

THE PHOENIX

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The Empty Mirror

Picture Hitler like any other human being. Drinking tea. Painting his self-portrait. Dictating his memoirs. Bleaching his hair. Making love to Eva Braun. Picture Hitler, had he lived, forced into hiding. Endlessly watching newsreels, critiquing his media coverage. Getting psychoanalyzed by Freud. Tutoring Hitler Youth. Being tortured by visions of immaculate blonde women, a legion of Stepford *hausfrauen*.

Director Barry Hershey's award-winning debut asks what if Hitler had been forced to face the evidence of his own evil? The cinematography by Fred Elmes (*Wild at Heart*) meshes surreal imagery and archival footage, creating a dreamscape "dungeon" wherein Hitler lives and reminisces, reinventing himself. But his passion for architecture, literature, and Wagnerian opera cannot distract him from confronting his own demons.

At its most verbose, this film idealizes Hitler (British stage and screen veteran Norman Rodway, in a profoundly affecting portrayal) as a failed genius. But in its silent moments of visual horror, many of them enduringly haunting, *The Empty Mirror* transcends its ambitious erudition, becoming a work of beauty and emotional depth.

-- Peg Aloï