
After the Fall
(1964) Arthur Miller

Act 1. A bare stage.

Holga (30s) is a German archaeologist. She is a calm and independent woman. But the past haunts her. Here she reminisces about the war.

HOLGA. It was the middle of the war. I had just come out of a class and there were leaflets on the sidewalk. A photograph of a concentration camp. And emaciated people. It was dropped there by British Intelligence; one tended to believe the British. I had no idea. Truly. Any more, perhaps, than Americans know how a Negro lives. I was seventeen; I lived in my studies; I planned how to cut my hair differently. It is much more complicated than it seems later. There were many officers in my family. It was our country. It isn't easy to turn against your country; not in a war. There are always reasons – do Americans turn against America because of Hiroshima? No, there are reasons always. (*Pause.*) And I took the leaflet to my godfather – he was still commanding our Intelligence. And I asked if it were true. 'Of course,' he said, 'why does it excite you?' And I said, 'You are a swine. You are all swine.' I threw my briefcase at him. And he opened it and put some papers in and asked me to deliver it to a certain address. And I became a courier for the officers who were planning to assassinate Hitler. . . . They were all hanged.

[**QUENTIN.** Why not you?

HOLGA. They didn't betray me.

QUENTIN. Then why do you say good faith is never sure?]
(*After a pause.*) It was my country . . . longer perhaps than it

should have been. But I didn't know. And now I don't know how I could not have known. I can't imagine not knowing, now.

COMMENTARY: Miller's *After the Fall* is a play about how guilt preys heavily on innocent minds. Within the framework of the play the Second World War represents a fall from grace. Anyone touched by those times, whether in Germany or elsewhere, has been compromised. So it is with Holga who reveals how she first became aware of evil as a young student in Nazi Germany.

Holga's speech discloses the clear memory of a moral and political turning point in her life. A chance encounter with a leaflet outside a school yard sets off the chain of related incidents that grow into a plot, in which she is involved, to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Although Holga does not describe the photograph of the concentration camp her reaction to it justifies everything that follows. Try to imagine or find the kind of image that would have this impact. Notice how calmly Holga relates her transition from innocent ignorance to knowledge, from passive indifference to active involvement. Although the speech seems very neutral and matter-of-fact, it is also an admission of collective guilt and a confession. Holga speaks slowly and simply. Her command of English is precise and functional. She has a rational, scientific mind (she is an archaeologist) so she speaks clearly. The actor must find a way to convey her quiet passion and strong compassion. She concludes her speech on a note of uncertainty. Despite all that she has experienced she realizes there can be no moral victories.