

# Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.



*Dramatic Publishing*

# THE DIARIES

A Play  
by  
JOHN STRAND



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

© *The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois*

## \*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMIV by  
JOHN STRAND  
Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THE DIARIES)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:  
Writers and Artists Agency, 19 W. 44th St., Suite 1000,  
New York NY 10036 - Phone: (212) 391-1112

ISBN: 1-58342-232-3

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois

I owe special thanks to many people who advised, debated, warned and supported me during the development of this play. Foremost among them is Eric D. Schaeffer, artistic director of Signature Theater. For his friendship and support over the past decade I will always be grateful. To the play's director, PJ Paparelli, I owe a great debt for his talent, enthusiasm, dedication and commitment to this work. This play is better for his involvement, just as I am richer for his friendship. As often happens in the writing of new plays, the actors in the original production were the playwright's best teachers: to Edward Gero, Julia Coffey, Sybil Lines and Daniel Frith, my sincerest thanks. And finally, my love and thanks to Amanda Strand, whose wisdom and grace are always the values I strive for in my writing, however unattainable they ultimately prove to be.

For Amanda

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

*The Diaries* is an original play by John Strand. It was a Hilmar Tharp Sallee Commission for the New Century, Signature Theater, Arlington, Va., Eric D. Schaeffer, artistic director.

*The Diaries* premiered at Signature on June 14, 2002, directed by PJ Paparelli, with the following cast:

Ernst . . . . .	EDWARD GERO
Charmille . . . . .	JULIA COFFEY
Doctress . . . . .	SYBIL LINES
Kurt . . . . .	DANIEL FRITH

The set was by Ethan Sinnott. Costumes by T. Tyler Stumpf. Sound design by Adam Wernick. Lighting by Jonathan Blandin. Dramaturg Marcia Gardner.

A note on *The Diaries*.

This play is fictional. But it is inspired by history—specifically, events in the life of a real person.

During the Second World War, the German writer and entomologist Ernst Junger (1895-1998) served in the Nazi military as a captain. He was assigned to occupied Paris. Fluent in French, widely traveled and well educated, a published novelist and a frankly spiritual, even religious man, Junger kept a careful record of his time in France and on the Russian Front in the Caucasus. His diaries of this period, still available in German and French, are a remarkable portrait of life in a city under siege in the midst of war. They are also a portrait of a tolerant, enlightened officer, one who declared himself anti-war and even anti-Nazi.

But are his diaries true?

The thing that fascinates me about Junger and his war diaries is this: How are we to believe him? After all, the diarist, to a large degree, is his own and only witness. If he has reason to lie, or even to persuade the reader subtly toward a conclusion... Well, that's where the battle between truth and fiction begins. It is a part of that larger war, never-ending, between the past and the present.

— John Strand  
Washington, D.C.  
December 2003

# THE DIARIES

A Play in Two Acts

For 2 Men and 2 Women

(They play different characters in Acts One and Two.)

## The major characters, Act One:

Ernst Altsanger III, late 30s

Judith Gopnik, 30

Dr. Sawyer, about 40

Professor Dodge, late 30s

## The major characters, Act Two:

Ernst Altsanger, 40s. Novelist, entomologist, German army officer

Charmille, French, 20s

Doctress, German, about 40

Kurt, German, late 30s

The actors play additional characters as needed:

## In Act One:

Photographer

## In Act Two:

A French child

A French woman

Jean Cocteau, poet

Sasha Guitry, stage actor

Picasso, avant-garde painter

Colonel Seidel

Guest 1, an officer

Guest 2, an officer

A prisoner

Act One: Ohio in the present. Act Two: Occupied Paris in 1942.

Although all characters in the play are fictional, some of them are inspired by actual individuals and by historical events.



A note on the set and costumes.

In writing this play, I have tried to minimize the symbols of Nazism, especially the swastika, the flag, etc. I have done so not only because I find them objectionable, nor even because their overuse in film has rendered them almost parodies of themselves, but primarily because the character Ernst tries throughout the play to avoid facing them, both literally and metaphorically. In Act One, a German officer's jacket is used in the mock "trial" of his grandson. In Act Two, Ernst wears the uniform jacket when he is finally forced by circumstances to do so. Also in Act Two, the character Kurt is in uniform briefly in two of the final scenes. No other overt use of the symbols, in the set or costumes, is necessary.

— JS

## SCENE FIVE

*(ERNST alone, back in his hotel room. During his speech, he places a framed butterfly specimen on a chair. Clicks on a tape recorder.)*

ERNST. 24 January. Dayton, Ohio. Day's Inn. Eleven p.m. Degraded myself tonight. Again. Hearing disorder made me look even more pathetic... Lesson Number One from the short unhappy life of Ernst Altsanger the Third: Never, ever ask an old man on his deathbed what you can do for him. Because the danger is, he might say, "I was a Nazi butterfly collector. Go and make sense out of that"

I'm sick of it. Sick of being the evening's designated monster. Sick of the spectacle of other people judging. I'm sick of standing in the crossfire between the past and the present.

The truth is, Grandfather, *I* hate you, too. For sticking me with this *Geduldspiel* of half-lies and half-truths that you called a life. For making me promise to clear your name... Even if people believed me, why should they understand? Sixty years. With every passing day, it all gets dimmer, less and less understandable... But the truth always has another side, Grandfather, doesn't it. Which is, I love you. For being a father to me after my own father walked off the job. The long summer days in the country. Collecting insects. Reading to me from the great authors. Those are still the best memories of my life. I admired you so much—the writer, the scientist. The soldier... I think, Grandfather, if you had only learned how to say the words “I’m sorry,” both our lives would have been transformed. You could stay in your grave, where you belong. And I could stop being haunted by you.

*(He turns off the tape recorder.)* But that's not going to stop, is it? *(Withdraws a vial of pills.)* You know, it's amazing that they give depressed people a whole vial of these things at once. Where's the warning label? “Caution: Taking more than the recommended dose will cure your depression permanently”... Or how about “Federal law prohibits ending your useless life in a cheap hotel in Ohio.” *(Deadly serious.)* Yeah. That is so fucking funny. *(He swallows the whole vial. A beat.)* Oh Jesus. I finally actually did it... *(Fumbles for the tape recorder.)* My last will and testament. To my estranged wife, Ruth. To my dear son, Karl... *(A knock at the door. Calling:)* Go away! *(To the recorder.)* I have come to a point where I no longer have the strength— *(Another knock. Calling:)*

I'm doing early check-out, leave me alone! (*Another knock.*) Damn...

(*He exits to answer the door. A beat, and enter JUDITH like a one-woman police raid; he follows. She has a shoulder bag and carries a bottle of wine and a book, a copy of the diaries. She tosses the book on the table.*)

JUDITH (*quickly*). All right, so here it is. I want answers, and I can't get answers without you, so I think we should talk, *really* talk, without the bullshit, because it's possible—I'm not saying for sure, but it's possible—that you're not a denier, in which case you're either naïve or stupid, but I read your novel—don't talk, just listen—which was not bad, not great but not bad, so you're not stupid, and I could see where you were going with the character who lets his life fall apart because he's so obsessed with the past, and I think you know your grandfather was guilty, maybe not of major war crimes, so let's go over it, page by page if we have to, because really I can't sleep and you're the only person in this miserable little hotel that I can talk to, so what do you say? I brought a bottle of wine.

ERNST. I think I'm going to be sick. (*Exit ERNST. She picks up the empty vial. A beat, as it clicks.*)

JUDITH. Hey. Hey, what are you, nuts!?

(*Lights. Transition.*)