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The Spanish Temper



Synopsis

Eliciting comparisons to Orwell's Homage to Catalonia, Pritchett's meditative work on Spain is comprised of a string of sketches, woven around the author's musings on the Spanish character. Having lived in Spain for four years during the 1920s, Pritchett is well placed to deliver such a report, and his resulting narrative is both well informed and delightfully written. Victor Sawdon Pritchett (1900-1997) was born over a toyshop in 1900 and, much to his everlasting distaste, was named after Queen Victoria. A writer and critic, his is widely reputed to be one of the best short story writers of all time, with the rare ability to capture the extraordinary strangeness of everyday life. He died in 1997.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am fascinated with Spain and I admire V.S. Pritchett. So his book THE SPANISH TEMPER was a natural for me. He wrote it in 1954, based on living there for two years in the Twenties, visiting again in the mid Thirties, and extensive travels in the early Fifties. The book is part travelogue and part history, with the connective tissue being an exploration of the Spanish essence, or "temper". Its portrayal of Spain is now rather dated (Franco's autocracy still prevailed in 1954), but nevertheless there is enough of interest and relevance. Plus there is Pritchett's superlative prose, which might prove to be timeless. The structure of the book is a meandering trip through Spain, beginning in the Basque provinces and then slowly heading south, through Madrid and on to Andalusia, then northeastwards, up the Mediterranean coast to Barcelona. It is by no means comprehensive.

Rather, Pritchett dawdles over topics that interest him, among them: the Escorial ("the mausoleum of Spanish power"), the Spanish preoccupation with death, Cervantes and Don Quixote, Don Juan, bullfighting (the best overall account I have read), and gypsies and cave-dwellers. There are various small incidents of note. For example, Pritchett encountered three blind peasant women at a fork on a deserted country road; they were headed towards Vigo and were afraid they might take the wrong turn; they were not beggars or gypsies, but they were on a one-hundred-and-fifty mile sojourn . . . on foot. Then there was the cafe-proprietor of whom Pritchett asked which side was responsible for destroying the bridge over the Ebro during the Civil War; he said, "the others

One of the best and most friendly book on Spain and the spaniards. Pritchett does a clever, realistic and affectionate balance between virtues and mistakes of "the spanish temper". For all of us that loves dear Spain, an entertaining reading, a book for all hours.

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