

FEATURED REVIEW

Hitler: A Biography. By Peter Longerich. Translated by Jeremy Noakes and Lesley Sharpe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pages xiii + 1344. Cloth \$39.95. ISBN 978-0190056735.

The best of the Hitler biographies investigate human behavior rather than just the man himself. The more a biography shows the dictator holding a monopoly of power, leaving the *hoi polloi* largely manipulated and rudderless, the less there is to learn about the agency of ordinary persons. No doubt Hitler constrained choice, but the capacity to choose is a critical part of what it means to be human and make moral judgments, at all social and power levels. We study the past to enlighten the present, which is now illustrating the recurring phenomenon of strongmen, their image, and their believers. This article reviews some of the major Hitler biographies, including those by Walter Langer, Alan Bullock, Ian Kershaw, and Volker Ullrich, in relation to that by Peter Longerich, biographer of Joseph Goebbels and Heinrich Himmler. He now joins the still-gathering surge of Hitler biographies, which arguably has already overflowed its banks to flood out other histories.

Hitler biographies have entered an era of counter-narratives reflecting ongoing debates about ordinary persons as well as generational questions. Making a case for writing another biography, Longerich pushes against Kershaw, whose path-breaking modified-structuralist approach sees Hitler as buoyed by adoring masses and sycophantic collaborators who created him as their agent. Kershaw's Hitler is a mediocrity—less the agent of his power than benefiting from circumstances and existing structures. Longerich reverts to top-down images of an all-powerful figure who outmaneuvered opponents. The charismatic image of Hitler as Germany's savior with near-superhuman abilities mattered to Nazi Party members, but buy-in from society at large to the Hitler Myth is propaganda. The masses did carry out Hitler's will but were cowed by force. After inflating the party's presence so Hitler could leverage himself into the chancellorship, the people fade from the story.

Hitler did decide to take Europe and the world to war, remaking the continental order and setting the terms for mass murder and genocide along racial lines. To get his way, to which persons or class of people did Hitler pay the most heed? There is surely truth in Longerich's focus on elites for understanding the Reich and its crimes, as well as in Kershaw's structuralist stance taking account of mass support and preexisting circumstances.

Questions persist about how Hitler accumulated so much power and motivated supporters. Longerich's structural analysis of how Hitler directly controlled the Reich appears one-dimensional, as if Hitler issued clear orders that his subordinates understood and executed without further interpretation or innovation. Longerich's Hitler, like Thomas Weber's, does move tactically, pressing when he has the advantage and retreating from untenable positions, though he is loath to take personal responsibility for failures (expecting his satraps to absorb blame). Absent a structural model like Kershaw's "working towards the Führer" or the leverage of mass support, Longerich's analysis seems tenuous.

In a proto-structuralist position from 1961, A. J. P. Taylor warned against pinning all guilt on Hitler, just as psychoanalyst Walter Langer, in 1943, perceived Hitler as "the expression of

a state of mind existing in millions,” or as “cultural environments.”¹ In the thick of war, Langer foreshadowed Kershaw’s “Hitler Myth.” The Third Reich was “not wholly the actions of a single individual” since “a reciprocal relationship exists between the Fuehrer and the people . . . the madness of the one stimulates and flows into the other and vice versa . . . Having created him as its spokesman and leader, [Germany] has been carried along by his momentum, perhaps far beyond the point where it was originally prepared to go. Nevertheless, it continues to follow his lead in spite of the fact that it must be obvious to all intelligent people now that his path leads to inevitable destruction.”²

Hitler could not have existed save for the German masses’ image of him, which kept them in sync, nor was Hitler’s attraction due to ideology, wrote Langer. He also anticipated Zygmunt Bauman’s indictment of “modern civilization”: “We are forced to consider Hitler, the Fuehrer, not as a personal devil, wicked as his actions and philosophy may be, but as the expression of a state of mind existing in millions of people, not only in Germany, but to a smaller degree in all civilized countries.” To think that all would be well again if only Hitler could be done away with “is wholly inadequate for those who are delegated to conduct the war against Germany,” Langer warned. Hitler was not “a madman” or “inhuman,”³ common images that allowed many millions to distance themselves from Hitler. In 1946, a team of psychiatrists tested the twenty-two main Nazi defendants before the Nuremberg Tribunal and found them to be intelligent and psychologically normal, with the exception of Robert Ley.⁴ For decades, scholars concealed these findings because they disturbed the placated mass opinion in the United States and elsewhere simply because the tests “did not show what we expected to see and what the pressure of public opinion demanded that we see—that these men were demented creatures, as different from normal people as a scorpion is different from a puppy.”⁵ Accepted narratives continue to skew the way we interpret sources.

Longerich finds little in Hitler’s first thirty years to explain his metamorphosis “almost overnight” from “obscure failure” to “the man around whom the whole of world policy revolved,” as journalist Sebastian Haffner wrote in 1979.⁶ Rather, Hitler adopted many of his ideas from the forces of reaction following the destruction of the Bavarian Soviet Republic—in particular the Reichswehr in Bavaria as well as the *völkisch* and far-right movements. This worldview demanding the acquisition of living space for a unified and racially defined German people remained stable throughout Hitler’s career, Longerich shows, and Hitler did not compromise these central goals. Other biographers also point to 1919 as transformational, with Hitler learning he could move masses through the spoken word and his first formal consideration of the “Jewish problem.” Hitler carried with him a trench mentality and the elemental belief that all life was Darwinian struggle.

¹A. J. P. Taylor, “Second Thoughts,” *Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), xix; Walter Langer, *The Mind of Hitler: The Secret Wartime Report* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), 144.

²Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 142–44.

³Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 85, 144; Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1989).

⁴Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 536.

⁵James Waller, *Becoming Evil* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 62.

⁶Sebastian Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler* (New York: MacMillan, 1979), 3.

Alan Bullock's 1952 biography, by contrast, argues that the "greater part of the experience on which [Hitler] drew was already complete when he left Vienna" in 1913, inflamed by the antisemitism of Austrian political giants of the time, Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger.⁷ Bullock finds the Hitler we now know in Vienna, in part because he searches for origins that define Hitler in the mass mobilization of fascist politics, which is "the major political invention of the twentieth century," according to Robert Paxton.⁸ Bullock finds Hitler's pan-Germanism and antisemitism to be commonplace for his milieu, and like other biographers up until the 1970s, he elides the impact of antisemitism in the Holocaust, a massive deficit also characterizing Joachim Fest's 1973 biography.

However, by identifying Hitler's "originality" as his "grasp of how to create a mass-movement and secure power on the basis of these ideas," Bullock does make a critical point, underplayed in recent biographies. Hitler's political leadership skills lay in recognition of "the nature of political power in an age of mass politics." While, for Hitler, neglect of the masses was Schönerer's Achilles' heel, Lueger, by contrast, "brilliantly displayed that grasp of political tactics," gaining strength from the support of Vienna's lower middle class. Hitler saw Austria's social democrats as powerful Jewish and "evil spirits" exploiting the German people, even as he eviscerated socialist speeches and press for perceptions of mass behavior, appropriating the tactics of mass meetings and mobilization.⁹ Others including Kershaw and Brigitte Hamann (a rare, important woman's voice among these biographies along with that of Marlis Steinert) see similar influences on Hitler's ideas of mass mobilization in Vienna, although Thomas Weber differs.

Bullock relates Hitler's fascism to the organizational and propaganda chapters of *Mein Kampf* and the Nuremberg Trial records rather than to *Mein Kampf's* biographical sections, and he also used the most helpful account of Hitler's youth, that of August Kubizek. Bullock sees Viennese origins in *Mein Kampf's* claim that popular backing would be Hitler's first pillar of power, providing real authority behind the use of force that the Volk would see as legitimate. The roots of Hitler's mass politics, writes Bullock, are in his condemnation of parliamentary systems that, Hitler thought, contrasted with the leadership of a real man, the genius as leader who rose to direct his race toward their collective destiny.

"Go to the masses," Bullock wrote, is "the first and most important principle for political action laid down by Hitler," whose basic political conviction was that a leader "move[s] masses."¹⁰ For Hitler, the masses, once unified, were to become the engine for driving off the inferior races in the East and settling the new Lebensraum out to the Ural Mountains. Bullock cites Hitler's "simple fact that no great idea, no matter how sublime or exalted, can be realized in practice without the effective power which resides in the popular masses." The ideology of power—the mobilization of the masses in the universal Darwinian struggle—joined hands in Hitler's mind with hatred of the Jews, that damning presence preventing German unity at the deep level of the national spirit (*Volksgeist*). Hitler as politician appreciated the importance of "social problems and of appealing to the masses," which he saw as "working up the spiritual instincts of the broad masses."¹¹

⁷Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (London: Odhams Press, 1952), 46.

⁸Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 9.

⁹Bullock, *Hitler*, 44–45.

¹⁰Bullock, *Hitler*, 68, 69.

¹¹Bullock, *Hitler*, 45, 69.

While identifying dictatorship as a core theme of *Mein Kampf*, the editors of the 2016 “critical edition” overlook the masses as a theme. But Hitler’s focus on anchoring power in recognition of his authority by the masses is an essential reason Hitler felt compelled to create not a political party but a movement, headed by a dictator. The masses are the dictator’s cornerstone; the only topic to which Hitler dedicated two of his fifteen chapters concerned techniques of influencing the masses.

Biographers, including Longerich, regularly discuss women in evaluating Hitler’s emotional and inner life, pointing out that Hitler was able to relax in the presence of women. Stating that Hitler saw the masses as feminine and desiring a leader, Langer identifies gender as a possible theme for illuminating Hitler’s leadership. The masses, like women, were emotionally malleable, swinging back and forth between extremes and in need of an alpha male, the genius who knew the way and led with a firm hand (cue Hitler). Langer points to one of Hitler’s garbled contradictions: women would light the fire of his movement, Hitler mused, and once convinced of Nazism, they would convince their children as well, and then their husbands would follow them to the movement.¹²

Is it possible that we sometimes lose rather than gain knowledge, as more and more biographies are written? The new rise of popular autocracies redirects attention to how Hitler built and maintained mass movement authority.

An important connection between Langer and the first major biography, the one by Bullock, is their ease with interpreting the importance of what Hitler calls “spiritual weapons” for his fundamental aim of unifying the Volk and legitimating violence in mass opinion. Spiritual weapons, in Hitler’s usage, provide the *casus belli* for violent assault as well as an acceptable worldview that serves as an alternative to the one under attack (Judeo-Bolshevism).

Early biographers Langer and Bullock connected Hitler’s perception of “spiritual weapons” to his solicitation of the masses—his need, as Langer put it, for “the support of the people ... to carry through the project on which he is engaged,”¹³ and the initial task of ridding Germany of Marxism (Judeo-Bolshevism) as Germany’s “internal” enemy. Hitler’s efforts to root out German Christianity along with his later statements show that he retained this reasoning about the conditional basis for using force effectively within the Reich. Langer cites *Mein Kampf* on Hitler’s appreciation of the “willingness, almost desire, of the masses to sacrifice themselves on the altar of social improvement or spiritual values ... Any movement that does not satisfy this spiritual hunger in the masses will not mobilize their wholehearted support and is destined to fail. All force which does not spring from a firm spiritual foundation will be hesitating and uncertain ... Every attempt at fighting a view of life by means of force will finally fail, unless the fight against it represents the form of an attack for the sake of a new spiritual direction.”¹⁴

Bullock cited this same passage as a key to understanding Hitler’s mass appeal, while adding Hitler’s adjoining sentence that every effort to combat Marxism up until then, including that of Bismarck from 1878 to 1890, had failed because “it lacked the basis of a new worldview” to fight for in its place. For Hitler, communism was hard to defeat “because it was able to exert a powerful attractive force over the masses comparable with that of

¹²Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 72.

¹³Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 71.

¹⁴*Mein Kampf*, cited in Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 72–73.

Nazism,” Bullock noted.¹⁵ Hitler argued that “power lay with the masses,” and critically, as Bullock writes, Hitler never relinquished this belief, although he did see it in relationship to terror. “Violence and terror have their own propaganda value.” Bullock noted. “The display of physical force attracts as many as it repels.”¹⁶ The use of force for freeing Germany from Marxism was conditioned on equipping its opponents with “spiritual weapons,” Bullock wrote, which “shows once more the originality of [Hitler’s] ideas as soon as he was faced with a question of political leadership.”¹⁷

Biographers since Bullock have overlooked the theme in *Mein Kampf* of “spiritual weapons” that condition Hitler’s thoughts on the effective use of force as a tactic, along with other uses Hitler makes of the word *spiritual*. Illustrative is the repeated media outcry as American high schoolers and police manuals cite just this: “The very first essential for success is a perpetually constant and regular employment of violence.” No one notices that this is incomplete because it sounds like Hitler to us. But *Mein Kampf* continues by warning of the importance of “spiritual weapons” and that the use of force can backfire: “any persecution that takes place without spiritual preconditions (*geistige Voraussetzungen*) appears as morally unjustified and immediately whips up the more valuable stocks of a people to protest.... This will occur for many simply from a feeling of opposition against the attempt to crush an idea through brute force ... As a result, the number of inwardly-convinced followers grows in step as the persecution increases ... a so-called ‘inner’ cleansing can only take place at the cost of general impotence.”¹⁸

This was not the last time that Hitler voiced awareness that force can lead to a cycle of counterproductive escalations. His role was more complicated than tuning the raw force meter up or down depending on the degree of resistance encountered, as if any and all resistance alike goaded the regime into greater brute repression. Hitler could not have attained and exercised “such tremendous power that a few veiled threats, accusations, or insinuations were sufficient to make the world tremble,” in Langer’s words, if he had not deployed a whole range of tactics opportunistically.¹⁹

Perhaps Hitler’s rather profuse use of the words *spirit* and *spiritual* bears on the ongoing debate about Hitler’s *Volksgemeinschaft*. Given Hitler’s belief that the masses want to sacrifice themselves for “spiritual values” and that any successful movement must satisfy this hunger, we can begin to argue that Hitler certainly intended that the *Volksgemeinschaft* should eventually become a reality, although Longerich sees it as mere propaganda. Further, the Nazi concept that the “healthy sentiments” of the Volk itself would form the real, unique fount of law coincided with Hitler’s theory that social norms would eventually be the same as Nazi policies.²⁰ No one doubts Hitler’s commitment to unifying the Germans,

¹⁵Bullock, *Hitler*, 397, 405.

¹⁶Bullock, *Hitler*, 72.

¹⁷Bullock, *Hitler*, 55.

¹⁸Anthony Ramirez, “Outcry over Use of Hitler Quote in Yearbook,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1999 (<https://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/18/nyregion/outcry-over-use-of-hitler-quote-in-yearbook.html>); Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, “Kentucky Police Training Quoted Hitler and Urged ‘Ruthless’ Violence,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/31/us/kentucky-state-police-hitler.html>); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Eher Verlag, 1943), 186–87, 189.

¹⁹Langer, *The Mind of Hitler*, 142.

²⁰Frank Caestecker and David Fraser, “The Extraterritorial Application of the Nuremberg Laws: *Rassenschande* and ‘Mixed’ Marriages in European Liberal Democracies,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 10, no. 1 (2008): 35–81.

and it is likely that he at least made decisions in light of his desired *Volksgemeinschaft*. Hitler recognized the limits of terror particularly for rule of his own race.

Kershaw wrote his state-of-the-art biography of the man whose “mark on the century has been deeper than that of” any other at the end of that century, the first to be written with the aid of the complete Goebbels diaries. Kershaw’s biography is guided by his structuralist positioning, reinforced by his judgment that rabble-rousing was Hitler’s only real talent. Kershaw presents a charismatic leader, absorbing and reflecting what those around him wanted, while mostly absent as a strategist actively directing government. His lethargy, in fact, created a feudal system seething with competitors trying to please him: “Hitler’s authority was, of course, decisive. But the initiatives that he sanctioned derived more often than not from others.”²¹ Is Kershaw’s structuralist positioning, together with a moderately talented Hitler, adequate for explaining Hitler’s rise and rule?

Kershaw’s enormously influential biography was written by the historian of earlier works on Nazism, who introduced two defining models, the “Hitler Myth” and “working towards the Führer,” which constitute brilliantly convincing mechanisms for his interpretation. The “myth” worked because the masses bought Hitler’s claims. To sustain loyalty he needed to take account of mass habits and concerns. According to “working towards the Führer,” Hitler uttered Nazi ideals, and people across society, “by no means limited to party members or functionaries,” worked toward realizing his goals. There was never a shortage of persons willing to carry out even the most heinous crimes, and moreover this was done for banal motives—destroying a competitor, settling scores, seeking gain in some other way. Further, the appeal of Hitler and his movement as he rose to power “was not based on any distinctive doctrine” but was rather “a pastiche of different ideas.”²² Other political parties, however, had none of Hitler’s capacity for exploiting raw public anger or his party’s “image of strength and dynamism, the missionary drive of the national crusade.”²³

Characteristically, Kershaw considers decisions and personal developments as having unfolded over time rather than at one pronounced moment. Longerich identifies Hitler’s passage from “drummer” to Führer with his leadership of the Beer Hall Putsch as his initiative alone. Kershaw, like Langer, places this transformation during Hitler’s imprisonment, as more and more followers acclaimed his new stature. Consonant with the Hitler Myth, this recognizes the critical initiative of those over whom Hitler claimed authority.

Kershaw sees another decisive evolution in Hitler’s self-concept following Hindenburg’s death in August 1934 and accompanying his consolidation of domestic power, albeit without a noted corollary development in the Führer’s skills. Kershaw’s Hitler moved from social reformer to grand gambler on the international stage in search of ever-greater glory, achieving it not necessarily by choice but because his position disallowed embarrassment or unpopular associations. The Reichstag fire, for Kershaw, who follows Fritz Tobias and wrote before Benjamin Hett’s persuasive account, consolidated Nazi power on a par with the Night of the Long Knives and the early 1938 shakeup at the top levels of the government and the military. But it caused a “panic reaction of the Nazi leadership.” The Enabling Act of March 1933 derived from the Center Party’s ignominious actions and Hitler’s blackmailing and bullying,

²¹Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, xxix.

²²Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 530; Ian Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer’: Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (July 1993): 117.

²³Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 332.

which do hint at skills beyond public-speaking. The Gleichschaltung was introduced from the top, but forces from below rushed to obey in advance, falling into line and going well beyond orders to complete the transition from democracy to Nazi rule at all levels of state and society. Writes Kershaw, “What is striking is not how much, but how little, Hitler needed to do to bring this about.”²⁴

This perspective yields key if sometimes overlooked insights on the social limits of Hitler’s power: to maintain his image and power, Hitler could not give orders that “would have been widely ignored” and thus would have undermined his image of authority. Does this always square with Kershaw’s indecisive Hitler, who was “forced into action” to boycott Jewish businesses, to “sanction” what others have demanded? For Kershaw, the April 1, 1933, boycott was “within Germany—something which would repeat itself in years to come—the dynamic of anti-Jewish pressure from party activists, sanctioned by Hitler and the Nazi leadership [to be] taken up by the state bureaucracy and channeled into discriminatory legislation.” The Munich Agreement of October 1938 does, in fact, show a Hitler manipulated into accepting a peace he did not want. But the March 1936 remilitarization of the Rhineland shows a Hitler who acted not only against the advice of his generals but also against his closest Nazi advisors. According to Goebbels, Hitler made a firm decision alone one day after weeks of irresolution (how he did this would be of great interest to any biographer). An exception to Hitler’s lethargy, for Kershaw, was his diligence in writing his own speeches. He “remained, above all, the propagandist *par excellence*.”²⁵ Certainly, moving on the Rhineland was not necessary militarily at that point, but it made sense as propaganda to Hitler in his position of Führer because morale was in the doldrums but was boosted dramatically with the Rhineland, along with Hitler’s image as Germany’s unparalleled leader.

Kershaw demonstrates different ways to see the feats attributed to Hitler. For Germany’s economic recovery, for example, Hitler must be credited only “indirectly” because his “significant contributions” were measures taken out of “propaganda instincts” rather than “economic know-how.”²⁶ Bullock sees Hitler as directly determining Germany’s course on a range of issues and crises. On the problem of Ernst Röhm’s insubordination, for example, Bullock’s Hitler made high-profile statements from mid-1933 through February 1934 that there would be no further Nazi revolution. When Röhm continued to call for it, Hitler reached out, promoting him to the Reich cabinet and writing him a letter of “unusual friendliness,” thanking him for assisting in the (concluded) Nazi revolution. Further, surely Hitler was able to see that the professional army would serve him better in rearming or in war than the storm troopers. Bullock shows Hitler repeatedly voicing his clear alignment with the military while pointedly refusing to side with Röhm during those same months.²⁷

Kershaw’s Hitler is indecisive about how to handle Röhm and his Sturmabteilung (SA), refusing to act until “compelled to do so,” forced into action by the military, Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich. Popular backing robed his use of force against members of his own Volk in legitimacy, as illustrated by the general popular acceptance of the bloodbath on the Night of the Long Knives. This endorsed Hitler’s claim that his will was, in fact, the law and would be adopted by the people: “The adaptation to violence which had

²⁴Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 260, 458.

²⁵Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 473, 535, 585–86.

²⁶Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 450.

²⁷Bullock, *Hitler*, 281–92.

systematically undermined a sense of legal norm since the start of the Third Reich” was “pav[ing] the way for ‘strong sympathies for summary justice.’”²⁸

This view of Nazi terror as reflecting rather than trampling the popular will amounts to heresy for top-down interpretations like that of Longerich, who portrays as rather heroic the grumbings of church elites. Longerich concedes that Bishop August von Galen’s sermons in the late summer of 1941 caused Hitler to issue a “halt decree” for Nazi “euthanasia.” Structuralists see this, however, as happening not because of Galen’s own position as an elite, but because his voice represented such a sizeable section of the people. Longerich sees other compromises, such as Hitler’s decision in October 1934 to yield to Bishops Hans Meiser and Theophil Wurm while dismissing his ally Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller along with his hopes for establishing a Reich church, as the result of foreign pressures.

Kershaw and others point out, however, that the Nazi leadership was accustomed from the beginning to assuage international opinion ruffled by whipping up domestic support, whether by expelling Jews from the civil service or withdrawing from the League of Nations. Anticipating damage to Germany’s economy and foreign prestige, the economics and foreign ministers attempted to cancel the April 1933 boycott of Jewish businesses. Concerns about the international response were disregarded, but worries about the domestic economic impact limited the boycott to a single day. To counter negative foreign reactions, the Nazis activated a “damage limitation operation” when needed, writes Kershaw.²⁹ In 1935, less than six months after bowing to the bishops, Hitler dealt a much bigger blow, introducing an air force and army conscription in naked defiance of the Versailles Treaty. This garnered massive applause around the Reich, which was vastly more important to Hitler than the foreign outcry.

As Kershaw writes, the European diplomatic order that might have controlled Hitler was as stable as a “house of cards.”³⁰ Surely, threats from the Archbishop of Canterbury, contrary to what Longerich writes, meant little to Hitler, compared with the oppositional martyrdom fervor spreading due to advancing plans for the Reich church. Kershaw shows plentiful evidence about escalating worries due to the popular unrest, fanned by Meiser. Heinrich Müller’s Gestapo tactics of muzzling and raw force backfired, inflaming popular defiance into greater swarms of protest. Regional Nazi political elites put up an intense fight but failed to compete well against the bishops for control of popular opinion, which brought them into such conflict with one another that they sought Hitler’s intervention. Longerich writes that the Night of the Long Knives was, in part, a warning to the Catholic Church, which leaves unexplained why the defiant bishops continued their protests during and immediately following that murderous weekend, apparently (rightly) unconcerned that they too might become victims of another such purge.

The journalist Volker Ullrich criticizes Longerich for a “remarkably veiled” view of German society, but writes that Hitler “surprisingly forgave the southern German bishops Wurm and Meiser, who had been disciplined by the Reich bishop.”³¹ Ullrich’s fascinating page-turner is deeply researched and sheds a brilliant light on emerging autocracies in our time, although it overlooks Hitler’s strategically watchful eye for maintaining the forward

²⁸Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 520.

²⁹Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 474.

³⁰Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 494.

³¹Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Knopf, 2016), 646.

momentum of his mass movement. Hitler publicly explained his compromise with the bishops the following month, as Longerich reports, saying that “some of the clergy did not want” the “single, strong Protestant Church” that Hitler had “intended to create.”³² But Hitler did not have to forgive the bishops for thwarting him any more than he had to become a communist to make his pact with Stalin. He was a tactician and cared about his image among the masses these elites represented.

Longerich explains the Holocaust within the framework of a state beholden to Hitler’s personal rule, which seems incomplete without more consideration for the part of the man who could influence others in one-on-one interactions. The war of annihilation in the East, from the outset, was a reflection of Hitler’s new framing of the conflict as a war against the Jews. A crucial moment in Hitler’s drive toward genocide occurred in September 1941, when Hitler resolved to deport German Jews, signaling that the war against the Jews should be generalized to all Jews under German control. He was active in subsequent efforts to compel authorities in allied and occupied countries to follow suit in sending Jews off to their death, hoping to draw his collaborators closer through complicity while integrating them into his plans for race and space. This perspective usefully draws out the contextual, ideological, and instrumental motives that Hitler may have drawn upon in guiding the process of genocide and can be seen as a corrective to arguments that the Holocaust emerged through undirected radicalization alone.

Longerich mentions secrecy concerning “euthanasia” but not regarding the Holocaust, despite its similar purpose—and why would an all-powerful autocrat bother with secrecy at home in either case? Kershaw, who argues that Hitler enabled the Holocaust by stating that the “Jewish question” must be resolved, and thus empowering subordinates to find solutions that escalated in the ongoing competition to please the Führer, points out a panoply of reasons that “Hitler’s preoccupation with secrecy remained intense,” including the preempting of “bureaucratic and legal interference” in the killing process.³³

But no major biographer writes of the heightened concerns about secrecy and Hitler’s image caused by the tens of thousands of Jews married to Gentiles of the Reich. Both Raul Hilberg and Uwe Adams, in 1961 and 1972, respectively, demarcate separate sections of their books to address the peculiar problems that intermarried Jews caused to the Nazi regime. Discussing these matters in 1953, Gerald Reitlinger, like Hilberg, concluded that almost all “full” German Jews who survived at home did so because they were married to non-Jews.

Longerich does mention intermarried Jews in relation to Berlin and its Gauleiter Goebbels, but leaves the reader uninformed about why these Jews were treated differently. Kershaw, whose Hitler Myth model was in effect precisely within the Reich and whose “working towards the Führer” model is a relative of “cumulative radicalization,” also does not address why the regime set intermarried Jews apart as a separate problem. One might suppose that a Hitler biography would take Hitler’s decrees into account—certainly regarding the Holocaust—but these biographies ignore Hitler’s December 28, 1938, edict that divided intermarried Jews into two groups, the “privileged,” who were not required to wear the yellow star, and the “nonprivileged,” who were marked for slaughter by it. Martin Bormann recognized it as elementally important: the “Führer made several

³²Hitler, quoted in Longerich, *Hitler: A Biography*, 411.

³³Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 522.

fundamental decisions regarding the Jewish question.”³⁴ The decree illumines the regime’s rule home. It also altered the significance of the Nuremberg Laws for most of the approximately 30,000 intermarried “full Jews,” now classified as “privileged.” What could have motivated this decision? Longerich deflects scrutiny by casting the decree merely as part of “a further wave of discriminatory provisions.”

Hitler biographies skirt the Holocaust when it comes to intermarried couples. Longerich does not mention intermarried Jews in connection with the Wannsee Conference, although discussions of them and their Mischlinge children dominated almost half of the meeting. He rightly states that the Wannsee Conference did not make decisions on genocide and that these decisions remained in flux, but Ullrich suggests that State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart’s complaints about the “never-ending bureaucratic work” of these special cases is what mattered.³⁵ Kershaw also overlooks the lengthy discussion of intermarried Jews at Wannsee, mentioning only the Mischlinge in passing. But as indicated by Hitler’s December 6, 1942, authorization for Goebbels to “ensur[e] that the nonprivileged full Jews are taken out of Germany,”³⁶ there was a critical difference for Hitler between “full Jews” and “half Jews” when it came to “racial purification.” Goebbels’s sessions with Hitler together with his diaries, for example the April 18, 1943, entry, make it clear that Hitler included the minority of intermarried Jews who wore the star—designated as “nonprivileged Jews” by Hitler in December 1938—as among the Jews now to be deported. Goebbels regularly writes merely of the “Jews,” and his mention of “full Jews” here also indicates he did not plan to deport the fraction of half-Jewish Mischlinge who wore the star.

It is particularly in relation to Hitler’s December 1938 intermarriage decree and his close direction of the deportation of Berlin’s Jews that it becomes clear how cumulative radicalization as a way of explaining the Final Solution does not hold within the Reich as it does in the East. Goebbels, who, as Kershaw writes, was “probably the closest that Hitler came to friendship,” worked toward the Führer in ways that upheld the Hitler Myth, although this sometimes placed constraints on “cumulative radicalization.”³⁷ In contrast to the free rein Gauleiters had in the East to deport those they designated as Jews as it suited them, Goebbels as Gauleiter in the German capital never made a move against what he called the “delicate” intermarried cases without Hitler’s permission. Corresponding with Hitler’s December 6, 1942, authorization, Goebbels resolved on February 18 to declare Berlin free of Jews by March 1943. At the same time, the SS Economic Division in Auschwitz was promised an allotment of skilled laborers from Berlin in early March 1943 that could be met only by including intermarried Jews in the deportations.³⁸ But as Goebbels recorded on March 6, 1943 (complaining about those who carried out orders blindly without adjusting to circumstances), conditions arose that caused him to change those orders—and he at

³⁴For what Martin Bormann described as Hitler’s “fundamental decisions” dividing intermarried Jews into privileged and nonprivileged categories, see Nuremberg Document 069-PS.

³⁵Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Downfall 1939–1945*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Knopf, 2020), 282.

³⁶December 6, 1943, entry in Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels—Sämtliche Fragmente*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, part II, vol. 10 (Munich: Saur, 1987–2008).

³⁷Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, 178.

³⁸See also Joachim Neander, “Auschwitz, the ‘Fabrikaktion,’ Rosenstrasse: A Plea for a Change of Perspective in Protest,” in *Protest in Hitler’s “National Community,”* ed. Nathan Stoltzfus and Birgit Meyer-Katkin (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 125–42, esp. 132–33, and Appendix 8, 251–54.

once visited Hitler for his approval of the precedence Goebbels had granted wartime morale for the moment.

Hitler's leash on Goebbels and the survival of Germany's intermarried Jews complicate the theory of cumulative radicalization within the Reich, especially in light of other coeval points at which Hitler ordered his Gauleiter lieutenants to desist from using force in favor of the "appropriate means" of "education"—that is, convincing Germans that their self-interest coincided with the Nazi course.³⁹ Decisions on intermarried Jews illustrate the fluctuating conflict between forces from top and bottom, with the Volk collectively taking on increased presence as "total war" ramped up the regime's dependence on morale, to a point on November 2, 1943, when Goebbels voiced fears that the regime was abating its authority by "giv[ing] in to the pressure of the street."⁴⁰

The fate of intermarried Jews can reveal patterns of rule while underscoring the usefulness of both top-down and bottom-up approaches. It also illustrates well Hitler's direct hand in Holocaust orders that pitted the Nazi principle of racial purification against the precept of preserving Hitler's image, which was especially vulnerable in cases of intermarried Jews due to intensified demands of secrecy. The durability of the Hitler Myth, an important model for understanding Hitler's power, was maintained by constraints, however temporary they were thought to be, on working toward the Führer, while making room for a third important model—Hitler's ability to keep his goals in mind while patiently waiting for circumstances to align before he struck. This frames some of Hitler's inaction as nascent action as he waited on circumstances, a conclusion more easily reached through Longerich than Kershaw.

The continuing trajectory of Hitler biographies has integrated Holocaust history, but there is more to fathom, including themes of gender. There are connections between gender and intermarriage related to our understanding of resistance as well as its reception, as Katharina von Kellenbach has argued well.⁴¹ While the history of intermarried Jews, inside and outside the Reich, weighs on the structuralist bottom-up approach, themes of gender (beyond Hitler's relationship to women, which Langer identified) also suggest additional dimensions of importance that coincide with the problem of the intermarried Jews, including Goebbels's fears by November 1943 that the regime was giving in to women's demands on the streets instead of using naked force to suppress them. It was women rather than men who gathered repeatedly, publicly to pressure the regime, suggesting that women had their own forms of defiance. Gender was a core factor in the regime's categorization of intermarried Jews as either privileged or nonprivileged, following complaints due to the Kristallnacht pogrom: women partners of Aryan men were "privileged" and did not wear the star, whereas non-Jewish women married to Jews were "nonprivileged," in a "Jewish household" that was marked by the star on the doorway. Also, *Rassenschande* was most serious when the male was Jewish.

³⁹Nathan Stoltzfus, *Hitler's Compromises: Coercion and Consensus in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 271; Julie Torrie, "For Their Own Good": *Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 111.

⁴⁰November 2, 1943, entry in Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, part II, vol. 10.

⁴¹Katharina von Kellenbach, "The 'Legend' of Women's Resistance in the Rosenstrasse," in *Protest in Hitler's National Community*, 106–24.

Although some debate persists whether Ullrich has upstaged Kershaw as the “definitive” biographer of Hitler, historians make different judgments about strengths, weaknesses, and absences, and note that changes across time have not necessarily yielded unconditional gains to our knowledge.

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