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Review by Robert John Miller ([email](#))

HITLER'S MUSTACHE by Peter Davis

The Barnwood Press, Inc., 10553 2 nd Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98177; ISBN# 0-935306-51, 80pp., \$16.95, paperback

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Peter Davis wrote a book entitled *Hitler's Mustache* in which all of the poems are titled "Hitler's Mustache: [something]" and are about Hitler's mustache, except none of them are about Hitler's mustache. Or they all are about Hitler's mustache, but in the same way that arguments about who left the dishes in the sink are really about dirty dishes. Just as the argument becomes a statement on the health of the relationship, so Hitler's mustache becomes a statement on the poetry of the human condition.

In the American mindset, the tragedy that is Nazism resonates more profoundly than, say, the tragedy that is the Khmer Rouge, perhaps because Nazism is our very own bastard, a weed sprung from the Western world's own soil. Nazism is uncomfortably closer to home, both geographically and ideologically, and Hitler's mustache, the physical "fur trap" (see: "Hitler's Mustache: The Alternative Names"), becomes emblematic of the everything not understood about everything, the shadow's shadow, the enigma's mystery, the psyche's psyche. As Davis writes in "Hitler's Mustache: The Mustache Is a Riddle, Except It Can't Be Answered," "More importantly is the Fascist in each of us. The rope that climbs us like children in elementary school, some extended snake that is too easy to grip." Or, as the character Frederick remarks in Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters*, "The reason they can never answer the question 'How could it possibly happen?' is that it's the wrong question. Given what people are, the question is 'Why doesn't it happen more often?'" We are all fascists, except of course we aren't

After reading the book, the word "mustache" becomes delineated from any thoughts of facial hair and, instead, becomes a word nearly as versatile as curses. A certain mustache, an inexplicable panache, is created, without the work making a mustache of itself, without becoming a gimmick vis-à-vis an especially smurfy episode of *Smurfs*. And then there's the meta-demonstration of fascism itself, "mustache" becoming a censor's filler for anything especially mustached.

What's more, the book is funny, the way that people are funny and the way people like to laugh at funny things. Like in "Hitler's Mustache: The Teenage Mustache Sestina," in which a youth talks about growing mustaches. Or, as in "Hitler's Mustache: The List of Facts," in which we learn that "Hitler's mustache sees a beard and wonders, 'Why didn't I think of that?'" Perhaps that's the question that we, as mustaches, should all be asking.