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When the Berliner Ensemble at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm stages a production of Carl Zuckmayer's Der Hauptmann von Köpenick, one can without reservation conclude that enormous changes are indeed taking place in Germany. That statement may at first seem disingenuous, but to connoisseurs of footnotes in German theatre history, few developments could rival this latest evidence of reconciliation along political, cultural, and especially theatrical lines. Theatre and politics have a long history of close association in Germany, and no theatre has been more politically conscious than the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht was, as "his" Berliner Ensemble subsequently became, an advertisement for the ruling regime in the Soviet zone of occupation. With the impending dissolution of the German Democratic Republic, it is no wonder that Brecht's theatre should be at the forefront of stupendous change. Why is Carl Zuckmayer a beacon of that change?

Zuckmayer was Brecht's opposite number in 1948, a playwright of equal advertising value on the other side of the German-German border in the western zones of occupation. Zuckmayer was a liberal, middle class humanist who represented for many West Germans in the 1940s and 1950s a palatable alternative to Brecht. The result was a non-subtle competition between the two playwrights, as they came to personify adversarial directions in which the German theatre was then heading. Now that the German theatre is heading towards reconciliation, Zuckmayer's play is an appropriate vehicle even for a Marxist theatre to produce. Der Hauptmann von Köpenick is about reconciliation among Germans with opposing viewpoints. It treats the real-life episode of Wilhelm Voigt, a homeless cobbler who one day paraded through the Berlin suburb of Köpenick in a Prussian captain's uniform. Obedient Germans obeyed every command he gave them, and Kaiser Wilhelm II was so taken with the old bum's panache that he pardoned him and gave him a lifetime pension. The play essentially gave Germans a rare opportunity to laugh at themselves and at how seriously they took their military traditions. Yet it had never appeared in any East German theatre's repertoire, and this is the first Zuckmayer play ever to be staged at the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht was troubled by Köpenick's message of reconciliation (a theme common to Zuckmayer's work) because reconciliation, Brecht felt, was too similar to catharsis. It papered over the real need for social and political change while allowing audiences to leave the theatre with important questions unconfronted. Having grown up in the Wilhelmine era, Brecht remembered little about its military that was whimsical. Zuckmayer, on the other hand, was far less ideological in his treatment of military characters (and of injustice generally); his tendency was to view political questions, too, within humane dimensions.

This production at the Berliner Ensemble did not ignore political questions, but it did interpo-
late military music between scenes as a humorous digression. The music was not Hanns Eisler or Paul Dessau (it was a pastiche of Wilhelmine marches arranged by Rainer Böhm and Karl-Heinz Nehring), yet it broke up the scenic flow of the piece, a technique of which Brecht would have approved. Director Christoph Bruck also used the play's "Berlines" dialect, not to localize the play but ironically to historicize it, much as Brecht demanded. Rather than creating the illusion of gritty realism, the dialect had an antiquated musicality about it, similar to the Wilhelmine march music. Director Brück also invented a means to stage this distinctly "un-Brechtian" play in a Brechtian manner. With designer Henning Schaller he created two long mobile wall units, each of which had eight door openings. These walls shifted for each scene to become the backdrop for Prussian police offices, unemployment bureaus, prison hallways, restaurants, and many other of the altogether eighteen scenes required. Each terminated with a blackout, with the music covering shifts; hence the production did not look much different from Brecht plays now running in the company's repertoire. There was thus an unaccustomed (for Zuckmayer audiences, at any rate) abruptness in the flow of the play's action. In the original production staged nearly fifty years ago at the nearby Deutsches Theater, director Heinz Hilpert emphasized a cinematic flow of one scene to another, utilizing the theatre's revolve. Most subsequent West German productions followed that precedent. The Theater am Schiffbauerdamm also has a revolve, but Brück did not employ it, choosing instead to "make the knots visible" per Brecht's imperative.

In the role of cobbler Voigt, longtime Ensemble actor Hans-Peter Reinecke established early on that his performance was not going to be a "star turn" as it has been for many German actors. Reinecke is not in the mold of Werner Krauß (who originated the role), Max Adalbert, Heinz Rühmann, or the West German actor most closely associated with it, Carl Raddatz; Reinecke did not attempt to win audiences over. He instead presented his case, as if he were a self-taught lawyer, but one speaking for the dispossessed. He somehow retained the character's sense of humor, however, which enabled him to survive without bitterness the years of official harassment; at the same time he maintained a critical distance from the character, making Voigt a political commentary on the German notion that "passports make the man," as Brecht phrased it.

The reality now that Germans no longer need passports to go back and forth across the German-German border also informed this production. References in the script to the ease in traveling from one district of the city to another aboard the city's subway system in 1906 drew unexpected laughs, a response that would only be possible in 1990. The reality that the political system in which the Berliner Ensemble once thrived will now face complete overhaul is a major reason for staging a Zuckmayer play in the first place; it is evidence of the Berliner Ensemble's instinct for survival within a rapidly changing environment. Reports from East German theatres in recent years had noted an increasing, though always subtle, activism for reform in the German Democratic Republic's political structure; actors and audiences had developed a kind of language based on gesture, intonation, inflection, and silence. Now, that language is largely unnecessary, as the GDR's political structure has nearly completed the wholesale collapse begun on 9 November 1989. No citizens of the GDR are more startled by the speed of collapse than theatre personnel, who now openly voice profound uneasiness about the future. Even ushers at the Berliner Ensemble speak of the looming spectre of unemployment. Everyone in the theatre realizes that government funding agencies will no longer support them in the accustomed manner, since the basis for competition between the two German states has disappeared. A competition for wider audience acceptance has replaced it, and thus one finds the work of a bourgeois playwright like Zuckmayer in a theatre like the Berliner Ensemble. Will Brecht's theatre itself become bourgeois? No productions of Guys and Dolls or Arsenic and Old Lace are planned, but Der Hauptmann von Köpenick is a good place to start. Its presence at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm leaves little doubt that enormous changes have already taken place, and that further accommodation and reconciliation will follow.