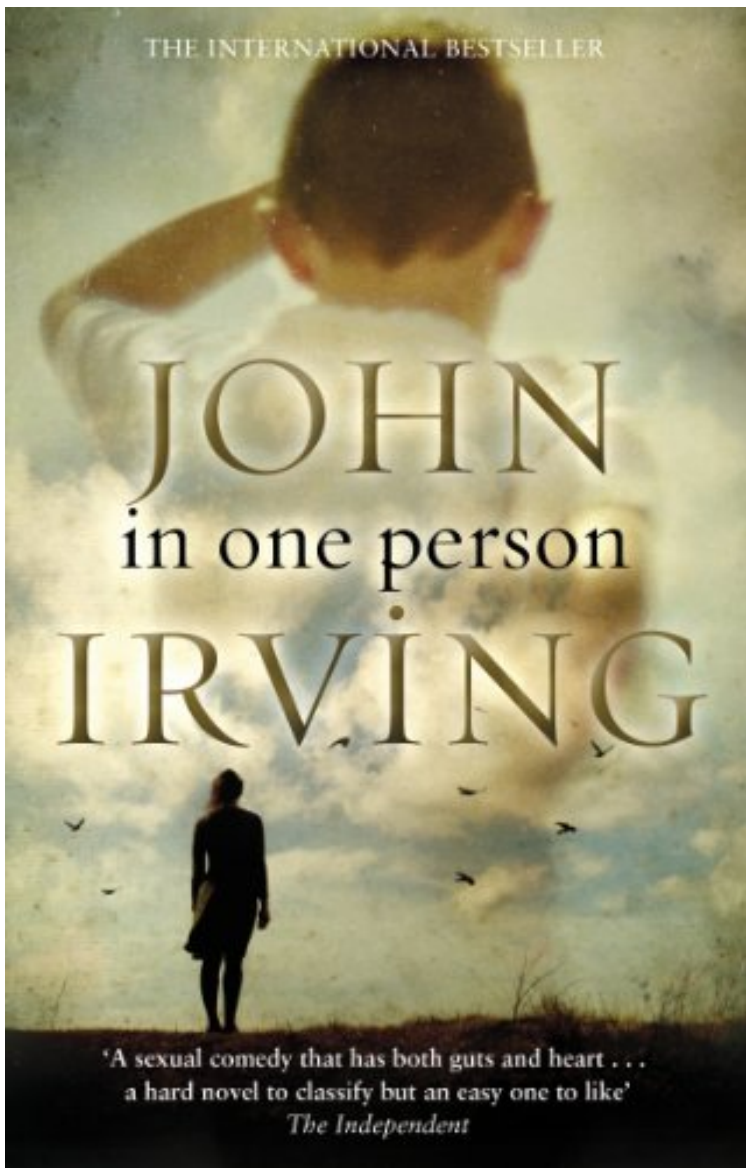


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In One Person



Par John Irving
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA compelling novel of desire, secrecy, and sexual identity, In One Person is a story of unfulfilled love tormented, funny, and affecting and an impassioned embrace of our sexual differences. Billy, the bisexual narrator and main character, tells the tragicomic story (lasting more than half a century) of his life as a sexual suspect, a phrase first used by John Irving in 1978 in his landmark novel of terminal cases, The World According to Garp.His most political novel since The Cider House Rules and A Prayer for Owen Meany, John Irvings In One Person is a poignant tribute to Billys friends and lovers a theatrical cast of characters who defy category and convention. Not least, In One Person is an intimate and unforgettable portrait of the solitariness of a bisexual man who is dedicated to making himself worthwhile.ExtraitIm going

to begin by telling you about Miss Frost. While I say to everyone that I became a writer because I read a certain novel by Charles Dickens at the formative age of fifteen, the truth is I was younger than that when I first met Miss Frost and imagined having sex with her, and this moment of my sexual awakening also marked the fitful birth of my imagination. We are formed by what we desire. In less than a minute of excited, secretive longing, I desired to become a writer and to have sex with Miss Frost not necessarily in that order. I met Miss Frost in a library. I like libraries, though I have difficulty pronouncing the word both the plural and the singular. It seems there are certain words I have considerable trouble pronouncing: nouns, for the most part people, places, and things that have caused me preternatural excitement, irresolvable conflict, or utter panic. Well, that is the opinion of various voice teachers and speech therapists and psychiatrists who've treated me, without success. In elementary school, I was held back a grade due to severe speech impairments an overstatement. I'm now in my late sixties, almost seventy; I've ceased to be interested in the cause of my mispronunciations. (Not to put too fine a point on it, but fuck the etiology.) I don't even try to say the etiology word, but I can manage to struggle through a comprehensible mispronunciation of library or libraries the botched word emerging as an unknown fruit. (Liberry, or liberries, I say the way children do.) It's all the more ironic that my first library was undistinguished. This was the public library in the small town of First Sister, Vermont a compact red-brick building on the same street where my grandparents lived. I lived in their house on River Street until I was fifteen, when my mom remarried. My mother met my stepfather in a play. The town's amateur theatrical society was called the First Sister Players; for as far back as I can remember, I saw all the plays in our town's little theater. My mom was the prompter if you forgot your lines, she told you what to say. (It being an amateur theater, there were a lot of forgotten lines.) For years, I thought the prompter was one of the actors someone mysteriously offstage, and not in costume, but a necessary contributor to the dialogue. My stepfather was a new actor in the First Sister Players when my mother met him. He had come to town to teach at Favorite River Academy the almost-prestigious private school, which was then all boys. For much of my young life (most certainly, by the time I was ten or eleven), I must have known that eventually, when I was old enough, I would go to the academy. There was a more modern and better-lit library at the prep school, but the public library in the town of First Sister was my first library, and the librarian there was my first librarian. (Incidentally, I've never had any trouble saying the librarian word.) Needless to say, Miss Frost was a more memorable experience than the library. Inexcusably, it was long after meeting her that I learned her first name. Everyone called her Miss Frost, and she seemed to me to be my mom's age or a little younger when I belatedly got my first library card and met her. My aunt, a most imperious person, had told me that Miss Frost used to be very good-looking, but it was impossible for me to imagine that Miss Frost could ever have been better-looking than she was when I met her notwithstanding that, even as a kid, all I did was imagine things. My aunt claimed that the available men in the town used to fall all over themselves when they met Miss Frost. When one of them got up the nerve to introduce himself to actually tell Miss Frost his name the then-beautiful librarian would look at him coldly and icily say, My name is Miss Frost. Never been married, never want to be. With that attitude, Miss Frost was still unmarried when I met her; inconceivably, to me, the available men in the town of First Sister had long stopped introducing themselves to her. **THE CRUCIAL DICKENS NOVEL** the one that made me want to be a writer, or so I'm always saying was *Great Expectations*. I'm sure I was fifteen, both when I first read it and when I first reread it. I know this was before I began to attend the academy, because I got the book from the First Sister town library twice. I won't forget the day I showed up at the library to take that book out a second time; I'd never wanted to reread an entire novel before. Miss Frost gave me a penetrating look. At the time, I doubt I was as tall as her shoulders. Miss Frost was once what they call statuesque, my aunt had told me, as if even Miss Frost's height and shape existed only in the past. (She was forever statuesque to me.) Miss Frost was a woman with an erect posture and broad shoulders, though it was chiefly her small but pretty breasts that got my attention. In seeming contrast to her mannish size and obvious physical strength, Miss Frost's breasts had a newly developed appearance the improbable but budding look of a young girl's. I couldn't understand how it was possible for an older woman to have achieved this look, but surely her breasts had seized the imagination of every teenage boy who'd encountered her, or so I believed when I met her when was it? in 1955. Furthermore, you must understand that Miss Frost never dressed suggestively, at least not in the imposed silence of the forlorn First Sister Public Library; day or night, no matter the hour, there was scarcely anyone there. I had overheard my imperious aunt say (to my mother): Miss Frost is past an age where training bras suffice. At thirteen, I'd taken this to mean that in my judgmental aunt's opinion Miss Frost's bras were all wrong for her breasts, or vice versa. I thought not! And the entire

time I was internally agonizing over my and my aunts different fixations with Miss Frosts breasts, the daunting librarian went on giving me the aforementioned penetrating look. Id met her at thirteen; at this intimidating moment, I was fifteen, but given the invasiveness of Miss Frosts long, lingering stare, it felt like a two-year penetrating look to me. Finally she said, in regard to my wanting to read Great Expectations again, Youve already read this one, William. Yes, I loved it, I told her this in lieu of blurting out, as I almost did, that I loved her. She was austere the first person to unfailingly address me as William. I was always called Bill, or Billy, by my family and friends. I wanted to see Miss Frost wearing only her bra, which (in my interfering aunts view) offered insufficient restraint. Yet, in lieu of blurting out such an indiscretion as that, I said: I want to reread Great Expectations. (Not a word about my premonition that Miss Frost had made an impression on me that would be no less devastating than the one that Estella makes on poor Pip.) So soon? Miss Frost asked. You read Great Expectations only a month ago! I cant wait to reread it, I said. There are a lot of books by Charles Dickens, Miss Frost told me. You should try a different one, William. Oh, I will, I assured her, but first I want to reread this one. Miss Frosts second reference to me as William had given me an instant erection though, at fifteen, I had a small penis and a laughably disappointing hard-on. (Suffice it to say, Miss Frost was in no danger of noticing that I had an erection.) My all-knowing aunt had told my mother I was underdeveloped for my age. Naturally, my aunt had meant underdeveloped in other (or in all) ways; to my knowledge, shed not seen my penis since Id been an infant if then. Im sure Ill have more to say about the penis word. For now, its enough that you know I have extreme difficulty pronouncing penis, which in my tortured utterance emerges when I can manage to give voice to it at all as penith. This rhymes with zenith, if youre wondering. (I go to great lengths to avoid the plural.) In any case, Miss Frost knew nothing of my sexual anguish while I was attempting to check out Great Expectations a second time. In fact, Miss Frost gave me the impression that, with so many books in the library, it was an immoral waste of time to reread any of them. Whats so special about Great Expectations? she asked me. She was the first person I told that I wanted to be a writer because of Great Expectations, but it was really because of her. You want to be a writer! Miss Frost exclaimed; she didnt sound happy about it. (Years later, I would wonder if Miss Frost might have expressed indignation at the sodomizer word had I suggested that as a profession.) Yes, a writer I think so, I said to her. You cant possibly know that youre going to be a writer! Miss Frost said. Its not a career choice. She was certainly right about that, but I didnt know it at the time....

Revue de presse Praise for In One Person: "Fullness of heart,' a quality Irving has praised in Dickens, is one of [In One Person's] many virtues, and the reader is swept along by the histories it tells.... John Irving understands plotting as few other living American writers do." The New York of Books "Deeply affecting.... [A] novel that reaffirms the centrality of Irving as the voice of social justice and compassion in contemporary American literature." Steven Hayward, The Globe and Mail "Memorable.... Powerful and timely." CBC Books "An important book that will become, over time, a cultural standard." The Washington Independent of Books