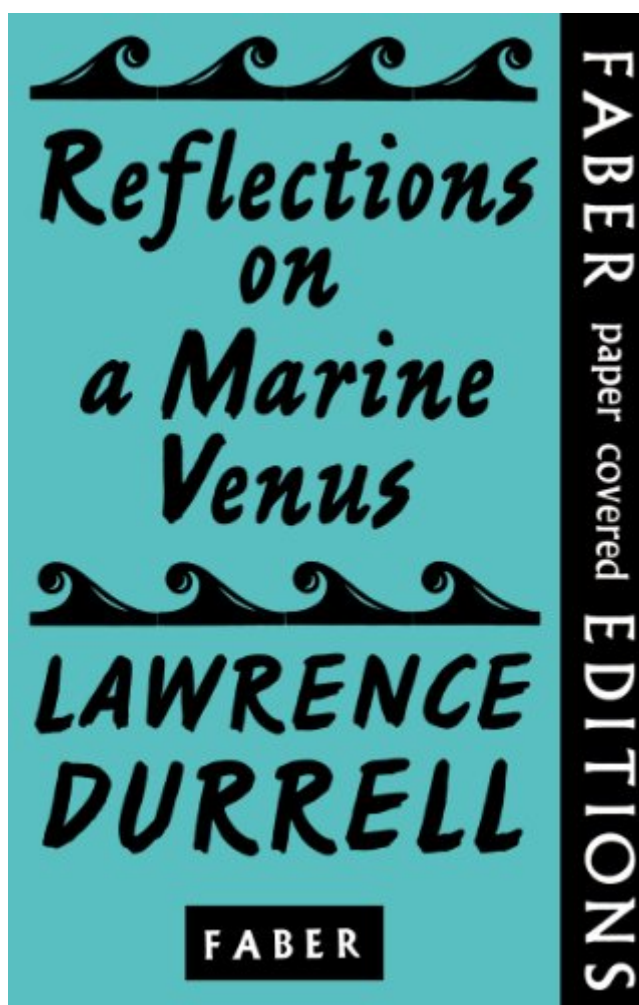


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Reflections On A Marine Venus: A Companion To The Landscape Of Rhodes



Synopsis

In his hugely popular *Prospero's Cell*, Lawrence Durrell brought Corfu to life, attracting tens of thousands of visitors to the island. With *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, he turns to Rhodes: ranging over its past and present, touching with wit and insights on the history and myth which the landscape embodies, and presenting some real and some imagined. With the same wit, tenderness and poetic insight that characterized *Prospero's Cell*, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* is an excellent introduction to the Eastern Mediterranean. 'How pleasant . . . to meet Mr Durrell, gloating over his enjoyment of a Greek island! . . . He excites a longing to leave for Rhodes at once.' Raymond Mortimer

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Customer Reviews

The 'marine Venus' of the title is a statue which was found by sailors in their nets at the bottom of Rhodes harbor and which much appealed to Durrell, who thought of her as the 'presiding genius' of the place. He began this book while assigned to Rhodes as an information officer in 1945, and finally finished it in Belgrade in 1952 while working as a press attaché for the British Embassy.

Before publication, it was chopped almost in half by his editor, Anne Ridler. She excised most of the passages dealing with the recent war, and "left the descriptions of the landscape and people....She oriented the book to sunlight, blue skies, and clear sea." [quoted from the introduction David Roessel]. War still clings like a gray film to the bright fabric of 'Venus.' Durrell writes intense, brilliant descriptions of Mediterranean skies and dazzling Greek villages, but as in all of his works that I've read, there is also a submerged longing for past love, past history, past glory. Some of his most beautiful passages, both in this book, in "Prospero's Cell," and in the books of "The Alexandria Quartet" take place under water. Here, the author goes for a midnight swim in the final chapter of "Reflections on a Marine Venus"---"The [moon]light filters down a full fathom or more to where, on the dark blackboard of weed, broken here and there by dazzling areas of milk-white sand, the fish float as if dazed by their own violet shadows which follow them back and forth, sprawling across the sea's floor." Bright surfaces. Submerged longings. There is even a ghost story floating just below the surface of a trip to the Island of Patmos. This chapter has some of the most powerful and eerie descriptions in the book. It brings together the storms of the 'little summer of Saint Demetrius', a lost, lingering voice from the war, and an Abbot who presides over a monastery where St. John was said to have composed the Books of the Apocalypse. "Reflections on a Marine Venus" is one of a series of travelogues that Durrell wrote about his pre- and post-war experiences in and around the Mediterranean. The other books in this series are "Prospero's Cell", "Spirit of Place," "Bitter Lemons," and "Sicilian Carousel." Ultimately, these books defy the description 'travelogue'. Durrell wrote about the peculiar genius of a place, not bound by any moment in time, but for all time.

This book made me fall in love with Durrell. It is simply wonderful. Combining elements of old and new Greek travel writing, this paints a wonderful picture of life in Greece. He does his best to show the rich history of Rhodes, a city of mysticism for its colossus.

Wonderful evocative poetic prose. Durrell surpassed himself. Even now it still inspires one to visit and experience Rhodes, and Greece.

Just...read it.

Erudite, personal but not as good as the 'BITTER LEMONS OF CYPRUS' or the more complex, lengthy, and challenging 'ALEXANDRIA QUARTET'.

I am not an avid reader but this book changed my way of thinking about history. it gave such a vivid picture of the setting and challenges of post wwII greece I would recc this to anyone.

I haven't received this!

...to see them after many years and in different circumstances." So wrote Lawrence Durrell, in his epilogue to this marvelous account of the island of Rhodes specifically, and more generally, the Dodecanese Islands, which are in the Aegean Sea, off the southwest coast of Turkey. Durrell arrived at Rhodes, from Egypt, within a month of V-E day, 1945. He was (loosely) attached to the British forces which occupied the island, as a Press AttachÃ©, and, as he rather wryly notes, a "censor." Rhodes had been part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912, when it was seized, and to some degree colonized by Italy. The Germans took it from their one-time ally in 1943. Rhodes sustained substantial war damage in World War II, including numerous aerial bombardments. The harbor was littered with sunken ships, and unmarked mine fields deterred casual wanderings. Such a mine field would take the life of his friend, Gideon. This book is an account of these islands, from the perspective of his two-year stay there, 1945-47, when the British authorities returned the islands to Greece. Even though I had previously read Durrell's *A Bitter Lemon* of Cyprus and *Providence*, I was stunned by the display of erudition in this book. He is also an acute and sensitive observer, and there are passages that are pure poetry. He displays a deep love for Rhodes (he calls himself an "Islomane," that is, a lover of islands), and one of his tributes is as follows: "...the landscape put her nymph's arms about human habits, beliefs, styles of minds so that imperceptibly they are overgrown by the fine net of her caresses... the island's green and gentle self..." I grew up reading the columns of the naturalist, Joseph Wood Krutch, in the NY Times, and have subsequently read *The Desert Year* and *Twelve Seasons* (Essay index reprint series). Durrell is Krutch's equal, in his ability to render deeply descriptive passages of the natural world, and in the appendix, he "walks" you through the seasons, just like Krutch would. Durrell is fluent in Greek, and thus is able to enjoy the islanders on their own terms. He, and a couple of his English friends, tour Rhodes, by car when necessary, by foot by preference. Early in his stay, they manage a tour of the other islands by boat, and that includes a visit with the abbot of the monastery at Padmos, purportedly the island where St. John wrote the Apocalypse. In alternating chapters he relates the present and the past. Rhodes was a base for part of the Crusades (I didn't know that 70,000 humans were slaughtered when Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders in 1099). The Knights Templar was a strong force on the island for centuries. The author also devotes an entire chapter to

one of the "wonders of the ancient world," the Colossus. It really did exist, for 56 years, until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 227 BC. As for the title, it was a statue that was raised from the harbor during the clearing of the wartime detritus. He says of her: "She sits in the Museum of the island now, focused intently upon her own inner life, gravely meditating upon the works of time...the preoccupation of a stone woman inherited from a past whose greatest hopes and ideals fell to ruins. Behind and through her the whole idea of Greece glows sadly, like some broken capital, like the shattered pieces of a graceful jar, like the torso of a statue to hope." Durrell was a good friend of Henry Miller, and greatly admired his first work, *À Tropic of Cancer*, which has prompted a desire in me to re-read it. And, of course, Miller, who spent time on the beaches of Rhodes with Durrell, was also influenced, writing *À The Colossus of Maroussi* (Second Edition). I've been thinking a lot about the Mediterranean lately. The "inland sea" that nurtured those who laid the foundation for Western civilization. As Durrell sees it: "Italy and Greece, if you like, the lovers: the Italy of the domestic arts, the passionate feeling for husbandry and family order, the feeling of a vineyard built with the fingers, pinch by pinch, into terraces of household wine: Italy that conquers as a wife or nurse, encroaching on nature with the arts of love. Then Greece: the vertical, masculine, adventurous consciousness of the archipelago, with its mental anarchy and indiscipline touched everywhere with the taste for agnosticism and spare living: Greece born into the sexual intoxication of the light..." Ah, how fortunate Durrell was, to see and appreciate where "the story truly all began." To have a balcony, and be able to gaze out on the Med, would be true happiness. Going home to one's roots is long overdue, and Durrell is such an excellent guide. 5-stars, plus.

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