

Thank you... to my play,
Karski's Message... have found it a
memorable... I
... to
the case and... "Foreword." The
part of justice... played by my
good friend, Bill Jones... a marvelous actor,
... he is also a very... writer and
scholar. He... that I
make the "Foreword"... of our
audience, and... that you
find it an...
...

FOREWORD TO KARSKI'S MESSAGE

Tragedy in Two Acts

By: Phillip H. McMath

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Thank you so very much for coming to our play, *Karski's Message*. I hope that you have found it a memorable theater experience. In writing it, I decided that it would perhaps be of some value to the cast and crew if I wrote this "Foreword." The part of Justice Felix Frankfurter is played by my good friend, Bill Jones. Bill is a marvelous actor, but he is also a very gifted lawyer, writer and scholar. He was good enough to suggest that I make the "Foreword" available to members of our audience, and so I have done so. I hope that you find it an informative and stimulating complement to our drama.

Phillip H. McMath

FORWORD

"If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep."

KING LEAR, Act IV, Scene ii, Albany, Shakespeare

"Force and Imagination: they are the ultimate foes.
Force or Imagination: that is the ultimate choice."

Harold Goddard, "On Shakespeare."

FOREWORD

Let me opine a bit. Too often history gives us context without intimacy and art intimacy without context. Our play endeavors to meld these two into an effective dramatic union. So, let's look at the historical context in which our characters find themselves; then visit their individual stories, and, thirdly, comment on the dramatic structure and the theme of the struggle between Force and Imagination that hopefully imbues every word of our drama. You may have noticed this in one of the epigraphs.

Of course some or all of you will know some or all of this very well, but perhaps a review won't hurt.

In glancing back, most agree the 19th Century was the zenith of the European Age. Speaking in very general terms, it arose from the 18th's Neo-Classical Age of Reason merging into the 19th's Romanticism—Rousseau bouncing off Voltaire, and Beethoven off Mozart, if you will. Late in the century it began to give way to a "realistic" reaction, but was always considered supreme, regardless of the phase. As such, there arose in the West, before 1914 that is, enormous pride, self-confidence, and belief in the "inevitability of progress." Academics of today, inclined toward a kind of intellectual taxonomy, as they are, have labeled this attitude "Eurocentric." Yes, this is true simply because Europe dominated the world. Now it's over. The 20th was a period of transition and all transitions are painful, as we know only too well. Is it any wonder that it has been labeled by some as the "Age of Anxiety?"

But for our purposes we need to be more specific. That is, focus on the cultural center of gravity of our play, Germany and Poland. So we need to know that after Napoleon's fall in 1815, Germany, eventually united by Bismarck, had gradually replaced France as the great country on the Continent. This status France had enjoyed for about three hundred years with competition, first from Spain and then Austria, but by the latter half of the 19th Century, Germany, with its military power established in its stunning victory in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), together with its achievements in music, art, science, literature, scholarship, economics, and philosophy, had made it preeminent. Britain and Russia were impressive in their own way, and rejoiced in ruling half the globe, but this was peripheral to Europe, not at its center, and while the United States and Japan were emerging, one was across the Atlantic and the other in far-off Asia. And, well, American culture was considered brilliant in ways but yet green, if not downright gauche, you know, and the Japanese much too insular and inscrutable. Latin America was thought a large, interesting, but corrupt and very backward, hinterland, while China, a dormant giant, with an ancient culture, was dominated by outlaw warlords, opium addicts and foreign interests, while still dozing off the long sleep of Confucian Feudalism. India was a colony of Britain, along with half of Africa, in an empire "upon which the sun never set." This was certainly impressive, but the fact remained that the primary focus was Europe and had been for centuries. It seemed as if this would never change. As someone said, "Europe is the heart of the world and Germany is the heart of that heart."

Okay, we may ask, but how did this flowering go from the Renaissance to the Holocaust? More specifically, how did Germany go from Hegel to Hitler? From Kant to *Einsatzgruppen*? From Bach to Buchenwald?

What did Hitler mean when he said that he could not be understood without an appreciation of Richard Wagner? Was Hitler a logical extension of German culture or an aberration? Or is something more profound at work?

Put another way, does this devolution represent something unique or the inevitable Manichean dichotomy of what Harold Goddard terms in his marvelous work, *On Shakespeare*, "Force vs. Imagination?"

First, let's look at "Force."

I

FORCE

Alas, as we all know, in 1914 Europe blundered into one of the greatest calamities in history — the First World War (1914-1918), or the "Great War" as it is sometimes called, or the "Great Catastrophe," as it might more accurately be labeled. (In a hideous irony, it was known at the time as "The War to End All Wars.") By this folly, the "Central Powers" of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, lined up against the Allies, Britain, France, Russia, and eventually the United States, for four years of slaughter.

In its bloody backwash several great dynasties collapsed and were thrown into the trash can of history like so much tripe: The Hohenzollerns of Germany, the Romanovs of Russia, the Hapsburgs of Austria-Hungary, and the Ottomans of Turkey, while the "winners" Britain and France, having lost a generation in the mud and blood of the "Western Front," were damaged and demoralized. Of the major participants, only the United States emerged stronger. Japan sat it out and China was too weak to participate. But not to be outdone, Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, and over the course of the next few years managed to kill 6 million Chinese. (Out of that cauldron arose Maoism and all that has meant.)

The first to exit the Great War was Russia. She staggered out in 1917 and then fell from chaos into civil war. Vladimir Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, was a ruthless politically ambitious intellectual, bent on revenge and power, who outmaneuvered everyone, Conservative, Liberal or Socialist, to seize control in a coup d'etat masquerading as a popular uprising. In his unreadable magnum opus, *State and Revolution*, Lenin makes his big point that in order to make a better world we need to murder and imprison more people. Armed with this scintillating breakthrough,

he established an unsurpassed reign of terror and repression as the most efficacious road to Utopia and the Marxist "End of History." (He has been described by one as "a thinking guillotine.") Surprising himself with his own mortality, he died 1924, but Russia was soon forged into a totalitarian state by his successor, Joseph Stalin, a short, half-educated Georgian peasant with a withered arm and a twisted mind, who soon ruled as the new Tsar of the Soviet Union, a Communist empire cemented conterminously by the Reds over the old White one.

But moving on to our next collapse brings us to Austria-Hungary. This once powerful Hapsburg arrangement that had kept order over a mélange of ethnic tensions for centuries, was torn to shreds. (Today they form a weak patchwork of small republics set in the abdomen of Europe like scar tissue over an old wound that never quite heals.)

Then there were the Ottomans, whose vast empire unraveled like thread off a spool, after ruling over the eastern and African half of Ancient Rome for five centuries. This "Sick Man of Europe," as it was once called, for all its ramshackle despotism, was an undervalued stabilizing force that had exerted its hegemony from the Balkans across Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Arabia, Egypt and North Africa. (One wonders what the final price of this demise will be as today we watch its self-immolation. Does anyone think it will be easily contained? It puts in mind the old cynicism, "Better the evil you know, than the good you don't know.")

Of course, central to our story is Germany and Poland. Weimar Germany — following the "Great War," was humiliated and embittered. An entire generation, particularly veterans, was brutalized and nearly deranged by a defeat they quite simply could never accept. Haunted by the deaths of a million comrades, fearful of the expanding and ever powerful Soviet Union, scourged by a failed economy, and searching for scapegoats, the myth arose that somehow they had not been beaten at all, but "stabbed in the back" by the Jews, plutocrats, and Communists. This was nonsense but widely believed. One scapegoat seems as good as another, in these matters.

Realizing these alienated Germans needed something with which to comfort them besides their own humiliation, their brother veteran, Adolph Hitler, in 1922 stepped behind a Munich beer hall podium and provided it. Hitler, a nobody from nowhere, an unknown Austrian corporal, but a decorated, wounded soldier, an erstwhile Viennese park bench bum, was unfortunately possessed of diabolical political skills, and by 1933 had mesmerized and willed his way into supreme power as the Fuhrer of Germany. His "Third Reich," he shouted, "would last a thousand years!"

Perhaps more important was the between-the-wars culture shock. The optimistic assumptions of the antebellum mind had vanished like a sweet childhood's dream. In a word, Europe, previously so self-assured and confident, now found itself morally bereft. That is to say, the trenches of the Great War had also dug a deep fissure in the psychic earth of Europe and in it had planted the seeds of despair. Why had this happened? What did it mean? What to believe? What to do? Extreme questions always lead to extreme answers: Fascism, Communism,

militarism, Anarchism, and Nietzschean nihilism raised their hands. Culturally, Dadaism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and Existentialism, all implicitly proclaimed that the Renaissance creative energies had exhausted themselves in the egoistic ecstasy of Romanticism which had proven an abyss and from which only an Age of Anxiety could arise.

Italy and Spain opted for Fascism; Russia, as we have seen, became Communist and Germany, Nazi, while America, ever Europeanistic rather than European, found its own unique anodyne — a Jazz Age hedonism all washed down with bath tub gin in full sight of that famous orgasmic light at the end of Daisy's dock.

Our play's other principal is Poland, a country that had simply vanished in the post-Napoleonic settlement, chewed up and swallowed by Prussia, Austria, and Russia, but then had risen phoenix-like off the pages of the Versailles Treaty. For a marvelous, grand moment Poland seemed a bright ray of hope in an ever-darker sky. But as always, trapped as it was between two mortal enemies, Germany and Russia, the country's fate was a cruel one. Poland always hated and feared both and was never quite sure which to hate and which to fear the most. As the Polish saying went, "Germany will destroy our body and Russia will destroy our soul." In a word, the ink wasn't dry on its liberation before Poland anxiously feared a second annihilation.

And, as all the world knows, sensing war, Britain and France wanted "peace in our time" and so attempted to appease Hitler. By 1939 this had failed. Stalin, unimpressed by Western weakness, to an astonished world, made a side deal with his nemesis — a "non aggression pact" with Hitler in August, and through a "secret protocol," the two dictators agreed to split the Polish cake.

Hitler was free "to live his dream;" he started another World War, invading Poland from the west on September 1st, as Stalin invaded from the east on September 17, 1939. In doing so they cast Poland, and eventually their own countries and Europe, into hell. Britain and France declared war on Germany but were idle. Hitler was weak in the west but gambled that the Allies would do nothing and he was right; they sat at the table's edge watching as Poland was eaten, waiting to be served up in their turn. This was the so-called "Phony War," but it wasn't phony for the Poles, who fought with heartbreaking bravery; then by October 1st, were overwhelmed. It's at this point, November 1939, that our play begins.

Germany's policy in Poland, the prototype of its crimes in the East, was simple, to subjugate its people and annex its territory, and, pursuant to its racist ideology, to exterminate the Jews and enslave and finally liquidate the Slavs.

In its half, Soviet policy was also simple, likewise to subjugate Poland's people and annex its territory and, in furtherance of its Marxist ideology of "class struggle," to murder the Polish intelligentsia (thousands were shot) and to deport over a million "counter-revolutionaries" to the Siberian Gulag where, after unspeakable suffering, most perished.

Some 6 million Poles died in the war. About half were Jews, or 90% of Polish Jewry. They were ghettoized then gassed in death camps — Auschwitz and Treblinka being the more infamous. (3 million more Jews were murdered from elsewhere to round out the Holocaust number at 6.)

Yet unlike Fascist France of Petain, the Poles declined collaboration and cleverly constructed a secret state, with its leadership under General Wladyslaw Sikorski, who headquartered first in Paris and then London.

But Hitler, ever active, his eastern flank secure via Stalin, and Poland half digested, marched west in April of 1940, overwhelming Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and, finally, France, which surrendered in June. Yet Britain, under Churchill, held on courageously even as America remained disarmed by self-deceit, and Stalin, as Germany's faithful friend, supplied Hitler with oil, coal, food and a rising sense of invincibility.

Yet Stalin had pledged a Devil's bargain, for in destroying the Polish buffer, he had made war with Germany more likely, if not certain. Without this, Hitler could never have invaded in '39, and, if needing to transit, could not have invaded Russia in '41. The solution had been simple, viz., a Soviet alliance with Poland in the east and France and Britain in the west, trapping Hitler in his Reich. But Comrade Stalin wanted his half of Poland, too, and paid for it dearly.

So Hitler swung east again, attacking Stalin on June 22, 1941. Thus began the worst fighting in history as almost 5 million German soldiers and about 27 million Soviets (civilian and military) perished on the Eastern Front.

On December 7, 1941, Japan dragged in America, and on the 8th, the Germans stalled with the winter sun glistening on Moscow's Kremlin churches... the Ascension and the Annunciation. Within 6 months America was on to Tokyo, and, after Stalingrad in '43, the Germans never spoke of victory again and the Soviets of anything else. Finally, after peripheral fights in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, the Allies landed at Normandy in June of '44, coming from the west, and with the Soviets driving from the east, Hitler's Reich was doomed.

In Poland resistance had increased as, animated by the energy of hate and despair, Warsaw's Jewish Ghetto rose in '43 but was crushed by the SS; animated by the energy of hate and false hope, the Underground rose in '44, and was annihilated by the German army. The Soviets waited till it was done, then came and enslaved Poland... yet again.

In April of '45 Berlin fell. Sitting on a sofa, Hitler and Eva Braun shot themselves. Their bodies were burnt. Nazi Germany surrendered in May. Japan, Asia's tyrant, beaten, broken, and bombed with nuclear weapons, capitulated in August.

The sequel to The Great War was over — 50 million perished. (The numbers vary.)

In 1953 Stalin died in bed. I remember hearing it on the radio riding with my parents in the car.

Fleeing genocide and persecution, much of world Jewry returned to Israel, but has not found peace, and today, with the spread of nuclear weapons, faces a Second Holocaust.

Devastated and divided, Germany was resurrected, and in 1990, reunited, while Poland overthrew the Communists the same year. For both, this was the real end of the Second War.

As for the Soviet Union, what one Russian called "that tower of Babel, cemented together by dreams and blood," collapsed in 1991 — the day after Christmas — the "dreams" of revolution and the "blood" of its reality, one assumes. But Russia is fighting again, is threatening again, and the world is trembling again, appeasing again, making mistakes again, and there is war again. Yeltsin may have stood on a tank but now Putin is driving it.

And Ages? If the 19th (1815-1914) was Europe's apogee, then the 20th (1914-1991) was its nadir.

Is it too much to say that the Nazis ruined Germany, the Bolsheviks ruined Russia, and together they ruined Europe?

Where are we now? No one knows. Where are we going? No one knows.

II

OUR PLAY

In approaching historical fiction, I have found that one can strike a balance between the creative freedom of fictional invention, and the order of history, if a certain basic rule is followed: That is, if a fact is known with reasonable certainty, remain faithful; if it's disputed, use the version that one prefers; if it's unknown, invent so long as it's in harmony with the spirit of what occurred and thematic intention.

Our play, *Karski's Message*, strives to conform to this formula. It is faithful to the important facts, i.e., the war, the Holocaust and Karski's attempt to stop it, while taking certain artistic liberties in transforming our play from page to stage. In doing so, hopefully fact and fiction are mingled without violating the spiritual or psychological truth of our story. Yet where there are also major inventive elements, perhaps these aspects are the truest of all. Or, as Pablo Picasso once said, "Art lies to us, in order to tell us the truth."

One difficulty of presenting biographical/historical material on stage rather than on the page is that with the emphasis on action and dramatic suspense, it's challenging to communicate all the necessary information without encountering factual overload. A novelist or biographer, on the other hand, can do this in a more thorough and leisurely way without injury to the reader's attention.

Not boring folks with backstory has always been a challenge. In Shakespeare's history plays, for example, unless you are boned up on "The Wars of the Roses" you are bound to be lost. Of course the Elizabethans knew it well enough, and Shakespeare was writing for them and not us, but the fact remains, unless one is content to be befuddled, one needs to brush up a bit before any Shakespeare play about kings.

In our play, one can assume that audiences will know certain basic things about the subject but not much more. You'll see that the early scenes attempt to get critical information out quickly and unselfconsciously. Additionally, this will be supported by a few paragraphs in the program.

But there is another layer of knowing, as well, maybe of greater importance. Of course most will not know what the actors know, but they will know and learn enough, and, moreover, they will sense that the actors' knowledge, like the hidden part of an iceberg, is much deeper than that above the surface. In other words, a deeper historical significance can be sensed, without being seen, because of its presentation. Put another way, if an actor speaks of something he actually understands, like Warsaw's infamous Pawiak Prison, the fact that it incarcerated about 100,000 people, Christians and Jews, that some 17,000 were tortured and executed, and another 60,000 were trained out to Treblinka for gassing, while not known specifically, the under-the-surface gravity hopefully will be communicated by the emotive way in which it's expressed.

As for our characters: Karski, Hamann, Borecki, Feiner, the Nun (who I give the name Sister Sonia), and Frankfurter are real. Though representational, Specht, Renee, the Sewer Children, Sturm, and the Unknown Peasant Woman are fictional. But this is misleading -- the elements of "reality" and "fiction" get blurred, and run together like the confluence of two rivers. One is one shade and the other another, but they quickly blend into a new color that is a composite.

Jan Karski (1914-2000), our hero was born Jan Kozielski, to a prosperous Polish Gentile family. Adopted the name Karski as a *nom de guerre*, which he kept. He was raised and remained a practicing Roman Catholic. Smart, adept at languages, fluent in German, French and

English, Karski was educated at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwow — law faculty. Joined the Polish diplomatic service, served in Germany, Switzerland and Britain, 1936-38. He retained a reserve commission in artillery and served in his unit at the beginning of the war as a lieutenant. Captured by the Soviets in September 1939 and interned as a POW in Russia; he pretended to be a private and was returned to Poland in a prisoner exchange; he escaped from the Germans and joined the Underground. His "handler" was Marian Borecki (sometimes spelled Borzecki), a Gentile practicing Catholic, former Minister of Interior in a prewar government and an early leader and founder of the Polish Underground and the Secret State. He recruited Karski as a courier to the exile government in France, led, as mentioned, by General Sikorski.

On his third trip Karski was captured in Slovakia in May of 1940, he was tortured by the Gestapo and interrogated by one Heinrich Hamann of the SS, but Karski escaped from a hospital via an elaborate rescue operation conducted by the Underground. After a period of isolation and recuperation, he returned to clandestine work.

Later, Borecki was captured and tortured by the Gestapo in Pawiak, and, according to Karski in 1944, was shot. It's stated this way in our play because that was the belief at the time. However, according to one source, Borecki was sent to Auschwitz where he survived the war as a slave laborer.

In concert with the Bund, a Jewish Socialist organization involved in resistance led by Leon Feiner, Karski was selected to carry the "message" and "demands" for the Western world about the Holocaust. He was smuggled into the Warsaw Ghetto and a death camp in 1942. Then, in early 1943, disguised as a Vichy French worker, he traveled across Germany and into France. From there the French Resistance smuggled him into Spain and from Gibraltar he flew to London. He met with Jewish leaders and the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden and conveyed the demands and his "message" about the Holocaust. He was frustrated in his attempts to meet Churchill.

At the behest of General Sikorski, then in London, he was sent to the United States. Among others, in July 1943, he met first with Justice Felix Frankfurter, a justice of the Supreme Court, and later with President Roosevelt. His "message" was not believed and nothing was done. The "demands" were filed away.

Karski published his memoir *Story of a Secret State* in 1944. He remained in the United States, married, became a citizen, and taught at Georgetown University. He was selected as "Righteous Among Nations" by the State of Israel in 1982 and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize shortly before his death and honored with the Freedom Medal by President Obama in 2012 (posthumously).

His opponent in our play is Hauptsturmfuhrer (Captain) Heinrich Hamann, the SS officer who interrogated Karski in Slovakia in 1940. (Slovakia was essentially a satellite of Nazi Germany.) Hamann was a Prussian from a Junker family and a dedicated Nazi. The essence of

the questioning is replicated in our play as reported by Karski in his memoir, *Story of a Secret State*, with dramatic liberties. After Karski's escape, Hamann took a particular interest in the Karski case, hunting down many members of the Underground who helped him escape. Several were arrested, tortured, and executed. Then Hamann is lost to history. Except for glimpses of the man as offered by Karski, his characterization in our play is otherwise pure invention.

Obersturmführer (1st Lt) Sepp Specht is his SS fictional subordinate. All the scenes with Specht and Hamann are invented.

Countess Renee Olzanski is a highly fictionalized conflation of two people about whom there is little biographical information. (Olzanski is a made-up name.) It seems very likely that Karski had an affair with a young, attractive girl called "Renee." Not much is known about her, not even her surname, except that she worked closely with Karski in the Underground for some time and considered herself his "fiancee."

He was also closely associated in the Underground with a young lady of mixed Jewish and Gentile parentage who seems to have come from an aristocratic or upper-class background. He lived in her apartment in 1941. And, at a different time one presumes, she rented out a room in the same apartment to a German army officer about whom nothing is known. He is the basis for the fictional Oberst (Colonel) Hans Sturm, an officer in the German army.

Leon Feiner (1885-1945) is a Polish-Jewish lawyer and leader of the Bund, a Jewish Socialist Labor organization. The Bund competed with Zionism as the other big Jewish political force in Poland. The Zionists in turn were subdivided between the "Right" and "Left" Zionists. The Bund opposed the Zionists' primary goal of establishing the State of Israel as a "hopeless Utopian dream." It maintained that the Jews should pursue their interests in their home country.

Feiner was captured by the Soviets after their invasion in 1939 and interrogated, tortured, and imprisoned by the NKVD, the Soviet version of the Gestapo. The Bund, even though it was socialist, was anti-communist and hence considered a "class enemy" by the Soviets. Likewise, its rival, the Zionists, was considered the same. The fact that the "Left Zionists" were socialist did not matter any more than it did with the Bundists. The Gestapo, on the other hand, did not burden itself with such distinctions, and persecuted them all simply because they were Jews.

After Germany invaded Russia in 1941, Feiner was able to escape and make his way to Warsaw. He took a Gentile *nom de guerre* and became an important leader of Jewish resistance. It was felt that the Allies still did not fully appreciate the criminal nature of the Nazi regime and its policies of genocide. There had been rumors and reports but no credible eyewitness surfaced. Consequently, it was decided that one should be sent. Feiner, in coordination with the Underground, selected Karski and arranged for him to witness a death camp and also guided him into the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. (Feiner died in Warsaw in February of '45 of natural causes, so did not live to see the war's end.)

As for the "Sewer Children," they symbolize the Jewish boys and girls that were able to maneuver the nooks and crannies of Warsaw and later its Jewish Ghetto. The Ghetto, an area roughly the size of New York City's Central Park, shaped in a rough "T" and imprisoning some 400,000 Jews, was in fact something of a sieve. Though its 22 gates had been locked in November of 1940, and its inmates slowly starved, children could climb the walls, slip through cracks of abandoned buildings, and squirm through sewers as food scroungers. If caught, they were frequently killed. Few survived the war.

The Jews, as in the coils of a constrictor, were slowly being squeezed, so Hitler then issued orders for the second phase of the "Final Solution." These were formalized at the Wannsee Conference of January '42. Accordingly, in the spring and summer of '42, death camps were established in Poland. Some 300,000 people from the Ghetto were murdered at Treblinka, east of Warsaw. Facing extermination, the Bund, Zionists, and other Jewish organizations, in coordination with the Underground, embarked on a plan of armed resistance. But, without Allied help, their plight was hopeless — the world must be made to understand.

Yet America, and to some extent Britain, safe behind its geographic isolation, had little appreciation of this reality. Felix Frankfurter (1882-1965) was no exception. The son of Austrian Jewish emigrates, born in Vienna, he came to N.Y. at aged 12, went to Harvard Law school, embarked on a brilliant career and was ultimately appointed a Justice of the United States Supreme Court by his friend FDR. And it was the president who asked him to see Karski before his own interview. After reading the demands and hearing Karski relate his "message" about the Holocaust, he told Karski that, "I am unable to believe you." Asked if he was calling him a liar, Frankfurter replied, "No, I did not say you were lying... I said that I am unable to believe you... there's a difference."

These are the final lines in our play. In a sense everything builds to them.

This brings us to the other half of the dichotomy of our Goddard epigraph, "Imagination."

III

IMAGINATION

Our play is about Evil. But it is not the mere "bad" of the throw-away line of the sophomoric Hamlet, who, in his youthful banter with Rosencrantz, says "for there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so." No, that does not define it. In fact, that comment represents a moral evasion that Hamlet himself does not really believe as later he says:

The spirit I have seen may be a devil; and the devil hath power t' assume
a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps out of my weakness and my
melancholy, as he is very potent with such spirits, abuses me to damn me.

Indeed, no one who has heard the message Karski delivers can believe that it is anything but a missive of Absolute Evil. There is no "thinking" that can possibly make it good. It is Evil manifest — an independent Force.

It is not relative. It is ubiquitous, almost palpable, and not located in one special time, place or people. It does not depend upon tastes, fashions, or ratiocinations for its existence. No, indeed, it is not only infernal, but also eternal. It is not vanquished by legislation or acts of parliament or good intentions. It cannot be reasoned with or wished away. One cannot plead with its "better instincts." In fact, it's as implacable as a serpent, its oldest symbol, and just as mutable. It's never extinguished but morphs into new forms, new platitudes, agendas and programs — wears new uniforms, assumes new faces, speaks in new voices — persuades in different ways — slithers away and reappears.

When Hitler and Stalin were dead, Evil did not die with them. It simply shed them like old skin.

In our play, we see Evil personified in Hitler's servant, SS Hauptsturmführer Heinrich Hamann. It's not that Hamann has merely adopted wrong ideas or opinions, made a wrong turn, bet on the wrong political horse; yes, sure, he did those things, but it's more than that, no, he is literally possessed with a spirit of Evil that drives him into a kind of madness that we see in his final scene. Yet his madness has a certain coherence, and it is this coherence that makes it so terrible, so fatal. There was a time when people would have said that he was possessed... by Satan. That is no longer fashionable but how wrong were they, really? Can we, in our skeptical, materialistic time, find a better metaphor?

To be sure, Hamann presents an enormous challenge to actor and director, but without him we have no real message. You cannot have the Garden without the snake, *Othello* without Iago, *Richard III* without the humpback, or *Paradise Lost* without Satan.

Though Hamann is not literally present in the final scene, he is there in spirit. He drives us toward it, and possesses us in it. In it, his predictions come true — Frankfurter answers in the way that Hamann said he would.

But why look at it? Why not turn away as Frankfurter did? It is painful to see, like the sun, we wish to shade our eyes or avert our gaze, as he did — as Hamann foretold.

Hamann has challenged us to look, betting that we won't, and so we must prove him wrong. We must remember the victims and the heroes, for their sake and our own, and for the future. Or, as Thomas Hardy said so well, "If the way to the better there be, it exacts a look at

the worst."

If the infernal is eternal then it must be met, defeated on its own grounds — in eternity — in Imagination. As William Blake said, "Imagination is our only real word for eternity."

Where there is no Imagination there is no light. Without Imagination there is no empathy, hence, no sympathy, tenderness, forgiveness, patience, understanding, compassion, faith, and love. Lust without love leads to violence and violence to killing — they are inexorably linked. This is well known. Men of Force, like Hitler and Stalin and all their minion demons like Hamann, people who cut off heads on television, or murder innocents like Kayla Muller, burn people in singles or by the millions, are easily understood.

Evil has taken over their souls by robbing them of Imagination — they are blinded and live in perpetual darkness — can find no communion with the world except through power, power for its own sake, power over others, a lust that can only find its consummation in violence, cruelty, and destruction — they are emotionally and passionately committed to violence and death rather than life and love. In a word, they are morally insane. They hate humanity. *Karski's Message* to Frankfurter is one of mass insanity — of moral chaos, which he cannot accept. It's too horrible. So he looks away.

What's to be done?

"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea? Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"

Is Force ever good? Yes, in ending chaos, as Fortinbras does at the end of *Hamlet* or Henry Tudor at the end of *Richard III* and as the world did in defeating Hitler. But it can do nothing else. Goddard answers, "The best force can do is to impose order, not to elicit harmony." In the end, "harmony" must come from elsewhere, from Imagination.

"Force or Imagination: they are the ultimate foes. Force or Imagination: they are the ultimate choice."

But in this struggle are we alone? If so we are doomed. Let's not forget our other epigraph.

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep.

Our play is also about Good. If Evil is Absolute then so is Good. If there are Devils so are there Angels — "visible spirits." How can we conjure these "visible spirits?" Through

Imagination, but Imagination is not a phantom, or illusion, or trick, but a means of seeing a greater reality. Those without it are dead to sight, but with it there is light.

"Let faith oust fact," as Melville has Starbuck say in *Moby Dick*. And Faith arises from Angelic Imagination.

IV

SOURCES

The primary historical sources are: *The Story of the Secret State*, by Jan Karski, and the excellent biography, *Karski, How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*, Revised Edition, by E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski; while for the history of Poland during the war, the superb, *The Eagle Unbowed, Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, by Halik Kochanski is at the top of the list.

I have taken particular inspiration from the *Diary of Etty Hillesum*, who my good friend, Eddie Back, put me on to, and *On Shakespeare*, by Harold Goddard, the best criticism of that titanic figure I know of.

On a more personal level, I have drawn great inspiration from working with my dear friend, Penina Krupitsky, a Holocaust survivor, on our novel based on her life, *The Broken Vase*. As of this writing, Nina is living with her family here in Little Rock. The dedication of the book at Yad Vashem library in Jerusalem in 2010 was one of the most rewarding moments of my life.

I am very thankful to The Weekend Theatre Board, Matthew Mentgen, our Director, Claudia Moskova-Cremeens, our Assistant Director, and Patti German, our Stage Manager, and all the marvelous cast and crew of our play, *Karski's Message*. Their dedication, energy and talent has been a great inspiration. I have never worked with more gifted people than these.

"I am in Poland every day, on the battlefields, if that's what one can call them. I often see visions of poisonous green smoke; I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying, every day, but I am also with the jasmine and with that piece of sky beyond my window; there is room for everything in a single life. For belief in God and for a miserable end. When I say that I have come to terms with life, I don't mean that I have lost hope. What I feel is not hopelessness, far from it. I have lived this life a thousand times over already, and I have died a thousand deaths."

Diary entry of Etty Hillesum, gassed at
Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of twenty-nine.

On the way to Auschwitz, Etty Hillesum pushed a postcard through the slats of the boxcar. It was found on the tracks and mailed. In it she said, "We left singing." This was the inspiration for the character of the "Unknown Peasant Woman" in our play.



Children photographed at Auschwitz