

# PROSCENIUM

## **Broken Glass**

By Arthur Miller

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Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January to Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2009  
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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## Cast

Phillip Gellburg ..... Duncan Sykes  
Sylvia Gellburg ..... Angie Sutherland  
Dr Harry Hyman..... Anton Jungreuthmayer  
Margaret Hyman..... Sheila Harvey  
Harriet..... Lynette Shanbury  
Stanton Case..... David Pearson

Directed by ..... Anne Gerrard

Stage Manager ..... Crystal Anthony  
Assisted by ..... Linda Hampson  
Properties ..... Caroline Bronne-Shanbury  
Costumes ..... Evelyn Moutrie  
Music written and recorded by..... Vince Eavis  
Lighting and sound..... Michael Gerrard

The play takes place in Brooklyn in the last days  
of November 1938

## Kristallnacht

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1938 in Paris, a Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, shot dead Ernst von Rath, third secretary of the German embassy, in protest at the Nazi expulsion of Jews. On the next day the whole of Germany's Jewish community was subjected to a reign of terror without precedent in modern times in a civilised country. Dr Josef Goebbels, the Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, claimed the orgy of violence and arson was a spontaneous reaction to the assassination of the German diplomat, but the events bear all the hallmarks of an officially organised pogrom.

The attacks began simultaneously throughout the country, following a clear pattern and, in contrast to past anti-Jewish outbreaks, in which loutish Storm troopers had been prominent, were joined by middle-class people.

Hugh Carleton Greene, writing in the Daily Telegraph:

Mob law ruled in Berlin throughout the afternoon and evening and hordes of hooligans indulged in an orgy of destruction. I have seen several anti-Jewish outbreaks in Germany during the last five years, but never anything as nauseating as this. Racial hatred and hysteria seemed to have taken complete hold of otherwise decent people. I saw fashionably dressed women clapping their hands and screaming with glee, while respectable middle-class mothers held up their babies to see the 'fun'.

The night is being called Kristallnacht. More than 7,000 Jewish shops were looted. Hundreds of synagogues were burned down. An unknown number of Jews died. To save insurance companies from bankruptcy, the Nazis say they will confiscate any money the Jews may receive and give it back to the insurers.

Francis Schott, aged 12 at the time, in Solingen:

A jarring sound jolts us awake in the middle of the night. Glass and wood of the apartment door shatter. My little sister and I sit up in our beds, uncomprehending. The noise gets louder yet, things are breaking and gruff male voices can be heard...

Worse is to come, much worse. But a twelve year old has absorbed a lesson. The orderly world in which only the police can get you and won't come unless you are a criminal – that world is gone. By fanning prejudice into hate, a government can turn a populace into assault troops. Painful as it is, we must remember.

Broken glass alone accounts for millions of Marks-worth of

damage. It is said that Goering is not pleased when he hears most of the replacement glass will have to be imported and paid for in scarce foreign currency. 'They should have killed more Jews and broken less glass,' he fumes.

In the Guardian in November last year, Paul Oestreicher remembers the night terror struck:

Berliners went wild that day, 19 years ago. The impossible had happened. The Wall had come down. It was November 9 1989. I wasn't there. But I was there on the same date in 1938, 70 years ago. Germans went wild on that day, too. They let loose an orgy of destruction. The synagogues were set ablaze, Jewish shops were smashed up and pillaged, Jewish men were rounded up, beaten up, some to death, many sent to concentration camps. What eventually followed was unthinkable. The streets that night were strewn with broken glass. The Germans called it Kristallnacht, the night not of broken glass but of broken crystal, to symbolise the 'ill-gotten Jewish riches' Germans would now take from them. Never mind the many Jewish poor. Never mind that Jews such as my grandparents were Germans as deeply patriotic as any of their neighbours.

My Christian father, born to Jewish parents was in 1938 forbidden, as all Jews were, to continue working as a doctor. From a small provincial town we fled to Berlin with one aim, to find asylum anywhere beyond the reach of Hitler. An only child, six years old, I was given refuge by kindly non-Jewish friends. My non-Jewish mother had resisted the pressure to divorce her husband and quit a marriage defined by the Nazis as rassenschande, racial disgrace.

The day of the great pogrom started much like any other. But a rare treat was in store. My mother came to take me for a walk. As a non-Jew she was not directly threatened. Berlin was bathed in autumn sunshine. We walked to the Tauentzienstrasse, Berlin's Regent St. For me, the big city was full of wonder – until terror struck. Trucks pulled up at exact intervals. Jack-booted men wielding wooden clubs ran up and down the streets and began to smash the windows of the Jewish owned department stores. My mother grabbed hold of me. We fled.

## The American Response

President Roosevelt, 15 November 1938:

Such news from any part of the world would inevitably produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation, I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization

Despite these words, the American Government refused to increase their quota for Jewish refugees.

Arthur Miller, in *Timebends*, 1987, is sharply critical of both American government and American people:

By the early 1940s the world knew that the Jews en masse were being hunted down by the Germans, and by 1942 that they were being incinerated, but such was the grip of anti-Semitic bigotry on the American State Department and the British Foreign Office that even the official immigration quotas were never filled...And the American Jewish community did not dare to demand that rescue efforts be put in motion, such was the fear of exacerbating the American people's hostility not only to Jews but to foreigners in general.

## The Play

Oestreicher in his article draws a comparison between the reactions of other nations to the plight of the Jews in Nazi Germany to the present day treatment of refugees:

The German sentiment 'send them away', has given way in Britain and in many other parts of Europe to 'send them back', sometimes to more persecution and even death. Lessons from history are seldom learned.

Arthur Miller makes a similar point in an interview with Angela Lambert for *The Independent* in August 1994 just before the opening of *Broken Glass* at the National Theatre:

There's a magical element in the play, I might as well confess: a woman who by virtue of her own sensibility is affected by something going on 4,000 miles away. I knew that woman when I was a teenager; she, and the story, came out of my own past. But her plight is not specifically Jewish. It could apply to any group of people who feel endangered because of their identity – be they

Armenian, Basques, Irish or Jewish.

An idea re-iterated in an interview with Christopher Bigsby:

Not merely do those joined by love still discover what strangers they have become, but, around the world, what we have taken to be the solid foundations of civilisation continue to crack and crumble. In 1994, people in Sarajevo were blown apart by gunners on a hillside for no better reason than that they could be. As Miller remarked: 'They are sitting there blowing the hell out of that town and we're all sitting here saying 'Tch! Tch! Isn't that terrible?' They blew up sixteen children and did you see anyone pause on his way to lunch? That's what this play's about.

That, and much more.

## On The Stage

The opening production in New York was not a success. The director, John Tillingier recollects:

On the opening night of the production of Broken Glass, Arthur and I were having a drink in a bar nearby. I told him that I was unhappy with my production of the play and felt I had failed him. Arthur replied, 'Other than the original production of Salesman, none of my premieres were ever successful.' And there were no recriminations on his part towards me. I told him that I was certain Broken Glass would receive the approbation it deserved in London, whatever the production. 'They like me over there,' he said. 'I don't understand why they don't like me in my own town.'

Miller did indeed find London more congenial. He added an extra scene to the play:

In this case it was the penultimate scene, which I loved to write, because it was a quiet, amusing, retrospective piece of work and I'm at that stage of life when you like to write that way. It took me about an hour and a half to write so it must have been right.

He enjoyed attending and contributing to the rehearsals; the director, David Thacker:

The other day he said to the actors, 'Don't be more thoughtful than the lines.' He's like a lie-detector in rehearsals, completely tuned in to the truth, The work we've done on Broken Glass is the most detailed we've done together.

The actor, Henry Goodman:

For me, Arthur Miller as a writer not only wore a mask that reveals his true insight into people and politics that provoke us all to action, he also gave us, the actors, a mask so fine we can only wear it well if we want to accept the challenge to reveal truth. His work makes acting a dignified job. He was also wickedly humorous. As the self-loathing Jew, Phillip Gellburg, I was about to have a heart attack and near dying in bed having just discovered 'there are Chinese Jews' when he said at one rehearsal, 'Ya know, he can laugh before he dies.'

The critics were not entirely complimentary. Nicholas de Jongh in The Evening Standard, while describing the play as 'eerily disturbing', raising the question of whether we 'remain relatively indifferent to the suffering of far-away countries where we have no economic stake' and seeing Sylvia's paralysis as 'a symbol for a moral inertia by which America is possessed', found the end 'neither convincing nor believable'. Steve Grant in Time Out saw Phillip Gellburg as a 'dramatic cousin of Willy Loman: an immigrant Jew whose pride in his success in business and his only son's booming military career hides a self-loathing about his ethnic background', but thought the mixture, 'part Jungian case study, part history play, and part detective story' did not wholly cohere.

However, Irving Wardle in Independent on Sunday under the headline 'Age Has Not Withered Him, admired 'its ferocious emotional energy, and 'the masterly use of metaphor and stage imagery'.

And finally Harold Pinter:

I admired Arthur tremendously. It was wonderful to be with him. I think he remains a tower of strength as a playwright. When you look back, it is a remarkable achievement, and not just the earlier ones. I admire Broken Glass. The Last Yankee is a wonderful piece of work. He's done so much.

# Our Next Production

## Antony And Cleopatra

By William Shakespeare

“Eternity was in our lips and eyes, Bliss in our brows’ bent”.

A battle-hardened soldier, Antony is one of the three leaders of the Roman world. But he is also a man in the grip of an all-consuming passion for the exotic and tempestuous queen of Egypt. And when their life of pleasure together is threatened by the encroaching politics of Rome, the conflict between love and duty has devastating consequences.

Directed by Colin Hickman

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March to Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2009

7.45pm Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Box Office : 07970 916 358

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## About Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known “The Tide” by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

For more information on Proscenium, and to join our mailing list, please visit our web site :

<http://www.proscenium.org.uk>

Contact us at :  
[www.proscenium.org.uk](http://www.proscenium.org.uk)

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