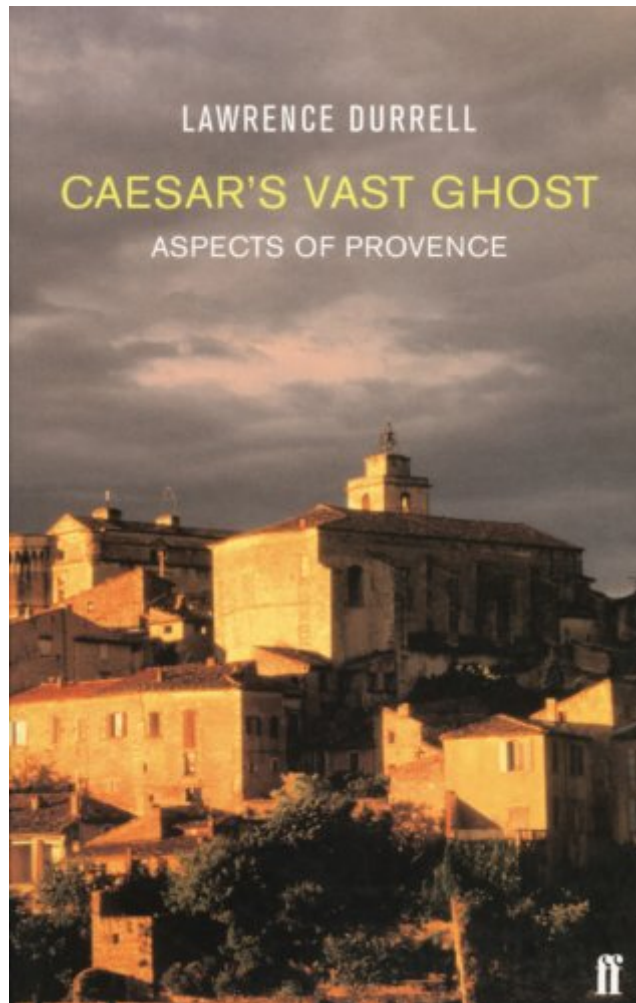




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Caesar's Vast Ghost: Aspects Of Provence



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

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Customer Reviews

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

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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