

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Abou Bakr Belkaid University

Tlemcen



Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of English

**Melodramatic Tactics and Jewish Emancipation  
through Elizabeth Polack's play *Esther, the Royal  
Jewess (1835)***

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as partial fulfilment of the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

**Presented by**

Messaoud Ikram

**Supervised by**

Dr.Kheladi Mohammed

**Board of Examiners**

**Chairperson: Prof. Senouci Faiza**

**Supervisor: Dr. Kheladi Mohammed**

**Examiner: Dr. Rahmouni Amel**

**Chairperson**

**Supervisor**

**Examiner**

**Academic year 2021 - 2022**

## Dedication

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research and would not have made it through my master's degree.

Dear Father, my best friend, guardian, leader, and teacher, my most beloved person, possesses all the qualities of a real-life superhero.

Mother, There is no greater gift than my mother's love. Thank you for every sunny day that has illuminated the recesses of my memories.

The angel on earth who pulls out my best traits is Kawther. Thank you for making difficult times easier and enjoyable ones more enjoyable.

Marwa, my sweetheart, you are my safety net in a chaotic world; you are the golden thread that connects me to the purpose of my life.

Mohamed, My little brother hides a grown man within him... Oh, thank you for being my companion, comrade, and defence attorney.

Sarah, the day you first wiped my tears, I knew you were a true mate. You are worthy of a million thanks and as many hugs as I can give.

Adel, my dear husband, thanking you is impossible because one lifetime is too short to extend my gratitude for how delightful you make me feel every day.

Safia, The heart of my loving grandmother is a patchwork of love and care; may Allah protect you, darling.

I dedicate my dissertation to my two families and to my dear aunt Salima, whose death has left a vacuum in my heart.

## Acknowledgments

It is a genuine pleasure to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my patient and supporting supervisor, **Dr. Kheladi**, whose guidance and encouragement has been invaluable throughout this study.

I would also like to thank **Pr. Faiza Senouci** and **Dr. Rahmouni Amel** for their significant examination and their esteemed appraisal.

I am grateful to Mister **Souidi Mohamd Yacine** for his personal assistance, support providing some paid sources, as well as his words of encouragement and motivation.

I would also like to thank and appreciate my professors, **Farid Daoudi** and **Amine Belaid**, for their overwhelming attitude and scholarly advice to accomplish this task.

## Abstract

Due to the Emancipation process in the early nineteenth century, Anglo-Jewish melodramas, as powerful performances with overly dramatic characters and captivating scenarios, were often assertively political in nature. This present research work aims to bring to light the long forgotten melodramatic play *Esther, the Royal Jewess* (1835) by Elizabeth Polack, the first Jewish dramatist in Britain, by examining the main aspects of Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation in her play. This dissertation suggests that this Melodrama depicts the manifestations of the Jewish Emancipation movement in Britain through a New Historicist interpretation of the play script and that Polack would not have succeeded in delivering her political teachings hidden underneath Esther's biblical tale if she had not used the victimhood aspect to capture the attention of the public's working and middle classes.

**Keywords:** Jewish Emancipation, Melodrama, *the Royal Jewess 1835*, *Esther*, politics, victimhood, working-class, Purimspiel.

## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Abstract .....	III
Table of Contents .....	IV
General Introduction: .....	1
Chapter one: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation.....	4
1.1. Introduction.....	6
1.2. The New Historicism .....	6
1.3. Jewish Emancipation in early 19 <sup>th</sup> century .....	10
1.3.1. Conception.....	11
1.3.2. Emancipation settings: Jewish socio-political status during the process .....	12
1.3.3. Emancipation and the working and lower-middle classes:.....	14
1.3.4. The struggle for Emancipation: .....	15
1.3.5. Anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Britain: .....	17
1.4. Melodrama: .....	19
1.4.1. Definition.....	20
1.4.2. Melodrama Criticism.....	21
1.4.3. Melodrama in Political Discourse: .....	28
1.4.4. Melodrama and the Working and Lower-middle Classes:.....	32
1.4.5. The Aspect of Victimhood in Melodrama: .....	34
1.5. The Biblical Story of Esther: .....	35
1.5.1. The Significance of the Story:.....	36
1.5.2. The Story of Esther and Politics of Diaspora.....	36
CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis.....	40
2.1. Introduction:.....	43
2.2. Elizabeth Polack: .....	43
2.3. The play of Esther 1835:.....	43
2.3.1. Synopsis of the play: .....	44
2.3.2. Characterization: .....	45
2.3.2.1. Esther .....	46
2.3.2.2. Mordecai .....	46

2.3.2.3. Haman.....	46
2.3.2.4. king Ahasuerus: .....	47
2.3.3. Settings:.....	47
2.4. 2.4. Aspects of Jewish Emancipation in politics in the play .....	48
2.4.1. Politics of diaspora in the play: .....	48
2.4.1.1. Esther as a Jewish orphan in Persia .....	48
2.4.1.2. An image of Jewish assimilation in the Diaspora (Concealing Jewish identity):	49
2.4.2. Anti-Semitism: .....	50
2.4.2.1. Political and theological insecurity: .....	50
2.4.2.2. The demand for dual loyalties: .....	51
2.4.2.3. Haman’s antagonism toward all Jews: .....	52
2.4.3. Government system criticism:.....	54
2.4.3.1. A mighty king but a fragile man: .....	55
2.4.3.2. Imprudent legislation:.....	56
2.4.3.3. Working and middle classes through the character of Levi the Jew and the audience:	58
2.4.4. Aspects of victimisation in the play of Esther: .....	60
2.4.4.1. Jews as good citizens:.....	61
2.4.4.2. Esther’s rhetoric:.....	62
2.4.4.3. Esther intervenes on behalf of her people: .....	64
2.4.4.4. Mordecai’s struggle of feelings:.....	66
2.5. Criticism.....	67
2.6. Conclusion .....	74
General conclusion.....	75
References.....	77

## **General Introduction:**

Literature is a form of art that reflects social life. The suggestive-expressive word is its vehicle for expressing those values. This straightforward definition collides with another. It is the writer's artistic depiction of a human situation or experience, meant to bring pleasure and benefit to the reader.

A writer possesses the ability to connect the past and present, revealing and cementing the principles of goodness, which are central to literature and one of its objectives. It is the intellectual power of a dramatist, in particular, to expose the spirit of a nation, to connect the various facets of its identity, and to look ahead to a brighter future. This can only be accomplished through the presence of mature, responsible writers who are aware of and committed to addressing their nation's issues, such as Elizabeth Polack, who demonstrated her Anglo-Jewish identity through her melodramatic plays.

Melodrama, as a sensational dramatic performance with exaggerated characters and thrilling situations designed to elicit strong emotions, arose during the early stages of the French Revolution, and was promptly exported to England, where it grew into a distinct genre. Although sentimentality originated in Western Europe, its incorporation into stage work began earlier and became more prevalent in England than on the continent. Melodrama took on a new significance in English society following the Napoleonic Wars. Thus, it was employed to disseminate ideological precepts to all social strata.

The ideological messages contained in English melodrama were often overtly political in nature. The dramatic apparatus of villain-hero confrontation was broadly applied throughout the nineteenth century, including the portrayal of the culmination of efforts to remove the legislative restrictions established in place on England's Jewish population. Melodrama worked as a powerful medium for any member of English society, whether those who supported the system or those who had radical beliefs. It has come to be linked to the nationalistic political views of its wide range of viewers.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the political rhetoric of Elizabeth Polack's 1835 melodrama, *Esther the Royal Jewess*, or *The Death of Haman*, by exploring the ways in which the play used its artistic elements to reflect its political attitude toward the Anglo-Jewish experience of Emancipation among nineteenth-century Britain's working and lower-middle classes. This study emphasises the connection between Melodrama and the history of Jewish Emancipation.

The play's historical and political significance is revealed by situating it within its social, political, and religious context, and our research is informed by Elizabeth Polack's religious dimension as the first diaspora-Jewish dramatist to recount the biblical story of Esther.

The arguments in this interpretation are premised on the notion that melodrama, as a distinguishable form of popular stage practice, has a genuine and enduring social and political significance and is inexorably tied to the process of removing Jewish disabilities due to its highly dramatic characteristics and aspects of victimisation and righteousness.

This study has two objectives: socially to demonstrate how the melodramatic mode recertifies Jewish identity in British society, emphasising the role of aesthetics and the power of mimesis in serving the matter of Jewish nationalism; and academically to elucidate the great vindication of the so-undervalued melodrama that was cleverly employed as a literary manipulation in retelling the story of Esther, about the beautiful young queen who risks her life to serve God and save her people, which was written to the Jewish people to record the origins of the Feast of Lots, or Purim, the annual festival that commemorates God's salvation of Jews.

The following research questions were developed in order to achieve the objectives of this study, which revolve around a critical historicist analysis of the play of *Esther*, which was first performed in 1835 within the context of Jewish Emancipation in Britain:

- What are the most significant Jewish Emancipation-related aspects of the play?



- How did Polack use the play to convey her political views?
- What role did Melodrama play in enhancing the play's political significance?

This research adopts the "New Historicism" critical paradigm, which attempts to explain intellectual history via literature and literature in its sociocultural context. The first chapter contains the most relevant reviews of Jewish history in late Georgian and early Victorian England to the current discussion; objective evaluations that include references to pre-existing melodrama publicity and criticism; as well as a few key perceptions related to the political dimension of Polack's historical melodrama. Elizabeth Polack, the playwright, is introduced in the second chapter, followed by a critique of the play and a comprehensive assessment of the notions needed for its historicist analysis.

# Chapter one: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

**Table of Content Chapter One**

Dedication .....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Abstract .....	III
Table of Contents .....	IV
General Introduction: .....	1
Chapter one: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation.....	4
1.1. Introduction.....	6
1.2. The New Historicism .....	6
1.3. Jewish Emancipation in early 19 <sup>th</sup> century .....	10
1.3.1. Conception.....	11
1.3.2. Emancipation settings: Jewish socio-political status during the process .....	12
1.3.3. Emancipation and the working and lower-middle classes:.....	14
1.3.4. The struggle for Emancipation:.....	15
1.3.5. Anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Britain: .....	17
1.4. Melodrama: .....	19
1.4.1. Definition.....	20
1.4.2. Melodrama Criticism.....	21
1.4.3. Melodrama in Political Discourse: .....	28
1.4.4. Melodrama and the Working and Lower-middle Classes:.....	32
1.4.5. The Aspect of Victimhood in Melodrama: .....	34
1.5. The Biblical Story of Esther: .....	35
1.5.1. The Significance of the Story:.....	36
1.5.2. The Story of Esther and Politics of Diaspora.....	36

### 1.1. Introduction

English theatre was a significant weapon for deeper ideals and broader policies throughout the eighteenth century. In early nineteenth-century England, melodrama flourished within a shattered social order; neo-classical concepts of reason, the framing of the Jew as an adversary, right movements, and Emancipation were all exemplified in the art of the age. With the requirement to utilise the increasingly potent emotional economy of melodrama in order to disseminate progressive ideas via common cultural standards, theatre took on a new significance for the Jewish question. Drama was about political rhetoric, not "felt experience," "personal response," or "imaginative singularity." That was perfectly captured by Elizabeth Polack in her 1835 adaptation of *Esther, the Royal Jewess*. However, literary evaluations of melodrama from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have all too often judged the genre in terms of biased preconceptions about its audience. Due in part to these presumptions, there has been no systematic attempt by a literary critic to situate Anglo-Jewish stage melodrama in its social context or to account for what is generally accepted to be the relatively common presence of its defining characteristics throughout nineteenth-century British society. Thus, this chapter delves into the play's historical context and the years during which the Jews of Britain confronted both communal and governmental repudiation. In addition to related ideas that show how important the play is when viewed objectively in its historical context, the following paragraphs explain why this study's topic requires a different approach.

### 1.2. The New Historicism

Various approaches have been proposed to conduct a conventional, reasoned consideration of literary works and issues. However, few studies have been published on the new critical paradigm known as New Historicism.

New Historicism has been defined as a literary theory that asserts the importance of interpreting literature in relation to culture, politics, history, and social phenomena. This contemporary perspective implies that artistic production is inextricably linked to the period's social and cultural practices. According to New

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Historicism, an artistic entity is a product of its political and social context. It is predicated on the premise that art is the true embodiment of a society's material actions. It states that a work of fiction cannot be completely divorced from non-fiction. Additionally, it establishes a connection between a fictional entity and history. (Zengin, 91).

According to Dr. Parvini Neema's records, this approach has had a significant impact on literary studies, particularly in Shakespeare and early modern literature, and despite opposition from feminists, cultural materialists, and classical scholars, this field finally supplanted traditional paradigms in the study of early modern works, dominating early modern literature studies in the 1980s and 1990s. (Neema)

In the context of academia, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines New Historicism as:

A term applied to a trend in American academic literary studies in the 1980s that emphasized the historical nature of literary texts and at the same time (in contradistinction from 'old' historicisms) the 'textual' nature of history. As part of a wider reaction against purely formal or linguistic critical approaches such as the New Criticism and deconstruction, the new historicists, led by Stephen Greenblatt, drew new connections between literary and non-literary texts, breaking down the familiar distinctions between a text and its historical 'background' as conceived in previous historical forms of criticism. New historicism is less a system of interpretation than a set of shared assumptions about the relationship between literature and history, and an essayistic style that often develops general reflections from a startling historical or anthropological anecdote. ("New Historicism")

According to Lois Tyson (2006), New Historicism rejected both traditional historicism's marginalisation of literature and New Criticism's enshrinement of the literary text in a timeless dimension separate from history. Traditional literary

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

historians believed that a literary text embodied the author's intention and illustrated the spirit of the age that produced it. On the other hand, new historicist critics believe that literary texts are neither self-contained art objects that transcend the time nor place in which they were written, nor do they embody the author's intention. New criticism held that literary texts transcended the time and place in which they were written. (Boulegroune, 2019)

Instead, literary works are cultural artefacts that can tell us about the way discourses interacted and the web of social meanings that existed in the time and place where the work was written. They can do this because literary production itself is a product of discourse interaction, which makes it possible for them to do so.

To investigate this vision, a more detailed explanation of the literature and methodology is required. For new historicism, both the literary text and the historical context in which it originated are critical, as text (the literary work) and context (the historical conditions and the new historical and cultural criticism that generated it) are mutually constitutive: they create one another. As with the dynamic relationship between personal identity and society, literary texts shape and are shaped by their historical surroundings. (Williams, 123)

Mukesh Williams claims that, in contrast to previous theoretical approaches, the New Historicist approach to literary studies focuses on three factors: literature, author, and reader. Literature, according to New Historicism, is merely a "text" that is identical in nature to all other texts that constitute a culture. There are numerous definitions of literature, and these definitions vary by society and generation. Thus, "literature" is a "socially constructed" term, and its definitions change with time. Literary evaluations are also subjective. No author's work is superior to another, and no culture's products are superior to another. However, all works, literary and non-literary, are worth examining. This method changed the focus from basic to contextual, from humanist to historical, from signs to society, and from closed systems that keep meanings the same to open systems that make sense. (Williams, 124).

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Rather than the events themselves, New Historicists are concerned with the interpretations that they enable. By adopting three of Foucault's discursive methodologies – his concept of discourse, the production of power and knowledge, and the human subject – to literature's historical and cultural context (4). Moreover, because the New Historicism theory is a return to empirical literary studies, it necessitates the use of a specific analytical framework. Gregory S. Jay (1990:6) states:

The analysis needs to describe: the set of discursive possibilities offered to the writer by the cultural archive; the assumption within the text of a contemporary audience whose knowledge must both be used and resisted; the projection within the text of a future audience constituted by its decipherment of the text; the social and institutional sites of the text's production and reception; the figurations of subjectivity offered or deployed by the text; the effects of reflexivity inscribed in the text; and the possible contradictions between the text's cognitive, performative, didactic, aesthetic, psychological, and economic projects.(Belaid, 8)

George S. Jay's statement is overwhelmingly concerned with the non-literary aspects of a text and the social situation of both the writer and the audience; it is necessary to develop a concurrent connection between the literary work and the other non-literary factors in order to conduct a comprehensive evaluation rather than the traditional perspective, which considers the literary foreground and the historical context of a text. (Belaid, 8)

In terms of drama, Clifford's examination of dramaturgy and onstage production appears to validate the view that no school has claimed hegemony over dramatic criticism methodology throughout the last century, and indeed, all preceding approaches have been scrutinized in the wake of the growth of deconstructionism and other postmodernist methodologies, some of them profoundly embedded in scepticism. (Davidson, 359)

Fortunately, not all critics and scholars have ignored the historical settings of a play, which are most fruitfully investigated through interdisciplinary research, an undertaking that New Historicism promoted following comparative drama. Despite the fact that this approach has severe limitations, as Steven Mullaney proves in his "The Place of the Stage", a perceptive scholar will definitely find insights that will ultimately lead to a better understanding of drama and theatre in every period of history. (Davidson, 359)

Therefore, a historical approach to Polack's play *Esther* (1835) as a mode of fiction represented in performance must take into account the cultural, political, and social conditions of England. In addition to a more detailed evaluation of the main episodes of Anglo-Jewish history and the ideologies that drove the first female Jewish dramatist to the creation of such a script, considering the varying interpretations in different historical and geographical contexts.

To support the implementation of the aforementioned approach to Elizabeth Polack's play, the following subsection will provide background information on the social and political position of Jews in Britain throughout the Emancipation process.

### 1.3. Jewish Emancipation in early 19<sup>th</sup> century

The relatively few years from 1830 to 1860 are best characterised as the beginning years of political accomplishment during which the British government and society solved several complications in relation to the Judaic matter. Although there was a remarkable shift in English attitudes toward Jews in Britain during these decades, they remained, in theory, enemies of the state. Perspective about the "Alien" prevailed; the old dominant attitude of abhorrence and Jewish disabilities determined that the Jews would continue to be underprivileged until their total liberation (Freitag, 1).

Therefore, it was suggested that the Jewish community had made a concerted effort to firmly identify with the nation's interests in order to reduce the public's highly prejudiced view of the non-native Jewish minority. Correspondingly,



this process of cultural, religious, social, and political fulfilment is called "emancipation."

On the eve of the 19th century, the term "emancipation" has been used by students of Jewish history to outline the process by which Jews resisted European subordination through the asset of equal rights. The expression "emancipation" is implicitly vague and capable of being interpreted from multiple lenses, though it confounds the Jewish position and its attainment, assuming a single achievement. (Sorkin, 2016)

An ever-increasing body of present-day literature relates equal rights to public citizenship, failing to demonstrate the diverse Jewish experiences around the continent. Moreover, despite the partial nature of the equal opportunities the Jews obtained, they attained them through a myriad of strategies. (Sorkin, 2016).

The Emancipation involved different aspects of Jewish life; its study is an integral part of the operation itself. It had advocates who regarded it as the new age of Jewish deliverance and the end of diasporic inferiority, as well as dissenters who saw it as a threat to the survival of Judaism. These proponents and opponents have driven the establishment of further academic study of the Jewish Emancipation that is associated with the so-called dispersion of the Jews. (Sorkin)

In spite of the extensive scholarship on European Jewry in the last few decades, there has not been a comprehensive treatise on the subject of Emancipation as a European phenomenon. A lot of the research that has been done on this idea is hard to generalise because it does not give a full picture of the whole continent (or at least most of it) (Sorkin, 31).

### **1.3.1. Conception**

The term "Jewish emancipation" came into general use after the attainment of Catholic Emancipation in England in 1828. It connotes the release of Jews from prior bondages into a state of freedom. It shaped the legal and political construction of modern Jewry, and thus, modern Jewish history has frequently been associated with the advancement of legal equality. (Katz, 1)

While this liberation movement has been studied at the local, municipal, regional, national, and continental levels, there is no established chronology. However, most historians, notably professor Salo Baron, have dated the beginning of Emancipation with the French Revolution's emancipatory legislation, that is, with the proclamation by the French National Assembly in January 1790, concerning the equality of Sephardic (Spanish Portuguese) Jews and Ashkenazic (German-Polish) Jews in September 1971. (Baron, 56)

This movement became the major target of a protracted struggle and a turning point in Jewish destiny that affected almost every element of Jewish life, including occupation, education, religion, and communal cooperation. (Katz, 1).

### **1.3.2. Emancipation settings: Jewish socio-political status during the process**

The law of nearly every civilised country recognises two forms of status: a political status or national character, in virtue of which an individual becomes a citizen or subject of a particular state, and at once entitled to its protection and liable to the obligations incident to allegiance; and a civil status, in virtue of which he becomes clothed with certain municipal rights and duties. For this study, it is necessary to describe and explain the complicated political and social changes that brought Jews into the mainstream of British society.

Marcus Roberts's investigation indicates that at the turn of the nineteenth century, England had between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews, most of whom were poor immigrants or second-generation immigrants who were regarded as low-status and foreign. In the early nineteenth century, the majority of Jews were poor artisans and tradesmen. Poverty was rampant, and synagogues and Jewish charitable organisations assisted the Jewish poor. (Roberts, 34)

Numerous authentic historical narratives discuss the widespread concern about the close connection between poverty and illegitimacy affecting philanthropic action in the late-Georgian and Victorian eras, which concerned acculturated middle-class

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Jews who saw it as a threat to their efforts to improve Jewish civil status. Furthermore, the poor's misbehaviour fuelled anti-Semitism in general, jeopardising their own assimilation. As a result, beginning in the late eighteenth century, municipal leaders established a network of philanthropic institutions aimed at not only assisting the poor but also changing their manners and morals and providing them with the means to join the respectable. (Endelman, 84).

As the century progressed, a growing number of Jews were born in England and became increasingly prosperous and educated, with a substantial percentage becoming middle class. By 1880, the English Jewish community numbered approximately 60,000, with roughly two-thirds based in London. Additionally, they had assimilated to the point where they considered themselves English citizens and were gaining respectability. Their legal status as citizens of this country, on the other hand, has remained unchanged since the start of the 18th century. These well-established Jewish middle and upper classes lobbied for the removal of remaining restrictions on their full participation in national life. While many Jews were opposed to joining the establishment, what they needed most was to be accepted as full and legal equals with all other Englishmen. (Roberts, 35)

It is well documented in the historical literature regarding Jews' position that they were excluded from many of the institutions and professions that made up the English establishment in the early nineteenth century because they could not take Christian oaths or receive the sacraments in order to do so. It was illegal for them to hold any position in the Crown, the municipal administration, or the legal profession. No Jews were allowed to serve in Parliament, attend Oxford or Cambridge, be freemen in the City of London, or practise law as barristers, to name just a few of the many restrictions. (Freitag, 12).

Political and social liberals, backed by the emerging middle class, supported the Jewish community in achieving these goals. At the time, both America and France were on the verge of reform, if not revolution. They advocated for the abolition of civil disabilities not only for Jews, but also for Roman Catholics and non-conformist Protestants. Additional assistance came from members of the church and other

political groups. The City of London was arguably the most vocal advocate for reform and Emancipation of all these groups, seeing the critical necessity for Jews to be granted the same rights as other citizens. (Roberts, 35)

Over the course of several decades, Emancipation progressed slowly but steadily. In 1818, synagogues were recognised as legal bodies capable of claiming unpaid dues. Naturalization was no longer required for the Anglican Communion following the Act of Parliament in 1826. This accomplished all of the Jew Bill's objectives with barely a murmur of public opposition. There was no longer a limit on the number of Jewish brokers in 1828. (Ibid, 35)

In 1830, the City of London elected Baron Lionel de Rothschild to the House of Commons, albeit he was unable to assume his position due to the religious requirement of the Parliamentary oath. In 1831, Jews were granted Freedom of the City, and they were no longer required to take an oath on the New Testament. This was a significant concession, as it enabled them to conduct retail business in the city for the first time. (35)

In 1833, when Lincoln's Inn established the precedent of dismissing the traditional conclusion of the oath, Jews gained the right to practise as barristers. University College was established in 1837 with the support of Isaac Lyon Goldsmid. It was a non-denominational school that allowed Jews to come, even though they had been able to go to Scottish colleges before. This allowed professing Jews to get a degree from an English university for the first time. (35)

### **1.3.3. Emancipation and the working and lower-middle classes:**

Some scholars, such as Israel Feinstein, hold a different perspective on the matter of Jewish movement in Britain, arguing that not all Jews desired or cared about Emancipation in the first place. Even middle-class Jews who had made some progress in life were sometimes so preoccupied with paying the bills that they were both indifferent to and uninformed about the political situation. Public meetings held by the emancipationists in an attempt to capture the public's attention were mainly ineffective. Henry Mayhew's writings on the subject of politics for *The Morning*

Chronicle of London in the 1840s reveal a complete lack of interest in and knowledge of politics among the Jewish Street sellers and old-clothes men. (Gossman, and Pyne, 2020)

As noted by Lionel Gossman, the great scholar of European intellectual history, the belief that just a few Jews cared about Emancipation was so entrenched that on April 11, 1833, a letter was addressed to Robert Grant, the Member of Parliament leading the charge for a second Emancipation bill in Parliament. However, three of the sixty-eight signatories were Rothschild's, six were Goldsmids, and five were Mocattas, a prominent Sephardi family with economic ties to the Goldsmids. Additional notable Emancipationists signed the letter.

He also stated that some more educated Jews opposed political Emancipation because it would threaten the thousand-year-old Jewish identity, faith, and religious devotion. Thus, Joseph Crooll, a Hungarian-born Hebrew instructor at Cambridge and former preacher at the Manchester Synagogue, contended in *The Last Generation* that Jewish "separateness" was a divinely appointed condition pending God's people's messianic restoration to the Holy Land. He was concerned that emancipation would cause Jews to renounce their faith.

According to the same article, while many impoverished Jews were uninterested and others were concerned about the future of the Jewish religion, those who fought for complete emancipation of Jews in England did not surrender.

### **1.3.4. The struggle for Emancipation:**

After the non-conformists and Catholics were released by Parliament in 1828 and 1829, the real battle to liberate the Jews began. This left Jews as the only group to suffer from civic restrictions, which was unacceptable. Reform bills were introduced into Parliament. The first was defeated in the House of Commons. A second attempt to pass a law was made in 1833. This time, the bill was based on Tory interests in the Lords, and they would be an issue on nine other occasions between 1834 and 1857. (Roberts, 36)

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

David Salomon's career was instrumental in achieving Jewish independence. He was one of the bank's founders. In 1835, he was elected the city's first Jewish Sheriff after Parliament enacted the Sheriff's Declaration Act, which allowed him to serve without taking the Christian oath. He was also elected alderman the same year, but was disallowed owing to his religion, and his constitutional challenge was ultimately rejected. (36)

Salomons was elected alderman for the Portsoken Ward in 1844 but was not permitted to take office. In 1845, following widespread protests over Salomons' election as Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor in 1844, the Jewish Municipal Relief Act was passed, allowing Jews to hold all municipal posts without taking the oath "in the true faith of a Christian". (36)

Salomons became the city's first Jewish mayor in 1847, after successfully lobbying Parliament to enable Jewish council members. The Oxford and Cambridge Reform Acts of 1854 and 1856, respectively, permitted Jews to study at the two colleges, albeit for a long period afterwards. Few Jews took advantage of this opportunity due to government fears of assimilation. Salomons became London's first Jewish Lord Mayor in 1856. (Ibid, 37)

This left one more impediment to overcome, namely the prohibition on Jews becoming members of Parliament. Salomons and his friends discovered that Parliament was unwilling to act on this matter. They determined that the only way to succeed was to be elected as MPs democratically, even if their seats in the House were denied due to their inability to swear an oath. They accurately reasoned that Parliament would finally be unable to resist the will of the people. (37).

Salomons and four other Jews continued to run for Parliament from 1835 onwards. Baron Rothschild was elected to Parliament four times between 1847 and 1851, and Salomons was elected in 1851, but neither was able to take their seats due to the mandatory oath. The city and other supporters exerted considerable pressure on Parliament to comply. (37)

Victory came in 1858 with the passage of the Jewish Relief Act, which abolished the religious oath required for entry into Parliament. On July 26, 1858, Baron Lionel de Rothschild was eventually elected to the Commons. The enabling act was confirmed as a permanent standing order in 1860. It was not until 1866 that the oath for assuming a Crown office, as well as the oath for admission to the House of Lords, were abolished. Nathaniel Rothschild became a lord in 1885 when he was elected to the Upper House. Jews were eventually granted academic fellowships in universities in 1871, when the restriction of being a clergyman was lifted. Finally, Jews were granted the same rights as other British citizens. (37)

The Jews' circumstances were significantly altered, and their position was considerably improved. These economic, social, and political advantages, however, did not prevent the emergence of extreme anti-Semitism. Quite the contrary, the advancement of Jews in gentile society tended to galvanise opposition from those incensed by the anti-Semitic nature of that society's very integration of Jews. The idea of Jewish naturalisation and Emancipation was viewed as a noble ideal by its proponents, notably the intellectuals who campaigned for it in public discourse, as a way to remedy a great wrong perpetrated by centuries of ignorance and blindness. (Katz, 52)

Their opponents, on the other hand, characterised it as a perilous innovation, the hazards of which must be made abundantly evident. Due to the popular conviction of the unity of humankind at the time, opponents of the Jews felt forced to provide reasons why the Jews should be excused. Throughout their efforts to justify their position, a diverse array of causes and arguments emerged, with old and new pretexts being created to continue the anti-Jewish propaganda. The synthesis of these causes ushered in a new era of ideological anti-Semitism. (Ibid, 53)

### **1.3.5. Anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Britain:**

In her article "The Definition of Antisemitism," Kenneth L. Marcus stated that defining Anti-Semitism has always been problematic due to the term's disreputable origins, discredited sources of its derivation, different expressions of the notion, and

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

the controversial politics of its applications. Nonetheless, this is a critical task, not only because the term must be accurately defined in order to be recognized but also because the accompanying issue must be addressed with conceptual precision. (Marcus, 97)

In 1878, Wilhelm Marr, a German publicist from Hamburg, co-founded the first anti-Jewish party in Berlin and invented the term “anti-Semitism” to represent these new forms of animosity. This neologism refers to the racist interpretations of linguistic and racial theories that were prevalent in Europe at the time. As a result of a selective reading of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, which extended the theory of natural selection to human societies, "social Darwinism" arose. The struggle for existence empowered the strongest, defined as the physically powerful, to enslave and even exterminate the weakest. This new worldview justified European colonial invasions and appeased racial and biological anti-Semitic beliefs. (Toczé and Lambert)

Still, it looks like a sign of prejudice and unfair treatment against all Semitic people. In modern times, however, the term refers only to prejudice and/or discrimination towards Jews, either as individuals or as a group. This prejudice and/or discrimination based on Jews' religion, ethnicity, ancestry, or anti-Semitism may motivate group membership. It is founded on the notion that Jews share certain characteristics, think, and behave differently than other people. (Ibid, 109)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, new versions of the rejection ideology for which Christian anti-Judaism had served as the secular model evolved throughout Europe. Nationalism, which made the nation the framework under which men defined themselves, generated a non-existent "Jewish nation" to which every Jew was said to have sworn allegiance. Thus, even after Emancipation, the Jew remained distinct, and his distinction from "revolutionaries" was permanent. (Claude and Annie, 81)

The upheavals generated by industrialization, such as the proletarianisation of the working classes and the concentration of capital at the cost of the peasants and middle classes, promote the search for a convenient excuse by increasing the



possibility that people will look for one. However, it was the Rothschilds. In France, Germany, and England, there were numerous notable Christian industrialists and financial families. Nonetheless, the Rothschilds came to represent the pinnacle of world capitalism. The rejection was coupled with the dream of an ambitious and deceitful people who gradually installed their own members in all the major positions in order to enslave the society that had welcomed them. "Jews are everywhere," said the impersonators of Édouard Drumont. (81)

On the basis of the vast majority of works about anti-Semitism in Britain, it is argued that despite the fact that Jews were the only religious group specifically targeted by anti-Semitism and that the campaign's leaders questioned whether Jews were willing to accept legal discrimination in exchange for social equality, questions were raised about the Jews' moral character and "racial" identity. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 made it easier for Jews to be freed from restrictions in the 1800s. (Tananbaum)

### 1.4. Melodrama:

The domestic elements of the battle for Jewish integration into European society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have tended to be ignored by contemporary Jewish historiography. Instead, the majority of works have focused on public efforts to gain acceptance, such as modernising Jewish education, the Jewish worship Reformation, and normalising Jewish occupations, in addition to applying critical standards and methods to Jewish scholarship. Endelman claimed that historians have focused their attention on a small group of prominent figures who managed the activities of the organised Jewish community in Britain, neglecting areas such as literary productions and dramatic performances. (Endelman, 69).

Due to the unprecedented popularity of theatrical entertainment during the revolutionary period of the early nineteenth century, as indicated by Henry James, the theatre was not merely a middle-class or aristocratic cultural institution to be visited in a carriage for a few hours in the evening; it was a truly popular form of entertainment for all classes, urban and rural, an aspect of life that infiltrated even the

sacred domestic interiors of respectable Victorian homes through amateur theatricals. (Hudston, 3)

Thus, this extended essay argues that we should pay more attention to the influence of drama as a multidirectional form of art, particularly melodrama, which served as a political modality beyond the stage. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to looking at melodrama as a genre, followed by a brief look at its criticism, its position in political discourse, and the aspect of victimisation within the genre.

### 1.4.1. Definition

Melodramas are identified as a genre that emerged in revolutionary France. The terms "music drama" or "song drama" originate in Greek but made their way to Victorian theatre through French. For much of the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom, melodrama rose to become the most popular kind of theatrical entertainment, during which more people went to the theatre than at any other time in history. Its enormous popularity during the Victorian era was largely due to its appeal to working-class or artisan audiences, as well as a ready-made network of so-called illegitimate theatres (theatres forbidden by law to perform drama involving the spoken word unaccompanied by music). (John, 2011)

According to the same article by Juliet John, despite the fact that melodrama's popularity began to diminish around the end of the 19th century, it had a huge cultural impact both during and after its heyday. Authors like Dickens, Wilkie Collins, sensation novelists, and even Henry James were inspired by melodrama. Due to its direct influence on the growth of the silent film business, a number of its techniques have been incorporated into contemporary cinema, television, fiction, and the performing arts.

In the context of academia, the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines melodrama as:

Originally, a stage-play (typically romantic and sensational in plot and incident) with songs interspersed and action accompanied by appropriate orchestral music. As the musical element ceased to be regarded as essential, the word came to mean a sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions. ("Melodrama")

### 1.4.2. Melodrama Criticism

Melodrama was practically overlooked by literary criticism for a century. This relative silence is perhaps the most surprising trend in dramatic criticism because melodrama was the most popular kind of theatrical entertainment for much of the nineteenth century. Its popular cultural position was completely antithetical to the Arnoldian tradition that dominated approaches to "literature" from Arnold's time until that of his student, F. R. Leavis. In contrast, melodrama underwent a significant renaissance in the 1960s, when cultural studies promoted the study of popular forms and eradicated the distinction between "high" and "low" art. This made the study of popular forms more widely recognised. (Hyslop, 85)

Several studies, including that of W. D. Howarth, suggest that Melodrama was created with an uneducated audience in mind, in order to appeal to those who are often kept out of literary fiction. Rousseau's *Pygmalion* was the first work to utilise the term "le mélodrame" in 1772. Guilbert de Pixérécourt, the self-styled and critically praised "founder of le mélodrame," adopted the term "dumb show" and the music from *Pygmalion* and used them in the production of melodramas about the French Revolution with the anti-revolutionary objective of maintaining social order in the 18th century. Although Pixérécourt was a conservative politician, he was a cultural revolutionary in many aspects, explicitly declaring, "I am writing for those who cannot read." As a result, he established a melodramatic aesthetic directed primarily towards an illiterate audience. (John, 2).

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

According to reported criticism, melodrama was well suited to thrive even within the aesthetic constraints imposed by the Licensing Act; as a music drama aimed at "those who cannot read," it never relied entirely on the spoken word to interact with audiences. Indeed, melodrama was so successful in Britain that "legitimate" theatres were forced to adopt its tactics in order to survive. (2)

*A Tale of Mystery (1800)*, based on Pixérécourt's *Coelina*, was the first British drama to call itself "a New Melo-Drama" and premiered on November 13, 1802, in the "legitimate" Covent Garden. This cross-class popularity was clear from the moment it was imported into the United Kingdom. According to Charles Dickens' "The Amusements of the People" (1850), melodrama, like Italian opera, speaks through conventional passion. (Ibid, 3)

Previous studies have shown that melodrama was popular with audiences at the start of an era when people had more access to culture and politics because it was inclusive and appealing to a wide range of people.

It has been explored in prior studies by Oscar Wilde that various subgenres of melodrama developed throughout the nineteenth century, for example, the Gothic, the romantic, the domestic (including factory melodrama), and crime melodrama. Subgenres were different in what they focused on, but they all used the same basic aesthetic template that could be used in a wide range of genres and times. (Wilde, 376)

A further analysis of several existing critical studies on the techniques of melodrama provided evidence for Michael R. Booth's description of the genre as an allegory of human experience dramatically ordered; even when the allegory is welded to, what David Mayer calls "immediate social circumstances and concerns." As an example, the characters are flat and lack depth. Good-looking people exude confidence, while dishonest individuals exemplify negativity. Techniques such as tableaux and tableaux vivants, in which players freeze in symbolically meaningful stances reminiscent of framed narrative art characterise the visual language of the playwright's work. (John, 3)

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

At its finest, melodrama can reach what Peter Brooks calls "the expressionism of moral imagination." At its most fundamental level, speech is functional, and characters communicate through facial features, motion, and songs, in addition to language. According to Dickens, melodrama is a highly emotional genre in which felt passions are communicated. (ibid, 4)

A number of authors have recognised the importance of melodrama in nineteenth-century emotional frameworks through the rising scholarly interest in "affect" and "emotion." However, Julia John's systematic and theoretical analysis signals that melodrama's aesthetic simplicity, its "non-elite" audiences, its demonstrative rather than analytical style, and its devaluation of both spoken and written language have all delayed its academic study. (4)

According to critical orthodoxy, the publication of Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976) signifies the beginning of the "serious" study of melodrama. Brooks' central thesis was that "the melodramatic mode" is a means of "discovering, demonstrating, and making operational the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era." His unprecedented use of tools such as psychoanalysis and expressionism to analyse the melodramatic mode as it showed itself in the novels of canonical writers such as Balzac and Henry James were revolutionary. (4)

Instead of redefining the field of literary studies by means of melodrama, Brooks makes the genre acceptable to literature by separating it from its ideological and theatrical surroundings and framing characters as "psychological markers," thus concealing the cultural politics of melodrama's lack of interest in the psyche. (4).

The work of Brooks, on the other hand, is possibly an outlier among studies of melodrama, which can probably most helpfully (though not entirely) be divided into three categories: "theatrical" studies, which concentrate on theatre as theatre and/or theatre history; "genre" studies, which include, but go beyond, a considerable body of work on the cultural politics of the genre (as genre); and "contextualised studies," which include an appraisal of melodrama within a larger study. Even before Brooks' landmark book, writers such as Michael R. Booth, Maurice Willson Disher, Frank Rahill, George Rowell, and Allardyce Nicoll had begun to investigate stage

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

melodrama on its own (theatrical) grounds, acquainting readers with nineteenth-century melodrama's past. (Ibid, 5)

In the same way, Robert Heilman's *Tragedy and Melodrama* (1968) and Eric Bentley's chapter on melodrama in *The Life of the Drama* (1964) were both important works on melodrama as a genre before *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

Although melodrama has been studied from several theoretical perspectives over the course of cultural studies' history, many notable edited collections of articles have taken a cohesive approach to a variety of different theoretical readings of the genre. Only a few of the works in this literary index show how melodramatic plays can be political.

For example, Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulos, for example, argue against Peter Brooks and "aesthetic" metanarratives of melodrama in their collection *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (1996) in favour of specific, historical interpretations of the genre. The nineteenth-century environment is critical for constructing the genre's subversive model. *Melodrama: Stage, Film, and Screen* (1994), edited by Jacky Bratton et al., begins with the notion that nineteenth-century melodrama was an "agent of modernity". (5).

Elaine Hadley's 1995 monograph, "Melodramatic Tactics," applies a genre approach to determine how the melodramatic mode was adopted as a form of "theatricalized dissent" by protestors criticising the rise of economic class and market forces, while Julia Dickens's *Villains* (2001) demonstrates how the cultural politics of melodrama can be used to reevaluate the work of a major Victorian author. (5)

While an interest in the cultural politics of genre has persisted, there has probably been a growing trend to position an examination of melodrama within a larger discussion of cultural or theatrical practises and/or politics. For example, Katherine Newey's *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (2005) looks at genre but mostly as an example of how the theatre industry worked. One of the most important empirical studies of theatre audiences is "Reflecting the Audience," written by Jim Davis and Victor Emiliano in 2001. (Ibid, 6)

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Identity politics are transcended and changed by the work in the discipline. It has been previously assessed only to a very limited extent, until it was first debated as a new central focus of melodrama scholarship by Anna Clark in her seminal essay, "The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture, 1748–1848." emphasises the connection between melodrama and radical political writing in the eighteenth century and the Romantic period, while also examining the possibility that melodrama can be working-class entertainment. (Ibid, 8).

Clark's historical examination of the class and gender politics of melodrama questions the binary vocabulary used to analyse identity politics on occasion. Kristen Leaver's "Victorian Melodrama and the Performance of Poverty" applies class politics to questions of representation and subjectivity to counter the tendency of modern revisionist readings of Victorian privacy to assume that all Victorians' relationships to ideological formations are identical to those of the middle class. (8)

Leaver follows Martha Vicinus's key article "Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama" in that he reframes our understanding of nineteenth-century political, affective, and cultural formations through the popular crime melodrama *Maria Marten; or The Murder in the Red Barn*. Vicinus' controversial and politicised defence of domestic melodrama argues for the genre's "value as a psychological touchstone for the powerless." (Ibid, 9)

Revisionist historiography argues for a more organic, less judgmental, and less hierarchical depiction of the British stage, as Jacky Bratton's *New Readings in Theatre History demonstrated just recently (2003)*. Current historiography has its origins in the 1830s, and by focusing on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Bratton questions conventional notions of periodicity in order to examine the historical differences between "the play" and "the stage." Similar paradigm-shifting efforts are made in Jane Moody's *London, 1770–1840 Illegitimate Theatre (2000)*. (9)

As Julia John has previously stated, there are two aspects where melodrama has the potential to modify our understanding of nineteenth-century history and contemporary disputes are in the fields of "affect" and "modernity." Melodrama has always relied heavily on the emotional response of its audience, even before Henry

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

James remarked that melodrama audiences attended the theatre "to look and listen, to laugh and cry, and not think". (9).

Eric Bentley delivers a harsh blow to people who like melodramatic passion in *The Life of the Drama*, arguing that emotion is what gives melodrama its value: The tears poured by an audience during a Victorian melodrama could be described as the poor man's catharsis, and as such, have a stronger claim to be the primary goal of popular melodrama than its infamous moral pretensions. (9)

The tears shed by the audience at a Victorian melodrama [...] might be called the poor man's catharsis, and as such have a better claim to be the main objective of popular melodrama than its notorious moral pretensions. [...] Once we have seen that the modern antagonism to self-pity and sentiment goes far beyond the rational objections that may be found to them, we realise that even the rational objections are in some measure mere rationalization. Attacks on false emotion often mask a fear of emotion as such. Ours is, after all, a thin-lipped, thin-blooded culture. (9)

In addition to being passionate, Bentley's writings express an acute sense of the political, as well as artistic and personal, worth of the melodramatic experience of feeling. To be sure, there has been a noticeable trend to distrust emotional responses to mass culture as false consciousness, even among those on the left who want the "tears shed" by those outside the cultural elite to be valued. (Ibid, 10)

Although this is changing as Marxist interpretations of popular culture get more sophisticated, melodrama critics have always been required to think about emotions in complex ways, even before the word "affect" rose to prominence on the critical agenda. Thus, Jane Shattuc's essay "Having a Good Cry over *The Colour Purple*" is a seminal examination of the relationship between "feeling" and agency in melodrama that transcends the text, genre, and theories discussed. Shattuc stated "All melodramas offer a twofold hermeneutic: a positive one which draws on the



## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

emotional strength of true liberatory hopes and a negative one which recuperates the idealistic drive-in conjunction with a repressive ideology.” (10).

Similarly, Simon Shepherd's "Pauses of Mutual Agitation" is a perceptive examination of melodrama's "assumed simplicity of moral feelings and fantasy resolutions," challenging in particular the widely held critical assumption that melodramatic endings capture the conservative ideology of the whole. (10).

Shepherd maintains, "Points of arrival do not always reflect established stability." His essay, once again, has far-reaching implications, providing a way out for critics instinctively opposed to the idea that successful conclusions assert conservatism, a way out of the logic of pessimism that so frequently frames academic discussion of emotion politics, despite the presence of more optimistic political voices. (10)

In 2000, Rohan McWilliams revealed that melodrama was transforming not only our nineteenth-century geography but also history itself. He argued that if we examined our own academic templates through the perspective of melodramatic emotion, we would derive greater benefit from them than if we attempted to fit them into an existing academic discourse. There are already indications that this is the case. According to the book "Melodrama and the Historians" by McWilliams, historians are increasingly employing melodrama to explore Victorian speech and emotional dynamics. More research and criticism on how melodrama is used to understand how Victorian literature and history interact across fields in the present day. (10)

While the cultural elite have repeatedly characterised melodrama as "other," the form has been an intrinsic part of the modern experience for individuals of all classes. As Charles Dickens argues in *Oliver Twist* in defence of melodrama, real-life upheavals are no less dramatic than those in theatrical melodrama. However, we are active participants, not passive observers, which makes all the difference in the world. Actors are not aware of quick changes and sudden outbursts of passion or emotion, which regular people see and immediately dismiss as silly and illogical. (Ibid, 14)

The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling [than those in stage melodrama]; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on; which makes a vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators, are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous. (John, 14)

It is possible to rationally explain melodramatic feelings by identifying them with a false sense of self, but Bentley refers to this as mere rationalisation. Instead of assuming that melodramatic emotions must be "false emotions," Julia believes we should focus on attempting to comprehend the power of melodrama and melodramatic sentiment in contemporary culture. (14)

Regardless of what Sharon Aronofsky Weltman revealed in her lengthy article *Melodrama, Purimspiel, and Jewish Emancipation 2019* on the appropriateness of using melodrama for Jewish emancipation purposes that go beyond reclaiming a neglected female writer. It is difficult to make clear conclusions regarding the political legacy of melodrama because prior contributions did not emphasise the persuasive and ingrained quality of the genre. This is an academic response to the long-ignored social and political significance of melodrama and an attempt to demonstrate how it was employed in Polack's 1835 Purimspiel, *The Royal Jewess*.

### **1.4.3. Melodrama in Political Discourse:**

As critical theory frequently emphasizes, aesthetics and politics are inextricably linked. Since the recent publication of Allen Feldman's critique of realism, which has an antinomic relationship with melodrama, it has thrown light on the ways in which creative form and the desire for political action (or lack thereof) are deeply intertwined. In her essay, "Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Freedom," Elisabeth R. Anker asserts that melodrama is both an aesthetic and a political endeavour. (Banerjee, 199).

Based on an article titled "Political Melodrama and Theatre," melodrama is considered an aesthetic genre born of class struggle traumas and set against the backdrop of a contemporary society's yearning for identity, social order, and strong moral guidelines. In addition, people try to stand with the oppressed, speak for them, and protect them. On the other hand, melodrama takes on the dramatic task of showing the struggles of the oppressed. (Teampău, 165)

However, taking into account existing academic criticism of melodrama and conflicting views on the genre, we realise that Elisabeth R. Anker's contribution to the field is original in that she views melodrama as a political genre that not only governs political rhetoric but also creates a particular kind of citizenship and national identity and even legitimises state power's violence. *Orgies of Feeling* examines the history, political strategies, and affective aspects of melodrama as a political discourse, with a particular emphasis on modern American politics. (Banerjee, 200).

Anker relies on Linda Williams's key essay "Melodrama Revisited" as one of the literary and film theorists relied on to describe the melodramatic technique of narration. Anker follows Williams in defining aesthetic melodrama as a genre in which characters are shown as either good or evil; the victim-hero loses his or her innocence; and the victim-hero tries to get it back through the dialectics of sadness and action. (Ibid, 200)

However, Koel Banerjee, a doctoral student in Comparative Studies in Discourse and Society at the University of Minnesota's Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, asserts that Anker's judgement of the emotional dynamics of American politics is clearly contested. She asserts, however, that melodrama's effects go beyond narrative arts to religious and civic concerns, as well as political engagement. Christine Gledhill says that melodrama gives in to demands that are not allowed by the rules of social, psychological, or political discourse. (200)

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

Anker distinguishes melodrama as an artistic genre from melodrama as a political genre, despite the fact that literary and cinematic melodrama reflect the dynamics of the characters' personal and social lives. Anker's notion that melodrama has larger ramifications than popular culture is essential to comprehending this disparity. Even though Anker spends a considerable amount of time discussing the political origins of melodrama as a kind of art, this book focuses mostly on how melodrama is used in politics, particularly after September 11, 2001, when politicians in the United States employed it to convey their views. (Ibid, 201)

Nonetheless, Anker argues convincingly that, rather than encouraging political subjects to endure the exhaustingly insecure and unsatisfactory conditions of contemporary social life, political melodrama promises that subjects can overcome their vulnerability through dramatic counteracts of force, which melodrama equates with the attainment of freedom. The enduring appeal of melodrama illustrates the psychological dynamics and political repercussions of this insatiable desire for freedom. (Baltimore, 2).

Melodramatic political discourse is part of a moral economy that portrays the victim as the hero and is motivated by the desire for liberty. "Unfreedom" does not relate to the meaningless loss of American sovereignty after 9/11, as evidenced by Anker's abbreviation. Instead, it refers to broader neoliberal conditions such as disenfranchisement, loss of agency in the face of global capital forces, financial instability, outsourcing of working- and middle-class jobs, and opaque government agencies. Anker demonstrates how the state uses histrionic language to justify its monopoly on violence. Anker used Nietzsche's idea of "orgies of feeling" to explain the sudden change in public opinion in favour of strong government action to restore what people see as lost sovereignty. (Banerjee, 202)

According to Anker, Brooks' definition of melodrama suggests that it does not address the unfairness of social institutions based on race, class, and gender. Melodrama often contributes to the belief that neoliberal politics is "civic nationalism" and is based on a promise of freedom that does not solve any of the real problems. She is unconcerned with the accuracy of the melodrama's portrayal of

political events. She emphasised, however, that it contains meanings that control and determine its effectiveness. She also talked about how melodrama becomes the norm in political talk, especially during times of national crisis. (202)

Even though Micah Del Rosario's review of Anker's book suggests that her account of melodramatic political subjectivity in the fourth and fifth chapters becomes ironically melodramatic in the absence of any literary, theatrical, filmic, or social text, which seems to have predisposed them to conceptual dilations in political theory, Anker argues that the dramatization of powerlessness is a power strategy in the sense that melodramatic orgies of feeling, which motivate people to act (Del Rosario, 1215).

According to Anker, the dramatic development of an empowering subjectivity is the response to loss (of innocence or sovereignty) in melodramatic orgies of feeling. In contrast to their artistic counterparts, the victim-heroes of melodramatic political discourse emerge victorious and, as a result, are no longer suffering victims, as melodramatic protagonists occasionally are, even at the moment of denouement. She adds that orgies of feelings "describe a paradoxical attempt to alleviate confusing feelings of powerlessness by imposing strong victimisation effects on the self, including horror, agony, grief, helplessness, and shock." (Banerjee, 203)

Anker's statements are substantiated by archival research; rigorous and in-depth analysis of political discourse and media coverage that extends well beyond the 9/11 attacks; and a historical foundation and assessment of melodrama's popularity in America. Her contribution is useful not just for political theory, but also for people who study melodrama in literary and media studies. This is because she looks at how melodrama affects the emotional landscape when it is used in politics. (203)

However, the book's concluding chapter, "Left Melodrama," lacks the archival resources and depth of the preceding chapters and seems more like an afterthought than an integral part of her thesis. While the issue of melodrama in communist discourse is critical, Anker's evaluation of melodrama's emancipatory and radical potential falls short. (Ibid, 205).

To reach a conclusion about the relationship between melodrama and political legacy, we can assume that, despite the shortcomings of Anker's work on the subject, which critics have noted, it is objective to assert that political discourse consists of melodramatic rhetoric designed to attract attention in order to convey a political message.

### 1.4.4. Melodrama and the Working and Lower-middle Classes:

Melodrama, it is generally assumed, arose because of a huge socioeconomic upheaval in the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution established a sizable middle class that was morally and socially orthodox, as well as an artisan working class whose lives were frequently mundane. Melodrama, which can take the form of novels or dramas and might be about the triumph of good over evil, virtue over vice, or justice over wrong, satisfies this need.

Historiographers and literary critics both appear to regard the genre of melodrama and the working and lower-middle classes as being unsuitable for anything more than a superficial or restricted engagement with serious political concerns. Such preconceptions are conveyed in William Wordsworth's assessment in 1805 that the "laugh, grin, grimace" of the plays he enjoyed while in London "passed not beyond the suburbs of my mind," with the term "suburbs" combining non-elite topography with a lack of profundity. (Carruthers, 145)

According to Israel Finestein's contribution to the topic in his journal article *Anglo-Jewish Opinion during the Struggle for Emancipation (1848–1858)*, there is no evidence that Jews were less prudent and respectable than others. Despite the fact that the crime rate among immigrant Jews in London had decreased since the eighteenth century, the emancipationists were eager to promote not only their achievements but also their reputation. In a pamphlet published in 1835, the Salomons stated that Jews desired to overcome every obstacle to the improvement of their condition pertaining to civil rights and that they had anxiously endeavoured to diffuse education among their poorer classes. Therefore, Jews in the middle and upper classes of Anglo-Jewry were at their most interested in Jewish things. (Finestein, 125)

If England was a highly class-conscious society, so was Anglo-Jewry. There was a conflict between Anglo-Jewry's ingrained snobbery at that period and the emancipationists' desire to raise the social and cultural level of the Jewish middle and lower classes. Allied to the acutely self-conscious patriotism and social aspirations of the emancipationists there was a sharp sense of Jewish inferiority. They were highly sensitive to Christian opinion. It was not in respect of themselves that they were sensitive but in respect of the foreign and poor elements within the Jewish community. There was a widening of Jewish interests in the middle and upper reaches of Anglo-Jewry at this time. (125)

Modern theatre critics and theatre historians, however, have both argued that nineteenth-century stage melodrama reinforces middle-class social norms by emphasising the family as the primary social unit, viewing social conflicts in terms of the individual, and adopting a highly sentimental worldview because of its focus on family. While melodrama does address class and social themes, these critics believe that it is not a politically involved form; rather, as Robertson Davies implies, broad social tensions manifest not as social protest but as individuals' drive to seek retribution for particular wrongs. (Leaver, 442)

While such readings readily acknowledge that melodrama's audiences were predominantly drawn from the lower classes for the majority of the century, they characterise them as passive consumers of an entertainment form that reproduced the values of the dominant middle class, rather than as a group that actively shaped a genre to advance its own distinct political and social interests. In short, they overlook the critical fact that melodrama embodied distinct meanings for marginal audiences and so tapped into class tensions rather than just disempowering or exploiting the poor through middle class construction. (Ibid, 443)

Melodrama's associations with the lower classes and tendency to operate as a substitute cultural expression were evident from the beginning. The popularity of

melodrama was fostered by a rapidly growing urban population whose entertainment needs could not be supplied by existing theatres. Because it included musical interludes, it avoided the patent constraints that regulated the performance of conventional plays. (Ibid, 444)

### 1.4.5. The Aspect of Victimhood in Melodrama:

Though the breadth of Victorian theatre has been studied in recent years, no study has analysed the characteristics of victimisation in Anglo-Jewish Melodramatic Theatre during emancipation. The first attempt to examine the aspect in general was undertaken by Thomas Elsaesser.

*Melodrama after the Tears*, by Elsaesser, is one of the most important works in the field of melodrama. It includes a whole book that focuses on what it thinks is the most important thing for people to identify within melodrama.

According to Elsaesser, victimhood is a highly universalizing term in Western countries because of a number of broader political shifts that have influenced the social compact and the concept of personhood, including conceptions of subjectivity and gender. The most notable shift is from opposing ideologies (Marxism/Communism vs. Liberalism/Capitalism) to competing post-Enlightenment universals like "human rights" vs. "multicultural diversity," or "humanitarian interventions" vs. "sovereignty," or "religious self-determination." (Elsaesser, 34)

At the same time, Elsaesser asserts that a shift away from politics as consensus decision-making and collective action toward crisis management and security operations has occurred, as has a shift away from an understanding of ethics as living a good and justified life toward ethics as surviving in the face of death and disaster.

Being a victim status is therefore an important part of today's condition, which could be described as a powerful ontological category but also as "a powerful ideological category" and a rather militant way of claiming rights and entitlements that some used to come with being a citizen, an active participant in one's society, and



a valued member of one's community, while others reflect the change in society as a whole. (Ibid, 35)

### 1.5. The Biblical Story of Esther:

The biblical story of Esther, which serves as the basis for the play, has enthralled audiences for centuries. During the middle Ages, Esther, as a Jewish female character, was regarded as a kind of Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Immaculate Conception, Mary's victory over the Devil is shown to be like Esther's victory over Haman. Similarly, devout mediaeval lyrics indicate the typological relationship between Esther and the Virgin Mary. Esther was also thought to be "representing the Church." She is the type of church that rescues her people from peril and, after slaying Haman, leaves a memorable day and a grand feast for posterity. On the other hand, early Protestants predicted Esther readings based on "the late Elizabethan identification of England as a chosen country." (Gürova).

Elizabeth, a modern-day Esther, rescued her people from Roman oppression and fostered genuine Christian piety throughout her realm. England's Catholic opponents, notably France and Spain, were viewed as contemporary Haman, posing a threat to the New England's survival. Christine de Pizan is one of the female writers of the middle Ages who cites Esther as a model for aristocratic women. She recounts the story of Esther in order to explain how God used a woman to save the Jews. In this way, Esther's figure goes beyond the traditional role of a good wife to become a symbol of women's independence. (Ibid)

The exotic environment, the beautiful young heroine, and the ironic reversal of fortune all contributed to the appeal of the biblical account of Esther to English and European playwrights. Audiences in England, Germany, and France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries experienced numerous interpretations of the Esther story. Between 1556 and 1689, eight plays based on the Book of Esther were composed in France. At least six writers in sixteenth-century Germany dramatized the biblical account, two of whom created multiple Esther plays. In England, dramatic

adaptations ranged from a 1594 mention of a lost play in Henslowe's diary to Elizabeth Polack's play in 1835. (Ibid)

Elizabeth Polack keeps true to the original biblical account in her play *Esther, The Royal Jewess*, with the exception of a few minor embellishments.

### 1.5.1. The Significance of the Story:

The book claims to explain how the Jewish people began to celebrate Purim. Esther, the lovely Jewish wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), and her cousin Mordecai convince the monarch to rescind an order ordering the extermination of all Jews across the empire. Haman, the king's senior minister, and the day determined by lot (Purim), had planned the massacre. Rather than that, Haman was hanged on the gallows he constructed for Mordecai, and the Jews destroyed their adversaries on the day designated for their extermination. Purim was founded to commemorate that day, according to the Book of Esther, however this explanation is almost certainly legendary. However, there is no consensus on the historical incident that inspired the story. The text may have been written as recently as the first half of the second century BCE; however, the Purim celebration may have originated during the Babylonian exile (6th century BCE). (“Book of Esther | Summary & Facts”)

### 1.5.2. The Story of Esther and Politics of Diaspora

The Diaspora, as an idea and a historical event, undermines nationalist cultural practises in the cultural sciences that imply a more or less geographically restricted unitary culture. Even when not explicitly acknowledged, Jewish diaspora-distributed cultural identity has long been a favourite model for postmodern identity theory. From the authorship of the Book of Esther to historical interpretations of Purim celebrations, Purim is a viable model for conceptualising the Diaspora.

In S. D. Goitein's opinion, Esther was penned during and for the time of exile. Modern critics who are interested in what Esther has to say about the Diaspora

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

reaffirm Goitein's claim that the book was written for a specific audience, while many also support his claim about the book's origin. The story's setting in the Diaspora, the fascination with the Persian bureaucracy depicted, and the story's depiction of Israel and its religious and national significance are all factors in determining Esther's intended audience and author. (Stern, 25)

As a novel about a diaspora, Esther serves as both a message and an explanation for the novel's oddities. Diasporic experiences are reflected in Esther's absence of God, as well as the absence of specific Jewish traditions on the side of its Jewish protagonists and heroines. Criticisms of trans-historical ideas about Jewish life in the Diaspora support the claim that Esther is predominantly diasporic because of its setting and subject matter. (Ibid, 26)

There is no historical Esther, Mordechai, or Haman in Esther's narrative, nor is there a specific historical event to base it on. Most critics say that Esther is about the ongoing existential issues that Jews living outside of their ancestral homelands face, such as political and theological confusion, dual allegiance, and the difficulties of building a meaningful Jewish existence outside of their homeland. (Ibid, 29)

According to Stan Goldman, Esther's story is an accurate depiction of Diaspora integration by focusing on Esther's struggle to survive while living in exile. When it comes to assimilation and Jewish identity, the two are usually considered mutually exclusive. In the same way, Edward Greenstein believes that Esther's depiction of Diaspora life reflects the circumstances of the novel's dispersed readership. (Ibid, 44)

The Jewish exile is depicted in the scroll with apprehension and fear. An oppressive majority and precarious position necessitate that a population express its repressed tensions. Esther's scroll and Purim are both able to meet this need. It is true that these claims are consistent with contemporary notions of diaspora, but when viewed in light of the Jewish socio-political situation during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, as well as contemporary Jewish literature addressing the diaspora experience, these claims are problematic. When discussing Esther's uniqueness in the Bible, the Diaspora identity is frequently mentioned. (Ibid, 52)

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

An explanation for the absence of references to Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple is that the Diaspora either has been or is expected to be separated in some way from these centres of Judaism. Because it lacks God, lacks concern for the land of Israel or Jerusalem, lacks particularist practise by its protagonists, and has an abundance of coincidence, Esther is distinct from other narrative texts about the Diaspora experience, both within and outside the canon, both of which have similar characteristics. (Ibid, 28)

Tobit, for example, discusses the help of God, the advantages of Jewish specificism in politics or religion, and the significance of Jerusalem as the epicentre of Jewish life in the Diaspora in Tobit. According to current scholarship, Esther was written in exile and intended to be read by exiles. Today, the idea that Esther is an exile story means an optimistic view of the Jewish diaspora and its achievements, or a humanitarian effort to ease the strain of living in what appear to be harsh and stressful exile conditions. (28)

In the eyes of many scholars, Esther and Mordechai serve as models for the Jewish diaspora's survival. Despite the apparent absence of God, the story's structure and conclusion show that God is still at work, saving the Jewish people through Esther. However, even those scholars who claim to have an optimistic view of the Diaspora conclude that Esther's book is able to help those who have been forced to leave their home country. (Ibid, 29)

### 1.6. Conclusion

This chapter is intended to provide context for our literary study and the New Historicist methodology employed by conducting a survey of scholarly articles, books, and dissertations pertinent to the subjects of Jewish emancipation in 1830s Britain; melodrama as a literary and theatrical genre; and the biblical story of Esther as the source for Elizabeth Polack's melodrama.

Considering the conditions of British Jews prior to and after the publication of the work, it indicates that British Jews agreed to be liberated and to have the right to participate in British politics, governance, and parliament. These perseverance and

## CHAPTER ONE: Historical Perspectives on Melodrama and Jewish Emancipation

efforts coincided with efforts to educate the working classes. The middle and working classes were drawn to promoting and assisting the liberation movement, and the 1830s saw the start of the Jewish minority's integration into British society as independent citizens. Despite the evident traces of anti-Semitism revealed by studying the history of British Jews and the restrictions placed on them, anti-Semitism persisted and aided Jewish emancipation efforts.

According to the second section, which compiles and exhibits all of the perspectives on melodrama as a suppressed literary genre, there are few works that examine melodrama from a political standpoint, despite its contribution to enhancing political debate and its role in instilling conviction. Despite the critics' neglect of the victimhood utilised in melodrama, which practically permeated literature and theatre, melodrama was a popular form of cultural expression and entertainment for the working class and middle classes during the closing of the Georgian era.

The final section of this chapter highlights the religious context of the story of Esther by emphasising the work's significance in defining the Jewish Purim celebration. Numerous observations have been made on the exotic, eastern, foreign, and historical characteristics of the story and the bulk of analyses of the literary work that is part of the biblical Megillat place it within the framework of diaspora literature as a reference for Jewish interactions in foreign lands.

# CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

### Table of Content Chapter Two

CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis.....	40
2.1. Introduction:.....	43
2.2. Elizabeth Polack: .....	43
2.3. The play of Esther 1835:.....	43
2.3.1. Synopsis of the play: .....	44
2.3.2. Characterization: .....	45
2.3.2.1. Esther .....	46
2.3.2.2. Mordecai .....	46
2.3.2.3. Haman.....	46
2.3.2.4. king Ahasuerus: .....	47
2.3.3. Settings:.....	47
2.4. 2.4. Aspects of Jewish Emancipation in politics in the play .....	48
2.4.1. Politics of diaspora in the play: .....	48
2.4.1.1. Esther as a Jewish orphan in Persia .....	48
2.4.1.2. An image of Jewish assimilation in the Diaspora (Concealing Jewish identity):	49
2.4.2. Anti-Semitism: .....	50
2.4.2.1. Political and theological insecurity: .....	50
2.4.2.2. The demand for dual loyalties: .....	51
2.4.2.3. Haman’s antagonism toward all Jews: .....	52
2.4.3. Government system criticism:.....	54
2.4.3.1. A mighty king but a fragile man: .....	55
2.4.3.2. Imprudent legislation:.....	56
2.4.3.3. Working and middle classes through the character of Levi the Jew and the audience: 58	
2.4.4. Aspects of victimisation in the play of Esther: .....	60
2.4.4.1. Jews as good citizens:.....	61
2.4.4.2. Esther’s rhetoric:.....	62
2.4.4.3. Esther intervenes on behalf of her people: .....	64

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

2.4.4.4. Mordecai's struggle of feelings: .....	66
2.5. Criticism.....	67
2.6. Conclusion .....	74



## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

### 2.1. Introduction:

The religious aspect of Jewish identity in the 1830s; the limited political status of British Jews in 1835; and the significance of implementing victimhood through melodrama in relation to the biblical and diasporic nature of the story of Esther; are all vital to conducting an objective analysis, which is examined in detail in this chapter. The primary objective of this chapter is to identify traces of Anglo-Jewish politics related to the emancipation movement in the play by analysing the plot and allegorical images that can be interpreted to disclose Polack's typical political purpose.

### 2.2. Elizabeth Polack:

Little is known about Elizabeth Polack's private life as the first Jewish woman melodramatist in England. Her birth and death dates are unknown, however based on her professional career (1830-1838); she was most likely born in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Polack is credited with five plays: *Alberti; or the Mines of India*, *Angelina; or, the Golden Chain* (both lost), *Woman's Revenge* (attributed to John Howard Payne), and two highly successful melodramas, *Esther, the Royal Jewess; or the death of Haman 1835* as well as *Saint Clair of the Isles*; or *the Outlaw of Barra* appeared at the Pavilion Theatre. (Gürova)

### 2.3. The play of Esther 1835:

*Esther, the Royal Jewess, or The Death of Haman; A Three-Act Historical Drama* produced by Elizabeth Polack was successfully played for a month beginning March 7th, 1835, at the New Royal Pavilion Theatre on Whitechapel Road in London's East End and was popular enough to justify two reprints. As implied by the title, the play is a retelling of the biblical Esther, in which the courtier Haman plots the elimination of the Jews in the ancient Persian Empire. Queen Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, foil Haman's plans, rescue the Jews, and institute the Purim holiday in commemoration of their deliverance. (Carruthers, 146)

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

Despite the fact that plays with biblical themes were outlawed throughout *Esther's* performance, the Pavilion was a minor, unlicensed theatre and was therefore exempted from prohibition. It was only a matter of time until the Pavilion Theatre became a shelter for the Yiddish theatre community in London. The show's major audience was drawn from Shoreditch, a low-income working-class neighbourhood where the tribes of Israel have established a permanent presence. The Pavilion's repertory in the 1830s established it as a home not only of melodrama, but also of plays critical of sections of British society in the unstable years preceding the original Reform Bill of 1832 that According to Jim Davis and Victor Emiliano, was intended for a reputable readership. (146)

### 2.3.1. Synopsis of the play:

The article by Carruthers asserts that the *Royal Jewess, or The Death of Haman!* Is analogous to the German trauerspiel in its concentration on historical life. According to her, the plot of the play is more realistic than the biblical account of Esther, which is characterised by what Betty Rojtman and Jonathan Stavsky call an "astonishingly favourable series of circumstances." (Ibid, 150)

Thus, the play's plot is purposefully constructed, as evidenced by the fact that the play's sequence of events can be described in terms of a well-constructed plot, complete with the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The plot can be summarised in five well-organized sections based on a reading of the script: Esther as Queen of Persia, Haman's Plot to Exterminate the Jews, Esther Advocating on Behalf of Her People, Haman's Fall, and lastly the Triumph of the Jews over Their Enemies and the establishment of the Purim celebration. (Polack, 1-30)

Polack's play is divided into three acts, The first act of the play King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes) had a wife named Vashti, and he ordered that she be presented before the people during a large dinner one night to show her beauty. The queen did not appreciate being paraded around while the king and presumably others were "merry with wine." Queen Vashti's refusal to submit to the king culminated in a

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

royal order to dethrone her. Encouraged by his counsellors, the monarch ousted her as queen and began scouring the kingdom for the most beautiful women. (Ibid, 5-8)

The second act presents one of the women chosen for this competition: Hadassah, a charming Jewish girl. When she was brought to the king's court, her name was changed to Esther. Esther commanded the admiration of everyone who saw her, most notably the king. Esther was chosen as the king's new queen, but her righteous cousin, Mordecai who raised her advised her not to divulge her Jewish identity, as Jews were still viewed with mistrust across the Persian Empire. Shortly after she became queen, the script records an apparently unrelated incident. Two men intended to assassinate the king, but Mordecai discovered the scheme and had Esther inform the monarch. Both men were hanged, and the episode was documented in the king's personal history. This occurrence proves to have a significant impact on the remainder of the story. (Ibid, 8-13)

The third section introduces us to Haman, the story's antagonist who rose to become the empire's second in charge. He was an arrogant man who required everyone to bow to him. Everyone except Mordecai did. This infuriated Haman to the point where he convinced the monarch to issue an edict ordering the annihilation of all Jews in the region. (Ibid, 18-21)

Haman's aspirations are shattered the following morning, when the king orders him to honour Mordecai by leading him in a parade around town in remembrance of Mordecai's saving his life. Esther requests the king to punish Haman for attempting to assassinate her and her people during the second banquet, and the king agrees. Haman is hung on the gallows he constructed for Mordecai. Finally, Purim is designated an official Jewish holiday when the Jews of Persia execute all of Haman's agents. Mordecai is appointed as the king's new adviser. (Ibid, 21-30)

### **2.3.2. Characterization:**

It is generally known that theatrical melodramas place greater emphasis on their elaborate plots than on their characters. In melodramas, characters often play archetypes in their respective roles. Thus, after reading Polack's play script, we understand that conflicts are sensationalised rather than character traits, and that

## **CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis**

Polack's descriptions of the characters' physical appearances, personalities, actions, and interactions are justified and described through the characters' dialogue rather than direct description, so that readers and viewers can fully comprehend personality characteristics through the characters' spoken exchanges. Additionally, Polack instructs readers on how to appropriately identify emotional patterns using a range of dramatic tactics, including word choice, imagery, viewpoint, style, and most importantly, allegory, to create a distinct atmosphere employing a pitiable tenor. As a result, we can infer a character's qualities based on a thorough examination of their tones and rhetoric.

### **2.3.2.1. Esther**

Esther is regarded as a hero. When Esther was promoted to the role of queen, she kept her Jewish heritage strictly under wraps. Even though she was not a member of the Persian court, she did a brave thing for the Jews when she heard about a plan to kill them on Persian lands.

### **2.3.2.2. Mordecai**

Esther is a distant cousin of Mordecai. He is well known for his steadfast faith as a devoted Jew. He is a person of honesty, fortitude, and tenacity. At the outset of the play, he thwarted an attempt to assassinate the king, enabling him to continue his attempts to rescue the Jewish people. Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman ignites the central conflict in the second act of Polack's melodrama. This is the story of Mordecai versus Haman. In the story, Mordecai takes on the role of a father to the orphaned Esther, providing her with advice and knowledge throughout the Esther script.

### **2.3.2.3. Haman:**

The opponent of the Jewish people. Mordecai refused to submit to Haman's authority in Shushan after he took control of the city. Haman ratcheted up the emotions by asking the king to sign an edict against all Jews in the empire and then declared his plan to hang Mordecai. Esther, on the other hand, foils his plans by assassinating King Haman in his place.

### 2.3.2.4. King Ahasuerus:

When Queen Vashti disobeyed the king in public during a banquet, the monarch dismissed her. As a result, he brought Esther to be his new queen. Ahasuerus has an inactive role in the plot: he removed the queen, carried out Haman's plots, made magnificent promises to Esther, and gave Esther and Mordecai the right to draught counter-laws and organise their own rituals. Ironically, while being the most powerful, the King of the 127 Provinces is the weakest of the key characters.

### 2.3.3. Settings:

Examining the surrounding environment, background, historical place in time and geographic location is neither the intended purpose of our analysis nor the most important aspect of evaluating a historical melodrama. However, due to the diasporic nature of the play and its Jewish dimension, it is now necessary to include a brief description of the settings in order to demonstrate the inferiority of the constructed time and place in Polack's theatrical work.

In the play, the area from India to Ethiopia is shown to be King Ahasuerus' kingdom. The melodrama of Esther takes place in the king's palace in Susa, a Persian city in what is now Iran, during Ahasuerus' reign in a foreign land with a foreign king. (Polack, 1-9) Although Ahasuerus is referenced in the Hebrew Bible, this king is more popularly known as Xerxes I, the legendary and cruel ruler of the mighty Persian Empire from 486 to 465 BC. All of the stories in the Septuagint and Josephus say that the king Artaxerxes is the son of Xerxes. (Crawford, 4)

Within the framework of the idea of diaspora, the progression of events and the actions of the characters that Polack uses throughout her scenes illustrate that Jews living in exile were still engaging with authorities from other governments, some of whom may have been fairly hostile. In his address to Levi the Jew, Mordecai illustrated the dispersed condition of the region: "Mor .Worthy man I accept your offer Enter my house refresh thyself and we will depart together but we must part the palace gates I will appear as a mendicant and thus I may obtain intelligence of my

## **CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis**

loved Esther I will deem my glory since it may one day help to free my people from land of slavery” (Polack, 17)

Because of this, the play was the kind of reminder that may have had the power to inspire Jews who were living outside of the Levant or who were living under foreign rulers to continue to be strong and have faith in both themselves and their sense of identity. The story focuses on characters who were able to keep their Jewish identity while surviving during a time and in a place that posed intense opposition to that identity.

### **2.4. 2.4. Aspects of Jewish Emancipation in politics in the play**

The analysis of the play's plot, characters, and settings suggests that there is a spectrum from what the hypothesis predicted; thus, to provide a comprehensive answer to the questions raised, one must thoroughly investigate any kind of political manifestation in relation to Jewish Emancipation in the play; the following section is explicitly dedicated to decoding the symbolism and religious allegories used by Polack to serve the objectives.

#### **2.4.1. Politics of diaspora in the play:**

Although the term "diaspora" has traditionally been used to refer to a population's mass dispersion from its indigenous regions, the most notable diaspora is the Jewish dispersion. Struggling with the vulnerable position of Jews scattered throughout Persia, outside their ancestral homeland, and who stand out among non-Jews in their assertion on maintaining their cultural rules and norms, diaspora standards should be considered as a major political illustration in this play.

##### **2.4.1.1. Esther as a Jewish orphan in Persia:**

Diasporas provide the conundrum of relating to an often-adversarial society while also preserving a homeland's cultural memory. The Esther Scroll, upon which the play is constructed, invites us to explore that precarious balance. It provides three

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

possible responses: revenge, takeover, and remaining as Diaspora Dreams. (Katz and Blondheim)

Esther is portrayed as a Jewish orphan who resides in Persia with her cousin Mordecai as a representative of the Jewish exiles. It is inevitable that Jewish groups in the Diaspora will enjoy tales of wrath and conquest. It is perhaps most unexpected that some diaspora narratives do not involve returning to their homeland or fighting back against their oppressors, but rather living in exile and making the best of their circumstances. The narrative incorporates three Diaspora dreams. Haman is the major figure in a fantasy of vengeance, since he is ultimately executed on the gallows he built for Persia's Jews. In this case, the ascension of a Jewish queen and Mordecai's subsequent appointment as the king's lieutenant are also essential plot elements.

Mordecai and his lovely ward, Esther, appear to be prosperous as they live in exile in the Persian capital of Shushan. True, they face threats from Haman, but they successfully prevent his genocidal plot and even rise to power as a result. After that, the Jews seem to succeed there, leaving no evidence of anything other than the desire to stay. Polack makes no mention of the most evident Diaspora dream, that of return: there is no mention of fleeing or returning to the Promised Land in Esther, only of surviving successfully in Persia. In both the story and the play of *Esther*, the desire to live independently as Jews in a different society is achieved.

### **2.4.1.2. An image of Jewish assimilation in the Diaspora (Concealing Jewish identity):**

Esther (Ishtar), the heroine's Persian given name, translates as 'hidden, 'that she was. Hadassah impersonates Esther and claims to be someone she is not. Indeed, this passage contains a dramatic contrast between Esther and Mordecai. He is always making himself known. Even the monarch addresses him as "Mordecai the Jew," a nickname. He makes a point of presenting himself in public as a Jew, despite the fact that his given name is Persian, not Hebrew. He does not bow to Haman, tells people he is a Jew, and wears sackcloth and ashes in public to show how much he hates Haman. (Dafilou)

## **CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis**

Thus, Esther is the one who is concealed. She covers not only her real name, Hadassah, but also her Jewish identity. For several years, she has been living at the palace as if she were a regular Persian girl. If she practised Judaism in that environment, she did it discreetly. Mordecai wants her to be someone or something other than herself, but she hides her Jewish identity because he wants her to appear to be someone else. (Polack, 16)

While Esther clearly agrees with Mordecai's requirement that she not reveal her identity and understand the reason for this command, our examination of their actions leads us to differing conclusions about their appropriateness. It does appear more reasonable to interpret Mordecai's purpose objectively since the text portrays him so positively; he is a Jewish man of noble ancestry, a Jerusalemite, and a man of remarkable kindness who has taken in an orphan and raised him in his own home, among other things. Esther's rise to the throne at the cost of giving up her power to King Ahasuerus cannot be seen as honourable unless it was a one-time, one-way decision made with the goal of saving the Jews in mind. (Ibid, 14)

### **2.4.2. Anti-Semitism:**

Although it is difficult to generalise a biblical attitude because numerous authors wrote the books of the Hebrew Bible over many centuries, the Bible rarely displays gentile hatred or antagonism toward Jews merely because they were Jews. Almost every Jewish literary production, however, is centred on any explicit instance of anti-Semitism in recorded history, and because the religious story of Esther is said to be the only biblical book that depicts anti-Semitism and has itself been the subject of anti-Semitic criticism, the play must contain traces of this phenomenon.

#### **2.4.2.1. Political and theological insecurity:**

As represented through the protagonists' characterizations, there is a tension in seeking to define identity. It is both variable and inextricably linked to and within social group affiliations. This tension is particularly pronounced when Esther's shifting and changing alignments are contrasted with Mordecai, who embodies the concerns



## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

about keeping an affiliation with a "historical" social group as the guiding feature of identity. Esther's characterization reveals itself complicated as the play regresses. The story delves into the complexities of identification in the diaspora.

In light of Esther's authority, declaring her Jewish origin would put her in danger of losing her position as queen as well as her life, as the story's antagonist Haman was well aware. In the end, she chose to remain silent. The fact that Esther is a Jew means that she is practically a slave, and it would have been disastrous if her Jewish identity had been known. Despite the threat, Esther could no longer stand for injustice against her people and was forced to accept the necessity of disclosing her religious background to King Ahasuerus in order to survive. (Ibid, 19)

### 2.4.2.2. The demand for dual loyalties:

Dual loyalty emerges when an individual or group of citizens has political allegiance to another government or entity in addition to their loyalty to the state, which can sometimes put their commitment to the state at risk of being questioned. Dual loyalty is described as an allegation when it is founded on the premise that it is impossible to hold dual political allegiances at the same time. (Baron, 44)

Two primary issues drove Mordecai. Primarily, Mordecai treats Esther as if she were his own daughter, whom he adores. He is concerned about her well-being and what will happen to her in the future, and he is concerned about her actions and conduct in the present. It should be emphasised that, initially, and before her becoming queen, Mordecai's major concern is for her well-being, fearing that she will be mistreated. (Polack, 15). This prospect no longer concerns him when she succeeds Vashti as queen, and he instead becomes concerned with what she herself will accomplish and the manner in which she will conduct herself in the future, the Royal Jewess discourse demonstrates Esther's commitment to two independent objectives that may be in conflict with one another, resulting in a conflict of interest between the two entities.

Est.fear not me, nor think I care for the proud Monarch's  
glory Uncle I pray you let me obey the king Mr It is the only

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

sacrifice I can make and if it is to save my people I will not shrink to do it Now hear my last in junction Let not the splendour of a court make thee forget Him u how gave the law Remember thy captive nation and pray for their deliverance. Est If I forget thee oh my chosen people and do not cherish and preserve thy memory and pray for thy peace and welfare then may my tongue refuse to frame the strains of harmony may I never more know peace and may my life be passed in grief and sorrow (speaks in broken accents). (Ibid, 16)

When Esther is selected to be queen, she finds herself at the heart of two different relationships. The control and reign of King Ahasuerus, her husband and Mordechai, stood outside the royal palace at the same time, claiming another loyalty for her. Esther's dual engagement is one of the most confounding representations of diaspora politics. She wears two masks: one of queen and one of a Jewess, evoking the archetype of the Diaspora Jew's dual loyalties.

### **2.4.2.3. Haman's antagonism toward all Jews:**

By putting Jewish existence against the kingdom's safety, Haman, the antagonist, plays on the king's feelings of entrenched conflict. On numerous occasions, Haman makes an argument for the king's sense of justice and the king's duty to uphold law and order in society. Nevertheless, we must consider his urge to rule and take the place of the king before he met Mordecai and Esther, Clearly Haman already hated the Jews and there were many anti-Semitic feelings throughout the kingdom. His hostility towards Jews stemmed in part from Mordecai's Jewishness. This government-sanctioned atrocity was committed when Mordecai's reluctance to kneel before Haman proved to be the last straw. Before he came up with the idea, he likely spent a great deal of time considering it. (Ibid, 10) Thus, the following lines reveals his urge to get rid of the king with the help of his fellows and wife:

(Enter BIGTHANA und TERESH) : Big Peace to the noble Haman .Ham: Peace to ye both my worthy friends how thrive our plans How is it with the people .Ter: Noble Haman

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

they are well-nigh weary of the despotic reins of government .Big And more I have so won upon their confidence that they are but waiting for a word of mine to burst their bounds of silence and boldly to assert and claim their rights Ham All goes on well but let us proceed with caution and when the fire of rebellious freedom blazes forth it must be quenched in blood in royal blood. Ter .What meanest thou Ham That we must hurl the tyrant from his throne and by his destruction ensure our peace and safety Big Then you would have him die Ham Yes he must perish and my own hand shall rid of the despotic bar to our country's welfare Ter Who would then be sovereign of these vast dominions Ham Myself for he who frees the people from a tyrant's yoke best knows the way to govern them Oh were these kingdoms mine I'd show Assyria how a king should govern Yes my friends my noble colleagues ours must be a bold.(10)

Haman's unreasonable hatred towards Jews is portrayed in his language when speaking to Mordecai, "Ham. Oh no you mistake rash and unthinking man T is not an usurping power we possess but a right of superiority over a fallen people for what are you a grovelling crew a money hoarding herd too lazy for bodily exercise and too weak in intellect to rule the state." (20)

Consequently, the conflict is legalized and framed as a necessary action to preserve the social-political system's stability. In this instance, it was determined that the total disagreement would be depicted as an institutionalised issue, and so it was. Haman must reduce Jews and Jewishness to a single bloc that has been objectively reduced and classified in order to remove the community from the normative identity that defines the social-political body, as part of his appeal. When he accomplishes this, he is able to classify "Jew" as a thing, which renders "Jew" a serious threat to the monarchy's social-political order and consequently to the kingdom's own power.

Being able to determine the identity or body of someone else is a display of power in itself. Because of this act, the established division of power is altered, as is

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

the way in which those who are affected relate to it and to one another. This act entails the immediate rejection of a subjected group's self-defined identity in favour of an imposed one. Haman's actions demonstrate that active control over another's identity and body indicates insecurity about one's own power and stability. Alternatively, to put it another way, the act of defining carries the fear of invalidation.

Haman weakened the king's authority with intentional positioning, portraying him as easily influenced within his own power game. In addition, similar to the king's dismissal of Vashti, Haman seeks to remove Mordecai, who refuses to acknowledge Haman's authority. However, rather than equating body with body and aggressive identity with complacent identity, as the king does, Haman, whose position is precarious, perceives Mordecai as a symbol of a greater threat. Rather than dealing with Mordecai individually, Haman heaped collective blame on all Jews through his flagrant characterization of all Jews as socially destructive. This implies that Haman's comprehension of Jewish identity is limited to what he can perceive through the lens of his own identity. Therefore, the term "Jew" is restricted to the place of an object classified and defined within the Haman-established hierarchy. Haman's words serve as a prove, "Ham. Thou art a stranger then as thou dost not conform Where thy country is. Mor. I have no country the settled land of my forefathers has been basely wrested from me and all my race Ham. I see you are a Jew Mor. Yes, a Jew and proud of the name. Ham. ME thinks it is but a poor boon to be proud of to have no acknowledged country to be a wandering race a marked people as objects for scorn." (Ibid, 20)

Haman's hostility toward all Jews stems from a personal conflict that is then wrapped up in political discourse to legitimise it in the eyes of the governing authority and the public. Haman considers Jews to be inferior subjects.

### 2.4.3. Government system criticism:

Considering the extraordinary Jewish movement in early nineteenth-century Britain, Polack dramatizes aspects of bad governance. Her voice, through her storyline and characters, is a thorough yet non-violent critique of the regime she lived under. The characters of Mordecai and Esther's status as respectable Jews worthy of inclusion

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

in government, their expression of displeasure towards the king about unjust laws, and their utterly corrupt position as a despised minority, all these indications are not without significance, but clearly depict Polack's opinion on British rule and government.

### 2.4.3.1. A mighty king but a fragile man:

The king issues an order, receives a denial, seeks advice, and then follows it. Thus, he begins as an unusually meek and flexible character, which contrasts sharply with his political and financial dominance. These character traits remain consistent and crucial throughout the plot, and the majority of the events that ensue can be explained in part by the monarch's personality, which permits himself to be controlled in turn by various members of his entourage.

While emphasising the concept of dominating, the first scene focuses intensely on Ahasuerus's strength and wealth: everything on Ahasuerus's power and wealth: everything conspires to impress the audience. All of this generates an ironic impact when we realise that this king, who is so wealthy and powerful, is led by liquor and has problems commanding the obedience of his own wife. (Ibid, 6)

One also detects an emphasis on appearance. Ahasuerus organises the banquet primarily to demonstrate his fortune and glory, and if he requests Vashti's presence, it is mainly to demonstrate her beauty. Thus, Ahasuerus values the attention of others. This appears to be a case of populist rhetoric or a sense of worthlessness. (Ibid, 5)

In his fury, Ahasuerus seeks instruction rather than acting directly. The following lines from the play's text somewhat justify this behaviour.

Ahasuerus Most holy man I need your counsel hearken to  
what I say and then bestow your judgment To do all honour to  
my noble guests who now surround me I sent to ask the presence  
of my queen and was refused I sent again and she persisted in  
her disobedience Speak learned men what says your law what  
punishment has she deserved for be it what it may I swear by the  
gods I doom her to your decision Much Great king thus saith the

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

law should the consort of an Assyrian king refuse his just behest she shall be put away be banished from the realm and one of gentler mood be exalted to the throne Aha Is that the law and must I banish her my dark ired queen she who is lovely as the rose graceful as the stately palm.(6)

In the face of all those who know the law, remains startling when one thinks that it is primarily a marital issue. Additionally, this council is never consulted again in the remainder of the play: Haman's promotion and demise, as well as the two decrees touching the Jews, are chosen by the king, circumventing the system portrayed as usual, which is the only way to assure that the monarch's decision is made. This demonstrates that the king is not obligated to engage his council, he does so voluntarily. Thus, rather than seeking explanations from the queen, the monarch addresses his counsellors directly; the conjugal affair becomes a matter of politics.

### 2.4.3.2. Imprudent legislation:

The issue of imprudent legislation is introduced immediately in the first act of the play, when the Persian queen Vashti is punished for refusing to accept the dinner invitation from King Ahasuerus. By royal order, Vashti is thereafter dispossessed of its sovereignty. This initial legislative process the first legislative procedure to remove the queen results in Esther, the adoptive daughter of the Jew Mordecai, ascending to the throne. As soon as the second act begins, a dispute arises between Prime Minister Haman and Mordecai, who, as a Jew, refuses to bow down to him. Haman gets from the king the issuance of a decree sentencing the Jews of the empire to annihilation as punishment as appears in the third scene of the second act:

Ham Mark me Jew and be it a lesson to thee and all thy race Thy virulent expressions are useless now I have of served many fools like thyself who mouth and fume about oppression and pristine rights forsooth Noble exertions and superior tact are the bulwarks of national independence and grandeur These are the rocks of public safety and whilst they hold together not all the empty oratory or petty whims of would be rulers can shake it

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

Though in a moment the guards by my order might place thee in a dungeon from that I have refrained Now listen in calmness Not only on thee but all thy race shall my vengeance be directed In silence shall the decree be formed that will exterminate thee and all thy hated people.(21)

Ahasuerus requires the advice of legal experts in light of the sensitivity of the issue; the monarch appears to be constrained by the law in his response to his disobedient queen. Muchacus gives him a serious response when he asks about the legal procedures he must follow, according to what appears in the play:

Muc Peace to the great Ahasuerus .Aha Most holy man I need your counsel hearken to what I say and then bestow your judgment To do all honour to my noble guests who now surround me I sent to ask the presence of my queen and was refused I sent again and she persisted in her disobedience Speak learned men what saves your law what punishment has she deserved for be it what it may I swear by the gods I doom her to your decision. Muc Great king thus saith the law should the consort of an Assyrian king refuse his just behest she shall be put away be banished from the realm and one of gentler mood be exalted to the throne.Aha Is that the law and must I banish her my dark-haired queen she who lovely as the rose graceful as the stately palm, but she defied my power disobeyed my kingly word The law enjoins her banishment and is a king conform not to his country's edict how can he claim allegiance from his subjects Yes though my sorrow will be unbounded Vashti shall have her punishment. (6)

Vashti refuses to appear before the king, and Muchacus recommends that she never be allowed to return to the king's court. She becomes a concubine because she does not wish to be treated as a woman who resides with her husband but holds a lesser social status than his wife holds. The Vashti incident exemplifies a legal system

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

in which policy can elevate a royal family issue to an imperial legal case. Thus, the reasoning implies that the King's punishment of Vashti is not motivated by a personal grudge, but rather by considerations of public benefit.

The Vashti case illustrates yet another characteristic of the Persian legal system. It appears that the royal command recorded in the Persian laws is irrevocable and cannot be repealed.

Before anything else, it is important to note that Persia claims to be governed by a traditional, unwritten constitutional provision known as law. The law reigns supreme in this society. Second, the fundamental law of this judiciary order prevents the revocation or alteration of royal commands.

### **2.4.3.3. Working and middle classes through the character of Levi the Jew and the audience:**

The second scene of the first act is distinct from the biblical story's incidents; Polack introduces a character named Levi the Jew, a humble merchant who lives among domestics and peasants. He delivers a speech in which he introduces himself as a Jew, as well as a few positive traits that he is known for, such as his willingness to accept receiving no profit for his goods. (Polack, 8)

Enter Domestic Peasants, laughing and exclaiming  
Fun tis he tis he Enter Levi carrying his Bos Levi Pless my heart pless my heart can't a merchant travel without all dis hubbub They laugh You laugh at me you all laugh will you buy and then Levi the Jew will laugh at you but hush I'll tell you my history All Yes the history Levi My fader is very old and I am his son I shells all the corn merchants and all the sailors I am honest everybody knows me I can laugh met you if you buy I fun you if you fun me I can jeer if you jeer me and I am ready to shell to all and I'm called Levi the Jew.(8)

To provide an authentic assessment of the play, we must first evaluate Levi's presence, his Jewish heritage, and his theological significance in terms of diasporic



## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

satire, in addition to a detailed analysis of his speech as a lowly merchant. Since Levi does not exist in the book of Esther, this insertion requires examination. Moreover, consideration of the target audience is necessary.

Levi is introduced in the Hebrew Bible as one of Jacob's twelve sons and, in that position, as the "father" of one of ancient Israel's tribes. As retribution for Levi's participation in the slaughter of Shechemites, which triggers Jacob's wrath, he and his family are "dispersed" across the world rather than given specific parcel of land. Later in Levi's story is told in the Pentateuch, he, and his family (the Levites) are excluded from the other tribes. It is more accurate to state that they have been dedicated for certain priestly duties, such as serving Aaron and Yahweh. Because the Levites lack access to land, they receive a tithe to support themselves while performing their priestly responsibilities. In addition, they will be assigned a series of places known as "Levitical cities" in which they will be compelled to reside. These cities are dispersed among the remaining tribes. (Spencer, 2017)

Levi's pitiful appeal, which involves speaking passionately and doing his utmost to sell his goods, invokes the audience's emotions. Since is the most expressive art that utilises vivid imagery, we can observe that Polack focused on evoking sympathy as the primary emotional response in the audience to gain their acceptance first and to gain their consolidation with a character from their social class and accept his Jewish background by depicting his daily struggles in such a different society.

Frances China asserts that the tastes of the Shoreditch audience, which gravitated toward the sentimental, patriotic, and moral, were much less sophisticated than those of audiences who frequented the more fashionable West-end theatres where our play was performed (Carruthers, 148) However, the relationship between the melodramatic genre and its working-class audience is not coincidental in the case of Polack's play.

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

The November 1828 opening of The Royal Pavilion (Whitechapel Road, Mile End) as a venue for "Newgate melodrama" by Wyatt and Farrell, as well as the fact that it catered to a predominantly Jewish audience from the surrounding area and featured many Jewish actors, demonstrate that the play's audience was interested in its content and message. (V. Allingham et al)

Given the play's comparison of the depoliticized citizen to a slave, it is clear that the audience's participation, particularly that of the Jewish working class, is a summons to join in the emancipation debate. When Mordecai follows Esther to the palace before the lethal edicts are issued, his lack of rights as a Jew is highlighted by his plan to disguise himself as a homeless person because, as Polack demonstrated, they would turn Mordecai away from the palace gates, as if he, as a Jew, had no feelings of humanity; Thus, our playwright shows this point right at the end of the first scene of the second act, "Mor Worthy man I accept your offer Enter my house refresh thyself and we ll depart together But we must part at the palace gates I will appear as a mendicant and thus I may obtain intelligence of my loved Esther I ll deem my bondage glory since it may one day help to free my people from this land of slavery Exit into the House" (Ibid, 17)

### 2.4.4. Aspects of victimisation in the play of Esther:

Melodramas commonly feature three types of acts: the protagonist lives a joyous and virtuous life; a villain threatens or victimises the protagonist, who usually feels powerless; and a hero takes action to save the protagonist and punish the villain. Anker says that as stories of suffering and victimhood become more commercialised, they are gaining melodramatic qualities. Because it establishes strong differences between good and evil and asks for heroic intervention, melodrama is an effective instrument for advocates of both state violence and human rights. (Anker, 2014); thus, a victimhood motif is anticipated throughout Esther's melodrama.

**2.4.4.1. Jews as good citizens:**

Those who are familiar with Jewish history would recognise that, after the exile, the Jews were dispersed throughout the Persian Empire and enacted their own laws. Polack, on the other hand, worked on the Jewish characters' actions and the audience's assumptions to persuade them that her perspective was accurate. Indeed, the account provided by Haman, the adversary, seems questionable.

Mordecai, Esther, and Barnabazabus are the main protagonists at this point in the play, with Levi playing a minor role. One of the four Jewish figures is Mordecai, Esther's adoptive father, guide, companion, supporter, and fighter for the rights of their Jewish community. Esther's obedience to the court's laws is proved not only by her dedication to the king and the nation, but also by her concealment of her origins from the king until the appropriate time, instead relying on Mordecai's advice. Levi, a Jew, seeks public assistance by selling his items as a needy merchant and offers his assistance to Mordecai. Barnazabus is the disguised Jew in the court who remains committed to his faith while in exile and uncovers the plot to assassinate the monarch, as evidenced by the preceding dialogue between Mordecai and Barnazabus:

Bur. I overheard a dark conspiracy against the life of Ahasuerus planned by that man who now basks in the sun of royal favour the treacherous Haman. Mur. Ah is it him I marvel not that he who could insult a fallen people should prove a traitor to his sovereign But say good Barnazabus what plan can we adopt to crush this hideous project. Bur. The conspirators are to appear among the guests at the coronation of the queen They will have daggers concealed beneath their garments, but the death blow will not be struck till all strangers have retired You must come disguised among the guests I will admit you and at the fitting time you must point out the traitors to the king. Mor. It shall be so I will unmask the plotting infidel. (Polack, 21)

The reader must identify personalities who are representative of the Jewish people as a whole. Likewise, characters are depicted at extremes. Esther, the queen

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

heroine, is the most beautiful and fearless woman, while her cousin Mordecai, the hero, is the most honourable. This Melodrama contains anger, wrath, and a menace to the monarch, as well as a struggle to the death between Haman and Mordecai and a threat to the Jewish people, whom Haman labels as rebels. Furthermore, even if Levi the Jew was a benefactor to them and they forged partnerships with other Jews, such as Barnazabus, the Jewish merchants were impoverished.

The story is also extremely political, nationalistic, and identity affirming. This melodrama is a product of late Georgian Britain, when the Jewish people's political circumstances included an extraordinary movement of self-determination; it is a means of self-assertion and self-justification. Thus, the intelligent and good characters Esther, Mordecai, and Levi are Jewish, but the foolish, misguided, and/or evil characters Haman and Ahasuerus are not.

Elizabeth has integrated subjective patterns in order to further the message's effectiveness. Despite the fact that the term "good Jew" is not stated in the text, the transformation of the story into a historical melodrama instils personal conviction in the audience with fictional characters who belong to the same religious group and possess the same excellent traits. Polack's characters have the ability to influence her socio-political interests. Such as the oppressed status of Jews in the diaspora, as represented by the character of Levi, and the innocent and graceful nature of Esther, the orphan who listens carefully and covertly, exerting support among the powerful, pleasing the king, and confronting life's challenges with the moral orientation proposed by her Semitic background and ethnicity, that is reflected in the first scene of the second act of the play, "Mor. You owe no thanks to me If I have made you happy there is an inward voice that whispers like an approving counsellor to my heart that I have done my duty But let me remind thee Esther when I am gathered to my fathers and thou art left alone in this land of infidels let no persuasion shake thy settled faith be true to Him who has chosen us for his people."(14)

### 2.4.4.2. Esther's rhetoric:

Although Mordecai supports Esther in uncovering the plot against the king, Esther reveals Haman's intention to the king at the opportune time and in the proper

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

manner. Throughout the play, only Esther's eloquence is successful in preventing a tragedy. Her speech is carefully constructed, and her timing is precisely executed. When she eventually resolves to interact with the king, she does not act immediately as the play asserts:

Est Stay my noble spouse and hear me My heart has no  
homage to pay at your altars I love you beyond all on earth next  
my foster parent my uncle but there is a secret in my heart now  
to be disclosed Not all your idols have charms for me not all  
your oracles can avert my creed not all your engines of cruelty  
can make me apostate for nature and truth is my directing star  
The brightest boast of my soul is in being of the foundation and  
root of all revealed good I am my king a Jewess.(28)

During a banquet, Esther takes advantage of the opportunities given. After successfully luring the king and revealing herself to be a Jew, accusing Haman of committing a crime against her people and pleading with the monarch to spare the Jews, she exerts herself for the first time. She does not directly face the monarch; rather, her tone is endearing, her attitude is supplicatory, and the rhetorical mode she employs is that of a petition. She gains authority by speaking only when the king encourages her to do so and by submitting to his control each time.

Additionally, Esther always responds with humility. By drawing attention to the king's tremendous power and influence, Esther eventually persuades him to share his responsibilities with her. In the public and political sectors, she assumes the role of a female leader. At the end of the play, Esther makes a statement as a queen who is determined to make her own future and the future of her people:

Est. Oh noble soul how my heart pants to hear this  
liberality Humble and lowly are our desires We are persecuted  
but wish not to be trampled underfoot Oh my king you require  
fidelity to your throne and punish as traitors all who swerve from  
your laws What is the Jew's crime fidelity to his Maker for this  
he is pointed at derided scoffed and what is noble in others are

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

with bigoted men the Jew's curse and though beneath the arm of power the Jew must bend yet this cannot always be for moral right will rise to vindicate humanity This is the subject I wished to speak on to save myself and countrymen from destruction.(28)

Elizabeth demonstrates the art of successful or persuasive speaking through Esther's speech in order to capture the attention and cooperation of the audience. As she has done throughout her life, Esther approaches the king and employs a technique that substitutes passion for logic in an effort to win the argument with precision, control, and timing, as well as verbal accuracy and eloquence. Direct, combative language is ineffective and even dangerous, while indirect, non-confrontational approaches will be successful in achieving the intended goal.

### **2.4.4.3. Esther intervenes on behalf of her people:**

Bringing Esther into the picture could threaten her position, if not her very existence. Instead of providing a sober assessment of the state of Anglo-Jewry in the United Kingdom, the scene appeals to the prejudices of readers and viewers.

Polack illustrates Esther's precarious position as a disguised Jew through Mordecai's response to her insistence on joining the court and starting to realise her eagerness to save the Jews. Regardless of whether she intervenes, her life is in imminent danger. She stands no greater chance of fleeing the king's palace than any of the other Jews. Because, if she remains silent at such a crucial time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from an unexpected source, and Esther cannot imagine being able to stop the edict. However, she eventually agrees to accompany Mordecai to the king, displaying her dedication to him.

Esther is compelled to make a choice. She can continue to deny her Jewish identity and serve as the first lady of Ahasuerus' harem for the remainder of her life. Alternately, she can take control of her own life and do everything she can to help her people. According to the script, Polack aimed to portray Esther's realisation that her exalted status is not simply a pleasure to be enjoyed but also a significant duty to be

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

used to save other people. Her nation is in danger, and its problem has become her plight because she is in the best position to help.

Despite the fact that Mordecai's arguments are clearly centred on self-preservation, Esther will undoubtedly be identified and slain if all Jews are commanded to be killed. The second argument invokes fate, with a tinge of divine service thrown in for good measure.

Esther's suggestion does have ramifications because it involves undermining an unbreakable law, which has serious consequences. In any event, we have already had the opportunity to recognise the Persian Empire's great importance to the law: it is placed above all men, including the king, even in the presence of the monarch! It is undoubtedly for this reason that the queen employs twice as many polite expressions when conveying her desire; after all, it is a matter of courtesy. The difficulty this time is restoring the rule of law. She makes the following argument to defend her position:

EST! Oh noble soul how my heart pants to hear this  
liberality Humble and lowly are our desires We are persecuted  
but wish not to be trampled underfoot Oh my king you require  
fidelity to your throne and punish as traitors all who swerve from  
your laws What is the Jew's crime fidelity to his Maker for this  
he is pointed at derided scoffed and what is noble in others are  
with bigoted men the Jew's curse and though beneath the arm of  
power the Jew must bend yet this cannot always be for moral  
right will rise to vindicate humanity. This is the subject I wished  
to speak on to save compatriots and myself from destruction.  
(28)

As her sense of responsibility for her country's inevitable demise grows, Esther volunteers to act as an intermediary between the monarchy and the people. She is willing to risk her position, her wealth, and even her life for the greater good. It has been transformed from a source of self-gratification into a source of service.

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

Esther's heroic speech in the play, which echoes the biblical Esther's response to the murderous edict, "If I perish, I perish," expresses sacrifice in the name of religious and political freedom. This is in contrast to the biblical Esther, whose bravery is a reaction to the decree that threatens slaughter. She does not seek the king's permission to retaliate against the Jews; rather, she pleads that the death decree against them be withdrawn, which will be considered a fruitful result of Esther's sacrifice, once they receive permission to issue a decree in favour of the Jews. (15)

### 2.4.4.4. Mordecai's struggle of feelings:

While the biblical book of Esther does not contain a single statement describing Mordecai's suffering or feelings regarding the departure of his niece, who is essentially his daughter, Polack's melodramatic work accurately portrays Mordecai's feelings and attempts to convey his weakness and deep regret in relation to the situation.

The author made the dialogue between Mordecai, Esther prior to Esther's departure sound terrible since the emphasis is on Mordecai's loss of Esther at the hands of a king who is harsh, and dreadful judgments are irrevocable as illustrated in the following lines:

“Mor. what said the slave Esther she whom I reared from infancy the only hour of my declining years she to become slave to an infidel Never Sooner would I see her die before me Crosses to him Go back and tell the haughty king that the degraded Jew will lose his life but will not sell his honour.” (14)

“Mordecai (Struggling with his feelings) Can this be Esther She whom I fondly hoped would have cheered my last lours and closed my eyes in death and can she leave me for the vein pomp and splendour of a throne!” (15)

“Passed in grief and sorrow More Falls on her Neck and speaks in broken accents Enough I know thy truth but if thou art not happy should proud Ahasuerus not honour thee as his lawful queen return to thy peaceful home to him who vowed to love and



## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

cherish thee and let the haughty monarch see the Jews can suffer death but not dishonour Now take my blessing and obey thy king.” (16)

Elizabeth Polack exploited emotion and religious commitment to lure excluded parts of society, such as the working and middle classes, to the fundamentally political subject of Jewish emancipation. As stated in the introductory paragraph, there are few artistic and literary answers to political concerns facing Jews. The recitative verses in Polack’s play reflects the Jewish characters’ commitment. “With bitter cries let Israel's sons bewail/Lo! O'er our lives our enemies prevail/And for our sins this evil is ordained /To punish us for holy rites profaned/Forsake us not! Oh, turn not from our voice /Deliver us the people of thy choice.” (27)

Due to the representation of Mordecai's anguish and refusal to give up his only niece, which are not disclosed in the biblical Megillat, we can believe that Polack invented the scene to make it more relevant to a specific audience.

### 2.5. Criticism

Our theatrical based criticism of the play, which follows a profound analysis that serves the New Historicist study of the work, is premised on two basic stages: the first stage relating to the general structure of the play, which determines the work's production settings; and the conditions under which it was conducted with reference to the writer's life and socio-political circumstances, especially since Polack's works are related in terms of their ideologies. To decipher Polack's allegorical meanings, the second section is devoted to criticising the earlier evaluation of the play's Jewish Emancipation aspects, which Polack exploited to promote her message under the guise of religious theatre, in addition to the use of victimhood as the main melodramatic feature for such purposes.

Elizabeth Polack was England's first Jewish female dramatist. She was most likely born in the first decade of the nineteenth century, as her life is documented by a few surviving historical records. Although neither her birth nor death year nor location were recorded, documentation of her activity as a dramatist in London from 1830 to

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

1838 has survived for posterity. Only *Esther, the Royal Jew; or the Death of Haman* and *St. Clair of the Islands; or the Barra Outlaw*, who survived, are among her five contemporary recordings. ("Elizabeth Polack")

According to the same article about Polack, "Alberti" or "Mines of India" was performed in the Royal Pavilion on May 10, 1834. This work was eventually attributed to Polack as its composer. Following the success of "Exotic East" at the Royal London Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel, East End, in 1835, the pavilion became a centre for Yiddish theatre in London. The adaptation of Elizabeth Helme's 1803 novel *St. Clair, St. Clair* (1838), was not well received. It appears that this is the origin of the melodramatic cliché "Again foiled!"

By examining Polack's previous compositions, it appears that all of her works potentially advance the Jewish political release movement in Britain, focusing on the obstacles to joining the Jewish minority in the British government. She is addressing a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish audience, requesting religious tolerance for all people. (Weltman, 202)

At a time when British Jews campaigned for civil rights, the New Royal Pavilion Theatre on Whitechapel Road staged *Esther the Royal Jewess* for a month, and the play was popular enough to warrant a second performance. According to Victor Emeljanow, the Israelite tribes' audience had made Shoreditch their permanent home. Due to the Pavilion's status as a minor, unlicensed theatre, the play could be performed despite its biblical content. (Carruthers, 146)

This three-act historical melodrama recounts the biblical narrative of Esther, wherein the advisor Haman strives to exterminate Jews in the ancient Persian Empire, as the title suggests. In the course of the narrative, Esther saves the Jews from annihilation. Queen Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, foil Haman's intentions, save the Jews, and arrange a Purim celebration to commemorate their redemption. The Eastern exoticism of the settings and the fact that the title of Polack's 1835 play is derived from the story of Esther, which is part of the Ketûbim, one of the Five Scrolls read on Purim, conceals the playwright's main objective. (Crawford, 161)

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

Critics have agreed that Elizabeth Polack's play addresses critical issues such as the struggle for the emancipation of Jews and women at a time when both categories faced severe legal and cultural constraints. Thus, Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, director of comparative literature at Louisiana State University, produced her seminal essay as a feminist analysis of the play, emphasising the powerful female protagonist and inspired by Judith Butler's gender theory. Dr. Jo Carruthers, on the other hand, compared it to Walter Benjamin's reflections on the scorned German theatrical genre of the *trauerspiel*. Both critics acknowledged the play's Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

General criticism of the play can produce speculation regarding the playwright's Jewish nationalist leanings, especially given that she staged the piece in a mixed theatre one week before the Jewish holiday of Purim and considers the difficult period in which Jewish emancipation leaders educated the lower classes of British Jewish society.

We therefore focused on the play's political dimension in order to highlight the significance of Polack's political activism appeal to different communities within the same theatre to promote her emancipationist ideals through melodramatic tactics. Attention to the play shows that literature is an essential and critical instrument for offering a more detailed picture of past Anglo-British political attitudes.

It is of enormous importance to our paradigm to note that in 1829, political rights were granted to Roman Catholics and dissenters. It took another thirty years until 1858, when Lionel de Rothschild became a Member of Parliament and entered the House of Commons for the first time. Historiographers who have written on the debates regarding Jewish emancipation that took place during this period have, for the most part, portrayed the Jewish working class as uninterested in the movement to eliminate the few remaining hurdles to full Jewish political equality in their writings. However, even while some poor Jews were unconcerned about the survival of the Jewish community and Jewish people, those who fought for the complete emancipation of Jews in England did not surrender. (Carruthers, 145)

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

The Jewish rights movement, which occurred in London between 1827 and 1831, is identified in an article by C. S. Monaco, courtesy professor of history at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida:

Viewed within this context, the Jewish rights movement clearly manifested a quantum shift in consciousness. Once the medieval “law of the kingdom” *mentalité* had been breached, there was slight chance of reverting to old ways. Thus, recognition of this episode not only adds appreciably to our knowledge of social movements and interfaith activism in late Georgian England, but it challenges a variety of preconceptions, including the emergence of modern Jewish politics. (Monaco, 338)

The story of *Esther* is mimicked in *The Royal Jewess of 1835*, not because Polack wants her play to appear biblical, but because she wants to connect it to her own experience as a Jew at the time. Polack used melodramatic victimhood and allegorical symbols to reveal her political intent, in contrast to previous Diaspora compositions, which relied heavily on biblical themes and style to build links with pre-Exilic Israel and ancient literature. The duty of sustaining Jewish continuity in the face of major dislocation in the Jewish community falls on diaspora narratives. Linking the present with the past and modern Diaspora literature with older, traditional literature is an effective approach for preserving continuity. By using a biblical tone, *Esther* makes it more likely that her mixed audience will understand her.

When comparing the written play with the biblical account, the first aspect is the inclusion of the Jewish character Levi, from the class of modest traders, whose main goal is to sell their goods. The second aspect is Polack's stress on the identification of Barnazabus and his dedication to his Jewish membership despite his time in the palace among the infidels. The second aspect is to show, through Mordecai's dramatic declaration, the author of *Esther*'s original story's sentiments and regrets about the

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

situation of dispersed Jews. ("Introductions to the Books of the Bible, Esther", Polack, 8-14-19)

The Jews remain steadfast in their view that they are a distinct and organic people, that they are endowed with their own particular brilliance, and that their intelligence and identity are backed up by superior wisdom. Regardless of historical, social, or political development, Jewish belief and confidence remain constant, which is well portrayed through Polack's characters.

The play's characters are categorised into two groups: the heroic allies of the loyal Jews who triumphed at the end of the play; and the wicked unbelievers who pay the price for anti-Semitic beliefs, attitudes, and legislation against Jews as individuals and groups. This highlights the appeal of Jews by emphasising their distinctiveness and victory in all scenarios.

The ideological critiques that emerge from the play of Polack as a direct result of the investigation of political events and symbols are prominent. First, there is the manifestation of Jewish politics in the diaspora; second, there is the presentation of anti-Semitic images through both the plot and the tone used; third, there is criticism of the British government and legislation.

Although Diasporas provide the challenge of interacting in a frequently antagonistic environment, Mordecai and Esther appear to be prosperous in exile in the Persian capital. This allegory represents Polack's dreams and her determination to create a homeland in the diaspora.

The concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology describes assimilation as the absorption of a minority group into a majority population, during which the minority group adopts the values and norms of the dominant culture. According to Endelman's "assimilation and assimilationism" chapter in the Cambridge History of Judaism, assimilation is no longer a neutral notion for historical research. The phrase had a favourable connotation throughout the age of emancipation (1789–1871). In the view of the Zionist and Orthodox movements, Jews had given up too much of their identity by adopting modernity. (312)

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

Polack viewed assimilation as a commendable, desirable, and necessary adaptation to the circumstances of the time, as reflected by her wise character, Mordecai, who recognised the significance of assimilation and the necessity of Esther adopting this attitude, given her position in the kingdom's government. (Polack, 14) At the end of the century, however, as emancipation was attacked and destroyed, it became a controversial term. For the Zionist and Orthodox camps, who thought that Jews had given up too much of what made them unique by embracing modernity (Endelman, 213), the playwright showed that she was both open to assimilation if it helped her reach her goal as a Semitic and afraid of losing her Jewish heritage in late Georgian Britain.

We could indeed assume that Polack exposed her ideology that nothing merits risking Jewish lives more than Jewish nationhood and religious faith. She illustrated it through Esther's total secrecy for all that time in exile and inside of the Royal court, hiding her Jewish identity until she openly confessed it in the appropriate dimensions for the same national and religious purpose. The plot suggests that there exists a transition from a passive citizen hiding his identity for his piety to an active citizen revealing his identity for a merely nationalistic reason. It could also be an appeal to working and middle-class Jews to join the emancipation effort and convert from passive to active citizens, as Esther did.

Polack incorporated the anti-Semitic cliché of dual loyalty into the play's second act, when Haman arranges to exterminate the Jews after he becomes enraged by Mordecai's refusal to bend down to him, a rejection that was rooted in Mordecai's faith. Haman, representing British rulers, asserts that the Jews are disloyal to their king because they are loyal to their religion and must be destroyed. The playwright portrays Haman's argument as extremist and anti-Semitic as an insidious claim, in a portrayal of what British society considers the Jews, addressing the British king at the time, King William IV. (Polack, 20)

While the law is important for establishing a kingdom and preserving uniformity, Carruthers maintains that true sovereignty requires the sovereign to live both within and above the law. Benjamin's interest in the sovereign individual and law

## CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis

stemmed from his disagreement with Carl Schmitt, who first stated, "The sovereign is he who decides the exception." According to Schmitt, the sovereign can legitimately suspend the law, and hence power over the law identifies the sovereign. Schmitt and Benjamin both agree that a sovereign has power, but Schmitt defends dictatorship because a strong leader keeps things in order. (Carruthers, 152)

In Polack's dialogues, the king is portrayed as an irresponsible ruler who offers his governance to a corrupt politician like Haman, who uses it to further his nefarious schemes. While the king is immersed in his wine in search of his pleasures, unconcerned with his people's sufferings, he has no opposition to signing a decree to exterminate an entire people. When Esther urged him to reconsider his reaction, Polack ignored the reality that the king's recklessness and imprudence favoured Jewish safety. However, the theme of legislation against Jews was the only one that was addressed, as it appears in the fourth scene under the title of a street in Syria, "Enter AHASUERUS ESTHER BARNAZABUS & C. Aha! My lovely queen, you are now more composed. Take my golden sceptre it secures you from all danger and assures you of my unabated love but first to compose thy spirits let us to the Temple of the Gods and offer homage for your safety" (28)

Since the majority of Jewish issues in exile arise from the ruler's instructions, his presence or absence in terms of issuing laws and decrees, irresponsible legislation is a central theme in the play. Our dramatist presents a historical Melodrama of Jews living in exile who are unable to declare their Jewish ancestry despite facing challenges, intolerance, and injustice. These endeavours represent the actual efforts made by British Jews; consequently, she does not proclaim her opinion clearly. Rather, she uses her characters and plot to create a sense of righteousness. This allegory is a historical representation suitable for all ages that illustrates how Jews comprehend their surroundings and conditions and how to properly complain in order to survive in the larger world.

Just as Dr. Ibrahim Helmy, an expert on folk arts, confirms that almost all of the narratives in "The Arabian Nights" depict the Jews' deceit, treachery, and dishonesty, Polack attempts to polish the image of the Jews for the British Jewish and Christian

## **CHAPTER TWO: New Historicist Analysis**

audience through four significant illustrations in the play: In giving every Jew in the story the status of a good citizen, the way Esther casts her royal request, the way she stands by her nation and her Jewish people, and risks her life for the her Judean nationhood.

Most compelling is the revelation of Mordecai's feelings when Esther was brought to the kingdom's palace, which emphasises his suffering and his loyalty to the Jews. The play's melodramatic victimhood uses its representation of exile to advocate the subjective good nature of Jewish membership in British organised society and the way they deal with the politics of diaspora in order to disseminate a socio-political and religious lesson to the mixed audience of the Pavilion Theatre.

To recapitulate, we can claim that this melodrama clearly exemplifies the manifestations of the Jewish emancipation movement in Britain. However, Polack would not have succeeded in conveying her political teachings hidden behind Esther's biblical account without using the victimhood feature and the literary technique of the religious allegory to capture the attention of the middle and working classes of the public because melodrama was so popular during that era. Additionally, Polack offered a number of adjustments in support of the Jewish struggle, such as newly created characters and emotions.

### **2.6. Conclusion**

Given the historical context of the play's setting, during which the Jewish elite worked hard to preserve a united public image that reaffirmed their place in national politics; Regarding an examination of the play's political aspects, Polack's characters' traits and behaviour, and the religious significance of the story in Jewish heritage as a primary source for the Purim celebration, it is reasonable to assume that Polack's theatrical production contains a political message. Melodrama techniques have considerably contributed to obtaining the support of the middle and working Jews for the Jewish struggle. It may be argued that these techniques, particularly victimhood, were greatly useful to the emancipation effort.



## General conclusion

*Esther's 1835* melodramatic play is a presented and written document, a political record, and an official religious message. Despite its marginalisation since its premiere at the Royal Pavilion Theatre, this theatrical piece could be examined from different perspectives, particularly feminist and orientalist. Thus, the religious nature of the work and its oriental framework made it just another version of Esther's story that has been retold in numerous dramatic works, the most famous of which was Jean Racine's version from 1689. Given the relevance of the play's religious content, the year 2019 witnessed the first appraisal that relates the play to the issue of Jewish emancipation in Britain.

The goal of this research is to find connections between the details of the play and the emancipation movement, as well as to find the most important evidence to support the idea that Jewish theatre, and specifically the *Esther* play, was driven by politics and introduced in its most powerful way through the feature of victimhood.

It is difficult to determine whether or not this melodrama contains a political message without first studying it historically, examining its literary and artistic elements using the New Historicist approach, comparing it to the Book of Esther in the Bible, and revealing the temporal and spatial dimensions in which Elizabeth Polack wrote the play as the first Jewish female dramatist in Britain, as well as considering the implementation of melodramatic features.

Despite the academic necessity of never being certain about a specific interpretation or conclusion regarding literature as being subordinate to the reader's and critics' ideologies as well as their religious and political background, objective analysis of *Esther's* play appears to have made inclusions, such as ethnically charged characters who exaggerate feelings of grief, injustice, and sacrifice in fighting what modern history defines as anti-Semitism. The absence of these additions in the Bible's account of Esther serves as confirmation.

After a stylistic analysis of the language and patterns of the work, it is asserted that the playwright's artistic intelligence lies not in portraying the religious story itself,

but rather in the dramatist's ability to conceal the political content within the aesthetics of literature and within the folds of religious theatre through melodrama. Thus, the questions raised in the general introduction have been answered.

In examining the history of Britain's Jews throughout the late Georgian and early Victorian periods, it became evident that a Jewish educational and political movement worked to integrate lower- and working-class Jews into British politics and into British culture without renouncing Jewish identity and nationalism.

This confirms that the play's political significance is primarily related to educating and enlightening working- and lower-class Jews to join the emancipation efforts, and without the use of melodramatic victimhood and religious allegories, Polack would not have been able to emphasise her socio-political struggle in Britain. These tactics have a significant impact on the play's value and effectiveness.

This research on how New Historicist analysis pertains to the study of religious theatre could be utilised to uncover facts as well as hidden historical and political themes in plays. It might be a groundbreaking approach to studying Jewish drama, from the earliest plays to contemporary films, to demonstrate how Jews employ literature and the arts for intellectual manipulation.

## References

1. Anker, Elisabeth R. *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.
2. Anna Clark, 'The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture, 1748–1848', in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. by Jean Radford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 47–70.
3. Aronofsky Weltman, Sharon. "Echoes and Whispers: Becoming Modern with Elizabeth Polack." *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, vol. 48, no. 2, Nov. 2021, pp. 202–219, doi: [10.1177/17483727211036865](https://doi.org/10.1177/17483727211036865).
4. Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 1990.
5. Banerjee, Koel. "Melodrama And Its Political Legacy". *Cultural Critique*, vol 100, 2018, p.199. *University Of Minnesota Press*, <https://doi.org/10.5749/culturalcritique.100.2018.0199>. Accessed 9 June 2022.
6. Baron, Ilan Zvi. "The Problem of Dual Loyalty." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2009, pp. 1025–44. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27754542>. Accessed 2 Jun. 2022.
7. Belaid Mohammed Amine, *Alleged Anti-Semitism in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*. Master dissertation, University of Tlemcen.
8. Booth, *English Melodrama*, p. 14; David Mayer, 'Encountering Melodrama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 145–63 (p. 146).
9. Boulegroune, *Context-oriented Literary Criticism: New Historicism*. Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra Faculty of Letters and Languages.
10. Boyarin, Daniel. "Introduction: Purim and the Cultural Poetics of Judaism-Theorizing Diaspora." *Poetics Today*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, p. 1.

11. Bratton, J S, et al. *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*. London, British Film Institute, 1994.
12. Britannica, the Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Book of Esther". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 20 May. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Book-of-Esther>. Accessed 31 May 2022.
13. Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess: With a New Preface*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995, p. 55.
14. C.S. Monaco (2009) THE EXTRAORDINARY MOVEMENT OF THE JEWS OF GREAT BRITAIN 1827–1831, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 8:3, 337-359, DOI:10.1080/14725880903263069
15. Carruthers, Jo. "Melodrama and the 'Art of Government': Jewish Emancipation and Elizabeth Polack's Esther, the Royal Jewess; or the Death of Haman!" *Literature & History*, vol. 29, no. 2, Nov. 2020, pp. 144–163, doi: 10.1177/0306197320945947.
16. Dafilou, Sarah. "The Heroine of Purim | Sefaria." *The Heroine of Purim | Sefaria*, www.sefaria.org, <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/28628>. Accessed 2 June 2022.
17. David, Esther. "Book of Esther". *Goodreads.Com*, 2002, [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/279876.Book\\_of\\_Esther](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/279876.Book_of_Esther).
18. Davidson, Clifford. "The 'New Historicism' and Early Modern Drama: A Review Article." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1988, pp. 359–369.
19. Dickens, Charles, and Michael Slater. *The Amusements of the People and Other Papers: Reports, Essays, and Reviews, 1834-51*. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1996.
20. Drew, John et al. "JSTOR: "Household Words", Volume I March 30 – September 21, 1850". *New Library World*, vol 105, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 89-90. *Emerald*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/0307800410515309>. Accessed 8 Apr 2022.

21. Drucker, Aaron P. (1914) "The Book of Esther." *The Open Court*: Vol. 1914: Iss. 4, Article 5
22. Pedwell, Carolyn. "The Persistence Of Melodrama: Affective Politics Post-9/11 and Anker's Orgies of Feeling - Kent Academic Repository". *Kar.Kent.Ac.Uk*, 2015, <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/48019/>.
23. "Elizabeth Polack". *Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias*, 2010, <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/4238303>.
24. Elsaesser, Thomas. "Melodrama and Victimhood: Modern, Political and Militant". *Melodrama After the Tears: New Perspectives on the Politics of Victimhood*, edited by Scott Loren and Jörg Metelmann, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016, pp. 35-52. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048523573-003>
25. Endelman, Todd M. "The Checkered Career of 'Jew' King: A Study in Anglo-Jewish Social History." *AJS Review*, vol. 7, 1982, pp. 69–100., [Doi: 10.1017/S0364009400000660](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009400000660).
26. Endelman, Todd M. *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000*. Berkeley, Calif. Univ. of California Press, 2002.
27. Freitag, Gene Ray, "Jewish disabilities in nineteenth-century England" (1968). *Student Work*. 420.
28. Gossman, Lionel, and M. Taylor Pyne. "III. Towards Full Emancipation in The Victorian Age". *Victorianweb.Org*, 2020, <https://victorianweb.org/religion/judaism/gossman11.html>.
29. Gürova, Dr. Ercan. "(DOC) Esther A Versatile Figure | Dr. Ercan Gürova - Academia.Edu." (DOC) Esther A Versatile Figure | Dr. Ercan Gürova - +Academia.Edu, [www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/30114737/Esther\\_A\\_Versatile\\_Figure](https://www.academia.edu/30114737/Esther_A_Versatile_Figure). Accessed 31 May 2022.
30. Heilman, Robert B. *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience*. London, University of Washington Press, 1968.

31. Howarth, W.D. "Word and Image in Pixérécourt's Melodramas: The Dramaturgy of the Strip-Cartoon." *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800–1976*, edited by David Bradby et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 17–32.
32. Hudston, Sara. *Victorian Theatricals: From Menageries to Melodrama*. London, Methuen Drama, 2000.
33. Hyslop, Gabrielle. *RESEARCHING THE ACTING OF FRENCH MELODRAMA, 1800–1830 - Article in One Complete Issue of NINETEENTH CENTURY THEATRE, WINTER 1987*. First Ed.
34. Jane Shattuc, "‘Having a Good Cry over The Color Purple’: The Problem of Affect and Imperialism in Feminist Theory," in Bratton, Cook and Gledhill, pp. 147–56.
35. John, Julia. "Melodrama And Its Criticism: An Essay In Memory Of Sally Ledger". *Researchgate*, 2008, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276343929\\_Melodrama\\_and\\_its\\_Criticism\\_An\\_Essay\\_in\\_Memory\\_of\\_Sally\\_Ledger](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276343929_Melodrama_and_its_Criticism_An_Essay_in_Memory_of_Sally_Ledger).
36. John, Juliet. "Melodrama." *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*, 2 Mar. 2011, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100148996>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2021.
37. Katz, Elihu, and MENAHEM BLONDHEIM. "The Book of Esther's Unique Perspective on Jewish Life in the Diaspora." *Tablet Magazine*, [www.tabletmag.com](http://www.tabletmag.com), 6 Mar. 2012, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/belief/articles/home-away-from-home-2>.
38. Katz, Jacob, and Mazal Holocaust Collection. *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*. Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press, 1980.
39. Katz, Jacob. *The Term "Jewish Emancipation": Its Origin and Historical Impact*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1964.

40. L. Tananbaum, Susan. "Britain: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *Jewish Women's Archive*, [jwa.org/encyclopaedia/article/britain-nineteenth-and-twentieth-centuries](http://jwa.org/encyclopaedia/article/britain-nineteenth-and-twentieth-centuries). Accessed 16 Feb. 2022.
41. Leaver, Kristen. "VICTORIAN MELODRAMA and the PERFORMANCE of POVERTY." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 2, Sept. 1999, pp. 442–444.
42. Löffler, Marion. "Book Review: Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*." *Political Studies Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 2016, pp. 235–236.
43. Mayhew, Henry, and William Tuckniss. *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopædia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*. London, Griffin, Bohn, and Co, 1861.
44. McWilliam, R. "Melodrama and the Historians." *Radical History Review*, vol. 2000, no. 78, 1 Oct. 2000, pp. 57–84.
45. Mulrooney, Jonathan, and Jane Moody. "Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2004, p. 485.
46. Neema Parvini. *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. London; New York, Bloomsbury, 2012.
47. Newey, Katherine. *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
48. Polack, Elizabeth. "Esther, The Royal Jewess. An Historical Drama, In Three Acts And In Prose". *Google Books*, 1835, [https://books.google.dz/books?id=SdhZAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.dz/books?id=SdhZAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).
49. Carroll R., M. Daniel. "The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction To Critical Issues&Lt;/I&Gt; (Review)". *Hebrew Studies*, vol 41, no. 1, 2000, pp. 239–241. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.2000.0002>.

50. Roberts, Marcus "the Story of England's Jews - The First Thousand Years", published in Great Britain, 2007, page 34.
51. Salo Wittmayer Baron. *Newer Approaches to Jewish Emancipation*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960.
52. Sergei Eisenstein and Richard Taylor. *Selected Works*. London, British Film Institute, 1996.
53. Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dickens, Griffith, and Ourselves' [1942], in *Selected Works*, ed. by Richard Taylor and William Powell, 4 vols. (London: British Film Institute, 1996), III, 193–238; F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948)
54. Sidnie White Crawford, and Leonard J Greenspoon. *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*. London; New York, T & T Clark International, 2003.
55. Sorkin, David. "Emancipation". *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2016, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0122.xml>.
56. Spencer, J., 2017. Levi/Levites. [online] Oxford bibliographies. Available at: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393361/obo-9780195393361-0240.xml> [Accessed 15 April 2022]
57. Stern, Elsie R. "Esther and the Politics of Diaspora." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2010, pp. 25-53,191. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/esther-politics-diaspora/docview/1270602615/se-2?accountid=202267>.
58. Teampău, Radu. "Political Theatre And Melodrama". *Researchgate*, 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342200853\\_Political\\_Theatre\\_and\\_Melodrama](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342200853_Political_Theatre_and_Melodrama).
59. Teampău, Radu. "Theatre Performance In Postmodernism". *Researchgate*, 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325052763\\_Theatre\\_Performance\\_in\\_Postmodernism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325052763_Theatre_Performance_in_Postmodernism).



60. The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess: With a New Preface. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995, p. 15.
61. The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Fourth ed., Oxford, United Kingdom; New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2015.
62. Toczé, Claude, and Annie Lambert. *Les Juifs En Bretagne : Ve-Xxe Siècles*. OpenEdition Books, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 17 Jan. 2018, [books.openedition.org/pur/43298](https://books.openedition.org/pur/43298). Accessed 23 Jan. 2022.
63. V. Allingham, Philip, and Jacqueline Banerjee. "Theatres In Victorian London". *Victorianweb.Org*, 2022, <https://victorianweb.org/victorian/mt/theaters/pva234.html>.
64. Vicinus, Martha. "'Helpless and Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama." *New Literary History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1981, pp. 127–43.
65. Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest [1895]*. Value Classic Reprints, 2016. pp. 357–419 (p. 376).
66. Williams, Mukesh. 2004. *New Historicism and Literary Studies*. Souka University, Japan.
67. Wilt, Napier et al. "The American Theatre As Seen By Its Critics, 1752-1934". *American Literature*, vol 7, no. 2, 1935, p. 226. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2919718>.
68. Zengin, Mevlüde. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities NEW HISTORICIST IMPLICATIONS in WOOLF'S MODERNIST ART with REFERENCE to Mrs. Dalloway*. 2018.

## Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how Elizabeth Polack's 1835 melodrama *Esther the Royal Jewess, or The Death of Haman*, used artistic elements to reflect its political attitude toward the Anglo-Jewish experience of emancipation among Britain's working and lower-middle classes in the nineteenth century. This dissertation specifically investigates how Polack's melodrama reflected the Anglo-Jewish experience of emancipation, stressing the connections between melodrama and the history of the Jewish movement

**Keywords:** Jewish Emancipation, Melodrama, *the Royal Jewess 1835, Esther*, politics, victimhood, working-class, Purimspiel.

## Résumé

Le but de cette thèse est d'étudier comment le mélodrame d'Elizabeth Polack de 1835, *Esther la Juive royale, ou La mort de Haman*, a utilisé des éléments artistiques pour refléter son attitude politique envers l'expérience Anglo-juive de l'émancipation parmi les travailleurs et les classes moyennes au XIXe siècle. Cette thèse examine spécifiquement comment le mélodrame de Polack reflète l'expérience Anglo-juive de l'émancipation, soulignant les liens entre le mélodrame et l'histoire du mouvement juif.

Mots-clés : Émancipation juive, Mélodrame, la Juive royale de 1835, Esther, politique, victimisation, classe ouvrière, Pourim

## ملخص

الغرض من هذه الأطروحة هو التحقيق في كيفية استخدام إليزابيث بولاك للعناصر الفنية للميلودراما من خلال مسرحية 1835 *إستير اليهودية الملكية، أو موت هامان*، لتعكس موقفها السياسي تجاه التجربة الأنجلو يهودية للتحرر بين الطبقات العاملة والمتوسطة والدنيا في بريطانيا خلال القرن التاسع عشر. تبحث هذه الأطروحة على وجه التحديد عن كيفية تصوير ميلودراما بولاك للتجربة الأنجلو يهودية التحررية، مؤكدة على الروابط بين الميلودراما وتاريخ الحركة اليهودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحرر اليهودي، ميلودراما، اليهودية الملكية 1835، إستير، السياسة، الضحية، الطبقة العاملة،

عيد بوريم