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Albert S. Lindemann. *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xxiv + 568 pp. Index. \$22.95 (pb). ISBN 0 521 79538 9.

Review by Michael R. Shurkin, The Johns Hopkins University.

As a student and teacher of Jewish history, the two subjects I go to great lengths to avoid are anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. In fact, I try to banish them to as small a place in my thinking and my curricula as I responsibly can. I consider it my obligation to combat the tendency common to Jews and non-Jews alike to flatten the historical experience of Jews into a narrative of suffering through the ages or allow what were only a few years in one exceptional century to eclipse a history some three millennia long. When I tell people that I specialize in French Jews, for instance, they invariably respond by making some reference either to Dreyfus or to Vichy, as if there could be nothing more to French-Jewish history. Furthermore, it is extraordinarily difficult to discuss anti-Semitism and the Holocaust while steering clear of emotion. Objective inquiry slips too easily into condemnation and blame.

For these reasons I am predisposed to like Albert S. Lindemann's fascinating book, *Esau's Tears*, which appeared in paperback last year. *Esau's Tears* is a sweeping comparative study of modern anti-Semitism in Austria, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Russia, and the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lindemann takes aim at the large and rapidly growing body of work on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust and condemns the whole lot for its "disappointing intellectual standards and doubtful conclusions" (p. ix). He is primarily concerned with the related tendencies to overstate the importance of anti-Semitism, to oversimplify it, and to reduce its history to a teleology according to which the rise of anti-Semitism caused the Holocaust. His purpose is to demonstrate that the significance of anti-Semitism has been exaggerated, that anti-Semitism, because it has been oversimplified, is misunderstood, and that anti-Semitism (as opposed to chance and personality) did not cause the Holocaust. To prove these points, he marshals an enormous quantity of information and covers a vast amount of ground. His method throughout the book is to impress upon his readers the complexity of his subject. His achievement, in his own words, is "not to reveal events in all their clarity but in all their ambiguity" (p. 545).

Lindemann's unwritten rule is that "ambiguity" always means "less significant." Significance, of course, is relative, and Lindemann's approach works well when he is writing about France and the United States, two countries where the argument for the insignificance of anti-Semitism is easy to make. These also are the cases that Lindemann knows best, having previously published a book that compared the Dreyfus Affair with the Leo Frank Affair as well as a comparable episode in Russia.[1] In addition, at least with France he has the weight of historiography on his side. Philip Nord and Michael Burns, whom Lindemann cites extensively, both minimize the significance of anti-Semitism in late nineteenth-

century France.[2] He can comfortably draw from them and his own work to conclude that the ideas of France's notorious Jew-haters such as Drumont and the Assumptionists never really caught on, and the Dreyfus Affair, noisy as it was, was ultimately less significant than commonly thought (p. 234). Or, that its significance had little to do with anti-Semitism (pp. 231-233). As for the United States, Lindemann does not need the help of a Nord or a Burns to make his case. The caliber of the scholarship on American anti-Semitism is light enough for Lindemann to brush aside. He correctly asserts that anyone with any sense of the realities in Europe would recognize the exceptionalism of the American exile. Those who argue otherwise are guilty of "provincialism" (p. 226).

Lindemann's arguments become much more problematic when he struggles with the hard cases, Austria, Germany, Romania, and Russia. He wants very badly to convince us that things were not as bad in these countries as is commonly assumed, and to do so he toils to demonstrate the ambiguity of Austrian, German, Romanian, and Russian anti-Semitism. He leaves no stone unturned in order to prove that every stone can be turned, tirelessly claiming that everything has another side that must be kept in mind to understand the past correctly. Unfortunately, he is often grasping. He claims, for instance, that neither Richard Wagner nor Wilhelm Marr, the man who coined the word "anti-Semitic," were as anti-Semitic as is usually assumed. Lindemann's reasoning? Wagner's anti-Semitism was ambiguous because he had Jewish friends, although Lindemann also tells us that he treated them cruelly. Marr similarly gave "mixed signals" because he was married three times to Jewish women (p. 127). Such information does little to support the claim that Wagner and Marr's anti-Semitism was anything less than it appears in their published writings and public pronouncements. It makes them look worse, not better, and one can only wonder about the self-respect of Wagner's Jewish friends or Marr's Jewish wives.

More importantly, in the course of Lindemann's stone turning serious problems emerge with his thesis about anti-Semitism. Lindemann never actually defines the word "anti-Semitism," a fact which hobbles much of his analysis. However, he does advance the following two-part thesis: 1. Anti-Semitism cannot be an entirely baseless hatred, "having nothing to do with Jewish reality or Jewish action in the real world..." (p. 20). In other words, anti-Semitism results from actual experience with Jews, who must possess qualities that provoke fear or resentment. Jews therefore share some measure of responsibility for the hatred aimed at them. 2. The "core" of that reality is "the rise of Jews" in the modern period, a rise that "was real and not just a perception, even if the perceived truth was exaggerated" (p. 21).

In order for this thesis to work, Lindemann has to establish the reality of a threatening behavior or characteristic. The "rise of the Jews," whether measured demographically, economically, culturally, or politically, was real enough, but Lindemann has to do some work and demonstrate what exactly Jews did that was a problem. He sometimes succeeds. For instance, his discussion of the astonishing prominence of Jews among the thinkers, leaders, and shooters of Eastern Europe's radical revolutionary movements makes it easier to understand the common identification of Jews as a revolutionary threat. The noisy intervention of Jewish individuals and Jewish organizations at the Congress of Berlin certainly makes it appear as if Jews wielded real power. However, the appearance of power is not proof of power. In most cases, and the Congress of Berlin is probably one of them, the only power "the Jews" possess is the appearance of power or the power that non-Jews imaginatively attribute to them. Such distinctions do not trouble Lindemann. He is too willing to accept clichés for fact. At best his method establishes that negative stereotypes about Jews were nearly universal and that holding such stereotypes could therefore be considered reasonable. But is it fair to accept anti-Jewish clichés when

Lindemann wants us to reject similar banalities about the anti-Semitism of Europeans? Lindemann must do better.

The best example of Lindemann's failure to do so is his section on Romania, where he wishes to rescue Romanians from their reputation as brutish 'extra-chromosome' anti-Semites by transferring much of the blame for their Jew-hatred to Jewish shoulders. "...Even a small effort at even-handedness," Lindemann asserts, "reveals that Romanian anti-Semitism derived from something more than the lower moral tone of Romanians: The activities and nature of Jews in Romania had something quite palpably to do with the hatred directed at them. A brief look at Romanian history is revealing (p. 309)."

What I expected to follow was a careful account of Romanian Jews' social and economic relations with their neighbors. Such things can be very edifying. There are, for example, a number of thorough studies of rural life in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Alsace that leave no doubt as to the reality of the destructive relationship between peasants and Jewish money lenders.[3] However, Lindemann gives no concrete information about Jews in Romania and no evidence that they did their neighbors any harm. Instead, he readily accepts as true the testimonies of anti-Jewish Romanian nationalists. Their main complaint against Jews, moreover, is curious. They alleged that Polish-Jewish immigrants in Romania refused to learn Romanian and embrace Romanian national identity because they denigrated Romanian culture and were contemptuous of the language. "Even if Jewish immigrants to Romania had been willing to take up a non-Jewish national identity," Lindemann writes, "it would not likely have been with such a 'primitive' and widely denigrated people as the Romanians. Even those many Jews who abandoned Jewish tradition in this period only rarely identified with such people--powerless, 'historyless,' and destined, so many argued to be absorbed by the superior, historic peoples" (p. 313). Which Jews thought this way? Who voiced such an opinion? What proof is there that Jews belittled Romanian and did so for such intellectual reasons? Lindemann does not tell us. He also does not indicate if average Romanians, the peasants and merchants who came into contact with Jews, were as concerned with their national identity as their leaders. They probably had far more disappointing reasons for mistreating Jews. Ultimately, the only actual crime that Lindemann can place at the feet of Romania's Jews is that they reminded insecure Romanian nationalists of the deficiencies of their nation. These deficiencies are the Romanians' problem, not the Jews'.

The arguments presented in *Esau's Tears* about Romanians and others raise important questions about the interplay between reality and fantasy in anti-Semitism and the assignment of responsibility. The author of one of the best studies of anti-Semitism, Gavin Langmuir, sees the relationship between reality and fantasy as critical to understanding Jew-hatred. He argues that the word "anti-Semitism," because it implies a special kind of hatred unique to Jews, should only be used when Jew-hatred is entirely "chimerical." [4] In other words, Jew-hatred is only "anti-Semitism" when it has absolutely no basis in reality. Ritual murder and desecration of the host are two classic examples of anti-Semitic fantasy. When there is a grain of truth, however, Langmuir prefers to categorize Jew-hatred as xenophobia, which, though certainly cruel, is a universal phenomenon. Langmuir then proceeds to analyze the relationship between the xenophobe and the "outgroup" on one hand and the relationship between truth and fantasy within xenophobic claims on the other. He faults the xenophobe for a lack of critical thinking, for he or she ignores the fact of diversity among Jews as well as the often obvious disparity between the qualities attributed to "the Jews" and those of actual Jewish individuals. In fact, xenophobic claims really have little to do with the group under attack. "The subject of a xenophobic assertion is not

the outgroup," Langmuir informs us, "it is a felt social menace." [5] The "empirical characteristics" of the outgroup are largely irrelevant.

I would have appreciated a sustained discussion in *Esau's Tears* of the relationship between truth and reality in anti-Semitism. It would have helped me understand someone like the historian Treitschke, for instance, who considered the prominence of Jews in German journalism to be a threat to the German nation. Lindemann is content to argue that since Jewish dominance of the press was a fact, Treitschke's anti-Semitism was not fantasy. It was, therefore, partially the Jews' fault, and Treitschke's critics judge him unfairly (pp. 135-6). However, to borrow Langmuir's parlance, one must ask how much Treitschke's xenophobia really had to do with Jews' "empirical characteristics." Was it a "fact" that Jews "dominated" German journalism? It is possible that they were very prominent. But was there really an identifiable Jewish influence on the media? What was its strength and nature? Why did Treitschke see in the Jewish influence a national threat? Why was he so obsessed with the perceived Jewish threat that he took the trouble to write and publish on the subject and associate himself with anti-Semitic politics? I am inclined to think that Treitschke's anti-Semitism tells us more about him and his society's insecurities than it does about Jews. Are Jews' responsible for his perception of reality? Where exactly does responsibility lay?

Of course, Lindemann makes clear that he has no interest in apologizing for anti-Semites, yet he makes several arguments to that effect. First, he argues that leading anti-Semites were not responsible for German anti-Semitism: "Anti-Jewish feelings were not the creation of 'bad leaders' but rather emerged from the experience [with Jews] and deeply ingrained mindsets of Germans and of course preceded the 1870s" (p.145). Then he argues that in general individuals are not responsible for historic events: "No single individual caused or created [the ground-swell of anti-Semitism], any more than the ground-swell of revolution in Russia in 1905-1917 was the responsibility of individual revolutionaries. The significance of the efforts of men like Treitschke and Stoecker pales beside such larger, impersonal factors [i.e. the rise of the Jews]. Individuals are more palpable and certainly more emotionally satisfying to condemn than impersonal forces, but one does need to keep in perspective the relative importance of each" (pp. 146-147).

Given the obvious interplay between reality and fantasy in anti-Semitism, the "experience" of Jews is heavily subjective. Germans' "mindsets" were probably more determinative of attitudes toward Jews than empirical reality. Would not the individuals who had contributed so much to forging these "mindsets" have some share of the responsibility for the attitudes that they yielded? This is particularly true if we accept Lindemann's injunction against essentialist assumptions about Germans. If they are not essentially anti-Semitic, someone had to teach them and remind them to hate Jews.

In the Epilogue to *Esau's Tears*, Lindemann takes on the thorny subject of the relationship between anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. One of the primary objectives of his book is to argue that anti-Semitism did not cause the Holocaust. It is a tricky argument to make, for it begs the question of the relationship between thought and action. Lindemann has to concede that anti-Semitism made the Holocaust possible, but he insists on absolving it (and its spokespersons) of responsibility for it. Curiously, his explanation for how the Holocaust happened is a reversal of his earlier argument about the historical role of individuals.

There is a “rational explanation” for the events of the 1930s and 1940s, Lindemann tells us. Although the “primary role of anti-Semitic ideology” is “entirely plausible,” a “careful examination of the historical record” places that assertion into “serious doubt.” For one thing, he writes, the record indicates that anti-Semitism was not as strong among the general German population as often assumed. Germans were not Hitler’s willing executioners. What, then, were the factors that brought about the Holocaust? Lindemann prefers to stress personality and the indeterminacy of events (p. 542). In other words, Hitler and accident are responsible.

Reading *Esau’s Tears* and writing this review have only strengthened my desire to steer far away from anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Lindemann ostensibly sets off to provide an objective view, but he gets caught up in the strange task of assigning responsibility. As a reader, I find myself similarly compelled to counter his allegations of responsibility with my own. In this sense neither of us prove able to escape the Holocaust’s shadow when it comes to the topic of anti-Semitism. *Esau’s Tears* works very well as a critique of other studies of anti-Semitism, whose faults Lindemann effectively demonstrates. However, in its own quirky ways the book shares too many of their faults to be useful for non-specialists who are looking for a general history of the subject.

NOTES

[1] Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs, Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank, 1894-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2] Michael Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair, 1886-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Philip G. Nord, *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[3] The best example is Jean-Michel Boehler, *Une société rurale en milieu rhénan: La paysannerie de la plaine d’Alsace (1648-1789)*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1994). See also Boehler’s “La perception de “l’Autre” dans la campagne alsacienne des XVII et XVIII siècles,” *Revue d’Alsace* 120 (1994): 61-95, as well as Jean Daltroff, *Le prêt d’argent des Juifs de Basse-Alsace (1750-1791)* (Strasbourg: Publications de la Société Savante d’Alsace et des Régions de l’Est, 1993).

[4] Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 328.

[5] Langmuir, 330.

Michael R. Shurkin,
Johns Hopkins University
shurkin@jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu

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