Although Victor Klemperer’s 1947 study of the wiles and distortions of Nazi language, *LTI, Notizbuch eines Philologen* (LTI for *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, the language of the Third Reich) achieved something of the status of an underground though largely unread classic, it was only in the mid-1990s, with the publication of the diaries he kept during the Nazi period, that this scholar of French literature acquired broad-based fame within Western intellectual circles. The diaries constitute perhaps the most intricately detailed, sharply perceptive, and painfully wrought chronicles of everyday life in the Third Reich that we possess, at least from the viewpoint of its victims. The immense interest generated by the diaries was also, no doubt, spurred by the author’s prickly personality and the ideological conflicts he had to confront in the face of Nazism. They demonstrate how Klemperer, Wilhelmian son of a Reform rabbi, born 1881, convert to Protestantism, radical assimilationist, passionately committed to *Deutschtum*, opposed to all forms of Jewish particularism, and obsessively anti-Zionist, was faced with the collapse of his spiritual and intellectual worlds. The diaries register this process of decomposition and the valiant, if often hopelessly contradictory, attempts of this almost archetypically assimilatory Jew to somehow salvage and reconstitute them.

But Klemperer did not only leave behind his records of the Nazi period. He was, almost instinctively, an inveterate diarist. Although there are no diaries for the period from his birth in 1881 through 1918, he did write a massive two-volume autobiographical memoir—*Curriculum vitae*—covering those years, and the *Tagebücher* for the Weimar Republic alone come to well over 1600 printed pages. Those chronicling the Nazi period are of a similar length. Just as diligently (or compulsively), he continued the habit into the post–Second World War period (1945–1959). With the publication of these diaries—in which he opted for Communism and a life in the German Democratic Republic—we are able to gain a fuller perspective on the course of his tempestuous life. It is through his graphomaniac reflex (Klemperer himself came to feel overwhelmed by the mass of material he had accumulated) that the whole course
of German history from the 1880s through the GDR of 1959 is reflected and is given peculiar individual expression. Klemperer’s chronicles function as a kind of seismometer of the extraordinary times and changes through which he had to live and respond. In them, the deep historicity of personal existence, of individual fate and choice, becomes uniquely transparent. Were we left merely with the Weimar diaries, we would, I suppose, judge them as occasionally penetrating mirrors of their times, politically perceptive in places, sensitive to the growing anti-Semitism and jingoism of the period, a disarmingly candid personal record of a frustrated liberal and Romance scholar, but not much more than that. Clearly it is within the extremities of the dark Nazi years that Klemperer, for all his self-absorption (perhaps because of it), transcended himself. Attuned to, and skilled at, the art of daily recording, he is transformed into a master observer and chronicler. In the thick descriptions of the National Socialist quotidian life—the graphic portrayal of everyday fear, uncertainty, confusion, growing isolation, slender hope, impoverishment, and expectation of death—Klemperer’s chronicles attain a kind of grandeur, clarity, and moral stature. They have stamped our image of him as a kind of hero, menschlich, allzu menschlich, to be sure, vain, fussy, vulnerable, and idiosyncratic, but a kind of hero (or anti-hero) nevertheless. What has changed—or remained consistent—now that we have the post–World War II diaries? How, now, are we to measure the life and situate the man? And, more prosaically, what do the diaries reveal about the nature of Klemperer’s choices and commitments, his life in the GDR? More than ever, the profoundly conditioned connections between the personal and the political remain in evidence: whether in relatively normal or extraordinary times, all of Klemperer’s diaries underline the ways in which larger forces impinge upon ordinary lives. To be sure, the context of the post-1945 diaries, though shaped by the immediate Nazi past, is a different one. It is clear that we cannot expect the same drama, the same starkness, even the same heroism. Indeed, in mid-1945, upon the downfall of Nazism and the return to some kind of normalcy—“again to eat well, to drink well, to go on a nice drive, visit the sea, go to the cinema…no 20-year-old can be half as life-hungry…”—Klemperer observed to himself, “Compared with the previous situation, you are now in paradise.” Relative to what had gone before, as a radically assimilated Jew, one could live a semblance of “normal” life—gray and ambiguous though it may have been—in the German Democratic Republic. But, of course, it is precisely the grayness and the ambiguities here that constitute the interest, the moral tension, of these documents. Anyone familiar with Klemperer’s pre-1945 apolitical, liberal Bildungsbürgertum existence is faced with an anomaly: the commitment to the GDR, the metamorphosis into a Communist and a loyal party member cries out for explanation. This becomes especially necessary given Klemperer’s previous outspoken critical hostility to Communism, a distaste matched only by his contempt for Nazism and Zionism. Indeed, in his 1933–1945 diaries, he consistently damned National Socialism precisely because it so resembled