

simpl

by Peter Froehlich

a National Arts Centre English Theatre /
Tarragon Theatre (Toronto)
coproduction

Study Guide

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE ENGLISH THEATRE
PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES
2003-2004 SEASON

Marti Maraden
Artistic Director, English Theatre



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE
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This Study Guide was researched and written by **Deborah James** for the National Arts Centre English Theatre, March 2004.

This document may be used for educational purposes only.

About This Guide

Portions of this study guide are formatted in easy-to-copy single pages. They may be used separately or in any combination that works for your classes. Here is an outline of the contents of each page with suggestions on how it may be used.

The Section Titled

May Be Used To

simpl -- A quick Overview
(two pages)

Introduce students to story, setting, characters, etc.

simpl -- Background
(one page)

Provide historical information on Valentin's performance venues

simpl -- Biographies of Valentin and Karlstadt (two pages)

Familiarize students with the real lives of the main characters

simpl -- A Production Who's Who
(one page)

Aid students writing reviews

Interview with *simpl* Playwright and Actor Peter Froehlich (two pages)

Offer insight into the playwright's creative process

simpl -- What to Watch for in this Production (one page)

Guide students' viewing of the production

simpl -- Suggested Activities
(two pages)

Suggests ways to extend students' learning in the classroom

simpl -- Scene Study Activity
(two pages)

Explore an extract from the text

Resources (one page)

Lists selected print, web, and film resources

A Sketch of Karl Valentin
by Karyn McCallum

May be displayed in the classroom

simpl—An Overview (page 1 of 2)

Story

simpl is based on the lives of Germany's brilliant comedic performer Karl Valentin and his gifted and devoted stage partner Liesl Karlstadt. Their 22-year partnership spans some of the most catastrophic events in German history: WWI and the German defeat; harsh and humiliating terms of peace that cripple the country's efforts to rebuild; runaway inflation and economic collapse; the violent clash of political extremists; the global depression of the 1930s; the triumph of Hitler and the Nazi regime, which institutionalizes racism and brutal repression; and the unprecedented death tolls and devastation of WWII. With the help of a musical accompanist/actor (the fictional character Gerhard Krachmann), Valentin and Karlstadt perform several pieces from their wide-ranging comic repertoire as the chronicle of the times in which they live unfolds.

Setting

The action in *simpl* is set in Germany between the years 1911 and 1947 on the stage of the *Café Simpl*.

Characters

Karl Valentin -- A brilliant, multi-talented comedic entertainer and film star who rose to fame in his native Germany in a time of dire economic and political upheaval. A detailed account of his life is available on the **Biographies** page of this guide.

Liesl Karlstadt -- A gifted actress, film star and writer, Valentin's longstanding creative and performance partner. A detailed account of her life is available on the **Biographies** page of this guide.

Gerhard Krachmann -- A musician who provides the accompaniment for Valentin and Karlstadt's comic routines. This fictional character also assumes multiple roles as needed throughout the play. He comes to believe that Hitler can provide an answer to Germany's problems. This places him in sharp contrast to Valentin, who refuses to allow his art to serve political ends.

Theme

simpl explores complex ethical questions about the role of the artist in society.

simpl – An Overview (page 2 of 2)

Title

“Simpl” is a German word which can suggest many things:-

- “Simpl” is the short form of “Simplicissimus” who was the main character in the picaresque seventeenth-century German novel *The Adventurous Simplicissimus* by Grimmelshausen (1621-1676). The hero, an innocent simpleton, finds himself increasingly drawn into involvement with worldly affairs during the Thirty Years’ War. Despite his lack of cunning, Simplicissimus always manages to come out of potentially harmful situations unscathed, unwittingly turning the tables on his would-be persecutors. Ultimately he withdraws from the world and becomes a hermit.
- The popular satirical journal *Simplicissimus* was published in Germany from 1896 to 1944. The journal’s no-holds-barred attacks on government and the military made it the leading voice of dissent for liberal artists and intellectuals. On several occasions editors, writers and cartoonists were imprisoned for work that appeared in its pages. A number of “kabarets” (cabarets), inspired by the success of the journal, adopted the short form of the name and called themselves the *Simpl*.

The title has many resonances for playwright Peter Froehlich:

“Simplicissimus was the wise fool, the simpleton immune to the subterfuge of others because he doesn’t get it, but there’s also a strong association with courage that connects to the German satirical journal Simplicissimus, which was the organ of the resistance for 50 years. It was fearless, and everyone who was anyone wrote for it or drew for it.

“To my mind, though, the connotation of the title that has the most to do with Karl Valentin is simply ‘simple’, as in simple-minded and straight ahead -- I do what I do, don’t confuse me with political complexities. He’s very clear headed. He recognizes where his gifts lie and the fact that he’s not going to be good at something else.

“Of course there’s a kind of denial and self-absorption in Valentin’s position, too. He knows he’s a genius, but his genius becomes a license for him to do as he pleases. He doesn’t treat people very well -- his partner, Liesl, for example. He’s on his own road, he’s on a roll, and he doesn’t want her needs and personal struggles to screw him up or complicate his life. He loves her, but she just needs to accept that he has to keep doing what he does. He doesn’t want to be sidetracked onto personal or political tangents.”

simpl -- Background **Beer Halls, Music Halls, Café-Theatres, and Kabarett** (Cabarets)

An enormous range and variety of entertainment existed outside of the formal professional theatre in early 20th-century Germany. In the **beer halls** of a city like Munich, where Valentin got his start, patrons seated around long tables enjoying steins of brew and hearty German fare would also be entertained by traditional bands dressed in lederhosen playing the kind of oom-pah-pah music we associate with Oktoberfest festivities. Young women might sing traditional folksongs, yodel or play selections on tuned cowbells. Comics might tell jokes or perform short physical comedy routines.

Variety was the watchword for the offerings at **music halls** and **café-theatres**, where numerous brief sketches and musical interludes made up the program. Acts involving trained animals might share an audience with actors performing capsule versions of the classics, comedians, acrobats, jugglers, contortionists, singers and novelty acts of all kinds -- like Valentin's "Orchestrion", a machine that could reproduce the sounds of 20 different musical instruments.

Nightclubs and dinner theatres called **kabarett (cabaret)** grew in popularity between the two world wars in the larger urban centers. These venues initially appealed to artists and intellectuals in search of more experimental, avant-garde and overtly political diversions. Here's a description of The Eleven Executioners, Munich's earliest kabarett: The Executioners rented the back room of an inn and decorated it with paintings and etchings by their contemporaries from Jugend to *Simplicissimus*, as well as an impressive collection of "instruments" of torture. The problem of censorship was solved by making the cabaret a private club. The programme began with the Executioners dancing and singing grotesquely on stage, throwing their blooded robes around with abandon. This was followed by a mixture of chansons, recitations, puppet plays, dramatic pieces and literary parodies.

After 1929, political hostilities between the left and the right combined with a severe economic depression took much of the social and political bite out of kabarett performances. "It was left to the Master of Ceremonies, or conferencier, to meet any challenges from the audience and to inject the proceedings with the satirical edge that had become the form's essence. Conferenciers had to be well-versed in literature, masters of improvisation, possess an acid wit and be fully in tune with the street politics ... When Hitler took power in 1933, cabaret was one of the first victims of Nazi terror. Some writers and performers were arrested and taken to concentration camps; some committed suicide; and others left Germany for America or other parts of Europe. The few [like Valentin] who tried to return to cabaret after the war found that it had lost the zest, the vitality and bite that had made it such a remarkable force during the early part of the century."

Quoted extracts originally appear in "The German Cabaret" at http://www.nodanw.com/shows_c/cabaret_essay.htm#top

simpl -- Biographies of Valentin and Karlstadt (page 1 of 2)

Karl Valentin (1882-1948)

The man who was to become a German cultural icon known as Karl Valentin was born Valentin Ludwig Fey on June 4th, 1882, in the Munich suburb of Au. His roots were solidly middle-class; his father owned and operated a small furniture-shipping firm. The young Valentin first worked as a cabinet-maker but left it after a few years to pursue a career as a music hall performer. The death of his father in 1902 compelled him to take over operation of the family business with his mother and put his ambitions on hold. The business was sold four years later.

Valentin went on to build his “Orchestrion”, a fantastic musical machine that combined 20 different instruments and provided accompaniment to his comic routines. He toured with it around the Bavarian beer hall and *café-theatre* circuit, with little success. Consistent public recognition for his unique gifts came in 1908 as a result of repeated appearances at the Frankfurter Hof music hall in Munich.

Valentin re-worked the tradition of the Bavarian music hall performer, creating original songs, monologues and sketches and performing them in the guise of innumerable comic characters drawn from everyday life. In 1911 he discovered Liesl Karlstadt, a novice performer ten years his junior with her own outstanding comedic talents. Karlstadt, “*short, plump, dark, played both men and women of all ages; [Valentin,] lanky, scrawny, albino-hued, was always out of sync with his surroundings.*”^{*} The duo would work together for more than two decades.

Valentin and Karlstadt went on to an enormously successful engagement at the *Simplicissimus* kabarett in Munich. During this time, Valentin married Gisela Royes, already the mother of his two children and a former maid to the Fey family. In 1913, Valentin added film actor to his list of accomplishments, starring in a biting satirical short film called “*Karl Valentin’s Wedding*” that lampooned the institution of marriage. He racked up a career total of 29 films in all, most of them comedies, making his last appearance on film in 1941.

Valentin was exempted from military service in 1914 at the start of WWI for health reasons. He performed with Karlstadt over 120 times for the wounded in Germany’s military hospitals over the next few years.

Valentin’s popularity reached its apex in the 1920s with performances at fashionable kabarett throughout Vienna, Zurich and Berlin. Despite his own anti-intellectual stance, Valentin was admired by several of the leading literary figures and intellectuals of the day, including Bertolt Brecht, Herman Hesse and Karl Tucholsky.

In the 1930s, as the situation in Germany worsened and the prospect of another war loomed, Valentin experienced numerous personal setbacks. He opened his own theatre in Munich in 1931 but was forced to close it a few weeks later due to fire regulations. He struggled to realize his lifelong dream of creating a wax museum -- the “Panoptikum” -- featuring his own absurdist brand of humour in 1934-35, but it ultimately flopped which led to his and Karlstadt’s financial ruin. She threw herself into the Isar River in despair, survived, and sought treatment in a sanatorium.

By 1933, Hitler and the Nazi party gained control of the German government and proceeded to transform the country into a brutal police state. Many artists and intellectuals fled the new regime; Valentin stayed, complied with Nazi censorship laws, and continued to work until 1940, when the risk of performing became too great. Though impoverished and struggling to sustain himself and his family during WWII, Valentin continued writing sketches that he would never perform. He was reunited briefly with Karlstadt in 1947, and died on February 9th, 1948.

^{*}Laurence Senelick, *Cabaret Performance*: Vol.1, p. 30

simpl -- Biographies (page 2 of 2)

Liesl Karlstadt (1892-1960)

Liesl Karlstadt was born Elizabeth Wellano in Munich on December 12, 1892, the fifth of nine children. Her first job was as a salesclerk in the lady's undergarments department of the Tietz Department Store. She began performing -- yodelling, dancing, singing, playing music and acting -- in the beer halls and kabarets in Munich at 17.

She was discovered by Karl Valentin in 1911 and the comedy team of Valentin and Karlstadt was born. Though a gifted character actor and writer in her own right, Karlstadt remained "second banana" to the brilliant Valentin, who was ten years her senior.

By 1915 the pair had risen to great popularity in their native Munich. Through the 1920s Karlstadt worked alongside Valentin on the stages of café-theatres and kabarets all over Germany and appeared with him in numerous films. She took acting lessons in 1930 and appeared in the stage play *Storm in the Waterglass*.

Karlstadt later risked her own money backing Valentin's dream -- a wax museum/kabarett called the "Panoptikum"; it failed in 1935 and both were wiped out financially. She attempted suicide in April of that year and spent time in a psychiatric clinic at a time when Nazi laws called for the compulsory sterilization of mental patients. Her doctor wrote a letter on her behalf in which he claimed that there was no need for the surgery because Liesl Karlstadt was unable to bear children, which may or may not have been the truth.

By 1936 she was well enough to work with Valentin and director Jacob Geis on a film called *The Inheritance* that portrays a young couple who are so impoverished they own nothing but a candle stub. The film was banned by the Nazi's because of its pessimistic presentation of contemporary life in Germany. The incident cast a pall over Valentin's film career. Karlstadt did not work with him again until 1947.

Valentin died in 1948 from complications of a cold. Karlstadt continued a solo career, performing on the stage, in films, and in over two hundred episodes of the successful radio series, *Family Brandl*. She died on the 27th of July, 1960, of a brain hemorrhage. She was 68.

***simpl* -- A Production Who's Who**

simpl was developed through the National Arts Centre's New Play Development Programme and is an NAC English Theatre/Tarragon Theatre (Toronto) coproduction.

CREATIVE TEAM

Director

Richard Rose

Composer/Music Director/Sound

John Millard

Set/Costume Design

Yannik Larivée

Lighting Design

Martin Conboy

CAST

Karl Valentin

Peter Froehlich

Liesl Karlstadt

Nicola Lipman

Gerhard Krachmann & As Cast

Peter Tiefenbach

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Stage Manager

Laurie Champagne

Apprentice Stage Manager

Michelene A. Sutherland

Interview with *simpl* Playwright and Actor Peter Froehlich (page 1 of 2)

Peter Froehlich has worked as a director and actor in theatres throughout Canada, including the Stratford Festival, the National Arts Centre, Centaur Theatre, Citadel Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, Mulgrave Road Theatre, Axis Mime Theatre, Toronto Free Theatre, Theatre Passe Muraille, and The Great Canadian Theatre Company. He has taught and directed for the School of the Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University (Vancouver), and for the National Theatre School (Montreal), and is currently a professor in the Department of Theatre at the University of Ottawa. Recent performances at the NAC include The Winter's Tale, An Enemy of the People, All's Well that Ends Well, Hard Times, and The "Vaudevilles" of Chekhov.

What inspired you to write about the life and work of Karl Valentin?

I've been working a long time on what I call the illegitimate theatre. My interest in it comes out of having taught theatre history and realizing that, like my own teachers, I was really only teaching the history of masterpieces, which just isn't the whole story. The "great works" approach paints a picture of the history of theatre as the movement from one genius playwright to the next.

Besides that, all the genius dramatists were deeply influenced by what was going on in the streets -- the "theatre" that takes place outside of theatres, in the kabarets and circuses and brothels and prisons and coffee houses. Not only was Shakespeare aware of this, but he borrowed, stole, from the work these "illegitimate" performers were doing. His troupe was made up of these people. We think, oh yeah, there are 'real' theatre people, and then there are those buskers on the streets. But he took all his clowns off the street and adapted his writing for each one to incorporate their particular gifts. Molière, too, lived the life of an itinerant entertainer for a long period of time and drew on that experience in his plays.

For years I was looking for scripts from this kind of theatre and I was told, well, examples just don't exist -- and if they do exist, they're not very good; they don't compare with Aeschylus. But some of the texts I've discovered are phenomenal. So my work on Valentin is part of this much wider project I'm still working on.

Why has this material been neglected for so long?

For one thing, the dramaturgy is totally different so it's very hard to read these pieces if you don't know theatre intimately. You look at them and say, well, this is not literature. And it isn't! But the piece in performance is designed to be a vehicle for a quick-change artist or an acrobat or for someone who does funny voices. Of course it's not going to work on the page! Academia, in so far as it cares about the theatre at all, assumes that there's a single dramaturgy, but that's not the case at all. I'm very interested in the possibilities of an illegitimate dramaturgy. I have a few notions about how such a thing might work.

Keep in mind as well that these pieces were performed in various places other than theatres, so they all put a strong emphasis on holding the spectators' attention. Say a certain piece was written to be performed on the stage of a kabarett. The actor/audience dynamic is very different there. It's not like everybody is sitting in total darkness facing the stage with only one thing going on -- somebody's serving food, somebody's yelling for orders to be picked up, there's a band playing in the corner, people are coming and going, scraping their chairs. If the performer loses the spectators' interest, it's completely gone. It's not like at the Arts Centre where people wake up on cue and applaud.

Interview with *simpl* Playwright and Actor Peter Froehlich (page 2 of 2)

What was your first exposure to Valentin's comedy?

When my father died he left behind a pile of records. One of them was Valentin. I put it on and I was just floored, partly because it reminded me so much of my father. And I thought, maybe there's a piece here. I became fascinated with Valentin and started reading about his life. And the issues that emerged really captured my imagination. How does someone continue to be an artist in appalling times?

We have a certain number of versions of that period in history. We know the Third Reich -- or at least we think we do -- we know about the Nazis. As far as the artists go, we teach the émigrés and the resisters. More recently we've looked at the collaborators -- people like Gründgens and Hauptman -- and we use them as cautionary tales; but we all think, if I had had to make the choice as an artist, I would have been heroic. I would have been a Bertolt Brecht or a Kurt Weil and used my art to publicly denounce the rise of fascism. But in fact most artists were neither collaborators (quite) nor heroes (quite).

The story of Valentin is a new version of that history. He wasn't a hero, for sure, but he was not a collaborator either. He just tried to keep on doing what he did. Wherever we can test his politics, he's on the right side -- but not very far on the right side. And, yes, he did appear before Hitler and took great pride in being able to list him among his fans. But his fan base was all over the map politically -- right, left, in between, upper class, elitist class, and working class.

How would you describe Valentin's work? What's unique about him?

For one thing, his range of material was very broad. He could do routines based on verbal miscommunication, musical interludes and songs, comic situations and exaggerated characters, slapstick, prop comedy, disguises and quick changes. I don't touch about 50% of his material because it really can't be translated. Often the humour in those pieces depends on an understanding of the distinctive dialect in which they are written. There's an entire piece about two obsessed and not very bright people arguing about the correct plural of "dumpling" -- and it's a longish piece!

Obsessions, fixations, are a hallmark of Valentin's comedy. Communication between his characters usually fails because what one character is desperately trying to communicate to the other is entirely the product of his own mental constructions. I think he writes about ideology itself -- not any particular ideology, but the overarching concept of the fixed idea that they all share. His characters come into the world with one fixed idea and they're constantly trying to make clear to other people why they are stupid for not getting it. Valentin's ideologues are laughable.

Of course this idea meets with resistance. In this sense I think he was very political. He wouldn't have thought of it as political. He didn't publicly take issue with Hitler's particular ideology, it's true; he took issue with the mental frailty that makes ideological thinking a fact of life.

Before 1960, Germans tended to see him as a pessimist. His take on the world was that being human is a mistake; it's all down the drain. His humour gets us laughing, but at the same time it touches the core of human misery. That pushes it, though. You can fit him into any number of constructs but he is beyond labels.

simpl -- What to Watch For In This Production

1. The Character/Theme Connection

simpl poses the question of what it can possibly mean to be a non-political artist in horrific times. Watch for how the characters of Karl Valentin, Liesl Karlstadt and Gerhard Krachmann each respond differently to the personal and political challenges of the times they live in. Which response makes the most sense? Which character do you most sympathize with? Which of the three is a hero? A villain? A victim?

2. Being Funny -- Let Me Count the Ways

Valentin's popularity and brilliance were due in part to the enormous range of his comedy. When viewing the performance, try to identify at least one specific instance of each of the following:

- a) **prop comedy** -- comedy centered on a character's interactions with one or more objects
- b) **comedy of miscommunication** -- "Who's on first?"-style verbal mix-ups and confusion
- c) **black comedy** -- comedy with a disturbing or macabre edge
- d) **slapstick** -- broad physical comedy like that of the Three Stooges where people get hit, fall down, get a pie in the face, etc.
- e) **comic songs** -- songs with funny lyrics like those of Tom Lehrer or Adam Sandler
- f) **surreal observation** -- surprising and slightly twisted versions of familiar things
- g) **exaggerated and/or stereotypical characters**, especially people who "just don't get it"
- h) **looking funny** -- comedy based on outlandish make-up, costuming and/or physical appearance

3. The Technical Complexities of Staging *simpl*

Watch for and be prepared to comment on the complex way this production of *simpl* makes use of the other art forms of music and visual art. As well, be on the lookout for ways in which the show makes technical demands of theatre professionals other than the actors. What challenges does *simpl* present for the lighting designer and technician? For the sound designer and technician? For the costume designer and the dressers? For the stage carpenter and the props master?

simpl -- Suggested Activities (page 1 of 2)

1. Scene Study

Divide the class into groups of three (or four if you want one person to direct and give feedback) and give them copies of the **Scene Study Activity “Josef Goebbels and the Railway Porter”** included herein. The scene represents a crucial turning point in the action of *simpl*, the moment when Valentin realizes that the personal risk of continuing to perform in the face of ever more restrictive Nazi censorship laws is just too great. Below are some aspects of the scene to explore:

- a) Have the students read through the scene several times and come to some agreement as to what each character most wants from the others (his or her objective or goal) and from the situation overall. Encourage them to utterly overplay their character’s goal in rehearsal in this exploratory stage. Things can always be scaled back later.
- b) All the action in *simpl* takes place on the stage of a kabarett in front of a live audience. Ask your students to consider how this will affect the way they play the scene. Have them build in one specific moment when each of the characters clearly acknowledges the audience.
- c) Have students isolate the stage directions and do a movement-only version of the scene. How much emotion and attitude can a character express through actions like sitting, standing, posture, being turned towards or away from another character, turning the pages of a newspaper, exiting the stage, etc.?

2. Getting *simpl* Online

Though Valentin and Karlstadt are just as well known in Germany as Charlie Chaplin or the Marx Brothers are in North America, it’s very difficult to find information about them in English. Two internet sites are especially useful for rounding out the information provided in this guide:

- a) Karyn McCallum’s interactive site about *simpl* is a virtual tour through the world of the play where students can **view a series of original designs, hear music from the show, and follow a timeline of historical events.** The site will be available for viewing during the run of *simpl* (March 30 to April 10, 2004). Link to this innovative blend of theatre and technology at the **ArtsAlive.ca English Theatre site** at <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/index.html>.
- b) Visit <http://www.chuck-fotografik.de/valentin-karlstadt/> to view an extensive gallery of photos of Valentin and Karlstadt.

simpl--Activities (page 2 of 2)

3. Exploring Physical Comedy

Give students working in pairs or small groups the opportunity to explore the challenges of creating two- to four-minute scenes of physical comedy. Give each team one of the suggestions for an item from the list below. Their task will be to devise a scene in which at least one character has an extremely difficult time as a result of his/her interactions with the given item: gum; a hose; a ladder; a hammer; insects; paint; garbage; glue; a musical instrument; a pizza; a conveyor belt; a frozen metal doorknob; a pair of eyeglasses; a plate of spaghetti; a fishing rod; wind; a vacuum cleaner.

During the rehearsal phase all group members need to reach consensus on who their characters are; the kind of relationship they have with each other; the details of where the scene will be set; and an outline of the basic action in the scene. NB: The players must use only their bodies and imaginations to create and manipulate the item onstage.

4. Discussion Topics

The following topics for group discussion extend and deepen themes in *simpl*:

- a) What is the connection between art and entertainment? Explain the difference between an artist and an entertainer?
- b) What other functions beyond entertainment should art serve in society?
- c) Is art ever outside of or above politics?
- d) What is the connection between personal choices and political realities?
- e) Under what circumstances would you permit the government to censor the arts? Should artistic freedom be absolute?

5. Researching Other Art Forms and Artists

simpl offers rich ground for further research. Topics you may want to assign include:

Drama -- Bertolt Brecht; Kurt Weil; Max Reinhardt; Georg Kaiser; Ernst Toller; Erwin Piscator; Carl Zuckmayer; Gerhart Hauptmann; Gustaf Gründgens.

Visual Art -- George Grosz; Max Ernst; Kurt Schwitters; Ernst Ludwig Kirchner; Emil Nolde; Max Pechstein; Otto Dix; Max Beckmann; Käthe Kollwitz.

Film -- Fritz Lang; Ernst Lubitsch; Leni Riefensthal.

Art Forms/Movements -- realism; expressionism; Dada; Bauhaus.

simpl -- Scene Study Activity (page 1 of 2)

JOSEF GOEBBELS* AND THE RAILWAY PORTER (1939)

Valentin: So, write it down, the railway porter is standing on platform number two at the Hauptbahnhof and of course it's empty, no one travels anymore.

Karlstadt: *(Still sitting.)* So he's polishing his glasses.
Krachmann turns the page of his newspaper.

Valentin: Good, ja, that's good! And up runs . . . a stranger, a foreigner, and he's totally lost.

Karlstadt: *(She stands.)* A . . . Prussian professor ...

Valentin: . . . of philology, ja, ja, write it down, and he says, "Over here, quick, porter, hurry, I need you to carry these bags to platform number three . . .

Krachmann: Did you read this?

Valentin: . . . my train is leaving in two minutes."

Krachmann: Goebbels has published another of his edicts.

Valentin: Shh-Shht. So the porter says . . .

Krachmann: *(Puts on his reading glasses :)* "Despite my repeated ordinances of 8 December 1937 and 6 May 1939 in which I urgently stated the requirement that cabaret and performance matters be assimilated to the demands of public taste . . ."

Valentin: Gerhard, we don't need music for this, you can go home to bed now. So, the porter says . . .

Krachmann: "I am informed from a multitude of sources that so called conferenciers** and kabaretists*** continue to practice their mischief . . ."

Valentin: So the porter says--Liesl, write it down -- "Before I can take your bags you are required to fill out a questionnaire, here, name, address, mother's maiden name, grandmother's maiden name ..."

simpl -- Scene Study Activity (page 2 of 2)

Krachmann: ". . . They scoff at the measures necessary to safeguard the purity of our unique race, and thereby contribute to imperiling both the inner unity of the nation, which is the most important prerequisite for the victorious conclusion of this war. . . ." (*Liesl Karlstadt sits down again.*) All performances commenting in any way on the circumstances of public life are forbidden . . ."

Valentin: That's not us! That's not us! That is aimed at the political kabaretists--they deserve what they get--not at the harmless work we do.

Krachmann: ". . . even if they are made in an allegedly well-intentioned manner."

Valentin: So, a professor of philology from Berlin comes running up to a railway porter at the Munich Hauptbahnhof.

Krachmann: "It is expressly forbidden to play off one city against another, one part of the Reich against another . . ."

Valentin: All right, so . . . a local professor runs up to a railway porter

Krachmann: ". . . or one social group or profession against another."

Valentin: So two railway porters meet on the . . . (*Pause, he fixes Krachmann in the eye.*)
Twins!

Krachmann: "At the Führer's behest, any and all cheap and frivolous vilification of the conditions of public life entailed by the necessity of war is unequivocally barred from the stage. (*Karlstadt exits.*) Transgressions will be punished with the harshest penalties."
(*Krachmann exits.*)

Valentin: Two Munich railway porters meet on the No, they don't meet. And the first one says . . . Absolutely . . . Nothing! (*With a significant look at the table of Nazi officials at the back on the left:*) We must still be allowed to say that!

* Josef Goebbels: Hitler's Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment.

** conferencier: the master of ceremonies in a kabarett.

*** kabaretists: kabarett performers

Resources

Print Resources

Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*. Studio Vista, 1975.

Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*. Harvard Univ. Press, 1993.

Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-33*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974.

Alan Lareau, *The Wild Stage: Literary Cabarets of the Weimar Republic*. Camden House, 1995.

Harold Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret*. Columbia Univ. Press, 1987.

Lawrence Senelick, *Cabaret Performance*. 2 Vols. Johns Hopkins Press, 1993.

On the Web

TheatreHistory.com--an excellent site to visit for an overview of theatre history in Germany and other countries.

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/index.html>

Detailed information on the German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTsimplic.htm>

Overview of Hitler's Rise to Power

<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/nazirise.htm>

Informative page about the Nazi's ideas on art

http://ring.mithec.com/side/Nazi_art.html

List of links to sites on Nazi cultural life and propaganda

<http://www.germanculture.com.ua/library/links/naziparty.htm>

Encyclopedias entry on Comedy with links to Vaudeville and Music Hall

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy>

Videos/DVDs

Mephisto, based on the play by Klaus Mann. Directed by Istvan Szabo, 1983.

"In early 1930s Germany, ambitious stage actor Hendrik Hofgen (an extraordinary performance by Klaus Maria Brandauer) cares little for politics and lives only for his art. But when the Nazis begin their rise to power, he seizes the opportunity to perform propaganda plays for the Reich and soon becomes Germany's most popular actor. Consumed with fame, Hendrik must now survive in a world where the ideology of evil is the ultimate drama and the true cost of a man's soul becomes the most shattering measure of all. Based on the real-life career of Gustaf Gründgens."--Synopsis, DVD Barn

The Architecture of Doom, written, produced and directed by Peter Cohen, 1991.

"The film looks at Nazism and the Nazi ethic by way of its aesthetic. Hitler the failed artist and his eventual preoccupation with art and architecture are key to this unique view of the 20th Century's most notorious regime, a perspective that proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that art really does matter -- far more, in fact, than is ever acknowledged."--Boxoffice Online Reviews.

sketch of Karl Valentin by Karyn McCallum





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