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The Seven Addictions And Five Professions Of Anita Berber: Weimar Berlin's Priestess Of Depravity



Synopsis

The Seven Addictions and Five Professions of Anita Berber is the first contemporary biography of a notorious actor/dancer/poet/playwright who scandalized sex-obsessed Weimar Berlin during the 1920s. In an era where everything was permitted, Anita Berber's celebrations of "Depravity, Horror and Ecstasy" were condemned and censored. She often haunted Weimar Berlin's hotel lobbies, nightclubs and casinos, radiantly naked except for an elegant sable wrap, a pet monkey hanging from her neck, and a silver brooch packed with cocaine. Multi-talented Anita saw no boundaries between her personal life and her taboo-shattering performances. As such, she was Europe's first postmodern woman. Among those Anita Berber claimed as members of her vast sexual harem were Marlene Dietrich, Magnus Hirschfeld (the founder of modern sexology and gay liberation), Klaus Mann, Conrad Veidt, Lawrence Durrell, and the King of Yugoslavia. Berber acted in Fritz Lang's Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler and starred in the silent epic, Lucifer. Even Leni Riefenstahl credits Berber for inspiring her controversial career. After sated Berliners finally tired of Anita Berber's libidinous antics, she became a "carrion soul that even the hyenas ignored," dying in 1928 at the age of 29. The Seven Addictions and Five Professions of Anita Berber chronicles a remarkable career, including over 150 photographs and drawings that recreate Anita's enduring "Repertoire of the Damned."

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Customer Reviews

The life and death of Anita Berber (1899-1928), who was what we would now call a performance

artist, are inseparable from the frantically erotic climate of Weimar Germany, as this tabloid-style tell-all biography by Gordon (*Voluptuous Panic*) makes abundantly clear. A child of divorce, the Dresden-raised Berber began dancing at 16, earning major Berlin reviews and working in film by 1918; she began dancing nude in 1919, and did films titled *Prostitution* and *Different from the Others* that same year. Gordon provides numerous photos and titillating anecdotes taking readers from that point to Berber's death in a Beirut nightclub (including her alleged sexual enslavement to a woman and the woman's 15-year-old daughter). This intriguing, haphazard document offers a plethora of clues into the life of a woman whose repertoire included a dance entitled "The Corpse on the Dissecting Table." Berber's life cries out for thorough study, such as that recently accorded inspired Dadaist Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Mel Gordon is Professor of Theater Arts at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of twelve books, including "The Grand Guignol," "Dada Performance," "The Stanislavsky Technique," and the Feral House titles, "Erik Jan Hanussen: Hitler's Jewish Clairvoyant" and "The Seven Addictions and Five Professions of Anita Berber."

The book kinda jumps around and it doesn't focus on any real timeline . Ms. Berber's story is interesting and it covers a time period in Germany that is often ignored . After WW1 and before Hitler takes power . It was like the wild west in terms of freedom of expression in Germany at that time . The book really left me wondering how her career would have turned out if she would have gotten off the drugs and focused on her career . I would guess she would have left Germany once Hitler come into power and I wonder if she had come to America how her career would have went . She obviously had talent but as we've seen so many time , drugs and alcohol simply ended what ever chance of her having a long career . So we will never know what could have been . Decent book that I would recommend if the price stays low . There are much better books that cover the Weimar Republic and the entertainment industry during that time period . So I would only recommend this one if you are just interested in Ms Berbers story .

This is a quick read: most of it is double-spaced; there are a lot of pictures; there are pages of expressionist poetry by Berber or one of her husbands; there are descriptions of her dance routines. It's an interesting book just the same and I enjoyed reading it. It took me two days. Gordon put together a pleasing biographical narrative from a number of foreign sources, including non-English

autobiographies, German magazines, and newspapers of the day. He neither extols Anita as a liberated woman nor labels her self-destruction as the death of a reprobate. He doesn't psychoanalyze her post facto but recounts her actions--many of which were seriously outrageous--in a matter-of-fact manner. Consequently the narrative may strike some as remote and indifferent or, on the other hand, as an attempt not to get in the way of a good story that is absurd in its own right. Berber was an expressionist dancer in Weimar Berlin as Germany changed from a self-assured, tightly controlled, buttoned-down society to one awash with cynicism, war guilt, debt and anxiety. The smart urban set who could still afford a nightlife cast their sentiments with avant-garde artistes who had protested Wilhelmian sexual and lifestyle repression through dance and graphic art for years. This became the "in" thing. Turning nineteen in this atmosphere the red-haired Ms. Berber, daughter of a dancer and trained as a dancer herself, ran wholly amuck with help from her bohemian friends. Pronouncedly narcissistic (she was a teen-ager after all), stoned continuously on cocaine and brandy, paid well to titillate audiences with nude dancing, there was little she would not do. Gordon quotes accounts of the day that she had a beautiful, boyish body and genuine talent as an experimental dancer. Her sexual paramours included the young, the old, men, women, and children. She enjoyed appearing nude in public places like restaurants and hotel lobbies to cause a stirr. Within a few years fickle popular trends shifted away from uninhibited dances that celebrated sex and drugs. Added to this, Ms. Berber's young body was slowly breaking down under a nightly onslaught of drugs and alcohol coupled with strenuous physical demands of dancing. Her cocaine habit turned her impulsively angry; she lashed out at critics in the audience with empty Champaign bottles; her bookings at nightclubs dried up. By the age of twenty-eight she was no longer avant-garde and was forced to tour. The next year she developed fatal tuberculosis and came home to Berlin to die. She was buried, according to Gordon, in a pauper's grave. The reader may make of that what he or she will--as Gordon would have it. Either she was a beautiful spark of liberation or a young girl living her short life out in a fool's paradise of her own and other's making.

Fascinating inform rarely found, but I wanted more in almost every chapter than what was supplied. It sent me searching for more books on her and that period in time.

I liked the book , she was an amazing lady

As there are few similar works that speak to this era and the people, it is an interesting book. While

the book contains many wonderful period photos, the writing is uneven and meandering. Whole chapters go by without mentioning Anita at all. I think this was a missed opportunity to capture the person and period of the time. I wasn't left liking Anita very much, though that isn't the author's fault really, it is what it is. I might recommend this book solely for its value as being one of few that speak to this time. One just wishes there were better efforts out there than this. A narrative biography of Anita's life would have been more welcomed than what this book put forth.

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