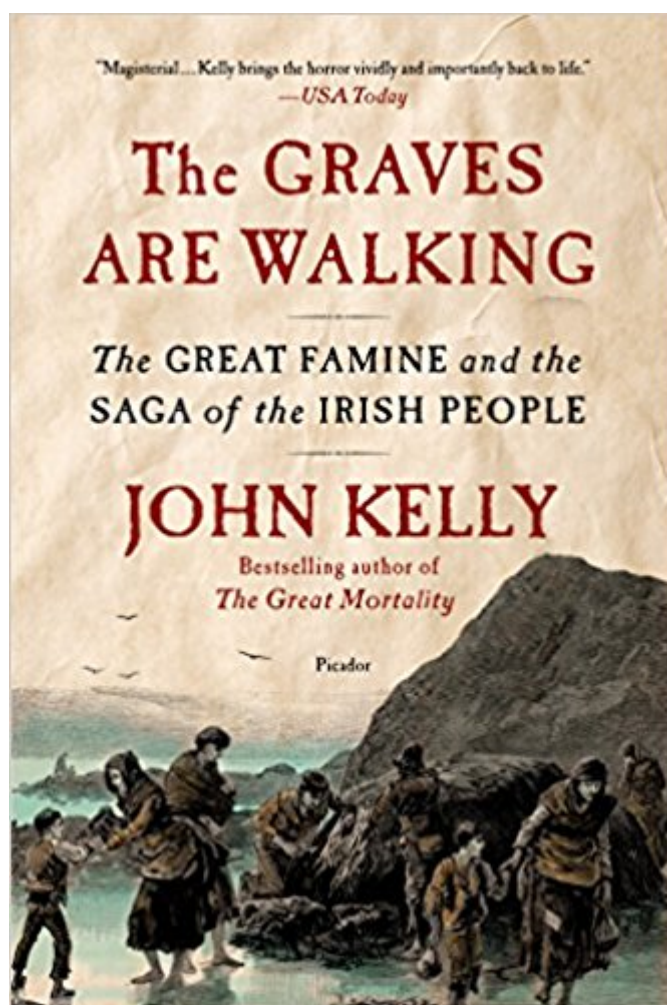


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# The Graves Are Walking: The Great Famine And The Saga Of The Irish People



## Synopsis

A magisterial account of one of the worst disasters to strike humankind--the Great Irish Potato Famine--conveyed as lyrical narrative history from the acclaimed author of *The Great Mortality*. In this masterful, comprehensive account of the Irish Potato Famine, delivered with novelistic flair, Kelly gives us not only the startling facts of this disaster--one of the worst to strike mankind, killing twice as many lives as the American Civil War--but examines the intersection of political greed, bacterial infection, religious intolerance, and racism that made it possible. Kelly brings new material to his analysis of relevant political factors during the years leading up to the famine, and the extent to which Britain's nation-building policies exacerbated the mounting crisis. Despite the shocking, infuriating implications of his findings, *The Graves Are Walking* is ultimately a story of triumph--of one people's ability to remake themselves in a new land in the face of the unthinkable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• *USA Today* • "Magisterial...Kelly brings the horror vividly and importantly back to life."  
• *The New York Times Book Review* • "A moving account of the famine...Kelly has produced a powerful indictment of the British mind-set in the nineteenth century, and of the British policy that resulted from it."  
• *The Washington Post* • "An accessible, engrossing history of horror...Cogent and forceful."  
• *The Economist* • "An engrossing narrative of the famine, vividly detailing Victorian society and the historical phenomena (natural and man-made) that converged to form the disaster."  
• *New York Post* • "Though the story of the potato famine has been told before, it's never been as thoroughly reported or as hauntingly told."  
• *New York Post* • "John Kelly gives heartbreaking

detail to the Great Famine that seared itself into the memory of the Irish people, and sheds fascinating new light on the policy decisions that made it even worse. *The Graves Are Walking* is a cautionary tale for all who would risk calamity--human, economic, or ecological--in the name of scoring an ideological victory.

- President Bill Clinton: "This fine book is sourced largely from contemporaneous accounts and is thoroughly documented. It is a witheringly bleak portrayal, extraordinarily detailed and gracefully written. Everyone who holds a policy-making position in government today or tomorrow should study this book."
- The Washington Independent Review of Books: "Kelly intersperses the nitty gritty of the shifting Irish economic situation with horrific glimpses of its human toll."
- Laura Miller, Salon: "In humanising the complexities of the Great Famine, John Kelly's emotional history of the time makes for a compelling and heartbreaking read...Kelly doesn't shy away from the kind of vivid descriptions and heightened language more often associated with poetry than historical writing."
- The Irish Times: "An incredibly well-researched analysis of the Great Famine...The book reads like a novel, making the reality of this particular bit of history all the more haunting."
- Shelf Awareness: "Mr. Kelly's moving, powerfully narrated account of the tragedy and its aftermath brings it alive in all its horror."
- The Washington Times: "An upsetting, enlightening, necessary book that deserves multiple, durable audiences [and] stands as a testament to the resilience of a people under some of the greatest duress the world has ever seen."
- History News Network: "This is a wonderful book about a terrible event. It's also a rare combination of compelling writing, excellent scholarship, and insightful analysis that ranges over the full scope of--and goes beyond--the potato famine itself, from agricultural science, through the English politics that contributed so much to the death toll, to the impact of Irish immigration in America. A truly outstanding book."
- John M. Barry, author of *The Great Influenza: The story of the deadliest pandemic in history* and *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty*: "Kelly (*The Great Mortality*) traces a path of misery and devastation as he documents one of the 19th century's worst disasters, a nightmarish six years that left twice as many dead as the American Civil War...[Kelly's] exhaustive research covers every aspect, threading the gruesome events into a huge panoramic tapestry that reveals political greed lurking behind the pestilence."
- Publishers Weekly (Starred Review): "The Graves Are Walking is compelling reading. Once again John Kelly illuminates a dark time, removing it from the shadows of legend and hearsay into the bright light of history. Even among the graves of Irish famine, he finds vivid life."
- Richard Rhodes, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* and *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*: "John Kelly is one of America's great historians and storytellers. He has a new one out

now: the essential *The Graves Are Walking*. It's a brilliantly rendered account of the Great Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s. The prose sizzles with deep intelligence, hard research, and an inspiring compassion for the millions who died of hunger. It was an honor to read such first-rate nonfiction. Highly recommended!

- Douglas Brinkley, author of *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* and *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* œ I wish more people wrote history like this: fast-paced but carefully documented, lively as a novel but tackling, head on, one of the great human catastrophes of nineteenth-century Europe. Kelly's portrait of a tragedy rooted in a superpower's imperial arrogance has echoes for the world we are still living in today.
- Adam Hochschild, author of the New York Times bestseller *To End All Wars* œ *The Graves Are Walking* is an engrossing chronicle of an historic tragedy that forever changed Ireland, Britain, and America. Kelly conveys the rawness of Irish suffering with a powerful intimacy--an entire nation reduced to a single wish: survival.
- Amanda Foreman, author of the acclaimed *A World on Fire: an Epic History of Two Nations Divided* and the international bestseller *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* œ John Kelly vividly writes the compelling story of the horror of Ireland's potato famine, with intimate portraits of those who died and those who fled. Most illuminating is how he captures, in devastating detail, British leaders, who, imbued with religious fervor and ideological blinders, decided to use the plague as an occasion to teach the Irish good work habits, responsibility, and to rid them of their dependence on government. An extraordinary book, and a lesson for our times.
- Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, and author of *Failing America's Faithful: How Today's Churches Mixed God with Politics and Lost Their Way* œ Kelly deftly conveys the enormity of what was at stake. *The Graves Are Walking* seeks accountability for those responsible for the human toll from a shortage of everythingâ "even coffins.
- Booklist œ Kelly's work is written with the verve of a good novel... his powerfully argued conclusion is that the British were guilty of neglect rather than malice, allowing religion and ideology to overrule their common humanity. ...At the height of the famine, a British official received a report of the latest casualties and scribbled a single word underneath: why? This book provides as good an answer as we are likely to get.
- Daily Business Post (Dublin, Ireland)

John Kelly is the author of the acclaimed bestseller *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time* and *Three on the Edge: The Stories of Ordinary American Families in Search of a Medical Miracle*. He has written about medicine, history, and psychology for many years. He lives in New York City and Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

John Kelly has written a very readable book about a very traumatic time in Ireland's history. What makes Kelly's book good is because he looks at all the factors that led to the years of starvation at the end of the 1840s. Of course no book on the famine would be complete without addressing the United Kingdom's central role in setting the local policies and social structure that exacerbated many of the factors that caused the famine and increased the suffering. From the UK leadership's philosophies on government and their opinions of the Irish, to mismanagement, to incompetence, to an inability to understand the extent of the problem, and to deliberate action and inaction that led to more starvation than would have been otherwise, Kelly addresses all these issues. At the same time Kelly examines the issues of the effects of bad weather, not just in Ireland but across Western Europe, which had the effect of reducing crop yields in other countries thereby increasing the demand for food around the world. This led to increased demand and pressure on existing grain sources of all types, which, given the potato blight that affected all of Europe, caused nations to turn to alternative foods. Of course, Kelly also examines the potato blight and the fact that Ireland virtually, although not totally, relied on a single crop, the potato, and when the crop was destroyed year in and year out, the major source of food for Ireland disappeared. Naturally there was an international trade in food, but even that last grain crops in America had disappeared and there were periodic shortages of available shipping. At the same time, the distribution system within Ireland was archaic with many parts of the country virtually unreachable. Railroads had only been developed in the previous decade and had not yet become the major way to move goods overland they would later become. This meant the nation relied on poor roads that were greatly affected by the weather. As long as enough food could be produced locally, that wasn't really a problem, but when the potato failed for several years, the lack of infrastructure made it difficult if not impossible to supply some towns. And, again, underlying all of these integrated problems was poor British policy. The government failed to understand, or deliberately ignored the extent of the problem. This meant they failed to follow through on successful policies, usually because they didn't want to fund them, or they refused to implement solutions at all. This was because of philosophical beliefs on government, or racist beliefs about the Irish as a people. While the government as a whole may not have pursued ethnic cleansing as a policy, certainly the effect of their policies was to cause Ireland to lose one million dead and two million to flee the country, causing Ireland to lose approximately one-third of its population. What makes this book is that Kelly examines all these issues and paints a more complex picture of the famine years. All these issues came together in an almost perfect storm of suffering.

As a History student whose focus is on how changes in religion, politics, and culture under Tudor kingship/queenship has impacted the modernization of Ireland, I found this book quite interesting. Kelly provides relevant, interesting detail such as excerpts from newspaper stories and direct quotes from individuals living in Ireland during the famine. Although I disagree with his argument that the famine was not genocide, I believe that the author presents a fairly objective insight to Ireland during the great hunger in a manner that allows the reader or scholar to form their own opinion on the matter. More importantly, I found that Kelly presented the information in a manner that introduces those with little understanding of the famine to the topic, but the book also provides intricate details for those who are more familiar with this short period of Irish History. I initially came across this book when it was assigned as a reading for one of my courses a few years ago and will be incorporating it into my thesis research.

This book is the best and most thorough account of the "hard times" in Ireland that I have found. My great-grandfather was born on Governor's Island in New York on Valentine's Day in 1851 which means his mother came across the North Atlantic in steerage, in winter, 8 months pregnant. They were a very tough bunch and the family legends tell about their struggles--walking barefoot through the snow from Westport in Co. Mayo to the boat in Sligo town, etc., but what I did not know about was the story of those that did not survive the famine or the transit. We always called them "coffin ships" but the scale of the genocide, and it was genocide, was never as clear as it is though Kelly's book. When I was growing up, it was always "The English, goddam them," just as Kelly says. I don't hear that any more, either from family members here or in Ireland, But reading Kelly's book shows how the prejudice and bureaucratic incompetence of the British conspired to kill millions of Irish men, women and children. Everyone should read this book. There are many lessons for today's conflicts in the world.

There are those times when a book finds a place of personal rapture in one's desires. I'm reading John Kelly's *The Graves Are Walking*, and it's a stunner of an accomplishment. I often gesture queries to the rhetorical, wondering why the Irish are so destined and blessed with passion and soul. We all need that Irish in us, deep, nestled within our truest selves; a refrain I tend to glance at more than occasionally. This book reads like an unforgettable conversation with an inspirational professor, a dear friend, and if ever there were lessons of history lost to education so American, it is the Irish potato famine of the 19th century. *The Graves Are Walking*, a masterfully rich literary

triumph-the desperation of will; of a people, who, through the agony of purpose and the resolve of near rebirth, transform themselves in the end, to conquer the evils of near annihilation.

This is a "tough" book....not much light at the end of the tunnel. First its difficult to follow all of the persons responsible for the incredible loss of life/ those who stood by, or, worse, made money as a people (the Irish) starved to death; then too there was the amount of prejudice, racism in fact, that allowed people in power to treat the Irish as less than human. I certainly came to understand, better, why the Irish I met in Ireland in the 80s were still angry with the Brits. Think the story would have had just as much impact and been easier to follow with less detail. The point was made but not before my non fiction book club, en mass, gave in and never finished the book (my selection mind you). It needed a stronger editor.

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