Ella Yan

GERM 499

Essay 3

April 1, 2015

**THE JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES**

*(When the lights go up, we see a residential street lined with colorful doorways. The houses are neon colors. The stage, in contrast, is lit in only black and red, with lightning streaking the otherwise-empty backdrop; thunder and drumming can be heard. Stage machinery and stagehands producing the sound effects are clearly visible to the side. Three men in SA uniforms skip jauntily across the stage carrying a banner: VIENNA, EARLY 1938.)*

*(It is early evening on a weekday. A* ***MAN*** *and his adolescent* ***BOY*** *of about 12**walk along a nearly-empty residential street. They are dressed in large trench coats and hats, and are due to visit a man in one of these houses.****)***

**BOY.** (*Whining, dragging his feet. He falls to the ground dramatically and rolls around to show his petulance.*) Papa, are we nearly there? When can we stop walking? We’ve come from all the way across town!

**MAN.** (*Patiently. He maintains a steady walking pace and helps the* ***BOY*** *up without breaking his stride.*) My son, you know we have no money for the tram. But we must see Herr Strauss tonight. I have heard that he is interested in meeting with someone from our congregation. If we can convince him to understand the world the way our church does, that’s at least one fewer supporter for Hitler and this senseless war. You’ve heard of how Herr Wagner walked six hours to speak with that family in…

(*The* ***MAN*** *grows silent as two* ***SA OFFICERS*** *walk toward them. The* ***MAN*** *comically runs in circles, ala Benny Hill, trying to find a hiding place. He drags the* ***BOY*** *along; the* ***SA OFFICERS*** *pay no mind to this.*)

**SA OFFICERS.** Heil Hitler! (*They salute. The* ***MAN*** *and* ***BOY*** *stop running in their tracks.*)

**MAN.** (*Out of breath, but confidently*.) Good day, gentlemen! (*He tips his hat to them, but does not salute*.)

(*Immediately, the* ***MAN*** *takes ahold of his son’s arm again, walking speedily past the* ***SA OFFICERS*** *with the* ***BOY*** *in tow. They move swiftly across the street before the* ***SA OFFICERS*** *can react.*)

*(As the* ***MAN*** *and* ***BOY*** *move, the houses among the backdrop quickly come alive, shifting in the opposite direction. The drumming and thunder pick up; the scene feels almost-comically hectic. The background changes as the facades of new houses move onto the stage, reflecting the* ***MAN*** *and* ***BOY’s*** *new location on a different, yet similar, street. The backdrop lighting remains red and black, in contrast with the neon houses. One house is bright white while the others are colorful, with a sign indicating the* ***MAN*** *and the* ***BOY’s*** *destination.*)

**BOY.** (*Confused, worried.*) There have been so many men in uniform around the city lately, Papa! They notice when I refuse to line up with the other boys and when I don’t salute! (*He climbs onto his father’s back as he says this, reverting to the state of a much younger child.*)

(*The* ***MAN*** *sighs and shakes his head, turning straight to the audience. He is hunched over under the weight of his son on his back*.)

**MAN.** (*Gesturing to members of the audience throughout.*) My child, for their lack of understanding, I apologize. But we must have our own convictions and remain true to the teachings of our church. You know as well as I that this Hitler is not the solution for mankind’s problems. He may say he believes in the power of work alone, but the Party is really focused on promoting war, the military, violence! We cannot use that greeting or salute Hitler. Don’t you see that would be as good as admitting salvation comes from Herr Hitler, rather than from Jesus? Don’t you see the hypocrisy in that? Salvation can come only from the Jehovah God himself, as you learned before you were baptized last summer.

(*The thunder and drumming in the background stops; the red and black background lighting gets a bit brighter, as if the sun has just come out. The* ***MAN*** *eases the* ***BOY*** *off his body and looks around briefly, examining the houses. He notices they have arrived at their destination, the white house, which is marked by a large neon-lit arrow and “Come In” above the door.*)

**MAN.** Ach, here we are. Remember your manners when we greet Herr Strauss.

(*He knocks steadily, three times, on the door. A thunderclap is heard with each knock. A moment later, a* ***WOMAN*** *answers. She is very voluptuous and wearing a tight, bright outfit, with a tall bouffant hairdo in an unnatural hair color.*)

**MAN.** Good evening. Is Herr Strauss at home? My name is Hermann Adler, and this is my son Fritz. I have heard that Herr Strauss has been interested in receiving some information from me. He should be expecting us this evening.

**WOMAN.** (*Haughtily*.) My husband should be home from work shortly. Would you like to come in to wait for him in the sitting room?

**MAN.** Certainly. Thank you, Frau Strauss.

(*Pieces of the background come to life and move again as the three step into the sitting room. Pieces of the new setting move onstage. The sitting room is well-decorated and suited to a upper-middle-class couple. There is a couch, coffee table, and armchair. There is a mantle with a large portrait of Hitler. The* ***MAN*** *and* ***BOY*** *are invited to sit. As the* ***WOMAN*** *moves to exit the room, the* ***MAN*** *notices a Bible resting on the armchair, left by Herr Strauss. A spotlight suddenly illuminates the Bible, which glitters.*)

**MAN.** (*To the* ***WOMAN****, cautiously*.) Say, Frau Strauss, that is a beautiful Bible you have. Has your husband ever mentioned an interest in attending a Bible study?

(*The* ***WOMAN*** *initially looks confused, and then grows angry as she realizes the purpose of the man’s visit. Another thunderclap. She turns and walks back into the center of the room, but remains standing.*)

**WOMAN.** (*Exasperated.)* You’re not another pair of Jehovah’s Witnesses, are you? My stupid husband! This is the second time now someone has come to our door, promoting this belief or that movement. Doesn’t he know what trouble he brings us with his careless inquiries? My husband is too curious, and that will be the death of him! (*Pause*. She turns to the audience.) And me too, if I’m not careful!

(*She swoons dramatically, then calms herself*.)

**WOMAN.** (*cont. To the* ***MAN****.*) I apologize. Herr… Adler, was it? You must understand. My husband and I, we are German. We’re *Deutsche Christen*, and we’re loyal to the Führer. It can be no other way.

(*She pauses*.)

**WOMAN.** (*cont.*) Besides, the Führer himself has just announced on the radio that you Bible students are not at all doing the right thing, going door-to-door like this. Like beggars! (*Pause. She turns to the audience again, walking toward them.*) “Hard work is prayer,” he says. That is how my husband and I worship. (*Pause.*) “This is what God accepts.”

(*She walks over to the portrait of Hitler, takes the photo in her arms to hug it, and closes her eyes and bows her head, as if nestling a baby in her chest.*)

**MAN.** (*Calmly, as he stands and walks to the edge of the stage, looking at the audience.*) I’m sorry, Frau Strauss. I am as willing to work as the next man. Pay taxes, give to the community. I can respect Hitler, but I will not worship him.

(*He pauses, shakes his head. Looks as if he’s reflecting. The stage darkens and a spotlight is placed on just the* ***MAN****.*)

**MAN.** (*cont. More quietly.*) I love God and my fellow man. That is why I cannot take part in this war; I would rather give my own life than take the lives of others and betray the teachings of God. I will not be a hypocrite.

(*Silence.* *The lighting returns to normal.*)

**WOMAN.** (Shocked.) (*To the* ***MAN****, still clutching to photo of Hitler.*) Aren’t you aware of the terrible things that will happen to you? (*She gestures wildly to the boy.*) To your son? (*Almost whispered, referring clearly to the* ***BOY*** *but speaking only to the* ***MAN***.) The Führer says it is especially the younger ones who have to change their ways before it is too late. Why not send him to join the Hitler Youth? Save that boy from all the hard times and persecution you yourself have no doubt experienced.

(*Silence. She continues solemnly*.)

**WOMAN.** (*cont.*) You must know whom you are dealing with. Very seldom does the Führer compromise. (*Urging.*) Save him from Dachau.

(*A thunderclap is heard*.)

**MAN.** (*Reserved, after a pause.*) I know the situation well. The leader of a nearby congregation was given one month to convert before being put to death. He died just last week.

(*A pause.*)

(*The* ***WOMAN*** *turns, walks over to the* ***BOY.***)

**WOMAN.** I feel sorry for your father.

(*She shakes her head and looks back down at the sitting* ***MAN.***)

**WOMAN.** (*cont.*) (*With pity.*) I cannot help you.

(*She leaves the room, photo still in her arms. The stage fades to black.*)

References

“Jehovah’s Witnesses—Oral History.” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.* United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d. Web. March 31, 2015.

“Living Histories: Seven Voices From the Holocaust.” *USC Shoah Foundation*. University of Southern California, n.d. Web. March 31, 2015.