ACT I

January 1935, Berlin. A memorial service for Fritz Haber is held on the anniversary of his death in the Harnack House, the usual meeting space for the Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of German Science. Snow can be seen falling through the windows. Nazi banners hang on either side of the podium at which Max Planck stands -- the Nazis have only grudgingly given Planck permission to hold the ceremony. He gives the introductory address, in the spotlight, while Haber’s longtime friend, Professor Richard Willstatter, watches from the back of the audience.

MAX PLANCK
Thank you for joining me today on this anniversary of the death of our friend and colleague, Fritz Haber. As you may know, adherence to the …

...their party duties have prevented many of our friends from attending today’s memorial, but they do wish to make it known that they send their thoughts.

I am also bound to remind you, per ministry directive, to please refrain from reporting on today’s ceremony.

Still, today ought to be a joyous occasion. It is a final farewell. It is a celebration of the life of a kind-hearted, thoughtful man, a brilliant scientist, and a true patriot, whose magnificent discoveries kept Germany afloat during the early years of the World War, and whose impact on German science as a whole cannot be overstated. Professor Haber was …

RICHARD WILLSTATTER
OH DEAR FRIEND, YOU ALWAYS SPOKE OF PROGRESS.
WHEN DID THE GODS OF PROGRESS LEAD US ALL ASTRAY?
WHEN GERMANY’S BRIGHTEST STARS, ARE SLOWLY BEING EXTINGUISHED,
THEN WHO ELSE CAN WE TURN TO, TO LIGHT UP OUR WAY?

I LOOK BACK, ON THOSE EARLY, HEADY DAYS,
IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE, THAT THE DREAMS WE HAD COULD DIE.
OUR WHOLE LIVES LAY AHEAD OF US, AND SCIENCE HELD THE ANSWERS,
AND WE FOUGHT FOR OUR NATION, A NATION THAT HAS LEFT US BEHIND.

(Old film reels of 1880s-era factories and laboratories are projected onto the back wall)

IT’S THICK IN THE AIR, THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESS,
IT ASSUMES ITS PLACE ON THE ALTARS OF PRAYER,
IT BASKS IN THE FLATTERING GLOW OF SUCCESS.
IT LIGHTS UP THE MIND’S EYE WITH FUTURES OF PLENTY.
IT PERVERDES THE ZEITGEIST AS WE ROUND THE CENTURY,
ONE REALLY DOES FEEL, THAT LIFE’S GREATEST SECRETS ARE ALL ABOUT TO BE REVEALED.
AND HOW MANY MEN, GIVEN THE KEY, 
COULD RESIST THE URGE TO SEE WHERE IT LEADS? 
COULD RESIST THE CHANCE TO PASS THROUGH HISTORY’S ARCHES, 
THE PORTALS TO POWER AND GLORY AND FAME, 
TO ETCH INTO STONE THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND NAME, 
IT’S THE STUFF OF LEGEND, A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN, A MEPHISTOPHELEAN DEAL.

HEROS ARE MADE FROM THE SAME MOLD AS VILLAINS, 
THEIR PORTRAIT DARKENED OR LIT UP BY ITS FRAME. 
AND HISTORY’S LEFT WITH MERE OUTLINES TO FILL IN, 
A TALE TO RECOUNT, 
A STATUE TO MOUNT, 
A MYTH TO TEAR DOWN, 
AN ECHOING STORY AND NAME.

(A smoke machine switches on to begin obscuring the stage, to give the impression of 
descent back into the past. A young Fritz Haber is seen holding his high-school diploma 
stage-right once the smoke clears, and Willstatter directs the next few verses at him.)

THE TWISTS OF HISTORY CAN BE SURPRISING, 
AND FORTUNE OFTEN FAVORS THOSE WHO ADAPT. 
CAN YOU BLAME A HARD-WORKING PATRIOT FOR RISING, 
RISING FROM HIS STATION, 
RISING FOR HIS NATION, 
RISING TO THE OCCASION, 
WHEN HIS SHOULDER WAS TAPPED?

HABER YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN KNOWN AS A SAINT, DID 
YOU GUESS THAT YOUR LEGACY WOULD BE SO TAINTED? 
FIRST SEEN AS A SAVIOR, YOU FELL OUT OF FAVOR, 
THOUGH TRULY, YOU GAVE YOUR COUNTRY THE BULK OF YOUR SOUL. 
FROM THE PEAKS OF YOUR FAME YOU QUICKLY DESCENDED, 
YOUR LONG RISE TO EMINENCE ABRUPTLY ENDED, 
AND YOUR HUBRIS AND PRIDE PUT YOU ON THE WRONG SIDE 
OF A SENSELESS DIVIDE, SPIRALLING OUT OF CONTROL.

(Willstatter exits stage-left, but continues singing from off-stage.)

BUT HOW MANY MEN, GIVEN THE KEY, 
COULD RESIST THE URGE TO SEE WHERE IT LEADS? 
COULD RESIST THE CHANCE TO PASS THROUGH HISTORY’S ARCHES, 
THE PORTALS TO POWER AND GLORY AND FAME, 
TO ETCH INTO STONE THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS AND NAME, 
IT’S THE STUFF OF LEGEND, A FAUSTIAN BARGAIN, A MEPHISTOPHELEAN DEAL.