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Anselm Heinrich. Theatre in Europe Under the German Occupation. Routledge, 2018.

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Abstract

Review of Anselm Heinrich. *Theatre in Europe Under the German Occupation*. Routledge, 2018. 274 pp.

Keywords

theatre history, German history, interdisciplinary studies

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Anselm Heinrich's book, *Theatre in Europe Under the German Occupation*, is a study of officially supported German-language theater in all the territories controlled by Germany from 1938 to 1945. The focus, however, is on German-language metropolitan and regional theaters in Poland, the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Latvia, and Ukraine, with an interest in "subsidies and institutional structures, theatre repertoires and the theatres' representative functions" (5-7). Heinrich pays particular attention to their repertoires, regarding their composition as intentional in the same way that an anthology or art gallery is organized with an agenda in mind: "The arrangement of these repertoires, therefore, creates a certain meaning, they become 'configured corpora'" (8). Heinrich wants to show how the Nazis tried to create a European wide theater based on their own selection of what they considered properly Germanic plays (10). The book's six chapters (including one with fifteen subchapters) reflect the author's substantial use of several archives across Germany and Europe, and the text includes evidence of this research in the form of photographs of theater buildings, stage productions, program listings, and more.

Heinrich argues that choosing a repertoire of German-language plays demonstrates the theaters' participation in Nazi efforts to Germanize the continent. Indeed, in contrast to existing scholarship, this study illustrates the central role of theater in both political and military schemes (17). Nazi plans to radically reshape Europe included massive relocations of not only indigenous peoples away from their homes but also the relocation of German populations into those areas (157). In order to foster Germanization of these areas, Nazi officials saw theater as one of German culture's "chief expressions" (163). This explains the massive subsidies and support (including the construction of new theaters and renovation of old ones) that Heinrich documents so well.

The author further details the actual programming used to achieve this agenda. Increased subsidies also meant more productions and longer seasons and helped them control the quality of theater programming (112-13). The Germanizing process also included Shakespeare, to whom the Nazis claimed they had more right than the British. They based this claim on Shakespeare's "Nordic genes," and thus one can see the influence of the Nazis' racist ideology in the selection of plays (30). Plays otherwise were chosen from the traditional, classical German canon (Schiller, Goethe, Kleist, Grillparzer, etc.). Heinrich also takes opera and musical performances into consideration, where, of course, Wagner productions also were favored. Indeed, initially at least, officials wanted to press "heroic classical drama" and therefore a "repertoire based on entertainment instead of uplift was not what the regime wished to see" (113). However, Heinrich's close observation of the

repertoires shows that, over time, the regime's agenda did not always match the public's taste, and the theaters' choices would then openly deviate from the prescribed Nazi agenda. Sometimes, articles in the program notes or other formats would try to justify the altered play selection as fulfilling the regime's agenda in its own way. For instance, the chief dramaturge in Litzmannstadt, as Łódź was renamed (163), stated that they had to reach out gradually to a public that "so far, has been largely alien to German theater. [The theater, therefore,] has to offer a mixed fare ..." (118). Although the local populations regained control and dominated local culture after the war, the legacy of the "substantial Nazi efforts" continued, sometimes till today, in such things as the repertoires produced. In this, Heinrich addresses claims that there were no traces left of the Occupation in theater after the war (234-5).

Heinrich does an admirable job of sifting through a large amount of material in order to paint a more precise picture of German theater in occupied Europe. Heinrich's approach is decidedly historical and reflects influences not only by scholars like historian Hayden White, but also a number of theater historians who utilize an interdisciplinary approach to theater and pay particular attention to "the interplay and creation of meaning between stage and audience." (17) He is critical, then, of studies that use "repertoires, opera libretti, stage designs, or costumes in isolation without asking about the context in which they were produced." He also advocates expanding the scope of inquiry in his field to a vast array of sources and subjects, such as circus shows, oral testimony, police records, diaries, and handbills (18). His use of repertoires and other elements within not just a poetic context but also an ideological and political one is reminiscent of the translation studies scholar André Lefevere's emphasis on the role of patronage and his concept of rewriting in his book, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*: "The same basic process of rewriting is at work in translation, historiography, anthologization, criticism, and editing" (2017: 7). Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how this study fits into the broader context of post-colonial research about how an outside, occupying power tries to overlay, eliminate, or ignore indigenous languages, culture, and traditions that it considers inferior. Heinrich's study might appeal then not only to those interested in the specific field of theater history or German Studies, but also any number of scholars interested in the theory and practice of interdisciplinary studies.

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