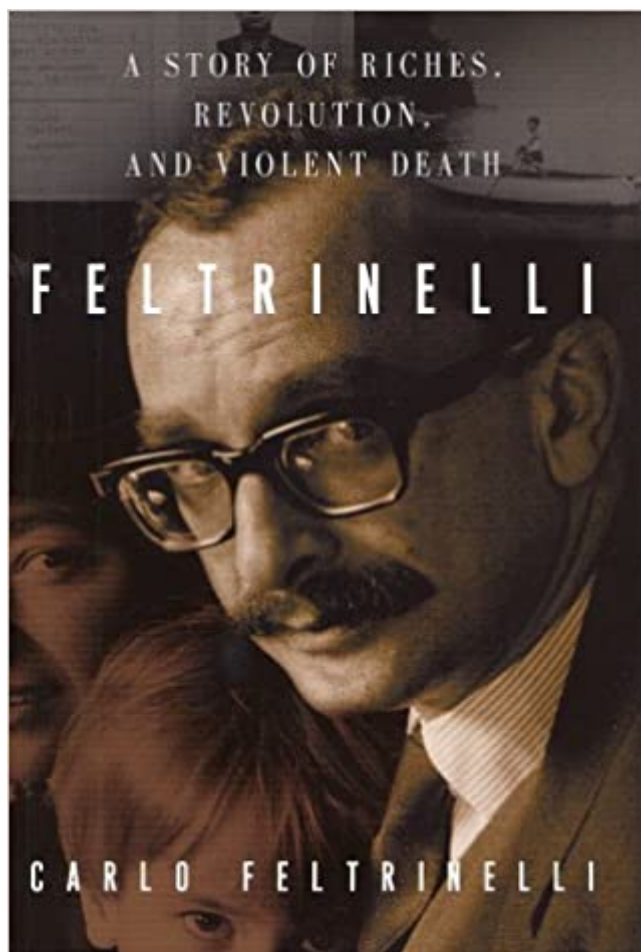


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Feltrinelli: A Story Of Riches, Revolution, And Violent Death



Synopsis

On a spring evening in 1972, a man climbed up an electricity tower outside Milan intending to place a bomb, but instead fell to his death. Notices in the next day's newspapers announced the botched action of an unnamed "terrorist." It quickly became clear, however, that this revolutionary was one of the most famous men in Europe. Born into a wealthy and distinguished family, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli fought with the partisans against the Nazis, joined the Communist Party, then took over the family's financial empire after the war. In 1954 he founded the house that bears the family name and published the likes of Pasternak, Kerouac, Bellow, and Che Guevara. In the sixties he supported revolutionary movements in Europe and the Americas and befriended Fidel Castro. But in spite of his leftist sympathies, Feltrinelli wasn't proletarian enough to give up his yachts, sports cars, and lavish estates in which he dreamed up his schemes and projects. Combining personal memories of his father with a carefully documented history of the period, Carlo Feltrinelli has written an unsparing, provocative, and above all deeply engrossing book.

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Customer Reviews

Giangiacomo Feltrinelli lived a fascinating life: one of Italy's leading postwar tycoons as well as an active member of the Communist Party, Feltrinelli died in 1972 while trying to commit a terrorist act in the name of breaking down the capitalist system. But the suspense builds slowly in this biography written by his only son, Carlo Feltrinelli, who exhibits little psychological insight in understanding why this scion of a wealthy family might have embraced the left (readers are left to guess that his

experience fighting in the anti-Nazi Resistance might have been the impetus). He also devotes little space to examining how Giangiacomo Feltrinelli squared his wealthy lifestyle with his proletarian beliefs, opting instead to detail his father's success in publishing: the Feltrinelli publishing house, of which Carlo is now director, brought out translated works by such influential writers as Boris Pasternak, Jack Kerouac and Che Guevara. While these details of Giangiacomo will be of interest to the publishing cognoscenti, it is only when Carlo pursues his father's involvement in leftist terrorism during the turbulent 1960s-and prints the texts of his father's letters written during that time to him as a young boy-that the book comes to life, at times taking on the quality of a Hollywood thriller. But by then it's too late to persuade readers to care for a man about whom they know little. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Starred Review Giangiacomo Feltrinelli always seemed determined to break the mold. He was the scion of a wealthy family who, as a teenager, joined Italian partisans to fight the Nazis. After the war he joined the Italian Communist Party while simultaneously expanding his family's lucrative financial holdings. He eventually rebelled against orthodox Marxism, building a successful publishing house that printed the works of Boris Pasternak, Jack Kerouac, and a variety of left-wing cultural and political icons in the 1960s. While he maintained an opulent lifestyle, Feltrinelli began to flirt with the leftist terror groups that plagued Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. He died in seriocomic fashion, blown off an electrical pylon while attempting to plant a bomb. His son, Carlo, director of the family publishing firm, has written a wonderful biography of this fascinating and frustrating man. It would be easy and wrong to dismiss Feltrinelli as a dilettante and hypocrite. Although he loved the good life, his political passion and commitment were genuine, if poorly directed. He admired, of course, revolutionaries such as Castro, but he blanched at their political repression. In the end, a genuinely deep understanding of this compelling man remains tantalizingly out of reach, but this examination of his relatively short life is well worth the ride. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

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