

TWILIGHT OF THE NAZI GODS

Final Entries 1945:
The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels
Introduction by Hugh Trevor-Roper
Putnam's, 368 pp., \$14.95

Reviewed by
W. Warren Wagar

IN 1928 AND 1929," the late Hajo Holborn, of Yale, once told me, "I used to see copies of *Mein Kampf* in a bookseller's window and smile to myself. Like other Germans at that time, I thought the Hitler movement was finished. I couldn't understand how Hitler had ever been able to achieve anything. Of the top leaders, only Goebbels had a certain appeal."

The appeal of Dr. Joseph Goebbels to young German intellectuals like Holborn is not difficult to fathom. In contrast to the swaggering toughs and the tight-lipped fanatics who composed the bulk of the Nazi leadership, Goebbels was a man of some refinement. Before joining forces with Hitler, he had earned a Ph.D. in literature at Heidelberg and had written several plays and a novel. He became a journalist and propagandist of remarkable skill early in the history of the Nazi party. Goebbels was also, by educated tastes, a better orator than Hitler. His toxic wit, good German, and rich voice made his public speeches curiously effective, although he lacked Hitler's intensity.

Yet, as Holborn and every other discerning German soon discovered, Goebbels lacked something more crucial than intensity. He was a man without true culture or convictions, a petty bourgeois opportunist who fell under Hitler's baleful enchantments and became the most steadfast of his lifelong satraps. The veneer of higher education could not long conceal the awful hollowness within. Anyone who makes his way through the master propagandist



Joseph Goebbels (1931)—"A creature of the void. By contrast, even his Fuehrer had just begun the downward slide to hell."

dist's voluminous diaries is left with no doubts on that score. Like a C. S. Lewis villain, Joseph Goebbels was a creature of the void, the evil that is nothing positive in itself but only the total absence of authentic being. By contrast, even his Fuehrer had just begun the downward slide to hell.

Final Entries 1945 is a new installment of the Goebbels diaries, covering six of the last weeks of the Second World War, from February 27 to April 9. Part of a much larger collection recently made available to a West German publisher, it contains every word that survives from 1945. Thirty years ago, the American journalist Louis P. Lochner gave us a severely edited version of the 1942–43 entries. Since then, there has also been Helmut Heiber's edition, *The Early Goebbels Diaries, 1925–1926*. Goebbels in fact kept some sort of diary throughout his adult life, in later years intending that it should serve as the basis for a complete, official history of the Third Reich. That he never lived to write such a history is of course a blessing, but the diaries constitute a major primary source for historians of the Hitler era.

The entries of 1945 confirm rather than alter in any radical way our picture of the twilight of the Nazi gods. Each entry begins with a dreary recapitulation of the military news of the day, material that Lochner generally spared his readers. The same phrases are used again and again, but Goebbels never seems to have lost interest in the minutest details of the fighting.

In the rambling comments and diatribes that follow, the current military situation is often discussed a second time. Aping Hitler in this as in so many other ways, Goebbels fancied himself something of a grand strategist. He could not resist belaboring the generals for their supposed mistakes. But the greater part of the entries deal with political matters, both national and international. From his first years with Hitler, he had been as much the politician as the propagandist. He had built the power base of the Nazi party in Berlin, as the city's gauleiter for nearly two decades. He remained a politician to the end.

Like his mentor, Goebbels practiced a politics of hate. In 1945, he more than ever felt himself surrounded by contemptible enemies, whom he could now blame for the imminent collapse of the Reich. His diaries endlessly repeat the charge that the true architects of Germany's ruin were Göring and Von Ribbentrop. The latter had pursued a disastrous and unimaginative foreign policy (albeit at Hitler's direc-

tion, a point Goebbels tactfully chose to ignore). Göring, for his part, had made a mess of the air war and the command of the Luftwaffe and had disgraced himself by his dissolute way of life. But there were many other bunglers on Goebbels's list, such as Dr. Robert Ley, the Nazi labor boss, and—in the final accounting—most of the generals and party leaders of the Reich. Only Goebbels, a tiny remnant of the faithful (including Colonel-General Schörner, Grand Admiral Dönitz, and Gauleiter Hanke, of Lower Silesia), and the incomparable Hitler himself escaped criticism.

The final entries also devote many pages to the external enemy. Goebbels showed a measure of respect for Stalin because of his courage in adversity and his ruthlessness, but for the Western Allies and their leaders he felt only the deepest scorn. Borrowing from his own propaganda at the time of the Battle of Britain, he denounced Churchill as "the gravedigger of Europe ... a replica of Nero ... a top-class gangster." Montgomery was "a brainless fellow," without heart or emotion, guilty of "unparalleled cynicism." The Americans were Jew-ridden plutocrats, happy to see Europe in ruins. Goebbels dwelt with special delight on intelligence reports of impending labor unrest and political upheavals in the Anglo-Saxon countries, which he half-imagined would end their participation in the war, if Germany could only manage to hold out long enough.

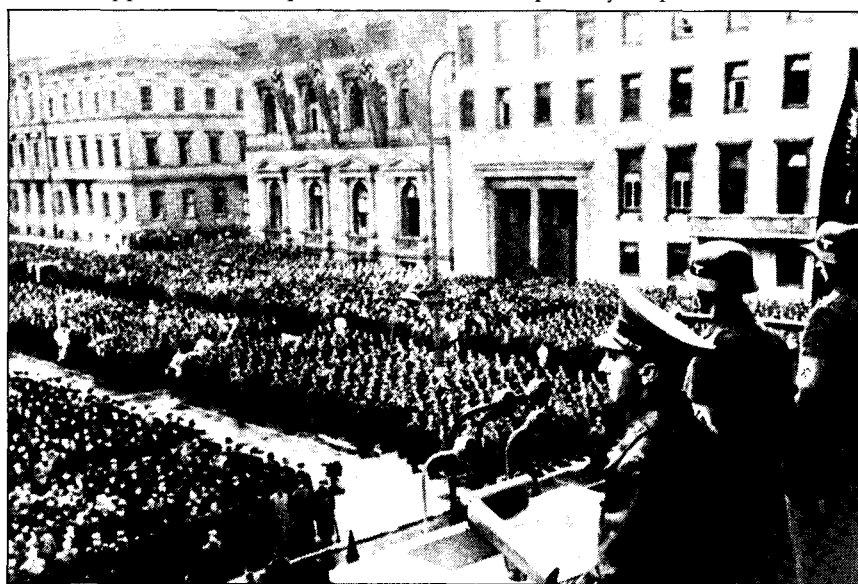
Meanwhile, the propaganda chief frightened himself with thoughts of the atrocities that the merciless enemy perpetrated against Germany almost every day. Russian troops ("the offscourings of the steppes") were responsible for

"truly horrifying" outrages that "cannot be repeated in detail." A Hungarian informant told him stories that were "enough to freeze the blood in one's veins." The bombing of Dresden by the Allies early in 1945 was "a real tragedy such as has seldom been seen in the history of mankind and certainly not in the course of this war."

It goes without saying that Goebbels felt no remorse or guilt for Germany's part in the wreckage of Europe. The war was the fault of the Western Powers, which had ruthlessly attacked the Reich without provocation. Blaming the outbreak of hostilities on Germany, he wrote, was like blaming the murder victim for his own death. The Anglo-Americans were simply taking their chance to attempt the plunder and destruction of the Continent. Their Jewish confederates had the same objective.

Although, as Viktor Reimann has pointed out, anti-Semitism did not come naturally to Goebbels in the early days, he soon enough added the Jews to his enemies list and succeeded with his usual facility in parroting Hitler's ideas. In a passage in the diaries worthy of the Fuehrer, he railed against the influence of the Jews on American foreign policy, recommending that anyone in the United States in a position to do so "should kill those Jews off like rats. In Germany, thank God, we have already done a fairly complete job." A day later, we find him deploring the "wicked and thoughtless game" played by the Jews of Palestine, who had called a one-day prayer strike as an expression of sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust. The whole thing was "grotesque."

It is patently impossible to sift the



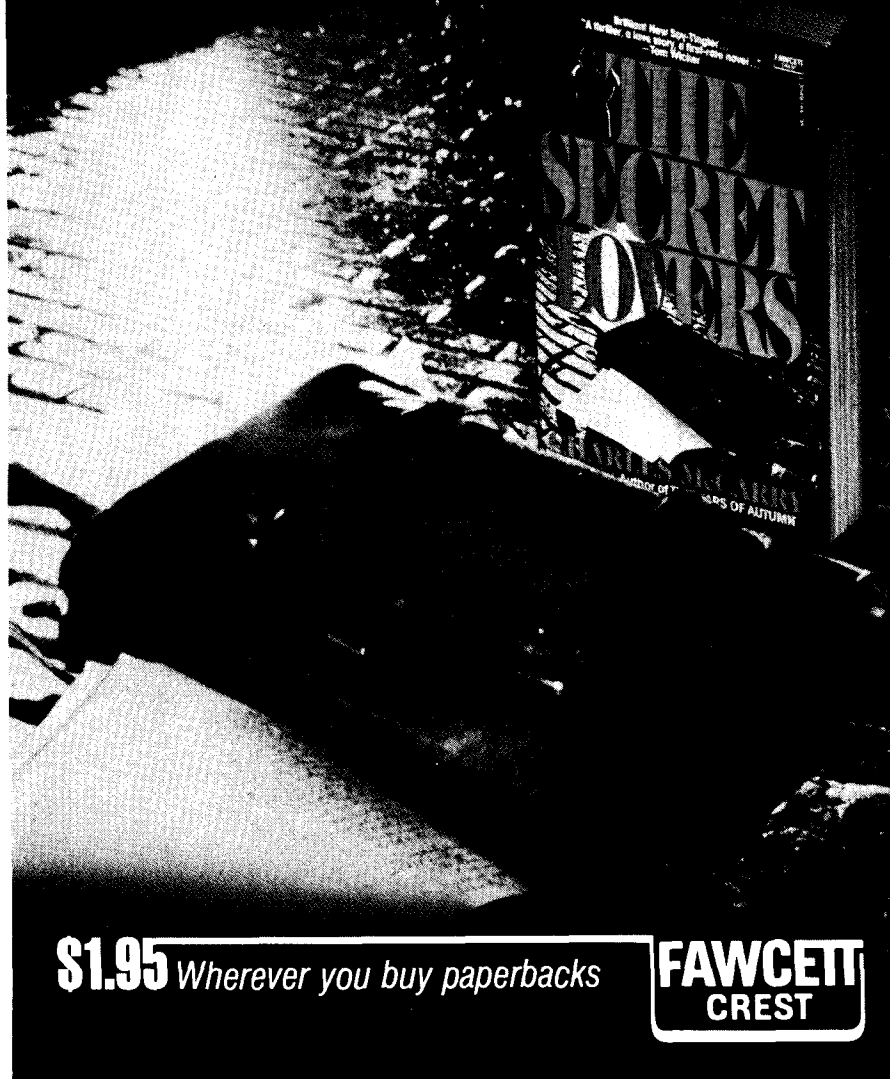
Goebbels addressing the Berlin Home Guard (1945)—"A politics of hate."

When you're an American Intelligence Agent, falling in love can be fatal.

In Christopher's work, cunning, betrayal and secrecy are necessary for survival. Loving Cathy threatens that survival. And it threatens world order.

"A masterful spy story that can stand comparison with *le Carré* at his best."
—John Barkham Reviews

"A thriller, a love story, a first-rate novel." —TOM WICKER



\$1.95 Wherever you buy paperbacks

**FAWCETT
CREST**

propaganda from the truth, the willful deception from the self-deception, or the hypocrisy from the nihilism in materials such as these. Goebbels dictated his diary entries to an aide, for possible use in the postwar era. They were quasi-official utterances, not private notes. Evidence such as that provided by Rudolf Semmler, Goebbels's press chief, and Albert Speer, Hitler's armaments minister, indicates Goebbels did not include everything of major importance that was on his mind, especially on the subject of Hitler.

Nevertheless, I am tempted to agree with Helmut Heiber in his biography of Goebbels that the "Reich Minister for Propaganda and National Enlightenment" finally came to believe in his own lies—if not always consciously, then perhaps at a deeper level. The lies, the hate, and the fear were necessary to Goebbels. His paranoia thrived on adversity, on struggle against real and imaginary enemies. Like our own Richard Nixon, he literally could not function without such struggle, waged almost incessantly.

In the result, his public pose as the stalwart National Socialist pitted against a host of internal traitors and fools and an equally mighty host of foreign opponents became in a sense the real Goebbels, more real than the lecherous weakling who also occupied a space inside his psyche. Goebbels grew to darkly great proportions. He was no superman, but he did more than any other Nazi, not excluding Hitler himself, to keep his country fighting against hopeless odds down to the last square kilometer of German soil.

Madmen have their strength. The last words of Dr. Joseph Goebbels, for all their stupefying emptiness and hol-

Wit Twister No. 119

Edited by Arthur Swan

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word. Answers on page 69.

The _ _ _ _ _ ,
fleeing, hid great treasures worth
A prince's _ _ _ _ _
in this fertile earth.
And thus our farms and _ _ _ _ _
_ _ _ _ _ sometimes yield
A silver harvest in the golden field.

A.S.