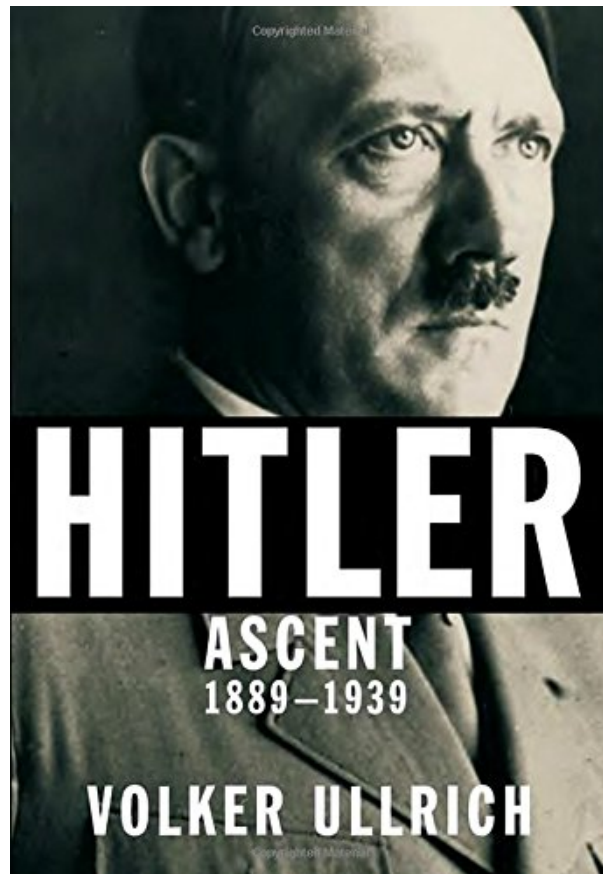
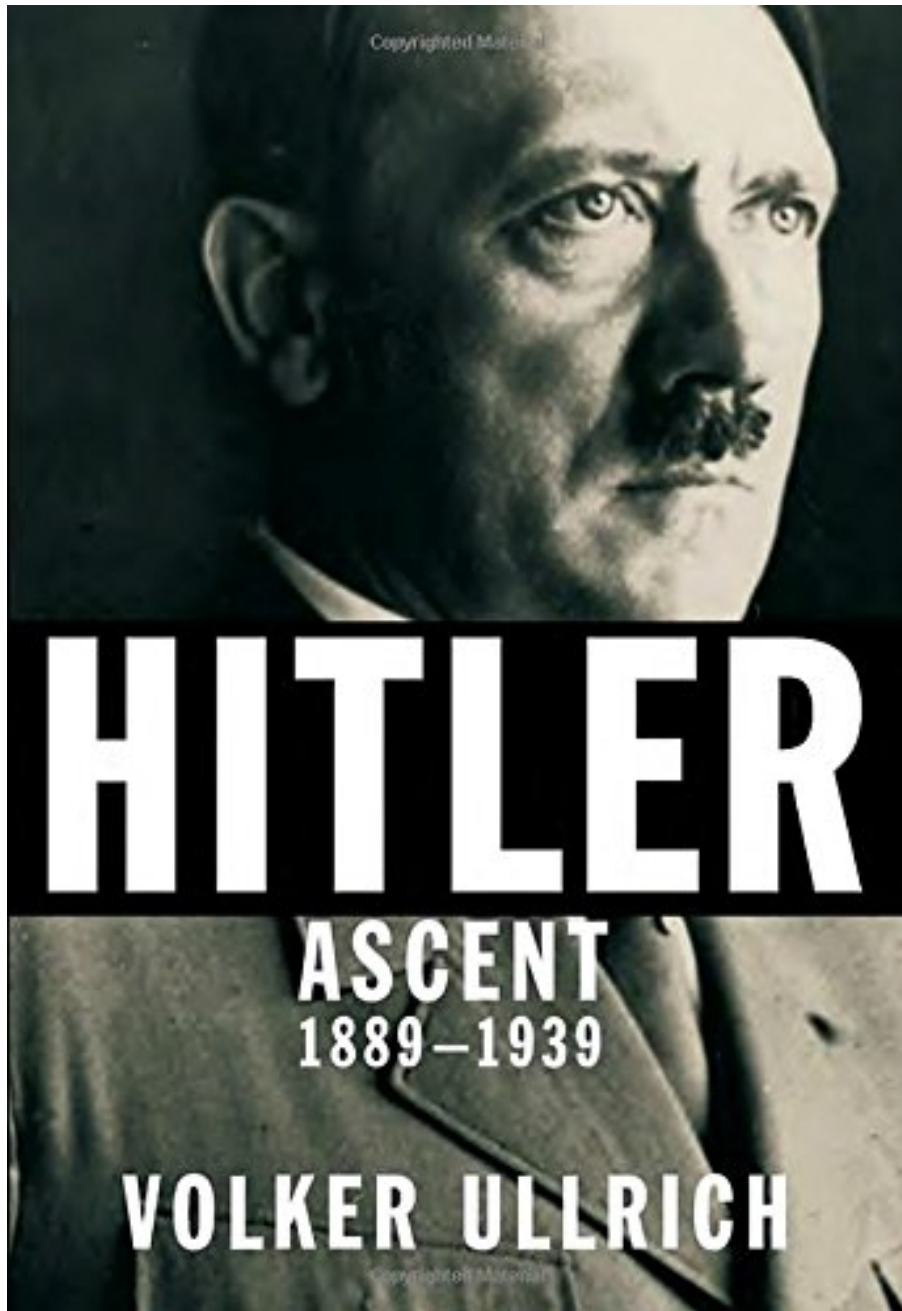


HITLER: ASCENT, 1889-1939 BY VOLKER ULLRICH



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Review

“A wonderful array of well-chosen anecdotes...Mr. Ullrich is a journalist rather than an academic, which partly explains one of the book’s many positive features — its remarkable fluency and readability...[F]or an entirely sound, interesting and even entertaining account, Mr. Ullrich’s study can be thoroughly recommended as a most worthwhile addition to the voluminous literature on the man.”

—Neil Gregor, The Wall Street Journal

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—Kirkus

“[A] fascinating Shakespearean parable about how the confluence of circumstance, chance, a ruthless individual and the willful blindness of others can transform a country — and, in Hitler’s case, lead to an unimaginable nightmare for the world.”

—Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times

“This is, by any measure, an outstanding study... Learned, calm and riveting... All the huge, and terrible moments of the early Nazi era are dissected, from the early beer hall speeches, to the failed putsch, through the economic and social dislocation of Weimar and the opportunities that presented... The political history is meticulously told. But the real strength of this book is in disentangling the personal story of man and monster... Ullrich’s rigour and sensitivity enables him to succeed.”

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—Robert Gellately, *Times Higher Education*

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—Timur Vermes, author of *Look Who's Back*

"The first volume of Volker Ullrich's monumental new biography, *Adolf Hitler: Die Jahre des Aufstiegs 1889-1939*, is beautifully written, as befits the experienced journalist, and deeply and freshly researched, with many new details and a finely balanced judgement, as one would expect from the trained historian."

—Sir Richard J. Evans, *Times Higher Education* "Best Books of 2013"

"Ullrich's attention to detail during this period of Adolf Hitler's life is exceptional... If the second volume is as informative and interesting as the first, it will be a valuable collection for those interested in this era and those who are just learning about it."

—Judith Reveal, *New York Journal of Books*

About the Author

VOLKER ULLRICH is a historian and journalist whose previous books in German include biographies of Bismarck and Napoleon, as well as a major study of Imperial Germany, *Die nervöse Grossmacht 1871–1918* (The Nervous Superpower). From 1990 to 2009, Ullrich was the editor of the political book review section of the influential weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

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“Hitler As Human Being”

Excerpt (pgs. 382-386)

As a rule, people who got a close look at the Führer for the first time were rarely impressed. After a meeting with Hitler in December 1931, the industrialist Günther Quandt deemed him the very definition of average. Sefton Delmer described him as an everyday person reminiscent of a travelling salesman or a junior officer. As we saw, the American reporter Dorothy Thompson called Hitler the exact prototype of the little man on the street. William Shirer, the correspondent for America’s Universal News Service, also came away disappointed after seeing Hitler in September 1934 at the Nuremberg rally. “His face,” Shirer wrote in his diary, “had no particular expression at all—I expected it to be stronger—and for the life of me I could not quite comprehend what hidden springs he undoubtedly loosened in the hysterical mob which was greeting him so wildly.”

Hitler’s appearance was hardly winning. Finance Minister von Krosigk, who met Hitler for the first time when the new chancellor was sworn in on 30 January 1933, recalled the Führer’s face as being unremarkable. “There was nothing harmonious about his features, nor did they have the irregularity that expresses individual human spirit,” Krosigk wrote. “A lock of hair that flopped down over his forehead and the rudiments of a moustache only two fingers wide gave his appearance something comic.” Hitler’s moustache was the feature that everyone noticed. Early on, Hanfstaengl had urged him to shave it off, arguing that it was fodder for caricaturists. “My moustache will be all the rage one day—you can bet on that,” Hitler replied. Around 1925 or 1926 he told Adelheid Klein, a friend in Munich: “Imagine my face without the moustache! . . . My nose is much too big. I have to soften it with the moustache!” Indeed, Hitler’s large, fleshy nose was rather disproportionate to the rest of his face. Klaus Mann called it the “most foul and most characteristic” aspect of Hitler’s physiognomy. For his part Albert Speer claimed that he only noticed how ugly and disproportionate Hitler’s face was in the final months of the Third Reich, when the Führer’s appeal was declining. “How did I not notice that in all the years?” he wondered in his Spandau prison cell in late November 1946. “Curious!”

Almost everyone who came into contact with Hitler was struck by another feature. Upon seeing the young Hitler for the first time in 1919, Karl Alexander von Müller immediately noted his “large, light-blue, fanatically and coldly gleaming eyes.” Lieselotte Schmidt, an assistant and nanny to Winifred Wagner, had a different impression. Like her mistress, she admired Hitler and found that his eyes shone with goodness and warmth. “One glance from his lovely violet-blue eyes was enough to sense his gentle temperament and good heart,” Schmidt said in 1929. Otto Wagener, the economic adviser who entered Hitler’s service that same year and still professed his admiration of the Führer in a British POW camp in 1946, recalled:

From the first moment, his eyes captivated me. They were clear and large and calm. He stared at me full of self-confidence. But his gaze did not come from his eyeballs. On the contrary, I felt it came from somewhere far deeper, from infinity. You could read nothing in his eyes. But they spoke and wanted to say something.

Christa Schroeder, one of Hitler’s secretaries from 1933 onwards, was somewhat more sober: “I found Hitler’s eyes very expressive. They looked interested and probing and always became more animated whenever he spoke.” The playwright Gerhart Hauptmann also noted Hitler’s “strange and lovely eyes” after meeting the Führer at the inauguration of the Reich Culture Chamber in November 1933.

Whether people perceived Hitler’s gaze as cold or benevolent, impenetrable or friendly and inquisitive

depended both on the given situation and their political views. “What admirers praise as the power of his eyes strikes neutral observers as a greedy stare without that hint of decency that makes a gaze truly compelling,” wrote the Hitler detractor Konrad Heiden. “His gaze repels more than it captivates.”

But even critical observers sometimes praised his eyes. “Hitler’s eyes were startling and unforgettable,” wrote Martha Dodd, the daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Germany, William Edward Dodd, after being introduced to Hitler by Hanfstaengl in 1933. “They seemed pale blue in colour, were intense, unwavering, hypnotic.”

Alongside his eyes, Hitler’s hands attracted the most attention. “So expressive in their movements as to compete with the eyes” was how Houston Stewart Chamberlain put it in a fawning letter to Hitler in 1923. For Krosigk, Hitler’s hands were nervous, delicate and “almost feminine.” In 1933, when the philosopher Karl Jaspers voiced doubts as to whether someone as uneducated as Hitler could lead Germany, his colleague Martin Heidegger replied: “Education is irrelevant . . . just look at those lovely hands.” Many of Heidegger’s contemporaries shared his admiration for the Führer’s hands. In an article for the December 1936 edition of *New Literature*, the head of German radio characterised Hitler’s delicate hands as being the tools of an “artist and great creator.” And in October 1942, while imprisoned in a British POW camp, General Ludwig Crüwell opined: “His hands are truly striking—lovely hands . . . He’s got the hands of an artist. My eyes were always drawn to his hands.”

But more impressive than his eyes and hands was Hitler’s talent for speaking. His appearance may have made him seem average and everyday, but as soon as he took to the stage, he was transformed into a demagogue the likes of which Germany had never known. Admirers and detractors were in absolute agreement on this point. In his essay “Brother Hitler,” Thomas Mann attributed Hitler’s rise to his “eloquence, which although unspeakably base, has huge sway over the masses.” Heiden wrote of “an incomparable barometer of mass moods,” while Otto Strasser spoke of an “unusually sensitive seismograph of the soul.” Strasser also compared Hitler to a “membrane” broadcasting the most secret longings and emotions of the masses. Krosigk concurred. “He sensed what the masses were longing for and translated it into firebrand slogans,” the Reich finance minister wrote. “He appealed to the instincts slumbering in people’s unconsciousness and offered something to everyone.” The American journalist Hubert R. Knickerbocker, who had encountered Hitler as a seemingly polite, small-time politician in the NSDAP’s Munich headquarters in 1931, was astonished by a public appearance that same evening. “He was an evangelist speaking at a tent meeting, the Billy Sunday of German politics,” the Pulitzer Prize winner wrote. “Those he had converted followed him, laughed with him, felt with him. Together they mocked the French. Together they hissed off the Republic. Eight thousand people became one instrument on which Hitler played his symphony of national passion.” As Knickerbocker realised, the secret to Hitler’s success lay in the mutual identification between speaker and audience—in the exchange of individual and collective sensitivities and neuroses.

It was not only the faithful whom Hitler managed to put under his spell. “There won’t be anyone like him for quite some time,” Rudolf Hess wrote in 1924 while imprisoned in Landsberg, “a man who can sweep away both the most left-wing lathe operator and the right-wing government official in a single mass event.” Hess’s view was no exaggeration. Numerous contemporaries who rejected Hitler and his party struggled to resist the lure of Hitler’s overwhelming rhetoric—indeed, some succumbed to it. In his memoirs, the historian Golo Mann described the impression a Hitler speech made on him as a 19-year-old student in the autumn of 1928. “I had to steel myself against the energy and persuasive force of the speaker,” Mann wrote. “A Jewish friend of mine, whom I had brought along, was unable to resist. ‘He’s right,’ he whispered in my ear. How many times had I heard this phrase ‘He’s right’ uttered by listeners from whom I would have least expected it?”

Hitler's talent for persuasive oration gave him a hypnotic sway over crowds. Part of his secret was his unusually powerful and variable voice. "Those who only know Hitler from the events of later years, after he had mutated into an immoderately thundering dictator and demagogue at the microphone, have no idea what a flexible and mellifluous instrument his natural, non-amplified voice was in the early years of his political career," noted Hanfstaengl. It was Hitler's voice, at a speech in Weimar in March 1925, that won over Baldur von Schirach, later the Nazis' Reich youth leader, at the age of 18. "It was a voice unlike any other I had heard from a public speaker," Schirach recalled. "It was deep and rough, resonant as a cello. His accent, which we thought was Austrian but was actually Lower Bavarian, was alien to central Germany and compelled you to listen." he called himself the greatest actor in Europe," Krosigk recalled. That statement was one of the excessive flights of fancy to which the dictator became increasingly prone in his later years. Nonetheless, Hitler had an undeniable ability to don different masks to suit various occasions and to inhabit changing roles. "He could be a charming conversation partner who kissed women's hands, a friendly uncle who gave children chocolate, or a man of the people who could shake the callused hands of farmers and artisans," remarked Albert Krebs, the Gauleiter of Hamburg. When invited to the Bechstein and Bruckmann salons or to afternoon tea at the Schirachs' in Weimar, he would play the upstanding, suit-and-tie-wearing bourgeois to fit in with such social settings. At NSDAP party conferences, he dressed in a brown shirt and cast himself as a prototypical street fighter who made no secret of his contempt for polite society.

Hitler adapted his speeches to people's expectations. In front of the Reichstag, he talked like a wise statesman. When he spoke to a circle of industrialists he was a man of moderation. To women he was the good-humoured father who loved children, while in front of large crowds he was a fiery volcano. To his fellow party members he was the truest and bravest soldier who sacrificed himself and was therefore allowed to demand sacrifices of others. André François-Poncet, who witnessed Hitler's various appearances at the Nuremberg rally in 1935, was impressed by the Führer's ability to intuit the mood of each given audience. "He found the words and tone he needed for all of them," the French ambassador remarked. "He ran the gamut from biting to melodramatic to intimate and lordly." The man who succeeded François-Poncet in 1938, Robert Coulondre, was also surprised by the man he met at the Berghof retreat when he presented his letter of credence in November. "I was expecting a thundering Jove in his castle and what I got was a simple, gentle, possibly shy man in his country home," Coulondre reported. "I had heard the rough, screaming, threatening and demanding voice of the Führer on the radio. Now I became acquainted with a Hitler who had a warm, calm, friendly and understanding voice. Which one is the true Hitler? Or are they both true?"

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A major new biography—an extraordinary, penetrating study of the man who has become the personification of evil.

“Ullrich reveals Hitler to have been an eminently practical politician—and frighteningly so. Timely... One of the best works on Hitler and the origins of the Third Reich to appear in recent years.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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For all the literature about Adolf Hitler there have been just four seminal biographies; this is the fifth, a landmark work that sheds important new light on Hitler himself. Drawing on previously unseen papers and a wealth of recent scholarly research, Volker Ullrich reveals the man behind the public persona, from Hitler's childhood to his failures as a young man in Vienna to his experiences during the First World War to his rise as a far-right party leader. Ullrich deftly captures Hitler's intelligence, instinctive grasp of politics, and gift for oratory as well as his megalomania, deep insecurity, and repulsive worldview.

Many previous biographies have focused on the larger social conditions that explain the rise of the Third Reich. Ullrich gives us a comprehensive portrait of a postwar Germany humiliated by defeat, wracked by political crisis, and starved by an economic depression, but his real gift is to show vividly how Hitler used his ruthlessness and political talent to shape the Nazi party and lead it to power. For decades the world has tried to grasp how Hitler was possible. By focusing on the man at the center of it all, on how he experienced his world, formed his political beliefs, and wielded power, this riveting biography brings us closer than ever to the answer.

Translated from the German by Jefferson Chase.

- Sales Rank: #317 in Books
- Published on: 2016-09-06
- Released on: 2016-09-06
- Format: Deckle Edge
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 1.90" w x 6.60" l, 1.25 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 1008 pages

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About the Author

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HITLER by Volker Ullrich

"Hitler As Human Being"

Excerpt (pgs. 382-386)

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Almost everyone who came into contact with Hitler was struck by another feature. Upon seeing the young Hitler for the first time in 1919, Karl Alexander von Müller immediately noted his “large, light-blue, fanatically and coldly gleaming eyes.” Lieselotte Schmidt, an assistant and nanny to Winifred Wagner, had a different impression. Like her mistress, she admired Hitler and found that his eyes shone with goodness and warmth. “One glance from his lovely violet-blue eyes was enough to sense his gentle temperament and good heart,” Schmidt said in 1929. Otto Wagener, the economic adviser who entered Hitler’s service that same year and still professed his admiration of the Führer in a British POW camp in 1946, recalled:

From the first moment, his eyes captivated me. They were clear and large and calm. He stared at me full of self-confidence. But his gaze did not come from his eyeballs. On the contrary, I felt it came from somewhere far deeper, from infinity. You could read nothing in his eyes. But they spoke and wanted to say something.

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But even critical observers sometimes praised his eyes. “Hitler’s eyes were startling and unforgettable,” wrote Martha Dodd, the daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Germany, William Edward Dodd, after being introduced to Hitler by Hanfstaengl in 1933. “They seemed pale blue in colour, were intense, unwavering, hypnotic.”

Alongside his eyes, Hitler’s hands attracted the most attention. “So expressive in their movements as to compete with the eyes” was how Houston Stewart Chamberlain put it in a fawning letter to Hitler in 1923. For Krosigk, Hitler’s hands were nervous, delicate and “almost feminine.” In 1933, when the philosopher Karl Jaspers voiced doubts as to whether someone as uneducated as Hitler could lead Germany, his colleague Martin Heidegger replied: “Education is irrelevant . . . just look at those lovely hands.” Many of Heidegger’s contemporaries shared his admiration for the Führer’s hands. In an article for the December 1936 edition of *New Literature*, the head of German radio characterised Hitler’s delicate hands as being the tools of an “artist and great creator.” And in October 1942, while imprisoned in a British POW camp, General Ludwig Crüwell opined: “His hands are truly striking—lovely hands . . . He’s got the hands of an artist. My eyes were always drawn to his hands.”

But more impressive than his eyes and hands was Hitler's talent for speaking. His appearance may have made him seem average and everyday, but as soon as he took to the stage, he was transformed into a demagogue the likes of which Germany had never known. Admirers and detractors were in absolute agreement on this point. In his essay "Brother Hitler," Thomas Mann attributed Hitler's rise to his "eloquence, which although unspeakably base, has huge sway over the masses." Heiden wrote of "an incomparable barometer of mass moods," while Otto Strasser spoke of an "unusually sensitive seismograph of the soul." Strasser also compared Hitler to a "membrane" broadcasting the most secret longings and emotions of the masses. Krosigk concurred. "He sensed what the masses were longing for and translated it into firebrand slogans," the Reich finance minister wrote. "He appealed to the instincts slumbering in people's unconsciousness and offered something to everyone." The American journalist Hubert R. Knickerbocker, who had encountered Hitler as a seemingly polite, small-time politician in the NSDAP's Munich headquarters in 1931, was astonished by a public appearance that same evening. "He was an evangelist speaking at a tent meeting, the Billy Sunday of German politics," the Pulitzer Prize winner wrote. "Those he had converted followed him, laughed with him, felt with him. Together they mocked the French. Together they hissed off the Republic. Eight thousand people became one instrument on which Hitler played his symphony of national passion." As Knickerbocker realised, the secret to Hitler's success lay in the mutual identification between speaker and audience—in the exchange of individual and collective sensitivities and neuroses.

It was not only the faithful whom Hitler managed to put under his spell. "There won't be anyone like him for quite some time," Rudolf Hess wrote in 1924 while imprisoned in Landsberg, "a man who can sweep away both the most left-wing lathe operator and the right-wing government official in a single mass event." Hess's view was no exaggeration. Numerous contemporaries who rejected Hitler and his party struggled to resist the lure of Hitler's overwhelming rhetoric—indeed, some succumbed to it. In his memoirs, the historian Golo Mann described the impression a Hitler speech made on him as a 19-year-old student in the autumn of 1928. "I had to steel myself against the energy and persuasive force of the speaker," Mann wrote. "A Jewish friend of mine, whom I had brought along, was unable to resist. 'He's right,' he whispered in my ear. How many times had I heard this phrase 'He's right' uttered by listeners from whom I would have least expected it?"

Hitler's talent for persuasive oration gave him a hypnotic sway over crowds. Part of his secret was his unusually powerful and variable voice. "Those who only know Hitler from the events of later years, after he had mutated into an immoderately thundering dictator and demagogue at the microphone, have no idea what a flexible and mellifluous instrument his natural, non-amplified voice was in the early years of his political career," noted Hanfstaengl. It was Hitler's voice, at a speech in Weimar in March 1925, that won over Baldur von Schirach, later the Nazis' Reich youth leader, at the age of 18. "It was a voice unlike any other I had heard from a public speaker," Schirach recalled. "It was deep and rough, resonant as a cello. His accent, which we thought was Austrian but was actually Lower Bavarian, was alien to central Germany and compelled you to listen." he called himself the greatest actor in Europe," Krosigk recalled. That statement was one of the excessive flights of fancy to which the dictator became increasingly prone in his later years. Nonetheless, Hitler had an undeniable ability to don different masks to suit various occasions and to inhabit changing roles. "He could be a charming conversation partner who kissed women's hands, a friendly uncle who gave children chocolate, or a man of the people who could shake the callused hands of farmers and artisans," remarked Albert Krebs, the Gauleiter of Hamburg. When invited to the Bechstein and Bruckmann salons or to afternoon tea at the Schirachs' in Weimar, he would play the upstanding, suit-and-tie-wearing bourgeois to fit in with such social settings. At NSDAP party conferences, he dressed in a brown shirt and cast himself as a prototypical street fighter who made no secret of his contempt for polite society.

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Most helpful customer reviews

63 of 64 people found the following review helpful.

Best source for Hitler's life

By Richard Moss

The best source for Hitler's life up to the outbreak of WW2. Clear, level-headed. Absorbing.

Best source for Hitler's life: Kershaw's classic two-volume biography is the obvious comparison. Ullrich has 15 years of subsequent research to draw on. As well, Kershaw presents a Life and Times, while Ullrich focuses on the life. Ullrich can seem plodding in comparison with Kershaw's brilliance, and subsequent research doesn't overturn Kershaw's analysis, so you may still prefer him. If you've already read Kershaw and you want to go deeper, Ullrich is for you.

Clear: Straightforward, fairly concise, readable. Excellent translation, livelier than the original.

Level-headed: Ullrich disposes of much of the nonsense written about Hitler -- that he was a shirker in WW1, or gay, or lazy. He doesn't swallow Speer's self-serving lies.

Absorbing: Ullrich's method is to give the facts with a minimum of analysis. It's dry, but the events are so powerful that the result is absorbing. I didn't find the book too long. Yes, it's 1,000 pages, but 232 of them are source notes, and there is a lot to cover.

Book or Kindle? Buy the Kindle version. The book is workmanlike rather than attractive.

27 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Hitler Ascent 1889-1939 is a well written thorough account of evil Adolf's rise to the Chancellorship of Germany in 1933

By C. M Mills

What If's abound in the discipline of history. How great it would have been if Adolf Hitler had never been born to leash untold murder on the Jewish population of Europe and to lead to the murder of millions of victims in the inferno of World War II. But Hitler was born. He did live. His story has been told in millions of words and thousands of books.

What makes this book by Dr. Volker Ullrich originally written in German worth your time and money?

. a. The author dispels many of the myths about Hitler. For instance, there is no truth to the canards that he murdered his niece Geli Raubel or was gay or had only one testicle. Hitler had a photographic memory, loved art and architecture and enjoyed motor cars though he never learned to drive.

b. Hitler could be cold and cruel but also congenial with close friends.

c. This book covers the life of Hitler from his Austrian birth, life as a bum in Vienna and Munich, service in

World War I when he won an Iron Cross First Class and his early entry into politics and right wing Anti-Semitic organizations.

d. the book gives detailed information on the internecine Nazi Party disputes; Hitler's nine months as a prisoner in Landsberg Prison following his treason trial and his arrest following the failed Beerhall Putsch in November, 1923 and his writing of Mein Kampf while incarcerated.

e. We learn of his genius as a rhetorician and public speaker of mesmerizing ability.

f. Hitler was a mimic, a skilled actor and a lover of the music of his idol Richard Wagner.

g. The two goals of the NSDAP were the elimination of Jews through murder in Europe and the defeat of the Soviet Union.

The book is well written though dry and is easier to comprehend than the two volume work on Hitler published by Ian Kershaw fifteen years ago.

The biography draws on new archival material which has become available to authors and researchers in the last few years.

Hitler Ascent is the first volume of the projected two volume set which will follow the evil Fuhrer to his suicide in 1945. An excellent well researched book.

40 of 42 people found the following review helpful.

A dense, crucial and scholarly work

By Bookreporter

First published in Germany in 2013, HITLER: ASCENT 1889-1939 is a dense, scholarly work that looks at the dictator of the Third Reich from many perspectives, offering perhaps the most "human" view available in our times.

Volker Ullrich states that writing about Adolf Hitler is "without a doubt the most difficult task for a historian." Hitler was, by the time of his suicide at the end of World War II, considered by all but a handful of his most fanatical followers to be a monster, and since then has been almost universally depicted as such. Thus a chapter entitled "Hitler as Human Being" reveals the author's notable determination to present a responsible view of his complex protagonist. Ullrich chronicles Hitler's early childhood, his adolescence as a rather dreamy school dropout and his service in World War I, up to the moment when he became the occupant of the German Chancellery, pivoting his country to the brink of all-out war.

Contrary to other accounts that suggest Hitler was the product of abuse, Ullrich asserts that the boy experienced an unremarkable childhood for the time and place. The young Hitler showed early academic promise but wound up with slipping grades, contempt for teachers and an autodidact's love of solitary reading. Eschewing the intimacy of most romantic relationships, but not a sexual deviant, he purposely developed an uncommon ability to stifle personal sentiment and morph into an iron-willed leader with near superhuman charisma. His pale violet eyes were variously described as intense, hypnotic, unforgettable and unwavering. Though he had only average talent as a painter, his hands were cited as those of an artist, and he used them memorably in his highly dramatic speeches.

Admirably intent on presenting Hitler in an unbiased manner, Ullrich cannot help but paint a picture of an aberrant character devising and achieving an unprecedented rise to glorification. Hitler could cry at will, hide feelings of contempt behind a gracious persona, and had a prodigious memory --- but only for the facts he considered important. He could be both warm and cold, so extremely so that even his closest confidantes were perplexed when they thought back on it. And though anti-Semitism was rife in Germany after World War I, it was Hitler alone, in his distant and nuanced manner, who would cold-bloodedly predict, in 1939, "the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."

Ullrich's thoughtful first volume of the Hitler biography immediately made the bestseller list in his native

land. No stranger to exploration of the megalomaniacal personality, having written previously about Bismarck and Napoleon, Ullrich expresses his belief that by allowing Hitler some traces of normality, the deeds of the future Führer “will emerge as even more horrific.”

Reviewed by Barbara Bamberger Scott

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HITLER: ASCENT, 1889-1939 BY VOLKER ULLRICH PDF

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Review

“A wonderful array of well-chosen anecdotes...Mr. Ullrich is a journalist rather than an academic, which partly explains one of the book’s many positive features — its remarkable fluency and readability...[F]or an entirely sound, interesting and even entertaining account, Mr. Ullrich’s study can be thoroughly recommended as a most worthwhile addition to the voluminous literature on the man.”

—Neil Gregor, *The Wall Street Journal*

“The author deals with the usual turns, such as Hitler’s rough years as an aspiring artist and the horrors of trench warfare in World War I, but he adds welcome observations and interesting asides along the way...Timely, given the increase in right-wing intransigence throughout the world, and one of the best works on Hitler and the origins of the Third Reich to appear in recent years.”

—Kirkus

“[A] fascinating Shakespearean parable about how the confluence of circumstance, chance, a ruthless individual and the willful blindness of others can transform a country — and, in Hitler’s case, lead to an unimaginable nightmare for the world.”

—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“This is, by any measure, an outstanding study... Learned, calm and riveting... All the huge, and terrible moments of the early Nazi era are dissected, from the early beer hall speeches, to the failed putsch, through the economic and social dislocation of Weimar and the opportunities that presented... The political history is meticulously told. But the real strength of this book is in disentangling the personal story of man and monster... Ullrich’s rigour and sensitivity enables him to succeed.”

—John Kampfner, *The Guardian* (U.K.)

"A superb biography of the Führer’s pre-war years...Readable and compelling... This biography stands apart thanks to Ullrich’s refusal to buy into the idea—assiduously fostered by the Fuhrer himself—that Hitler was invulnerable... The contradictory vulnerabilities that he calmly exposes heighten the power of this extraordinary portrait... It is a tribute to Ullrich’s absorbing biography that one contemplates its second volume with a shudder."

—Miranda Seymour, *Daily Telegraph* (U.K.)

“Striking... A highly detailed and always interesting critical narrative of [Hitler’s] political life... What mark[s] him out is his conscious abandonment of conventional morality: the monstrous, shameless ease with which he lied, betrayed and murdered... Full, intelligent and lucidly written... Ullrich’s narrative of Hitler’s

rise to power... is full, intelligent and lucidly written.”

—Neal Ascherson, *The London Review of Books*

“It succeeds brilliantly ... [deserves] to be read as widely as possible.”

— David Aaronovitch, *The Times* “Book of the Week” (U.K)

"In a most impressive and massive account, [Volker Ullrich] adds telling details and subtle nuances to the dictator’s portrait and provides a fresh perspective on his rise. The result is a must-read book that is bound to be a critical and commercial success."

—Robert Gellately, *Times Higher Education*

“Fine biography... Where Ullrich adds greatly to our understanding is by making the mercurial, changeable and...profoundly unknowable Hitler believable... This is a major achievement... Impressive and revealing biography.”

—Nicholas Stargardt, *Literary Review*

“Volker Ullrich compellingly tells us once again that no one could have been under any illusion about Hitler’s general intentions towards the Jews from his very first appearance as a political figure, even if the detailed planning of genocide took some time to solidify... Insightful ... Acutely argued... One of the more unexpected questions we are left with by a study of political nightmare such as Ullrich’s excellent book is how we find the resources for identifying the absurd as well as for clarifying the grounds of law and honour.”

—Rowan Williams, *The New Statesman*

"Volker Ullrich works like a master chef: he trusts his ingredients and uses them with great care. The Hitler that emerges is droll, clever, hysterical, and at the same time alarmingly pragmatic; the reader is able to follow his development from oddball to messiah, propelled forwards by the dynamics between the Fuhrer and his people. Ullrich describes what happened: nothing more, nothing less. And it is exactly this impressive restraint which gives the book its two important qualities: it is both reliable and enormously entertaining."

—Timur Vermes, author of *Look Who's Back*

"The first volume of Volker Ullrich’s monumental new biography, *Adolf Hitler: Die Jahre des Aufstiegs 1889-1939*, is beautifully written, as befits the experienced journalist, and deeply and freshly researched, with many new details and a finely balanced judgement, as one would expect from the trained historian."

—Sir Richard J. Evans, *Times Higher Education* “Best Books of 2013”

“Ullrich’s attention to detail during this period of Adolf Hitler’s life is exceptional... If the second volume is as informative and interesting as the first, it will be a valuable collection for those interested in this era and those who are just learning about it.”

—Judith Reveal, *New York Journal of Books*

About the Author

VOLKER ULLRICH is a historian and journalist whose previous books in German include biographies of Bismarck and Napoleon, as well as a major study of Imperial Germany, *Die nervöse Grossmacht 1871–1918* (The Nervous Superpower). From 1990 to 2009, Ullrich was the editor of the political book review section of the influential weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

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HITLER by Volker Ullrich

“Hitler As Human Being”

Excerpt (pgs. 382-386)

As a rule, people who got a close look at the Führer for the first time were rarely impressed. After a meeting with Hitler in December 1931, the industrialist Günther Quandt deemed him the very definition of average. Sefton Delmer described him as an everyday person reminiscent of a travelling salesman or a junior officer. As we saw, the American reporter Dorothy Thompson called Hitler the exact prototype of the little man on the street. William Shirer, the correspondent for America’s Universal News Service, also came away disappointed after seeing Hitler in September 1934 at the Nuremberg rally. “His face,” Shirer wrote in his diary, “had no particular expression at all—I expected it to be stronger—and for the life of me I could not quite comprehend what hidden springs he undoubtedly loosened in the hysterical mob which was greeting him so wildly.”

Hitler’s appearance was hardly winning. Finance Minister von Krosigk, who met Hitler for the first time when the new chancellor was sworn in on 30 January 1933, recalled the Führer’s face as being unremarkable. “There was nothing harmonious about his features, nor did they have the irregularity that expresses individual human spirit,” Krosigk wrote. “A lock of hair that flopped down over his forehead and the rudiments of a moustache only two fingers wide gave his appearance something comic.” Hitler’s moustache was the feature that everyone noticed. Early on, Hanfstaengl had urged him to shave it off, arguing that it was fodder for caricaturists. “My moustache will be all the rage one day—you can bet on that,” Hitler replied. Around 1925 or 1926 he told Adelheid Klein, a friend in Munich: “Imagine my face without the moustache! . . . My nose is much too big. I have to soften it with the moustache!” Indeed, Hitler’s large, fleshy nose was rather disproportionate to the rest of his face. Klaus Mann called it the “most foul and most characteristic” aspect of Hitler’s physiognomy. For his part Albert Speer claimed that he only noticed how ugly and disproportionate Hitler’s face was in the final months of the Third Reich, when the Führer’s appeal was declining. “How did I not notice that in all the years?” he wondered in his Spandau prison cell in late November 1946. “Curious!”

Almost everyone who came into contact with Hitler was struck by another feature. Upon seeing the young Hitler for the first time in 1919, Karl Alexander von Müller immediately noted his “large, light-blue, fanatically and coldly gleaming eyes.” Lieselotte Schmidt, an assistant and nanny to Winifred Wagner, had a different impression. Like her mistress, she admired Hitler and found that his eyes shone with goodness and warmth. “One glance from his lovely violet-blue eyes was enough to sense his gentle temperament and good heart,” Schmidt said in 1929. Otto Wagener, the economic adviser who entered Hitler’s service that same year and still professed his admiration of the Führer in a British POW camp in 1946, recalled:

From the first moment, his eyes captivated me. They were clear and large and calm. He stared at me full of self-confidence. But his gaze did not come from his eyeballs. On the contrary, I felt it came from somewhere far deeper, from infinity. You could read nothing in his eyes. But they spoke and wanted to say something.

Christa Schroeder, one of Hitler’s secretaries from 1933 onwards, was somewhat more sober: “I found Hitler’s eyes very expressive. They looked interested and probing and always became more animated whenever he spoke.” The playwright Gerhart Hauptmann also noted Hitler’s “strange and lovely eyes” after meeting the Führer at the inauguration of the Reich Culture Chamber in November 1933.

Whether people perceived Hitler’s gaze as cold or benevolent, impenetrable or friendly and inquisitive depended both on the given situation and their political views. “What admirers praise as the power of his eyes strikes neutral observers as a greedy stare without that hint of decency that makes a gaze truly

compelling,” wrote the Hitler detractor Konrad Heiden. “His gaze repels more than it captivates.”

But even critical observers sometimes praised his eyes. “Hitler’s eyes were startling and unforgettable,” wrote Martha Dodd, the daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Germany, William Edward Dodd, after being introduced to Hitler by Hanfstaengl in 1933. “They seemed pale blue in colour, were intense, unwavering, hypnotic.”

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