PFS FILM REVIEW - *The Empty Mirror*

Imagine that Hitler and his cohorts did not commit suicide as Germany went down to defeat. Instead, he stayed in his bunker with his close cohorts and plenty of food, undiscovered by the victorious allies; alternatively, he was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment in the same bunker with his friends cohorts; or perhaps, even more likely, he is in hell with his associates. Wherever he is, and Sigmund Freud is there with him, Hitler is impelled to review his life and put his afterthoughts on paper. Such is the film noir premise of The Empty Mirror, directed and cowritten by Barry J. Hershey and starring Norman Rodway, a Hitler with an English accent. As most audiences go to the cinema for entertainment, not as an occasion to provoke thought, the film is destined to be reviewed badly; the ordinary film critics are especially unhappy when they have to sit through something too deep for them. Throughout the film we observe snippets of his autobiography, intermingled with film footage of the Nazi era, music of Wagner and Handel, Hitler's self-portrait as well as art work that disgusted him, and the symbolism of blood. What do we conclude? Not that Hitler was a profound thinker, though he was acquainted with Friedrich Nietzsche. Not that he was a monster, though he committed monstrous acts. Not that he planned his rise to power with care, though we know that he became Chancellor by accident. But that we can never understand him and have no way to prevent future Hitlers other than to learn that he mobilized millions of Germans to follow his strange path appealing to the alienated masses in modern society through esthetics and myth. Hershey feeds us snippets so that we can draw our own conclusions, though few will be capable of doing so because the films assumes the unfamiliar post-modern premise that meaning is derived from conversation and intuition, not experience or rationality; in other words, the meaning of words is controlled by "spin" artists, who seek to disguise a reality that is inherently unknowable. Indeed, Hitler's understanding of the modern world and his contempt for modernity made him a post-modernist in the Nietzchean tradition, albeit an incoherent post-modernist. Thus, the film depicts a very different Hitler for us in a world that now has many Hitlers-advertisers who sell products by appealing to imagery, politicians who prefer to talk in code in order to cover up their foibles, and filmviewers (no less than most film critics) who want pure entertainment in order to escape from assuming responsibility over their daily lives. The Empty Mirror suggests that Hitler would probably have done things differently if given a second chance, but Hitler's methods of thought control live on. MH

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