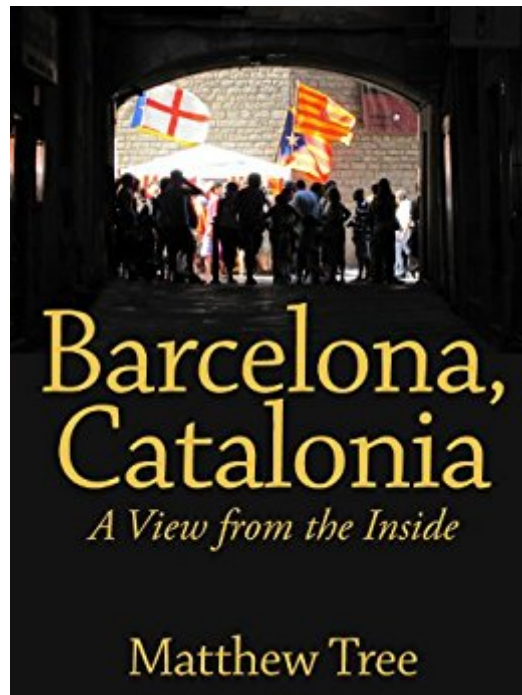




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# Barcelona, Catalonia: A View From The Inside



## Synopsis

A collection of Matthew Tree's incisive essays about life, language, and politics in Catalonia, as told through the eyes of a Catalan-speaking Englishman, or an English-speaking Catalan, depending on your vantage point, and his. Matthew's honesty and keen observations combined with his sharp wit and mastery of language (two languages!) give the reader a unique and compelling vision of Catalonia, rarely uncovered by the casual visitor, as he discusses what he promises is the next new state in Europe and its relationship with the state it currently belongs to. But Matthew does not limit himself to the purely political; he also gives us an insider's view of real life in Barcelona, from doctor's visits to shopping trips, through to finding one's own voice in another culture and language.

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## Customer Reviews

To kick off with, we Catalans have to face up to the fact that telling foreigners about Catalonia is never very straightforward. If people in other parts of Spain find understanding the concept of a

country within a country difficult to grasp, then those on the other side of the Pyrenees or on the other side of the Atlantic will find it even more so. That is the thankless task that Matthew Tree has been engaged in for many years through his work with many different media outlets, such as The Times of London and other more local publications, such as Catalonia Today or Barcelona INK. Tree is well-known across Catalonia due to the depth of his integration. It is this complete absorption into the very essence of Catalonia, its history, language and institutions, which often gives him a much clearer view of the state of things in the country and an insight into its people. In addition to his shorter articles, Tree has contributed to these various publications, the book also contains more in depth reflections, such as the paper he gave at the London School of Economics in 2008 or another he gave to an international symposium at the University of Lancaster in 2005, which provided an overview of Catalonia's history and literature. It is true to say that Matthew Tree is not an impartial observer. Through his writing he makes a spirited case for Catalonia and the Catalan language and culture and his efforts to resist the encroachment of Spanish culture and language. That said, you will not find a relentless tirade of propaganda within the covers of his new book. Tree's views and opinions are always well reasoned and behind them lies a true passion to explain the reality of Catalonia's position to the outside world. This London-born writer makes a special effort to breakdown stereotypes and point out things that may seem obvious to Catalans, but pass foreigners by. An example is the postgraduate Dutch student quoted in the book, who asks: "Is Catalan really a written language?". Another good example is Tree's description of the difficulties the speakers of Catalan find in La Franja, the border area where Catalonia and Aragon meet. He uses the case to demonstrate the fallacy of believing Spanish is a persecuted language within Catalonia.

I expected to learn a lot more about Barcelona and/or Catalonia from this book, for instance on a par with how much you would learn about Basque country through Mark Kurlansky's *The Basque History of the World: The Story of a Nation*, but I was disappointed on this point. Rather than containing bona fide chapters with some real substance, Tree's book contains almost nothing but one page vignettes that have been gleaned from a weekly column he writes, and though sometimes they are about Barcelona/Catalonia, often times they are not. I sympathize with the plight of Catalans but I think that the author's arguments in their favor are often specious, and sometimes his facts just downright questionable (I think he writes that Catalan is the 7th most spoken language in the EU and I find that hard to believe). As airplane material -- and indeed I read it on a plane -- it is quite good, albeit like reading a bunch of dis-jointed blog posts, but if you want something even

reasonably close to as deep as Kurlansky's treatment of the Basques, you will need to look elsewhere.

As beloved as Barcelona is to millions of Americans, Catalonia somehow gets completely overlooked. No more than a relative handful of North Americans even know the region has a vibrant language and culture separate from the Spanish state. That may change as the region assertively pursues its growing desire for national autonomy. For the curious, this book is a charming yet honest introduction to Catalan politics and culture by one of the region's leading writers -- a Brit! Aspiring novelist Matthew Tree wandered into Barcelona more than two decades ago on a lark, stayed, learned the language, and then began to fashion a brilliant body of work as a man of Catalan letters. The essays assembled here are mostly culled from his weekly column in *Catalonia Today*, an English language publication for the large anglophone expat community in Barcelona. As a consequence, they tend to toward being short and humorous vignettes of the author's life in the land of Gaudi and paella, though several of columns reflect Tree's frustration with the sometimes alarming anti-Catalan sentiments of the Castilian Spanish towards their restive Iberian neighbors. A few longer pieces toward the end touch on Tree's personal and professional trajectory as a novelist with his feet in two very different, but nonetheless connected, linguistic worlds.

I will be traveling to Catalonia in the summer and wanted to have an idea of what people in the area think of the arguments for and against independence. This was a good look at the pro-independence side, although it is highly repetitive at times. I wouldn't recommend it to the casual reader, but for anyone traveling to the area, it is an interesting piece of background.

I thought I would read historical background about Catalonia, why they want separation and insight from the writer but the most of book is a collective work of the writers published work on the newspaper like he just put what he had written on a daily newspaper and it is not really related to the book that much. I stopped reading it although I do like Matthew Tree.

The author, through different articles, makes a great job at discovering Barcelona and Catalonia from a social perspective that will even be insightful for the those that live or have lived in Barcelona or Catalonia. Quick and easy read, with simple and clear style, that for sure most of the readers will enjoy!

Great summary of the issues

Lovely articles but not so much about Barcelona and Catalonia though.

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