

A FAIRER PERSON LOST NOT HEAVEN

I remember that he used to hold conversations with the windblown trees.

Professor Eduard Huemer on his student Adolf Hitler

Snow fell once again on this afternoon in December 1909, the coldest winter in recent memory. A bone-freezing chill blew through the streets of Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and sixth-largest city in the world. It urged fur-clad pedestrians to hurry to the warmth and comfort of their homes or offices. They scarcely paid attention to the shivering prostitutes that lined the streets as they always did, or the huddled shadows of the homeless, who attempted to hide under trees and bridges. On the square opposite St. Stephen's Cathedral, municipal workers erected the stalls for the Christmas market that was to open in a day or two. Little bells on horses' bridles chimed thinly through the snowflakes.

Far from the entirety of the great city's residents was able to enjoy the blessings of a fur coat or a place by the fire - large numbers knew no such comfort. Those who had no place to go suffered most - it was estimated that perhaps twenty per cent of the city's two million inhabitants were consigned to everlasting poverty; most of them had neither shack nor shed to call their home. They infiltrated the warmth of the coffee-houses, attempting to evade the vigilance of waitresses or to invade railway stations, which, although unheated, at least provided shelter from the gales. They populated the warming rooms for itinerants operated by municipal and private charities, and bickered, came evening, over the benches in the Prater, Vienna's Coney-Island-style amusement park - which were by far the favoured resting places for the night.

An attentive observer of the drama that repeated itself every night might have spotted among the poor the gaunt figure of a pale, earnest young man, who, despite the easy sociability of Vienna's outcasts, wore his embitterment as if it were a precious decoration. His hairdo sported the characteristic forelock that a young Elvis Presley was to make famous forty-five years later. His drab brown summer suit was full of holes, some of which evidenced alarmingly expansionist intentions, and his thin overcoat was of the make to render aid on autumn evenings, not to withstand the grim of winter in Vienna. His hair was covered by a grey fedora that had seen better days.

The thin young man had seen better days himself. Twenty years earlier, he had been born as the second son of a petty bureaucrat who, nonetheless, in a bureaucratic country, had gained a measure of success in the Imperial Austrian Customs Service and had fathered nine children that we know of. His son, however, was not attracted to the bliss of public office or much interested in girls. He had left school early, for he planned to become a famous artist, a painter, or, perhaps, an architect. As of yet, however, these ambitions had failed to yield tangible fruit, and the young man was flat out broke. To the occupations he had felt unable to align with his personality he had recently added panhandling: he had neither the panache nor the recklessness of the successful beggar. Now the starving young man's last option was to call on the capital's charities, that is, to submit to the mercy of strangers.

Had the young man met a freezing death on some deserted lane or ditch in one of these long winter nights, we would be living in a different world: one, perhaps, without the threat of nuclear war or the tyranny of the internet but likewise - if we were lucky - without the ghosts of Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hiroshima. We might still be crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the sleek ships of Cunard or Hamburg-Amerika Lines, and buy spices in the "Colonial Store". There might still be, who knows, a Kaiser in Berlin or a Czar on the Romanov throne; the great British Empire might still exist, and Vienna and Budapest remain centres of world politics. But the young man survived this winter, and the next thirty-five. His name was Adolf Hitler, and he changed the world.

In some of these subsequent years, the fairies seemed to grant his every wish - the dreams, perhaps, he hedged in this cold winter - and hence the second quarter of the twentieth century was formed, to a degree no one thought possible, by a young Austrian mendicant - whom to get rid of cost over fifty million lives. And in the bargain, he left a vastly altered globe behind. Sebastian Haffner observed in the 1970's:

Today's world, whether we like it or not, is the work of Hitler. Without Hitler there would have been no partition of Germany or Europe; without Hitler there would be no Americans and Russians in Berlin; without Hitler there would be no Israel; without Hitler there would be no decolonization, at least not such a rapid one; there would be no Asian, Arab, or Black African emancipation and no diminution of European pre-eminence. Or, more accurately, there would be none of all this without Hitler's mistakes. He certainly did not want any of it. (1)

For almost fifty years following Hitler's death, Haffner's statement described the post-war world – essentially the post-Hitler world - accurately enough. The story of Hitler's life remains all too unlikely - a truant in his teens, a pauper in his twenties, in prison at age thirty-five, he was, only ten years later, the leader, "Führer" and Chancellor of a resurgent German nation. He was barely over fifty when he controlled most of the European continent, and dead, at the end of history's greatest conflagration, only ten days after his fifty-sixth birthday.

His adult life closely paralleled the age of the great European civil war - by some called the War of the Ottoman Succession - which raged, with peaceful intervals, from 1912 to 1945, and since he fought in the First and was responsible, undeniably, for much of the Second World War, his story necessarily coincides with the history of these wars. The first of them is thus a main subject of this investigation,¹ of which the present volume covers Hitler from 1889 to 1923, the years leading to his first attempt at gaining power. The catholicity of his impact on the world still makes him an almost unprecedented historical phenomenon. Joachim C. Fest – author of an eminent Hitler biography² – pointed out that:

In fact, to a virtually unprecedented degree, he created everything out of himself and was himself everything at once: his own teacher, organizer of a party and author of its ideology, tactician and demagogic saviour, leader, statesman, and for a decade the "axis" of the world. He refuted the dictum that all revolutions devour their children; for he was as has been said, "the Rousseau, the Mirabeau, the Robespierre and the Napoleon of his revolution; he was its Marx, its Lenin, its Trotsky and its Stalin. By character and nature he may have been far inferior to most of these, but he nevertheless managed what all of them could not: he dominated the revolution in every phase, even in the moment of defeat. That argues a considerable understanding of the forces he evoked." (2)

It goes without saying that historical biographies run the danger of overestimating the relevance of a single man's achievements, the risk to personalize history in the way that leads to what linguist Steven Pinker called the "bird's eye view" of the past - so far removed from the actual environment that only the most obvious characters are caught in the observer's gaze. (3) Hitler's career was, naturally, not entirely self-made - no man is an island - and many aided him along the road, consciously or not. Sometimes his opponents made things worse by trying to improve them - "appeasement" comes to mind, a clever strategy aiming at discouraging Hitler by granting his every demand.

Yet one may legitimately doubt how much a single man, try as he might, can or cannot decide the fate of man. Bertolt Brecht classically juxtaposed such personalization of history in "Questions from a Worker Who Reads":

"Who built Thebes of the seven gates? In the books you will find the names of kings.

Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?

The young Alexander conquered India. Was he alone?

Caesar beat the Gauls. Did he not even have a cook with him?" (5)

¹ John Burrow on the word "historia": "It was, so far as we know, Herodotus who first used the term historia (inquiry) for what we call history. A "histor" in Homer was someone who passed judgement based on the facts as a result of an investigation, so the link between history and inquest is a very old one." (4)

² Joachim C. Fest "Hitler" (1974), Harcourt Books ISBN 978-0-15-602754-0 (pbk.)

Hitler, we may reveal here, did employ cooks; yet nonetheless, much of his true personality remains obscured. In the preface of his voluminous biography "Adolf Hitler" (London, 1976), John Toland states that "My book has no thesis, and any conclusions found in it were reached only during the writing, perhaps the most meaningful being that Hitler was far more complex and contradictory than I had imagined." (6) In his own grand Hitler biography, Ian Kershaw notes:

The combination of Hitler's innate secretiveness, the emptiness of his personal relations, his unbureaucratic style, the extreme of adulation and hatred which he stirred up, and the apologetics as well as distortions built upon post-war memoirs and gossipy anecdotes of those in his entourage, mean that, for all the surviving mountains of paper spewed out by the governmental apparatus of the Third Reich, the sources for reconstructing the life of the German Dictator are in many respects extraordinarily limited - far more so than in the case, say, of his main adversaries, Churchill and even Stalin. (7)

Hitler's personal impact, the fact that his sympathies and antipathies directly determined the fate of millions, may perhaps only be compared with that of Martin Luther, of whom Owen Chadwick noted that "the Reformation would have happened without Luther. But without Luther it would not have happened in the way it happened." (8) Likewise, Germany would have recovered, sooner or later, from the Great War, but certainly not in the shape of the Third Reich, and the Second World War might have been avoided. Other wars would have taken place: Japan vs. the USA over the Pacific Ocean, local conflicts in Eastern Europe, Indochina or the Middle East; but no second war over the same battlefields of 1914 to 1918.

Still, perhaps it is but a historic coincidence that in the wake of their doctrinal quantum leaps - the individualization of the Christian religion in the case of Luther and the transformation of nationalism in the case of Hitler³ - the two most vicious wars in European history arose, but then, perhaps, it is not - both occurred after paradigm shifts that transcended the previous arrangements of the world, rendered them obsolete.

This personal impetus Hitler enacted upon the body politic almost necessarily precipitates an author's inclination to discuss political or military affairs over the examination of the social, economical and psychological trends of the time.⁴ Yet it were in the first instant such factors, in particular of psychological and economic nature, which made Hitler's career an actual possibility: without the loss of the Great War, the hunger winters, reparation payments, the Treaty of Versailles and its disastrous war guilt clause, inflation, and in particular the global recession that began in 1929, it seems unlikely that he could have found the ready supply of protest voters who backed his electoral successes from 1930 onwards. There are numbers that back up the importance of these economic and psychological factors. In the Reichstag elections of May 20, 1928, in the heyday of the Weimar Republic, the NSDAP, Hitler's party, came in only a distant ninth, winning twelve seats with a paltry 2.6% of the vote. (9) Twenty-eight months later, in the wake of the Wall Street crash of October 1929, the Reichstag elections of September 14, 1930, awarded Hitler and the NSDAP a remarkable 18% of the vote, which translated to 107 seats. (10) The NSDAP suddenly was the second-biggest political party after the Social Democrats of the SPD.

Thus we can say with some confidence that the breakthrough of the NSDAP in 1930 was less a result of the movement's inherent qualities, which until then seemed to have been a tough sell, but an expression of protest against the minority governments of late Weimar, which ruled, without the endorsement of parliamentary majorities, by presidential

³ In John Lukacs's words: "What he had seen - and more or less accurately - was the formidable attraction of populist nationalism in the age of the masses [and mass media, without whom his success would not have been possible, ¶]. That nationalism proved to be the principal political reality in the twentieth century. He was its most extreme representative. He sensed that sometimes after 1870 nationalism and socialism came to supersede the older nineteenth-century categories of conservatism and liberalism, indeed perhaps even of Right and Left [giving both 'Hitlerism' and 'Stalinism' their odd Right/Left duality of character, ¶]; and that, of the two, nationalism was more influential than socialism. The categories of socialism and capitalism themselves began to be outdated, because strength was more powerful than wealth, because nationality was more powerful than class, because nationalism was more powerful than internationalism. When there was national unity, the formerly rigid categories of socialist and capitalist, public or private ownership began to leak; what mattered was not ownership but management; and ownership and management and labour would be ultimately obedient to the dictates of nationalism." (11)

⁴ On these, much information can be gathered in Paul Kennedy's "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers", Vintage Books 1898, ISBN 0-679-72017-7 (pbk.)

emergency decrees and responded to the economic crisis with ill-advised austerity measures that did little to alleviate economic progress but were guaranteed to raise ill will. This aided Hitler, who, only a few months earlier, had seemed but a creator of random noise, a condottiere of street battles, a mixture between Don Quixote and Billy Graham on steroids. But by confusing Hitler's antics with his abilities, his enemies fatally underestimated him. After two further years of campaigning and manoeuvring Hitler gained the chancellorship - executive power. Twelve years later, many parts of the world lay in smoking embers.

Yet, as soon as the swords were laid down, the pens were drawn and produced, in fifty-odd years, more books about Hitler and the war he kindled than of any other man in history, if one excludes religious icons. The number of publications relating to Hitler and World War II was thought to exceed 50,000 in the 1980s, before Guido Knopp⁵ came up in 1995 with a then-current estimate of 120,000 titles, in and out of print, excluding fiction, websites, movies or television productions. Without a doubt, this number has risen since then - in the former Soviet Union alone, about 15,000 memoirs of the "Great Patriotic War" have found an interested and patient readership.

Such an extensive literature has produced many different interpretations of the Hitler matter by professionals and amateurs alike. The historians among the authors are naturally being held to the "professional standards", so to say, which has not kept all of them from arriving at surprising conclusions. Alan Bullock's early work of 1952, the first substantial post-war Hitler biography, was well characterized by its title and judged its subject nothing but "an entirely unprincipled opportunist." (12)⁶ This view is now generally believed too narrow. On the German side, Werner Maser⁷ evidenced an affinity for uncorroborated sources, among which he discovered entirely fictitious stories of a Jewish Grandfather and a son Hitler supposedly sired in WW I.⁸

Other theories held that Hitler, naturally, was a tyrant, but had not improvised, as Bullock suggested, but in his early days had conceived a devilishly clever plan to checkmate law and order, subjugate the German people and subsequently other nations and conquer the world. This approach overlooks that Hitler also had a considerable ability for exploiting tactical opportunities – cf. the pact with Russia in August 1939. Quite a few other authors have described him as a demon, a magician, a political thaumaturge.

No less a figure than Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, then Armaments Minister, for much of the Third Reich as close to the Dictator as anyone, described him soon after the end of the war as a "demonic figure", "one of those inexplicable historic phenomena which emerge at rare intervals among mankind," whose "person determined the fate of nations." Such a view runs the risk of mystifying what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945, reducing the cause of Germany's and Europe's catastrophe to the arbitrary whim of a demonic personality. An absolutely contrary view – tenable only so long as it was part of a state ideology and consequently evaporating as soon as the Soviet bloc which had sustained it collapsed – rejected out of hand any significant role of personality, relegating Hitler to no more than the status of an agent of capitalism, a cipher for the interests of big business and its leaders who controlled him and pulled the strings of their marionette. Some accounts of Hitler have scarcely recognized any problem at all of understanding, or have promptly ruled one out.

Ridiculing Hitler has been one approach. Describing him simply as a "lunatic" or "raving maniac" obviates the need for an explanation – though it of course leaves open the key question: why a complex society would be prepared to follow someone who was mentally deranged, a "pathological" case, into the abyss. Far more sophisticated approaches have clashed on the extent to which Hitler was actually "master in the Third Reich," or could even be described as "a weak dictator." Did he in fact exercise total, unrestricted, and sole power? Or did his regime rest on a hydra-like "polycracy" of power-structures with Hitler, on account of his undeniable popularity and the cult that surrounded him, as its indispensable fulcrum but little else – remaining no more

⁵ Guido Knopp "Hitler - Eine Bilanz" ['Hitler - A Summary'], Berlin 1995.

⁶ Alan Bollock "Hitler: A Study in Tyranny", London 1952, revised 1962.

⁷ Werner Maser "Adolf Hitler: Legende, Mythos, Wirklichkeit" ['Adolf Hitler: Legend, Mythos, Reality'], München 1971.

⁸ Cf. Chapter V.

than the propagandist he had in essence always been, exploiting opportunities as they came along, though with program, plan and design? (13)

Hence theories are not in short supply - yet until recently very little was composed about the individual Adolf Hitler and the abilities that allowed him to rise to his subsequent status. Many biographies are content to lament the paucity of detail on his personal life and a few came to the conclusion that he was a sort of non-personality. This would seem a bit unsatisfactory indeed, but it depicts not only the understandable desire of historians to distance their integrity from the monster but also expresses their disdain for a personality that so little fits their expectations. In Joachim's Fest great work, the contempt of the author - a son of the conservative bourgeois German elite that helped Hitler to power and was subsequently subdued by him - for his subject is almost physically noticeable, and in Ian Kershaw's amazing structural analysis, the subject of his biography remains strangely lifeless. Especially German historians very carefully avoided to discuss the various abilities Hitler necessarily possessed with the laudable intention not to be accused of pro-Hitler sympathies. But history is inquiry and must not subordinate itself to political correctness. Only recently have a few authors dared to inspect the personal qualities without which Hitler could not have made his impact, although the writings were clearly on the wall. Many contemporary witnesses have pointed out Hitler's perhaps greatest talent - that of an actor - but his changeability has usually been depicted as a result of weakness instead of being understood as his main feature, the key to his character. Volker Ullrich noted in 2013:

The core problem of approaching Hitler – as Karl-Dietrich Bracher had previously formulated – is to explain “how a man of such a narrow, restricted personal existence could cause and sustain a historical development of such global dimensions that so directly depended on him.” This was also the basic quandary for Ian Kershaw: “How do we explain that a man with so little intellectual gifts and social abilities ... could compel such an enormous historical effect that made the whole world hold its breath?”

But what if this presupposition is wrong in itself, if Hitler's personal existence was far less restricted and his intellectual capabilities were all but underdeveloped? Like most Hitler biographers before him, Ian Kershaw recognizes only Hitler's ability “to perturb the lower emotions of the masses,” Yet that Hitler possessed an extraordinary rhetoric talent is undoubted, and it was of pivotal importance during his political rise in the twenties and early thirties of the last century. But the chairman of the NSDAP was far more than a first-class demagogue - he was a most gifted actor as well. He became a master in the art of wearing different masks and playing numerous roles. Nobody realized this and pointed it out more than Charlie Chaplin in “The Great Dictator” of 1940. After Albert Speer saw the movie in 1972, he confessed that Chaplin “has succeeded more than any other contemporary man in his attempt to penetrate Hitler's character.”

This “strange role character” of Hitler's existence - that Fest had noted as well - it shall thus be the leitmotif of this abstract. His uncanny abilities of sham and pretension, that allowed him time and again to deceive his followers as well as his adversaries, were undoubtedly a major ingredient - his secret weapon - that made his rise as a politician possible in the first place.

Minister of Finances Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk [in the Nazi government from 1933 to 1938, ¶] reminisced seventeen years after the end of the “Third Reich” Hitler's “downright truthlessness” as the major strain of Hitler's character. “He was entirely untruthful even to his closest right-hand men - he was, I believe, so entirely dishonest that he himself could make no more distinction between truth and falsehood.” This moralizing judgement only proves too well that Schwerin von Krosigk still did not get it - Hitler had used his double-dealings all too well and often to deceive his early conservative government partners. (14)

Role playing and deceit were instruments, not accidents, and we shall have the opportunity to witness them also in this inquiry, which ends in 1923, i.e. well before the “Third Reich”. Yet it is clear that there was certainly an interaction of many circumstances that put Hitler on the road to the chancellery and they are described in many biographies and especially in Volker Ullrich's new work.

That individuals at certain times come to represent their ages in a form inseparable of their presence is a well-known phenomenon, and we refer to it when we say that “in the times of Herod” or “in the days of Caesar” things were so-

and-so, but are different today. Perhaps unconsciously, in doing so we substantiate the deep-rooted interrelationship of our fate's thespians and theatre: in forming history, as it is implied, the protagonists are being formed themselves; becoming Janus-faced hermaphrodites of human destiny. There is this somewhat philosophical yet important angle to Hitler's success, for the political orator is nothing without his audience, and therefore he also depended, at least until 1940 or so, upon the relationship to his listeners, which he was able to intensify a thousand fold by the use of technology that had only recently become available.

It were key inventions of technological propaganda that made his performances possible: not only did public address systems allow him to be heard in halls and stadia, his sponsorship of the first commercially available radio receivers enabled him to preach to the nation as a whole. He also profited from the age of newspapers: in Berlin alone, the rotating presses churned out thirty dailies. Hitler was also the first politician to make use of the aeroplane; travelling by air in a rented Junkers allowed him to hold speeches in two or more German towns each day; the headlines of the Nazi press



screamed "HITLER OVER GERMANY!" Had he been born a generation earlier, none of these technologies would have been available to him.

His time and place then, joined inseparably, we shall investigate. The present volume focuses on the early part of his strange career, and a few words are necessary to its arrangement. It is confined, time-wise, to the years between his birth in 1889 and 1923, the year of the Beer Hall Putsch, but for reasons that will become all too obvious, a few digressions into a more general historical background seemed necessary and are included. Chapters I to IV contain a much-condensed abridgement of European history from the Roman Republic to the establishment of the Second German Empire in 1871. This is because, in the first approximation, much of the history of these two millennia represents attempts to inherit respectively to revitalise the Imperium Romanum, to rule the continent and, perhaps, the world. Until AD 1806, i.e., the end of the "Holy Roman Empire", the more successful of the European hegemonies invariably decorated themselves with the ancient Roman titles "Caesar" and "Augustus".

The imperial order they attempted to restore followed the Roman practice of uniting heterogeneous populations under a single political authority, but they complicated the matter by attempting to impose a religious superstructure upon the body politic. Unsurprisingly, conflicts persisted – in the age of the great migration between the third and eighth century AD it was Christian orthodoxy vs. assorted heresies that competed as vigorously, or lethally, as, in the eleventh century, Orthodoxy vs. Catholicism or, after Luther, Catholics and Protestants. Yet nobody really succeeded in picking up the pieces of the Roman inheritance, although some – Charles V or Napoleon come to mind – came close. In many respects, Hitler attempted a comparable unification of the continent – albeit as a German hegemony. The Roman Empire, as Anthony Padgen pointed out, "has constantly provided the inspiration, the imagery, and the vocabulary for all the European empires from early-modern Spanish to late nineteenth-century Britain. All the former imperial capitals of Europe – London, Vienna, Berlin – are filled with grandiose architectural remainders of their indebtedness to Rome." (15)

Rome's ascent, achievements, splendour and fall – the latter a curious mixture of leveraged buyout and hostile takeover by German tribes – are the topic of the first three chapters, which are most indebted to Edward Gibbon and Chris Wickham. Again, the breadth of the historic horizon limits the attention that may be paid to the social and economic developments of the epoch between AD 500 and 1500. Yet little progress could be reported – not until the second half of the nineteenth century were citizens of the better European towns able to enjoy amenities readily available in ancient Rome; (relatively) safe drinking water, for a start, or waste disposal systems.

From the fifth century AD on, Germanic tribes established short-lived kingdoms on former Roman soil in Italy, Spain, Gallia and Africa. So did the Huns, who came close to sack Rome in AD 450 but eventually retreated into the vast expense of the Asian hinterlands after Attila's death. Inroads from Asia, however, continued: Avars and Bulgars followed the Huns in the seventh century, Hungarians in the tenth, Mongols in the thirteenth century and the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth.

Yet their conquests remained transient, and no serious contender for the Roman succession appeared until the Frankish Kingdom of Charlemagne briefly reunited most of Germany, France, Italy and Spain around the year AD 800. Alas, the realm quickly fell apart, and for the next 1,000 years the centre of the continent harboured a multiplicity of small to medium-sized feudal states which collectively became known as the "Holy Roman Empire". The subsequent European history, from the tenth to the nineteenth century, included few highlights – chiefly the Enlightenment and Renaissance, which brought, as the name implies, a rebirth of philosophy, the arts and the sciences – among many bloody chapters which include the Crusades, the religious wars in the wake of the Lutheran Reformation – notably the Thirty-Years-War – the global slaughter of indigenous populations in the name of slavery and colonialism, dynastic wars including the War of the Spanish Succession and the Seven-Years-War, also known as the French and Indian War, the French Revolution – including the reign of the guillotine, Jacobin terror and the Napoleonic Wars – and a number of smaller atrocities, ending with Napoleon III's ill-advised declaration of war on Prussia in 1870. The whole abattoir is inventoried in Chapter IV.

The direct narrative picks up in Chapter V with the life of Alois Schicklgruber, a man from the Austrian Waldviertel, who went to Vienna to become a Customs officer and one day changed his name to Alois Hitler. The revised name was

inherited by his second surviving son Adolfus, whom we shall follow in the Chapters VI to X until he leaves his native Austria for Germany, in 1913.

His time in München - where he arrived fifteen months before the outbreak of the Great War – gives us the last impressions of his adolescence before the great caesura of the war sets in. It is in München where he will develop - albeit after the war - the full gamut of anti-Semitism and then some. It does not seem that Hitler developed his personal - murderous - form of it in Vienna, as he claims in *MEIN KAMPF*, but rather in München, but after the war. John Lukacs remarks on the transformation one can observe when comparing Hitler's pre- and post-war writings:

There is a drastic change in both the content and the tone of these personal documents in 1919, but not before. The impression one receives of the younger Hitler is that of a loner, a dreamer, a German idealist – an impression that accords with the reminiscences of those who knew him during the war. In Hitler's extant notes, letters, and postcards to his friends, whether sent from the front or while on leave, the expressions are often childlike, showing a doglike loyalty and deference to his officers and his country. (16)

This, of course, would change. Yet the preponderance of the evidence, and modern historical consensus, indicates that Hitler learned his political trade, inclusive of anti-Semitism, in München. Indeed, the testimonies of his regimental comrades disaffirm claims that Hitler harboured specific anti-Semitic sentiments during the war.

The general narrative of his years in München is preceded, in Chapter XI, by a brief introduction to pre-war Germany as a political entity in general and its government - and Kaiser Wilhelm - in particular. Chapter XII follows Adolf Hitler in München to the eve of the Great War in August, 1914.

There has been - and remains - a discussion whether or not the war formed Hitler most, but there can be no doubt that without it, and the decorations he received in it and which gave him - the Austrian - as Joachim Fest remarked, a claim to front-line credibility, respect and authority in Bavaria, his political career, at least in Germany - a country whose citizenship he would not acquire until 1932 - was simply inconceivable. In this sense only the war made Hitler possible.

There can be little doubt that the Second War developed out of the receivership of the First, and because Hitler eventually usurped the governance of the delinquent nation, the Great War of 1914 - in Stefan Zweig's words the nexus between the world of yesterday and that of today - will occupy the centre of the present volume.

The road that led to its outbreak is followed in the Chapters XIII to XVII, which are most obliged to Luigi Albertini's classic *THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR OF 1914*. The synopsis of the catastrophe itself is preceded by a review of the changes in military paradigm which manifested themselves during the nineteenth century: improvements in weapon design, rendered a thousand times more effective by industrial mass-production, the speeding up of infantry operations by railways, of communications by telegraph, wireless and telephone, and the vast increase in the number of combatants by mandatory conscription laws. The refinement of the theory of war by General Staffs and military academies will be addressed and light shed upon the plans of the major combatants, the most famous - and misunderstood, it may seem - of which remains the elusive "SCHLIEFFEN PLAN", the spectre of which permeates every World War I summary. We shall also follow the war as PFC Hitler and his regimental comrades experienced it.

After the war Hitler returned to München where, on November 7, 1918, a sort of accidental revolution had swept an elderly drama critic, who was also the chairman of the Munich chapter of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), into the office of Bavarian Minister President and head of government. The king and his ministers had fled the town earlier this day because of revolutionary rumours. In the weeks and months to come, a series of counter-putsches and counter-counter-putsches provided material for newspaper headlines until one of them was successful in the sense that Bavaria returned to "order", that is - a military dictatorship.

PFC Hitler who, as some researchers argued, may have worked in the meantime for the Revolutionary Soldiers' Council (Soviet, i.e. Red Propaganda), now offered his services to the junta, and was sent to a crash course in nationalist and anti-Bolshevik propaganda. As far as we know, it was this course, and Hitler's subsequent appointment to political

instructor for enlisted men that opened the gates of his rhetoric talent and launched his political career, which we shall follow in the remaining chapters until the Beer-Hall-Putsch of 1923.

A personal remark:

The writing of history - modern history, at least - resembles a selection from an infinity of sources and opinions among which the author must attempt to separate wheat from chaff. Since this comes down to, essentially, a personal choice of belief and judgement, the inclusion of some and the omission of other material may readily support the suspicion of an author's individual agenda. Hence it shall be clarified that the present author is neither beholden to a political party or philosophical movement nor subjected to institutional orthodoxy, economic dogma or religion. No third party provided any financial or organisational assistance in the preparation, composition and gathering of material for this book. The author's father was an artillery officer in World War II, and an active liberal.

Yet in a time of the constant multiplication and resulting fragmentation of knowledge and opinion, fed by the industrious tyranny of television and internet, the pithy observations of the great historians and their comments on the human condition appear altogether too valuable to be jeopardized by the present author's paraphrases and thus have been preserved, where appropriate, by being quoted directly - at length, if warranted.

Although the present volume is not a biography per se, and most certainly not *ad gloriam in excelsis deo*, its composition resembles that of a biography in that the author is obliged to develop a moral relation with the protagonist - which, in Hitler's case, is an obvious problem, and not in the least because in this volume we are dealing with the young Adolf Hitler - before the commission of his greater crimes - and thus he often appears to be a somewhat vulgar yet still fathomable sort of politician, not much worse - *prima facie* - than his contemporaries.

If we thus had to pick a property, a characteristic of his early years that would aid us to visualize the "Führer" personality that was to evolve in later years, we would have to pick the power of his suggestive imagination. There was clearly a development to it: in his youth he was able to shape his own perceptions but could not or did not want to influence others - with the exception of his boyhood friend August Kubizek. But then, at some unknown day in the summer of 1919 during which he had visited courses in political education sponsored by the Bavarian Army, he found out that he could also shape the perception of strangers, often in spite of facts or logic. What may have been simply puerile fantasy - a famous line in *MEIN KAMPF* asserts that, while he froze in the streets of Vienna, "in my thoughts I lived in palaces," changed into the suggestive power that made his subsequent career possible. Since he had the knack to make men share his visions, with a bit of practice he became a master of persuasion - he had to, for in the early days he lacked the power of command. He did threaten, if necessary, but mostly he preferred the seduction of the mind. The mastery of this art never aided him more than in the mixture of charm and menace by which he convinced Germany's opponents, in particular the democracies of England and France, to grant Nazi Germany more support and leeway than they had given the democratic Weimar Republic. Great Britain and France allowed themselves to be taken in, politically divided and ridiculed until, to save the last vestiges of the honour they had profaned in München 1938, their sole alternative was war.

That persuasiveness is a gift of the devil could not surprise John Milton:

"Belial, in act more graceful and humane,

A fairer person lost not heaven; he seemed

For dignity composed and high exploit:

But all was false and hollow, though his tongue

Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear

For better reason."

"Paradise Lost", Bk.2, L.109⁹

⁹ A few minutiae ought to be observed throughout this volume:

(1) Russian dates before 1918 may appear in "Old Style", sometimes marked OS, as reckoned by the Julian calendar that was used in Tsarist Russia. In 1917, it was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar. The Second Russian Revolution - the "October Revolution" - which put Lenin's Bolsheviks into power thus actually occurred, by modern reckoning, in the night of November 7 to 8, 1917.

(2) A difficult problem remains with the spellings of Slavic, Turkish, Chinese or Japanese names, which are spelled differently in many sources – the reader is asked to keep this in mind.

(3) Since the Chapters XVI to XIX deal chiefly with European diplomacy, the following expressions will quickly become familiar: the term "Wilhelmstrasse", after its location in Berlin, denotes the German Foreign Office; the "Quai d'Orsay" stands for its French counterpart; "Whitehall" represents the British, "Ballhausplatz" or simply "Ballplatz" the Austro-Hungarian office in Vienna and "Chorister's Bridge" the Russian Foreign Ministry. The "Sublime Porte" or plainly "Porte" refers to the Turkish Office of the Grand Vizier, who managed the Ottoman Empire's international relations.

(4) Indented paragraphs, i.e. citations, are preceded and concluded by quotation marks in the case of primary sources; their absence marks quotes from secondary materials. Brackets concluded by the ¶ sign indicate the author's comment, e.g. [... see n. 344 on border fortifications, ¶]

(5) English translations have been adopted in primary sources – most prominently MEIN KAMPF - respectively from the English editions of readily available secondary materials. The translations from German or French sources are the author's. The proverbial translation problems in Albertini have resulted in a number of minor corrections that deviate from the text of the Enigma Books 2005 edition.

(6) A note on the usage of the term "race" in older sources, for example in Gibbon. The word "race" may denote a clan or tribe, an ethnic or social community or even the population of a whole province or state; it does not necessarily express or include a biological relationship – existent or not – and did not (yet) carry the dubious connotations presently associated with it. Cf. Cit. 115 in re Clovis: "... his ambitious reign was a perpetual violation of moral and Christian duties: his hands were stained with blood in peace as well as in war; and as soon as Clovis had dismissed a synod of the Gallic church, he calmly assassinated all the princes of the Merovingian race," that is, all male clan members. Yet one might keep Karl Deutsch in mind, and his observation that "a nation ... is a group of persons united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours." ["Nationality and Its Alternatives", 1969, p.21]

(7) The Bibliography provides the ISBN of all works cited if available. A few elder books are listed with their US Library of Congress Card number.

(8) NB: Until 1918 or so, the word "Austria" has been used synonymously with "Austria-Hungary" in both primary and secondary literature.

(9) The original forms – in use circa until 1919 – of the terms "Serb", "Serbia" and "Serbian" were "Serv", "Servia" and "Servian", and occur thus in some older works, e.g. in Albertini.

(10) All footnotes are indexed in the Appendices.

(11) In the context of "Celtic" vs. "Germanic", a French commentator remarked that "'Celtic' and 'Germanic' (as well as 'Latin', 'Slav' or 'Arab') are ethnic terms based on linguistic and cultural aspects, not genetic ones. Genetic science is a very new methodology - that being the reason why the people of the world (and Europe of course) have always been classified and defined not by their genes (which was impossible to do), but the fact that they form an ethnicity in the cultural sense - i.e. in the true meaning of what an ethnicity is: a group of people united under a same cultural pattern, customs, languages, etc. If they present a specific phenotype it is a mere consequence of living and mixing genes among together since a long time." See <http://www.city-data.com/forum/europe/1457341-celts-germanics-same-people.html>

(12) To ease confusion, Central Power armies are always labelled by numbers, e.g. 2nd Army, or 7th Army, while Allied armies are spelled out, i.e. First Army, or Fifth Army. Following German military tradition, the Roman numeral XL (=40) is replaced by XXXX, so the Forty-Second Corps would be written XXXXII, not XLII.

(13) The Maps of the War are from the West Point Atlas, copyright-exempted and freely available for viewing and/or download at <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/WWI.aspx>