



In Patrick Leigh Fermor's Footsteps

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Travelogue readers are most probably familiar with the works of Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915–2011). One of the most distinguished authors of the genre, he had a long and quite varied career in many walks of life, from being a soldier to his scholarly work. But primarily he was an ardent traveller and a keen and talented reporter on the wonders and details of the worlds he got to know. Walking from London to Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) with nothing but the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and a volume of Horace's *Odes* in his rucksack, falling in love with a Romanian aristocrat lady and living with her in Moldova, meeting people from all walks of life – politicians, soldiers, aristocrats and farmers, even disguising and living as a shepherd for two years to organize and lead the guerrilla fight against the German occupying forces in Greece during World War II; also travelling to all over the world – leave one with memories not only to cherish but also to share. Still, he became a published author quite late, in 1950, though then to instant acclaim and honours (his very first volume, *The Traveller's Tree*, won the Heinemann Foundation Prize for Literature).

Dan Horațiu Popescu's *Layers of the Text & Context. Patrick Leigh Fermor & Friends*, as the title already suggests, is a volume with a double focus. It closely examines Patrick Leigh Fermor's works and correspondence and places them in a biographical, political, and cultural context, thus shedding light not merely on the English author's oeuvre and aesthetic path to becoming one of the major travelogue authors of the twentieth century but also on the context of this development, people, places, and experiences that shaped this formation process, as well as on a turbulent period of Central-Eastern European history

between the 1930s and the Cold War era, also depicting how Romania is reflected in the eyes of a Westerner.

The double nature of the subtitle is also well sustained throughout the volume as Fermor's geographical, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic journey and accounts of all these voyages are juxtaposed with those of Durrell, Sacheverell Sitwell, Edward Lear, and Bruce Chatwin.

The book is logically structured and offers – also through its structure – a panoramic view not only of Fermor's travels, correspondence, artistic/aesthetic endeavours and challenges but also of other travellers/artists of the twentieth (and nineteenth) century(ies). The first section, "On Becoming a Writer," focuses on Fermor's road to writing and publishing, his struggles after World War II, when he found himself jobless and homeless. Though without a proper (university) education, he was capable of writing, and with support from friends, he managed to start on the twisting road of authorship. Popescu leads us along this path, presenting the manors, hotels, and abbeys Fermor resided in during this period of his life and how his art turned from writing at these shelters to writing about these places (in works such as *A Time to Keep Silence*, in which Fermor identifies St Wandrille as "a tower of solid ivory").

The second part of Popescu's book shows us the Romania of the early twentieth century as seen by Fermor and Sacheverell, who first met in person in Romania, Sacheverell being there at the invitation of Anne Marie Callimachi with the commission to write a book about Romania and Fermor returning from a journey of more than three years of travel. This section of the book also sheds light on how Sacheverell's *Romanian Journey* reports on this eastern part of Europe, including, but not limited to, for example, its cuisine, as well as Fermor's multiple Romanian ties.

The third section offers a reading of Fermor's *Between the Woods & the Water* from different angles, with special attention being paid to the images of the Other. The last section, "Walking to Byzantium," looks at three voyages to Mount Athos, Greece, and how the experiences of these journeys affected the travellers' artistic and spiritual development.

Popescu's book is written in a clear and elegant style, engaging the reader both intellectually and in enjoying the smart and witty mode of writing. References are precise and informative. They serve as a sound foundation for the author's arguments and as a reliable source for further reading for all those whose interest in the discussed topics is stirred by the volume.