black Swan (first published March 1989)

ISBN : 9780552135399

Author : John Irving

Format : Paperback 637 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Literature, Contemporary

 [Download A Prayer for Owen Meany ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online A Prayer for Owen Meany ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online A Prayer for Owen Meany John Irving**

---

## From Reader Review A Prayer for Owen Meany for online ebook

### Emily May says

*"I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice. 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've opted for the 3-star approach, but you shouldn't give it much weight where this book is concerned. Some people are really hung up on ratings - *does it really only deserve 1 star? you seemed to like it, why not 5 stars?* - when in truth, this book is so **complex, smart, multilayered and slow as fuck** that it's impossible to rate.

A Prayer for Owen Meany is a strange and interesting book about faith and doubt, with Owen himself representing an embodiment of the relationship between the natural and supernatural - everything from his physical description to the events of his life seem halfway between this world and the next.

This is my first Irving book. I don't know if that's a mistake or not - I probably will check out his other work but I'll definitely save it for a time when I'm ready for a slow plot. In A Prayer for Owen Meany, the narrator is John Wheelwright but he fades into the background, offering a perspective that at times feels like third-person.

John details the lives and habits of the characters surrounding him - most notably, of course, Owen Meany - making it a book about them and not himself. In fact, it seems like the author deliberately kept the novel's focus off of its narrator (who is perhaps a stand-in for himself?).

As I said, the story moves slowly and sometimes has a rambling quality, going on and on in **exhaustive detail**, exploring every aspect of a scene so that we get a lot of character and thematic depth (and also, it must be said, a bit of a headache). But it's hard to deny that Irving has a way with words and storytelling, working up to an important moment gradually and effectively, even if with a painful slowness.

The story spans many years and sometimes jumps a lot of time within a single page, before coming back again. As with many non-linear narratives, it offers a different and fascinating approach, while not being without confusion. It runs alongside many important events in American history (Kennedy's assassination, for example), which allows John to express his disdain for the Reagan administration, as well as his general anger toward America.

I'm not exaggerating when I say it's strange - John's account of his and Owen's childhood is odd to begin with, but the novel becomes increasingly nuts towards the end. I can't say I fully enjoyed it, but I thought the themes were interesting and incorporated well. John's running criticisms of America and American life manifest in ways big and small - the "big" being assassinations and the Vietnam War, the "small" being such as his mother's death by a baseball, an important American symbol.

It's not the kind of book you read for enjoyment (or I personally don't think so, but then I never fully got that guy in college who refused to go to any social events because he wanted to read Marcel Proust), but it is the kind you save for when you want a clever, thoughtful read with many layers and themes to uncover. I am glad I finally read it.

[Blog](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Store](#)

---

## Jason says

I've been on a huge John Irving kick recently, and man, am I glad I didn't start with this book because I might have aborted the whole thing before I had a chance to read some of his better works.

This one just didn't do it for me. Whereas I left other Irving novels feeling recharged and alive, I left this one pissed off and ready to drink cheap tequila until I blacked out and woke up in a new world where there are no books or stories or any sort of entertainment derived from the written word.

First of all, I think Irving has a habit of using his novel's narrators as a stand in for himself, which is fine, since he seems like an incredibly interesting dude, but here I felt like he was just going through the motions "Oh, ok, here's my main character, and he's different than me, uh, because we have different names and um...different parents...anyway, yeah, that's how we're different ok story time now!!!" it was a thin disguise at best and didn't work for me at all.

My second problem was the structure. The book takes place over the span of about 30 years, and sometimes events from all thirty were addressed in a single page. Which is fine, if it works, but I felt like he was trying to go for an "omni-present" narrative that ended up being muddled.

I also think the book might work better for people who are a little older than myself. A large part of the story deals with the Vietnam war and its relation to the Iran Contra scandal. While these passages were in no way "lacking" it did seem like they were aimed for people who were alive during that time, and could share in Irving's (obvious) outrage. Side note - I found myself finding a bazillion (yes, a bazillion) similarities between the national atmosphere in '68, and now.

Oh, and while I love Irving's knack for the unusual, here it seemed like every other page he was trying to force a "classic" situation, wherein unusual characters meet in an unusual situation that illuminates their nature in the most unusual of ways. It got so bad that at times I felt like I was reading a sitcom.

There were a few bright spots. I was genuinely moved by Owen's character, and I thought he served as a wonderful example of how Christ could have been at once holy, and flawed.

Gah - The thing is, Irving is a new love in my life, and like any new love, I wanted it to be perfect. But he isn't and that's fine because who wants perfection anyway but goddamn I wanted to love this one.

Um, yes. Ok, well, I'm giving it two stars - but two stars for Irving is four for most other authors.

---

## Andrew Smith says

It's a while since I finished this book – I felt I just needed a little time to gather my thoughts on it; there's a lot to take in. For those who have yet to experience this amazing book I'll quickly summarise the set-up. The two main characters are Johnny Wheelwright (through whose voice the tale is told) and his best friend Owen Meany. Owen is small in stature (possible less than five feet tall, fully grown) but big in character. His voice – we'll come back to that – dominates the novel. Set in a small New Hampshire town in the 1950's and 1960's, it opens with the catastrophic news that Owen was the cause of the death of Johnny's mother. A

mishit baseball shot struck her on the head and she died from the resulting trauma. How this individually affects the pair of them and impacts the relationship between them is one element of this novel, but just one element. The book can be seen as an anti-Vietnam War rant, which I believe it is - in part. It can also be considered the musings of a non-religious man (the author professes that he can accurately be described in this way) on the teachings of the bible and the way in which these lessons can guide people's thoughts, behaviours and the relationships they forge. It's also a rites of passage tale of two boys growing up amid the confusion of everything that's going on in their lives.

Aside from his height (or lack of it), Owen's voice is his standout feature – it's a nasal scream that is captured in the written version by being shown, throughout, in full capitals. In the excellent audio version I listened to the reader produced what I can only describe as a compellingly accurate rendition of the author's description. It's a haunting, screeching and slightly disturbing voice that absolutely stood out from the crowd. And Owen himself stands out in so many ways – he's wise, loyal, challenging, outspoken and kind. He's the kind of friend I believe we all wish we'd had when we were growing up.

There's humour here too. Some of Owen's verbal tirades had me smiling and sometimes laughing out loud. And there's a mystery to be solved concerning the identity of Johnny's father. This is a book that entertained, informed and challenged my perceptions in so many ways. I can only say that I was so sad to finish this tale that it's taken me a week or so to get over the loss of it. Is it the best book I've come across this year? It's more than that – much, much more than that. I know we all experience these things in our own way and I've no doubt some will be frustrated and switched-off by elements I found compelling here, but I'd urge anyone who fancies a thoughtful and possibly memorable journey through the lives of two people growing up to grab a copy of this book. With luck, you'll find it as wonderful a journey as I did.

---

## Steve says

Write memorable characters. How many “How to Write” books have said that? Whatever the number, it's a rule that John Irving must have taken to heart. Readers of this book will not soon forget the little guy in the title. Owen was exceedingly small, and had a high, almost cartoonish voice. But he also had a commanding presence. When he spoke, people listened. In large part, this was because he had a lot to say. He was opinionated, influential, and smart.

The narrator, John, was not as central to the story. But he and his family allowed us to get to know Owen through their interactions with him. Johnny was Salieri to Owen's Mozart, and Irving deserves credit for making the device work. The member of Johnny's family that launched the initial part of the plot was his mom. Owen, as a boy, had an almost unnatural attachment to her including an appreciation for the way she filled out a sweater. (According to reviews, breast obsession is kind of a thing with Irving. His newest book is evidently chock-full of boobaphilic references.) Anyway, the whole world within *this* book was turned upside down with one swing of a bat. Owen, who rarely got to play, and even more rarely got to try for anything but a walk, hit a foul ball that ended up killing Johnny's mom. Of course, it was nobody's fault, but Owen began considering himself some kind of instrument of fate.

Despite the initial impressions Owen made, he won over most everyone he met. This included Johnny's extended family: cousins, father figure, and patrician grandmother with the big house where everyone often met. (As another aside, I wonder why, in the interest of gender equality, there's no such word as “matrician”.) Though less privileged than most, Owen became a big-shot at the private school that Johnny's family arranged for him to attend. He was known as “The Voice” for his popular and well-argued op-ed pieces in the school paper.

The plot continues into the Vietnam War era where Owen becomes a soldier and John does not. Several mysteries are explained, but mum's the word about those. I will say that Irving did a good job sustaining momentum. The only dull parts are those focused on ~~Salieri~~ John in contemporary times. In flashback mode, which is most of the time, the pacing is brisk.

As for themes, there was no attempt to be sly with the Christ allusions. In fact, one scene featured Owen playing baby Jesus himself in the annual nativity play. (I'm big on parentheses today. This time I'm wondering if it's an old joke to suggest that Christ had an Owen Meany complex.) Then the God stuff somehow morphed into visions and the supernatural. To me, this was a disappointment, because the plot was driven inexorably and gratuitously by it. The story was doing well enough before this sledgehammer blow of thaumaturgy. The surrealism nullified what had previously rung true.

I shouldn't end this review with a complaint. So I'll reiterate what an extraordinary character Irving gives us with Owen. I still try to imagine his voice. Whenever Owen speaks in the book, the text is all CAPS so we're constantly aware that he's meant to stand out. Along with his voice, we get plenty more distinctions: he's wise beyond his years, authoritative beyond his station, and as memorable as any writing book could ever recommend.

---

## Edward Lorn says

Solid four stars. This is book seven in my John Irving Challenge. Let it be known that I'm an idiot. Irving's books shouldn't be read this close together. He takes upwards of four years to write these fucking things, and reading them back-to-back only highlights the little repetitive details that an author will forget about in four-plus years. I do not suggest being an idiot like me. Take your time with this author's back catalog. I'd say, they would be best read a year apart from each other. Now we digress for a while. This is going to be a lengthy diatribe followed by a review that will upset some people. You've been warned.

If you're only here for my thoughts on this book, skip ahead to paragraph four, the following paragraph being paragraph #1. Thanks.

I love the Goodreads community. There are authors who stay away from what they call the "Shark Tank of the Reading Community," where dastardly, trollish reviewers circle, waiting for a badly-behaved author to cut themselves, inciting a feeding frenzy. There are authors who literally believe Goodreads members have nothing better to do than to sit around waiting for authors to show the first sign of weakness. Then there are authors who use this site for marketing and what people in the restaurant business call table-touching. They hone their craft based on input garnered from reviews, and come to be active members who are here to help you with whatever questions you'd having regarding their latest book, or to host a giveaway, or maybe sometimes they also read and rate books, but never do they review because they don't want to cause waves. Then you have authors like me. I will always be a reader first. A reader who has his own opinions, his own likes and dislikes, his own views of the world. I don't write reviews to sell books. I don't write reviews to gain fans. In fact, I feel that sometimes my honest opinions damage me in the public eye more than they'll ever help me (right, MommaCat?). But, again, I write these for myself, or to give warnings to readers who enjoy or dislike the sames things as I. You will only ever receive my genuine feelings about a book. I don't participate in circle-jerk review swapping, I don't carpet bomb rivals or request that my fans do so, and I don't put on a happy face when someone pisses in my review corner in order to save face and keep acquaintances happy. I'm not that kinda dude. Don't like my opinions on books but like the stuff I write? Fine. Don't read my reviews. Better yet, don't follow me. Pretend I don't exist here on Goodreads, or social media in general. Wouldn't bother me a bit. I'm not here for a popularity contest. I'm not on Goodreads for

any reason other than discussing books with friends. If you don't like when I don't fangirl over your favorite books, that's none of my concern. If that twists your underwear in a knot and gives you a hemorrhoid, oh well. Because I'm not some dancing monkey here solely for *your* entertainment. I'm a human being with his own thoughts and tastes, and guess what that means? It means that, sometimes, ladies and gentlemen of the internet, we are *going to disagree*. But, if you're only here to tell me how wrong I am about your favorite book, or that I should shut up and write books instead of reviewing them, I will kindly ask you right now to stay the fuck off my grass.

I know I'm the enemy of some of you simply because I am an author. I get that, and I try to keep my distance from you. For the most part, you keep your distance from me, too, and I appreciate it, and this site remains a pleasant place for both of us. Simply put, I know where I'm not wanted and I stay away, lest I welcome your hellfire. But, again, FOR THE MOST PART, this website fucking rocks, as do the users who populate it. It's full of my favorite type of person in all the world--Readers. Because I'm a reader myself, a lifelong lover of books, and all I want to do is discuss books and share my favorite books and rage over the ones that piss me off. If I shit on your favorite books, it's because I didn't like them, not because I think I'm better than anyone else. I get that I'm a scrub, fighting his way to the top, and that some authors have been more successful than me, and for good reason. You're watching me learn. You have front-row tickets to my literary education. But the simple fact of the matter is, sometimes, I'm not going to like what you consider to be amazing works of literature. And if you take my reviews personally, well, I just gotta say, the fucking world doesn't revolve around you. It doesn't revolve around me either. The difference between me and you is that I realize that opinions are subjective, and that your negative review of a book I like is not a personal attack on me, just like my negative review of a book you love is not a personal attack on you.

But someone recently took it personally, which is why you're reading this stupid fucking diatribe. I was concerned that, by not giving *A Prayer for Owen Meany* a perfect score that I might summon down the wrath of some of you. Not all of you. Some of you. Maybe one or two of you. You know who you are. I shouldn't have to say this. It should be simple common sense that a stranger's opinion is not a slight on the temple of You. It's really that simple. I like a lot of you whose taste in books boggle my mind. I hate stuff like erotica or romance or YA, but loads of my friends on here love that shit. You don't see me in their comments section raging out over their tastes. So what if I don't like the books you read? Life goes on. And I think that's my point here. LIFE GOES ON. Stop taking everything so fucking personally. They are books, for fuck's sake. They're meant to be enjoyed. They're meant to be escapes. Stop getting so bent out of shape and go love whatever and whomever you want to love. Go on. No one's stopping you. Now, let's talk about THIS book...

### **THE ACTUAL REVIEW STARTS HERE**

*A Prayer for Owen Meany* is beautifully written. I could quote whole chapters to you, it's that good... in places. Pay close attention to those two words, though. "...in places."

That being said, I still think *The World According to Garp* is the better all-around experience. I know, I know, many of you will disagree with me. I know how many of you love this book. It was the single most requested book for me to read and review once I announced I was doing this John Irving Challenge (I'm attempting to read all of his books in a year and am currently on track to do so), and I feel some of you will be let down by my critique. But I'm not apologizing for how I feel. No one should have to apologize for liking or disliking or just feeling meh about a book. Ever.

While the level of writing in this book far exceeds the level of writing in *GARP*, *GARP* was consistently good. This book tends to ramble about meaningless, literary stuffs, like the background of character who pass in and out of the story only once. And the constant America-hate got old. Irving's right. This country has long been fucked. But beating a dead horse does not become him, and that's what the majority of this book is; Irving beating a dead horse. A horse that died on page 256.

I appreciate that Irving was trying to make Owen Meany's voice aggravating, but I found nearly everything about the kid annoying. He was too much of a know-it-all in my book, and because I am not religious in any way, shape, or form, I found a lot of his views sillier than a fucking clown orgy. People who talk to their god of choice or claim to hear His voice are no different to me than the wino outside the liquor store discussing quantum physics with the long-dead Carl Sagan. He's not talking to anyone but himself, and neither are you. You're both off your nut. Just my opinion. But crazy can be fun, and in places, Owen Meany is fun. But nowhere is he more fun than during the church performance and his part in *A Christmas Carol*. Which brings me to my number one complaint with this book.

The novel peaks at the 200-page mark and is never as entertaining as it was in those first 200 pages. Once the boys grew up, I lost interest. I knew Owen's fate, I knew John's fate, I knew everyone's fate, whether from my own guessing (which turned out to be accurate, and I hate when that happens) or because the author spoiled his own book. No reason I needed to know Owen's fate at page 200. No reason whatsoever. Fuck you for telling it, Irving.

My final word on the book is this:

There is never a good reason for 100-page chapters. Screw any author who does it. I'm the type of reader who takes breaks only when a chapter has concluded. If your chapter is 100-pages long, I MUST read all 100 pages in one sitting. If not, I feel like I've done the book a disservice by stopping where it never intended for me to stop. I know I'm fucking weird. You're not telling me anything I don't already know. Thing is, I'm not a quick reader. I peak at 100 pages a day. Not moving all day seriously fucks with my mobility, so I was forced, numerous times, to put the book down and walk around when I didn't want to. But that's just my bitch. You likely won't notice, nor will you likely care if you do.

In summation: If you read this entire review, it's very likely you are not happy with me. I know some of you will take offense where no offense is meant, but you'd do that anyway. Some people are professionally bothered. Nothing I can do about it. But if you feel guilty about something, or feel the need to defend someone, that's on you. I'm not pointing fingers. I'm making observations, and these observations are the way I see things. And what I found in this book is an author who has fallen in love with his own voice, and rightly so. The writing is sexy as fuck. But, at some point, you have to learn when to kill your darlings for the sake of the reader's enjoyment. And I feel too many darlings were spared in the writing of this book. And, in parts, too much was spoiled far too early. Take care of each other, and on to the next Irving!

**Final Judgment: Pretty but bloated.**

---

## Maxwell says

I might need to come back and write a longer review after I've thought about this book for a while because there is definitely a lot to ponder. It's a 600+ page book that I never fully loved, but I never wanted to stop reading it. Objectively, I think this book is really smart and thoughtful and 'good' (whatever that means). But my heart was never fully in it. This review is not going to make a lot of sense because I don't think I've made sense of my feelings towards this one yet. Anyway, it made me want to read more John Irving novels, so that says something. I just can't blanket recommend this to people. You've got to want to read it and appreciate slow, more thoughtful stories that take a long time to develop. I do like how it ended though, and reading the afterward made me realize how meticulous Irving is with crafting his stories. **3.5 stars**

---

## Tom says

I'm sure you can read a million reviews about this book. It seems to be many people's favorite. Let me just say that I have read 5 or 6 John Irving books, and this is the only one that is much more than a good story. About 10 years ago I was assisting a photography class for adults, and one of the participants, a minister, saw that I was reading this book. He said that A prayer for Owen Meany had more to say about the nature of God than anything he had ever read. We had a fabulous conversation about the book. I am basically an atheist, without the anti-god feeling that sometimes implies, yet despite our religious differences, we took exactly the same things away from this story. It's a powerful narrative.

---

## Algernon says

**It was Owen Meany who taught me that any good book is always in motion – from the general to the specific, from the particular to the whole, and back again. Good reading – and good writing about reading – moves the same way.**

John Irving is a great believer in the power of opening and closing lines. The one I have chosen above comes from the middle of the novel, but it explains both my fascination with the hero of the story and my goals in reviewing – connect the universal with the individual. Implied is a judgment of value: this is a great story, one that I admire despite several shortcomings or mannerisms that turned the reading experience into a see-saw ride from the sublime to the annoying.

The 'sublime' is in the universal search for meaning, for a direction in life. The word prayer in the title, and the famous opening lines, point towards an exploration of faith in the modern age. Two boys grow up together in a small town in New Hampshire. We follow them from the 1950's to the late 1980's, with a major turning point during the Vietnam War. John Wheelwright is a scion of what is the equivalent of local aristocracy, the wealthiest and most respected family in town. He is good looking but extremely shy and unassuming. Owen Meany is coming from a blue-collar background, a dysfunctional family, yet he is assertive, determined, charismatic, despite his diminutive size and his piping loud voice.

John Wheelwright is the narrator, from the perspective of an old man remembering in extensive flashbacks the events of his childhood and youth, events dominated by the personality of his friend Owen Meany. Contemporary observations of John's life in self-imposed exile in Canada are anchoring the story in the present. John is a bland character by design: he is a witness of the times, not an actor. That role is reserved for Owen. In a Christmas pageant John describes himself as a Joseph, a passive element in the myth. Right from the first page we learn that John is on a quest to understand and to eventually embrace religion. He moves in childhood from Catholic to Episcopalian to Presbyterian and several other popular faiths of the period, with detours into hippie and anti-war culture. As a child, he follows the traditions of his parents and family. As a student he starts to ask questions and to have doubts. His spiritual journey is also expressed by his search for his father, a secret that his unwed mother took with her to her early grave.

*What made Mr. Merrill infinitely more attractive was that he was full of doubt; he expressed our doubt in the most eloquent and sympathetic way.*

The first key to the novel for me lies in this Pastor Merrill and his lack of faith. Through John and Owen, Irving proposes a rebirth of Christianity not by following the old dogma, but by telling new stories, better adapted to our modern culture.

*He taught the same old stories, with the same old cast of characters; he preached the same old virtues and values; and he theologized on the same old “miracles” – yet he appeared not to believe in any of it. His mind was closed to the possibility of a new story; there was no room in his heart for a new character of God’s holy choosing, or for a new “miracle”.*

If John is the passive voice, Owen Meany is very much the active one, the needed “miracle”. He always knows what he wants and he always knows how to make the others do what he wants. If anything, he is a little too obvious a plot device, with so much foreshadowing and manifest destiny expressed through him:

*On the subject of predestination, Owen Meany would accuse Calvin of bad faith. There were no accidents; there was a reason for that baseball – just as there was a reason for Owen being small, and a reason for his voice.*

*And: I remember how he had appeared to all of us: like a descending angel – a tiny but fiery god, sent to adjudicate the errors of our ways.*

*... he was still and would always be The Voice. He demanded attention; and he got it.*

I don’t want to go into details about the spiritual journey undertaken by the two friends. It has, like the rest of the book, its ups and downs, its rushing to the finish line moments and its slogging at a snail’s pace interludes. What I want to point out are two other keys to understanding the novel:

- It is an extremely detailed and lovingly drawn journey down memory lane for the writer, incorporating many autobiographical elements of a sheltered childhood and of a controversial education in a private college in Exeter, New Hampshire, followed by a growing political awareness and militancy. This moving from the universal search for truth to the particulars of life in a small town worked very well for me, despite being almost drowned in the ordinary details of day to day life for the boys. The talent of John Irving shines brightly in his character sketches and in his ironic brand of humour, one that exposes the ills of society without foaming at the mouth anger. The older version of John is though a much bitter narrator than the younger one ( *THIS COUNTRY IS MORALLY EXHAUSTED.* ), spending too much time criticizing the politics and the leadership of his native land. The targets of the author’s satire are many, but the most time is spent on school leaders ( *HOW CAN THEY PRESUME TO TEACH US ABOUT OURSELVES IF THEY DON’T REMEMBER BEING LIKE US?* ) and war mongering.

- It includes metafictional elements, by making the older John both a reader and a teacher of literature, examining the way stories shape and define our understanding of the world. It also connects with the first thread, with the need to create new stories instead of blindly following the old ones. One of the examples chosen to illustrate the point is John’s doctorate study of “Tess of the d’Urbervilles” and the importance of predestination in the work of Thomas Hardy. It also gives us John’s favourite quote as a storyteller, also borrowed from Hardy:

*A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We storytellers are all ancient mariners, and none of us is justified in stopping wedding guests, unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experiences of every average man and woman.*

Which quote bring me to the few reasons I didn’t rate this present novel among my favourites, despite the engrossing experiences recounted here and the beautiful prose of John Irving.

- There are a LOT of ordinary experiences. The novel feels padded, and some of the salient points are made not once or twice, but five or ten times, as if the ordinary reader is too thick-headed to get it right the first time.
- There is too much predestination, maybe not surprising in a novel dealing with religion and faith, but something that I find personally very difficult to accept. I am a natural doubter, and admire people like John

Randi who are working to expose the usual scams of confidence artists. Most of my beef with religion comes from the injunction to believe in the absence of evidence, something our John spends his whole life trying to embrace. (*It's a no-win argument – that business of what we're born with and what our environment does to us. And it's a boring argument, because it simplifies the mysteries that attend both our birth and our growth.*)

- Speaking of John, he is such a wet noodle as a person, that I had absolutely zero interest in his struggles to get a girlfriend or to make a career for himself. His only relevance is as a sounding board for the author's faith explorations.

- Owen is better company, and a LOT of fun to have around, but so over the top in his portrayal that I never for a minute considered him as a real person, as opposed to a theatrical role. (view spoiler)).

Conclusion: John Irving confirmed that he is one of the most talented storytellers on my library shelves, intellectually provocative and touchingly empathetic towards his characters. Owen Meany is a memorable hero of our modern world, but I don't plan to re-read his story anytime soon. I plan to read instead "The Tin Drum" by Gunther Grass, which I understand served as inspiration for John Irving in writing the present novel.

---

## **Marty says**

A long time ago, I came across a story that my grandmother recommended. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I definitely hadn't expected to read what would become my favorite book. The story begins as many do, giving background on the area that will provide the setting for our tale, a history as reference, but quickly catches up with the main characters and the supporting cast. And we quickly learn of **Johnny** and **Owen Meany**, two friends who forge an eternal bond despite their obvious mismatches - physical, social, cultural and religious differences. And a tragic consequence of a baseball game.

### **GOD HAS TAKEN YOUR MOTHER. MY HANDS WERE THE INSTRUMENT. GOD HAS TAKEN MY HANDS. I AM GOD'S INSTRUMENT.**

Big words for an eleven-year old who can almost sit in his friend's lap. But Owen is so self-assured that whether John believes him or not, he knows that there is something special about Owen. They all know that there is something different, but no one but Johnny knows how different - or special - Owen really is.

Through their years together, Owen grows closer to Johnny than a simple friend: He becomes a brother, an aide in the search for Johnny's unnamed father, an influence that will guide Johnny's throughout his life. From helping to search for the identity of Johnny's father to keeping him out of the Vietnam war, Owen has written the script for Johnny's life although Johnny never realizes it until the end of the story - only then does he know that Owen knew the script for his own life as well, but never revealed it.

Each action in his short life was a test to help him fulfill the one part of his destiny that he couldn't see - the final act. Johnny faithfully helps Owen in these tasks, things that he can't possibly know the reasons for. But to Owen, even Johnny's mother's death had a purpose. Everything had a purpose to Owen. Even if he was the only one to seem to know why things happened the way they did.

**He had sunk the shot in under four seconds!**

**"YOU SEE WHAT A LITTLE FAITH CAN DO?" said Owen Meany. The brain-damaged janitor was applauding. "SET THE CLOCK TO THREE SECONDS!" Owen told him.**

**"Jesus Christ!" I said.**

**"IF WE CAN DO IT IN UNDER FOUR SECONDS, WE CAN DO IT IN UNDER THREE," he said.  
"IT JUST TAKES A LITTLE MORE FAITH."  
"It takes more practice," I told him irritably.  
"FAITH TAKES PRACTICE," said Owen Meany**

Irving uses Owen Meany to analyze faith, not only as in a single religion sense, spirituality as a whole. Despite everything that he endures, Owen Meany never loses his faith, his knowledge that he is an INSTRUMENT OF GOD, as he reminds Johnny on many occasions. It is this faith, through the threat of expulsion, through the lean & hard teen years, and into his enlistment into the army, that keeps Owen going, knowing that he has a mission that he has to fulfill, and not much time to do it. Along the way, he changes Johnny, filling him with confidence and self-reliance and even religion, infusing all of those characteristics that Owen has an abundance of and is loathe to leave behind.

Irving's narrative is uniquely captivating, as is the way that he chooses to depict characters, to breath life into them. Although Owen and Johnny are by far the main characters, they live among a expansive cast, who all have their own place in this tapestry. Owen touches everyone in some small way, leading up to his grand fulfillment.

*A Prayer for Owen Meany* is one of my favorite books, and many other's that I have lent it to have found a fondness for the story as well. Owen grabs you the way he grabs the other characters in the novel. There is something so strong, so compelling about him that you have to find out what is going to happen.

**"NOW I KNOW WHY YOU HAD TO BE HERE," Owen said to me. "DO YOU SEE WHY?" he asked me.  
"Yes," I said.  
"REMEMBER ALL OF OUR PRACTICING?" he asked me.  
"I remember," I said.**

And you will remember it, too.

---

## **Diane says**

This is the book that made me want to be a writer. I read it in high school, thanks to my favorite English teacher, Mrs. B, who had written down the title on a Post-It note and said, "You need to read this." I immediately went and found a copy and had it finished it by the end of the week.

There is no way I can write a review that is worthy of this novel, but I shall try. It is the story of two boys in New Hampshire in the 1950s: the narrator is Johnny Wheelwright, whose family is wealthy; and his friend, Owen Meany. How to describe Owen? He was small and light, and he had a loud, high-pitched voice. He was smart and a loyal friend. Owen's parents were a bit odd, and his family was poor enough that the Wheelwrights often helped Owen with tuition and clothing.

The first chapter brings a tragedy: Johnny and Owen are playing baseball. Owen, who doesn't usually get to bat because he was so small, was told by the coach to go ahead and swing. Owen hits a foul ball that strikes Johnny's mother and kills her. Johnny is devastated and has trouble forgiving Owen, but they eventually make peace, thanks to a stuffed armadillo toy. (Thus explaining the armadillo pictured on some editions.)

The rest of the chapters cover the boys as they grow up and go to prep school. Owen has a gift for writing and pens some inflammatory columns in the school newspaper. There is also a hilarious prank that Owen

pulls on a teacher he doesn't like, which involves a car, some athletes and a stage.

One of my favorite sections of the book describes a church Christmas pageant that goes horribly awry. Owen, who can be a bit bossy, takes over the pageant and assigns himself the role of Baby Jesus, even though in previous years it was just a doll. It's a laugh-out-loud disaster, and almost every year at Christmastime I'll pull out this book and reread the chapter.

When the boys turn 18, the Vietnam War is escalating and Owen signs up for the Reserve Officers Training Corps, which will pay for his college tuition while he serves. Owen even comes up with a plan to spare Johnny from having to go to Vietnam. Owen always has a plan, you see.

The plot slowly builds and builds, and I would describe it as a crescendo. There is a purpose to everything in the story, and by the end of the book, we understand why things had to be exactly what they were.

If you are a first-time reader of this novel, I need to warn you that there is a difficult passage at the beginning. Johnny, who is now an adult and has left the United States and moved to Canada, discusses his feelings about religion. I think this is the point where some readers get frustrated and abandon the book, but I urge you, I implore you, I beg you -- do not give up. There is a reason for it. If you can power through the discussion of churches, you will break through to a wonderful story.

Speaking of religion, I would be remiss not to mention the comparison to Jesus that Irving made. Whenever Owen speaks, his dialogue is in ALL CAPS. Bible readers will note that Jesus' words were printed in an all-red font in many editions. There are other similarities to Christ, but the less said on this, the better.

I have reread this book many times since I first read it in 1990, and each time, it moves me again. Some novels are easy to explain -- this one is not. It's a marvelous mix of comedy and drama and bildungsroman and the meaning of our lives, and I am grateful to have it in my life. I am not a religious person, but I became so attached to the character of Owen that thinking about him can make me a bit misty-eyed. He is complex and fleshed out in a way that few fictional characters are.

Note: This book meant so much to me that I was horrified to hear that Hollywood made it into a movie. There is no way this book could be captured on film. Luckily someone had the good sense to change the title -- probably a demand of Mr. Irving -- but I have no intention of ever seeing it. Some of you may know that I have a hobby of comparing movies adaptations with the source material, but this book is the exception. I want to remember it in its pure form. Owen would want it that way.

---

## **Choko says**

\*\*\* 5 \*\*\*

**A buddy read with the most beloved Judy!!! Owen Meany was a gift!!!**

---

## **Nick G says**

I'm short on time for this review, but man, this is the closest thing to "a perfect story" as anything I've ever read.

\*\*\*I'm back a few days later to edit my review, because I can't stop thinking about this book. It might be my favorite. I might be *in love* with this story. As the first sentence of the story starts out, "I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice...", well, I am, too.

\*\*\*SPOILERS FROM THIS POINT ON IN THE REVEIW\*\*\*

I think I fell in love with book as I read one specific sentence. It's at the end of the story, when Owen and Johnny are in the "temporary bathroom" with the children, and his dream is starting to unfold.

I thought I had it all figured out - the lunatic kid has the grenade and he's going to try and blow them up. But then I read the sentence when Owen looks to Johnny and says something along the lines of "WE'LL HAVE ABOUT FOUR SECONDS". Maybe I was a little slow to catch on, but it was right then that I realized the reason they had always practiced "the shot". It blindsighted me and I loved it. Irving had made their routine practice of "the shot" so commonplace in their time together, that I forgot about even asking what purpose it served being in the story.

But the sentence carries so much more power than that. At the same time I realized the purpose of "the shot", it also hit home how Owen had lived his entire life for that moment. He had known his fate, his moment, and not only did he embrace it, he had prepared for it. And when it came time to act and live this moment, he didn't flinch. Just as Owen had lived his life for one specific point and time, the power of this story was revealed to me in one perfect sentence.

It gave me THE SHIVERS.

---

## **Lisa says**

Being in a melancholy mood, I was trying to think of a book that made me laugh tears. And the first one that came to mind was Owen Meany. I couldn't stop laughing, except for when I cried buckets.

Rarely do I read books that shake my emotional equilibrium in the same entertaining way. Owen Meany in all his absurdities will stay with me forever, just like the other characters, which I learned to love despite (or because of) their highly constructed lives, all serving the "big purpose" in the end.

Some say this is a novel proving the inner truth of faith. I say this is a novel that shows a reader the literary basis of any myth. The creator of stories moves his characters to the grand finale with a purpose, and the reader knows it and cries and laughs anyway.

In my adolescence, I went through a John Irving phase, reading most of his tragicomedy novels in one go, loving his sad humour, his strange plots, his social message and his unique characterisation. Of all his novels, this one touched me most, and it is the one I have kept in my heart over 20 years. I can still see that baseball flying in slow motion. And I can still feel that rage against the author. How dare you put me through this emotional collapse, between laughter and tears? I can still hear the voice of Owen, and feel his incredible determination. The airport scene still breaks my heart, the sheer beauty of the practised sacrifice is just "l'art pour l'art" at its best.

When the narrator sums up his doom, I feel with him:

"I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice. 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."

Owen Meany didn't make me a Christian, quite the contrary, but he certainly made me a believer in the power of fiction. I am also doomed to remember his voice.

---

## **Nathan says**

I gave this book three stars because I figure that's the average of five stars and one star. Some of the things about this book were great; others were really terrible.

Irving's strong-point is definitely his ability to draw interesting characters in vivid--sometimes painful--detail. Owen, of course, is the central and most interesting character. He's a little runt of a boy with a bizarre voice, a sarcastic wit, an iron will, and an unwavering faith in God and in the fact that he is an instrument of God's will. In stark contrast to Owen's miraculous life stands Owen's best friend and the narrator of the story, John. We get two views of John. Most of the book consists of John narrating his childhood and telling the story of Owen Meany. The childhood John is self-conscious, indecisive, and unmotivated. The other view comes from periodic scenes of the middle-aged, mundane John who now lives in Toronto and invariably launches into long and bitter rants against the United States and its foreign policy. The reason for the rants becomes clear by the end of the book, but that doesn't make them any more enjoyable.

Many of the supporting characters are also interesting. I really liked John's grandmother, Mrs. Wheelwright, who is a sort of New England, old-money royalty. John's sexually charged and extremely rambunctious cousins are usually comical, and Reverend Louis Merrill is sort of tragically lovable.

The plot, on the other hand, is incredibly long and wandering. Though parts of the narrative are moderately gripping, often the story drags along. Irving keeps you reading not with intense plot development, but rather with an intense curiosity to find out **what** the big deal is about Owen Meany. While the ending is good--very good, in my opinion--Irving has built up your anticipation so much, that by the time it finally happens, it almost doesn't have a prayer (pardon the pun) of meeting your expectations.

While there are several themes in the book, the most important, in my opinion, seems to be that of faith vs. doubt. Owen's incredibly strong faith is contrasted with John's lack of faith during his childhood, and his passive, "church-rummage" faith during his adult life (which, we are told on the first page, John credits to the "miracle" of Owen Meany). The Reverend Louis Merrill also seems to be a more important character than his relatively small role would suggest, and his self-admitted personal philosophy is the paradoxical "doubt as the essence of faith." In one of the more ironic passages of the book (slight spoiler warning...), Rev. Merrill's doubt is finally dispelled not through the miraculous events surrounding Owen Meany, but through a very mundane and spiteful prank.

The problem is that none of the book's myriad of themes and symbols was particularly interesting to me. The central theme discussed above seems to hold such potential, but in the end I didn't feel any more enlightened than I started. Often with books I find myself identifying with one particular character. That didn't happen with this book, and I think that impeded my ability to glean insight from the story.

Overall, I'm glad I read it. I'd be interested to hear what other's have to say about it.

---