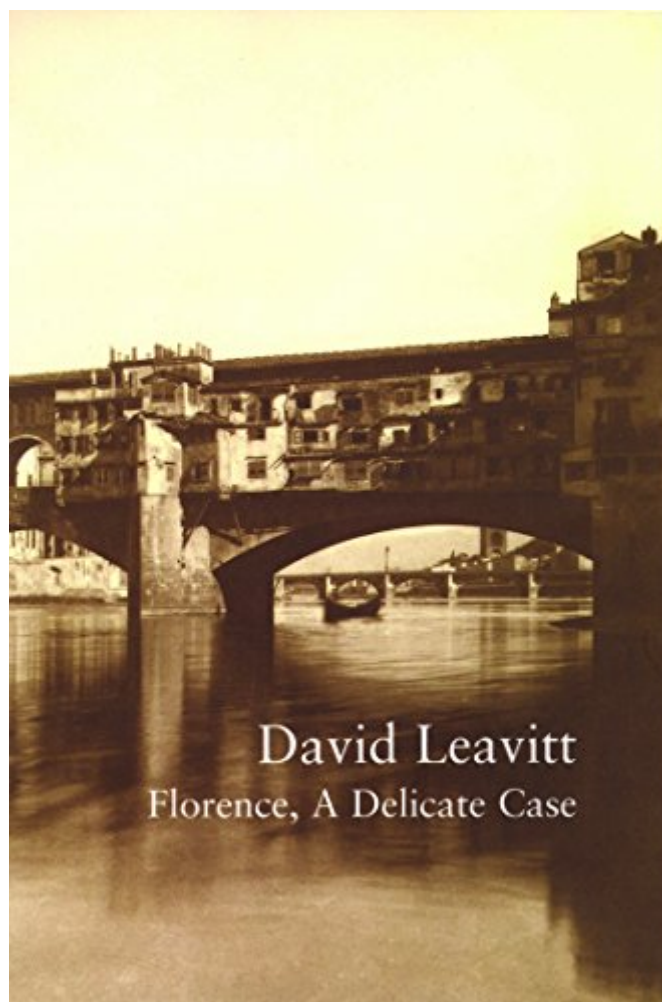


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Florence: A Delicate Case



Synopsis

The third in the critically acclaimed *Writer and the City Series* - in which some of the world's finest novelists reveal the secrets of the cities they know best - *Florence* is a lively account of expatriate life in the 'city of the lily'. Why has Florence always drawn so many English and American visitors? (At the turn of the century, the Anglo-American population numbered more than thirty thousand.) Why have men and women fleeing sex scandals traditionally settled here? What is it about Florence that has made it so fascinating - and so repellent - to artists and writers over the years? Moving fleetly between present and past and exploring characters both real and fictional, Leavitt's narrative limns the history of the foreign colony from its origins in the middle of the nineteenth century until its demise under Mussolini, and considers the appeal of Florence to figures as diverse as Tchaikovsky, E.M. Forster, Ronald Firbank, and Mary McCarthy. Lesser-known episodes in Florentine history - the moving of Michelangelo's *David*, and the construction of temporary bridges by black American soldiers in the wake of the Second World War - are contrasted with images of Florence today (its vast pizza parlors and tourist culture). Leavitt also examines the city's portrayal in such novels and films as *A Room with a View*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Tea with Mussolini*.

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Customer Reviews

"Florence A Delicate Case" is a small book, with but 5 chapters in not much more than a half an inch of paper. The opening is smart, and what follows engages the reader, as Leavett portrays a Florence about as different from the Forrester/Merchant Ivory version as one could imagine; a Florence that is dark, obsessed with death and a magnet for suicides. But, just as one is settling in for what promises to be an exquisite read (and well before the end of the first chapter) the book changes tone and becomes a chronicle of ex-pat Anglo-American Florentine gossip, by the most undeserving bunch of back biting queens, their money-poor, titled nobility, and vacationing socialite friends, and hangers on. And the gossip isn't even fresh! It's a recycled, reconstituted gossip dating back for the better part of the last century, flashing a brief flicker of fame-renewed, upon people and their works that have been long since forgotten, and deservedly so. This increasingly annoying recitation continues unabated through chapters two and three, and then (what a relief!) the reader arrives at chapter four, which details in rather dry terms, the whys and hows of the statue of David being moved from its original home in the Piazza della Signoria to its current home in the Florence Academy, and why there's a copy in the piazza today. And then, at the beginning of chapter five, right after a curious disclaimer of sorts, the book returns to its gossip, and in the process reveals the reason for its writing... The disclaimer is about as ostentatious as what it's trying to put aside; that David and Mark were offered introductions to everyone in the expat community that mattered, and all of the places that mattered, but they turned pretty much all of them down.

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