



The Empty Mirror

Review:



★★★★

Bizzare, bombastic and sure to rankle, Barry J. Hershey's outrageously fanciful journey into the mind of Adolph Hitler is also a surprisingly incisive examination of fascist psychology. Deep within a dank, cavernous bunker at some unspecified time after the fall of the Third Reich, Adolph Hitler (Norman Rodway) is busy thinking about his image. "For 12 years, I was the greatest actor in Europe," he muses, and he's got the scrapbook to prove it. As he pores over newsreels, home movies, newspaper clippings and photographs, Hitler dictates his memoirs and evaluates not his life, but his persona — the reflection he constructed in order to seduce a nation.

He's not alone in his ruminations: The specters of Joseph Goebbels (Joel Grey), Herman Goering (Glenn Shadix), Eva Braun (Camilla Soeberg) and even Sigmund Freud (Peter Michael Goetz) pass through the bunker. The film, which is maddening and fascinating in equal parts, is neither a biography nor an apologia, though Hershey's earnest attempt at understanding sometimes comes uncomfortably close to compassion. Instead, this extraordinary-looking film dives deep into the aesthetics of fascism, the psychology of megalomania and the cult of the Fuhrer, and, more times than not, comes up with something interesting. Though given to glib theorizing ("There are no essences under the appearances, only appearances"), Hershey (who co-wrote the screenplay with R. Buckingham) is also capable of remarkable insight. The film's key moment will also surely be the most misunderstood and reviled: Hitler's realization that, for all his media savvy and mad visions of immortality and a thousand year reich, he has no control over what's left behind — history will construct its own Adolph. The Great Conqueror becomes the Great Destroyer and, as horrific death camp images flicker on the screen, Hershey's weeping Hitler disappears into the projector. --*Ken Fox*

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