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Rovit, Rebecca. *The Jewish Kulturbund Theatre Company in Nazi Berlin*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2012. 287pp. \$41. ISBN 978-1-60938-124-0.

In this intriguing study Rebecca Rovit charts the history of the Jewish *Kulturbund* theatre in Berlin, which the Nazis sanctioned in 1933 and closed in 1941. She convincingly works out the difficulties the *Kulturbund* faced and how this theatre operated in an increasingly oppressive climate. The Nazi regime only authorised the theatre to produce plays by Jewish dramatists, the playhouse was only open to Jews, and it was not allowed to publicise its activities. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Nazi cultural policy constantly changed and was, therefore, unpredictable. But even within Berlin's Jewish community there was no consensus as to what this theatre should do, and whether it should exist at all. Zionist fractions advocated a Jewish cultural separatism whereas most of the protagonists of the *Kulturbund* theatre saw themselves as liberal assimilated Jews educated according to Humanist concepts (p. 22). It was largely due to their influence that the enterprise continued with a "pre-1933 bourgeois German theatre repertoire" (p. 97).

Rovit finds the right balance in this study, she avoids glorification of the *Kulturbund* theatre and its protagonists and equally abstains from overdue demonization of Hinkel and the Nazi cultural apparatus. Her matter of fact style serves her well in tracing the theatre's history, and by using a chronological approach she is able to work out the growing pressures on the company and the tightening grip of the Nazi authorities. Anti-Semitic laws, Gestapo interventions,

lack of funds and resources, and an increasingly hostile environment made working at the *Kulturbund* theatre a continuous struggle, particularly after the beginning of World War II.

At times it would have helped to link specific points to general issues, for example concerning the business character of the theatre. The highly subsidised German theatre system is only mentioned in passing. By elaborating on the fact that the *Kulturbund* theatre was forced to run as a commercial venture, however, Rovit could have stressed even more that this undertaking was set up as an “atypical” playhouse by the Nazis from the start. More research is needed on the interplay and negotiations between the *Kulturbund* and Nazi officials and the strategies involved on both sides – something which Rovit acknowledges (p. 212) but equally something her readers might have reasonably expected her to do herself. A discussion of the existing literature on the topic might have been useful, too.

Overall, however, this is a passionate account of an influential lost theatre, which to many of its protagonists constituted a haven of the arts amidst a brutal and inhuman dictatorship. The table at the beginning of her volume, which lists the *dramatis personae* of this book, serves as a potent reminder of how few of the *Kulturbund*'s protagonists actually survived the Holocaust.