



## Pilgrim

By Timothy Findley  
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### About the Book

In an ironic twist of fate, shortly after more than 1,000 people perish on the Titanic, a man named Pilgrim hangs himself without success. When his faithful butler, Forster, cuts Pilgrim down from the tree, all signs of life have gone from his body. For five hours he remains certifiably deceased. And then, remarkably, he revives. This has happened before. His life-long confidant, Lady Sybil Quartermaine, whisks Pilgrim away to the famous Burgholzli Clinic in Zurich, to receive psychoanalytic treatment at the hands of the young doctor Carl Gustav Jung. There, confined to a ward of lunatics, including the eccentric Countess Blavinskeya, who believes she belongs on the moon, Pilgrim yearns only for death. As he reveals to Jung, Pilgrim has lived many past lives over the last four thousand years, as both men and women, and he has personally played a key role in many of the most historically significant moments of humankind. He has inspired St. Teresa of Avila, posed for Leonardo da Vinci, helped build Chartres cathedral, and befriended Oscar Wilde. And now Pilgrim is tired of the human condition. He has hopes that his latest incarnation will be the last and he is eager to swiftly

end it. As Jung grapples with his own doubts and his crumbling marriage, Pilgrim leads him on a journey into the life of one of "humanity's most interesting minds." Stretching Jung's imagination and his conception of reality, Pilgrim challenges Jung to reassess everything he ever thought he knew about the human mind. Pilgrim's detailed journals recounting his dramatic past lives prove to be the inspiration that spurs Jung to create his theory of the collective unconscious. Just as Jung begins to grasp the import of Pilgrim's words, Pilgrim effects a dramatic escape from the clinic. With assistance from Forster, he sets out to destroy mankind's greatest works of art, believing that their absence will draw attention to the fact that human creativity always seems to lose out in the face of human destructiveness. Exploring the timeless questions of humanity and consciousness, *Pilgrim* is Timothy Findley's most fascinating novel to date. **Topics for Discussion**

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?

**About the Author:** 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.