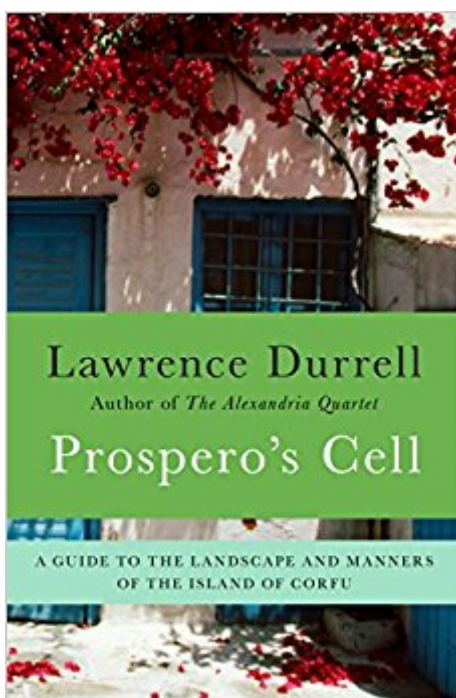


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Prospero's Cell: A Guide To The Landscape And Manners Of The Island Of Corfu



Synopsis

From a member of the real-life family portrayed in *The Durrells in Corfu*, this memoir of the idyllic Greek island is "among the best books ever written" (The New York Times). Before Lawrence Durrell became a renowned novelist, poet, and travel writer, he spent four youthful years on Corfu, an island jewel with beauty to match the long and fascinating history within its rocky shores. While his brother, Gerald, was collecting animals as a budding naturalist, Lawrence fished, drank, and lived with the natives in the years leading up to World War II, sheltered from the tumult that was engulfing Europe "until finally he could ignore the world no longer. Durrell left for Alexandria, to serve his country as a wartime diplomat, but never forgot the wonders of Corfu. In this "brilliant" journey through that idyllic time and place, Durrell returns to the land that made him so happy, blending his love of history with memories of his adventures there (The Economist). Like the blue Aegean, Prospero's Cell is deep and crystal clear, offering a perfect view straight to the heart of a nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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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