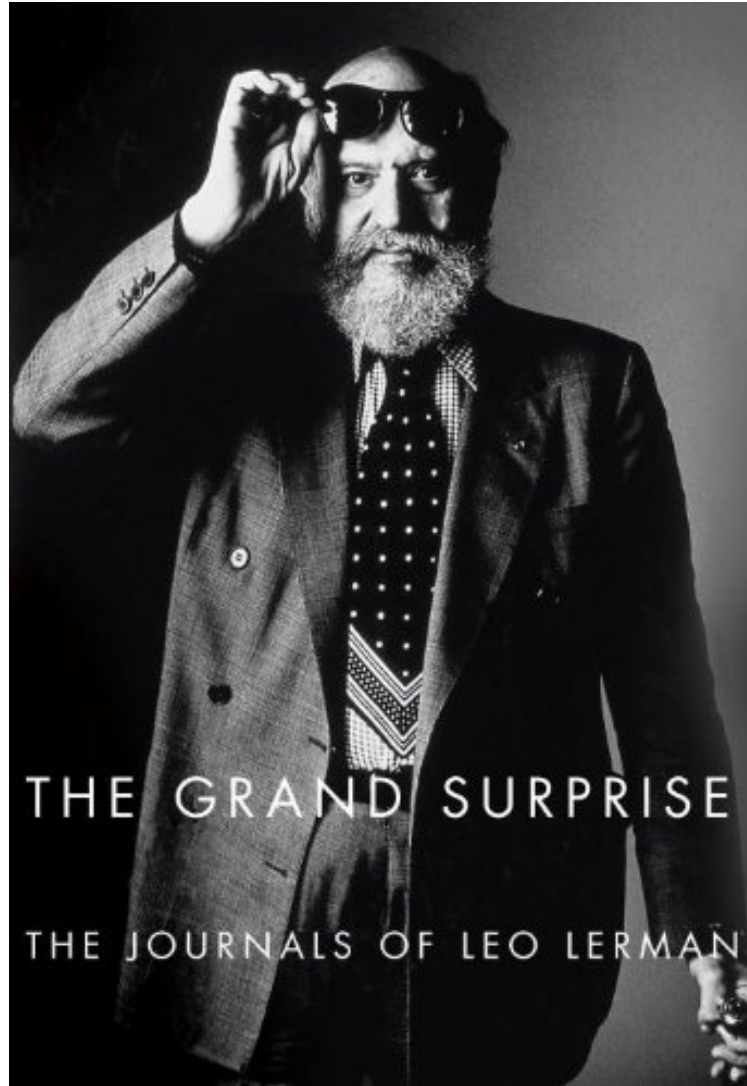


(Read now) The Grand Surprise: The Journals of Leo Lerman

The Grand Surprise: The Journals of Leo Lerman

Leo Lerman

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Leo Lerman : The Grand Surprise: The Journals of Leo Lerman before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Grand Surprise: The Journals of Leo Lerman:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Really made me think By Avid Reader As a memoir it isn't the kind of book you read straight through, though that's what I'm trying to do. I read a review of this book in the NYTimes when it first came out and it got good reviews, and mentioned a couple of anecdotes involving Marlene Dietrich, and I told myself: you have to get this! I waited WAY TOO LONG to purchase this! But what I'm getting out of it so much more than the funny, trivial, celebrity-driven gossip usually gets you in so many lesser writings. Yes, the stories are entertaining and certainly unique, about Maria Callas and Dietrich and Garbo and Monroe and Grace and that awful Elizabeth Taylor (he wasn't impressed with her). But when everything is said and done, they were still just people, and

THAT'S what excited him. I thought to myself, what did this guy ever do except have everybody over to his house for drinks every frigging night? Well, they talked. When you read this book what you will come away with is a man who just loved people, loved art, and wanted everybody to be comfortable and relaxed and themselves. He spent a lifetime doing that. And wrote it all down. I'm loving it!

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An acquired taste that you acquire as you read it

By John C. Mucci

While he may have been a pain in the ass, Leo Lerman knew everyone in 1940-1970s New York, and wrote endlessly about them. You cannot imagine the number of celebrities, soon-to-be celebrities, and would-be celebrities that graced his several homes. Without being an arrogant prick, he was certainly not rich, but traveled well, working for Conde Nast, and knew such people as Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote--the list would fill up practically the whole volume. But it is Leo's reflections on their relationship, and on the world of art, the spheres of culture, that make this a dazzling kaleidoscope of letters, diary-entries, and a few letters to him a delicious read.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Dishy fun

By Mindy Butler

If you love gossipy books about the NY arts scene (music, theater, publishing, fashion etc.), this is compulsively readable. Seems like Leo knew everyone who was anyone for decades during the first two-thirds of the 20th century, from Maria Callas to Marlene Dietrich to the founders of the New Yorker. Loved this so much after I read it from the library I bought a permanent copy!

A remarkable life and a remarkable voice emerge from the journals, letters, and memoirs of Leo Lerman: writer, critic, editor at Conde Nast, and man about town at the center of New York's artistic and social circles from the 1940s until his death in 1994. Lerman's contributions to the world of the arts were large and varied: he wrote on theater, dance, music, art, books, and movies for publications as diverse as *Mademoiselle* and *The New York Times*. He was features editor at *Vogue* and editor in chief of *Vanity Fair*. He launched careers and trends, exposing the American public to new talents, fashions, and ideas. He was a legendary party host as well, counting Marlene Dietrich, Maria Callas, and Truman Capote among his intimates, and celebrities like Cary Grant, Jackie Onassis, Isak Dinesen, and Margot Fonteyn as part of his larger circle. But his personal accounts and correspondence reveal him also as having an unusually rich and complex private life, mourning the cultivated world of 1930s and 1940s New York City, reflecting on being Jewish and an openly homosexual man, and intimately evoking his two most important lifelong relationships. From a man whose literary icon was Marcel Proust comes an unparalleled social and emotional history. With eloquence, insight, and wit, he filled his journals and letters with acute assessments, gossip, and priceless anecdotes while inimitably recording both our larger cultural history and his own moving private story. From the Hardcover edition.

From *Publishers Weekly*

Writing about the Ike and Tina Turner show at Carnegie Hall in 1971, Lerman notes, "Tina and Ike are primitive, outdoor water-closet...[she] turns them on with stupid smut. My father would have found them provocative." And while it is no surprise that Lerman, longtime features editor at *Vogue*, later editor-in-chief of *Vanity Fair* and all-round arts devotee, disliked them--his tastes ran more to Lotte Lenya singing Kurt Weill--it demonstrates that he was omnivorous in his desire to experience the full range of culture and entertainment. This broad, selection of Lerman's journals is filled with great gossip (on everything from Ruth Gordon's eating habits to architect Philip Johnson's sex life) and some astute remarks on art. Lerman (1914--1994) is a great diarist: the details are precise, the information careening from idiosyncratic to important, and his tone endlessly amused and amusing. While he can be peevish and even mean, he is also frequently funny and generous. The casual reader may be lost at times, but if you are moderately conversant with high art and high society--or just want to know what Princess Marina, duchess of Kent, wore to the Metropolitan Opera in September 1956, Lerman's journals are perfect. 24 pages of photos, 8 in color. (Apr. 6) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *The New Yorker*

Lerman, who died in 1994, was at the center of fashionable New York society for almost fifty years, thanks to his work at such magazines as *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*. The son of a housepainter in East Harlem, Lerman was drawn to "the surface glitter" of the elite, and he helped launch the careers of countless singers, writers, actresses, and artists. He was known for frugal but grand soirees--Marlene Dietrich emptied the ashtrays at one; William Faulkner stood in line with Maria Callas for Chinese food at another--but he never entirely lost his sense of being an outsider, or his feeling that magazine work was a distraction from "a life of letters." Lerman's diaries, interspersed with his correspondence and an unfinished memoir, form a rich, occasionally rueful mosaic of a man who collected friendships the way those around him collected wealth or accolades, and who, most of the time, seemed to find his life the better for it. Copyright copy; 2007 Click here to subscribe to *The New Yorker* Engrossing . . . In his review of *Period Piece* [a memoir by Charles Darwin's granddaughter], Lerman endorsed wit and humor; in books of recollections, and there is no shortage of either here. . . . The *Grand Surprise* exemplifies the qualities that Lerman himself sought out in the autobiographies and life recollections that an astonishingly successful autodidact with no more than a high school education--so avidly read: wit, respect for time past, profound feeling, a lack of cheap sentimentality, and above all an abiding sense, when others might have become jaded, of deep

“wonder” at the haut monde (as he liked to put it) of Art and Society to which he had struggled so hard to gain access. . . . To my mind, what makes *The Grand Surprise* most worth reading for anyone interested in the substance, rather than the coruscating surface, of the times and culture it describes is the scintillant quality of Lerman’s critical acumen. To read this book is, as it were, to witness a meteor shower of casually tossed-off insights into dance, theater, film, music, art, and literature of his day, and of the past. . . . I savored every page of his remarkable private writings —Daniel Mendelsohn, *The New York Times* “The Grand Surprise [is] a magnificent arrangement of [Leo Lerman’s] unpublished memoirs and correspondence. . . . Stephen Pascal, Lerman’s assistant for more than 12 years . . . deciphered and edited his former mentor’s journals with [Lerman’s longtime partner Gray] Foy’s help and privy knowledge, and hunted down hundreds of Lerman’s letters. In *The Grand Surprise*, Pascal resurrects and imposes order on a dazzling life in the scene-stealing language of the man who lived it. . . . Lerman [once complained] “I am fat with words”; Pascal has reshaped Lerm...