



Goebbels: A Biography

Peter Longerich, Alan Bance (Translator), Jeremy Noakes (Translator), Lesley Sharpe (Translator)

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From renowned German Holocaust historian Peter Longerich comes the definitive one-volume biography of Adolf Hitler's malevolent minister of propaganda.

In life, and in the grisly manner of his death, Joseph Goebbels was one of Adolf Hitler's most loyal acolytes. By the end, no one in the Berlin bunker was closer to the Führer than his devoted Reich minister for public enlightenment and propaganda. But how did this clubfooted son of a factory worker rise from obscurity to become Hitler's most trusted lieutenant and personally anointed successor?

In this ground-breaking biography, Peter Longerich sifts through the historical record—and thirty thousand pages of Goebbels's own diary entries—to provide the answer to that question. Longerich, the first historian to make use of the Goebbels diaries in a biographical work, engages and challenges the self-serving portrait the propaganda chief left behind. Spanning thirty years, the diaries paint a chilling picture of a man driven by a narcissistic desire for recognition who found the personal affirmation he craved within the virulently racist National Socialist movement. Delving into the mind of his subject, Longerich reveals how Goebbels's lifelong search for a charismatic father figure inexorably led him to Hitler, to whom he ascribed almost godlike powers.

This comprehensive biography documents Goebbels's ascent through the ranks of the Nazi Party, where he became a member of the Führer's inner circle and launched a brutal campaign of anti-Semitic propaganda. Though endowed with near-dictatorial control of the media—film, radio, press, and the fine arts—Longerich's Goebbels is a man dogged by insecurities and beset by bureaucratic infighting. He feuds with his bitter rivals Hermann Göring and Alfred Rosenberg, unsuccessfully advocates for a more radical line of “total war,” and is thwarted in his attempt to pursue a separate peace with the Allies during the waning days of World War II. This book also reveals, as never before, Goebbels's twisted personal life—his mawkish sentimentality, manipulative nature, and voracious sexual appetite.

A harrowing look at the life of one of history's greatest monsters, Goebbels delivers fresh insight into how the Nazi message of hate was conceived, nurtured, and disseminated. This complete portrait of the man behind that message is sure to become a standard for historians and students of the Holocaust for decades to come.

Goebbels: A Biography Details

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From Reader Review Goebbels: A Biography for online ebook

Casey Wheeler says

I received a prerelease e-copy of this book through NetGalley (publication date October 14, 2014) with the expectation that I will post a review on their site and others (my blog, Goodreads, Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, Twitter, Amazon, etc.).

I requested this book as I have an interest in World War II and the leading characters in the conflict (regardless of which side they were on). This is the first book by Peter Longerich that I have read.

I found this book to be well written and researched. The author's style makes this an easy and engrossing read. While the subject matter can be disturbing at times, he paints a very complete picture of Josef Goebbels that creates an understanding of how he can be the mouthpiece of the Third Reich and at the end the most devoted of Adolph Hitler's followers.

Goebbels left exhaustive diaries that the author made excellent use of in getting into the head of the subject.

I recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in gainging a better understanding of one of the leaders who contributed to one of the darkest periods in our world's history.

Alice says

REVIEW COMING SOON

Kayla Tornello says

Goebbels was definitely an interesting subject for a biography. The author did a great job of researching him and wrote an incredibly detailed story. I received an audio book edition of this story, and I had a very hard time focusing on it while I tried listening while driving in the car. I think that the narrative is just too detailed to translate well into an audio edition.

I received this book as a Goodreads First-Read. Yay!

Paul says

Goebbels – A masterpiece Biography

Goebbels by Professor Peter Longerich is a masterpiece biography with outstanding research that over seven hundred pages covers all aspects of Joseph Goebbels. This biography delves into the dark heart of Goebbels and shines a light upon aspects of his life that we think we know with excellent scholarship and we find out how important Goebbels was within the Third Reich.

Using Goebbels own diaries which he started in 1925, as he was then a failed novelist and playwright to when he died in the Hitler bunker in April 1945. Goebbels had originally struck a deal to publish his diaries and even though some were published in 1948, most were carried off to Moscow and was not published fully until 2008.

There have always been rumours that somehow Goebbels how the club footed propagandist had a very healthy love life and not just with his wife, Magda. He was also a midget lothario who was a narcissist with a profound need for attention and admiration, something he used to attract many women within the Reich. But the narcissistic tendencies of Goebbels also tended to overstate how important he actually was, though he was conceited and very insecure. Especially in respects to whether Hitler was having an affair with Magda, one thing is certain that Hitler often had to act as the marriage guide counsellor to the pair.

Chapter ten which deals with the years between 1933 and 1939 is interesting is that we are able to see how that the once free press of Germany fell under Goebbels' censorship and control in the growing dictatorship. What Longerich does well is that he teases out the role Goebbels played in the Holocaust in the use of the anti-Semitic propaganda and the agitation that he encouraged. We also learn that he uses the ability to whip up anti-Semitic feelings across the country as a way to always get back in to Hitler's good books.

We also get the confirmation that Goebbels was left out of the loop in the conduct of the war that Germany was raging, but this gave him time and space to hone his skills as the first 'spin doctor'. Something that we do learn is that unlike other leading Nazis Goebbels did not have a power base independent of Hitler, except towards the end of the war when he was urging Hitler to fend off the challenges to his authority.

What we do learn through the diaries and Longerich's writing that Goebbels had no redeeming qualities other than being a calculated liar who never once took a brave decision in his career or life. Even his suicide is not as grand as he would have liked especially as he knows the Russians are closing in, he asks for a soldier to shoot him as he does not think the poison will kill him.

This is an excellent biography that opens up the lurid world that Goebbels lived and operated in, there is no admiration for the man, which is understandable, but the facts are laid bare and we can see Goebbels for what he was. A narcissist who had a constant need to be desired and admired, who exaggerated his own importance a man who should have hung at Nuremberg.

Kemper says

I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for this honest review.

This should teach me to pay more attention when I ask for an ARC.

I requested this from NetGalley on a whim when I saw the title, and I didn't realize that I was getting a book that was almost a thousand pages.* I also didn't consider that a kitten-squisher of a biography about a notorious Nazis wasn't going to be ideal summer time reading. I've done my best to give it a fair review, but any critical comments I make should probably be taken with a grain of salt by anyone interested in it.

Peter Longerich uses Joseph Goebbels' diary as a guide post from the time when he was a wannabe writer and radical through his rise through the Nazi party to become the chief architect of its propaganda. By contrasting what Goebbels claimed in his journals against other documentation Longerich gives us the real history.

This portrayal shows that Goebbels was a raging narcissist that achieved the recognition he craved by dedicating himself to Adolf Hitler who Goebbels helped elevate to the supreme leader of Germany. (We all know how well that ended.) By making Hitler into an almost god-like figure, Goebbels could then validate himself as great by earning Hitler's respect and praise. Hitler's opinion was so important that Goebbels and his wife Magda (Who it seems Hitler had a bit of a thing for.) made him a de facto father figure that they treated like a member of the family and consulted on domestic decisions.

Perhaps what's most interesting is how Longerich uses what Goebbels claims against other historical documents to show how much Hitler used him like a chump. While Goebbels liked to brag about his close relationship with Hitler and boast about his many accomplishments, the records show that in fact Hitler often kept him out of the loop, ignored his advice, and even occasionally used him as a diversion. If Goebbels had more self-awareness he might have realized that Hitler saw his value as a talented creator of propaganda but didn't credit him as much more than that, at least until the end of the war left him with few other options.

After establishing what he believed about Goebbels' personality, Longerich is content to relay the facts of his life in chronological order while letting quotes from the diary clue us into what Goebbels was thinking and correcting the record with a minimum of commentary aside from occasionally pointing out patterns. This approach gives a remarkably detailed and rich portrait of Goebbels as well as the inner workings of the Nazi party.

However, it's also one of the problems with the book. Everyone has habits and routines. When you read something that covers 20+ years of a person's life, it's going to get repetitive no matter what they're doing even if they're Nazis perpetrating some of history's greatest crimes. So whether it's Goebbels kissing Hitler's ass or Goebbels having some bureaucratic squabble with another Nazi or Goebbels feuding with his wife or Goebbels launching another anti-Semitic propaganda campaign, there comes a time when the point has been made so it seems like the same thing is being rehashed over and over.

In a weird way the strength of the book became one of its irritations for me, but I'm not sure what could have been done about it. It's tempting to say that it could have used more analysis and less detail, but the details are what eventually give you such an understanding of what made Goebbels tick. It seems unfair to fault Longerich for being too thorough, but in the end that's almost what it feels like.

If you're looking for a seriously detailed in-depth biography of Joseph Goebbels that also provides a lot of behind the scenes history of the Nazis, then this is the book for you. If you're in the mood for a lighter pop-history that tells you the basics about Goebbels, you should probably look elsewhere.

** About 40% of the book is its bibliography and notes.*

Donna Davis says

Longerich has established himself as a scholar who specializes in writing about the Nazi thugs who surrounded and supported Hitler's regime in the 1930's and 40's. Thank you to Net Galley and Random

House for the ARC.

The fact is, despite my strong preference for meaty, well-documented, detailed historical works including biographies, I really struggled with this one. At first I thought it was my own fault for asking for 992 pages (about a third of which is documentation) about such a rotten guy, but that isn't the reason I kept setting it aside. I devoured John Dean's recent tome on Nixon, who while not actually a fascist was a really dirty guy, and that was really interesting reading. This colossal volume on Goebbels, on the other hand, is dry, dry, dry.

Longerich's thesis, if such a large work can be boiled down to its essence, is that while Goebbels was a villain and a sociopath, he wasn't nearly as important a player in Hitler's regime as he considered himself to be. He was emotionally dependent on Hitler and the reverse was also true, but his scope and authority were not as great as many people may believe. Longerich makes his case thoroughly and carefully, using Goebbels's own journal entries and other primary documents, often citing works in the German language to back his assertions. And maybe that is where part of my ambivalence lies, because what he sets out to prove, isn't what I wanted to know. I wanted to know—just as we always do when something really calamitous occurs or a really monstrous person draws the public eye—what the hell happened to make someone participate in, and even initiate, the things that Goebbels did. I don't care about his love life, and would just as soon see a good portion of the first 200 pages edited, since the interesting part of his story is later in his life, once the fascists assume power. However, Longerich has written about at least one other top Nazi, and he followed the same basic format, relying on the man's early life to demonstrate the formation of his character, and he's had success and acclaim by doing so, and perhaps that isn't entirely the reason I found this work to be so unexpectedly dull.

For those who are pursuing research projects that involve Nazi top officers, Goebbels is bound to be a valuable resource. For general audiences it might have been more interesting to see him from multiple perspectives. We see Goebbels through his own eyes, and we see what Longerich has discovered to be fact in terms of the authority he was given and the positions he held. I wonder, what about what others who worked with him thought about him? What about how the German public perceived him? I think it might have livened up the text to include more vantage points.

I have no doubt whatsoever that this is the most thorough biography of Goebbels that is widely available and written in English. For scholars seeking information for purposes of research, I highly recommend it. For the audience that seeks an accessible and interesting history and biography that relates to the Holocaust and Nazi officers, I recommend *Six Million Accusers: Catching Adolph Eichmann*, by D. Lawrence-Young.

In short, Goebbels is more appropriate for a niche audience than as a general read.

SundayAtDusk says

Never having read a biography about a high-ranking Nazi, I feared *Goebbels: A Biography* might be too harrowing a read. Early on, though, I realized harrowing was not what this book happened to be, which made it easily readable. Yet, the more I read, the more I wondered if the way the book was written didn't make Goebbels and his kind seem too normal. By the time one reached the end of the author's conclusion, which was page 700, one is apparently suppose to believe Goebbels main problem was he was narcissistic. Really? That's it?

He was also apparently always looking for a mother figure, even though he had a living mother, who he claimed to be very close to in his diary. Why did he need more mother figures? The author says that is how he saw Hitler--as a mother. Hitler as a mother figure? Now, men who are always looking for mothers are often men who are always fantasizing there are forever innocent little boys, not responsible for any bad or shameful things they do. Their mothers are responsible; or their mother substitutes, such as their wives, are responsible.

When Goebbels first starts talking about Hitler in his diary, though, it doesn't sound like he's seeing him as a mother figure. It sounds like he's in love with him! His diary entries also show he is a total drama queen when it comes to all of his romantic relationships with women. In addition, he married a woman, Magda, in what was apparently a threesome with Hitler, because that is what Hitler wanted. And when his wife had only daughters, he was terribly disappointed, and only happy when she had a son. Moreover, he started showing off a mistress for all to see in public until Hitler put an end to that. Finally, he thought telling lies was a normal and good thing. Is it possible that Goebbels was such a good propaganda minister because he was an expert liar even before he became a Nazi? Is it unreasonable to suggest that besides being narcissistic, Goebbels was also possibly a self-loathing latent or closet homosexual? He certainly wouldn't put that in his diary, but those were unmistakable signs of that. Narcissism is often a type of self-hatred rooted in shame.

That could also partly explain why he became rabidly anti-Semitic. Besides needing a scapegoat for Germany's problem, he needed someone to project all of his own self-hatred and guilt onto--it was the Jews who were dirty and worthless and the cause of all of life's problems. Thus, all the Jews needed to be destroyed. (Not to mention all of the exposed or out-of-the-closet homosexuals.) Of course, in the end, Goebbels destroyed himself, which was no surprise.

The fact that he also killed all his children, as if they were his to kill, is definitely a sign of narcissism. But it's also a sign he didn't want or truly love them in the first place. He was emotionally the little boy, the one who always needed a mother, the one who never would be held responsible by God for any bad things he ever did. You can't hold an innocent little boy responsible. No matter what shameful things he did, he would not be responsible. That is why he always needed at least one mother figure on hand. To take the blame. He probably most definitely made sure Magda committed suicide with him.

(Note: I received a free e-copy of this book from NetGalley and Random House in exchange for an honest review.)

Lewis Weinstein says

I got this from NetGalley and am having trouble reading it on my kindle. Perhaps there's a way to get it in Word format so I can read it on my MacBook and take notes.

Scott Baker says

I was conflicted about whether to give this book 3.5 or 5 stars, and finally opted for a four-star review. Please see my reasoning below.

Reason for a five-star review: Longerich has written probably the most comprehensive biography to date of

Joseph Goebbels. The author has conducted meticulous research, going through all of Goebbels' diaries and putting together a detailed accounting of the propaganda minister's thoughts and concerns. Two aspects of the biography I found most interesting were 1) Goebbels was not as close a confidante of Hitler's as history has led us to believe, and 2) much of his proximity to Hitler resulted from Hitler and Magda (Goebbels' wife) having a very close and possibly intimate relationship. Longerich's book brings Goebbels to life through the man's diaries, and is invaluable for anyone studying the propaganda minister and/or the political machinations within the Nazi party.

Reason for a 3.5-star review: While Longerich's book is an excellent scholarly work, it is long and tedious if one is interested in a more leisurely historical read. I found myself skipping over entire chapter segments that went into details about gauleiter gatherings or other such topics. While in no way should this be viewed as a detraction of the book, I do want to warn the readers ahead of time so they are aware.

Mark Lonsdale says

An important psycho biography of a monstrous individual - but at times makes him an almost comic figure and underplays his influence, which I found surprising. Raises, but does not really pursue, the potentially explosive idea of a three way relationship between Goebbels, his wife, and Hitler. You realise how personality driven (as opposed to process driven) was the Nazi regime -it was all about who had last spoken to Hitler. A key message is that we must be forever vigilant for politicians massaging laws and accruing special powers to "protect our security" (e.g. ministers deciding on citizenship). I was struck by what a hotbed of extremism in the 1920s were the peaceful towns of Westphalia that I lived among as a boy. Also that nazism truly started as a kind of hybrid of extremist socialism and nationalism (one of the comical aspects is the way Goebbels continued to court and uphold the Soviet Union until he belatedly "got the memo").

Bou says

Clarifying biography by Petr Longerich about Goebbels, one of Hitler's most loyal followers

For his biography, Peter Longerich puts mainly out of Goebbel's diaries, which give a good insight in the thoughts and actions of this man. Some aspects that I learned:

He was totally devoted to Hitler, even allowed Hitler to enter in a trio partnership with his wife (with whom he regularly had difficult dealings), allowed Hitler to enter his private life while Hitler kept him out of his political activities. Hitler had him wrapped around his fingers.

During the war, he kept fighting to control the Reichs propaganda ministeries, which regularly made him quarrel with some of the other top nazi's. Even in the final years, when all was already lost, he kept trying to gain total power with regards to press and media. In the end, he never succeeded in this goal.

His rabid antisemitism was appalling. He created the lies that were put forward to the German people, and in the end believed himself in them.

Alannah Clarke says

Received a free copy to review through netgalley.com

Having studied Nazi History for so many years now, I think this last year (my third year in university) was the first year in which the Nazi party were not mentioned at all. Anyways, through my years of research, I had come to know one name quite well, Joseph Goebbels. But I didn't know that much about him, which is why I thought this book would be really interesting to me. Simply because this book seemed to promise some new viewpoints about this wicked man whom some people don't even know of.

I thought the author did a great in trying to explain the man and his propaganda campaign, since he was the Reich Minister for Propaganda from 1933 to 1945. Goebbels knew very well how to control what people thought, a lot of people don't seem to realise that it Goebbels who made the German people go against Jewish people and blamed them for their part in Germany's downfall after the First World War. The book is detailed and interesting, I believe that many historians interested in Nazi History will enjoy this book.

judy says

We'll just call this what it really is -- a meticulous academic examination of Joseph Goebbels. It's not interesting and the chances of your learning something new and mindblowing are almost nil. It isn't the author's fault. Goebbels made diary entries every day. What we know of him comes from those and other writings--some his, some not. The main problem is that Goebbels is a full blown narcissist. It's all about him. He's always right and he's always successful. What I don't understand is how or why this man worshiped Hitler. Near the end of the war, he did see a few faults with his hero. Not enough, however to stop him and his wife from committing suicide upon Hitler's death--and killing their six children. A legend in his own mind, Goebbels was never in the true inner circle. When it came to military strategy and really significant decisions, Goebbels was never invited in. He would find out eventually, sometimes after the fact. Hitler had a talent for making people feel that they were essential to him--although they weren't. It depends on how you want to use this book. You do get what Goebbles is doing with his time but you rarely see the other suspects. In short, this is a narrow view of a huge subject.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

Longerich has set the bar high for anyone to surpass this volume.

Peter Longerich is a German professor of history. He is regarded by fellow historians as one of the leading German authorities on the Holocaust.

Benefiting from the 1997 discovery of the microfilmed diaries in a Russian archive of Longerich's work on Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister is a master class in biography.

In immense detail he covers the rise of Goebbels from journalist and wannabe playwright to Reich Chancellor for a day following Hitler's suicide.

Surprisingly despite his club foot, polio-weakened body and the nickname, the "poison dwarf" Goebbels was quite the lothario. His most infamous affair, was with the Czech actress Lida Baarová, with whom Hitler ordered Goebbels to break off his relationship whereupon Goebbels offered his resignation, which Hitler refused. Goebbels even attempted suicide which resulted in a furious Hitler ordering Himmler to remove Baarová from Germany, where she was deported to Czechoslovakia

However, the book is much than an exposé of his love life, it shows how Goebbels tried to manage the morale and thoughts of the German population from the early 1930s through to the denouement in Berlin in 1945

I'd always thought Goebbels was part of the Nazi inner circle and despite being one of Hitler's intimates he was on the periphery of most of the main decisions throughout the war, often being told after the fact. Even knowledge of an invasion of the Soviet Union was late in being supplied to him.

Whilst there's many biographies on the other leading Nazis, there's surprisingly few on Josef Goebbels, however Longerich has set the bar high to surpass this volume.

Tom Mathews says

Goebbels: a biography, published in German in 2010 and recently translated into English, may soon stand with Joachim C. Fest's biography of Hitler as one of the key sources of information for those interested in understanding the personalities and events that brought about the advent of the Third Reich and all the horrendous events that it spawned.

Longerich's biography of Joseph Goebbels, based largely on the Nazi propaganda minister's voluminous diaries, begins in the early 1920s with Goebbels, a young man with a less than impressive track record in school and employment, struggling to find himself. At one point drawn to the Catholic church and socialist ideology he ultimately rejects both and follows a totally different path. Longerich portrays Goebbels as an extremely narcissistic individual who at one point saw himself as the ultimate savior of Germany but who fell victim to the powerfully persuasive personality of Adolph Hitler, and instead assumed for himself the mantle of self-proclaimed John the Baptist and dedicated himself to spreading his Führer's message.

As with most comprehensive biographies, there are several places where the pace tends to lag but it still contains a lot of previously unpublished information that will intrigue readers. I was interested to learn that when Goebbels first became interested in anti-Semitism he read the series of booklets 'The International Jew' written by American Auto maker Henry Ford but decided that '*he was not prepared to follow the author's train of thought all the way.*'

One ultimately is given the impression that Goebbels believed that he had a greater impact on events in Europe than he actually did. Perhaps his greatest propaganda coup was to leave most students of history believing that he alone controlled much of the output of the German media, educational and artistic institutions during the years the Nazis were in power. The truth is that he fought a constant, and usually unsuccessful battle to convince Hitler to grant him the power he craved, and in the end had to settle for sharing many of the propaganda functions with other party officials. That he lacked that power is evident in how many of the key German actions that Goebbels was left out of until after they were begun. Even so, Goebbels' many diaries still provide readers with much information regarding the secret meetings and inner

workings of the Nazi party.

English narrator Simon Prebble does an admirable job of narrating the audio version of this book produced by Highbridge Audio. The narration is unabridged and runs for 28.75 hours.

*Quotations are cited from an advanced reading copy and may not be the same as appears in the final published edition. The review book was based on an advanced reading copy obtained at no cost from the publisher in exchange for an unbiased review. While this does take any 'not worth what I paid for it' statements out of my review, it otherwise has no impact on the content of my review.

FYI: On a 5-point scale I assign stars based on my assessment of what the book needs in the way of improvements:

- 5 Stars – Nothing at all. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
- 4 Stars – It could stand for a few tweaks here and there but it's pretty good as it is.
- 3 Stars – A solid *C* grade. Some serious rewriting would be needed in order for this book to be considered *good or memorable*.
- 2 Stars – This book needs a lot of work. A good start would be to change the plot, the character development, the writing style and the ending.
- 1 Star - The only thing that would improve this book is a good bonfire.
