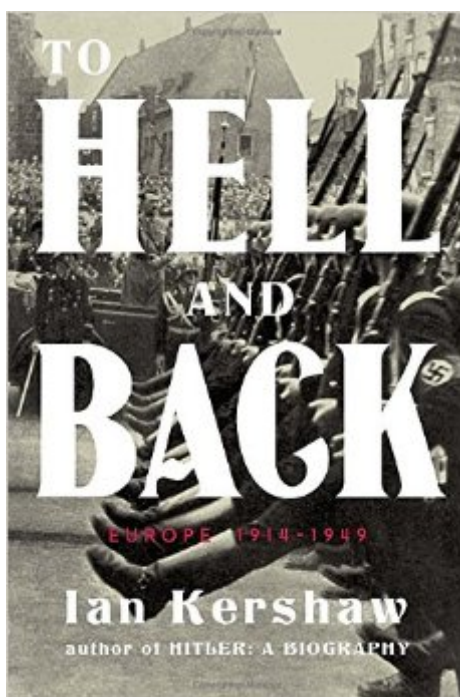


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# To Hell And Back: Europe 1914-1949 (The Penguin History Of Europe)



## Synopsis

"Chilling... To Hell and Back" should be required reading in every chancellery, every editorial cockpit and every place where peevisish Euroskeptics do their thinking. Kershaw documents each and every "ism" of his analysis with extraordinary detail and passionate humanism." The New York Times Book Review

The Penguin History of Europe series reaches the twentieth century with acclaimed scholar Ian Kershaw's long-anticipated analysis of the pivotal years of World War I and World War II. The European catastrophe, the long continuous period from 1914 to 1949, was unprecedented in human history "an extraordinarily dramatic, often traumatic, and endlessly fascinating period of upheaval and transformation. This new volume in the Penguin History of Europe series offers comprehensive coverage of this tumultuous era. Beginning with the outbreak of World War I through the rise of Hitler and the aftermath of the Second World War, award-winning British historian Ian Kershaw combines his characteristic original scholarship and gripping prose as he profiles the key decision makers and the violent shocks of war as they affected the entire European continent and radically altered the course of European history. Kershaw identifies four major causes for this catastrophe: an explosion of ethnic-racist nationalism, bitter and irreconcilable demands for territorial revisionism, acute class conflict given concrete focus through the Bolshevik Revolution, and a protracted crisis of capitalism. Incisive, brilliantly written, and filled with penetrating insights, To Hell and Back offers an indispensable study of a period in European history whose effects are still being felt today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Europe of 1914, at least for its bourgeoisie, represented the height of civilization, the "Belle Époque" if you will. And of a sudden the wheels fell off the track and the continent plunged into the darkness The Great War. British historian Ian Kershaw certainly proves George Kennan's maxim that World War I was "the great seminal catastrophe of the 20th Century." The war arose in the milieu of ethnic nationalism, territorial revisionism and increasing class conflict growing out of mass industrialization. These three factors would remain long after the war ended and into this pot would be thrown the crisis in capitalism induced by the Great Depression. Also arising out of the war was the successful Bolshevik Revolution that sent chills down the spines of the conservative elite. To Kershaw this was the most important event of the 20th Century because the very real fear of communism made opposition to the rise of fascism far more difficult in the West. It hardened the right and split the left. As a result the crisis in capitalism forced politics to the right rather than the left which is not too much different from what happened post-2008. Thus the West's response to the rise of fascism was timid, to say the least with respect to Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the Spanish Civil War and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938. All the while the great purge trials were going on in Moscow. Kershaw's view of this history seems more deterministic than say that of Zara Steiner's. To him there is more or less a straight-line between the Versailles settlements to the start of World War II. To be sure he gives credit to "the spirit of Locarno," but not enough in my opinion. He also leaves out two chance events that may have altered history.

Outstanding job of coalescing mountains of detail. Kershaw uses comparison to make ideas clear and distinct. Chapters: 1) On the Brink 2) The Great Disaster 3) Turbulent Peace 4) Dancing on the Volcano 5) Gathering Shadows 6) Danger Zone 7) Towards the Abyss 8) Hell on Earth 9) Quiet Transitions in the Dark Decades 10) Out of the Ashes Kershaw takes turns to cover many different European areas. This enables reader to contrast different developments occurring at the same time. The interaction of the English, German, Russian, Italian, etc., worlds create understanding. Very well done! I enjoyed the fact that Kershaw did not avoid making moral judgements. War is horrible. Hatred is evil, whether it is directed against Jews, Kulacks, Businessmen, Handicapped, Poles, or anyone else! His comparison of Italian Fascism, German Nazism and Russian Communism is fascinating. His explanation of the difference between the eastern and western front in WW2 was enlightening. Germany had two different goals. West was to conquer, east was to exterminate. Not the same! This work does not only present war and politics, but also the emotional, cultural and

religious effects. Covers artists and artistic movements. Picasso, Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, etc. are shown in the new world of the twentieth century. "Earlier ideals of beauty, harmony and reason were radically discarded in modernism. Fragmentation, disunity and chaos were the new leitmotifs - a remarkable anticipation in cultural forms of the political and economic rupture left by the First World War." (167)The religious outlook changed.

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