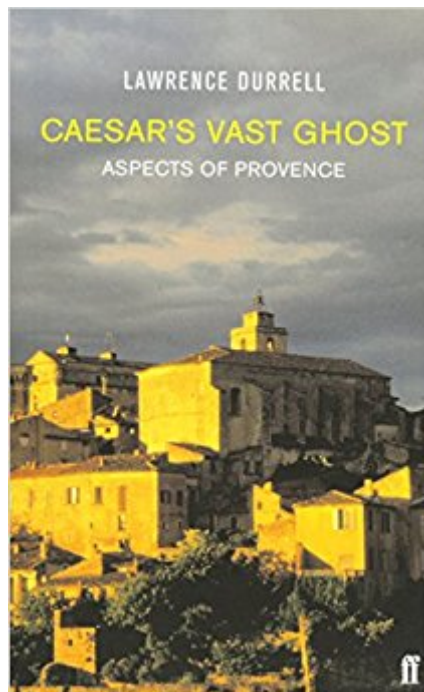


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Caesar's Vast Ghost



Synopsis

Provence, where Lawrence Durrell lived for thirty years, is the motif of this final work, published just before his death. It is a highly personal and unusual book, part travelogue, part writer's notebook, part autobiography. It preserves memories from his intimate experience of the Midi, and scattered through the evocative text are nineteen poems inspired by the genius of the place.'A richly characteristic bouillabaisse by our last great garlicky master of the vanishing Mediterranean, our old Prospero of the south; poet, travel writer, novelist and fumiste . . .' Richard Holmes, The Times

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The noted novelist's sixth travel book explores the history and culture of Provence, where he has lived for more than three decades. Although not quite on the same level as *Bitter Lemons* (Dutton, 1959), which focused on the political tensions over Cyprus in the 1950s, *Vast Ghost* has all the characteristics of Durrell's travel books: brilliant descriptive passages, esoteric theories on love and culture, colorful local characters, and bizarre sexual escapades. (The book concludes with the author escorting a "Latex doll of great beauty" to a water party on the Rhone.) Durrell won't win over any converts, but those who enjoyed his previous travel writings won't be disappointed either.-

Donald P. Kaczvinsky, Louisiana Tech Univ., RustonCopyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 Sommieres in 1990.

very self indulgent. The one interesting bit was the translation of the criterion used in valuing a Lover in the "Courts of Love". Durrell was pickled and tired by the time he wrote this...

A very literary and imaginative impression of Provence. There were patches of interest and then stretches of flightiness that I find dull. Once I settled into a pattern of skim reading where Durrell 'goes off on one' and just settling on the more informative sections, it went well. If you try to give everything equal attention, it'll go slowly.

This is one of my two favorite books on Provence, the other being Ford Maddox Ford's book "Provence". Durrell spent his last years in Provence and this book does a great job of capturing its history and culture. Mayle's books are fun, junk food; this book is a seven course, five-hour meal at a three-star Michelin restaurant.

Durrell's writing is always intriguing if you can fight your way through his obscure allusions and off-beat thinking, and this reminiscence of Provence (I imagine his last book - it ends with a goodbye) is typical: beautiful in the places where he stays grounded but prone to unintelligible flights of fancy. It covers the history and geography, bullfights and bowling games, chasms and conquerors, of the Languedoc area with an infectious personal passion, so it is inspiring as a travelog; but there are inaccuracies that bar it from guide status. (He has Julius Caesar (about 90 BC to 40 BC) involved in colonizing Provence at 122 BC, and rescuing local statues in 65 AD.) An enthralling browse, but expect to skip parts.

Durrell's long experience in the region allowed him to discuss many of the more obscure aspects of Provence and its history. It is part history, part memoir, part poetry. The book should be read for its

value as entertainment and to gain a sense of Provence & its history, but I do not feel that it would be a suitable source of accurate historical information. Upon further investigation of many events that Durrell talks about, I discovered that he presented only one side of a situation about which there is no current consensus or agreement among academics/historians. Finally, I found the last chapter of the book quite bizarre, and admit that I got very little out of it. Citing the above qualifications, I recommend this book for those interested in Provence (with the added bonus that Durrell's writing is a thing enjoyable in itself).

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