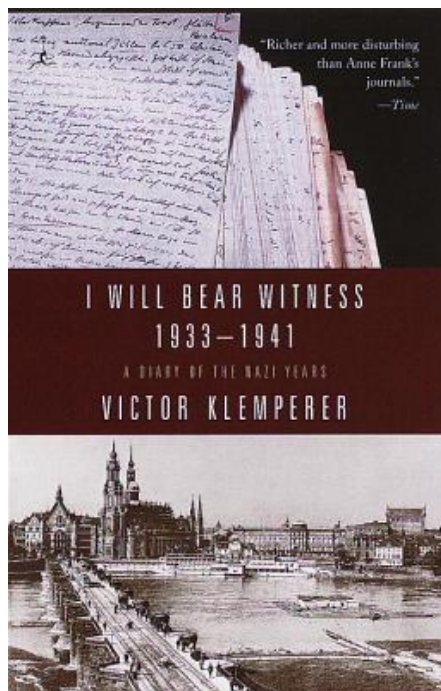




I Will Bear Witness 1933-41 A Diary of the Nazi Years

Victor Klemperer , Martin Chalmers (Translator)

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The publication of Victor Klemperer's secret diaries brings to light one of the most extraordinary documents of the Nazi period. "In its cool, lucid style and power of observation," said The New York Times, "it is the best written, most evocative, most observant record of daily life in the Third Reich." I Will Bear Witness is a work of literature as well as a revelation of the day-by-day horror of the Nazi years.

A Dresden Jew, a veteran of World War I, a man of letters and historian of great sophistication, Klemperer recognized the danger of Hitler as early as 1933. His diaries, written in secrecy, provide a vivid account of everyday life in Hitler's Germany.

What makes this book so remarkable, aside from its literary distinction, is Klemperer's preoccupation with the thoughts and actions of ordinary Germans: Berger the greengrocer, who was given Klemperer's house ("anti-Hitlerist, but of course pleased at the good exchange"), the fishmonger, the baker, the much-visited dentist. All offer their thoughts and theories on the progress of the war: Will England hold out? Who listens to Goebbels? How much longer will it last?

This symphony of voices is ordered by the brilliant, grumbling Klemperer, struggling to complete his work on eighteenth-century France while documenting the ever-tightening Nazi grip. He loses first his professorship and then his car, his phone, his house, even his typewriter, and is forced to move into a Jews' House (the last step before the camps), put his cat to death (Jews may not own pets), and suffer countless other indignities.

Despite the danger his diaries would pose if discovered, Klemperer sees it as his duty to record events. "I continue to write," he notes in 1941 after a terrifying run-in with the police. "This is my heroics. I want to bear witness, precise witness, until the very end." When a neighbor remarks that, in his isolation, Klemperer will not be able to cover the main events of the war, he writes: "It's not the big things that are important, but the everyday life of tyranny, which may be forgotten. A thousand mosquito bites are worse than a blow on the head. I observe, I note, the mosquito bites."

This book covers the years from 1933 to 1941. Volume Two, from 1941 to 1945, will be published in 1999.

I Will Bear Witness 1933-41 A Diary of the Nazi Years Details

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Klemperer , Martin Chalmers (Translator)**

From Reader Review I Will Bear Witness 1933-41 A Diary of the Nazi Years for online ebook

Steph (loves water) says

Amazing. Quite possibly the most important book to come out of WW2. This man's first hand account of what went on in Germany during the rise of the National Socialists and the affect upon his family, neighbors and friends is an insight into a society gone mad.

Although many Germans were anti-Nazi, the National Socialists came into power because they were seen as the lesser of the two evils, when given a choice between that and Communism. As Professor Klemperer observes throughout this diary, the ideologies are similiar, but most people did not see it that way. The paralyzing fear of day to day living gave rise to an apathy experienced across the country, and he mostly found himself talking to people who could not, or would not, listen.

I found this work to be outstanding. Daily recital of the changes and abuses suffered by the Jews over the years 1933-1941 are interspersed with incredible insight and occasional flashes of brilliance. The novella "Cell 89" particularly impressed me as an awakening of the human soul.

I am so glad that this book survived destruction and am amazed that it was discovered in the 1990s. Everyone should read this book. The lessons and insights in this book could apply to the current situation in the United States. It could also serve as a warning against the dangers of mass apathy.

Louise Silk says

In May 1935, Klemperer (1881-1960) was forced into early retirement from his position as professor of French literature at Dresden University. While he was born a Jew, he had converted to Christianity, married an Aryan woman and was very assimilated. Still he was labeled a Jew and with that all of his rights gradually stripped away. He and his wife had to move into a special "Jew house" and rented out their home to a tenant selected by the Nazis. His identity card was labeled with a J, he had strict rations, and had all of his valuable possessions confiscated. By 1945, he was one of only 198 registered Jews left in Dresden.

In this first of three volumes, Klemperer kept a detailed diary of life under the Nazis that is a fascinating tale of indispensable information on how Jews were stripped of their rights in Germany.

Sunny says

This is a diary style book about the 1933-41 years of victor klemperers life. he was jewish but had converted to protestantism. he was married to a german aryan wife. he was still prosceuted and gradually ostracized through all the riles the nasties bought in gradually against the jews. things really kicked off around krystallnacht. this is better than anne franks diaries. he was a lecturer at university. it talks of some of the key

events that happens in the buildup to the second world war in Germany and Dresden but it also and equally importantly mentions the daily detailed discrimination Jews faced. There is a wealth of detail in this book that is certainly worth reading. Not as hard hitting as Wiesels "Night", or Borowski's "This Way to the Gas", but still shocking in the way life was squeezed out of the Jews in Germany and surrounding countries.

Mark Colenutt says

We all know of Anne Frank's tragic testimony to people's inhumanity when they are possessed by a vainglorious impression of themselves. Superiority is clearly defined by how humanely you treat the vulnerable and not how easily you decide to crush the defenceless.

Victor Klemperer's two-volume diaries are simply the most significant publication in recent years in any historical discipline. While we are amazed by Frank's maturity in her observation and style and above all her resilience, Klemperer is the better writer. This is not solely due to his more mature years but also to the fact that he was a professor of literature at Dresden University. His writing style reflects his academic training as does his perceptive understanding of the times he was living through.

What led to the Second World War was the gradual mutation of German society from a modern, democratic society to one prepared to first accept a dictator and then follow him blindly down the road to European domination. What was it then that enabled this to occur at grass roots level? Klemperer gives us fundamental insights into this question while documenting the acerbic hate towards the Jews and the daily atmosphere inside a country taken over by a military mindset. He also paints a surprising picture of a German social kaleidoscope split between those who are openly aggressive alongside those who are secretly compassionate.

Victor Klemperer had no alternative but to bear witness and leave as his last will and testament an accurate document of what he and others were subjected to the moment society went to the wall and civilised acceptance of others' differences was exchanged for unrelenting intolerance and accusation.

The diaries are an integral part of clarifying the extent to which the ordinary German was responsible for Hitler's policies and the resultant Holocaust. The poignant two-volume memoirs are now standard texts in this field of study.

Therefore, for anyone with a serious interest in Nazi Germany this is a must-read whether they be an armchair academic or Oxbridge-Ivy League aspiring Don.

Greg Brozeit says

Victor Klemperer was a professor of classical languages in Dresden. He lost his position and sense of security soon after Hitler took power. Although he had converted to Protestantism in 1911, he was classified a Jew by the Nazis. And while Dresden's Jewish community steadily dwindled because of deportations to Lodz, Auschwitz, and Theresienstadt, since his wife, Eva, was a "full-blooded Aryan" they were kept safe from deportation until they were notified to prepare to leave the city on February 13, 1945. That night the infamous firebombing of Dresden that killed thousands took place. Ironically, it turned out to be a reprieve for Klemperer and Eva. In the chaos that ensued, he removed the yellow stars from his clothing before they both joined the flood of refugees streaming to the west and south of Germany as the war came to a close. By

some miracle, his diaries, which he stored in the shed of a friend on the outskirts of Dresden, survived. They may well be among the best, most insightful documents that describe what life was like at “ground level” in Nazi Germany. This first translated volume covers 1933-1941.

Klemperer understood the personal threats Nazism posed for him and others like him. He recognized in April 1933 that he was “now...at the mercy of an arbitrary power.” Within two years the threats became more visceral: “I truly expect that one day our little house will be set alight and I shall be beaten to death.” Less than three months after Hitler came to power, he was “almost used to the condition of being without rights” and noted how official propaganda became “the opposite of a democratic press is the *disciplined press*.”

Compounding their dread was the abandonment and marginalization of their friends, colleagues, and neighbors. “No one dares write,” he wrote, later adding, “[b]ut everywhere complete helplessness, cowardice, fear.” Yet there was also a perverse acceptance and support for Hitler he noted in May 1936: “The majority of the people is content, a small group accepts Hitler as the lesser evil, no one really wants to be rid of him.” Two years later, he was “ever more convinced that Hitler truly speaks for more or less all Germans.” As bad as many might have thought the Nazis were, many believed “the Communists and that would be even worse!” leading him to conclude “[t]he saddest thing about it is that everyone now reckons only with extreme governments: NSDAP or Communism—as if there were nothing in between.” As a veteran of WWI, Klemperer was a German first, but the daily indignities led him to conclude, “No one can my Germanness away from me, but my nationalism and patriotism are gone forever.”

As early as December 31, 1933, Klemperer anticipated Hannah Arendt’s thesis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to “equate National Socialism and Communism: both are materialistic and tyrannical, both disregard and negate the freedom of the spirit and the individual.” Being an academic who lost his position at the university, he understood that “...they do *not want anyone to study*; intellect, scholarship are the enemies.” By 1941 he was more succinct: “Always and everywhere: National Socialism does not want to know, to think, *only believe*...The main thing for tyrannies of any kind is the suppression of the urge to ask questions.”

Another difficulty for Klemperer was that he himself did not consider himself to be a Jew. Indeed, although he would have liked to emigrate—as many of his family members and colleagues did—he was very critical of Zionists, who he felt were “are just as offensive as the Nazis” and “exchange[d] nationalism and narrowness for nationalism and narrowness.” His strong opinions caused further isolation; even among the Jewish community, “No one will help us. To the Jews I am apostate.” Feelings of isolation intensified in his rare communications with friends and family who emigrated. His nephew, who settled in Chicago, “has no idea of the difficulties here. Obtain a visitor’s visa immediately—how easy he thinks it is!” Instead, he and Eva continued to “go on living fatalistically.”

Regardless of his deep convictions, however, Klemperer and Eva were still subject to every legal and social restriction that applied to all Jews. Not only was his profession denied him, but so was, over time, his ability to learn and read. “In the morning [of October 9, 1936] at the library I was told gently, that as a non-Aryan I was no longer allowed to use the reading room. They will let me take everything home or give it to me in the catalog room, but an official ban has been issued for the reading room.” On December 3, 1938, shortly after Kristallnacht, Klemperer was banned from “using the library.” The man who informed him “was distressed beyond words, I had to calm him. He stroked my hand the whole time, he could not hold back the tears,” leading Klemperer to write, “But these few, sympathizing and in despair, are isolated, and they too are afraid” because “Aryan friends of the Jews are always treated worse than Jews themselves.” Other ramifications after Kristallnacht included a prohibition for Jews to go to movie theaters, have driver’s licenses, and increases in taxes, which made it more difficult for them to emigrate, and “all Jewish doctors [were] struck from the Medical Register...so they can starve.” After the invasion of Poland, restrictions increased including limits on withdrawals from bank accounts and curfews for Jews after 8 pm.

Klemperer's contemporaneous writing debunks notions that average Germans were unaware of the atrocities committed in their nation's name. For example, word of the building of the new Buchenwald concentration camp in became common knowledge; "no one comes back from there a second time, between ten and twenty people die every day anyway." He notes the November 8, 1939 assassination attempt on Hitler at the Munich Bürgerbräu, had him "reckoning with arrest, concentration camp, perhaps also the bullet" since "we know the culprits: England and behind it Jewry." He also notes in August 1941 that "[t]here is widespread talk now of the killing of the mentally ill in the asylums," which turned out to be one of the few times Nazi policies were changed due to public outcry.

Popular knowledge of the reality of Nazi Germany was also underscored in anecdotes and urban legends implying more than they said, especially since "dissemination carries the threat of prison: A man in Berlin takes his wife to the hospital so she can give birth. A picture of Christ hangs over the bed. The man: 'Nurse, that picture must go, I don't want the Jewboy to be the first thing by child sees.' The nurse: She herself could not do anything about it, she will report it. In the evening he gets a telegram from the doctor: 'You have a son. The picture did not need to be removed, the child is blind.'" Another story he recorded on September 7, 1941: "A married couple...learn that all four of their sons have been killed in Russia. The father hangs himself, the mother hurls the picture of Hitler out of the window into the courtyard Half an hour later she is arrested ('taken away')."

Two instances of his prescience in his diaries are noteworthy. One of his more philosophical remarks that is as relevant today as when he wrote it right after the 1936 Olympics in Berlin was his recognition of "...an absurd overestimation of sport; the honor of the nation depends on whether a fellow citizen can jump four inches higher than all the rest." And when he is briefly imprisoned for not having followed rules during a blackout, Klemperer has much time to reflect and realizes, "It is honorable to be imprisoned now, it will be advantageous to any future character reference." He foresaw how future generations would elevate the memory of those who resisted.

Occasionally Klemperer found fleeting moments of optimism and grace, as he wrote on New Year's Eve 1938, of "not [having] reached the last circle of hell, for uncertainty is not the worst thing, because in uncertainty there is still hope." In his few public forays, Klemperer sometimes had quiet conversations with old friends and acquaintances on street cars only to revert to silence when "a man with a Party badge got on...Such incidents always give me hope for a quarter of an hour. No more." Prior to Christmas 1939, many of his neighbors committed small acts of kindness. A grocery store owner "slips me one bar of chocolate after another, and the butcher writes on the back of a receipt: For Christmas we have put by a tongue for you." Some even gave secret gifts of books, "an expression of courage and a profession of opposition. It is a most significant symptom of the general mood. In return I gave her *Germinal*..." These acts of kindness prompted him to write on New Year's Eve 1939, "I am now convinced that National Socialism will collapse in the coming year. Perhaps we shall perish with it—but it will certainly end, and with it, one way or another, the terror." He often "encounter[s] much sympathy, people help me out, but fearfully, of course."

What little optimism he had was quashed by the swift military success Germany has in Holland, Belgium, and France. "Historical development takes more time than an individual human being has. And I fear Hitler's halo of invincibility." By the end of May 1940 he notes "*Everybody* in the [Jewish] house *absolutely certain* of German victory." Even when wounded soldiers return home for treatment, cries of "It's the Jews fault!" only deepen despair. Widespread rumors of England's capitulation were also taken as fact until the air raids began. In the beginning of 1941, Klemperer realizes that the good news from the front must be false based on what he sees around him; the quality and quantity of meat is severely curtailed, ersatz coffee replaces the real thing, restrictions on Jews multiply—higher taxes, confiscation of typewriters, stricter emigration rules, prohibitions of half-Jews from serving on the front lines, milk delivery for Jews becomes illegal, increased police checks at Jewish homes, bans on smoking for Jews—everything belies official propaganda.

Klemperer considered September 19, 1941 to be the worst day of life, when he was required to wear the

yellow Star of David, even though he wrote in 1938 that “[f]or half a day I thought, now one must find the courage for suicide.” Perhaps more than anything, it brought back the words he had written in 1933, “I must live here and die here.” As hard as his life had been since 1933, he could not have imagined that things would get even worse as he would describe the events of 1942-1945.

Audrey says

Reviews of this diary consistently fail to account for the richness of its contents. No one should "rate" a Holocaust memoir, but my decision to do so reflects my impression of my experience with Klemperer's words as a witness to a place, time, and life at times oddly similar and dissimilar to my own.

Klemperer's diary is unique. As an academic, he knows he lives in troubled and interesting times. He leaves the "facts" of events in Nazi Germany to historians and focuses on documenting his lived experience and responses to his changing world. As a WWI veteran, a professor, and husband of an Aryan woman, his circumstances and a great deal of Providence, allow him to both remain in Germany (a suburb of Dresden) and survive many of his contemporaries despite his own advanced years.

Klemperer's prose provides the reader with more than a window. He might as well be sitting in your room speaking to you. His emotions are palpable eighty years later, and his thoughts almost answer your own questions as soon as they're formed. He knew as he wrote that his actions would have consequences (and prompt serious question)--for more than himself--in the years to come and he is unapologetic and stubborn. He will bear witness, so help him God.

Beyond the obvious reason to read this book as a unique account of Nazi Germany, there are important secondary reasons. As an academic, he struggles within the academy-- courses, curriculum, colleagues, petty squabbles, publishing. Timeless. Despite being deprived of a position and seeming impossible odds, Klemperer drags himself out of bed each day and writes, reads, and thinks. Even in a cell, uncertain of seeing his loved ones again, he argues with himself over the success of Hitler's regime in light of known history, considers material for his own work, and creates a puzzle for he and his wife's 37th anniversary (the first ever spent apart).

His heart, soul, and mind are his own. His will to stay and chronicle his life, a choice he makes mainly on his own. His words, carefully worded, are his alone. At the same point, he makes concerted and specific mention of the many kindnesses--surprising to us and him--day after day, year after year--that conspire to keep him alive. As a result, we bear witness to the strength not only of his will, but the compassion and love of humankind in the midst of darkness.

Lewis Weinstein says

UPDATE 6/10/17 ...

As part of my research in preparation for writing the next section of the sequel to A Flood of Evil, I read Klemperer's diary from 1936-38. Here are a few observations on the major events of the day ...

Jul 1938 ... antisemitism is again greatly increased ... Jewish assets must be reported ... Jews are banned from certain trades ... yellow visitor's cards needed for baths ... the Academic Society for Research into Jewry is meeting in Munich ... the opening of art exhibitions in Munich and elsewhere recite their familiar

anti-Jewish slogans

... Aug 1938 ... for weeks now, intensified Jew-baiting and drastic new measures all the time ... extreme tension everywhere ... fear of war everywhere

The entries, however, contain not a single word about the horrors of Kristallnacht which took place on November 9, 1938.

EXCEPT ... Several days after the events, however, he makes this cryptic and sarcastic entry ... "in April, when in wise anticipation of the Grunspan murder and its atonement ..."

This refers to the murder of a German diplomat in Paris by a Polish Jew, an event which was used by the Nazis as the excuse to unleash a nationwide pogrom. Klemperer is referring to the extensive preparations, months before November, for what was later falsely described as a spontaneous reaction.

*** PRIOR COMMENTS ...

It is one thing to read the history of horrific events, but even greatly written history cannot match the immediacy of a contemporaneous diary. The pain, fear, anxiety, and frustration come through with a raw clarity that is unnerving.

So far I have read only 26 pages, through the entry of July 28, 1933, but already I have several ideas I will look to incorporate into my characters in my novel-in-progress. The diary continues through the end of the war in 1945. An incomparable resource.

*** it is a disgrace, which gets worse with every day that passes ... there's not a sound (of protest?) from anyone ... everyone's keeping his head down, Jewry (SPD?) most of all and their democratic press ... who will have the majority on March 5? Will the terror be tolerated and for how long? It is impossible to make predictions.

*** the defeat in 1918 did not depress me as greatly as the present state of affairs ... it is shocking how day after day naked acts of violence, breaches of the law, barbaric opinions appear quite undisguised as official decree ... the Socialist papers are permanently banned

*** no one dares write a letter, no one dares make a telephone call, we visit one another and weigh up our chances ... since telephone calls are unsafe, and since everyone is depressed, we constantly have nerve-racking morning or afternoon visits ... catastrophe is imminent ... there is no salvation ... Eva's nerves are completely gone ... the same conversations everywhere ... fragments of madness in which we are unceasingly immersed

*** for the moment I am still safe ... but as someone on the gallows, who has a rope around his neck, is safe ... at any moment a new "law" can kick away the steps on which I'm standing and then I'm hanging

*** Hitler on a film at the cinema ... clenched fists, twisted face, wild bawling ... on January 30 they were still laughing at me ... they won't be laughing anymore

MORE TO FOLLOW ...

notgettingenough says

I wrote this a few years ago, but nothing's changed, not in my part of the world, anyway. It was around the time I was reading Klemperer's book on the language of the third reich, and interactions with friends online prompted it.

In Australia and no doubt elsewhere in the world, this sequence is happening.

First we have terror.

Next we have anti-terror.

And new on the line is terror of anti-terror, or anti-anti-terror, such as a glut of journalistic articles telling us why the Australian Government's new anti-terror laws are 1984 and the instigation of the thing we should really be terrified of. You can see an example [here](#).

This is the spin we all create: the Nazis, Mark (my friend) who quotes the Nazis, Ed (my friend) and I guess, me, much as I'd like to think I'm if not above, then at least apart from, spin.

Mark the other day quoted a highranking Nazi talking about the effect of propaganda, in this case, the value of creating fear, the implication being that this is what is happening in Australia at the moment.

Göring: the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.

He followed this up by linking to one of the many media articles talking about the Orwellian world into which Australia has now descended and which is the true enemy, the one of which we should be truly terrified.

As it happens, my reading at the moment has me firmly entrenched in the 1930s and WWII, a sickening period to be reliving, but also an educational one, especially in view of IS. Mark referred to IS in terms of fascism the other day, but as Klemperer would be quick to point out, there is a massive difference between fascism and Nazism. Clearly we would have to say, if we observe this difference, that IS is not fascist, but something far more horrific, and the comparison to Nazism seems more accurate to me.

Because of this reading, I happened to come across something said by a highranking Nazi too and it is this:

Himmler: The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect.

The fact is, propaganda is one thing. It can't hurt, it might help, and no doubt the Nazis were masters of utilising it for their cause. But terror is like this. It is getting beaten to death in the street. It is being forced into slavery - and not just any old slavery, but slavery where you are starved to death and treated in unspeakable ways before being killed in equally unspeakable ways. It is not only about groups of Jews being forced naked into rooms where they are gassed to death, but about the people who watched this happen and enjoyed it. Ordinary people who got their jollies like this. It is about being a French person in occupied France in the resistance and what that entailed. If one German was killed by you, then ten French prisoners

were killed. When that didn't help it became more and more French for one German. It is about being in so-called Free France but being forced into slavery for the Germans. If you were not Jewish, that is. If you were Jewish, some other appalling fate. Terror in the IS area and in other parts of the world where fundamentalist Islam invades is like this. It is fucking terrifying. That is what Australia is fighting against at the moment.

I don't have the skills, nor the presumption to present a true picture of the sheer terror that was life in Europe in this period if you weren't willing to be one of the terrorisers and maybe even if you were. But surely it can't be too hard to put yourself in this world and get an idea of it.

This is not a world I want to be part of. Probably most Germans would have thought they didn't want to be part of it either, given the choice, and even after some of them, to their surprise perhaps, discovered that it was fun watching groups of naked human beings being gassed to death. It happened, and it happened because people let it happen. At which point do we step in? Having seen when and how this process took place in WWII, I find it hard to believe it isn't right to step in earlier rather than later.

The bottom line is, however, the terror is real. It isn't something the PM of Australia has created because you don't like what he's done to the Barrier Reef or women's shelters. And if he - and others - have attempted to deal with this through anti-terror, ie creating fear of terror, one can hardly blame him. It is hard to believe that it is necessary even. Fear of terror? Count me in. Fighting against terror? Count me in. Hoping that this doesn't turn into something Orwellian. Count me in. Do I put this last? Yep. It's a no-brainer.

In the 1930s everybody outside Germany let what was happening continue. They watched Hitler happen. They watched ordinary Germans become Nazis. They watched Germans kill Jews - 'hey, as long as it's just Jews and homosexuals and people like that, let's not worry about it.' They let Germany start brutally taking over other countries. 'Hey, it's not our country, let's hope for the best.' Nobody ever wanted to do anything much about it until they perceived their own country to be under threat. World War Two was not the only horrifying consequence of this willingness to hope for the best.

Oh, it's only Kurds. It's only women. It's only homosexuals. And you know. These guys aren't so awful really, they are maybe a bit crazy. Hey, let's send in some therapists. Yeah. Let's see if that works. And yeah, maybe if we leave them alone, you know. They'll leave us alone. Well, hell's bells, they said they would leave other countries alone. Okay, we'll give them half of Czechoslovakia. God damn. They've taken the other half too.

My nightmares are half IS and half Nazi. They are both real.

Ana says

This book is incredibly hard to finish, even if you're armed with enthusiasm about the subject. These are the diaries of a literature professor of Dresden, a Jew married with an Arian woman during the years of the Nazi regime coming into full power. It is, at times, extremely boring, because across 8 years of writing, some pages are just mundane details about his and his wife's life under the ever-growing hatefulness of the regime. However - that is the exact point of interest of this book. It gives you details on the opinions of people living right at that time, their daily struggles, their hopes and dreams, what they ate, what they fed their cats, how they committed suicide, how they went on walks and so on and so forth. It is tedious at times, but worth it for the overall picture. The one most interesting thing of it all is Klemperer's focus on *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (Language of the Third Reich), where it shows the beginnings of him realizing how important language and

the use of it was to maintaining the Nazi regime in place. After he collected this information, he went on to write a book specifically about that, which I am hoping to read soon.

William2.1 says

An astonishing document that's unlike anything else I know that might fit under the heading of Nazi period memoirs. The perspective it provides — that of Jewish academic Victor Klemperer and his "Aryan" wife living in Dresden during a time of state-sponsored genocide — beggars description. Moreover, it's very well written. Do read both volumes.

Jo says

In April 1935, Klemperer (1881-1960) was a Protestant professor of French literature at Dresden University and a veteran of WWI. By early May, he was simply a Jew and, like other Jews, forcibly retired. His marriage to an Aryan woman gave him some small protection. By 1945, he was one of only 198 registered Jews left in Dresden. Through it all, Klemperer kept a diary, that was not intended to be published. It is a detailed account of living under the Nazis, indignity piled on indignity, all that he & his wife cared about stripped away. In the second volume (1942-1945) indignity becomes brutality and terror. He wrote down everything, in minute detail. The two volumes [read them in order] are probably the most extraordinary eye-witness account about life in Nazi Germany ever written. It is powerful reading.

Ian says

When I first started reading the diaries of Victor Klemperer, I wondered how to keep track of all the various acquaintances and family members he is mentioning. An appendix of who-is-who would be extremely helpful, yet it did not take away any of the impact reading his personal accounts had for me. As many reviews already state, this is an incredible document because it simply records the thoughts, fears, suspicions, rumours, that are circulating around an average German's life as he experiences life under Naziism. Although it mentions the big headline news events, the assumption of power by Hitler, the death of President Von Hindenburg, the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, it does not delve into them as a journalistic news account or history text; instead the diary records Klemperer's gut reactions, the discussions he has with his wife about the incidents, the sense of fear and helplessness of not knowing what comes next. That in itself is what gives these diaries their impact...

Meaghan says

I found this diary fascinating and believe it's an indispensable work of history -- almost one-of-a-kind. You see a lot of diaries and memoirs from the Holocaust/WW2 years, but not much from the mid- to late-1930s and the rise of Hitler. Reading Klemperer's diary, which covers January 1933 through December 1941, you can see how the fascist state gradually chipped away at the rights of Jews, and the Holocaust was accomplished in little baby steps. I can summarize it like this:

Jewish civil servants were thrown out of their jobs. Klemperer, a college professor, was forced into early

retirement and didn't get a veteran's pension. Non-Jewish maids were prohibited from working in Jewish households. First Aryan civil servants, then all Aryans were forbidden to associate with Jews. Jews had to fill out an inventory of all their assets. Everyone was either leaving the country or trying to get out; many of Klemperer's Jewish friends left for places as far away as South America. Kristallnacht happened; the synagogues burned. Jews were no longer permitted to drive. War started, and with it, rations: Jews got smaller rations than Aryans. People who were half Jewish or less could serve in the military, but had limited opportunities for promotion. Jews were no longer allowed to use the library reading room, then they were forbidden to check out library books. There was an earlier curfew for Jews, and they were only allowed to go grocery shopping at certain times of the day. Many stores had "No Jews Allowed" signs. Jews were no longer allowed to live in their own homes; Klemperer and his wife had to move into a special "Jew house" and rent out their home to a tenant selected by the Nazis. Klemperer committed a minor breach of blackout regulations and served an eight-day jail sentence in solitary confinement; the same offense, committed by an Aryan, would probably have resulted in a 20-mark fine. As the book ended, Klemperer had just gotten out of jail and his typewriter was confiscated; Jews were no longer permitted to have them. And the war has three and a half years left to go!

Yet Klemperer was extremely fortunate in a lot of ways. He was very assimilated -- in fact, he had converted to Christianity, after a fashion -- and had a lot of Aryan friends, and most of them remained his friends. His siblings provided much-needed financial support. And his marriage to an Aryan woman would eventually save his life; he was one of the few hundred German Jews who never had to go into hiding and was never deported to a concentration camp.

All this he faithfully records, along with the minutiae of daily life: his pet cat, building and maintaining his house, learning to drive and buying a lemon that breaks every week, constant dental appointments and general hypochondria, dinner parties, reading, scholarship, sibling rivalry, the weather, etc etc etc.

One thing I took note of was, at least from what Klemperer saw, perhaps half the German population sympathized with the Jews. He writes about meeting ardent Nazis and people who try to make his life miserable because of his Jewishness, but more often he notes expressions of sympathy from strangers, shopkeepers slipping forbidden food into his basket, that sort of thing. He even wrote about a "Star Club," a group of Aryans who went around giving friendly greetings to Jews on the street who wore the yellow star, just to show them not everyone hated them. This sort of thing flatly contradicts the theses of a lot of scholars who write books with titles like Hitler's Willing Executioners. The problem was, at least in Klemperer's case, most of the people who sympathized with him did so in a very quiet, unproductive way: they were either too apathetic or too scared to take real action and provide serious, tangible aid. As some wise person once said, all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

Victor Klemperer wrote two other diaries, one up to 1945 and the other about the postwar years in Communist East Germany. I hope they are as good as this one; I plan to read them both as soon as I can get my hands on them.

Rebecca says

Since I had to read this for an essay*, I'm not going to write a full review for this. I did have to skim through some sections, since not everything is relevant for my essay and I was focused on flagging as many reference points as possible. I don't want to rate it any higher until I've read it cover to cover, which I will hopefully do sometime in the future.

It is such an interesting read. I love history and I'm especially fascinated by books like this. I Will Bear

Witness is the detailed account of a Jewish man living under the Nazi regime. His observations on everything from politics to Zionism, propaganda to communism, are incredibly intriguing. He also writes about his money and health issues, as well as his wife, family, friends and neighbours. It is essentially a diary of the Nazi years - a mix of the mundane and the opposite. Anyone can read about Germany and the Jewish situation in this time in a textbook, but primary documents such as these diary entries are invaluable. It is such a vivid account of living under the regime and an important voice to be heard.

"I continue to write. This is my heroics. I want to bear witness, precise witness, until the very end."

I urge anyone interested in the time period and gaining a greater sense of Nazi Germany and the Jews to give this book a read. It is far more detailed than other WWII Jewish memoirs, such as *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Night*, and quite different from the two, but it will hold appeal to those who got something out of those reads.

* For the curious, my essay is on the usefulness of Victor Klemperer's diaries in understanding the Jewish situation in Germany 1933-41.

Christa says

Klemperer's diary helps us to understand Nazism. Klemperer dairies give a first hand account of the atrocities faced by Jews during the reign of Hitler over Germany. His prose also chronicles many events giving explanations to why many 'ordinary' Germans accepted or denied the actions of the NSDAP. It is definitely proof that many Germans who later claimed not to know about the terrors associated with the Nazi regime actually knew about them by either, participating, resisting or being a bystander while it occurred. In order to learn from the mistakes of Germany during this era, comparing war plans evaluating outcomes and percentages will not suffice. The details of Klemperer's diary that sheds the true light on the people, places, and misfortunes tell the true story of the most horrific time of the twentieth century.

Pat says

A book that finally made me understand why the Jews didn't violently revolt.

Thomas J. Hubschman says

I Will Bear Witness, 1933-1941 & 1942-1945
A Diary of the Nazi Years
By Victor Klemperer

Victor Klemperer was a professor of French literature, specializing in the Enlightenment, employed at the Technical University of Dresden at the time the Nazis came to power in 1933. At that point in his career he already had a few scholarly works in print and was planning another, a project on the 18th century he continued researching and writing until circumstances forced him to postpone that work. But he did continue the personal diary he had begun many years earlier, now with the purpose of documenting not the big picture of Nazism in Germany (he would leave that to historians) but the experience of it by a single individual,

along with other ordinary personal matters he had been recording for decades.

The fact that the Nazis considered him a Jew despite his conversion to Protestantism in his youth put him in the bulls-eye of their abuse. But he was married to an "Aryan," and on that account some of the harshest measures heaped on non-Aryans were sometimes blunted or postponed, including shipment to Theresienstadt, the concentration camp in Czechoslovakia where most of Dresden's Jews were to meet their deaths. He had to wear the yellow star, avoid contact with Aryans, not use public transportation, subsist on starvation rations, and would in fact have been sent off to his death within a few days had not British Lancaster bombers rained fire on the population of Dresden, Aryan and non-Aryan alike, in the spring of 1945, allowing Victor and his wife Eva to escape the city and leave behind his Jewish identity by claiming his identification papers were destroyed in the fire.

There are plenty of books about the Nazi era. What's so special about the Klemperer diaries? Why would I recommend these two volumes to anyone interested in learning what the Hitler regime was like over any work by a professional historian, however worthy that study may be?

My answer has to do with the special character of the diaries, their combination of documentation of a horror growing worse with each passing day (everyone Klemperer talks to believes such an absurd regime will surely fall within months) and the details of a middle-aged upper-middle-class couple's life, including the stresses and strains on their marriage, not all of them the result of Nazi oppression. One quickly comes to feel one is living with the Klemperers, if only as a fly on the wall, as they struggle to complete the construction of their "dream house" in a suburb just outside Dresden — Eva's obsession despite their having to subsist on a modest pension after her husband loses his university post.

The daily visits to the house site as they scrape together the money to lay a foundation, then construct modest living quarters and, of course, a garden, seem like an exercise in futility, given what the reader knows is going to happen a few years later. You want to shout at them, "Get out! Get out!" But Eva is determined to have her house, partly, one suspects, because she had given up her own career as a musicologist and performer in favor of her husband's career. Besides, Hitler really did seem too extreme, too downright surreal, to last much longer (odd, that in America he was seen as a "moderate" who would keep the Bolshevik menace in check). And, besides, as the author of these diaries keeps asserting, he, Victor Klemperer, is a German, a real German, not like the aberrations who had taken over his country, though his faith in that identity is sorely tried over the next twelve years.

The course of the Klemperer marriage, however inadvertent, is continuous and detailed. In the '30s, Victor is careful to not complain about Eva's morning fits or constant dental emergencies or her obsession with the house, but the reader wonders what is going on in the woman's mind, when (with the hindsight of history) the dreadful future seems so clearly written on the wall. But as the years pass and the noose tightens economically and in every other way around the necks of Jews, Eva meets each new deprivation with remarkable personal resources, not just sharing all of her husband's social and economic disabilities but assisting neighbors in need in the "Jews houses" where the Klemperers are finally forced to live, right down to scrubbing their floors. She also risks her freedom (as an Aryan she could have secured her own status simply by divorcing him), if not her life, by smuggling the manuscript pages of his diary to an Aryan safe house. Using her Aryan ration card she spends hours each day scrounging for food (mostly potatoes, sometimes rotten). And, yet, the Klemperers maintain a remarkably active social life, mostly with others marked as Jews but also with a handful of Aryans.

In the end, the diaries reveal the slow maturing of two human beings who are already well into middle age at the point the diaries open. Victor evolves from a slightly ivory-towerish academic into a more fully rounded person capable of both empathy and a sense of complexity for the people, all the people, he lives among; Eva, from a house-hungry spouse with possibly a grievance about the loss of her own chance at a career into a courageous and devoted spouse and neighbor. Their marriage and love for one another grows stronger with

each new stress placed upon them. What seems in the early pages of the diaries a marriage held together perhaps largely by routine and convenience, by its mid-point has become a thing of unshakable devotion and deep affection.

The diaries provide documentation of many different aspects of German society under the Third Reich, despite the restriction of their being written from one man's point of view. Among these is the obvious fact that many Germans had no use for Hitler, were sympathetic to those the Nazis designated as Jews or otherwise non-Aryan and, as might be expected in a situation where getting the wherewithal just to survive became more and more difficult, were largely ignorant of the strictures Jews were living under. Why else would they risk their own freedom and lives by befriending and assisting individual Jews? There is a naïveté about some of their expressions of support — a stranger crossing the street to shake the hand of someone wearing a yellow star (much to the chagrin of the person wearing it, knowing how dangerous such an act was, primarily for the star-wearer); a shopkeeper slipping extra food into the bag of someone wearing the star and offering a whispered word of encouragement to hang on, it won't be long now till the war is over.

There are far too many of these acts, some of them a good deal more substantial than what I've indicated, to put them down to anything other than sincerity. And on the question of what ordinary Germans knew about the "Final Solution," even Jews themselves didn't realize what shipment to Theresienstadt meant until the last year or two of the war. For a time they even entertained a belief that in Theresienstadt they would at least have a better diet and get decent medical care. It's hard to believe non-Jews could have known something more, at least not ordinary working stiffs, despite the manic, irrational broadcasts by Goebbels blaming "World Jewry" for all the evils in the world (in one he insists the Jews using their American dupes were bombing Rome in order to destroy Christianity, just a first step in their plan to kill all the gentiles in the world). Even when the truth becomes clear about Auschwitz and the other death camps, some supporters of Hitler insist the Fuehrer could not have known about the camps because he was a "man of peace."

Klemperer writes:

"...National Socialism was already [in 1923] ...powerful and popular. Except that at the time I did not yet see it like that. How comforting and depressing that is! Depressing: Hitler really was in line with the will of the German people. Comforting: One never really knows what is going on. Then the Republic seemed secure, today the Third Reich appears secure."

But he also writes, later:

"There is no German or West European Jewish question. Whoever recognizes one, only adopts or confirms the false thesis of the NSDAP and serves its cause. Until 1933 and for at least a good century before that, the German Jews were entirely German and nothing else.... The anti-Semitism, which was always present, is not at all evidence to the contrary. Because the friction between Jews and Aryans was not half as great as that between Protestants and Catholics, or between employers and employees or between East Prussians for example and southern Bavarians or Rhinelanders and Bavarians. The German Jews were part of the German nation, as the French Jews were a part of the French nation, etc. "

There seem, in fact, to be two distinct kinds of (Aryan) Germans in these diaries: Nazi thugs who descend on Jews' apartments, beat up the old women and men and steal the butter off the table before trashing the place; and "ordinary" Germans, even officials like local police who, when they had to visit the Jews Houses, doffed their hats, shook hands, apologized for the intrusion and even offered words of reassurance. One wonders how this could be the same country, never mind the same city. These "good" Germans give Victor hope, though by the end he believes the entire nation will have to be reeducated in the values he believes to have been essential to German culture dating back to the Enlightenment (he blames Romanticism for Nazism). He, happily, lives to see that day and even to reclaim his former professorship at the Technical University of Dresden, which lay then in the Soviet zone and becomes part of East Germany.

One wonders why these diaries are not more widely read as firsthand witness for that horrific period of German history. Is it because life as Klemperer records it is too complex for our sound-bite culture (some of the older men in the Jews House cheer for the Wehrmacht — they had fought against the Brits and French in the first world war and can't bring themselves to change sides). Is it because he insists early on that Zionism and Nazism are ideologically the same thing: blood = land? I keep expecting him to change his mind about Zionism after the slaughter of Jews goes into high gear in 1942-43, but he sticks to his guns. He fully expects to be one of the slaughtered, watches as his neighbors are taken away in twos and threes. He loses his faith in the Germany he believed in before 1933, but he never loses faith in the principles he believes that culture exemplified at its best.

It's impossible to summarize a work as varied and rich as these diaries, never mind give a sense for the experience of living through those years vicariously with the Klemperers. The diaries end in 1945 with a return to their suburban home after living for several weeks as refugees in Bavaria. But that return is, of course, just another beginning. The volume of the diary that takes up where these two leave off extends as far as 1959 and was published in Britain, but not in the US. Klemperer died the following year, 1960, of a heart attack.

Steve Cox says

Most surprising was how quickly after 1933 that the vise began to tighten on Klemperer and his fellow Jews. Second most surprising is how orderly and law-abiding it all was, in a twisted sense. Over the next 12 years, the Jews' rights and privileges were reduced one by one, as Klemperer lost lost his prestigious university job, his house, his food rations, his rights to use Dresden's transportation, etc. Then when almost all Jewish rights were gone and the deportation orders began to be enforced, there was still a pecking order which was by and large upheld by the local authorities. Klemperer watched the majority of his fellow Jews go to the camps, with little illusion as to what awaited them there. He avoided deportation longer than the rest because his wife was an Aryan, and he was a WWI veteran. Still he was next on the list when the Allied bombing of Dresden occurred and he and his wife escaped in the chaos.

Klemperer comes across as a fairly priggish cuss; you'll tire of his self-regard and his constant references to the work on his "dix-huitieme", an academic study of 18th century French thought. But that makes him a real person, dealing with the tedium and trials of daily life under a regime that he watched turn from menacing to murderous, trying to make sense of it all.

Lori says

A fascinating and in-depth journey of the lives of a married couple; the husband, a Jew converted to Christianity, and his Gentile wife. In Nazi Germany, a converted Jew was still a Jew, and so the couple suffered extreme hardship and persecution because of his Jewish heritage. Incredibly detailed---the diary form made you feel as if you were there with them, suffering every indignity every day for seven years and more. Shocking how slowly and deceptively the Nazis gradually took from them every thing they had ever worked for---jobs, status, savings, pension, home, cats, friends, food, privacy. Unbelievable how educated people could have been so fooled into thining that "any day now" they were going to be saved and all the Nazi foolishness would be exposed and ended. REally, an unbelievable read, and only tedious in some of the author's lamentations and the work he was doing on his own personal book.

Tony says

Klemperer, Victor. I WILL BEAR WITNESS. A DIARY OF THE NAZI YEARS: 1933-1941. (1995). ****. Victor Klemperer (1881-1960) was a Jew living in Dresden and teaching French literature at the Technical University there when the National Socialist Party gained power. This diary (Part I of II) begins abruptly on January 14, 1933. This is obviously not when he started his record-keeping. In fact, the diaries themselves have gone through several editors who have had to pare down the material in them in order to make something that is still readable by the average reader. This volume covers the period from 1933 to 1941, and catalogues the slow but inevitable erosion of Jewish dignity and rights under Hitler's regime. Klemperer was fortunate in that his wife, Eva, was Aryan. This put them in a special category where they were not immediately sent off to a concentration camp. The selections from these diaries "chronicle in unparalleled detail the progressive elimination of every private space, the arbitrary cruelty toward those whom the regime classified as Jews, and finally the operation of an opaque (to those who were its victims) apparatus of extermination, that worked slowly, stretching out time to impose an agony of anticipation. Not only does it do so from the inside, as it were, from the perspective of those subjected, but uniquely it does so from the first day to the last of the Third Reich." These diaries provide a new picture of life under that regime written by a man of letters – although he did not write them with a view to their publication. Life was too iffy for that thought. Recommended.
