

## JEW-FACE: NON-JEWS PLAYING JEWS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

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A recent Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, starring the British actor Alfred Molina as Tevye, was a major hit. Audiences loved it. It was lavish and eye-catching, it reproduced Jerome Robbins's choreography, along with many of the special effects of the beloved 1964 original production with Zero Mostel. But it was the first Broadway production of the musical in which the leading role was played by a non-Jew. A debate quickly ensued in the American Jewish press; can a *goy* be an authentic Tevye?

Thane Rosenbaum, a major American Jewish novelist, thought not. "The sensation is as if you're sampling something that tastes great and looks Jewish but isn't entirely kosher," he lamented in the *Los Angeles Times*. Given the "immersion of Jews in American culture," Rosenbaum wrote, "it should come as no surprise that the new-look Tevye doesn't have to be a played by a Jewish actor....as if Tevye is now a universal paradigm of every persecuted, over-labored working stiff and not some artifact of vanished European Jewry."<sup>1</sup> In my own review in the *New York Jewish Week*, I agreed, writing that Molina "never seems remotely Jewish" and that the production "expunged the musical's Jewish soul."<sup>2</sup>

Both of us were quickly taken to task by Ami Eden of the *Forward* newspaper, who lambasted us for our "misguided definitions of Jewish authenticity and lack of imagination." Eden quoted an article by John Heilpern in the *New York Observer* asking pointedly "Where is it written that only a Jew can play a Jew? If that were the case, Laurence Olivier, the son of a priest, wouldn't have given us his memorable Shylock, and Nathan Lane, a Catholic, wouldn't have been able to play Max Bialystock."<sup>3</sup>

These questions make sense, and I've actually reconsidered my original point of view. I don't see any reason why a non-Jew couldn't play a Jew on stage. But Rosenbaum's question

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<sup>1</sup> Thane Rosenbaum, 'New 'Fiddler' Seems to Have Lost Its Soul,' *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 2004. [http://english.sem40.ru/cultural\\_heritage/8506/](http://english.sem40.ru/cultural_heritage/8506/)

<sup>2</sup> Ted Merwin, 'Sunset on a Jewish 'Fiddler',' *New York Jewish Week* (27 Feb 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ami Eden, 'Fiddling With Tradition: Does Musical Misstep?' *Forward* (12 March 2004).

still haunts me. Have Jews truly assimilated into American life so completely that it no longer matters whether or not a Jewish actor is played as Tevye? Perhaps Tevye has become a symbol of Everyman uprooted from his ancestral heritage and left to wander through a broken world. In that case, his Jewishness is more or less incidental.

The problem is that *Fiddler on the Roof* is a linchpin of Jewish identity for many American Jews. Nary a Jewish wedding or Bar Mitzvah takes place in America without the band breaking into a rendition of “Tradition” or “Sunrise, Sunset.” If *Fiddler* falls entirely into non-Jewish hands, even in New York (it is already one of the most popular musicals throughout the world, especially in Japan), then will it lose its ability to inspire American Jews with the kind of diffuse regret and longing (both evoked and sated by everything from klezmer music to Seinfeld to matzoh ball soup) that still serves for many not-terribly observant Jews as a more or less viable Jewish identity? Or can non-Jews play Jewish roles just as well as Jews, as long as they play them “authentically”? Heilpern’s question can be expanded to ask why any theatrical character needs to be played by an actor of his or her ethnicity, race, gender or age? Is it not the very essence of theater that any actor can theoretically play any role?

To regain some historical perspective, I decided to undertake a study of how Jews have been played by non-Jews throughout the history of the American theater. In this essay, I argue that non-Jewish performers initially played Jewish roles in ways that reflected larger societal anxieties about the place of Jews in American culture. Jews were perceived as outcasts from society, and thus fascinating in their own right. A century later, after Jews have become almost fully integrated into American society, the wheel has turned full circle and to for a non-Jew to play a Jew has become a kind of tribute to the tremendous effect that Jewish culture has had on American society.

The reasons for casting non-Jews as Jews have changed repeatedly depending on the status of Jews in American society. For example, as Jews became more successful, especially in the entertainment industry itself, both Jews and non-Jews wanted to view Jews as assimilable into American society, and thus for a Jewish character to “look non-Jewish” actually symbolized the imminent acceptance of Jews into the mainstream. After the Second World War, American Jews entered a triumphal phase in which Jewish culture had a tremendous effect on American culture in general, and Jews became viewed as universal symbols of humanity. It was less unnecessary during this period for non-Jews to play Jews, since Jews had become a favored

ethnic group within society and could play themselves. Only in more recent years, in a kind of post-multicultural twist, have the boundaries among ethnic groups begun to dissolve and thus Jewish culture seems less the exclusive property of Jews themselves. This has fueled a new round of non-Jews assaying Jewish roles.

The mass migration of Jews from Eastern Europe to the Americas beginning in the 1880s (the beginning of an exodus of Eastern European Jews that ultimately brought almost two million Jews to America by the early 1920s) sparked a wave of portrayals of Jews in popular entertainment. Immigrant stereotypes were also the stock in trade of the variety shows known as vaudeville. Routines about “Hebrews” were popular in America well into the 1920s, when many were published in books of vaudeville “sketches” for use by amateur actors.

The foremost non-Jewish actor who specialized in Jewish roles in New York at the turn of the twentieth century was David Warfield, who actually tried to humanize the depiction of the Jew on stage.<sup>4</sup> Born David Wohlfelt in San Francisco in 1866, Warfield deliberately set out to change the ways in which Jews were viewed in American society. His career began inauspiciously; he was playing Melter Moss, the Jewish con-man in Tom Taylor’s Victorian melodrama, *The Ticket of Leave Man* when his putty nose started to grow in length like Pinocchio’s. His efforts to bring the recalcitrant appendage under control made it take on all kinds of ridiculous shapes, until he was dragged off the stage to catcalls from the audience. But eventually he came to specialize in what he called his “Hebraic specialty,” and achieved great popularity by creating a burlesque Jewish type who was, in Paul Distler’s words, a “truly laughable but human figure.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, despite the prevalence of the notion of race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews’ so-called biological inferiority seemed to disappear once they started to become accepted as “white” people. As Matthew Frye Jacobson has pointed out in *Whiteness*

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<sup>4</sup> Warfield’s ethnicity is a matter of dispute. Paul Distler accepts Warfield’s own claims that he was not Jewish. But Harley Erdman theorizes that since Warfield went to such great lengths to assert a non-Jewish identity (including becoming a practicing Christian, decorating his home with Christian art and repeatedly telling the press that he was not himself Jewish) that he *was* actually a Jew, albeit one who was extraordinarily conflicted about his Jewish identity. See Paul Antonie Distler, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Racial Comics in American Vaudeville,’ Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1963, p. 171 and Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of An American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, 1997) pp. 106-113.

<sup>5</sup> Distler, ‘Rise and Fall,’ p. 173.

of a *Different Color*, the consignment of Jews and other minorities to substandard racial categories was dependent in the end simply on visual “evidence” of difference; when perceptions began to shift, so did opportunities for Jews to be more accepted in the American mainstream.<sup>6</sup> The changing portrayal of Jews on stage helped to make racial caricatures into flesh and blood characters.

Beginning perhaps with Clifford Odets’ *Awake and Sing!*, a Depression-era play about a Bronx Jewish family teetering on the verge of respectability that starred veterans of the Yiddish stage like Stella Adler and Morris Carnovsky, Broadway became identified with Jewish dramas that not only dealt with serious themes but overwhelmingly starred Jewish actors. Paul Muni, Jack Gilford, Phil Silvers, Sam Levene, Zero Mostel, Theodore Bikel and many Jewish actors made careers playing Jewish characters on Broadway. In the wake of the Nazi Holocaust, negative stereotypes of Jews were no longer acceptable in American popular culture. As American society moved into what Irving Howe has called a “philo-Semitic phase after the Second World War,”<sup>7</sup> Jewish characters did tend to be created and portrayed with greater depth and sensitivity.

The rise of Existentialism in the postwar decades led to a newfound interest in religion in America. Jews, who were experiencing extremely rapid economic success, became role models for the rest of society that was also enjoying unprecedented postwar affluence. A 1955 bestseller by Will Herberg entitled *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (a study of what the author called America’s “triple melting pot”) elevated Jews to equal status with Christians; according to historian Jonathan Sarna, the book “captured the national imagination and shaped subsequent religious discourse.”<sup>8</sup> Jews also became extremely influential in television, the first true mass market medium, and Jewish culture had a tremendous effect on American culture in general. From Sid Caesar’s television comedy to the songs of Allan Sherman to the rise of the suburban Jewish shopping-mall delicatessen, Jews became ensconced at the center of American popular culture.

In addition, as writers like Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow won the most prestigious literary prizes in the world, the Jew began to be seen as Everyman. The title of Ellen Schiff’s book on the Jew in American drama, *From Stereotype to Metaphor*, says it all. “Every

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<sup>6</sup> See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976) p. 568.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven, 2005) p. 275.

man is a Jew though he may not know it,” Malamud said, explaining that everyone has the “primal knowledge...that life is tragic, no matter how sweet or apparently full.”<sup>9</sup> Some have gone even farther in writing about the influence that Jews have had on Western society. Yuri Slezkine, for example, states that “The Modern Age is the Jewish Age, and the twentieth century, in particular, is the Jewish century...Modernization is about everyone becoming Jewish.”<sup>10</sup>

Or acting Jewish? As prominent non-Jewish actors again take on Jewish roles, they may not “become” Jewish, but they certainly help to redefine what “Jewishness” can be, even though Slezkine concedes on the first page of his book, *The Jewish Century*, that “no one is better at being Jewish than the Jews themselves.”<sup>11</sup> They also achieved a level of influence unknown to previous ethnic groups in the United States. By the end of the 1960s, the decade of *Fiddler*, even though Jews represented only three percent of the nation’s population, they already comprised 27 percent of law professors, 23 percent of medical school professors and 22 percent of biochemistry professors.<sup>12</sup> By the year 2000, Jews had dropped to two percent of the nation’s population, but they earned 75 percent higher incomes than other Americans with similar demographics. Indeed, 45 percent of the top 40 of the Forbes 400 richest Americans were Jews.<sup>13</sup>

What was the secret of Jews’ meteoric economic rise? According to Steven Silbiger in his book, *The Jewish Phenomenon*, it was learning to act like Jews. He listed seven “keys to Jewish success” that included “Take care of your own and the will take care of you,” “Develop your verbal confidence,” and “Be psychologically driven to prove something.”<sup>14</sup> By mimicking what Jews do (including learning a few words of both Hebrew and Yiddish), he confidently asserted, non-Jews could achieve the same level of success. In pointing out that non-Jews consume 75 percent of the \$50 billion kosher food market in the United States he hinted that perhaps they already have more of an appreciation for Jewish culture than Jews themselves do. (Of course, most mainstream food companies--other than meat companies--in the United States have their products certified as kosher, so non-Jews consume a lot of kosher food without knowing or caring that it is kosher.)

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Lasher, ed., *Conversations with Bernard Malamud* (Jackson, 1991), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, 2004) p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Slezkine, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> See Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 318.

<sup>13</sup> Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, p. 318.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Silbiger, *The Jewish Phenomenon* (Marietta, 2000), p. 9.

Of course, it is Jews themselves who have been identified with with mimicry, with what the world's greatest living Jewish scholar, Adin Steinsaltz, calls the "imitative faculty of the Jews" in his new book, whose first chapter is entitled "Are We Jews With Masks?" Steinsaltz suggests that masking is "one of the most conspicuous characteristics" of Jews, positing that their assimilation of into Western society is best seen as a matter of the way in which Jews imitate their host society by their ability to "interiorize this resemblance into their very souls."<sup>15</sup> Yet in many ways Steinsaltz simply repeats the ideas of the most influential scholar at the other end of the denominational spectrum, the Reform rabbi Eugene Borowitz, who in 1973 wrote a book entitled *The Masks Jews Wear* in which he argued that Jews were adopting the external appearance of other Americans and neglecting or denying their Jewishness.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, this talent for mimesis is viewed by many scholars as almost a constitutive quality of Jewishness itself. Itzkovitz has pointed out, "To many observers over the past century, this performativity has seemed to be the most Jewish trait of all, often accompanied by a corollary talent for translating other cultures into an American idiom."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps for non-Jews to perform as Jews is simply the flip side of Jews donning blackface? Is there some obscure revenge that non-Jews are now gaining by dressing up as the Jews who used to dress up as *them*? Or do we enter a hall of infinite mirrors in which non-Jews perform Jews performing non-Jewish characters?

Nor, obviously, is there a unitary way for a non-Jew (or a Jew, for that matter) to perform a particular role. Indeed, two non-Jewish actors' interpretations even of the same role have sometimes been diametrically opposite one another. For example, in the 1997 Broadway revival of Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, the central role of Pseudolus (played originally in the 1960s by Zero Mostel and then by Phil Silvers) was taken by Nathan Lane (an Irish Catholic) and then by Whoopi Goldberg (an African-American woman). Lane continued his reputation for playing Jewish characters when he took on the role of Hubert Cram, a part also originated by Silvers. in a concert staging of the Jule Styne, Betty Comden and Adolf Green musical *Do Me Ri*, where he was, in the words of Ben Brantley of the *New York*

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<sup>15</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, *We Jews: Who Are We and What Should We Do?* (New York, 2005) pp. 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Borowitz, *The Masks Jews Wear: The Self-Deceptions of American Jewry* (New York, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Itzkovitz, 'They Are All Jews,' forthcoming in Vince Brook, ed., *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture* (New Brunswick, 2006).

*Times*, ideally cast as the “bluntly drawn schlemiel of a hero” who was hilariously “hapless [and] self-deflating.”<sup>18</sup>

Of the revival of *Forum*, Brantley wrote that the role of Pseudolus “demands a manic comic spirit” and thus “has inevitably gone to wild-card performers unlikely to resist opportunities for their own shtick”—read Jewish performers. Brantley identified the role of Pseudolus as the “most extreme incarnation of the work's frenzied comic madness” and wrote that while for Lane, “the whole production was somehow his straight man,” Goldberg played the role as the “sardonic straight woman to the chaos around her” with frequent expressions of “wry detachment or bemused astonishment.” He said that she slipped into the production like a “cat taking over a chair in an unfamiliar apartment.”<sup>19</sup>

In general, for non-Jews performing Jewish roles, this unfamiliarity is definitely beginning to wear off. Nowadays, the sheer number of Jewish roles—and, one might argue, the declining numbers of Jewish actors, as the Yiddish theater has dried up, fewer Jews go into acting and the overall size of the Jewish community continues to diminish—makes it inevitable that Jewish characters will be played by non-Jews, most of whom are eager to play these roles.<sup>20</sup> There are simply fewer bankable stars who are Jewish and those who are, like Ben Stiller, seem to have extremely limited range.

The role of Max Bialystock in *The Producers* is another good case in point. Nathan Lane, with a face that one critic described as a cross between a choir boy and a bull-dog), won almost universal raves for his performance as the shady theatrical producer who, with his accountant accomplice Leo Bloom (played on stage originally by Matthew Broderick—another non-Jew), seduces old ladies to get them to invest in an atrocious musical called *Springtime for Hitler*. But while Lane was rightly acclaimed for bringing his trademark insouciance and bitchiness to a show that is the epitome of bad taste, some critics complained that the character did not seem

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<sup>18</sup> Ben Brantley, ‘A Singing Nathan Lane Adds Ham to the Fizz,’ *New York Times* (8 May 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Ben Brantley, ‘Goldberg Variations on Fun in ‘Forum,’’ *New York Times* (7 March 1997).

<sup>20</sup> However, according to costume designer Ann Roth, “There was an actress on Broadway recently who was playing a Jew. So I produced a Star of David for her to wear and she said she would never wear something like that. I said 'It's not about what you would wear, sweetheart, but what your character would wear.' I hadn't heard that kind of thing for years - most actors these days will go a long way to nail their characters." Quoted by Lisa Armstrong, ‘The Talented Miss Roth,’ *Times of London* (14 Feb 2000).

particularly Jewish in his portrayal. For example, the visiting *Seattle Times* critic called his portrayal “more Jackie Gleason than Zero Mostel.”<sup>21</sup>

As other ethnic groups have risen to prominence in American society, to some extent displacing Jews as the prime minority group, Jews have become interesting for other members of other ethnicities to impersonate on stage. One example was a production by the National Asian Theatre Company of William Finn and James Lapine’s *Falsettoland*, a jaunty and skittish musical about a non-traditional Jewish family in which the son decides to have his Bar Mitzvah in the hospital room of his father’s gay lover who is dying of AIDS.<sup>22</sup> The all-Asian cast was unable to get the Yiddish expressions quite right, nor were they able to get across the Jewish stereotypes convincingly. But as Welly Yang (who played Whizzer) told Sallie Han of the *New York Daily News*, “I’m not going to say it’s not weird when a bunch of Asian-Americans walk in wearing yarmulkes. But if you can believe this blue background on the stage represents the sky, then you can believe these Asian-Americans are Americans who are Jewish.”<sup>23</sup>

NATCO was formed precisely to give Asian actors the opportunity to play mainstream roles (their other productions have included *Our Town* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*). Have Jews been so successfully embraced by American society that Asians are improving their own position by impersonating them? Indeed, Eric Liu has suggested that Asians are the “new Jews” in American society, writing that “Somewhere in that half-lit region between stereotype and sociology, the notion has taken hold that Asian-Americans are ‘out-Jewing’ the Jews.”<sup>24</sup> He points out that Asians are following much the same trajectory in America as Jews did, becoming successful in only two or three generations through a focus on education, hard work and sacrifice.

So by playing Jews, Asians are—much like Christians in Medieval Drama—showing the ethnic group whose experience they are both indebted to and have in some measure transcended.

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<sup>21</sup> Misha Berson, ‘Center stage in N.Y., London: Top springtime theater productions in the Big Apple,’ *Seattle Times* (3 June 2001).

<sup>22</sup> One wonders if in choosing this particular ethnic-themed musical to perform, NATCO was aware of the great success of the production of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* in Beijing in 1983, as compared to the failure of the production of August Wilson’s *Fences* in 1997. For the background on these two productions, see William H. Sun, ‘Power and Problems of Performance Across Ethnic Lines: An Alternative Approach to Nontraditional Casting,’ *The Drama Review* 44 (4) (Winter 2000) pp. 86-95.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Han, ‘Funny, They Don’t Look Jewish,’ *New York Daily News* (14 July 1988) p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> See Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (New York, 1999), p. 145.

“I think it’s great. I’m in no way offended they’re playing Jewish characters. I hope one day they’ll let us be Asian,” Finn told an interviewer who asked about his granting permission for the production.<sup>25</sup> As Jonathan Miller pointed out in the program note to a premiere of his production of Mozart’s *Così fan Tutte*—an opera that is all about disguise and deception--at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, “when you pretend to be someone else the chances are that you will discover unexpected versions of yourself...”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps non-Jews are exploring aspects of their own identities by performing Jews, even if only through the contrast with their own religions or ethnicities.

Perhaps the record for a non-Jew performing the most Jewish characters in one play should go to Anna Deavere Smith, whose one-woman show, *Fires in the Mirror*, was a tour-de-force of playing multiple characters—11 Jewish, 15 black—who were involved in the deadly race riots in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn in 1991. Smith, who modeled her impersonations on the tape-recorded interviews she conducted, played real-life Jews from Norman Rosenbaum, the Australian Jew whose brother was stabbed by 20 black youths, to Roz Malamud, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish matron, to Rabbi Shea Hecht, a community activist who became a spokesperson for the Crown Heights Jewish community. John Heilpern of the *New York Observer* raved that Smith “recreates, and magically, the whole phenomenal divided world of Hasids and black Americans, of pogroms and slavery, stoned rappers and Jewish mothers, of the sweet oddness of humanity, its rage and grief.”<sup>27</sup> And one audience member who participated in a post-performance discussion at Harvard University, thanked Smith for “putting so many voices in one body.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ellen Umansky, ‘Asian-American Theater Finds ‘Falsettoland’ True,’ *Forward* (10 July 1988) p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Miller, ‘Program Note’ to Brooklyn Academy of Music playbill, March 2003.

<sup>27</sup> John Heilpern, ‘At a Superb *Fires in the Mirror*, Take a Look at the Audience,’ *New York Observer* (15 June 1992) p. 26. However, Smith’s performance was less well-received in London when it ran at the Royal Court in 1993; critic Peter Roberts wrote that Smith is ‘no Ruth Draper who can effortlessly people the stage with a host of unseen characters’ and that the ‘theatrical tour de force comes between you and the grim picture she has set out to draw and reduces it in consequence to a Joyce Grenfell style entertainment when what is required is a dispassionate World in Action type programme.’ Peter Roberts, ‘Identity Crisis,’ *The Stage and Television Today* (29 April 1993) p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Cameron Barr, ‘One-Woman Gallery of Voices,’ *Christian Science Monitor* (15 June 1992) p. 10.

In addition, there appears to be something fashionable about being Jewish. British television star Ricky Gervais recently surprised a reporter from the *New York Times* by using a Yiddish word. When asked how he even knew the word—the word itself is not disclosed in the article—he responded that he “grew up wishing he was an American Jew for the comedy and the one-liners,” citing Neil Simon’s *The Sunshine Boys* as one of his favorite films.<sup>29</sup> In addition, a number of American celebrities, including Elizabeth Taylor, Roseanne Barr, Britney Spears and Madonna, have publicly embraced Jewish mysticism, known as Kabbalah. Madonna in particular has become a major global spokesperson for Kabbalah. Not only did Madonna use Jewish symbols in her most recent concert tour, but she refused to perform on Friday nights. She also adopted a Hebrew name (Esther), began wearing a Jewish star, and traveled to Israel—at a time when few Jews were journeying there because of fears of terrorism—both to worship on Rosh Hashanah and to visit the grave of a famous Jewish mystic.

Whatever the implications for Jewish continuity and Christian understanding of Jewish culture, the casting of non-Jews as Jews continues—and not just in theater. Al Pacino, fresh from playing the infamous Jewish lawyer Roy Cohn on the acclaimed HBO film of Tony Kushner’s epic *Angels in America*, stars as Shylock in a new all-star British film version of *Merchant*, directed by Michael Radford. Many said that the film version downplays the anti-Semitism in the play. And as Michael Freedland pointed out in the *Manchester Guardian*, Shakespeare is “simply experienced differently on stage.” He added, “To hear the words ‘dog Jew’ shouted on Dolby Surround speakers; to see a Jew fall to his knees and forced to convert to Christianity on a wide screen, cannot fail to have a different, and greater power.”<sup>30</sup>

Other critics assailed Pacino’s performance as lacking an overt sense of Jewishness. One prominent Jewish critic, Ron Rosenbaum, complained that Pacino’s Shylock is “less like Shakespeare’s Jew than a heroically suffering Everyman, a Brechtian Mother Courage figure of endurance, persisting however put upon. A Shylock safe for civics classes. A Shylock who is more like a somewhat grouchy version of Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*.”<sup>31</sup>

Grouchy or not, generations of young people have now seen a non-Jew playing one of the most archetypal Jewish roles in Western drama. It is now taken for granted that non-Jews can

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<sup>29</sup> Joyce Wadler, ‘The ‘Office’ Manager’s New Career,’ *New York Times* (19 Aug 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Michael Freedland, ‘A Very Jewish Villain,’ *Manchester Guardian* (9 Dec 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, ‘Sanitizing Merchant: Pacino Plays Shylock Like a Grouchy Tevya,’ *New York Observer* (6 Dec 2004).

play Jewish roles as well as—if not better—than Jews. In this context, casting Pacino makes perfect sense. After all, Jews and Italian are always fond of pointing out how similar they are to one another. Who better to play a Jew than an Italian, especially one raised in a largely Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx?

And what happened with the Broadway revival of *Fiddler*? After a year playing Tevye, Molina left the show. His replacement was Harvey Fierstein, the openly gay Jewish playwright and actor. But the majority of critics, including me, were not mollified. Fierstein certainly played the role with enough *Yiddishkeit*. But a flouncing, effeminate Tevye? He just didn't seem heterosexual enough....