



Dietrich & Riefenstahl: Hollywood, Berlin, and a Century in Two Lives

By Karin Wieland

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Boston Globe Best Book of 2015

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Magisterial in scope, this dual biography examines two complex lives that began alike but ended on opposite sides of the century's greatest conflict. Born at the dawn of the twentieth century, Leni Riefenstahl and Marlene Dietrich both came of age in Weimar Berlin, a time of great political ferment. Glamour and decadence thrived beside abject poverty, and the German capital's outpouring of literature, fashion, and film marked it as the most vital European metropolis. As young women of this era, Dietrich and Riefenstahl lived so close to each other that Riefenstahl could see into Dietrich's apartment from the roof of her building. Both women seized upon the revolutionary energy of the 1920s, seeking careers on the stage and in film.

*In 1929, filmmakers were casting what would become the iconic role of Lola-Lola (who made "Falling in Love Again" a sensation) in the groundbreaking sound film *The Blue Angel*. Riefenstahl, whose work in her "mountain films" had already made her a national emblem for the athletic rigor and spirited independence of the New Woman, hoped for the part but didn't get it. Only a few years later she became the official filmmaker of the Third Reich. Dietrich, however, won the role and the adoration of millions when she moved to Hollywood and redefined the "vixen" for a new era.*

*While Dietrich's slender and androgynous beauty made her a fashion icon whose influence can be seen to this day, Riefenstahl's own iconography is no less indelible. With her work on two of the most notorious—if artistically sophisticated—propaganda films of all time, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, Riefenstahl was a progenitor of fascist symbolism. After the war she proclaimed her ignorance of Hitler's motives, but she could never completely distance herself from her Nazi collaboration. Dietrich vehemently condemned Hitler during World War II and found a renewed sense of purpose touring with the USO, but as a result she could never comfortably return to her native Germany.*

Both women were "prodigies of will, discipline, endurance, self-reinvention, and exaltation of the body in all its muscular, androgynous, pose-striking

pagan glory" (James Wolcott), and both had their grand passions, but neither abandoned ambition for the sake of love. As award-winning biographer Karin Wieland shows, in their later years, both women grappled with controlling their image? Riefenstahl by pursuing an additional career in photography, and Dietrich by eventually hiding at home as her famous beauty was ravaged by time.

Skillfully juxtaposing these two fascinating lives, Wieland brings to vivid life a time of international upheaval, chronicling radical evolutions of politics, fame, and femininity on a grand stage. Examining the moral responsibility of the artist, Wieland poses questions as deeply relevant to our century as to the last. A magisterial portrait of two diverging but lasting images of the modern woman, Dietrich & Riefenstahl is "a superb" (Die Zeit) panorama of the twentieth century.

25 photographs

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Editorial Review

Review

“Wieland is shrewd...about her subjects and has done serious work...that give her book credibility, texture, and unending interest. This is the story of two glamorous women whose achievements in another time might have been no more substantial than the images on a screen but who assumed real-life roles with the highest historical stakes.” (Claudia Roth Pierpont - *The New Yorker*)

“The true subject of [Wieland’s] dual biography is...the contrast between good and evil...Did the women ally themselves with a particular nation because that nation reflected their authentic selves? Or did the choice itself?Dietrich's move to America; Riefenstahl's complicity with the Third Reich?transform them into different people than they would otherwise have been? Wieland offers no pat answers...Evil here is not banal; it is jaw-droppingly bizarre and eclipses good.” (M. G. Lord - *Los Angeles Times*)

“In this lively, deliciously gossipy dual biography, Karin Wieland treats both with great sympathy but also clear-eyed assessment.” (Kate Tuttle - *Boston Globe*)

“[With] hypnotic power.... Wieland uses these two virtuosos’ lives to generate piercing insights about ambition, ego, creativity and the life-changing, world-altering repercussions of a momentous choice.” (Michael Sragow - *Washington Post*)

“Behold Karin Wieland's *Dietrich & Riefenstahl*, a double-decker biography about a pair of sacred monsters that motors the length of a century, through two world wars, countless affairs, still-burning controversies, and white satin streams of Hollywood lore, never losing focus on the point on the horizon where fame and infamy meet...As a mere mortal myself, I finished *Dietrich & Riefenstahl* fully sated and completely agog.” (James Wolcott, *Vanity Fair* columnist and author of the PEN Award–winning collection *Critical Mass*)

“Illuminating.... Via a fluent, often witty translation by Shelley Frisch, Wieland draws the portrait of women who were ambitious to a degree stunning in their day. Moreover, by tracking their divergent careers together, she is able subtly to suggest some answers to a question that hangs over every mid-century German artist: what kind of responses were available to the Nazi apocalypse?” (Farran Smith Nehme - *The Guardian (UK)*)

“A sweeping, revelatory dual biography.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

“Separating fiction from the apocryphal, German political theory historian Wieland takes readers on a densely layered, whirlwind tour of Weimar Germany, 1930s Hollywood, the Third Reich, World War II, and more.... An absorbing read and a must-have for film collections. Highly recommended where Erik Larson's *In the Garden of Beasts* is popular.” (Kent Turner - *School Library Journal*)

“Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl have found an ideal biographer in Karin Wieland. She brings a lively style, a wealth of detail, and a perfect balance between skeptical objectivity and measured sympathy to her account of the parallel and then diverging lives of these two ambitious women.” (Celia Applegate, *Vanderbilt University*)

About the Author

Karin Wieland lives in Berlin and is an historian of political theory at the Hamburg Foundation for the

Advancement of Science and Culture.

Shelley Frisch is the prize-winning translator of biographies of Nietzsche, Einstein, and Kafka. She lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

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The publication untitled Dietrich & Riefenstahl: Hollywood, Berlin, and a Century in Two Lives is the guide that is recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the e-book content that will be shown to a person. The language that the author uses to explain their way of doing something is easy to understand. The author did a lot of research when writing the book, and so the information that they share with you is absolutely accurate. You also might get the e-book of Dietrich & Riefenstahl: Hollywood, Berlin, and a Century in Two Lives from the publisher to make you much more enjoy your free time.

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