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978-0-521-65086-1 - Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France:
The Politics of Halévy's *La Juive*

Diana R. Hallman
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| OPERA, LIBERALISM, AND ANTISEMITISM
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

The Politics of Halévy's *La Juive*

This is the first comprehensive critical study of the nineteenth-century French grand opera *La Juive* (Paris Opéra, 1835), a powerful and successful work by the leading dramatist and librettist Eugène Scribe and Conservatoire-trained composer Fromental Halévy. Hallman explores the politically charged messages of the opera within the context of French social and cultural history. The book addresses the opera's portrayal of religious intolerance and Jewish-Christian conflict in subject, setting, and characterization, viewing the anticlerical thrust of its critique as a reminder of the historical abuses of an autocratic Church and State and as a reflection of the liberal ideology of the July Monarchy. It also considers the portrayal of the central Jewish characters in light of literary stereotypes, Jewish "emancipation" and acculturation, and contradictory, antisemitic attitudes toward Jews in French society.

Diana Hallman is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Kentucky. She is a contributing author to the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* edited by David Charlton, and has written articles and reviews concerning Halévy and the politics of French grand opera, as well as an article on the librettist Ludovic Halévy in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 1998. She was a featured speaker for the BBC's live broadcast of *La Juive* from the Vienna Staatsoper, 1999. Dr. Hallman's research interests also include the history of American concert life and performance, and she is completing a book on turn-of-the-century Austrian-American pianist Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler.

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To Gordon and to my family

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PREFACE

La Juive (*The Jewess*) first captivated me as a doctoral student drawn to the study of nineteenth-century opera – particularly neglected works of the French theatre – and the interrelationships of opera with a larger culture. As I turned to this central work of Parisian *grand opéra*, one of a small body of operas that remained in the core repertoire in Paris and other European musical capitals throughout the century, I began with the simple query: why would a work so titled and featuring Jewish–Christian antagonisms appear and succeed on the stage of the Paris Opéra in 1835? Searching for answers to this basic question took me well beyond the operatic stage and provided me with deep insights into social, religious, and political realities of France in the early nineteenth century. This exploration convinced me that a focus on the music and drama solely within operatic traditions would not reveal the cultural meanings of *La Juive* as deeply and broadly as a “thick” historical reading. In this study, I have chosen to view the work within some of the rich contexts that made it a moving, evocative commentary, combining with the power and beauty of its music and drama and the appeal of its visual spectacle. This reading is only one of many that this provocative work invites. Recent studies have shown how varied and multifaceted the approaches to *grand opéra* can be, and this multiplicity seems especially fitting for a genre that represented the largest-scale fusing of theatrical arts before Wagner, “the principal alternative to the Italian tradition,” as David Charlton states in his prospectus for the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, and a genre closely bound to the intriguing political era of the July Monarchy (1830–48) and a rapidly urbanizing Europe. Inevitably, my interpretations of *La Juive*, particularly its treatment of Jewish–Christian conflict and characterization, are mediated by my own sensibilities in a post-Holocaust age

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(as they undoubtedly will be for my readers), my own cultural values and biases, and perhaps my belief that this work holds great relevance for our world today.

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ABBREVIATIONS

F-Pan	Archives Nationales, Paris
F-Pa	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris
F-Pn	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
F-Pn, Ms.	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Paris
F-Pn, Mus.	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département de la Musique, Paris
F-Po	Bibliothèque Nationale de France Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris
US NYp	New York Public Library, Performing Arts Division, Research Library, New York, NY
US NYpm	Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, NY

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