Breakdown of the Play’s Structure and Characters

**PASSION PLAY - PART ONE**

TIME – Spring, 1575
LOCATION - A village in Northern England
SET – The suggestion of the sea. A playing space

**CHARACTERS**

Pontius, the fish gutter ..........................plays Pontius and Satan  
John the Fisherman .................................plays Jesus and Adam  
Mary 1 ..................................................plays the Virgin Mary and Eve  
Mary 2 ..................................................play the Mary Magdalen  
Visiting Friar  
Village Idot  
Carpenter 1 or Sam ...............................plays the angel Gabriel  
Carpenter 2 or Simon .............................plays Joseph  
Director Machinist ...............................plays an emperor  
Queen Elizabeth

**PASSION PLAY - PART TWO**

TIME - 1934  
LOCATION - Oberammergau, Bavaria  
SET – The suggestion of a forest. A playing space

**CHARACTERS**

Foot Soldier ........................................plays Pontius Pilate  
(nas Pontius the Fish Gutter in Part One)  
Eric ......................................................plays Jesus  
(Was John the fisherman in Part One)  
Elsa ......................................................plays the Virgin Mary  
(was Mary 1 in Par One)  
Mary 2 ..................................................plays Mary Magadalen  
(was Mary 2 in Part One)  
The Visiting Englishman (was Visiting Friar in Part One)  
Simon Lily Violet ....................................dressed as a normal girl  
(was Village Idiot in Part One)  
Carpenter or Johann .............................also plays ensemble roles  
(was Carpenter 1 in Part One)  
Carpenter 2 or Ludwig ..........................also play ensemble roles  
(was Carpenter 2 in Part One)  
Director ..............................................(was Director in Part One)  
Rochus Shallhammer German Officer ...........  
(was machinist in Part One)  
Hitler ..................................................(was Queen Elizabeth in Part One)
PASSION PLAY - PART THREE
TIME – 1969 – to present
LOCATION - Spearfish, South Dakota
SET – Open space. The suggestion of a tollbooth. A horizon line

CHARACTERS
P....................................................................................plays Pontius Pilate and Satan
                                      (was Pontius the Fish Gutter in Part One)
J....................................................................................plays Jesus; P’s brother
                                      (was John the Fisherman in Part One)
Mary 1..........................................................plays Virgin Mary (was Mary 1 in Par One)
Mary 2..........................................................plays Mary Magdal (was Mary 2 in Part One)
VA Phsychiatrist...............................also plays ensemble roles (was Visiting Friar in Part One)

Violet..............................................Mary 1’s child (three years old when we first meet her)
                                      (was Village Idiot in Part One)
Carpenter 1........................................also plays ensemble role (was Carpenter 1 in Part One)
Carpenter 2 ............................................also play ensemble roles
                                      (was Carpenter 2 in Part One)
Director...............................................(was Director in parts One and Two)
Young Director.................................(was Machinist in Part One)
Ronald Reagan.....................................also plays Queen Elizabeth and Hitler

Key Facts from Each Era:

Part One: NORTHERN ENGLAND. 1575
• Plays were acted only in the daytime. The boxes, or "rooms," as they were styled, were arranged nearly as in the present day; but the musicians, instead of being placed in the orchestra, were in a lofty gallery over the stage.
• Elizabeth I, byname The Virgin Queen, or Good Queen Bess (born Sept. 7, 1533, Greenwich, near London, Eng.—died March 24, 1603, Richmond, Surrey), queen of England (1558–1603) during a period, often called the Elizabethan Age, when England asserted itself vigorously as a major European power in politics, commerce, and the arts.
• The cult of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen wedded to her kingdom was a gradual creation that unfolded over many years,
• Many scholars think it unlikely that Elizabeth ever seriously intended to marry any of these aspirants to her hand, for the dangers always outweighed the possible benefits, but she skillfully played one off against another and kept the marriage negotiations going for months, even years, at one moment seeming on the brink of acceptance, at the next veering away toward vows of perpetual virginity.
• Elizabeth restored England to Protestantism. The Act of Supremacy, passed by Parliament and approved in 1559, revived the antipapal statutes of Henry
VIII and declared the queen supreme governor of the church, while the Act of Uniformity established a slightly revised version of the second Edwardian prayer book as the official order of worship.

- If Elizabeth’s religious settlement was threatened by Protestant dissidents, it was equally threatened by the recalcitrance and opposition of English Catholics.
- The alarming increase in religious tension, political intrigue, and violence was not only an internal, English concern. In 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth and absolved her subjects from any oath of allegiance that they might have taken to her. The immediate effect was to make life more difficult for English Catholics, who were the objects of a suspicion

Part Two: OBERAMMERGAU, BAVARIA. 1934
- Nazi Germany grew out of a collective national shame, embarrassment and resentment towards the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- Hyperinflation is believed to have been a major favor in the rise of the Nazi party to power.
- This frustration was manifested in an increased number of voters supporting extremist far left- and far right-wing political groups, like the Nazi Party. The Nazis promised a strong government, radical overhaul of the economy, and a new national pride and unity – without “enemy” elements such as Communists, liberals, pacifists, Socialists, and Jews.
- The government conservatives hoped that Hitler could be controlled and made a puppet to help save their positions of power.
- A large number of Oberammergau villagers became members of the Nazi Party, including at least 152 of the 714 actors in the 1934 play
- Hitler consolidated all mechanisms of governance and functions of state under himself and installed a single-party dictatorship.
- In July 1933, the Vatican and the Nazi government signed the Condordat, granting various privileges to Catholic schools and clergy. In return, the church in Germany, its Center party, and all of its newspapers and associations agreed to abstain from intervening in Nazi politics. This ensured Nazism could stand unopposed by Germany’s 23 million Catholics.
- The posters advertising the 1934 Passion Play were mandated to include the phrase “Germany Calling.”
- A combination of racial antisemitism and social Darwinism, however, invested this traditional antisemitism with a new and dynamic image.
- Oberammergau in 1934 was "a Catholic village filled with humble craftsmen who doubled as Passion players."
- during Passion years, about half of the town of 5,000 will participate in the play. Many come from families who have been participating in the play for generations, sometimes inheriting the roles of their ancestors.

Part Three: SPEARFISH, SOUTH DEKOTA. 1969 – the present
- The town of Spearfish derived its name from the river that runs through the town where Native Americans used to spear fish. After World War II
Spearfish grew in popularity as a favorite family summer vacation destination because of the Badlands near Mt. Rushmore

- The Passion Play was performed from mid-June through Labor Day. There were also three nightly performances a week, usually given collectively, averaging forty shows a season (Williams, 370).
- Vietnam War, (1954–75), a protracted conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam and its allies in South Vietnam, known as the Viet Cong, against the government of South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States.
- Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) Soldiers of war brought into close proximity to extreme scenarios involving death, violence, explosions, fear, etc., often cope with numbing or desensitizing themselves from their circumstances so that in the heat of the moment they can keep focused and perform their duties without hesitation. It is only after soldiers have returned to their homes and families do they recognize how much they have actually gone through, the impact of which is often too much for them to bear.
- The NEW RIGHT was a combination of Christian religious leaders, conservative business bigwigs who claimed that environmental and labor regulations were undermining the competitiveness of American firms in the global market, and fringe political groups.
- Despite theological divisions, all evangelical leaders agreed that America was experiencing a moral decline.
- Ronald Reagan noted for his conservative Republicanism, his fervent anticommunism, and his appealing personal style, characterized by a jaunty affability and folksy charm.
- The 1960s "revolution" has perhaps been exaggerated over the years. Studies show, for example, that while a large vocal minority of mostly middle- and upper-middle-class college students challenged traditional institutions and morals, many of their peers remained as committed to old-time moral and religious values as ever.
- Spearfish is a typical mid-American town holding to conservative political views rooted in family traditions and religious Christian practices. However, there still would have been a strong presence of Native American heritage, as well as a strong Germanic influence considering that the Black Hills Passion originated from an acting troop in Germany during the 1940’s (Williams, 370).

History of the Passion Play:
The earliest example of a play dealing with the life or death of Jesus dates back to 979 A.D. A manuscript in the Bodleian Library of that dates in the earliest provable written record, and shows the scene of the Three Marys at the Tomb... (Williams, 15).

A 13th Century Manuscript in German is the first written evidence we have of the Passion, and it seems to have been written as a prologue for a Resurrection play. It begins with the calling of Peter and Andrew, and proceeds through the ministry,
betrayal, capture, trail, crucifixion, death and burial. It is the first real Passion Play (Williams, 15).
As we move out of the Dark Ages and into the Renaissance people began to lose
interest in religious plays.
Williams says that the “Preoccupation with secular themes dominated the stage of
that day, and the drama of the Church fell into the shadows...The professional
theatre flourished in the cities, but the rural areas particularly on the Continent, did
not easily give up their love of religious pageantry” (Williams 20).
The Oberammergau Passion Play was first staged in 1633.
In 1811 a new prose version of the Oberammergau passion play was written by
Othmar Weiss. Weiss depicted the Jews in a harsh light, making them responsible
for Christ’s death.
In 1934, the 33rd Passion Play year saw 440,000 spectators and special
performances for the 300th anniversary of the original production.