The Castle in the Forest: A Novel by
Norman Mailer

Mailers Swan Song-Nazis, Devils, Incest And Evil

No career in modern American letters is at once so brilliant, varied, and controversial as that of Norman Mailer. In a span of more than six decades, Mailer has searched into subjects ranging from World War II to Ancient Egypt, from the march on the Pentagon to Marilyn Monroe, from Henry Miller and Mohammad Ali to Jesus Christ. Now, in The Castle in the Forest, his first major work of fiction in more than a decade, Mailer offers what may be his consummate literary endeavor: He has set out to explore the evil of Adolf Hitler.

The narrator, a mysterious SS man who is later revealed to be an exceptional presence, gives us young Adolf from birth, as well as Hitler's father and mother, his sisters and brothers, and the intimate details of his childhood and adolescence.
A tapestry of unforgettable characters, The Castle in the Forest delivers its playful twists and surprises with astonishing insight into the nature of the struggle between good and evil that exists in us all. At its core is a hypothesis that propels this novel and makes it a work of stunning originality. Now, on the eve of his eighty-fourth birthday, Norman Mailer may well be saying more than he ever has before.

From the Hardcover edition.

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The Castle in the Forest was Norman Mailers last novel and, to be blunt, the book will not have the shelf life that some of his works (namely Armies of the Night, The Executioners Song and The Naked and the Dead) have. That is not to say this is an unrewarding or bad book; far from it. Mailer presents Hitlers childhood through D.T., a minor devil who has been assigned to influence the young boy. Sly, insightful and often funny, D.T. ranks as one of the most interesting narrators in American literature in a long time. Mailer had been looking to blend the omnipotent narrator with a first person one for over two decades and, while he did not quite succeed with Ancient Evenings or come close to pulling it off in The Gospel According to the Son, he finally hit a home run in The Castle in the Forest. Besides presenting Hitlers childhood, Mailer also touches on his religious beliefs (which would be expanded in On God), presents two of the best characters he ever created in D.T. and Alois Hitler (Adolphs father), takes shots at Himmler, ponders incest and masturbation, and mourns the passing of autocratic monarchies in two lengthy asides somehow even bringing Mark Twain into the mix. This novel should have been a disaster and in the hands of almost any other writer it would have been. Somehow Mailer pulled it off and it is a testament to his literary ability. The ending paragraphs are some of the most beautiful Mailer wrote in his long career. This book, like a lot of Mailers work as a novelist, will not be remembered in fifty years. This still a remarkable book from a great writer (even if his best works were non-fiction).

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