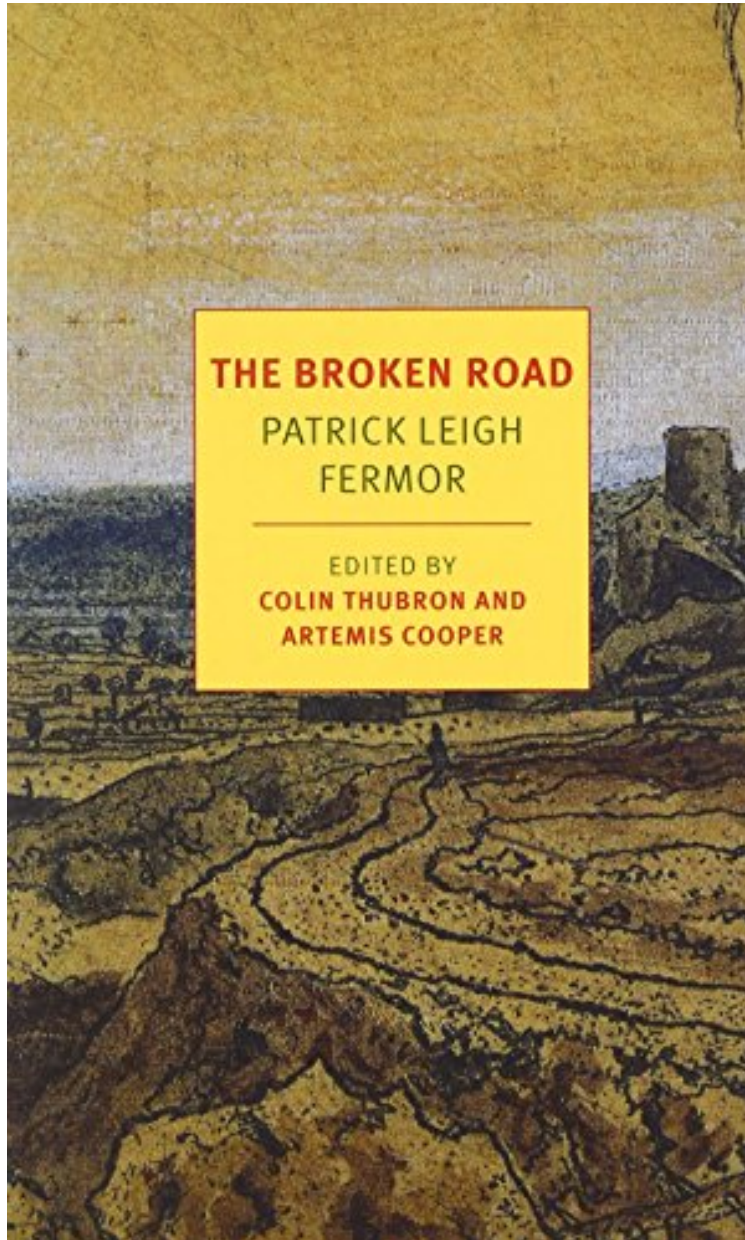


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The Broken Road: From the Iron Gates to Mount Athos (NYRB Classics)

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Patrick Leigh Fermor : The Broken Road: From the Iron Gates to Mount Athos (NYRB Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Broken Road: From the

Iron Gates to Mount Athos (NYRB Classics):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The capstone to one of the highlights of my reading career

By R. M. Peterson

One of the landmarks of travel literature is Patrick Leigh Fermor's three-volume account of his 1934 trek across Europe as a nineteen-year-old. To be sure, though, to characterize the books as "travel literature" may do them a disservice, both because they eclipse almost all other representatives of the genre and because they are much more than a travelogue. PLF mixes in history and ethnology in such an engaging and informative fashion that the books are *sui generis*. The first two volumes, which I have also reviewed on , are "A Time of Gifts" and "Between the Woods and the Water". The second one ended with PLF at the Iron Gates, a gorge on the Danube River between Serbia and Rumania. In *THE BROKEN ROAD*, PLF resumes his journey through portions of Rumania and much of Bulgaria, crisscrossing that country three times. He travels mostly on foot, sometimes sleeping rough; sometimes staying with shepherds, gypsies, or farmers; sometimes with friends he makes along the way; and on a few occasions with the upper crust. One of the more memorable lodgings was at the "Savoi-Ritz" in Bucharest. When he came upon it, he thought it a small hotel, "about my level, in spite of its daunting name." It turned out to be a brothel and entertaining indeed is PLF's account of late-night, after-work dinner with the five girls of the establishment -- one from Bukovina, a Moldavian, a Transylvanian, a German from a town in the Carpathian passes, and a Gagauz from the Dobrudja ("I gazed at her with the reverence of an ornithologist at the glimpse of an Auckland Island merganser"). Another night was spent with six Bulgarian shepherds and four Greek fishermen in a cave along an isolated inlet of the Black Sea on the coast of Bulgaria. Against a crackling wood fire, PLF witnessed several soulful folk dances, fueled by the raki that PLF had carried in his rucksack. At the opposite end of the spectrum, while staying at the apartment of a German diplomat in Rumania PLF went to a dinner party for Artur Rubinstein, where the great pianist played Chopin after which there broke out "dancing and drinking at an uninhibited tempo". What helps make *THE BROKEN ROAD* and its two predecessors special is that PLF wrote them, contemplatively, forty to sixty years after the journey itself, with the benefit of the intervening years of life lessons and much scholarship. This gives him greater perspective as well as the opportunity to interlace the story of his travels with fascinating information about the history and the peoples of the places he visits. One small example, this one of the hatred between the Bulgars and the Byzantines: "The hatred is epitomized on either side by the act of one Byzantine emperor, Basil the Bulgar-slayer, who totally blinded a captured Bulgarian army of ten thousand men, leaving a single eye to each hundredth soldier so that the rest might grope their way home to the [Bulgarian] czar: a spectacle so atrocious that the czar, when the pathetic procession arrived, died of grief and shock." PLF's prose is rather baroque in its intricacies, and his vocabulary is prodigious. He is prone to elaborate lists and flights of fancy, both of which are evident in his account of when, while trudging along a railway, the Orient Express suddenly appears out of the darkness and whisks past him, setting him to thinking about "its freight of runaway lovers, cabaret girls, Knights of Malta, vamps, acrobats, smugglers, papal nuncios, private detectives, lecturers in the future of the novel, millionaires, arms' manufacturers, irrigation experts and spies." PLF worked on writing the third volume of his pan-European journey off and on between 1990 and his death in 2011, at age ninety-six. He never finished it. It ends mid-sentence, with the youthful PLF still in Bulgaria, about 120 miles short of his goal, which was Constantinople (as he preferred to call the city). As a point of biography, PLF spent several weeks in Istanbul and then embarked on a tour of the Greek Orthodox monasteries on the rugged peninsula of Mount Athos. During that excursion he maintained a detailed diary, the eighty pages of which are appended to *THE BROKEN ROAD*. It is entitled "Mount Athos", and it can be skipped. The contrast between it and *THE BROKEN ROAD* and its two predecessors is stark. As keen an observer as the youthful PLF was, the books written forty and more years later are so much richer and more engaging. They transcend travel literature; for me they are literature pure and simple, and they are among the highlights of my reading career.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Rich and satisfying... to the end of the line, and beyond

By John P. Jones III

In 1934, Patrick Leigh Fermor, then 18 years of age, set off to walk from Holland to Constantinople, traversing a Europe that would be largely devastated and irrevocably changed within a few short years. I recently read the first two volumes of this Trilogy, *A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube* (New York Review Books Classics) and *Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople: From The Middle Danube to the Iron Gates* (New York Review Books Classics). Obviously enthralled, I had to finish the story, and it was another excellent read. As with the other two volumes, he is writing this many decades after his originally hike, and so he has imposed more than a half century of erudition upon his youthful memories. At first glance, it may not seem to "work," but it certainly did for me. This volume is somewhat different than the first two, in that it was not finished when he died. It ends, literally in mid-sentence, and he has not quite reached Constantinople. Colin Thubron and Artemis Cooper have skillfully edited the work. They noted that he had written virtually nothing about the end point of his hike. Afterwards, he decided to tour the monasteries on the Mount Athos peninsula, in northern Greece. That account is some 80 pages of this book, and is produced as he wrote it in his diaries of the time. Thus, the reader can contrast the two styles, one a more straightforward youthful account, the other the decades of erudition layered on the original trip. He celebrated his 20th birthday in the St. Panteleimon monastery, in February, 1935, having obtained far more of an education that most

people do in a lifetime. Volume 3 commences at the Iron Gates on the Danube (the rocky narrows of the river), and soon Fermor is in Bulgaria, and his travels there constitute most of the book. He traverses the country, more or less, three times, north to south, and back, and back again. Like the other volumes, he weaves arcane (certainly to me) historical information with the chance encounters of the road. I knew very little about Bulgaria, on the losing side in two world wars, and a "loser" in terms of territory to its neighbors. Bulgaria was also an integral part of the Ottoman Empire for almost half a millennium, finally "liberated" by the Russians, towards the end of the 1800's. Fermor emphasizes in numerous ways what is "received wisdom" in Western Europe: the ethnic hatreds in the Balkans run deep. Even though only 18, he is the "perfect English gentleman," in that he never "kisses and tells." So radically different from today. Of the various women along the way, the most enticing seemed to be Nadejda, who is half Greek, living in Plovdiv, on the Maritza River, in southern Bulgaria. Quite liberated; no doubt the fact that both parents are dead is a factor. She fashions herself to be a student at the Sorbonne. I just read *The Odyssey* for the first time, so was more than a little impressed that they would both reference this work, together, at 18. Talk about being on the same wavelength. She would be the goddess on Calypso, and retain Odysseus in Plovdiv. But like Homer's hero, Fermor decides to "move on." I think I might have lingered a while longer. The author crosses the Danube again, entering Romania, for three weeks of the good life in Bucharest. He describes the strong French influence permeating the elites. The third traverse is along the Black Sea coast, and there are vivid depictions of Bulgarian dancing, as well as the Sarakatsani, the only completely nomadic tribe in the Balkans. He would later describe these people in much greater detail in his book, *Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece* (New York Review Books Classics). The author has such a keen eye for the natural world, in which he often slept. Rich and lively depictions, as autumn deepens into winter. And somehow he weaved in his family's Anglo-Indian history via letters. In a less skilled writer, it would have been a mishmash. With Fermor, it flowed smoothly. In deep winter he visited 20 some Christian Orthodox monasteries on the Mount Athos peninsula. He travels by foot between almost all of them, which is the operative means of transportation there. The monks are hospitable to travelers, and are impressed with the smattering of languages he has acquired. The food, he relates, was less than inspiring. Was he a "seeker"? Like with the women he meets along the road, he never really says, though one insight was provided during his brief stay in the small village of Daphni. One resident inferred that all the religion on the peninsula was just so much bunkum. Fermor demurred. Fermor went on to live for many years in Greece, and wrote a number of books on the country, one of which was mentioned above. I'm sure I'll be reading them in the future. For volume three of the long walk, successfully completed, 5-stars, plus.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One of the best travel books of the last 100 years. By USAF Veteran Part 3 of the trilogy by acclaimed Travel writer, Patrick Leigh Fermor, of a journey on foot from the Netherlands to Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1933-4 is a fantastic close to one of the best travel adventures of the last 100 years. Fermor flunked out of school in England, grew tired of constant and aimless partying and decided to strike out across Europe by foot. Financed by an allowance of an English Pound a week from his family, he took months gathering acquaintances and language facility as he went - mooching off of everyone he could on the way. Fermor's first book of the series, *A Time of Gifts: On Foot to Constantinople: From the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube* (New York Review Books Classics), wasn't published until 1977, decades after the real events. Fermor relied on memory mostly, and some various diaries and manuscripts relating to the trip. The result was this masterpiece which I feel is the single best travel book of the 20th century. I'm not alone in that belief, by the way. Fermor's second book, published in 1986, wasn't as good for a variety of reason. *Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople: From The Middle Danube to the Iron Gates* (New York Review Books Classics) This 3rd book was published after Fermor's death in 2011 and wasn't finished. However there were draft versions and variations that had been worked on by Fermor and it was almost finished, so don't think this is mostly non-Fermor. Fermor's biographer, Artemis Cooper Patrick Leigh Fermor: An Adventure, and noted travel author Colin Thubron, successfully edited this book and it reads like vintage Fermor to the end. We get the benefit of an 18 year old starry-eyed wanderer with a glib tongue and a photographic memory superimposed on a much older and wiser author looking back through the years at people and places all too often destroyed in the coming WWII. And the journey is fantastic. A modern day Odysseus, Fermor immerses himself in the experience and as a solitary traveler finds himself out there mixing with royalty and thugs. Fermor shows a great depth of historical knowledge in the Balkans as well as facility with languages. And his descriptive prose puts you right into the scenes being described. I simply don't know enough superlatives to describe this. I think this 3rd book is actually closer to the first work of genius in this series and better than the second. Lately, we have found that many travel writers embellish or adjust or fabricate (read: lie) about their experiences. Chatwin, Morris, Kaczynsky and others have all admitted or been found to make up some of their "non-fiction". Fermor doesn't appear to suffer from this artificiality, as near as I can tell - not knowing the area nor the languages spoken there. This is an excellent book, entertaining, humorous, erudite, and just plain fun and adventurous. Why not 5 stars? The arrival in Constantinople was never fleshed out by Fermor. Still, I highly recommend it and also recommend you start with the first book and read them in order.

In the winter of 1933, eighteen-year-old Patrick ("Paddy") Leigh Fermor set out on a walk across Europe, starting in

Holland and ending in Constantinople. Decades later, Leigh Fermor told the story of that life-changing journey in *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water*, works now celebrated as among the most vivid, absorbing, and beautifully written travel books of all time. *The Broken Road* is the account of the final leg of his journey, catching up with Paddy in the fall of 1934, following him through Bulgaria and Romania and ending in Greece. Days and nights on the road, spectacular landscapes and uncanny cities, friendships lost and found, leading the high life in Bucharest or camping out with fishermen and shepherds—such incidents and escapades are described with all the linguistic bravura and astonishing learning that Leigh Fermor is famous for, but also with a melancholy awareness of the passage of time. Throughout it we can hear the still-ringing voice of an irrepressible young man embarking on a life of adventure.

From Booklist*Starred * Reading classic travel writer Fermor's body of work reinforces the conviction that a beautiful style is nearly requisite in travel writing to combine immediacy and resonance. Fermor (1915–2011) primarily made his name with two companion books, *A Time of Gifts* (1977) and *Between the Woods and Water* (1998), which chronicled his walk across Europe as a teenager in 1933 and 1934. A third volume, to complete an intended trilogy, did not see publication during his lifetime. Now, his literary executors (one of whom, Artemis Cooper, is the author of the recent and defining *Patrick Leigh Fermor: An Adventure*, 2013) have prepared the manuscripts he intended to use for the third volume—and thus the trilogy is complete. The notably handsome and inexhaustibly curious Englishman walks, on this final portion of his trek, through Bulgaria and Romania. Being on foot, he naturally experiences the landscape and the locals on an especially intimate level. As history has spilled heavily over these two countries since the time of the Ottoman Turks, history is woven into Fermor's enlightening account. People, customs, and geography are what good travel writers seek and share, Fermor foremost among them. --Brad Hooper "An unforgettable book, full of strange encounters with a prewar Balkan cast of counts, prostitutes, peasants, priests and castrati. The greatest pleasure of all, as usual, is Leigh Fermor's own infectious, Rabelaisian hunger for knowledge of almost every kind. His memory seems eidetic; his eyes miss nothing. He seems to carry within himself a whole troupe of sharp-eyed geographers, art historians, ethnologists and multilingual poets." —Robert F. Worth, *The New York Times Book* "Fermor's gift of observation transcends time, fusing the classical with the modern in prose of voluminous richness." —Robert D. Kaplan, *The Wall Street Journal* "When you put down *The Broken Road* you feel what [Leigh Fermor] himself felt on departing from Mount Athos... 'a great deal of regret.'" —Daniel Mendelsohn, *The New York of Books* "By any standards, this is a major work. It confirms that Leigh Fermor was, along with Robert Byron, the greatest travel writer of his generation, and this final volume assures the place of the trilogy as one of the masterpieces of the genre, indeed one of the masterworks of postwar English non-fiction." —William Dalrymple, *The Guardian* "The descriptions of waking in unfamiliar places are so seductive that even the most home-hugging reader will long to wake somewhere unknown. And some of the evocations of landscapes and views will live long in the memory." —Anthony Sattin, *The Observer* "In the end, it's his moments of joy, his revelling in a young man's moments of epiphany, which stay in the mind." —Neal Ascherson, *London of Books* "The *Broken Road* is superb, towering about the usual run of travel books.... The *Broken Road* is better than any gleaming capstone: while giving us a more than satisfactory idea of Leigh Fermor's Balkan adventures, it also, in its raggedness, accentuates the seamless magic of the books that came before, and it wraps the whole enterprise in a pathos that humanizes his superhuman gifts." —Ben Downing, *The Times Literary Supplement* "In a lamplit frenzy of mystic dance and song, among Homeric fisherfolk and swains, young Paddy discovers the underground ecstasies of rebetika in all its 'quintessence of fatalism.' Glimpsed from the future, he sets a course for the Greece that would keep his prose dancing ever after." -- *The Independent* "The now-complete trilogy documenting his journey is essential curriculum for any traveler.... Fermor's youthful forays across Bulgaria and Romania to the coast of the Black Sea make the reader wish all of life were one long journey of slow mornings on Turkish divans, welcome platters of raki and Turkish delight, crackling firelight and long conversations in various languages... Even those who have never seen the Danube will be struck with nostalgia—not for the author's memories, but for their own, encapsulated in that same crystal mien of idealized youth..." —*Longitude* "A fitting epilogue to 20th-century travel-writing and essential reading for devotees of Sir Patrick's other works." --*The Economist* "How fitting, for a man so young at heart, with such a boundless appetite for life, that his last published words should be those of a wide-eyed 20-year-old, embarking on what will be a lifelong love affair with Greece. His editors, Colin Thubron and Artemis Cooper, have put this book to bed with skill and sensitivity. Friends and fans, acolytes, devotees and disciples can all rest easy. It was worth the wait." --Justin Marozzi, *The Spectator* "The youthful joy shines through, and the deep cultural learning that was superimposed in later years is there in sufficient quantity to lend wonder to this fragmented tale.... Anybody who loved its two preceding volumes will fall upon it hungrily. Anybody who has not read the two preceding volumes should do so without delay." --*The Scotsman* 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 Praise for A Time of Gifts and Between the Woods and the Water*, the first two volume in the trilogy: “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 author’s 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* “Those for whom Paddy’s prose is still an undiscovered country are to be envied for what lies ahead—hours with one of the most buoyant and curious personalities one can find in English.” — *The New York Sun* “Mr. Fermor...is a peerless companion, unbound by timetable or convention, relentless in his high spirits and curiosity.” — Richard B. Woodward, *The New York Times* “We are aware at every step that his adventure can never be duplicated: only this extraordinary person at this pivotal time could have experienced and recorded many of these sights. Distant lightening from events in Germany weirdly illuminates the trail of this free spirit.” — *The New York Times* “The young Fermor appears to have been as delightful a traveling companion as the much older Fermor a raconteur.” — *The Houston Chronicle* “[*A Time of Gifts*, *Between the Woods and the Water*] are absolutely delightful volumes, both for those who want to better understand what was lost in the violence of Europe’s 20th-century divisions and for those who appreciate the beauty and thrill of travel writing at its best.” — *The Houston Chronicle* “Leigh Fermor is recognizably that figure many writers of the past century have yearned to be, the man of action.” — *The Guardian* “He was, and remains, an Englishman, with so much living to his credit that the lives conducted by the rest of us seem barely sentient-pinned and paltry things, laughably provincial in their scope, and no more fruitful than sleepwalks. We fret about our kids’ S.A.T. scores, whereas this man, when he was barely more than a kid himself, shouldered a rucksack and walked from Rotterdam to Istanbul.” — Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker* “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*

Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915–2011) was an intrepid traveler and a heroic soldier who is widely considered to be one of the finest travel writers of the twentieth century. After his stormy school days, 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) and *The Broken Road* (published posthumously in 2013), 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. During 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. Leigh Fermor lived partly in Greece—in the house he designed with his wife, Joan, in an olive grove in the Mani—and partly in Worcestershire. In 2004 he was knighted for his services to literature and to British–Greek relations. Colin Thubron is the president of the Royal Society of Literature. Among his books are *The Lost Heart of Asia*, *Shadow of the Silk Road*, and most recently, *To a Mountain in Tibet*. Artemis Cooper is the author of the biography *Patrick Leigh Fermor: An Adventure* as well as the editor of *Words of Mercury*,

a collection of Leigh Fermor's writings. She has written several works of history, including *Cairo in the War*.