

TEXT

For Conduct And Innocents
(drama in verse)

by

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Germany's Jeremiah

Born 1906 in Breslau, Germany (now, part of Poland) into a prominent, but not particularly religious family, Dietrich Bonhoeffer embraced the teachings of Protestantism early, becoming a well-known theologian and acclaimed writer while still in his twenties. When most of the Church leadership in Germany crumbled under the weight of Nazism, Bonhoeffer and a group of colleagues set about establishing the Confessing Church as a moral and spiritual counterforce. Bonhoeffer also plotted with a group of co-conspirators to overthrow Hitler; toward that end, he participated in organizing efforts to assassinate the Nazi leader. Arrested in April, 1943, Bonhoeffer remained in prison for the rest of his life. Remnants of the Hitler command were so obsessed with Bonhoeffer's death that they executed him at the Flossenburg concentration camp, located near the Czechoslovakian border, on April 9, 1945, only two weeks before American liberation of the camp. Stripped of clothing, tortured and led naked to the gallows yard, he was then hanged from a tree.

In 1930, Dietrich Bonhoeffer arrived here in New York City from Germany with a doctorate of theology and additional graduate work in hand and with some experience as a curate for a German-speaking congregation in Barcelona, Spain. He had been awarded a fellowship to Union Theological Seminary, where he came under the influence of many of the leading theological luminaries of the day, including Reinhold Niebuhr, a major force for social ethics. While a teaching fellow at Union, Bonhoeffer was especially engaged, through a fellow student, Franklin Fisher, in Abyssinian Baptist Church – so much so that he taught Sunday School there and occasionally was allowed to preach by the then senior minister, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. To Bonhoeffer, Abyssinian reflected, in many ways, his expectations for a Christian community. Inspired and invigorated by the mutual support, mutual service, and social action at Abyssinian, he had also been moved by the sermons and fell in love with the music, the spirituals. During this time, he bought many spiritual records, which he took back with him to Germany the following year. Those recordings later served as a source of solace and strength for him and his students in Finkenwalde, Germany at the Confessing Church's illegal seminary for which Bonhoeffer functioned as director.

Several years following, in 1939, Bonhoeffer returned to Union very briefly as a lecturer; after only a few weeks, he concluded he did not belong in the safe haven of America and that he had to go back to the struggle in Germany and work even more earnestly against the evil regime of Nazism if he had any claim to shape Germany's future. Upon his return to Germany, Bonhoeffer focused his efforts on numerous anti-government activities that included the supplying of assistance to Jews and creating a network, both inside and outside the country, of clergy and others seeking peace.

Born a few years into the 20th century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was forged by war and domestic turmoil in his beloved Germany. Confronted with Nazism that proved intent on eliminating the Jews, Bonhoeffer, often called "Germany's Jeremiah," drew on the best

and wealth of the Judeo-Christian legacy and on the love for and by God to gain the personal strength to try to put a stick in the spokes of the Nazi wheel.

For Bonhoeffer, scripture itself was not a series of words on a page; rather, scripture extrudes human properties, for it encompasses us, it warns us, we are part of it, and it is part of us. The following is an excerpt from Psalm 74: “The enemy has laid waste everything in your sanctuary. . . They set fire to your holy place; they defiled the dwelling-place of your name and razed it to the ground. They said to themselves, ‘Let us destroy them altogether.’ They burned down all the meeting-places of God in the land.” Bonhoeffer jotted down the date of November 9, 1938 beside this psalm in the margin of his prayer book – the date of Krystallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, when Jewish synagogues, homes and stores were destroyed, and terror shot through the Jewish community in Germany and parts of Austria. Bonhoeffer had earlier declared: “One may not sing Gregorian chants unless he stands with the Jews.”

Likewise, the words of the Sermon On The Mount to Bonhoeffer were not abstruse, were not separate from the way we should behave; to him, the Sermon had not become a set of idealized acts no one could possibly achieve – on the contrary, to Bonhoeffer, we shall love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, we shall hold secret our giving to others, and if someone asks for our coat, we should offer more. The Sermon On The Mount stands as a crucible by which one should live fully.

The complexities of the man led to unusual ironies. Though a person of transparency, Bonhoeffer carried out the tasks of a double agent for the Allies when employed by the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, furnishing information about internal matters in Germany to the Allies through various ecumenical clergy contacts. Further, though a pacifist, much of his time from 1939 to his arrest in 1943 was dedicated to organizational efforts to kill Adolph Hitler. Notwithstanding these and other apparent incongruities exhibited by Bonhoeffer, we should appreciate that such ironies are the stuff of an honorable and sophisticated man searching for and discerning his own personal theology and his unique place and role on earth. Bonhoeffer’s brother-in-law understood the uncommon qualities of the man, his special mission and martyrdom, describing, in the following words, the mood that surrounded a memorial service for Dietrich Bonhoeffer in England more than three months after his execution: “Those who attended the service held at Holy Trinity in London at the instigation of the Bishop of Chicester on July 27th, 1945, felt that, on April 9, 1945, when Dietrich Bonhoeffer met his death at the hands of the SS guards, something had happened in Germany that could not be measured by human standards. They felt that God Himself had intervened in the most terrible struggle the world has witnessed so far by sacrificing one of His most faithful and courageous sons to expiate the crimes of a diabolical regime and to revive the spirit in which the civilization of Europe has to be rebuilt.”

Author's Comments

The conversations within *For Conduct And Innocents* are, of course, fictionalized; however, Bonhoeffer's presence in the particular locations at the particular times, when discourse occurs in this drama in verse, is historically accurate. For this composition, I found it necessary to invoke liberties with certain characters. As an example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one month shy of his thirty-seventh birthday and Maria von Wedemeyer only eighteen at the time of their engagement in January, 1943; accounting for these facts, I simply could not fathom a dialogue during the crucial period immediately preceding the theologian's arrest, encompassing the subjects and issues explored in *For Conduct And Innocents*, between Bonhoeffer and a teenage woman. He had something to say about this intrinsic problem himself in a letter, dated July 21, 1944, from prison to his close friend and associate, Eberhard Bethge: "Perhaps the time will come one day when I can talk to Maria like this; I very much hope so. But I can't expect it of her yet." Indeed, later in life, Maria voiced her own misgivings about the effects of her age at the time of engagement to Bonhoeffer, expressed to her sister, Ruth-Alice von Bismarck, in February, 1976: "I was so young at that time. The thing is, I'd also like to be associated with Dietrich as the person I am now." The audience should observe I have made several adjustments to actual history, including the name and presumed age of the fiancée in the drama – thus, Gertrude was created.

Also, for the part of Richard N., there is no one individual on whom the role is based, but rather, it embodies a collage or amalgam of friends and persons intensely connected to Bonhoeffer's life, goals and labors – maybe, Eberhard Bethge (the theologian's closest friend), biographer of Bonhoeffer; maybe, Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, two important influences; also, of coincidence, Reinhold Niebuhr's brother, also a eminent theologian, who had little, if any, contact with Bonhoeffer, but who nevertheless held the name, Richard, so it was rather easy to combine the brothers into "Richard N," the character, but this association can go just so far since the part played in this drama in verse is obviously and distinctly that of a German, and the Niebuhr brothers were Americans, though their family's roots were only briefly removed from Germany. I trust the audience will forgive these accommodations and understand the usefulness of the latitude taken.

For Conduct And Innocents

(Drama In Verse)

Characters

<i>Dietrich</i>	- <i>German Theologian and Nazi Foe</i>
<i>Gertrude</i>	- <i>Dietrich's Fiancée</i>
<i>Richard N.</i>	- <i>Dietrich's Colleague and Friend</i>
<i>Voices ad seriatim</i>	- <i>Voices of the Condemned</i>

Opening

Voice of the Condemned, #659537:

Small amounts of love contain a modest gift,
But the larger parts of love speak prophecy.

By 1940, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has secured a position through his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, in the Abwehr, the German Military Intelligence Office, which includes a number of senior officials engaged in the development of plans and strategies to bring down the Nazi government. Following the surrender of Poland, Bonhoeffer is already at work with others to remove Hitler; the conspirators expect to use the savagery perpetrated by the German SS in Poland to illustrate to the German people the evil nature of the regime. Demonstrably indicative of Nazi cynicism in the justification of aggressive military actions, the German airborne invasion of Holland and the bomber strikes in Belgium in May, 1940, several months following the attack against Poland, are defended by the Nazis as necessary to safeguard the neutrality of both countries. In September, 1940, Germany carries out a heavy bombardment against London, the most intense air attack on a city ever.

Act I

September, 1940

Location: Klein-Krossin Estate

Near Kieckow, Germany

Richard N.:

Blame the cold, for it takes the winter's loss better
Than we do in our short and loosely controlled wit. . .
Tolerating these regrettable times – our own lesser rules brushed aside
And, in blood, mutating into those outside the nation's approved decrees. . .
The newest transgressions of which we hear laying claim to what
Appears normal.

Dietrich:

God's not so far
Away, at our hands and traffic, from the quotidian and
Smallest cell, and arranged to be the per se and the circle.

They've tried to ruin the face of God, now further
Behind, to set fear without mercy. As God cannot
Choose to desert even the maniac, as I remind myself
We are chained into the laws of usual men,
We know we abide a broken Eden, ordained risks.

Richard N.:

You stand one
Unknown away from the next devolving crime, where, though as
A spy in a liar's shirt. They take you as seriously
As you sometimes take yourself. . .

Do we say we are the killer's opposites, so much
Like the way children will, at times, set their mouths
And unroll, pretending to be strangers?

Or can we, for fact, apprise that
We're capable of beating them strength against strength, goal against
Goal?. . .

No one believes the heretics can be used, but you

Have done it, Dietrich. They'll swear you misled the best, and
They'll hate you the worse for it – you, who took
Your own principles even more completely against the perverse roar –
another blunt move into arrogance.

Gertrude:

You carry that certain scent of death
In a subject, Dietrich; you, to measure robust killers touting
Too much low ambition. . .

And you plan to rule and
Expose fault to clarity, knowing the touch of obscure parts
Should again vanish quicker than sound. Yet, you came then
As a stranger too – I now wish you could have stayed
That way. . .

I understand you look to evade and defeat
Death through one more death, for you're heroic enough to command
And conceive that a naïve world shall swallow
Another taste. . .

If God were the god of the
Living, then how can we treasure solitude?
And yet, you're so much
Safer alone, aren't you, Dietrich, on guard at all times?
Bland and noxious,
Waiting on a move, I'm piqued by your creations, Dietrich;
You chide so well – I, partial heathen. . .

But while treating us as a testament or tact,
You soon imitate the search and eloquence of God to
Serve your own nameless and lonely forge toward a message.

Dietrich:

Busily, we avoid most alternatives, for
They suggest danger here. Many ideas are hard as
The earth, and I get harder myself the more abstract
I wear them alone. . . Bear with me, love's
No more an accident than grass is. . . While we treat
Love evermore present as another
Wish that's no longer in hiding.

Gertrude:

But we grew here like two minimum fates, two platitudes,
Which rouse no milestone nor resolution, blown out of the
Exercise of life to dry in some posture alone among
The dust of disinterest. . . Waving ghostly at our own revisions
With words to be heard quaintly by themselves and sparsely
Understood enough as space for a lifeless profile.

Oh,

Dietrich, I still get angry whenever your fatherhood chooses to
Divide our fluent presence. . .

Dietrich:

Will we
Have to wait very long for a pause to start
Honest looks again?

In gross ways, my own games end up teased by patriotic
Decay. . .And show traits of a lover prone to fail so many deftly
And mechanically. . .

Betrayal appears on more mouths, brothers anger
Brothers – even of the same blood, an impetus for murder rears
Less forbidden. . .

On October 2, 1940, Hitler discusses with his new Polish Governor that laborers needed by the German Reich shall come from Poland, whose gentry and intelligentsia are to be terminated. Two weeks later, Hitler outlines his plans for the Czechoslovakian state – approximately half of the populace are to be sent to Germany as slave workers, while the other half, including the intelligentsia, are to be terminated. In the fall of 1940, Bonhoeffer receives notice that he is prohibited from speaking in public. Toward the end of the year and in the early part of 1941, Bonhoeffer resides at the Ettal monastery in Bavaria; these months represent the longest period of time for him to work on his writing – in particular, ETHICS – during the war years.

Act II

January, 1941

Location: Ettal Monastery

Near Oberammergau, Bavaria

Dietrich:

. . .And if that other face, of man, manly worshipped,
Should not cope or were defiled,
The desires of millions would also falter.
Surprising none, the face, as all such faces do, beguiles
And will not substitute; and refusals of the face landed
Self-inflicted wounds, we found. . .Should the face
Break down, the victories and profound talk cannot
Be repaired.

How, in these unusual times, strength of the
Negative to express joy! . . .At that, those repugnant questions somehow
Give utterance to the worst corner of our hopes: Who
Is valuable, who isn't? . . .

Another momentum to flow, as though God chose to test
Us through one more choice, which we, so amateur, must consider.

Voice of the Condemned, #097605:

Murder, an act of the cryptic, famous. . .It
Came, and it comes with less effort than a song to
Raise the rest of morning, wise and playfully done.

Murder, sharper than any doubt or
Confused passion, does not leave an abstruse line. . . Murder,
The avowed apostle of mute clarity and loud night. . .

Voice of the Condemned, #611019:

Then, history then joined to the mad crowd to be
Obscene, the old spirit explained away and coined as past.
The gently old parting first – they're the least, the least
Aware, the least in place, in the midst of thirst.

. . .So many drawn to profess a bond with
A devil who sleeps through din and wakes for chaos.

Voice of the Condemned, #820211:

And still, as peace
Was inert and disguised as coy, they didn't even try to
Take it seriously but hastened away in bliss to convert
All trust and grace into weaker names.

Dietrich:

Are we arranged in case this latest evilist tells
Us how to lie? Are we sensible enough to move safely out
Of the way? I watched him closely to see if he would talk
Back like an angry boy having bluffed and notched all
Those who unify after him. But as for the moment,
A murder does not assure days of persistent ease,
For it is not murder that he wants, though murder,
Like theatre, brings an answer and an applause. . . Inside his
Own special pit and, thus, inside his own special fault,
Then, at last, he finally knows, after all the fuss,
That murder only looks like theatre.

So many suggest we
Should play the fanatic's game for the fanatic's tale
Of belying, of molding parts that rage to the beat
Of kill. . . In the heart of an enfolding and
Secret rage are unsatisfied, but extreme views.

Voice of the Condemned, #083626:

Two fists begin to grab for the same and prime state,
And both come back with unique and dissimilar handfuls in
A rush. . .

Richard N.:

It's all too close like someone who'll not leave you
Alone, who asks for grandiose schemes. . .
Anything passing close as a sign for venue,
Altogether unrehearsed, will appeal, of course,
As little else can.

Dietrich:

To watch and to stand against which we judge all
Things. . . A couple of predatory sounds; then, screams accuse;
Someone soft excuses, for the raw and loud, any rant
And tries to temper tragedians who do not hush nor
Pare the vows of incorrection or sin for the mass
Mind.

In 1941, Hans von Dohnanyi, with Bonhoeffer's participation, heads an effort to use Jews in the Abwehr, allowing them to escape Germany through Switzerland and then disappear, a program known as "Operation 7." The "Final Solution," as envisioned by the Nazis, meant the total elimination of all Jews in Europe; extermination facilities at Auschwitz are ordered to be established in early summer of 1941, and the gas chambers there were to be built so that 2,000 persons could be killed at one time, rather than the 200 killed in each gas chamber at Treblinka. On June 22, 1941, Hitler's guns along hundreds of miles of Russian borders start the German campaign against the Soviet Union, but by mid-October, the Germans are stuck in the mud. By the summer of 1941, the conspirators' work accelerates with greater optimism for an overthrow of the Nazis, but Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden in Britain dismiss the role of resistance in Germany of which Bonhoeffer and the conspirators are a part.

Act III

December, 1941

Location: Klein-Krossin Estate

Near Kieckow, Germany

Bonhoeffer convalesces from pneumonia.

Richard N.:

I was cut
Roughly from a rough source and authorship and stood up like
A part of damnation to witness the coarse and unholy
Soldiers take others with impunity, at the time thinking of
Everything I would do if they happened to lurch a
Move my way.

Amid survival and guilt, there's a seizure
And no choice. . . Even then, how we try to prove
That we own something of ourselves. . . How I
Now reach to hide in cowardice that something I reluctantly
Call my own.

Dietrich:

For so long as I had wanted to be left
To myself – yet, seconds passed headlong like stones resounding against
The chamber of my skull until I realized I
Was all alone. . . And none, by their own will, could
Now come back to confuse us with the innocence of
An old life. Desperation in a lonely room
Stirred like acid as it burned away in my blood,
And I could not think of myself any longer but
Lustily to focus on a fierce pain. It was not a link
To insanity, but to grief, as I thought of silly things:
An iron wrinkle of a distant aunt's smile and disbelief
And the twitch in my uncle's step, a path I
Had lost a long time ago, a niche that mattered
So little it was not even a memory, some who
Were not friends at all but a fitful and bruised
Half of an incomplete thought. . . I no longer
Proceeded with anyone whom history could have judged
Slightly relevant to the acceded, prevailing course – No,
None to interfere with content
while the new front rearranged shapes. . .

A lover. . .as though a shrewd disease that cannot rightly
Satisfy itself until it has secretively invaded another body.

Richard N.:

A choice cannot be borrowed any more
Than happiness can. . .though we listen for a voice so to
Lose our own as if it were never ours to
Have.

Gertrude:

I've watched you wait now, Dietrich, and muse about other times. . .
Your brooding times to change the times when change
Magnified the worst parts of us. . .

Voice of the Condemned, #568791:

It's a matter that many had come
Around to hear you talk for no other absurd reason
Than they would believe in everything you might say. You
Had hope for awhile, as hope will always conceive of
Certainty by believing solely in itself.

Gertrude:

A self-vision locked inside a silent dream is altogether a
Desire for power. . .

Dietrich:

To learn to
Be clear. . .than to hide an idea in a wasteland
Of gray – I catch myself here wishing to be profound,
But the few, decent ideas I have left lie garbled
Between a question and my last utterance simply at play.
If vague, I can't trust myself; I'm alone in
Many words to be sustained or to deny the non-effect
They have. I yet will follow the chart of those
Words wherever they take me, for they are set as
Mine in a sea of currency and consequence; but imprisoned
By my own obscurity and estimate, I resign myself to
Be both victim and the molder of unshaped peace. . .

Richard N.:

The police did come;
We countered that they had more rights over us
Than we had over ourselves.

No one stood; nothing was
Said. We looked at one another as though we wanted
Someone among us, who was misled, to betray each of
Us before we did it one to the other.

To flaunt, to save myself and
You, Dietrich, from the brutal and blunt conceits that ask
For a dishonest reply. I watched your heroic sweat confront
Its mission, much like your blood, so
Rash and too hot to shun the chill and turn
Of conscience.

You didn't laugh enough to be taken seriously. . .
Can you find friends and friendship to know
Others who will give you sympathy? . . .

The beginning of country if
We could be so discreet; can it be of radiance
Or merely patriotic? The more
Powerful the largest crowd, less true the loudest thing it says.

Dietrich:

The enemy and I, we constructed each other into apostasy
And did not fall for each other's story.

None of us could
Any longer be well-guarded again; no, they looked at hands
To find soft spots and at our undiscarded clothes to
Confirm if someone more malevolent and well-arranged should
Be present. The enemy waited in a corner and conceded, saying
Nothing 'til silence strengthened their heedless stock. I would keep
Thinking how the silent event and obedience disclosed so much
More than we wanted to reveal, even more by gesture
Than anything any of us could have exposed or confessed.

Voice of the Condemned, #721843:

A promised system, pray tell, shouldn't rise so cruel in
Its effect. . .The citizens awake to well-worn stealth and then
Defer in acquiescence, or they then exploit the weakness to
Be transformed in brief into a hidden power or vogue
Greatness.

Richard N.:

The police, in time, relied
On us to finish an imposed and elemental lie; if
We fought, we gave them the best excuse to consume
Us, but if we submitted and bought the reign, it
Spread the admission of guilt.

Dietrich:

I watched pleasure rise from subtle to
Heavy until they set us efficiently and notched us into
Their pattern; whether we had changed or lied held no
Relevance. . .Force seized them into one tragic and illicit life,
Functions in the range of a surge by delusion
And of regardless conduct. . .

They told us we'd break apart in this world, for
We were ruined by all apparent and bold happenings and
Could not overcome ideas that were too fragile in a
Fight that does not wait either on some ethic that
Serves itself or on one of us moving toward a
Reason no one but ourselves, who're left behind, can understand.

On December 7, 1941, Hitler issues a “Night and Fog Decree”; anyone jeopardizing German security is to vanish without a trace into the night and fog of unknown areas of Germany, and no information is to be provided to the families of those who vanish. By the beginning of 1942, a meeting of the Nazi senior officials is called in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to discuss how the “Final Solution” can be accomplished. At around the same time, the number of persons and groups involved in Germany in opposition to Hitler and the Nazi government grow. Bonhoeffer states, on more than one occasion, that a coup can only begin with the death of Adolph Hitler.

Act IV

April, 1942

Location: The Bonhoeffer Family Home, Marienburger Allee 43

Berlin, Germany

**Bonhoeffer, facing the audience,
sits alone at his writing table.**

Dietrich:

Like children,
there were others who'd doze and
Could not recognize the world in which they were abiding;
And still others, who chose to rise and dismiss it
And try to direct, by conscious copy,
Existence falsely in a false phase or fantasy. . .

And all the subtlety wore thin around the worn, and many
Responded to nothing unless it led to the obviously angry;
Unstopped, they could not let doubt stress a blank sheet
Against which to draw and set the best of themselves. . .

Revolution: their pleasure for which they groped and,
Perhaps, which was, even briefly, the value they understood to
Be themselves. . . The revolution to do evil and save illusion
That would be obvious to everyone and for the perpetrator. . . Splendid!
Have the revolutionists been more successful
At anything than the overthrow of a sad, old system?
And if not, do they have anything more to be
Proud of than the degree of grand skill it took
To establish a new savage? The success to employ
A demonic threat expertly. . . by undoing our possibility bit by bit
Until it disappears into the hunger that's teased and fed
By making it more unfed. . .

As they confer violence onto
Every part, as violence so numbly institutes the deeply undiluted
Storm they possess. Every act stirs the dream to
Crude completion. . .

And if some trust us sacredly and we then commit
Murder, many may even think it's but our own loose form
Of justice. . .

The Church puts on its lyric and
Hands in its pockets and pulls out the best it
Has and gives its agents frayed, slight benefit to apply
And handle; the threads shortly wear out.

Within

Its composure, what does the Church choose? If its intent
Were union, it couldn't survive then solely being the Church.
If it chose to revive through the snare of
Prior charms, yes, it endures, but just so long as
We don't decide it fosters a relentless tale.

The

Institution deems to persist on the glory it has known;
While the Church lately redesigns regimes and twice merits of
Its prophets and a venomous pact for the current lines of
Its retreat. . .
Yet, the Church cannot fail forever: It's a certain
Part of recall and will
Rise to overwhelm the speed and end of decay. . .
Near the destiny of pure water in original rites.

On April 26, 1942, the Reichstag passes a law imparting to Hitler absolute power of life and death over every German and suspends any laws that serve as an obstacle to the fulfillment of the provisions of the law. The following month, Bonhoeffer takes a hurried trip to Stockholm to meet with his friend and colleague, Anglican Bishop George Bell, and to request the British government not attack Germany in case of a coup against Hitler. At the meeting, Bonhoeffer also provides to Bell a list of German military leaders whose units would initiate a coup against Hitler. A few weeks later, Bell meets with Anthony Eden to discuss the information furnished by Bonhoeffer on internal German conditions, including plans for a coup; Eden expresses deep concerns that Bonhoeffer may be used by the Nazis.

Act V

June, 1942

**Location: Rathausgasse
Freiburg, Germany**

Dietrich:

Was it simply the
Allure of calm as the evildoer did select the smoothest steps
To withdraw himself either from exposure or from options? . . . After
Antagonism had filled his mouth greedily with special and raw themes
At the very time he was most convincing. I couldn't fight
Him face to face without a ready crime of always
Thinking of him to be everything outside of myself. . .
He stayed a damaged clue, caught in
My own defense.

Voice of the Condemned, #814715:

I would have lied then
To save myself, not even splendidly, but by lore or
Something very meager or less; I realize daily, almost blindly,
That a gift from God is the eager cleverness to
Stay alive. . .
The changes, all changes, unwelcome changes escalate a little
Each time we arrive at a new hero. . .

Richard N.:

Do many conspire for vaunted expressions in
The street when troops wait noisily in an attire of
Conviction for someone to meet them like most will for
A lover who's been away for love's sake?
The upbeat
Women wanting to welcome soldiers – and the children were owned
In the colors, and odd men were afraid of rumors
They'd one day join the ranks. . . While soldiers gathered a
Reason or two to be proud, for they had made a
Completely new world, and they could swiftly introduce most to
Its pleasures. They wished to blame us for our role
Degrading a report on their blunt practice. . .
One man, even with a cheer, can't

Lift the contents unless it's someone like you, Dietrich,
Who has the will to break forms and let the dense energy
Run out like fire over a frayed and colorless cloth.

Voice of the Condemned, #579009:

A soldier means little but for the legions of approval standing
Behind him. He can create no elegant scenes nor a
Sequence further than the world he protects. Yet, at times
The blood roars, justice declines into a curled and unemployed
Phrase. . .

Dietrich:

To conclude that no force exists without help, even passively,
From the people it governs, and, as such, the flow
Of government critiques the costs of our human failures in
Laws to protect us one from the other. Here, it touts enough lies to let us
Be innocent of sin. . .

Everyone wants

To be moral; even the murderer feels best if he
Knows he's killed a favored prey to gather laurels he
Sought to land.

Richard N.:

Old men in town talked

About things to say as they couldn't have sung smugly
Of their future. We knew the time string made no
Sense without them, without every siren or lure each old
Soul could reduce to a watchful chant.

Old men needing less freedom than they often

Had if they're going to be freer than they are. . .For
I was young, so a new world could vow a
New credo, made believable; soon, I must have
Found events leading the revolution were done so
With our crimes, not daring, in mind.

And an old

Man, reflecting the one town, reflecting also the exaggerated myth
Of an old nature, stopped short to shout at the day,
"Is it within the failing that frailty is
Again going to lead us?"

And he'd sit and direct

While he says, "Small things are for mercy, don't you
Know that, yet? We'll choose less than a great call,
A great torch, or unlimited freedom – these too quickly
Tempt to love all comers all the more. . .So, you're going to test
And interpret my value?"

The old man wiped his forehead

With the palms of blanch hands and raised both arms

As though oddly deft, saying, “You still can
Not change everything I’ve done in my life – already, my
Own past shall revolt on you as one creation you can
Not explain.” Was he so old that no scheme encircled
The monologue? During those times,
We heard a lot we’d like to forget.

It was a flagrant burning away of blurred things that
Were left too long in the family attic, and the
Shedding would occur before any more mean work shall
Begin.

After a few more months, I never heard the
Praise of the past undermine the new logic
Of the newest paradigm.

To think of it, I
Believe he must have wandered off to another remote town. . .Not
Many are pleased with uncertain times – not those with discontent
By loss or who lose themselves left in the wreckage. . .

Dietrich:

Of course, revolution dispels the setting and rearranges the chairs. . .

Act VI
June, 1942
Location: Kalckreuth Home
Munich, Germany

Dietrich:

No warm days left –
They seem to pass us by – warm days to serve
To get the sting of winter and hibernal disappointments
Out of our deep muscles.

Someone had stolen my rush of
Texture and paled it such that I couldn't boast of either
A greed of isolation or a greed of comfort, the
Need to be with none or the need to talk.
In the glare of madness, I was not the person
I continued to expect, though the stare of those who
Did not know assumed I had become the last, best chance
That remained once our safety was looted and consumed away. . .

Voice of the Condemned, #112028:

Things must be
More than habitual or correct in the recent morning – they
Must raise a cause for a form of justice. . .

These times, talks of survival, are a style
Of lying. . .But surviving spoke back to let us
Know we'll wake mornings marvelously dying, always vast and rare.

Richard N.:

It's the habit of things I miss most now
When I am at this fragile moment fitting
The mood of the current world. History was already clued in;
The soldiers – they must repel those who dare
To keep them from crimes they'd like to see, the
Times they'd like to deliver and the heroes they'd leap
To be.

Dietrich:

It yet seems harshly too serious that serious roles are
Too perfect for any of us. I retrace how
Then in training, the world never did reflect my cut
Of it; the world leaned always askew; but now it
Lies ever more aligned. I glean too well the reason
I'm here delayed or the reason they strain to
Imprison me in myself: They chaff to find when soon

Illumed, I'll not stop. . .

An empty church or prisons replete with confused rakes
And victims, while the dead had wanted
A better country to deserve. . .Following rumors
That wade through the streets, trailing to spot the guilty
To prove the rumors were true and should not fade,
Most diverging knew the dying was once again another mere
Tactic to rid the world of the boast of innocence. . .

I don't need objects or evidence the way I did;
I don't fight the way I did.

In all respects,
I'm getting weary of all that promises more than I
Have yet received.

Voice of the Condemned, #506790:

The body cannot fill itself, but deigns to keep
On eating until the hunger to survive will have eaten itself
And its vanity.

Dietrich:

The enduring harm, the grinding ache, pain –
I take these as methods, almost a discipline.
To suffer,
That is to be free,
To defy the apostasy from peace and mercy. . .

Gertrude:

Contents will run like light water into
The oceans that swallow and fulfill a refuge of change –
To the dangerous, we're not yet danger,
And we can still be used, though there's no kindness
Nor agreement.

Have you read anything catching so briefly the message of
This brave letter we received from my sister? Part of
It I'd like to share with you. . .

“You
Are missed, Dietrich, more than others would be missed,
For you knew us so well, while we'd persist in
Tales and needing someone to stitch up the family's refrain.
You'll behold everything I mean by this – we don't escape by
Talking about the future at home anymore. The songs keep
Us from thinking about the present rout, and we desire
A lull from the next vicious report. There's no one
To rely on anymore for shaking excess, for God's sake,
From the newspaper, when those yielding minds can be blamed
For the cheap manner news is spread. I've recently inherited
The rude role of obstructionist since you left. Today, I

See the single and suspiciously whole contagion you had and
The power you exerted over us all. Yet, one thing,
Dietrich – we don't doubt the deserted ones as much as
We had – to receive the harsh side of your intuitive
Voice for doing so. There's nothing seductive nor softly conveyed
Enough happening to any of us to urge us outwardly,
As we linger about the cruel deviling that won't go
Away. Someday, we'll talk about better parts of our hectic
And compelled country." She ends the letter by telling
Of friends talking much less now than they
Ever did when, in any respect, there were so
Many more of them with whom to speak.
Subjects are different now, and everyone can ignore each other
Somewhat better, for they are much more conscious of each
Other than they've ever been, especially waiting for the cruelest day.

Dietrich:

For as truth turns less important than survival. . .For as
Bitter as I resound, survival, to most, stays colorless and
Native truth, loosely confusing right and wrong. . .

They come again, the night panthers after my curled and
Covered soul, who'll take equal pleasure in having my body
First.

Act VII

June, 1942

Location: Klein-Krossin Estate

Near Kieckow, Germany

Dietrich:

I have come
To see nothing to confirm history happens to assert
Itself toward better times. In this nation,
A hard rule has ways of tripping into codes
And reverent names, as if, by nature,
Events happen that come to be best
For mostly all, so they say. . .
Doubting this rhyme, I watch then for any vitreous signs
For power to play itself out daily above
The exercise of truth. Many, even uncouth ones, didn't say
So, but they learned power had rendered truth useless again –
At least, moral truth useless, as a cliché rose
Too large for any to resist.

Voice of the Condemned, #917643:

To be so honest there means not to
Be there at all. . .honesty, in peril and penalty,
To be null over protracted time. . .
As though deniers know the place we
Want to go, but the place of refuge quits and
Dissolves before we ever reach it.

Voice of the Condemned, #034789:

We're tired of listening for an ethic; if we
Weren't, you'd be received, and the tyrant wouldn't have acquired
The country as a personal yard for those arrogant romps.

Dietrich:

It's on febrile ground that tests
Are won and lost.
The method to fit, the tack
For winning, must contrast with the moral – we have quickly
Found, in the gust of these years,
That to fade sends the highest mode of conduct. . . Yet,
We've heard the most facile is one who tends to
The tools and gears in this upheaved land, which
Puts poets and theologians to the ground and foremost fears. . .

While a salesman can beat us, we don't
Have to ply the stuff he's selling, but plan on
It, we're stuck with the politician we instate.

Enemies of the state because we think aside, but then
We're shortly enemies of the laws to think at all.

Voice of the Condemned, #420829:

Recall the times we were
Too silent to hear schemes from any keenly
Longing, who no longer listened, but, learning to declare,
Gave themselves a job in the fight.

That's not

The way it is around the innocuous many – brittle, disappointed
Folk who'll keep repeating a tiresome day for cadence,
While time apparently never moves and deep power seems no
More brutal in one year than another. . .

By September, 1942, Hitler's victories yield an extraordinary amount of territory, encircling most of the Mediterranean; he also controls the land mass from northern Norway at the Arctic Ocean to Egypt and from the Atlantic to the southern parts of the Volga River. However, Germany's military fortunes decline quickly thereafter; by late 1942, the Soviets surround twenty-two German divisions at Stalingrad, El Alamein is broken through by Montgomery's forces, and the Allies achieve other advances in North Africa. In October, 1942, Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer are informed they have been named in an investigation, conducted by the Gestapo, into certain sensitive areas, such as money going to Jewish refugees as part of "Operation 7" and anti-government sentiments and plans among Abwehr officials and staff. In February, 1943, the conspirators believe a coup will occur in March through "Operation Flash" – with a bomb to be placed on Hitler's plane leaving Smolensk on March 13th; however, the bomb does not explode. Another attempt in early 1943 also fails. On April 5, 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans von Dohnanyi and his wife, Christine, Dietrich's sister, are arrested – Dietrich at the Bonhoeffer family home; Christine is released a month later, but Bonhoeffer and Dohnanyi remain incarcerated for the rest of their lives – charges against them by the Nazi government expand during their imprisonment.

Act VIII

The Day of Arrest

Location: The Bonhoeffer Family Home, Marienburger, Allee 43
Berlin, Germany

Dietrich:

I think about solitude

More – a mere premonition before
I draw a harsh future? For I find I want
To be alone more than I ever have, earnestly too,
Though I've never been alone so much before.
Yet, when away, I think of home too easily,
As though an evil pall exists from some final and
Grave sentence there.

Yes, I miss the many I love –

Of course, daily.
I don't try talking quite as much, out of context, as I
Did, for I have more to uncover than I
Have to say.

Friends, who had never refused me, reply
Slowly now when I need them in a hurry. I
Don't rely on jokes anymore to get me by gloom
Or on tricks to retrieve stolen scenes. I grew much older than
I thought I would in a short time. Among romantics,
I am pale to give advice. And I don't seek
New settings much anymore either, for the pattern fails to
Give its pleasure anymore.
Oddly, if at all wise, I know survival and tons
Of evidence are merely dry education.

A moment's meant to be astute

As if I were to instill and envelope myself
With every thinker who has brushed the same vow and
Rock I have. And I daydream a lot instead and
Listen to others and remember things, a stock of flight,
Formerly forgotten. Or I
Foretell reports to come that cause
Constant thought over those I'll remember but will probably
Never encounter again.

Richard N.:

New machines, time force
New allegiances, wresting others into other enclaves. . .
The course acquires
Its way doubtlessly – clear of bit players, contrivances
And all that reminds all of mere fashion. And the faster, once done,
More reliable lies the course over the land,
Building new order in a little less time. . .

Gertrude:

Our
Heroes are constantly ablaze by passing through an abyss – the
Will to history. . .

Voice of the Condemned, #011725:

The rightness we hype,
Though the display of an angle could rightly
As well have been directed in still another way and
Could have also been wrong: war has too many perfected
Rules for those looking casually at conduct; for it is
Expected after the famed battles that victors will bring
A thick moral to the reason the other side
Finally lanquished. . .as the moral can justify any sick purpose
For any war and divert words from an honest charge
Against those who mark, mine and insert the blood.
With the weakest bearing blame for the dead, a comfortable
Violence comes as the treat. . .A world connects the shame.

Voice of the Condemned, #626380:

The soldiers
When they race so high, swarming, a faceless horde of
Wasps – they're too sure the base world they build won't
Be complete until all of us are wrenched from everything
We thought we were.

Voice of the Condemned, #197865:

The malicious maneuvers to exclude include greatness of a kind:
A glaring light beyond all simple light, barbarous pride,
No reserved candor, instability by a strict consolidation of thought
. . .as a sound wears out its
Words. . .as the drone kills everything that purports radiance. . .
And the rest who listened too little hear less and
Have confirmed it would be best to be entirely deaf.

Voice of the Condemned, #745014:

Hypnotic chants: The nature they effect to
Inflate the flaws and storied parts of us and
Objectify them into a monument, jeered and codified;
The flaws, all the time buried deep, a testament in
Us, our secret weapon. . .

Dietrich:

I am never without reasons; they come to me too
Dark to disguise, young and also stout, light as unmeasured
Light. In a versatile and strange way, they resemble liberty
Without delay. . .

But reasons
Can also bring chaos, for they'll never be at rest
Until we dilute or diffuse whatever they've said. . .
If I can believe in more than something reasonable, I'd
Like to sustain and quickly retrieve it. . .as reason still
Continued a desire, even as desire was hardly restrained by
Reason.

I infer scores of many inspired by doubt. . .But that's all
Meaningless to those who can foresee a future so
Greedily they establish no restrictions on it. . .
In a time of extreme answers, extreme questions are hardly safe.

Gertrude:

The already announced results, tribute to the marauders, catch most short –
With power trying to convince us of surety through insults.
Yes, I'm deceived cheaply on behalf of a future
I had never seen but couldn't neglect.

New shapes teach
New size – we're called to the last, perfect tower.

Voice of the Condemned, #348127:

Within view of
The actual, we're publicly more assailed with each thunder of
Loose bombs, combing and darting so near our zone
Of panic. . .

Though we fought
Closer there for every life than these severed winners, who
Hunt us, these neighbors favored by air without selves to
Explain.

Dietrich:

They step loudly, steps ricocheting against the center, vital part
Of an inviting, this inviting heart – pulse momentarily convinced! I
Feel no drift waiting to be struck by loud resolve.
Do not stop them. A swift fever must have

A chance to expire, as consumptive fire purges
Altogether.

I sense the heat of torment close;
Let it follow an intended course. At last, let my
Pain wash entirely in weakness.

I hear martial, extended
Sounds. Unlock the doors. Free the house, this nest of
Cold resistance. Freedom comes. Don't wait for a next knock.
Open the house, the doors! Do you love me?
Then, don't deny them this slaughterhouse. So, do you love
Me? Then, lead them by access. Do you love me?
Do not refuse them. Do you love me? Feed them.

Postscript: Two years following their arrests, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans von Dohnanyi are executed in separate locations on April 9, 1945. In less than two weeks, Bonhoeffer's brother, Klaus Bonhoeffer, and another brother-in-law, Rudolph Schleicher, are also executed for their roles in the conspiracy and the assassination attempts on Hitler. On April 30, 1945, Adolph Hitler commits suicide – his Third Reich in ruins.