Jacques Loria (1860-1948) was one of the best known Sephardi literati, and his
*Dreyfus*¹ was among the most frequently performed Ladino plays. He is also the author of
a sensational French novel (1897) and a Turkish one (1909), both published in Istanbul.
His Ladino works, also thrillers, deal with Jewish topics from a Zionist perspective,
treating antisemitism as fundamentally irradicable.

Loria was well-informed about the details of the Dreyfus Affair and obviously
had read Dreyfus’ memoir. Most of the play’s characters have historical prototypes, but
some of Dreyfus’ persecutors are made-up grotesque figures, all of them outspoken
antisemites. For ideological reasons, the play has an aspect conspicuously absent from
Dreyfus’ memoir. While the real Dreyfus does not use the word “God” even once,
Loria’s protagonist frequently talks to the “powerful and merciful God” asking him for
justice, which he does not expect from human beings, and then thanks him for his
salvation.

Loria’s play contains only one important episode that has no referent in the real
Dreyfus story. Kept in solitary confinement on Devil’s Island, Dreyfus suddenly receives,
disguised as a packet of pills, a letter from his wife in which she announces the imminent
triumph of justice. Thus, while loyal to the Zionist agenda, Loria was no less interested in
making a profit, for which purpose he turned a dark episode of Jewish history into a
thriller, albeit with a clear ideological message.
Dreyfus was meant both for reading and staging, which is evident from the stage directions, many of which are descriptive. The language of the play is gallicized even on the phonetic level, and many lines seem to have been translated from the French.²

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1 The present translation and phonetic transcription are made from the following edition:


2 For more information on Jak Loria and a detailed analysis of his play, see Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*, ch. 6.