

# ACADEMIA

Accelerating the world's research.

## Patrick Leigh Fermor

Hariclea Zengos

**Want more papers like  
this?**

[Download a PDF Pack of  
related papers](#)

[Search Academia's catalog of  
22 million free papers](#)

Title: Patrick (Michael) Leigh Fermor

Known As: Fermor, Patrick Michael Leigh; Leigh Fermor, Patrick Michael; Leigh Fermor, Patrick; Fermor, Patrick; Fermor, Patrick Leigh

British Travel writer ( 1915 - 2011 )

Author(s): Anita G. Gorman (Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania) Hariclea Zengos (American College of Greece)

Source: **British Travel Writers, 1940-1997**. Ed. Barbara Brothers and Julia Marie Gergits. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 204. Detroit: Gale Group, 1999. From Literature Resource Center.

Document Type: Biography, Critical essay



Full Text: COPYRIGHT 1999 Gale Group, COPYRIGHT 2007 Gale, Cengage Learning

Table of Contents: [Biographical and Critical Essay](#) ["Introductory Letter to Xan Fielding"](#) [The Traveller's Tree](#) [The Violins of Saint-Jacques](#) [A Time to Keep Silence](#) [Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese](#) ["Gluttony"](#) [Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece](#) ["The Background of Niko Ghika"](#) [A Time of Gifts](#) [Between the Woods and the Water](#) [Three Letters from the Andes](#) [Writings by the Author](#) [Further Readings about the Author](#)

WORKS:

## WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

### BOOKS

- The Traveller's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands (London: Murray, 1950; New York: Harper, 1950).
- A Time to Keep Silence (London: Queen Anne Press, 1953).
- The Violins of Saint-Jacques: A Tale of the Antilles (London: Murray, 1953; New York: Harper, 1954).
- Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese (London: Murray, 1958; New York: Harper, 1958).
- Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece (London: Murray, 1966; New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
- A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube (London: Murray, 1977; New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
- Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland: The Middle Danube to the Iron Gates (London: Murray, 1986; New York: Viking, 1986).

- Three Letters from the Andes (London: Murray, 1991).

## OTHER

- Konstantinos P. Rhodokanakes, *No Innocent Abroad: A Novel*, translated by Leigh Fermor (London & Toronto: Heinemann, 1937); republished as *Forever Ulysses* (New York: Viking, 1938).
- Colette, Julie de Carneilhan [and] *Chance Acquaintances*, translated by Leigh Fermor (London: Secker & Warburg, 1952).
- George Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner: His Story of the German Occupation*, translated, with an introduction, by Leigh Fermor, annotated by Leigh Fermor and Xan Fielding (London: Niko Murray, 1955).
- Niko Ghika (Nikolaos Chatzkyriakos-Ghikas), *India*, translated by Leigh Fermor (Athens: Icaros, 1959).
- Matila Ghyka, *The World Mine Oyster: Memoirs*, introduction by Leigh Fermor (London: Heinemann, 1961).
- "Gluttony," in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (London: Sunday Times Publications, 1962; New York: Morrow, 1962).
- Ghika, Ghika: *Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture*, texts by Leigh Fermor and Stephen Spender (London: Lund Humphries, 1964; Boston: Boston Book & Art Shop, 1965).
- Miles Reid, *Into Colditz*, introduction by Leigh Fermor (Salisbury, U.K.: Michael Russell, 1983).
- David Smiley, *Albanian Assignment*, foreword by Leigh Fermor (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984).
- Roger Hinks, *The Gymnasium of the Mind: The Journals of Roger Hinks 1933-1963*, edited by John Goldsmith, with a memoir by Leigh Fermor (Salisbury, U.K.: Michael Russell, 1984).
- "Greece," in *The Englishman's Room*, edited by Alvilde Lees-Milne (Topsfield, Mass.: Salem House, 1986), pp. 91-95; republished as "Sash Windows on the Sea: Patrick Leigh Fermor at Home in Greece," *Architectural Digest*, 43 (November 1986): 178-181, 226, 228.
- Freya Stark, *Over the Rim of the World: Selected Letters*, edited by Caroline Moorehead, foreword by Leigh Fermor (London: Murray in association with Michael Russell, 1988).
- Sacheverell Sitwell, *Roumanian Journey*, introduction by Leigh Fermor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- Nicolas Bouvier, *The Way of the World*, translated by Robyn Marsack, introduction by Leigh Fermor (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992; Marlboro, Vt.: Marlboro Press, 1992).

- Xan Fielding, *A Hideous Disguise*, foreword by Leigh Fermor (Francestown, N.H.: Typographeum, 1994).
- Marianna Koromela, *In the Trail of Odysseus*, introduction by Leigh Fermor (Norwich, U.K.: Michael Russell, 1994).

### **SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS-- UNCOLLECTED**

- "Entrance to Hades," *Cornhill*, 169 (Spring 1957): 166-177.
- "The Black Departers: An Adventure in Greece," *Cornhill*, 173 (Autumn 1963): 295-327.
- "On Prospero's Island: Balancing Splendor and Rusticity in a Corfu Villa," *Architectural Digest*, 43 ( June 1986): 152-157, 212.
- "Observations on a Marine Vulcan," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 33 (Fall 1987): 305-307.
- "A Clean Sheet for Paeonia; Patrick Leigh Fermor Defends Greece Against Accusations of Bullying Macedonia," *Spectator*, 269 (12 September 1992): 24-26.
- "Some Architectural Notes," *Spectator*, 273 (24 September 1994): 46.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY:**

Patrick Leigh Fermor's life and travel books have earned him comparison with T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) and a reputation as one of the foremost travel writers of the twentieth century. Writing in *The New York Times* (5 December 1986), John Gross called Leigh Fermor "the preeminent English travel writer of his generation." Leigh Fermor's writing often focuses on areas not particularly well known to American and western European readers, including the Balkans, prewar Slovakia and Hungary, the southern Peloponnese, and the Andes. Leigh Fermor's meticulousness, attention to detail, scholarship, and wide-ranging interests make his books valuable eyewitness accounts of cultures that have changed dramatically or even disappeared since his visits to them.

In *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980) Paul Fussell defines travel books (as opposed to guidebooks) as "a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative--unlike that in a novel or romance--claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality." Fussell's definition not only explains how travel writing conjoins the personal and the literal but also suggests how travel writing reveals as much, if not more, about the traveler than the travels. Such is the case with Leigh Fermor. While his books describe his journeys to far-flung areas of the world, they do more than catalogue places seen and people met. Leigh Fermor's

works constitute a portrait of himself as a scholar, artist, traveler, and man. As a scholar, he possesses a vivid imagination that is preoccupied with capturing the people and events of the past. As an artist and writer, Leigh Fermor is lyrical, reveling in the love of words for their own sake. Using sensory details, he vividly re-creates moods, impressions, and experiences for his readers. As a traveler, Leigh Fermor undertakes a journey not with the end in view but in search of strange happenings along remote and unfamiliar paths. As a man, Leigh Fermor emerges from his works as an engaging personality: intellectually curious, sensitive, and confident, with a passion for scholarship, languages, literature, art, architecture, and geography and--most important for a traveler--a love of adventure and the unknown.

Patrick Michael Leigh Fermor was born in London on 11 February 1915 to Muriel Eileen Taaffe Ambler Fermor and Sir Lewis Leigh Fermor, Order of the British Empire and fellow of the Royal Society. Shortly after her son's birth, Muriel Leigh Fermor sailed to India to be reunited with her husband, who at the time was heading the Geological Survey of India. Because of the dangers of travel during World War I, Leigh Fermor's parents, like other colonials at the time, thought it best to leave their young son in England. His mother intended to return for him at the end of the war, not knowing that it would last for nearly four more years.

In "Introductory Letter to Xan Fielding," which prefaces *A Time of Gifts* (1977), Leigh Fermor described himself during his formative years as "a small farmer's child run wild." He spent a blissful early childhood with permissive foster parents on a Northamptonshire farm, where "I was allowed to do as I chose in everything." These "marvellously lawless years," he wrote, made him unfit for the constraints of any school, save for the rather unorthodox Salsham Hall, near Bury St. Edmunds, a coeducational school for "difficult children" aged four to twenty, where Leigh Fermor was sent at age ten. Its unorthodox educational methods included students and teachers country dancing in the nude. When Salsham closed, Leigh Fermor was sent to a more conventional preparatory school. After the freedom of Salsham, he found this school unbearable, and so he left. Passing his common entrance exams, he gained entrance to King's School, Canterbury, where he again proved unable to live by constraints. (One of Leigh Fermor's friends there was Alan Watts, later well known for his writings on Zen Buddhism.) Leigh Fermor wrote later that his housemaster saw him as "a dangerous mixture of sophistication and recklessness." After a series of misdeeds, Leigh Fermor was dismissed.

At seventeen Leigh Fermor found himself in London and spent the next two years studying for the London Certificate, which he hoped would eventually clear the way for entry to Sandhurst and a military career. The bohemian world of London, however, seduced him away from his plans to join the army. The publication of a poem fired him with the idea of becoming a writer. In the summer of 1933, after

passing the London Certificate exam, Leigh Fermor attempted to live the London writer's life, renting a room in a Shepherd Market boardinghouse, but he spent his time socializing with his friends more than writing. By the winter of the same year, Leigh Fermor decided to "abandon London and England and to set out like a tramp-- or, . . . like a pilgrim or a palmer, an errant scholar" to cross Europe by foot and reach Constantinople (renamed Istanbul in 1930). On 8 December 1933 Leigh Fermor set out on this great adventure. Far from giving up his dream of becoming an author, he saw his travels as a way of realizing it. His journeys would give him something to write about and give him the needed solitude, time for reflection, freedom, and inspiration to create. In fact, throughout his sojourn, Leigh Fermor recorded his experiences in notebooks from which he later reconstructed part of his journey in *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986).

During the years before the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Leigh Fermor found time to translate Konstantinos Rhodokanakes's novel *No Innocent Abroad* (1937) from the original Greek. In 1939, after extensive travel in Central Europe, the Balkans, and Greece, Leigh Fermor enlisted in the Irish Guards. His military career during World War II was distinguished. He served as a lieutenant in the British Military Mission in Greece and Crete and as a liaison officer to the Greek headquarters in Albania. He fought in the campaigns of Greece and Crete. After the fall of Crete to the Germans, he organized the resistance movement there and, disguised as a shepherd, oversaw guerrilla operations on the island from 1942 to 1944. Leigh Fermor's friend and fellow soldier Xan Fielding has written an account of the Cretan resistance, *Hide and Seek: The Story of a War-time Agent* (1954).

In 1944 Leigh Fermor led a successful expedition to seize Maj. Gen. Heinrich Kreipe, commander of the twenty-two thousand German troops on Crete. The operation is recounted in several books, including *Ill Met By Moonlight* (1950) by Maj. W. Stanley Moss. (The 1957 movie version starred Dirk Bogarde as Leigh Fermor.) In Moss's book Leigh Fermor is referred to as Paddy and described as a dashing, adventurous, and charming friend who looked "Teutonic" in his disguise as a German soldier. He was also an inspiration to his cohorts: "The morale of our own little band continues to be as high as ever, but Paddy is forever having to give pep-talks to the outsiders, telling them not to give up hope and that the end of the world is not yet upon us." Another account of the expedition is found in George Psychoundakis's *The Cretan Runner* (1955), a book translated, with an introduction, by Leigh Fermor. Psychoundakis functioned as a guide and runner for the British officers hiding on the island. In Psychoundakis's narrative, Leigh Fermor is called Mr. Michali by the Cretans and described as "a tall man, full of life, with a beautiful moustache and curly brown hair. He wore Cretan breeches and boots, a black shirt and a fringed turban,

and he had dyed his whiskers and hair in such a way that he seemed the image of a true Cretan."

Leigh Fermor, Moss, and their British and Cretan associates captured General Kreipe and escaped through the Nazi-occupied capital city of Iráklion, passing through German roadblocks with Leigh Fermor posing as the general. Then with the aid of Cretan runners they contacted radio operators who could transmit messages to Cairo and facilitate their escape from the island. David Smiley's *Albanian Assignment*(1984) reports that when Leigh Fermor and Moss had spoken to their friends in Cairo about their intended capture of the general, their military associates had registered alarm, but their "social contacts" had laughed at what they considered a joke.

At the end of the war Leigh Fermor was in North Germany as the team commander of the Special Allied Airborne Reconnaissance Force. He was discharged from military service in 1945. For his service to the Crown he was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1943 and the Distinguished Service Order in 1944. The people of Crete showed their thanks for his contribution to the resistance effort by making Leigh Fermor an honorary citizen of Iráklion in 1947.

By 1947 Leigh Fermor had met the Honorable Mrs. Joan Rayner, born Joan Elizabeth Eyres Monsell, daughter of Henry Bolton Graham Eyres Monsell, first Viscount Monsell; she became Leigh Fermor's wife in 1968. A 19 June 1947 letter from Freya Stark to Sir Sydney Cockerell reported that "a young buccaneering Irishman called Leigh Fermor is coming to lunch with Joan Rayner, who was Osbert Lancaster's secretary in Athens." Stark's letters during the postwar period show Leigh Fermor to have been a friend as well as an intriguing figure to her. On 27 August 1950, she wrote to her husband, Stewart Perowne, "Yesterday we had a cheerful party down here with Patrick Leigh Fermor and Joan and two young Pallisers--Paddy looking in this wine dark sea so like a Hellenistic lesser sea-god of a rather low period, and I do like him; he is the genuine buccaneer."

In 1947-1948 Leigh Fermor spent a year as deputy director of the British Institute in Athens, Greece, and then resumed his travels. During the late 1940s he and two companions, one of whom was Joan Rayner, journeyed to the Caribbean and the West Indies, island travels that he recorded in detail in his first book, *The Traveller's Tree* (1950). They also inspired his first and only novel, *The Violins of Saint-Jacques* (1953).

*The Traveller's Tree* takes its title from a plant commonly known as the traveler's tree. Like the people who inhabit the Antilles, it was originally a stranger to that region. As the preface explains, the book concerns life on the islands "as it impinges on an interested stranger, their buildings and food and religions, their history and the

perceptible texture of their existence." *The Traveller's Tree* received immediate critical acclaim, earning Leigh Fermor the Heinemann Foundation Prize for Literature in 1950 and the Kemsley Prize in 1951.

Leigh Fermor wrote in his introduction that he felt no compunction to treat political problems, but he could not avoid offering passing opinions on racial conflict. For example, in Martinique he met a civil engineer, formerly from Lyons, who "embarked upon a hymn of hate against the Negroes." Leigh Fermor concluded that the Frenchman was a "little madman." In Barbados Leigh Fermor encountered a more subtle form of discrimination, discovering that the places of entertainment for "whites only" are called clubs. "Thanks to the clarity of our complexions," Leigh Fermor wrote, "we were automatically members." A white Barbadian friend later described this unspoken system of discrimination to Leigh Fermor as one of the advantages of the island, and when Leigh Fermor asked where a white and a black Barbadian could meet for dinner, his friend made it clear that whites and blacks did not meet. Leigh Fermor called this system "disgustingly hypocritical" and more despicable and loathsome than the laws of segregation then in effect in the United States.

*The Traveller's Tree* is a penetrating account of travel in the Caribbean, probing the mixed heritage and varied history of each island and offering readers an unforgettable picture of the islands before they were transformed largely into resorts and spas for tourists. The book includes vivid descriptions of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada, St. Lucia, Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Eustatius, Saba, St. Martin, St. Thomas, Haiti, and Jamaica. Leigh Fermor was interested in the landscape and architecture of each island, but above all he focused on the unusual groups of people that populate this region. In Dominica, for example, he encountered Caribs, members of a nearly extinct group of Native Americans. *The Traveller's Tree* details the history of these warrior peoples and describes with particular relish their cannibalistic habits of yore. Though they were initially difficult to subdue, by the eighteenth century the Caribs were nearly eliminated by white colonists. By the late 1950s there were only five hundred Caribs left, and of these, Leigh Fermor noted, only one hundred were of pure blood. Leigh Fermor felt privileged to have met these members of a nearly extinct people. In Jamaica he encountered the Kingston Pocomaniacs, who--like Haitians who believe in voodoo and Christianity--practice a curious religion that mixes Christianity with surviving remnants of African religion. Leigh Fermor witnessed late-night rites of Haitians and Pocomaniacs, rituals that result in the participants experiencing ecstasy and possession by spirits. Not only are Leigh Fermor's accounts of voodoo highly detailed and extensive, but they also abound with interesting conclusions, including his assessment that it "was the unifying force of Voodoo, far more than the advent of New Ideas from Europe, that impelled the slaves at the time of the French Revolution to revolt."



Writing in *Library Journal* (15 December 1951), W. K. Harrison called *The Traveller's Tree* "one of the most rewarding travel books published in many years," and *The Sunday Times* said Leigh Fermor was a "born writer," the "ideal traveller, inquisitive, humorous, interested in everything." Reviewing the book for the *New Statesman and Nation* (13 January 1951), Dorothy Carrington termed Leigh Fermor's account of voodoo "the most intelligent I have read on the subject." The reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) judged the chapter on voodoo one of the best in the book, citing as well Leigh Fermor's "keen eye for such vestiges of splendour and prosperity as have survived the depredations of tropical nature and the collapse of an economy based on slavery" (29 December 1950).

Leigh Fermor's translations of Colette's *Julie de Carneilhan* and *Chambre d'Hotel*, published in 1952, were followed by his novel, *The Violins of Saint-Jacques*, in 1953. The book was inspired by the volcanic destruction of St. Pierre, the capital of Martinique, in 1902. Leigh Fermor gave a realistic sense to a fantastic tale employing a frame narrator, an Englishman, who relates the early history of the island. Then the scene switches to the Greek Aegean island of Mitylene, where the English narrator meets Berthe de Rennes, a woman past seventy, who eventually tells him the story of her youth on the island of Saint-Jacques at the turn of the century and of the tragedy that befell her the last night of Mardi Gras. Antonia White in the *New Statesman and Nation* (5 December 1953) described the writing as "deliberate, sometimes overconscious artifice, scattered with French and native words and adorned with litanies of picturesque names." Yet, she complimented Leigh Fermor on his "fine visual imagination, shown to the full in the description of the fiery destruction of St. Jacques as seen from a small schooner." While White admired Leigh Fermor for his "erudition," "delight in exotic sights, sounds, faces and dresses," and the "skill with which he builds up to his grand climax," the novel remained for her "little more than a splendid spectacle." *The Violins of Saint-Jacques* inspired a successful three-act opera, composed by Malcolm Williamson, with libretto by William Chappell. It had its premiere at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, on 29 November 1966.

In *A Time to Keep Silence* (1953) Leigh Fermor described his extended sojourns in two French monasteries, the Abbey of St. Wandrille de Fontanelle and La Grande Trappe, and the abandoned rock monasteries of Cappadocia in Turkey. Not a believer, Leigh Fermor initially went to the monasteries because he was in search of a quiet, inexpensive place to stay while he wrote. As the title suggests, the main theme of the work is the effect of silence and solitude on the human consciousness and spirit. In 1952 Leigh Fermor, on a friend's recommendation, visited St. Wandrille de Fontanelle, one of the oldest Benedictine abbeys in France. At first, he wrote, the peaceful solitude and pervading silence of the abbey did not calm his spirit but made him melancholy, lonely, and unproductive: "So much silence and sobriety! The place

assumed the character of an enormous tomb, a necropolis of which I was the only living inhabitant." His feelings about the abbey underwent a change, however, as he learned to turn inward and to be with and by himself.

While the transition from "urban excess to a life of rustic solitude" was painful and slow, Leigh Fermor came to see the monastery as a "silent university" at which he learned much about himself and his unsuspected capacity for silence, contemplation, and solitude. In his introduction to the 1957 edition of the book Leigh Fermor wrote that the seclusion, silence, and solitariness of the monastery eventually allowed him to reach "a state of peace that is unthought of in the ordinary world," a clarity of mind and spirit that made him feel as if he were "the beneficiary . . . of a supernatural windfall."

Leigh Fermor's next encounter with monasticism occurred at the Abbey of Solesmes in western France, where he remained for two weeks, "established in a warm cell, writing hard in front of a blazing log fire, enjoying the amenities of a library that must be one of the largest of any monastery." His visit to Solesmes was followed by a more extended stay at La Grande Trappe, where Leigh Fermor encountered the rigorous rule of the Cistercians, with its sacrifice, deprivation, penance, physical hardship, and "the unbroken cycle of contemplation, prayer and back-breaking toil." Although Leigh Fermor admired the difficulties of Trappist life, he also questioned them in his analysis of the paradoxes inherent in such an existence.

In the final section of *A Time to Keep Silence* Leigh Fermor recorded his visit to the rock monasteries of Cappadocia, no longer inhabited by monks but by doves. Arriving in the "derelict town" of Urgub (Urgüp), in which he saw "the last vestiges of humanity," Leigh Fermor and his companion descended into a "tormented ravine" of "wild strangeness." The landscape seemed to Leigh Fermor to be almost extraterrestrial, like "the surface of the Moon or Mars or Saturn: a dead, ashen world, lit with the blinding pallor of a waste of asbestos, filled, not with craters and shell-holes, but with cones and pyramids and monoliths." Within these geological formations tenth- and twelfth-century monks had constructed detailed replicas of Byzantine churches. Leigh Fermor describes the silence that pervades the rock monasteries of Cappadocia as of a different kind than that he had found at the monasteries in France. It is the silence of ruin, desertion, abandonment, and mystery. The "rock monasteries keep their secret almost as closely guarded as Stonehenge. . . ."

Leigh Fermor's next travel book, *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese* (1958), was well received by critics, inspiring reviewer John Raymond to write in the *New Statesman* (6 December 1958) that "Mr. Leigh Fermor is the best travel writer of his generation." Classical scholar Gilbert Highet praised the book in a blurb printed on the dust jacket: "It is a really beautiful book of travel in an almost wholly unknown

part of Europe, among people who still belong largely to the tough simple Middle Ages; and it shows not only their charm and vigor, but the delights which still await the explorer of Greece." Part travelogue, part an inspired evocation of the past, Mani, which won the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize, is a fusion of scholarship, imagination, and history.

Desolate, rocky, and isolated, Mani is generally considered the southernmost extension of continental Europe in the Mediterranean--though Leigh Fermor noted in a later interview (New York Review of Books, 8 February 1987) that a village near Gibraltar "beats it by a sixth of a mile." In his account of his journeys about this rocky peninsula in the Peloponnese, Leigh Fermor captured the rugged beauty of this once remote and wild region of Greece and the toughness and endurance of its people, whose roots stretch back to Byzantium. The dominant theme of the book is the contrast between the Greek present and its mythic past. Leigh Fermor sought out this remote area of Greece to explore the relationship between contemporary Greeks and their history, believing that in still untouched areas this relationship would be undisturbed by "the butt of a Coca-cola bottle." Hanging over the narrative is a pervading sense of doom and impending loss. Much of the past remains alive in contemporary Greece, particularly in rural areas, in the form of traditions, customs, and rituals, but much has also been lost in the process of growth and Westernization and in the name of progress.

The book reveals the vibrant folk culture of Mani, the poetic dirges of the wailing women at funerals, the propensity of the citizenry to blood feuds, and their hospitality. In this book, as elsewhere in his writings, Leigh Fermor reveals his fascination with the mix of pagan and Christian elements in folk culture. "The clergy did what they could to reduce the pagan characteristics" of Greek culture, Leigh Fermor wrote, "but there was more truth in the gods' claims to immortality than is generally thought." Among the most valuable sections of Mani are Leigh Fermor's careful analyses of the persistence of pre-Christian beliefs in modern Greek society.

In 1964 Leigh Fermor and Rayner built a house in the town of Kardamyli in Mani, which he described in an essay collected in *The Englishman's Room* (1986). The essay, which was republished in *Architectural Digest* (November 1986) with photographs by Derry Moore, describes the appearance of the house as "like a monastery which had been crumbling for centuries."

On 27 September 1958, while in the middle of reading Mani, Freya Stark wrote to John Grey Murray that Leigh Fermor's book was "first rate." "I think he writes better than I do--more consciously and with a fine choice of words," she exclaimed, adding that he "gives wonderful descriptions of rock and sky and the gauntness and intensity of this land--I do hope it will be liked as it deserves."

In 1962 Leigh Fermor contributed an essay on "Gluttony" to a series on the seven deadly sins in *The Times* (London). Also boasting essays by Angus Wilson, Edith Sitwell, Cyril Connolly, Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Sykes, and W. H. Auden, the series was later published as a book. Leigh Fermor's humorous insights into gluttony includes a cigar-smoking character named Mr. Vortigern, who blames pasta for the decline of Italian culture:

The piazzas were a tragic squirming tangle of spaghetti and lasagne, the lagoon ran red with tomato sauce. Italy's genius was dead, laid low by her own gluttony . . . not only Italy's painting, but Italian thought and poetry and literature and rhetoric and even Italian architecture. Everything was turned into macaroni.

In 1966 Leigh Fermor published *Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece*, an account of a journey "undertaken a few years ago," according to Leigh Fermor. Again his traveling companion was Joan Rayner, who as Joan Eyres Monsell had taken the photographs for Mani and did so again for Roumeli. The colloquial designation for a region of northern Greece, the name Roumeli is not found on present-day maps. Its boundaries have changed over the centuries, and it is now generally understood to be that region of northern Greece that lies south of the Agrafa Mountains. Leigh Fermor's introduction refers to Roumeli as a "contracting wilderness," expressing his displeasure that "progress" is stripping the region and its people of their connection to the past: "Monasteries and temples which, almost yesterday, were only to be reached by solitary and exacting climbs are now the brief staging points of highly organized and painless tourism in multitudes."

According to Fussell, tourists insist on visiting the known and the familiar, while travelers relish the unknown and the absence of the familiar. Leigh Fermor is the epitome of the traveler and a critic of the tourist. Tourism "destroys the object of its love," and it saddened Leigh Fermor to see that Greece had become the "most recent, most beautiful, and perhaps its most fragile victim." Tourism has turned "dignified islands and serene coasts into polluting hells." It has changed delightful, old Athenian taverns into "an alien nightmare of bastard folklore and bad wine." Some inns survive unpolluted, Leigh Fermor discovered, but soon, he predicted, guidebook writers would tell their readers where to find these last bastions of Greek culture. For Leigh Fermor, who believes that such guidebooks should be "publicly burnt," "Greece is suffering its most dangerous invasion since the time of Xerxes." Leigh Fermor's statements have proven prophetic.

Roumeli describes the wedding celebrations Leigh Fermor attended among the Sarakatsan nomads, his visit to the monastery of St. Barlaam in the Meteora, and his search for George Gordon, Lord Byron's shoes in Missolonghi. The dominant theme of the work is the decline or loss of traditional ways of life. For example, his narrative

of his sojourn at the monastery of St. Barlaam focuses on the reasons for the decline and decay of Orthodox monasticism. In the eleventh century hermits and ascetics first began to occupy the pinnacles and crevices of the Meteora, and by the sixteenth century a powerful community of twenty-six monasteries was flourishing there. At the time of Leigh Fermor's visit only four were still active. Of the others only occasional ruins remained. Leigh Fermor attributed the decline to two causes: legislation that stripped the monasteries of much of their wealth and the impact of Western materialism.

Leigh Fermor's two books on Greece have contributed to the general reader's understanding and love of the country. Leigh Fermor traces the roots of his philhellenism to the years he spent in German-occupied Crete, which mark the beginning of his many years of study, experience, and observation of the Greek environment. Cocker argues that Leigh Fermor "is the most obvious heir to [Robert] Byron's pre-war mantle as leading philhellene amongst British writers." Certainly Leigh Fermor, along with Lawrence Durrell, writes in the tradition of the British travel writer Robert Byron.

Leigh Fermor also owes a debt to another philhellene, the poet Byron. In *Roumeli* Leigh Fermor wrote that "every English traveler, however humble or unimpressive, and whether he knows or deserves or wants it or not, is the beneficiary of some reflected fragment of his glory." Byron is revered even today as a national hero by the Greeks, and Leigh Fermor, too, has been honored by the Greeks for his service to their country. As if in tribute to Byron's memory, during a trip to Turkey in October 1986, Leigh Fermor at age sixty-nine repeated Byron's 1810 swim across the Hellespont.

Writing in *The New York Times* (28 August 1966), Stark praised Leigh Fermor's ability to present people "as they are" as well as his "brilliance, the felicitous profusion, the exuberance of learning and information, wayward as a gossamer, from what one soon comes to realize is a very solid store." In *The New Statesman* (13 May 1966) V. S. Pritchett expressed reservations about Leigh Fermor's "greed for detail" that at times overburdened his style but praised his ability to present fully realized human beings and their conversation, concluding that Leigh Fermor "probably knows Greece better than anybody." *The TLS* (7 July 1966) writer, in addition to praising Leigh Fermor, indulged in a more personal analysis of the author:

Mr. Leigh Fermor has acquired an enormous fund of esoteric knowledge during his wanderings, and writes like a baroque angel; but when one closes his enchantingly digressive book it is not the objective or historical passages that stick in the mind so much as the oblique self-portrait he has built up, of a traveller as nomadic and untrammelled as the Saracatsani themselves, riding through Macedonia in his teens,

an eyewitness of the 1935 Venizelos revolution, with Cretan comrades in the White Mountains during the German occupation, playing billiards with Lady Wentworth, hunting for Byron's shoes in Missolonghi, always a little elusive and tangential, writing a testament the centre of which is never, one feels, plumb in the middle.

Leigh Fermor's knowledge of Greece is amply demonstrated in the essay he wrote for Ghika: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture (1964), a book of Niko Ghika's art work with text by Leigh Fermor and Stephen Spender. Leigh Fermor's essay, "The Background of Niko Ghika," notes that Greece is "wilder and harder, less vegetated and more precipitous" than Italy, that rich source of great painters. The light in Greece is also different, less diffuse and less soft than in Italy: "Low and bright, the large sun spins in a sky of pale and unfathomable blue drained of all but radiance." He was made an honorary citizen of Gytheion, Laconia, in 1966 and of Kardamyli in 1967.

Leigh Fermor's next book, *A Time of Gifts* (1977), won the W. H. Smith and Son Literary Award in 1978. This volume is the first in a projected trilogy about his travels in central Europe during the 1930s, part travelogue, part interpretative autobiography, and an important historical narrative that documents what the region was like before the storm of World War II. The title of *A Time of Gifts* comes from lines in Louis MacNeice's poem "Twelfth Night": "For now the time of gifts is one / O boys that grow, O snows that melt." The book chronicles the first leg of Leigh Fermor's trip across Europe to Istanbul, taking the reader from Rotterdam to the Hungarian border. Using diaries he kept on his journey and the resources of his memory, Leigh Fermor re-created his young self at eighteen, offering his readers his perspective on the past and an image of the young man he was.

As an author of fiction creates a character, so an autobiographer creates a persona, a version of himself or herself that may or may not coincide with life as it was lived but that captures meaning or significance. The young Leigh Fermor is a captivating figure. A lover of history, he is attracted by strange place names and haunts the libraries of his hosts in search of knowledge. Showing remarkable poise and self-confidence for his age, he is just as comfortable in the company of swineherds as he is in the company of nobility. With his knowledge of languages he is able to break barriers between himself and his hosts, who find him so engaging that he becomes a lifelong friend. He is eager to experience the strange and exotic and curious enough to ask questions. He can be reserved at times and at others a reveler. Leigh Fermor does not look on this younger self with nostalgia or regret. He acknowledges that time is irredeemable, but because he still possesses youthful enthusiasm and avidity, he does not seem to be saddened by the passage of years.

To avoid giving his narrative a melancholic cast, Leigh Fermor tries not to compare the central Europe of the past with that of the present. Such comparisons would be

"like having a skeleton at the feast," Leigh Fermor later told an interviewer (New York Review of Books, 8 February 1987). Instead the book is an enchanting portrait of a Europe that was destroyed by totalitarianism and world war. In much of Europe young Leigh Fermor discovers a tradition of hospitality and benevolence toward wandering young people. In Holland, for instance, he learns that humble travelers can find refuge for the night in police stations. A local constable lets him spend the night in a cell and gives him a bowl of coffee and some bread. In Germany--after having been robbed of the rucksack that contained his books, passport, money, and diary of his trip to that point Leigh Fermor is treated with kindness and generosity by Baron Rheinhard von Liphardt-Ratshoff, who re-equips him with a rucksack and clothes, presents him with a seventeenth-century, leather-bound copy of Horace's odes and epodes, and sends him off with letters of introduction to fellow members of the gentry.

Leigh Fermor sleeps at times in barns and at other times in fairy-tale castles and learns from a Burgermeister that as a student he is entitled to expect and even demand a free supper, a mug of beer, a bed for the night, and bread and a bowl of coffee for breakfast in every town or village in Germany. Nor is such hospitality unique to Germany. In Vienna he is befriended by Konrad, a Frisian who helps him find subjects to sketch in order to earn some much-needed pocket money. Leigh Fermor attributes his success in selling these sketches not to his talent but to "kind Viennese hearts."

A Time of Gifts lingers on what was golden about pre-World War II Europe: the landscapes, arts, architecture, history, literature, and, above all, the people. Still, neither the reader nor Leigh Fermor can ignore that Adolf Hitler has come to power in Germany and that signs of war are gathering. In Germany, Leigh Fermor sees framed photographs of Hitler in inns and store windows, swastika armbands and flags, Hitler Youth and Maidens, and he is aware of the persecution of the Jews, finding striking the ordinariness of individuals capable of such inhumanity. In one inn young Leigh Fermor sees a dozen SA men, who, after a few mugs of beer, begin to sing German folk songs. Leigh Fermor notes that "the charm" of their singing "made it impossible, at that moment, to connect the singers with organized bullying and the smashing of Jewish shop windows and nocturnal bonfires of books."

Leigh Fermor's digressions, which make each of his works seem spontaneous, immediate, and unstructured, take various forms--historical background and information, philosophical musings, postscripts and asides that create a sense of intimacy between Leigh Fermor and his audience, flashbacks, flash forwards, and flights of the imagination. Rather than being peripheral to the works, these digressions are the heart of each book. As Mark Cocker observes in *Loneliness and Time* (1994), "a single linear narrative is never quite adequate to contain the burning multiplicity of ideas exercising him at any one moment."

The master of digression, Leigh Fermor jokingly apologizes for interrupting his narrative with Proustian associations, making comments such as "We shall never get to Constantinople like this. I know I ought to be moving on. . . . But I can't--not for a page or two." In one moment of free association he flashes forward to the kidnapping of General Kreipe in the mountains of Crete during World War II, commenting that, though they were enemies, he and the general had felt a strange connection and mutual respect, perhaps because they shared a knowledge of Horace's odes. The reader is unlikely to want Leigh Fermor to move on during such digressions, for they are an integral part of the experience of traveling with him.

Writing in *The New York Times Book Review* (27 November 1977), Raymond Sokolov declared that Leigh Fermor had re-created "historically irreplaceable impressions of Central European Jews waking up to Hitler's menace, of the last days of the charming, Hapsburgian petty nobility and of the pre-Communist landscape of Hungary and Rumania." Yet he added some mild reservations about the "prose of preening but often magnificent richness" and Leigh Fermor's "(perhaps excessively) literate mind." Reviewing the book for *Library Journal* (1 September 1997), A. M. Robinson called the volume "pure gold, most highly recommended," while Jan Morris in *The Spectator* (24 September 1977) called the work "nothing short of a masterpiece."

Winner of the 1987 Thomas Cook Travel Book Award and the 1987 International Time-Life Silver Pen Award, *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986), the long-awaited second volume of Leigh Fermor's trilogy, picks up where *A Time of Gifts* leaves off. Leigh Fermor's journey now takes him down the Danube from Budapest, across the great Hungarian plain by horseback, and over the Romanian border into legendary and mysterious Transylvania, a wild and beautiful region of forests and mountains, which at that time was secluded from Western eyes. The woods of the title are in Transylvania, and the water is the Danube and its tributaries. The book ends with young Leigh Fermor at the Iron Gates, where the Balkans begin. As in *A Time of Gifts*, *Between the Woods and the Water* records a dual perspective, that of a young and enthusiastic eighteen-year-old and the older, septuagenarian Leigh Fermor. Reviewing the book for the *Los Angeles Times* (28 December 1986), Richard Eder described it as "as much an old man's encounter with his young self as it is an account of sights and people."

Leigh Fermor "meant to live like a tramp or a pilgrim or a wandering scholar, sleeping in ditches and ricks and only consorting with birds of the same feather," but while he found himself some nights with Romanian-speaking shepherds whom he fancied as lineal descendants of Vlachs and Dacians or with peasant farmers or even sleeping alone in the mountains, at other times he found himself "strolling from castle to castle, sipping Tokay out of cut-glass goblets and smoking pipes a yard long with archdukes



instead of halving gaspers with tramps." His portrait of a rural Hungarian aristocracy captures a world that perished in the rubble of World War II.

Leigh Fermor describes a learned, elegant, and eccentric class of people whose homes were filled with antiques and large libraries. Leigh Fermor captures the appealing eccentricities of the Hungarian gentry without making them seem petty or frivolous. One host kept a shotgun by his piano while he played Bach fugues. Every few minutes he broke off, rushed to the window, and shot "a bird from the enormous rookery that overlooked the house." A Hungarian count, who collected moths, spoke English fluently, but--thanks to a Highland nanny--with a Scottish accent. ("I'll dree on own weird," he tells Leigh Fermor as he thinks over a difficult decision.) Leigh Fermor also had the unusual experience of playing bicycle polo with a count and his entourage.

*Between the Woods and the Water* also explores the power and art of memory. Leigh Fermor's diary entries were "backed up by a collection of clear visions." Leigh Fermor is quick to confess to lapses in memory, discovering that memory is often selective and untrustworthy, but he is also surprised by some of the moments that he does remember vividly. For example, in re-creating an evening at a Hungarian castle, Leigh Fermor recalls the members of the party and the piano music, but not what was discussed or what was played. In his mind's eye, however, is a clear vision of a bowl of "enormous white and red peonies" from which "a few petals have dropped on the polished floor." These retained concrete images or visions, which capture poetically and concisely the essence of the remembered experience, are akin to William Wordsworth's "spots of time" in which the imagination and memory transcend time.

For the eighteen-year-old Leigh Fermor life is akin to a golden age, but the septuagenarian Leigh Fermor writes with the knowledge of what the future held for his cast of characters and for their region. In the narrative there is a sense of impending catastrophe. The people young Leigh Fermor meets sense the threat of war. While they do not know when catastrophe will strike, they just know that it will. "Everything is going to vanish," an Austrian friend laments at the prospect of a power dam. Leigh Fermor, given the benefit of retrospection, knows that most of it did. At times, because of Leigh Fermor's knowledge of the future, a bit of melancholy seeps into the narrative. In fact, few of the friends Leigh Fermor mentions survived World War II. "Every part of Europe I had crossed so far was to be torn and shattered by war," he sadly explains to his readers, "and when war broke out, all these friends vanished into darkness."

As in his earlier works, Leigh Fermor mixes history with description and takes delight in details. He responds with equal sensitivity to the richness and variety of human life and the beauty of the landscape. For Phoebe-Lou Adams, whose review of the book

appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1987), *Between the Woods and the Water* "is just as charming as its predecessor, for young Mr. Fermor was observant, well informed, discreetly inquisitive, sympathetic, and ready for any action that came up, while the older Mr. Fermor adds to the tale worldly experience and a wryly humorous view of his juvenile self." There were still some reviewers, however, who felt his writing lacked restraint in the description and information it provided.

In 1987 Leigh Fermor wrote "Observations on a Marine Vulcan," a tribute to Lawrence Durrell, whom he first met during World War II in Cairo and later encountered in Rhodes. The following year Leigh Fermor received the Municipality of Athens Gold Medal of Honour.

*Three Letters from the Andes* was published in 1991, the same year Leigh Fermor received an honorary doctorate in literature from the University of Kent. The book describes a 1971 journey he took with five friends. As the group traveled from Lima into increasingly remote parts of Peru, Leigh Fermor chronicled his experiences in a series of letters to his wife in Greece. These letters, somewhat revised, are the basis for the book. The lively epistolary form creates a sense of intimacy. Lacking Leigh Fermor's characteristic digressions, asides, and footnotes, *Three Letters from the Andes* is perhaps the most linear of his narratives. It is a slim work, lacking the development and the attention to minute detail that a reader expects from him. While reviews for the book were generally favorable, Charles Solomon pointed out in the 11 July 1993 issue of the *Los Angeles Times* that the gear these upper-class British adventurers took with them included Charvet pajamas and fourteen bottles of airport whiskey. Solomon also criticized the "droll, impractical tone that suggests the *Pickwickians* at Machu Picchu."

While Leigh Fermor reveled in the beauties of the Andean landscape, the Inca ruins, and the Spanish baroque churches, for him the high point of the journey was crossing a glacier for the first time. Reaching a height of just over fifteen thousand feet, Leigh Fermor discovered "an undulating, brilliantly sparkling" stark white wilderness--empty, uninterrupted stretches of snow and ice that were strangely beautiful. A novice climber, Leigh Fermor described reaching the peak of the glacier as "a moment of great euphoria, and . . . near intoxication. . . ." He also recounted the joys and rigors of camp life. Although they had some creature comforts, such as whiskey, the expedition team washed in cold streams and huddled in tents against the cold, snow, hail, and wind. Leigh Fermor found himself "Lord of the Primus," tending to the lighting and cleaning of the stove and the brewing of the tea. After his adventures in the high Andes exploring some of the least known and remotest parts of the region, he was saddened to find himself "down to earth," enduring local hotels without hot water (and, at times, without running water) and badly boiled eggs for breakfast. This book includes fewer memorable encounters with people than do most of his previous

works, and, except for occasional vivid evocations of nature, it does not quite reach the breadth and depth of Leigh Fermor's previous works.

In 1992 Leigh Fermor published "A Clean Sheet for Paeonia," an article in which he defended Greece against charges of "bullying" the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the same year he received the Prix Jacques Audiberti, Ville d'Antibes, and he contributed a foreword to a new edition of Sacheverell Sitwell's Roumanian Journey (first published in 1938). In 1993 Leigh Fermor received an honorary doctorate from the American College of Greece.

A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Royal Society of Literature, Leigh Fermor is also a patron of the Friends of Mount Athos, a visiting member of the Athens Academy. He and his wife, Joan, still live in Mani.

Mainland Greece and its islands, Romania and other countries of central Europe, the islands of the Caribbean, and the Andes Mountains have all inspired Leigh Fermor's romantic imagination. His extraordinary contribution to twentieth-century travel literature can only be enhanced by the long-awaited publication of the final volume of his travels in the 1930s from Holland to Constantinople.

FURTHER READINGS:

## **FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

### **Interviews:**

- Nicholas Shakespeare, "Walking Back to Happiness," *Times*(London), 16 October 1986, p. 17.
- R. W. Apple Jr., "Skeletons at the Feast," *New York Times Book Review*, 8 February 1987, p. 31.

### **References:**

- Maurice Cardiff, *Friends Abroad: Memories of Lawrence Durrell, Freya Stark, Patrick Leigh-Fermor, Peggy Guggenheim and Others* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
- Mark Cocker, *Loneliness and Time: British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994), pp. 195-202.
- Xan Fielding, *Hide and Seek: The Story of a War-time Agent* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954).

- Greg Keeton, "They Kidnapped a General," Reader's Digest, 63 (September 1953): 121-125.
- Verlyn Klinkenborg, "A Time of Gifts," New Republic, 196 (19 January 1987): 36-38.
- W. Stanley Moss, *Ill Met by Moonlight* (London: Harrap, 1950).
- David Smiley, *Albanian Assignment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984).
- Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography 1915-1965* (New York: Random House, 1972).
- Paul West, *The Modern Novel*, 2 volumes (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963), I: 147.
- Simon Winchester, *Epilogue to The Violins of Saint-Jacques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

**Source Citation** (MLA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition)

Gorman, Anita G., and Hariclea Zengos. "Patrick (Michael) Leigh Fermor." *British Travel Writers, 1940-1997*. Ed. Barbara Brothers and Julia Marie Gergits. Detroit: Gale Group, 1999. *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 204. Literature Resource Center. Web. 31 Dec. 2013.

**Document URL**

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1200008410&v=2.1&u=acg&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=af0b0ac6fd3704e6a0d48616bc1f00e7>

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|H1200008410

Writing strategies by beginning authors of academic genre. Abdul Syahid. [abdul.syahid@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id](mailto:abdul.syahid@iain-palangkaraya.ac.id). A spontaneous skill or easily acquired. Writing strategies by beginning authors of a cademic genre. Abdul Syahid. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 9 (1), 20-41. Writing tips, Writing tips for authors, Writing tips novel, Writing tips for teens, Writing tips creative, Writing tips for beginners, Novel planning, Creating a plot, Character development, Editing tips, Self-publishing, Marketing Tips, Author Platform, Facebook for authors, Twitter for authors, Pinterest for authors, Instagram for authors, Writing resources, Fiction, Non-fiction, Fantasy, Romance, Dystopian, History, Thriller, Crime, Sc-fi, Science Fiction, YA. How to Outline Your Book for Plotters | Just Writerly Things. Outlines can help with the flow of writing and they can stifle your creativity. Learn how to craft the perfect outline to your next book. Writing Tips, Writing Advice, Author, Novel, Book, Characters, Creative Including Author's purpose definition, anchor charts. authors purpose activities and pie charts to improve writing skills. A complete guide for students and teachers about the Author's purpose; to persuade, inform or entertain. Including Author's purpose definition, anchor charts. authors purpose activities and pie charts to improve writing skills. HOME/. Writing/.