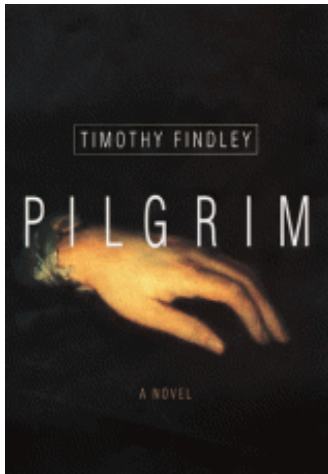


# Pilgrim

by Timothy Findley

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## About the Book

*"I have lived many times, Doctor Jung. Who knows, as Leda I might have been the mother of Helen--or, as Anne, the mother of Mary.... I was also crippled shepherd in thrall of Saint Teresa of Avila; an Irish stable boy and a maker of stained glass at Chartres.... I saw the first performance of Hamlet and the last performance of Moliere, the actor. I was a friend to Oscar Wilde and an enemy to Leonardo.... I am both male and female. I am ageless, and I have no access to death."*

On April 15, 1912--ironically the very date on which more than a thousand people lost their lives as the *Titanic* sank--a figure known only as Pilgrim tries to commit suicide by hanging himself from a tree. When he is found five hours later, his heart miraculously begins beating again. This isn't his first attempt to end his life, and it is decided that steps must be taken to prevent Pilgrim from doing himself further harm.

Escorted by his beloved friend, Lady Sybil Quartermaine, Pilgrim is admitted to the famous Burgholzi Psychiatric Clinic in Zurich, where he will begin a battle of psyche and soul with Carl Jung, the self-professed mystical scientist of the unconscious--who is also a slave to his own sexual appetites.

Hungry for intellectual and spiritual challenge, Jung is fascinated by this compelling and enigmatic patient who refuses to speak. Slowly, though, Jung coaxes him to reveal the astonishing story of his existence. Pilgrim claims to be ageless and sexless, having lived as both male and female for four thousand years. Asserting that he has witnessed the greatest events of human history, he recounts his involvement with numerous figures who have shaped world culture, including Leonardo da Vinci, Oscar Wilde, and Henry James.

For Jung, probing this patient's mind proves a challenge that is both frustrating and enlightening. Is Pilgrim delusional? Are his memories only dreams or something far more fantastic? Is it madness or a miracle? These interactions with Pilgrim have a profound and unexpected effect on the esteemed and controversial doctor's own life and sanity, for his

dreams soon become entwined with those of his patient's, while the anchor of his soul, his marriage, begins to disintegrate. The puzzle called Pilgrim will seemingly lead either to Jung's salvation--or his damnation.

Beautifully written, deeply evocative, and filled with a fascinating cast of historical characters, *Pilgrim* is both a richly layered story of a man's search for his own destiny and an absorbing, mind-expanding novel that explores the timeless questions of humanity and consciousness.

## Discussion Guide

1. One of the central questions of *Pilgrim* is the main character's sanity. Does your opinion change throughout the course of the novel? How does Findley make the reader constantly reevaluate that assessment? By the end do you think Pilgrim is a visionary, or mad? Could he both?
2. What is your interpretation of Pilgrim's journals? Are they actual memories, or a detailed fiction? Do you believe the authenticity of their stories? Why are most of the entries labeled as "dreams"? Is there any common thread between the different people Pilgrim claims to have been? How is the narrative voice of the journals different from the rest of the novel, and what does it reveal about the character of its author?
3. What is Sybil Quartermaine's relationship to Pilgrim? Is she insane? How was the attractive couple at the hotel Baur au Lac involved in her death? What does she mean by her parting words, "In the wilderness, I found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD... And I have made my sacrifice accordingly"?
4. What is the significance of Pilgrim's name? What is his pilgrimage and what does it mean to be a pilgrim? Jung, while reading the journals, is inspired to see his own journey as a pilgrimage: "I shall carry my notebook, of course. And perhaps a staff." What ultimately is Jung's pilgrimage? Does it change through the course of his work with Pilgrim, and does Jung reach his destination?
5. What kind of a husband is Jung? How is the state of his marriage a reflection on the state of his mind, and on his work? Do you agree with Jung when he tells Freud that marriage must allow for polygamous affairs? What is the price he pays for his own affairs? How does Jung repeatedly fail the women in his life: Emma, Sybil, Countess Blavinskeya?
6. Pilgrim bemoans, "I am tired of being captive to the human condition. Of being so endlessly a human being." What aspects of human life does he specifically find wearying? Most people would enjoy living multiple lives. Why do you think Pilgrim does not?
7. Pilgrim coaxes Jung to release an imaginary butterfly out a window, saying, "there it goes... you have set your imagination free at last." Does Pilgrim succeed in opening up Jung's imagination? To what degree does Jung come to believe in Pilgrim and his story, and what prevents him from believing fully? How does Pilgrim and Jung's relationship evolve, and at what point does Pilgrim become the doctor, and Jung, the patient?

8. How is Pilgrim's case an inspiration for Jung's theory of the collective unconscious? What does Jung's theory make of Pilgrim's "memories"? What does his revelation do to his relationship with the rest of the psychoanalytic community? What do you think the difference is between a mental breakdown and a mental discovery?

9. After a traumatic dream of the future, Pilgrim attacks the instruments in the clinic's Music Room, screaming, "damn all music! Damn all art! Damn all beauty! Kill! Kill! Kill!" Why does he have such antipathy toward art? Why does he attempt to burn Chartres? When he steals the Mona Lisa, why does he think, "She is free... I am free. We are free."?

10. Did the inclusion of the Author's Note at the end of the novel affect your appreciation of Findley's book? Were you surprised by the extent of historical realities in the novel? Was it difficult to digest a fictionalized account of real historic figures, or did the fact that many characters actually existed lend the novel a greater impact?

## Author Bio

Timothy Findley has received the Governor General's Award for Fiction, the Edgar Award, and the Chalmers Award, and is the only three-time recipient of the Canadian Authors Association Award, honored for fiction, non-fiction and drama. Among his nine novels, three short story collections, two books of non-fiction and three plays are *Dust to Dust*, *The Piano Man's Daughter*, *Headhunter*, *Famous Last Words*, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, *From Stone Orchard*, and *The Wars*. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada as well as Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France. Timothy Findley lives in Stratford, Ontario, and the south of France.

## Critical Praise

"Beautiful writing and extraordinary invention."

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