

The Female Face of Brutality:  
Examining the Gruesome Acts of  
SS-Helferinnen

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# A Dual Case Study

- How did these women come to embrace such brutality?
- Why are these women remembered in a worse way than their male counterparts?



Figure 1: Nazi officers and female auxiliaries (Helferinnen) run down a wooden bridge in Solahuette. The man on the right carries an accordion. (Nazi officers with an accordion, n.d.<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1163587>)

# Early German / Nazi Views Towards Women

- Norse Mythology
  - Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, in *Ride of the Valkyrie*
- Children's fairytales
  - The Evil Queen in *Snow White*
  - The Stepmother in *Cinderella*
  - The Sea Witch in *The Little Mermaid*
  - The Selfish Witch in *Rapunzel*
  - Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*



Figure 2: Valkyrie (The Valkyrie, n.d., [https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/44700/44747/44747\\_valkyrie.htm](https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/44700/44747/44747_valkyrie.htm))

# Growing up in Nazi Germany

- Average age 26
  - 5-10 when the Nazi's rose to power
- Education reform
  - Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service
- League of German Girls
  - Young Girls League
  - Faith and Beauty Society
- “Kitchen, Children, and Church”

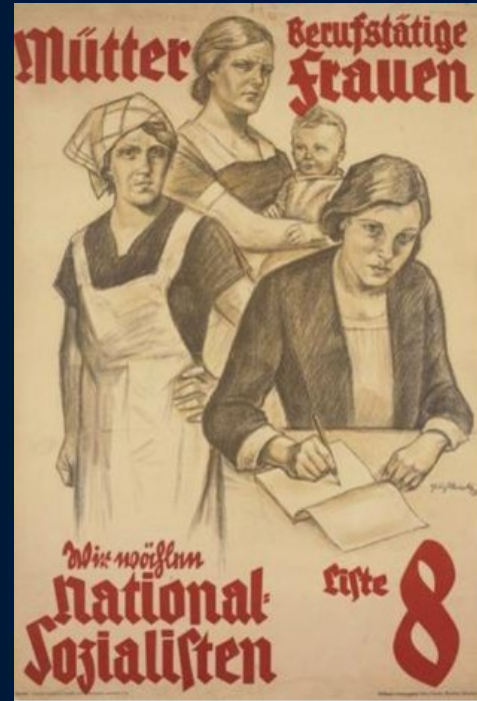


Figure 3: GERMAN PROPAGANDA POSTER: 'MOTHERS WORKING WOMEN' (Propaganda Poster, n.d., [https://www.alexautographs.com/auction-lot/german-propaganda-poster-mothers-working-women\\_ADE494180C](https://www.alexautographs.com/auction-lot/german-propaganda-poster-mothers-working-women_ADE494180C))

# While in the Camps

- 50,000 camp guards
  - 3,700 female guards
- Specific women stood out
  - Irma Grese
  - Isa Kolch
  - Dorothea Binz
- Specific male staff that stood out
  - Amon Göth
  - Josef Mengele
  - Oskar Groening



Figure 4: Nazi Ravensbrück camp: How ordinary women became SS torturers (Female SS with a dog in snow, n.d., <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55661782>)

# Irma Grese

- “The Hyena of Auschwitz”
- “The Beautiful Beast”
- “The Beast of Belsen,”
- Concentration camp guard at Ravensbrück and Auschwitz
- Warden of the women's section of Bergen-Belsen.



Figure 5: Close-up of Irma Grese, known as "The Bitch of Belsen", an SS wardress in Auschwitz- Birkenau, Ravensbrueck, and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. (Irma Grese, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa7623>)



# Amon Göth

- “The Butcher of Płaszów”
- Commandant of the Plaszow Camp
- Made popular by Schindler’s List

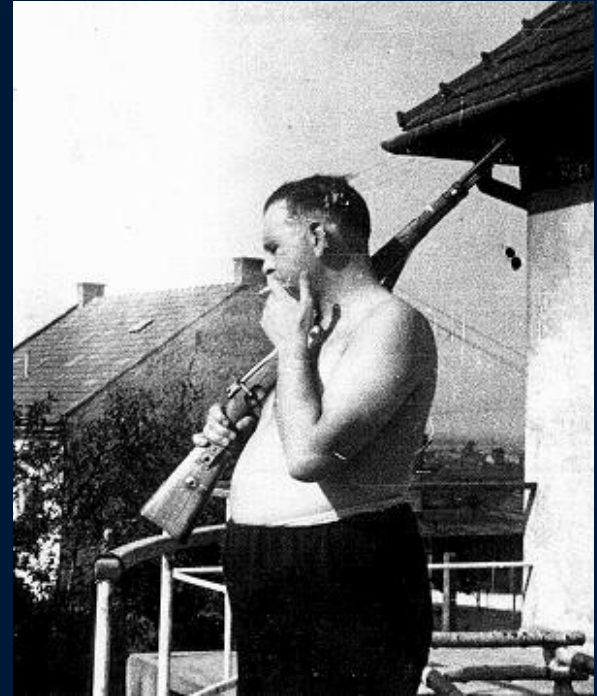


Figure 6: Commandant Amon Goeth stands with his rifle on the balcony of his villa in the Plaszow concentration camp. (Amon Goeth, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa31497>)

# The Hierarchy of “Worseness”

- To establish a hierarchy of suffering there too must be a hierarchy of worseness
- Separating the quantitative evidence and the emotional testimony
- Preconceived notions of gentleness and kindness often associated with the female gender
- When met with brutality the women appear worse



# Post - Liberation Attitudes

- Their youth added to the curiosity of their brutality
- Shelly Cline
  - 84% of women convicted
  - 50% of men
- Their attitude and appearance in the trials



Figure 7: Female guards of the Stutthof Concentration Camp at a Gdańsk war trial held before the Special Law Court between 25th April and 31st May of 1946, Poland. (Female SS on Trial, n.d., <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/instant-articles/ex-guard-from-stutthof.html>)

# “Scholarship”

- These women have become a pop culture fascination
- Bizarre attention placed on their brutal actions and lives

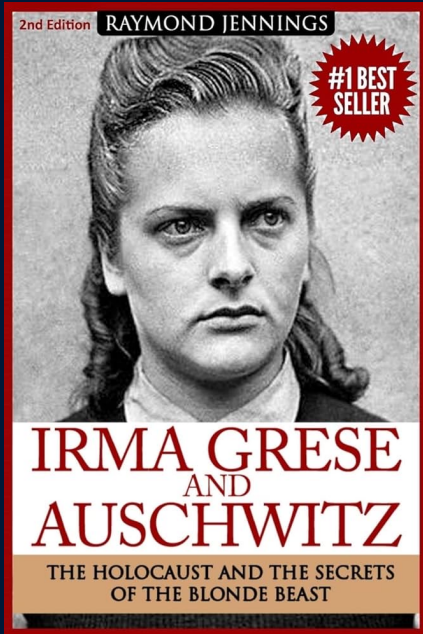


Figure 8: Irma Grese & Auschwitz: Holocaust and the Secrets of the The Blonde Beast, (Irma Grese Book 1, n.d., <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/irma-grese-auschwitz-raymond-jennings/1123332997>)

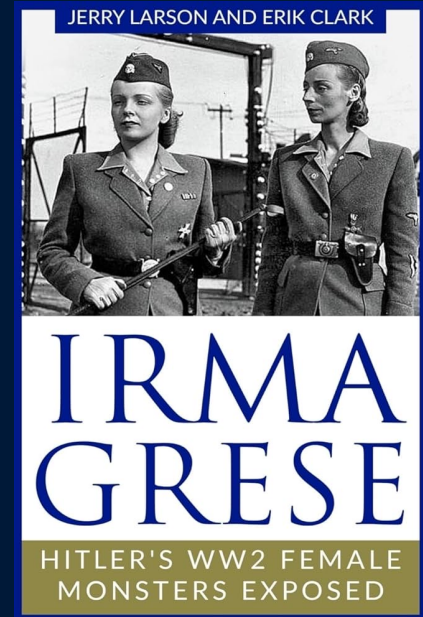


Figure 9: Irma Grese: Hitler's WW2 Female Monsters Exposed. (<https://www.amazon.com/Irma-Grese-Hitlers-Monsters-Exposed-ebook/dp/B07JHZN1CC>)

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Thank You

Questions?