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Zibaldone



Synopsis

A groundbreaking translation of the epic work of one of the great minds of the nineteenth century Giacomo Leopardi was the greatest Italian poet of the nineteenth century and was recognized by readers from Nietzsche to Beckett as one of the towering literary figures in Italian history. To many, he is the finest Italian poet after Dante. (Jonathan Galassi's translation of Leopardi's *Canti* was published by FSG in 2010.) He was also a prodigious scholar of classical literature and philosophy, and a voracious reader in numerous ancient and modern languages. For most of his writing career, he kept an immense notebook, known as the *Zibaldone*, or "hodge-podge," as Harold Bloom has called it, in which Leopardi put down his original, wide-ranging, radically modern responses to his reading. His comments about religion, philosophy, language, history, anthropology, astronomy, literature, poetry, and love are unprecedented in their brilliance and suggestiveness, and the *Zibaldone*, which was only published at the turn of the twentieth century, has been recognized as one of the foundational books of modern culture. Its 4,500-plus pages have never been fully translated into English until now, when a team under the auspices of Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino of the Leopardi Centre in Birmingham, England, have spent years producing a lively, accurate version. This essential book will change our understanding of nineteenth-century culture. This is an extraordinary, epochal publication.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's difficult to review such a book as this translation of Leopardi's hodge podge of notes, diary entries, conversational remarks and massive digressions touches on seemingly every topic which

crossed the great poet's mind. I have been waiting thirty years to see an English translation and this is one of the most useful, elegant books to be published by any academic or commercial publisher in a generation. FSG receives high praise for releasing this almost 2000 page edition, finally making available this great pathfinder's inner thoughts and everyday remarks. Leopardi was a man of all times, of a modern as well as classically trained sensibility whom we would do well to study and rediscover our civilizing roots in today's civil maelstrom. Patrick Sulaiman Cole

Leopardi is one of the greatest of the Western Romantics, up there with the early Goethe, Shelley, Hugo and Novalis. And this publication of his notebooks has got to be the publishing event of this millennium. I never thought they'd finally get translated in toto and have waited for more than a decade for this. The Zibaldone, which I have finally finished reading, reveals a mind infinitely sensitive to its own processes and confirms for me my suspicion that Leopardi is one of the greatest of Western writers.

I own two editions in Italian of the Zibaldone, but this one is now my first resource. The patient creation of a whole raft of scholars and translators, this massive volume is simply indispensable. Why study Leopardi? Well, not only was he a major lyrical poet, but also a thinker of the caliber of Montesquieu, Rousseau, Vico, Jaspers and a (very few) others. He deals acutely with such issues as the relation between nature and culture, the interaction of poetry and science, and the destiny of nations and cultures. In the Zibaldone (or miscellany) these penetrating reflections are interrupted here and there by dry philological notes on Latin and Greek words. It is easy just to skip over these and proceed to the ideas--though those concerned with ancient languages will find the philological matter interesting also.

Two centuries ago, when knowledge was less, it was still possible for one man to learn everything. Leopardi may now take his throne alongside Goethe and Humboldt and Novalis. At such a price and at 2,500 pages, with much of the text still in Italian, Greek and Latin, this is not everyone's feast. His subjects range the gamut of the possible. It is as if someone had single-handedly written an encyclopedia and a dictionary combined. If he had lived to be seventy, how long would this have been? To think that a man who felt life to be a delusion and a snare, yet could hold his own long enough to write all this! We must take our hats off, for we are in the august presence of Greatness. Leopardi was not merely a man, he was a universe.

This book reminds me of Pascal's "Pensee." But without the severe Calvinism. So many ideas. Leopardi explores unhappiness, boredom, illusion, nature, distraction, writing, language etc... A lot packed into two thousand+ pages. One entry/thought could be meditated on for a long time... There are about five pages near the beginning that were rather pedantic in which the author criticizes various writers. Besides these entries, it has been an amazing reading experience.

Leopardi's Zibaldone deserves a whole cosmos of stars. This publisher's choice of paper, however, warrants barely a glimmer. They would have done well to follow the lead of various publishers' paper choices for hardback versions of Proust or Montaigne. Still, since it is the only version available in English translation, it gets five stars because "difficult though the pages be to turn precisely, and as much as they may make a marginalia maniac's life a struggle" it should be bought and read and reread, and, if owing to the shoddy paper, bought again and reread again. Alas, as Leopardi wrote: "In this respect, pleasure is similar to peace of mind. The more it is sought and desired in itself and alone, the less it is to be found and enjoyed . . . The very desire for peace of mind necessarily excludes it, and is incompatible with it."

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