



Hitler

A.N. Wilson

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A ruthless dictator who saved his country from economic ruin only to nearly destroy it—and an entire people—in his quest for world domination, Adolf Hitler forever changed the course of history. In this masterful account of Hitler's life, biographer A.N. Wilson pulls back the curtain to reveal the man behind the mythic figure, shedding new light on Hitler's personality, his desires, and his complex relationship with the German people.

While Hitler maintained that his life had been characterized by “struggle” from its very beginnings, Wilson shows that the reality could not have been more different. Hitler grew up in middle-class comfort and, as a young man, lacked ambitions of any sort besides a vaguely bohemian desire to become an artist. And while the Hitlerian mythos holds that he forged his skills as a leader during the First World War, Wilson explains the truth: Hitler spent most of the war as an office boy miles from the front lines, and only received his cherished Iron Cross because of his slavishness to the officers he served. The army gave him a sense of purpose and brotherhood, however, which continued to inspire Hitler once the war ended.

Hitler left the army with no skills, contacts, or money—and yet, within fourteen years, he would become chancellor of the German nation. Wilson describes the story of Hitler's ascent as one of both opportunism and sheer political shrewdness. He possessed no real understanding of the workings of government but had a prodigious knack for public speaking, and found that a large number of Germans, despairing at their country's recent defeat and terrified by the specter of international communism, were willing to listen to the right-wing fantasies that had taken root inside his head. Allying himself with the extremist German Workers' Party (soon renamed the National Socialist Party), Hitler offered many Germans a seductive vision of how the country might raise itself back up and reclaim its rightful place at the center of world politics.

Wilson shows that, although Hitler's bid for power stalled at first, he soon gained traction with a German public starved for hope. Using his skills as a manipulator, Hitler found himself first at the head of the Nazi Party, then at the helm of the German nation. Wilson explores the forces that allowed Hitler to become Chancellor of Germany, and later to march Germany into total war. He examines Hitler's increasingly virulent anti-Semitism and his decision to implement the Final Solution to exterminate European Jews, and he considers Hitler's tactical successes—and failures—in World War II. Wilson also reveals a great deal about how Hitler's personal life affected his time as Germany's leader, from the lasting pain caused by the death of his mother and the suicide of his young niece to his poor health and addiction to the drugs prescribed by his doctor. As Wilson demonstrates, Hitler the Führer was not so different from Hitler the bohemian: lazy, moody, and hypersensitive, he ruled more through intimidation and the mystifying force of his personality than through any managerial skill or informed decision-making. His story—and that of Germany—is ultimately a cautionary tale. In a modern era enamored with progress, rationality, and modernity, it is often the darkest and most chaotic elements of society that prove the most seductive.

Hitler's unlikely rise to power and his uncanny ability to manipulate his fellow man resulted in the deaths of millions of Europeans and a horrific world war, yet despite his colossal role in world history, he remains mythologized and, as a result, misunderstood. In *Hitler*, A.N. Wilson limns this mysterious figure with great verve and acuity, showing that it was Hitler's frightening normalcy—not some otherworldly evilness—that makes him so truly terrifying.

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