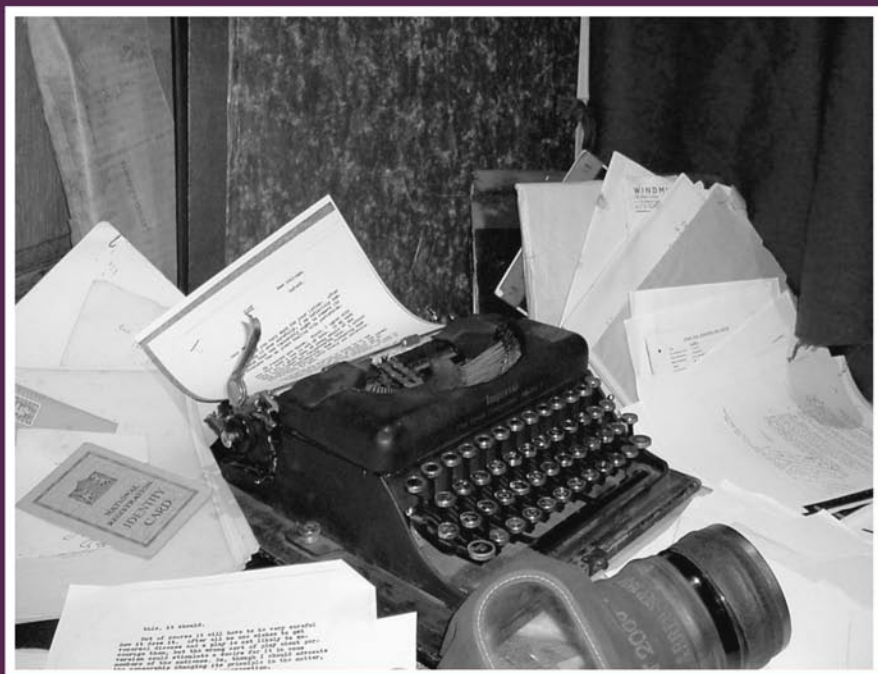


STEVE NICHOLSON

# The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968



## Volume Two 1933–1952

'Nicholson writes with wit and insight, and his work is always engaging. He has the happy knack of being able to offer analysis of extremely serious and complex issues in an entirely accessible way . . .'

*Martin Banham, Emeritus Professor of Drama & Theatre Studies,  
University of Leeds*

*The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968* is based on a systematic exploration of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence archives, which contain files for every play submitted for a public performance licence in Great Britain. In three volumes, it examines plays that were banned, and the far greater number that were significantly cut or altered. Steve Nicholson also makes substantial use of the Royal Archives at Windsor to provide new insight into the debates that went on within and beyond the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

**This second volume** focuses primarily on political and moral censorship, documenting and analysing the control exercised by the Lord Chamberlain. It also reviews the pressures exerted on him and on the theatre by the government, the monarch, the Church, foreign embassies and by influential public figures and organisations.

**Among the topics covered are:** the ban on criticising the Nazis or portraying Hitler; restrictions on anti-war drama; controlling nudity and strip shows in wartime reviews; comedians and innuendo; youth violence and the shock of realism on the postwar stage; the perceived threat to society from 'sexual perversion'; the campaigns of the Public Morality Council.

Volume Three will cover the period 1953–1968, beginning at the dawn of the Conservative fifties, and will examine how censorship affected the work of Genet, Beckett and the controversial new wave of British playwrights.

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# The Censorship of British Drama 1900–1968

*Volume Two: 1933–1952*

Steve Nicholson

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*of*  
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*For Katya and Vikka*  
*Thanks for finding such good uses for all the drafts.*

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## INTRODUCTION

# ‘The Most Dispensable of All the Fetters’

If it is unfair to the writers that is not our business  
(Lord Chamberlain’s Reader, 1934)

After we have finished with it the author would not wish to go on  
(Lord Chamberlain’s Reader, December 1938)<sup>1</sup>

I suppose it was tempting fate to joke, in my preface to the first volume of this study of the Lord Chamberlain and theatre censorship between 1900 and 1968, that I would need to write six books to tell the story fully. Now I see that my ‘six’ might have read ‘twelve’, for this second volume will reach only as far as 1952, and a third volume will be required to take the story through to the final death throes of the system.

One of the factors which has made it necessary to revise and extend the project has been the discovery of a further dimension of material, which is currently contained within the Royal Archive at Windsor Castle. With the probable exception of the former Assistant Comptroller to the Lord Chamberlain, John Johnston, whose book on censorship was an important but hardly an adequate account,<sup>2</sup> no-one else who has written about the subject has had access to this material; just as no-one had previously looked at the fifty thousand or so files on individual plays in the Manuscript Room of the British Library.

Broadly speaking, the Windsor archive contains material which is *not* specifically or primarily related to individual plays. A few more or less randomly chosen file titles give some sense of the range of topics covered: ‘Enquiries and Comments by Sir Ian Malcolm Regarding Principles of Censorship to be Observed in Advising the Lord Chamberlain’; . . . ‘Press Announcement re Necessity for Giving a Complete Description of a Performance Including Acts in Which there is No Spoken Dialogue, and a Clear Description of the Action, “Business”, or Dress’; . . . ‘Letter from Public Morality Council, with Reports of their Stage Plays Committee, and Lord Clarendon’s Reply, Giving Aspects and Principles of the Censorship’; . . . ‘Correspondence with Mr George Black on question of interpolation,

in Plays or Revues, of Gags or Business not Previously Approved by the Lord Chamberlain'; . . . 'Mr Cain Complains of Obstruction Caused by playing National Anthem in Theatres and Cinemas'; . . . 'Mr Oteifi Chief Egyptian Censor Interviewed By Assistant Comptroller'; . . . 'Correspondence with Theatrical Managers' Association re. Proposed Production, at Cambridge, of Seventeenth Century Play *'Tis Pity She's A Whore'*; . . . 'Attachment of a Yiddish Playreader'; . . . 'Confidential Correspondence With Public Control Department, LCC, re. Appearance of Max Miller at an Entertainment at Windsor Castle'; . . . 'As to Wearing of Human Bones on the Stage'. Once I had been given permission to consult the archive, such files were plainly not to be ignored. Indeed, information which came to light is integral to almost every paragraph of this book; if the British Library archive of files on individual plays represents a goldmine for the researcher, then these are perhaps the diamonds.

As with the extensive 'Correspondence Files' at the British Library, those in the Royal Archive typically contain letters, minutes of meetings, memoranda, notes, statements, cuttings and other documentation. As some of the titles cited above promise, it is often in these files that the evolving policies and strategies (and the arguments about them) are most clearly made manifest: in the detailed records of conferences called by the Lord Chamberlain to hammer out principles with representatives of government and the theatre industry; or meetings with the licensing wing of the London County Council intended to forge common approaches to dealing with nudity; or of showdowns with individual managers who were not playing the game in the way the Lord Chamberlain wanted it to be played. The issues are also shown in the notes made by the Lord Chamberlain's secretary for his annual lecture on theatre censorship to trainees in the Scottish Police College in West Lothian ('Censorship before production from MSS and largely based on impression . . . Individual and changing interpretation of text possible at every performance', he observed; 'Considerable possibility of evasion of rulings');<sup>3</sup> or in the courteous and detailed response to a senior law lecturer at Manchester University carrying out research into licensing practices ('I am naturally anxious to give anyone in your high position in the academic world as full an answer as I can . . . You will understand, however, that to an ordinary enquirer I should feel unable to answer many of the questions so fully, or indeed at all');<sup>4</sup> or in the bulging files which document the two occasions in 1946 and 1951—occasions about which we previously knew nothing—when the Lord Chamberlain sought the advice of a number of 'wise and responsible men and women' as to whether he should relax his policy in relation to one of the most contentious issues of all:

I am under heavy pressure from some shades of public opinion to lift the ban upon plays in which reference to homosexuality and Lesbianism occur . . . it would be a great help to me if you could give me briefly and in confidence the answer to the following question: In your view, am I any longer justified in withholding permission for these two subjects to be mentioned on the stage?<sup>5</sup>

Not only the Lord Chamberlain's letter but all of the replies are preserved, and a revealing and enthralling set of documents they make.<sup>6</sup>

Yet not for a minute should it be thought that the significance of the material in the Royal Archive in any way lessens the importance of the 900 or so files per year which centred on individual plays. It is here that we see the Lord Chamberlain and his staff at the coalface, cutting words or lines or gestures or costumes, negotiating with managers and playwrights, disagreeing with each other. Moreover, the distinction between the content of the two archives is far from absolute; on the one hand it frequently occurs that a report or a letter which begins by responding to a specific text broadens rapidly into matters of general principle. And on the other, what may begin as a general discussion of principle necessarily finds itself citing specific texts as exemplars. Did I say twelve volumes? Actually, one could very easily write a volume for every year.

One of the possible objections to tracking the practice of theatre censorship in the relative detail I have mapped is that it might tell us more than we need to know. In other words, I may simply be piling up examples which duplicate each other, and a more effective approach would content itself with fewer examples from which firm and general policies could be easily and succinctly extrapolated. Maybe the reader of this work will be able to do that better than I have. But it is not for want of trying that I have found myself generally struggling to identify and articulate sets of rules or consistent practices—or that when I have done so they are invariably tentative and hedged with exceptions, reservations and doubts. Every individual play, to a greater or lesser extent, challenged or stretched the censorship because of the gap between the actual and the theoretical—between a specific text and a (more or less) agreed but usually unwritten policy. Nor were the Lord Chamberlain and his staff always of one mind; and though in the end decisions were the responsibility of the Lord Chamberlain alone, he was not expert or certain or devoted enough to be impervious to arguments and claims put to him by his Readers or advisers. In my reading of the evidence, then, it is extremely hard—and becomes a futile exercise—to discover anything approximating to absolute consistency, or, to be more accurate, to find consistency in relation to scripts that were actually written and submitted for licence. There certainly were rigid and fixed principles which could never have been violated, but these operate at the level of unseen ideology, undiscussed and invisible. It is

surely unthinkable, for example, that during the period covered by this book one might find the Office having to deal with a play that advocated equal rights for homosexuals, or attacked institutions such as the Church or the monarchy. These were absolute taboos, and no playwright or manager would have wasted time trying to breach them. But the interest lies in the gaps and the hints and the subtexts.

It is only rarely that a play is submitted which is unequivocally seen by the Lord Chamberlain and his Readers as utterly and irredeemably beyond the pale, incapable of ever achieving a licence. Where we have to look is in the constant clash between principles (which were themselves constantly shifting) and individual texts. No two plays or characters or lines could ever be the same as each other—even if they had been, then the political or moral or aesthetic or historical or even geographical context was different. To be sure, the Office was forever endeavouring to compare texts with each other and to think in terms of precedents, but the links were never firm and the situation and pressures never precisely the same. In any case, rather than replicating a decision made last year or last month or last week on a ‘similar’ play, the Office might be trying to learn from experience and do the opposite. Moreover, even to say that the Office might choose to treat two similar plays quite differently begs the enormous issue of what we might mean—or what the Office might have meant—by ‘similar plays’; are we talking about plot and content? Language? Form? Characters? ‘Message’? In practice, then, even what might appear—and might sometimes have been claimed—as absolute bans, never really were. Homosexuality could be listed but it couldn’t be so easily defined or its presence agreed upon. Certainly you could prevent anyone called ‘God’ or ‘Queen Victoria’ or ‘Hitler’ from appearing on the stage, but that does not necessarily prevent audiences from seeing them there. Much oil was burnt in the Lord Chamberlain’s Office (and elsewhere) trying to agree even on a definition of nudity: something which one might have thought would have been relatively unambiguous and stable. What chance, then, that more obviously nebulous concepts could be tied down firmly even within (let alone beyond) St James’s Palace? As we well know, theatrical communication is so fundamentally elusive, and the interpretations which occur to audiences derive from so much more than a bare text (even if one includes stage and costume and gestural directions as part of that text) that a system which carries out its censorship before a single performance occurs could never know what was going to be visible in the theatre. The Lord Chamberlain and his staff were not fools—they knew this. Performances—even texts—leaked meanings, and however hard they tried to anticipate them and patch them up, new holes were always appearing. Back in 1918, one of the Lord Chamberlain’s advisers had noted: ‘I have heard of a comic

actor who said he could recite *Mary had a Little Lamb* in such a way as to make it a monument of obscenity . . . I do not doubt it'.<sup>7</sup>

The Office itself frequently espoused the fact that 'every play is judged according to its merits', and that the Lord Chamberlain 'avoids as far as possible any predetermined code of hard and fast rules'. And this was almost inevitably true. As they told Mr Street, the Manchester law lecturer, in 1952, the key criteria were 'method of treatment and sincerity of object, rather than choice of subject'. This effectively acknowledged that censorship was primarily a matter of interpretation rather than absolutes. The Comptroller went on to inform Mr Street that although the Lord Chamberlain would never 'prejudge' a play, there were four 'themes' on which he had 'not known him pass one'; these were 'The physical appearance of the Deity on the Stage', 'Representation of the Royal Family' (which by this time meant that 'No Member of the Royal Family living after the death of Queen Victoria is permitted to be depicted'); 'Unnatural Vice', here defined—perhaps strangely—as 'pederasty and Lesbianism'; and 'Representations of Living Persons, or those recently dead'. He then concluded: 'None of these prohibitions is necessarily immutable, and they will probably be modified if contemporary conditions ever make this desirable'.<sup>8</sup> I make no apologies, then, for three volumes and the wealth of examples; that is where the riches and the story lie, and that is where we have to go.

In September 1939—a date not insignificant in British and European history of the twentieth century—an article in *New Theatre* described the Lord Chamberlain as 'the most dispensable of all the fetters on theatre art'.<sup>9</sup> He was not dispensed with, however. In three sections covering the pre-war period, the war years themselves, and the immediate post-war period, this book explores the continuing struggles to redefine or remove his absolute authority, and, by detailed reference to extensive examples, to look at the effect of censorship on the development of British theatre over twenty years. We begin with the last third of Lord Cromer's reign as the incumbent of St James's Palace, with Britain and Europe increasingly threatened with destruction and meltdown, and end on the eve of the coronation which ushered in a new Elizabethan England, as Cromer's successor, the Earl of Clarendon, completes his own fourteen-year reign.

Following the general pattern of Volume One, the three chronological sections are divided into eleven thematically based chapters. In practice, however, it is impossible to be either chronologically or thematically tight, since incidents and debates related to individual plays may recur and extend over years and decades. Within each of the three sections I have attempted to divide the focus of separate chapters into broadly political and broadly moral issues, but these are never discrete; in a world familiar with both the concept of sexual politics and immoral politicians, it goes without saying

that these are somewhat spurious divisions. Yet they are ones that the Lord Chamberlain's Office and the period recognised, largely without question, and it therefore seems a more appropriate framework than any other I have been able to construct. In Section One, then, the first chapter is devoted entirely to issues surrounding the portrayal of the Nazis and fascism on the British stage in the thirties. The second chapter focuses on moral and sexual issues, but matters relating to what was habitually labelled 'perversion'—which in the parlance of St James's Palace (and, doubtless, beyond) meant homosexuality and incest—are looked at separately in Chapter Three. The final chapter dealing with the pre-war years concentrates on plays engaging with political issues other than the Nazis. In the second section, the heart of Chapter Five is wartime censorship on political grounds, while Chapter Six deals specifically with issues of nudity and the body, and Chapter Seven with other moral concerns. In the final section, Chapter Eight traces the campaigns and the battles fought over censorship in the changing cultural and historical climate of the post-war years, with the 1949 cross-party parliamentary bill which aimed to repeal the Theatres Act as the focal point. Chapter Nine returns to issues of morality in the changing(?) and 'brave new world' established after 1945, Chapter Ten centres on the arguments over whether to lift the ban on the depiction of homosexuality, and Chapter Eleven on dramas engaging with national and international political events.

The fact that the structures within the three sections are broadly similar without being completely formulaic reflects the need to follow where the most important and fiercely contested sites of struggle seemed to occur at different times. Yet I have doubtless excluded material which is deserving of future attention, and which others might see as more significant than some of what I have chosen to include. On another day, I might, like the Lord Chamberlain, have called it differently myself.



SECTION ONE  
1933–1939



## CHAPTER ONE

### ‘Verboten’

#### The Nazis Onstage

It is not easy to go on shielding the Germans from their misdeeds being depicted on the stage in this country.

(The Lord Chamberlain to the Foreign Office, November 1934)<sup>1</sup>

In April 1934, *New Statesman and Nation* published an article by the critic and playwright Hubert Griffith, provocatively entitled ‘The Censor as Nazi Apologist?’<sup>2</sup> It centred on the recent refusal to license an English translation of *Die Rassen*, a drama written by the Austrian playwright Theodor Tagger under his pseudonym of Ferdinand Brückner, and first performed in Zurich the previous November. Griffith refers to the English version under the title *Races*, though, possibly to disguise its political content, it had been submitted to the Lord Chamberlain with what his Reader described as the ‘ironical’ title of *Heroes*.<sup>3</sup> The story centred on a female Jewish student forced to flee the country and abandon her Aryan lover, who is himself attacked by his Nazi friends for associating with her. Griffith insisted that the tone was ‘moderate’ and that any propaganda was ‘unspoken and only implied’. Indeed, he claimed that a Nazi official witnessing a performance in Switzerland had admitted that ‘there was nothing untrue about it, and that it represented what Jews in German universities had got to expect’. Griffith told his readers that the official reason given for refusing to license *Heroes* was that two other anti-Nazi plays had already been turned down and that the censorship was bound to be consistent, and he accused Lord Cromer of being ‘more sensitive to the susceptibilities of the German Embassy than he has any reasonable right to be’.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, however, the Lord Chamberlain and the British theatre were not standing alone; productions planned for Prague and Buenos Aires had already been suppressed, after German representations, while a proposed production in New York had also been cancelled.

Until—and even after—the day war was declared on Germany in 1939, the Lord Chamberlain and his Readers were repeatedly embroiled in

negotiations and disagreements as to the stage portrayal of political events in Germany and Europe. Such discussions were partly internal within St James's Palace, but frequently involved the Foreign Office and the German Embassy, as the theatre was required to accommodate itself to national and international political strategies. The Lord Chamberlain's staff were by no means always happy with what was required of them. Reporting on Brückner's play, George Street pointedly observed that 'to those who take the theatre seriously it must seem a pity that matters which have stirred public feeling should be excluded from it'; he commented that it 'does not include attacks on individuals', and, pre-empting another possible ground for objection, expressed his 'doubt if any disturbance would result' from staging it.<sup>5</sup> But Street knew that his personal view as Reader counted for little and would be over-ruled.

Griffith ended his article by announcing that the English translation of *Heroes* was about to be published, and that 'Literature is still (at the moment) freer than the stage'. Although the promised translation never appeared, the general point remains true, and the primary reason for this was that licensing for the stage was in the gift of the head of the royal household. It followed that any play staged in public had been effectively sanctioned and endorsed by the monarch, and that its 'message' could be seen as carrying his support. As a result, the Lord Chamberlain was effectively obliged to ensure that the British stage did not upset the German authorities. In February 1934, Cromer wrote: 'I have no wish to deter people from showing up the brutality of the Nazi regime, but this can perfectly well be done in books and novels, and even published plays, but not by plays acted on the English stage.' As an internal memorandum made explicit, it was not even a question of whether a play was 'fair':

The brutality of the Nazi regime is, I imagine, beyond question. Books are published on this theme & also plays, but much as my personal sympathies are with those who wish to enlighten the world as to doings in Germany, it would be very mistaken policy to allow such plays to be acted on the English stage.<sup>6</sup>

As early as August 1933, Cromer had insisted on removing a scene called 'The Dictators' from a Lupino Lane revue, even though it had been previously broadcast on radio: 'We cannot have Mussolini or Hitler impersonated on the stage without objections being raised, so this had better come out'.<sup>7</sup> Almost certainly, he was thinking of objections made by the German Embassy rather than by members of the public. The following month a reference to Hitler was cut from a revue at the Prince of Wales's Theatre—even though one to the British prime minister was allowed to remain<sup>8</sup>—and in reading the script for the October *Revuedeville* at the Windmill Theatre, Street drew attention to an anti-war song: 'I mark some

lines on Hitler; the "straws amongst his hair" I should think can hardly be passed—it is certainly insulting and it is not the moment for exacerbating remarks on the stage'. Cromer agreed, and the lines were removed.<sup>9</sup>

Yet a complete ban on references to contemporary Germany would have been impracticable and probably self-defeating. Whether by coincidence or not, the first serious play about the Nazis was approved for public performance two days after Griffith's article had appeared. *Whither Liberty*, written by Alan Peters, a Leeds doctor, was licensed for Bradford Civic Theatre on 16 April 1934; its cause was probably helped by the fact that it was not to be staged in London, but, more importantly, the script had been substantially rewritten since its first submission nine months earlier under the title *Who Made the Iron Grow*, when Street had described it as 'a strong indictment of the atrocities and excesses committed by the Nazis'.<sup>10</sup> Both the narrative and the form of Peters's play proved to be early models for a succession of scripts to emerge over the next few years, which struggled to fit the horrors of contemporary events into a formulaic straitjacket of 'realistic' characters, setting and dialogue. In this instance, the head of the Bergheim family is a medical professor interested only in science, who has never revealed to his wife—an aristocratic woman of anti-Semitic tendencies—that he is of Jewish origins. One of their sons is drawn to the political right, the other to the left, while their apolitical daughter turns down the sexual advances of a Nazi storm trooper in favour of a Jewish scientist. The playwright attempts to project into this domestic world the increasing violence and prejudices of German society, as one son is killed and the rest of the family flee into exile. Bergheim's wife is officially informed that her husband is a Jew and has lost his post at the university, and she is given the opportunity to annul the marriage. But in the final moments of the play, she recants her prejudices and decides to remain with him, holding up to the audience a crumpled piece of yellow paper with the word 'Jew' on it, which she will stick back on the door from which she had previously torn it down. 'The play is not a good one', wrote Street in July 1933, 'the author is in too great a hurry'; yet in its way it was an important one. More to the point, the Reader realised that it would create 'political difficulties'. Street urged against wholesale rejection, and tentatively questioned the logic of the very particular limitations placed on the stage:

Since it avoids indictments of policy—except for a few passages which may be excised—and is aimed at atrocities denounced by every English newspaper, by many public men, by the overwhelming majority of English people in private, it would be in my opinion a great mistake to ban it.

He marked specific references likely to inspire objections—'The burning of the Reichstag . . . The denunciation of Hitler . . . The professor's forecast of

policy’—but pointedly observed that ‘so violent a Revolution ought not to be squeamish about criticism in a foreign play. It is effectually stifled at home’.

Cromer sent the script to the Foreign Office: ‘It is a very anti-Hitler piece’, he warned them, ‘and, although it is only to be produced at Bradford and is unlikely to come to London, there is always the possibility of this’. The Foreign Office responded by strongly recommending that, at the very least, the issues to which Street had drawn specific attention must be amended:

Even so I expect that we should have a protest from the German Embassy if the play were put on in London; and in view of your complete authority over plays we might not be able to give a very convincing reply.

Whatever one’s personal views, the play is a violent attack on a government with which we have friendly relations, and so far as the Foreign Office is concerned the hope of reciprocity in similar circumstances would incline me to deprecate the appearance of the play in London.

It is hard to know whether the Foreign Office was really concerned about how the German stage would represent Britain or the King or whether this was largely an excuse, but it was a point frequently raised over the next few years. In any case, the Lord Chamberlain took the advice of the Foreign Office and refused a licence; when someone from Bradford Civic Playhouse queried the reason, he was invited to attend St James’s Palace to obtain further information. ‘These people live in Bradford’, wrote one of the Lord Chamberlain’s staff, ‘we can’t very well ask them to call’; but Cromer was astutely reluctant to commit himself in writing:

Care must be taken in the wording of the reply to give no handle for raising a controversy in the Press over ‘political censorship’.

The best course really would be to invite Mr Webster—in spite of his living in Bradford—to take an opportunity of calling at St James’s. It could then be explained to him verbally that a propaganda play of this nature, must inevitably be regarded as an attack upon the present system of government in Germany.

Whatever one may think of the Hitler regime, the prosecution [sic] of Jews etc. they are no direct concern of ours, so that the presentation of this picture of conditions on the British stage could not be regarded otherwise than unfriendly and lead to official complaint which would be difficult to answer. Besides which if we allow this in England, our authorities can hardly complain of retaliation by anti-British plays in Germany. At the present time it would be an unwise play to produce and will do no good, only possibly harm.

Cromer also hoped he could discourage the playwright from amending and resubmitting the script: ‘I hardly think any alteration in the dialogue would remove the basic objection to the theme of the play’, he wrote. But

details of the case were evidently leaked to a newspaper editor, and in December 1933 Cromer felt obliged to respond to his probing and justify his own decision:

The whole thing is a strong indictment of atrocities and excesses committed by the Nazis in Germany and, while possibly there is much truth in it all, I did not think that the British stage was a vehicle for this sort of propaganda, which would most certainly have led to protests from Diplomatic quarters which I always endeavour to avoid.

For your personal information, let me explain that the political aspects of the play were such that instead of circulating it to the Advisory Committee, I referred it to the Foreign Office people, who were emphatic in deprecating the appearance of such a play in this country. Had such a play have [sic] been allowed here it would be futile for us to complain of the production in Germany of anti-British plays, and as naturally the Foreign Office are mainly concerned in maintaining good relations with Germany and other Foreign Countries, they were bound to take this line, and having advised me in this sense I could hardly do otherwise than abide by the advice given me.

Personally I hate introducing any political element into censorship at all, but at times this is inevitable and *Who Made the Iron Grow* is a case in point.

A verbal explanation has been given to the would-be producers, the Bradford Civic Playhouse.

Peters's play subsequently received a handful of private performances in Leeds, and in February 1934 the playwright himself wrote to Cromer to ask what he needed to do to obtain a licence for public performance: 'It has been suggested to me that if the play were re-written, and the scene placed in an imaginary country ruled by a political party not called Nazis or Fascists, that you might reconsider your decision'. Peters promised to remove specific references to actual statesmen, though he admitted that 'it would be impossible to hide the fact that the allusion is to Germany'. However, he intimated that the application need not be so narrowly defined: 'The production of the play in its altered form would be useful as propaganda against similar tragic conditions being forced upon England'.

At a meeting with the playwright's solicitor, Cromer confirmed that the Ruritanian route might be acceptable, and in March 1934 a revised script was duly submitted under the title *Whither Liberty*. Again Street reported, and again he did his best to persuade the Lord Chamberlain to grant a licence; he also questioned the logic of requiring so transparent a fictionalisation, though he recognised that this was an established strategy which had frequently been adopted. But above all, Street, who had been a Reader in the Office for some twenty years and was now approaching retirement, pleaded for the stage to be granted the freedom to criticise a regime which hardly deserved the protection and respect being granted to it:

I gather . . . that the Lord Chamberlain hoped he would be able to license the play if an imaginary country replaced Germany, and other names were altered. This has been done. Germany becomes Nordia, Hitler Hacker, Nazi Nori, Brown Shirts Yellow Shirts, and so on. Otherwise the play is the same, with the outrages on Jews and the denunciation of the Nazi regime.

That Nordia means Germany and the other imaginary names those for which they stand will of course be obvious to everybody. But that was certain when the author was more or less encouraged to make the changes. That being the case, however, I should be inclined to cut out the accusation against Hacker, i.e. Hitler, of himself having the 'Senate House' 'blown up' as being particularly offensive to the German government and as never having been proved, whereas for the outrages of the Jews there is a mass of evidence. But I think the play should be passed. The custom of allowing imaginary names when the real names would not be, even though everyone knows the identification, is open to objection in theory, but it has always existed and has saved many a situation. . . . My own opinion, for what it may be worth, and with the greatest respect to the Foreign Office, is that the stage should not be debarred from expressing an almost universal sentiment. I note that another anti-Nazi play refused here is being presented in France and America. Still more, do I think that this revised version with its imaginary names should be allowed.

Cromer insisted on some further amendments, but he then licensed the play—even while acknowledging that no-one who saw it would be in any doubt about the real subject matter. What he had effectively done, however, was to protect his own back (albeit with a somewhat thin covering) against the inevitable criticisms and accusations which would flow from the German Embassy. He said as much in an internal memorandum: 'Much as I regret resort to the subterfuge of a change from the real to an imaginary country, dictates of policy render this necessary. Although too transparent to hoodwink any audience, it is sufficient, or should be, to gainsay any official protests'.<sup>11</sup> Such a priority would be a central plank of his policy over the next few years.

But if a week is a long time in politics then four years was a very long time for St James's Palace. In 1938 it came to the attention of the Lord Chamberlain's Office that Peters's play was to be revived. Both Street and Cromer had gone by then and, under pressure from the government, which was now even more desperate to avoid upsetting Germany, the Office decided that 'in view of the national situation' the play should not be revived. In October 1938, the new Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Clarendon, took the almost unprecedented step of seeking the surrender of a licence which had been issued four and a half years earlier:

You may remember that even in 1934 there was some difficulty in granting a licence for the play *'Whither Liberty'*.



International affairs have changed considerably since then, and if the play were submitted for licence at the present time, it would undoubtedly be refused.

In view of this the Lord Chamberlain requests you to return the licence which was issued to you in April, 1934.

I hope this withdrawal will only be temporary, but in view of the present situation the necessity for doing so is one which I'm sure you will understand.

Mrs Roberts, from the Bradford Civic Theatre, may have understood, but she was not willing to submit:

I hope you will pardon me for expressing my very strong feeling that it is just the present state of international affairs that makes it much more important that such plays as *Whither Liberty* should be produced, more important even than in 1934 when the licence was given. Glad as everyone is that peace has been preserved there is, I think, throughout the country a strong feeling of dismay that Nazism has, by the method thro' which peace has been maintained gained a considerable victory. Everyone to whom I have spoken, in the country or in the town . . . are united in their desire that we should somehow make it plain that England's passion for peace should not preclude us from expressing our detestation of tyranny. A play such as *Whither Liberty* . . . might enable many people to find an emotional and rational outlet for their scarcely formulated convictions and feelings.

Surely the Lord Chamberlain's office is not going to be the first to abandon the peculiar genius of the British people and their rulers, which has for so many centuries allowed the free expression of opinion, whether at Hyde Park Corner, in the press or in the Theatre, and has, by the use of this safety valve, escaped revolution for longer than any country in Europe—where such safety valves are not permitted.

It is not as if *Whither Liberty* was a gross exaggeration, it is very much an understatement of the case.

In a potentially awkward situation for the Lord Chamberlain's Office, Clarendon's silver-tongued Comptroller, Sir Terence Nugent, employed all his diplomatic expertise to try and persuade Mrs Roberts to accept a compromise:

In view of the international situation the Lord Chamberlain is naturally anxious to do nothing which may embarrass the leaders of this country.

For this reason, and because of complaints at other plays which have been received from foreign embassies, the Lord Chamberlain has decided that in plays which criticise or attack the acts or ideology of the leaders of Foreign States and their supporters, great care must be taken to avoid leaving anything in the script which may furnish a clue as to which State is aimed at by the author . . .

In *Whither Liberty* there are many such passages, which the Lord Chamberlain will require altered before the play can be performed in public again.

Nugent invited Roberts for a personal interview, and sought to reassure her that the Office's policy was rooted in an even higher sense of duty and responsibility than her own.

Finally, I am to say that the Lord Chamberlain would certainly not wish unduly to restrict a free expression of opinion, but I am sure that at such a time as this you will appreciate the necessity of not making more difficult the task of those who are working for a peaceful solution to the present International problems. The Lord Chamberlain feels that by the removal of clues that might connect fictitious characters and places with real ones no harm will be done to an author's work, nor will he, or she, be precluded from expressing those views which he has at heart.

Her reply seemed as obdurate as ever, implying that she would seek support and publicity in high places and asking:

on what authority your Office originally asked (in your letter of October 13th) 'for the return of the licence issued in April 1934' for *Whither Liberty* and what was the precedent for that action? The League of British dramatists, a part of the Author's Society, knows of no other case of a licence being recalled after it had been granted. It is a subject which interests them and which would also interest several friends of ours who are members of Parliament.

I heartily share the Lord Chamberlain's desire to assist in a peaceful solution of the present International problems, and feel that to allow it to appear that England has no objection to persecution for race, religion or opinion, is not a good, nor in the long run, a safe method of seeking that end.<sup>12</sup>

In the event, a compromise was reached in which further cuts were imposed on the text and the licence was not surrendered.

The other anti-Nazi drama alluded to in Griffith's 1934 article was *Take Heed*, a warning play by a barrister, Leslie Reade, which had been privately staged at the Piccadilly Theatre in January and then refused a licence for public performance. The private performances by the Progressive Players had attracted the sort of critical response which would inevitably provoke the German Embassy, and though the censors remarked that the reviews had been generally positive, this was far from an incentive to grant a licence, 'since all state that the play is strong anti-Nazi propaganda'. The *Daily Telegraph* described it as an 'anti-Hitler play' and 'an indictment of the Hitler regime', and the *News Chronicle* predicted that while a ban would be regrettable it was probably inevitable: 'I presume the censor will not allow *Take Heed* to be played in public, although there is nothing in its picture of Nazi intolerance and cruelty which has not been vouchsafed for by eye

witnesses'.<sup>13</sup> Street's report echoed this last point: 'The play is vehemently and fiercely anti-Nazi', he wrote, 'but in the light of what has been witnessed to of the early atrocities it is difficult to say it is unfair'. Yet even he reluctantly recommended that a public performance should not be allowed:

I cannot advise the Lord Chamberlain to grant a licence. I should like to, because I dislike the brutality and ignorant 'Nordic' nonsense of the Nazi movement. But it would be 'asking for trouble'. I have read that when the play was produced at the Piccadilly they were apprehensive of disturbance. Nothing happened except enthusiastic applause, and I do not suppose there are many Nazi Germans in London. Protests from the German Embassy would of course be made, and I think would be unjustified on the facts if the abuse of Hitler were taken out. But it would be unwise to allow a theatre to become a centre of anti-Nazi feeling and I cannot advise the Lord Chamberlain to take that risk. I should be only too glad if he takes a different view, but I advise as duty dictates.

Street suggested that performances might incite confrontations and clashes in the audience, and reviews referred to similar apprehensions; the *Daily Telegraph* noted that 'It was feared in some quarters that a hostile demonstration might be made', while the *Morning Post* report clearly indicates that the threat was taken very seriously: 'The large number of police who surrounded the Piccadilly Theatre last night gave credence to the many rumours one heard within that the Fascists were due to make a demonstration against this play'.<sup>14</sup> In seeking a licence, the play's producer, Harold Mortlake, claimed that the audience had included 'many Germans who were not Jews' and that the theatre had 'specially invited members of the Fascist Party to come and see the play and there were many present, including Sir Oswald Mosley'; he insisted there had not been 'one murmur of dissent nor any suggestion of disorder'. Yet the play and its production were undoubtedly intended to disturb; one review described even the programme as 'provocative, for it contained a statement that the Nazi steel whip that was used on the stage was "kindly lent by Miss Ellen Wilkinson from her collection of such implements made on her recent visit to Germany"'.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, a powerful speech in the climactic scene evidently produced strong reactions, when a professor with impeccable Aryan credentials, whose Jewish wife has been driven to suicide in an effort to preserve her family from persecution, drags her dead body in front of a group of storm troopers:

You ask me to salute your leader. I will do so over her poor body. (*He raises his hand slowly in a fascist salute*). Hail National Socialism! Hail Reaction! Hail Barbarism! Hail Torture and Murder! Hail Intolerance! Hail the destruction of Liberty and Culture. Hail the man who has shamed our country and defiled her in the sight of mankind! Hail those who have

caused the very name of our country to stink in the nostrils of the whole world! Hail Hitler!<sup>16</sup>

Some reviews reported that this attack on the Nazis and their leader was drowned out by the cheers of the audience, and since part of the Lord Chamberlain's brief was to prevent performances which might lead to a breach of the piece, he had a ready-made justification for refusing a licence.

A further anxiety was that, as its title clearly signals, *Take Heed* was not intended simply as a dramatisation of events in Germany, but also as a warning about what could happen at home. In one scene, the professor is asked by his wife what Germany has done to deserve its present punishment and subjection. He replies that it was the 'indifference' of the ordinary population which allowed the Fascists to take power:

We weren't accustomed to our liberties and didn't esteem them highly enough. Democracies must look after their rights, or they'll be gone before you've even counted them; for the enemies of democracy are always on the alert. We were too easy-going and tolerant. All that mattered to us was our own work, our own friends. Often enough we were so occupied with our little worries that we never even bothered to vote. We neglected the privilege which brave men had died to win for us; and then when the trouble came, we cursed the Republic light-heartedly, and sighed for a Dictator. We should have worked night and day for the democracy. We should have given our very souls for the preservation of the Republic just as the National Socialists gave theirs to destroy it. Instead, we did nothing; and in that way we were guilty of a fault . . . We have our Dictator now, and retribution has overtaken us. I pray God that the remaining democracies will escape our fate.

Like Street, Cromer did not dispute the authenticity of the picture the play painted of contemporary Germany, and he claimed that he had 'the strongest reluctance to allowing political motives to effect Stage Censorship'. Yet he was adamant that he had 'no alternative as the theme does not lend itself to alteration or modification'.<sup>17</sup> Although he sent the script to Sir Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office, his 'confidential' letter accompanying it suggests that his mind was effectively made up:

My dear Van,

At a time when you have quite enough to occupy you at the Foreign Office without having to trouble about plays, I hesitate to inflict this one upon you. To save time I should be very glad if you could arrange for someone at the Foreign Office to look through the accompanying play by Leslie Reade entitled 'Take Heed', which is purely an Anti-Nazi Propaganda piece of a distinctly strong order.

Even if it were cut about and modified, which would ruin it for the theatre, it would, I think, be most unwise to have it produced in England as you would be bound to have protests from the German Embassy.

Vansittart agreed, and his reply testifies to the government's priorities:

Confidential

My dear Cromer,

Many thanks for your confidential letter . . . I agree that protest would most certainly be made by the German Embassy. They have already protested about considerably less.

There is an answer when the press is concerned, but the answer is not so easy (and would certainly not be accepted) where the theatre is concerned and a licence has been granted. The Germans would of course look on this as an official encouragement, if not incitement.

The producer offered 'to make any cuts or changes desired', but had to be satisfied with two further private performances later that year.

*Take Heed* was resubmitted by Mortlake in December 1938, with the intention of presenting it immediately in the West End.

I have prepared a version of the play from which I have excised every reference to political personages, places, countries, and to Germany in particular . . .

I will of course, also alter all the uniforms worn on the stage so that, like the script, they no longer signify the Nazi regime

But with the government wholeheartedly pursuing its policy of appeasement, the Reader, Henry Game, commented:

The Lord Chamberlain has recently decided that these anti-Fascist plays must be satisfactorily ruritaniaised, if they are to receive a licence. I do not think that this play will lend itself to such treatment—there is too obtrusive a background of the contemporary German politics of 1933. For this reason I think the Lord Chamberlain will be justified in refusing to lift the ban.<sup>18</sup>

Rather spuriously, Game attempted to draw a distinction between this play and the licensed *Who Made the Iron Grow*: 'there is much less political background woven into the narrative of that play, and the brutality is more personal to the characters concerned, than symbolic of the general brutality of a political party, as here'.

Mortlake continued the battle, showing himself ready to challenge a policy of intransigence which was effectively anti-Semitic. The Assistant Comptroller expressed his frustration, with a rather disquieting emphasis: 'This play has given a great deal of trouble—I have spent hours with this man Mortlake who is a Jew; he is not the author but only the present owner of the play'. He drew another distinction which teetered on the edge of political absurdity: 'I have tried to point out to him that we do not object to a play on the persecution of the Jews, but we will not have any direct reference to the persecuting country—even by inference'. In January 1939,

somewhat surprisingly, Lord Clarendon agreed to license *Take Heed*—provided that the script was submitted to an extensive catalogue of alterations in line with this policy. Apart from replacing ‘brown shirts’ with ‘coloured shirts’ and insisting on no recognisable salutes or uniforms and no goose-stepping, the dozens of changes required included the removal of the term ‘Herr’, the substitution of ‘King’ for ‘Emperor’, ‘Marshall’ for ‘Leader’, ‘Our’ for ‘Nordic’, ‘Hebraic’ for ‘anti-Nordic’, ‘Military Socialists’ for ‘National Socialists’, ‘All Hail’ for ‘Hail’, ‘crowns’ for ‘marks’, ‘Paris’ for ‘Basle’, ‘abroad’ for ‘England’, ‘terror’ for ‘monster’ and, in order to avoid anything too specific or identifiable, of ‘millions’ for ‘two million’. Whole passages of discussion were also marked for exclusion, and the censorship crucially excised the final visual image, in which ‘a shaft of sunlight suddenly streams through the divided curtains’ and catches the corpses of the dead professor and his wife: ‘No sunlight to encircle the heads of Sophie and Opal’, insisted the endorsement.

Mortlake expressed himself ‘appalled at the ruthlessness with which your office is hacking the play to pieces’, and railed against the particular limitations imposed on the stage:

in deference to your wishes I have changed the locale, the names of my characters, the very characteristics of their speech, in order to make this play as harmless as a J.M. Barrie charade . . . Since you insist on cutting anything that is at all good in the play . . . Why this squeamishness, when the German Government openly brag about it. As this is now Ruritania, if they recognise it and protest against it, surely the more shame they? . . . I have reluctantly agreed to your chopping off of the head, arms, legs, and tongue from what was once a living play. That it has taken every literary virtue from the play does not matter very much to the Office. I pray you to have the understanding and generosity to at least let me keep the remnants of the plot in.

Although—unlike the Office—I loathe mutilation in any shape or form, I enclose herewith a clipping from ‘Picture Post’ with a characteristic reference from a speech of Friend Goebbels. Picture Post may say it. The stage must not. Lowe can say it daily with the utmost impertinence, and temerity. The Stage? VERBOTEN! Queer situation in a country which boasts proudly, challengingly of its complete FREEDOM OF SPEECH!

The Lord Chamberlain sent the revised script to Dr Von Selzam at the German Embassy, and an internal Office memorandum recorded the German response: ‘He said it was a pity such plays had to be as “they did not help” which of course is obvious but I explained our difficulties too, which I believe he understood’.

Although *Take Heed* had been subjected to very extensive and detailed cutting, one might ask why the Lord Chamberlain was prepared to consider

allowing it at all in 1939, when it had been refused in 1934. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the review of the production published in *The Times*:

The process of events . . . may well have seemed the melodramatic exaggeration of propaganda when the play was first produced a few years ago. In 1938 the facts have so far outstripped Mr Reade's imagined horrors that one is more inclined to suppose that they have been deliberately toned down to suit the exigencies of the stage.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, the play no longer appeared extreme or excessive, and had been effectively censored. When it might have been shocking, it was silenced. Soon after war was declared, the original script was resubmitted: in November 1939, Game commented: 'As far as making the play an anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi play by restoring the original text, I see no objection'. The Acting Comptroller agreed:

Mr Game now considers there is no reason why this play should not be licensed, since other plays of an anti-Nazi character, such as *Pastor Hall* and *The Crucible* have recently been passed . . . it is simply a bitter denunciation of the Nazi Party and regime. There is no propaganda in it against any other country and it therefore seems logical to pass it for production.

Clarendon even managed a little joke: 'I agree', he wrote, 'for we need not now "take heed" of German feelings'.<sup>20</sup>

The Lord Chamberlain's Office had always been willing to consult the Foreign Office, and the interests of 'friendly' nations had traditionally been taken into account. But it had surely never found itself under the sort of sustained pressure that it experienced from the German Embassy during the thirties. What made it even harder for playwrights and producers who wished to engage with contemporary international politics were the changing strategies and positions of the British government. A further specific obstacle was the general principle, as stated in court in 1939, that 'the Lord Chamberlain will not permit rulers of foreign states to be mocked upon the stage'.<sup>21</sup> In September 1934, Henry Daniell's *Lucid Interval* was submitted for the Playhouse in London, but although Street admired the play he again doubted if it could be passed:

This is a fantastic play about Hitler. It is clever and interesting and the only objection is that it is about him. There is no disguise at all, though of course the name is changed. . . . I wish it could be licensed with an instruction against any personal make up. Given the admitted facts Hitler is not treated badly . . . A man with a sense of a humour would not object to this portrait of himself. However I cannot advise a licence without further consideration. A sense of humour is not a strong point with Germans and there might be a fuss.

Cromer again sent the script to the Foreign Office, who were adamant:

Sir Robert Vansittart asked me to say that he has come to the reluctant conclusion that it would be undesirable to license this play. What ever the make-up of the principal character, there could be no doubt in anybody's mind that it was intended to represent Hitler, and there are many passages (apart from the general trend of the play) that would certainly provoke protest from the German Embassy: such for instance is the love-making scene which, so far as is known, would be quite untrue to life. Moreover and this is perhaps the most important aspect, Hitler is now not merely Chancellor but the Head of a friendly state and falls into a different category. It would be most unfortunate if there were any retaliation in Germany at the expense of the King.<sup>22</sup>

Over the next few years, any direct reference to Hitler was automatically refused; in 1939 a description of him as 'a tub-thumping little Austrian house-painter' was disallowed, and the phrase 'a rum little beggar' was cut as 'disrespectful'.<sup>23</sup> Lines referring to Hitler and Mussolini as 'those two dictator fellows' were removed from a revue in Peterborough, as a 'rude reflection',<sup>24</sup> while the briefest of references to Hitler as 'that awful man' was excised from a portrait of life in a Glasgow tenement, with the Office refusing even to allow a character to say of Hitler that he had 'never heard of him'.<sup>25</sup>

Nor was the Lord Chamberlain acting in isolation. In 1935, for example, the Chief Constable of Liverpool instituted a successful prosecution against a comedian for saying that Hitler was 'head of the Nancies',<sup>26</sup> and revues and pantomimes found the policy equally restricting—especially since it also covered visual representations. In January 1937, the London County Council noted in relation to the impersonation of Hitler in a Variety Show at the Paramount Theatre in Tottenham Court Road 'that steps were immediately taken to have the item complained of removed from the performance'.<sup>27</sup> Many pantomimes traditionally incorporated more or less harmless political gags, and in a 1935 report on a Christmas version of *Robinson Crusoe* Street pointedly observed that 'freedom of allusion to current events is an immemorial privilege of pantomime'.<sup>28</sup> Now, however, such freedom was under attack, and a week later the same Reader dutifully reported in relation to a *Jack and the Beanstalk* that he was 'very careful in all the pantomimes to note any jokes about Hitler or Mussolini'.<sup>29</sup> He clearly found such requirements rather absurd. Reporting on a *Dick Whittington* for Gateshead he recorded: 'As the German Embassy is so childishly touchy about Hitler I mark a harmless joke about him'; he added: 'it would be absurd to censor it and Gateshead is not London'.<sup>30</sup> The following month, Street made his feelings even clearer in relation to another slight piece: 'Jill

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\* *Out of the Dark*, by Ingram d'Abbes



has a pony called Hitler . . . I mention this as there may be no limit to the stupidity of the German Embassy in this matter, but I think there should be a limit to its indulgence'. Considering that a few months earlier they had insisted on changing the name of a goose called Hitler (and a pig called Baldwin) in a particularly silly farce, it is actually surprising that Cromer ruled that Jill's pony 'Can be risked'.<sup>31</sup> In February 1936 a passing reference to 'that blighter Hitler' was removed from a one-act play,<sup>32</sup> and cuts in that winter's pantomime season included a character in an Eastbourne *Cinderella* saying Hitler had deported him for refusing to salute a German sausage,<sup>33</sup> and from a *Babes in the Wood* at Hull<sup>†</sup> the verse:

When Mary went out walking  
Along with Mr Hitler.  
One hand he kept to salute like this  
And the other hand to tickler.<sup>34</sup>

Occasionally, things got through. In the autumn of 1935, the German Embassy protested vehemently about the London production of a Hungarian play in which a page boy in a Budapest hotel has the name Hitler;<sup>‡</sup> 'the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office asked that the reference should be omitted in deference to German wishes', noted the Assistant Comptroller. (Bizarrely, the name of Ghandi was substituted, leading to complaints from both the India Office and the Indian National Congress, and to questions in Parliament.)<sup>35</sup> In 1937 references to Germany as 'the enemy' were removed from a revue sketch in Southampton.<sup>36</sup>

As some of the examples already cited show, make up and costume were as important as text, and any hint of a toothbrush moustache was removed. In November 1936, the Office inspected a dress rehearsal of a revue and complained that in a scene called 'Selling the Earth', one of the silent bidders was made up to resemble Hitler. When they were told to modify this, the management asked whether 'the male character may give the fascist salute and say "I should have a different face, but the Censor has cut it"'. Unfortunately, is not clear whether this was permitted.<sup>37</sup> However, one case which caught the national news occurred in January 1937, when the Office upheld the complaints of the German Embassy about another pantomime version of *Robinson Crusoe*. The Lord Chamberlain's secretary, George Titman, first heard about it through the Foreign Office:

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\* *Their Majesties Pass By*, by Leonard Hines

† Written by Frank Dix, Fred and Jack Clements

‡ *Vicky*, by Ladislaus Bus-Fekete

Mr Baxter telephoned to me yesterday that representations have been made to the Foreign Office by the German Embassy concerning the caricature of Herr Hitler in the above-named pantomime.

After perusing the script and being assured that no such representation of Herr Hitler, or a dictator, had been passed, I attended last evening's performance at the theatre.

I found that the German Embassy was fully justified in the protest made.

I also found that there were many other unauthorised interpolations . . .

After the performance, I interviewed the manager and told him that the representation of Herr Hitler must come out immediately and he assured me that this would be done. He said that it was not in the rehearsal and that the comedian must have slipped it in later—(which is the old excuse).<sup>38</sup>

Though often overlooked (or unknown), the interpolation of lines after a script had been licensed was technically an offence against the Theatres Act, and the *Daily Mirror* reported that summonses had been duly issued on these grounds:

Because a gag about Hitler was introduced in the pantomime 'Robinson Crusoe' at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, the Lord Chamberlain has summoned the principal comedian, the proprietress of the theatre and the author of the pantomime. He has also ordered the gag to be cut out of the show.

The joke was introduced by Hal Bryan in a scene in which he is supposed to be making love to a dusky queen.

One of the actors says: 'Don't let the queen get you or she will make you her dictator.'

Bryan put on a little black moustache, pulled one lock of his hair over his forehead and came down the stairs shouting, 'Heil, heil, heil.'

'It seemed such a simple little joke,' said Bryan. 'You see I was not even dressed like Hitler. I had a pilot suit and a red wig.'<sup>39</sup>

Rather confusingly, the Lord Chamberlain's letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions seems to describe a different gag:

Towards the end of the story of Robinson Crusoe, where the white people are defending themselves in the stockade against an assault by the 'blacks', a man is stated to be approaching bearing a white flag. The gate is opened and the comedian runs into the camp made-up to represent Herr Hitler, giving the Nazi salute and saying 'vot iss all sis about?' His appearance in this guise is quite short, but sufficiently long for there to be no doubt about his identity . . .

His Lordship desires me to inform you that he has at no time permitted the representation of Herr Hitler in any stage play, for reasons which are obvious.<sup>40</sup>

The resulting court case was widely reported in national newspapers—'Hitler Gag Alleged in Panto Summons' was the *Daily Express* headline—and fines were imposed.<sup>41</sup>

If he was made aware of it, any 'guying' of Hitler in revues was invariably disallowed by the Lord Chamberlain. From a Windmill *Revuedeille* in April 1935, a feeble joke was cut in which someone asking for raspberries is told to 'go to the corner house and make a noise like Hitler'.<sup>42</sup> On another occasion the Chief Constable of Preston sent a report on a touring revue to the Office, detailing a scene about which he had qualms:

Two men walk on the stage from opposite wings, each wearing semi military uniforms . . . one of them wearing a black moustache in representation of Herr Hitler the German Chancellor and the other, a thick set figure bearing a very strong resemblance of Signor Mussolini the Italian dictator. As these two men approach each other Mussolini's prototype raises his hand in a Fascist salute and Hitler's prototype gives the Nazi salute. They do this three or four times as they walk across the stage, halting at attention for each salute, and then when they are each disappearing at the sides of the stage, both turn round and each makes a disparaging sound with a rubber instrument, commonly known as a 'razzer'.<sup>43</sup>

The case was taken up by the Lord Chamberlain, and the revue was inspected in several different venues. 'These "raspberries", which the Director of Public Prosecutions describes as "a labial imitation of the passage of wind through the rectum", are never allowed', reported Titman, and a public prosecution was brought in January 1939. In February 1937, the Office deleted 'a quite unnecessary reference to Hitler', noting: 'the fact that all the characters in this sketch turn out to be inmates of a lunatic asylum adds to the advisability of cutting'.<sup>44</sup> In October 1938, a brief mention of Hitler was removed from a Boy Scout show in Lanarkshire, and a Birmingham University Revue was instructed to cut a joke about a governess being nicknamed 'Miss Hitler' and to her nephew having been born with a small moustache.<sup>45</sup> On another occasion\* they cut 'a most peculiar reference to Hitler', in the line 'P'raps it'd 'elp if old 'Itler 'ad a baby'.<sup>46</sup>

Street described the Italians as 'less silly in such matters than the Germans', but the Lord Chamberlain was still careful to censor anything which seemed to tread on dangerous ground, and in December 1935 he removed from another version of *Robinson Crusoe* 'Benito's Jazz-Band' and references to Abyssinia.<sup>47</sup> In January 1936, Street described a scene within a Windmill *Revuedeille* as 'An absurd sort of imaginary parallel to the Abyssinian troubles', and warned that "'Signor Captain Whale-Blubber" for Mussolini might give offence'; Cromer was adamant: The whole thing

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\* *Heaven and Charing Cross*, by Aubrey Danvers-Walker

as it stands will not do. If they want any skit of this sort it must be entirely amended so as to be free of objectionable features to sensitive foreigners. The best course is to delete the scene entirely.<sup>48</sup> Later that month, Street found himself pleading to his superiors\* that 'One cannot rule out all dictators', for it had become increasingly hard to include any such reference at all.<sup>49</sup> In June 1937, the Office cut lines from a revue sketch in Sheffield in which Mussolini was 'mentioned impolitely', and Game's report on a revue in Blackpool in 1938 noted that 'There are a bunch of Mussolini jokes which I have marked, and which in view of the recent Foreign Office letter should be cut'.<sup>50</sup> In 1938, 'an undesirable Hitler joke' was removed from a *Cinderella* but a reference to Mussolini allowed to stand specifically because 'it's complimentary'.<sup>51</sup>

In August 1938 the censorship effectively killed off a sketch for Manchester's Palace Theatre called 'Geneva in a Dream', in which leading international statesmen were made the subject of comedy: 'the Stalin is slightly offensive, and the Hitler more so—both being figures of fun', and steps were taken to ensure that it was rendered innocuous: 'By banning Hitler and Stalin we have actually practically destroyed this silly little sketch and this telegram . . . will give it its death blow'. Permission was given to perform the sketch 'subject to deletion of all dialogue reference and make up concerning Monsieur Blum, Anthony Eden, Stalin and Hitler'.<sup>52</sup> A revised version in which the international leaders had been replaced by unidentifiable delegates was deemed acceptable, provided no attempt was made to imitate or represent the original characters: 'it may seem silly in view of the plain speaking in the daily papers and elsewhere, but as we are a Censorship I doubt whether we should allow anything at the moment which could possibly exacerbate the German feelings'.<sup>53</sup>

As we have seen, references to swastikas, brownshirts, goose-stepping and marks were habitually excised from serious plays as well as revues, along with national anthems, military salutes, portraits of Hitler or Mussolini, Nazi or fascist emblems, the use of the word 'German', and any German or German-sounding names. In December 1937, the senior Reader, Henry Game, revealingly described Beatrix Thomson's *Sons of Adam* as too 'thinly disguised'.<sup>54</sup> While not recommending complete rejection—'I should be sorry to see any play which expresses hatred of persecution banned'—he insisted that the Nazis must not be implicated as the persecutors, and the censorship required the removal of 'all clues, which connect the action specifically with Germany and the Nazis'. A revised version was submitted in February 1938, but Game argued that although the script had been 'pretty satisfactorily denationalized', there

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\* On behalf of *Sweet Wine*, by Kenneth Bolton

were 'a few words still left in which point to Germany as the country aimed at'. With a rather disquieting detachment, Game pointed out that there was no need to disguise the victims, since 'Three European Powers seem to be busily engaged at the moment in persecuting the Jews', but he was adamant that the identity of the oppressor must not be indicated through costume. Indeed, he even contemplated whether a similar requirement should be extended into the style of acting: 'Felman, the villain of the piece, who is described as fair and bullet-headed, should not perhaps be made too aggressively Teutonic?' he mused. Again, the censorship insisted on removing all specific German references from Clifford Odets's short play, *Till the Day I Die*, licensing it 'On the understanding that the particular Totalitarian State aimed at is left indefinite'.<sup>55</sup>

It was not easy for the Lord Chamberlain to maintain consistency through the thirties. Probably the first significant stage criticism of the Nazis to be licensed for public performance was *The Crooked Cross*, a play written by Sally Carson and produced by Sir Barry Jackson for Birmingham Repertory Theatre in November 1934. This was essentially a realistic drama set in Germany, which again used a small group of characters and a domestic setting to examine the effects of recent events. It showed or alluded to relationships being destroyed by racial prejudice, to friends and families turning on each other, to Jewish professionals being sacked from their posts, to violence being perpetrated against Jews, and to the deaths of refugees attempting to flee across the border. In 1934, the presentation of such shocking and contemporary subject matter on the public stage was a breakthrough of considerable significance, and the judgement expressed by the reviewer in *Truth* was fairly typical, and not unfair:

This is a great theme . . . It must be, for alone it has triumphed over bad writing and bad acting and made *Crooked Cross* move a quarter of its audience to tears . . . Miss Carson . . . is the first to have seen the dramatic possibilities of a subject which other Ivory-Tower-dwelling authors have scorned . . . The wish must be added that some more able dramatist will make a better play from the same story.<sup>56</sup>

Crucially, in terms of the censorship, the reviewer insisted on the play's willingness to be fair to all sides:

she is accurate—the German consul in Birmingham, who saw the play, had no complaints—and she is fairer to the Nazis than more foolish opponents would have been. She has had the intelligence to see that the rank and file of the Storm Troopers were boisterous, bourgeois unemployed.

Of course, Carson and Jackson would both have known that such 'fairness' was essential to their hopes of securing a licence, and the play's tone and emphasis probably reflect conscious or unconscious self-censorship.

When *The Crooked Cross* was submitted in the autumn of 1934, Street's description of it as 'temperately written', and his reminder that it was based on accepted facts, amounted to a coded appeal to the Lord Chamberlain to approve it. 'If it is a rule that no play about contemporary Germany can be licensed I suppose this cannot be', he wrote.<sup>57</sup> Knowing that it was the portrayal of Hitler which might cause most concern, he stressed that the violence and prejudice were blamed entirely on the storm troopers, and that there were no grounds for resenting this 'now that Herr Hitler has given the Storm Troopers the cold shoulder and shot some of their leaders'. Cromer was prepared to support Street's position, and the Foreign Office evidently accepted his distinction:

The opinion of the competent authorities in the Foreign Office whom I have consulted is that we cannot object on political grounds to all plays about Nazis. There is here no portrayal of Hitler himself, and we do not wish to interfere with your discretion if you regard it as suitable to license.

*The Crooked Cross* was duly licensed, though not without some significant cuts. One of these was a speech in a scene in which a young woman watches in horror as a group of Nazis beat someone up; she then asks her pro-Nazi brother what would have happened if the victim had been her own Jewish boyfriend:

ERICH: Do you really want to know? Well, (*He is looking at her all the time*) if it was Moritz, your dear Moritz, your nice little Jew-boy (*He pauses, considering the effect he is making*) I'd have them beat him slower, much slower . . . beat him only on the raw flesh first, whip him in the eyes, flog his teeth in . . . beat him till the blood . . . till the blood . . .<sup>58</sup>

It was specifically the detail of the violence to which the censors objected, and the Lord Chamberlain recommended that 'the description of the atrocities might be toned down'. He did not, however, interfere with Erich's justification for the violence:

He was a filthy little Communist skunk. Dirty lot all of them. If we teased a few more like that we wouldn't have so much trouble from them. Punishment, that's what they want and then all they got wouldn't pay them out for the dirty tricks they've done to us, all the tribe of them.

Also cut was a suggestion linking the Nazi love of regalia to a latent homosexuality, when the young woman says to her brother: 'You love the uniform and the noise and the flag-waving—and I don't imagine the Storm Troopers are immune to your charms'.

Under the headline, 'ANTI-SEMITISM DRAMATISED', *Truth* highlighted the absurdity of the Lord Chamberlain's policy of attempting to anonymise the subject:

He was right, though it seems to be against his previous principles, to permit the performance of this Anti-Nazi play; and rightly again he has left it almost uncut. But what he has cut! Every 'Heil Hitler' in the dialogue. Since any Nazis who did not thus begin and end their conversations would be considered traitors, the absence of these two words must be far more an insult to a foreign potentate than their presence.<sup>59</sup>

But it was January 1937 before *The Crooked Cross* reached London, and by then, it had lost its power to shock and its topicality. James Agate dismissed its predictability: 'Nothing is uttered by any character which is not taken for granted before he enters the theatre by any person above the age of ten who has ever thought for five minutes about religious persecution of any kind'.<sup>60</sup> Yet *The Times* praised the play for its 'restraint from propaganda' and its willingness 'to show us both sides of the question',<sup>61</sup> while W.A. Darlington in the *Daily Telegraph* also approved the writer's balance: 'Although she hates the things which Nazism did to the Jews, she tells truly and sympathetically how it put heart into the younger generation of Germans'.<sup>62</sup> Despite this, the Westminster production drew a storm of protest from right-wing elements in Britain. 'Several papers have "got us into trouble" over this play', wrote Cromer.<sup>63</sup> One extreme review described *The Crooked Cross* as 'an insult to Nazi Germany and part of a very dangerous anti-German propaganda'; it added that 'Anti-Semitism is inevitable in countries where Semitism makes itself conspicuous by its exaggerated ambitions, its obtrusiveness and its desire for domination'. This article was sent to the Office by a member of the public, accompanied by a long and disturbing rant penned in Gothic print on notepaper bearing an apocalyptic letterhead featuring a church window and a figure burning in flames:

Can you explain the criminal folly of your department in passing such a subject?

I have lived in Germany for five months in the last year, mixing with every class, in cities and villages and I am proud to number several members of the National Socialist Party among my friends. The people are happy, well-fed and putting up a magnificent fight to regain for their country the security and prestige she lost. There is no oppression of the Jews, merely certain regulations which they (as do any aliens in this country) have to abide by. The German people have two dominant desires, from the highest to the lowest; peace, and friendship with Britain. They are bitterly hurt by the persistent campaign of lying atrocity stories in our Jewish controlled Press. The mass of the British people is as anxious for German friendship as they for ours.

What would be the reaction of the British Government if a play, rabidly anti-British, were produced in Berlin, passed by a Government department? An official protest, at least, if not worse. Germany is hypersensitive, and there are limits to what she will stand in the way of insults from us. She has everything to gain (and we have everything to

lose) from a declaration of war against us, a war which in our present lamentable state of weakness, we should lose. Are all our young generation (for whom I speak) and our splendid Empire to be sacrificed to pander to the revenge-instinct of a handful of Jew professors and profiteers, who have found it impossible to earn their livings in the country that puts patriotism and decency first?

I must most seriously ask you to have this play withdrawn. If there is any legal necessity for a private person to apply, as common informer, I am prepared to do so myself . . .

P.S. It seems to me so un-British and utterly against all our rules of fair play, to launch, or tolerate these attacks on a Government who have never shown us anything but friendship.

Another factor which sometimes influenced the Lord Chamberlain was the location in which a play was to be performed. After all, the German Embassy was unlikely to find out about productions which took place outside the main cities and theatres. In January 1935, Cromer approved a patriotic pageant for The Women's Unionist Association,<sup>\*</sup> in which a group of factory workers moaning about life in Britain are transported by a fairy godmother to other countries, so they can discover how lucky they are to live where they do. 'It is all rather complacent, but mostly true', wrote the Lord Chamberlain's Reader.<sup>64</sup> But among the places they visit are Germany in 1930, and again in 1934; the former shows children happily playing, the latter children preparing for war in a world of anti-Jewish persecution. 'One can hardly interfere with the Woman Unionists representing known facts', commented Street, though he added: 'As a matter of expediency I think it a pity to rub in Germany's faults just now, and her alleged warlike intentions'. However, the saving grace was the venue: 'St Helens is not an important centre'. Cromer agreed: 'I hardly think in the circumstances of this production interference is necessary'. The following month the Office also licensed *Official Announcement*,<sup>†</sup> another play which sought to expose anti-Jewish persecution. The censorship decided the play was 'a trifle which could hardly cause any fuss'. Its performance was in Bexhill.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps more surprisingly, in May 1935 the censorship licensed for Cambridge's Festival Theatre *Son of Judea*.<sup>‡</sup> This was a short play set in Berlin, in which we see a worker being victimised because of his Jewish grandfather, and hear his grandmother being beaten up offstage by brutal storm troopers. There are also references to concentration camps, to 'thousands of quite innocent people massacred, butchered', and to 'steel rods beating out the rhythm of Nazi marching songs on the backs of some

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\* *Tell England*, by Aileen M. Wood

† Written by Eleanor Elder

‡ Written by Michael Walsh



poor swine'. Yet it seems that the only cut made was the removal of the epithet 'bitch'. Street commented: 'it is impossible to prevent an occasional protest against barbarous usage of Jews'.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, a few months later Street identified the satire of Auden and Isherwood's *Dog Beneath the Skin* as 'an obvious attack on Germany' and proposed a series of cuts; he added: 'I dare say if the Lord Chamberlain requires all these excisions the author will withdraw the play. It would not be a great loss'. A considerably altered script was staged in January 1936 by the Group Theatre, and Game, who inspected the performance, found a few elements to be still unacceptable: 'One of the characters carries a Swastika flag which won't do, another character wears a mask of Mussolini (unflattering) and another a mask which I took for Hitler with toothache'. The Office insisted on removing all of these.<sup>67</sup>

In November 1935, the censorship licensed without objection Friedrich Wolfe's *Professor Mamlock*. Already, Street was criticising the play for its use of cliché and for being out of date:

Yet another play, and rather belated, exhibiting the irrational intolerance practised against Jews in Germany. Belated, because the events are two years old and contemporary intolerance is on different lines . . . The play is rather ineffective for an English audience. We do not need to be told as we are over and over again of the want of reason and logic in the persecution of Jews. . . . But there is no reason for refusing a licence. Much more violent plays on the subject have been passed.<sup>68</sup>

Cromer queried 'I suppose the Germans cannot object?', but he agreed to risk a licence. Tellingly, when the same script was (unnecessarily) resubmitted in January 1939, it received a much less generous judgement from Henry Game:

This play is very definitely an anti-Nazi play, and as the development of the action is based on certain well-known events—such as the Reichstag fire—which marked the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis, it will be extremely difficult, or impossible, to Ruritanianise it without drastic re-writing . . .

If we are to adhere to the rule, that if authors want to write anti-Nazi plays, they must cast them in a Ruritanian form, I cannot possibly recommend this play.<sup>69</sup>

It was then discovered that Wolfe's play had already been licensed some years previously, and there were insufficient grounds for revisiting it.

In 1936 a licence was granted for what Street described as 'the most uncompromising attack on the persecution of the Jews we have had'. *Do We Not Bleed*\* was a desperately old-fashioned melodrama set in the fictitious

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\* Written by George H. Grimaldi

province of Galania and featuring a completely unflappable English hero confronting and outwitting the villainous governor. Despite an absurd and fantastical narrative, there was no doubting the identity of the victims.<sup>70</sup> The Governor declares he is 'fighting to free Galania of the accursed Jew', and to keep 'the blood of the race as pure as my own'.<sup>71</sup> The play's twist is to reveal at the climax that during a previous visit to Britain this Governor received an emergency blood transfusion which came from the English—and Jewish—journalist now confronting him! Street described *Do We Not Bleed* as 'An extremely bitter attack, effective though crude, on anti-Semitism in Germany', but again declared that 'the subject is stale now and unattractive'. He even argued that 'Such plays, which stir up useless passion, are I think to be deplored, even though they may be based on facts'; but there were reasons why it was unnecessary to ban it: 'The play is to be produced by the Richings Players—patroness Princess Victoria and with a distinguished President—probably in the country and though it is an able play of its kind I doubt its coming to London'.<sup>72</sup>

One of the problems which the censors repeatedly struggled with was the issue of 'fact' and 'fiction'. While on the one hand they intervened to prevent the inclusion of false—or unproven—details and accusations, it was the documenting in dramatic form of what was widely accepted to be 'true' which frequently caused the most trouble. 'It is "la vérité qui blesse"', as they informed the Foreign Office.<sup>73</sup> On one occasion they suspected that a playwright had included actual text taken from 'a recent Nazi edict' and, bizarrely, it was proposed that the author should be told 'that if he didn't make it up he must take it out'.<sup>74</sup> Which way could a playwright turn? The German Embassy was particularly sensitive to any suggestion that the Nazis themselves had burnt down the Reichstag in order to discredit the Communists, and the 1938 version of *Whither Liberty* was licensed specifically 'on the understanding that the accusation against Hacker of having the "Senate House" blown up is omitted'.<sup>75</sup> Yet as early as December 1934, the Office had licensed Elmer Rice's *Judgement Day*, even though Street's report described it as 'an unmistakable and bitter attack on the Hitler Regime and especially on General Goering and, equally unmistakably a parody of the trial for the burning of the Reichstag'. Though it was 'cleverly veiled', said the Reader, there was 'no doubt of the identification'.<sup>76</sup> But Street persuaded his superiors that 'the distinguished American author ought to "get away with it"' because the identification was not explicit: 'It seems to me difficult to insist with an author that he must mean such an application'. However, in 1937, plans were announced to stage *Judgement Day* in London for the first time. The Office realised that, despite its cloak of fiction, Rice's play was likely to attract protests:

In the final scene the dictator . . . is, very rightly, murdered. This fact, in itself, will not commend the play to the German Embassy, and, when taken in conjunction with the flagrant injustice of the trial itself, the characterisation of both Hitler and Goering . . . will probably call forth a protest from the German Embassy. As Mr Street points out there is a possibility that they will not be so foolish as to suggest that the cap fits the German people, but I do not think that the Germans at the moment are over-burdened with a sense of humour, or a vision of proportion.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, apart from ensuring that make up and costume were not used to make the analogy explicit, Cromer refused to withdraw the licence he had previously issued: 'It is usually an inopportune moment in our foreign relations to stage any play likely to offend the Germans, so that conditions in this respect differ little in April 1937 from those of December 1934'.

But Rice's play received such widespread publicity and acclaim that it transferred from a small theatre into the heart of the West End. Meanwhile, reviewers left their readers in no doubt about the real subject: 'Though its scene is in an imaginary European State, it is by no means Ruritanian, but locked to contemporary events', stated *The Times*.<sup>78</sup> Others were even more explicit: 'The Storm Troopers' shirts . . . are Slavic green, as supposedly worn in a totalitarian State in south-eastern Europe, but the green would seem to be a dye from Teutonic brown, as worn at the Reichstag Fire Trial'.<sup>79</sup> Some drew attention to the audience response: 'On the first night the cheering was tremendous . . . Here, in the middle of the London theatre, is the most effective piece of anti-Nazi propaganda yet devised'; according to this reviewer, the performance of Rice's play was 'worth a million book clubs and demonstrations'.<sup>80</sup> The German authorities applied pressure on the Foreign Office:

Herr Fitz Randolph of the German Embassy told me this morning that they had instructions from Berlin to draw our attention to the play *Judgement Day* which had now been running in London for some months. The play was clearly based on the Reichstag Fire Trial, and in German eyes was objectionable in that it was meant to cast discredit upon German judicial institutions. He appreciated that there was no direct allusion to Germany, and that it had been quite cleverly disguised, but at the same time it was perfectly obvious that it was intended as an attack on Germany . . . He drew attention to the . . . article in today's *Daily Telegraph*, showing that the play had been banned by the Burgermaster of the Hague 'on the grounds of its likeness to the Reichstag Trial'.<sup>81</sup>

Opting for the gentlemanly approach which so frequently oiled the wheels of the British establishment, the Embassy put its trust in a discreet, rather than an overt intervention:

He added that it was desired only to draw our attention to this matter and not to enter a protest, and he particularly asked that, if we did find it possible to take any action, we should be careful that the fact of a German Embassy's intervention should not appear in the Press, as this would only make matters worse.

By coincidence or not, the censorship was able to reassure the Foreign Office that the production would be 'coming off in about ten days time'.

The German Embassy's strategy of making frequent complaints was doubtless intended not only to affect the immediate case but to influence future decisions. And indeed, the complaints about *Judgement Day* probably bore fruit elsewhere. The following year, when the author of *Take Heed* cited the licensing of Rice's play as a relevant precedent, Game dismissed his claim: '*Judgement Day*', he wrote, 'would certainly not be licensed now, and was always an example of bad-censoring'.<sup>82</sup> In fact, as the British government pursued its overt policy of appeasement towards the Fascists, and as the political crisis in Europe deepened, so these were reflected in the decisions and the arguments of St James's Palace. In May 1938, the Lord Chamberlain sought advice from the Foreign Office in connection with *Lorelei*\* and its 'many references to German persecution and cruelty'. But it was the general principle that most concerned him: 'I can foresee that we shall receive an increasing number of plays bearing on Germany and the Nazi regime so it would be a help to us if you could give—not so much a ruling, but some hints as to subjects and situations which it will be well to avoid'. The Foreign Office replied:

We have, of course, had to consider this point on several occasions in the past, often as the result of a protest from the German embassy. We have always taken the line with the embassy that it is impossible in this country to censor plays dealing with Nazi ideology in general, merely on the ground of their underlying theme and general tendency. On the other hand it is clearly important that we should do what we can to give Herr Hitler, as the head of the German state, the protection which is afforded to heads of states by international practice. The Germans are very touchy about criticism of Herr Hitler and they have often pointed out that in Germany the greatest care has always been taken to prevent the appearance of any objectionable references to the British Royal Family. We should therefore welcome it if, in dealing with plays about Germany you were able to remove all references to Herr Hitler and passages which might be considered derogatory to his dignity as Head of the German state.

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\* Written by Jack Duval

The application for a licence for *Lorelei* was voluntarily withdrawn by the management following subsequent private discussions with the Lord Chamberlain's Office.<sup>83</sup>

In June of the same year, the Office licensed *Spring Morning*,\* a 'light satirical comedy' about a dictator and his home life; they accepted the argument that it was 'the species "Dictator", and not the Political system that is the chief target of the author's ridicule', and that 'the caricature of a Dictator is sufficiently indefinite'. Even so, references to Jewish persecution and to the country having been previously 'robbed of its colonies' were cut, and to ensure that there were 'no recognizable emblems' on costumes, the manager was actually required to submit for approval a specimen cream shirt with symbol.<sup>84</sup> In the same month, Shaw's *Geneva* was approved, despite the fact that the main characters included transparent representations of Hitler and Mussolini. The new Reader, Geoffrey Dearmer, who soon gained a reputation at St James's for being unreliable and prone to leniency, recommended only minimal alterations. He argued that the dictators were 'by no means unsympathetic characters' and that Shaw's treatment of them was far from negative: 'If anything it is too fair!', he remarked. Dearmer suggested that the 'Chaplin moustache' might be removed, but on this occasion Cromer chose not to insist even on this: 'So long as there is no attempt at impersonation, objection can hardly be taken to a "Chaplin moustache" on the stage', he wrote, and decided that 'GBS is such a self-extinguishing volcano', that the play would cause 'little commotion'.<sup>85</sup> But the decision to license Shaw's play soon came to haunt the Office when it was invoked as a precedent by other writers.

Cromer did not have to deal with the repercussions himself. He retired in July 1938, after a sixteen-year reign, to be replaced by the Earl of Clarendon, a former Conservative whip, chairman of the BBC and, most recently, Governor-General of South Africa. Almost immediately, Clarendon had to deal with one of the most remarkable plays about Hitler and the Nazis so far written, a satirical farce called *Follow My Leader*, by Terence Rattigan and Anthony Maurice. Though one might now question how far it was appropriate to use broad comedy to attack the Nazis, this was surely one of the most witty and successfully sustained political satires of the decade. The Marx Brothers and Chaplin's *Great Dictator* both come to mind, but there are also elements in *Follow My Leader* which prefigure the work of Dario Fo, and, though it lacks the essential toughness, of Brecht's *Arturo Ui*. It certainly got under the skin of the German Embassy, and censorship kept it off the stage until January 1940, by which time, once again, its moment had passed.

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\* Written by C. Carter