

HAMILTON BASSO



THE VIEW FROM POMPEY'S HEAD

"His best book. . . . [Basso] has advanced the ambition of past and present, a review of the psychology of the Old South into the New."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS

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Sweet, sleepy—beautiful—old Pompey's Head, South Carolina. Anson Page thought he'd ground it out of his life for good. Now a Manhattan lawyer representing a large publishing house, he's returning to his hometown after fifteen years to investigate the mystery surrounding one of his client's authors, a major American novelist who lives on nearby Tamburlaine Island. Both painfully familiar and irrevocably altered, the landmarks and people in Pompey's Head resurrect for Page the sweep of his past life. As he sets about resolving business matters, he collides headlong with the enduring power of lineage to determine belonging and dominance, exclusion and shame, and the realization that leaving does not mean escaping. A deft interlacing of recollection and suspense, *The View from Pompey's Head* is Hamilton Basso's most popularly acclaimed novel. When first published, it spent forty weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and was translated into seven languages.

The View from Pompey's Head Details

Date : Published November 1st 1998 by LSU Press (first published January 1st 1954)

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Author : Hamilton Basso

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From Reader Review The View from Pompey's Head for online ebook

Sharon says

A really good story in the tradition of Southern authors. Anson returns to Old Pompey on assignment, but learns about a lot himself and Southern society while he is there.

Barbara Van loenen says

It certainly held my interest even though the narrative was slow in a few places. It was fun to read a period piece about a time and place I know so little.

Philip says

Interesting, the ways we find our ways to books. I've encountered this title many times over the years in used bookstores, and though I had no interest in it, the title and the author's name have always stuck with me.

I recently came across a mention of it during some internet-surfing about something else, and was intrigued by a mention of its main plot: "Manhattan attorney Anson Page returns to his Southern roots after 15 years, arriving in Pompey's Head, South Carolina, to investigate the mystery surrounding missing royalties due famous author Garvin Wales."

I discovered that copies of the book are still in my county's public library system, and put in a request for it (my request for now-obsolete titles such as this one, and FENGRIFFEN, THE STORY OF ESTHER COSTELLO, THE ORACLE and LOVERS ALL UNTRUE must have librarians - especially younger ones - scratching their heads as they head into the stacks.

5/02: Although this got off to a slow start, by about a quarter of the way through it became quite engrossing. Anson Page's return to his roots causes him to reflect back on his life in Pompey's Head and the people he knew there. The result is an entertaining novel about growing up in the South during the 1920s/1930s, and its ingredients are pretty much everything we've inevitably come to expect of such novels set in the South: economical (economic changes have come to several residents), social (resulting from those economic changes, and everyone worries a great deal over what will be thought or said about whatever they do), and racial (there is an account of a trial to obtain financial damages for an injured black man who works for Anson's father).

At 409 pages the novel is a bit flabby - excising a few unnecessary repetitions would have tightened it up a bit. Looking back from 2012, the big secret regarding the missing royalties doesn't really carry the impact it would have in 1954, but that's to be expected; all in all I think this falls comfortably into the "They Don't Write 'em Like This Anymore" category.

Devon says

1/2 cup Heart of Darkness
1/3 cup To Kill a Mockingbird
1/4 Stop Time

Mix together dry above with a splash of Southern Comfort and a generous dose of "don't you dare leave this place or we'll never forgive you" Bake at 90 degrees for 375 pages then put out in torrential downpour to get the full effect of the ending.

I can see why this book was featured in Dow Mossman's best books of the 50s in the documentary Stone Reader. The writing is strong enough to keep the reader's attention even though the first two parts are just lawyers sitting around talking in between Anson's memories. It really gets interesting when Anson returns to Pompey's Head. Yes, it is about "you can't go home" but it's also about "home" being a place Anson needed to identify with/feel belonging but never could. Home is home, no matter if one did not belong there. The entrenched practices and beliefs in place are still there although Anson has long since moved on from the class and race divisions that people in Pompey's Head cling so desperately to in order to forge their own identities and find meaning.

"Home" is so complex: some things you can't wait to escape but they are manifest in you somewhere; "home" is where they never forgive you for leaving; "home" is where they speak lies and everyone understands the lies are part of the language--the lies make sense when the truth is unthinkable; "home" is where that one person you are intertwined with so deeply and for ever loved still lives--that person who you love down to your bones but you can never be together because...well, you just can't...it's the place you needed meaning and connection from the most but did not and will never get it.

Viki says

If you don't like a lot of detail, then this book is not for you. But I do, so I gave it a 4 star rating. The setting was in the 30's primarily and the plot explored social standings and the focus put on ancestors background to establish those standings. The main character struggled throughout his life with finding acceptance within himself. The author exposes how small town values influence those who live there and especially those who try to escape that influence by moving away.

Sherrill Watson says

"Voices of the South" is a better title, also: View from Hilton Head island. Written in 1954.

Anston (Sonny) Page is somewhat working to make partner in the lawfirm of Roberts, Guthrie Barlowe & Paul, appropriately called by his wife, Margaret (Meg), 'Boring, Barlowe Tedious and Impossible.' He is pulled into Barlowe's office to go back to Pompey's Head, where he grew up. Mrs. Lucy Wales is suing Phillip Greene for \$20,000 (quite a bit of money in 1954) for money her husband, Garvin Wales, a writer, which was "stolen" by Mr. Greene, who has since died. The checks were paid to Anna Jones over 21 years, from 1936-1940. Did Wales, who is now blind, know about the \$20,000? Anston will find out, and incidentally, will learn why he left.

The book is Anston wandering around Pompey's Head, and thru reminiscences and recollections. This is a time when Negroes were servants. Anston pulls some ideas from Shintoism, ancestor worship, to cover the founding families of Pompey.

"The white man trying to protect his identity-or so he imagines-and the Negro trying to establish his." That's what it's been about for generations. "The white man could not accept the Negro as an equal- he simply could not, and yet, since the Negro was walking, talking, living, he could not deny his reality as a human being." The white man could pretend, however, ". . . drawing on Gospel and ancient law, building up his theory of a Greek republic, . . . always there was the Negro, another person, another human being-- and determined, even in those early days when he was most inarticulate, even from the depths of bondage, to insist that he WAS a human being, to insist on his own identity."

Pompey's Head is comprised of 20 founding families, and nothing much has changed, in 200 pages.

Tony Taylor says

The author, Hamilton Basso, was a popular writer in the '50s and had some best sellers, including this book, The View from Pompey's Head (Note: Pompey's Head is the name of a fictional town in the Low Country of South Carolina). The book is definitely a product of the '50s both in style and in the setting, including the characters. It is the story of an attorney who works for a New York law firm, and is asked to return sent to his home town of Pompey's Head to help investigate a "mystery" surrounding a famous writer who has retired in the area.

The book today may appeal to someone who has grown up along the coastal areas of South Carolina and enjoys reflecting on the old South and its culture as it was perceived over 50 years ago, but the author's style is now dated in many respects, primarily in that he spends too much conversational time between the protagonist and his old acquaintances from his younger years. The reader can easily get bogged down in reading about relationships that have very little to do with the plot other than to set the tone... the feel of the times between the 1930s and 1950s. I read it based on a recommendation by a well-read and published librarian, but if someone told me to quit by the time I got to page 50, I would have done so, but I plugged on in hopes that there were some redeeming graces to the book.

Joe says

I'm not sure what book is described in the "book description" but it is not The View from Pompey's Head by Hamilton Basso

Sandy Carmichael says

Not an easy book to read; heavy, slow moving but worth the effort I feel. Would not do well now days in the "politically correct area" but definitely gives insight to small town southern life in 30's, 40's and 50's. No happy ending as such but reality.

William Miles says

One of my all-time favorite novels!

Manray9 says

A Good Writer from the Recent Past

Recently I read an article published several years ago in The Boston Globe about two prominent 20th Century writers who are now largely forgotten. Perhaps it says something about me that I have read both and enjoyed their work. They are Calder Willingham and Hamilton Basso.

I finished Basso's *The View from Pompey's Head* just last week. It is slow moving in a pleasant, languid, distinctly Southern manner. Basso gradually develops memorable characters, crafts fine scenes and steadily hones the plot - with the ultimate Southern shocker of miscegenation.

The View From Pompey's Head spent 40 weeks on The New York Times Bestseller List in the 1950s and was made into a Hollywood motion picture starring Richard Egan and the ravishing Dana Wynter. Basso published 11 books and edited *The New Yorker* for 20 years but is virtually forgotten today. Basso and *The View From Pompey's Head* deserve a wider audience and greater appreciation from readers in 2005.
