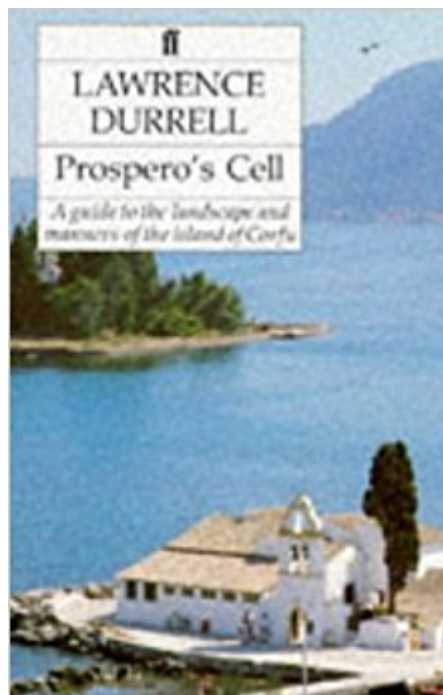




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Prospero's Cell: A Guide To The Landscape And Manners Of The Island Of Corfu (Greece)



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

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Customer Reviews

Lawrence Durrell was born in 1912 in India. He attended the Jesuit College at Darjeeling and St Edmund's School, Canterbury. His first literary work, *The Black Book*, appeared in Paris in 1938. His first collection of poems, *A Private Country*, was published in 1943, followed by the three Island books: *Prospero's Cell*, *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, about Rhodes, and *Bitter Lemons*, his account of life in Cyprus. Durrell's wartime sojourn in Egypt led to his masterpiece, *The Alexandria Quartet*, which he completed in southern France where he settled permanently in 1957. Between the Quartet and *The Avignon Quintet* he wrote the two-decker *Tunc and Nunquam*. His oeuvre includes plays, a book of criticism, translations, travel writing, and humorous stories about the diplomatic corps. *Caesar's Vast Ghost*, his reflections on the history and culture of Provence, including a late flowering of poems, appeared a few days before his death in *Sommières* in

1990.

Delightful and an enjoyable read.

slow but interesting book about a place unlikely to every be visited by most readers

A nice read for a lazy day.

The book itself is wonderfully poetic, I share the enthusiasm of the previous reviewers. The introduction by Mr. Winchester left an unpleasant taste in my mouth, however. Although I found the information about the political situation in Corfu at the time very interesting, further on he makes some totally unnecessary and condescending comments about the books of Gerald Durrell.

I love all of Lawrence Durrell's books!

Before tackling *The Alexandria Quartet*, I thought I'd try something shorter by the author first. Since I had enjoyed Gerald Durrell's hilarious accounts of the Durrell family in Corfu, it seemed interesting to compare what his brother had to say about the island. I didn't expect the books to be similar. Gerald was a child in Corfu; Lawrence was a young man newly married, so naturally their outlooks and memories would be quite different, not to mention their writing styles. What I didn't expect was that the structure of the book is a mess. It seems to have been thrown together with no overall design. A series of essays about life in Corfu would have been fine, and some chapters are like that. But other chapters consist of diary entries, complete with dates, from the start of his sojourn there to the end. So the book is organized neither chronologically nor by topic. It concludes with a potpourri of facts for the traveler and a selection of letters of Edward Lear, who also lived on Corfu. What a mishmash! Also annoying are things which Durrell ought to explain but never does. He refers many times to Corcyra, but never explains that this is just another name for Corfu (it took me a while to figure that out). Worse, from the second page, he refers to "N.", but never explains that she is his wife, or that her name is Nancy. What's the big secret? Some research reveals that in 1945, when the book was written, he and Nancy had separated, but the references to her in the book bear no malice. It's just that, oddly, the book presents her as someone of no importance. He never refers to the fact that his mother, two brothers, and sister were living on the island the whole time, aside from two minor offhand references to his brother (he doesn't mention which one, but it's evidently Leslie).

So apparently his family are of no importance, either. Strangely, in Gerald's Corfu books, Lawrence lived in the same house as the family (he actually had a separate house) and Nancy didn't exist. It's hard to know how much of both accounts is fiction, but now I'm suspicious. The very first sentence of Prospero's Cell is: "Some where between Calabria and Corfu the blue really begins." It goes on to describe the essence of the journey from Calabria, Italy, to Corfu, Greece. The language is lovely and poetic. But ... Calabria is the "toe" of Italy, nowhere near Corfu. If you were sailing from Italy to Corfu, you would leave from the "heel" of Italy, as Gerald in fact described the trip, not Calabria. So why did Lawrence say Calabria? Couldn't he check his facts? I suspect that Gerald's humorous descriptions of his brother Lawrence as someone completely egotistical, who couldn't be bothered with anyone except himself, are not entirely exaggerated. It appears that Lawrence couldn't be bothered to check his facts, or to explain things to the reader, or even to plan the book with a consistent structure. If the reader suffers, too bad.

This book was not what I thought it would be. Instead of it being a guide to Corfu, it was a daily journal of some of the author's experiences and conversations with his friends in Corfu. The book was difficult for me to read because of the author's style of writing. There is a lot of Ancient Greek history and mythology, philosophy and a mixture of Greek spelled words both names of people and places. I have read other books on the Durrell family in Corfu and like them very much.

It's too erudite for me.

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