



Photo: Gudrun Likar

STEPHEN SEWELL is one of Australia's most experienced and prominent writers, and his writing has won many awards. As a playwright, he is well-known for his violently political dramas such as *Traitors*, *Welcome the Bright World* and *The Blind Giant is Dancing*. Other playwriting credits include *The Father We Loved on a Beach by the Sea*, *Dust*, *The Garden of Granddaughters*, *The Sick Room*, *The Secret Death of Salvador Dali* and *Three Furies: Scenes from the Life of Francis Bacon*. His screenwriting credits include *The Boys* (winner of 1998 AFI for Best Screenplay adapted from another source), *Sisters* and *Lost Things*. *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America—A Drama in 30 Scenes* was first produced by Playbox in association with the State Theatre Company of South Australia in 2003. It has had much-lauded productions overseas, including London and Germany, and in 2005 it will play in Edinburgh and New York. It has won more awards than any Australian play in history.

MYTH, PROPAGANDA AND DISASTER IN
NAZI GERMANY AND CONTEMPORARY
AMERICA

A DRAMA IN 30 SCENES

STEPHEN SEWELL



Currency Press • Sydney

CURRENCY PLAYS

First published in 2003
by Currency Press Pty Ltd,
PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia
enquiries@currency.com.au
www.currency.com.au

This revised edition published 2005

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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA CIP DATA

Sewell, Stephen, 1953–.

Myth, propaganda and disaster in Nazi Germany and contemporary America: a drama in 30 scenes.

Rev. ed.

ISBN 0 86819 775 0.

I. Title. (Series: Currency plays).

A822.3

Set by Dean Nottle

Cover design by Mollison

Printed by Southwood Press, Marrickville, NSW

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‘Know reality for what it is.’
Marcus Aurelius



Introduction

Stephen Sewell

The assault on international law and democratic institutions currently being waged under the guise of the War on Terror has provoked a storm of protest throughout the world, and within the theatre community, and *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America—A Drama in 30 Scenes* is part of that reaction. With its roots in the great tradition of humanist opposition to absurdity and tyranny, from Kafka's *The Trial* through to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Brecht's *Galileo*, *Myth* tells the story of Talbot Finch—a name chosen to evoke America's own great liberal tradition, in the name of Atticus Finch, the hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—as he suffers a mysterious persecution at the hands of someone only he can see, and whose existence is denied by all around him. Caught in this nightmarish trap, Talbot questions his own sanity as he confronts the question each of us is asking at the moment: is this really happening and what can I do to protect myself? What can I do to protect myself from a State that can dispense with any pretence to legal obligations and practices simply by calling me a terrorist? What can I do to protect myself when the ancient prohibitions against torture are being flouted in a gulag of secret prisons dotted across the globe, filled with ghost prisoners apparently beyond the reach of even the International Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions? How can I protect myself when my own Government is complicit in the kidnapping and torture of Australian citizens and happy to lie on a daily basis about its knowledge and involvement in international crime? How can I protect myself now?

The answer is now well known. On my own, it is impossible to protect myself in all but the most rudimentary of ways, but as a group we can protect ourselves from the tyrants who are ever ready to take away our lives and rights. This is not empty rhetoric, this is the core

element of democracy: for good or for evil, the power of the group is infinitely greater than the power of the individual. This is a truth that has been proven again and again, both in the positive and the negative senses. The Nazis won in Germany because they were able to corral and annihilate any opposition, and herd the many German people they had not murdered into the Nazi Party itself. In the famous words of Pastor Martin Niemöller, ‘In Germany they first came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me—and by that time no one was left to speak up.’

On a more positive note, the ability of people to confront and defeat the bullies and little Hitlers in our midst is a daily experience, and one that should encourage us to take heart in the community we are a part of. And part of the expression of that community is theatre.

Theatre has nearly always been on the side of the oppressed and the vulnerable because theatre, even in its most ancient forms, has used as its material human lives and dilemmas, and presented these in a communal setting. Of all the arts, theatre is most unique in its direct relationship with its audience. Theatre is the people speaking to themselves, and in speaking to themselves, creating a sense of their own unity. This is why autocrats from Plato down have been suspicious or downright condemnatory of the theatrical arts, and this is why politics and theatre have always had such an intimate relationship. The Velvet Revolution that overthrew Communism in the former Czechoslovakia was forged in Vaclav Havel’s Magic Theatre in Prague, where the Oppositionists met and plotted the downfall of the old regime, and this is but one of the most recent links in the long chain that has found theatre and political action synonymous. Theatre is politics and politics is theatre, and so long as the rulers control the other forms of mass media, theatre will remain the avenue through which we can inform one another of how we really feel.

And how we feel now is angry, frightened and confused. How we feel now is bewildered as the world we have known of laws and rights and democracy are stripped away and replaced by an Ancient Regime

of arbitrary power we thought died centuries ago. But we should not be disheartened. We know that while tyranny presents itself as strong, it is fundamentally weak, relying as it does on the absolute power of an individual, and what makes it weak is what makes us strong, and we will win this fight against those who would lock us up and torture us because we are humanity willing itself to thrive and live. We know their lies for what they are, and know their most corrosive lie—‘you are alone’—is the biggest lie of all, because we know we are not alone, and when we sit in a theatre hearing each other breathe as the joys and fears of our lives are presented onstage, we know the truth: we are not alone, and we are not afraid.

Sydney
June 2005

‘Naturally the common people don’t want war, but after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag people along whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.’

*Hermann Goering,
Hitler’s Reich-Marshal
at the Nuremberg Trials
after World War II.*

Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America was first produced by Playbox Theatre, in collaboration with the State Theatre Company of South Australia, at The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, on 4 June 2003, with the following cast:

TALBOT	Nicholas Eadie
EVE	Alison Whyte
MARGURITE	Ming-Zhu Hii
JACK	Michael Habib
AMY	Jacqy Phillips
STAN	Robert Macpherson
JILL	Martha Lott
MAX	Tom Considine
MAN	Greg Stone

Director, Aubrey Mellor
Designer, Shaun Gurton
Lighting Designer, Mark Shelton
Sound Design, David Franzke



CHARACTERS

TALBOT
EVE
MARGURITE
JACK
AMY
STAN
JILL
MAX
MAN
SECURITY GUARD
THERAPIST
STUDENTS, GUARDS

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

University lecture hall.

An American-sounding man in his forties is addressing a collection of students as slides illustrating his talk flash through the dark space, occasionally lighting the large American flag hanging from the ceiling.

TALBOT: ... So that what you really have, for all their claims to rationality—And what you must remember is the incredible organisational skill that went into keeping the trains running on time, and the ovens stoked, even as the Reich itself was being devoured by the victorious invading armies—for all their quite justified claims to running an efficient and rationally organised killing machine, the facts of the matter are that these very clear thinking men—Eichmann, Speer, Himmler and the rest—were involved in a deeply irrational struggle they were bound to undertake given the mythic hobgoblins unleashed in their psyche by Nazism, and prominently displayed in Nazi propaganda, in order to justify itself. For if the racial purity of the superior Aryan was the supreme value, then the Nazi supermen had no choice but to exterminate the Jews or become degenerate and be exterminated in their turn, and when it became clear to Hitler in those last lonely days of *Gotterdammerung* in his Berlin bunker that Aryan Germany had indeed lost the struggle, he actively embraced extermination and death by ordering Speer to destroy Germany's remaining food and fuel supplies so that the nation would starve and freeze to death rather than linger on as a degenerate slave race under the boots of the despised Slavs. In the end, the madness that had only been implicit at the outset, and that no one believed anyone in their right mind could possibly mean, consumed everything, and the rational was revealed as nothing more than the hand-maiden of the completely insane.

The last image is of a little Jewish boy holding his hands up in surrender as a Nazi soldier points his gun at him.

FIRST VOICE: [voice-over] Then what's the point?

TALBOT: Point?

FIRST VOICE: [voice-over] Of thinking; of trying to work things out?

SECOND VOICE: [voice-over] If all we're doing when we try to think rationally is working out clever ways of committing insane acts, what's the point of thinking?

TALBOT: I believe you have just stumbled onto one of the saddest riddles of Western thought.

FIRST VOICE: [voice-over] I'm serious, Professor: what's the point of thinking?

TALBOT is bringing things to a close.

TALBOT: The hope that one day we might find the truth, and as someone famous once said—it was either Mulder or Jesus—'The truth might set us free'.

But another voice calls through the darkness.

MAN: [voice-over] I have a question, Professor...

There is something odd and commanding about the voice that makes TALBOT peer out into the shadows.

TALBOT: Yes...?

MAN: [voice-over] If all nations, as you say, are ultimately undone by the myths that found them, what will be the fate of America?

TALBOT: America, sir?

MAN: [voice-over] Yes. America.

TALBOT: What do you think?

MAN: [voice-over] No. What do you think?

TALBOT picks up his briefcase and collects his papers.

TALBOT: I think it's already happened.

MAN: [voice-over] What?

TALBOT: I think America has entered the kingdom of Fantasyland.

Chortle-chortle, ha-ha...

The lights change as TALBOT moves off and for a moment we see the swastika illuminated on the stars and stripes, before a voice calls out...

MARGURITE: Professor...

It's a pretty Asian girl running up.

Professor...?

TALBOT: Yes?

MARGURITE: I wonder if I could see you—I'm having trouble with one of the essay questions.

TALBOT *makes a move.*

TALBOT: Talk to your tutor.

MARGURITE: I did, but he said I should talk to you—It's the Political Statics question—

TALBOT: I'm sorry...

MARGURITE: Margurite—Margurite Lee.

TALBOT: I'm sorry, Miss Lee, we've got a lock-down drill in five minutes—I really can't talk.

MARGURITE: Can I see you in your rooms?

TALBOT *takes off.*

TALBOT: Make an appointment with the Faculty Secretary.

MARGURITE: I really enjoy your lectures, Professor!

TALBOT: Got to go.

MARGURITE: 'Bye!

Just then, an ominous-sounding alarm begins as a voice comes over the loudspeakers.

SECURITY: [*voice-over*] Would all staff and students go immediately to their muster points. This is a lock-down. Would all staff and students proceed immediately to their muster points.

Light change.



SCENE TWO

Talbot's home.

A beautiful, sophisticated woman in a black dress is preparing a salad in the kitchen as TALBOT pours himself a drink.

EVE: ... So eventually the right part arrived and he took it out and that's when he discovered that all it was was one of those plastic-bottle-

cap-type things—those flanges inside the bottle top—stuck in the outflow—It was a waste of the entire morning—We didn't need to replace the motor at all.

TALBOT: The pleasure's of consumerism...

EVE: And I've got a deadline—Will you set the VCR? My episode of *CSI* is on tonight.

TALBOT: What happens in this one? Plato decides the real is an illusion and has Socrates poisoned?

EVE: No, that was last week—What happens is the decomposed body of a teenage hooker—

TALBOT: I'll set the VCR.

EVE: Hey, I'm the one pulling the moolah around here—You know how much they're paying me for *West Wing*?

TALBOT: Go on, frighten me.

EVE: Oh, by the way, your publisher rang.

TALBOT: My publisher? When?

EVE: He asked you to call—I think he thinks the book's a little academic and wants a few more sex scenes.

TALBOT: Don't we all.

EVE: Hey, I'm wearing my Yves Saint Laurent underwear, if you really want to know.

TALBOT: Well, that must have really thrilled the plumber.

EVE: Yeah, he could barely keep his hands off the knobs.

TALBOT: So when did the publisher ring?

EVE: Just before you got home—And this guy tonight, he's your boss, right?

TALBOT: My boss, yeah.

EVE: And the other one...?

TALBOT: Is the Faculty lawyer.

EVE: So we're talking serious brown-nosing here—Who's who?

TALBOT: Jack's the Head of the Department and Stan's the lawyer.

EVE: And what's in it for me?

TALBOT: You just wait, baby; if they confirm my tenure, it'll be neapolitan ice cream from here on in.

EVE: You really know the way to a girl's heart—So what time are they arriving?

TALBOT: Eight—What's the time now? I might just have a shower...

TALBOT *begins to move off.*

EVE: It's just a marinara and salad—is that all right? I got some crusty bread.

TALBOT: Are you ready?

He disappears and the sound of the shower is heard as EVE continues.

EVE: Ready? Yes; yes, I'm ready, Talbot—Ready for what, I don't know—I was working on this scene today—you know, in the movie—where the mother discovers that the little girl is gone and I was just—struck—by how awful that must be—how terrible—It must be the worst thing in the world to lose a child—In fact, I can't imagine how you'd ever recover—I suddenly felt a terrible, terrible emptiness—a cold emptiness inside—Do you think that, really, that is our purpose in this world? To care for children? To bring them into being and watch them grow? If it is, then I wonder what on earth I'm doing. Why am I living the life I'm living—parties, forums, international blahdy-blahs?—Listen to me prattle—What's that? The *ennui*—Yes, *ennui*, of the proper bourgeois wife—'Moscow, Moscow—we must work'—when maybe it's all terribly simple after all, and all I have to do is forget my contraceptive pill one night—But as you say, Talbot, if we had children, we'd no longer have each other, would we?—We'd just start turning into things to one another—Sometimes I think I'm turning into a thing even now—Why is that, Talbot? Why is it that just when you think you've solved it, you realise you haven't even started?

'Ding-dong'... the front door chimes, and TALBOT greets...

TALBOT: Jack—Amy... Come in.

JACK and AMY enter, taking the place in.

I hope you didn't have any trouble with Security—

JACK: Security? No—Wow, look at this...

AMY: It's beautiful...

JACK: It's beautiful, Talbot—We must be paying you more than I thought!

AMY: It's beautiful, Talbot.

'Ding-dong'... and TALBOT's off again.

JACK: Manhattan, ay—look at that...

EVE *steps out.*

EVE: [*greeting*] Hi, I'm Eve—I'm Talbot's—

JACK: Eve—I'm so pleased to meet you—We've both heard so much about you.

AMY: You're a novelist...?

EVE: Television writer.

JACK: Television...

TALBOT *returns with* STAN...

TALBOT: It's Stan!

JACK: Stan!

... *and his wife* JILL.

AMY: Hi, Jill...

JILL: Long time, no...

AMY: Yeah...

JILL: [*explaining*] We saw each other at FAO Schwartz this morning—

There was another security scare down there—can you believe that?

People had their own gas masks, for God's sake...

TALBOT: What can I get you guys to drink? Campari?

AMY: I'll have a campari.

JACK: I'll have mine with a little ice—Were you here on nine-eleven?

TALBOT: Yes...

JILL: Gee, you would have been able to see everything...

The guests are now lounging at a long table, philosophising at the end of an enjoyable meal. Another man, MAX, has joined the table.

JACK: ... Well, I know you've got a bee in your bonnet about it, Talbot, and it's certainly an interesting idea, but you can't take this myth thing too far, can you?

STAN: What do you actually mean by it, Talbot?

TALBOT: It's really pretty simple, Stan: you're a lawyer, right?

His wife, JILL, horse-laughes.

JILL: So-called.

TALBOT: So part of your education would have involved learning the myths of the law.

STAN: Such as...?