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**Diana R. Hallman**, *Opera, Liberalism and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France: The Politics of Halévy's La Juive*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvii + 390 pp. Illustrations, music, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-521-65086-0.

Review by Lisa Moses Leff, Southwestern University.

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Diana R. Hallman's new book about composer Fromental Halévy's *La Juive* is the "first comprehensive critical study" of this intriguing opera, according to its publisher (p. i). First performed in February 1835, *La Juive* became one of the most popular operas of the nineteenth century, a favorite of both Mahler and Wagner, staging the problems of clerical intolerance and religious fanaticism with great drama. Although it fell into relative obscurity after the 1930s, this classic French grand opera has been performed in several opera houses since the 1980s, including major productions in Vienna in 1999 and New York in 2003. With its return to the public spotlight, audiences have sought to understand the opera's somewhat confusing attitude toward the Jews. Given the opera's unmistakably liberal perspective, as well as its composer's Jewishness, many have wondered what to make of *La Juive's* numerous antisemitic statements and caricatures. Coinciding with the revival of this unjustly forgotten opera, Hallman's carefully detailed analysis of *La Juive* sheds much needed light on this issue by placing the work in the artistic, social, and political context in which it was produced. In so doing, her book also paints a sensitive portrait of the artistic milieu and political culture of the early July Monarchy.

Because readers of this review may be unfamiliar with *La Juive*, a brief summary of the opera is in order. Set at the Council of Constance in 1414, the drama opens with the townsfolk's celebration of Prince Léopold's victory over the followers of the Bohemian religious reformer Jan Hus. The story revolves around the Jewish goldsmith Eléazar and his beautiful daughter Rachel. Rachel is being courted by a young Jew named Samuel who turns out to be Prince Léopold in disguise. When Eléazar discovers the deception, he is infuriated; yet at his daughter's behest, he agrees to accept Léopold as a son-in-law anyway. Surprisingly, Léopold refuses. The problem, it turns out, is not only that Léopold is a Christian but also that he is married to Princess Eudoxie, a customer of Eléazar's. With the discovery of this second deception, an angry Eléazar asks the Cardinal, an old acquaintance, to take action against the prince. In response, and much to the delight of the sadistic crowd, the Cardinal condemns Léopold, Rachel, and Eléazar to death for breaking the law of God. Still in love, Rachel appeals to the Cardinal to spare Léopold, which he does. The Cardinal tells Eléazar he will spare Rachel as well if she will convert to Christianity. Though filled with love for his daughter, the crowd's bloodthirsty Jew-hatred makes Eléazar decide not to attempt to persuade Rachel to convert. The final act brings a final twist. Once again refusing the chance to convert, Rachel is thrown into a cauldron of boiling water. Just then, Eléazar reveals a stunning secret: Rachel was in fact the Cardinal's own illegitimate daughter, whom Eléazar had rescued in Rome during a fire. After his admission, Eléazar makes his own way up the scaffold and the opera ends.

Hallman's study of this opera centers on presenting and accounting for the contradictory attitudes it adopts toward Jews. *La Juive*, she explains, has an overall liberal and even somewhat anticlerical message about tolerance, and yet, it also deploys a whole set of important anti-Jewish stereotypes, especially in its characterization of Eléazar (as angry, greedy, and separatist to the point of hating Christians) and to a lesser degree, in its characterization of Rachel (whose goodness to all can be explained by her Christian birth). It criticizes Eléazar as a fanatic, even though it also presents him as genuinely religious and a victim of intolerance and sadism. It also suggests a kind of unacceptable sexuality on Rachel's part, even as the opera's overriding voice tells us that she too is a victim of a society that cannot recognize love between Christians and Jews as legitimate. The music, Hallman explains in chapter four, serves at once to magnify the contrasts inherent within each of the characters and to heighten the dramatic opposition between the Jews and the Christian world that persecutes them. This too contributes to the spectators' sense that there is a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the opera. Hallman describes the contradiction most succinctly at the end of her book's last chapter: "As Voltairean themes resound in *La Juive*, reminding its audience that through intolerance and despotism lay a continuation of the follies of the past, the opera concurrently reinforced ideas about the Jewish Other already present in the minds of its audiences" (p. 296).

Hallman's explanation of how these contradictions came into existence is a fascinating story, and her analysis of what they tell us about both the opera and the world in which it was produced is thought provoking as well. Because the French grand opera was produced through collaboration between authors, performers, and even producers, with an eye to public taste as well as to government censorship, Hallman explains its nuances and its contradictions by placing it in a set of overlapping artistic, religious, social, and political contexts. The artistic context--literary, musical, and dramatic--is the setting for much of the book's analysis. Situating the Jewish characters within the long literary tradition with which Halévy, librettist Eugène Scribe, and contemporary audiences were familiar is a useful strategy, enabling Hallman to show how the authors of *La Juive* both mobilized and, in important respects, softened stereotypes familiar to readers of Shakespeare, Lessing, and Sir Walter Scott, among others. Hallman shows that *La Juive* was part of a trend within Restoration and early July Monarchy theater that portrayed Jewish characters in ways that played on these traditions and yet humanized Jewish characters more and more.

Hallman's discussion of the musical context is especially interesting. Unlike previous scholars who have insisted that Halévy's score bears no recognizably "Jewish" elements, Hallman shows that the music of the Passover service in the opera simultaneously "incorporated idioms of European art music while alluding to Jewish musical traditions" in much the same way that contemporary French Jewish synagogue composers were doing (p. 181). By placing this music within the context of the movement for religious reform--with which Halévy's family was involved--Hallman challenges traditional notions of what should be considered "Jewish" music in this period.[1]

As her analysis of the musical context suggests, Hallman also sees *La Juive* as embedded in the context of the transformation of Jewish life in the decades following the Revolution. She argues that elite Jews like the Halévy family should not be understood as estranged from Judaism, as some scholars have contended, but rather engaged in a project to reform and modernize their religion to fit with the new conditions of the day. Examining evidence from their personal lives as well as their writings, Hallman also contends that the Halévys rejected the traditional proscription against interfaith romance and friendship. This too, she argues, is not so much a sign of their abandoning Judaism but rather stems from their reformist beliefs. She argues that critiques such as these made their way into the opera itself and help to account for its ambiguous representations of Jewish characters and the Jewish religion.

Finally, Hallman places this opera in the political context of the rise of liberalism in the 1830s. This political context was crucial in shaping the content of the opera for a number of reasons, and exploring it does much to explain the opera's contradictory perspectives. Using contemporary reviews, Hallman shows that audiences saw the opera through the prism of Voltaire and were clearly quite familiar with his writings about religious fanaticism and intolerance (including his classic account of the Council of Constance). Referencing Voltaire's work in this way was a powerful symbolic act, Hallman explains, representing a firm liberal position in the public discussion about the relationship between Catholicism and the state. Additional evidence about each of the collaborators' political views (these include not only Scribe and Fromenthal Halévy's views but also those of the lead performer Adolphe Nourrit and Fromenthal's brother Léon Halévy) round out the picture here; each of them, Nourrit most of all, believed that the performing arts should be used to effect social and political change.

Placing *La Juive* in the context of contemporary struggles over the place of the church in public life allows Hallman to identify an important source of the opera's ambiguous representations of Jews and Judaism as well. In the 1830s, Jews finally achieved full legal equality in France, and yet a number of contemporary scandals suggest that anti-Jewish prejudice was far from disappearing. These issues are clearly reflected in the opera. Pointing to deliberate and systematic references to Voltaire is particularly illuminating in this regard. In a number of respects, Hallman shows, the opera is reproducing the same ambivalences that Voltaire displayed, using Jews to represent the worst kind of religious fanaticism, while at the same time condemning the Church for its persecution of the Jews.

*Opera, Liberalism and Antisemitism's* greatest success is in how well it accounts for the seeming contradictions of *La Juive*, arguing that those contradictions were present in the broader milieu in which the opera was produced. With its stress on dramatic opposition, its collaborative production process, and the scrutiny it received from government censors, critics, and paying audiences, grand opera seems an ideal object of study for those seeking to hear the competing voices of the world in which it was produced and performed. Hallman does a commendable job in finding these voices in *La Juive*, depicting the opera as a record of some of the most interesting discussions of the

day, including the relationship between the Catholic Church and state authority, the rise of capitalism, the social and political role of the performing arts, and the changing place of the Jews in French society.

The very fact that she does such an excellent job placing the opera in these overlapping contexts leaves the reader with the hope and expectation that Hallman will also advance a new argument about them. And yet, it is here--in shedding light on the contexts rather than the opera--that Hallman is less successful. This may leave some readers with unanswered questions that could have been addressed with the material Hallman presents.

The most intriguing of these is the question of what exactly Hallman's findings add to our understanding of the relationship between antisemitism and liberalism, the two key elements of the book's analysis. Numerous scholars before Hallman--Hannah Arendt, Arthur Hertzberg, and more recently Ronald Schechter--have constructed arguments that seek to determine the contours of this relationship.[2] Focusing on nineteenth-century liberalism rather than the Enlightenment (as Hertzberg and Schechter did), Hallman's research places her in an excellent position to comment on the relationship between liberalism and antisemitism at a particularly crucial moment in their respective histories. As she notes, the 1830s represented a new stage in liberalism's ascendancy, and its proponents in both government and the arts made Jewish equality a priority. Nonetheless, Hallman convincingly shows us, hostility toward Jews not only persisted in this milieu but in some ways began to take on the characteristics of modern antisemitism by blaming the ills of capitalist society on the Jews. The anti-materialist, proto-socialist Jew-hatred of the July Monarchy is clearly distinct from the Enlightenment Jew-hatred of Voltaire, and its emergence just as liberalism was finally gaining power is a fascinating phenomenon that still requires explanation. Yet Hallman does little to account for this development. Although she does a wonderful job showing how both liberalism and antisemitism existed in the world in which *La Juive* was produced, she misses the opportunity to contribute a new analytic perspective to this lively and important discussion.

Even with unanswered questions such as this one, scholars of French history, Jewish history, and historians of the performing arts will nonetheless learn much from Hallman's book about the artistic currents, social trends, and political issues of the July Monarchy. Readers will also certainly appreciate the book's excellent timing, since it provides the tools to appreciate this enigmatic opera at a moment when it is reappearing on our stages.

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## NOTES

[1] A more traditional approach to the question of the "Jewishness" of Halévy's music can be found in Ruth Jordan, *Fromenthal Halévy: His Life and Music (1799-1862)* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1994).

[2] Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968); Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); and Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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