

HOW AN AUTHOR'S FIRST NOVEL, WITH UNCANNY ACCURACY, FORETOLD THE REAL-LIFE CONTROVERSY

# The man who gave the world the Hitler Diaries—a year ago

NO STRANGER story can ever have fired the imagination, yet fuelled doubts, as much as the alleged discovery of Hitler's diaries and the row now erupting around them.

But there is an even more bizarre facet to one of the century's great controversies.

A year ago, a British author called Jim Williams, writing under the name of Richard Hugo, put the final touch to a novel telling his version of how the Hitler diaries were discovered. It was published in 1982, yet uncannily it matches today's headlines.

**FICTION 1982:** Diaries come to light, more or less by chance, in Germany.

**FACT 1983:** The alleged Hitler diaries are located in an East German hayloft.

**FICTION 1982:** Publishers call in British historian to verify authenticity.

**FACT 1983:** Lord Daere, Third Reich authority Hugh

Trevor-Roper, called in to examine the material and says it is genuine.

**FICTION 1982:** American graphologists ready to confirm Hitler's writing from photostats.

**FACT 1983:** American graphology firm confirms Hitler's handwriting.

**FICTION 1982:** The diaries are held at a bank in Zurich.

**FACT 1983:** The so-called diaries are held in a vault in Zurich.

**FICTION 1982:** An early diary section concerns Eva Braun and attacks Nazi officials.

**FACT 1983:** An early diary section concerns Eva Braun and attacks Nazi officials.

**FICTION 1982:** Diaries described as being in many volumes with black leather bindings, silver motif and eagle and swastika embossed in centre.

**FACT 1983:** Diaries are 60 volumes, some bound in dark blue leather embossed with gold swastikas.

The author explains: 'I tried to foresee every implication.'

The result is uncanny. Here is his story:—



ON 'Publishers' Row,' New York's Sixth Avenue, Burton MacGruder has a mysterious visitor.

Simon Knights is a 'freelance agent' based in Zurich. 'I have a manuscript,' he announces to the veteran publisher, 'which needs to be handled by one of the leading publishing houses.'

'Tell me: Would the diaries of Adolf Hitler be of any interest to you?' MacGruder asks: 'Fiction or fact?' 'Fact,' replies Knights.

'It's too easy to assume that everything is known about Hitler,' says the agent. 'The truth is that he was a highly secretive man. Today we know all about Eva Braun but during the war her name was just a rumour and the German public knew nothing of her. How much more secretive do you think he would be about keeping his diaries?'

## Peddled

Dropping more bait, Knights adds casually that he has not a single diary, but a series (like the 60 peddled to Stern magazine in real life). 'Hitler kept a set during the war to use as a basis for his memoirs.' The asking price? 'Ten million dollars.'

Alone, the publisher muses that it's a proposition no sane man was going to believe. But after all, true or false, Hitler's diaries were bound to be interesting.

MacGruder tells his partner: 'If genuine, they'd be the hottest thing in publishing since the war, the hottest thing this century.'

Knights will provide only a few photostat sample pages. But even so, the publishers start becoming hypnotised by potential profits. 'Let's put a figure on U.S. rights, say four million? UK rights another quarter of a million?' they say.

MacGruder is fascinated by the Hitler aura. 'Real or fake, it would be one hell of a book,' he realises.

Authentication of the diaries is the first hurdle. 'We don't need some professor who'll sit on his doubts and the diaries for a year while he makes up his mind,'

**'If they're genuine, they're the hottest thing since the war... if they turn out to be a hoax, so what?'**

MacGruder snaps. 'We have to turn the book into cash pretty damn quick.'

The expert they turn to is Jonathan Grant, an English historian and writer with a reputation sounding faintly familiar. His books on World War II, with titles like *Himmler*, the Apotheosis of Mediocrity make harsh judgments on the Allies and are 'bought in thousands by people who want to disagree.'

Before hiring him to investigate, MacGruder voices arguments similar to those undoubtedly heard at Stern magazine recently.

'The diaries cover from 1942 to the end of the war and they're in Hitler's own handwriting. That's a hell of a thing to forge. Even Clifford Irving didn't try to write the whole hoax book in Howard Hughes's handwriting.'

MacGruder, the publisher, says: 'If it turns out to be a hoax—so what? We still get something we can print. We leave it as a question. Anyone who believes in the Bermuda Triangle will buy it. I don't see how we can miss.'

Grant, the historian learns the alleged proof of the diaries, a tale no less unlikely than Stern's version of the 60 books being hidden in an East German hayloft.

'According to Knights, the diaries were bought by a Frenchman named Boisseau. He was a soldier and did a stint in Cologne in 1945. It seems he just picked them up in the street from some guy selling war trophies.'

Asked for his opinion on the diaries, Grant hedges. 'Hitler was a dreamer, he saw himself as the new messiah... so you may say he would have the motivation to

keep a diary, the vanity of preserving every thought for posterity.

'The problem is that motivation isn't enough. Keeping a diary requires method was impulsive. He could never have kept a diary on a daily basis, like Peeps.'

And scanning sample pages, Grant warns: 'The diary mentions a meeting with Rommel and von Rundstedt shortly after the Normandy landings. Well, there was one. The point is that it doesn't mean a thing. If I can find out what happened on any given day, so can any competent forger.'

'Maybe you'll never know for certain whether the diaries are genuine.'

The American publishers have a month in which to verify the diaries. Fictional historian Grant seems far more cautious than Lord Daere (Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper), who gave his blessing to Stern's find after a few hours' examination.

'Unless we're luckier than we deserve, no regular programme of research can be completed in the time,' Grant tells his assistant, Lisa Black.

He orders her, for the sake of speed, to 'begin at the end'... Hitler's end.

'He kept the diaries until a couple of days before his death.'

Grant took a book from among those on the floor. Lisa read the title *The Last Days of Adolf Hitler*, by the Englishman, Trevor Roper. 'This should help you,' says Grant.

As happened in fact, Lisa Black decides that the diaries were smuggled from the bunker by a trusted aide.

'The way I see it, he would have sent



Foresight saga: Jim Williams, alias Richard Hugo, author of *The Hitler Diaries*: 'They were a ripe plum begging to be picked' Picture: KEVIN HOLT

them by the same route as his will.' (Supposedly, the real-life diaries were put aboard one of the last planes from Berlin, then recovered and hidden when it crashed).

Although graphologists are ready to rule on the diaries, even using photostat copies of his writing, Jonathan Grant points out: 'McGraw-Hill had two firms pass the handwriting of the Howard Hughes forged manuscript. They said it was genuine.'

Grant and his assistant go to France, where an antiquarian bookseller who handled the original diaries, describes them.

'Let me say that the bindings are quite attractive: Black leather with a silver motif and an eagle and swastika embossed in the centre... Nazi memorabilia.'

Meanwhile, publisher MacGruder goes to Zurich to collect photostats of the diaries. 'A bundle about 1in. thick. Each daily entry was on a separate page with the date printed in heavy Gothic lettering.'

'The writing was angular and spidery, varying in size from a slovenly scrawl of letters covering two or three lines to a cramped, minuscule script filling the margins.'

'It's called *Kurrent*, once the normal handwriting of any German.'

There are wrangles over the price, with MacGruder protesting: 'Nobody can command ten million up-front, not even for the biggest thing to hit publishing since Shakespeare.'

But Knights has a counter-argument that must have occurred to the marketeers of the Other Hitler Diaries.

## Secrets that survived the Bunker

by Hugh Trevor-Roper

The 1983 headlines that followed the pattern of the 1982 fiction...

## 38 years after bunker suicide Hitler's secret diaries to be published

After historian Trevor-Roper authenticates the diaries, eager publishers tell of their incredible find...

## Germans greet find with great scepticism

The doubts creep in and the rows over authenticity begin.

'The West German Government owns the copyright under the terms of Hitler's will. But will the owner seek to enforce copyright?'

While the haggle continues, historian Grant becomes convinced that the diaries are genuine.

They give clues to a secret peace treaty between Hitler and Stalin, with the Soviet leader Kossygin flying to Germany in 1944 and meeting the Führer to carve up Eastern Europe.

The Russians will have a new empire while Hitler, freed of Eastern Front pressure, can fight on against America and Britain.

Obviously, the Russians are desperate to suppress the diaries and their fictional fate is left open, with many governments having a vested interest in keeping them secret.

But the novel ends with another ironic echo of events approaching in real life.

A wheeler-dealer in MacGruder's Manhattan office has a brainwave. 'I know this stringer for the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. I've got him interested and he thinks he can sell the deal to his paper.'

Adapted and extracted from *The Hitler Diaries* by Richard Hugo. Published in hardback in 1982 by Macmillan. To be published in paperback by Sphere Books on May 16 at £1.95.

My race to be first with the Fuhrer

HE WASN'T lying low in some East German forger's factory yesterday or planning his next disinformation coup from a Kremlin desk.

The shadowy figure behind *The Hitler Diaries*, cover name Richard Hugo, was getting on with his day-time career as legal adviser to a Manchester chemicals company.

'It is rather eerie, the way fact is following fiction,' admits 35-year-old Jim Williams. 'But I'm honestly not the least surprised. All the time I was writing my thriller, I was driven by a sense of urgency.'

'Those diaries were a ripe plum begging to be picked, either for a novel, or in reality. My main concern was that somebody would do it ahead of me.'

Mr. Williams, married with three children, spent nearly four years writing his fictional version of the unearthing and marketing of the Führer's diaries.

'I spent a long time thinking it through logically, working out how the material would be presented and the problems of validating it,' he explains.

Intent on crafting a meticulously researched thriller reeking of credibility, Jim did get one major theme wrong.

His fictional publishers and historians are far too sceptical about Hitler's

Interview by NIGEL BUNYAN

literary legacy, taking a whole month to confirm authenticity.

Lord Daere gave 'the publishing find of the century' his blessing after a few hours examination of certain sections.

Williams chuckles: 'Yes, maybe I did over-estimate the historians' reluctance to validate such an important find, but it was my first novel!'

He has firm views on their real-life sequel, as pounced on by Stern and *The Sunday Times*.

## Unusual

'I don't believe they are the genuine article,' says the writer who warns readers of his novel how easy it would be to forge them.

'I find a number of aspects unusual, particularly the fact that Hitler's signature is said to be on each page.'

'I don't believe, either, that he would have written entries on a regular basis. He was too unmethodical. Even Mein Kampf was dictated rather than written.'

The thriller version of the diaries is strewn with corpses as fugitive Nazis, Soviet, CIA and Israeli agents clash during the

ten-million-dollar auction to buy Hitler's books.

Real life has been only marginally kinder, leaving German and British publishers with a multi-million pound headache and poor Lord Daere staunching academic gunshot wounds to his reputation.

Still, it's an ill wind. Jim Williams's book, well received last year but making no great stir, is suddenly the hottest thing since those other diaries.

Except that his fiction, presented as such from the start, may have more future.

Macmillan's 1982 hardback edition has sold out and is likely to be reprinted.

Sphere's paperback, planned before the greatest free publicity campaign in history, is being rushed out two months earlier than planned, with an opening print of 300,000.

Already published in the U.S., the fictional diaries have just been bought in Japan.

Williams's reaction is restrained. 'Very fortunate. I didn't even have an agent when I wrote it, just sent it in and hoped.'

He is now at work on another thriller, but firmly refuses to discuss his follow-up's storyline.

'There's no cause for concern,' he says. 'I'm not really a prophet.'