

S.N. Behrman, Comedy, and the Extermination of the Jews: Broadway, Christmas Eve, 1934

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ABSTRACT: *S.N. Behrman's Rain from Heaven premiered on Broadway on Christmas Eve, 1934. In the play, Hugo Willens, a refugee from Nazi Germany, describes a pamphlet he had written in Germany that led to his exile: the satirical pamphlet narrates the extermination of all the Jews but one. Tracking Behrman's wide reading, which he recorded in his diaries, shows that anticipation of genocide was widely shared by writers in the public sphere to which he belonged. Behrman intended the story of the last Jew as a joke, as some of his audience understood, but it was a joke with political force. The fictional comic pamphlet was part of a larger project of remaking the comedy of manners for the purposes of anti-Nazi resistance.*

KEYWORDS: *Broadway, print public sphere, genocide, Jewish humour, comedy of manners*

S.N. Behrman, celebrated Broadway playwright and screenwriter, cosmopolitan denizen of Manhattan and Los Angeles, was the third child of observant Jews who had fled Vilna for the United States in the early 1890s (Reed 19).¹ Famous in the 1930s as a writer of elegant Broadway comedies, Behrman, who “became, in some sort, a Garbo specialist,” also thrived in Hollywood (Behrman, *People* 151; see also Rifkind 135).² He contributed to the *New Yorker* from the late 1920s until just before his death in 1973.³ Behrman heard Freud lecture at Clark College in 1909 (Reed 22); his son, David, was born in Salzburg when he and his wife, Elza Heifetz, the sister of Jascha, the violinist, attended the Salzburg Festival in Austria in 1937 (Reed 29); he exchanged letters with a young Wallace Shawn in the 1960s (Behrman, Papers b. 23, f. 9).⁴ He was, in short, an exemplary American middlebrow writer in the age of total war and monopoly capital. Behrman also remembered the pogroms in eastern Europe. In *The Worcester Account*, he writes that his father “lived his entire life as if in ambush, perpetually under the shadow of ancestral massacre” (18). In the early 1930s, Behrman imagined the possibility of the near-total extermination

of the Jews, folding this threat into what Brooks Atkinson called his “silken drawing-room comedy” of 1934, *Rain from Heaven* (“Play” 28). What does this silk have to do with that genocide?

PAMPHLET, PRINT, COMEDY

The Theatre Guild’s production of *Rain from Heaven* opened at the John Golden Theatre on 24 December 1934, and its Broadway run lasted ninety-nine performances (Gross, *S.N. Behrman* 66). With previews in Boston, the play was well received in New York, and the New York company toured to Washington, DC, and beyond. Widespread attention to the play in the print public sphere, to which Behrman contributed, surrounded the Broadway opening. Random House published the play individually in 1935, Samuel French’s acting edition appeared the following year, and Random House reprinted it in the *Theatre Guild Anthology*, also in 1936. *Rain from Heaven* belongs to the genre of the comedy of manners that includes works by Wilde and Shaw or, to invoke Behrman’s preferred term, the “high comedy” of his American contemporaries such as Philip Barry.⁵ The story of *Rain from Heaven* circles around Lady Violet Wyngate, whose country house near London is the centre of erotic, aesthetic, and political turbulence. The play bears comparison with that better-known house party work of the later 1930s, Jean Renoir’s film *The Rules of the Game* (1939). Like *The Rules of the Game*, though more schematically, *Rain from Heaven* stages debates between right and left. And like Renoir’s film, its plot includes a vacant yet celebrated aviator loosely based on Charles Lindbergh, here an American named Rand Eldridge. Further, this aviator’s love for his hostess results in dire – if in this case not immediately fatal – romantic triangulations. Both Vi and Rand’s brother, Hobart Eldridge, hope to enlist Rand’s celebrity, Hobart advocating Anglo-American fascism and Vi an aesthetically sensitive and humanistic left liberalism. Among Vi’s guests are refugees: two Russians, Nikolai Jurin, who fled the Bolshevik revolution, and Sascha Barashaev, a musician, and a German exile, Hugo Willens. Willens and Vi have a brief romance – she rejects Rand after his anti-Semitic outburst – but Willens finally decides that he must return to Europe to join the anti-Nazi struggle.

Willens occasions the play’s engagement with anti-Semitism and Nazism. Early in the play, he describes “The Last Jew,” a pamphlet he had published in Germany after the Nazi rise to power. He insists that his pamphlet, which the Nazis burnt, “had nothing to do with politics. It was pure fantasy”:

With the extermination of the Jews, the millennium has been promised the people. And with the efficiency of a well-organized machine the purpose is all but accomplished. They are all dead – but one – the Last Jew. He is

about to commit suicide when an excited deputation from the All-Highest comes to see him. There has been a meeting in the sanctum of the minister of Propaganda. This expert and clever man has seen that the surviving Jew is the most valuable man in the entire Kingdom. He points out to the Council their dilemma. Let this man die and their policy is bankrupt. They are left naked, without an issue, without a programme, without a scapegoat. The Jews gone and still no millennium. They are in a panic – till finally a Committee is dispatched – and the Last Jew is given a handsome subsidy to propagate.

- VI: (Claps her hands in delight; jumps up.) Where is it? I must get my hands on it. I want to publish it in my magazine.
- HOBART (*Maliciously and Ironically*): The Jew accepts the subsidy, I suppose.
- HUGO (*Calmly*): Not only does he accept it – he makes them double it. You see, Mr. Eldridge, he is not an idealist – he is a practical man. Idealism he leaves to his interlocutors.
- VI: Why not? A subsidy to propagate for destruction – As an Imperialist Fascist, Mr. Eldridge, you must understand that perfectly. (*Rain 29*)⁶

While scholars of drama have noted this passage, it appears nowhere in the large literature on art and the Holocaust.⁷ Its absence is arguably a consequence of the genre of this particular parable of extermination and also the genre of the play it belongs to. A comedy of manners and a comic, satirical pamphlet are not the preferred modes of past historical perspicacity. Further, the historical knowledge that the passage illuminates has also become obscure. Behrman was alert to the rise of “Hitlerism” and to the figure of the Jew in its ideology. But *Rain from Heaven* is not an instance of exceptional historical sensitivity in a context in which genocide – a term from the 1940s (Jacobs) – was unimaginable. Rather, the play illuminates a moment in the early 1930s when the public sphere was alive to the threat of German wars of extermination. *Rain from Heaven* does not exemplify the sort of privileged historical foresight Adorno would assign to Kafka.⁸ Widespread fear of genocide made Behrman’s joke possible.

Rain from Heaven provokes questions about how people in a catastrophically charged period in the past thought about the future, and how they acted, or didn’t act, on that knowledge. As Michael André Bernstein has emphasized, critical callousness can accompany the benefits of hindsight: “Backshadowing is a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the

participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*" (16, emphasis in original). Such "backshadowing" might apply to Willens's "fantasy" in which it is precisely a German refugee who seems to intuit "what was to come." If a Broadway playwright imagined such a scenario, was similar insight not available to many? Bernstein's argument helps to underline the historicity of this "fantasy." What is remarkable is not that Behrman was "prophetic" – many writers knew the Nazi program included extermination – but that his play aimed to forestall the possibility it seemed to predict. Behrman, as will become clear, imagined his "high comedy" as a form of anti-fascist resistance.

Jean-Michel Palmier's claim that the exiled Weimar intelligentsia were "perhaps the last generation of intellectuals to believe in the power of the word over history" resonates (3). Different though New York and Hollywood were from Berlin and the European centres to which exiles first fled the Nazis, belief in the "power of the word over history" also marks Behrman's commitment to the print public sphere. *Rain from Heaven* represents lives intertwined with print. Willens is a critic and writer: as satire, "The Last Jew" is unusual, but it is part of a writing life. Vi subsidizes a journal that Rand judges "harmless" but Hobart considers both "Communistic" and "a Liberal weekly that's very dangerous" (16): the dim Rand ignores his brother's elision of political differences. Hobart, meanwhile, together with a newspaper magnate, contrives a scheme, in Vi's words, "to enlist the Anglo-American youth for Fascism" (40). In *Rain from Heaven*, politics play themselves out as divisions in the public sphere. Willens's pamphlet exemplifies this engagement with the public sphere. As Meredith McGill has emphasized, the pamphlet has a privileged relationship to the contemporary, broadcasting "a sense of the relation of discourse to time that is at odds with both the book's ambition to endure and the serial's parsing out of time into intervals" (85). That Willens's pamphlet has been destroyed in Nazi book burnings puts a drastic spin on the format's orientation to the present and resistance to endurance. This fiction of the force of an evanescent, scabrously comic pamphlet is one of the ways *Rain from Heaven* imagines political action. It is also a foil for the play's own comic and political project.

For Behrman, high comedy could contain or deflect the very violence his play predicted. High comedy is now probably most familiar from *Holiday* (1938) and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), both directed by George Cukor and starring Katharine Hepburn. These Hollywood variations on the comedy of manners, like other examples of the genre, feature verbal wit; the world of an enclosed elite, marked at once by wealth and a cultured appreciation of the arts and other worldly pleasures wealth alone cannot buy; and a frank concern

with intersecting trajectories of marriage and money.⁹ Behrman consistently stressed the question of what comedy can contain, most obviously in *No Time for Comedy* (1939). Robert Gross puts it starkly: “Although Behrman has been praised as a writer of Meredithian high comedy, his ambivalences actually presage the genre’s demise” (“High” 159). *No Time for Comedy* contains a critique of its genre while, in the end, defending its comic mode.¹⁰

Does high comedy – or comedy as such – stretch to the breaking point when, in 1934, a German Jewish exile chooses to return to Germany or when that exile satirizes the possibility of the extermination of all but one surviving Jew? The underlying assumption about high comedy here is open to challenge. That assumption, to use Herbert Marcuse’s term from a classic essay of the 1930s, might be that in a universe in which all art is affirmative – in which all art, precisely by maintaining a separate preserve for beauty, the soul, and so on, preserves the very culture that endangers the soul (Marcuse) – some art is nevertheless *more* affirmative than other art. High comedy, with its illusion of a leisure class more witty than any actually existing subset of that class, might qualify as such a super-affirmative art: high comedy affirms the excellence of that class whose wit and elegant living guarantee its right to the privilege it enjoys. High comedy plays the game of distinction, and the audience is happy to lose.¹¹

Behrman, however, imagined his plays as distinct from such affirmation. Behrman believed a satire of genocide might help prevent it. If one source of his comedy was writerly assimilation into high comedy, another was comedy as a Jewish response to catastrophe. Considering the jokes gathered in Immanuel Ringelbaum’s *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* and Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), Louis Kaplan writes, “[B]oth of them demonstrate how Jewish humour could be used as a political weapon and as a provocative form of entertainment during (and in response to) an extreme state of a culture under threat of extermination” (“It Will Get,” 345). The threat in 1934 was more distant, and *Rain from Heaven*, however informed by the memory of pogroms, occupies the other side of the historical cesura of the Holocaust. And yet Behrman already advocated a form of politicized comedy. Further, he wrote in the aftermath of catastrophes and thought of *Rain from Heaven* – urbane and witty, anxious and riven – as a response to that long history. Indeed, his belief in high comedy’s political power partly explains why *Rain from Heaven* has largely vanished: the historical prescience so striking in hindsight is a measure of the play’s failure in history. It is not that there can be no jokes about the Holocaust: there have been many (see Dundes and Hauschild; des Pres; Gilman; Kaplan, *At Wit’s End*, “It Will Get”; DeKoven Ezrahi). It is too late, however, for a joke to play a role in preventing it.

BEHRMAN READS ABOUT EXTERMINATION, 1933–34

Behrman's engagement with a print public sphere as reader and writer shaped the play: his unpublished diaries point to a literature of extermination long before the war began. The *New York Times* anchored Behrman's public sphere; satellites included the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Time*, and *Harper's*, all of which Behrman read regularly. Behrman's note "read the papers" is a frequent diary entry.¹² Meanwhile, in the few years leading up to the winter of 1934, Behrman socialized with Sonya Levien, Harold Laski, Ernst Lubitsch, Harpo Marx, Claire Trevor, Eddie Cantor, Felix Frankfurter, John Maynard Keynes, Lydia Lopokova, and many others. Rudolf Kommer and Salka Viertel kept Behrman informed about German emigres.¹³ One entry typifies Behrman's chronicle of social life punctuated by reading, writing, and world crisis: "read Sunday papers, Hitler whom I hope to live to see rejected of men, to Harpo for dinner whence I have just come" (Papers b. 28, f.13, 18 April 1933, p. 252). (A similar mixture of the comic and horrific surfaced in a "[h]orrible dream about Hitler: had written something adverse to Nazis he got me out of a seat in the theatre & walked me out very amiable & charming saying: You ought to write – you have talent!" [Papers b. 29, f. 1, 4 March 1934, p. 143].) Behrman was accustomed to soirées with celebrities and to reading, and yet he catalogued the guests at parties and the newspapers, magazine articles, and books he read.

Fittingly, the idea for "The Last Jew" came to Behrman at a party, and an article in the *Times* provided material for the play's plot. Less than a week after the New York opening of *Rain from Heaven*, Behrman published an article in the *Times* describing his source, a short memoir by the German drama critic, Alfred Kerr (Behrman, "In Behalf"): Kerr's piece, too, had been published in the *Times* (Kerr). Roughly a week after Behrman wrote about Kerr, Brooks Atkinson, who had already reviewed the play, published a second piece about *Rain from Heaven* ("Mercy for Moderns"). Behrman wrote for an audience who would read his account of the genesis of his play in the pages of the paper in which he had discovered an important source for it. Behrman assumed an audience of readers in a particularly delimited print public sphere, and he assumed that many of these readers also went to the theatre. His diary includes a remarkable note on this connection between writing and reading: "Great urge to write a messianic last act! And to read everything – the passion all over again the minute I read anything!" (Papers b. 29, f. 2, 6 May 1934, p. 15). This loop through the *Times* illustrates the reciprocity between his writing and reading; Behrman's messianism will emerge below.

The assumption that future genocide was unimaginable before World War II is false, at least where the English-language press in 1933 and 1934 is concerned. Writers in the early 1930s regularly anticipated genocide in the

near future. Further, Willens's fictional pamphlet describes with accuracy the centrality of the figure of the Jew to Nazi ideology and anticipates the sheer bureaucratic efficiency behind the "extermination" of Europe's Jews. The first of these points is now less startling than the second. Behrman, however, encountered both in his reading: many commentators saw wars of extermination as a likely consequence of the Nazi rise to power. Some of these writers may also have read *Mein Kampf* in German or in the English translation published in 1933.

Behrman's reading in 1933 and 1934 included a number of acute analyses of Nazism's need for the demonized figure of "the Jew." The critic Ludwig Lewisohn, for instance, in what Behrman judges "a superb article" (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 28 July 1933, p. 17), describes Germany's "pagan revolt" and its target, the Jew, "the symbol of the free personality alone with its God," "the symbol of the critical intelligence": "If the Jews were not there to be tortured, upon what symbolical object could the 'holy madness' wreak its self-justificatory pagan rage?" (Lewisohn 276). Though the theological turn in Lewisohn's interpretation of Nazism might have been unusual, related analyses were not uncommon. Mary Heaton Vorse, activist and co-founder of the Provincetown Players, wrote after a visit to Germany that "the Jew in the minds of Hitler and his followers is a cancer on the body politic." Vorse realized the implication of this metaphor: the Jew "is a disease, to be treated as such and to be got rid of" (256; see Behrman, Papers b. 26, f. 1, 26 July 1933, p. 17). To get "rid of" this "cancer" could describe the forced immigrations and impoverishment of what Vorse twice calls the "cold pogrom" of 1933 (255, 256). Intimations of extermination were, however, also audible.

Willens's parable allegorizes this necessity of the last Jew's survival as the real object of Nazi ideology: the Nazis will always need the Jew as barrier to the "millennium." But the more startling aspect of Willens's pamphlet is not its analysis of the importance of the Jew to Nazi ideology but its prediction of all but total genocide. Is there any similarly straightforward prediction of this possibility elsewhere?¹⁴ Again, Behrman's reading shows that he was not alone in picturing genocidal possibilities. Lewisohn, in the article quoted above, realizes the implications of Nazi racial thought and fears that the "pagan attack upon the very roots of the Judeo-Christian ethical and humane tradition" (276) would result in the crucifixion of the Jew: "They have begun. The scapegoat is being slain; the Jew is crucified" (281). In a discussion of the Versailles treaty's limitations on German power, Lewisohn asks, "Who would dare to favor equality of armaments for a nation fanatically convinced that it would be helping to save the world for the savior race of the Germans to 'gas in' (*einzugasen*) foreign provinces and exterminate life where inferior races live and then replace them?" (282). Lewisohn's unusual English phrase is a

translation of a rare German word, but both foresee the transformation of the gas warfare of the trenches into a tool of extermination. Lewisohn saw the war against Jews as one of several racial wars in which Germany's pursuit of *Lebensraum* would spell mass death. Behrman also notes a "brilliant article" by Leon Trotsky (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 27 August 1933, p. 31). Trotsky predicts the Nazi push into Poland and other Eastern European countries, and observes that the Nazis "prefer the extermination of the conquered 'inferior' peoples to their Germanization," arguing that "[t]he whole historical philosophy of National-Socialism proceeds from the supposedly fundamental inequality of nations and the right of the 'superior' races to trample upon and to extirpate the 'inferior' races" (387). Extermination, extirpation: Trotsky pictures a whole set of genocides, not limited to that of the Jews.¹⁵

Willens's word *extermination* also appears in an address by Samuel Untermyer broadcast over WABC radio in New York on 6 August 1933, the text of which appeared in the *Times*. Untermyer predicts that

the world will confront a picture so fearful in its barbarous cruelty that the hell of war and the alleged Belgian atrocities will pale into insignificance as compared to this devilishly, deliberately, cold-bloodedly planned and already partially executed campaign for the extermination of a proud, gentle, loyal, law-abiding people. ("Text" 4)

In *The Coming Struggle for Power*, John Strachey similarly foresees an era of vicious wars: "Some defeated nations may well be exterminated *en bloc* in the concluding phases of the contest" (255). In this book, Strachey underestimates the force of Nazi anti-Semitism and describes "kill the Jews" as rhetoric used to "catch shopkeepers" (266). In another work from the same year, *The Menace of Fascism*, however, Strachey emphasizes Nazi persecution of the Jews and begins with a relevant montage of passages from the English press.¹⁶ Extermination as a likely consequence of a newly militant Germany's expansion was, then, widely feared. Few distilled these fears into so astonishing a scenario as did Behrman, but the threat of extermination was the subject of widespread apprehension.

ARGUMENTS ABOUT MASS DEATH: READING THE JOKE

Behrman's career was distinctly middlebrow. David Savran has argued for the concept's usefulness for understanding American theatre, which occupies an "impossible conjunction" (17), simultaneously seeking political efficacy, moral responsibility, commercial success, and cultural respectability.¹⁷ *Rain from Heaven* occupies that "impossible conjunction." Behrman made his high comedy the vehicle of his protest against Nazi racial ideology. One might object that this met a demand for a fillip of unobjectionable political content.

One might also say, however, that the horizon of fulfilment would have been a future in which our past would be unrecognizable. Had Behrman's comedy functioned as a successful warning against the extermination he predicted, history would be utterly different. The idea is grandiose, but only as grandiose as the aspirations of that contradictory middlebrow culture Behrman embodied.

For Behrman, the question of how to respond to the threat of "Hitlerism" was an urgent one. He imagined that *Rain from Heaven* might contribute to the undoing of the threat of extermination the play predicted. These hopes are vivid in his account of the genesis of *Rain from Heaven* published in the *New York Times* on 30 December 1934, a week after the New York opening. This account focuses on the story of Alfred Kerr, the powerful German critic who provided Behrman's model for Willens.¹⁸ Kerr, one of the most influential theatre critics of Weimar Germany, went into exile with the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Behrman was especially troubled by the playwright Gerhart Hauptmann's repudiation of Kerr. Kerr had long been an important advocate of Hauptmann's work, whose *The Weavers* (1892), with its sympathetic treatment of working-class revolt, provided a monument in the history of political drama.¹⁹ Kerr did not, as Behrman puts it, "measure up to the new standardization" ("In Behalf" X₃), which Hauptmann, a Nazi sympathizer, supported.

In the *Times* piece, Behrman imagines a meeting between the two men in "the great man's quiet study" as "an essential conflict":

There they were, these two men, two artists, two civilized men, two essences of what the race might hope to be – the author of "The Weavers" and the author of an exquisite poem in which a man mourns the untimely passing of another artist who might have become a friend. [...] Here, in a clear vapor, might rise an emanation so distilled and powerful that miraculously it might de-lethalize those other and headier exhalations from the test-tubes of the poison gas chemists and from the heated breaths of the demagogues. Because if not from this room, from where else? That it did not come – this for me – was essential tragedy. ("In Behalf" X₃)

The otherwise slightly redundant sequence – "two men, two artists, two civilized men" – economically suggests that art civilizes, and this suggestion is crucial to the episode's despair over what art should do for the "race," a term that oscillates here uneasily between national and universal connotations. In Behrman's fantasy of political efficacy, the encounter of Kerr and Hauptmann should have produced the "clear vapor" of a miraculous antidote to hot political plagues: this alchemical enlightenment is itself an etherealized faith in the aesthetic. The phrase "poison gas chemists" resonates powerfully after the Holocaust. Behrman, like Lewisohn, intuited that that an echo from the

trenches of World War I captured a lethal future threat, a chemical analogue to the poisonous words of the unnamed Hitler and other “demagogues.” This critique of demagoguery leads to a contempt for crowds and masses that is the obverse of Behrman’s emphasis on an encounter between individuals: “For the mob is the same in nearly all countries whether it engages in a pogrom in Russia, an Armenian massacre in Turkey, a book-fire in Germany, a lynching-bee in America” (“In Behalf” X3).²⁰ Mobs, Behrman argues, have no interest: “[T]hey may be reduced to the generalizations of the crowd-psychologist.” And for Behrman, the corollary to this is that mass death, too, has become a tired subject: “We are so used to slaughter that the doleful mass-necrologues of history no longer give us pause” (“In Behalf” X3). With the world-weariness of some of his characters, Behrman argues that mass death resists representation. (In Behrman’s novel *The Burning Glass*, a German exile in 1930s Hollywood echoes this: “The dead, especially en masse, are uninteresting” [292].) Offering Passchendaele and Russian famine as examples, Behrman argues “that these vast lapses from civilization are so continuous, so wearisomely repetitious that they become literally unimaginable and boring. If they were at all imaginable would they recur so devastatingly?” (“In Behalf” X3). For Behrman, the impossibility of imagining “mass-necrologues” is a cause of their devastating repetition in history. Behrman anticipates post-Holocaust concerns about the resistance of traumatic historical events to aesthetic representation. But his solution is neither to claim that mass death marks a limit to representation nor to call for new forms of abstraction. Instead, the tedium of “mass-necrologues” leads to an argument about dramatic representation:

But the battle which might have taken place in Gerhart Hauptmann’s study reveals the impasse in which the human race is suffocating with a vividness, as far as the playwright’s problem is concerned, beyond battlefields and holocausts and carnage. For one thing you can’t get a battlefield on the stage – you can get a man on the stage, a superb specimen-man with a façade conveying nobility and when you get him there – and his opponent – you have history and the past and the present and future – as a scientist may have a disease or its antidote in a drop of water – all these innumerable deaths and the arresting savior. (“In Behalf” X3)

Behrman’s reflection on his play marks its representational constraints and its utopian aspirations. On the one hand, this is the pragmatism of the Broadway playwright: wars and massacres are hard to stage. On the other, this pragmatism does not disguise astonishing confidence in the capacity of the play to contain a microcosm of historical time. By staging the “essential conflict” that did not in fact occur, theatre can counter “innumerable deaths” with a messiah who puts a stop to things, that “arresting savior.” Further, the

temporal encapsulation of that clairvoyant “drop of water” should have its own historical force. Behrman’s newspaper account thus summarizes a project for anti-fascist representation that leads to questions about the play and its performance.

Willens’s fictional pamphlet, “The Last Jew,” survives as the remnant of another project. This is true in two senses: Behrman first conceived of the story as a full-length play, and the pamphlet’s fictional mode pursues the subject of genocide in a manner that Behrman declares drama cannot itself manage. So, does “The Last Jew” – as the abstract of a lost narrative within the play – admit the partial failure of the very representational project Behrman describes in his *New York Times* article? If, that is, the drama must represent “battlefields and holocausts and carnage” through the “specimen” figures of the stage, the potential German genocide remains inassimilable to theatrical representation. To the extent that this murder is not staged but narrated – and narrated through the text of a pamphlet that is itself represented as no longer existing, as Willens has managed to save no copy from Nazi book burnings – Behrman is already composing within a code that decrees that this genocide is and must remain unrepresentable. Indeed, as Behrman also acknowledges in “In Behalf of a Critic,” a conflict between critic and playwright based on that between Kerr and Hauptmann is also not staged, but only narrated, in *Rain from Heaven* (64–65). The promise of Behrman’s method would seem to be that the staging of dramatic conflict allows for the missed encounter between Hauptmann and Kerr, loyal Nazi and courageous exile – allows, that is, for a theatrical power that gains in historical necessity whatever it misses in historical fidelity. It is precisely that the encounter did not take place in history that makes it necessary for Behrman to stage it, even if in transfigured form.

The form of Behrman’s dramatic response changed. On 24 August 1933 – at yet another Hollywood dinner party chez Salka Viertel, with whom he was collaborating on the screenplay for Garbo’s *Queen Christina* (Rifkind 134–45), as “Oscar” (almost certainly Oscar Levant) played a Gershwin concerto on piano – an idea came to him:

While Oscar was playing was struck by an idea for a play “The Last Jew.” All the Jews in the world have been exterminated one is left – a comedic tragedy – the meeting at the end with the victorious Hitlerite. All evening I thought about this. [...] I saw myself devoting myself to this play in which I could express everything I have been feeling on this question. To the Brown Derby, to bed at two in the morning. (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 24 August 1933, p. 29)²¹

Every Jew but one has been “exterminated”: a “comedic tragedy”!? About a week after this initial inspiration, Behrman recorded his second thoughts: “Decided the Last Jew must be one-act” (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 1 September 1933,

p. 33). On 4 October 1933, he began to imagine the story as a longer play; he tells a friend (probably the actress Ina Claire) about his idea: “[S]he rather rose to it seeing herself in Portia and suggesting a title ‘The Quality of Mercy’ and that it be an Irish girl defending a condemned Jew! Can I tie it up with L.J.? Was rather excited all the rest of the day – I must do something against the mania of cruelty and persecution now abroad in the world” (4 October 1933, p. 51). These variants – “comedic tragedy,” one-act play, courtroom drama – suggest the dilemma Behrman faced.²² Behrman’s initial sketch for a “comedic tragedy” resembles quasi-expressionist political plays of the interwar period such as Elmer Rice’s *Judgment Day*, a broad allegory of the Reichstag fire, staged on Broadway in autumn 1934. Behrman wrote neither such a play, which would have been a massive departure for him, nor the one-act play, nor the heroic tale of courtroom justice, a reversal of *The Merchant of Venice* in which the gentile Irishwoman defends “a condemned Jew.”²³ Indeed, Behrman never stages this recalcitrant material as action at all: in *Rain from Heaven*, Willens paraphrases a pamphlet that no longer exists. The “comedic tragedy” had become, generically, a joke inside a comedy of manners. And yet to observe that *Rain from Heaven* condenses the story of the Last Jew into a joke does not mean that the impulse to “do something” in response to a genocidal historical moment had faded: for Behrman, comedy was doing something.

Rain from Heaven is, among other things, a play about the consequences of comic writing. Willens makes his living as a music critic. The play stresses that the pamphlet is the cause of his internment in a concentration camp – in the early 1930s, these were not yet extermination camps – and subsequent exile:

HOBART: Then may I ask why you were put into a concentration camp?
 HUGO: I wrote a pamphlet.
 HOBART (*In Triumph*): Ah! Communist!
 HUGO: Not at all! It was satiric. (28)

Satire, according to the logic of Willens’s response, is by definition uncommitted, or else there would be no necessary contradiction between a pamphlet’s being both Communist and satiric. “They did me the honor to burn it – (*Deprecatingly*) – with other important works” (28). Willens modestly insists on the pamphlet as his comic response to a persecution to which he was not himself subject: “As a writer on music I had, as a matter of course, innumerable Jewish friends. I was touched personally by their sudden misfortunes – also, as a lover of music, I was devastated by what the Aryan standardization was doing to my world” (28). The pamphlet is the product of sympathy,

not yet part of any conscious political project. When Vi insists that Willens should “rewrite it – from memory” so that she can republish it, he objects: “Why? Why should I be the Jewish apologist? I’m not a Jew” (29). Willens, speaking of his “speck” of Jewish blood, explains that he “had a Jewish great grandmother.” He declares: “Curiously enough I was rather proud of that speck” (30).²⁴ Provoked by the pamphlet, the sequence suggests, the Nazis proceeded to discover Willens’s Jewish roots.

With quite remarkable consistency, reviews in widely circulated New York daily newspapers erased the pamphlet’s importance. Review after review claimed that Willens is in exile because he is a Jew. In his *Times* review, Brooks Atkinson described Willens as “a music critic who has been exiled from Germany for illegal blood content” (“Play” 28). In the *Herald Tribune*, Percy Hammond called him “a suave music-critic banished from Munich because his great-grandmother was a Jew” (12). To the *New York Post* critic, John Mason Brown, Willens was a “race-conscious music critic [...] who has been exiled from Germany for being one-eighth Jewish” (9). Burns Mantle, in the *Daily News*, wrote that Behrman protests the “expulsion” of exiles who possess “blood streams ever so slightly tinged with Semitic strains.” And so on. Few reviews make any mention of “The Last Jew”; for the most part, Willens’s transgression becomes simply racial.

“Ibee,” a reviewer for *Variety*, did register the content of Willens’s pamphlet: “The refugee’s story of the last Jew in Germany is one of the most amusing passages in the script” (136). If Ibee is reporting the response the audience, that audience in New York in 1934 laughed. Why?²⁵ While the political intrigue is limited to a fairy-tale fascist kingdom with a “minister of Propaganda” resembling Goebbels, the genocide it describes is almost total: “[W]ith the efficiency of a well-organized machine the purpose is all but accomplished” (*Rain* 29). There is no suggestion that the killing has been limited to the borders of this unnamed place that sounds exactly like Germany, or even to Europe. Willens plainly foresees that bureaucratic “efficiency” in the execution of genocide that has troubled observers from Hannah Arendt to Zygmunt Bauman. And, like Bauman, the pamphlet intuits that its readers are not immune to the threat that it describes. Indeed, what might have been “amusing” is precisely the aggression which Behrman’s audience might have experienced. Who, on Christmas Eve, attended the play’s opening night in Manhattan? The victims of the genocidal program would include a large part of Behrman’s audience – precisely the audience that, based on the evidence of reviews, understood the joke. If what is (barely) repressed is that the widespread discourse of extermination might apply to you, it may be that you laugh when you are told that you are also in danger.

“The Last Jew,” then, is a Jewish joke. Louis Kaplan’s argument that this “self-ironic” genre “‘takes back’ anti-Semitic hatred and converts it into laughter even while being exposed to its toxic risks” fits it perfectly (*At Wit’s End* 21). Critics who recognized the importance of “The Last Jew” were, it seems, themselves often Jewish. This may explain why Henry W. Levy, in *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, spent a few paragraphs appreciatively summarizing the fictional pamphlet, while Stark Young, a contributor to *I’ll Take My Stand*, the “manifesto” of the southern agrarians, complained that the play was, as “racial discussion,” “somewhat oblique and a little vulgar” (308).²⁶ And both critics were right: the story was important to the play, and it was “vulgar,” a startling departure from the genteel and assimilated mode of most of the play. The punchline relies on that common anti-Semitic trope: the Jew will do anything for money, even if it means reproducing in order to provide justification for Nazi propaganda. The joke is also about sex: “They are left naked, without an issue, without a programme, without a scapegoat” (*Rain* 29). The absence of a scapegoat leaves the kingdom “naked,” sexually vulnerable and “without an issue,” a curious formulation that suggests it is both out of good arguments and childless. If the kingdom is “without an issue,” then the solution is to pay the Last Jew to reproduce. But with whom will the last Jew have sex in order to produce more Jews? The kingdom must suspend its own ideology and encourage sex between a Jewish man a gentile woman: in order to preserve ideology, that ideology’s most intimate prohibitions must be violated. And then there is the matter of matrilineal descent: will the next Jew after the Last Jew even *be* a Jew? All we know about the Last Jew is that he is a man and that he is found on the verge of suicide. The Last Jew cannot satisfy the rule of matrilineal birth, but this also illustrates Behrman’s awareness of the absurdities of Nazi racial ideology: virtually anyone could turn out to be a Jew (see, e.g., Bartov). Vi “Claps her hands in delight; jumps up” (29). Vi, that is, gets the joke.

Vi, a “beautiful, gracious women of twenty-eight to thirty, whose sympathetic nature causes her to be liberal in her social and economic attitudes” (*Rain* 7), is the familiar gentile heroine of the high comedy. Vi gets the joke, but she belongs to another genre. Her sympathies attract her to liberal causes; her hospitality extends to fascists even while she argues with them. Such hospitality, the social basis of a dramatic form that allows for the heterogeneous gatherings that make the plays compelling, is the practice of an affluent and tolerant liberalism. The episode of the Last Jew interrupts this scene of liberal toleration with a Jewish joke about the end of toleration. This brief generic interruption to the texture and practices of the high comedy anticipates the play’s ending. The Last Jew does not commit suicide but negotiates for his survival: “[H]e is a practical man” (29). Willens decides to leave England to join the “intellectual front,” gathering among exiles on Germany’s borders

(100). Vi understands his choice to return to Europe as almost explicitly suicidal. Willens grants that this might be true but declares that he is

determined at last to view the world – including myself – completely without illusion. It's a matter of life and death. I see now that goodness is not enough, that kindness is not enough, that liberalism is not enough. (*Rises*) I'm sick of evasions. They've done us in. Civilization, charity, progress, tolerance – all the catchwords. I'm sick of them. We'll have to redefine our terms. (101–2)

Although able to imagine the militant determination of a newly anti-liberal leftist, Behrman never fully abandons the pleasures of a comic form that seems always to have room for the very comforts Willens rejects. But what this comedy makes visible is not a past in which extermination was always already inevitable but, instead, a singular moment when a joke could expose a latent threat.

Rain from Heaven simultaneously registers the threat of extermination and the impossibility of it taking dramatic form. Or, to put it otherwise, the high comedy surrounding the pamphlet is Behrman's protection against that threat. The joke's climax bears comparison to the denouement of *Rain from Heaven* as a whole. This climax, too, follows from a complicated stew of eros and anti-Semitism. At the curtain to Act Two, Hobart Eldridge, the fascist industrialist, mistakenly claims that Willens is Vi's new lover, and his brother Rand, the dull but handsome and amorous aviator, lashes out:

RAND (*Turns on Him*): You dirty Jew!
VI (*Horriified*): Rand!
HUGO: It's all right, Vi. This makes me feel quite at home.
HOBART: You swine! Maybe those people over there are right.
VI: Hobart, please remember – Herr Willens is not only my lover, he is also my guest. (*Smiles at HUGO*) (*Rain* 87)

This curtain forms a pair with dialogue near the play's end, where Willens decides that he must leave Vi:

HUGO: Yes. I must leave you. I must go.
VI: Where?
HUGO: Back to Germany.
VI (*Almost in Terror*): Oh!
HUGO: In a sense it's come to me that I am deserter.
VI: But you can't go back, Hugo – They'll – stop you. (100)

The dashes breaking Vi's last line here acknowledge the risk embodied in Hugo's determination. And it is not "backshadowing" that makes this risk

apparent. Behrman encountered the question of what it might mean for an exile to return in Heinrich Mann's "Dictatorship of the Mind." Mann discusses the relative freedom from persecution of wealthier Jews, citing the case of one banker who "has had himself declared an 'Aryan.'" Mann then compares the plight of intellectuals: "[I]f Einstein were rash enough to return to Germany he could not count on such polite attentions" (419). If the Last Jew chooses to reproduce on unacceptable terms, raising a family of scapegoats necessary to the Nazi regime, Willens chooses a dangerous return to Germany or its outskirts – potentially deliberate martyrdom – as a protest against the very possibility that his pamphlet predicts.

Rain from Heaven does not stage Willens's return to join the "intellectual front" forming somewhere on the borders of Germany. Mostly, as everyone who has ever written on Behrman has stressed, people talk. In 1935, for instance, Grenville Vernon observed, "Nothing happens except the expression of ideas, but ideas so subtly evolved, so poignantly expressed, that we forget all else" (318). And yet something does happen: Willens decides to join an incipient anti-fascist resistance. "The Last Jew" is the first step in his radicalization through writing and talk. Behrman self-consciously writes in the tradition of Shaw's revival of the comedy of manners and his opening up of its political potential. In an unpublished note, Behrman slightly misquotes Shaw's preface to *Heartbreak House*: "What really happened was that the impact of physical death and destruction, the one reality that everybody can understand, tore off the masks of education, art, science and religion from our ignorance and barbarism and left us glorying grotesquely in the license suddenly accorded to our vilest passions and most abject terrors."²⁷ Behrman comments: "[N]ow the *depression* even more than the war has done this same thing and this play should be to guard against the depression danger, the depression pest – worse than any war this unloosed" (S.N. Berhman Papers, b. 20, f. 4, pt. 1, emphasis in original). This danger, that is, lies in the future potential for violence.

For Behrman, the play might serve to "guard" against the passions and terrors the depression produces: high comedy as protection against fascism. Vi echoes this language, describing "a pest over all the world just now, an epidemic of hatred and intolerance that may engulf us all. [...] People have suffered too much during the last twenty years – they can't stand any more, that's all. In one way or another they're letting off steam" (*Rain* 66). The theory of comedy here is anti-cathartic: suffering leads to the need for release, and the forms of this release are not the antidote to but a further aggravation of the "epidemic of hatred and intolerance." The pairing of Behrman's notes and Vi's dialogue suggests the ideology of high comedy. Behrman's high comedy aims to produce the elegant forms of conversation that might guard against the brutality of unthinking release. Rather than wish-fulfilment, delivering

the promise that the audience might enjoy the forms of luxury high comedy displays, this ideology suggests that the possibility of this staged or screened conversation buttresses the civilization that makes anti-fascist action possible.

UNCOMMITTED

Working on a train travelling west on 3 January 1934, Behrman hurriedly typed notes:

[B]y removing it to another land I can get interesting comment – the harm is done – and he the awful boredom of it – if we could be done with it forever for pity’s sake don’t be [...] romantic about it – abjure it – don’t let a soul know any time anywhere when I wrote the last jew [*sic*] it was a wish fulfillment if I were the last jew I could willingly commit suicide and in a [*sic*] listening – the harm is done and it’s done for a thousand years – and to live on this assumption that you are a prosperity luxury and once the golden stream is over and constriction sets in you are the first notch in the belt to be tightened like traveling on a passenger vessel that will let you stay on board whiel [*sic*] the weather is fair and ho [*sic*] for the sharks the minute there’s a storm it’s no good enough it’s horrible it’s a bore all the romantic claptrap about being a jew you have to give up most of the privileges of being a human say how you say – the nuisance value. (Papers, b. 20, f. 4)³⁸

These notes move rapidly from a playwright’s strategy for the setting (“another land”) to a sketch of dialogue that follows after the word “comment.” This passage is largely not a moment of Behrman’s self-lacerating private reflection but notes toward dialogue for Willens. And yet the possibility of attaching the first person here to Behrman suggests the intensity of an identification that drives Behrman’s representation of this character. Ina overhears: this would be Ina Claire, the actress and frequent collaborator Behrman had had in mind for the role of Vi (a role first played instead by Jane Cowl). That Behrman imagines the actress herself listening, instead of the character she might play, points to Willens’s speaking on behalf of the playwright. Probably at this point, Behrman had decided that he wanted Claire to play the role but had not yet decided on the character’s name. In any case, the uncertain location of the speaker and the ambiguity of the first person emphasize the question of who speaks these words. Privately, Behrman notes that these words must never circulate in the public sphere – “don’t let a soul know” – and, indeed, the play includes nothing as explicit as this suicidal wish. This self-hatred in the face of the “awful boredom” of a history of persecution is by no means the last word; it exists in tandem with his determination to “do something against the mania of cruelty and persecution now abroad in the world,” a determination that, while more easily assimilable to his public opposition to “Hitlerism,” appears in his diary and also belongs to Behrman’s private writing. But the suicidal wish does not wholly disappear.

Behrman documented the Theatre Guild's debate about the play's ending. Lee Simonson, the set designer, understood the ending as staging an irresolvable conflict between Vi's liberalism and Willens' militancy. He also argued that Willens's Judaism was the "spark" that "set off the militant messianic impulse that sends out at the finish." Behrman notes further: "Lee felt very strongly that it is not the Judaism that should be emphasized as the objective but only as the propulsive impulse" (Papers, b. 20, f. 4). Judaism, earlier admitted only as a "speck," becomes the revolutionary "spark." In the first act, Willens relates how that "speck" became something more: "Atavism? The *speck* – took possession of me. I became its creature. I moved under its ordering. (*Humorously*) Then I began to ask myself whether subconsciously I hadn't written the pamphlet to defend *my* antecedents" (*Rain* 31, emphasis in original). In the August 1933 diary entry in which he first mentions "The Last Jew," Behrman writes that he "was struck by an idea"; Willens describes himself as possessed by a Dybbuk-like spirit whose "creature" he becomes. It is unclear, in this scenario, if writing the pamphlet is already a response to the possession Willens describes, but the motive is no longer the most important thing. Ironically, because he writes the story of the last Jew, a Jewish identity is forced upon him by Nazi racial definitions: "a Nordic with an interesting racial fillip," as Willens describes himself (30), becomes a Jew. The joke is on the book burners: "The Last Jew" makes Willens Jewish.

Willens's questions about his own motivation resonate with the play's concerns with what writing can make happen. "You're an artist, Hugo," Vi objects in the climactic scene: "What have you to do with feuds and hatreds and rebellions?" (*Rain* 101). An artist? Moments earlier, Willens directs his self-hatred at his earlier profession as critic, a "public taster of the arts – a dilettante in everything," and he regrets his support for the playwright, based on Hauptmann, whose reputation he had made and whose name he repeats with disgust: "Lehrmann – I made Lehrmann – I created a world in which Lehrmann was king and what sort of a world is it? A criminal architect who builds houses that topple on their hapless tenants" (100). Behrman/Lehrmann: the scarcely encrypted autocritique of the liberal playwright as collaborator marks the ambivalence of the play's end. The fragmentary allegory of the "criminal architect" is tantalizing: the criminal could be the playwright king or the critic who "made" him. In this context, Vi's insistence that, as an artist, Willens transcends the squabbles of the political world is peculiar: he does not himself picture criticism as art. The question of the genre of "The Last Jew," then, returns: its status as evanescent satirical pamphlet embodies the play's struggle with the question of what art might do. A fiction written

out of sympathy by a politically uncommitted critic, “The Last Jew” is a pamphlet whose after-effects lead, finally, to the critic’s embrace of anti-Nazi activism.

Adorno’s “Commitment” offers a trenchant commentary on the politics of Behrman’s play:

When even genocide becomes cultural property in committed literature, it becomes easier to continue complying with the culture that gave rise to the murder. One characteristic of such literature is virtually ever-present: it shows us humanity blossoming in so-called extreme situations, and in fact precisely there, and at times this becomes a dreary metaphysics that affirms the horror, which has been justified as a “boundary situation,” by virtue of the notion that the authenticity of the human being is manifested there. (88–89)

When Vi first explains that Willens has “just emerged from a concentration camp,” she asks about his experience:

HUGO: No luxury. Plain. Simple.
VI: Showers or tubs?
HUGO: Barbed wire and truncheons.
VI: Both! How generous! (*Rain* 26)

Sascha, the musician in exile, comments: “That couldn’t have been any joke” (26). And while Vi hasn’t exactly made Willens’s experience a joke, she has joined him in choosing the stance of ironic distance to the language of suffering, as if the traveller’s option of a room with a bath or one with a shower – in hindsight a chilling comparison – were equivalent to a prisoner’s non-choice between barbed wire and truncheons. This distillation of the stance of high comedy captures the relation of *Rain from Heaven* to the history it acknowledges. Settling on the customary country house of high comedy might be still worse than staging of the extreme situation of the camp: the noble exile returns to Germany while the “authenticity of the human” survives in the English countryside, with meals served by devoted servants at regular hours: “Hugo, listen – humanity is here, all around us,” says Vi, promising him that when he encounters “our common folk,” he will find that they are free of “ferocity or brutality or mass-hate” (100–1). Humanity survives precisely because horror is acknowledged and the exile chooses to return to it. For Behrman, in 1934, comedy provides a form of negation that continues to assert the humourist’s transcendence of the brutality that is the humour’s source.

Adorno’s argument in “Commitment” reflects his larger concern with the status of art after World War II and, more particularly, his apprehension that the historical conditions that made the Holocaust possible have not vanished. The genocide that “becomes cultural property in committed literature,” then,

is the genocide that has already occurred, but the threat also remains.²⁹ As “cultural property” – that is, as commodified art – genocide becomes aesthetic experience: “The victims are turned into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in” (88), akin to those fed to sharks in Behrman’s scenario. Here, Adorno imagines this terrible appetite as post-war cannibalism: this world remains the world that did in the dead of Auschwitz, and it continues to eat its victims. The chronology of this theory of the aftermath would seem, then, to be marked by the caesura of Auschwitz and all that that name has come to represent.³⁰ And so Adorno’s essay would also seem an uneasy fit with the historical challenge of “The Last Jew,” given that the description of the pamphlet appears in a play not written in the aftermath of the genocide but, instead, as “fantasy,” as the registration of a genocidal possibility already latent. Behrman knew that to write high comedy before the Holocaust was already barbarism.

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NOTES

1. Behrman’s *The Worcester Account* remembers his childhood and youth. See also Ljungquist.
2. Compelling considerations of Behrman’s plays include Krutch (180–205); Rabkin (chap. 8); and Gross, “High Ambivalence.”
3. For a bibliography of Behrman’s publications, see Reed (141–45).
4. Behrman’s papers in the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, which include his diaries as well as correspondence and other miscellaneous papers, are cited by box (b.) and folder (f.) number, and also, in the case of diary entries, the date and page number.
5. See Behrman, *People in a Diary* (22); Behrman, “Query: What Makes Comedy High?”

6. Page numbers for *Rain from Heaven* quotations are from the 1936 Samuel French edition.
7. Rabkin observes that “The Last Jew” was “direfully prophetic” (230); Reed simply quotes the passage in *S.N. Behrman* (61). The play has received some attention. See, e.g., Brüning (244–46); Fearnow (83–92); Gagey (206–07); and Sievers (327–29). Isser classes *Rain from Heaven* as “antifascist drama” (32–33) but focuses on Behrman’s later adaptation of Franz Werfel’s *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* (36–43). See also Wertheim (4–5) and Takayoshi (21–22).
8. See especially Adorno, “Notes on Kafka,” in *Prisms* (259–60).
9. I draw on overviews of high comedy and the comedy of manners from Vineberg and Hirst (1–3, 111–12); see also Weales.
10. Gross’s “High Ambivalence” includes an extended analysis of *No Time for Comedy* (148–53).
11. Cf. Gagnier’s “Comedy and Consumers,” in *Idylls of the Marketplace* (chap. 3).
12. See, e.g., Papers, b. 29, f. 1, 31 August and 1 September 1933, p. 33, where three variants appear.
13. For Kommer, see Vietor-Engländer; for Viertel, see Rifkind and Viertel’s own *The Kindness of Strangers*.
14. In 1935, the Polish comedians Shimen Dzigán and Yisroel Shumacher performed a sketch, “The Last Jew in Poland,” so close to Behrman’s scenario that it seems probable they had heard of it (Efron 60–63).
15. Waldo Frank’s “Why Should the Jew Survive?” – which Behrman laconically judged “a fine piece” (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 7 December 1933, p. 91) – is an outlier here: Frank argues that the “traditional Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and North Africa [...] are doomed by their own archaic form” (121).
16. Behrman judged *The Coming Struggle for Power* “devastatingly brilliant” (Papers b. 29, f. 1, 2 February 1934, p. 130). For *The Menace of Fascism*, see Papers b. 29, f. 1, 2 March 1934, pp. 142–43.
17. See also Conroy, as well as Freedman’s definition of the middlebrow (93–97) and long note on Bourdieu (236–38n11).
18. For Kommer’s informing Behrman about Kerr, see Vietor-Engländer (175–77).
19. Kerr had published “more than seventy reviews of Hauptmann” (Mellen 159).
20. A fuller reckoning with race in *Rain from Heaven* might begin with the scene where Clendon Wyatt, a Rhodes scholar from South Carolina, sings “a Negro spiritual” (45). Paul Robeson initially inspired this character (Shea 197).
21. For the genesis of *Rain from Heaven*, see also Shea (163–218).

22. *No Time for Comedy*, recalling this dilemma, portrays a successful comic playwright who refuses to write comedy while the Spanish Civil War rages. The protagonist decides to write a drama about a victim of the war, quickly fearing he has material only for a one-act play (77).
23. *Rain from Heaven* takes its title from Portia's speech on mercy in *Merchant of Venice* (4.1.185) and includes quotations from that play (78).
24. Cf. Freedman's description of the "notion that Jewishness in small doses and small doses alone connects to artistic genius" (112).
25. Julie Hamburg, who directed a New York production in 2000, reports that the "comment was often completely ignored by the audience, although we found it shocking. There were occasionally some gasps, however."
26. For another appreciative account, see Shearwood, who describes Willens as "a German music critic, who has escaped from a concentration camp, where he was detained both because of his frank writing and because his great grandmother was Jewish."
27. Behrman's source was probably Shaw (xxv).
28. A small piece of this survives as dialogue in *Rain from Heaven* (67).
29. On this topic, see especially Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.
30. For a lucid discussion of Adorno on poetry after Auschwitz, see Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, especially chapter one.

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