



Nora Webster: A Novel

By Colm Toibin



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From one of contemporary literature's bestselling, critically acclaimed, and beloved authors: a "luminous" novel (Jennifer Egan, *The New York Times Book Review*) about a fiercely compelling young widow navigating grief, fear, and longing, and finding her own voice—"heartrendingly transcendent" (*The New York Times*, Janet Maslin).

Set in Wexford, Ireland, Colm Tóibín's magnificent seventh novel introduces the formidable, memorable, and deeply moving Nora Webster. Widowed at forty, with four children and not enough money, Nora has lost the love of her life, Maurice, the man who rescued her from the stifling world to which she was born. And now she fears she may be sucked back into it. Wounded, selfish, strong-willed, clinging to secrecy in a tiny community where everyone knows your business, Nora is drowning in her own sorrow and blind to the suffering of her young sons, who have lost their father. Yet she has moments of stunning insight and empathy, and when she begins to sing again, after decades, she finds solace, engagement, a haven—herself.

Nora Webster "may actually be a perfect work of fiction" (*Los Angeles Times*), by a "beautiful and daring" writer (*The New York Times Book Review*) at the zenith of his career, able to "sneak up on readers and capture their imaginations" (*USA TODAY*). "Miraculous...Tóibín portrays Nora with tremendous sympathy and understanding" (Ron Charles, *The Washington Post*).

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, October 2014: Atmospheric and emotional, Colm Toibin's (*Brooklyn, The Master*) seventh novel is the story of a forty-year-old widow in 1960s/70s rural Ireland who's on the verge of slipping back into the isolated life from which her husband had rescued her. Nora Webster is, like Toibin's best characters, iconoclastic, strong and deep. When she loses her beloved Maurice to a long and horrible illness, she seems beyond help: she resents the neighbors' well-meaning questions and concerns and she's so grief stricken she barely notices how her children are suffering. Nora is not entirely likable—a self-centered person mired in depression rarely is. But Nora is also proud, fierce and angry—and slowly, slowly she wins you over. Even more important, she eventually finds a way to save herself. This is not a novel that makes a lot of noise—and yet it's musical. It has a kind of deliberate, note-by-note crescendo—but very few crashing cymbals—as Nora rediscovers her love of singing, learns how art can help her navigate through grief, and how music can help even the most quiet among us to regain our voice. — *Sara Nelson*

Review

"Fascinating... Revelatory... More thoughtful than Emma Bovary and less self-destructive, in the end far and away a better parent than the doomed Anna Karenina for all the latter's dramatic posturing, Nora Webster is easily as memorable as either—and far more believable. To say more would spoil a masterful— and unforgettable—novel." (Betsy Burton *NPR*)

"The Ireland of four decades ago is beautifully evoked... Completely absorbing [and] remarkably heart-affecting." (*Booklist (starred review)*)

"A compelling portrait... [of] a brave woman learning how to find a meaningful life as she goes on alone." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"A high-wire act of an eighth novel... Toibin's radical restraint elevates what might have been a familiar tale of grief and survival into a realm of heightened inquiry. The result is a luminous, elliptical novel in which everyday life manages, in moments, to approach the mystical... There is much about Nora Webster that we never know. And her very mystery is what makes her regeneration, when it comes, feel universal." (*Jennifer Egan, The New York Times Book Review*)

"[*Nora Webster*] may actually be a perfect work of fiction... There is no pyrotechny in the writing — just compassion and shrewd insight. Which is where Toibin's brilliance lies... People call Toibin a beautiful writer because they don't know how otherwise to classify such a delicate talent, such empathic simplicity. Some mysteries can't be deciphered by criticism. Colm Toibin is not a beautiful writer, he's merely a great one." (*Darin Strauss, The Los Angeles Times*)

"Compelling...an emotionally satisfying read...powerful." (*The Associated Press*)

"Toibin's restraint, sly humor and gentle prose cadence echo those of another Irish master, William Trevor. So does his affection for his characters... How Nora chooses to make her voice heard and how her children find ways to express their own pain provide *Nora Webster*'s plot and pleasure... a so-called average life can

make for a thrilling read...Toibin presents one woman's life keenly observed and honored with compassion. With Enniscorthy, he also creates a town, constrained and forever behind the times though it is, that feels like the whole world." (*The Miami Herald*)

"[A] quietly moving study of a complex character and her ambiguous feelings toward the web of family and neighbors surrounding her in the small town of Enniscorthy.... All his books share precise, restrained prose, which can, in its simplicity, reach elegance." (*Maya Muir, The Portland Oregonian*)

"Miraculous... a strikingly restrained novel about a woman awakening from grief and discovering her own space, her own will...extraordinary... [Toibin] portrays Nora with tremendous sympathy and understanding." (*Ron Charles, The Washington Post*)

"Toibin artfully shows us a Nora unmoored...This quiet, wrenching novel conceals considerable human turbulence beneath its placid surface. So Toibin has learned well from Henry James...In many ways, *Nora Webster* would bring an admiring smile to the Master's lips." (Daniel Dyer, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*)

"A deeply moving portrait of the flowering of a self-liberated woman, *Nora Webster* tells the story of all the invisible battles the heart faces every day." (Buzzy Jackson, *Boston Globe*)

"Momentous, made with consummate art... It does everything we ought to ask of a great novel: that it respond to the fullness of our lives, be as large as life itself." (*Tessa Hadley, The Guardian*)

"Each paragraph of these pages rewards rereading, so deftly are they composed, and so full of pathos and insight." (*Claud Peck, The Minneapolis Star Tribune*)

"Richly detailed... Tóibín's slow pacing results in bright moments of beauty." (*The New Yorker*)

"Heart-rendingly transcendent... Mr. Toibin's prose has an elegant, visceral simplicity." (*Janet Maslin, The New York Times*)

About the Author

Colm Tóibín is the author of seven novels, including *The Master*, winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; *Brooklyn*, winner of the Costa Book Award; *The Testament of Mary*, and *Nora Webster*, as well as two story collections. Three times shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, Tóibín lives in Dublin and New York.

Users Review

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Gayle Collins:

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