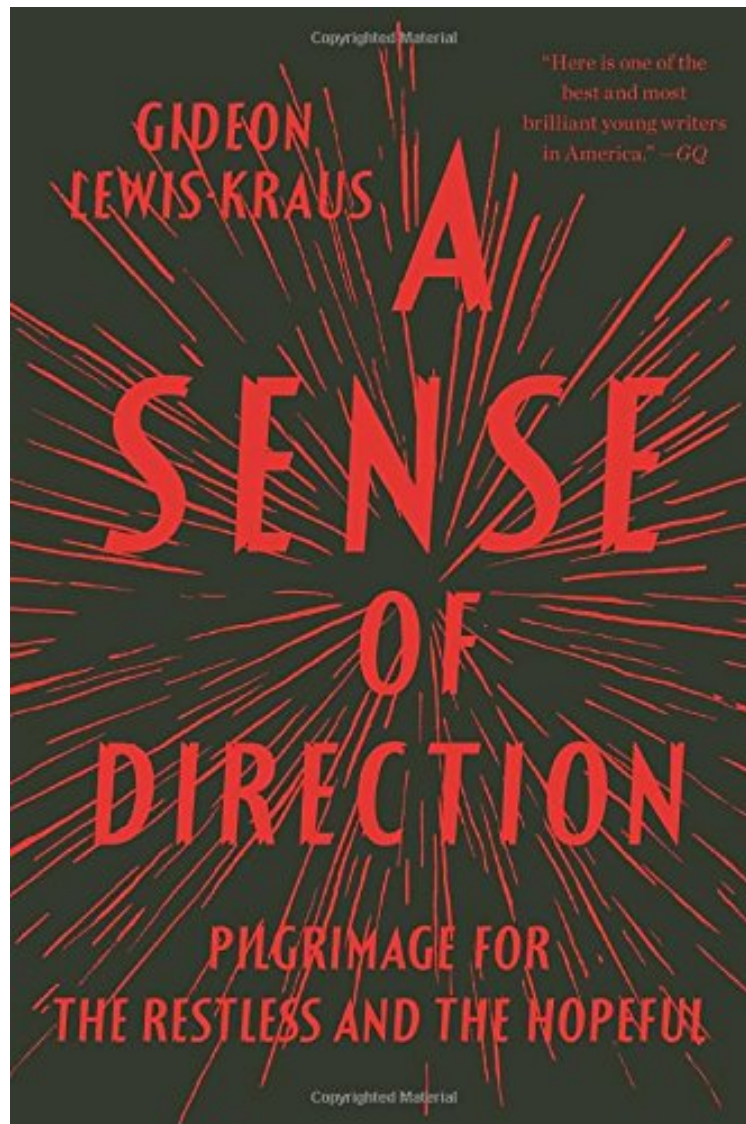


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## A Sense of Direction: Pilgrimage for the Restless and the Hopeful

*Gideon Lewis-Kraus*

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**Gideon Lewis-Kraus : A Sense of Direction: Pilgrimage for the Restless and the Hopeful** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Sense of Direction: Pilgrimage for the Restless and the Hopeful:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. RefreshingBy S. ONEILLColm Toibins review in the Guardian is spot on and worth looking up. He gets at some of the flaws of the book, but is broadly appreciative.I liked the book even more than Toibin did. I admired the authors refusal to part from the facts, his true and sharply observed memories, which struck me unusually honest.He's a sharp thinker. He's especially thought-provoking in how he

critiques the conceits of modern travel writing, such as the obsession with authenticity (eat like a local!). Yeah, he comes across as more self-centered than most people. But I read this book after reading Patrick Leigh Fermor's books on walking across Europe in the 1930s -- classics of the genre -- and I don't think Fermor was any less narcissistic. It's hard to recount a thousand mile walk without being thrown back on your own thoughts. Anyway, I'm eager to read this writer's next book, though I know his style, like DFW's, isn't to everyone's taste. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. "...the stories we tell in retrospect rarely resemble the stories we hope we might tell one day. By Fairbanks Reader - Bonnie Brody

**A Sense of Direction** by Gideon Lewis-Kraus is a report of three pilgrimages taken by the author, a man in his 30's seeking direction, forgiveness and the gift of forgiving. At the start, Gideon is rootless, aimless and essentially hedonistic. His divorced parents are both rabbis. His father is gay and divorced his mother when Gideon was 19. Gideon is estranged from his father. Gideon is an accomplished professional writer with attachment issues concerning places, fixed abode and his father. He goes from the aimless life he is leading in Berlin on the Camino de Santiago, an 800 kilometer pilgrimage in Spain, with his friend, Tom. The pilgrimage is a 1000 year old Catholic tradition, but in the present it is taken for secular reasons. Certainly Gideon, a secular Jew takes it for reasons having nothing to do with religion and everything to do with the idea of pilgrimage itself. When Gideon finishes the Camino, he hears of an even longer and more arduous 1200 kilometer pilgrimage, the Shikoku, in rural Japan. This is a much less well-traveled route, one most generally taken by retired Japanese. It goes past 88 temples. Gideon does this one alone, although he meets and travels for short periods with other pilgrims. His isolation and unfamiliarity with Japan language and culture lead him further on the road to self-knowledge. After Gideon completes the Shikoku, he enlists his brother and father to go to Uman, Ukraine for the mass Rosh Hashanah gathering of 40,000 hassidic disciples of the Bratslaver Rebbe, Nachman. Uman is the site where thousands of Jews were slaughtered during pogroms and Ukraine is a country that exceeded all others in the slaughter of Jews during the Holocaust. This is a pilgrimage of yet another sort, one in which Gideon grows further and comes to better understand forgiveness. Gideon chooses to go on this pilgrimage with his brother and father in the hopes that there can be some resolution of their long-standing issues. When I started the book I was impressed by the writing and thought that Gideon was bright, gifted and aimless, completely filled with himself and his own problems. I braced myself for a well-written exercise in "I'm more intelligent than you; I'm more ironic than you, I'm more alienated than you. I could not have been more wrong. Gideon grows by first mindlessly following the arrows pointing the way on the Camino and then by the more circuitous and ambiguous directions of the Shikoku. He comes to a sense of completion with the Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year where in Jewish tradition is said that we are written in the Book of Life for the New Year. Gideon becomes that work in progress that marks a real mensch. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Pilgrimage

By MarZAs Gideon set the stage for his pilgrimages it was difficult for me to relate to him; but once he was on El Camino I appreciated his insight and honesty. Instead of the facile reasons one so often hears from peregrinos on the Camino, he was forthright in his ambivalence. Ultimately this attitude left him more open to receiving whatever wisdom and healing might be gained by the process of pilgrimage. He captured the pettiness of the emotional life of a pilgrim when the going gets tough - somehow it always does - and how the drudgery of daily life is transmuted to insight and acceptance. The sequence of his pilgrimages has a logic that is consistent. Well done Gideon!

In medieval times, a pilgrimage gave the average Joe his only break from the daily grind. For Gideon Lewis-Kraus, it promises a different kind of escape. Determined to avoid the fear and self-sacrifice that kept his father, a gay rabbi, closeted until midlife, he has moved to anything-goes Berlin. But the surfeit of freedom there has begun to paralyze him, and when a friend extends a drunken invitation to join him on an ancient pilgrimage route across Spain, Lewis-Kraus packs his bag, grateful for the chance to wake each morning with a sense of direction. Irreverent, moving, hilarious, and thought-provoking, *A Sense of Direction* is Lewis-Kraus's dazzling riff on the perpetual war between discipline and desire, and its attendant casualties. Across three pilgrimages and many hundreds of miles, he completes an idiosyncratic odyssey to the heart of a family mystery and a human dilemma: How do we come to terms with what has been and what is and find a way forward, with purpose?

From Bookforum *A Sense of Direction* is a painfully particular and deeply personal book about a subject that typically gets treated with the airbrushed gloss of a travel brochure. Peter Manseau Beautiful, often very funny Lewis-Kraus weaves a story that is both searching and purposeful, one that forces the reader, like the pilgrim, to value the journey as much as the destination. The New Yorker A long walk to self-discovery that speaks eloquently of our times. NPR.org Gideon Lewis-Kraus has written a very honest, very smart, very moving book about being young and rootless and even wayward. With great compassion and zeal he gets at the question: why search the world to solve the riddle of your own heart?" Dave Eggers Here is one of the best and most brilliant young writers in America. GQ "Charming and disarming a wonderful exploration of the stories we tell ourselves." T: The New York Times Style Magazine A witty, deeply felt memoir an honest, incisive grappling with the brute fact that we only have one life to live sparkles with tight, nearly aphoristic observations." The Boston Globe Nail[s] our collective anxiety every sentence rings true Lewis-Kraus is a master. Daily Beast Rightfully anticipated literary debut. Nylon A complicated meditation on what the

physical act of pilgrimage can mean in modern society [with] moments of brilliant philosophical insight. The Onion AV Club Lewis-Kraus does nothing if not dazzle on the sentence level. But his commentary isn't just pretty; it's deeply self-aware. The Cleveland Plain Dealer Gorgeously written [Lewis-Kraus is] aimless, sure, but meticulously, obsessively, beautifully so. The Rumpus A young writer seeks a cure for his fecklessness by following roads very much taken in this scintillating travel memoir Lewis-Kraus's vivid descriptive powers and funny, shaggy-dog philosophizing [yield] an entertaining, thoughtful portrait of a slacker caught up in life's quest for something. Publishers Weekly Physically, Lewis-Kraus's feats are staggering, but more so is how fully and fluidly he recounts them, alongside meditation on his own youthful anxieties and a well-synthesized history of the act of pilgrimage. Booklist If David Foster Wallace had written *Eat, Pray, Love*, it might have come close to approximating the adventures of Gideon Lewis-Kraus. *A Sense of Direction* is the digressively brilliant and seriously hilarious account of a fellow neurotic's wanderings, and his hard-won lessons in happiness, forgiveness, and international pilgrim fashion. Gary Shteyngart This is a brilliant meditation on what the spiritual and fraternal and paternal and communal might mean to a person right now, fueled as it is by the funny, thorny, dreamy, generous, cranky, rigorous, truth-seeking voice of Gideon Lewis-Kraus. For the sake of whatever force or idea or feeling sustains you, make a pilgrimage to your nearest bookstore and buy the goddamn book. Sam Lipsyte About the Author Gideon Lewis-Kraus has written for Harper's, The Believer, The New York Times Book Review, the Los Angeles Times Book Review, Wired, McSweeney's, Bookforum, GQ, Slate, and other publications. For the moment he lives in Brooklyn.