



A Memoir

Leni Riefenstahl

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An autobiography of controversial German dancer, actress and eventually Hitler's top national film executive, Leni Riefenstahl.

A Memoir Details

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Jessica T. says

I have defeated you Leni Riefenstahl. A part of me believes this woman is a liar and a sociopath...

Hung-ya says

I don't think there is anyone who dares to deny the prominence and accomplishments of Leni Riefenstahl, I myself was especially so after watching Triumph of the Will.

I admire the courage and bravery of hers to disclose her life in almost full details, especially when she knew that doing so, she was also telling the readers about her woven past with the Nazis. I adore the fact that how she came through on the top of her profession when all other brilliant fellow professionals were dominantly males. And she was absolutely talented in whatever she chose to do.

Having said that, during my reading her memoir, I couldn't help but feel that while she was disclosing her tangled past with Hitler and all, she probably had chosen to hide something in the mean time. Though she kept saying that she had neither no knowledge nor interest in politics whatsoever, unfortunately the fact is that she wouldn't be in where she was during the Nazi period without certain degrees of support from the Nazis. And to even gain and own that power to film documentaries for Nazi Germany, one must have shown some degree of loyalty so that people would place trust in her. These are the details I thought Leni chose to play down with so that she wouldn't invite more criticism than what she already had.

Perhaps that is why we could never stop talking about Leni Riefenstahl that she had been both phenomenal and controversial at the same time almost throughout her life. And what a life she had!

Steven says

A long but such a rewarding read. Riefenstahl's memoir is vivid, detailed and oh so exciting to read and she finds every moment she can to tell her story and show her successes and failures. Controversial indeed, but there is no denying that Riefenstahl is possibly the most innovative female film director and in every way, a true artist.

Roman Moguchiy says

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Chris Landry says

Fascinating.

Riefenstahl's daring and technical skill is matched only by her narcissism and complete lack of remorse for not following many of her contemporaries in leaving Germany in the early thirties. If you can deal with an unreliable narrator, and you are interested at all in the history of film and fascism, this is a wild and engaging story.

Some notes:

- She maintains to the end that she is apolitical, that she has no ideas about racism or patriotism
- By her account she has a devastating effect on men: Goebbels, Von Sternberg, and even US Olympian Glenn Morris were just a few of the high profile personalities reduced to sobbing puddles of humanity begging to be possessed by her
- She enumerates all the ovations her film screenings receive
- She maintains her ignorance of any atrocities committed in Germany and Poland
- The way in which film production was managed under the Nazis was really bizarre

What is most maddening is that as folks like Brecht and Lang fled Germany - even as she had offers to work in Hollywood, as she claimed - she stayed on. But her claims of ignorance are unconvincing - surely the writing was on the wall. That decision haunts her to the end of her life and dogs her career, which after the war consists of denazification tribunals, libel suits, and bouts of poverty. I wonder if she might have been better served by a bit of contrition. But what she refuses to accept is that as an artist you have some responsibility for the choices you make. And artists who do not take a stand when historical events demand it (think apartheid) they must live their shame for being on the wrong side. Leni would have none of it.

Unbelievable.

Calvin says

I can count on two fingers the number of books I have not finished. It must be the guiding hand of adulthood gently nudging me closer to my mortality when I recognize that to continue the tradition of finishing books for the sake of completion is flawed and deserves caveats from time to time. This is one of those times. I made it 441 pages into this memoir, a shallow, narcissistic journey through the narrowed down, cleaned up story that Riefenstahl chose to present as her own at the end of her horrifically long life. I read Trimborn's biography of her, which called this book useless for historical purposes and, after reading through Riefenstahl's recounting of her life up until she began her creepy, capitalistic obsession with the "exotic" peoples she met in Africa, I can corroborate his reasons for distrust. The Memoir acts as part hagiography and part systematic breakdown of every criticism levied against her in favor of her version of a life where the most successful Nazi-image crafter of the Third Reich committed absolutely no wrong while profligating under the warm handshake of Hitler. The fact that she refers to men she hires to literally play slaves in her slave movie to be called "Black Freight" near Uganda as "my blacks" in what seems like a complete lack of awareness for how referring to people you barely know in the possessive while being accused of involvement in human rights' violations might be counterintuitive to a book where you're trying to paint yourself as a saint is a strong argument example for how incapable she was at the end of her life of understanding how at any point she could have had an indirectly negative role in the Holocaust. But it is not the reason why her Memoirs are unbelievable: they're unbelievable because the structure her whole story of innocence is rested on is the presumption that she lacked societal awareness - when, in fact, she is provably

one of the best networkers, manipulators, societally relevant entrepreneurs who has probably ever existed. She forced the gears of her industry to turn in her favor with wit and grace and incredible conviction. I doubt she cared about the success of Hitler's success outside of its relevance to her film career - but she absolutely thrived on it while he was alive. She fed off of Hitler. And to die without taking a hint of credit for that involvement sprays the splendid halls of her absolutely stunning art with ceiling sprinklers filled with shit. This book was worth reading, for me, to satisfy an understanding of who Leni Riefenstahl was. And it did satisfy that need. I am satisfied knowing that she was an unbelievably talented and legendary sociopath.

Olethros says

-Además de la polémica que la acompañó, después, también hubo decisiones activas y coraza naif, antes.-

Género. Biografía.

Lo que nos cuenta. El libro Memorias (publicación original: Memoiren, 1987) es la autobiografía de la actriz y fotógrafa, pero mucho más famosa por su faceta de realizadora y, en concreto, por sus dos documentales en la época del Reich y su relación, de distintas y variada naturaleza, con muchos de los dirigentes nazis.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

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Candace says

this woman was amazing.

Vladislav Velizanin says

A long and rewarding read.

Mark says

Ms. Riefenstahl is more or less the prisoner of history. Having been one of the world's greatest innovative cinematographers, and forced to create what was effectively "the most effective propaganda film of all time" the Triumph of the Will, Ms Riefenstahl keeps her own reputation intact by being the person who also documented the 1936 Olympics, her film of which, Olympia, was given awards in all the countries Hitler later conquered. She insists on her apolitical freedom, and takes refuge from the many cases of innuendo which built up around her after the war, in her artistry, as well as her own freedom of racial prejudices, but the consequences of having been a witness to the intrigues of and first person intimate of Adolf Hitler give this book a historical weight all of its own. You really want to read it through to the end.

Braden says

The self-serving reminiscences of a Nazi propagandist and collaborator who refused to admit it. Riefenstahl is an incredibly rare blend of a person lacking self-awareness with quite a healthy sense of self-worth and fascist tendencies. Her memoirs are a fascinating example of equivocation and moral justification, but are often unbearable in its rampant self-aggrandization and total lack of remorse. Worth a read, though, if you're interested in Third Reich hangers-on, the German film industry, and the lengths to which a person will go to hold oneself inculpable for one's actions.

Erik Graff says

Back during high school a few of us drove to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois to see Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a film I have not seen since but remember with extraordinary clarity, so impressive was it, visually speaking. Other than clips from her later *Olympia*, I have not seen her other cinematic productions.

Consequently, I picked this up without knowing much about the author beyond the fact that she was the most famous film director associated with the Third Reich. I had absolutely no idea that she remained a public figure into the eighties or that she had had a later career as a photographer.

While, for me, the most interesting parts of her memoirs concern the Nazi years, particularly as regards her associations with leaders of the NDSAP, these do not constitute the bulk of her recollections. What she mostly writes about are, at first, romance (with men and with artistic subjects) and then, after the war, the difficulties she had with doing any creative work owing to the persistent belief held by many that she herself had been a Nazi (she hadn't). Much of this later work is associated with Africa, the Sudan in particular.

Frankly, except for the war years, I found this book emotionally difficult. "Listening" to Riefenstahl was, to my ear, like listening to my mother, another romantic, albeit less accomplished. Too much of it was too personal. I would have appreciated more context, more about others. Although a great artist, Riefenstahl was no intellectual, her lack of understanding of her objective circumstances, her historical and political ignorance, leading her into dark waters and much aggravation.

Paul Cornelius says

Leni Riefenstahl died in 2003, when she was 101 years old, the last surviving member of Hitler's inner circle. How much of her life after 1945 was an attempt to cover up and mislead history is not clarified by this memoir. But what is there is a stunning record of how Riefenstahl came of age and entered the German film industry when it was at its height, making Mountain Films and developing a production technique that would come to full fruition in her documentaries, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*. Her filmic transitioning remains an art form in and of itself; her work flows, moves, and isolates its subjects against natural and epic backgrounds. Individuals become expressions of natural will and order. So, in many ways, she does reflect the ideology of the political movement that made her rise possible in the first place.

The details of Riefenstahl's life mesmerize the reader. And it also demonstrates one of the quirks of National Socialist Germany. That is, not only the survival but the flourishing of certain types of women in Hitler's Third Reich. Riefenstahl, like the aviatrix Hanna Reitsch, was something of a bohemian working outside the traditional social roles assigned to women. She became a force, a power to be reckoned with in Germany during a time when sexism operated as a secondary sort of racism. Clearly, this was not the ideological goal of Nazism but it was an aspect of the Nazi elites that they saw something of themselves, outsiders, perhaps, in figures like Riefenstahl, Reitsch, and Hitler's personal secretaries.

Riefenstahl's death and her memoirs effectively closed the book on the passing of a certain era in history. Hitler and his regime now belong to a past whose living memory no longer exists. You can still find some hints of it in Riefenstahl's writings, but you will need to read between the lines to determine the ultimate truth.

Ricardo says

For some reason I don't buy her naïveté regarding Hitler and her relationship with him and the regime. She was no doubt a gifted, strong willed and clever woman. She wants to come across as a victim. She is very convincing but I feel she is hiding more than what she is willing to say. When you read this book it is imperative to read between the lines. Her first hand accounts of the Nazi inner circle is quite interesting.

Manuel Cartes says

Tres años ya que leí este librazo (casi 1.000 páginas). Una mujer como pocas en la historia. Hizo su trabajo como quiso en el momento y el país más complicado del sXX para hacerlo. Capaz de levantarle la voz al Führer o decirle a Goebbels que se dejara de hablar hueás. Podría ser la bandera de muchos, pero prefieren los referentes plásticos, hedonistas y pomposos que entrega la tv.

Leni inmortal.
