

Title: The Habima Theatre in Prague in 1928 and 1938

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The Habima, formed in 1917 in Moscow, was an itinerant Hebrew-speaking theatre company, whose main purpose was to spread the message of the Jewish national revival with a clear Zionist agenda. The paper examines the troupe's little-known visit to Prague on 24-28 February 1928 (with Ansky's *Dybbuk*, Leivick's *Golem* and Pinski's *Eternal Jew*) and on 24-30 January 1938 (with Ansky's *Dybbuk* and Gutzkow's *Uriel Acosta*) as part of its world/European tours. The theatre's reception, ten years apart, is compared and contrasted on the basis of newspaper reviews from the centre-left *Národní osvobození*, centre-right *Národní listy*, the social-democratic *Právo lidu*, the Communist *Rudé právo*, the liberal *Lidové noviny*, the conservative *Národní politika*, the cosmopolitan *Prager Tagblatt*, the German minority's *Prager Presse*, the assimilationist Jewish minority's *Rozvoj* and the Zionist *Selbstwehr* and *Židovské zprávy*.

On the whole, both the 1928 and 1938 Czechoslovak responses to the Habima's performances reveal just as much about the Habima's art as about the Czechoslovak art and political scene, and about the critics themselves. Although competently written and well balanced, most reviews, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were openly patronising and seldom failed to remind the reader (perhaps not altogether unjustifiably so) that the Czechoslovak theatre was already in many ways well beyond the 'expressionist' trend that had been kept alive by the Habima. Regardless of the differences in their individual opinions (which were usually well informed and well argued) and personal agendas, the critics exhibited a clear dependency on the political divisions in the country. Those writing for the left-of-centre and liberal newspapers were the most enthusiastic about the company, whereas those working for the right of centre and Zionist periodicals often were the most demanding. As for Czechoslovak Communists, they were predictably more impressed with the Habima's 1928 tour, when the troupe had been billed as a Moscow one, than with its subsequent visit, made from the new permanent place of abode in British Mandate Palestine. Still, ultimately, when put together, virtually every critical judgement across the political spectrum did contribute positively towards a more profound understanding of such a complex and challenging phenomenon as the Habima.