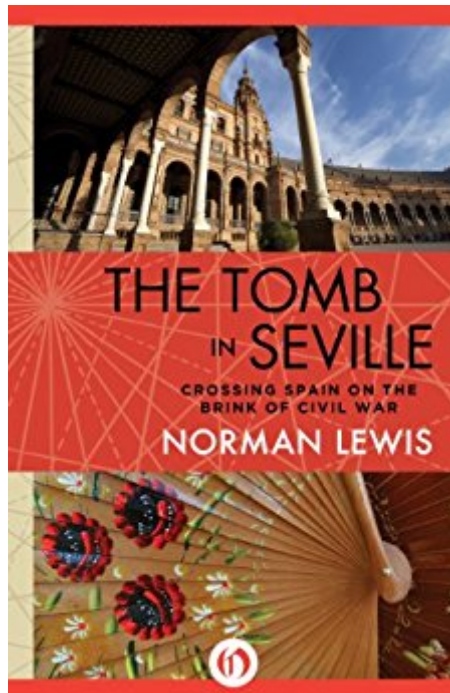


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The Tomb In Seville: Crossing Spain On The Brink Of Civil War



Synopsis

The last work of renowned travel writer Norman Lewis: a thrilling adventure through 1930s Spain on a pilgrimage to the tomb of a Spanish ancestor. In the 1930s, Norman Lewis and his brother-in-law, Eugene Corvaja, journeyed to Spain to visit the family's ancestral tomb in Seville. Seventy years later, with evocative and engrossing prose, Lewis recounts the trip, taken on the brink of the Spanish Civil War. Witnesses to the changing political climate and culture, Lewis and Corvaja travel through the countryside from Madrid to Seville by bus, car, train, and on foot, encountering many surprises along the way. Dodging the skirmishes that will later erupt into war, they immerse themselves in the local culture and landscape, marveling at the many enchantments of Spain during this pivotal time in its history.

Book Information

File Size: 1017 KB

Print Length: 160 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media; First Trade Paper Edition edition (July 30, 2013)

Publication Date: July 30, 2013

Language: English

ASIN: B00DU45UNK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #655,473 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #50

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Spain &

Portugal #127 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Spain & Portugal

#256 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > Spain & Portugal

Customer Reviews

Exquisite descriptions and a youthful disregard for danger mark Lewis' last book before his death at 95 in 2003. This final volume in a long and lauded career of travel writing and fiction looks back at the journey that got him started in 1934. It's actually a retelling of his first book, a mostly forgotten Wodehouse-inspired piece called "Spanish Adventure." The journey begins at the behest - and expense - of Lewis' father-in-law Ernesto Corvaja, a Sicilian of Spanish ancestry. In hopes of finding

his family fondly remembered in Seville, he sends his son Eugene Corvaja and Lewis to Spain to pay their respects to the Corvaja tomb. However, Spain is on the brink of its bloody civil war between the fascists and communists. The young men cross the border from France, with some delays and difficulties, to bask in the tranquil flow of life in San Sebastian. In contrast to France, "No one was in a hurry, or carried a parcel, and there were no clocks." Despite a few minor inconveniences - disrupted phone service, a sightseeing drive cut short by armed guards, a sinister police visit to their hotel - the two are chiefly discomfited by the closing of the local cabaret and equally reassured by its abrupt reopening. The next day an official "State of Alarm" is declared, the trains stop running and both experienced "a sensation that the personality of this town had undergone a remarkable change. The people of San Sebastian, as we had agreed, seemed to set great store by matters of personal deportment." But, "at this moment San Sebastian seemed full of running figures and queues had formed at the doors of food shops with desperate would-be customers struggling to get in. Such was the confusion that even the paseos were abandoned.

I have heard Norman Lewis referred to as the first really modern travel writer, but I wonder if that is true. Whether or not he was the first, however, the sheer volume and quality of Lewis's work do mark him out. *The Tomb in Seville* was his last book and was published posthumously in the autumn of 2003; he had died several months earlier at the age of 95. Lewis was born in 1908 - in London, but to Welsh parents. Both were ardent spiritualists, and his upbringing (described vividly in his first volume of autobiography, *Jackdaw Cake*, was strange. As a young man he pursued various ventures, including the motor trade and motor racing, and was married, quite young, to the daughter of a Sicilian of noble Spanish descent, Ernesto Corvaja. In September 1934, his father-in-law sent him on a mission to Seville in search of the Corvaja ancestral tomb, which Corvaja hoped would be found in the cathedral. His son, Eugene Corvaja, travelled with Lewis. *The Tomb in Seville* is the account of their journey. There are some very odd things about this book, not least that it appeared not just posthumously but nearly 70 years after the journey it described. At the time, at least one critic expressed wonder that Lewis should still be writing so well in his 90s, but one wonders if this book was actually written much earlier. It may be that Lewis intended it as part of *Jackdaw Cake*, published nearly 20 years before - but then held it back for some reason, so that it remained unfinished business for decades. Certainly it has the air of something written much sooner after the event than 70 years. Equally odd was the timing of their journey.

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