



Selling Hitler

Robert Harris

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The con job of the century--the faking of the Hitler "diaries". How could some of the most distinguished historians of the Hitler era, and some of the most aggressive and street-smart publishers in the business have been taken in by these documents? This lively, witty account conveys a sobering picture of the ease with which those who profess to purvey the truth can convince themselves of almost anything.

Selling Hitler Details

Date : Published May 5th 1987 by Penguin Books (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9780140099485

Author : Robert Harris

Format : Paperback 402 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Cultural, Germany, War, World War II, Mystery, Crime

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From Reader Review Selling Hitler for online ebook

Jeremy Cox says

Slow. More detail about more people's folly than you ever wanted to know. I think I would have enjoyed a version 1/3 of the length much more.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

What a weird, weird forger. Very entertaining to read about, though.

Probably about three and a half stars.

Angus McKeogh says

Just okay. The subject matter and the story should've been gripping. Discovery of diaries written by Adolf Hitler. The story of their publication. The story of their forgery. One of the statements about how the forgeries should've been immediately known was that they were so dull and banal. And that's unfortunately exactly how this book devolved. It became so dull and banal after starting out with a flourish of interest. Collectively just okay.

Michael says

Almost makes management at my work look competent.

Neil Fox says

The Hitler diaries affair - the supposed discovery and sensational publishing of the diaries of Adolf Hitler by German news magazine Stern and the Sunday Times - remains the biggest fraud in publishing history. This was Fake News the real thing before the expression was ever coined. The affair was an operatic tragicomedy that sucked in the great and mighty of the publishing World, as well as academics and historians, destroying careers, reputations and fortunes in the process.

Robert Harris' account of the fiasco is one of farce, greed, obsession and fantasy as Stern's management - complacent, negligent and incompetent- were gripped by a collective delusion as they descended into their own bunker-like mentality.

1983, the year of the diaries' case, was almost equidistant to the end of World War 2 as it is to the time of writing this review; at the time a reminder of how potent a symbol Hitler remained almost 40 years after his death, and his continuing grip on the World's imagination - a dark mirror held up to the face of mankind. The

emergence of the diaries and fascination with their content re-opened old wounds and led to heated debate about rehabilitation and re-writing of history.

Whatever we may think of journalistic standards of today, this brand of Cheque book journalism and utter lack of accountability are thankfully a relic of the 80's. The almost unbelievable thing is that Stern lived to survive with just a few sacrificial lambs taking the fall from the editorial staff while its management and that of Gruner & Jahr and its corporate owner Bertelsmann escaped largely unscathed, as did the Sunday Times and its odious owner, Rupert Murdoch. Justice wasn't served to the higher-up's that facilitated the ridiculous hoax through their negligence and greed.

Harris recounts the affair with the journalistic flair and style of an intrepid reporter breathlessly breaking a scoop backed up by solid research. Unfortunately he signs off in 1986; this is a story that could certainly deserve and benefit from a contemporary foreword or epilogue.

Gerald Sinstadt says

Perhaps the author, who knows how to spin a good yarn, is the only one whose reputation is enhanced by Selling Hitler. Otherwise, on the one hand are the con men who market the faked Nazi memorabilia; on the other are those who fell for it all to the extent that they needed to make it true even after they began to suspect it wasn't. As a parable to illustrate the foibles of human nature the book is a classic.

The catalysts are a German journalist obsessed with collecting Nazi souvenirs, and a small-time forger of luncheon vouchers who sees a niche market develop into a career. The supporting cast of newspaper moguls and editors, journalists, professors, experts and analysts are unified by gullibility. Like Beckett's Godot, Martin Bormann promises to appear but somehow never does. As in a Faydeau farce, the the first lie provides the foundation from which one improbability becomes the source of another: so-called specimens of Hitler's handwriting are authenticated because they are compared with other examples of the same forger's work.

Robert Harris has done his homework well and presents it in all its most hilarious detail

Erik Graff says

This book details the hype surrounding the 'discovery' of Hitler's diaries during the mid-80s--and the backpeddling when they were revealed to be fraudulent. Involved were such publications as Stern, The Times of London and Newsweek; such individuals as Hugh Trevor-Roper, David Irving and Rupert Murdoch. Most interesting, however, are the glimpses one gets of the then still-living associates of Adolf Hitler and their credulous admirers.

Wayne says

"Impossible to stop reading" Observer.

"A very funny story...very well told" Norman Stone, Times Literary Supplement.

These exact and tantalising front and backcover reviews read in the book section of our local "Second-Hand Rose" type shop had me decide to purchase it,THE book,immediately. To read about Mr. Hitler at one remove would also be a pleasure rather than a trauma.

And so it all has proved:

VERY amusing; UNputdownable; photos of the leading players; and brilliant portraits of Human Nature at some of it's weakest and most self-deluding moments...these simultaneously unsettling and humorous. AND it's all well told, a cast of thousands seemingly, as yet more and more people get aboard, in what promised to be the BIGGEST discovery, not as it eventuated the BIGGEST scam and self-delusional, publishing event in History. The diaries themselves, each short volume forged in a matter of hours, were mainly lists of appointments, and EXTREMELY boring. But the recipients were never able to READ them because they were written in a dated Germanic script.Only the MOST deluded and fanatical Nazi Collector in the cast was able to do this. Error, chance, deception,greed,self-delusion and more just piling one more onto another in the growing pile that will burst the dam to release Exposure and Truth. Galloping and detailed, a roller coaster ride of a read, just the thing to distract you from ...something as long-winded and poorly edited as...lets say, Marcel Proust !!!!

Lobstergirl says

This is one of those books you have to read to believe - no Wikipedia entry can do the topic justice. The levels of stupidity, greed, gullibility, and incompetence involved are astonishing.

The story begins with the convergence of two people in the late 1970s: Konrad Kujau, a small-time but highly industrious crook who had established a cottage industry in the fabrication of Nazi documents and Hitler paintings, and Gerd Heidemann, an unscrupulous, Nazi-obsessed (not in the good way) writer at *Stern* magazine. It is a story of supply and demand. The forged Hitler diaries, of which there would eventually be about sixty volumes, didn't come into existence until Heidemann established contact with Kujau. Heidemann believed the diaries were real, and convinced superiors at *Stern* to buy the rights to them. *Stern*, its eyes filled with Deutschmark signs, began to buy the diaries. Once committed to the purchase, as well as to extreme secrecy in order that they not be scooped on the story, there was no turning back, and the proper skepticism that should have accompanied such an endeavor never developed. *Stern* was deeply, and in their opinion irrevocably, invested in the necessity of the diaries being real. Due to the extreme secrecy they practiced, over a period of years, they never had the diaries examined thoroughly by top German historians (Hugh Trevor-Roper, the expert they used, had written one book on Hitler's final days but was not an expert on the

Third Reich), never had a complete forensic analysis done, and never did the detective work that would have proved the documents were faked. Repeatedly pressed to reveal the source of the diaries, Heidemann kept throwing up roadblocks: the source was East German and his life would be in danger if his name were known, etc. Moreover, Heidemann skimmed off a large percentage of the payments from *Stern* that were supposed to be going to the owner of the diaries (the forger). His lifestyle became ever more lavish, yet no one at *Stern* demanded a proper accounting. They just kept giving him more and more money. And more and more diaries kept appearing, and Heidemann's standard of living kept rising.

In the end, after the proper forensic tests had been done (which was after *Stern* had begun to publish the diaries), the paper, ink, glue, and other materials in the volumes were found to be of postwar vintage. Moreover, the forger had copied most of the diary entries verbatim from a chronology of Hitler's schedule compiled by Max Domarus, a German historian, in 1962. Domarus had made a small number of errors, such as stating that a certain meeting took place in 1933 rather than 1932, and these errors were reproduced in the forgery.

If only *Stern* had listened to Hitler's associates who were still living. They insisted that he hadn't had the time to keep a diary. He ate dinner at 3 a.m. and then went straight to bed. He had also suffered an injury to his writing arm in the assassination attempt of 1944 and would have had to dictate any diary entries, yet they were all handwritten.

It was interesting how certain details contributed to the air of authenticity that certain of the duped experts found. The fact that there were sixty volumes, and the fact that the diary entries were overall so completely banal and non-juicy, convinced Hugh Trevor-Roper and others that they must be real.

The book reproduces a WWI-era poem supposedly written by Hitler. (It's not clear if the poem is or is not authentic.)

"An Idyll in the War"

*As the medical orderly Gottlieb Krause heard as he came through Arras,
The sudden dull cry of a woman from the closest house:
I must help! was his thought, even a German in the field remains helpful,
And a newborn baby Frenchman arrived in the world with Gottlieb Krause's help.*

*And with his typical great care he looked after the child,
Washed it, cared for it, to show we're not barbarians
And held the babe with pleasure in front of his comrades;
This little worm knows nothing of Iswolski and Delcassé's intrigues!*

*Milk was rare and needed in a hurry; in the meadow grazed a cow,
And two soldiers from the next troop commandeered her at once,
And milked her! It ran in spurts and in rich amounts,
Shrapnel fell close by but didn't stop the work.*

*Right afterwards, he gave the bottle to the child he had delivered,
And pulled two zwieback out of his pocket for the mother
An idyll proving once again the German's noble creed,
If the Limeys haven't destroyed it, the house is still there.*

Matthew Pritchard says

This is the story of the infamous Hitler Diaries fiasco in the early '80s, one of the largest publishing frauds in on record.

The series of events is explained by Harris in clear, crisp prose, and portrays a mixture of greed, hubris, political chicanery, and blatant stupidity, as the protagonists - employees of the German magazine, Stern, and The Sunday Times mainly; with cameos from Rupert Murdoch; Holocaust denier, David Irving; and various ex-Nazis from Hitler's inner circle - wheel, deal, and wheedle to get their hands on dozens of incompetently forged diaries, spending millions in the process.

What really comes out of the book, though, is a sense of the insidious fascination the world still has with Hitler, a fascination so powerful that it caused many experienced journalists and historians to throw caution to the wind in their desire to learn the inner workings of Hitler's mind.

My only gripe is that Harris perhaps went into too much detail in certain sections - the same story could have been told just as effectively with far fewer words. That said, it is still a cracking read.

Lili Kyurkchiyska says

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Laura says

From BBC radio 4 Extra:

True story of the most sensational publishing fraud in history - the forging of Adolf Hitler's diaries.

David Lowther says

Much of this book was fascinating. Unfortunately there was too much of it. The author, a renowned novelist, whose books tackle genres from Ancient Rome to the frightening future where information technology begins to take control Hal like, have always been thoroughly researched and this frequently gives them credibility. In Selling Hitler Harris has followed a similar path and no one could doubt that theses events of thirty four years ago unfolded exactly as he tells us in Selling Hitler.

What I found a little dull was the lead up to the great scandal when The Sunday Times, Stern and others proclaimed that they were publishing extracts from diaries kept by Hitler. These turned out to be fakes and reputations suffered and some media outlets became laughing stocks. All of this is told very well but how this all came about was complex and sometimes repetitive.

The book was written in 1986 which means that there is no follow up in terms of what happened to the main

players. I shall do my own research! The whole book and the affair left me pretty much open mouthed and the latter parts of the book have the pace of a thriller. However, as a standard text on one of history's biggest frauds, *Selling Hitler* is a valuable document.

David Lowther. Author of *The Blue Pencil*, *Two Families at War*, *Liberating Belsen* and *The Summer of '39*.

Claire Webster says

This was the first non-fiction Robert Harris book I had read, but I found it as instantly gripping and readable as any of his fiction. Actually, of course, it is truth of the 'stranger than fiction' kind -- a jaw-dropping tale of bold forgery, hero-worship and self-delusion -- which perfectly suits his style. The cast of fantasists, fanatics, the greedy, the lazy and the egotistical could come straight from a thriller and the twists, turns and near misses of the 'plot' keep the reader enthralled all the way to the sorry denouement.

Ivan says

Storia di una "sola"

Crediamo a ciò cui vogliamo credere, vediamo quello che vogliamo vedere, a dispetto dell'evidenza. Ciarlatani, imbroglioni al lavoro, ma non solo; in questo caso un astuto e abile falsario che nel 1983 spillò un bel po' di marchi (10 milioni) alla rivista Stern e prese per il naso Trevor-Roper, storico ed esperto del nazismo. Un qualche cosa di simile è successo a casa nostra nel 2007 con i falsi diari di Mussolini. Di piacevole lettura, Harris ci regala anche momenti di quasi suspense.
