



Venice: Pure City

Peter Ackroyd

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Peter Ackroyd at his most magical and magisterial -- a glittering, evocative, fascinating, story-filled portrait of Venice.

In this sumptuous vision of Venice, Peter Ackroyd turns his unparalleled skill at evoking place from London and the River Thames, to Italy and the city of myth, mystery and beauty, set like a jewel in its glistening lagoon. His account is at once romantic and packed with facts, conjuring up the atmosphere of the canals, bridges and sunlit squares, the churches and the markets, the fiestas and the flowers. He leads us through the history of the city, from the first refugees arriving in the mists of the lagoon in the fourth century to the rise of a great mercantile state and a trading empire, the wars against Napoleon and the tourist invasions of today.

Everything is here: the merchants on the Rialto and the Jews in the ghetto; the mosaics of St Mark's and the glass blowers of Murano; the carnival masks and the sad colonies of lepers; the doges and the destitute and the artists with their passion for colour and form -- Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, Tiepolo. There are wars and sieges, scandals and seductions, fountains playing in deserted squares and crowds thronging the markets. And there is a dark undertone too, of shadowy corners and dead ends, prisons and punishment.

The language and way of thinking of the Venetians sets them aside from the rest of Italy. They are an island people, linked to the sea and to the tides rather than the land. 'The moon rules Venice,' Ackroyd writes: 'It is built on ocean shells and ocean ground; it has the aspect of infinity. It is the floating world... changing and variable and accidental.' This book, like a magic gondola, transports its readers to that sensual, surprising realm. We could have no better guide -- reading Ackroyd's **Venice** is, in itself, a glorious journey and the perfect holiday.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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