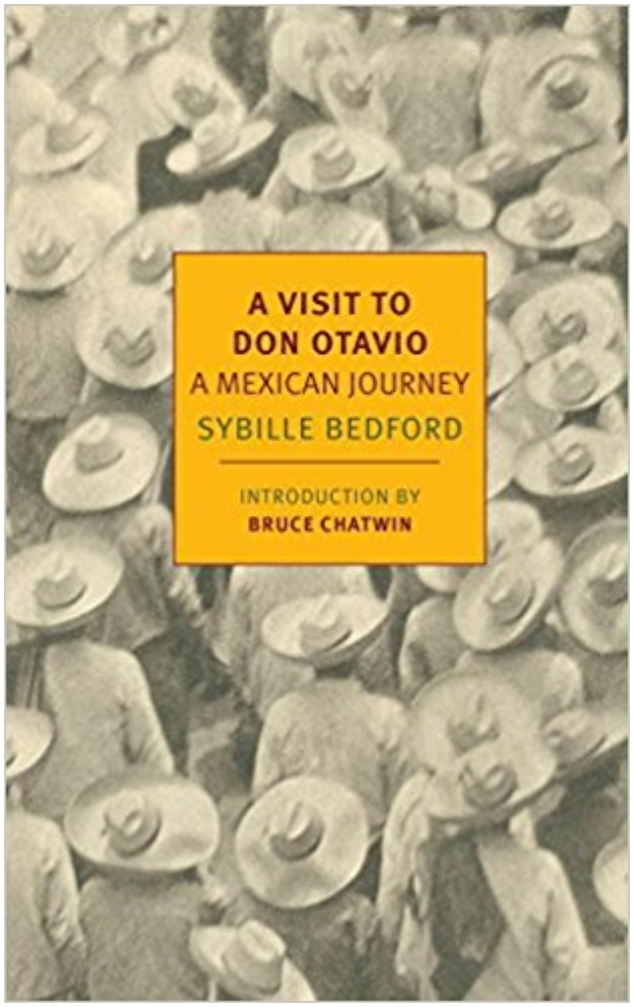
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A Visit To Don Otavio: A Mexican Journey (New York Review Books Classics)



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Synopsis

In the mid-1940s, Sybille Bedford set off from Grand Central Station for Mexico, accompanied by her friend E., a hamper of food and drink (Virginia ham, cherries, watercress, a flute of bread, Portuguese rosÃƒÂ©), books, a writing board, and paper.Ã Â Her resulting travelogue captures the violent beauty of the country she visited.Ã Â Bedford doesnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t so much describe Mexico as take the reader thereÃ¢â ¬â •in second-class motor buses over thousands of miles, through arid noons and frigid nights, successions of comida corrida, botched excursions to the coast, conversations recorded verbatim, hilarious observations, and fascinating digressions into murky histories. At the heart of the book is the Don Otavio of the title, the travelersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ gracious host, his garrulous family and friends, and his Edenic hacienda at Lake Chapala. Published in 1953, A Visit to Don Otavio was an immediate success, Ã¢â ¬Å“a travel book written by a novelist,Ã¢â ¬Â• as Bedford described it, establishing her reputation as a nonpareil writer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Bedford treats many aspects of Mexican culture and daily life with humor and grace: the slow passing of time, religious and civil fiestasÃ¢â ¬Â¦siestas and gunfights, bejeweled women an their sinful secrets, the musicÃ¢â ¬Â¦and political gossip.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Enrique Krauze, The New York Review of BooksÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Bedford is a beloved writer, and this travel memoir, originally published in 1953, brings all the same brillianceÃ¢â ¬Â¦Her impromptu trip is narrated in such amazing detail that youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll delay the end, hoping the adventure will go on and on.Ã¢â ¬Â•

Ã¢â ¬â •Claire Luchette, Travel + LeisureÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Before I am ready to call it quits, I would like to reread every book I ever deeply enjoyed, beginning with Jane Austen and Isaac Babel and Sybille BedfordÃ¢â ¬â„¢s A Visit to Don Otavio.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •William Maxwell Ã¢â ¬Å“A powerful response to landscape and to people. Mrs. Bedford has the art of putting one bodily in the country with all senses awake, and one emerges with her from the Mexican experience bruised, shocked, but elated and with oneÃ¢â ¬â„¢s brain turned on.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â Ã¢â ¬â •V. S. Pritchett, New Statesman"One of the great works of travel literature.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Benjamin Schwarz, The Atlantic Ã¢â ¬Å“Here is Bedford in all her glory: the adventurer, the Bohemian, the reporter, the philosopher, the aesthete. Far from rendering the text chaotic, it thrives on these contrasting dimensions, engaging the reader on multiple levels and conveying the full range of BedfordÃ¢â ¬â„¢s many talents. Above all, what comes across is her sense of jouissance and fascination with the world.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Hans Rollan, PopMatters Ã¢â ¬Å“An amusing yet highly serious interpretation of Mexico.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Shusha Guppy, The Paris Review Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A rare gem, poised, vivacious and with a delicate and finely-tuned sense of humor.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Barbara Kastelein, Inside Mexico Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Everyone, whether or not he plans to visit Mexico, should read A Visit to Don Otavio.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New Yorker Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Of all the women writers of this century, Sybille Bedford is, to my mind, the finest.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Julia Neuberger, Evening Standard Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“[Bedford] is capable of exercising a fine sort of detachment while telling an intensely personal story.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Virginia Lee Warren, The New York Times

Sybille Bedford (1911Ã¢â ¬â œ2006) was born Sybille von Schoenebeck in Charlottenburg, Germany, to an aristocratic German father and a partly Jewish, Hamburg-born mother. Raised variously in Germany, Italy, France, and England, she lived with her mother and Italian stepfather after her fatherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s death when she was seven, and was educated privately. EnÃ Â courÃ Â aged by Aldous Huxley, Bedford began writing fiction at the age of sixteen and went on to publish four novels, all influenced by her itinerant childhood among the European aristocracy:Ã Â A Legacy (an NYRB Classic),Ã Â Jigsaw (short-listed for the 1989 Booker Prize), and A Favourite of the Gods and AÃ Â Compass Error (forthcoming from NYRB in a single volume in 2017). She married Walter Bedford in 1935 and lived briefly in America during World War II, before returning to England. She was a prolific travel writer, the author of a two-volume biography of her friend Huxley, and a legal journalist, covering nearly one hundred trials. In 1981 she was awarded the Order of the British Empire. Bruce Chatwin (1940Ã¢â ¬â œ1989) was born in

Sheffield, England. He was appointed a director of SothebyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s at age twenty-five, but left to study archaeology at the University of Edinburgh and soon began a career as a travel writer for The Sunday Times Magazine. His 1977 book In Patagonia is considered a classic in the field of travel writing, and his 1988 novel, Utz, was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize.

An escape from the modern world. The descriptions of the onerous train trips and any kind of travel in that era are worth buying the book for. One of my favorite books

A fine book of travel writing, describing the author's trip in the late 1940s (first published in 1953). The author has the eyes and ears of a novelist, and a curiosity about the history.

I am puzzled by the euphoric high regard people like William Maxwell, V. S. Pritchett, and Bruce Chatwin had for Sybille Bedford book about a year in Mexico, mostly spent sponging off a member of the largely disposed elite, called Don Otavio, on the shores of Lake Chapala. If the book is a novel, as ChatwinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s introduction claims Bedford told him, it is a mediocre one with one-dimensional characters and no plot.As a travelogue, it is becalmed at the estate called San Pedro, the villa that Don Otavio and his older siblings are planning to turn into a hotel, though it is unreachable by road. For me, it is even more becalmed by going on and on and on then on some more about the hapless Hapsburg Maxmillian. (Unlike most Anglophone romancers, she has no interest in his wife who went mad, Carlotta.)She goes on at lesser length about the campaign for Indepence from Spain and rhapsodizes about Monte Alban and Mitla, though a reader unfamiliar with those Oaxaca pre-Columbian sites would not have any idea what they look like from what she wrote. Moreover, she mistakenly attributes Mitla to Zapotecs and Teotihuacan to Aztecs. (She did not get to Mayan or Mayan-Toltec sites.)The German-born Brit Bedford and her American traveling companion, E., went from New York to Mexico shortly after the end of WWII and were pleasantly surprised to have escaped rationing. They were unpleasantly surprised by roads and buses, and rather unappreciative of Mexican railroads with sleeping compartments. (These no longer exist, and I realize that my travels mostly by rail between 1974 and 1981 are longer ago from now than they were from the time Bedford was there.)She hated the Pacific ports of Mazatlan and Acapulco and failed to reach the ocean further south on another attempt, made the mistake of staying down by Lake Patzcuaro rather than in the colonial city above it, had good things to say about Cuernavaca, Guanajuato, Guadalajara and Mexico City. She also dismissed San Miguel Allende, already a developing expat home in the mid-1940s, and, when she was only a few miles from it,

couldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t be bothered to go see the then-new volcano (Parangaricutiromicuaro) that popped up in a Michoacan corn field .Mexico is not the hell it was for some other British writers (D. H. LawrenceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Plumed Serpent, Graham Greene, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano), but I was not wowed by her prose style. I was irritated by her faulty histories and by interjecting clumps of French into the text and for most of the chapter epigrams. I can read French, but found the epigrams irrelevant and their deployment (in marked contrasted to a dearth of Spanish) pretentious

Sybille Bedford was a witty and gifted writer. Every sentence of her account of her trip from New York to Mexico is a pleasure.

Great read, insightful, good writing, no surprise it's a classic.

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