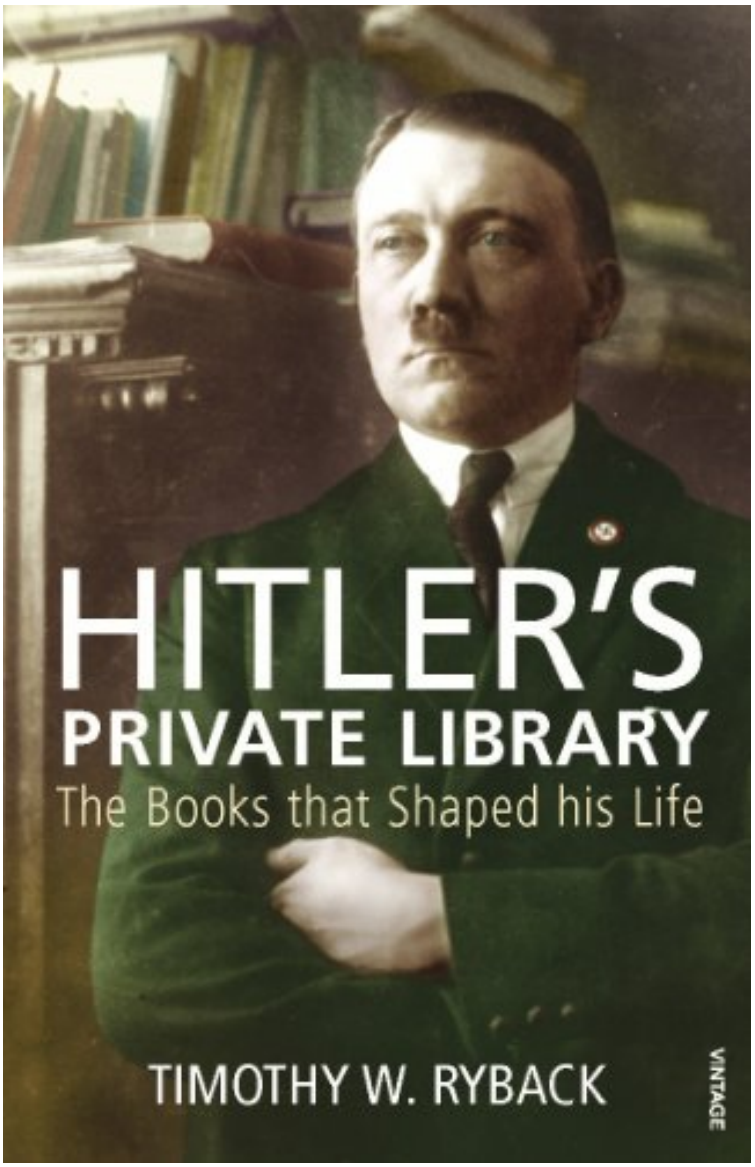
Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped his Life



Par Timothy W. Ryback
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(Library ebook) Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped his Life

Par Timothy W. Ryback : Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped his Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped his Life:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurHe was, of course, a man better known for burning books than collecting them and yet by the time he died, aged 56, Adolf Hitler owned an estimated 16,000 volumes - the works of historians, philosophers, poets, playwrights and novelists. For the first time, Timothy W. Ryback offers a systematic examination of this remarkable collection. The volumes in Hitler's library are fascinating in themselves but it is the marginalia - the comments, the exclamation marks, the questions and underlinings - even the dirty thumbprints on the pages of a book he read in the trenches of the First World War - which are so

revealing.Hitler's Private Library provides us with a remarkable view of Hitler's evolution - and unparalleled insights into his emotional and intellectual world. Utterly compelling, it is also a landmark in our understanding of the Third Reich.ExtraitThe Man Who Burned Books FOR HIM THE LIBRARY represented a Pierian spring, that mataphorica source of knowledge and inspiration. He drew deeply there, quelling his intellectual insecurities and nourishing his fanatic ambitions.He read voraciously, at least one book per night, sometimes more, so he claimed. When one gives one also has to take, he once said, and I take what I need from books. He ranked Don Quixote,along with Robinson Crusoe, Uncle Toms Cabin, and Gullivers Travels,among the great works of world literature. Each of them is a grandiose idea unto itself, he said. In Robinson Crusoehe perceived the development of the entire history of mankind. Don Quixotecaptured ingeniously the end of an era. He owned illustrated editions of both books and was especially impressed by Gustave Dors romantic depictions ofCervantess delusion-plagued hero. He also owned the collected works of William Shakespeare, published in German translation in 1925 by Georg Mller as part of a series intended to make great literature available to the general public. Volume six includes As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Hamlet, and Troilus and Cressida. The entire set is bound in hand-tooled Moroccan leather with a gold-embossed eaglevflanked by his initials on the spine. He considered Shakespeare superior to Goethe and Schiller in every respect. While Shakespeare had fueled his imagination on the protean forces of the emerging British empire, these two Teutonic playwright-poets squandered their talent on stories ofmidlife crises and sibling rivalries. Why was it, he once wondered, that the German Enlightenment produced Nathan the Wise, the story of the rabbi who reconciles Christians, Muslims, and Jews, while it had been left to Shakespeare to give the world The Merchant of Veniceand Shylock? He appears to have imbibed his Hamlet. To be or not to be was a favorite phrase, as was It is Hecuba to me. He was especially fond of Julius Caesar. In a 1926 sketchbook he drew a detailed stage set for the first act of the Shakespeare tragedy with sinister faades enclosing the forum where Caesar is cut down. We will meet again at Philippi, he threatened an opponent on more than one occasion, plagiarizing the spectral warning to Brutus after Caesars murder. He was said to have reserved the Ides ofMarch for momentous decisions. He kept his Shakespeare volumes in the second-floor study of his alpine retreat in southern Germany, along with a leather edition of another favorite author, the adventure novelist Karl May. The first Karl May that I read was The Ride Across the Desert, he once recalled. I was overwhelmed! I threw myself into him immediately which resulted in a noticeable decline in my grades. Later in life, he was said to have sought solace in Karl May the way others did in the Bible. He was versed in the Holy Scriptures, and owned a particularly handsome tome with Worte Christi,or Words of Christ,embossed in gold on a cream-colored calfskin cover that even today remains as smooth as silk. He also owned a German translation ofHenry Fords anti-Semitic tract, The International Jew: The Worlds Foremost Problem, and a 1931 handbook on poison gas with a chapter detailing the qualities and effects ofprussic acid, the homicidal asphyxiant marketed commercially as Zyklon B. On his bedstand, he kept a well-thumbed copy of Wilhelm Buschs mischievous cartoon duo Max and Moritz. WALTER BENJAMIN ONCE SAID that you could tell a lot about a man by the books he keepshis tastes, his interests, his habits. The books we retain and those we discard, those we read as well as those we decide not to, all say something about who we are. As a German-Jewish culture critic born ofan era when it was possible to be German and Jewish, Benjamin believed in the transcendent power ofKultur.He believed that creative expression not only enriches and illuminates the world we inhabit, but also provides the cultural adhesive that binds one generation to the next, a Judeo-Germanic rendering of the ancient wisdom ars longa, vita brevis. Benjamin held the written wordprinted and boundin especially highr egard. He loved books. He was fascinated by their physicality, by their durability, by their provenance. An astute collector, heargued, couldreada book the way a physiognomist decipheredt he essence of a persons character through his physical features. Dates, placenames, formats, previous owners, bindings, and all the like,Benjamin observed, all these details must tell him somethingnot as dry isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole.In short, you could j udge a book by its cover, and in turn the collector byhis collection. Quoting Hegel, Benjamin noted, Only when it is dark does the owl of Minerva begin its flight, and concluded,Only in extinction is the collector comprehended. When Benjamin invoked a nineteenth-century German philosopher, a Roman goddess, and an owl, he was of course alluding to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels famous maxim: The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk, by which Hegel meant that philosophizing can begin only after events have run their course. Benjamin felt the same was true about private libraries. Only after the collector had shelved his last book and died, when his library was allowed to speak for itself, without the proprietor to distract or obfuscate, could the individual volumes

reveal the preserved knowledge of their owner: how he asserted his claim over them, with a name scribbled on the inside cover or an ex libris bookplate pasted across an entire page; whether he left them dog-eared and stained, or the pages uncut and unread. Benjamin proposed that a private library serves as a permanent and credible witness to the character of its collector, leading him to the following philosophic conceit: we collect books in the belief that we are preserving them when in fact it is the books that preserve their collector. Not that they come alive in him, Benjamin posited. It is he who lives in them. FOR THE LAST HALF CENTURY remnants of Adolf Hitlers library have occupied shelf space in climatized obscurity in the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress. The twelve hundred surviving volumes that once graced Hitlers bookcases in his three elegantly appointed librarieswood paneling, thick carpets, brass lamps, over- stuffed armchairsat private residences in Munich, Berlin, and the Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden, now stand in densely packed rows on steel shelves in an unadorned, dimly lit storage area of the Thomas Jefferson Building in downtown Washington, a stones throw from the Washington Mall and just across the street from the United States Supreme Court. The sinews ofemotional logic that once ran through this collection Hitler shuf?ed his books ceaselessly and insisted on reshelving them himselfhave been severed. Hitlers personal copy of his family genealogy is sandwiched between a bound collection of newspaper articles titled Sunday Meditationsand a folio ofpolitical cartoons from the 1920s. A handsomely bound facsimile edition ofletters by Frederick the Great, specially designed for Hitlers ?ftieth birthday, lies on a shelf for oversized books beneath a similarly massive presentation volume on the city of Hamburg and an illustrated history of the German navy in the First World War. Hitlers copy of the writings of the legendary Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz, who famously declared that war was politics by other means, shares shelfspace beside a French vegetarian cookbook inscribed toMonsieur Hitler vgtarien. When I first surveyed Hitlers surviving books, in the spring of 2001, I discovered that fewer than half the volumes had been catalogued, and only two hundred ofthose were searchable in the Library ofCongresss online catalogue. Most were listed on aging index cards and still bore the idiosyncratic numbering system assigned them in the 1950s. At Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, I found another eighty Hitler books in a similar state of benign neglect. Taken from his Berlin bunker in the spring of 1945by Albert Aronson, one of the first Americans to enter Berlin after the German defeat, they were donated to Brown by Aronsons nephew in the late 1970s. Today they are stored in a walk-in basement vault, along withWaltWhitmanspersonal copy of Leaves of Grassand the original folios to John James Audubons Birds of America. Among the books at Brown, I found a copy of Mein Kampf with Hitlers ex libris bookplate, an analysis of Wagners Parsifal published in 1913,a history of the swastika from 1921,and a half dozen or so spiritual and occult volumes Hitler acquired in Munich in the early 1920s, including an account of supernatural occurrences, The Dead Are Alive!, and a monograph on the prophecies of Nostradamus. I discovered additional Hitler books scattered in public and private archives across the United States and Europe. Several dozen of these surviving Hitler books contain marginalia. Here I encountered a man who famously seemed never to listen to anyone, for whom conversation was a relentless tirade, a ceaseless monologue, pausing to engage with the text, to underline words and sentences, to mark entire paragraphs, to place an exclamation point beside one passage, a question mark beside another, and quite frequently an emphatic series of parallel lines in the margin alongside a particular passage. Like footprints in the sand, these markings allow us to trace the course of the journey but not necessarily the intent, where attention caught a...Revue de presse"Elegantly written, meticulously researched, fascinating" (Ian Kershaw)"Lively and entertaining survey of the dictator's reading ... a wealth of fascinating detail" (Richard Overy Sunday Telegraph)"Enlightening" (Clive Sinclair, Book of the Week Independent)"Ryback has made an original and interesting contribution to the study of this monster, not least by showing that, in some respects, he was just like many of the rest of us" (Simon Heffer Daily Telegraph)"Ryback's...volume is unique in its focus on a limited number of books and in the forensic attention he lavishes on them" (Bertrand Benoit Financial Times)