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If Venice Dies



If Venice Dies

Salvatore Settis

Translated by André Naffis-Sabely



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Synopsis

"Anyone interested in learning what is really going on in Venice should read this book." —Donna Leon, author of *My Venice and Other Essays* and *Death at La Fenice*

What is Venice worth? To whom does this urban treasure belong? This eloquent book by internationally renowned art historian Salvatore Settis urgently poses these questions, igniting a new debate about the Queen of the Adriatic and cultural patrimony at large. Venetians are increasingly abandoning their hometown; there's now only one resident for every 140 visitors; and Venice's fragile fate has become emblematic of the future of historic cities everywhere as it capitulates to tourists and those who profit from them. In *If Venice Dies*, a fiery blend of history and cultural analysis, Settis argues that "hit-and-run" visitors are turning landmark urban settings into shopping malls and theme parks. This is a passionate plea to secure the soul of Venice, written with consummate authority, wide-ranging erudition and flair.

Salvatore Settis is an archaeologist and art historian and former director of the Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles and the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa. He is chairman of the Louvre Museum's Scientific Council., Settis, often considered the conscience of Italy for his role in spotlighting its neglect of national heritage, is the author of several books on art history.

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Customer Reviews

"This powerful work of cultural criticism ... feels chock-full of insight. It shines a harsh light on the risks in the way we live, much as Jane Jacobs did in 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities'

more than 50 years ago."#151;The Washington Post#147;A chilling account of the slow agony of Venice as illustrative of a global consumerist epidemic. Richly documented and imbued with deep angst about this supreme urban creation."#151;Philippe de Montebello, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art"Anyone interested in learning what is really going on in Venice should read this book."#151;Donna Leon, author of My Venice and Other Essays and Death at La Fenice"An impassioned plea that every lover of Venice, urban planner, architect, and cultural historian should read."#151;Kirkus (Starred review)"A bracing tonic ... enlightening."#151;The New York Times"Brilliant ... This book should be required reading for every citizen."#151;The New Criterion"At once a moving eulogy for Venice and a resounding manifesto, enriched by a dense web of historic, literary and cultural allusions."#151;Publishers Weekly"This bracing and beautifully written book outlines how threats to Venice are amplified not only because of its unique, precarious geography, but because of similar threats to urban health across the planet."#151;Architectural Record"Eloquent ... a cautionary tale for the inhabitants of every still-breathing, still-not-like-every-other-megalopolis, city."#151;Maclean's"In this insightful, at times lyrical, book, Salvatore Settis argues that ... Italy is doing poorly in treating the patient. He offers medicine for the disease that has a global reach."#151;The Weekly Standard"Settis shows how the tragedy of Venice could happen to any city which has a past. It's a powerful polemic."#151;Richard Sennett, author of The Fall of Public Man and Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization, and Professor of Sociology, New York University and the London School of Economics"A terrific book ... serious and important."#151;Common Edge"Settis is an archeologist and an art historian, and here he writes with flash and passion about the present and future of Venice ... a grim but downright thrilling short book."#151;Open Letters Monthly"A joy to read, and its righteous anger at the awful predicament facing Venice and other historic cities is an invaluable resource to be visited again and again by those who love cities."#151;Architecture Here and There"For author Salvatore Settis, Venice's transformation from functioning historic metropolis to tourist destination amounts to a catastrophe ... It is hard not to see the logic of his claims."#151;The Brooklyn Rail"Venice is indeed unique but it stands for all cities in this eloquent, furious blast against the commodification of our planet and the relentless destruction of human communities by the mentality of markets."#151;Roger Crowley, author of City of Fortune: How Venice Ruled the Seas"This book valiantly shows why Venice#151;crossroads of civilization, art and commerce, eternal place of love#151;cannot be allowed to perish."#151;Diane von Furstenberg, Vice Chairman, Venetian Heritage Council"An elegant indictment of the challenges Venice faces from today's rapacious economic environment. Settis offers an ethical

prescription for re-imagining and resuscitating the historical uniqueness of Venice and Venetian life."#151;Eric Denker, coauthor of *No Vulgar Hotel: The Desire and Pursuit of Venice* and Senior Lecturer, National Gallery of Art#147;A lament for the day-by-day destruction of great beauty #133; full of anger and disappointment at what the author sees as the moral bankruptcy of Italy today.Ã¢â#151;The Art Newspaper#147;The vision of Settis is particularly gloomy and pessimistic, but there is still hope.Ã¢â#151;Corriere della Sera#147;Salvatore Settis wants to curb the sellout of cities #133; Balancing sharp intellect and moral indignation, lucid writing and impassioned argument, his polemic makes for captivating reading.Ã¢â#151;Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung"Settis's analysis extends to all cities. Only active citizenship can save them from the greed of real estate speculators."#151;Desmond O'Grady, former European editor of *The Transatlantic Review* and author of *The Road Taken*"With his book, Settis has clarified what conservationism and the protection of our cultural heritage should mean."#151;Il Manifesto

Salvatore Settis is an archaeologist and art historian who has directed the Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles and the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa. He is chairman of the Louvre Museum's Scientific Council. Considered the conscience of Italy for his role in spotlighting its neglect of the national cultural heritage, SettisÃ¢â#151;his name has been mentioned frequently for the post of minister of culture and Italian president. He is the author of several books on art history as well as a regular contributor to major Italian newspapers and magazines.

What an incredible book; if you care about the future of Venice, you must read this book. We have traveled with small groups in Venice for more than twelve years. We have seen an erosion in the infrastructure of the city-in its ability to support the literal and actual weight of hundreds of thousands of cruise passengers on the city. This has got to stop. Please read this book and learn!

Beautiful. Italians have style in cars, cloths and books about fascinating cities!

A brilliant book that's captures the essence and importance of Venice. It's painful to see what tourism and commercialization has done to the city.

This review is based on a pre-publication copy of the book. By Bill Marsano. Salvatore Settis comes to this book exceedingly well-credentialed: he is the author of books on art history, is an archeologist, and is former director of Los AngelesÃ¢â#151;his Getty Research Institute and

Pisa's Scuola Normale Superiore. And what he has produced here is an extended meditation on the future of cities in general and Venice in particular. It is sometimes an angry meditation but always a passionate and penetrating one. What, he asks, is the future of a city that has lost its soul? This is no mere rhetorical posturing; Settis makes it clear what loss of soul means: shrinking population (Venice has lost far more than half its people since 1961); inadequate employment (beyond tourism jobs), which drives people out of the city; loss of nearly all industry besides tourism; shortage of housing due to the growing number of residences converted to second homes for rich people who leave them vacant for most of the year; loss of urban memory—the memory of its importance, history and accomplishments—in a city that has become a mere vacation destination for both the wealthy and the hordes of one-day tourists spilling out of cruise ships that are bigger and more densely populated than any physical structure in Venice. Does that describe Venice? Yes, and it equally describes Disneyland. Would you call Disneyland a city? Does a city have citizens, or merely customers? When we hear of plans to save Venice we think of sinking squares and deteriorating structures, but in fact Venice's saviors have only destructive ideas to put forth. Pierre Cardin has proposed a 820-foot skyscraper in mainland Marghera, only two miles away; others have proposed a ring of skyscrapers that would surround the city, reducing Venice to a decorative object; and building, on an island in the Giudecca Canal, Veniceland—yes, a Venice theme park actually IN Venice, complete with the usual touch-screen educational displays, historic re-enactments and, of course, a gigantic Ferris wheel. It is one thing to save Venice with anti-flood barriers and quite another to save it by re-thinking it or re-branding it, or by holding international competitions to design Venice's new logo. These, Settis points out, are merely rapacious profit schemes whose object is no more than to extract the maximum from Venice's value as real estate. That much is certain. Less certain is the method by which actual living citizens will be restored to the physical city of La Serenissima, desperate as her need may be. Bill Marsano is a writer, editor and long time lover of Venice, whose canals he paddles in his kayak whenever possible.

Italian author Salvatore Settis not only writes books on art history and articles for journals and magazines—he is also an archaeologist and art historian, having directed the Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles and the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa as well as

serving as chairman of the Louvre Museum's Scientific Council. He is considered the conscience of Italy for his role in spotlighting its neglect of the national cultural heritage. Salvatore addresses concerns about the viability of Venice as a center of culture and architecture in this century of mass media influx and invasion by non-cultural hoards. With Venetians coming out on the streets to protest the massive cruise ships that are overtaking their city, now's a good time to get an in-depth look at the issues that are transforming the Queen of the Adriatic from a cultural gem into a Disneyfied theme park. The scope of the writing in this book certainly merits all the numerous awards it has already garnered. Salvatore credits his countryman for the notion of "invisible cities." He uses this as a defining term for the city as "a living tapestry of stories, memories, principles, languages, desires, institutions, and plans." If homo urbanus can go on weaving that tapestry, allowing for "human scale" rather than insisting we pay for it, then even the likes of Chongqing may yet serve as "reservoirs of moral energy we'll need to build our future." As many of us mourn the passing of gentility and correspondence being substituted with Facebook ramblings, tweets, blogs, selfies, cell phone and computer addiction, this book demands we look at the bigger picture. Are we stomping on civilization and history and tradition and all of the past that matters in favor of the instantaneous need for entertainment by hand held games and ear buds that allow us to speak to people miles away while being annoyingly public? He raises so many fine questions while simultaneously connecting us with Italian culture and art and prose and philosophy as all as possible attendants at the conceivable demise of magnificent Venice? Extraordinary reading on so many levels as a very important book, this. Grady Harp, October 16I voluntarily reviewed a complimentary copy of this book

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