



# A Prayer for Owen Meany: A Novel

*By John Irving*

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## A Prayer for Owen Meany: A Novel By John Irving

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.

In the summer of 1953, two eleven-year-old boys—best friends—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.

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## A Prayer for Owen Meany: A Novel By John Irving Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Owen Meany is a dwarfish boy with a strange voice who accidentally kills his best friend's mom with a baseball and believes--accurately--that he is an instrument of God, to be redeemed by martyrdom. John Irving's novel, which inspired the 1998 Jim Carrey movie *Simon Birch*, is his most popular book in Britain, and perhaps the oddest Christian mystic novel since Flannery O'Connor's work. Irving fans will find much that is familiar: the New England prep-school-town setting, symbolic amputations of man and beast, the Garp-like unknown father of the narrator (Owen's orphaned best friend), the rough comedy. The scene of doltish the doltish headmaster driving a trashed VW down the school's marble staircase is a marvelous set piece. So are the Christmas pageants Owen stars in. But it's all, as *Highlights* magazine used to put it, "fun with a purpose." When Owen plays baby Jesus in the pageants, and glimpses a tombstone with his death date while enacting *A Christmas Carol*, the slapstick doesn't cancel the fact that he *was* born to be martyred. The book's countless subplots add up to a moral argument, specifically an indictment of American foreign policy--from Vietnam to the Contras.

The book's mystic religiosity is steeped in Robertson Davies's Deptford trilogy, and the fatal baseball relates to the fatefully misdirected snowball in the first Deptford novel, *Fifth Business*. Tiny, symbolic Owen echoes the hero of Irving's teacher Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*--the two characters share the same initials. A rollicking entertainment, *Owen Meany* is also a meditation on literature, history, and God. --*Tim Appelo*

### From Publishers Weekly

Although he is convincing in his appraisal of the tragedy of Vietnam and in his religious philosophizing, "Irving's storytelling skills have gone seriously astray in this contrived, preachy, tedious tale of the eponymous Owen Meany, a latter-day prophet and Christ-like figure who dies a martyr after having inspired true Christian belief in the narrator Johnny Wheelwright," warned PW. Author tour.

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### From Library Journal

Diminutive Owen Meaney, the social outcast with the high, pinched voice, has an enormous influence on his friend Johnny Wheelwright--not least because the only baseball Owen ever hits causes the death of Johnny's mother. But as Johnny claims, "Owen gave me more than he ever took from me. . . . What did he ever say that wasn't right?" Spookily prescient, convinced that he is an instrument of God, Owen intimidates child and adult alike. Why Johnny "is a Christian because of Owen Meaney" is the novel's central mystery but not its only one: Who, for instance, was Johnny's father? Untangling these knots, the adult Johnny pauses to consider his religious convictions and distaste of American politics in passages that are neither especially persuasive nor effectively integrated into the book. And though Owen is a compelling presence, his power over others is not entirely convincing. Still, readers will be drawn in by the story of the boys' friendship and by the desire to see some resolution to Johnny's mysteries.

- *Barbara Hoffert, "Library Journal"*

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**Cora Morrell:**

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**Gerald Kelly:**

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