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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ HISTORICAL

I Was Hitler's Baker

Glenn Peterson
Ideopage Press Solutions (Jun 20, 2019)
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I Was Hitler's Baker *is a disturbing and timely historical novel in which a driven, cruel, and merciless man rises to power.*

In Glenn Peterson's compelling historical novel *I Was Hitler's Baker*, an ordinary man has a chilling view of Adolf Hitler's rise to power; he explains how the German people were able to remain silent in the face of unimaginable horror.

Josef Putkamer, an ordinary, apolitical German man, was a classmate of bizarre, bullying Adolf Hitler when he was young. His experiences were frightening. Although blinded in one eye by a rock thrown by young Hitler, Putkamer was caught up in the maladjusted boy's schemes, too.

The narrative becomes more tense in time with the growth of Nazi Party membership. Hitler is appointed chancellor. Despite seeing the destruction of the businesses and lives of his Jewish neighbors, Putkamer, trying to establish a bakery in Munich, decides to rely on his past association with Hitler and the help of his Nazi wife to win Nazi favor and patronage for his bakery. "For the most part, the German people went on with their daily lives, blissfully unaware of the absolute hell their Führer was taking them into," Putkamer comments after the fact.

Putkamer proves to be both ambitious and naïve. His perspective and inner conflicts make it easy to see how German citizens were captivated by Hitler. Putkamer watches as increasing numbers of people are swayed by Hitler's electrifying speeches—speeches that target Jews and other groups, claiming they're responsible for the nation's problems. He lives his day-to-day life with unease, functioning as a husband, father, and businessman in a country in which neighbors are afraid of their neighbors.

The turmoil and confusion of the times are palpable as Putkamer, walking an emotional tightrope, ignores the suffering. Clear, pointed dialogue reveals the characters of each speaker, as when young Hitler refers to an old man who had died in a fire as "a filthy Hapsburgian."

Striking descriptions, such as of Hitler's pale blue eyes and their "piercing, almost hypnotic quality" make the work more gripping. As Putkamer transitions from a tradesman who's ignorant of the events around him into a fearful man who's struggling to survive, and finally into full awareness of the horrors, powerful statements about the effectiveness of fear in keeping people quiet arise.

Interactions between real and fictional characters are realistic, as are the attitudes of German society. Spelling, punctuation, and word usage errors are distracting, as are issues with spacing, missing words, and inconsistent capitalization. Several untranslated German phrases slow the pace and hinder understanding.

I Was Hitler's Baker is a disturbing and timely historical novel in which a driven, cruel, merciless man rises to power, in part because everyday people turn a blind eye to the signs of their nation's descent into depravity.

Source: https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/i-was-hitlers-baker/

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 10, 2020)

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