

Top review from United Kingdom



Martin Davies, The Barbary Press, Ibiza, Spain

[4.0 out of 5 stars](#) À la recherche . . .

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One hundred years after Proust finished his famous doorstopper, 'le temps perdu' is again the subject of a book that spans the middle ground between fiction and memoir. Barragan's undeniable gifts as a writer are particularly evident in a series of short tales she inserts into the main narrative, allowing readers to see how real-life events are re-imagined and transformed via a powerful artistic imagination, that age-old process of spinning straw into gold.

As a long-term resident of Ibiza, I found of particular interest the episodes set on the island from 1965 to 1966, and also the inside depiction of artistic and left-wing milieus in Buenos Aires, Cordoba (Argentina), Iowa City and rural Ontario. I was totally ignorant about the author's celebrated parent, Argentine-American printmaker Mauricio Lasansky (1915–2012), father of modern printmaking according to one august authority. The 'voyage round my father' is certainly a warts-and-all portrait, depicting his professional dedication side by side with dismal failings as a parent, son, husband, and even colleague. There is, of course, an obvious connection - what artistic genius has garnered posterity's praise as an outstanding family man or team player? Here we have the classic tortured soul who moves heaven and earth to gaze upon his favourite masterpieces, find a quiet place to nurture his creative dreams - and make sure his offspring follow, *mutatis mutandis*, in his footsteps. The rejection of any religious (Jewish) heritage, a constant theme throughout these pages (and in the lives of countless modern artists), had mixed results. It underpins so many New World dreams, forging a fresh identity to prevent 'the dead from commanding' (to rephrase Blasco Ibáñez's novel set in Ibiza).

The chronological arrangement is slightly awkward, interrupting the flow as periods, locations and characters are changed time and time again (46 switches altogether). A table of contents would also have been useful, and I drew up a family tree (constantly added to) which came in handy.

In short, this is a book packed with heartfelt reflections and intimate biographical nuggets which will enrich students of printing history for many years to come, while also providing food for thought for wordsmiths of every variety, professional and amateur alike. Barragan's writing is to be savoured from the very first page to the last, as borne out by these brief extracts:

"My plan was to write about one year on Ibiza – exhilarating, serene, memorable for its lasting impact. Alan and I stepped onto an island where ties to the natural environment, to history, to self-knowledge and dignity, became ours. Where the people, their dwellings, and the rhythm of life, became ours. That remarkable encounter ushered me from a protected youth toward maturity. Like flakes of glistening mica, the essences of Ibiza marked our future paths [. . .] When Alan and I think of Ibiza, we're always amazed it was little more than a year. By following in the footsteps of her agrarian culture – virtually unaltered for centuries – we experienced the pride of her people, the calm of landscapes and dwellings, the balance of rural grace and poverty. The ethos of that time and place has never left us."