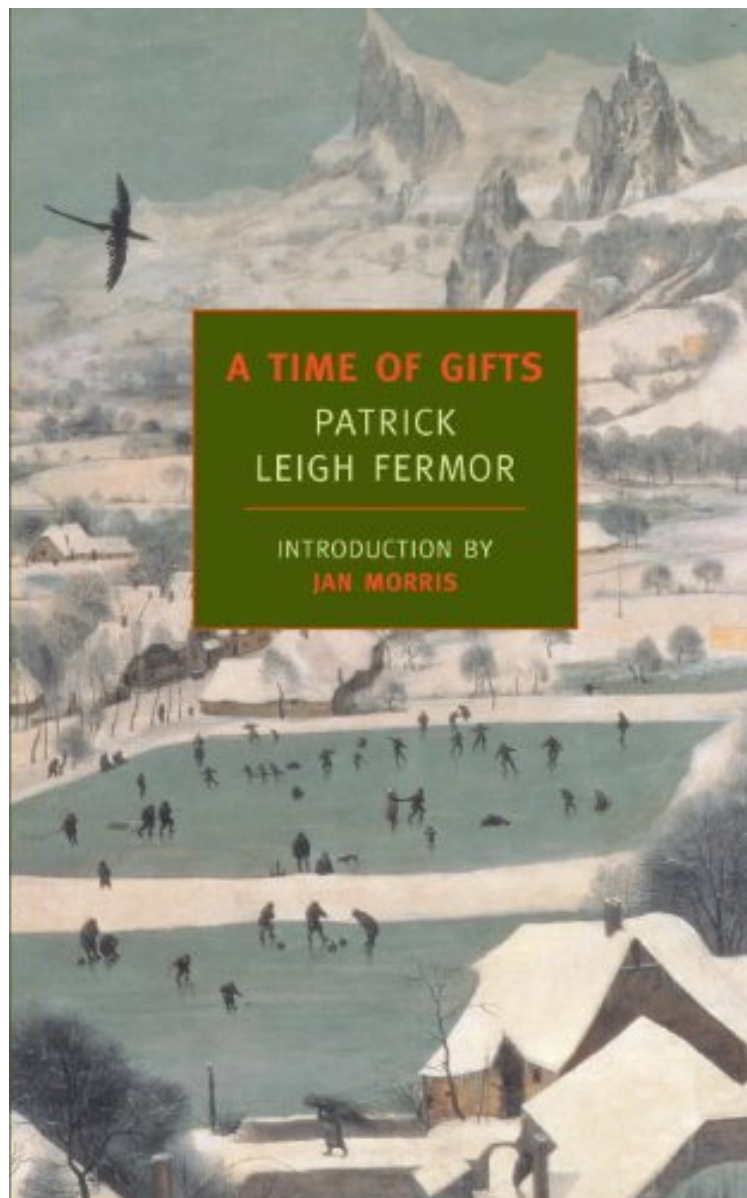


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Patrick Leigh Fermor, Jan Morris

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#75798 in Books Fermor, Patrick Leigh/ Morris, Jan (INT) 2005-10-03 2005-10-03Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.00 x .75 x 5.001, .73 #File Name: 1590171659344 pagesNew York Review of Books | File size: 70.Mb

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube* (New York Review Books Classics):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A cultural diversity lost forever
By Jackal
Europe of 1933 was different:- There were no motorways- There were no modernist architecture- There were no global brands- There were no tourists- There were no immigrants
That year a young man decided to walk from London to Istanbul with a notebook. In 1977 he decided to write about his first foreign journey. What an accomplishment it is. He writes totally without sentimentality. I love the youthful attitude of bewilderment and wonderment. I instantly feel like wanting to recreate his trip. The landscape has changed so it is no longer possible to walk and meet people so it has to be by car (or maybe I just don't want to spend two years). However, even more, I love the author's prose. He writes in a beautiful way. The descriptions are very direct and detailed. I want to read slowly to really savour the writing. I also want to understand the nature of his writing. It is interesting how the old author writes about the younger self. Beautiful writing.
Another travelogue is *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography*; a book about the lost cultural diversity of what is now France. Also immensely interesting. These two books have made me think about the lost cultural diversity. It is impossible to keep people and ideas from moving across countries. However, we need to think more about protecting the diversity that once was. Books and museums are fine, but not sufficient.
Leigh Fermor's trilogy certainly took some time to write; first volume in 1977, second volume in 1985, and third volume in 2013. The author died last year almost 100 years old. A life well lived.
174 of 177 people found the following review helpful.
Lost Youth?
By Daniel Myers
This book is an extreme rarity. It is one that I cannot imagine ANYONE NOT enjoying. Strapping young precocious Fermor, bounced out of school and knocking about London with some chums awaiting, in Fermor's case, with many misgivings, the military rigours of Sandhurst, decides to chuck it all and go gadding about Europe during the interwar years toward Constantinople at the age of eighteen (He turns nineteen about halfway through.). The result, culled from memories and diaries that survived, and penned decades later, is a bouncing picaresque jaunt through the heartland of Europe, all seen (save for the occasional aside) through the coruscating eyes of youth, is one I simply can't imagine anyone wanting to miss, especially given that this is a world now lost to us almost completely. Interlarded herein are disquisitions on literature, architecture, and history, history, history (a witches' brew of real and apocryphal). Add to this delightfully unguided rather than misguided quest a cast of characters ranging from the homeless seeking shelter to the aristocrat in his schloss whom the author chances upon the way and you have a simply irresistible and sui-generis narrative. You have this book which, regardless of how many grey hairs age has snowed upon your head, will make you feel young and in love with the world again.---5 lofty, swirling stars.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Must Read
By Capricorn One
I read an article in the Washington Post about the "best travel books of all time" and this one was described as a masterpiece - one of the all-time best. The story is fascinating - a nineteen year old English young man, obviously well-educated and from an upper class family, extremely well read in the classics (all of Shakespeare, etc.), ancient languages (Latin, Greek), sets off on a walking tour of Europe from Holland to Constantinople in 1934. His intent was to live on 4 pounds a month (mailed ahead to be picked up at Post Offices or Embassies en route) he plans to do a lot of sleeping in barns and low cost inns. While he certainly does some of that, his personality, outgoing nature, gift of language (he learns German very quickly) and the overall pre-War culture of the time find him ensconced in castles, private homes, fed, and otherwise well-treated - but still "roughing it" most of the time. He wrote this book later in life, but there are frequent long excerpts from the diary he kept. What was amazing to me was his depth of knowledge of ancient Europe, from architecture to wars to cultures - so totally different from today's nineteen year old. His writing style is both the brilliance and the flaw in this book. He has a way with words and a command of the English language that is a little over the top. He can take several pages to describe the look of a Cathedral and, in my opinion, uses four-bit words when more simple descriptions would suffice and make the reading less tedious. You will not learn much about Europe in this book, and will likely not find it a "page turner", but ultimately you will be glad you read it. It ends in Hungary (a later book finishes his journey to Constantinople). It's title is telling - he was the right person, at the right age, doing the right thing, at the right time. A few years later his tour would not have been possible, and would certainly not be possible in today's less trustful, less friendly world. I encourage reading it, but there will be some "wading through" portions that must be put up with. But again, in the end, this book will make you feel well at having been privy to not only a fascinating adventure, but a courageous personality in a unique point in modern times.

At the age of eighteen, Patrick Leigh Fermor set off from the heart of London on an epic journey to walk to Constantinople. *A Time of Gifts* is the rich account of his adventures as far as Hungary, after which *Between the Woods and the Water* continues the story to the Iron Gates that divide the Carpathian and Balkan mountains. Acclaimed for its sweep and intelligence, Leigh Fermor's book explores a remarkable moment in time. Hitler has just come to power but war is still ahead, as he walks through a Europe soon to be forever changed through the Lowlands to Mitteleuropa, to Teutonic and Slav heartlands, through the baroque remains of the Holy Roman Empire; up the Rhine, and down to the Danube. At once a memoir of coming-of-age, an account of a journey, and a dazzling exposition of

the English language, *A Time of Gifts* is also a portrait of a continent already showing ominous signs of the holocaust to come.

"This is a glorious feast, the account of a walk in 1934 from the Hook of Holland to what was then Constantinople. The 18-year-old Fermor began by sleeping in barns but, after meeting some landowners early on, got occasional introductions to castles. So he experienced life from both sides, and with all the senses, absorbing everything: flora and fauna, art and architecture, geography, clothing, music, foods, religions, languages. Writing the book decades after the fact, in a baroque style that is always rigorous, never flowery, he was able to inject historical depth while still retaining the feeling of boyish enthusiasm and boundless curiosity. This is the first of a still uncompleted trilogy; the second volume, *Between the Woods and the Water*, takes him through Hungary and Romania; together they capture better than any books I know the remedial, intoxicating joy of travel." Thomas Swick, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* Recovers the innocence and the excitement of youth, when everything was possible and the world seemed luminescent with promise. ...Even more magical...through Hungary, its lost province of Transylvania, and into Romania... sampling the tail end of a languid, urbane and anglophile way of life that would soon be swept away forever. Jeremy Lewis, *Literary A* book so good you resent finishing it. Norman Stone "The greatest of living travel writers an amazingly complex and subtle evocation of a place that is no more." Jan Morris "In these two volumes of extraordinary lyrical beauty and discursive, staggering erudition, Leigh Fermor recounted his first great excursion They're partially about an older authors encounter with his young self, but they're mostly an evocation of a lost Mitteleuropa of wild horses and dark forests, of ancient synagogues and vivacious Jewish coffeehouses, of Hussars and Uhlans, and of high-spirited and deeply eccentric patricians with vast libraries (such as the Transylvanian count who was a famous entomologist specializing in Far Eastern moths and who spoke perfect English, though with a heavy Scottish accent, thanks to his Highland nanny). These books amply display Leigh Fermor's keen eye and preternatural ear for languages, but what sets them apart, besides the utterly engaging persona of their narrator, is his historical imagination and intricate sense of historical linkage Few writers are as alive to the persistence of the past (he's ever alert to the historical forces that account for the shifts in custom, language, architecture, and costume that he discerns), and I've read none who are so sensitive to the layers of invasion that define the part of Europe he depicts here. The unusual vantage point of these books lends them great poignancy, for we and the author know what the youthful Leigh Fermor cannot: that the war will tear the scenery and shatter the buildings he evokes; that German and Soviet occupation will uproot the beguiling world of those Tolstoyan nobles; and that in fact very few people who became his friends on this marvelous and sunny journey will survive the coming catastrophe." Benjamin Schwarz, *The Atlantic* Praise for Patrick Leigh Fermor: "One of the greatest travel writers of all time *The Sunday Times* A unique mixture of hero, historian, traveler and writer; the last and the greatest of a generation whose like we won't see again. *Geographical* The finest traveling companion we could ever have . . . His head is stocked with enough cultural lore and poetic fancy to make every league an adventure. *Evening Standard* If all Europe were laid waste tomorrow, one might do worse than attempt to recreate it, or at least to preserve some sense of historical splendor and variety, by immersing oneself in the travel books of Patrick Leigh Fermor. Ben Downing, *The Paris About the Author* Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915-2011) was an intrepid traveler, a heroic soldier, and a writer with a unique prose style. After his stormy schooldays, followed by the walk across Europe to Constantinople that begins in *A Time of Gifts* (1977) and continues through *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986), he lived and traveled in the Balkans and the Greek Archipelago. His books *Mani* (1958) and *Roumeli* (1966) attest to his deep interest in languages and remote places. In the Second World War he joined the Irish Guards, became a liaison officer in Albania, and fought in Greece and Crete. He was awarded the DSO and OBE. He lived partly in Greece in the house he designed with his wife, Joan, in an olive grove in the Mani and partly in Worcestershire. He was knighted in 2004 for his services to literature and to British-Greek relations. Jan Morris was born in 1926, is Anglo-Welsh, and lives in Wales. She has written some forty books, including the *Pax Britannica* trilogy about the British Empire; studies of Wales, Spain, Venice, Oxford, Manhattan, Sydney, Hong Kong, and Trieste; six volumes of collected travel essays; two memoirs; two capricious biographies; and a couple of novels but she defines her entire oeuvre as disguised autobiography. She is an honorary D.Litt. of the University of Wales and a Commander of the British Empire. Her memoir *Conundrum* is available as a New York Book Classic.