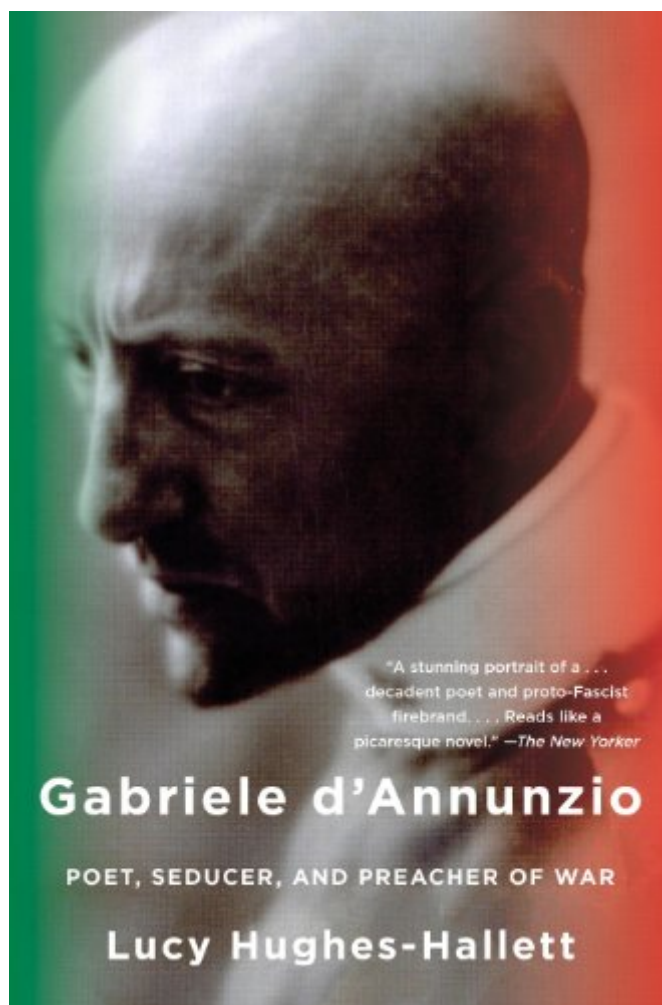


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Gabriele D'Annunzio: Poet, Seducer, And Preacher Of War



Synopsis

Godfather to Mussolini, national hero of Italy and the WWI irredentist movement, literary icon of Joyce and Pound, lover of actress Eleonora Duse: here is Lucy Hughes-Hallett's extraordinary biography of Gabriele d'Annunzio, poet, bon vivant, harbinger of Italian fascism. Gabriele d'Annunzio was Italy's premier poet at a time when poetry mattered enough to trigger riots. A brilliant self-publicist in the first age of mass media, he used his fame to sell his work, seduce women, and promote his extreme nationalism. In 1915 d'Annunzio's incendiary oratory helped drive Italy to enter the First World War, in which he achieved heroic status as an aviator. In 1919 he led a troop of mutineers into the Croatian port of Fiume and there a delinquent city-state. Futurists, anarchists, communists, and proto-fascists descended on the city. So did literati and thrill seekers, drug dealers, and prostitutes. After fifteen months an Italian gunship brought the regime to an end, but the adventure had its sequel: three years later, the fascists marched on Rome, belting out anthems they'd learned in Fiume, as Mussolini consciously modeled himself after the great poet. At once an aesthete and a militarist, d'Annunzio wrote with equal enthusiasm about Fortuny gowns and torpedoes, and enjoyed making love on beds strewn with rose petals as much as risking death as an aviator. Lucy Hughes-Hallett's stunning biography vividly re-creates his flamboyant life and dramatic times, tracing the early twentieth century's trajectory from Romantic idealism to world war and fascist aggression.

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Customer Reviews

Very well-written biography of a true rotter who happened to be a great poet and brilliant intellectual. Sex, drugs, spending other people's money lavishly, more sex, more drugs, a classical music lover, and last but not least, a fascist dictator who beat Mussolini to the punch, and by all accounts, an orator to rival Hitler. What more could you want? A thoroughly entertaining read!

Not since the erudite, witty, and generally brilliant John Ryle Lawson III wrote his magisterial volume on Tom Landry and Bill Walsh has an author handled a subject with the skill that Lucy Hughes-Hallett displays in her riveting account of this forgotten but significant figure. D'Annunzio, a necessary ingredient for Mussolini's rise, is an intriguing figure. An amusing figure. An irritating figure. An offensive figure. An outrageous figure. And a morally reprehensible figure. You have to read this book to believe that such a person ever could have existed. By the end of the book, you'll be sorry he did. As an aside to the Football Community, it's quite an oddity when D'Annunzio takes over Fiume and you learn that he referred to his troops as the Legion of Fiume. If Erin Andrews doesn't like interviewing members of the Legion of Boom, I can't imagine how much she'd dislike interviewing members of the Legion of Fiume. Perhaps the pinnacle of D'Annunzio's strangeness occurred when this artistic, lewd, callous, war-mongering man was trying to refashion the government he headed for a year or so in Fiume. The constitution he crafted was quite a lulu. As Hughes-Hallett puts it, he outlined a position "so veiled by mumbo-jumbo that it can only be described in the constitution's original words." Hughes-Hallett then quotes from D'Annunzio's constitution, showing the madness that came over him when he contemplated himself or government. He wanted a special position in government..."It is reserved for the mysterious forces of the people. It is a figure of offering to the unknown genius, to the appearance of the new man, to the ideal transfiguration of the works and of the days, to the fulfilled liberation of the spirit." That loon was a major figure in European politics less than 100 years ago. Turn that over in your brain.

Gabriele d'Annunzio's life was shaped by his many and lurid addictions -- to women, oral sex, Fascism, poetry, war and high drama. Lucy Hughes-Hallett does a wonderful job of bringing this

extraordinary character back to life. The rich and heady concoction that was d'Annunzio's daily existence makes for a brilliant but sometimes overwhelming read, in parts like the script of a Fellini film, and in others like the more lurid passages from Gibbon's *Decline & Fall of The Roman Empire*. Highly recommended to anyone interested in the man or the period.

Knowing very little about Gabriele D'Annunzio, I found the book very interesting. It is also a history of the Italy of D'Annunzio times as well as the rise of fascism. Also enjoyed reading of all the artists, writers, lovers who weaved in and out of D'Annunzio's life.

First part was tough going but once in Fiume it picked up. Extremely impressive research and putting together of the story. Came to the story knowing nothing and learn't a lot. Would have enjoyed a little bit more analysis upon his death. The German spy, the reactions to his death and his legacy.

superb writing and a clear description of Italian politics between the two wars. I had read d'annunzio while a student in Italy very long ago but had no idea of his life. He was an amazing and fascinating man and the story is told in such a way that I couldn't put it down.

Some of those whose biographies we would like to read did not leave enough material behind them. With Gabriele d'Annunzio, poet, seducer and preacher (and debtor who rarely paid his creditors, and aviator, and would-be dictator of Fiume, and builder, and house decorator, and friend/enemy of Benito Mussolini) the problem is just the opposite. He filled notebook after notebook describing his every thought and emotion, starting with the look of a flower that reminded him of this or that and ending with the peculiar shape and smell of a specific woman's genitals. In selecting the material, combining it with other sources, and providing a portrait of the man--in some ways an appalling man, but a great poet nevertheless--the author has done a superb job. My only complaint is that, since the book was written for non-Italians, it has very few direct quotes from d'Annunzio's work. As a result the reader is left a bit puzzled as to just what in that work moved the tens, indeed hundreds, of thousands who paid him homage. A shame, but it could not be helped.

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