

[HARDCOVER: UK]

Fat lady sings for the Third Reich

We all know how the story ends, but the final part of Richard J. Evans' trilogy brings it masterfully home

BY PETER PRESTON
THE OBSERVER, LONDON

In one narrow sense, the final book in Professor Evans' magnificent trilogy is an anti-climax. We know who lost the Second World War. We know about Dunkirk, D-Day and Dresden. His first two volumes, on the coming of the Third Reich and its seizure not only of power but of the German psyche, seem more immediately relevant seven decades on than another account of the subsequent battles and bestialities. Yet, in an almost Wagnerian way, you need to see the madness complete; you need to watch Berlin burning, a pyre of malevolent dreams. This is the fire Hitler built. This, crucially, is the history of his Reich set in its own obsessive context. This is the end of the party.

But that was probably always going to be the case. Evans tells the 1944 joke of a naive young German looking at a globe of the world: huge green swaths for the Soviet Union, pink for the British empire, mauve for the US. "And this blue spot?" he asks, fingering Germany. "Oh! Does the Leader know how small it is?"

We're used to other pens portraying 1939 to 1945 as a titanic battle for survival between evenly matched forces, an equal struggle we almost lost. It's far rarer to have the practical situation clinically analyzed, to see how the Reich — in weaponry, manpower, strength and resilience — was always overmatched. Once surprise had banished inertia and Britain had avoided defeat in 1940, the Allies were virtually inevitable victors; and Hitler as military leader was a fantasist in thrall to his own illusions. World domination? "Germany's economic resources were never adequate to turn these fantasies into reality, not even when the resources of a large part of Europe were added to them." The dream could never have come true.

Never underestimate Germany's sheer paranoia, though; for attack was also the Third Reich's deluded, defensive way of vanquishing its enemies close by and within. There were the Poles — "more animals than men, totally dull and formless," Hitler declared, but still commanding German-speakers in former German territories. "If Poland had gone on ruling ... [here] for a few more decades," Hitler said, "everything would have become lice-ridden and decayed." So "the sub-human people from the East" had to be routed, obliterated or (if possessing blood good enough to make them a "leader class") turned into Germans.

There were Gypsies, Ukrainians, Czechs, the halt, the lame: all to be shipped away or shot. The SS cleared Polish asylums, made patients stand in line, then buried them — 2,000 in a few brutal

Publication Notes



THE THIRD REICH AT WAR

BY RICHARD J. EVANS

926 PAGES

ALLEN LANE

weeks of 1939. And, of course, there were Jews; the Polish Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, then of Germany itself. "The Jews have deserved the catastrophe they are experiencing today," Hitler told Goebbels in 1942. "As our enemies are annihilated, they will experience their own annihilation ... We must accelerate this process with cold ruthlessness, and in so doing we are rendering an incalculable service to a human race tormented by Jewry for millennia." That service charge in cold statistics: three million murdered in the camps, 1.3 million killed by the SS, 700,000 disposed of in mobile gas chambers, a million starved to death. Incalculable, unforgettable infamy.

Evans is history's master of the Holocaust. He knows its macabre facts and figures; his Reich books demonstrate in chilling detail how German hatred and resentment for failure turned in on itself and millions of its own inhabitants; he does not spare civil servants or doctors or scientists, or simple pillars of German society — they knew what was happening, they shared the guilt. Worse, they saw it as part of their own war effort, defending Germany against the dark forces that had brought it down. Extermination was not some irrational spasm consuming a few lunatics in temporary power. It was deliberate and condoned, in its own surreal context.

Only when Allied bombing raids began to shatter its cities did Germany awake to the horrors it had unleashed upon itself. Only when it looked closer did it begin to see the emotional cripples it had brought to power.

Could it happen again, Evans asks. Could our cozy Euroworld slither back into the cesspits of human behavior? Maybe not in any literal Nazi revival way (though Austria provides scant comfort these days). But the Third Reich also stands as a wider warning of what havoc "racism, militarism and authoritarianism" can wreak. In that sense Hitler's war against humanity never loses its awful force.

SUNDAY PROFILE



Above: Hu Jia, right, a high-profile civil rights activist who was jailed in March for three-and-a-half years by Chinese authorities, smiles at his wife Zeng Jinyan. Left: Hu Jia is pictured at his home in Beijing, while under house arrest. Right: Hu Jia displays photos of Chinese AIDS sufferers from Henan Province.



Activist defies China's panoptic glare

He has been detained at a secret site, subjected to house arrest and seen his wife and friends harassed by the authorities, but Chinese dissident Hu Jia, winner of the EU's top human-rights prize, refuses to be silenced

BY BILL SMITH
DPA, BEIJING

His name was familiar to US President George W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) months before he won the EU's Sakharov prize for human rights, yet just a few years ago China's most prominent dissident was a largely unknown activist for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Hu Jia's (胡佳) international reputation grew while he was forced to spend most of his time confined inside his suburban apartment on the outskirts of Beijing in 2006 and last year.

Before his formal arrest in late December, Hu had spent most of the previous two years under virtual house arrest or other forms of detention.

With no paid employment and few visitors allowed, he used his enforced isolation to act as a bridge between foreign media and the growing number of rights activists across the country.

Each weekday, Hu collected and disseminated information on rights cases and other issues in China via the Internet and telephone.

He also learned the names of many of the State Security officers who loitered outside his apartment every day.

Some of them remain stationed there to prevent his wife, fellow activist Zeng Jinyan

(曾金燕), from speaking to foreign media and governments.

But Hu and Zeng did manage to testify by telephone to a European Parliamentary hearing on China's human rights record in November last year.

Hu's activism began in the late 1990s when the economics graduate volunteered to work on environmental projects.

In 2001, he began helping villagers infected with HIV/AIDS through blood-selling schemes in the central province of Henan.

The following year, Hu and four friends had their first run-in with state security police who intercepted them and seized film after they traveled to Henan villages.

The group took Christmas toys and clothes to children in poor villages that were decimated through AIDS spread by the illegal collection and sale of blood.

"It seemed like the worst scenes of AIDS in Africa, with old and young people infected," Hu said.

"State security police threatened us and said that AIDS was a state secret," he said.

Hu believes that China was "lucky" to be shaken out of its complacency on AIDS by the scandal over a cover-up of cases of SARS in Beijing.

"After SARS in 2003, nobody



PHOTO REUTERS

“ [China's] state security police threatened us and said that AIDS was a state secret. ”

— Hu Jia, human rights activist

dared to say that AIDS was a state secret any more," Hu said. "It gave us an opportunity to be more open."

His continued advocacy for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS in China brought

him international attention and several awards.

But after two "golden years" of relatively open activism, the climate began to change with the arrest and harassment of AIDS activists in 2005, he said.

His own surveillance became a little more relaxed after the birth of the couple's first child in November last year.

The Dalai Lama sent a Tibetan name for their daughter at their request, he said, in a move that can only have further angered the Chinese government.

Hu is a practicing Tibetan Buddhist and Zeng met the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, in his Indian exile in 2006.

Hu and Zeng also released a short documentary last year about their surveillance, and excerpts are now widely available on the Internet.

"A week after our wedding party, Hu Jia was put under house arrest by the State Security police and after a month he disappeared ... and there was no news for 41 days," Zeng said at the start of the 30-minute film, *Prisoners of Freedom City*.

The title of the documentary reflected the irony of the couple's restricted life in a modern, low-rise estate known as BOBO Freedom City.

Hu said he was seized by

state security police from the party's Central Political and Judiciary Committee and taken to a secret site, where he was detained for 41 days in February and March 2006.

"They tied my hands behind my back, pushed me to the floor [of their car] and put a black bag over my head," he said. "It was just like a kidnapping by the mafia."

He believed the arrest was linked to his support for rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng (高智晟), who was convicted of subversion in December 2006 but given a suspended prison sentence.

Hu and Gao, who is believed to be held under house arrest at a secret location in Beijing, were both nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

Hu said that during his own house arrest he was constantly expecting the fateful knock on the door that would mean the authorities had decided to press charges against him.

That knock came just 18 days after Hu's interview was interviewed by Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

Despite appeals from the EU, the US and rights groups for his release, a Beijing court sentenced Hu to three-and-a-half years in prison in March for "inciting subversion of state power."

[HARDCOVER: UK]

Beijing: the city of lost history

Longtime Beijing correspondent Jasper Becker uncovers the troubled recent past of China's Olympic megalopolis and the destruction that was wrought to build it

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

You might think that *City of Heavenly Tranquility*, with its subtitle "Beijing in the History of China," was a serene survey of one of the world's great cities, looking at its history from its foundation to its contemporary, post-Olympics face. And you'd be right. These things are there, with the story excellently told into the bargain. But there's also another theme, for which even the full title doesn't prepare you. At its heart, this book is an appalled lament for one of the greatest acts of historical vandalism of modern times — the destruction, within the last 10 years, of a gorgeous, resplendent, ancient city and its replacement by a hurriedly erected modern megalopolis that could, architecturally speaking, be just about anywhere on Earth.

As a China-based foreign correspondent, Jasper Becker should know what he's talking about. He's been the Beijing representative for the *Guardian*,

the BBC and the *South China Morning Post*. He's lived in Beijing since 1985 — not continuously, but for a large amount of the time, some 20 years in all. He knows the city, both as it was and as — tragically in his eyes — it now is.

You even feel that it's perhaps Becker's seniority that allows him to give vent to some of the opinions in this book. He's relentlessly critical of China's authorities, seeing the destruction of old Beijing as a continuous process that began before the Cultural Revolution and is still going on today. Could this book even be some sort of Parthian shot, a last dart flung over his shoulders at those in power before he finally quits the country?

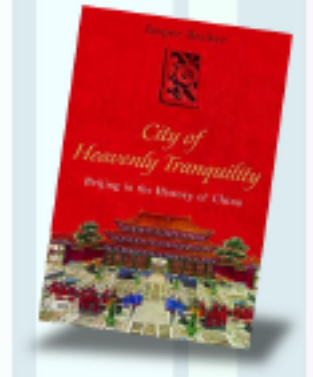
"In some ways," Becker writes, "the destruction of old Beijing and the eviction of its residents can be considered a collective punishment visited on a population that had dared to rebel." He cites Bertold Brecht writing after the 1953 uprising in East Berlin — the people had

failed the government, and so it was necessary for the government to relocate them and replace them with more amenable subjects.

Although it has been an important center since at least the 10th century, Beijing hasn't always been China's capital. The previous one (of several) was Nanjing, but in 1421 the charismatic Yongle (永乐) Emperor moved the administrative center north for what were essentially strategic reasons. So from life in the lush world of the Yangtze delta the scholarly civil servants had to shift to a windy and dusty northern plain, cold in winter and hot in summer, and a city that had neither a seaport nor a major river to serve as its transport terminus.

Nevertheless, successive emperors made it into one of the most glorious cities on Earth. Becker is very strong on this — essentially, I'm certain, because he believes it, but also perhaps because the finer he makes the city look in the past,

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CITY OF HEAVENLY TRANQUILITY

BY JASPER BECKER

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ALLEN LANE

the more terrible the destruction that has been unleashed on it in recent years is made to appear.

The daily court routine under the Yongle Emperor is

extravagantly evoked, and many more recent topics are aired as well, such as the death in 1966 of writer Lao She (老舍), giving the feeling that the author is keen not to miss any opportunity to incorporate the fruits of his long residence in the city into this book. Several of the chapters read like interviews, or clusters of interviews, or else trips to see the vestiges of former greatness in the company of some interesting, though often cautious, local authority.

This is an exceedingly engaging book, with far more detail than it's possible to indicate here. The past and the present leap out with equal vividness because Becker combines library research with a good deal of oral history — seeking out individuals who remember things and writing down what they tell him. He finds, for instance, the wife of the famous architectural historian Liang Sicheng (梁思成) who, at Qinghua University, was severely

persecuted by Red Guards. She shows him where the guard factions fought and where Jiang Qing (江青) addressed the crowds.

In his greatest coup, he tracks down the man who was almost certainly the last surviving imperial eunuch, aged 96 when Becker talked to him 12 years ago. He'd arrived in the Forbidden City in the last days of the Qing Dynasty, but had nevertheless been retained right up until the final expulsion of the eunuchs in 1924. Lean and unshaven, he bore little resemblance, Becker writes, to the "grossly fat, vain peacocks with rouged and powdered faces who cackle their way so prominently through Chinese literature." But the old man's memory was too poor for him to be able to tell the author much. Becker gives lurid details of the castration process, but whether they come from the man himself or from independent research is unclear.

There are times when Taiwan is tacitly evoked, at least in the

mind of a reader living here. You're reminded, for instance, of the proliferation of Taiwanese fortune-tellers and geomancers when Becker writes about the Chinese Communist Party's prohibition of such things in his chapter on calendars ancient and modern.

The obliteration of old festivals and the destruction of former sacred sites tolls like a death-knell throughout the book, but here it's especially intense. He cites Robespierre's abolition of both Christian festivals and the old calendar during the French Revolution, and both of course have now returned to France. But this particular chapter ends with the eruption of Falun Gong in 1999. There is no question at present of such believers being given any tolerance whatsoever. But they represent a force of irrationalism that, Becker considers, could erupt and call into question everything that modern Beijing appears to represent, and at virtually any moment.