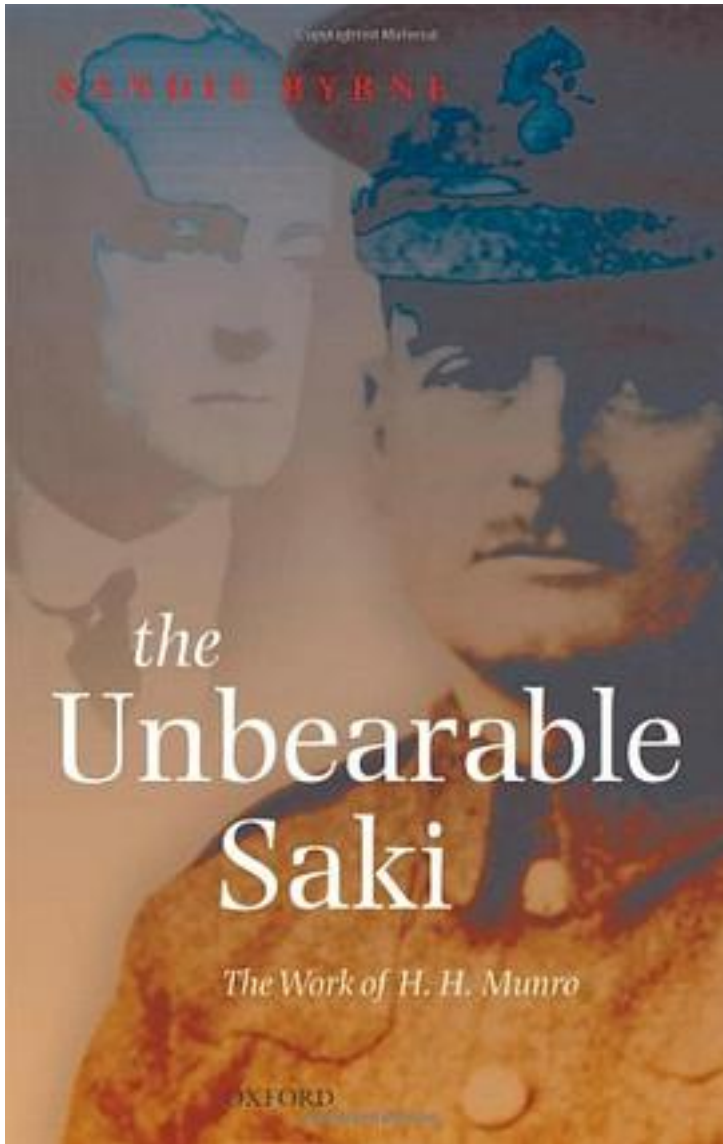


The Unbearable Saki



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著者:Sandie Byrne

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Saki is the acknowledged master of the short story. His writing is elegant, economical, and witty, its tone worldly, flippant irreverence delivered in astringent exchanges and epigrams more neat, pointed, and poised even than Wilde's. The deadpan narrative voice allows for the unsentimental recitation of horrors and the comically grotesque, and the generation of guilty laughter at some very un-pc statements. Saki's short stories have been much reprinted as well as adapted for radio, stage, and television, but his novels, *The Unbearable Bassington* and *When William Came*, are almost unknown, his journalism and travel writing forgotten, and his plays rarely performed. Sandie Byrne argues that his reputation has been unfairly overshadowed by his predecessor Oscar Wilde, contemporary George Bernard Shaw, and successors P.G. Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh. In a well-meaning introduction to the Penguin Complete Saki, Noel Coward reinforced the received image of Saki's work as celebrating an Edwardian or even Victorian milieu of privilege, luxury, and affectation; comedies of manners and light satire. Byrne shows that Saki's writing was no nostalgic evocation of a lost golden age, and that he was rarely concerned with the charm and delight Coward describes. His preoccupations were with England, the values of Empire, and the dangerous beauty of the feral ephebe. The threat to the first two of these triggered his alleged metamorphosis from cosmopolitan cynic and dandy-about-town to patriotic, even jingoistic, NCO, in a manner worthy of his blackest humour.

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