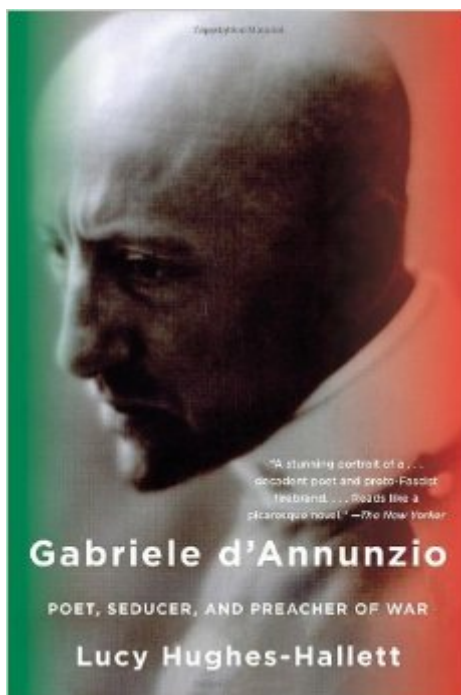


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Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, And Preacher Of War



Synopsis

Winner of the Samuel Johnson Prize for Nonfiction Winner of the Costa Biography

Award**Washington Post Best Books of 2013****Economist Best Books of 2013**This fascinating life of Gabriele d'Annunzio "the charismatic poet, bon vivant, and virulent nationalist who prefigured Mussolini" traces the early twentieth century's trajectory from Romantic idealism to Fascist thuggery. D'Annunzio was Italy's premier poet at a time when poetry could trigger riots. A brilliant self-publicist, he used his fame to sell his work, seduce women, and promote his extreme nationalism. At once an aesthete and a militarist, he enjoyed risking death no less than making love, and he wrote with equal enthusiasm about Fortuny gowns and torpedoes. In 1915 his incendiary oratory helped drive Italy into the First World War, and in 1919 he led a troop of mutineers into the Croatian port of Fiume, where he established a delinquent utopia. Futurists, anarchists, communists and proto-fascists descended on the place, along with literati and thrill-seekers, drug dealers and prostitutes. Three years later, when the fascists marched on Rome, they belted out anthems they'd learned in Fiume, while Mussolini consciously modeled himself on the great poet. Lucy Hughes-Hallett's compelling biography is a revelation both of d'Annunzio's flamboyant life and of the dramatic times he helped to shape.

Book Information

Paperback: 608 pages

Publisher: Anchor (May 6, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307276554

ISBN-13: 978-0307276551

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (33 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #672,058 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #68 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European > Italian #228 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War I #4042 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors

Customer Reviews

It's September 21, 1927. He is in his bedroom. A woman has just left. A disordered bed. An overturned scent bottle. A little gold box in which few traces of cocaine remain. A cold supper laid

out on the table. D'Annunzio hasn't yet touched the food, but the woman ate some of it during the night. Now, alone, he eats ravenously. The fig and the prosciutto each remind him of the intimate parts of the woman he shared last night. This is just one almost complete entry which appears in this fascinating new book on one of the most colourful characters in modern history. Who was D'Annunzio? He was a poet, a seducer, a womanizer, a pilot, a writer, a playwright, a rebel, a leader of proto-fascists and of mutineers. He worshipped Napoleon. He admired Carlyle who would confirm the poet's veneration for great men and reinforce his conviction that it was not economic forces, as the socialists maintained, but the action of superb individuals that shaped history. Born in 1863, he wrote many novels and poems and spent some time in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century. These were the times when poets still had a say and were admired. James Joyce called him "the only European writer after Flaubert to carry the novel into new territory". He was also a journalist and yearned for public adoration. He was a notorious womanizer who took care to document even the tiniest intimate moments of his sexual acts. His sexual appetite was insatiable. He enjoyed drugs and mysticism. And airplanes. And fast cars, courtesy of Fiat. The masses loved him. He was a demagogue and a kind of a Duce; at least this is how he referred to himself many years before the people and history made the acquaintance with the name of Mussolini.

This is a biography of Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863 to 1938), whom Romain Rolland had likened to a pike, a predator of other people's ideas which he then powerfully reshaped, and the author constantly reminds us of those of D'Annunzio's contemporaries all over Europe who had views similar to his own. Contemporary ideas - literary, artistic, political - were grist to his mill, and D'Annunzio was extraordinarily many-sided: a famous poet and playwright, his texts rich, sometimes overheated, with imaginative similes and suffused with an eroticism often mingling pleasure and pain and occasionally sprinkled with revolting imagery, especially scatological about his enemies; a journalist; a charismatic public speaker; a connoisseur of music, painting and European literature; a compulsive and minute recorder of all his experiences, especially sensory ones, which will then feature in his novels (as will the love-letters he wrote to his various amours); an aesthete and a dandy. He spent extravagantly beyond his means, cramming his homes with precious objets d'art, textiles, masses of flowers, staying at the most expensive hotels, and leaving bill after bill unsettled. He kept a string of thoroughbred horses and many dogs, mostly greyhounds. On four occasions bailiffs stripped him of the bulk of his precious possessions. He was a promiscuous womanizer, and women fell for him although he was small and in later years quite ugly, with a waxen complexion and bad teeth. From his schooldays onwards, he was a ruthless self-publicist, ready to invent parts

of his biography. A lover of the past, he also anticipated Futurism in his enthusiasm for modern machines - cars, aeroplanes, torpedoes, machine guns - just as he blended an effete Decadence with macho Fascism.

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