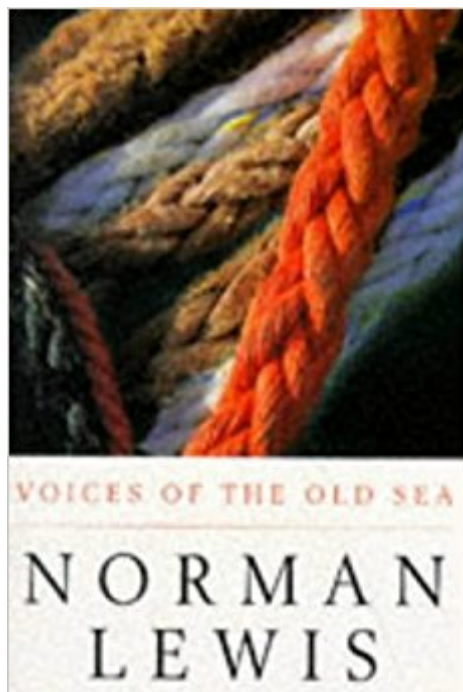


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Voices Of The Old Sea



Synopsis

Describes Norman Lewis's three post-war successive summers in the remote fishing village of Farol, on what is now the Costa Brava. The book records the villagers' struggle to sustain their precarious existence and to defend it against the enticements of tourist development.

Book Information

Paperback: 231 pages

Publisher: Picador (January 12, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0330345613

ISBN-13: 978-0330345613

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 15 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #15,165,028 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #85 in Books > Travel >

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Customer Reviews

"Lewis really goes deep, like a sharp, polished knife." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

8 1-hour cassettes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the best books I've read in a long time. Norman Lewis is a fine writer, not well known in the US. Around 1950, with little visible means of support, he spent parts of several years in a small fishing village somewhere south of Barcelona--working on fishing boats and chronicling a dying way of life. The villagers' culture, rituals, and beliefs were pre-modern to say the least, perhaps going back one or more millennia--but already in the early stages of being swept aside by the coming tidal wave of the seaside tourism industry. Those who fought against Franco's army have to keep a low profile, and guard secrets. Lewis is a wonderful storyteller and great painter of characters, with eyes and ears for the tragedies and comedies of life. Not to be missed are his descriptions of the "cat village" where he lived, full of non-church going fishermen and their families, who follow ancient pagan rituals and superstitions--versus the nearby "dog village" of stolid,

God-fearing farmers who, of course, look down on the cat villagers while they also see their ancient culture slipping away..

Of course this is a wonderful book, easily gotten through, but whence the idea this is travel writing? It's one of several autobiographical books Lewis put out decades after his visits. This one first appeared in 1984 recounting three seasons he spent in the late 1940s in a remote Spanish fishing village. *Voices of the Old Sea* is more like an ethnography, but by someone who writes like no social scientist - descriptively, ironically, and with some kind of love for the people he's studying. It's a primitive world Lewis remembers. You'll be shocked by his images of animal cruelty - bear baiting, dog starving, dolphin maiming. But that is part of the whole package. Throughout, we get a sense of an unstoppable vanishing. Farol and Sort, its sister village two miles away, are as different from each other as they are from the rest of Spain. In a little while, the hustlers and the tourists will discover them and we'll just have this book to record what's lost. Would it have hurt this publisher to include a map locating Farol and Sort in relation to Barcelona and Gerona? We have no idea where they were or whether they exist anymore.

This is a sad story of tragic loss. Great reading or rather writing, of course, and obviously moving, but sad to be so fully and eloquently shown a way of life so rewarding, yet so tranquil in its simplicity, so totally destroyed by "development". Farol; a simple fishing village in the old Spain, had the misfortune of being on that coast eventually exploited and destroyed as the "Costa Brava". The author, after a rather tough time in WWII sought out a retreat in the then isolated region just as it was identified by the Spanish government and local entrepreneurs as being "suitable for substantial development as a holiday destination". Which development, of course, not only destroyed the village, its daily life and annual cycles, but the whole culture of the inhabitants. Lewis painstakingly, over three seasonal domiciles, earned acceptance from the fisher-folk, carefully not to transgress local taboo - no leather on the boats - he gained a grudging place, and was reluctantly given recognition, as an almost honorary local, even to his own "beautifully wrecked" chair outside the local bar. He sought a 'sense of place' just at the time that it was torn from the villagers, and their age-old dependence on their local shamans and natural leaders. The story of that journey to acceptance and the all too rapid evaporation of the mores of such simple rustic values by the corruptions of development and tourism - headed mainly by a former bandit of this arid region with its villages of cat lovers contesting with the village of dog owners - is a fascinating read. As Cyril Connolly wrote ... "Lewis is able to write about the back of a bus and make it interesting" Here Lewis

had a far more significant subject - a community in its still hopeful death throes in the path of 'progress'.

This is truly great travel writing. Prior to the 1950s, Lewis visited the coast of Catalonia several times to get away from England and to experience more of the country he loved. His stories are gentle, respectful accounts of the people he met and the friendships he made. He gives the reader a special view of life in coastal Catalonia (now known as the Costa Brava) that existed before it was transformed into a hot European tourist destination. He also gives the reader a first-hand look into the transformation as it happened. The fishing stopped. Centuries old local customs and unusual traditions vanished in just in a few years. Traditions were replaced by expediency. The simple life was replaced by profit-seeking. Authentic life experiences were replaced by manufactured ones, mainly designed to meet the false expectations tourists had of Spain.

Although "Naples, 44" is often cited as Norman Lewis' best work (and is well worth reading), "Voices of the Old Sea" is saturated with all the best attributes of Lewis' writing, i.e., a keen descriptive eye, humor, and empathy with the people/culture described. The setting, Mediterranean Spain ... the time, before the tourists came. It's a fascinating look at a society that no longer exists ... with all its quirks, eccentricities, traditions, and ways of viewing the world.

I bought my first Norman Lewis book as a sale item on a rack (Tomb in Seville). I have now read 4 of his globetrotting books and have enjoyed every one of them. This one was right on the money though after recently visiting a few coastal towns in Spain I used his book to take me back to how it used to be from what it has now turned into.

An interesting read. Even if it seems to wander a lot.

Literate, traveller, teacher, observer, the mold of this type of travelling and beautiful prose will not be seen again, please appreciate his genius and take heart

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