



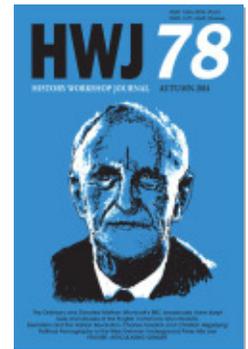
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Fulfilling the Prophecy

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challenge the national mythology. And if his book doesn't in any way supplant Avrich, it is certainly worthy to sit beside it.

D. D. Guttenplan is London correspondent for *The Nation* magazine. *American Radical*, his biography of the journalist I. F. Stone, will appear in 2009.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, New York, 1980, p. 238.

2 Zinn, *People's History*, p. 240.

3 Lucy Parsons always denied having any African ancestry, claiming instead to be the daughter of a father from the Creek nation and a Mexican mother. But since any admission of slave parentage would have made the Parsons' marriage illegal under the laws against miscegenation – and since the available evidence, Lucy's appearance and the plentiful contemporary reports all suggest African-American origin – most historians have tended to discount her claims.

4 Quoted in Philip S. Foner and David Roediger, *Our Own Time: a History of American Labour and the Working Day*, Westport, CT, 1989, p. 82, cited by James Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, New York, 2006, p. 23.

5 Green, *Haymarket*, p. 141.

6 Green, *Haymarket*, pp. 167–8.

7 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, Princeton, 1984, p. 217.

8 Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, pp. 221–31; Green, *Haymarket*, pp. 207–8.

9 Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, pp. 410–11.

10 One of the most celebrated poets of his day, Lindsay was born in Springfield, Illinois the son of a physician; the family home was next door to the governor's mansion. Lindsay committed suicide in 1931, and his books have all been out of print since the 1960s, but the text of 'The Eagle That is Forgotten' can be found on the internet at <http://poetry.poetryx.com/poems/9487/>. Howard Fast's biographical novel about Altgeld is *The American*, 1946.

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Fulfilling the Prophecy

by *Nicholas Stargardt*

Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2007; pp. 870 + xxvi. £30; 978-0-297-81877-9.

On 5 March 1944, Kurt Gerstein wrote in a letter to his father, a retired judge,

I do not know what goes on inside you, and would not presume to claim the smallest right to know. But when a man has spent his professional life

in the service of the law something must have happened inside him during these last few years. I was deeply perturbed by one thing you said to me, or rather wrote to me. . . . You said: Hard times demand tough methods! – No, no maxim of that kind is adequate to justify what has happened.

In a generational role reversal, the son pleaded with the father to take a moral stance, warning him that he too ‘will have to stand up and be called to account for the age in which you live and what is happening in it’. Gerstein *films* was a hygiene officer in the Waffen-SS who had been deeply disturbed by witnessing the lengthy, three-hour procedure of gassing a group of Jews from Lwów at the Bełżec extermination camp in August 1942. Gerstein was not there by accident: he had been sent with a delivery of *Zyklon B*, the canisters of prussic-acid pellets used in the gas chambers of Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau; and he would continue these deliveries till the end of the war. But he was not just another cog in the machine. On his journey back to Berlin from Bełżec, he fell into conversation with the Swedish attaché and told him what he had seen, disclosing his own identity and invoking the liberal Protestant Bishop of Berlin Otto Dibelius as a reference. Back in Berlin, Gerstein informed Dibelius himself, as well as his Catholic counterpart, Bishop Konrad Count von Preysing, and he tried to brief the Papal Nuncio and the Swiss legation too; but all in vain.

The Swedish attaché’s report to his government was promptly buried. Preysing’s campaign to persuade his fellow Catholic Bishops to do something culminated a year later in discussion of a petition against the ‘deportation of non-Aryans in a manner that is scornful of all human rights’, but nothing came of the initiative. Only one leading German cleric protested against the murder of the Jews: Theophil Wurm, the Bishop of Württemberg, in a private letter to Hitler in July 1943. Lacking any wider endorsement, Gerstein’s spiritual isolation was complete.

Saul Friedländer first thought about these actors in 1964, when he published a set of documents on Pius XII and the Third Reich, followed by a study of Kurt Gerstein. Since then Friedländer has argued that we need to understand the Holocaust in its emotional and psychological as well as its historical dimensions. More than twenty years ago, he had a famous public exchange of letters with Martin Broszat, then the doyen of German historians of the Third Reich, about whether the ‘final solution’ was central to the historiography of Nazi Germany and whether the voices of the victims were relevant. In an extraordinarily unself-aware assertion, Broszat suggested that Jewish historians were inherently and disablingly subjective, with true objectivity reserved for German practitioners of his then-dominant brand of structuralist history.

Friedländer’s answer to Broszat has now been delivered by the two monumental volumes which make up his *Nazi Germany and the Jews*. The first volume told the story of the German Jews trapped in the Third Reich up to Hitler’s invasion of Poland in September 1939; the second now covers

the war and the 'final solution' as a pan-European process. From the outset, there was clearly something special about Friedländer's writing, with its insistence on multiple layers of interpretation and its juxtaposition of many vantage points and voices.

In the first volume Friedländer traced how a minority of Germans was attracted to anti-semitic violence, matched by the retreat of the majority into civil cowardice. This frequently ironic image of unheroic and self-absorbed behaviour narrows and hardens in the pages of *The Years of Destruction* to the story of a far more radical anti-semitism, which, Friedländer contends, now encompassed the social majority in Germany, wedded to their *Führer* and his war against the Jews. He also broadens the frame to encompass the whole of occupied Europe, yet without surrendering his sharp eye for detail and multiplicity. By focusing on the expectations, knowledge and calculations of those affected on every side and at all levels, Friedländer paints the most varied and vivid, but cumulatively also the bleakest group portrait of a Europe in which the guardians of its heritage abandoned both their own values and a core part of its Judeo-Christian moral foundation. From the anti-semitic leadership of the Polish Catholic Church, which openly welcomed the ghetto-ization of the Jews, to the studied indifference of the Communist resistance, non-Nazi and even anti-Nazi organizations in occupied Europe simply shrugged off any humanitarian responsibility as they focused their efforts on their own sectional interests.

The failure of the Churches in almost every country was all the more profound because they were virtually the only civic bodies that continued to enjoy an independent existence in Nazi-controlled Europe. Their abandonment of the Jews lies at the heart of Friedländer's book: it is central to his story of Europeans' destruction of their own cultural heritage. His is not a plea for a heroic resistance which was almost everywhere absent. Rather, it is a sombre insistence on stripping away all those historical alibis and myths built up to convince post-war Europeans that they had not been tainted by their experience of German occupation..

With the genocide placed in these pan-European dimensions, the multitude of non-Nazi or even non-German institutions and actors who told themselves at the time that they were choosing the lesser evil becomes a crucial part of the story of isolation and destruction: in every sense, the Jews had nowhere to go. This story of abandonment yields the full significance of the Holocaust for European culture and society. For Friedländer, the Holocaust touched everyone – and he applies this rule unflinchingly to the Jewish elites as well. Where postwar commemoration in Israel focused on the ghetto fighters in Warsaw and Białystok, Friedländer refuses to find consolation in tales of either physical or spiritual resistance

Instead, he confronts the reader with the 'choiceless choices' of the ghetto leaderships, at their starkest when he recounts what happened to Jacob Gens, the head of the Vilna ghetto's Jewish police. In October 1942, he and his Jewish policemen were sent to the nearby town of Oszmiana and ordered

to kill the Jewish inhabitants. Alongside Lithuanian units, Gens and his men did so, but only after he had negotiated the number to be executed down from 1,400 to 400. Friedländer quotes Hermann Kruk's ghetto chronicle as well as the diary of the famed founder of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Zelig Kalmanovich, to tell us that back in the Vilna ghetto, Gens's impossible quandary was fully understood (pp. 436–7). Such situations marked the moral end point of Jewish attempts to mediate with the Germans. For most of their duration the Jewish ghettos of Vilna and Łódź sought to 'work to live', contributing to the German war economy and to the enrichment of venal German officials alike. In this process the logic of forced collusion was the same for each of the ghetto leaders, and the Germans went on using them until they were ready to destroy the last remnants: so they shot Gens eleven months after Oszmiana, just before they finally liquidated the Vilna ghetto.

In the Israel in which Friedländer spent his twenties, Zionists were horrified at the apparent passivity of the European Jews, and Hannah Arendt famously condemned the Jewish Council leaders for leading their communities to their deaths. But Friedländer is surely right that the greater fact was that they had already been abandoned by the great majority of non-Jewish Europeans. He shows that armed resistance simply led the Nazis to accelerate the pace of killing; and that those who did fight back in the ghettos and camps only did so when they knew they were being closed down. Instead of condemning men like Jacob Gens, or even the tyrannically capricious Chaim Rumkowski, whose failings have often been recounted, Friedländer's central point is that the Jewish leaderships had no choice but to comply as long as they had a residual community left to shield.

The Jewish elites of Western Europe emerge from this narrative paying the price for having assimilated so thoroughly and absorbed the secular nationalism of their role models so deeply. In France the traditional body representing Jews, the Consistoire Central, came under the leadership of Jacques Helbronner, a man with impeccable national and Republican credentials. He shared the conventional hostility of conservative nationalists to the foreign Jews who, like Friedländer's own parents, had fled the pre-war German occupations (in their case, of Prague). And Helbronner remained confident that his close personal ties to the Vichy regime and the French episcopate would help him to defend the French Jews. When the first mass round-ups of foreign Jews were carried out in Paris in August 1942, he refused to let it interrupt his holiday plans. And when his own turn came, in October 1943, no one, not even his close friend and head of the French Catholic Church, Cardinal Gerlier, intervened to prevent his deportation to Auschwitz.

A similar story can be told of the Dutch elite who ran the Amsterdam Jewish Council. In the face of the Germans' overwhelming force and absolute determination, it was perhaps understandable that those with least power and facing the greatest danger would seek to deflect the threat on to

others. But Friedländer's wider point is that German occupation greatly aggravated existing ethno-nationalist tendencies, including those within assimilated and liberal West European Jewish communities.

Friedländer achieves his narrative feat of integrating perpetrators and victims, critics and bystanders within his history by adopting the structure of a chronicle, unfolding it in six months at a time. He charts the careful adjustments in German law and policy, but the central narrators, who animate the chronicle and give it the yardstick of individual humanity, are Jewish diarists: Victor Klemperer in Dresden, Etty Hillesum and Anne Frank in Amsterdam, Moshe Flinker in Brussels, Mihail Sebastian in Bucharest, Dawid Sierakowiak in Łódź and Yiskhok Rudashevski in Vilna. Sebastian wonders what has happened to his brother in Paris in June 1940, when he expects the French defeat to 'find release in one long pogrom'. For Klemperer, the same events precipitate a visit from a widow in deep mourning, thoughtfully bringing him the socks, shirts and underpants which had belonged to her recently-killed soldier husband. Nothing better conveys the enormous scale of these events, or their duration, than this sense of time passing so slowly, as some of the same motifs and actors come around again and again: German occupation officials pleading against having to house or feed any more deportees; Himmler trying to prevent the Security Police and the SS from becoming corrupted by the business of mass murder; German firms snapping up Jewish assets in order to gain a toehold within major Dutch companies.

The structure of the chronicle also allows Friedländer to shift the balance from instigation to process and social impact. This is a major historiographic shift: for decades, historians have been interested principally in the moment of decision to murder, whether this was the decision taken on high by Hitler, or those numerous decisions of reserve policemen in the field, famously debated by Daniel Goldhagen and Christopher Browning in the 1990s. This liminal moment which turned men into perpetrators matters to Friedländer too, as I will discuss below, but his major achievement is to broaden the focus out again and depict the enactment of this decision across a whole continent.

* * *

In the 1970s Saul Friedländer was moved to explore his own childhood during the German occupation, when he had been sent away by his Czech Jewish parents to be hidden in a French convent school. Here, with its dark building, endless prayers and the nuns' reverence for Marshal Pétain's struggle against godlessness and communism, Paul Friedländer was received into the Church as Paul-Henri Ferland. The simple, literal faith of this ultramontanist brand of Catholicism gave the young boy a new security and focus. Reflecting on this period later, he tried to recapture the feelings which had animated him then:

Had God not tested me because he loved me more than the others, thus pointing out to me the road to sanctity? All these thoughts elated me . . . I confess that I have never again felt the emotion that used to grip me when, kneeling in the big chapel during a solemn high mass, I heard Madame Vernier strike the first chords of a fugue or even a simple hymn on the harmonium.

What had happened to his own absent parents was something Paul did not learn until eighteen months after liberation. Friedländer now reverted to his original name, joined the *Irgun* and emigrated to Israel. That Paul, now Saul, Friedländer would become a historian, let alone *the* contemporary historian of the Holocaust, was not foreseeable – but perhaps his need to know was. This is what singles him out amongst his peers: a refusal to stop at the often technically demanding challenge of establishing the relationship between ideologies, policies and killings – the complex contours of the external, causal history: a need to know what it meant in personal terms too.

It is the Jewish diarists who fulfil Friedländer's aim of avoiding the flattening and packaging effects of historical explanation. Almost all his key chroniclers were also acute observers of themselves, but this is not something which he explores. The elderly Klemperer, sent to work in a factory in Dresden, lost much of his social snobbery, surprised in the 1930s by how little assistance his erstwhile academic colleagues had given him, and how much he received during the war from his mainly female co-workers. As starvation engulfed the Łódź ghetto, the domestic conflicts in the Sierakowiak family turned into real hatred, the son forced to look on impotently while his self-sacrificing mother starved and his father devoured most of the family's tiny rations. Friedländer's narrative self-restraint here has its costs: although we are invited to see the world through their eyes, we learn very little about the inward transformation his chroniclers underwent.

Then there is that other voice, thundering through the silence of the collaborationist regimes and the Churches: Hitler's. He rages and rants about the Jews, Roosevelt, Stalin, the Jews to all who will listen. Whether he is addressing the troops on the eastern front, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, his barber, Himmler, the Finnish foreign minister, Goebbels or the 'old fighters' of the movement; whether he is monologuing late at night in his field headquarters, writing officially to Pétain, speaking over the radio to the German people, or dictating his political testament in his bunker in Berlin, the language and formulations remained remarkably consistent. Following the contours of his famous 'prophecy' of 30 January 1939 – that a new war would bring about the liquidation of the Jews – Hitler's rage was always defensive, always retaliatory, always threatening that the Jews, who had plotted the world war and Germany's destruction, would be destroyed themselves. He returned to his 'prophecy' time and again, not least in December 1941 when his declaration of war on the US was carried by an anti-semitic tirade against Roosevelt and his Jewish backers. For

Friedländer, this was the culminating moment when Hitler decided on the 'final solution'.

Friedländer's narrative can be read as a chronicle of this prophecy fulfilled. Compared with the views of other historians, his view is both more traditional, in its emphasis on Hitler's obsession with the Jews, and quite different, in its perspective on the German people. This might be mistaken for another round of the old intentionalist-functionalist debate, with Friedländer adding his weight to the Hitler-centred interpretations of Lucy Dawidowicz and Gerald Fleming against structuralists like Broszat. Yet he takes a consensus position here, not that different from syntheses proposed by Ian Kershaw or Mark Roseman, in which weight is given both to Hitler's decision and to the war's sudden escalation in October-December 1941 from a short campaign against the Soviet Union to an unlimited global conflict. Where Friedländer strikes out on his own is in his account of what the Holocaust meant to the German people:

Hitler was surrounded by the hysterical adoration and blind faith of so many, for so long, that well after Stalingrad... countless Germans still believed in his promises of victory. ... A metahistorical enemy demanded, when the time for the decisive struggle arrived, a metahistorical personality to lead the fight against those forces of evil.... As the struggle reached its critical phase, at the height of the war, to lose faith in Hitler meant only one outcome: the prospect of horrendous retaliation at the hands of 'Jewish liquidation squads', in Goebbels's words. Robbing the Jews contributed to the upholding of the *Volksstaat*; murdering them and fanning the fears of retribution became the ultimate bond of Führer and *Volk* in the collapsing *Führerstaat* (pp. 657–8).

This is a view which Friedländer first developed in 1982 in a short essayistic book called *Reflets du Nazisme*, and it has remained central to his interpretation ever since. He is on strong ground when he argues that exterminating the Jews became the war that Hitler *could* win. It is less clear, however, whether this objective ever fully replaced the other war. Even at the end, Hitler and Goebbels were still entertaining fantastical hopes, imagining that Roosevelt's death might destroy the Allied coalition, just as Frederick II was saved from catastrophe by the sudden demise of Catherine the Great (and Hitler kept Frederick's portrait in the bunker with him in the final weeks). Hardly a rational basis for hope, but hope's very presence checks the purity of the nihilistic urge to destroy and be destroyed.

What is at stake here is not Hitler's psycho-biography, but 'why tens of millions of Germans blindly followed him to the end, why many still believed in him at the end, and not a few, after the end' (pp. 656–7). This question is crucial to Friedländer's enterprise. He does not simply ascribe generalized nihilistic, destructive urges to Hitler. That has long been popular in all the wrong places. The notion that Hitler and Goebbels wanted to kill the German

people when they finally killed themselves has provided one of the oldest alibis amongst conservative German nationalists: as Hitler's final victims, they were implicitly innocent of his crimes (replayed recently in the Hirschgiebel film *Downfall*). Such slipshod special pleading is anathema to Friedländer. For him, all the destructive impulses are concentrated relentlessly, and almost solely, upon the Jews. For Friedländer, Hitler's rants about the Jews are not just the ravings of one possessed – though they are that too – but more ominously proffered an enticing promise to redeem the German nation by purging it of all the Jewish influences which had allegedly led to defeat in 1918. This thesis of 'redemptive anti-semitism' as '*the mobilising myth of the regime*' (p. 288) is Friedländer's distinctive interpretative contribution. And it provides the unifying arch joining the two volumes of his history of *Nazi Germany and the Jews* into a single great work.

But how satisfying is this explanation? The nihilistic and redemptive drives to destroy the Jews have to face two tests. First, there is the counter-argument that many of those who carried out the Holocaust in the east saw this merely as the first step within a much larger plan to conquer, ethnically 'cleanse' and colonize eastern Europe. Friedländer acknowledges the work of historians like Christopher Browning, Michael Wildt, Ulrich Herbert and Dieter Pohl, who have pushed this agenda, but he does not engage with the outlook and views of key actors within the SS-Police empire. To do so would undoubtedly have ruptured the narrative symmetry of the book, with the amplified irrationality of Hitler's voice as *the* counterpoint to the quiet reasoning of the Jewish diarists. But not to examine the outlook of those charged with carrying out the destruction is also to neglect a key alternative to the nihilistic, millenarian interpretation. For, if they saw killing the Jews as a part of colonial war, then the romantic, irrational uniqueness of the Third Reich becomes somewhat less: mass murder begins to revert once more from end in itself to a means to an end; true, the peculiar relentlessness of the Nazi pursuit of Jews in places, from Rhodes to Southern France, which they had no plans to colonize, still needs explaining, but this is a discussion Friedländer largely avoids.

The second test concerns the propensity of 'ordinary Germans', as Goldhagen dubbed them, to embrace the radical anti-semitic violence of the regime during the war. There are examples of ordinary soldiers, like the one Friedländer quotes writing home from Brest-Litovsk in June 1942, describing the shooting of 1300 'men, women and children' in the pits outside town and speculating that 'if the war goes on much longer, the Jews will be turned into sausage and served to Russian war prisoners and to the Jewish specialized workers...' (p. 426). But what is missing are other kinds of reaction: the more complex palette of emotions – shame, indifference, indignation, resigned disgust – which featured for example in Friedländer's account of the 1938 pogrom in volume one is largely absent from the German side in volume two. Friedländer's argument is also much more hard-hitting: he is arguing that the Germans continued fighting the war

because the chief effect of feelings of responsibility for the genocide was to deepen and strengthen the current of radical anti-semitism. In the end, we are told, it was not just Hitler but the German people who were waging war principally against the Jews.

Since the early 1970s historians have scrutinized Nazi reports on morale and public opinion for what they tell us about German civilians' attitudes towards the Holocaust, and it has become clear that references to 'what we did to the Jews' were most widespread in the wake of heavy bombing raids on German cities. From Hamburg to Bavaria, Germans spoke about the Allied bombing as 'retaliation' for Germany's treatment of the Jews. In Rothenburg ob der Tauber, to cite just one example, local Nazi officials confirmed that 'One often hears the opinion amongst national comrades that the terror attacks are a consequence of the measures carried out against the Jews'.¹

What is much less clear is what such opinions meant. For the Jews trapped in the ghettos, their own persecution and murder framed their understanding of the war; whereas, for Germans, I suggest, the war framed their understanding of and response to the murder of the Jews. Their respective positions were marked by huge asymmetries not only of power, but also of empathy and identification. Germans' emphasis in airing their retaliatory fears was almost certainly on their perceptions of their own plight, on the bombing: and so I think we will only understand how they framed their knowledge of the Holocaust when we ask how they perceived the war as a whole. Just as continued trust in Hitler's leadership does not show that Germans shared his view of the Jewish threat, so there is no reason to suppose that a whole nation was gripped by the same nihilistic embrace of the power of destruction which was such a prominent element in Hitler's own thinking. There is a major problem that still needs to be explained here: how do we account for the willingness of Germans to go on fighting a war they knew was being prosecuted by genocidal means? These questions remain very open ones; and none of it makes the moral abyss any less deep, or the Holocaust less central than in Friedländer's account.

There is no consolation in Friedländer's narrative, and yet he writes with such compassion and understanding as well as analytical rigour that he is able to achieve that rarest of things – to enlarge and change how one thinks and feels about events we have heard others speak about many times. More than any other historian that I can think of, Friedländer has fused the intellectual and emotional journeys which makes a truly great writer. This is the masterpiece he set out many years ago to create.

Nicholas Stargardt teaches history at Magdalen College, Oxford. He is the author of *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (Cape and Vintage, London, 2005). He is currently writing a social history of Germany in the Second World War.

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Death Becomes Her

by *Lauren Kassell*

Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006; 224 pp., £19.99; ISBN 9 78030 0116991.

Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, Zone Books, New York, 2006; 419 pp., £23.95; ISBN 1 890951 676.

Every student of anatomy has seen her. She's draped across the table, head cocked, lips parted, eyes closed, breasts bare, legs splayed. Death, a skeleton holding his staff, stands above her, static in an animated audience of physicians and their pupils. The woman is dead, her belly open and her womb empty, a flap of skin folded back by the man who holds our gaze and instructs us with a pointed finger.

He is Andreas Vesalius (1514–64) and the image is the title page of his *De humani corporis fabrica*, an epochal account of the anatomy of the human body complete with sumptuous engravings. Along with *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* by Copernicus, also published in 1543, it marks a shift from medieval scholasticism to modern science. In the triumphalist history, Vesalius is the hero of modern human anatomy. When he was appointed as professor of surgery and anatomy at the University of Padua in 1537 he changed the way the subject was taught. For two centuries physicians had presided over anatomies, reading from Galen and instructing a surgeon to demonstrate the parts of the body. Vesalius took hold of the knife, and discovered that the bodies before him did not fit Galen's descriptions. Galen, he concluded, had worked from animals. A new account of human anatomy was needed. He conducted hundreds of dissections, recorded his observations in detailed drawings, and hired expert engravers to prepare the illustrations for his masterpiece. His book was the foundation of comparative anatomy and the beginning of scientific medicine.