

The Diaries of
Victor Klemperer
1945-59
The Lesser Evil

'Klemperer's diary deserves to rank alongside that of Anne Frank'
Sunday Times



The Lesser Evil: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1945-1959

Victor Klemperer, Martin Chalmers (Translator)

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Translated from the original German, this final volume of Victor Klemperer's diaries opens in 1945. After the horrors of the war, Victor and Eva's return to their Dresden home seems like a fairytale. Victor tries to resume his distinguished academic career and joins East Germany's Communist Party. In 1951, Eva dies; a year later, aged 70, Victor marries a student—an unlikely but successful love match. But with the growing repression of the Communist Party, and the memory of those who did not survive, Victor's achievements ring hollow. Politics, he comes to believe, is, above all, the choice of "the lesser evil." A masterpiece both of Holocaust literature and memoir.

The Lesser Evil: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1945-1959 Details

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Tristan Colgate says

After the intensity of the first two volumes, the third is somewhat less essential. It focuses on Klemperer's time in East Germany. Whilst still interesting, and still well written, it is less captivating.

Ann Riley says

Hallelujah!!! I finally finished this tome!! It took me forever to get through this book, but it was worth it. I read the first two, equally lengthy volumes without nearly as much trouble. This was a very insightful book in that Klemperer was writing from the perspective of an East German. Reading of his interpretation of events from behind the "iron curtain" was definitely a different view.

Susanne says

Remarkable. Vol. 3

Meaghan says

This third Klemperer diary is much less exciting than the previous two (unsurprising, as the Nazi years and the war are now over) and also much less comprehensive. The first diary covered nine years; the second three and a half; this one covers a little over thirteen years in about the same number of pages as the first two books. The editor marked omissions with ellipses, and I don't know if there was a single entry that didn't have at least one. Sometimes entire entries were eliminated and the editor summarized them in brackets. But, looking at what was left, I don't think I missed much.

After the armistice Victor Klemperer and his wife Eva experienced a remarkable, 180-degree turn of fortune. They got their house back; he was feted by everybody (they were all anxious to demonstrate that THEY had not been Jew-hating Nazis, thank you very much); his academic career rose from the grave and he became a minor celebrity within the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Wealth, fame and international travel (even as far away as China) followed.

Yet from my reading of the diary I can't say Klemperer's postwar years were happy ones. He considered Communism the "lesser evil" to capitalism, but he was uneasy about the similarities he noticed between the Communist government and the Nazis. He witnessed the revival of anti-Semitism and the rise of Holocaust denial. He got embroiled in petty academic infighting while becoming convinced that his star was only on the ascendancy for lack of competitors within the GDR. Eva Klemperer died in 1951 and Victor remarried within a year to Hadwig, a former student who was twenty-five years to his seventy. They deeply loved one another, but he felt guilty for his seeming "betrayal" of Eva and for denying Hadwig her youth and the

possibility of children. And, in the final years, his health went into a marked decline, forcing Hadwig to be a nursemaid to him more often than not.

Were it not for the deep impression Klemperer's earlier diaries made on me, and my determination to see his life through, I probably would not have read this book. But it is a good demonstration of life in the early years of the GDR (before the Berlin Wall was erected) and of much historical interest. Unlike the first two diaries I think this one can stand on its own.

Lysergius says

The third and final part of Victor Klemperer's diary covers the years from 1945 - 1959. Documenting his failures and petty disappointments, his increasing disillusionment with the GDR, his second marriage and his failing health.

Louise Silk says

This third Klemperer diary covers a little over thirteen years beginning in 1945. The first diary covered nine years; the second three and a half. After the armistice Victor Klemperer and his wife Eva experienced a remarkable return. They got their house back; he was feted by everybody anxious to demonstrate that they had not been Jew-hating Nazis; his academic career rose from the grave and he became a minor celebrity within the East German Democratic Republic. His wife, Eva, died in 1951 and Victor married Hadwig, a former student who was twenty-five years to his seventy. Until the end of his life he felt guilty for his betrayal of Eva and for denying Hadwig the possibility of children making his postwar years not happy ones.

Victor considered Communism the lesser evil to capitalism, but he was uneasy about the similarities between the Communist government and the Nazis. He witnessed the revival of anti-Semitism and the rise of Holocaust denial. He continued to consider himself a first and foremost a German and to deny his Jewish heritage which in and of itself continued to be his main personal nemesis. Rather than resolving themselves, these contradictions became more acute after 1945. This diary shows how he tried to come to terms with his life, his religion and his politics while trying to catch up from past deprivation and to achieve under continually challenging circumstances.

David says

Klemperer picks up where his two earlier diary volumes leave off. I only intended to read this volume until we reached the period where things stabilized after the war (perhaps late 1940s), but it was very interesting and I read to the end. Klemperer's home ended up being in East Germany, and while he could have gotten to the West, he decided to stay. Title comes from Klemperer's decision to support the Communist government because he was mortified by all the former Nazis who were used by the western Allies to form the West German government.

As in Volumes I & II, the notes were very good.

John says

inside look of day to day life in East Germany after 1945--

Scott Wood says

Proof that living through a totalitarian regime doesn't give one any insight into the causes of totalitarianism.

Grace Walters says

Not as compelling as the first volume ("I Shall Bear Witness") but a faithful picture of the early days of the GDR.

Victoria Stevens says

In the final diary, Klemperer transitions through miraculous physical salvation and recovery... only to become small and solitary near the end of his life. In this outcome, he is but human.

Read this volume bearing in mind the question of what Anne Frank might have made of her life had she survived? In survival, would she have been relegated to an historical footnote rather than remaining a symbol of hope and love?
