

THE DEPUTY



a candid theatrical memoir by Jerome Rothenberg
adapter of the Broadway production

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I WAS CALLED INTO the production of *The Deputy* when Herman Shumlin discovered, a couple of months before the scheduled opening, that he couldn't "live with" his first version of the play, an abridgement (more or less) of the Winston text that Grove Press was preparing to publish. Hochhuth and Shumlin had cut the play in half and had somewhat altered its plot line, but with results that now felt heavy, stilted, colorless—especially the language. As a poet, what could I do to make the language move, or otherwise put life in it?

I knew about the play only what I'd read in the papers (which at that point wasn't much) but was certainly not put off or shocked by what was being played up as its "thesis." My feeling, then as now, was that a close connection existed between two thousand years of Christian anti-semitism and Hitler's final solution to the Jewish "problem." Not having read the play yet, I hoped it would have something for me to take hold of besides its *dossier* on Pius. The guilt-by-silence of a single man couldn't possibly be the issue; the complicity-by-silence-and-incitement-of-*many* might be. I was concerned too that the play speak in dramatic, not merely polemical, terms.

From Shumlin came copies of the German text and (in English) his and Hochhuth's adaptation. A first reading convinced me that I could and should do it—so elated and irritated me, in fact, that my mind was soon boiling over with new ideas and words and images. A few days later, I presented Shumlin with versions of two of the key speeches, by which time I already knew how I wanted to re-work the opening scenes. To *re-work* them, let me stress, since it was clear that the adaptation, stripping three or four hours off the original, would have to make up somehow for the loss of magnitude, epic scope, etc. But Shumlin seemed willing to go along with anything I wanted—perhaps that's the measure of how desperate he was. The following week, after reading my version of the first two scenes, he was so pleased and relieved that he granted me a "completely free hand." Nor did he go back on his word until completion of the third scene.

There's a process of identification that's essential if a translation is to re-create its original—i.e., if a new work is to emerge, the value of which is more than informational. As I said before, when I took the play home and read it, I felt both irritated and elated. The irritation was partly with the lack of time—a month to rewrite the entire play, later extended to six (or was it seven?) weeks—and with the fact that I was a stranger to the theater and knew it. Then too, I realized that Hochhuth and I were far apart in the artistic means we favored; since some of the changes I had in mind were extreme, I wanted to feel sure that I was doing them for the play's sake, not simply from a disagreement with his means.

But the other feeling—the elation at the upsurge of images, words and ideas was the stronger. What Hochhuth had done, in what I thought of as his ingenuous and old-fangled way, was to make visible the lineaments

of a nightmare; and he had done it with a series of symbols and figures that made the revelation painful, forcing sight on those who stopped to look.

The title of a Charles Olsen poem stuck in my mind: *The Death of Europe*. Was this what Hochhuth had succeeded in showing, this vision of murder, cruelty, indifference, of a world in which man's flesh is crucified while the servants of the cross refuse to bear the cross, to share the sufferings, and WHY? This is the question that Hochhuth's Pope must answer—and *he does*. He answers with empty words, with words made empty by events; answers as *any man might*; knows all the proper answers; gives them as *any man might*; so that the shadow falls across them too, and those who see it turn away in terror, in revulsion, for something unclean has come to pass in the heart of the temple.

The lineaments of a nightmare, then—but of a nightmare so total that the mind refuses to believe it. I decided to stress those images of terror, putting the documentary aspects second. Since Hochhuth and Shumlin had already reduced the play to the scenes involving the young Jesuit hero, I would let it be his vision throughout, his nightmare in the face of a reality we wouldn't show, a reality that would always be off-stage. Everything visible, then, would be a comment on that overwhelming reality that the mind (the Christian mind, at least) has struggled to reject—until dream and reality, nightmare and death, come together at Auschwitz, and there is no escape but a scream.



SO FAR, I had before me a complex if diffuse work, which I was hoping to compress without losing the complexity. To do this, I planned to focus on its point of greatest depth, measuring myself by that. When I came to consider the kinds of ideas Hochhuth dealt with, decided that the historical indictment of Pius could make its way without much heightening from me. Most of the scenes showing Nazi officials and Nazi attitudes had already been cut, and as for Hochhuth's presentation of 19th century philosophical positions, I found it very German and very tedious. It was, in fact, his religious material that seemed to me to carry the play's meaning, providing the real intellectual force.

The major conflict in the play, as everybody knows, is between Riccardo Fontana (a fictional priest) and Pope Pius XII (a quasi-fictional pontiff); the issue in question is whether Pius should have openly condemned the Nazi policy of genocide against the Jews. Another issue, though less obvious and less discussed, concerns the concept of *deputyship* itself, of how Christ is to be represented by his priesthood. On both

issues (and, of course, they're inseparable here) the attitude of Hochhuth's Pope is institutional and rational, while that of his Jesuit is personal and mystical. When Pius refuses to act, Riccardo rushes to Auschwitz where, from a practical point of view, he can accomplish nothing. Let me emphasize that: *Riccardo Fontana does not go to Auschwitz to save Jews*. Yet the play is clearly *about* why-in-fact-he-goes-there.

From the time he becomes involved, Riccardo's nightmare journey is a latterday descent into Hell—a descent that puts all Christian faith and belief into question. Yet it is Christ's road too, Christ's agony as archetype. More and more Riccardo identifies with the victims, identifies the victims with the Crucified, the archetypal victim. He follows the Jews to Auschwitz, the damned into Hell. To win a Christian victory? But there is no victory in that place, only crucifixion; no Sunday morning, but Christ still walks in Hell and darkness.

"There have always been," Berdyaev writes, "and there always will be, two races in the world, and the boundary between them is more important than any other; crucifiers and crucified, oppressors and oppressed, persecutors and persecuted. It is superfluous to specify which one Christians should belong to." Superfluous, but if this play is to remain a "Christian Tragedy," it has to specify just that; has to touch that ultimate despair that Christ too must have known. At the heart of the nightmare for Riccardo, two "facts" stand out to make the despair complete: that at Auschwitz the world is going through what the Doctor calls "a turning" in which "the idea of life is over," and that the Pope, in whom the agony of the Crucified should be the most acute, is no more involved than the ordinary benevolent statesman, perhaps less.

Anyone who still cares about these things, will see that the Christian elements don't soften the "historical" indictment of Pius but enforce and clarify the demands made on him for what is, after all, an extraordinary action. To Shumlin, though, the "deputy" theme, in its specifically Christian sense, was probably intrusive and confusing. As he kept telling me, he wanted this to be a play against *all* silence and complacency in the face of injustice. So did I, but not by sacrificing the play's specifics: the way that action, theme and symbol worked (or could be made to work) together; the sense of cosmic terror that gave it something like a tragic force. As these fell away in rehearsal, the play became more and more a statement of readily acceptable pieties that I'd have thought anyone seeing it would long ago have taken for granted. In a similar way, references to the Church's historical anti-semitism (which I would have extended to all the churches) were all but eradicated—on the assumption, I believe, that the play should make us aware with hurting our feelings. I wanted it very much *to hurt our feelings*.

For me the play begins to move with the entrance at the Berlin Nuncio's of Kurt Gerstein, SS man and self-proclaimed "witness to the name of God." Here,

clearly, is the most elusive figure in the play; one too, who prefigures the awareness that Riccardo will reach only much later in his journey. Having willingly taken part in the Final Solution in order, he says elsewhere, "to find out what was happening and help destroy it," he is here trying to deliver a "message to the Vatican," an appeal for intercession; but as he speaks, the shadow falls across his words and fills them with the awful knowledge that he won't be heard.

It is this desperation and futility—of a man who's acting and who knows he must fail—that I wanted to convey by a brutal exaggeration of every word and gesture. Not a madman but the dream's evocation of a madman who speaks the truth, speaks it to another man (the Nuncio) too civilized to act beyond his powers and whose distress at the facts is matched by his irritation with Gerstein for presenting them. The perfect wall, in short, for Gerstein to address.

Where Hochhuth would later develop Gerstein as a German hero, I was limited by his and Shumlin's cuts to the figure as he appears in the opening scenes, a man with an equivocal attitude toward himself as a murderer and self-proclaimed savior. Yet this was precisely what I wanted, not the Scarlet Pimpernel aspects of the character but the hint it gave of a "salvation" through the experience of evil. To emphasize the gulf beneath him (as well as the futility of his appeal), I turned his speeches into an exaggerated series of stops and starts, rapid shifts from one type of address to another, hoping also that this would break up the comparatively unvaried pattern of long speeches in Hochhuth's original.

On the stage the wording of the scene remained fairly close to what I'd written, but the conception was drastically different. Gerstein was no longer *a man acting who knows he must fail*; the exaggerated gestures had become the genuine article, "feelings welling from the heart," etc. But not only Gerstein. The Nuncio had been so directed that his emotional response to the murders seemed higher-pitched at times than Gerstein's. When he tried to dismiss the SS man by saying, "God grant you peace . . . we will offer prayers for the victims," there was no *hauteur* in his voice; instead he sobbed. The gulf between them had been reduced to a puddle.



OUR SECOND SCENE, in Gerstein's apartment, opens with an exchange between him and Jacobson, the young Jew he's been hiding. Here I felt certain that if the play's reality (nightmare of the death of Europe) were to be presented meaningfully, we had to show it at its extremes, as already in the place towards which it's heading. To do that, to portray (in Jacobson par-

JACOBSON
 Germans don't get fleas.
 (Brightening):
 Come on, Gerstein, let's curse Germans!

GERSTEIN
Get you some water
 (Changing the subject):
 I'll get you that passport before the bombers blow
 this place up.

JACOBSON
You didn't bring one
 Get me some soap while you're at it. Pee stains on my
 underwear. And blood. What a mess. -- (Gerstein?)

GERSTEIN
 (Standing at the window.)
 What?)

JACOBSON
 I want some air.

move, quickly
 (JACOBSON ~~walks over to~~ the window, ~~tries~~
~~to stick his hand out.~~ GERSTEIN quickly
 pushes him away.) *sits down bucket, & grabs his*

GERSTEIN
 (Peering out, cautiously):
 Beware, beware--
 the doctor's on the stair.

JACOBSON
 The King of Shadows!

GERSTEIN
 Bearing death flowers.

JACOBSON
 Kill him!

GERSTEIN
 In my dreams.
 (He puts an arm around JACOBSON, moves
 him toward the other room.)
 Get in there, like a dog.

JACOBSON
 (Smiling, but frightened):
 Like a mongrel, Gerstein, like a MONGREL.

ticularly) the consequences of that reality, I found it necessary to move further from Hochhuth than I'd originally expected.

Hochhuth's "Jacobson" was the traditional "good Jew" of literature: bespectacled, studious, timid, deferential to benefactor, etc. His behavior (including an understandable outburst when he learns that his parents have been killed) was completely "in character" and, as such, probably useful to Hochhuth in touching his German readers and compensating for his, and their, lack of acquaintance with Jews. For myself, I simply couldn't accept this as the *reality of the situation*, but felt that living in a hole would lead, at its extreme, to a dehumanization of the victim. I wanted the play, like a bad dream, to show *the worst that could happen*, at no point to let their words touch but to have them speak the language of the dead.

With this in mind, I rewrote the dialogue between Jacobson and Gerstein as a series of brutal thrusts (by Jacobson mostly) that were not "real" conversation so much as patter. The scene opened with the following exchange:

(Sounds of bombing fade out. GERSTEIN and JACOBSON are filling pails with rubble. The sound of a GERMAN MARCHING BAND outside.)

JACOBSON. *What a mess. (As GERSTEIN doesn't respond, more insistently:) It smells here. Dirty air, dirty people. Dirty music. (He moves closer to GERSTEIN.) Gerstein, I have fleas.*

GERSTEIN. *(Picking up the pails:) I'll carry these down to the yard.*

JACOBSON. *Germans don't have fleas but I have fleas.*

GERSTEIN. *Do they bother you?*

JACOBSON. *They're killing me, the bastards. Look, my navel's raw from them. (He lifts up his shirt, scratches his belly.) MONSTERS! (Taps GERSTEIN on shoulder.) Are you sure you're not Jewish?*

GERSTEIN. *Yes...*

JACOBSON. *I like you, Gerstein—but don't think I don't hate you too. Is that what you think?*

GERSTEIN. *No.*

JACOBSON. *Germans don't get fleas. (Brightening:) Come on, Gerstein, let's curse Germans!*

It's not hard to see that the emphasis here is on the word *German*, on Jacobson's bitterness and despair, his mockery of his benefactor, his self-hatred, etc.; for I was not so much dirtying up the characters as the reality-of-the-situation. Whether Jacobson was scratching real fleas was somehow not the point.

Shumlin wanted the scene dirtied up too—the Jacobson part for sure because the stereotype offended him. At the same time he wanted to establish credibility, to provide explanations for things I'd deliberately omitted: how close the bombing was, why Jacobson had fleas and Gerstein didn't, where Gerstein washed, why Jacobson questioned Gerstein about being Jewish, etc. By Shumlin's insistence on certain cuts and inserts (for he had finally to be in charge) the stage reality

shifted more towards his conception of it than I'd have wanted.

As a result I wasn't able to show clearly the reality as I'd seen it—as a thing so terrifying that only the *incredible* could come near it on the stage. I lost the chance but not the conviction that there's a reality in the theater that comes from making visible the consequences, the limits, of an action rather than its causes. In other words, that Jacobson behaves as he does because he has no soap is far less important than that he does so because he will have lost (is already seen as having lost) his humanity. Here, in fact, the insertion of explanatory material dims the reality that the suppression of causality would have heightened.

The dialogue between Gerstein and the Doctor suffered the same changes: a proliferation of explanatory material and an insistence that the actors turn the debauched patter I'd written for them into "real" conversation. The movement of the scene, under Shumlin's direction, became essentially psychological (Gerstein's fear, the Doctor's pursuit), which wasn't impossible in itself, except that the Romantic insanity and inanity of the Doctor's discursions were, I think, muffled. Perhaps I'm too involved to judge, but it seems to me now that if changes were going to be made from what I'd written, they should have gone much further for the sake of some consistency. As it was, most of the non-naturalistic material was cut, but enough remained so that, spoken in a naturalistic style, it was probably unnecessarily confusing—both to the audience and the actors.

The losses, because they weren't consistent, also worked to make the new ending of the scene seem considerably more anti-naturalistic than anything that preceded. For this, I had expanded a few lines and a stage direction of Hochhuth's into a "ritual" marking Riccardo's first commitment to, and tentative identification with, the Jewish victims. He hands his passport to Jacobson, and Jacobson gives him the frayed yellow star. As Riccardo fingers it,

... the lights start dimming to a single spotlight that will finally surround the three men. GERSTEIN and JACOBSON slowly move in on Riccardo. They are on either side of him and speak, like voices in a holy ritual of the Church. It is, in fact his initiation into the underworld—a journey that will end in Auschwitz. As their voices press against him, he raises the Star of David higher.

GERSTEIN. *But you'll learn.*

JACOBSON. *You'll learn, priest.*

GERSTEIN. *You'll descend the stair—*

JACOBSON. *At night.*

GERSTEIN. *You'll feel cold.*

JACOBSON. *The darkness will run through you.*

GERSTEIN. *Hide, Priest.*

JACOBSON. *The mirror is watching.*

GERSTEIN. *Hell is watching.*

JACOBSON. *Is the night inside you?*

GERSTEIN. *You'll have to live with it.*

JACOBSON. *To see it, to touch it.*

GERSTEIN. *In death.*
 JACOBSON. *In pain.*
 GERSTEIN. *In hatred.*
 JACOBSON. *In pain.*
 GERSTEIN. *Take the star.*
 JACOBSON. *The light is in the star.*
 GERSTEIN. *The pain is in the star.*
 JACOBSON. *And wear it.*
 RICCARDO. (*Thrusts the star against his heart:)* *Here?*

I'd like someday to print large sections of this scene as I originally had it, because I think they'd show that the changes I'd decided on, weren't simply arbitrary, that (in the beginning at least) I was working from a total concept of the play. If you read the stage directions and lines I've just given as poetic images, you'll see where I was taking it. Once that concept was broken—in action or in symbol or in language—so that only a part remained here, a part there, the remnants (like this ritual of the star) became little more than decorations, a pointless kind of flourish.



GIVEN COMPLETE FREEDOM, I would have continued as I did in fact try to continue: stressing the Christian elements and symbols, the nightmare journey, the theme of Christ and outcast, the relentless and sometimes cruel exposure of what's *most difficult* for an audience to accept. I would have done this, because I felt a play emerging that wasn't only a vehicle for a social message but held up a mirror to a difficult and complex reality. To pry that play loose, I had often to concern myself with much that wasn't its message. At times I felt that I was the only one who was bothering.

Of material in the play that's *most difficult for an audience to accept*, the character of "Pius XII" comes first to mind. In handling this I tried to be faithful to the exigencies of the play and not to be distracted by extratheatrical considerations. That a recently deceased Prince of the Church should be cast as a "villain" didn't, as I've said, shock me; one has only to think of Dante's treatment of Boniface VIII (and others) for a good literary parallel. In both instances, a specific figure is singled out to represent what the author considers the abuse or misconception of a great office—and in both instances, the objective historian may sense a distortion of the facts-taken-as-a-whole. It is, as Aristotle wrote long ago, "that the poet's function [contrasted to the historian's] is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary . . ."

Perhaps Pius shouldn't have been singularized by name, though I can't imagine how his specific identity

could have been concealed. But the real point lies elsewhere. Since the play, at least as cut, focuses almost entirely through Riccardo, his terror and passion must necessarily color the way in which the other characters and their actions come across to us. Thus the Pope and the lesser hierarchs will appear as he sees them—contrasted to his own mind's vision of Jesus. If this is clear, the play can proceed to its limits; if, by any hedging, it becomes unclear, then it would be better to keep Pius off stage, for the loss of theatrical "shock" would be preferable to a pointless attempt to write "real" history in the context of fiction.

I regret that so much of the controversy has concerned the historicity of this or that detail in Hochhuth's portrait of Pius. While I feel that his facts were basically accurate, I'm convinced too that he was writing as a caricaturist, and regret that no one connected with the play has yet been willing to say so—including Hochhuth.

In brief, it seems to me that:

- 1) if you're focussing through Riccardo's mind, the question of a historical portrait of Pius is not important; what matters is that the portrait (or caricature) be a true comment on the Church's actions and silences, then and throughout her history;
- 2) those who are going to be offended by criticism of the Pope will be no less offended if you presume to be "objective;"
- 3) being "objective" shades off quickly into "going easy," thus puts you in constant conflict with the materials the play provides;
- 4) by the time of Pius' "*gran rifiuto*," Riccardo's mind can only see him in the most horrifying terms;
- 5) the fury of the contrast between Pope and Christ (the very heart of the "deputy" theme) demands a fury of presentation;
- 6) if the play is a nightmare, the Pope must be a nightmare Pope.

By the time the play reached New York, there had been so much criticism of its more difficult-to-document facts and its portraiture, that the producers tried (apparently with Hochhuth's approval) to make it a more "rounded and objective" portrayal. (I was surprised too to hear Hochhuth, in his big New York press conference, "defend" the references to Church finances as an attempt to compliment Pius and the Catholic Church for their clearheaded recognition that the Church *doesn't live by the spirit alone*. I would like to think there was more tongue in his cheek than his manner betrayed.) Again the material, both Hochhuth's and mine, contradicted and confused the effort toward conciliation. The criticism of those who thought the play too hard on Pius was now joined by that of those who thought it too soft.

Perhaps *The Deputy* was too much of a political event to be treated simply as a play. Even so, I can't help feeling that anticipation of the possible repercussions only weakened its impact while satisfying no one. Take, for example, the Jewish criticism directed at the play

for not showing more of the victims and of the Germans as the chief victimizers. The fact is that Shumlin, on the basis of earlier productions and criticism, had attempted to “strengthen” those areas. He had decided, before I came into it, to open with a symbolic (?) procession of victims led by a Nazi guard, and to “clarify” the Gestapo interrogation of Jewish prisoners in Rome.

The Gestapo scene itself had drawn fire because the Jews it showed were all converts (a point of some importance, since the Church’s unwillingness to act for them was tantamount to a sanction of *racial* anti-semitism). Shumlin, himself very sensitive on this score, insisted the Roman Jews’ “Jewishness” be played up and their Catholicism played down. We had some of our worst arguments over this, for all the good it did the play. Perhaps I felt myself offended as a Jew—but that’s not a way I like to put it.

Hochhuth (who, as far as I know, had originally decided on the scene cuts with Shumlin) again surprised me at his press conference by echoing this criticism, specifically about elimination of scenes showing the round-up of the Roman Jews. For my part, I can only say that I agreed with the cuts and would have carried them further. I feel that the scenes in question are digressions from the plot, with no “positive” virtue in the shortened version except to give the audience a respite in a part of the reality that it already largely accepts. Besides, the primary guilt of the Nazis is declared time and again, and the tragedy of the Jews and the hero’s identification with them is never in doubt.



THE PLAN FOR THE FINAL SCENE at Auschwitz was to reduce it to a long dialogue between Riccardo and the Doctor. As delivered to me, in the Hochhuth-Shumlin version, the scene showed Riccardo arriving in Auschwitz, being picked out of line by the Doctor, refused permission to die, harangued for fifteen or twenty minutes, cajoled to help the Doctor escape to Rome, and finally sent to the ovens when he’s done nothing more than call the Doctor a bad name. The action was vague and the language impossible.

My own first idea was to make it a kind of epilogue in limbo—to throw all props away and have the two figures confront each other briefly and tersely and “in so many words.” Shumlin let me know quickly that he wouldn’t live with it that way. Hochhuth’s dialogue bored him—better yet, disgusted him, since he felt that any talk at Auschwitz was repugnant. (Again and again in rehearsal, he would balk at such sights as the Doctor sharing a bench with Riccardo, swearing he couldn’t stomach the two of them so close, or words to that effect.) On the other hand, if I was planning

to take the “victims” off the stage, he would simply not do the scene; and if he didn’t do the scene, he’d remove the Doctor from the second scene. In effect, he told me he was tired of Riccardo’s whining throughout the play and that this scene gave him a chance to realize what the play was really about, the murder of six million Jews.

The play, of course, isn’t only a memorial, and it isn’t only a generalized outcry against silence and indifference. Through Riccardo it also copes with the questions of what it means to be human; of where each man stands with relation to human suffering, to crucified and crucifier; of the ages-old gap between ideal and reality in our civilization; of the Church’s responsibility for what may be seen as the recurrent crucifixion of the nation of its founder. Riccardo’s death, if we were in fact going to show it, had to follow out of all those questions and the action of the play, or we would be abandoning the play at the end.

Why would the Doctor suddenly allow Riccardo to die? I searched through the original scene (where the problem doesn’t come up, since Riccardo’s death, remember, is delayed and accidental) and found, in a conversation with Gerstein, lines that made it clear to me. In the second scene, the Doctor, quoting Weininger, had defined the “evil principle” as “despair at the possibility of meaning.” Now Riccardo seems to experience the full impact of that when he cries out: “... with each human body that I burn, / I burn away a particle of faith. / I am burning God. / Corpses—a conveyor belt of corpses, / an endless belt ... If I knew that—He was looking on— / (*with revulsion*) / I would ... have to hate Him ... / I am—I would be frightened of salvation / (*points vaguely upwards*) / through Him. —A wild beast that devours its young.” (MacDonald’s translation.)

I wanted the scene to touch that emptiness—that endless circle—because only then would Riccardo’s agony be complete. A *conveyor belt of corpses*—I tried to get at this by the appearance and disappearance of two groups of victims, almost identical in appearance and gesture, and by having Riccardo cry, “There is no world.” In brief, the Doctor would be sending Riccardo to die because Riccardo was defeated; in his defeat and despair, he had followed Jesus to the final agony on the cross. The resurrection, at Auschwitz as at Golgotha, is for the eyes of faith—when the bodies have stopped squirming.

The prospect of Riccardo’s despair and seemingly meaningless death was too much for this production—though I still feel it would have been the most pointed commentary on the Pope’s silence. Shumlin, in fact, understood the defeat and agony far better than some of the others (one co-producer even came up with the idea of a triumphal march of victims), but he didn’t want it stated in such Christian terms, still didn’t want a real exchange between the two men or any further comment on the Pope, on Christianity, on evil, on reality. The scene returned almost to where I’d found

it, except for a few, free-floating references to “emptiness” and the remains of a long speech I’d written for Riccardo in which he describes in detail the human agony of Christ crucified. This, Shumlin felt, was all that was needed to justify the Doctor’s sending Riccardo to die—only he didn’t want it to speak so directly about Christ or Riccardo but to be confined to the Jewish victims. Riccardo was allowed to march off happy—but I guess that was more Jeremy Brett’s view of the role than Herman Shumlin’s.

By then, however, I had really given up on the final scene. If Riccardo couldn’t take part in the exchange, if the play’s various themes couldn’t be recapitulated and set against the final terror, if everything specific was now taboo or bored Shumlin, if by one person or another I was badgered to end the play on a note of triumph when I saw clearly that there was no victory at Auschwitz, I could only “sit back and enjoy it.” The final solution to the final scene was to cut what was left to shreds, on the notion that the shorter it is, the less it hurts.

It was felt too that this would help commuters catch their trains on time.



I’M NOT COUNTING UP my “losses” in the play, because those aren’t important to me. From the start I hoped that *The Deputy* would throw light into dark places, and to some degree it has. Many of the most important things, however, have been left unsaid—at least in the play. There’s been a tendency to view its theme as simply an attack on silence-in-the-face-of-murder. But that was only to see it in halfway terms.

Recently a lot of publicity has been given to a New York murder which a number of innocent bystanders watched in silence from their apartment windows. People have come to me and said, *See, there’s your Deputy theme again.* But of course it isn’t—unless we can assume that the Church and Christianity have been innocent of the centuries of incitement leading up to the Final Solution.

The production, I think, has added to the false impression. So has much of the more public controversy, perhaps from a feeling that a truce between denominations would be broken by stirring up the really bad memories. Even Hochhuth, in his later statements, has tended to be more politic, as when he analogized the Nazis as arsonists and the Church as the unwilling Fire Brigade. *But what if the Church had provided the matches?* The play says that some of the time,

because it isn’t only about silence but about the ages-old disparity between Christ and his Church, between the spirit and the forms in which it seems to be embodied. As such (though Hochhuth, as a Protestant, makes this much less clear) it’s a question that goes beyond the Catholic Church, that touches all the churches and all men who perpetuate the contradiction in our culture.

And what of Eugenio Pacelli? May we not ask how the inheritor of Peter’s Throne could possibly have been an “innocent” bystander like those people in Queens? If there’s a continuity of succession in the Papacy, then every Pope’s innocence or guilt involves the actions of his predecessors. The office and the history of the office can’t be overlooked in understanding the urgency of the play’s demand for an extraordinary action—some kind of expiation.

The past refuses to stay hidden. Theological anti-semitism and deicide are still burning issues—so that the sins of the fathers be visited upon the sons unto the two-hundredth generation. There’s also, though we more hesitate to speak of it, a papal record of anti-semitic bulls, anti-Jewish decrees and expulsions, Church-sponsored ghettos in the Papal States, identifying badges, public humiliations, etc. And though these ended in Rome with the coming of the secular state in 1870, in the 1890s the Papacy itself was still backing the anti-semitic parties of Central Europe. But the 19th Century was exactly the time when racial anti-semitism, which so many apologists treat as a phenomenon separate from the anti-semitism of the churches, was growing up in Europe. By the time Hitler came to power, as Lewy’s recent book makes clear, the hierarchy in Germany was still able to endorse the Nuremberg Laws as long as the Christian conscience wasn’t violated. But hadn’t it been violated already—or are hatred and degradation less repugnant to it than murder?

The churches, historically, have too often played a brute’s game towards the Jews and themselves and others—and by doing so, they have hidden Christ’s face from men by a veil of blood. Yet, William Blake wrote, “God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men.” Perhaps, though Blake was no Catholic, that is the greatest indictment of Pius from a Catholic point of view: that he failed to see how deep the loss was, failed to be the deputy who could make God visible to man. This is, after all, the “question asked of God” in the final act of *The Deputy*, the question of his presence, of where-he-is. In the play, the fictional Riccardo (though “an ordinary priest”) takes on himself the agony of representing God among the crucified, in Auschwitz. The tragedy of our civilization may be that the beautiful things are the work of “ordinary” men and characters in fiction.

The Poems of Léopold Sédar Senghor

The original French texts with translations by Charles Guenther



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