Polite Carnival

Purim Festivities within the Sephardi Community of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam

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ABSTRACT

The present work examines the emergence of Western Sephardi theatre in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and its connection to the frameworks of the Jewish carnival, Purim. I focus on how the different aspects—theatrical, carnivalesque, and ritual—of Purim theatre were harmonized and how they interacted with each other. In order to recover the performative character of this singular cultural phenomenon and to flesh out its three main facets, I primarily rely on a Bakhtinian close reading of the first three Sephardi *comedias burlescas* that remained from the end of the seventeenth century: *El perseguido dichoso*, *Comedia famosa de Aman y Mordochay*, and *Comedia famosa dos successos de Jahacob e Essau*. This study demonstrates that their Catholic cultural background allowed Jews to adopt Iberian dramatic forms with relative ease, to recreate them according to their own interests, and finally to develop a semi-professional, more or less institutionalized theatrical structure in the midst of the Jewish carnival. The festive spirit and upside-down character of the carnival provided the perfect platform for theatre to emerge in a culture that generally condemned theatrical practice. Additionally, I argue that these *comedias* had a complex and fruitful relation to Purim rituals which they often evoked, imitated, and parodied, and which promoted the reinforcement of collective identity and communal cohesion. Ultimately, I reveal that the cultivation of this genre can be interpreted as an early sign of modernization and acculturation of the Sephardim of early modern Amsterdam.

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1699: AN INTRODUCTION

Jean Racine, the celebrated French classicist playwright, passed away in 1699. The year literally set an end to a century full of great, canonical theatrical traditions and currents all over Europe, from English Renaissance theatre to Spanish Golden Age drama. In the very same year, two little-known (and, from a global point of view, definitely uncanonical) stage plays, the *Famous Play on Haman and Mordechai*[1] and the *Famous Play on the Deeds of Jacob and Esau*[2] were published in the Netherlands (the former in Spanish in Leiden, and the latter in Portuguese in Delft). Curiously, both were by anonymous authors, and both written for the holiday of Purim, or as it was commonly referred to, the "Jewish Carnival."

The concept of Jewish drama is a rather paradoxical phenomenon, embodying a collision and fusion of opposing ideological currents. On the one hand, theatre, one might say, had been an *institutum non gratum* in Judaism's eyes since antiquity; while on the other hand, Jewish theatre finally emerged and institutionalized in the seventeenth century, and it also appeared to be a part of Sephardi religious rites for the first time in Amsterdam: the two *comedias* mentioned above and the manuscript of *Harassed but Happy* (1685–86) by Isaac de Matatia Aboab[3] are considered the first Sephardi Purim plays,[4] while in Christendom such a relationship between theatre and liturgy had already had a 500-year-long history.[5] Scholarship connects these pieces to the Sephardi community of Amsterdam, a community of Judeo-convert *émigrés* of Iberian origin of the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries to the city

[1] *Comedia famosa de Aman y Mordochay* (Leiden, 1699).
[2] *Comédia famosa dos successos de Jahacob e Essau* (Delft, 1699).
[3] Isaac de Matatia Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso" [1685–1686], EH-48-D-21, 13, Ets Haim Bibliotheek, Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam. The work has been translated to English by Michael D. McGaha: Isaac de Matatia Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," in *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, trans. Michael D. McGaha (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998).
[4] Harm den Boer, *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam* (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 1995), 323.
[5] Evi Butzer, *Die Anfänge der jiddischen Purim shpiln in ihrem literarischen und kulturgeschichtlichen Kontext* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2003), 23.

that was, beyond question, *the* literary-cultural center of European Jewry in the given epoch. This is despite the plays' anonymous authors (except for Aboab's case) and their false places of publication, which must have been the results of the authors and printers' intention to completely distance themselves from such a disreputable literary genre as theatre, as well as to stimulate more interest and attention.

Even today, primarily in Hasidic communities, short amateurish plays are performed within the frameworks of Purim. This post-Toraic holiday is, certainly, among the most joyful and popular festivals in the Jewish lunisolar calendar, celebrated on Adar 14th and 15th, in the last month of the year, around late February or early March, with costumes and plenty of alcohol. It commemorates the fictional events described in the Book of Esther, celebrating Queen Esther's efforts to prevent Jews from extinction in the Persian Empire. Today, partially based on the original biblical narrative, and partially on rabbinical exegesis, four fundamental commandments must be fulfilled on Purim: publicly reciting the foundational story from a *Megillat Ester* (Esther Scroll) in the synagogue; donating to the poor and needy; giving presents to family and friends; and organizing a rich Purim dinner with plenty of alcohol.

Purim is a highly festive, carnivalesque celebration, a holiday filled with infinite jest—and a holiday *of* infinite jest. However, the revelry is implicitly framed by a set of rigid rules to be fulfilled and a two-day-long liturgical structure to follow, as it is, at the very same time, a rather serious religious ritual. Purim is the perfect embodiment of the interference between the most sacred and the extremely profane: prayers, Bible recitations, heavy drinking, mockery, and theatre are concentrated within the same time and space. It is also that time of the year when we say farewell to winter and welcome spring; when nature is about to be reborn, and so are the people. Purim is the opposite of the lachrymose Jewish history-telling:

it celebrates the occasion when Jews' situation changed for the better, thus, turning the world(view) a little bit upside down.

This thesis aims exactly to go upside down and investigate seventeenth-century Sephardi Purim customs in the early modern metropolis of Amsterdam, with a special focus on their performative character, and, in particular, on the community's burlesque theatrical activity during the holiday. My primary questions are as follows: Firstly, what was Purim theatre like? Secondly, how could theatre claim the liturgical center of a religious festivity within Judaism? And finally, how were all the different aspects of the rather curious phenomenon of the Purim play, namely, theatricality, the carnivalesque, and religiosity, negotiated and harmonized?

To be able to conclude in answering these questions, I must look at what sorts of theatrical and carnivalesque customs and practices were in use around that time, based on the limited set of sources, and what peculiarities the community's Iberian New Christian past contributed in shaping such traditions, again, particularly regarding theatre. I do not intend to provide a reconstruction of any specific Purim performance but of general tendencies, since such an attempt would fail due to a performance's ephemeral nature.[6] I also contrast these traditions to gentile (Catholic Spanish and Protestant Dutch), Italian Jewish, and Ashkenazi performance cultures. Despite its many uncovered folkloristic elements, I argue that the strong Catholic Iberian cultural influence shaped and tamed the "new" Sephardi performative culture to such an extent that it very soon shifted from a more extemporaneous and "topsy-turvy" nature (that characterized early modern Ashkenazi *Purimshpiln*) to a more professionalized and institutionalized theatrical form that penetrated Jewish religious life via their Purim *comedias*, completely subverting the long-standing rabbinical taboo against theatrical practice in the religious sphere and turning theatre into an

[6] Laura L. Vidler, *Performance Reconstruction and Spanish Golden Age Drama: Reviving and Revising the* Comedia (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 9.

organic element of Western Sephardi[7] Purim rituals. At this point, it is also crucial to highlight that Purim appeared to be the only time when theatre was tolerated, due to the holiday's subversive character—every other attempt, as we will see, was strictly stifled. I argue that the penetration of drama, which was perceived by normative Judaism as a literary genre full of conceivable Christian and pagan characteristics and overtones, was possible because it was constrained to one single time of the year, and that it lacked virtually any obvious foreign religious contaminations due to the parodic, upside-down character of that very day that washed them all away. Ultimately, as a further-reaching consequence, this led to the emergence and solidification of secular culture among Jews, as the adoption of non-Jewish elements (theatre) can be interpreted as a form of acculturation. Comedy was a genre that they became pioneers of, despite being latecomers and the rearguards of early modern drama at first. Their indirect successors are such renowned theatrical manifestations as modern Yiddish theatre, *fin-de-siècle* cabaret, Broadway, or American Jewish comedy.

Generally, this ex-*converso* theatre was more disconnected from the streets, i.e., the public spaces shared with the non-Jewish inhabitants of Amsterdam, and it was moved into the inner Jewish spaces (such as patios or courtyards of Jewish residences), in order to avoid conflict and further prejudice against the Sephardi community that was very keen on fitting in and being accepted by their Christian cohabitants. They wished to represent themselves as a "well-behaved/polite people" (*gente política*) very similar to their host society.[8]

Furthermore, I demonstrate that Purim, and Purim plays in a Western Sephardi context, bore special importance for the Amsterdam community. They saw their ancestors' own tribulations of the recent past, back in Iberia, in the foundational story of Purim, the biblical

[7] The difference between Eastern and Western Sephardim is that Eastern Sephardim were the exiles of 1492 from Iberia, primarily settling in Ottoman territories, while Western Sephardim were *converso* emigrants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

[8] Yosef Kaplan, "*Gente Política*: The Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam vis-à-vis Dutch Society," in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. Chaya Brasz and Yosef Kaplan (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 29.

narrative about Queen Esther and the salvation of the Jewish people from total annihilation. The "Jewish carnival," like every carnivalesque festivity, functioned as a safety valve in releasing both internal and external tensions (including suppressed fantasies of revenge)[9] that, technically, helped maintain the social *status quo* of the place and period, while it also helped Western Sephardim cope with their traumatic past and express their unique New Jewish/ex-*converso*/Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation identity.

Literature Review

Studies on Purim practices and Purim plays mostly concern the territory of Ashkenaz, the Yiddish-speaking world of Central and Eastern Europe, while the otherwise profoundly studied Western Sephardi communities, particularly that of Amsterdam, remain treated only in passing in this regard. Fortunately, there has been a general attention towards the literary production, including drama, of the ex-*converso* community of the aforementioned Dutch city, that is often referred to as "the New Jerusalem" or "the Jerusalem of the North," expressing the Jewish reputation of Amsterdam in early modern European Jewish history. This urges an even more diverse and extended research of this very community, even by focusing on nuanced questions, since the city shaped and helped diffuse major ideas of the epoch. Purim, despite its extra-Toraic origin, is among the most popular holidays of the Jews, especially, as one would later see, among Western Sephardim, whose identity was at stake in the studied period.

Scholars who have worked on the literary and particularly dramatic production of the Sephardi community of Amsterdam, provide a perfect context for my research with regards to general tendencies, major authors, genres, key issues, and the main literary influence of

[9] Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 276.

the Spanish Golden Age theatre. Unfortunately, other dramatic stimuli that are relevant in the analysis of carnival parodies (such as the mystery plays, *commedia dell'arte*, or the Dutch *farce*) await further extensive scholarly research. Nevertheless, publications appearing from the late 19th century onward are, without question, valuable sources of information that will be presented and revised in greater depth in Chapter I.

First of all, I would like to highlight the works of Meyer Kayserling in the second half of the nineteenth century, who studied Sephardi history,[10] compiled a literary dictionary,[11] and published an early overview of the literature of Western Sephardim, including that of the community of Amsterdam that serves as the cornerstone of later studies.[12] Henry Besso of the first half of the twentieth century gives the first mention of *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau* in a series of articles that, for the first time, deal specifically with the dramatic literature of the Amsterdam community, providing further basis for theatrical investigations.[13] However, his works function only as inventories of literary pieces with brief overviews of their content.

Jonas Andries van Praag, a Dutch hispanist and contemporary to Besso, has published an article that first discusses the two aforementioned *comedias* in relation to each other, in greater detail, providing a brief but helpful philological analysis, and realizing their generic similarities.[14] Among contemporary scholars, Harm den Boer's impressive body of works is of capital importance, primarily his monograph *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam* (The

[10] Meyer Kayserling, *Geschichte der Juden in Portugal* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1867).
[11] Idem., *Biblioteca Española-portugueza-judaica. Dictionnaire bibliographique des auteurs juifs, de leurs ouvrages espagnols et portugais et des oeuvres sur et contre le juifs et le judaïsme* (Strasbourg: Charles J. Trubner, 1890).
[12] Idem., *Sephardim. Romanische Poesien der Juden in Spanien: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Geschichte der spanisch-portugiesischen Juden* (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1859).
[13] Henry V. Besso, "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries," *Bulletin Hispanique* 39 (1937): 215–238. Idem., "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries (suite)," *Bulletin Hispanique* 40 (1938): 33–47. Idem., "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries (III–IV)," *Bulletin Hispanique* 40 (1938): 158–175. Idem., "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries (suite)," *Bulletin Hispanique* 41 (1939): 316–344.
[14] Jonas Andries Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," *Neophilologus* 25 (1940): 12–24, 93–101.

Sephardi literature of Amsterdam) that I heavily rely on, a comprehensive work on all genres that manifested in the literature of Amsterdam ex-*conversos*. He is the first to discuss the cultural relevance of the *comedias* from the perspective of Purim, and the first to categorize *El perseguido dichoso* among Purim plays, based on its literary characteristics. The very recent discovery of the manuscript of a so-far unknown Purim play is also due to his efforts in the field.[15]

Haydee Litovsky does not study Purim plays among the Sephardi plays that she analyzes in her monograph, but her work is also crucial when looking for Spanish theatrical influences in Sephardi drama.[16] Michael McGaha, a specialist of the literary depictions of Joseph, published an introductory study and an English translation of *El perseguido dichoso* in his *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, connecting the play to the long literary tradition of depicting the figure of Joseph in Spanish literature.[17] Emily Colbert Cairns does something similar to McGaha, as she studies Esther in early modern Spanish plays (Jewish and non-Jewish as well) in her recent monograph *Esther in Early Modern Iberia and the Sephardic Diaspora: Queen of the Conversas*.[18]

[15] The piece is an interlude by an anonymous author entitled *Entremez el Parho* (Interlude of the Pharaoh) copied in Amsterdam in 1711 as the first item of a compilation of miscellaneous literary texts called *Livro de entremezes y mais curiozidades* (Book of interludes and other curiosities) and now kept in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Hamburg, cod. hispan. 30. A digitized version is available here: https://digitalisate.sub.uni-hamburg.de/nc/detail.html?tx_dlf%5Bid%5D=25078&tx_dlf%5Bpage%5D=1&cHash=07748318f604b633765f3cf5adf4ade7. Accessed: May 20, 2018.

[16] Haydee Litovsky, *Sephardic Playwrights of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries in Amsterdam* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991).

[17] Michael D. McGaha, *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998).

[18] Emily Colbert Cairns, *Esther in Early Modern Iberia and the Sephardic Diaspora: Queen of the Conversas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Primary Sources

Due to the scarcity of historical sources concerning Purim customs in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, a set of literary texts make up the skeleton of my primary source research which provides a considerable amount of information regarding these Sephardi popular practices. Besides the three aforementioned Purim *comedias, El perseguido dichoso, Aman y Mordochay,* and *Jahacob e Essau,* I also include a printed Purim parodical poem from the very end of the seventeenth century by one Joseph Benjaez, called *Micamoca: Burlesco* (Who is like you? A parody).[19] I use *El perseguido dichoso*'s seventeenth-century manuscript version kept and digitized in the Ets Hayim Library in Amsterdam, since it was printed only just over a century later, while the other two *comedias* were printed shortly after their composition.

Besides these literary sources, in the last section of the thesis, to provide a larger context for my investigation, I use a group of printed publications from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries that belong to the genre of ethnographic accounts on Jews, both by Christian and Jewish authors, in a variety of languages and regions, including Latin, German, Italian, and Dutch texts. From the second half of the seventeenth century, such pieces were often published with illustrations depicting Jewish rituals and everyday customs, some of which capture Purim practices. Finally, items from early modern Dutch Jewish material culture, i.e. illuminated Esther scrolls, also turned out to be valuable sources of information regarding Purim in general, and Sephardi Purim theatre in particular.

[19] Joseph Benjaez, *Micamoca: Burlesco* (Amsterdam, n.d.).

Theory and Methodology

It is not easy to find works that deal with a piece of cultural history of early modern Jewry, not to mention one that focuses on everyday life or folklore, as it is generally difficult to conduct a historical anthropological research focusing on social rituals, such as a carnival, and their significance in Early Modern Studies in general. The interest and enthusiasm in popular traditions (literary, oral, performative, etc.), though, is not recent at all: Peter Burke demonstrates in his monograph *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* eighteenth- and nineteenth-century curiosity and the eventual "discovery of the people" finally led to historical research in the field, starting with folktales and folk music.[20] A foundational figure of the approach and the field, Carlo Ginzburg, also notes that due to "the scarcity of evidence about the behavior and attitudes of the subordinate classes of the past,"[21] it is not surprising that this field has been relatively less productive. David Hall, in the introduction of the more recent book, *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, adds that historical research of this kind also requires the invitation and firm knowledge of other disciplines, such as folklore, literary studies, cultural anthropology, linguistics, etc.[22]

In Jewish Studies concerning early modernity, David Ruderman's *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* is a recent but crucial work that puts sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cultural phenomena on the very same page and reveals how they constitute a tightly intertwined network on a European scale.[23] His comprehensive work is essential in situating my project in the field of early modern Jewish cultural history: however,

[20] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 6.
[21] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Routledge, 1981), xiii.
[22] David Hall, "Introduction," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 14.
[23] David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

he does not deal with sources or topics that would generally be categorized as related to popular culture. The only works I have come across that explicitly use a historical anthropological approach are Roni Weinstein's *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews*, which analyzes marriage rituals in early modern Italy,[24] and his *Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy:* Tiferet Bahurim *by Pinhas Barukh ben Pelatiya Monselice*, a monograph focusing on moralizing literature and the most intimate aspect of Jewish everyday life.[25]

The foundational theoretical and methodological guidelines that I heavily rely on in my work are provided by Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*,[26] a paradigmatic publication to all who decide to conduct investigations in early modern historical anthropology, as the already cited Ginzburg names him as the field's precursor and central figure.[27] In his work, Bakhtin shows how to dig out crucial pieces of information on Renaissance popular culture, primarily the carnival, via a close reading of a literary work from that very period. In my research on early modern Sephardi Purim customs, my key sources were seventeenth-century stage plays that helped me understand and reconstruct such cultural practices among Jews, for which I had to carry out a similar analysis to what Bakhtin had done regarding François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* series, setting up a list of folk genres that manifest in the French author's works, primarily, as he writes, in the midst of the carnival, the concept that lies in the center of Bakhtin's work—and of popular culture. As Purim is, indeed, a carnival-like phenomenon, just not in a Christian but a Jewish context, it is crucial to revise the Russian scholar's thoughts on popular culture and its core, the carnival with all its features, while keeping in mind the major changes that the

[24] Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004).
[25] Idem., *Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy:* Tiferet Bahurim *by Pinhas Barukh ben Pelatiya Monselice* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009).
[26] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
[27] Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xvi.

Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, or the Foucauldian disciplinary apparatus, among other novelties, generated by the seventeenth century.

Bakhtin writes that the carnival is "the parody of extracarnival life,"[28] a world turned upside down, at least for a day or two, when roles are switched, and the prohibited is permitted. In this manner, Queen Esther's narrative is the perfect material for a Jewish carnival, as it recreates an imaginary situation where, for once, a Jewish queen reigns over Persia, and it is not the Jews who have to live in constant fear of persecution and/or extermination but the gentiles. These carnivals (and similar phenomena), according to Bakhtin, stand in stark contrast to official, clerical culture[29] and are dominated by so-called "folk laughter:" a laughter that subverts and annuls norms, a laughter that annihilates its subject by snickering into its face.[30] The author emphasizes that this type of laughter is not a single reaction to a specific situation, but represents a universal spirit of the time of the carnival, when people laugh with and at everyone and everything.[31]

In his time, Bakhtin, as his fellow countryman Aron Gurevich evaluates, shed light on the worldview-character of this concept of folk laughter that no one else had done before—a worldview that was as equally legitimate as the serious, official one.[32] However, Gurevich warns his readers that despite Bakhtin's unquestionable achievements and contributions to the field, there is an important flaw in the structure of his theoretical thinking: namely, his strict binary, oppositional conceptualization of popular and elite culture that do not merge at all. The former is characterized by parody and laughter, while the latter by dogmatism and gloom.[33] In contrast to Bakhtin's ideas, Gurevich shows that the two very much formulated

[28] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 11.
[29] Ibid., 5.
[30] Ibid., 4–7.
[31] Ibid. 11–12.
[32] Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 177.
[33] Ibid., 178.

an organic compound that could not be entirely separated from each other, and such a rigid oppositional view cannot be maintained anymore, since these were two aspects of the same culture that constantly interacted with each other, borrowing and lending cultural elements from and to each other. Gurevich also adds that the carnival was not a total negation and demolition of official culture, but its continuation and affirmation that only temporarily turned its components upside down.[34] Moreover, a carnival was an occasion where every layer of society was represented.[35] These considerations must be kept in mind when connecting Chapters II and III together.

Another key term in the Bakhtinian theoretical system, closely connected to that of folk laughter, is "grotesque realism," a notion that the author studies thoroughly, and defines as an alternate aesthetic attitude of Early Modernity, borrowed from Antiquity, in which the body, with all its otherwise considered disgusting functions, plays a central role.[36] As Bakhtin draws up the core genres and manifestations of the voice of the masses with the help of Rabelais, the abundance of images of feasting, drinking, sex, urinating, defecating, and other aspects of the "bodily lower stratum" is, indeed, striking, to which he devotes two enormous chapters in his monograph, thus demonstrating that grotesque realism is one of the leading threads in non-official, alternative expressions of culture that one has to look out for when studying literary texts in order to reconstruct early modern popular practices. Gurevich adds to Bakhtin's thoughts that the brilliance of grotesque realism is that it fuses both the serious and the comic aspects of life together by finding the funny in the scary—and this is what the carnival or a *danse macabre* are all about.[37] Gurevich even goes on to suggest that one should call grotesque realism the real worldview of the era, not folk laughter, as he argues that the mixture of the two contradictory components, the comic and

[34] Ibid. 179–180.
[35] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 25.
[36] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 19–28.
[37] Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 195.

the serious, resulting in grotesque situations, is a constant feature of Medieval and Renaissance culture.[38]

Bakhtin classifies the genres intro three main categories, all of which, though, are closely intertwined and cannot be clearly distinguished from one another: ritual spectacles (such as the carnival itself), literary parodies, and manifestations of familiar speech (abusive language, profanities, oaths, etc.).[39] As an addition, or aid, I use Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* as well to help me detect additional popular genres that did not leave hints in Rabelais's works, since Burke, as a historian, used non-literary historical documents and visual material when writing his comprehensive monograph.

The Bakhtinian findings concerning customs and performativity would be, then, situated in a broader theoretical context of the anthropology of performance, a subfield of the anthropology of experience (as a performance is a kind of "structure of experience")[40] that helps me interpret the meaning and place of theatre, ritual, carnival, and their tight connection in Western Sephardi society. Here, I primarily rely on Victor Turner's body of works, as well as publications by Turner's wife Edith Turner, and his close friend Richard Schechner—the three pioneers in the aforementioned field of study.

For Turner, man is a *Homo performans*, a "self-performing animal,"[41] and (twisting out the famous Geertzian saying) culture is "a play a society acts to itself about itself."[42] These two quotations might as well be the epigraphs of this work, as they express how much we can learn about a community by studying their performance culture, since when putting on a play, they reflect back on and define themselves, too. They are not only the subjects but

[38] Ibid., 206–208.
[39] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 5.
[40] Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," in idem., *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 63.
[41] Victor Turner, "The Anthropology of Performance," in idem., *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 81.
[42] Victor Turner, "Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting," in idem., *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 104.

also the objects of the performance, not to mention the famous Turnerian concept of social drama (social performance) and its connection to actual, aesthetic drama (cultural performance), aided by the Schechnerian loophole model expressing the dynamic relation of the two:[43] the scholar warns us to read performances (either communal rituals or "aesthetic dramatic processes") together with the sociocultural context of the given place and time, as the two are in a rather intense and constant dialogue.[44] A play does not simply mirror social breaches, traumas, or cataclysms, but it also has the power to have an impact, stimulate discourse, and perhaps even generate solutions. This is, indeed, a crucial notion with regards to Sephardi Purim plays that do reflect on discourses on ex-*converso* history, crises, and identity.

Turner argues that, similar to rites of passage, every performance occurs in liminality (a term he borrows from Arnold van Gennep), i.e., in a special place and time that stands in between two specific states of being (either individual or communal), when, according to the author, the most precious values of a community come to light.[45] The same way, every ritual (such as Purim practices) has a special time and place to be performed at. It is an orchestra-like interplay of all senses, in a way being a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that "serves to communicate information about a culture's most cherished values"[46] and functions as a "social glue."[47] In a ritual, every minute detail has a specific purpose: however, the prescriptive rules and formalities do not fill in the occasion, they only frame it. It is the human experience of actions, interactions, and communality that make a ritual.[48] Theatrical performances are quite similar to communal rituals,[49] though, generally, theatre has not been not considered a

[43] Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," 74.
[44] Victor Turner, "Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film, and Spectacle in Cultural Performance," in idem., *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 28–29.
[45] Ibid., 102.
[46] Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," 79.
[47] Ibid., 82.
[48] Ibid., 79.
[49] Turner, The Anthropology of Performance," 93.

ritual performance since around the industrial revolution: it only resembles many of its characteristics, thus not being liminal but only *liminoid*. However, in the case of early modern Purim plays, theatre performance was, indeed, a unique type of ritual or mock ritual, as it mirrored the *megillah* recitation and evoked many other elements of the liturgy, such as the festive dinner. When separating theatre from ritual, scholars emphasize that in the case of the former a differentiation of the audience and the performers occurs, while in the case of the latter there is no clear borderline.[50] While Sephardi Purim performances very much resembled proper, institutionalized theatre, I demonstrate that they still maintained many of the characteristics that made them a ritual: they were a communal experience that allowed and encouraged audience participation, and they were not as professionalized as a proper Spanish stage production.

Richard Schechner highlighted that most scholars dealing with performance studies ignore both the role the audience has[51] and the long sequence of phases that surround a performance. He correctly reckons that training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-ups before, and cool-downs and aftermaths after a performance, which stand in parallel with rites of passage, also provide valuable information on a culture.[52] Therefore, as much as my sources allow, I also intend to pay attention to questions of preparation and aftermath in the following chapters.

As already indicated in the Bakhtinian definition, the carnival is always interpreted as a safety valve within society, just like certain rituals or, as we have just seen, theatre. In the peculiar case of Sephardi Purim, a Purim *comedia* cannot be defined only one way or another: it is all three in one. It is carnivalesque, it is on stage, and it is an organic part of the holiday liturgy, which makes its effect even more powerful. Having the function of releasing

[50] Turner, "Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting," 112.
[51] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 5–6.
[52] Ibid., 16.

stress out of the community's life and seemingly subverting the long-standing power structure, it is, in fact, always a reinforcement of the existing *status quo*. As Stephen Greenblatt puts it in the context of Shakespeare, it always involves "the powerful containment of that subversion."[53] Although it does not change the situation of Jews, Purim festivities, I believe, do create a sense of *communitas* among its participants (ideally, the entire body of Amsterdam Sephardim), which not only provides pleasure for them by "sharing common experiences with one's fellows,"[54] but also (re)generates a stronger communal cohesion.[55] It thus creates a stronger sense of collectivity, or "togetherness,"[56] and group identity, which, in the case of ex-*conversos* in the seventeenth century, when they had to redefine who they were and what Jewishness and Judaism meant after two centuries of persecution in Iberia, is of extreme significance: "Drama heals; art cures; music soothes; the novel is therapeutic. Getting to know oneself is to put oneself on the way to healing oneself."[57]

Thesis Outline

In Chapter I, I provide a brief overview of late medieval and early modern *converso* history until the establishment and the Golden Age of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, contextualizing it within wider Western European, both Jewish and gentile frameworks. I deal with such key topics as the forced conversions, the infamous expulsion of 1492, the Inquisitions of Spain and Portugal, the emergence of a Western Sephardi diaspora, the reinvention of Judaism in their midst, the Dutch civil war, and, finally, the minority politics of the Netherlands of the seventeenth century concerning the newly

[53] Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion," *Glyph* 8 (1981): 53.
[54] Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 2.
[55] Ibid., 28.
[56] Ibid., 4.
[57] Turner, "The Anthropology of Performance," 106.

arrived conversos/soon to-be Jews. During the discussion, particular interest is paid to the cultural "hybridity" of the community, to quote Homi Bhabha's term applied to Jewish Studies by Moshe Rosman,[58] a phenomenon that I demonstrate via the example of the focal subject of this thesis, namely, Sephardi drama and theatre. A significant emphasis is put on the unique cultural transmission that can be observed in the seventeenth-century dramatic scene of Amsterdam where Spanish, Dutch, and Jewish literary trends collided and interacted.

Chapter II is devoted to the introduction of the three *comedias* and to all the relevant issues raised by the authors in the pieces' paratexts (in terms of Gérard Genette): the title pages, the dedications, and the endnotes (the appendix of *Aman y Mordochay*, due to its content, is dealt with in greater depth in the subsequent chapter). I discuss their publication history, with regards to the question of censorship in Amsterdam that I connect with their social settings, namely, the peculiar literary academies, the wealthy patrons with artistic affinities, and the identity and extension of their target audience. Here, I deal with the problem of authorship and anonymity in the period, as well as the conceptual opposition of vernacularity and *belles-lettres* among ex-*conversos*. Additionally, I identify the genre of the three plays as *comedia burlesca*, a parody of the Spanish serious *comedia*, with an excursus to all their immediate precursors and literary influences, including Spanish Baroque drama, mystery plays, *commedia dell'arte*, and Dutch Protestant edifying literature, and I present the serious generic elements of the works here, since the explicit intention of the authors was to publish high-quality and successful stage plays in the manner of the great Spanish playwrights of the *Siglo de Oro*.

Chapter III focuses on the plays' comic devices and their carnivalesque and folkloristic background with roots in popular culture. Here, the guidelines by Bakhtin become of

[58] Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?* (Oxford, Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 82–110.

extreme importance, as I look for traces, hints, and references to the more popular registers of Sephardi culture, as well as to theatrical activity, demonstrating that the three *comedias* are, indeed, valuable sources with regards to Jewish folklore, particularly to Purim carnivalesque customs that can be reconstructed owing to the preservation of these plays. These stage plays, thus, represent a semi-popular stratum of early modern Sephardi literature that was not rigidly dissected from the elite circles at all, as they were, apparently, involved in both the production (sponsorship and authorship) and the consumption (readership, spectatorship) of such plays and their actual performances staged during the epoch.

While Chapter I provides a non-Jewish dramatic literary context for my research, Chapter IV contextualizes the Amsterdam plays within early modern Purim traditions, to see whether and how ex-*converso* practices, particularly of performance and theatre, differed from those in Ashkenaz or Italy, the latter being the birthplace of modern Jewish playwriting. Here, I invite additional, supplementary sources to my study, including printed documents, visual sources, and sacral artifacts (*Judaica*) from material culture as well, to put together an even more nuanced picture of Western Sephardi Purim customs. I conclude that the Catholic Iberian cultural background led to the emergence and institutionalization of Jewish theatre in Amsterdam that adapted biblical narratives within a liturgical sphere in a rather parodic, upside-down manner conserving traditional Jewish practices—that were, nevertheless, disciplined by the idea of a *gente política*.

I. SETTING THE STAGE

At the dawn of Early Modernity, Jews were practically banned from Western Europe, although it did not mean that they suddenly vanished without a trace from that corner of the continent; it only meant that the practice of Judaism was officially forbidden, and that its practitioners could expect persecution orchestrated by the religious authorities. At the end of the fifteenth century, in their last resort in the West, the Iberian Peninsula, Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity, expelled from Spain, and then harassed in Portugal up to the point where masses of recently-baptized New Christians decided to leave the country to look for a more peaceful and tolerant environment.

From the late sixteenth century onward, New Christian colonies appeared all over Western Europe, as well as in the Ottoman Empire and the colonial world, including major (and soon-to-be major) port cities, such as Hamburg or Amsterdam. The latter soon became a cultural and economic center for world Jewry, especially since it was the only enclave in the region where Judaism could be practiced openly. This chapter is devoted to the reconstruction of the cultural image and life of the "New Jews" of Amsterdam, with a special focus on their uniquely hybrid character and their literary-theatrical output in the cosmopolitan port city where Jews very clearly functioned as cultural transmitters, principally between the Iberian and Dutch literary scenes, which provided the pretext for the appearance of the first three parodistic Purim plays written by Western Sephardim: *El perseguido dichoso* by Isaac de Matatia Aboab from 1686 and two anonymous pieces printed in 1699, the *Comedia famosa de Aman y Mordochay* and the *Comedia famosa dos successos de Jahacob e Essau*.

I.1. Anchoring at a Safe Haven

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 is perhaps the most emblematic event in the history of the emergence of Sephardi diasporas in the early modern period. Tensions between Jews and the Christian society at large had mounted throughout the process of the Reconquista, partially because the former gained an ever-growing economic hegemony.[59] Violent anti-Jewish events often culminated in forced baptisms that eventually resulted in the emergence of a new socio-religious stratum of so-called New Christians (*cristianos nuevos*/*cristãos novos*), a stratum that virtually did not belong to either Iberian Jewry or Christendom: they were considered inbetweeners standing on the frontier between the other two. In primary sources, as well as in scholarly literature, they are also referred to as *conversos*, *anusim*, crypto-Jews, and, more offensively, *marranos* ("pigs"), with the first two terms implying the enforced nature of their conversion, while the latter two terms are used for that subgroup of New Christians who secretly continued to practice Judaism to the extent that their circumstances allowed them, primarily by the hearth. Such aforementioned events became so frequent, the vicious activities of the newly established Spanish Inquisition (without papal approval) became gradually so intense, and anti-Jewish sentiments became so strong and deep-rooted among the authorities and a significant portion of Spain's inhabitants by 1492, that the expulsion of every Jew who had not converted yet was anything but surprising in retrospect.

Initially, Portugal welcomed those who wished to find refuge there, but due to a dynastic marriage between the two Iberian sovereignties the Portuguese policy of Jewish immigrants changed radically to a tone similar to the Spanish, which reached a crescendo

[59] Renée Levine Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

over the next century, after Spain technically annexed Portugal.[60] The forced conversion of Portuguese Jews to Christianity *en masse* in 1497 was just the beginning of a prolonged witch hunt conducted by the Portuguese Inquisition that followed the mechanisms of its Spanish counterpart, only with more eagerness to persecute every New Christian that looked slightly suspicious—and all of them did in the eyes of the inquisitors.[61] However, scholars concluded that some *conversos* practiced Judaism in a clandestine manner, while others followed Catholic customs and rituals. Although the number of each group cannot be estimated, there was, indeed, a significant number of New Christians who devotedly and piously practiced Christianity.[62] As carrying on with a normal life became tremendously difficult for many, due to the constant harassment by the Holy Office, as well as to the hardships of finding employment in many sectors because of the freshly invented concept of blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*/*limpeza de sangue*) that allowed Old Christians exclusively to pursue certain professions (usually governmental and clerical), more and more Portuguese New Christians "seeped" out of the country.[63]

The constant waves of *converso* emigration catalyzed the establishment of a great multitude of new Sephardi communities that eventually concentrated in three major sites: the Ottoman Middle East, Northwestern European port cities, and the colonial world.[64] Among these, Amsterdam quickly grew into the most significant Western Sephardi center throughout the early modern period in Europe, and, simultaneously but not coincidentally, a focal point of the emergent world trade system. Most probably, the arrival of the first *conversos*, followed by a number of etiological myths, can be dated to the late 1580s and

[60] Ibid., 65.
[61] Ibid., 61.
[62] Miriam Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: The Ambiguous Boundaries of Self-Definition," *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (Fall, 2008): 71.; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 34.
[63] Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 86–89.
[64] Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 34.

early 1590s,[65] a time period during which the seven Protestant United Provinces unleashed the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) against the Catholic Spanish Habsburgs and ultimately gained independence from them, unlike their southern brethren who remained under Habsburg rule.

Many *conversos* stayed in the city of Antwerp—but only temporarily. It still belonged to the Spanish Netherlands and was one of the most important port cities of the sixteenth century. Its fame, due to the war and the increasing New Christian immigration as a great economic factor and contributor to its competitor, Amsterdam, was over very soon.[66] As is rather well-known, the nascent Dutch Republic adopted a policy of religious toleration, and Amsterdam indeed fulfilled the metaphor of a "safe port" to anchor at.[67] Thus, this new homeland allowed New Christians to leave Christianity behind and convert to Judaism, the religion of their forebears.[68]

Initially, the "New Jews," as they are often called in the literature, established three distinct communities that in 1639 merged into one unified conglomerate, the Talmud Tora community, the symbolic manifestation of which was the inauguration of the impressive Esnoga synagogue in 1675 that was meant to represent Sephardi *grandeur*. They organized themselves just like every other traditional Jewish community at the time and put a large emphasis on abiding to the rules of the *halakha*. During the early period of the Sephardi community, the members established all the fundamental organizations of Jewish religious and everyday life: they opened a cemetery and established several institutions, including the Hevra Kadisha (Burial Society), a Jewish school, a dowry society, and additional charitable

[65] Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 72.
[66] Ibid., 70.
[67] Colbert Cairns, *Esther in Early Modern Iberia*, 128.
[68] When discussing this issue, scholars suggest that one should avoid using the word "return," because the generations in dispute had, in fact, never been Jewish before stepping on Netherlandish soil: they were raised and educated as Catholics. See for instance: Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 76.

organizations in the 1610s and 1620s.[69] Religious life, in the beginning, was organized with some external help, as the Sephardim asked foreign communities to send practicing Sephardi (and, at times, Ashkenazi)[70] rabbis from Venice, Livorno, and Salonika. However, the fact that the very first community they came across was none other than themselves defined their unique path toward the reinvention of Judaism (often following Catholic agendas) solely as a religious affiliation, and "not an all-embracing way of life," i.e. not something that entered and dominated all spheres of life.[71] Consequently, religious values and questions were restricted within the austere walls of the synagogue, where strict, honorable, and decent behavior (*decorum*) was expected, similar to Catholic and Calvinist service.[72]

Regarding the lay leadership, the wealthiest and most influential members of the community made up the secular governing board, the *Ma'amad*, following Venetian example.[73] The institution consisted of six so-called *parnasim* and a treasurer who voted on their own successors twice a year, as well as on the appointment of the rabbis (*hahamim*).[74] This group of quasi-oligarchs eventually gained such wide-ranging power that it even had authority to decide on religious affairs, concerning both small-scale issues, such as a divorce, and large-scale ones, like censorship or excommunication (*herem*), the latter of which it used with remarkable frequency. This interference very much bothered the rabbinate that experienced its loss of authority as a general crisis within Judaism—in fact, all over the continent.[75]

[69] Ibid., 73.
[70] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 15.
[71] Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), 17.
[72] Yosef Kaplan, "The Portuguese Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century: Between Tradition and Change," in *Society and Community*, ed. Abraham Haim (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1991), 168–170.
[73] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 17.
[74] Yosef Kaplan, "The Jews in the Republic until about 1750: Religious, Cultural, and Social Life," in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, eds. J.C.H. Blom et al. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 122.
[75] Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 97.

It is a common perception that all members of the Sephardi community were extremely wealthy. However, poverty was quite extensive even within a society that was full of powerful magnates and successful *émigré* merchants, though the elite tried very hard to suppress it and to communicate a much more favorable image of themselves toward gentiles. They even donated large sums of money to charity organizations and eventually invented the category of *despachados*—those poor Sephardim who were sent to colonies (first to Palestine, then to the Caribbean) to be poor somewhere else.[76]

It must be emphasized that despite the Dutch Republic being a land of tolerance, the limits of Jewish autonomy were never precisely defined, and toleration of the public practice of Judaism was never officially or formally sanctioned in any state document. However, *de facto* recognition came in 1612, the year when authorities allowed Jews to build their first synagogue in Amsterdam.[77] Hence, the Netherlands was the westernmost country in the early seventeenth century where Judaism was tolerated. Dutch cities could decide individually whether they would wish to let Jewish subjects through their gates, which a few (besides Amsterdam) did. However, in due course, almost all Jewry concentrated in Amsterdam, where the municipal authorities expressed their expectation of appropriate behavior[78] and the obedience to Dutch law in exchange to their relative freedom.[79]

The Portuguese Jews prospered in Amsterdam, the new cosmopolitan center of international commerce. The city became known to Europe as the "Venice of the North;" and "Jerusalem of the North" or "New Jerusalem" to European Jews in particular, due to its new cultural significance and reputation among them.[80] Here, because of the relative

[76] Yosef Kaplan, "Bom Judesmo: The Western Sephardic Diaspora," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 649.
[77] Daniel M. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of 17th-Century Amsterdam* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 12.
[78] This consisted of only three restrictions based on the general regulations proposed by Hugo Grotius in 1616: Jews were not allowed to 1. publish anti-Christian treatises, 2. proselytize; 3. have sexual relations with Christian women. Ibid., 13.
[79] Ibid., 24.
[80] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 13.

tolerance and the economic stimuli, Sephardim developed a unique identity and a thriving cultural life, despite the fact that they numbered not more than a few thousand—an amount that was quickly surpassed by the Ashkenazim in the course of the eighteenth century.[81]

I.2. On Cultural Hybridity

In his recent monograph *How Jewish Is Jewish History?*, Moshe Rosman refers to the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam as the representatives *par excellence* of an essentially hybrid culture[82]—a term that he borrows from postcolonial cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha—which he defines as a byproduct of, primarily but not exclusively, a hierarchic relationship between a local Jewish community and its surrounding, hegemonic gentile culture, which is characterized as a fusion of cultural elements of the two.[83] Rosman adds that Amsterdam Sephardim developed their identity and unique culture *after* leaving their Iberian homeland, their original hegemonic cultural sphere, taking this fundamentally non-Jewish "native culture" abroad and fusing it with new (or, perhaps more accurately, old-new) elements that resulted in their self-identification as "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation,"[84] an amalgam of Jewish culture and Portuguese ethnic identity.[85]

Their Iberian Catholic past was, naturally, a defining element of Portuguese Jewish identity, since all who arrived at Amsterdam were raised and educated as Christians, and had tight connections, everyday interactions, and complicated entanglements with Iberian culture (including the key literary product of this period: Spanish *Siglo de Oro* drama), which

[81] Jonathan Israel estimates that the highest number was ca.3000 in 1700, when the Ashkenazi community's populations was already around 3200 individuals which then multiplied to 9000 by 1725. See: Jonathan I. Israel, "The Republic of the United Netherlands until about 1750: Demography and Economic Activity," in *The History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, eds. J.C.H. Blom et al. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002), 100.
[82] Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?*, 102.
[83] Ibid., 97.
[84] Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation," 72.
[85] Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?*, 102–103.

was manifested in their vernacular (Portuguese), the language of their *belles-lettres* (Spanish), fashion (they mimed the Iberian aristocratic style at the time of their departure), hobbies (such as gambling or consuming coffee), cultural institutions (literary academies, theatre), etc.[86] Their Iberianness had cemented, which led Western Sephardim to develop a Portuguese ethnic consciousness so strong that they never even referred to themselves as Jews but as Portuguese. Even their external identifications were similar: in port cities, "Portuguese" simply meant "Sephardi," which was also an "abbreviation" for "members" or "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation."[87] To this significant component came Judaism—or rather, a reinvented Judaism. *Conversos* had had little to no connection to or profound knowledge of Jewish religion or liturgical practice due to the strict anti-Jewish milieu (featuring the infamous activities of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions) in which they had lived. Therefore, when converting to Judaism, they practically had to rebuild it from scratch, while they could still maintain the aforementioned defining Iberianness, due to the fact that geographically there were no other Jewish communities nearby that could have influenced or altered their (self-)image.[88]

A fundamental element in the religious thought and practice of New Jews was the relative (though not complete)[89] lack of rabbinic tradition and a salient dominance of biblical literature, which was mainly attributable to the fact that the only "Jewish" scriptural item they could carry on to read without persecution in Iberia was the Bible itself. Therefore, the Scripture became their cornerstone and "point of reintegration into Judaism."[90] Additionally, I argue that their Dutch Protestant environment might have also reinforced the choice to base

[86] Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 78.
[87] Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation," 74.; Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano, "Plural Identities: The Portuguese New Christians," *Jewish History* 25, no. 2 (2011): 145–146.
[88] Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 74.
[89] Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation," 68.
[90] Harm den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes de Amsterdam y otras colonias en Europa Occidental," in *La Biblia en la literatura española II. Siglo de Oro*, ed. Rosa Navarro Durán (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, Fundación San Millán de la Cogolla, 2008), 343: el puente para la reintegración en el judaísmo.

themselves on the Holy Scripture, since one of the foundations of Protestant theology was the return to the Bible. Despite the apparent antagonism between a Catholic Iberian cultural heritage and Judaism, Amsterdam Sephardim found perfect ways to fuse and harmonize the two without any conflict.

In addition to the two dominant components, Iberianness and Judaism, Iberian historians argue that New Jews' diplomatic and economic activities were another defining factor of Amsterdam ex-*converso* identity and intercommunal cohesive power, particularly among the wealthy, who constituted a "pseudo-nobility," as Bodian characterizes them.[91] Within the professional sphere, they even gained yet another very telling name: the men of affairs (*homens de negócios*).[92] Sephardi enclaves, including (and, perhaps, led by) the one in Amsterdam, maintained an extensive commercial network that reached all corners of the known world for the purpose of conducting business, and, obviously, having political impact as well.[93]

Miriam Bodian argues that the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam developed a unique collective Jewish identity that was distinct from all other self-definitions of Jewishness in the early modern period. They characterized themselves in terms of their ethnic origins, rather than their religious confession, as a separate nation (*nação*)—an outcome of the community's collective memory of their forebears' persecution in their homeland of Iberia, the clandestine practice of Judaism there, the ever-growing difficulties of knowledge transmission, their subsequent exile from the peninsula, constant eastward migration, and finally, their resettlement in the Netherlands. As Bodian notes, these were both traumatic and unique experiences that that solely they shared and that fed into their mythical foundation and their survivor-image, making them distinct, though not completely separated

[91] Miriam Bodian, "'Men of the Nation': The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present* no. 143 (May, 1994): 62.
[92] Melammed, *A Question of Identity*, 62.
[93] Pulido Serrano, "Plural Identities," 137–140.

and exclusive, from all the other "old" Sephardi communities living primarily in the Mediterranean.[94]

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi also asserts that these traumatic experiences were significant factors in forging a new identity,[95] highlighting that ironically (and counterproductively) the Inquisitorial endeavors to put as many New Christians on trial as possible did not weaken but, on the contrary, strengthened their intracommunal cohesion and created a firm sense of solidarity and companionship in distress among *conversos*.[96] Furthermore, their forced distance from the Iberian motherland generated a peculiar diaspora identity as well, as Jonathan Ray argues,[97] that must be differentiated from the more ancient diaspora consciousness of all Jews who connected themselves to and lamented about the land of Palestine. This did not mean, though, that Sephardim did not also pay homage and respect to their host society and its government: Jews, as it has been a long tradition, included prayers for the authorities in their liturgy, and some of the leading figures of the community, such as Menasseh ben Israel, even identified with Dutch myths and national symbols.[98]

All these impulses and cultural stimuli resulted in the emergence of a culturally and economically successful multilingual community which, in order to maintain its status, cherished close and regular connections to its host society. It has been accepted among many scholars that the Sephardim of seventeenth-century Amsterdam absorbed hardly any cultural and/or linguistic elements from Dutch culture; rather, their "hollandization," that is, the adoption of the Dutch language and a more significant cultural impact coming from their host society, happened only in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Miriam Bodian also

[94] Bodian, "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation," 72.
[95] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court*, 43.
[96] Ibid., 40.
[97] Jonathan Ray, "New Approaches to the Jewish Diaspora: The Sephardim as a Sub-Ethnic Group," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series 15, no. 1 (Fall, 2008): 21.
[98] Benjamin Fisher, "For God and Country: Jewish Identity and the State in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," in *Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of David B. Ruderman*, eds. Richard I. Cohen et al. (Cincinnati, Pittsburgh: Hebrew Union College Press, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 59.

writes that the first encounter with a Northern, Protestant culture amounted to a "culture shock" that could not be more different from Iberian cultures, which also reinforced New Jews' own sense of collectiveness and distinct Iberian diaspora identity in the making.[99] In addition, Harm den Boer observes that Protestant pastors often pressed Jews to convert to Christianity, which eventually stimulated the birth of an extensive and firm apologetic literary corpus.[100] However, one can also find convincing counterevidence against Bodian's standpoint: the sympathetic attitude of the aforementioned Menasseh ben Israel (and others) toward Dutch culture; the inevitable necessity to speak the vernacular decently in order to maintain a vibrant economic life; the adoption of Dutch gothic handwriting;[101] and the Sephardi contribution to Dutch theatre. Additionally, as an example, we will see the collection of Dutch riddles attached to *Aman y Mordochay* that were perhaps even used and chanted during Purim festivities.

Sephardim in seventeenth-century Amsterdam left a profound impression on Europeans. Their appearance, knowledge, economic proficiency, and multilingual character made them *the* true cultural commuters and "interpreters" who, as living media, were able to promote and facilitate intercultural encounters and exchange. One of their main, though lesser-known, achievements was the export of Iberian culture outside Iberian spheres of interest. Sephardim not only kept Iberian literature alive among themselves, in the midst of Netherlandish Protestants, but also exported its goods to Dutch culture as well, stimulating a lively theatrical scene in Amsterdam.

[99] Bodian, "'Men of the Nation'," 65–66.
[100] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 325.
[101] Swetchinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 284.

I.3. Sephardi Poets' Society

The literary expressions and manifestations of a "split" ex-*converso* identity[102] have long been the focus of scholarly investigations within the field of Sephardi Studies, alongside the strong influence of Iberian literary themes, styles, forms, and the languages in which they produced such an enormous corpus: Spanish and occasionally Portuguese.[103] Here, I provide an overview of the main tendencies that were present within the Amsterdam Sephardi literary scene, with a special focus on their performative culture, primarily based on the monograph *La literatura sefardí en Amsterdam* by today's foremost scholar of Amsterdam Sephardi literature, Harm den Boer.

Despite the many attempts to interpret Sephardi culture exclusively through the lens of the series of tragic and impactive events in Iberia, their literature, as Harm den Boer demonstrates, cannot be categorized as a classic representative of exile literature because of the lack of a lachrymatory (or Ovidian) nostalgia or the otherwise typical *saudade* over Iberia.[104] On the contrary: by the seventeenth century, they had conceptualized their emigration as "a new and happy exodus" from the peninsula,[105] which paved the way for the development of a rather optimistic and unique literary tone through which it became possible for them to address a great variety of topics already present in European trends and add their own interpretive layers to them. Their resigned or Plutarchic nostalgia, besides dedicated to Iberianness as a whole, often collectively yearned for the primordial homeland, Jerusalem as well.[106]

[102] Jonas Andries van Praag, "Almas en litigio," *Clavileño* 1 (1950): 17–24.
[103] Paloma Díaz-Mas and Harm den Boer, "Presentación: Fronteras e interculturalidad entre los sefardíes occidentales," in *Fronteras e interculturalidad entre los sefardíes occidentales*, eds. Paloma Díaz-Mas and Harm den Boer (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006), 8.
[104] Harm den Boer, "Exile in Sephardic Literature of Amsterdam," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35, no. 2 (2001): 187.
[105] Ibid., 194.
[106] Ibid., 196.

Sephardi literature has often been conceptualized either as a marginal copycat and a late rearguard of Spanish *Siglo de Oro* literature, or as a peripheral early bird of modern Jewish literature. However, the cultural production of Amsterdam Sephardim cannot be characterized as epigonic but as high quality and abundant. Its uniqueness primarily lies in the peculiar religious and ethnic composite identity of its producers.[107] On the pages of many Sephardi literary works, one can observe the curious fusion of Iberianness (that is strongly associated with Catholicism) and Jewish culture without making a problem about it. Even quintessentially Jewish texts are pervaded by the aforementioned collective attachment to Iberian culture and the land in general, not to mention the literary forms these texts are molded into.[108] Partially due to their multifaceted identity with affinity toward Judaism, Iberianness, and commerce, two gargantuan, though often intertwining, categories can be circumscribed within the body of works: confessional (which is more abundant) and profane literature.[109] The former consists of didactic prose (manuals and introductory studies to Judaism for a converso readership wishing to learn the basics of Jewish religion), bibles, prayer books, and ethical edifying literature; the latter is a category of all kinds of works that focused on secular topics from mythology through history to love poetry. Although Sephardi literature in Amsterdam is so extensive and multifaceted that it cannot be reduced to one single aspect or issue that it principally addresses, according to Harm den Boer, a strong desire to integrate and to be accepted can be teased out from a great number of texts.[110]

Sephardi literature was produced primarily in the Spanish and Portuguese languages, and secondarily in Hebrew, as it mainly functioned as the language of liturgy, just like in most Jewish communities. However, the three were never truly separated from each other and devoted to a single, neatly defined function each. In fact, one can find literary pieces

[107] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 17–18.
[108] Ibid., 22–23.
[109] Ibid., 19.
[110] Ibid., 27.

written in Portuguese and Hebrew in all three main genres (drama, epic, lyric), as well as Bible translations, prayer books, and religious manuals in Spanish that comprised the majority of Sephardi literary products.[111] The most notable example of Spanish Bible translations is the Ferrara Bible, originally translated and published in 1553 in Italy, and which had six later editions in Amsterdam between 1611–1762.[112] As an aside regarding language use: by the end of the eighteenth century, the tables would turn, and Spanish would lose its role as the principal medium of literature. Its place would be taken by Hebrew, the new *Kultursprache* of Amsterdam Sephardim, alongside French, which throughout Early Modernity, developed into a *lingua franca* and an international language of the cultured and educated.[113]

Literary production primarily evolved in academies, the format of which followed that of Spanish literary societies, whose members were intellectuals, entrepreneurial merchants, and aristocrats.[114] Although we know very little about how exactly they worked, probably due to their impermanence,[115] these cultural institutions facilitated intellectual exchange among literary enthusiasts, just like in their Spanish and Dutch counterparts. Our primary source of information on the academies is the renowned Sephardi author Miguel de Barrios himself, who emphasizes that these literary societies often organized festive events and sometimes, with their poems and extemporaneous sketches, served as the main spectacle at social gatherings, such as wedding parties.[116] Within these circles, it was common that profane and sacral topics merged both in intellectual discussions and written pieces, which

[111] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 321.
[112] Ibid., 317.
[113] Shlomo Berger and Irene E. Zwiep, "Epigones and the Formation of New Literary Canons: Sephardi Anthologies in Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 40 (2007–2008): 150.
[114] Adam Sutcliffe, "The Conservative Hybridity of Miguel de Barrios," in *Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of David B. Ruderman*, ed. Richard I. Cohen et al. (Cincinnati, Pittsburgh: Hebrew Union College Press, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 209.
[115] Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 288.
[116] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 143.

very often served only *l'art pour l'art* purposes, meaning that through the large variety and density of themes and motifs (from religious to mythological and beyond) evoked within a single piece of literature authors could express their educated and cultured personality, as well as their refined taste.[117] The only academy that we know more of is the so-called Academia de los Floridos that had 39 members, most of whom were indeed bankers and diplomats (including one of its prominent founders, the influential ambassador Manuel de Belmonte) or held various administrative and managerial positions, such as judge, maintainer, financier, and secretary,[118] which might help us recover the composition of other literary societies in the Portuguese Jewish community.

Their eighteenth-century descendants were the so-called fraternities, imitating similar Dutch literary societies, which produced a large amount of mostly average Hebrew poetry anthologies, as Shlomo Berger and Irene Zwiep evaluate them.[119] Harm den Boer speaks of general cultural decline here, which was due to the loosening ties to Iberia and the gradual "hollandization" of the community, and slowly, salon culture took over the space academies would fade away from.[120] However, Shlomo Berger and Irene Zwiep evaluate the shift differently: despite the questionable quality of eighteenth-century pieces, they reached a major milestone by integrating a new series of secular themes and foreign poetic forms into Hebrew literature with great ease, forming a highly multifaceted Hebrew canon that incorporated antique Hebrew classics and contemporary epigones side by side.[121] I interpret this phenomenon as a continuation and expansion of the community's seventeenth-century literary activity (not in quantity, though), as New Jews had been freely experimenting with non-Jewish forms and topics, theatre included.

[117] Ibid., 144.
[118] Ibid., 145.
[119] Berger and Zwiep, "Epigones and the Formation of New Literary Canons," 152.
[120] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 146.
[121] Berger and Zwiep, "Epigones and the Formation of New Literary Canons," 158.

This openness to and curiosity about gentile stimuli becomes even more clear when studying the books on Jews' bookshelves: based on private library collections from the period, it seems that Sephardim, even rabbis, were very open to foreign literature,[122] which must also imply that they were aware of contemporary literary trends that they tried to keep up with. One can find the works of Quevedo, Gracián, Góngora, Vieira, or Camões on the shelves of all Sephardi intellectuals, alongside Spanish dramatic works by such names as Lope de Vega or Calderón de la Barca.[123]

I.4. Jews Promoting Catholic Theatre in a Protestant Country

As already indicated in the Introduction, despite official, normative Judaism's disdain for it, theatre enjoyed tremendous popularity among Amsterdam Sephardim. Their primary devotion was, naturally, to Spanish Golden Age drama (the so-called *comedia*, in particular), a successful and popular offspring of early modern European theatrical cultures, which Jews wished to promote and enjoy in their new homeland, a Protestant republic. On the remaining pages of this chapter, I intend to outline the peculiar cultural situation, where these three seemingly incompatible components—Jewish agents, Catholic theatre, and Protestant environment—intersected and interacted, by characterizing each and highlighting their mutual impacts.

From a sociological point of view, it is crucial to note that Spanish theatre in the seventeenth century was not a form of entertainment dedicated exclusively to the upper crust of society but to the entire population. Their needs were satisfied by two theatres (the Corral de la Cruz and the Corral del Príncipe) in Madrid that were not built with the purpose to

[122] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 19.
[123] Harm den Boer, "El teatro entre los sefardíes de Amsterdam a fines del siglo XVII," in *El teatro español a fines del siglo XVII. Historia, cultura y teatro en la España de Carlos II. Vol. III*, eds. Javier Huerta Calvo, Harm den Boer and Fermín Sierra Martínez (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983), 684–685.

facilitate dramatic performances originally but had an *ad hoc* character to them. These were open-air patio theatres surrounded by residences with windows and balconies (practically functioning as boxes) looking at the stage set up in the space downstairs: this type of theatre is called *corral de comedias* (referring to the upstairs interior corridors/balconies) in scholarly literature.[124] In a *corral*, every social class had their designated space where they could enjoy stage plays, thus reinforcing class and gender divisions within society: the "boxes" (*aposentos*) were maintained for the nobility, where men and women were allowed to mingle; the patio was where male commoners (*mosqueteros*) could take a seat on portable banks. Women had a separate space (*cazuela*, or "stewpot") at the very back of the courtyard on the second floor; and the clergy watched performances right below the *cazuelas*, in the *tertulia*.[125]

Usually, there was a small balcony above the stage that could be used for instance as a mountain peak in a scene. Each play was performed in daylight—nocturnal scenes were indicated with appropriate costumes (such as cloaks).[126] The theatres donated their daily income to local charity organizations in order to inoculate their spectacles against clerical criticism.[127] As we will see, Amsterdam followed a similar strategy to fend off accusations of anti-religious and immoral activities. Margaret Wilson states that since the population of Madrid was not large in the period, performance repertoires had to be updated frequently,[128] which resulted in the mass production of Spanish drama's main innovation, the *comedia*.

The new genre that virtually defined *Siglo de Oro* performative culture was coined by Lope de Vega in the 1580s, but *comedia* has a long history reaching back to the early sixteenth century, when Juan de Encina and Torres Naharro, the first dramatists of the

[124] Margaret Wilson, *Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (Oxford, London: Pergamon Press, 1969), 1.
[125] Vidler, *Performance Reconstruction*, 28.
[126] Wilson, *Spanish Drama*, 2.
[127] Ibid., 3.
[128] Ibid., 3.

Spanish language, and Gil Vicente, who published occasional pieces both in Portuguese and Spanish, made crucial steps for the development of Iberian theatre that undoubtedly reached a zenith in Lope's times.[129] The *comedia* was a worthy competitor to the French tragedy (represented by Corneille and Racine) emerging in the same period and heavily building on antique aesthetic considerations[130]—a characteristic that *comedia*-writers deeply desisted, and put a larger emphasis on theatre's recreational aspect instead. The theoretical debate, i.e., whether to prefer stylistic eloquence or light entertainment on stage, defined the entirety of the seventeenth century, which Calderón de la Barca put to an end by synthetizing *comedia*-elements with poise and edifying themes and messages.[131]

The Spanish *comedia* stage was characterized by "scenic minimalism," most probably using everyday objects and clothes as props and costumes alongside the modest background sets, not to mention the high abundance of off-set scenes in many *comedias* that are simply announced to the audience.[132] Verbal self-expression and gestures had to match the social status of each character: generally, a rather still and "upright body carriage" was expected from all actors who played members of the nobility on stage, even in dancing or dueling scenes,[133] while popular characters often invoked folk dances and effectuated more excessive body movements, mixing the many spheres of culture.[134]

The few literary histories of Sephardi drama in Amsterdam (Henry Besso, Haydee Litovsky, Harm den Boer) highlight that this exact Spanish theatrical tradition was continued in foreign lands by Sephardim, on an equally high level,[135] although the only playwright Spanish or Portuguese literary histories mention (if they mention any) is the aforementioned

[129] Ibid., 8–13.
[130] Ibid., 18.
[131] Ibid., 37.
[132] Vidler, *Performance Reconstruction*, 37–38.
[133] Ibid., 66.
[134] Ibid., 71.
[135] Besso, "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries," 231.; Litovsky, *Sephardic Playwrights*, vii–viii., 2.; den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 18.

Miguel de Barrios, the most productive author among seventeenth-century writers.[136] As scholars note, there is very little information available on Sephardi theatrical activity due to the restrictive environment (coming from both the Jewish and the Dutch side) that wanted to stifle all theatrical activities.[137] However, there were some within the rabbinate who understood the effectiveness this medium could offer in reaching an ever-wider audience with doctrinal messages.[138]

Such an attitude can be seen in connection with the first documented theatrical event (and the only one when we precisely know the play that was performed) within the community: the performance of Rehuel Jessurun/Paulo de Piña's *Diálogo dos Montes* (with theological aid by Rabbi Saul Levi Morteira) in a synagogue on the eve of Shavuot in 1624 by seven members of the congregation (who were also members of academies). The next day, the authorities banned this practice inside the synagogue space.[139] A next reference to theatrical activity is from 1667: a group of actors, including Miguel de Barrios, is mentioned in a notarial act, who presented a play (perhaps by Barrios himself) in a rented store in front of an audience of about thirty members. The cast included Lorenzo Escudero (Abraham Israel), a well-know and frequently employed Spanish actor of Moorish descent who wished to join the Amsterdam Sephardi community.[140] Harm de Boer writes that it was rather common to find Spanish actors in Amsterdam, as the community organized its own theatre companies and occasionally invited well-known Spanish actors back from the Peninsula to perform in the Netherlands.[141] A similar occasion is mentioned in a document from January

[136] Litovsky, *Sephardic Playwrights*, vii.
[137] de Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 153.
[138] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 330.
[139] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 137., 147–148.
[140] Ibid., 148.
[141] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 330.

2, 1696, by a Francisco Rodrigues Henriques, who rented a warehouse from Abraham Serrano, to put on a *comedia* performance.[142]

In addition to producing original plays, Sephardim imported, circulated, and even performed a large amount of Spanish *comedias*, as the example of Gil López Pinto, who held an exclusive debut of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, shows. Moreover, a number of *comedia* anthologies were published in Amsterdam from the end of the seventeenth century onward.[143] The presence of hosts, organizers, patrons, as well as the *morisco* actor Escudero and his company already shows that Sephardim played a significant role in facilitating and promoting the transmission of a distant culture and its representative products to foreign lands.

After the end of the century, in 1705, elitistic Sephardim founded a theatre-lovers' circle, who, as new trends began to conquer the Netherlands, performed French operas in addition to *comedias*.[144] In 1708, a group of Sephardim requested permission from the Amsterdam municipal authorities to stage performances in the Schouwburg (the municipal theatre) on Wednesdays, the only day of the week when the Dutch did not organize spectacles. They also admitted that they had been setting up plays in the past nine years. The appeal was denied, possibly on financial bases, as the Schouwburg transferred its income to charity organizations.[145] Interestingly, Ashkenazi Jews also took part in this initative, since a source from 1707 tells that they had also performed tragedies and comedies in Yiddish and Dutch (primarily of French and Spanish origin) in a warehouse three times a week (Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday), which the authorities' ban of 1708 impacted as well.[146]

[142] den Boer, "El teatro entre los sefardíes," 679–680.
[143] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 150.
[144] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 151.
[145] Ibid., 149.
[146] Jan te Winkel, "De invloed der Spaansche letterkunde op de Nederlandsche in de zeventiende eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 1 (1881): 75.

These sporadic occurrences nonetheless show the Jews' growing affinity for cultivating theatre in the city. The relatively small number of participants and occasional character might initially imply that theatre was exclusively a pastime for the elite: however, this reduced size of the audiences must have been primarily due to the limitations that the Dutch authorities had established. Their petition to gain permission to use the Schouwburg's stage on Wednesdays reveals that Sephardim indeed wished to provide theatrical entertainment for the masses, not solely for the *crème de la crème*. It is noteworthy that the scattered character of these aforementioned manifestations, always with a rather limited number of spectators, clearly demonstrates that theatre could not really rise up to legitimacy in this context, and only the frameworks of Purim could truly facilitate its attempt to function as a valid and effective literary medium, with the *Ma'amad*'s approval. This way, only Purim plays were able to reach a wider audience (ideally the whole body of the Sephardi community) to share the lessons of the holiday.

Besides the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, the seventeenth century was perceived as a Golden Age (traditionally dated from the late sixteenth century to 1672) in Dutch culture as well, even among contemporaries,[147] which virtually provided an intellectual home for Sephardi settlers and facilitated their Jewish literary production. The cultural flourishing began in the late sixteenth century, due to the initiation of the Dutch revolt and war of independence, which resulted in an exodus of Protestant intellectuals and professionals, left the regional cultural centers Antwerp and Brussels stagnant, and induced a larger economic role for Amsterdam where wealthy merchants and businessmen took on the patronage of cultural production.[148] Thus, Dutch culture of the newborn United Provinces was primarily an urban one, instead of being a part of court or clerical culture.

[147] Maria A. Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt: Themes and Ideas* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1991), 1.
[148] Ibid., 3.

The seventeenth century was a zenith in the history of Dutch culture. Although it did not become internationally known, their literary endeavors fit perfectly into European Renaissance trends,[149] and their activities contributed greatly to the intercultural exchange of various means of literary production (forms, genres, ideas). The Dutch Republic, as a center of publishing, even served as a major transmitter of world literature—and, on a more regional level, they even exported their own literary achievements, particularly to neighboring German territories and to Scandinavia.[150] The Dutch literary language became the standardized medium of politics and culture in an age when the Republic emerged into a global power, superseding the so-far significant Latin.[151] Authors were well aware of the international trends of their times, just like Sephardim, which were relatively easy to keep up with due to Amsterdam's dominant place in the printing business and its cosmopolitan character.[152] Dutch drama also entered west German territories and were performed in the original language (due to dialectic similarities), while Dutch actors of Jan Baptist van Fornenbergh's company were invited to the court of Queen Christina of Sweden, then asked to come every year from 1666 onward and establish "a Dutch-speaking court theater in Stockholm."[153]

Dutch theatre culture did not come *ex nihilo*: the Netherlands (especially the South) had been facilitating a promising urban literary scene since the fifteenth century in the form of the Chambers of Rhetoric—literary societies similar to the Spanish and Sephardi academies but, at the same time, much more. The ca. 400 chambers (from 1400 to 1650)[154]

[149] J.L. Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 138.; Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*, 152.
[150] Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*, 147–148.
[151] Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 143.
[152] Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*, 142.
[153] Ibid., 149.
[154] Ben Parsons and Bas Jongenelen, "Introduction. The Older the Hollander the More Foolish: Comedy, Foolery and the Chambers of Rhetoric in the Medieval Low Countries," in *Comic Drama in the Low Countries, c. 1450 – 1560: A Critical Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ben Parsons and Bas Jongenelen (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 3.

were not simply gatherings of aspiring authors where new dramatic pieces were discussed; they were responsible for organizing official and public events, commemorations, religious and political processions commissioned by the municipal authorities to implement political influence, simple entertainment, or literary competitions.[155] The actors were mostly volunteering citizens, showing Dutch theatre's essentially urban character.[156] Most of the early pieces of the sixteenth century were more static morality plays (*spelen van sinne*) that were always followed by shorter farces in competitions, often addressing current religious debates or promoting the ambitions and values of the urban elite and the advantages of an urban lifestyle.[157] This reveals that in this context the purpose of literature and drama was to educate while entertaining.[158] As opposed to Spanish *comedia* traditions, these Dutch plays put a large emphasis on visuality (costumes, powerful set design, *tableaux*, etc.), particularly in the case of morality plays.[159]

From the point of view of this investigation, it is important to note that sixteenth-century Dutch literature had already handed down a rich corpus of high-quality comedies mainly written to be performed and that the Netherlandish were even famous for their good sense of humor all around Europe.[160] With their comedies, rhetoricians intended to edify younger generations by incorporating allegorical figures that came from the genre of moralities. In the process, they invented new hybrid farces: the shorter *esbattement* and the longer and more complex *klutch*.[161] In meticulously composed poetic forms, authors often carried out rather sharp and offensive parody, with a tone that was critical of society.[162]

[155] Elsa, Strietman and Peter Happé, "Introduction," in *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400–1625*, eds. Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 20.
[156] Ibid., 20.
[157] Herman Pleij, "The Rise of Urban Literature in the Low Countries," Mid*dle Dutch Literature in Its European Context*, ed. Eric Kooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.
[158] Ibid., 66.
[159] Bart Ramakers, "Dutch Allegorical Theatre: Tradition and Conceptual Approach," in *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400–1625*, eds. Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 128–130.
[160] Parsons and Jongenelen, "Introduction," 1.
[161] Ibid., 9–10.
[162] Ibid., 12–13.

Through such lens, one can even consider the Sephardi Purim plays to be distant relatives to this significant Dutch trend, since the former also intended to educate New Jews on the *halakha* and to strengthen their collective identity and intracommunal cohesion in a rather humorous manner.

Seventeenth-century drama drew upon the network and infrastructure these rhetoricians had laid down, and the great playwrights of the period—Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero, Samuel Coster—all came out of the rhetoricians' overcoat, following their efforts to cultivate vernacular drama at the highest possible level. In 1637, due to municipal pressure, a number of Chambers of Rhetoric in Amsterdam united and established the city's first permanent theatre with a thousand seats, the Schouwburg. Designed by Jacob van Campen, it was the absolute focal point of Dutch performative culture in the Golden Age and could withstand Protestant criticism due to the fact that it donated its income to city orphanages.[163] The theatre's seat distribution resembles that of the *corral de comedias,* as it mirrored class and gender divisions, eventually reaching a rather wide, though less refined, audience; however, the Schouwburg's interior design had a completely different outline from Spanish patio theatres and very much looked like a common indoor theatre with a stage, boxes and a ground floor—as shown by two sketches of the interior by Salomon Savery,[164] a ground plan by Willem van der Laegh (all three from 1658, as memorabilia for the twentieth anniversary of the opening day), and an oil painting by Hans Jurriansz. van Baden (1653).[165] Apparently, the Schouwburg followed the Chambers' trend to stage a tragedy and a farce on the same occasion,[166] and also to use

[163] Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 142.
[164] The first three-dimensional attempt to depict the interior of the theatrical space: Peter G.G. Eversmann, "'Founded for the Ears and Eyes of the People': Picturing the Amsterdam Schouwburg from 1637," in *Drama, Performance and Debate: Theatre and Public Opinion in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Jan Bloemendal, Peter G.F. Eversmann, and Elsa Strietman (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 274.
[165] Ibid., 270–278.
[166] Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*, 34–35.

mobile *tableaux* as background sets.[167] Approximately twenty people worked for the theatre on yearly contracts, while artisans and artists were hired on an as-needed basis to design sets, costumes, props, posters, and additional advertising material. Occasionally, printed scripts were disseminated among the audience at premiers.[168] Besides hiring such experts, the Schouwburg maintained a broad intellectual and creative network of authors and translators (primarily from French) outside the frameworks of the institution and even outside the borders of the Republic, who often provided the trendiest plays of the time, alongside the theatre's own actors and chief dramatists.[169]

Literary histories usually single out the classicist trend in seventeenth-century drama, represented by such names as Joost van den Vondel and Constantijn Huygens, that followed the rules of Neo-Latin drama and French tragedy that evoked antique aesthetics. They only briefly mention commercially more successful experiments that ran simultaneously in Amsterdam (similar to the Spanish case),[170] primarily on the stage of the Schouwburg, where profitability heavily influenced artistic decisions, since its board's responsibility was to earn as much for the orphanages and nursing homes as possible. Under the direction of Jan Vos, a prominent representative of Dutch drama, the Schouwburg became the most modern and mechanized theatre in Northern Europe by 1665, when he established a complex machinery system to help stage eventful, sensationalistic, and spectacular scenes.[171]

This commercially more successful and entertaining current followed the patterns of none other than the Spanish *comedia*. Based on scholarly investigations and the valuable statistical findings that the Online Datasystem of Theatre in Amsterdam from the Golden

[167] Eversmann, "'Founded for the Ears and Eyes of the People'," 273.
[168] Frans R.E. Blom and Olga van Marion, "Lope de Vega and the Conquest of Spanish Theater in the Netherlands," *Anuario Lope de Vega. Texto, literatura, cultura* 32 (2017): 156.
[169] Kim Jautze, Leonor Álvarez Francés and Frans R.E. Blom, "Spaans theater in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg (1638–1672): Kvantitatieve en kwalitatieve analyse van de creatieve industrie van het vertalen," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32, no. 1 (2016): 31.
[170] Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 146–147.
[171] Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt*, 15.

Age to Today (ONSTAGE) has published so far, the trend Spanish drama set in the Provinces unfolds in front of our eyes as a genre that ran alongside the new classicist drama that, on the other hand, continued to articulate rigorously moralizing messages. Iberian adaptations to the Dutch language and context were, apparently, very much liked by their audience in the Schouwburg, due to the genre's high entertainment factor and relatively fair realism.[172] The appearance and influence of Spanish literature is not surprising, considering the fact that the Dutch Republic, until the late sixteenth century, was under Spanish Habsburg rule and remained exposed to constant Iberian cultural stimuli even after the revolt—the profound extent of their influence is nonetheless extraordinary, because of the negative political experience the Dutch had with Spain, similar to Sephardim. Hence, this shows that despite their opposing proto-nationalistic attitudes, cultural exchange could continue among the three parties without disturbance.

Theodoor Rodenburgh, an ambassador in the court of Philip III in Madrid, was the first to promote Lope's poetics of the *comedia* and commercial theatre-making by adapting a few plays by the Spanish innovator to the Dutch cultural environment and, thus, to the stage of the Schouwburg during the Twelve Years' Truce, slowly turning Spanish drama into one of the most popular cultural items in the United Provinces, climaxing in the second half of the seventeenth century.[173] Rodenburgh combined innovation with tradition, that is, he mixed the characteristics of the *comedia* with Dutch metric structures and an allegorical undertone inherited from earlier morality plays and farces.[174] Another wave of lose adaptations emerged after the end of the Eighty Years' War in 1648 and brought immeasurable success to the Spanish *comedia* in the Netherlands: some of Lope's plays were continuously staged

[172] See for instance: Harm den Boer, "La representación de la comedia española en Holanda," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 5, no. 23 (1999): 114.
[173] Ibid., 117–118.
[174] Olga van Marion and Tim Vergeer, "Spain's Dramatic Conquest of the Dutch Republic: Rodenburgh as a Literary Mediator of Spanish Theatre," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32, no. 1 (2016): 55–58.

for the next 150 years.[175] Interestingly, the *comedia* might have even represented a more significant trend during the second half of the seventeenth century than French tragedy, as the most frequently staged author was not the Netherlands' national treasure, Joost van den Vondel, but rather Lope de Vega.[176] However, Spanish-flavored drama almost completely disappeared in the eighteenth century—a period that eventually was dominated entirely by French drama.[177]

As the ever-increasing interest in Spanish *comedia* demanded more adaptations, theatre-makers had to find various means of transmitting it to the North. Since the Spanish language was less known among the Dutch, Lope's French translations provided the basis for further prose and then drama adaptations that mostly arrived at Amsterdam through the Spanish Netherlands (particularly Brussels).[178] Curiously, another channel was the local Sephardim who could read and translate *comedias* from their original. Their involvement shows that a portion of the thousand Portuguese Jews living in Amsterdam definitely spoke good Dutch, were deeply involved in intercultural exchange with their host society, and turned out to be a key factor in the development of Dutch Golden Age drama.[179] We know of two Sephardim by name who helped facilitate such transmissions. Joseph Athias provided a prose translation of Agustín Moreto y Cabaña's *Los celos de Escarraman: Comedia burlesca* (1671),[180] which, according to the ONSTAGE database, was performed in Dutch in 1715;[181] and Jacobus Barokus/Barocos/Baroces translated a number of *comedias* by Lope. Little is known about the life of Barocos, the principal Spanish–Dutch translator of *Siglo de*

[175] Blom and van Marion, "Lope de Vega," 158.
[176] Blom and van Marion, "Lope de Vega," 159.
[177] den Boer, "La representación de la comedia española," 123.
[178] Ibid., 163.
[179] Ibid., 166.
[180] Litovsky, *Sephardic Playwrights*, 2.
[181] ONSTAGE: http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/plays/1114. Accessed: May 6, 2018.

Oro drama, whose name is also just a pseudonym, simply meaning "baroque,"[182] evoking his activities and efforts as a cultural ambassador of the Spanish Baroque.

It is essential to note that most of these adaptations appeared in the second half of the seventeenth century, when Sephardi dramatic production also celebrated its heyday.[183] The simultaneous observation of Spanish, Sephardi, and Dutch theatrical practices clearly show that their interactions were more frequent and intense than was once thought, especially regarding Dutch–Jewish literary exchange during the Golden Age, as the examples of Barocos, Escudero, or Rodenburgh embody, alongside those Sephardim who visited Iberia and probably even attended *comedia* performances in the *corrales*. Interestingly, in all three environments theatre developed in a predominantly urban context and was promoted primarily by the local elites (the aristocracy in Spain and the economic elite among Sephardim and the Dutch). Also, religious concerns about the practice of theatre were equally raised among Jesuits, Protestant preachers, and rabbis, who protested against the immoral effect theatre would have on their youth, although all concerns were toned down due to various reasons. One reason was the philanthropic attitude and activity of the theatres. The other, in Spain, was that Spanish *comedia*, as already shown, explicitly propagated Catholicism's value system and reinforced the prevailing social norms and structures within the Spanish Empire—and so did Dutch drama. Dutch plays propagated standards Humanism and Protestantism found appropriate, and during the first half of the seventeenth century they provided a common ground for all of the United Provinces, regardless of their denomination, that could serve as a pillar of their newly emerging Dutch identity: anti-hispanistic attitude as a celebration of liberation from the Spanish yoke.[184] It is true, however, that the case of

[182] Jautze, Álvarez Francés and Blom, "Spaans theater," 34.
[183] den Boer, "La representación de la comedia española," 120.
[184] Judith Pollmann, "'Brabanters Do Fairly Resemble Spaniards After All': Memory, Propaganda and Identity in the Twelve Years' Trucem" in *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke*, ed. Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 219–223.

parodies is slightly more complex, since such pieces attempted to contradict the conformism promoted by the elites as a means to release social tension, although such practices, as presented in the Introduction, ultimately reinforced the long-standing social *status quo*.

Seventeenth-century Purim *comedias* addressed similar goals. In a Turnerian interpretive reading, this holiday, in general, functions as a propagation of Jewish religious doctrines and a commonly shared past, when the actual reenactment of a powerful narrative about exile and liberation (similar to the Dutch national narrative of the early seventeenth century) and the encouragement of community members to participate by wearing costumes and playing biblical heroes evoke the experience of *communitas* that forges an unbreakable intra-communal cohesion. The Sephardi case was no different: such intentions turned Purim itself into a foundational identity-defining feature within *ex-converso* culture who saw their own reflection in the face of Queen Esther.

In such a complex cross-cultural theatrical context the first three Sephardi representatives of the Purim play (*El perseguido dichoso, Aman y Mordochay, Jahacob e Essau*) appeared, properly opening the door for theatre to enter Sephardi culture. As previously indicated, they constitute the core of my investigation, concerning the performative aspect of Purim customs, theatrical spectacles, and their interactions with their religious framework, as well as the carnivalesque ambience that the spirit of Purim demands. They had a very strong occasional character, similar to the *Diálogo dos Montes* (that was written for Shavuot, and its performance was fortunately documented) or to very typical Iberian parallels, such as Gil Vicente (who, as it is well-known, wrote and staged many shorter *autos* for specific Christmas celebrations or the prince's birth)[185] and his followers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For these reasons, it can even be assumed

[185] Juliet Perkins and T.F. Earle, "Portuguese Theatre in the Sixteenth Century: Gil Vicente and António Ferreira," in *A Companion to Portuguese Literature*, eds. Stephen Parkinson et al. (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009), 67–68.

that they were likely to be performed. All three are retellings of the biblical stories of Joseph, Esther, and Jacob, respectively, with minor extrabiblical additions or authorial innovations. In the upcoming chapters, these plays will be closely analyzed with Genettian and Bakhtinian methodological tools to arrive at the previously expressed goals of the thesis.

II. THE PURIM *COMEDIA*: PARATEXTS

In this chapter, I focus on the paratextual features of the three singular products of the Sephardi theatrical scene, written for the occasion of Purim, discussing holiday practices and key issues that their characteristics raise: stylistic formulas, the biblical themes treated in the plays, questions of authority and anonymity, the notion of literary patronage, places of publication, the institution of censorship, the significance of the date of publications, and the identification of a fitting literary genre.

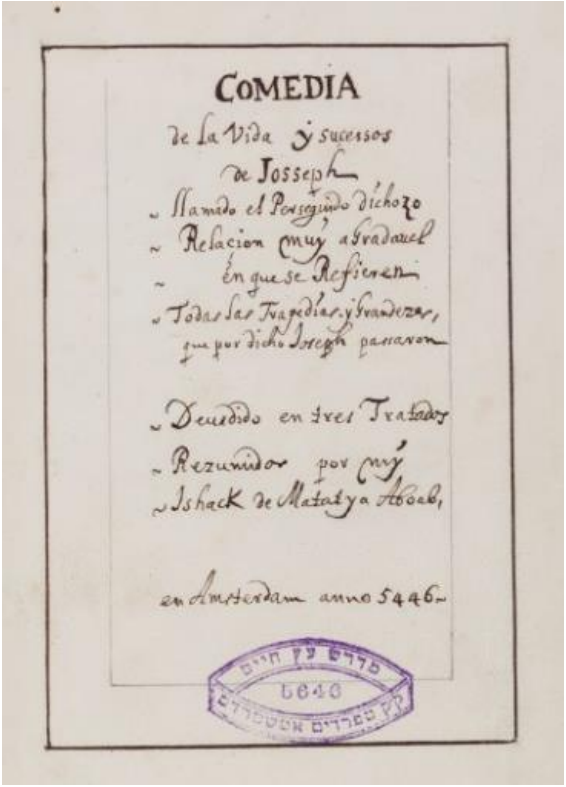
Here, I apply literary theorist Gérard Genette's concept of the paratext, an opaque term that consists of all sorts of textual "practices and discourses" that frame, follow, surround, support, extend, and/or facilitate the literary core text with the purpose to present it and allow its intellectual consumption.[186] In all cases, the paratext is subdued to the text itself, serving its set goals.[187] To this group belong such textual items as the title, the name of the author, the preface, endnotes, or the table of contents—all of which define and localize themselves with regards to the text they accompany.

II.1. Titles, Themes, and the *Comedia*

The first item one notices on the cover of the three Purim plays (*Fig. 1–Fig.* **2**.) is their title: *Comedia de la vida y sucessos de Josseph, llamado el perseguido dichozo: Relacion muy agradavel en que se refieren todas las tragedias y grandezas que por dicho Joseph passaron*; *Comedia famosa dos successos de Jahacob e Essau*; and *Comedia famosa de Aman y*

[186] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–2.
[187] Ibid., 12.

Mordochay. All three adapt biblical narratives and identify themselves as *comedias famosas*, which is a rather noteworthy form of cultural transfer already expressed in the title: these publishers in the Netherlands mimicked the formula which Spanish printers used when reproducing and disseminating *comedias* in Madrid that had been staged with remarkable success.


COMEDIA
de La Vida y sucessos
de Josseph
llamado el Perseguido dichoso
Relacion muy agradable
en que se Refieren
Todas las Tragedias y grandezas,
que por dicho Joseph pasaron
Devidido en tres Tratados
Rezumidor por muy
Ishack de Mataiya Aboab,
en Amsterdam anno 5446.
5646
Fig. 1. The title page of *El perseguido dichoso*

The genre of the *comedia*, as briefly mentioned in Chapter I, was the utmost innovation of Spanish Golden Age theatre. The term was used, on the one hand, as a general synonym for the word "play" in the given period and, on the other hand, as a signifier of a dramatic genre developed at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Iberia that cannot and should not be translated or interpreted simply as "comedy," since it was a play that mixed comic and tragic elements in its plot.[188] As already discussed in relation to its history and the intellectual debates surrounding *Siglo de Oro* theatre in Chapter I, the genre's key formulator was Lope de Vega, who, in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, elaborates on his mindset about the ideals of playwriting, and sets up a list of criteria of what makes a *comedia*. First of all, he contrasts his art form to the antique aesthetics of Aristotle, and he puts the audience's interests above formal considerations. The Spanish playwright states that his main goal is to entertain and to give pleasure to his audience, which he achieves by sticking to seven poetical bullet points: 1. comic and tragic elements are encouraged to be mixed; 2. the Aristotelian

[188] Wilson, *Spanish Drama*, 39.

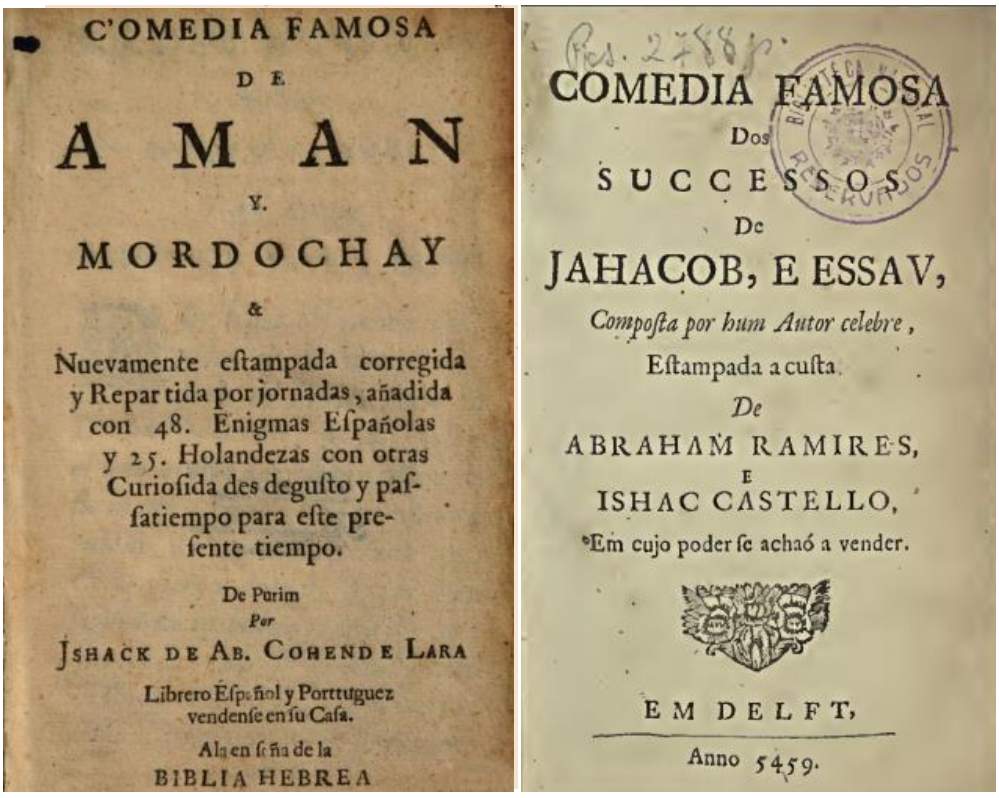

C'OMEDIA FAMOSA
DE
A M A N
Y.
MORDOCHAY
&
Nuevamente eſtampada corregida y Repartida por jornadas, añadida con 48. Enigmas Eſpañolas y 25. Holandezas con otras Curioſida des deguſto y paſſatiempo para eſte preſente tiempo.
De Purim
Por
JSHACK DE AB. COHEN DE LARA
Librero Eſpañol y Portuguez vendenſe en ſu Caſa.
Ala en ſeña de la
BIBLIA HEBREA
COMEDIA FAMOSA
Dos
SUCCESSOS
De
JAHACOB, E ESSAV,
Compoſta por hum Autor celebre,
Eſtampada a cuſta
De
ABRAHAM RAMIRES,
E
ISHAC CASTELLO,
Em cujo poder ſe achaó a vender.
EM DELFT,
Anno 5459.

Fig. 2. The title pages of *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau*

unity of the plot is acceptable but his instruction on the unity of time and space are to be dismissed; 3. a play is, preferably, well-organized and consists of three acts with a climax at the very end to keep up the audience's interest throughout the whole show; 4. language use should fit the theme and the speakers, which often would result in a simpler, more natural, and quotidian style; 5. the appearance of actresses is allowed, even dressed as men; 6. the topic of a dialogue usually determines the versification of the lines; and 7. storylines evolving around the question of honor are preferred, since it is a theme that concerns every person.[189]

Lope's *comedia* heavily relied on previous literary traditions and *topoi* appearing in the Iberian Peninsula. The enormous popularity and dominance of earlier religious drama (both one-act *autos* and longer mystery plays) continued to deliver themes for the authors of *comedias*, as well as the type of humor (principally, the mime), characters providing comic relief (such as the *gracioso*, the comic servant), and the strategies of developing a plotline

[189] Ibid., 30–31.

that the Italian *commedia dell'arte* brought to Spanish literature in the sixteenth century via Italian companies touring in Spain and disseminating the fundamentals of the genre. The plotline focusing on honor had also been present in Iberian literatures, as well as themes coming from the history of the kingdom. Additionally, on a stylistic and formal level, the lyricism of Gil Vicente also lived on in the frameworks of the *comedia*,[190] just like his innovation to represent the rustic, colloquial registers of Portuguese and Spanish.[191] Jesuit school drama, according to Margaret Wilson, must have had an impact on *Siglo de Oro* authors to some extent, since all of them were well-educated, and therefore had to meet the tradition of this eloquent, classicizing literature,[192] although it is true that the *Arte nuevo* generally dismissed classical norms. The only author from Antiquity who had a significant impact on the formation of the *comedia* was Seneca, with his affinity for eventful, hectic, and violent scenes.[193]

Regarding versification, authors of *comedias* did not seek homogeneity, much in opposition of classical theatre: however, eight-syllable verses (first and foremost in the form of *romances* and *redondillas*) seem to dominate the Spanish *comedia*, with occasional appearances of other types of verses, such as sonnets, *décimas*, or *terzets*, depending on the themes and tones of a certain scene.[194] As Lope himself already requested their presence with a desire to gain success, comical factors play a defining role in the genre. This supports Gurevich's arguments presented in the Introduction stating that humor, parody, and folkloristic elements had always been vital parts of all the aforementioned genres, as well as the *comedia*, and one cannot separate them from even the most eloquent or serious pieces of

[190] Ibid., 19.
[191] Ibid., 12.
[192] Ibid., 17.
[193] Ibid., 18.
[194] Ibid., 31., 40.

literature or establish clear binary oppositions of the high and low based on tragic and comic factors.

The three most significant motifs of *Siglo de Oro* Spanish drama were religion, love (non-platonic but never immoral), and perhaps the most important of them all: honor. As the latter tightly intertwined with social norms and structures, the *comedia* was a constant reflector of contemporary social issues, although without questioning society's fundamental institutions and norms.[195] The *comedia*, as a heritage of Gil Vicente, spoke of a natural and ordinary tone and avoided poetic acrobatics (except for Calderón de la Barca), thus creating a realistic atmosphere that strongly resembled that of its own contemporary times, while character development and their individualization remained a weakness of the genre.[196] Additionally, Michael McGaha writes that the most commonly used verses, the *romance* and the *redondilla*, very much resembled the Spanish prosaic language metrically,[197] indeed providing a more authentic impression.

Lope's formula fossilized and stood firmly against classicist demands, which hundreds of authors followed in the seventeenth century, producing thousands of stage plays of various length and quality, which made the *comedia* unquestionably the most productive genre in the history of theatre. Eventually, Calderón, the genre's last great representative, was the one who created a synthesis of more serious, intellectual expectations (building heavily on antique paragons) and the audience's demand for light entertainment by preserving all of Lope's generic components and adding religious and ethical content to them. Thus, the *comedia* became one of the key media of the Catholic Renewal/Counter-Reformation in maintaining, transmitting, and promoting their absolute values.[198]

[195] Ibid., 48.
[196] Ibid., 50–54.
[197] McGaha, *The Story of Joseph*, 232.
[198] Wilson, *Spanish Drama*, 37.

Religious drama was a significant sub-version of the genre, notwithstanding its limited quantity—Aurelio Valladares Reguero counts 122 pieces, excluding those that we know only the titles of—[199] which evoked and/or utilized biblical narratives in transmitting Catholic doctrines. This leads right to the next component of the Purim plays' titles: the main themes they mark. Besides being present in religious Sephardi literature due to their central role in Judaism, the stories of Joseph, Jacob, and Esther were equally welcomed and gained attention within Spanish literature despite their canonized spot in the Old Testament, which must be due to the fact that they all mediated appropriate social and religious values and provided suitable material for dramatic adaptations as well. All three stories include scenes full of tension, conflicts, deception, death, love, and, finally, a happy ending—the perfect recipe for Lope and his contemporaries.

Edward Glaser highlights that Jacob's story practically bathes in "spectacular episodes" that provided rewarding opportunities for *Siglo de Oro* authors, such as Luis Vélez de Guevara or Cristóbal de Monroy y Silva. However, Glaser rightfully adds the anonymous author of *Jahacob e Essau* to the corpus of Golden Age authors too, as he was the playwright of the last Jacob play of the century.[200] The scholar points out that, although to a different extent in each case, all dramatic adaptations of Jacob's adventures contain bucolic scenes, and shows that despite the obvious fact that the Portuguese-speaking author knew Spanish literature very well, a major difference between the pieces written by Spaniards and the anonymous author from Amsterdam is that the former put a large emphasis on the fundamental *Siglo de Oro* theme of love, staging rather passionate scenes, while *Jahacob e*

[199] Aurelio Valladares Reguero, "Panorama de las comedias bíblicas en el Siglo de Oro," in *La Biblia en el teatro español*, ed. Francisco Domínguez Matito and Juan Antonio Martínez Berbel (Vigo: Editorial, Academia del Hispanismo, 2012), 256.
[200] Edward Glaser, "El patriarca Jacob, amante ejemplar del teatro del Siglo de Oro español," *Bulletin Hispanique* 58, no. 1 (1956): 19.

Essau devotes much less time and attention to the complicated love life of the last patriarch.[201]

In his monograph *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, Michael McGaha introduces the stage adaptations (both *autos sacramentales* and classic *comedias*) of the Joseph story from the given period, including *El perseguido dichoso*, which was the last and fullest representation of the given narrative from the Golden Age canon, and the only one written by a practicing Jew.[202] He presents works by Miguel de Carvajal, Lope de Vega, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and an anonymous piece called *Joseph's Wedding*; then states that Carvajal's *auto sacramental*, *The Josephine Tragedy* from the 1530s served Isaac de Matatia Aboab as a model for his own Joseph play. He also suggests that Lope's piece, *The Trials of Jacob* (first published in 1635), might have influenced his work.[203]

Queen Esther, the protagonist of Purim and the most popular biblical female character in early modern Spanish literature,[204] did not just inspire Catholic dramatists on the peninsula to adapt her story to the stage.[205] Her character very much resonated with many *conversos* and New Jews, who thought of her as the "prototype of *marranism*,"[206] due to her suppressed Jewish identity in a foreign court culture—while, for Christians, she was conceptualized as a "pre-configuration" of the Virgin Mary and sometimes even Jesus in his savior aspect.[207]

[201] Ibid., 22.
[202] McGaha, *The Story of Joseph*, 226.
[203] Ibid., 229.
[204] Colbert Cairns, *Esther in Early Modern Iberia*, 5.
[205] Such as Lope himself, who wrote his *La Hermosa Ester* in 1621, or Cervantes, whose *La gran sultana* is a lose adaptation of the Book of Esther. See: Ruth Fine, "Los rostros de Ester: Tres versions dramáticas auriseculares del libro de Ester: *La hermosa Ester* de Lope de Vega, *La reina Ester* de Godínez y *La gran sultana* de Cervantes," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 7 (2010): 234.
[206] Ruth Fine, "'Siendo yo hebrea, señor': una lecura de *La reina Ester* de Felipe Godínez en clave conversa," in *Compostella Aurea. Actas del VIII Congreso de la AISO, Santiago de Compostela, 7–11 de julio de 2008*, ed. Antonio Azaustre Galiana and Santiago Fernández Mosquera (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2001), 588: el prototipo del marranismo.
[207] Fine, "Los rostros de Ester," 239–240.

Both Ruth Fine and Emily Colbert Cairns mention Felipe Godínez, a *converso* priest and playwright, as a paradigmatic example who perfectly embodied the two (mutually paradoxical) sides. His former Esther play (*Comedia famosa de la Reyna Ester*, 1613) celebrated the titular character as the "queen of *conversas*," the personification of clandestine Jewish religious practice; while in his second one (*Comedia famosa de Amán y Mardoqueo*, 1653), which was written after the Inquisition's investigation on him, he practically erased the implicit allusions to crypto-Judaism by removing Esther, its symbolic embodiment, from center stage and instead turned his audience's attention to the intrigue between the two male characters, thus taking a similar position to Lope's by promoting the norms (such as female obedience) of an empire that expelled its Jewish subjects.[208]

One can find all the major characteristics of the Spanish *comedia* in the three Purim plays. First of all, they operate with biblical stories that are already quite popular in the literary tradition where they gain their main inspiration from. All three stories are full of dramatic scenes and conflicts, most of which are already present in the Bible as well, such as the gravest of them all, the threat of complete extermination of Jews featuring in the Book of Esther and *Aman y Mordochay*, the deception of Esau by his brother Jacob in Genesis and *Jahacob e Essau*, or the typical element of disguise in the narrative of Joseph in Genesis and *El perseguido dichoso*. However, all of them end with a satisfying happy ending. They follow the style of the Spanish *comedia*: two out of three are written in Spanish, and all are arranged into three acts, although McGaha criticizes *El perseguido dichoso* for not having equally long parts (i.e. Act III is much shorter), or *jornadas*, as they were called at the time.[209] They also follow the metric system Lope would suggest: *romances* dominate *El perseguido dichoso* (although, again, McGaha points out the author's many mistakes and occasional odd

[208] Colbert Cairns, *Esther in Early Modern Iberia*, 61–62.
[209] McGaha, *The Story of Joseph*, 229.

choices),[210] while *quintillas*, though less common but still significant in Spanish drama, are the most frequent verses in the other two.[211]

II.2. Authors, Editors, and Patrons

Today, the first item on any book cover is usually the name of the author. Here, though, the title pages of two out of the three plays do not even contain the author's name, the only one we know of being Isaac Matatia de Aboab, the writer of *El perseguido dichoso*.

According to his genealogical history, which goes back to the fifteenth century,[212] Aboab's family was originally from Porto, and took the Dias surname after their conversion to Christianity, though several members continued to practice Judaism in a clandestine manner. The author's father, Manoel Dias Henriques, moved to Mexico, where the local Inquisition accused him of crypto-Judaic activity, for which he fled to Amsterdam and converted to Judaism in 1626, taking the name of Matatia Aboab,[213] one of the typical aristocratic Sephardi names that, according to Harm den Boer, returnees chose, symbolically burying their past Christian selves and expressing their unique New Jewish identity.[214]

He and his wife Ester's son, Isaac de Matatia Aboab was born on the night of September 6, 1631.[215] He worked as a merchant, which fits perfectly into our picture of contemporary authors and other intellectuals who were all wealthy businessmen and focused on literature only as a pastime activity. He was, without a doubt, a prominent member of the

[210] Ibid., 230.
[211] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 17., 94.
[212] For a detailed analysis of the source, see: Israël Salvator Révah, "Pour l'histoire des Nouveaux-Chrétiens portugais: La relation généalogique d'I. de M. Aboab," *Boletim Internacional de Bibliografia Luso-Brasileira* 2 (1961): 276–310.
[213] Isaac de Matatia Aboab, "Livro de nota de ydade reducido por my Ishack Aboab e copiado por my Mathatia do Senhor Ishack Aboab" [1685–1686], EH-48-E-27, 9, Ets Haim Bibliotheek, Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam.
[214] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 44.
[215] Aboab, „Livro de nota," 11.

community, since twice, in 1688 and 1697, he was elected to the board of the *Ma'amad*. He translated, edited, and wrote several works, including the aforementioned genealogy. Aboab was a well-educated and well-read Sephardi known for his large manuscript collection,[216] a fact that his Purim *comedia* buttresses with its many intertextual references. Harm den Boer has published the list of book titles Aboab recommended to his son in 1685, principally ethical and religious works, but also mentioning handbooks for accounting, which tells us a lot about which books Sephardim (or at least their intellectual elite) consumed at that time.[217] At the age of 75, he died on March 17, 1707 in Amsterdam.[218]

Despite the anonymity of the other two *comedias*' authors, several names are nonetheless mentioned on the title page and in the dedication of each: *Jahacob e Essau* refers to its donators, Abraham Ramires and Ishac Castello, who financed its publication, and is dedicated to Manuel de Belmonte; while *Aman y Mordochay* provides us the name of its editor, Ishack de Aboab Cohen de Lara, who dedicates the play "to the highly noble lord, and my friend, David de Souza Brito."[219] There is no available information on Ramires, Castello, or de Souza Brito in the literature, despite their presumed wealth and prominence in the Sephardi community; however, there is on Manuel de Belmonte, since he was, undoubtedly, the most influential Sephardi diplomat of his age.

Manuel (or Isaac Nuñez) de Belmonte, as Ramires and Castello's dedication also mentions,[220] earned the prestigious titles of baron, count palatine, and ambassador of Emperor Charles II of Spain (the last Habsburg on the Spanish throne who ruled between 1664 and 1700) to Holland.[221] As mentioned in Chapter I, Belmonte founded and was a

[216] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 333.
[217] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 113–114.
[218] McGaha, *The Story of Joseph*, 228.
[219] *Aman y Mordochay*, 3: Al Muy/Noble Señor/Y mi Amigo/David de Souza Brito.
[220] *Jahacob e Essau*, ii.
[221] Besso, "Dramatic Literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries," 231.

member of several literary academies, increasing his own prestige among Sephardim.[222] Harm den Boer notes that it often occurred that Sephardi literary pieces were dedicated to influential and powerful Sephardi protectors and patrons of high esteem (primarily diplomats), whose religious affiliation was never mentioned, unlike their aristocratic or other official titles they carried, just like in the case of Belmonte on the pages of the dedicatory segment in *Jahacob e Essau*. Den Boer states that the mention of such prestigious names in the dedicatory letter might have stimulated and intensified the sales of a publication, even among Christians.[223] Possibly, the same notion could be applied to the case of *Aman y Mordochay* mentioning the name of David de Souza Brito, who must have been a lesser-known but still prominent member of the community, whose relatives included the merchant and geographer Gabriel de Souza Brito.[224]

What we learn about Isaac Cohen de Lara from the title page and the endnotes of *Aman y Mordochay* is that he worked as a bookseller, and corrected, reedited, and rearranged (or more probably even adapted and altered) an original version of the play into three acts in order "to make it presentable."[225] This important phrase is accompanied by another key notion: namely that Cohen de Lara published the *comedia* explicitly for the occasion of Purim ("according to the taste and pastime formulated for this present period of Purim"),[226] a purpose that is only assumed in the two other cases based on the time of their publication and their generic characteristics. This gives an occasional character to the play, which might underpin an argument articulating that it was primarily meant by the author to be performed. The editor-publisher wished to invigorate the spirit of Purim and the possible performances accompanying it by adding a number of humorous and witty appendices, such as Spanish

[222] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 145.
[223] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 62.
[224] Kayserling, *Biblioteca*, 104.
[225] *Aman y Mordochay*, 80: para se poder representar.
[226] Ibid., title page: de gusto y pasatiempo para este presente tiempo de Purim.

and Dutch riddles, a drinking game, a cake-cutting game, or a simple-toned ballad about Jacob that, due to their content, will be discussed in the following chapter. In his dedication to his friend, David de Souza Brito, he even evokes the fundamental tradition of giving gifts on Purim by offering this play to him as a present for his friendship and the favors he has done for him.[227]

Cohen de Lara claims that the original author is a "talent from Hamburg,"[228] who listed some of the typographical errors in his own piece, which Cohen de Lara reproduces at the very end of the publication. The statement that the piece was not his own but was written by a Sephardi living in Hamburg might be true (and we do know of another Cohen de Lara, David, a rabbi, from whom he could have received the play due to their probable family connections),[229] or it might just be a marketing trick, to create a vibe of exoticism by marking the author as a mysterious Sephardi brother from abroad.

The publishers of *Jahacob e Essau* followed similar tactics, enhanced by mentioning the name of Belmonte. They claim that the playwright they are promoting is "a celebrated author,"[230] who, in reality, might as well be just an unknown aspiring writer. In addition, all three titles characterize their core texts as "*comedia famosa*," inducing the same luring mechanism as the other attributes, but these two features also embody a curious act of self-canonization as they copy the established formulaic conventions of advertising already successful Spanish plays in Iberia. Ramires and Castello, indeed, needed such methods to sell their product, as they also highlight the relative shortcoming of the piece, that is, its language choice. Portuguese, they admit, is not the proper medium of Sephardi *belles-lettres*; however, they intend to justify the author's choice by evoking sentimental feelings toward

[227] Ibid., 3–4.
[228] Ibid., 80: un ingenio de Amburgo
[229] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 14.
[230] *Jahacob e Essau*, iii: um autor célebre.

their mother tongue and the whole "illustrious Hebrew Nation,"[231] adding that this might compensate the fact that *Jahacob e Essau* was not written in Spanish, which is not simply the primary medium of Sephardi letters, but also the standard language of the *comedia*—or as Ramires and Castello refer to it, the "*arte cômica*"[232]—the popularity of which they are very well aware of.

Why though did the author choose the vernacular? Probably because he was aware of the fact that via Portuguese he could reach a much wider audience, an effect which the theatre, as one of the only mass media of the era, could even advance further. This, in the case of Purim festivities, was definitely an advantage, since we imagine carnivals as cultural phenomena that concerned every stratum of society, even (and especially) the popular masses. One can also argue that the use of the vernacular might have been the sign for writing the piece with the intention of an oral performance in the first place. In addition, in a more abstract sense, such a language, due to its inferior status to Spanish in the mindset of contemporary intellectuals, functioned rather subversively in the case of Purim: as the language of the people, the streets, and quotidian life, it displaces Spanish as the language of culture, and reinforces the upside-down character of the carnival in which *Jahacob e Essau* should be situated and reimagined.

Harm den Boer consciously connects the two publications to each other, meditating on whether they published a Spanish and a Portuguese Purim play to equally satisfy all of those who preferred one to the other.[233] He also adds that in some cases the mother tongue of the author was also determinative. Therefore, one might assume that the author of *Jahacob e Essau* was a native speaker of Portuguese, which can be reinforced by the fact that the linguistic and stylistic quality of the play is superb, with only a handful of hispanisms in the

[231] Ibid., ii: Nação Hebreia Insigne.
[232] Ibid., ii.
[233] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 43.

text. However, it is highly unlikely that the other author belonged to the Spanish-speaking minority of the population,[234] since his work is full of mistakes and lusisms: he must have picked Spanish solely for its prestige within the cultural sphere, just as the majority of authors in Amsterdam did.

What do we know about the two authors themselves? Almost certainly, they also belonged to the economic and intellectual elite of the community, because virtually every author of Sephardi literature came from wealthy families and had a daytime occupation in commerce or finance, and because the names of patrons financing the publications mentioned in the dedications indicate an extended social network within the highest stratum of Jewish society in Amsterdam. Despite the fact that the editors/publishers call them a "celebrated author" and "a talent from Hamburg," respectively, they were certainly not known for other literary works. The style of the enthusiastic amateur author of *Aman y Mordechay*, wishing to ride the tide of the popularity of Sephardi theatre during its heyday, is too rugged,[235] and that of the other playwright does not resemble any other writer's within the corpus, according to Harm den Boer.[236]

The reason behind the anonymity of authors of *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau* could be twofold, then. As I already noted in each case, marketing considerations might have been rather dominant (especially if each author was, in fact, an unknown newcomer), but an argument claiming that the authors might also have chosen secrecy to detach their own (otherwise spotless) reputation from such a denounced genre as the theatre within Judaism cannot go unheeded either.

[234] Ibid., 36.
[235] Ibid., 324.
[236] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 335.

II.3. Places, Dates, Censors, and Media

The three plays can be attributed to the Sephardi community of Amsterdam as their own intellectual products, because of the social network the *comedias* are situated in, the authorization of the *Ma'amad* which allowed their publication, and the fact that Amsterdam was practically the only significant dwelling-place for Jewish subjects within the Netherlands—despite the curious fact that the official places of publication of the printed pieces, *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau* are two smaller Dutch towns, Leiden and Delft, respectively.

The use of fake *loci* was a common practice in Sephardi Amsterdam. According to Harm den Boer, many times it was not related to censorship issues,[237] but to, yet again, marketing considerations,[238] especially since the *Ma'amad*'s signature approving the publication was at the bottom of the page in both cases. This method could have either triggered customers' affinity to buy these products as these fake names might have alluded a more exotic place of origin, or it could have soothed the suspicion of the Holy Office in cases of distributing Jewish books abroad by posing as a publication coming from a Catholic settlement without any significant Jewish or New Christian population, or any scandal of heretic activity.[239] In some cases, such strategies even lifted the responsibility of the Amsterdam community in the eyes of the Protestant church.[240] For sure, the name of Leiden must have been a buzzword within cultural circles because of its prestigious university

[237] Although he also notes that it was often the case, most notably in that of Miguel de Barrios, who was considered by many as an idolater, whose works are full of mythological and Christian allusions. See: den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 103.
[238] Ibid., 55.
[239] Ibid., 53.
[240] Harm den Boer, "Isaac de Castro, Albert Boumeester and Early Sephardi Printing in Amsterdam," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 38–39 (2005–2006): 231.

established in 1574 by William I, which also functioned as a regional intellectual center, primarily for Dutch and German students.[241]

The declaration of the approval of the *Ma'amad* is, then, unconnected to the designated places of publication. It is important to highlight that the board only examined works with some sort of a religious content, such as in the case of Purim plays, although the main concern here was not about the content but rather the genre.[242] The *Ma'amad* nominally had the power to confiscate books but never actually executed this right of theirs, and instead mostly censored books that were explicitly opposed to doctrines of the Written or the Oral Law, or publications that evoked Christian or pagan *topoi*.[243] Nevertheless, the usually very strict censors (rabbis, whom the *Ma'amad* commissioned to examine worrying pieces) granted both *comedias* the right to publication, unlike many of Barrios' pieces—again, showing from the official communal point of view that Purim was the only occasion when theatre was permitted to manifest itself.

Aman y Mordochay was approved on Adar 10th, slightly before the holiday itself, indicating the preparations for and the elevated mood of the upcoming events taking place on Purim, alongside the title page that declares the holiday as the occasion for the piece, perhaps even signifying that it was originally written to be performed. Interestingly, *Jahacob e Essau* was printed two months after Purim, on Iyar 6th of the same year, which might denote that it followed the Spanish tradition of publishing plays *after* they had proven to be successful (thus the expression *comedia famosa*), therefore suggesting a real performance that preceded it.

Alongside the specific days of Purim and the dates of publication of the plays, the years of publication also have a crucial significance in Jewish theatre history. All three plays

[241] Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt,* 17.
[242] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí*, 98.
[243] Ibid., 95.

appeared in the late seventeenth century, two of them, *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau*, literally at its very end, in 1699. As I already established, they follow the Spanish Golden Age *comedia* tradition, probably the most productive dramatic genre and period in the history of the theatre, but, curiously, some years after it had officially ended in 1681 with the death of Calderón, its last reformer. Although the plays in focus are only three out of a dozen dramatic pieces that were written by Amsterdam Sephardim, the concentration of these three humorous plays at the end of the century is very telling with regards to the canonization of the genre itself within Jewish society. First, this must necessitate a more established, more professionalized, and more institutionalized theatrical activity in the Jewish neighborhood that, though without a fixed edifice, worked simultaneously and, at times, in cooperation with the local municipal theatre, the Schouwburg (for more details, see Chapter IV). Second, this newly emerging theatrical practice stood in a rather paradoxical situation: although, as indicated before, Sephardi *comedia* manifested itself more prominently only after the zenith of its Spanish sister, it still became a first significant step toward modern Jewish theatre. Moreover, as the three Purim plays represent a parodistic branch of drama, they are *the* first comic theatrical manifestations of Jewish humor, all so in a professionalized and more or less canonized context, which is reinforced not only by their growing frequency but by their materiality as well. What is the significance of all this?

The fact that two pieces that are at the same time comic *and* theatrical were allowed to be printed and disseminated by the central authority of the community tells us that they finally broke through the glass ceiling that had limited and controlled the growth and development of theatre within Jewish culture, and molded it into a regulated form that truly resembled European dramatic practices—and it all came from the setting of a religious holiday that paradoxically opened the doors for the hitherto despised comedy.

El perseguido dichoso was written a decade earlier, in 1686; however, there are some ambiguities that contradict the date indicated on the title page: the sonnet that initiates the play as an epigram dates itself to 1652,[244] while the year on the back is 1694 (5454). To resolve this contradiction, I would suggest that the sonnet was not an original piece by Matatia Aboab but only a borrowed text, and the date on the leather back cover might indicate its (new) binding. In other words, the existing version is a 1694 copy of the original, thus implying a new wave of circulation after its first appearance within the Sephardi literary scene—and perhaps even a performance that might have given the *à propos* to rebind and disseminate the play once more. *El perseguido dichoso* must have remained popular, at least within intellectual circles, because it was circulated in manuscript form well into the eighteenth century, as the Ets Haim Library owns another copy of the play dated to that period.[245] It might embody an earlier stage of the previously described process of the development of theatre, perhaps to a more limited extent than any printed material (for instance, among academy members). Despite not being an easily distributable printed text, the reappearance and multiple versions of the manuscript show that it could also reach an audience quite easily, which might also allow the possibility of a performance, at least an intimate one, with a handful of people as the cast and/or the audience in an academic (and, therefore, aristocratic) environment.

Regarding the question of media and materiality, the seventeenth-century manuscript has a contemporary gold-tooled leather binding with "Comedia de Josseph" written on the front and "Matatya Aboab anno 5454" on the back, and it is written in very legible handwriting.[246] The printed plays show that their printers had little to no knowledge of the

[244] *El perseguido dichoso*, 6.
[245] Isaac de Matatia Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso" [18th-century copy], EH-48-E-04-05, Ets Haim Bibliotheek, Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam: http://etshaimmanuscripts.nl/manuscripts/eh-48-e-04-05/. Accessed: May 3, 2018.
[246] The Ets Haim Bibliotheek catalogue entry suggests that it is the handwriting of the author himself: http://etshaimmanuscripts.nl/manuscripts/eh-48-d-21/. Accessed: May 3, 2018.

two Iberian languages, as they contain many typographic errors, especially *Aman y Mordochay*, which often make them quite difficult to read (the latter in particular). The punctuation in *Jahacob e Essau* is very logical and makes it easier to understand the narrative—which cannot be stated about the Spanish piece. As mentioned, *Jahacob e Essau* contains fewer spelling mistakes, for which the author nonetheless asks its readers' forgiveness at the end of the publication.[247] This suggests that it was destined for a readership, but it does not reject the possibility of performance either. We will never know whether these *comedias* were ever performed, however, they contain a large number of clues and references with the help of which we can reconstruct a clearer image of seventeenth-century Sephardi parodic theatrical practices.

II.4. Purim Plays as *Comedias Burlescas*

Despite the authors, editors, and patrons' common intention to sell their plays as "*comedias famosas*," operating with various tools (such as anonymity, the evocation of exoticism and mysteriousness, references to the alleged fame of the author and the play, or the popularity of the genre), and fulfilling all the formal requirements of playwriting in the fashion of Lope de Vega, as briefly seen above, I would like to offer an alternative generic classification of the Purim plays in discussion: namely, the genre of the *comedia burlesca*, the parodistic play of Lope's serious/new *comedia* (*comedia seria/nueva*).

The *comedia burlesca* in Spanish literature (or in other names: *comedia de disparates, comedia de chanza, or comedia de chistes*) is a corpus of circa fifty pieces, primarily written during the reign of Philip IV (1621–1665) and performed at carnival time or on Saint John's

[247] *Jahacob e Essau*, 90.

Eve.[248] They continued to be performed well into the eighteenth century as well; however, their amount did not exceed a dozen.[249] Primarily, the genre's parodistic (*burlesca*) aspect did not simply mean the presentation of a handful funny scenes and characters (because the *comedia seria* can have these, too): it aimed to parody and subvert the set of generic criteria of Lope's new aesthetics, the core of the genre itself.[250] Its main channel to achieve this goal was the establishment of a comic contradiction that was being set up in a burlesque play by using the *comedia*'s formal requirements and filling them up with folly and absurdity (*disparate*—thus the genre's other name). Though they were usually shorter than serious *comedias*, they operated with the same verse types, stylistic elements, and, as seen above, the same paratextual components and strategies, which were, then, combined with surprising or rather shocking narrative elements that were beyond the general horizons of expectation (to use the Jaussian term) of its audience, generating a humorous tension between the already-known and commonly shared literary tradition and the illogical twists in the plotline and the unusual behavior of the characters.[251] The subversion of appropriate behavior on stage (*decorum*) by the use of vulgarity, a verbal tone that did not match a character's social class (as it was originally expected and practiced), or inappropriate courting were major tools of the parodistic play.[252]

In order to make its mechanism work and succeed, the audience did need to know the contemporary literary practices and basic *topoi* (mythological, legendary, historical, etc.) that were parodied on stage. Carme Morell Montado suggests that the seventeenth-century

[248] Ignacio Arellano and Carlos Mata Induráin, *Dos comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro: El comendador de Ocaña, anónima. El hermano de su hermana, de Francisco Bernardo de Quirós* (Kassel: Reichenberger, 2000), 2–4.
[249] Adelaida Cortijo Ocaña and Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, "Carnaval y teatro en el los siglos XVI y XVII, *El cortesano* de Luis de Milán y la comedia burlesca barroca," *Revista del Filologia Española* 84, no. 2 (2004): 399.
[250] Carme Morell Montado, "La comedia burlesca del siglo XVII: La otra cara de la comedia nueva," *Caligrama: revista insular de Filologia* 3 (1990): 57.
[251] Ibid., 57–58.
[252] Ibid., 62–63.

audience of the *comedia burlesca* indeed knew these traditions, as they had seen so many theatrical plays beforehand that they had a general perception of what was expected when going to the theatre.[253] Margaret Wilson buttresses this by showing that due to the relatively small population of Madrid for instance, a rapid refreshment of the repertoires of the local theatres was required, since virtually everybody went and could see every piece very soon, and the audience was supplied with a fair amount of *comedias*.[254]

In my opinion, this generic classification matches the Purim *comedias* well for a number of reasons. Firstly, the three stage plays took place in a carnivalesque *Sitz im Leben*, just like the *comedias burlescas* back in Spain, and contain a large number of folkloristic references as well. Secondly, their authors, as shown, had a similar social status to their Spanish colleagues. Thirdly, these plays utilize the same tools as *comedias* and are filled with the same parodistic features as *comedias burlescas*, such as word plays, situation comedy, or the mixture of different linguistic and stylistic registers. Chapter III will be devoted to this exact parodistic layer. Lastly, the whole foundation of Purim literature (including songs, poems, mock sermons, or plays) is parody itself, as all occasional pieces were written in strict and meticulous forms well-known to Judaism and then filled with absurdities and vulgarity with the purpose of generating a comic dissonance during carnival time. Purim drama itself, for instance, as mentioned before, evokes and parodies *megillah* recitations by adding all the aforementioned surprising, shocking, and humorous elements to the original and well-known biblical narratives, which guarantees the positive outcome of the parodying mechanism. The only major difference between the representatives of the *comedia burlesca* from Spain and Amsterdam is, of course, their religious foundation: while the former defended Catholic values and promoted imperial social organization and state institutions, the latter were rooted in Judaism and gave expression to their audience's unique

[253] Ibid., 61.
[254] Wilson, *Spanish Drama*, 3.

New Jewish identity—in a twisted, upside-down manner, faithful to the spirit of the carnival. Though implicitly, they even made fun of Christian motifs, such as the scene in *Aman y Mordochay* when the carpenters daydream about a festive meal after the planned execution of Mordechai,[255] evoking similar practices after public *autos-da-fé* in Portugal (see: Chapter III), which reveals the carnival's nullifying and purifying effect at work. Additionally, Spanish *comedias burlescas* did gain inspiration from the Bible (for instance, invoking biblical passages or the characteristics of biblical figures),[256] but they never actually adapted biblical narratives to the carnivalesque context, while, as we see it, the Amsterdam Sephardim very much did so. It is noteworthy to highlight that the Sephardi authorities must have allowed the publication of these biblical plays, because only they were considered to be able to mediate relevant religious and ethical values, and not those with mythological and Christian connotations, such as many of Barrios' works.

To conclude, the paratexts of these plays provide valuable information on the socio-cultural context of seventeenth-century Purim customs, which helps us understand the process of theatre-making in the midst of a community devoted to Judaism, a religion that strictly condemns practices of this kind. The existence of such texts shows a growing affinity for stage performance and parody that challenged the rabbinic prohibition of theatre, at least on the occasion of the Jewish carnival, and the paratextual components accompanying the plays demonstrate that such efforts were supported and encouraged (or even initiated) by the cultural-economic elites (that were more or less the same). These rich patrons and aspiring authors apparently imported Spanish literary models to the Netherlands, situated and canonized their own literary products in advance within the frameworks of the *comedia*-tradition, and helped shape carnivalesque practices on the holiday of Purim, reinforcing

[255] *Aman y Mordochay*, 18–20.
[256] María José Casado Santos, "*La Biblia* y la comedia burlesca: La otra cara de lo sagrado," in *La Biblia en el teatro español*, ed. Francisco Domínguez Matito and Juan Antonio Martínez Berbel (Vigo: Editorial, Academia del Hispanismo, 2012), 331–345.

Gurevich and others' argument on the futility of sharply distinguishing between elite and popular spheres within cultural production. In addition, the paratexts reveal that the plays were written for the holiday of Purim as a piece of entertainment, and their occasional character implies the possibility of their actual performance.

The upcoming chapters will deal with the nature of such performances and additional, often folkloristic or popular practices on Purim, and will describe the reasons that opened up a pathway toward the emergence of theatre in the midst of a Jewish community and its eventual fusion with two other, seemingly very similar but at the same time quite different, performative genres: the religious ritual and the carnival.

III. THE PURIM *COMEDIA*: PERFORMANCE

Moving on from the primary paratexts framing the plays, this chapter focuses on their contents, including the appendix attached to *Aman y Mordochay*. On the following pages, I intend to reconstruct the Purim customs of the Amsterdam Sephardi community. I do this by carrying out a close reading of the plays, looking for and collecting traces and manifestations (both implicit and more explicit) of Sephardi popular practices connected to this holiday. I follow the methodological guidelines and "genres" Mikhail Bakhtin establishes in his work on Rabelais and the carnival in the Renaissance. Here, my goal is twofold: on the one hand, I intend to prove the existence of and characterize actual Purim theatrical practices among seventeenth-century Sephardim; and on the other hand, to present the folkloristic and carnivalesque aspect that interacts with and reigns over the three *comedias,* resulting in a curious semi-popular cultural product that is the Purim play.

III.1. Popular Culture in an Elite Coat

El perseguido dichoso, *Aman y Mordochay*, and *Jahacob e Essau*, as described above, follow the structural and stylistic patterns of the Golden Age *comedia*, aiming to imitate the renowned playwrights Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca, both of whom belong to the world literary canon. However, in accordance with the generic "demands" of the carnival setting that they were proposed to be a part of, I defined their genre as the *comedia burlesca*, a parodic reenactment of the serious *comedia*, featuring festive components and references to carnivals (such as music, dances, costumes, absurd logic, the inversion of social ranks, verbal humor, etc.). Below, I will justify my classification and highlight the parodic aspect of the genre and its Sephardi representatives in order to see what the literary tools were that

eventually opened a path for performative manifestations (primarily the theatre) to emerge in Western Sephardi culture.

All three plays in discussion adapt biblical narratives, namely, of Jacob's[257] rivalry with his older brother Esau and his marriage to Leah and Rachel (Gen 25–29; *Jahacob e Essau*), of Joseph (Gen 37–50; *El perseguido dichoso*), and of Esther (the Book of Esther; *Aman y Mordochay*). However, only the latter treats the foundational story of the holiday of Purim, namely, the tale of Esther, taking place in the Persian court. The fact that the original story of the holiday was often changed to another one immediately leads one to mention the existence of literary plays, jokes, comic literary genres, and parodies as common features within the context of festivals in early modern popular culture all over Europe.[258] It is enough to mention one of the most common genres, the farce, which had already been enjoying tremendous popularity from the late Middle Ages on, both in the Sephardi motherland, Iberia, and the new homeland, the Low Countries. A short but extremely hilarious and highly controversial representative of the genre is the Dutch *Farce of the Barefoot Brothers* (*De bervoete broers*).[259]

The fact that the story of Queen Esther was not the only one featured on the imaginary Purim stage of Amsterdam is not surprising. According to the literature, the story of Jacob and Joseph had penetrated the holiday of Purim around the late Middle Ages in various Jewish traditions, altering and to some extent innocently parodying the original "canonical" text of the celebration.[260] Mordechai, the uncle of Esther and a protagonist in the narrative, according to medieval Jewish folklore, was a descendant of the patriarch Jacob (while Esau was Haman's ancestor).[261] This fact is implicitly evoked by the publication of a balladic

[257] In the case of well-known and/or commonly used names, I publish their English-language equivalent (such as Joseph, Esther, Jacob, Haman, etc.), otherwise I leave and transcribe them as are, in the original form.
[258] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 121–123.
[259] Parsons and Jongenelen, "Introduction. The Older the Hollander the More Foolish," 1–22.
[260] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam*, 328.
[261] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 23.

poem called *Romance de la Salida de Jahacob de Bersaba* (The ballad of the escape of Jacob from Beer-Sheva) about Jacob, in the appendix of *Aman y Mordochay*,[262] while Joseph, in my view, has a strikingly similar position in his own story to that of Esther's. Namely, both are protagonists of biblical court tales, who, despite their Jewish origins, have surprisingly successful careers within the royal court of a major Near Eastern empire. These upstarts embody an upside down, carnivalesque existence, which becomes especially true when at the end of the Book of Esther, the Persians are the ones who start living in fear of the Jews, and when at the end of Joseph's narrative, a group of Israelites inherits the finest lands of Egypt. Moreover, all three stories share a large variety of similarities in terms of their plot, narrative twists and elements, characters or structure, many of which can be considered the perfect material for a typical carnival parodic play.

Peter Burke, in his monograph *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, lists shared basic narrative elements of popular plays, such as the acts of recognition, misunderstanding, beating, disguise, combat, wooing, weddings, trials, wills, executions, or funerals.[263] The foundational biblical stories themselves already share many of these narrative elements with popular dramatic pieces, and their presence is enhanced by the folkloristic and authorial additions in the Purim plays in discussion.

In particular, these plays draw on the dramatic effects of disguise and recognition. For instance, Joseph's identity is hidden from his brethren and is only revealed after a long series of tribulations and tests;[264] Joseph's future wife Aseneth (Asna in the original), wearing a veil, tests Joseph's fidelity in Act III of Part I;[265] Esther is disguised by the "mask" of a Persian woman (though she only appears in the very last scene in *Aman y Mordochay*); Jacob, dressed as his brother Esau, tricks his father Isaac into giving him the blessing that

[262] *Aman y Mordochay*, 78–79.
[263] Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 135.
[264] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 307.
[265] Ibid., 264.

was intended to be received by his sibling;[266] and Eliphaz, Esau's son, with his companion attempts to rob and scare Jacob off when crossing the mountains.[267] "Official" combats (such as duels) do not appear in the plays. However, there are a few occasions when characters get into a fight on stage: Joseph is bashed and thrown into a pit by his brothers;[268] Joseph beheads a crocodile;[269] a group of shepherds fights over the recently discovered wells in the mountains at the end of Act I of *Jahacob e Essau*;[270] and the previously mentioned attack on Jacob at the beginning of Act III is, according to Van Praag, a depiction of a typical Iberian bandit technique.[271]

The Joseph-play's central motif is wooing, which often results in very humorous scenes, as virtually all women featured in the piece try to seduce the young dreamer, who, as the shortened title puts it, feels both "harassed but happy" (*perseguido dichoso*) by all the female attention he gets. Weddings also appear in *El perseguido dichoso* and *Jahacob e Essau* as the final happy endings of both storylines. One can interpret certain scenes in the plays as rather rapid trials, such as the imprisonment of Joseph after allegations of sexual assault,[272] or the conviction of Mordechai that happens only backstage. Only one moment in each play can be interpreted as wills, namely the pharaoh's final words to Joseph's family, giving them a large piece of land and technically letting them rule over Egypt,[273] and Jacob's final blessing over his sons,[274] the original version of which is widely considered among the most beautiful of Hebrew poetry in the Bible.

Funerals do not feature in the plays: however, *Aman y Mordochay* contains a moment of mourning and two execution scenes, one that is a planned but later cancelled and a second

[266] *Jahacob e Essau,* 42–45.
[267] Ibid., 56–63.
[268] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 245.
[269] Ibid., 255.
[270] *Jahacob e Essau,* 20–27.
[271] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 99.
[272] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 268.
[273] Ibid., 314.
[274] Ibid., 314–315.

that is actually performed. In Act II, Zeres, Haman's wife, Supsay, their son, and Harbona, Haman's right-hand man eagerly discuss what the best method of capital punishment would be in Mordechai's case.[275] Later, in the same Act, mother and daughter have a brief chat imagining how the Jew will suffer, with no less enthusiasm.[276] In Act III, soon after Haman's hanging, Zeres delivers a monologue in mourning garb, saying that her life is over now since the man she and their ten sons and one daughter loved left them.[277] A similar scene can be found in *El perseguido dichoso*, where Jacob, believing his dearest son died, bewails Joseph in a poetic insert.[278]

In addition to Burke's set of criteria, further characteristics and elements of folk literature can be found in the plays. For instance, reading the final scene of Act II, one comes across a rather peculiar moment, when the Devil, a frequent character of popular imagination, appears on stage and looks for the soul of Haman, who has been recently hanged on the gallows that he himself had ordered to be built for the execution of his archenemy Mordechai. The Devil then disappears from the scene but a second later comes back again, dancing and hopping around with Haman's soul on his back.[279] This scene, I reckon, has a curiously strong resemblance to the emblematic medieval Christian motif of the *Danse Macabre* (the Dance of Death) that plays a central role in both elite and popular visual and literary cultures all around Europe. Although its appearance (along with a number of other Christian motifs in Sephardi literature)[280] might be easily explained by the Iberian *converso* past of Amsterdam Sephardim, it is still an extremely rare occurrence in a Jewish cultural context.

[275] *Aman y Mordochay*, 16–18.
[276] Ibid. 20–22.
[277] Ibid. 43.
[278] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 252–254.
[279] *Aman y Mordochay*, 34–36.
[280] den Boer, "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes," 334.

All the non-biblical characters in supporting roles are regular types of medieval and early modern folktales, usually providing a comic relief as an *intermezzo* between tense dramatic scenes. In all three plays one can find shepherds, bakers, carpenters, garrotters, servants, and the like—all representatives of simple-minded people. For instance, in *El perseguido dichoso*, Joseph, when looking for his brothers in Shechem, meets a shepherd in the wilderness, who sings an ominous folksong about the jealousy of Cain, foretelling Joseph's own fate. Joseph pompously notes that he can only guess what the song is about, because he can barely understand what the shepherd is singing "in that uncouth style,"[281] evoking the stereotype of the rugged and uncultured character of the rural people. In *Jahacob e Essau*, four shepherds—Natan, Guerson, Ribato, and Ramon—have their previously mentioned verbal and physical fight about the wells they have dug in the mountains, a scene which is a creative expansion of only three biblical verses (Gen 26:20–22).[282] Their aesthetical counterexamples are Jacinto, Silvio, and Montano from Act III, who, though also shepherds, represent the idyllic and the bucolic, two topmost and intertwined issues of high literature during the Renaissance.[283] However, by bringing up the erotic in their songs about shepherdesses and their captivating dances accompanied by live music, by embodying a plain rural lifestyle, as well as by their later appearance as jesters at Jacob's wedding, they join back into the discourse on the carnivalesque. The baker of *Aman y Mordochay* sings witty folksongs and chants both times he appears, bashing and ridiculing Haman, gloatingly talking about the latter's death, and, as the mouthpiece of the author, making an interesting side note that not all of Persia should be punished for one single person's rotten and malicious mind.[284]

[281] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 13: en aquel su tosco estilo. The translation is from: Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 240.
[282] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 95.
[283] Ibid., 99.
[284] *Aman y Mordochay*, 41, vv.951–952: Solamente él culpado/Y no que los persianos.

An interesting character in *El persegudio dichoso* that deserves special mention is the lackey who, one might say, functions there as the *gracioso* or Fool—yet another central figure in carnivalesque settings. This lad is silly, vulgar, always drunk (as Joseph points out) but always asking for more, and, according to him, he is able to communicate with donkeys and gets on really well with them. Naturally, he is brushed off and treated like a dog all the time by his superiors,[285] as fools usually are, except at the heyday of the carnival when they become kings for a day.[286]

In his brief publication on the two *comedias*, Jonas van Praag discusses with great care the late antique and early medieval Jewish legends that became parts of their respective narrative models, while Michael McGaha does the same regarding *El perseguido dichoso*. Van Praag points out that *Jahacob e Essau* primarily relies on the foundational biblical narrative, with some additions originating from the innovative fantasy of the author and a legend telling the story of the hit-and-run raid of Jacob by Eliphaz.[287] In contrast, the overall plotline of *Aman y Mordochay* shows great resemblance to a legend that can be found in Ginsberg's collection of *The Legends of the Jews*,[288] with a set of other fables inspiring the scenes of the brainstorming of how Mordechai should be executed[289] and of Haman's humiliating encounter with the chamber pot.[290] McGaha demonstrates that a principal narrative element in *El perseguido dichoso* most probably comes from the late antique Greek novel *Joseph and Aseneth*,[291] an extrabiblical narrative that deals with the history of the romance between Joseph and his future wife in great detail.[292] With such intertextual

[285] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 294–295.
[286] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 197.
[287] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 99.
[288] Ibid., 17.
[289] Ibid., 18.
[290] Ibid., 20.
[291] Despite the fact that the oldest extant version is a Syriac manuscript from the 6th century CE, scholars argue that *Joseph and Aseneth* was composed in *koine* Greek. See: Christoph Burchard, "*Joseph and Aseneth* (First Century BC – Second Century AD): A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2., ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1985), 181.
[292] McGaha, *The Story of Joseph in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, 231.

allusions the authors could further stimulate the shared imagination and common knowledge of the masses, as these legends and alternate versions of biblical stories were widely known among commoners.

As a closing remark on the genre and its typological elements, the very fact that two out of the three pieces were written by anonymous authors might even evoke a certain popular cultural atmosphere around the works, since anonymity and the virtual "non-existence" of an author, or, more precisely, *the* author, could be considered a significant component of oral tradition. During the Middle Ages the concept of "the author as an institution" had not yet appeared widely in people's mindsets.[293] However, I believe that later in Early Modernity, especially when considering Spanish Golden Age drama that our authors intended to imitate, anonymous transmission can indeed be seen as an implicit allusion to folkloristic tendencies for whatever reason of the true identity of the authors of *Jahacob e Essau* and *Aman y Mordochay* might originally have been concealed (see Chapter II).

III.2. Classy Girls, Filthy Mouths

In pieces connected to the popular sphere, the way characters talk is very *telling*, as they usually gain inspiration from "marketplace talk." Here, Bakhtin distinguishes two categories: the genres of "familiar speech" (curses, profanities and oaths) and of "colloquialisms of the marketplace" (announcements, shout-outs, whoops, etc.).[294] In the following, these manifestations of folk culture will be examined, and, by expanding their

[293] Genette, *Paratexts*, 42.
[294] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 153.

horizon, a set of additional identifiable genres will be appended as well: the folksong, the ballad, the proverb, and the riddle.

All three *comedias* have a variety of examples of everyday talk, colloquialisms, and moderate vulgarity, as a means to parody generally expected social norms and *decorum*, i.e. appropriate behavior (that are represented in *comedias serias*). To start from the general tones of the ordinary people, it is of key importance to note that the almost unintelligible manner in which the shepherd from *El perseguido dichoso*, mentioned in the previous subchapter, speaks is a crucial reference to the general perception of villagers' verbal skills and expression. In *Jahacob e Essau*, after losing Isaac's blessing, Esau curses Jacob, calling him a "wicked creature"[295] and a "hostile brother"[296] and Rebecca a "cruel mother,"[297] and swears that he will prove his parents wrong and take revenge on his brother. Profanity and verbal aggression is a common feature in the conversations of Joseph's brothers in *El perseguido dichoso*. Right in the very first scene, they wish they could tear their younger brother apart, and when he shows up, they ironically say, "here comes the good piece,"[298] or as McGaha translates: "Mr. Smarty-Pants"[299]—a line which resonates with a later verse by Yissaskhar saying "there comes our dreamer,"[300] which is actually a direct quotation from Gen 37:19. Later on, before eventually selling him to Ismaelite merchants, the brothers swear several times that they will kill Joseph, besides the constant bullying he has to endure.[301]

Perhaps the most typical features in Joseph's play are the catfights between female characters over Joseph's love (or, more likely, his body), in which these mostly noblewomen very often end up expressing themselves in a rather vulgar tone, thus physically representing

[295] *Jahacob e Essau*, 48, v.1164: Ah! Mofina criatura!
[296] Ibid., v.1184: irmão enemigo.
[297] Ibid., v.1179: Ah! Cruel mãe.
[298] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 2: aqui viene/La buena pieza.
[299] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 233.
[300] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 20: viene nuestro soñador.
[301] Ibid., 19–20.

the world turned upside down that is the carnival. Aseneth defends Joseph's honor from Zenobia, while she calls the young girl an "infamous shameless hussy"[302] or "bitch," as McGaha translates,[303] and swears to take revenge on both her and Joseph at the end of Act I of Part II. Right in the next scene, during Joseph's public audience, three women, Aseneth, Semiramis and Cumena start to quarrel and degrade themselves by saying rather vulgar insults to each other, such as one technically calling the other a dog by calling up a proverb:

Aseneth	*Porque confiada estoy*	Because I am confident
	que no sois vos más y soy yo	that it is not you anymore but me
	quien ha de ser admitida.	who must be chosen.
Semiramis	*Mirad que no venga a ser*	You should realize that the dream of the dog
	el sueño del perro.	never comes to life.
Aseneth	*No, que basta estar aquí yo*	No, it's enough for me to be here
	para os oscurecer.	to darken you.
Semiramis	*Sois luz pero eclipsada*	You are light but eclipsed
	de mi sol y sombra os hace.	by my sun that overshadows you.[304]

The argument becomes so heated that Joseph has to interrupt by pointing out that with such vulgar words no one can seduce any man,[305] meaning that the verbal register the two women utilize in conversation is indeed a rather low one. All these items of familiar speech are non-official components of the language that, according to Bakhtin, turn over the linguistic conventions, norms and expectations of an ordinary day (i.e. noblewomen only speak eloquently, while it is the peasants' "role" to be obscene, especially in the literary framework of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* theatre), invoking the vulgar language often associated with the streets (which, at the same time, is the way people talk in the upside down world),[306] and by putting it in the mouth of the upper class, the authors of the *comedias* generate a class-

[302] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 87: infame desvergonzada.
[303] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 280.
[304] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 106.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 195.

specific source of humor, preparing the stage for further, better-defined genres of popular culture.

The only representative of the Bakhtinian system's "colloquialisms of the marketplace" is the genre of the never-ending list of different items as a form of announcement often connected to markets, usually food, an example of which appears, though not in a bazaar setting, in *Aman y Mordochay*, as a carpenter lists the various meals that he wishes to consume on such a festive occasion as a public execution.[307] Similar long itemizing of food can be easily imagined at marketplaces as vendors try to sell their goods to naïve passers-by, loudly shouting what they have to offer, and overstating their dimensions. Bakhtin writes that such enhancement of the quality, quantity and/or size of food is one of the most typical and most ancient forms of "hyperbolizing grotesque," usually standing in close parallel with images of exaggerated body portions (big bellies, buttocks, or phalli).[308]

Turning toward the song tradition, such inserts are clearly distinguishable from the main narrative of the plays, both by instructions provided ("singing," "X sings," etc.) and by separate metric versification. In *Aman y Mordochay*, the baker, as already mentioned, sings two songs as expressions of mockery targeting Haman, first, basically cursing him and wishing that the Devil would come in the end and take the evil wrongdoer to hell, and then, figuratively rejoicing over his dead body and chanting unintelligibly "tino tino tino tino ufalala ufalala!"[309] Bakhtin shows that popular genres of mockery serve a central function in people's mentality, as they allow their performers to look the evil in the eye and, by laughing at it, eliminate it with the overwhelming and destructive power of humor and laughter.[310]

[307] *Aman y Mordochay*, 18–20.
[308] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 184.
[309] *Aman y Mordochay*, 39, v.913–914.
[310] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 42.

At times, it is hard to distinguish between real folksongs featuring in the plays, authorial songs intentionally imitating the plain style and structure of folksongs, and inadvertently less complex or eloquent authorial compositions. One obvious example of the latter, though, is the masterpiece by the author of *Jahacob e Essau*, namely, the bucolic song mentioned in the previous subsection, evoking the peaceful rural life close to nature, the beauty of shepherdesses, and their stimulating dances.[311] At the end of the play, the shepherds Jacinto, Silvio and Montano sing a wedding song/toast to the groom Jacob.

At the beginning of Act II of *El perseguido dichoso*, Simon sings a folkloristic song about spring, featuring typical *topoi* of such poetry: blooming flowers, happy colors, chirping songbirds, sunshine, sweet roses and a peacock with which the singer identifies himself.[312] Similarly, Aseneth and her maid Rezinda sing a song about sunrise when they first appear in the play. The performance is interrupted by a crocodile crawling out of the Nile that Joseph kills immediately.[313]

A last example that should stand here is the *Romance de la Salida de Jahacob de Bersaba* attached to *Aman y Mordochay* that, being a ballad, represents a transitory genre between the poetic song tradition and prosaic works narrating Jewish legends. In twelve strophes, the *Romance* recounts the biblical myth of Jacob's escape from Esau's wrath from Beer-Sheva, his dream of the ladder, his meeting and later marriage with his biggest love Rachel in Beit-El—the same events that are described in Act III of *Jahacob e Essau*. The piece is rather short, and it is written in simple Spanish, "with no artistic value," as Van Praag evaluates it.[314] The other legend features in *Jahacob e Essau* and tells the story of another patriarch, Abraham, destroying the idols of his father Terach. This interlude is sung

[311] *Jahacob e Essau*, 67–69.
[312] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 18–19.
[313] Ibid., 36–37.
[314] Van Praag, "Dos comedias sefarditas," 23.

by a musician to Isaac who asks him to "sing a nice ballad."[315] After hearing the long *romance*, Jacob becomes very content with both the excellent lyrics and the pleasant melody,[316] which indicates that such ballads were sung among Jews, and that performing and listening to them and other legendary narratives in a poetic form was indeed an appreciated form of entertainment, even around the time of Purim.

Proverbs and idioms are also quite well-represented in these plays, proving further the incorporation of oral culture in early modern Purim traditions in the Netherlands. An example has already been mentioned above, as Semiramis in *El perseguido dichoso* says that "the dream of the dog would never come to life." In *Jahacob e Essau*, as Jacob retells his successes and tribulations to Laban, he says that when Esau was begging for food, he "grabbed the hand of the occasion for not to find it bare later,"[317] i.e., he immediately took the opportunity in order not to let it pass. Later, when Rachel confronts her father with his foul play regarding her marriage to Jacob, she says, "Everything was just the fabrication of a hundred thousand wind castles,"[318] i.e., everything he promised was just empty talk. Another example is provided by Guerson, a shepherd in Act I, as he argues with Ribato about the newly opened wells, saying that "You back the wrong horse, if you intend to go there!" or literally, "you make firewood out of bad bush."[319] As one can deduce from the examples, most proverbs are used when expressing anger, aggression, or threat, representing the colloquial, or, occasionally, rather vulgar layers of the language.

Riddles only appear in the attachment of *Aman y Mordochay*, but provide valuable information on early modern Sephardi oral culture. In the appendix, four different sections are related to this genre: 1. "36 Spanish enigmas with responses in verse, taken from a book

[315] *Jahacob e Essau*, 39, v.939: Canta algum bom romance.
[316] Ibid., 42, vv.1012–1014: Que está/A letra mui excelente/E a toada decente.
[317] Ibid., 74, vv.1843–1844: Lancei a mão da ocasião/Por não a achar depois calva.
[318] Ibid., 86, vv.2174–2175: Que tudo foi fabricar/Cem mil castelos de vento.
[319] Ibid., 22, vv.512–513: Fazes a lenha em ruim mato/Se pretendes ir por aí.

called *400 Responses*, asked by the Admiral of Castile Don Fedrique Henriquez from his confessor," 2. "Responses of the 36 Enigmas," 3. "Enigmas from a manuscript," and 4. "25 Curious Dutch enigmas."[320] Although the style of the Admiral's enigmas differs from the others in complexity and eloquence, the content of each section is rather similar, raising fairly long and obscure questions about simple objects and concepts, such as the shadow, fingers, the wind, a fox, a parrot, ants and other insects, chess, a comb, a quill, a needle, a mirror, a key, a bed, ice, various professions (surgeon, barber, apothecary, physician), death or time. The first two chapters with the thirty-six riddles and their keys take up most of the given space, while the answers to the questions from the manuscript or the Dutch ones are only printed on the margins of the pages. Nevertheless, all of them raise a set of issues that needs to be addressed.

Don Fadrique Enríquez, who is quoted as the questioner of the 36 enigmas taken from *Las quatrocientas respuestas* edited by Enríquez' confessor, the Franciscan monk Luis de Escobar, was a well-known admiral of the Spanish Armada back in the late fifteenth century, a great authority in the past of Iberia and its inhabitants. The collection (*cancionero*) is categorized as a representative of Renaissance problem literature (*literatura de problemas*), originating from the medieval Salerno school, with Graeco-Roman roots,[321] and it is comprehensively studied by José A. Sánchez Paso. What makes the featuring of this book in the appendix particularly peculiar is the rumor around Don Fadrique, who, according to contemporary chroniclers, had an affair with a married Jewish woman, Paloma/Palomba, and they had a baby together, whom Enríquez raised as his own, as a Christian, who was the grandfather of the future King Ferdinand of Aragon.[322] The riddles coming from this

[320] *Aman y Mordochay*, 49–75.
[321] José A. Sánchez Paso, "'Las quatrocientas respuestas a otras tantas preguntas' de Fray Luis de Escobar y la literatura de problemas en el siglo XVI" (PhD diss., Universidad de Salamanca, 1998), 7.
[322] Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 151.

publication are more complex and better-versed than the ones from the manuscript, which is due to the strong editorial modifications of the previous text, while the latter resembles the stylistic and grammatical simplicity of oral literature.

The other curiosity of this collection is the appearance of Dutch enigmas in it, very similar in form and content to those printed in Spanish. As mentioned before, according to scholars of Amsterdam Jewry, the "hollandization" of the community only began to proceed in the eighteenth century,[323] until that time Sephardim had received very little cultural or linguistic influence from the Dutch environment, although some of them must have spoken the language to some extent due to their commercial (for instance making business on the stock exchange, hiring skippers, or providing and reclaiming loans) and cultural activities (such as translating *comedia*s for the Schouwburg company). The existence and knowledge (and, of course, the survival in print) of Dutch oral poetry among seventeenth-century Portuguese-speaking Jews shows that the Dutch language served a much larger role inside the community than we previously thought, most probably restricted to a non-literary, colloquial level. Spanish equivalents added to the answers given to the riddles show at least a basic understanding of Dutch, while the riddles themselves are published unchanged, which, one might argue, could mean that the editor and his readership did not have a more profound knowledge of the language of their host country. However, I would argue that it could also mean the opposite: they did not think it would be necessary to provide translations as the corpus and its language were parts of common knowledge, and the translation of the solutions might have been the result of an unspoken pressure on the editor who felt the need to at least turn certain parts of the text into the language of the *belles-lettres* of Sephardim and of the present play as he aimed at high literary and commercial success by publishing *Aman y Mordochay* with all its additions. Moreover, it would not have made much sense if

[323] Berger and Zwiep, "Epigones and the Formation of New Literary Canons," 150.

the author had included unintelligible enigmas in this collection of Purim texts that addressed the wide celebrating community and evoked a huge variety of elements of popular imagination that even the simplest could relate to.

Apart from very basic objects and concepts mentioned above, quite a few of these enigmas attached to *Aman y Mordochay* deal with festive notions, such as triumphal processes, joyous activities (chess, ballgames, tickling, and light spanking), and feasting-related items (such as grapes and wine, roasted birds, rooster, garlic, olive, fruits, nuts, salt, pots, and the stove), a topic that will be further discussed in the following pages.

To sum up this section, the subversion of linguistic and stylistic norms, including unexpected colloquialisms, the featuring of folk songs and popular riddles, or the inclusion of the Dutch language when celebrating Purim, is a crucial means of the *comedia burlesca* to generate a carnivalesque atmosphere on stage and among the spectators.

III.3. Banquet and the Body

In the following section, I merge three major categories of the Bakhtinian system: those of banquet imagery, the grotesque body, and the "bodily lower stratum," namely the acts of defecating, urinating, vomiting, and sexual activity, because they are closely intertwined, and their joint analysis might provide a less scattered image of early modern Jewish festive culinary customs and related metaphors.

The most valuable pieces of information come from *Aman y Mordochay*—both from the core text and the appendices following it. As mentioned above, among the verbal manifestations of popular culture in the pieces, a long list of various meals is delivered by a carpenter, Sulema, who, being involved in the construction of the grand gallows for Mordechai's execution, is daydreaming about various meals he would eat right on the

spot.[324] This episode might be a reflection on (and, since it appears in a *comedia burlesca*: a parody of) the common Iberian practice of arranging huge meals for the Inquisitors after an *auto-da-fé público* (a public execution of heretics).[325] This imaginary dinner might give us an idea of what types of dishes belonged to Iberian cuisine (as it stands in harmonious parallel to the representation of such meals in *Siglo de Oro* literature and cookbooks)[326] principally, on festive occasions, at least on an ideal level, and which items Sephardim might have kept as part of their own culinary tradition.

Sulema, combined with specific meals, mentions various cooking methods and techniques: cooking, roasting, stewing, marinating, smoking, frying, leavening, and baking. He lists roasted beef ribs, smoked beef, cooked hen, roasted capon, stewed chicken, partridge, *longaniza* (a Spanish sausage-type), fish with olives, spices, salad, and, as desserts, pastries, tarts, and a thousand *buñuelos* (fried dough balls). After seeing this list, one can immediately deduce two points: first, Sulema's dream dinner is like a special holiday meal, since almost exclusively different types of meat and sweets are mentioned, both of which were (and are) expensive dishes, not to mention the (otherwise typical) hyperbolism of their quantity; and second, Sephardim maintained the main dishes and culinary specialties they had inherited from Iberian cuisine long after their departure from the Peninsula (except for the ones that proved to be *treyfl*). Additionally, at the bottom of the list, the carpenter also gives utterance to his wish to drink both red and white mulled wine, a notion which fits well into the picture, since Purim is usually celebrated before the start of spring, in February or early March (except in leap years, when it is celebrated in late March), when a mug of hot wine warms up its consumer in the cold weather, and the "famous beer from Hamburg."[327]

[324] *Aman y Mordochay*, 18–20.
[325] António José Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians, 1536–1765* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 105–106., 111.
[326] See for instance: Maria de los Ángeles Pérez Samper, "La comida escrita en la España del Siglo de Oro," *Food and History* 2, no. 1 (2004): 85–136.
[327] *Aman y Mordochay*, 19, vv.355–356: birra de fama de Hamburgo.

While Hamburg had been a major beer brewer and exporter since the Middle Ages on a continental scale,[328] the short reference to the city and its beverage might also show proof of the strong economic connection between the Portuguese Jewish communities of Amsterdam and Hamburg and how the latter provided world-class German beer for their fellow "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation."

In the middle of Act II, a Peasant also adds to the list of desserts and sweets, when he sings a song about preferring one's belly filled to wanting to do harm to another person, referring to Haman's vicious plan to execute Mordechai: he chants that he would eat huge quantities of marzipans, candies, fried *coscorões* (a Portuguese pastry), honeyed *buñuelos*, and *aletria*, a sweet Portuguese dish made of angel hair pasta.[329]

Jahacob e Essau also contains a key food-related aspect, namely, the fact that both major conflicts between the siblings are set in a feasting scene. In Act I, Esau, arriving back home fatigued after a long and tiring hunting session, begs Jacob to let him have a bite from the lentil stew and the bread that lie in front of him, which Jacob only allows if his older brother gives up his primogeniture, that is, the privileges of a firstborn. Esau, on the verge of starving to death, agrees and gets half of the delicious meal that was prepared by their mother Rebecca, and then he also has a sip of Isaac's homemade wine that, according to him, tastes "divine."[330] In Act II, Isaac asks Esau, his favored son, to hunt and then cook him something in exchange for his mighty blessing that he would get later, which Rebecca and Jacob also hear. Jacob, convinced by his mother, slaughters a kid from their own flock, which then he, pretending to be Esau, presents to his father. He is very content with the food which

[328] Richard W. Unger, *Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 60.
[329] *Aman y Mordochay*, 30.
[330] *Jahacob e Essau*, 19, vv.430–431: Jamais cuido que hei gostado/De tão divino bocado.

he washes down with some watered-down wine and gives the divine blessing to Jacob, generating Esau's incontrollable rage.[331]

In Act I of *Aman y Mordochay*, right in the second scene, a baker appears on stage complaining about Haman the "birdbrain" (*majadero*), who claimed that his bread had "made his stomach sick,"[332] thus technically ruining the reputation of his business of selling primarily *pastel de carnero*, a pastry filled with meat, by spreading such accusations. Besides another fascinating detail of Sephardi cuisine in Amsterdam, the mention of stomach problems is also of high importance, because, as Bakhtin states in his monograph, literary and visual images regarding the "bodily lower stratum" belonged to popular culture.[333] This way, the discourse on Haman's constipation adds to the list of references to the lower layers of Jewish popular imagination, and so does the scene where Haman's daughter accidentally pours her own urine from her chamber pot on her father through the window, naively thinking that her target was actually Mordechai.[334]

Besides eating and the grotesque aspects of the body, alcohol (such as the above-mentioned mulled wine and Hamburg beer), and heavy drinking play an equal role in both the plays and in carnivals. In *El Perseguido dichoso*, the lackey is a funny alcoholic, but we also come across a short banquet scene where all the brothers dine with Joseph, all of them ending up a little tipsy and, as a result, taking a nap.[335] While these scenes are equally informative, still, the most promising data come from the appendix of *Aman y Mordochay*. First of all, there is a short toast (*brindis*) for two drinking companions that I would call a simple drinking game: each participant has to drink shots after every other verse of the toast

[331] Ibid., 42–45.
[332] *Aman y Mordochay*, 9, vv.59–60: Que el pan de que son hechos/Hace a su estómago mal.
[333] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 55.
[334] *Aman y Mordochay*, 32.
[335] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 303.

they say, basically hurrying and encouraging each other to keep chugging,[336] which is followed by a short description of how to cut a cake to eight pieces by only three cuts.[337]

Regarding sexuality and eroticism, the Joseph-play provides the most instances, since all the women desiring Joseph's body and approaching him provide the main comical vein of the piece. The most explicitly erotic scene is, without question, the one when the almost naked Zenobia, Potiphar's wife, visits the similarly unclothed Joseph in his chamber, begging him to make love to her and eventually attempting to rape him, thus subverting gender norms in such situations.[338] Other expressions of sexual desire include Zenobia's earlier monologue[339] and first attempt to seduce Joseph,[340] and the aforementioned bucolic song sung by Montano the shepherd in *Jahacob e Essau*.

To sum up, these stage plays contain a surprisingly large amount of information on both Sephardi cuisine and eating/drinking customs connected to Purim: they knew and prepared dishes that had dominantly come from Iberian gastronomy; they put a special emphasis on both the quantity and quality of food on holidays; and, finally, they did not detest alcohol and heavy drinking when it came to the most joyful holiday season of the Jewish calendar, signifying that they already observed the Talmudic commandments of preparing a special holiday meal and of consuming as much alcohol on Purim as possible. Due to these sources we might have an idea in what form Sephardim stuck to these customs: with eating heaps of meat and Iberian sweets and drinking mulled wine and German beer while singing silly songs and competing who would get knocked out first by a series of shots. Apart from the "practical" information, many hints also evoke the milieu of carnivalesque joy by introducing elements borrowed from the popular literary imagination, such as

[336] *Aman y Mordochay*, 76.
[337] Ibid., 77.
[338] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 265–266.
[339] Ibid., 259.
[340] Ibid., 263.

feastings, comic scenes ridiculing or mocking certain characters through joking about human excrement, constipation or urination, and sexual desire and its often comic depictions.

Additionally, the featuring of dining scenes in parodic plays and the references to inebriation initiate a curious and close dialogue with the official Purim liturgy that requires the organization of festive meals and heavy drinking, thus connecting theatre and the carnival to the third party of the holiday: ritual. Such comic elements, alongside the aforementioned linguistic and stylistic registers that play a key role in every *comedia burlesca* and that evoke the spirit of the carnival itself and perhaps even imply how it was practiced, show that the three plays in focus were indeed situated in and inspired by a carnivalesque environment that allowed theatre to emerge for two days and that facilitated all its manifestations and experiments. As the example of the parody of public executions showed, the carnivalesque turned the genre's otherwise all present connotations of Christianity and paganism upside down and annulled them, approving the presentation of Jewish themes on a Jewish stage.

III.4. Performing Spectacles

Earlier, I attempted to provide a thorough overview of all the hints (literary motifs, oral genres, gastronomic peculiarities, etc.) that, one way or another, evoke or (in)directly refer to a carnival-like milieu, however, the actual performative elements that bring this so far rather static picture to life have not been discussed. The findings of the previous subchapters provide valuable but mostly circumstantial information on what Purim festivities in seventeenth-century Amsterdam might have looked like, how Jews spoke on the streets, what sorts of songs they sung, what stories they told, what food and drinks they consumed, and what mentality they shared when rejoicing during the Jewish carnival.

Certain *topoi* also show that the imaginative mind of the authors (and probably the readers, too) of the Purim plays and their attachments had much in common with other, non-Jewish images and perceptions of carnivals and other festivities, i.e., what an ideal carnival/Purim should be like, since these motifs, wandering around from culture to culture, also appear in a broader European popular literary scale. We have learnt that Purim can also be associated with grotesque images of the body, with mock-genres, parodies, costumes, tricks, and street fights. Furthermore, as I have already referred to it briefly, some riddles of *Aman y Mordochay* talk about a triumphal procession, tickling and spanking one another, playing chess, and they mention the word *pelota* which can either simply mean 'ball' or a popular ball game from early modern Iberia, somewhat similar to *jeu de paume*, all of which demonstrate the ludic and the ecstatic collective aspects of Purim, as they appear entangled with a play explicitly written for the occasion of that holiday. But what can we learn about the stage performances of contemporary Purim plays?

As I have stated before, there are no sources elaborating on the character of Purim plays, performances, and other related festive activities from the seventeenth-century Netherlands. One thing is for sure, though: that Purim performances indeed happened—and *El perseguido dichoso*, *Aman y Mordochay*, and *Jahacob e Essau* did not come *ex nihilo*. The sheer existence of the *comedias* is, thus, another clue that demonstrates that similar (probably more semi-theatrical) performances had already existed in Amsterdam before the end of the century, and by reading the three plays closely, a set of references to their intended performative aspect can be outlined, alongside the already presented paratextual references (Chapter II). Despite the fact that these specific pieces might have never ended up being staged or have been intended to be closet dramas or pieces read out loud in a reader's theatre-form, as a liturgical substitute for the recitation of the Esther Scroll on Purim, based on the

findings, they were definitely envisioned to be performed and were inspired by Purim festivities and celebratory activities.

There are two contradictory pieces of evidence in *El perseguido dichoso* concerning the question of whether the play was actually meant to be performed or it was a closet play. On the one hand, at the end of Part I, a servant talks to his audience, addressing them as the "reader,"[341] and encourages them to keep on proceeding with the play as the most fun part is yet to come. On the other hand, right before the final act, Yehuda, a brother of Joseph, inserts a poem between two scenes, breaking the fourth wall and saying that the reason for this interlude is the fact that the leading actor should have a rest, as he must be very tired by standing on stage for long hours by now, and then, as McGaha translates, he continues: "If our learned audience/still wants to hear the rest,/the Third Part is still to come,/and I promise it's the best."[342] Besides being empathic toward a fellow actor, Yehuda talks about a (perhaps already tired and impatient) audience that *listens* to the performance, and he clearly tries to gain (back) their favor and attention. The musical *intermezzo* with Isaac and the Musician in *Jahacob e Essau* might have served a similar function.

Although less explicitly, the fourth wall gets broken two times in *Jahacob e Essau*: first, right before he touches Jacob dressed as Esau, Isaac, interrupting his conversation with his son, suddenly talks about Jacob in the third person;[343] and at the very end of the piece, Laban says "Hereby Jacob's success story comes to an end."[344] Similar scenes take place in both the other plays. In *El perseguido dichoso*, old Jacob delivers a long speech on the most important commandments in Judaism and implicitly reflects on the misfortunes *conversos* had to experience and suffer back in Iberia;[345] while at the end of *Aman y Mordochay*, King

[341] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 64: lector.
[342] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 310.
[343] Ibid. 43, vv. 1048–1052: E não parece razão/Deixá-lo a descrição/Maiormente estando só/Quanto as mãos de Esaú são/Mas a fala é de Jacob.
[344] Ibid., 89.
[345] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 314–317.

David, Moses, Samson, the Persian king, Mordechai, and Esther each deliver short individual monologues about joy, feasting, the commandment of commemorating Purim on Adar 14th and 15th every year and the commandment of giving gifts to others on this holiday.[346] One can imagine this latter scene as a performance of a group of amateurs who one by one stand by the edge of the stage, recite their lines with edifying purposes, and then step back. The assumed interaction with the audience is attested and reinforced by the characters' consciousness about their own fictionality and their performed roles in a theatrical setting, as Moses refers to them as Jews that are, for once, not the last but the first "in this work."[347]

The stage instructions are generally not very telling in terms of performativity: they mostly inform us about characters entering and leaving the stage. The few exceptional occasions are usually about minor physical interactions (for instance a hug) or an upcoming musical interlude, when characters burst out singing folksongs and other pieces, demonstrating that musicality had a major part in theatrical productions and festivals. Besides the instructions and the songs themselves, the bucolic song that has been mentioned several times describes a certain group or circle dance that women dance hand in hand to the rhythm of the melody, much to the delight of the male gaze of the shepherds. This excerpt also mentions the *pandeiro*, a tambourine-like Iberian musical instrument,[348] and the dancers' lamb costume.[349]

On musical instruments: besides this *pandeiro*, three other objects are mentioned in the three pieces that contemporary Jews knew and probably played as self- and mass entertainment. One of them is simply the guitar, which comes back in the refrain of the

[346] *Aman y Mordochay*, 45–48.
[347] Ibid., 46, v.1121: En esta obra.
[348] *Jahacob e Essau*, 69, v.1714.
[349] Ibid., 68, v.1679: Trajes eram de anhas.

wedding song sung by the three shepherds in *Jahacob e Essau*,[350] the other is the *vihuela*, a medieval Iberian guitar-shaped string instrument mentioned in a Spanish riddle,[351] and the third ones are the jingles (*cascabeles*) that are mentioned by Moses[352] who, besides other heroes of biblical mythology such as David and Samson, appears at the very end of *Aman y Mordochay* as an almost allegorical figure representing Judaism and orders the audience to start dancing and ringing the jingles, since, in line with the present state of the narrative, they have just shaken off the burden of the despotic Persians, which gives reason for celebration.[353] He, David, and Samson then stand in line, start to dance the *folía*,[354] and take turns in singing verses about happiness to which, according to the text, every other actor should respond as a chorus.[355] A scene later, the King, Esther, and Mordechai conduct a session with the same structure that eventually culminates in a common singing, asking "everybody inside" to join in.[356] In a carnival performance setting, it is easy to imagine that the audience would also join this dialogically structured communal singing, especially if we interpret "everybody" and "inside" with more liberty, extending the words' meaning to the entirety of the theatrical space, thus including the spectators. There is a very similar musical session in *El perseguido dichoso*, with a very similar topic (i.e., the end of tribulations), as Simon starts singing and then everyone else joins in eventually. Jacob, who arrives late, is amazed by the beautiful tunes and the gorgeous clothes his sons are wearing.[357] He, then, adds that he should also dress up, since one must wear their best garb when it is time to celebrate.[358]

[350] Ibid., 83–85.
[351] *Aman y Mordochay*, 67.
[352] Ibid., 44, v.1052.
[353] Ibid., 44.
[354] The *folía*, according to the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), is a dynamic, cavalcadous groupdance accompanied with jingles and rattles. See: Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Madrid, 1611), 859.
[355] Ibid., 44–45.
[356] Ibid., 47: Cantan todos dentro.
[357] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 311.
[358] Ibid., 312.

The wedding song by Jacinto, Silvio, and Montano is also quite informative regarding its mode of performance. The shepherds agree to rehearse their piece before actually performing it to the thrilled crowd,[359] which reminds me of a similar scene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as the craftsmen prepare for their spectacle at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. They, then, talk about wearing costumes during the performance, and agree that Montano should be the tenor singer and the others would cover the rest,[360] evoking the process of rehearsals both in the case of theatres and semi-professional performances.

It has become rather obvious that circle dances and collective singing sessions might have been parts of Purim festivities, accompanied by traditional Iberian musical instruments and defined by Iberian musical aesthetic taste, which becomes apparent via the very use of Spanish guitars and drums and the metric versification of the songs embedded in the plays. Additionally, the awareness of the categories of singing voice types and vocal range is also very remarkable.

Today, costumes and putting on one's best are basic parts of Purim celebrations, and so were they in the past, based on the evidence implicitly referring to them. There is a more explicit reference to them, when Jacob decides to serve Laban in Beit-El and leaves the stage to "turn into a pastor,"[361] and a minute later he returns, most probably dressed as the other shepherds in the *comedia*. This might also mean that previously he wore a prettier garb that fit more to his prestige as a biblical patriarch—and though the three plays are parodies of the *comedia nueva*, social status must have been expressed, at least to a minimal extent, especially in the case of the noblewomen in *El perseguido dichoso*, in order to intensify and make the humorous contrast between their status and their inappropriate behavior even more obvious. Another clear indication of stage costumes is an instruction in *Aman y Mordochay*

[359] *Jahacob e Essau*, 83.
[360] Ibid., vv.2084–2085: Dize, pois tu o tenor,/Que eu entoarei os mais.
[361] Ibid., 78: Vão-se e torna Jacob de pastor.

that informs us about the entry of Zeres wearing a mourning garb.[362] Finally, in the jail scene of the Joseph play (Act II, Scene I), Aseneth turns out to wear a veil that makes her unrecognizable—another character, Cumena, a scene later even mentions the piece of dress and wonders who Joseph's mysterious visitor might have been.[363]

The women dancing around in the bucolic song are dressed as lambs, the three shepherds talk about wearing costumes for their performance, and it is easy to imagine that Jacob, the prototypical and emblematic actor in world literary history, also wears some sort of a spectacular hairy coat made of goat fur,[364] when tricking Isaac into giving him his blessing, while giving his performance of a lifetime by dressing up and altering his voice to pretend to be Esau who speaks in a deeper tone and has very hairy arms. To add to this, the appearance and the costume of the Devil in the *Danse Macabre*-like scene of *Aman y Mordochay* might also have been composed in an extravagant artistic design.

Jacob's previously evoked comment in *El perseguido dichoso* about dressing up for the joyous occasion tells more about people's general attitude toward Purim and other festivals in that time period: even if they did not wear costumes, as one would today, participants in the carnival crowd must have worn pretty clothes, with preferably happy colors, in harmony with the holiday spirit.

Regarding sets and props, the relative lack of references to such items in the instructions or the verses, as well as the static character of the pieces, particularly of *Aman y Mordochay*, might imply that Sephardi theatre followed the "scenic minimalism" of the Spanish stage. However, generally speaking, we might imagine that certain smaller objects appeared on stage, since the three representative *comedias* mention the use of certain props, such as keys, food, swords, bows, gems (that Eliphaz steals from Jacob), a large rock that

[362] *Aman y Mordochay*, 42: sale Zeres vestida toda de duelo.
[363] Aboab, "El perseguido dichoso," 71: ¿Quién será aquesta dama/que daquí sale atapada?
[364] *Jahacob e Essau*, 75, v.1880: certas peles de cabras.

Jacob sleeps on in the emblematic "Jacob's Ladder" scene,[365] and one might even imagine that in a more monumental production of *Aman y Mordochay* the infamous gallows also could have been built up on stage (if circumstances allowed).

To sum up, there is a high probability that these and/or very similar Purim plays were actually staged in the seventeenth century in Amsterdam based on the previous paratextual analysis and all the scattered references to an audience, communal singing, circle dances, live music, *ad hoc* rehearsals, tired actors and impatient spectators, costumes, festive garbs, games, processions, cheerful intimate activities (such as tickling), as well as the fact that their well-known stories needed to have another layer, a novelty feature (such as their staging and performance), so the audience would find them entertaining. Yet we must not envision these performances and the festive activities connected to them as rigorously regulated and institutionalized cultural phenomena but apparently rather as semi-professional or even completely amateur, although enthusiastic theatrical productions that attempted to incorporate as many commonly known folk customs, commandments, and motifs as possible to make their performance both meaningful and enjoyable to their audience.

III.5. The Purim *Comedia*: Theatre, Ritual, and Carnival

In this chapter, I attempted to demonstrate that the three earliest Western Sephardi Purim plays are indeed representatives of the *comedia burlesca* that were situated in a carnivalesque context while establishing a theatrical structure. Using primarily Bakhtin's close-reading methodology, I collected as many references, hints, and clues to popular practices during the Jewish carnival as possible with the explicit intention to reconstruct how these practices were

[365] Ibid., 63–65.

performed and experienced, and how they facilitated a rather vivid theatrical activity in a Jewish context—but only for one night.

Although *El perseguido dichoso* and *Jahacob e Essau* were written in a gorgeous and eloquent Spanish and Portuguese language, respectively, and the authors of all three pieces were eager to imitate the most fashionable literary trend in theatre dictated by Spain at that time, they had very strong connections to the most influential and powerful of the elite who sponsored and patronized them (see Chapter II), and they included very few explicitly violent scenes, these Purim *comedias* still absorbed thousands of cultural stimuli coming from the folk tradition.

Consequently, one could argue two points: 1. *El perseguido dichoso*, *Aman y Mordochay*, and *Jahacob e Essau* are hybrid literary products standing right on the frontier of the high and low, of elite and popular literature and belonging to the genre of *comedia burlesca*; and 2. *Aman y Mordochay* and *Jahacob e Essau* (and a hundred years later *El perseguido dichoso*, too), by being *printed* texts of a semi-popular genre that is primarily associated with orality, are virtually the perfect embodiments of the grand medial shift that was in the process of happening in this period, namely, in Ongian terms, the transition from "hearing-dominance" to "sight-dominance,"[366] i.e., from oral to print culture.

Due to the dominant parodic aspect of the genre of the *comedia burlesca* and the upside-down character of the carnival itself, theatrical pieces could be written, published, disseminated, and even performed among Sephardim in Amsterdam with the approval of the *Ma'amad*, attestedly at least from the end of the seventeenth century onward. The examples showed how Christian motifs were annulled and ridiculed in these pieces, thus annulling religious objections against the genre as well, and how carnivalesque practices were incorporated in theatre to give it a lighter, non-serious tone that would coexist harmoniously

[366] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 30th Anniversary Edition with Additional Chapters by John Hartley (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 117–119.

alongside rabbinic concerns and the festive atmosphere of Purim at the same time. Additionally, many components revealed Purim drama's proximity to Purim rituals, as the former often reenacted the latter, dominantly with a humorous undertone.

The following chapter will look at the broader contemporary Jewish context of Amsterdam Sephardi Purim theatre. I will deal with the question of how these practices resonated with and how much they differed from Purim traditions elsewhere in Europe, in order to see how traditionally Jewish Sephardi Purim customs remained, primarily compared to the well-known Ashkenazi *Purimshpil* tradition, how much of a unique case the three Iberian *comedias* embodied when contrasted to the early Italian Jewish theatrical manifestations, and how their Protestant environment affected their own performative culture.

IV. Sephardi Purim in Context

In contrast to Chapter I, this section provides a context for Amsterdam Purim theatre concerning Purim customs in a broader European Jewish perspective. I look at how early modern ethnographic accounts defined the holiday and described the typical traditions and activities carried out on its two days, keeping in mind that they did not distinguish between Sephardi and Ashkenazi customs, and noting that theatre must have been so rare that these manuals did not even refer to them. However, their content demonstrates perfectly the interactive relation between Purim theatre and holiday liturgy.

Next, I look at the earliest documented stage productions both inside and outside the frameworks of this very holiday in Italy and show that a dominant Christian environment and/or background had a defining role in the emergence of Jewish theatre in the period. Then, the well-known practice of the *Purimshpil* in Ashkenazi territories are discussed in greater detail, demonstrating that Western Sephardi theatrical culture shared a number of similarities with Yiddish Purim performances that might have functioned as an imaginary cultural barrier between Jews and Protestants in Amsterdam.

At the end of the chapter, I return to Amsterdam itself to provide additional information on the various forms of celebrating Purim in the seventeenth century, analyzing parodistic texts, visual material, and legal documents. By studying them, I conclude that Purim theatre, despite its carnivalesque instincts, was enclosed within walls in order not to bother Dutch society. Nevertheless, it further promoted the consolidation of ex-*converso* identity and, due to its carnivalesque participatory character, helped Sephardim reenact foundational Jewish narratives and thus experience a strong sense of *communitas*.

IV.1. Jews under the Loupe

From the sixteenth century onward, there was an emerging current in early modern Christendom of publishing custom books that treated Jewish rites systematically, peaking in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In his article, Yaacob Deutsch coined the phrase "polemical ethnographies of Judaism" to characterize the genre of the 78 pieces written primarily by German Christian authors that intended to present Jewish life to their readers, with an obvious polemical tone to them.[367] Their motivations were to demonstrate the absurdity of Jewish rituals, the superstitious character of Judaism, anti-Christian attitude, and "the deviation of Judaism from the biblical text."[368]

Though written by Christians, these books provide valuable, reliable, and accurate insight into Jewish liturgical practices, including Purim customs, since, first of all, most of the authors were converts, and, second of all, Jewish manuals of customs (*sifrei minhagim/minhogim*) usually restrict themselves to a somewhat rigid legal rhetoric, listing the necessary prayers and commandments of each holiday, while non-Jewish authors tended to depict Jews and Jewish customs more vividly, in practice, since the classics of Jewish literature or the table of contents of the prayer book did not mean much to a general Christian audience that read these works out of curiosity.[369]

In his monograph *Judaism in Christian Eyes*, Deutsch further investigates the corpus, showing that this principally German genre produced such bestsellers of the age that very much influenced Europe's perception of Judaism and Jews, as well as Jews' self-image. Moreover, the works published around the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

[367] Yaacob Deutsch, "Polemical Ethnographies: Descriptions of Yom Kippur in the Writings of Christian Hebraists and Jewish Converts to Christianity in Early Modern Europe," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 204.
[368] Ibid., 218.
[369] Ibid., 217.

moved on from sharply polemical theological debates to more "objective" descriptions, focusing on ethnicity and cultural phenomena.[370] I singled four works out of the corpus that I complement with a thematic dictionary and a philological work (that also bear striking similarities to ethnographies), and contrast with a Jewish custom book, which were all either milestones in describing Jewish practices in Early Modernity and/or had special relevance or reference to Amsterdam's Sephardi Jewish community. These are the *Synagoga Judaica* (Jewish Synagogue) by Johannes Buxtorf (1603 in German; Latin edition published in 1641), *Historie der Joden* (History of the Jews) by Abraham Costerus (1608), *Historia de gli riti hebraici* (History of the Jewish Rites) by the Jewish Leon Modena (originally written in 1616), *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus* (Hebrew-Mixed Philologist) by Johannes Leusden (1663), *Via della fede* (The Path of Faith) by Giulio Morosini (1683), *Dictionnaire historique, critique, chronologique, geographique et litteral de la Bible* (Historical, Critical, Chronological, Geographic, and Literary Dictionary of the Bible) by Augustin Calmet (1730), and *Cérémonies religieuses de tous les peoples du monde* (Religious Ceremonies of All the Peoples of the World) by Bernard Picart (1723).

Among seventeenth-century Jewish ethnographic writers, Basel professor of Hebrew Johannes Buxtorf was, unquestionably, the most successful with his *Synagoga Judaica,* a work that made a huge impact within Jewish society as well, resulting in Leon Modena's *Historia de gli riti hebraici*. Being the first ethnographic account on Jews by a born Christian, the *Synagoga* was the most commonly referred book within the genre, having twenty-one editions by the eighteenth century.[371] Regarding Purim, Buxtorf starts by telling the origins of the holiday and its name. He emphasizes that this is a commemorative holiday

[370] Yaacob Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 251.
[371] Ibid., 37.

with a very strong joyous aspect and feasting.[372] When describing the basic customs of Purim, Buxtorf highlights the fact that though it is not forbidden to work on these days, traditionally Jews restrict themselves from doing so. He then moves on to the evening service that includes candle lighting, the public recitation of the Book of Esther from a scroll (*megillah*) similar to that of the Torah, during which Jews make noises whenever Haman's name is mentioned and curse his evil name in various ways. Buxtorf describes a custom in connection with the former, namely, that Jews used to carve Haman's name into a stone or a piece of wood that they would hit during the service until his name would become illegible on the surface.[373]

One must take a brief excursus to the *Dictionnaire de la Bible* by Augustin Calmet, as, according to my knowledge, it contains the only visual depiction of this very practice from the (more or less) same period (*Fig. 3.*). He indicates, though, that the custom of breaking a huge stone in the synagogue with the name of Haman on it is only a past one already,[374] alongside the practice of burning Haman's effigy on stake, as many Christians often found it offensive, because they saw a mockery of the

Fig. 3. Jews erase Haman's name carved into a stone, Calmet's *Dictionnaire*, 1730.

[372] Johannis Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica: Auspiciis Authoris jam olim Latinitate donata, nunc primum in vulgus emissa* (Basel, 1641), 382.
[373] Ibid., 383.
[374] Augustin Calmet, *Dictionnaire historique, critique, chronologique, geographique et litteral de la Bible. Tome III.: N–T* (Paris, 1730), 208.

Passion play in the activity.[375] Calmet summarizes everything that scholarship has uncovered up until his times, from public recitations from a *megillah* (he emphasizes that it is not obligatory to read standing),[376] to special passages that have to be read out loud during the recitation, to reading out Haman's sons' names in one breath, feastings (with a reference to ancient *bacchanalias*), to cross-dressing, to the primary importance of the first day, to noise-making, or to Esther's fast the previous night, although he makes a mistake by claiming that in leap years it is the first Adar (Adar *alef*) when Purim is properly celebrated,[377] while in reality it is the second (Adar *bet*).

Buxtorf also talks about the part in the text when Haman's ten sons are listed, an excerpt that the reader must read out loud with one single gasp, otherwise, as a legend says, all souls would be erased from the earth.[378] He, then, lists the same additional pieces of commonly known information on Purim as every other custom book would do, be it Christian or Jewish, starting from the emphasis on joy, heavy drinking (with a reference to the well-known Talmudic passage on the degree of inebriation), costumes (including the otherwise forbidden cross-dressing), and concluding with Esther's commandment of giving alms and presents to each other, according to one's abilities.[379]

Modena's reaction to Buxtorf's biased account, in which he presents a distorted and misinterpreted image of Jews and Jewish life, arrived rather soon. His handbook, the *Riti*, on the customs of the Jews, originally written around 1616, although censored, was published in 1637 in Paris with the help of the French Christian mystic and Hebraist Jacques Gaffarel.[380] In 1638, Modena managed to publish an authoritative version of his work in

[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid., 209.
[377] Ibid., 208.
[378] Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica*, 384.
[379] Ibid., 384–386.
[380] Mark E. Cohen, "Leone da Modena's Riti: A Seventeenth-Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 34, no. 4 (October, 1972): 290.

Venice. The *Riti* is one of the first publications written by Jews targeting a non-Jewish audience in a European language, beside Simon Luzzatto's *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei* (Dirscourse on the state of the Jews) from 1638, Menasseh ben Israel's *Humble Addresses* from 1655, and his *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (Vindication of the Jews) from 1656. Modena's intention was to foster the wider acceptance of Jews living in the continent and beyond, even though his book is not explicitly a polemical work, but a custom book.[381]

Modena's work, despite its length, especially when compared to *Synagoga Judaica*, is quite detailed. The author intends to demonstrate that Judaism is not a superstitious, anti-Christian, and rigid religion that bends the original Scriptural law, thus proving the anti-Jewish arguments of the age wrong.[382] In the third part of the *Riti*, in Chapter 10, Modena provides a brief description of the customs performed on the holiday of Purim, which, in itself, is a valuable account, since most custom books from the period were dominantly written by Christians (by birth or conversion) or by Ashkenazi rabbis. After comparing the excerpts from the 1637 and 1638 versions, one can conclude that the two texts and page numbers are practically identical.

He says that Purim starts on Adar 14th, that is, March, and it is celebrated as a commemoration of the events described in the Book of Esther.[383] One should not work or conduct business during the two days of the holiday but fully devote themselves to its spirit. On the first eve, Jews go to the synagogue and listen to a *megillah* recitation. Outstanding parts of the ceremony are the noisy moments when the reader pronounces the name of Haman that function to curse and ritually annul his name, just like Amalek's in Exodus. It is

[381] Ibid., 287.
[382] Ibid., 298.
[383] Leon Modena, *Historia de gli riti hebraici: Dove si ha breve, e total relatione di tutta la vita, costumi, riti, et osservanze de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi* (Paris, 1637), and Idem., *Historia de' riti hebraici: Vita et osservanze deg'Hebrei di questi tempi*. Gia stampata in Parigi et hora da lui corretta e riformata (Venice, 1638), 79.

also customary to donate to the poor and needy, usually food, as well as to give presents to relatives, friends, students, and masters.[384]

The main commandment, he adds, is to rejoice, to dine and drink a lot, especially in the second evening. The second morning, though, is rather ordinary, without any *megillah*-recitations, big meals, or festive occasions. At the end, he, as all the other "ethnographers" of the Jews, tells his readership that in leap years it is the second Adar when Purim is actually celebrated, while Purim *katan* in Adar *alef* is just a holiday in name, not in practice.[385]

In the upcoming two centuries, Modena's work became a very influential account that constantly reappeared either in the form of translations,[386] references, or direct copies in others' ethnographic accounts on Jewish everyday life and religion, such as in Bernard Picart's famous *Cérémonies* in the early eighteenth century. In his brief description of Purim traditions, similar to most other custom books, only the most essential elements appear, without any reference to street carnivals, costumes, or spectacles, which might be curious if one considers the fact that he himself published a Purim play, too. The new information regarding interactive customs that do not explicitly come up in the *comedias* analyzed in the previous chapter are the *megillah*-readings and the noisemaking when Haman's name is mentioned—a feature that anti-Jewish accounts never forget to emphasize, beside the holiday's carnivalesque character.

His disputant Buxtorf's work was also translated to a number of languages, including Dutch, and was also followed by an even larger number of scholarly "epigones," who published their works heavily relying on his and his fellow German intellectual antecedents' publications. A Dutch and, coincidentally, the first non-German representative of the up-

[384] Ibid., 80.
[385] Ibid., 81.
[386] See for instance Richard Simon's French translation of the *Riti* and its critical edition: Léon de Modène, *Les Juifs présentés aux Chrétiens : Cérémonies et coutumes qui s'observent aujourd'hui parmi les Juifs*, traduit par Richard Simon, suivi de *Comparaison des cérémonies des Juifa et de la discipline de l'Église*, par Richard Simon, ed. Jacques Le Brun and Guy Stroumsa (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 1998).

and-coming trend is the lesser-known author Abraham Costerus, a Calvinist theologian and professor of Latin, who wrote a History of the Jews (*Historie der Joden*) in his mother tongue, which, despite its title, is much more of an ethnographic account than a history.[387] In the book's second volume, Costerus provides an already familiar description of Purim for his audience. He highlights the very same points and steps of the evening service as the works analyzed above, mentioning February 14th and 15th as the dates of Purim, the avoidance of labor, the importance of women's presence (although not in the synagogue service), the *megillah*-reading, the abundance of wine and food, dancing, singing, playing, cross-dressing,[388] as well as giving a detailed list of all the Hebrew curses and blessings one says during the *megillah*-recitation when Haman's name pops up, both in Hebrew-to-Dutch transliteration and Dutch translation: he mentions *Yimmah shemo* (May his name be obliterated), *Ve-shem rasha'im yirkav* (May the wicked ones' name be rotten), *Arur Haman* (Cursed be Haman), *Arurah Zeres* (Cursed be Zeres [i.e., Haman's wife]), *Arurim kol ovdei elilim* (Cursed are the servants of idols), *Baruch Mordechai* (Blessed be Mordechai), *Brucha Ester* (Blessed be Esther), *Bruchim kol Israel* (Blessed be the people of Israel).[389] These chants appear at the end of *Aman y Mordechay* as well, reinforcing the argument that states the close correlation of Purim theatre to the liturgy. Similar to Buxtorf and others, he calls the holiday the "days of Bacchus."[390]

[387] G.J. Jaspers, "Schets van Abraham Costerus' leven en werken," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 57, no. 1 (1976): 43.
[388] Abraham Costerus, *Historie der Joden*, vol. II (Rotterdam, 1608), 72–74.
[389] Ibid., 73.
[390] Ibid., 75: Bacchus-dagen.

A fellow Dutchman of Costerus' was Johannes Leusden, a professor of Hebrew at Utrecht University, who published his *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus* first in 1663, then in 1682 and 1699. As Deutsch notes, philological works could not compete with ethnographic ones in terms of popularity and selling rates,[391] nonetheless, this piece is central in an investigation on seventeenth-century Dutch Jewry, as the author, a fellow countryman, could personally observe Jews and Jewish customs in Amsterdam, especially after his visit in 1649. Furthermore, his work contains the first "ethnographic-oriented" visual depiction of Jews living in the United Provinces. However, the first edition's illustrations are only adaptations of the images added to the 1593 Yiddish translation of Isaac Tyrnau's famous *Sefer minhogim* (Book of Customs) by Simon Levi Ginzburg, first published in Amsterdam in 1645;[392] while the second and third editions contain original engravings by Johan Jacobs van de Aveele,[393] though they are not as precise and nuanced as the etchings by Bernard Picart fifty years later. As Samantha Baskind explains, the *Philologus* was not written for encyclopedic purposes: it might be even possible that the pictures did not capture the ceremonies of Sephardim but those of the much larger Ashkenazi community.[394]

Fig. 4. Esther scroll (3.) depicted in the first edition of *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, 1663.

[391] Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes*, 45.
[392] Henri Van de Waal, "Rembrandt and the Feast of Purim," *Oud Holland* 84, no. 1 (1969): 217
[393] Ibid., 218.
[394] Samantha Baskind, "Bernard Picart's Etchings of Amsterdam's Jews," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, 13, no. 2 (Winter, 2007): 51.

Nonetheless, this work embodies the crucial moment in the history of the genre, when visuality enters the field and must be interpreted hand in hand with its textual companion, as word and image create a symbiotic fusion.

Fig. 5. Esther scroll in the 2nd and 3rd editions of *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, 1682 and 1699.

Leusden's Latin account describes and depicts an Esther scroll made of a piece of wood and a vellum within the section where he introduces his readers to the liturgical and sacral artefacts of Judaism. He writes that it is an indispensable tool on the holiday of Purim, February 14th and 15th, when the book is read out loud from the pulpit.[395] In the first edition, the scroll is hung and numbered on the wall, next to additional objects he discusses in the section (*Fig. 4.*), while in the second edition he attaches a more lively presentation of the *megillah*: a bearded Jew lifts it above his head with one hand, while raising a *mesusah* in the other (*Fig. 5.*).

Fig. 6. Purim jesters in the first edition of *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, 1663.

Later, he adds that it is only one of the five *megillot* that are traditionally read out on certain occasions, alongside the Book of Ruth (Shavuot), the Song of Songs (Pesah), Lamentations (Tisha be-Av), and Ecclesiastes (Sukkot).[396] Regarding Purim customs, all

[395]Johannes Leusden, *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus, una cum spicilegio philologico, continente decem quaestionum et positionum praecipue Philologo-Hebraicarum et Judaicarum centurias* (Utrecht, 1663), 119.
[396] Ibid., 275.

three editions are identical, except for the illustrations and the subtitles introducing the explanation of the images. The first edition contains an image of three fool-like characters taken from Tyrnau's custom book published in Venice, who, wandering around outside, drink alcohol and play some music while wearing foxtail-like accessories (*Fig. 6.*). Since it is a very general image in style and detail, such a scene might have taken place anywhere, either in Sepharad or in Ashkenaz. Despite its lack of any specifics regarding Amsterdam, the image can provide us with a general idea of what Purim celebrations might have looked like in the city, since he refers to the fact that he himself witnessed a Purim festival during his visit to the Amsterdam Jewish community, evoking that Jews run around shouting and singing and chanting riddles and rhymes on the streets, as well as in the synagogue during the public recitation of the story of Esther,[397] which matches the findings of the previous chapter regarding singing, chanting, and communal gathering, not to mention his reference to costumes. Most probably, he would not have picked this image as an illustration, had he not considered it an authentic and more or less accurate depiction of local Purim customs.

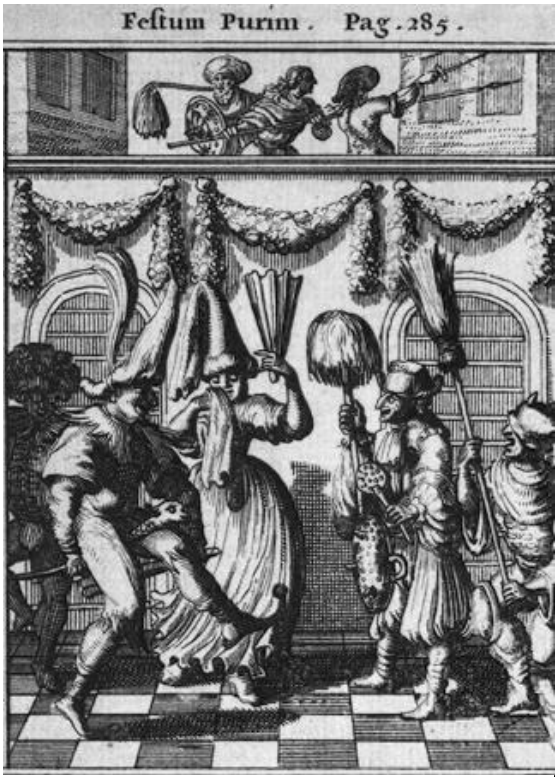


Fig. 7. Purim scene in the 2nd and 3rd editions of *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, 1682 and 1699.

Leusden explicitly cites Buxtorf's *Synagoga* when describing general Purim customs, claiming that the holiday is rather sumptuous, with gallons of wine and excellent food,[398] as

[397] Ibid., 285.
[398] Ibid., 285.

well as calling it a Jewish *bacchanalia*[399] and an irrational, absurd holiday.[400] As I have referred to it above, most of the ethnographic literature is based on Buxtorf and his fellow German scholars, giving the genre a strong focus on Ashkenazi examples. Thus, one cannot make far-reaching conclusions regarding Amsterdam Sephardim based on these sources without keeping in mind their flaws and contrasting the information with others, such as, in our case, the *comedias*. It is particularly important in Leusden's case, who, in the book's later editions, attaches a different illustration to the chapter (*Fig. 7.*), adding that it depicts Ashkenazi Jews,[401] while leaving the text as is, thus creating inconsistency and tension between the otherwise symbiotic connection between word and image, as the description no longer fits the illustration.

In the new etching, one can see not three but eight characters in a rather festive mood outside, perhaps, I would say, in a patio, based on the surrounding walls, wallflowers, and the checkered floor. In the lower section, five people dance and probably make noise, wearing masks and comic hats, and one of them even wears a fool-like pair of shoes while riding a stick with an animal head to it. Other characters are holding broomsticks upside down. Among the five, one is a woman, or a man dressed as a woman, as it is allowed on this day, which indicates the blurred gender distinctions during Purim. In the upper section, three soldier-like figures are in an alert or watchful position, holding spears, swords, and perhaps another broomstick. One has a turban on his head, while another is wearing a contemporary hat that is popular among the Dutchmen of the era (enough to look at seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre paintings). I can imagine that this can even be a Purim stage production in which the turban (as a costume) invokes the oriental atmosphere

[399] Ibid., 284.
[400] Ibid., 362.
[401] Johannes Leusden, *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus, una cum spicilegio philologico, continente decem quaestionum et positionum praecipue Philologo-Hebraicarum et Judaicarum centurias.* Editio Secunda, Emendata et Figuris aeneis ornata (Utrecht, 1682), 285.

of the biblical stories,[402] while the soldiers on the elevated floor might represent the performance itself, in contrast with the rejoicing crowd below. I doubt that it is a serious military or vigilant presence, because of the overall festive mood of the image and the use of the broomstick as a parodistic weapon. Furthermore, it is also possible that even the lower scene is a part of the production, with Queen Esther herself in the middle.

In his 1683 piece, Giulio Morosini gives a very detailed description of all the obligatory commandments and customs on Purim. He emphasizes that the first night is always rather solemn, while the upcoming day and night are intensely festive. Jews do not work on these days, although it is not forbidden. The most important mandatory deed is going to the synagogue to listen to the story of Esther read out loud by the cantor from top to bottom in the evening and the next morning, a custom that is always preceded by three blessings, and quasi-interrupted by shouting, noise-making, and cursing (Morosini lists the same ones as Costerus).[403] He mentions the rules of making a liturgically accurate scroll: it must be made of pieces of vellum properly sewed together (fulfilling its specific regulations) and fixed on a wooden stick, with the text organized in columns on it.[404] Additionally, he mentions the existence of illuminated Esther scrolls of which we have quite a few remaining examples from the seventeenth century, even from the Netherlands (see below)—sacral objects wealthy families can even own and keep at home,[405] as its cost is not as high as that of a Torah scroll which only entire communities can afford.

During the morning service, there is an addition to the *Shmoneh Esrei* prayer: a commemoration of the deeds of Haman (*Al ha-nesim,* or: On Wonders), as well as the recitation of Exodus 17 that contains the story of Amalek, Haman's prototype and

[402] Ivan Davidson Kalmar, "Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban: Orientalism, the Jews, and Christian Art," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 6.
[403] Giulio Morosini, *Via della fede* (Rome, 1683), 833–836.
[404] Ibid., 835.
[405] Ibid., 836.

antecedent.[406] Later, people start rejoicing, drinking, eating, which reaches its zenith in the evening, as Jews organize a huge and rich dinner (*seudat purim*). The second day passes without any extraordinary activities, although Jews still remain joyful.[407]

The last ethnographic account I would like to discuss is Bernard Picart and Jean Frédéric Bernard's *Ceremonies*, "the book that changed Europe," as the title of the monograph on the work evaluates its importance in early modern European thought. Despite the two creators' rather negative attitude toward religions in general, the work attempts to present all the world's religions as objectively and as accurately as possible, looking at the most sacred moments and the smallest banalities of every religious situation at the same time, thus disenchanting the so-far unknown rituals and cultures of the planet.[408] When writing about Jewish customs and ceremonies, the authors had in mind the Jewish communities (both Sephardi and Ashkenazi) of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Amsterdam, thus, providing valuable insight into the intercommunal life and carnival practices of ex-*conversos*.

Judaism is the very first religion that the authors present in the *Ceremonies*, based on pre-existing scholarly literature (they heavily relied on the French translation of Modena's *Riti* by Richard Simon, with the latter's own notes),[409] as well as on personal observations (that are manifested in the illustrations), as they moved from the religiously rigorous France to Amsterdam, a "melting pot" of cultures and religions of the epoch, where the Jewish presence was relatively easily perceptible, even symbolically, as the grand Sephardi synagogue, the Esnoga, was built in 1675 in the heart of the city of canals.[410] The main

[406] Ibid., 837.
[407] Ibid., 837–839.
[408] Richard I. Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 46.
[409] Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's* Religious Ceremonies of the World (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 180.
[410] Ibid., 171.

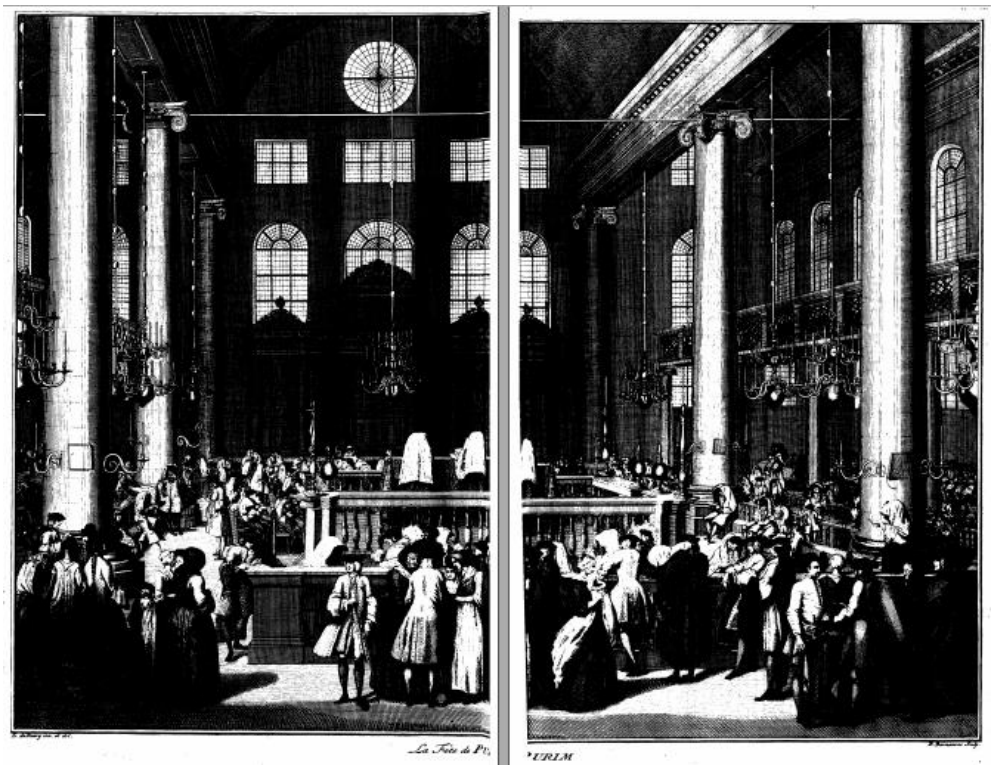


Fig. 8. Purim in the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam (*Cérémonies*, 1741).

achievement of Picart's etchings concerning Jews is the fact that he was the first within visual culture to consciously and systematically "discuss" Jews not as a conglomerate but as two opposing factions of European Jewry—the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. The work implicitly condemns the latter, for their uncivilized character, and overrepresents and, thus, "normalizes" the former in order to make Jews more acceptable to gentile elites in general.[411]

The description of Purim does not add any new pieces of information to the ones summarized above, except for the brief but fascinating comparison between Purim and the Christian carnival that, the authors say, happen during the same time of the year and that are very similar, therefore Purim can be called "the carnival of the Jews."[412] The main difference, they point out, is that Jews, first, have to be sad by fasting, and only later can

[411] Baskind, "Bernard Picart's Etchings," 43–44.
[412] Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies religieuses de tous les peuples du monde. Tome I.: Contenant les cérémonies religieuses des Juifs et des Catholiques* (Paris, 1741), 171: "le *Carnaval* des Juifs."

Fig. 9. The Huquier brothers' version of the previous etching.
Source: Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, catalogue nr.: M007482, accessed: Jan 7, 2018, https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M007482.

they start rejoicing.[413] They emphasize that Purim has a very uniquely twofold image, on the one side being solemn, while on the other side being rather carnivalesque.[414]

There is an image recording a Purim service in the 1741 edition of Picart's work, although not made by the master himself, but by one of his disciples, Louis Fabricius du Bourg, who also signed the engraving (*Fig. 8.*), which has two future reproductions (that are technically identical, except for the coloring) that I have uncovered, both printed around 1750, by the Huquier brothers (*Fig. 9.*) and Basset (*Fig. 10.*), respectively. The picture captures a *megillah*-reading, with quite a few people gathering together and surrounding the *bimah* where two men are standing and conducting the service with the scroll, that is also depicted, in one of their hands. Everyone is wearing colorful Dutch dresses, expressing the joyful character of the holiday and coinciding with the verses from *Jahacob e Essau*,

[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid., 172.

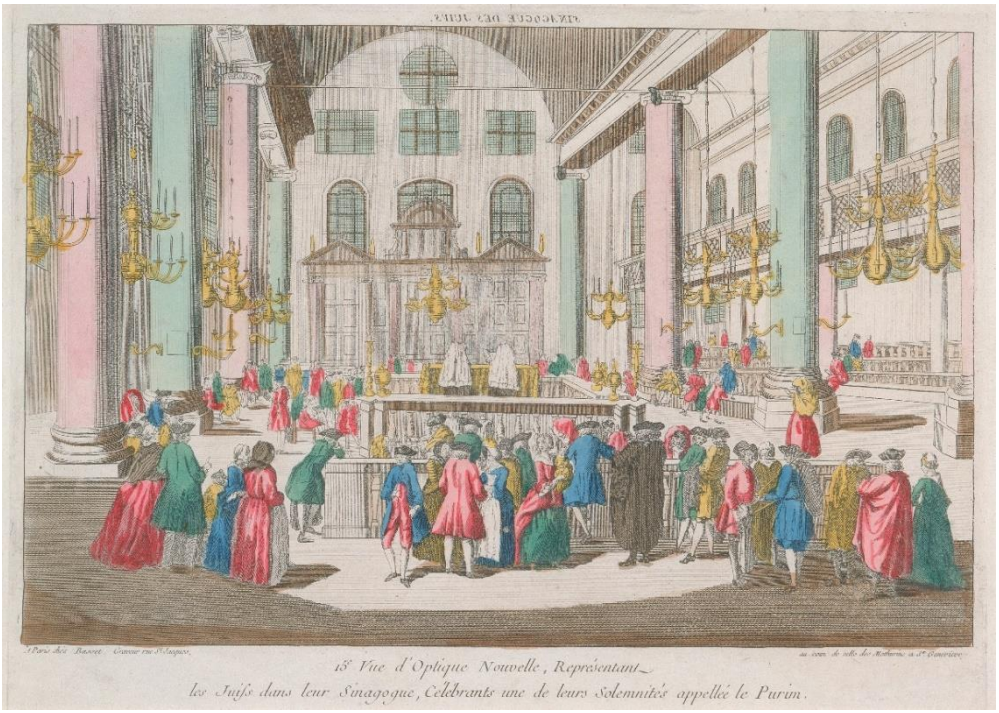


Fig. 10. Basset's version of de Bourg's etching.
Source: The Jewish Museum, New York, cat.nr.: F 5332, accessed: Jan 7, 2018, http://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/17503-the-purim-festival-in-the-portuguese-synagogue-amsterdam.

discussed in the previous chapter. Many people are sitting, many are chatting, and it is also very noticeable that men and women (at times, with babies in their arms) are mingling in the scene.

All these ethnographic writings more or less described the same basic pieces of information about Purim, most probably because they based their depictions on each other's works, automatically borrowing details from one another. Beside the data, they had something else in common: except for the engravings from the *Ceremonies*, all accounts treat Jews as one unified mass, which makes it very difficult to decide whether an information concerns Sephardim or Ashkenazim—or both. Although this differentiation might not even be necessary in the case of the given material, since they all present rather general observations that none of the authors with personal experience with Amsterdam Sephardim found contradictory anyway. The information these authors provide can be

contrasted with the data mined out of the *comedias* in the previous chapters, and some fundamental conclusions might be reached.

First of all, it becomes obvious that Jews of the seventeenth century all over Western Europe stuck to such commandments as fasting, *megillah* recitations, *seudat purim* (Purim dinner), giving alms to the needy, wearing costumes (including cross-dressing), pretty clothes, rejoicing in a rather extreme, carnivalesque manner, dancing, or making noises (which must appear in every text so as to represent Jews as backward and somewhat barbarous), while none of the chosen emblematic texts and images refers to Purim plays. Most of the main features described or depicted in these custom books are referenced in the three *comedias* as well, showing the dynamic interaction of the two: we have read about abundant imaginary meals with holiday cakes, costumes, "Sunday" bests, songs, and dances. This characteristic means that formally staged plays needed to be legitimized by the constant references to the various elements of the festive ritual. Regarding jest and joy, the *comedias* imagine these "mandatory" commandments in an obviously positive, festive manner: it is enough to refer back to the moment when Jacob finally stops grieving and urges everyone to dress up to celebrate and rejoice in *El perseguido dichoso*.

IV.2. Drama within Walls

Despite the absence of Purim theatre in ethnographic accounts, the genre appeared within gradually more and more European Jewish communities throughout Early Modernity. However, before this epoch, Jewish theatrical activity came into sight solely in Italy,[415] after a centuries-long gap following Ezekiel's *Exagoge* from Late Antiquity: the first Jewish playwright was Leone de' Sommi who became active in Mantua in the sixteenth century and

[415] Butzer, *Die Anfänge der jiddischen Purim shpiln*, 30.

published Jewish literature's very first Hebrew play,[416] attesting Jews' fascination with drama already in the 1550s. It is not surprising that the dramatic genre could appear in Italian Jewish literature so early on, since the Renaissance provided a thriving cultural milieu. However, the publication of dramatic pieces did not necessarily indicate the emergence of theatre as its medium, especially in the case of Hebrew, a language that only relatively few could understand. Therefore, I would argue that Sommi's otherwise pioneering experiment can be labeled as "drama without theatre" and was composed as a closet drama to be read by the rabbinic body and the intellectual elite of the Mantuan community.

The earliest attested stage productions of Purim drama were set in sixteenth-century Venice, a primary center of early modern European Jewry. First, a document from 1531 mentions that Christians were prohibited to attend Jewish performances on the holiday of Purim in the ghetto, although details about the extent of its theatrical character are unknown.[417] Also, we have information on a lost Esther play by Salusque Lusitano (Salomon Usque) whose piece was first performed in Spanish within the walls of the Venice ghetto during Purim in 1558, and then, a year later in Italian translation by Lazzaro di Graziano Levi (Leon Modena's maternal uncle) in front of the Venetian nobility as a public performance, which had a reprise several decades later, in 1592.[418] This piece is highly relevant, since its author belonged to the *Nação Portuguesa* due to his *converso* origin.[419] Unfortunately, there is very little information on the play or the performance, beside the deductions based on its later adaptation, and even the author's identity had been a question of speculation and debate. At first, Cecil Roth identified him as the son of Ferraran printer Abraham Usque (born as Duarte Pinhel in Portugal) and future ambassador to the Sublime

[416] Maria Luisa Mayer Modena, "Purim e gli albori del teatro ebraico in Italia," *Altre Modernità* (2011): 15.
[417] Ibid., 16.
[418] Cecil Roth, "'Salusque Lusitano' (An Essay in Disentanglement)," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 34, no. 1 (July, 1943): 78.
[419] Ibid., 75.

Porte as Duarte Gomez;[420] however, Herman Solomon later showed that Salomon's father Abraham was not identical with the Ferraran printer,[421] and that Salomon was not identical with Duarte Gomez either, as the latter never returned to Judaism, according to the scholar.[422]

Later, Usque's play was set out to be updated and modernized according to the current literary taste of the period. The task was assigned to Graziano Levi's nephew Leon Modena, whose adaptation titled *L'Ester: Tragedia. Tratta dalla Sacra Scrittura* (Esther: Tragedy. Adapted from the Holy Scripture) was published in 1619, but eventually never got to be performed. Written in a high literary manner leaving no space for improvisation or amateurship,[423] Modena's vision of Esther's story is rather serious in tone, despite the fact that his and his predecessor's adaptation of the narrative were proposed to be a part of the holiday of Purim. It is, nonetheless, a significant step in the history of early Purim plays.

Similar to Modena's adaption, the *Tragediou de la Reine Esther* (Queen Esther's tragedy), another tragedy was published at the very end of the seventeenth century in Provence, written by Rabbi Mardoché Astruc and, later in the eighteenth century, performed multiple times.[424] It is reasonable to mention this piece here within the frameworks of Italian Jewish theatrical practice, since the region had attestably long and tight literary and cultural connections with Italian Jewry and Italian culture in general—even in the play itself, elements of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition can be detected, and some characters even speak a curious, altered version of Italian.[425]

[420] Ibid., 82.
[421] Herman Prins Salomon, "O que tem de judaico a Menina e Moça?" *Cadernos de Estudos Sefarditas* no. 4 (2004): 201.
[422] Herman Prins Salomon, *Deux études portugaises: Two Portuguese Studies* (Braga: Barbosa e Xavier, 1991), 66.
[423] Abramo A. Piattelli, "'Ester': l'unico dramma di Leon da Modena giunto fino a noi," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, terza serie, 34, no. 3 (Marzo, 1968): 163.
[424] Erica Baricci, "'Puisque Esther, elle aussi comedienne, sut jouer la comédie au roi': la storia di Ester nel teatro giudeo-provenzale," *Altre Modernità* (2011): 48.
[425] Ibid., 50–52.

Mantua embodied an interesting case where the local nobility also had a considerably active role in the formation of Jewish theatre. Purim had long been celebrated among Mantuan Jews with music, dance, and other spectacular events. However, their performative culture first came to life when Jews had to reenact Judith's deuterocanonical narrative at the wedding of Maddalena Gonzaga and Duke Francesco Maria d'Urbino in 1498. With time, Jews had to perform at every Gonzaga wedding, as well as during the Christian carnival, revealing that Jewish theatrical activity in Mantua was set up because of the intervention of Catholic power (that the choice of the Book of Judith, which is not part of the Hebrew canon, also reaffirms).[426]

Despite the poorly documented general character of the theatrical life within the Venetian ghetto or Mantua, one can still elaborate on two fundamental observations. First, due to the fact that Usque, an ex-*converso,* provided the first Purim play in its history, and then Amsterdam Sephardim cultivated its later representatives, it becomes rather clear that the Iberian Christian past of these Jews indeed played a crucial role in the emergence of theatre in Sephardi culture. Since they grew up as Catholics and were familiar with the genre's Iberian branch and its place within Christian liturgy and religiosity, they adopted its formulae to a new, Jewish context, with relatively little hesitation. Second, there is a major difference, though, between the traditions developed in Italy and Holland: as Modena's title expresses, the Jewish theatre in Venice represented a serious branch of the genre, staging tragedies for the local nobility—while their Amsterdam counterparts were classic parodies. Apparently, Italian Jewish plays had to echo a heavier tone if they wanted to be considered legitimate and serious forms of theatrical expression, especially if they wished to gain the favor of their Christian audience who demanded these performances in the first place (both in the case of Venice and Mantua). In this point of view, one might even argue that very little

[426] Erith Jaffe-Berg, "Performance as Exchange: Taxation and Jewish Theatre in Early Modern Italy," *Theatre Survey* 54, no. 3 (2013): 397.

was essentially Jewish about these performances, especially when considering Mantuan Jewish subjects staging Ariosto's play at a Gonzaga wedding[427] that completely fell outside the physical and conceptual borders of the Jewish community.

Conversely, the Amsterdam pieces under study were specifically addressed to the Jewish community itself and had no intention to entertain their host society. Furthermore, Amsterdam Purim *comedias* (and thus theatre in general) have a much lighter tone to them that was rooted in Lope's intention to entertain with his invention, as well as in the Sephardi attempt that seemingly aimed to incorporate traditional Jewish performative forms that can be observed in the case of Yiddish *Purimshpiln*.

IV.3. Carnival in Yiddishland

When someone brings up the issue of, or simply mentions the term "Purim play," their immediate association is, most probably, the *Purimshpil*, the Yiddish carnival comedy, since the genre is primarily known from Ashkenaz. It is because of the relatively large number of pieces and their frequent renditions and adaptations by the later Yiddish theatrical tradition of Eastern European Jewry—a tradition that, at least partially, grew out of the Yiddish *Purimshpil*.[428] As a result, a wide range of secondary literature has been published on the topic that also deals with the earliest examples and practices of the *Purimshpil*.

A source from 1711 describes Purim festivities in Metz and Frankfurt, mentioning a play called *Mekhiras Yosef* (The sale of Joseph) by Berman of Limburg, performed by *yeshiva* students in front of a massive crowd which even Christian passers-by joined.[429] There are also a set of *responsa* dealing with the issue of theatrical practice in the region,

[427] Ibid., 398.
[428] Jean Baumgarten, "Purim-shpil," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* – http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Purim-shpil (accessed: December 26, 2017).
[429] Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 383.

alongside the long tradition of *musar* literature[430] and the custom books discussed above that primarily came from German territories that always touch upon contemporary Purim practices.[431]

When contrasting Ashkenazi and Sephardi Purim traditions, one can observe a whole set of similarities that are due to the commonly shared biblical and rabbinical traditions. As in Western Sepharad, Purim is the ultimate carnivalesque period in Ashkenaz, when the world is, at least figuratively, turned upside down for two nights. Among the shared festive features, the public recitation of the Esther scroll, presents, communal meals with holiday food, costumes, games, noise-making, and Purim plays can be found, although the specific details and nuances of these elements might be different, especially regarding gastronomy. As we have seen in Chapter III, typical Amsterdam Sephardi Purim desserts included Iberian sweets, such as the *buñuelos*, *coscorões*, marzipan, and various tarts, while here, in Ashkenaz, the most emblematic meals during the holiday of Purim are the well-known *homentashn* ("Haman pockets"), or *oznei-homen* ("Haman's ears"), a filled triangular cookie,[432] although the Iberian sweets were consumed on other occasions as well.

Both Jean Baumgarten and Ahuva Belkin, two prominent scholars in the field, provide an approach to early modern *Purimshpiln* that is similar to what I have conducted in the previous chapter, and look at such works to gather scattered information on Ashkenazi Jewish carnival customs that might be hidden in these dramatic texts. The earliest complete text of Purim plays they analyze is *Eyn sheyn Purim shpil* (A fine Purim play) from Nuremberg, 1697, very close in age to the three *comedias* from the Netherlands. It was found in Leipzig, in the collection of the Christian Hebraist Johannes Christoph Wagenseil, who got the existing copy as a gift from a convert from Krakow, Johann Christian Jacob Löber

[430] Ibid., 383–384.
[431] Joseph Kalir, "The Jewish Service in the Eyes of Christian and Baptized Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 56, no. 1 (1965): 78–79.
[432] Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 360–361.

Moses Kahan (Katz).[433] Another key text is the *Akhasveryresh-shpil* (Ahasuerus play) from Frankfurt, existing both as a manuscript and a printed version from 1697 and 1708, respectively.[434] Further pieces consist of the following: *Dos shpil fun Mordekhay un Ester* (Amsterdam, 1718), *Akta Ester ve-Akhasveyrosh* (Prague, 1720), *Mekhiras Yosef* (Frankfurt am Main, 1707 and 1723), and *Eyn sheyne nay aktsion fun kinig Dovid un Golyas ha-plishti* (Hanau, 1717).[435]

Examining this list, one can immediately deduce that the Book of Esther has a rather strong presence in the Yiddish *Purimshpil* tradition, as five out of seven adapt its narrative, and one tells the story of young David, and another, similarly to *El perseguido dichoso*, puts Joseph on center stage. One feature is obvious: with time, both traditions go beyond the limits of choosing the standard narrative exclusively, and they use the Purim theme only as a pretext to incorporate further texts, thus parodying the genre itself.

These anonymous plays were also deeply rooted in Jewish popular culture and also drew inspiration from gentile literatures, such as the *commedia dell'arte*, medieval mystery plays, moralities, Passion plays, the early modern Protestant and Jesuit biblical drama, and, primarily, carnival farces that even had very similar socio-cultural settings.[436] Among their antecedents in Jewish literatures, one should mention drinking songs, parodic poems (such as the one by Elia Levita from 1513, or another by Gumprecht of Szczebrzeszyn from 1555),[437] shorter dialogues (like *A Play about Toyb Yenklayn and His Wife Kendlayn and His Two Fine Sons* from Tannhausen, 1598),[438] parodies of prayers, sermons, rabbinic texts (for instance, the *Masekhet purim* by Kalonymus ben Kalonymos, a parody on drunkenness, imitating the style of Talmudic tractates; or the *Megilat setarim* by Levi ben Gershom,

[433] Jerold C. Frakes, *Early Yiddish Texts, 1100–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 772.
[434] Ibid., 361.
[435] Ibid., 374.
[436] Ibid., 363–365.
[437] Ibid., 367.
[438] Ibid., 368.

parodying the Mishna),[439] and emblematic figures of festive occasions, such as the jester (*badkhn*) or the master of ceremonies (*marshalik*), who performed witty songs and monologues at weddings, circumcisions, and the like.[440] The *comedias* had very similar literary precursors, with the addition of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* stage that granted a formally and stylistically more rigorous and institutionalized theatrical character to Western Sephardi performative arts, thus turning the Spanish and Portuguese Purim plays into curious literary hybrids.

Primarily based on the close reading of *Eyn sheyn Purim shpil* from 1697, Baumgarten says that the holiday of Purim always contained a street festival or procession, with musicians, dancers, clowns, jugglers, and actors,[441] who, as Belkin says, turned these public spaces into an "arena" of the festivity that connected the various spots of Purim performances together into one gigantic, or, more adequately, gargantuan stage.[442] These participants went from door to door to present *Purimshpiln*, as they were usually performed in the largest room (usually the dining room) of private households,[443] where the master of ceremonies entered and asked the residents to make room for a quick show, which Belkin compares to environmental theatre that uses the spaces and objects of everyday life in the spectacle.[444] Such shows were rather intimate, as they were condensed into a relatively small space—a space that generally was/is a private and sacred domain in Jewish spiritual life, since a large number of Jewish rituals are carried out at home. Purim actors, by entering the room, turned people's homes into a "leasure-time place," thus fusing the inner space of private houses with the outer public sphere of the streets and squares.[445]

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[439] Ibid., 372.
[440] Ibid., 370.
[441] Ibid., 375.
[442] Ahuva Belkin, "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theatre," in *Jewish Theatre: A Global View*, ed. Edna Nahshon (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 18.
[443] Occasionally, they could also take place in the courtyard of the synagogue or the *yeshiva*.
[444] Belkin, "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theatre," 17.
[445] Ibid., 19.

The master of ceremonies, then, introduced all the characters one by one,[446] who, then, performed the little spectacle in front of the dinner table that indirectly evoked the banquet scenes of the Esther story, symbolically turning the spectators into participants (the king and queen's guests) of the narrative, blurring the otherwise clear distinction between reality and stage/fiction.[447] Incidentally, the constant cues and remarks of the actors to their audience, for instance, complimenting the wine or mocking somebody, also served a similar function.[448]

Such references to domestic spaces, the streets, jester-like participants and their constant interactions with the spectators do not occur in the Sephardi pieces, except for a few blurrier scenes where someone breaks the fourth wall. This implies that the Amsterdam comedies were somewhat less *impromptu*, though perhaps not less amateurish, and better organized and slightly more institutionalized spectacles with a stage erected somewhere—such as in the courtyard of the synagogue (as its interior was off-limits since the performance of *Diálogo dos Montes* in 1624)[449] or a private mansion that would have been capable of receiving a larger multitude of rejoicing people. Based on the series of etchings by Romeyn de Hooghe from 1675, the synagogue did have a rather spacious courtyard that was surrounded by high walls that could even tone down the noise to an extent (*Fig. 11*–**Fig. 12.**). His depictions of mansions of wealthy community members Manuel de Belmonte and David Emanuel de Pinto (*Fig. 13*–*Fig.* **14.**) are not informative on the question whether they had

[446] Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 376.
[447] Belkin, "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theatre," 21–22.
[448] Ibid., 22.
[449] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí en Amsterdam*, 148.

patios inside or not: based on their size, though, they must have had larger chambers where smaller get-togethers could be (and were, indeed) held,[450] even for spectacles. The 1625 map of Amsterdam designed by Balthasar Florisz. van Berckenrode, that includes the Jewish neighborhood, shows that quite a number of edifices surrounded inner patios and courtyards

Fig. 11. Romeyn de Hooghe, *Profile of the Portuguese Jewish Synagogue*, 1675.
Source: Amsterdam Municipal Archives, accessed: May 1, 2018, https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?f_sk_archief=10097%2F010097015587.

Fig. 12. Romeyn de Hooghe, *Courtyard of the Portuguese Jewish Synagogue*, 1675.
Source: Amsterdam Municipal Archives, accessed: May 1, 2018, https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?f_sk_archief=10097%2F1543.

[450] Kaplan, "The Jews in the Republic until about 1750," 149.

Fig. 13. Romeyn de Hooghe, *Baron Belmonte's House*, between 1686–1705.
Source: Amsterdam Municipal Archives, accessed: May 1, 2018, https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?f_sk_archief=10097%2F1543.

(*Fig. 15.*) that could also facilitate performances, similarly to the *corral* tradition in seventeenth-century Madrid.

Baumgarten names Mordechai as the single most hilarious character in *Eyn sheyn Purim shpil*—and generally in Purim plays.[451] His lines are always the funniest punchlines, full of creativity, word plays, mockery, and, many times, vulgarity, since he often cracks scatological jokes with reference to the male genitalia, the anus, or flatulence;[452] while his niece, Esther remains the strict heroine that appears in the original biblical story, to be the constant memento of the narrative's serious aspect.[453] However, in some early eighteenth-century plays, as Belkin brings up a few counterexamples, Esther cannot escape the crosshatch of mockery either: though still having a minor role, she is, at times, described as

[451] Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 376.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid., 382.

Fig. 14. Romeyn de Hooghe, *Lord de Pinto's House*, between 1686–1700.
Source: Amsterdam Municipal Archives, accessed: May 1, 2018, https://beeldbank.amsterdam.nl/beeldbank/indeling/detail?f_sk_archief=10097%2F010097011409.

an extremely ugly bedwetter; or she is played by a promiscuously dressed man in other occasions.[454]

Belkin indicates that Yiddish Purim texts often allowed improvisation: she quotes a stage instruction saying that when entering, Mordechai can say whatever he wants,[455] showing that, aside from the general structure with the main turning points in the plotline, the formulation of minor details was up to the creativity of the actors and the randomness of the situations. On paper, the texts from Amsterdam do not indicate the allowance of such freedom to the creators: however, as there is no other evidence on how exactly Purim plays were performed in that environment, we can imagine that, when staging these or similar pieces, there must have been a certain limit or extent within what actors could alter the original script or adapt it to their own envisioned ideas and artistic goals. The wedding scene

[454] Ahuva Belkin, "The "Low" Culture of the Purimshpil," in *Yiddish Theater: New Approaches*, ed. Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), 40–41.
[455] Ibid., 31.

of *Jahacob e Essau* refers to this idea: the three shepherds as amateur actors/performers gather together to quickly rehearse a piece that they would like to perform in honor of the newly-weds.

Humor in the Iberian *comedias* of Amsterdam does not primarily lie in the main characters' personality, in my view: it rather comes from the inversion of expected stylistic registers (such as the quarrel of noblewomen over Joseph in *El perseguido dichoso*), specific punchlines, or the short appearance of *graciosos*. Interestingly, in both Ashkenaz and Western Sepharad, Esther remains a supporting character, while it is Haman and Mordechai (and their primeval conflict) who carry the show on their back, although it is their rivalry already in the Bible that starts the avalanche of life-threatening events.

In both Yiddish and Spanish-Portuguese plays, there are examples of foolish characters, insults, oaths, curses, fights, obscenity, references to the Bakhtinian "bodily

Fig. 15. The Jewish neighborhood. Detail from the map of Amsterdam by Balthasar Florisz. van Berckenrode, 1625.
Source: Stephen Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

lower stratum," drinking, and feasting,[456] in which the *Purimshpiln* often conclude, as the actors ask their hosts to let them join the holiday meal.[457] Another typical ending of a Yiddish Purim comedy is that the spectators stand up and join the final dance and communal music,[458] which also feature in the Amsterdam pieces, for instance, when a circle dance of shepherdesses in evoked in *Jahacob e Essau*, when the shepherds Jacinto, Silvio, and Montano sing a wedding song, or when the lines of David, Moses, and others in *Aman y Mordochay* imply the involvement of the crowd in the dialogically structured final scene, expecting the response of everyone present when shouting the chorus lines.

It is worth to mention that traces of oral literature can also be observed in these *Purimshpiln* transmitted in writing through repetitive forms, parallelisms, rhymes, contrasts, or profane occasional songs about alcohol and sex,[459] just like in the three *comedias* from the previous chapter, incorporating ballads, riddles, proverbs, folk songs, wedding songs, and erotic bucolic poetry.

As it could be seen that while the two theatrical traditions shared a striking number of similarities, due to the common sources of Jewish culture and liturgy that they both utilized, a set of differences have also come up in the study, besides the language they were written in. It is a common trait, though, that Yiddish and Portuguese were the vernaculars of their respective communities, and, although Spanish was the literary language of Western Sephardim, it was not the sacred language of the Jews either. I reckon that the main differences, such as a stronger presence of institutional and professional theatrical forms and norms in Sephardi drama, were primarily due to the inheritance of a dominant Iberian cultural heritage that demanded a more prestigious and rigorous theatrical dimension. The published and circulated Yiddish plays, therefore, stand somewhat closer to and resemble

[456] Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 379.
[457] Belkin, "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theatre," 23.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Belkin, "The "Low" Culture of the Purimshpil," 35–36.

more of oral literature, while the plays from the Netherlands exemplify and represent a rather peculiar semi-popular register, although in each case to a different extent.

Interestingly, though, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, printed Yiddish *Purimshpiln* published and performed in Amsterdam began to imitate Sephardi literary trends: they adopted characteristics of a more eloquent and more erudite form of theatrical practice (the opera), as the title pages of the 1718 publication of the *Akhashveyroshshpil* and *Dos shpil fun Mordkhe un Ester* (The Play about Mordechai and Esther) express their intention to be more fitting to be staged with professional actors and a properly edited script that would help the audience gain a better understanding of the given narrative.[460] The fact that they staged French and Spanish pieces for themselves, as seen in Chapter I, also demonstrates a new tendency toward Sephardi practices of theatre-making.

When compared to Italian Jewish and Ashkenazi theatrical life simultaneously, it is important to highlight the apparent dualistic trend within the frames of Iberian Jewish theatre showing that although in form (professionalism, institutionalization) it stood closer to that of the Venetian ghetto, in its content, tone, and expression it approximated Yiddish theatrical practices much more. Enough to look at their parodistic tools, the abundance of folkloristic and carnivalesque elements, the musical and dancing *intermezzi*, a certain extent of improvisation, or the audience's involvement and participation in the performance. I interpret this dominant aspect of the Amsterdam Purim plays as an intention of the Sephardi community to maintain an essentially Jewish character when practicing theatre, similar to their Ashkenazi brethren, which perhaps even served the function of an abstract frontier that maintained a fundamental separation between Jewishness and Christianity. Since there were no physical walls in Amsterdam that could fulfil this purpose (unlike in Venice), and since Sephardim were already the Jews of discretion, as I would call them, acting similarly to the

[460] Shlomo Berger, *Producing Redemption in Amsterdam: Early Modern Yiddish Books in Paratextual Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 68.

Dutch and adopting the genre of theatre, they had to institute remedial measures to still remain quintessentially Jewish.

IV.4. Back in New Jerusalem

In the following pages, I present additional information on Sephardi Purim customs to buttress earlier arguments deduced from the Purim *comedias*. I discuss the parodistic genre of the Purim poem, the missing link between traditional Purim customs and Purim theatre, as well as illuminated *megillot* from the Netherlands that often captured contemporary traditions and various components of Jewish material culture.

Harm den Boer in his monograph notes that the first Purim poem produced by the Amsterdam Sephardi community was a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century piece called *Micamoca: Burlesco* (*Mi-chamocha*/Who Is Like You: A Parody) by a certain Josef Benjaez de Constantina, that was dedicated to Manuel de Belmonte, the patron of *Jahacob e Essau*, who, according to Benjaez' dedicatory lines, sponsored the printing. Its exact date and place of publication are unknown, however, based on the death of Belmonte, as well as his person himself, it must have come out before 1705 in Amsterdam,[461] where it is located today (namely, in the Ets Haim Library, together with the manuscript of a Purim parody written in Livorno in 1703).

Mi-chamocha, the piece *Micamoca* parodies, is a medieval poetic work by Yehuda Halevi, the great poet of the Hebrew language during the Spanish Jewish Golden Age. It has been an essential liturgical song on *Sabbath Zakhor* (named after the weekly Torah portion *Zakhor* which tells the story of Amalek) or *Sabbath Mi-chamoca*, the Sabbath before Purim, already in the seventeenth century. This is attested by Morosini's custom book that discusses

[461] den Boer, *La literatura sefardí en Amsterdam*, 297.

the song in great detail, introducing its four parts and describing the poetic tools Halevi utilizes in it (such as acrostics).[462] *Micamoca*, just like Halevi's piece, retells the story of Esther, although in a highly parodistic style, in accordance with the spirit of the upcoming holiday: it includes a number of curses or Queen Vashti growing a tail (following a Talmudic legend),[463] among others. Additionally, one finds references to many contemporary items, similar to the three *comedias*, by exploiting the reality effect: we hear about countless mountain crystal bottles of wine imported from France, Florence, Slavonia,[464] Transylvania, Germany, and Spain,[465] the latter two being singled out by Benjaez for providing red and white wine for the banquet, respectively. The currencies of ducat[466] and quintal[467] are also mentioned here, similarly to peso and doubloon (*dobrão*) in *El perseguido dichoso*[468] and *Jahacob e Essau*,[469] respectively, as markers of a profane reality.

In his article, Harm den Boer mentions a manuscript containing a number of witty poems composed by anonymous poetesses and copied by the very Isaac de Matatia Aboab that might have been written for the occasion of Purim, due to their occasional character and humorous tone.[470] One of them, "Rica and Sara: Dialogue in pair,"[471] is a *bavardage*, a banter between two women who nag about the hardships of life and gossip about everybody as it is their sole source of happiness.[472] The other piece that I wish to mention is a series of

[462] Morosini, *Via della fede*, 815–817.
[463] Benjaez, *Micamoca: Burlesco*, v. 39.
[464] Ibid., vv. 21–22.
[465] Ibid., vv. 25–27.
[466] Ibid., v. 23.
[467] Ibid., v. 115.
[468] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 310.
[469] *Jahacob e Essau*, 60, v.1475.
[470] den Boer, "Exile in Sephardic Literature," 199.
[471] Kennett Brown reproduces the piece in his article: "Rica e Sara: Diálogo en pareados," repr. Kenneth Brown, in *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico: María de Zayas, Isabel Rebeca Correa, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Vol. II., ed. Monika Bosse, Barbara Potthast, and André Stoll (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1999), 460–471.
[472] Kenneth Brown, "La poetisa es la luna que con las de Apolo viene: Nuevos datos sobre y textos de varias poetisas sefardíes de los siglos XVII y XVIII," in *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico: María de Zayas, Isabel Rebeca Correa, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Vol. II., ed. Monika Bosse, Barbara Potthast, and André Stoll (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1999), 447.

redondillas sung by a widow who lost her otherwise rich husband to an unspecified disease and has spent all their money on his treatment, thus not having anything left to marry her daughter to her fiancé.[473] She asks the dowry society to give her money to make the wedding happen, which Job, the judge in the poem deciding on her case, provides.[474] Kenneth Brown emphasizes that such requests to the Dotar society were always assessed around the time of Purim,[475] which fact, in my opinion, indeed gives a strong occasional character to the dialogic song and a reason to connect it to the Jewish carnival.

Apparently, various types of parodistic texts had been disseminated for the occasion of Purim in Amsterdam throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, which not only *Micamoca*, the anonymous poetesses' works, and the three *comedias* prove but a number of manuscript copies of well-known medieval parodistic texts that were often recited on Purim: *Masekhet purim* (The Purim mask) by Kalonymos ben Kalonymos; a Purim poem by Solomon ibn Gabirol; or *Megillat setarim* (The scroll of secrets) by Levi ben Gershom. I will not discuss their specific content, since they were not original products of the period under scope, but their seventeenth-century circulation and frequent use are, indeed, very telling. It becomes clear that such humorous texts, parodies of liturgical and/or sacred texts of Judaism made large parts of the festival and even its preceding weekend leading up to it (as *Micamoca* shows), and most probably they were read out loud publicly, either in the synagogues or at people's homes, etc., to create the joyful, festive environment that Purim required.

Additionally, we know of a few seventeenth-century illuminated *megillot* from the Netherlands that provide information compatible with the preceding literary analysis. Their

[473] "Redondillas," repr. Kenneth Brown, in *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico: María de Zayas, Isabel Rebeca Correa, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*. Vol. II., ed. Monika Bosse, Barbara Potthast, and André Stoll (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1999), 472, vv.25–28.
[474] Ibid., 473, vv.5–12.
[475] Brown, "La poetisa es la luna," 448.

images show how people dressed up on these occasions or how they imagined the ancient Near East and its fashion trends on stage—or at least in seriously composed, "staged" liturgical settings. Additionally, their sheer existence shows the wide use of Esther scrolls in seventeenth-century Jewish liturgy, a fact that custom books also mention, even with illustrations in the *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*. However, one must not jump into far-reaching conclusions about Sephardim, since, most of the time, there is no guarantee that these *megillot* were made and/or used exclusively by them, and not by Ashkenazim, without assured information regarding provenience. However, the figures wearing clothes resembling Dutch fashion rather point toward a Sephardi context, as every seventeenth-century depiction of Amsterdam Jews makes a distinction between Sephardim and Ashkenazim based on their garb: Sephardim tended to wear Dutch clothes (except for the elite who followed French fashion and wore perfume) and shave (except for rabbis),[476] while Ashkenazim stuck with traditional Jewish pieces of clothing.[477]

It is generally true that many times these illustrations reflect on their own contemporary environments, depicting buildings, streets, and garbs that were not taken from ancient Near Eastern images for sure but were the results of the reality effect. It was a visual tool so typical in medieval and early modern arts that, by mixing contemporary elements (objects, fashion items, food, etc.) into a scene from antiquity, brought its spectators closer to the theme, as all the familiar features turned the picture easier to mentally receive, interpret, and evaluate the narrated story as more relevant to their lives.[478]

[476] Kaplan, The Jews in the Republic until about 1750," 151.
[477] See Samantha Baskind's already cited article. Additionally, for a set of images see: Henri Van de Waal, "Rembrandt and the Feast of Purim," and Stephen Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
[478] Keith Moxey, "Reading the Reality Effect," in *Pictura quasi fictura. Die Rolle des Bildes in der Erforschung von Alltag und Sachkultur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Gerhardt Jaritz (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 20.

Fig. 16. Details from the *megillah* at the British Library.
Source: The British Library, cat.nr.: OR 1047, accessed Febr 4, 2018, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_1047_f001r.

I would like to single out two pieces, one from the British Library, London (BL Or 1047),[479] and one from the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam (M000440)[480] that, according to their provenience information in the catalogues, were produced in the 1630–40s and the early eighteenth century, respectively, and that hold special relevance to early modern Sephardi Purim customs. The one in London (*Fig. 16.*) provides a long series of tiny illustrations of the original narrative, looking like a modern-time comic book, with numerous allusions to contemporary times (i.e. the appearance of items from early modern material culture, such as garbs, utensils, weapons, trumpets, harps, enormous ships, etc.), as well as to the Middle East via a detailed depiction of two elephants, a rhino, palm trees, and, occasionally, turbans.

I could detect a curious iconographic identicality of the depiction of fools on this *megillah* to the early illustration of Purim and Purim fools in the *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, as well as Rabbi Tyrna's *Sefer Minhogim* (*Fig. 17.*): the men, moving the same way, wear

[479] http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_1047_f001r (accessed: February 4, 2018).
[480] https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000440 (accessed: February 4, 2018).

Fig. 17. Purim jesters on the London *megillah* and Leusden's *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus.*

identical clothes, including the typical hat of the fool and pointy shoes, and hold identical tools (a bottle, a jar, a wind instrument, and either rattles or some pastries). In a reversed picture of the same figures a fourth fool is added to the group who is rolling the drum, in front of whom seven people are sitting, turning their backs to us, who, to me, signify the audience fully devoted to the spectacles of Purim (see the uppermost segment of *Fig. 16.* once again).

The *megillah* kept in the Jewish Historical Museum (*Fig. 18.*) also features several references to its contemporary Dutch Jewish environment, including the typical black hats of the period along with many of the garbs, the curly hairstyles, the medieval throne type with a baldachin, the huge chariot, the armors, or the shields, as well as elements evoking the natural environment of the continental climate with deer, rabbits, and pine trees. In addition, the *megillah* provides a set of references to performances and to a performative aspect of Purim: namely, it features a number of musicians (of wind and string instruments as well), clowns and fools, and the wooden stage itself with curtains. In a dining scene, one can identify chicken as one of the main dishes, and at the front, two figures are seemingly dancing, entertaining the guests, as well as the audience of the play. The colorfully-dressed fools (*Fig. 19.*) are running around with sticks and spits with fish and grilled chicken on

Fig. 18. Details of the *megillah* in the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam.
Source: Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, cat.nr.: M000440, accessed: Febr 4, 2018, https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000440.

them, while wearing extreme hats and hideous masks of birds and men with a huge moustache: some are playing musical instruments, while others are flailing with forks, sticks, flags, and sacks, or holding a huge wooden pitcher of (possibly) beer. The only character that explicitly evokes a Near Eastern environment is a recurring figure wearing a mustard turban, most probably King Ahasuerus himself. Biblical stories, especially that of Esther, were quite popular themes of contemporary Dutch painting,[481] as well as literature—one piece, Johannes Serwouters' *Hester, oft verlossing der Jooden* (Esther, or the Salvation of the Jews) from 1659, even refers to the Jewish holiday of Purim as a joyful commemoration

[481] Van de Waal, "Rembrandt and the Feast of Purim," 199.

Fig. 19. Fools depicted on the *megillah* at the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam.
Source: Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, cat.nr.: M000440, accessed: Febr 4, 2018, https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000440.

of Queen Esther's deeds in its dedicatory segment.[482] Since all of these contemporary (especially Dutch) paintings, similar to this and the previous scroll, depicting biblical scenes commonly feature Ottoman garb, often imagining the ancient Holy Land with an orientalizing, Turkish vibe,[483] I would argue that the King's depiction might be a clue to what actual costumes of biblical characters looked like on the early modern stage (Sephardi and gentile as well).

In his article on Rembrandt and Purim plays, with regards to Amsterdam Purim festivities, Henri Van de Waal refers to another *megillah* in the Jewish Historical Museum of Amsterdam (M000414)[484] that also contains references to the fashion, architecture, and material culture (with, once again, a ship) of the early modern times, as well as to theatricality. Namely, it features curtains or a checkered stage (a pattern identical to the etching in *Philologus Hebraeo-Mixtus*, which might mean that that image also depicted a stage scene), and most importantly, actors and actresses(!) singing *Shoshanat Yaakov*

[482] Serwouters, Johannes. *Hester, oft verlossing der Jooden* (Amsterdam, 1659), A3v. See online: http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/SerwoutersHester1659.html (accessed: January 6, 2018).
[483] Kalmar, "Jesus Did Not Wear a Turban," 6.
[484] Van de Waal, "Rembrandt and the Feast of Purim," 220.

Fig. 20. Details of a *megillah* from Germany or Italy.
Source: Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, cat.nr.: M000414, accessed: Febr 4, 2018, https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000414.

(Jacob's rose),[485] a popular liturgical song (based on a *piyyut* from the Gaonic period)[486] that is sung at the end of the recitation of the Esther scroll, featuring both in Sephardi and Ashkenazi liturgy. I must add, though, that according to the catalogue entry this *megillah* was made either in Germany or Italy in 1710 (*Fig. 20.*).[487]

These scrolls testify that music and musical instruments, dancing, parading fools, masks, alcohol, a fine dinner, and stage performances were, indeed, crucial features of the Jewish carnival among Sephardim in Amsterdam of the seventeenth century, just as the *comedias* have also shown it. What the visual depictions of Purim customs among Sephardim explicitly raised as a key issue is their difference from Ashkenazim and Ashkenazi rites and customs around the same time of the calendar. Sephardim dressed and celebrated differently from Ashkenazim, despite the fact that they lived in the same city, and despite their aforementioned intention to produce Purim theatre that should remain rather Jewish in character. The next section will reveal the social reasons why Sephardi carnival was only partially carnivalesque.

[485] The act of singing is indicated by the plaques beside the actors subtitling the scene.
[486] Van de Waal, "Rembrandt and the Feast of Purim," 212. Catalogue entry: https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000414 (accessed: February 4, 2018).
[487] https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M000414 (accessed: February 4, 2018).

IV.5. God Loves You When You're Dancing… But Only Modestly

In the seventeenth-century Netherlands, a mutual opening could be observed from both Christian and Jewish inhabitants: gentiles adopted a less hostile and more open and curious attitude toward Jews, while the latter opened up their gates to prove that they are no less human than their fellow city-dwellers, which resulted in chapters presenting the Jewish quarter in a bunch of travelogues (Philip Skippon, John Evelyn, William Mountague, Gregorio Leti, etc.),[488] guidebooks by Melchior Fokkens, Olfert Dapper, and Casparus Commelin, and a whole series of engravings and paintings depicting Jewish everyday life, by Romeyn de Hooghe, Jacob van Ruisdael, Emmanuel de Witte, Jan Lyken, Picart, or the national treasure of the Dutch, Rembrandt.[489] In all these descriptions and depictions, one can notice that Sephardim always dressed like the Dutch and behaved like the Dutch, unlike their Yiddish-speaking brethren.[490]

The elite of the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in the seventeenth century intended to communicate a "digestible" image of themselves toward gentiles, especially in such a cosmopolitan environment, where hundreds of Christian merchants turned up every day. This is why they advertised the ideas of *gente política* (polite people) and *bom judesmo* (worthy Judaism) within their community to integrate new values appreciated by the outside world, as a form of a "civilizing process," as Kaplan puts it.[491] Exactly along these lines, every form of noisemaking (like hammering) on Purim was banned in February 1640, as such customs began to be perceived as barbaric, a reprehensible act of the *gente bárbara*, and absolutely inappropriate to someone belonging to this *gente política*. [492] Similarly, the

[488] Kaplan, "*Gente Política*," 22–25.
[489] Baskind, "Bernard Picart's Etchings," 52–55.
[490] Kaplan, "*Gente Política*," 23.
[491] Ibid., 29.
[492] Ibid., 27.

authorities tried multiple times to ban processions and the use of masks on Purim.[493] Also, Sephardi Jews were not allowed to mingle with gentiles in the evening or to seduce Dutch girls.[494]

This "project" was the adoption of an aristocratic, courtly culture into Jewish life, with the intention to discipline Sephardim and, indirectly, Ashkenazim as well, the reckless fellow Jews in Amsterdam.[495] Based on these observations by Kaplan, Sephardim must have restricted themselves from being utterly visible on the streets, especially on the loudest day of the Jewish calendar, unlike Ashkenazi Jews. I would argue, though, that the existence and the repetitive reappearance of such restrictive orders in the books of internal regulations show that Portuguese Jews did organize festive events and wear costumes on Purim on the streets, otherwise legal restrictions would not have been necessary to be announced. Still, these festivities must have been rather modest eventually, just as the Sephardim of Amsterdam became known in general, regarding their manners and customs, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[496] Concerning Purim *comedias*, after considering Kaplan's findings, I would imagine them being staged in a more closed public or rather a semi-public space, such as an internal patio of a residential edifice or a mansion of a nobleman (as I have referred to it above), that would not have bothered the average Christian passer-by. On the other hand, Kaplan writes that Ashkenazim could not bother any less with the norms dictated by the gentiles: even well into the eighteenth century, they literally flooded the streets on Purim.[497]

It would be interesting to know more about the involvement and participation of women in Purim festivities, and, particularly, Purim plays. In the images presented above,

[493] Ibid., 36.
[494] Ibid., 30.
[495] Ibid. 28–30.
[496] For instance, they arranged wedding ceremonies inside their houses, instead of under the sky. See: Baskind, "Bernard Picart's Etchings," 50.
[497] Kaplan, "*Gente política*," 37.

one can identify women, although they might as well be men dressed as women, as it was a common practice that time, and as, officially, women were prohibited to perform on stage. Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, however, shows that by the eighteenth century, women also challenged the limits of *bom judesmo*, and dressed up as men on Purim, mingled with them in taverns, and more cases of adultery came to light, too.[498] Thus, one might even assume that by 1699, the date of publication of two out of our three *comedias*, women actively participated in Purim celebrations, dances, as well as stage plays performing in front of the rejoicing crowd.

As I have noted, and as Kaplan also says, such regulations implicitly indicate that the concept of *bom judesmo* was principally the ideal of the elite, while the masses often ignored such normative and suppressive guidelines, especially when it came down to rejoicing and releasing stress. Kaplan, in another article, presents a street fight, demonstrating that the lowest strata of Sephardim in Amsterdam did indeed make upheavals on the streets on such a regular basis that passengers were not bothered or surprised at all by the fight between Sephardi and Dutch youngsters.[499] I would further develop his argument and say that if such fights were, indeed, "routine" practices,[500] they might have even been agreed by gentile Dutch gangs on a regular basis, as well as ritualized as small-scale Jewish manifestations of the Davisian "rite of violence,"[501] in the frameworks of which these members of the Jewish community managed and released stress on an everyday basis. In my view, Purim worked very similarly among Sephardim: staging carnival plays and celebrating Purim itself, the

[498] Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, "Religious Life among Portuguese Women in Amsterdam's Golden Age," in *The Religious Cultures of Dutch Jewry*, ed. Yosef Kaplan and Dan Michman (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 96.
[499] Yosef Kaplan, "The Unusual Testimony of Charles Lemaître about a Street Brawl in Amsterdam in 1681," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 42–43 (2010–2011): 71.
[500] Ibid., 75.
[501] See in further detail: Natalie Zemon Davis, "Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past & Present*, no. 59 (May, 1973): 51–91.

holiday that should be considered essential regarding ex-*converso* identity, were the purifying ritual "valves" of a whole community.

The Purim play, in general, both in Sepharad and Ashkenaz, is a type of folkloristic play that gathers motifs and themes from popular culture. But it is more than a simple literary genre, as it is also a key ritual in Jewish religion. This is the only time of the year, exactly on the edge of winter and spring, when the otherwise prohibited is permitted, when men can dress up as women, when people can get completely drunk, and when they can make fun of social hierarchies and rigorous liturgical rules through the performance of *liminoid* theatrical pieces that resemble collective rites of passage—all set "in the framework of strict religious observance."[502] A commemoration of this kind provided the appropriate settings for opportunities for characteristic and firm theatrical phenomena to rise. Despite all prohibitions by rabbinical Judaism that considered theatre absolutely non-Jewish, a strong dramatic tradition within the Sephardi community of Amsterdam could emerge. As argued before, this must be due to their defining Iberian New Christian past, a cultural environment in which theatre was a conventional institution, a part of Christian rituals, and a platform for religious discourse, that turned theatre into an accepted and, moreover, normative medium of expression in the eyes of future Jews and their descendants.

Such an institutionalized and canonized form of theatre gave home to Purim plays within the frameworks of Amsterdam Sephardi Purim rites. If one studies it in relation to Italian ghettos and Eastern Europe, it could be concluded that the fair extent of cultural assimilation in Western Sepharad or the total segregation in Italy and in certain Central European cities (such as Frankfurt and Prague, coincidentally the settlements where the earliest *Purimshpiln* appeared), where Jews could imitate the society at large without any sanctions, could simultaneously lead to the development of theatrical practices. In Eastern

[502] Eli Rozik, "The Adoption of Theater by Judaism Despite Ritual: A Study in the Purim-Shpil." *The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms* 1, no. 3 (1996): 1232.

Europe, I reckon, only the rather late secularization and the gradually wider social acceptance of the Yiddish language gave opportunity to the establishment of theatres in the second half of the 19th century: until then, Eastern European Ashkenazim and the gentiles had to maintain the cultural frontiers that divided them within the same towns.

Traditional Purim plays, i.e., plays featuring Esther, end with the execution of Haman, which, in a ritual setting, is equal to an "expiatory and purificatory rite and collective exorcism,"[503] that provides for the community the opportunity to regenerate after escaping such horrendous events that were planned by the enemies of the Jews. Such a story, I believe, functions as an uplifting *exemplum* for the community to heal their wounds, and to let out all the social tensions they carry with them throughout the calendar year, due to both internal and external circumstances and stimuli. Furthermore, as in any carnival, the lower strata of society could also express their dissatisfaction via performing a narrative about "national" (or, I would say, ethnic) otherness.[504] By doing so, i.e. emitting social tensions, they actually reinforce their religious norms, as well as the long-standing social *status quo* with the outside world.[505]

In Amsterdam, Purim gained a novel dimension or connotation. Namely, as a distinct ex-*converso* identity had been coined over the previous two centuries, with all the traumatic experiences incorporated in it that only they shared, Purim and the events described in the Book of Esther mirrored their own tribulations back in Iberia, as well as their salvation by settling down in the Netherlands, where, figuratively, they could finally breathe again, and where they could openly practice Judaism. This notion is manifested in *El perseguido dichoso*: in the very last part, the brothers sing a joyful song about the end of their sufferings,[506] and then, right before his famous blessing, Jacob refers to the *autos-da-fé* of

[503] Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, 382.
[504] Belkin, "The "Low" Culture of the Purimshpil," 43.
[505] Rozik, "The Adoption of Theater by Judaism Despite Ritual," 1235.
[506] Aboab, "Harassed but Happy," 311.

the Inquisition by evoking the image of martyrs burnt at the stake.[507] Moreover, as he continues, he basically provides the reader/spectator a "manual" of Jewish religion by reciting the most important dogmas of Judaism,[508] implicitly calling up the peculiar nature of ex-*converso* existence, as they had to learn the basics of the religion from scratch, and reinvent it in the process. Furthermore, the inclusive and participatory character of the *comedias*, resembling Ashkenazi Purim practices, allowed not only the more rigid repetition and recollection of Jewish doctrines or shared memories but the experience of a strong sense of *communitas* as well: the wide ex-*converso* audience could feel included when reenacting such a powerful and meaningful story.

[507] Ibid., 314.
[508] Ibid., 314.

CONCLUSION

The Western Sephardim of Amsterdam were indeed a quite singular Jewish community in seventeenth-century Europe. Not only were they the conductors of world trade, Sephardim contributed greatly to the cultural history of the Netherlands and of European Jewry, as significant transmitters of various cultural and literary innovations of the epoch. This was due to their multilingualism, their culturally hybrid identity, and the international network they maintained, based on their identification with the so-called *Nação Portuguesa*.

As I have shown, this community produced a large literary corpus that included a fair amount of dramatic pieces. Among these, one can find three curious Purim plays (*El perseguido dichoso*, *Aman y Mordochay*, and *Jahacob e Essau*) that were in fact the earliest Sephardi representatives of the genre. From the very end of the seventeenth century (the 1680s and 1690s), they were embedded in a formulating theatrical scene with sporadically appearing performances that were usually stifled by the Jewish rabbinate (for religious considerations) or by the Dutch municipal authorities (for financial reasons). Apparently, at this stage, the only way theatre could penetrate Jewish culture was paradoxically the holiday of Purim.

This singular phenomenon led me to pose a set of intertwining research questions that I intended to answer in this thesis: 1. How did theatrical practice probably look like on the holiday of Purim? 2. Why could theatre emerge in the midst of a highly religious context, while Judaism strictly objected to such activity? 3. How were the theatrical, ritual, and carnivalesque aspects of the Purim play harmonized in the end?

Based on my primary source research, I revealed that Sephardi Purim theatre in seventeenth-century Amsterdam was twofold. On the one hand, it was quite institutionalized and professionalized, due to its Iberian heritage, that included the adoption and adaptation

of the Spanish *comedia*-formula that the three Purim plays imitated and parodied at the same time (this is the reason why I categorized them as *comedias burlescas*); as well as due to the general "civilizing process" of the period that affected the Sephardi community. On the other hand, Sephardi theatre tried to conserve and maintain traditional, more folkloristic, and more carnivalesque elements as well, similar to the much more *impromptu* Ashkenazi *Purimshpiln*. This probably originated from the idea of preserving the essentially Jewish character of the community, even when operating with such a non-Jewish genre, and underpinning cultural barriers between the otherwise gradually acculturating Sephardim and Dutch Protestants in Amsterdam, at least to a certain extent. Eventually, the Purim *comedia* became such an organic element of Purim that it mirrored, parodied, and therefore entered into a dynamic dialogue with its other rites, including the *megillah* recitation, as Purim plays also retell the foundational narrative of the holiday, or the festive dinner through a series of dining scenes in all of the analyzed plays.

The genre of theatre (and its classical forms), despite religious opposition, could emerge in the midst of the Sephardi community due to their Catholic Iberian past: they grew up watching and reading Spanish *comedias*, and they got used to the fact that theatre was often incorporated in their religious life. Thus, the adoption of Lope's formula must have been a relatively smooth process; however, its staging had to earn legitimate justification in light of fundamental *halakhic* concerns. Ultimately, as all other failed attempts showed, only the carnivalesque atmosphere of Purim could provide an appropriate forum to promote the blossoming of Sephardi theatrical life, as it was a holiday of uncontrolled rejoicing, subversion, and the ritual safety valve of the community through which internal and external social tensions were released by allowing everything that was otherwise unimaginable. In this manner, Jewish theatrical activity was able to stabilize, institutionalize, and professionalize itself, as well as to offer a means of mass entertainment for Western

Sephardim, its primary target audience, especially since they possessed the perfect form for that: the Spanish *comedia nueva*.

The parodistic elements that the holiday's carnivalesque facet demanded annulled all Christian and pagan connotations that theatre might have carried according to its Jewish perception. In addition, the three exemplary Purim *comedias* presented narratives that were connected to the core of Judaism, and evoked and interacted with a number of rituals and customs that were (and are) performed during the Jewish carnival. The performative reenactment of such fundamental biblical myths as the story of Jacob, Joseph, or Esther, the foundational narrative of Purim itself, reinforced their collective identity, especially due to its ex-*converso* component, and strengthened their communal cohesion, as Purim plays allowed the wider audience to participate in and literally experience the retelling of these aforementioned stories and their fundamental conflicts, creating a strong sense of togetherness and brotherhood (or *communitas*, as Edith Turner calls it) often climaxing in *katharsis*.

The emergence of Purim theatre within the Sephardi community of seventeenth-century Amsterdam can be seen as a form of acculturation, and therefore, an early sign pointing toward the process of modernization and eventual secularization of Dutch (and European) Jewry that are generally considered to be developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on a continental scale. Furthermore, with time, Purim theatre surpassed its own limitations and demanded more space—figuratively and literally—and the *comedias burlescas* written and published in seventeenth-century Amsterdam were just the earliest birds in the long history of Jewish comic theatre and popular entertainment: *El perseguido dichoso, Aman y Mordocahy*, and *Jahacob e Essau* were the cultural antecedents of such later comedic-theatrical developments as modern Yiddish theatre, turn-of-the-century cabarets, Broadway, or American Jewish stand-up and situation comedy.

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