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Prospero's Cell (Faber Library 4): Guide To The Landscape And Manners Of The Island Of Corfu



Synopsis

A guide to the landscape and manners of the island of Corfu.'One of Lawrence Durrell's best books - indeed, in its gem-like miniature quality, among the best books ever written.' Freya Stark'This charming idyll depicts the country life and cosmopolitan society of Corfu in the years immediately before the war . . . The matter of it is as sound as the story is delightful.' Sunday Times'Corfu, that Ionian island whose idyllic yet blood-stained history goes back the best part of a thousand years, could not have found a fitter chronicler than Mr Durrell. For he is a poet, with all a poet's sensibility, and a humanist to boot, with a keen eye for character and a scholar's reverence for antiquity.' Daily Telegraph

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Durrell's first literary travel essay-book, assembled from a diary he kept from 1935 -1939 in Corfu, described in his luscious impressionistic prose as paradise. Part cultural history, part diary of intense sense impressions, interwoven with anecdotes and conversations with locals, perfect summer reading for an island vacation.

The author describes life in pre-World War II Corfu. So eloquent, beautiful, engaging in language. I loved it!

I'm very fond of this author. I like very much how he describes scenarios, I feel myself wandering in the greek islands.

The setting for Shakespeare's "Tempest" is the Greek island of Corfu, argues one of the characters in this book, expounding on a deeply held belief of its author. The 'presiding genius' of Corfu, or as it was once called, Corcyra, is none other than Zeus Pantocrator. For the readers of his island books, the genius of place is Lawrence Durrell. According to the introduction by Carol Peirce (University of Baltimore, 1996), "Durrell composed "Prospero's Cell" as if it were a journal or diary of a year and a half on [Corfu]..." from April 1937 to September 1938, with a somber postscript from 1941 where he writes of friends already dead in the war. The war is a flat gray shadow, throwing the brilliance of Durrell's landscapes and dazzling Greek villages into intense relief. Reflections of a lost time are collected and focused through the genius of place--Durrell, himself. Some of his most beautiful passages in "Prospero's Cell," indeed in all of his island books, take place under water. Here, the author goes carbide fishing one night: "Presently the carbide lamp is lit and the whole miraculous under-world of the lagoon bursts into a hollow bloom... Transformed, like figures in a miracle, we gaze down upon a sea-floor drifting with its canyons and forests and families in the faint undertow of the sea--like a just-breathing heart." Bright surfaces. Submerged longings. As Durrell floats in the blood-warm sea, he thinks, "One could die like this and wonder if it was death. The density, the weight and richness of a body without a mind or ghost to trouble it." This book is partly the landscape of Corcyra, and partly a landscape of dreams. There are stories of vampires, saints, and 'kallikanzaros,' which is a Greek term for little cloven-hooved satyrs, who cause mischief of every kind. "Prospero's Cell" is one of a series of 'landscape books' that Durrell wrote about his pre- and post-war experiences in and around the Mediterranean. The other books in this series are "Reflections on a Marine Venus: A Companion to the Landscape of Rhodes," "Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel," "Bitter Lemons," and "Sicilian Carousel." Ultimately, these island books defy categorization. Durrell wrote about the peculiar genius of a place, not bound by any moment in time, but for all time.

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