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staged at the Schiller Theater in West Berlin in
1979.

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DER ROTE HAHN. By Gerhart Hauptmann.
Schiller Theater, Berlin, West Germany. November 26, 1979.

Gerhart Hauptmann completed *Der rote Hahn* in 1901 as a sequel to his highly successful *Der Biberpelz* (1893), and the two plays share the same neighborhood, many of the same characters, and much of the same feeling for the Berlin suburbs at the turn of the century. But in *Der rote Hahn* the century has taken a decided turn for the worse; the characters seem locked in mortal combat with each other for a share of Berlin's burgeoning prosperity.

In the Schiller Theater's new production, director Boleslaw Barlog has focused on the play's interpersonal relationships in an effort to mirror larger social and economic changes taking place, to recreate, in effect, the play's premiere production in 1901 by Otto Brahm. Rather than merely putting together a museum piece, Barlog has placed the play very carefully within its specific historical context and let it speak for itself.

The play deals with an emerging social order. Investment-minded developers are transforming old neighborhoods into vast new urban districts by replacing small family dwellings with large apartment buildings, and great new churches are going up where community chapels once stood. A self-centered, highly materialistic mentality attends the new order. Combining aggressiveness, optimism, national fervor, and anti-Semitism, developer Schmarowski gladly aids his mother-in-law, Frau Fielitz, in her scheme to use fire-insurance money collected by burning down her own house to finance construction of a large apartment building. Arson seems perfectly acceptable to the new order—even though an innocent retarded child must take blame for the crime. The child is like Frau Fielitz's cottage: having served its function, it must now fall by the wayside in the inexorable march of progress.

The old order, personified by von Wehrhahn, seems unwilling and unable to halt or even temper the new order's march. In fact, von Wehrhahn seems equally eager to exploit whatever resources are at hand, and differs from Schmarowski principally in his pompous gullibility. He becomes, as he did in *Der Biberpelz*, the tool by which Frau Fielitz accomplishes her crime. But neither the old nor the new order seems aware of any class struggle. Frau Fielitz and her cohorts are merely poor, and are fighting tooth and nail to raise themselves by any means available. They have simply bent rules promulgated by the old order as it attempted to propel Germany into a leadership role among modern industrial states.

Parallels to modern German society are here in abundance, but director Barlog is careful to avoid anything obvious. Inge Meysel as Frau Fielitz, Wilhelm Borchert as von Wehrhahn, Arnfried Lerche as Schmarowski, and above all Carl Raddatz as the retarded child's father masterfully create a total community feeling and simultaneously a feeling that the community is breaking up. Stage and costume designer Bernd Apfel used box-sets for interior scenes replete with steeply inclined ceilings reminiscent of Brahm's Hauptmann productions. He even used the wind effect—blowing Schmarowski's hat off—which critics in 1901 said was too studied.

Yet Barlog has not used detail simply for its own sake. While indeed providing a complete shoe-repair workshop in Act I, a blacksmith's forge in Act II, and a realistic courtroom in Act III, he has also created a context in which present-day German society may see itself reflected in the milieu of its great-grandfathers. That is the reason for the production's success. Left to speak for itself on its own terms, a play like *Der rote Hahn* expresses lessons unforeseen even by the playwright himself.

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