



Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives

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Forty years after his *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* set a standard for scholarship of the Nazi era, Lord Alan Bullock gives readers a breathtakingly accomplished dual biography that places Adolf Hitler's origins, personality, career, and legacy alongside those of Joseph Stalin--his implacable antagonist and moral mirror image.

Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives Details

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From Reader Review Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives for online ebook

Carol Storm says

A classic and must-read for every scholar of World War II. Two definitive biographies for the price of one, with tons of historical analysis and comparisons in strategy and outlook year by year.

Mary says

Brilliant. The longest book I've ever read! I have learnt so much about Stalin and the rise and continuation of communism. It was also a great way to learn about Stalin - in comparison with Hitler. Actually I learnt a lot about Hitler too! The author was right - religious fundamentalism had taken over as the biggest threat to the world after the Cold War ended. Would be great to read an updated version, there must be additional info around now 20 years after this was published.

Andrew Harrison says

This is a first-rate book for the general reader. Alan Bullock distills a vast amount of material into a clear narrative. The style is elegant and crisp: there's no shortage of detail, but he ensures that the reader doesn't get bogged down in a swamp of superfluous information. Highly recommended.

Mike says

Bullock delivers a fascinating exploration of the similarities between these two infamous leaders, made stronger and more convincing by the choice to compare their experiences at the same age (instead of what was happening in each man's life in a given year, say, 1938). A window not only into the lives of these two men, but the relationship between one's past and one's future.

Shawn says

Not as good as his first biography of Hitler, but still fascinating.

Rachel says

A great narrator and historian..don't be put off by the length of this book. Engrossing and a must read for anyone interested in the Third Reich/Stalin's Russia.

Alex says

On January 30, 1933, German president Von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler to be the Chancellor of Germany.

In November 1933, Hitler said, "I did not become Chancellor in order to act otherwise than I have preached for fourteen long years."

IMHO, it is necessary to note that unfortunately and to the shame of German people, Hitler came to power through the democratic election process on 07/31/1932 via popular support.

Below is the extract from Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_fede...

"The German parliamentary election of 31 July 1932, saw great gains by the Nazi Party (National Socialist German Workers Party, NSDAP), which for the first time became the largest party in parliament

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NSDAP election results

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| Vote percentage (change) | Seats (change) |
|--------------------------|----------------|
|--------------------------|----------------|

| | |
|--------------|----------|
| 37.8% +19.0% | 230 +123 |
|--------------|----------|

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"

Every Nation has its history and there is such thing as Nation's historical legacy and responsibility.

The historical blame for what German people did via popular support of overall Nazi's ideology remains in the books of history FOREVER!

The blame could not be assigned to Hitler alone - thousands of SS, SD Gestapo personnel was actively consciously and willingly involved with killings of millions innocent civil people - that was their daily *routine* during WW2 ! - this level of crime does not have (and hopefully will never have) any historical parallels ...

Stalin, on another hand, was handed the power from the top as a self proclaimed successor to Lenin (without any democratic elections at all).

Returning to German vs Russia comparison ...

So while Russia never was (up to now, inclusively) a democratically ruled country, Germany (as Weimar Republic) for 14 years (from 1919) was.

Here is another extract from Wikipedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic

"

Germany's period of liberal democracy lapsed in the early 1930s, leading to the ascent of the NSDAP and Adolf Hitler in 1933. Although the constitution of 1919 was never officially repealed, the legal measures taken by the Nazi government in February and March 1933, commonly known as Gleichschaltung ("coordination") meant that the government could legislate contrary to the constitution. The constitution became irrelevant; thus, 1933 is usually seen as the end of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of Hitler's Third Reich."

Also it is important to note that the majority of victims of Stalin's regime was among the population of his own country (USSR), while the majority of Hitler's victims were people of other (than Germany) countries. Stalin did not openly supported and conducted the policy of Genocide, while Hitler did. As every one (I hope) knows, Hitler's policy of Genocide was directed towards extermination of Jews (Holocaust - 6 millions of Jewish lives lost) and Gypsies.

Also, if someone wants to get the idea of the Stalin psychology (as a dictator) I suggest to read "Children of the Arbat" by Anatoly Rybakov.

Armin Hennig says

87/100 Eigentlich viereinhalb Sterne, ausführliche Rezi folgt.

AC says

Must Read -- One of the truly great works of historical synthesis in the 20th century.

Peter says

This is an excellent book. Bullock does an excellent job in his dual biography of arguably the two people who had the most influence on the 20th century.

Bullock places the two men side by side, sometimes in the same chapter, sometimes in successive chapters, and sometimes at the same time chronologically, while others at the same phase in their lives. By allowing himself the flexibility of switching between these two options, it allows him to compare and contrast these two men.

The other aspect of his work that I really enjoyed was Bullock does engage previous scholarship, and the various ways historians have grappled with understanding both these men and the oppressive systems they created, without it becoming cumbersome. Those that really want to dig into the historical debates can find sources in his notes, while those that really don't want to dig, can read an accessible one volume work about both Hitler and Stalin.

Pablo says

Great work of historical synthesis. Made me better understand the context in which Ceausescu and the post-war dictators developed, following the examples of the one-man-rule regimes so well covered in this book.

Bettie? says

Claudia Moscovici says

I used to teach Alan Bullock's "Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives" in courses about totalitarianism. Contrary to many other college textbooks, which tend to date rather quickly, this history book seems timeless. Bullock offers a monumental social biography of two of the most evil dictators in human history as well as an epic sketch of an era. Although the author specializes in Hitler, his grasp of Stalin is equally impressive. It rivals, in fact, Robert Conquest's "The Great Terror" in its thoroughness and depth.

As the title suggests, Bullock alternates chapters on Hitler with those on Stalin. He reveals how each dictator relied on his powers of manipulation, deception and opportunism to rise to power and spread totalitarian regimes meant to wipe out the human spirit and large parts of humanity itself across the world. The book also explains how Hitler and Stalin initially operated within the systems which they later (mis)used for their own selfish and nefarious goals. Whatever their rhetoric and ideology, both sociopathic tyrants ultimately craved power for its own sake, at the expense of everyone else, even the causes (and allies) they initially claimed to support.

Bullock's "Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives" gives us a detailed, compelling and extremely informative portrait of the faces of evil. It is an indispensable book for all those who want to understand how totalitarian regimes function and the role sociopathic dictators play in changing the course of history. As luck would have it, sociopaths are too self-serving and power-hungry to form lasting alliances. Had Hitler and Stalin not turned on each other, totalitarianism might have triumphed across the globe. As Winston Churchill famously stated in a speech after the German invasion of the Soviet Union: "If Hitler invaded Hell I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons."

Claudia Moscovici, Notablewriters.com

Mario Russo says

This is a great addition to world war II collection. The book delivers what is promised in the cover: Parallel lives of Hitler and Stalin, goes in depth of politics behind it all. Communism, nazism ideology, political context, Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, you got it all covered.

From everything I've known about Stalin so far, I think few things portray this man, as a phrase that is in the book, when he was informed about his wife suicide "She left me as an enemy".

John says

Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives by Alan Bullock is a highly engrossing book that chronicles the key events in the lives of both dictators in a side-by-side comparison to give a sense of the differences in their respective styles and personalities. The book is long (nearly 980 pages without including another 100 pages of appendices, footnotes, reference sources, etc). However, it is very well written and highly engrossing given the well described contrast between their lives. This book may have been made shorter had the author not

spent as much time detailing the historical context within which these personalities acted their roles but the impact of and context behind their actions would not have been as clear.

The take-aways about the similarities and differences in their styles are evident at all stages of their lives thus proving that while there are common strains in the lives of most despots, there are also unique behavior traits that are responsible for the rise of such individuals. These unique behavior traits combine with unstable societal conditions to lead to the rise of a political leader. Without the confluence of their unique personality with the conducive societal condition in each of their countries, both these individuals would have been nobodies in history books despite their unique capabilities.

Hitler's rise to power was due to his superior oratorical capabilities that allowed him to re-affirm the self-worth of an anxious country that had lost its confidence after the First World War. Hitler was an outsider to the system who was adept at playing to people's insecurities and staged huge dramatic rallies for which he practiced for hours before the mirror. This was the reason for his meteoric rise to power. Stalin on the other hand, was an insider who was not adept at public oratory. He consolidated power through political maneuvering and court plots that eliminated all his opponents leaving him as the sole heir to Lenin once the Bolsheviks were in power.

Once in power, they both continued strengthening their vice-like grip over their respective countries by unleashing a reign of terror through an elite corp of soldiers (or goons, depending on how politically accurate or descriptive you want to be in describing this group of loyalists). All this was aided by the prevailing social environment in both Germany and Russia during the middle of the twentieth century in which these former monarchies were grasping for a new political structure. The early twentieth century and the first World War had eliminated imperialism in these countries leaving them uncertain about the best form of government. Hitler and Stalin, each stepped in to exploit this vacuum in their respective countries. Most individuals in these countries had never experienced any form of government other than a monarchy with power being vested in an individual and hence it is plausible that they were willing once again to allow a consolidation of power in the hands of one individual without pausing to contemplate the loss of individual liberties.

Despite the similarity in the brutal methods used to retain power, their management styles were very different. Hitler was a big picture visionary who did not involve himself in the minutiae of administration until he started losing the War when he began micro-managing several battles unsuccessfully from the Berghof. This was one reason among several that eventually led to Germany losing the War. Stalin, in contrast was a capable administrator. He was a micro-manager who had every major decision in his government come up to him including approval for various buildings being built in Moscow. Stalin's capability as an administrator and his management style allowed him to continue to govern until he eventually had a stroke and died at the age of 73.

The above summary comparing the lives of Hitler and Stalin captures the gist of the 1000 page book and gives readers a sense of what they would experience in detail on reading the book. Overall, a well-researched book that leaves a reader with a good appreciation of the lives of both these influential individuals of the twentieth century.

Nicholas Bobbitt says

DNF. The swamp of names, organizations, terms of academic history which make texts such as this devoid of life, and the author's insistence on using abbreviations and initialisms which serve only to make the story

he is attempting to tell more confusing make this book, for me a disappointment. I appreciate what the author is attempting to do, but 1000 page long tomes tend to run out of steam and could be told in a more concise fashion. It certainly is an idea with merit, comparing two of history's worst despots' lives in such a way, I just could not get over the way it was told and the dryness which fills the text.

Carl Stevens says

The question "Is Trump like Hitler?" inspired me to read some three thousand pages of authentic history concluding with this magnificent tome. The answer is, "Yes, in some ways, now go read three thousand pages of authentic history yourself."

Michael Goldsmith says

To understand History and how Evil comes to power. Its important to understand this Evil in it's purest form so it cannot happen again. I am so concerened that it is happening again, look at the power vacume of the presidency today. The out of control spending, trying to take away our guns, the un-informed voters, the people who vote themselves service and the lack of people who really want to work. So many great men and women of the day died during this horrific period. It was a good book, but it makes you realize history can repeat itself.

Bevan Lewis says

This book made a positive impression when it appeared in 1991. Alan Bullock's distinguished academic career had been preceded by the publication of his biography of Hitler, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* which was acclaimed from its publication in 1951 as one of the finest explanations of Hitler. Beginning in the 1970s, Bullock became increasingly fascinated by the comparisons between the Nazi and Soviet empires - the irony of the theoretically opposed ideology but often startlingly similar methods, their tense interrelationship and differences as well. Bullock felt that the focus on the West and Germany had resulted in a neglect of the German-Russian axis - an interest in the East that preceded important studies by historians such as Norman Davies, and more recently the even more tightly focussed study of Timothy Snyder in *Bloodlands*. Bullock's book returns to Hitler, focussing on a comparison of him and Stalin as the framework for a comparison of the two regimes. It broadens previous attention to political theory in constructing the concept of the Totalitarian state, and takes a less emotionally invested approach to those in the 1980s who attempted a comparison to try and portray the crimes of the Nazi's as perversely mitigated by the similarities with Soviet Russia (the Historikerstreit or 'historian's fight').

The subtitle is significant - Bullock borrows the concept of "Parallel Lives" from Plutarch, implying similarities but also lines/lives that "never meet or merge". The structure of the book must have been a challenge. For most of the book he alternates between Hitler/Germany and Stalin/USSR until chapter ten, where the two are compared. Once he reaches a discussion of foreign policy in the 1930s and the period from the Nazi-Soviet pact onwards, the two subjects are dealt with in a more integrated way. This section by its nature flows better and possesses greater coherence however its bedrock is the more individual treatment earlier in the book.

Bullock's writing is pleasing and flows well, workmanlike and unpretentious. His broad reading is supported by the voluminous amounts of primary research materials released during Perestroika and afterwards, and the

1998 second edition contains extensive updates as well as the usual corrections. The well produced first edition hardback shows a standard of publishing which is certainly becoming rarer now, with well laid out pages and about five noticeable 'typos' in a book of almost 1000 pages.

The book balances the elements of historical biography and the necessary context well. It looks at the men on a personal level, although it focusses on the experiences and personal traits which drive their historical actions rather than giving too much about their personal life (thankfully it avoids the dubious realms of pop psychology or obsession with missing testicals etc). The context of the regimes is described well and sufficiently both to describe the men themselves as well as giving a good picture of the politics of the time. There perhaps was some temptation taken to delve a bit more deeply into the tactical and strategic aspects of World War 2 than was strictly necessary although these passages certainly made good reading and provided some good insights. Probably the chapters on World War 2 are those that have dated the most with research over the past twenty years although not to the point of obsolescence.

So what are Mr Bullock's key arguments? One point of strong comparison between the two men is their dual sense of historical purpose. Each believes they have a destiny as great men, which gives them the confidence and determination to pursue power with great effectiveness. They also both possess incredible natural political instincts. The ability to outsmart and outthink their opponents, to surprise them and where necessary ruthlessly devour them. Both men worked their way up from nowhere, completely dependent on their skills for advancement. Stalin had an added handicap of needing to carefully conceal his ambitions in the context of collective leadership, whereas Hitler was free to develop and exploit the 'Führer myth'. Both had constraints though, and Stalin's machinations in the 1920s to gain power without revealing his hand have some similarities with the contortions of Hitler's commitment to 'legality' in coming to power after the failure of the Beer Hall putsch (although the ultimate goal was never concealed).

Stalin's lowest point, as he was deceived and ultimately humiliated by Hitler is the pivot of the book. It is here that we see the ultimate interaction of the two dictators - Hitler's strategic brilliance, Stalin's attempts to buy time. In these pages are one of the most significant factors which will later be telling in the war effort. Yes, Stalin had ripped the heart out of the Red Army (or at least the head) with his purges of the leadership. Hitler and most of Europe didn't take Russia seriously as a military opponent. However even this did not overcome Hitler's economic problems. He needed to conquer more territory in order to keep rearming and vice versa. Bullock well points out the Nazi failure to put the full economy on a war footing until surprisingly late in the war, and the lost ground due to competing factions in the Nazi government.

The ensuing war is dealt with well at a strategic and diplomatic level. Hitler's intervention (positive and negative) in military decisionmaking is well covered, as is Stalin's halting but steadily improving military oversight after the shock of the initial German invasion.

Bullock carries the story beyond the final destruction of Hitler's dream, and his descent to paranoia, blame and a sense that for Germany they would 'all go down together'. The final years of Stalin's regime just provide further evidence of his brutal and paranoid nature, as well as the lessons he quickly learnt from history in ensuring the best possible East European buffer for the Soviet Union.

Hitler and Stalin is a powerful, detailed book which shows how so many of the central events of the twentieth century revolved around these two men. The 'great man' theory of history is widely denigrated, but Bullock's sound exposition of the facts points out clearly both the centrality of these two men to the regimes they ruled as well as how individual will, belief and drive can powerfully influence world historical events, ones which saw a dramatic change from the long nineteenth century, and an ensuing period where perversely immense Western prosperity sat alongside the repercussions of millions of deaths in two great wars. To those who say history is the product of impersonal forces, Bullock's book can be seen as a weighty and well argued proof that the opposite can be true, and a powerful warning of the consequences of two men who killed millions and changed the world.

Gwynn White says

Phew... I survived reading this book mentally intact. That feels like a small miracle. It is hard to imagine two more evil men. In fact, at times *Parallel Lives* reads like fantasy, because it is almost inconceivable that people could actually have behaved like Hitler and Stalin did. But in the end I think the prize for most evil man of the 20th century (or perhaps any century) goes to ... drum roll Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. He definitely wins hands down, no question. I think it is poetic justice that he died virtually at his own hand. SPOILER ALERT Having killed off all the doctors in Russia, there was no one to treat him when he got ill. So the bastard died. There is justice in the universe.
