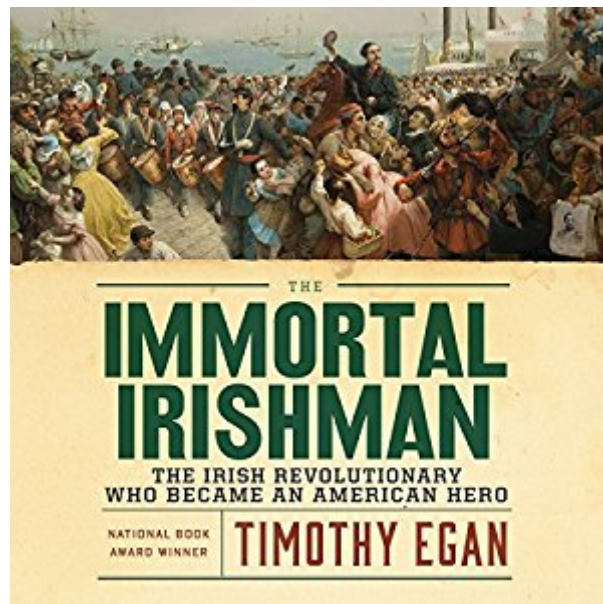


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# The Immortal Irishman: The Irish Revolutionary Who Became An American Hero



## Synopsis

From the National Book Award-winning and best-selling author Timothy Egan comes the epic story of one of the most fascinating and colorful Irishmen in 19th-century America. The Irish-American story, with all its twists and triumphs, is told through the improbable life of one man. A dashing young orator during the Great Famine of the 1840s, in which a million of his Irish countrymen died, Thomas Francis Meagher led a failed uprising against British rule, for which he was banished to a Tasmanian prison colony. He escaped and six months later was heralded in the streets of New York - the revolutionary hero, back from the dead, at the dawn of the great Irish immigration to America. Meagher's rebirth in America included his leading the newly formed Irish Brigade from New York in many of the fiercest battles of the Civil War - Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg. Twice shot from his horse while leading charges, left for dead in the Virginia mud, Meagher's dream was that Irish-American troops, seasoned by war, would return to Ireland and liberate their homeland from British rule. The hero's last chapter, as territorial governor of Montana, was a romantic quest for a true home in the far frontier. His death has long been a mystery to which Egan brings haunting, colorful new evidence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There are some books that are so well written, that bring the people and the time in which they live so brilliantly, that illumine so many events and issues, that help you, in short, to better understand our world and how it was formed, that you simply want to grab your friends and tell them in your

most impassioned voice, "You must read this book." And while I have grabbed no friends, I have told several how absolutely splendid this book is. The response, in every case, has been disinterest. Thomas Francis Meagher? Who is he? Why haven't I heard of him before? This is a case where one needs to trust the author. Timothy Egan is one of our finest nonfiction writers, and while a couple of his books - especially his outstanding book on the Dust Bowl disaster of the 1930s - are on topics of broad interest, he sometimes has taken up subjects things we need to know about rather than think we want to know. And such is this book about Thomas Francis Meagher. Although he died relatively young, Meagher's life sweeps through some of the key events in Irish and American history. Born into a relatively well-to-do family in Ireland - something of a miracle given the extreme oppression of the Irish by the English, where extreme resistance to English rule could lead to death or being sold into slavery in either the Caribbean or the southern Colonies. The first chapter, on the history of the subjugation and cruel and systematic abuse of the Irish by the British, is a marvel of compressed history. There is not a paragraph that isn't fascinating, while the book lays out the world into which Meagher was born. While many of the priests who were his teachers and his parents cautioned patience in the face of British occupation - which meant lesser British lords living on lands that had previously belonged to the Irish who eked out lives in enforced poverty, Meagher constantly asked why the Irish put up with it. And it is his refusal to tolerate what he saw as injustice that drove his life. Every section of this book details a new chapter in Meagher's life, which also happens to be a chapter in the life of the place in which he lives. After first showing his resistance to English rule and his violent opposition to it, we see him in the United States, where the almost equally vexing treatment of the Irish by American immigrants who had established themselves in the country a bit earlier than these Irish newcomers. Egan's attempt to gain respect comes together with his repudiation of Southern slavery is the book's longest section - and the one that will be of the greatest general interest (if one of my other friends asks, I'll simply tell them that it is a book on one of the Civil War's most colorful military leaders) - tells of Meagher's not insubstantial role in the American Civil War, where he became commander of the famed Irish Brigade, which brought a degree of respect and acceptance they had not achieved before. Not that all Americans accepted the Irish overnight, but Americans have always respected its war heroes, and now there were Irish ones. The final chapter of Meagher's life shows him and his wife going to North Dakota - which was far wilder and more rustic than when Teddy Roosevelt visited it a couple of decades later - as governor of the area. If one sees Meagher as a Quixote, always tilting against windmills, the vigilantism in the territory was more than he could oppose, and it might possibly have led to his mysterious death only a couple of years after the end of the Civil War. The book begins with the

event. Meagher on the deck of a paddle boat at the head waters of the Missouri. He falls off the deck of the boat and drowns. It is a mystery that has never been solved, though Egan takes a gallant and fairly convincing stab at resolving it. But the sheer scope of the story of Meagher, who was renowned for his ability to sway his fellows and in a land where great oratory made people the equivalent of today's rock stars (albeit, without the sex, drugs, or rock and roll, though with all the fame, celebrity, and packed houses where they spoke), is truly epic. Meagher stood out as one of the great public speakers of the age, and his heroism on the battlefield makes him a major, if peripheral figure in that conflict. But the genius of this book is how much it makes us understand so many things. The Irish Question. Resistance to English rule. Migration to America. The abuse of the Irish in the United States. The reasons why many went to war against the South. The Question of Slavery. The Civil War itself, along with many of its greatest battles. The end of the War. Western expansion. And we finally learn just how wild the wild west could be. All these aspects of Irish and American life are masterfully told, in a prose that carries us easily from one page to the next. If you read this book, it is possible that you will read a better one in the coming year. Possible, but not likely. I doubt that the book will garner Mr. Egan another National Book Award. Members of the award committee are apt to react as I did when I first had the opportunity to read this: Thomas Francis who? But while the book most definitely tells the story of one of the great Irish and Irish-American political activists, it also tells the stories of Ireland and America itself, and reveals things about both countries that most readers - and certainly this reader - had not previously known or understood. This is very likely going to stand as one of my favorite books of 2016 and I could, I would rush up to you in person and say straight to your face, "You must read this book." So do it.

I got this book on the recommendation of my mother; who ultimately wants to read it. I had no familiarity with Thomas Meagher, but the story, written by Egan is an easy read and very fluid. The first quarter of the book focuses on Meagher and his role in seeking to enlist people in the Irish Confederation. Egan does a really good job of discussing the oratory style of Meagher, in particular his accent, arousing speeches to the people, especially against the context of famine that was decimating the population. There are also really pleasant historical sidebars (not really a sidebar, but inclusion in the story?) of other particulars, such as the out migration of the Irish to Australia and Canada, elements that were supported by the British Crown. The death toll of the emigrants to the U.S., almost 1 in 5, is a staggering number that is seldom discussed. There is also background information regarding others as well throughout the story, giving insight into those who worked in the Irish Confederation, and throughout New York at various times. Meagher's trip to Tasmania

is also discussed, which, I had always been curious about the length of time it would take to get that far away to the penal colony (120 days). Perhaps there is a bit of irony in that the transport actually fed them and they wore no shackles. The time in Tasmania actually seems a bit like a resort, even if it was away from their homeland of Ireland. Meagher eventually leaves, but his note to his warden/parole oversight person is a bit priceless, he basically sent a same-day message that let them know he was heading out. I mention this message because it gives further insight into the type of character Meagher was and is throughout the book. While in the U.S., Meagher is highly regarded by those who knew him from Ireland. Eventually, Meagher becomes a union general and fights in the Civil War, specifically leading the Irish Brigade. Meagher's status remained while in the U.S., especially as he was placed in a bit of a position to use it to recruit new troops; even though the initial casualties weighed heavily on Meagher. There is also really interesting insight into the Irish's perception of fighting to free slaves; as that is one of the objections that is raised by many of the Irish when drafted or paid to fight for the Union. At the same time, Meagher's own battle in championing for his men, especially in the area of promotion and recognition are addressed. Overall, there are some political elements from the Civil War that are often excluded that are brought into the picture. The drafting of the Irish, and the ensuing riots that lashed out at African Americans are also another historical element that are seldom discussed or addressed. The Civil War portion takes up the largest chunk of the book, but Meagher's time in Montana is discussed for about 50-60 pages. During this time Meagher found himself at odds with vigilantes who were opposed to his authority, which was 2nd highest office in Montana, as a commission from Johnson. Meagher worked to continue to instill law in Montana, even at a time when it was pretty minimally populated and had a high leaning towards an old west type of rule. Overall, the book is really good, a quick read, and portrays the situation realistic with outside information into the stories of the time that are often overlooked. I'd really recommend it, and it gives a new insight into the Civil War, especially as it addresses internal conflict within the Union and between various groups.

Stirring orator; Irish revolutionary, which earned him a death sentence from England (later commuted); convict-exile to the penal colony of Tasmania, from which he escaped after three years; soldier, eventually General, for the Union Army in the Civil War, responsible for the recruiting and leadership of the Irish Brigade, which was one of the most distinguished (and bloodied) fighting units in the War; Acting Governor of the Territory of Montana; and man of principle, for which he probably was assassinated. That's a thumbnail description of Thomas Francis Meagher. Here's another, more

succinct one: one of the more extraordinary Americans I know of. He also was an extraordinary Irishman. Timothy Egan tells the story of Meagher's life (1823-1867) in the very engaging THE IMMORTAL IRISHMAN. At the same time, Egan also relates larger stories of history, the most significant being the seven-and-a-half centuries of English oppression of Ireland and the Irish; the Great Hunger; the British overseas penal system; and the Irish experience in America in the middle of the nineteenth century. The book is a highly readable blend of biography and history, which should not be missed by fans of either genre. It also would seemingly be a must for anyone proud of their Irish blood.

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