

**Forever**  
**Author - Pete Hamill**

**Book Review - by John Esposito - 12-26-2002**

Born and raised in the 18th century Ulster countryside, the young Irish lad could not have received a more idyllic childhood from his devoted parents. It is precisely why, at age sixteen, he has bid farewell to his beloved homeland and is riding feverishly astride the galloping Thunder, in quest of the city of Galway where a departing ship will transport him to the west.

The year is 1740 and our hero is embarking on a fateful journey from Northern Ireland to the settlement known as New York. His immediate mission in the colony is to avenge the death of his parents who perished at the hands of the treacherous British nobleman, the Earl of Warren. It is here the young immigrant will also become the recipient of a most rare and precious gift – eternal life.

So unfolds the enchanting, epic tale of Cormac Samuel O'Connor, a boy-man determined to honor the code of his ancestors and who will later be granted immortality after saving the life of Kongo, an African slave with magical powers that he befriends on the voyage to America. Cormac will live forever – but as the shaman cautions, “Even the gift of life has its terms. Its rules.” The condition is this – that he never leave the island of Manhattan. To do so would mean death and banishment forever from the *Otherworld*. While immortality bestows many blessings, the young protagonist will discover this magical gift delivers its share of loneliness and loss in a life that will not end.

This is a fascinating story that spans more than 250 years of human history with New York City as its lead character. In many respects it is equal parts historical novel and pure fantasy. It is also very much the story of the *forever* life and times of Cormac O'Connor. Through his ever-observant eyes we witness the violence, rebellion and disease that define New York's early years and watch it slowly evolve into one of the greatest cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Recognizing his gift of life requires that he “truly *live*”, Cormac assumes the customs and nuances that define each generation's culture and becomes an eyewitness to all of Gotham's major historical periods.

He is a craftsman in the truest sense and establishes himself over time as a blacksmith, printer, newspaperman, painter and musician. He is very much an activist and teetotaler with an affinity for languages. If many of these traits seem to suggest the alter ego of a living, breathing real New Yorker, who is also quite proud of his Irish heritage, you might suspect it is none other than the celebrated author of this magnificent 608-page tome.

Pete Hamill has been an acclaimed journalist for more than forty years. Although he has written on a variety of diverse subjects, his name is most synonymous with the city where he continues

to perfect his craft. He is a modern day O. Henry, the quintessential New York writer of our generation.

With *Forever*, his ninth and latest novel, Mr. Hamill has produced his long-awaited masterpiece, a fitting triumphant work of fiction. The prose is masterful in capturing the extraordinary range of people, experiences, events and emotions that marks essential moments in the city.

Mr. Hamill clearly demonstrates that he is a student of New York history, inserting his wealth of knowledge into Cormac's time travels. We see him working at a printing press and taking up with a young, indentured Irish servant. He becomes an advocate for emancipation during the New York slave uprising of 1741. He fights the Redcoats during the American Revolution and is wounded in the Battle of Brooklyn. He is present during the Draft Riots, forms a friendship with the infamous Tammany Hall leader, Boss Tweed, witnesses the stock market crash, and needless to say, the tragic events at the World Trade Center.

We listen along with Cormac to the music of the ages: from Irish flutes to pulsating African drums and Latin rhythms, while overriding sounds of jazz and blues convey a sad message of isolation and loneliness. The centuries do not pass without Cormac experiencing a series of temporary relationships, which are just that. These friendships can never be fully realized, as his secret would come to bear in just a few short years. It becomes apparent to the jaded Irishman that immortality brings one intolerable truth: everyone you love will die.

Cormac must seek out the "dark-skinned woman" foretold in the prophecy if he is ever to escape his fate. As the bright, sunny morning of September 11th begins, the mystery lady "adorned with spirals" is only a short distance away. And as Cormac Samuel O'Connor will discover, *forever* is a very, very long time.

**Byline: John Esposito is a freelance writer, who resides in New Providence, NJ.**