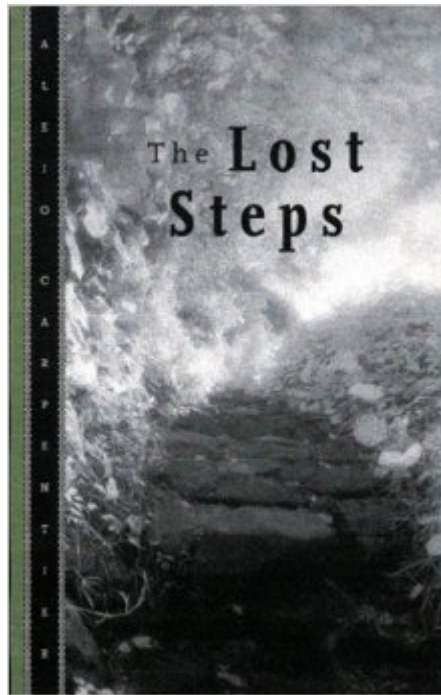


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# The Lost Steps



## Synopsis

Translated into twenty languages and published in more than fourteen Spanish editions, *The Lost Steps*, originally published in 1953, is Alejo Carpentier's most heralded novel. A composer, fleeing an empty existence in New York City, takes a journey with his mistress to one of the few remaining areas of the world not yet touched by civilization -- the upper reaches of a great South American river. *The Lost Steps* describes his search, his adventures, and the remarkable decision he makes in a village that seems to be truly outside history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The novel *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier is a beautifully told story of an anthropologist/composer who seeks to understand the often confusing world we live in. Fleeing an empty existence in New York City during the mid 1930's, Victor travels down to South America in search of primitive instruments and to discover their importance to the indigenous cultures he will encounter there. Venturing deeper and deeper into the jungle, Victor feels as though he is traveling farther and farther into history and farther away from his chaotic life of New York City. The simplistic and peaceful lives of the many tribes he finds deep in the jungle, and their beautiful musical instruments and primitive beats, cause for deep thought in Victor because of the almost overwhelming difference between the world he finds himself in and the world of the United States. This great contrast sets forth an amazing story both of adventure and deep intellectual thought of this time period. The book will take one on a journey into the depths of the human mind, the streets of New York City, and into the dense South American jungle. Never boring, the book is a page

turner and will entice each and everyone who reads the book to travel, think and understand what was going on in the United States during the 30's- both the good and the bad. The book also sets up great discussion between intellectuals who know and understand the study of primitive instruments. The book is beautifully written, beautifully told and is simply great. This is a must to read to let your mind go into the deep jungle and into the concrete streets.

I've read thousands of novels that I cannot remember clearly, and this is one that has stayed with me for more than 20 years. I have thought of it repeatedly the last few months while walking in the woods and observing how the trails change with the seasons (a crucial part of the plot) and thinking about what life would be like if we were cut off from civilization the way the main character in this book is. The theme of this book is as beautifully executed as a classic opera and is especially meaningful if you are a music lover. I'm delighted to know that the book is still in print so that I can easily reread it and give it as a gift to people important to me.

This great adventure novel was first published in 1953 and many of the scenes in this book seem prototypes for others I've come across in Latin American fiction. It is a story of a modern, educated, well traveled man, fleeing from the horrors of Europe leading up to WWII, to the Americas, who is then transposed into a world where the people still live in the stone age, a hidden city in the jungle and a bubble in time. Our hero & narrator dreamed when young of becoming a great musician, but has long since sold himself out just for the sake of earning a living. He rarely sees his wife, an actress, because they both have busy schedules that seldom coincide. One day a fated encounter with a museum curator he knew in his youth leads him to a mission into the jungle to find and bring back the most primitive of musical instruments and to gain anthropological insights on the origins of music. The musician, who begins the trip with his mistress, ends up on his own cut off from civilization. In the jungle he at last able to find an inner peace and happiness, he finds a new woman, regains his health & vigor and at last is able to release the musical score he has always known was inside him. By the time his wife has a plane sent in as a publicity stunt to rescue him, he does not want to return. This novel is deeply philosophical, in the end our musician can no longer find a place in either world, and the message is we can't go back, also theories about early humans which have been arrived at only by studying archaeological artifacts can only be flawed, to quote "New worlds had to be lived before they could be analyzed".

Unfulfilled by writing commissioned film scores and disillusioned by the pretence and vacuity of his

life in New York, a composer takes up an offer to go to the jungle to look for the rudimentary musical instruments that would provide evidence of a theory about the origin of music that he had developed as a student. The original plan of taking the money and his lover and defrauding the university so that they could enjoy an extended holiday in South America goes badly wrong when they unexpectedly get caught up in a revolution there and are forced into the jungle. Travelling at first with his mistress from New York and then with a mestizo lover taken up along the way, the book describes in wonderful Baroque prose the awesome scale and sense of time reversal that he experiences in his dark, dripping travels into a world of perpetual greenness. He senses that he is retracing the steps of humanity. Finally, deep in the jungle he is faced with having to make an almost mystical choice about his life and life work. The 'simple' life is uncompromisingly portrayed in its pitiless and raw brutality and yet somehow the 'noble savage' still retains the essence of humanity, a survivor in the natural world stripped of the worthless accoutrements and gadgets of modern life. This is at once adventure, allegory, love story, morality tale, and academic tract, but above all it is storytelling at its majestic best, a minor masterpiece of post-war literature. Carpentier was the first writer to coin the phrase 'magical realism' where myths, fables and religion are interwoven into narratives without faithful adherence to time or reality. The form is taken to its extreme in Garcia Marquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch*, and these two authors remain magical realism's most accomplished exponents. Although the style has influenced writers worldwide, for me it doesn't seem to work beyond Latin America.

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