

Hochhuth's *Judith*: an instigation to the murder of the President

by Rosemarie Schauerhammer

Under the title, *Judith—A Tragedy*, Rolf Hochhuth, well-known for his politically explosive pieces, has fabricated his latest “work,” a work which is, indeed, terribly “explosive.” It is a bomb, with which the American President’s life is to be “artistically” taken.

The work was written on commission for the Zurich Schauspielhaus and will be put onto the market in a large edition by the Rowolt publishing house. *Vorwärts* and *Der Spiegel* have excitedly praised the work as “explosive material for NATO members”—how true!

As *Vorwärts* puts it, *Judith* is concerned with a “preventive murder,” with “the inexpressibly stupid ignorance of knowing but repressed bourgeois democrats. An assassination attempt is, on the contrary, an attempt to stop a fatal development by lighting a beacon.” That this “attempt to stop a fatal development” consists in the murder of an American President is not criticized by *Vorwärts*—which is, after all, the official paper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). What is criticized is that Hochhuth merely writes. “Hochhuth hung around inactively in front of an American Pershing depot. He did not attempt to force his way into the White House in order to murder the American President.”

Whoever knows Hochhuth and his history for the past 20 years knows that this “tragedy” is not to be dismissed as the irrelevant ramblings of a deluded fool. With each of his “dramas,” Hochhuth has set off dramatic political events. We can already hear the many “Judiths” out there ticking, fantasizing, after reading Hochhuth, of being prepared as “human bombs” to bestow their deadly embrace on the hated American President.

From character assassination to poison gas

In February 1963, Hochhuth’s first work, *Die Stellvertreter* (The Deputy), had its premiere in Berlin. In this work, Hochhuth accused Pope Pius XII of not only knowing about the crimes of the Nazis, but of tolerating them and suppressing all opposition against them within the Church. This character assassination of a Pope shook the faith in the Catholic Church in Germany, which at that time was still suffering

from the shock of collective guilt, and paved the way for the fall of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer shortly thereafter and for the coming to power of the liberal Ludwig Erhard. With this work, Hochhuth set off the wave of so-called literary “coming to terms with the past,” which was later to become the favorite hobby of authors such as Heiner Kipphardt, Günter Grass, and Peter Weiss.

In 1965, Hochhuth published his essay, “The Class Struggle Is Not Over,” about which the later terrorist Ulricke Meinhof would say enthusiastically: “Class struggle . . . Hochhuth smashed a tabu.” In the essay, Hochhuth demanded a redistribution of property and “anticipated in part the extra-parliamentary opposition,” as *Spiegel* later wrote. Against this essay the liberal Chancellor Ludwig Erhard came out with his famous words, with which he prepared the way for the revolt of the leftist writers and thus for the developments of 1968: “I have no desire to discuss economic and social policy with Mr. Hochhuth . . . at that point the writer leaves off and a little irritating dog takes his place.” The debate of Erhard and Hochhuth put the whole group of leftist writers, of Grass, Hochhuth, Jens, Rühmkorff, Lenz, and Richter, among others, on a collision course with the state.

In 1971, Hochhuth wrote a letter to then Chancellor Willy Brandt on the plight of the homeless in the Federal Republic: “It is a degradation for all of humanity that children whose best years are wasted in these holes cannot at least summon the will, when they are 20 years old, to kill every municipal politician who originally condemned them to that life.” At this time, the Baader-Meinhof group has already begun its terrorist actions, out of supposedly “social motives.”

In 1978, Hochhuth forced the Baden-Württemberg Prime Minister Filbinger into retirement with the work *Eine Liebe in Deutschland* (A Love Story in Germany), in which he asserted that Filbinger had been a “terrifying judge” during the Nazi years.

In 1983, Hochhuth participated in the “celebrity” occupation of Mutlangen against the stationing of the Pershing II missiles. Today, in 1984, Hochhuth invites the murder of the American President in *Judith*.

***Judith*—The murder of the neighbor**

What is *Judith* about? The title betrays what the work means—in an allusion to the Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes—in which the beautiful Judith insinuates herself into the tent of the besieger Holofernes, tricks him, and cuts off his head. In Hochhuth's play, Judith and her brother Arthur, the second principal character, are children of the American East Coast Establishment; their father is a former ambassador who now works in the State Department. Arthur is crippled, chained to a wheelchair because he came in contact with the pesticide Agent Orange in Vietnam. When President Reagan orders the resumption of the production of biological and chemical weapons, the brother and sister decide to kill him.

The play begins with a prologue in Minsk, Russia, in 1943. The German Inspector General, a Nazi with a "humanistic education," is killed by his maid, Jelena, a Russian partisan with whom he is having an affair. She places a bomb under his bed. This prologue prepares the audience. As Hochhuth himself said, the prologue is supposed to make it clear that an assassination is necessary.

But what this prologue insinuates primarily is that President Reagan is the same as the Nazis, and therefore a tyrannicide is both necessary and morally right. This image of the American President is quite familiar from the pages of *Pravda* and other Soviet propaganda outlets. For quite some time, it has been the official Soviet public-opinion policy that President Reagan is to be portrayed as a new Hitler, whose madness this time will destroy not merely millions of human beings but all of mankind. Hochhuth is not politically naive enough that this KGB propaganda campaign could have escaped him. Whether Hochhuth has constructed his work as the conscious representative of a foreign secret service is a question that security forces in the Federal Republic should clarify as soon as possible.

The first act of *Judith* takes place 40 years after the prologue, in Washington, D.C. Judith and her brother Arthur debate various possibilities for killing "the neighbor" (the characterization in this work makes it absolutely clear that it is about President Reagan). Arthur, a chemist who has received a position in a university institute through his father's connections, has devised a microphone and a perfume atomizer which can deliver to the President a fatal dose of nerve gas. Judith, the widow of an economic writer and herself a political writer, will film the President on a ranch at the birth of a foal which he attends for publicity reasons.

At this point, a friend of Arthur enters—Edward, significantly, a Jesuit—who will be used by the two of them to send the President a series of threatening letters with "the date of the threatened execution if he does not revise the decision of arming weapons with nerve gas." The purpose of this exercise: "The FBI and the CIA should be certain that this fool regularly sending threatening notes is only making

threats the way that others are fooling around with flying saucers. . . ."

Now Gerald, a friend of Judith who has made his career in the East Coast Establishment, comes into the action. For his characterization, Hochhuth describes the career of McGeorge Bundy, "the most disastrous deceiver of the previous generation." Gerald works on the White House staff and is, therefore, the contact person to the President. The conversation between Judith, Arthur, and Gerald turns on the theme that President Reagan, "the neighbor," has not only resumed "production of poison gas," but also has spoken of a limited nuclear war in Europe. And Judith meditates in respect to her brother, crippled by Agent Orange—"It would only be logical if now one of you who were crippled by nerve gas should do away with this lackey."

The second act leads directly back to Minsk. The modern Judith meets the Judith of 1943, Jelena, in order to interview her for a film. The place where they meet is the soldier's graveyard in Minsk. In the setting for this scene, Hochhuth wrote: "Restricted neither by parliament nor by law, this hideous order [President Reagan's for production of biological and chemical weapons] calls for an equally radical reply, which—quite naturally—is exactly as remote from our Western tradition of law as is the godless crime of resuming production of poison. Civil disobedience against it would be merely childish—as contemptible as it actually appears in the eyes of those who are sick with power."

Jelena gives Judith the moral justification for a murder: "Assassinations of individuals are indispensable, in order to rebel against the intolerable: otherwise the people, we the normal dispensables in every land, pay with our blood what the great ones dish up at the cost of their people! . . . Not to act can be more of a crime than murder." A Russian, who lost his mind in the war because he was buried alive in a mass grave, portrays in an epileptic fit how the new "Armageddon," the nuclear war, will look.

The third act, entitled "Contact Poison or Nerve Gas," depicts an argument involving Judith, Arthur, and the Jesuit Edward; Edward, as soon as he hears of the details of the assassination plan, pulls out of the plot. Hochhuth has created an "alibi character" in the person of Edward which he, time and time again, draws into every interview. But, as Hochhuth himself admits, the audience does not identify with the priest, but solely and completely with Judith.

Judith is now all the more convinced to turn the plan into action, since there is also a mystical necessity for President Reagan's death: "A wounded Indian chief told the victorious Gen. William Harrison in person that indeed he would become King of America in 1840, but that he would, as would all his successors in the future who would be elected in a year ending in a zero, die in office—and it is true that without exception, in the 120 years between Harrison's and Kennedy's election, the seven elected at the end (or beginning) of a

decade have died in office, although only two of the seven died a natural death.”

And Arthur insists: “The resumption of production [biological and chemical weapons], sors had avoided for moral reasons, is crime enough for his execution. . . . The mind is not mere empty talk only where it is action . . . and it is the honor of the man with a conscience to become guilty . . . if he dirties, or bloodies, his hands.” And: “Of course those who make a world war must be killed.” Hearing these words, who doesn’t think of the Russian propaganda that Reagan is doing everything possible to unleash a world war?

In order that this play should appeal to the peace movement, especially in Germany, Hochhuth inserts here a short digression which turns on the fact that poison gas weapons are stored in the Federal Republic. “These inexpressibly stupid Germans, who store our weapons like beer. A herd of lemmings—since they are no longer a gang of bandits, an incomprehensible people. Their stupidity today almost matches their inhumanity under Hitler.”

The epitome of this act is that Judith decides to carry out the murder. “They are still doing map exercises with millions of nuclear dead. . . . Therefore, he who first expressed it [the possibility of a limited nuclear war—R.S.] the first to die. God wants it—otherwise I would not consider it.”

The last act, “Whoever takes up the sword,” takes place after the murder. Judith has killed the President with nerve gas. In order to give his “heroine” an opportunity for a monologue about her murder, Hochhuth, making use of “poetic freedom,” invents a nerve gas which only takes effect after two hours. For the sake of honesty, all would-be Judiths are hereby warned that in reality this part of the role may not be possible.

The fifth act shows Judith in a conversation with Gerald, who has no idea that the act has taken place. Judith rationalizes the murder: “A civilian undertakes a preventive strike against one who had planned the same for hundreds of millions. . . . That is not murder—but self-defense! Those who want disarmament are only fools, cowards that run away—this habit of thought of those sick with power is at an end. . . . My conscience is clear, for I could gain nothing for myself as I did this. . . .”

Whoever is still not convinced that the murder of President Reagan is a moral necessity will get what he needs in the appendix of the book. Rolf Hochhuth, who is actually amazingly well informed about domestic affairs in the United States, calls upon the “most experienced of all foreign policy experts, next to Molotov, who is still living at age 94 in Moscow,” Averell Harriman, who warned the world against President Reagan in guest commentaries in major newspapers throughout the world. Harriman is, as *EIR* has repeatedly demonstrated, not only the brain of the Eastern Establishment

but was also a zealous admirer of Hitler and his racial policies. To support Harriman’s “warning,” Hochhuth additionally quotes from Kennan, Fulbright, and Nixon, and draws a comparison between the present situation and the German naval armament of 1911, which in his opinion led to the First World War. Could that world war have been prevented if the Kaiser had been killed?

Hochhuth behind bars

There is no doubt that *Judith* represents an instigation to terrorism and murder; even Hochhuth himself does not dispute that. Out of fear of legal consequences, he prefaced the work with a five page “preamble,” in which he attempts repeatedly to emphasize that it is not a question of instigation, but merely of art. He even quotes Article 5, Section 3, Sentence 1 of the Fundamental Law of the Federal Republic, which states: “Art and science, research and teaching are free.” While it is true that the German constitution protects art and science from the arbitrariness of totalitarian censorship (as, for example, is common in the East bloc countries), what our constitution protects above all else is the “life and bodily safety” of every individual. Hochhuth drags this fundamental right in the dirt.

Hochhuth knows very well that Reagan only narrowly escaped one assassination attempt. It is also well-known what a crucial role the motion picture *Taxi Driver* played in motivating the would-be assassin Hinckley to this act. The agent will easily find the deadly weapon, once he has been worked into the properly deadly frame of mind. Hochhuth’s play is a pornographic invitation to such violence. And that has nothing to do with the “freedom of art.”

With incredible effrontery, Hochhuth places himself within the tradition of Shakespeare and Schiller. He asserts, for example, that Schiller’s drama *Wilhelm Tell* also has tyrannicide as its theme. That is not quite right. In this connection, Schiller presents the question of tyrannicide as the “final means” for the defense of the fundamental law of mankind. The corresponding passages are taken almost word for word from the American Declaration of Independence. In order to make this point perfectly transparent, Schiller contrasts the legitimate act of Tell himself with that of the assassin Parracidas, who murdered the Kaiser for contemptible motives.

While Schiller deals with the moral question of tyrannicide in a historical context, indeed in the context of a republican revolution, Hochhuth’s work gives specific directions for the murder of a concrete individual. Only the mentally ill can consider the murder of the American President as the “final means” for saving mankind from destruction by tyranny. This murder—even the threat of such a murder—fits far better with the evil and defamatory propaganda of East bloc dictators. That is not a matter of art, but rather a case for the courts.