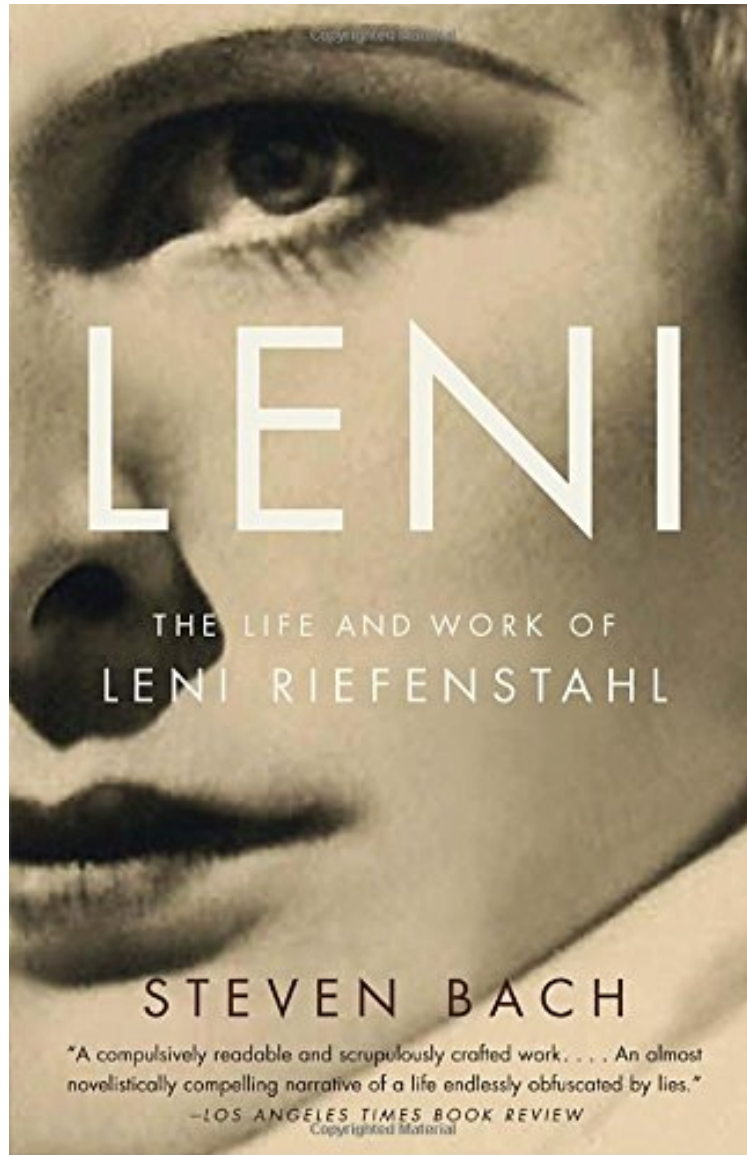


[Mobile book] Leni: The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl

Leni: The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl

Steven Bach

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Steven Bach : Leni: The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Leni: The Life and Work of Leni Riefenstahl:

43 of 43 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Folks Make for Interesting Biographies By Ronald H. Clark This is one of two current biographies out on Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003), who remains somewhat radioactive give her close association with Hitler and other top Nazi leaders during the 1930's and 1940's. The author is a former motion picture executive turned professor, who previously has written an excellent biography of Leni's contemporary

and rival, Marlene Dietrich. Leni is generally seen as being not a particularly pleasant person, who manifested an extreme degree of ego and far less concern about truth in the historical record. This book, while it does not seek to mitigate those allegations, and does in fact add some damaging new information, really the author is much more interested in charting the contours of Leni's life, the times she lived in, and those with whom she interacted than passing moral judgments. One of the strengths of the author is his ability to concisely set the stage at various points in Leni's life. His brief discussion of effervescent Berlin during the 1920's particularly is rich in insight and helps enormously in explaining the environment out of which Leni emerged. Similarly skillful is his discussion of the top Nazi party leadership (particularly Goebbels as propaganda guru) and political developments in Germany in the 1930's--just enough so that the reader is prepared to understand Leni's activities during this period. Bach is at his best, though, in focusing upon Leni as the film maker, whether it is her 1930's films such as "Triumph of the Will" and her Olympic films, or her later films (including the controversial "Tiefland") and African documentaries. He also casts an experienced eye on her many photographic book projects, especially those relating to Africa and coral reefs. The book covers the entirety of Leni's life where the reader learns she was active and working on new projects right up to her death at 101. So, this is a judicious biography of an extremely controversial figure. Bach lays out the facts which have emerged from an extremely thorough job of research, including a slew of taped interviews done in the 1970's with Leni and two dozen of her friends, collaborators and critics by a UCLA Ph.D. candidate. There are extensive notes and a helpful bibliography. The book is handsomely produced for Knopf by Berryville Graphics in Virginia. At 300 or so pages of text, I never once felt that Bach let his narrative drag. Whatever you can say about Leni, and plenty of folks have said a lot, she led a fascinating life which Bach has well captured in this fine biography.

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating biography of the complex and controversial Leni Riefenstahl

By Steven Peterson

This biography of Leni Riefenstahl by Steven Bach is compelling reading. It tells the tale of someone with great talent--but also someone who could never come honestly to grips with her role in Nazi Germany. Someone who, in the end, was a mediocre actress and dancer and a very talented filmmaker and photographer. But even with her successes, many felt that with Riefenstahl, she put as much focus on herself as on her works. And, with some of her works, critics noted that they were technically wonderful, but not with much soul or heart. Her early years featured a strong, almost overbearing father; she early learned how to try to "get around him." Her mother Bertha (whom some suspected of being Jewish) was supportive of her, whereas her father wanted nothing to do with Leni's visions for her future as a dancer. Injury derailed her from dance, and she began acting, with her most prominent genre being the so-called Alpine films. While she saw herself as a terrific actress, outside of some exceptions, she appears to have been rather ordinary. But, as throughout her life, her self-image was far more positive; she never had the ability to be self-critical. One virtue that emerged early in her films was physical courage (page 43), "the only personal quality she possessed that colleagues and even enemies could later praise without reservation." Through a series of events, she ended up in a position to direct a film featuring Adolf Hitler at the 1933 Nazi party congress, "Victory of Faith." It was not as well done as her later, much better known films, but it provided her experience in developing techniques, coming to understand camera work, and so on. Here, she was clearly working on concert with Joseph Goebbels and the Nazi political machine, although she steadfastly resisted the implication that she was a willing and even enthusiastic partner in her films with the party. Hitler decided that he wanted her to do a follow for the 1934 party congress. The result was one of her classics (and a troubling classic, given its explicit vehicle for Nazi propaganda), "Triumph of the Will." Anyone interested in the art of Riefenstahl must watch this movie; there is an awesome (and awful) grandeur to it. Following this, another of her major works, the film that focused on the 1936 Olympics. Technically, another strong work. Some of the same troubling questions, though, remain, including her ties to the Nazis. Her work as, at least functionally, a propagandist of the Third Reich essentially ended her film making career, although she made a handful of efforts. Thwarted, she moved to documentaries (in Africa) and photography. At a point later in life, she became one of the oldest scuba divers around and took what are apparently fine photographs underneath the sea. In her 80s and 90s, there was renewed interest in her earlier classic works, including showings at some film festivals. Even at that, though, when interviewed she would deny involvement with the Nazis, with the use of Gypsies as extras (some of whom would perish in the concentration camps), and so on. One of her later statements makes this clear, when she said (page 274) "I have never done anything I didn't want to do, and nothing I've ever been ashamed of."

This is a strong biography of a fascinating character, whose denial of her role in World War II leaves the reader troubled. She was remarkably ambitious and used whatever tools that she had at her disposal to get ahead; she was strong-willed and made enemies. This is a work that illuminates this complex person.

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Masterful depiction of a flawed genius

By Tom Holzel

Steve Bach has done a remarkable job of painting a complex, life-like and believable portrait of Leni Riefenstahl, the (in)famous Nazi-era film director. He does so both by pointing out her many shortcomings, (not the least of which is a rapacious sucking-up to Hitler and his cronies), and also by admiring her ground-breaking cinematic genius. This is an unusual feat for a critic who is politically liberal --a rare case of someone able to separate his reflexive distaste for the many moral and ideological compromises she made to fuel her rise from being a plumber's daughter, to becoming one of the most creative film directors of the 20th Century. Riefenstahl lived two separate lives: her life as a second-rate actress which segued into

becoming a sensational film director and naturalist photographer; and her life of spending the last 60 years of her career defending her casting-couch activities of the first 20. Active to the very end, she died in 2003, age 101--a camera still in her hand. How then to judge Ms Riefenstahl; how then to judge the book? As we never seem to learn, great talent does not necessarily come from great people. Why are we so regularly surprised to learn that geniuses are often terribly flawed in other aspects of their character. (This has made a "neutral" portrayal of Hitler impossible to depict. No one has been able to separate the evil of the man from his political genius--a genius that turned a prostate nation into a world power almost overnight.) .com was so repelled by Riefenstahl that for months they resolutely refuse to post more than two luke-warm reviews, in spite of attempts by many readers to add to the list. As one of Hitler's favorite pets, Riefenstahl eagerly sought to bathe in the reflected glory of the Fuhrer's power, while she combined that enabling light with her own illumination to create extraordinary cinematic works of art and propaganda. Of course her close association with Hitler made her a natural target of derision for that other propaganda machine--the entire Hollywood community. Once those sights were set, nothing she ever did could be admitted as worthy of artistic praise. (Most of the criticism of her ground-breaking film of the 1936 Berlin Olympics excoriates her for not knowing about Hitler's anti-Jewish activities of a much later date.) Steven Bach has admirably overcome that distinction, and his depiction of Riefenstahl is masterful. He does her full justice--her guile and dissimilitude, her backstabbing ambition, her reckless spunk and genius. What one is to make of this uneasy amalgam is something each of us will have to decide for himself.

Leni Riefenstahl, the woman known as Hitler's filmmaker, made some of the greatest and most innovative documentaries ever made. They are also insidious glorifications of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Now, Steven Bach reveals the truths and lies behind Riefenstahl's lifelong self-vindication as an apolitical artist who claimed to know nothing of the Holocaust and denied her complicity with the criminal regime she both used and sanctified. A riveting and illuminating biography of one of the most fascinating and controversial personalities of the twentieth century.

From Publishers Weekly Hitler's favorite filmmaker prettified her own story almost as much as she glorified the ugly reality of the Third Reich, which makes her a natural for biographers with a taste for dish and debunkery. Bach (Marlene Dietrich: Life and Legend) excavates, somewhat more fluently, many of the low points covered in Jürgen Trimborn's recent *Leni Riefenstahl: A Life*: her courting of Nazi sponsorship and admiration for Hitler, her witnessing later denied of a massacre of Polish Jews, her deployment of Gypsy slave laborers as extras (many of them died at Auschwitz) and her postwar efforts, through lawsuits and misleading memoirs, to downplay or suppress these facts. Bach also fleshes out more of Riefenstahl's private life, with details about a parade of lovers (one of them, an American decathlete, apparently tore off Riefenstahl's blouse and kissed her breasts in front of 100,000 spectators at the 1936 Berlin Olympics) and her attempts to get her hands on the inheritance of her niece and nephew. He intersperses perceptive commentary on her masterful propaganda films, while noting that her art "lulls and deceives" instead of awakening and illuminating. The result is a lively, incisive look at a compelling and somewhat appalling figure who demonstrated that beauty isn't always truth. Photos. (Mar. 19) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist *Starred* Riefenstahl revered "what was beautiful, strong, and healthy," but her greatest achievements, the paradigmatic films *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* were made to glorify Hitler and the Third Reich. In his penetrating and superbly well-written biography, Bach ponders the difficult questions raised by Riefenstahl's many-chaptered life (she was 101 when she died in 2003). Is there a moral dimension to art? Is devotion to making art an excuse for moral failings? As Bach expertly elucidates the opportunistic Riefenstahl's exploits as a dancer, actress, filmmaker, Nazi insider, African adventurer, photographer, and deep-sea diver, he takes measure, as no one else has, of her ruthless ambition, idealized aesthetics, and extreme egocentricity. Dexterously fitting together newly recovered puzzle pieces, Bach presents evidence suggesting that Riefenstahl was part Jewish; explicates her close relationships with Hitler, Goebbels, and Albert Speer; documents her use of "film slaves" borrowed from "holding pens for the Holocaust"; and analyzes her "self-righteous entitlement" and personal revisionist history. Possessed of phenomenal vitality and physical courage, if lacking in compassion and integrity, Riefenstahl loved fairy tales, and, as Bach so perceptively and artistically reveals, she succeeded in living one, however insidious. Donna Seaman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Brilliant. . . . Its difficult to overpraise Bach's efforts. . . . A compulsively readable and scrupulously crafted work . . . [Bach created] an almost novelistically compelling narrative of a life endlessly obfuscated by lies. The Los Angeles Times Book Energetic . . . Serves as [a] much needed corrective to all the spin, evasions and distortions of the record purveyed by Riefenstahl. The New York Times Fascinating. . . . The definitive new biography from Steven Bach should silence any lingering Riefenstahl apologists. . . . [He] bravely sorts through the mountain of falsehoods. Film Comment Fascinating. . . . Leni is a cautionary tale about an artist whose prodigious determination and ambition seem to have been unmediated by the slightest influence of conscience, soul, or heart. O, The Oprah Magazine