



# John Wayne: A Novel

*Dan Barden*

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## **John Wayne: A Novel** Dan Barden

In this immensely captivating and imaginative novel, perfectly set at the intersection of fact and fiction, Dan Barden superimposes the story of John Wayne on the story of the Bardens, a family very much like his own. Frank Barden, Wayne's contractor, is an Irish Catholic from New York who has come to California in pursuit of the American dream for his wife, Lillian, and their three young children, Danny, Alice, and Chris. Wayne is someone the Bardens work with, drink with, and felt blessed to be around.

In fictionalized episodes ranging from Wayne's first love at sixteen to his deathbed conversion to Catholicism, this novel offers a surprisingly intimate vision of John Wayne. The Bardens are the perfect observers, guileless enough to retain an unabashed admiration for a man they consider a hero, perceptive enough to begin to see him as he really is--a man struggling to come to terms with the myths that define him.

In their own way, the Bardens are coming to terms with these same myths. Frank Barden, trapped by alcoholism and the masculine ideal embodied by his friend Wayne, begins to lose touch with his family. Lillian Barden, disappointed by the impossible promise of the men around her, questions her faith in the manhood that men like Frank have to offer. As John Wayne lies on his deathbed at the close of this heartbreaking story, the Barden children have grown up, and Lillian and Frank are facing the dissolution of their marriage. With wit, intelligence and sympathy, Dan Barden "manages at once to humanize John Wayne and to expose the mythmaking apparatus that is as vital to American family life as it is to American cultural life" (Jennifer Egan).

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