

Tekst 9

Anatomy Of a Tyrant

Marc Fisher

EXPLAINING HITLER

The Search for the Origins of His Evil
By Ron Rosenbaum
Random House. 444pp. \$30

1 **G**ERMANS visiting the United States often marvel at our obsession with Hitler — the endless wartime footage on the Discovery and History channels, Hollywood’s many movies, the omnipresence of the Fuehrer in our pop culture. Why, Germans ask, do you fixate on Hitler, half a century after the war’s end? To which the proper response must be, Why do you not?

2 Ron Rosenbaum has spelled out in compelling detail exactly why we do, and why we should. He has spent a decade studying who Hitler was and how historians and journalists and others have come to explain him, but, far more than that, Rosenbaum tackles the even harder question of why we explain Hitler as we do, what our various and conflicting explanations tell us about ourselves and our societies.

3 What’s most remarkable about Explaining Hitler is how new it feels, because Rosenbaum, considering every major stream of fact, near-fact and utter fiction about the Nazi dictator, shows how the history of Hitler is the history of the postwar mind. The very concepts of responsibility, truth and meaning have changed dramatically in the past half-century: From deconstructionism to moral relativism and on to shifts in everything from parenting to governing, Western civilization has altered its way of looking at the world. That change stems as much from Hitler and the Holocaust as from anything

else, and Rosenbaum shows how our view of Hitler evolves along with our view of evil, personal responsibility and human nature. “What we talk about when we talk about Hitler,” he writes, “is often not the Hitler of history but

who might have antagonized Hitler, turning him against the Jews and setting the world on the course toward Holocaust. There’s the Jewish grandfather theory, and the Jewish prostitute theory, and the Jewish music teacher, and



‘Hitler, is it war?’ A caricature from ‘Crapouillot,’ Paris, July 1933

the meaning of evil.”

4 An entire family of Hitler explanations focuses on the contemporary concept that there are certain conditions that make an individual less responsible for his actions. Thus, the endless speculation about whether the source of Hitler’s evil was a missing left testicle or a case of syphilis or brutal corporal punishment at the hand of his father. “It is somehow more comforting to view Hitler as a monstrous pervert in his private life,” Rosenbaum writes. “Then his public crimes can be explained away as arising from private pathology.” Conversely, if Hitler is not a pervert, then he is one of us, within us, a truth too terrible to accept.

5 Then there’s a class of explanations that search for some Jewish acquaintance or relation

even the notion that Hitler’s niece, Geli Raubal, perhaps the only woman Hitler truly loved, spurned him for a Jewish lover. Rosenbaum is particularly dismissive of such theories, which he sees as an expression of the need “to find some Jew, any Jew ... to blame for the Holocaust”.

6 Rosenbaum is frustrated that a half century of scholarship has distanced us from Hitler and especially from “a Hitler fully conscious of his malignancy”. But with words and ideas that surprise, amuse and even elevate the reader, Rosenbaum has helped to restore Hitler to the historical record and remind us that the histories we write are as much stories of ourselves as of our past.

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- 1p **32** ■ Which of the following conclusions do paragraphs 1 and 2 lead up to?
Ron Rosenbaum's book
- A demonstrates the relevance of studying Hitler.
 - B explains why Americans necessarily take a different view of Hitler than Germans do.
 - C is a forceful reminder never to let a Hitler rise to power again.
 - D shows how to free society of the influence still exerted by Hitler's ideas.
- 1p **33** ■ "What's most remarkable about Explaining Hitler is how new it feels" (paragraph 3).
How has Rosenbaum achieved this, according to the reviewer?
By making clear that
- A successive interpretations of Hitler reflect the course of Western thinking.
 - B the figure of Hitler has for ever changed the concept of the world as a safe place.
 - C the Western world in fact projects its collective guilt on Hitler.
 - D the word 'evil' has found its definition in the atrocities committed by Hitler.
- 1p **34** ■ Why would it be "more comforting to view Hitler as a monstrous pervert in his private life"
(paragraph 4)?
It would confirm the assumption that
- A criminals have themselves to blame for their abnormal behaviour.
 - B Hitler's barbarity was an extreme but not unusual phenomenon.
 - C Hitler should be studied objectively rather than demonised.
 - D normal people are not capable of deeds like Hitler's.
- 1p **35** □ Vat de theorieën samen die in alinea 5 aan de orde worden gesteld.
- 1p **36** ■ What does Rosenbaum regret, according to the reviewer in paragraph 6?
The fact that the contemporary view of Hitler
- A can only consider him in terms of the personification of evil.
 - B does not sufficiently address his personal responsibility for his evildoing.
 - C excludes the possibility that he could not help being a product of his time.