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**From Stereotype
to Metaphor
*The Jew in
Contemporary Drama***

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Introduction:

The Tradition of the Stage Jew

I

In his famous "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech, Shylock means to justify his claim on Antonio and at the same time to argue the similarities between Christian and Jew. His plain logic is still compelling, even for audiences far better acquainted with Jews than were those at the Globe. Yet the degree to which the Shakespearean sense of humanity is original becomes more readily apparent when Shylock's hypotheses are applied to the Jew as he had appeared on the stage since the middle ages. For early European drama relied heavily on Jewish types whose life force was not blood, but legend.

Though the Jew on the medieval stage was ubiquitous, his role there had very little to do with his having "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions" of human proportion. On the contrary, his greatest value to the playwrights of the era was that he was different from all other men, a quality which illuminated all his idiosyncrasies. The popularity of the Jew in mystery and morality plays can be attributed to the medieval taste for juxtaposing extremes. The processions of "devils, executioners, tyrants, bawdy fellows, Jews, side by side with saints and the pious" illustrate that "the Jew was, in the ideas of the time, perfectly suited to the role of the foil."¹ Moreover, there was intrinsic drama in setting the nobility and beauty of Christ against the impotent rage of those hostile to him. Most important, the inclusion of despicable, risible types in Church drama, which naturally proscribed ridiculing the sacred, allowed for the introduction of the comic.²

A remarkable example is provided by the thirteenth-century *Benediktbeuern* nativity play. In the prologue, a band of Jews led by the melodramatically named Archisynagogus is seated to the left of Au-

gustine. On his right, by contrast, are Isaiah, Daniel, the Sybil, Aaron and Balaam. As the representative of the unbelievers, Archisynagogus mocks the prophesies by behaving ridiculously, "striking his companions, shaking his head, acting like a Jew generally [*imitando gestus Iudaei in omnibus*]."⁵ Subsequently, he displays his ignorance further in a debate with Augustine, a disputation whose didactic thrust was aimed well beyond the Jews on stage, for it was introduced into the Benediktbeuern play "for no other purpose than to suggest that Archisynagogus' ridicule of the paradox of the virgin birth can be adequately met only by the great Church father."⁶ The leader of the Jews is made to appear foolish in this scene and sinister in the next where he gives guileful advice to Herod who, having acted on it, promptly succumbs to a horrible death in full view of the spectators.

Along with Herod, Pilate and the devil, the Jew was regularly dramatized as the stiff-necked enemy of Christ, especially in the mystery plays, or as the diabolical tempter or sorcerous undoer of Christians (e.g., the various versions of Theophilus' pact with the devil through the agency of a Jewish conjurer, of which Rutebeuf's thirteenth-century *Miracle of Theophilus* is perhaps the best known). Bringing Jews into the Christian faith offered one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the glory and the power of the Church. Indeed, the disputation between Augustine and Archisynagogus in the Benediktbeuern play is followed by a poem which cites prophetic justification for proselytizing the unbelievers. There is an abundance of drama in which Jews, visited by personal miracles or bested in a debate with a Christian, directly present themselves for baptism.⁷

Two important distinctions were made by the medieval mind as it dealt with the children of Israel. The first is a certain ambivalence, bordering on open distrust, toward the Old Testament venerables like Abraham and Isaac who "belonged to the brotherhood of saints traditionally haloed on the stained-glass windows."⁸ The reverence paid the patriarchs stemmed from typological exegesis of the scriptures wherein the Old Testament served to prefigure (e.g., Isaac as the sacrificed Christ) or announce (e.g., the prophesies of Isaiah) the advent and promise of Christianity. Brought down from the cathedral windows to the stage in the parvis, Israelites were sometimes dramatized in ways which suggest that they were not as entirely "idealized, lacking all ethnic nature" and ennobled as one commentator observes.⁹

The suspicion evident in the stage treatment accorded these prototypes betrays a far from neutral recognition that biblical Hebrews were Jews. For instance, the stage directions for the twelfth-century *Ordo de Ysaac et Rebecca* required Isaac and his sons to wear "pilea

Judaica,"¹⁰ the identifying pointed caps of the Jews, which in later plays gave way to Oriental turbans, along with gold and silver belts and tassled purses.¹¹ The title page of the sixteenth-century interlude of *Jacob and Esau* specifies that those players who are to be considered Hebrews should be attired as such,¹² which presumably meant that they were outfitted with contemporary attributes like the special hat and the yellow badge.

A certain unwillingness attached to the receiving of sacred testimony from a Hebrew. In an early prophet play, Isaiah is tartly rebuked, "*Isayas verum qui scis, ueritatem cur non dicis?*" (Isaiah, you who know the truth, / Why do you not tell the truth?)¹³ In the twelfth-century *Jeu d'Adam*, "the prophets are solemnly escorted back to hell after the delivery of their testimony,"¹⁴ while Adam and virtually all the other patriarchs await the advent of Christ there at the end of *Le Mystère d'Adam* (thirteenth century).¹⁵ In a number of mystery plays, it is the Hebrew language itself that is caricatured when the litany solemnly chanted by stage Jews is patently gibberish.¹⁶ On the medieval stage, the men of the Hebrew Bible tended to be conceptualized somewhere between the saintly New Testament antitypes whom they prefigured and the stigmatized contemporary Jew who, the internal evidence argues, must have descended from them.

A second discrimination made by the theatre of the middle ages affected the portrayal of Jewish women. While the Old Testament patriarchs were depicted reverently, the repellent male Jews—whether Judas, Annas and Caiaphas or the more contemporary *mauvais sujets*—have no female counterparts. In the study *Portrait of the Jewess in French Literature (Portrait de la Juive dans la littérature française)*, Luce Klein observes, "[The Jewess] is neither the wife of Judas, or the devil, or even, it would seem, of the usurer or the sorcerer. If, in medieval literature, she is sometimes seen associated with the cruel, greedy, aggressive, hard-hearted or opinionated man who is her husband, it is at the precise moment when she is severing this association."¹⁵

To be sure, the patriarchs also played typological roles in church drama. Rachel lamenting her inconsolable children represents the *virgo mater* both in dramatizations of the coming of the magi (*Officium Ste-liae*) and the slaughter of the Innocents (*Ordo Rachelis*, both eleventh through thirteenth centuries). Perhaps the most interesting Jewish female image on the stage of the middle ages is the personification of the allegorical and iconographic¹⁶ Synagoga. A young woman whose bandaged eyes symbolize her blindness to the truth of Christianity, Synagoga almost always appears in contraposition with Ecclesia. Her attributes vary. Often she is a figure noble in defeat carrying a broken lance or standard and losing the Tablets of the Law (much as she

appears on the façade of the Strasbourg Cathedral), though occasionally she is given some of the gross caricatured traits more commonly applied to the male Jew.¹⁷

When Synagoga enters the twelfth-century *Libellus de Antichristo* she is with a band of co-religionists decrying Christianity. They are offset by Ecclesia attended by Mercy, Justice, the Pope and his clergy, and the Roman Emperor and his soldiers.¹⁸ Synagoga is singled out for attention. She is subdued by Antichrist, then converted by Enoch and Elijah who for their troubles are slain with her. The death of the three Hebrew figures serves as a reminder of "Christ's Passion, the sacrifice destroying the power of the Princes of Darkness."¹⁹ Synagoga's lot is no happier in the fourteenth-century play presented for the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Here, "after a tearful lament, Synagoga is pushed down the west steps of the stage by Gabriel and Raphael, lets fall her banner and the tables of the Old Law, and flees crying from the Church."²⁰ Though the episode is meant to demonstrate the incuracies of Jewish belief, it is worth noting that Synagoga's exit was greeted not with compassion, but laughter.²¹

The trials of the allegorical Synagoga notwithstanding, there seems little question that the Jewess was treated with less frequency and with much less fierceness than the Jewish male in the early theatre. Klein theorizes that this amnesty from opprobrium reflects "Christianity's initial ambivalence toward Judaism in which love combines with hatred and the recognition of a bond mingles with the violence of a rejection."²²

Something of the durability of that perception can be gauged in the reason offered by Chateaubriand in 1836 to explain the distinctive beauty of Jewish women. Unlike their men, he wrote, they are blameless. There was no Jewess in the crowd who humiliated and punished Christ. "The women of Judea believed in the Savior, loved him, followed him, comforted him with their goodness, soothed him in his afflictions." Concludes Chateaubriand, "The reflection of some magnificent beam must have remained on the forehead of the Jewess."²³

The conception of both male and female Jew in the middle ages announces and doubtless explains the fascination this "dual image"²⁴ will exercise in subsequent ages. The polarization into gender of positive and negative qualities associated with Hebrews manifests itself in a pair of characters who become a conspicuous literary motif, the beautiful Jewess and her repulsive father. The idealization of feminine virtue in a creature whose bloodline is nonetheless disposed to perjury gives rise to another literary stereotype, the *belle Juive*. We shall meet them again in these pages.

One of the medieval Jew's most conspicuous distinctions is his

virtual absence from the societies in whose drama he figures so colorfully. William the Conqueror brought Jews to England specifically to serve as "engines of finance." Despite humiliations, special taxes and various types of discrimination, their restricted existence was tolerable until the persecutions and massacres of the twelfth century. Edward I's act of expulsion in 1290 drove 16,000 Jews out of the country and put an end to a 225-year span in which Jews inhabited England, always as aliens.²⁵

By contrast, Jews had lived in France since the first century C.E. Along with periodic persecutions due to the exigencies of a king or nobleman or the zealotness of Crusaders, the recurring threats were forceful baptism, restrictions on occupations and religious practices, and discriminatory taxes. The southeastern Jews were the least vulnerable due to the limited reaches of royal command and the protection of prosperous, enlightened nobles. But in 1229, when the region from Carcassonne to the Rhone was annexed to the crown, all French Jews suffered worsening persecutions. Philip the Fair's Edict of 1306 confiscated the real and personal property of France's 100,000 Jews and expelled them, an act Cecil Roth interprets as spelling "the end of the ancient and glorious traditions of French Jewry."²⁶ Many of the exiles found temporary refuge just across France's borders or in provinces not yet part of the kingdom (e.g., Lorraine, Provence, Dauphiné), where they were hardly more immune to periodic banishment. Writing of the expulsions from Provence in 1498 and 1501, Bernhard Blumenkranz observes, "In France as elsewhere, the Jewish middle ages lasts until the Revolution."²⁷

While the notion of the Jew as undesirable alien is thus rooted in fact, the depiction in dramatic literature of his sinfulness and peculiarities is hardly reportage. What is significant is that the figure of the Jew as outsider, long an accepted dramatic convention, became a literal reality at the very time that amusement began to rival edification and glorification as prerogatives of the stage. Its sensationalism unchallenged, the theatre expanded its Jewish types into forms and shapes limited only by the human imagination.²⁸

The Jew is cast everywhere along the gamut of malevolence, from the simple foil who provokes laughter by ludicrous contrast with the faithful, to the wicked perpetrator of cruelty conceivable only by a mind possessed of the devil. Fostered by a climate of ignorance and superstition, exploited by the zeal of Christian apologists and proselytizers, frequently inspired showmen, the figure of the Jew could not possibly have become other than an increasingly spectacular personification of evil.

Yet in its portrayal of the Jew as a creature accursed and apart, the

early theatre reflected not only religious, social and cultural postures, but the assumptions that lay behind them and made them possible. These are primitive, emotionally charged premises that have very little to do with what people see and everything to do with what they need to believe. In his fascinating study of medieval mentality, Joshua Trachtenberg writes that "everybody knew that the devil and the Jews worked together. This explains why it was so easy to condemn the Jew a priori for every conceivable misdeed, even if it made no sense. . . . The catalogue of alleged Jewish crimes is long and varied indeed, and wholly unreasonable, unless we accept the self-evident fact, in medieval eyes, that as Satan's agents, nothing was beyond the depraved and evil nature of the Jews."²⁹

Paradoxically, although the stage Jew often appears to be constituted of elements foreign to human nature, like all successful villains he acts out fantasies beyond the reach of ordinary men, but not by any means beyond their yearning. Jonathas, the Jew of *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (c. 1470), is a fine example. He gloats over his fabulous wealth which, almost better than being inexhaustible, accrues from traffic with far-off, exotic places rather than from the sweat of his brow. Not only does he have the curiosity and the audacity to challenge the doctrine of transubstantiation, he also has the means to acquire the host for his personal examination. Who but a Jew would dare? It is difficult to miss the transference of guilty feelings at work in *The Croxton Play*. Moreover, since Jonathas is patently an ancestor of Barabas, Shylock and Isaac of York, he helps demonstrate that the myth of the wicked Jew responds to the human need to avow and be punished for baseness, a requirement not at all peculiar to men of the fifteenth century.

So indelibly was the Jew's moral fiber stained that he deserved to be cheated and humiliated even when he comported himself with uncommon magnanimity, as in the morality play *The Three Ladies of London* (1584). Four years later, as Barabas (Marlowe could hardly have chosen a more inflammatory name) the stage Jew attains diabolical apotheosis:

As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights
And kill sick people groaning under walls;
Sometimes I go about and poison wells;
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns,
That I may, walking in my gallery,
See 'em go pinnioned along by my door.
Being young, I studied physic and began
To practice first upon the Italian;

There I enriched the priest with burials,
And always kept the sexton's arm in ure
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells:
And after that, was I an engineer,

And in the wars 'twixt France and Germany,
Under the pretence of helping Charles the Fifth,
Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems;
Then, after that, was I an usurer,
And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
And tricks belonging unto brokery,
I filled the gaols with bankrupts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals;
And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning on his breast a long, great scroll
How I with interest tormented him.

But mark how I am blest for plaguing them;
I have as much coin as will buy the town.

(*The Jew of Malta*, II, 3, c. 1588)³⁰

Even an overachiever as remarkable and lucid as Barabas shares with his less accomplished stage brethren characteristics that are constants in the theatre through the sixteenth century. Whatever his form, the male Jew is a wretched, stiff-necked creature incapable of recognizing truth, unrepentant (if he is at all aware) of his crime of deicide, and—worst of all—tenacious in his inscrutable ways.

Having noted the special qualifications of the Jew to become everybody's boogeyman and the circumstances of history that have operated in making him one, it is important to account for his unflagging popularity as a villain in the theatre, even considering the medium's hospitality to stock figures in general. How is it that even at the end of the eighteenth century, author Richard Cumberland could make his character Sheva observe, "If your playwrights want a butt, or a buffoon, or a knave to make sport of, out comes a Jew to be baited and buffeted through five long acts for the amusement of all good Christians" (*The Jew*, I, 1)?

One clue is provided in the transition from life to dramatic literature of a cherished legend—that all usurers were Jews. While many European Jews had become moneylenders in the thirteenth century, curiously the usurer does not appear in French drama until the sixteenth century, despite "Carnival games and . . . scenes . . . in some mystery plays where Jews haggle with Judas over the price of his betrayal."³¹ The English stage presents quite another picture. Jews were expelled from the country in 1290, shortly after Edward I discovered he could rely on Italian bankers. Yet of Tudor England, Modder records, "What the average playgoer expected to see, and did see, in

the stage Jew was the incarnation of all the evil and unsocial traits of the medieval moneylender and tax-gatherer."³²

Which medieval moneylender? Laws against usury in England were enacted both before the Norman conquest and the subsequent influx of Jews and in 1341, 1487, 1546, 1552, and 1571, that is, long after the expulsion and well before the readmission of Jews in 1655. The multiplication of anti-usury measures in the sixteenth century bespeaks an obviously exacerbating problem for which it was illogical to hold the Jews accountable. Still, *The School for Abuse* (1579), a tract on secular immorality by Stephen Gosson, actor and playwright turned preacher, refers to a play entitled *The Jew* (unrelated to Cumberland's later work by the same title mentioned above), which exposed "the greediness of worldly chusers and the bloody minds of usurers."³³ M. J. Landa indignantly remarks, "At that time there was flourishing in London a notorious Christian usuer, Hugh Audley. . . . Whilst the apocryphal Shylock has given his name to the whole fraternity, who ever heard of a moneylender being termed an 'Audley'?"³⁴ Despite, or more likely because of the actual practitioners, usury was regarded as un-English (hence foreign); there is no question it was un-Christian (hence immoral). In short, an identity ideally suited to the Jew.³⁵

The emergence of the Jewish usurer as a stock type goes a long way toward illustrating the versatility and endurance of the nefarious stage Jew. The caricature was accessible, it was infinitely adaptable to any sort of base role, and it was credible, especially to a beleaguered and superstitious public. In an age where money, credit and banking brought daily woes, the Jew made a wonderful scapegoat. Although as we have seen, it was not the Jew who was running up the rate of borrowing, it was he who was represented as maniacally obsessed with acquisition. Furthermore, the culpability ascribed to the Jew attached not only to draining men of their resources, but to consuming their very lives. The image of the usurer who mulcts his creditors is of a piece with that of the scoundrel who poisons wells to spread the plague, and both are consonant with—indeed, derived from—the figure of the deicide. The myths of the Jew as vampire and as cannibal prospered, as myths always do, because they met a need. The Jew could be blamed for general catastrophe and held to account for the inexplicable. The transference of guilt for practicing usury in defiance of Church law pales beside the transference of the fascination with bloodshed which fuels the dire and apparently indelible myth of the Jew whose ritual requires Christian blood.³⁶ Lurking behind the Jewish usurer is an even more baleful figure, no doubt descended from Abraham, the first Jew of all—the Jew with the knife. And these two images are fused in Western drama's most illustrious malefactor, Shylock.

The archetypal usurer, humanized by Shakespeare, advances to a new position among dramatis personae, a position from which he exercises in *The Merchant of Venice* (and only there, for several centuries more) an unaccustomed function. In 1597, Shakespeare moved Shylock out of that vague "Jewry" from which his predecessors had been summoned only long enough to work their mischief. He placed him in the same society and subjected him to most of the same pressures and demands as the other characters. And he used him to articulate the fears and concerns of that society as it grapples with the vexations of a common problem—competition. It is hardly remarkable that *The Merchant of Venice*, like *The Jew of Malta* and *The Jew* which served Stephen Gosson as an example, should deal with usury when excesses in lending and forfeiture were gouging Englishmen. Similarly predictable is the use of the reprehensible Jew to set off the generous, merciful Christians. But rivalry serves as a far more important theme in *The Merchant of Venice* than usury or moral commentary. The unexpected and unprecedented lie in showing the Jew as equally subject to competition—in business and personal life—as the rest of the characters.

Through the figure of the Jew, Shakespeare makes other kinds of distinctions. The Christians dissimulate (note the priority given Portia's attributes in Bassanio's "In Belmont is a lady richly left,/ And she is fair, and fairer than that word./ Of wondrous virtues;" note the relaxed fervor of Antonio, the Christian gentleman, whose mercantile concerns have been satisfied: ". . . that, for this favour/ He presently become a Christian"). Shylock, by contrast, displays his ignoble human sentiments nakedly:

I hate him for he is a Christian;
But more, for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis, and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.

And again, stung and outraged by Jessica's treachery, "I would that my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!"

Shylock's most shocking confessions have a way of transcending his particular situation to express more universal concerns. Such is the impotent rage of the individual at cross purposes with his society:

If you deny me, fie upon your law!
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.
I stand for judgment. Answer—shall I have it?

Such the loneliness of the man suddenly bereft of all he holds dearest:

Why, thou loss upon loss! the thief gone with so much, and so much to find the thief, and no satisfaction, no revenge, nor no ill luck stirring but what lights a' my shoulders, no sighs but a' my breathing, no tears but a' my shedding.

As a stage Jew, Shylock incorporates a new dimension. His behavior reveals truths "better" men dissemble. Not only has he "senses, affections, passions," they constitute a range of feelings broader and more poignant than those of any other character in the play. For the present author, Shylock is far more convincing as a human being than as a Jew. His impoverished family life, his lack of ethics, his misanthropy bespeak the very antithesis of Judaism. As a Jew, he is fabricated of mythic malevolence and hellishness. But as a villain, he embodies authentic human capacity for greed, resentment and retaliation. The interworking of these distinct aspects of Shylock, rarely considered separable before the present century, may account for the unflagging appeal *The Merchant of Venice* has enjoyed for four centuries with actors, theatregoers, playwrights and literary critics.

Although it is never astonishing to discover that Shakespeare is as relevant to modern audiences as he was to the Elizabethans, it is noteworthy that with the complexity of Shylock, he prepares the vastly modified role and image of the Jew in the twentieth century more surely than almost any other intervening playwright. Paradoxically, it is Shylock's vulgar attributes rather than his nuanced individuality that made him and his play towering prototypes throughout the ensuing centuries. Edgar Rosenberg sees Shylock's first line ("Three thousand ducats, well!") "as a piece of stage logistics . . . in which the Jew's entrance binds him at once, without fuss, to his cash-nexus."¹⁷

However, it is not exclusively as a moneyman that the Jew is henceforth cast. The most cursory review of the many Bible-based plays of the late sixteenth century¹⁸ points up the need to distinguish between Old Testament and extra-scriptural (one cannot reasonably say "real-life") stage Jews. The Bible proved an inexhaustible source of inspiration for dramatists both in France, despite the Paris Parlement's ban on religious plays after 1548, and in England, where Cromwell's closing of the theatres in 1642 instituted a period of almost three centuries during which no biblical drama appeared on the professional stage. While I shall discuss in the next chapter those Old Testament plays which fall into the chronological purview of this study, the number and importance of religious dramas prior to 1945 where Jews play significant roles are too vast to pass in review in a summary such as this.¹⁹

What is relevant here is the radically new direction biblical dramatization takes in the Renaissance. The trend is well exemplified by *Abraham Sacrificing* (1550), whose author, Théodore de Bèze, was Calvin's successor in the chair of theology in Geneva. Bèze wrote a play about Abraham because he identified with the patriarch whose career seemed to the Renaissance man to parallel his own. In so doing, Bèze heads a long line of dramatists who, feeling a kinship with Old Testament Israelites, regard them as representatives of contemporary man rather than as prefigurations of New Testament personages. The Protestant tendency to view moderns as embodiments of scriptural Hebrews derives largely from the Reformation's fresh exegeses of the scriptures and its recourse to rabbinical commentaries on them. As a result, various Christian sects, notably the Baptists and the Puritans, became markedly more appreciative of Jews and Judaism. Indeed, English identification with Israel manifested itself in the sixteenth century when Lyly likened God's favoring of England to that "of a new Israel, his chosen and peculiar people."²⁰

In dramatic literature, one of the most successful fusions of poetic messianism and Christian identification with an Old Testament figure is *Samson Agonistes*. Murray Roston observes:

Of all the biblical drama composed during the [sixteenth] century, none overcomes completely that barrier of sanctity which prevents total identification between author and character. Bèze may feel deeply the similarity between his own exile and that of Abraham, but the analogy is confined to one restricted aspect of the patriarch's life. Similarly Udall's identification of Henry VIII with Hezekiah is intended as little more than a graceful compliment to the king. But in *Samson Agonistes* Milton has so immersed himself in the biblical character that the drama is, in a sense, a catharsis for Milton even more than for the audience.²¹

Although the uncertain date of composition of *Samson Agonistes* renders impossible a precise catalogue of the ways in which Milton identified with Samson, some substantial affinities are obvious: blindness, bitter disillusion in relationships with women, the success and hostility of enemies. Roston notes that "above all both were obsessed by the need to reconcile their suffering with the doctrine of divine justice."²²

Milton's Samson acknowledges his own guilt again and again. Still, he is not above the Old Testament hero's characteristic contumacy, lamenting that God has punished him too severely and repeatedly questioning divine wisdom. While sincere in his desire to expiate, he is far from humble and worries about his image:

Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
In every street, do they not say, "How well
Are come upon him his deserts?"

The pitch of Samson's rage in the scene with Dalila reveals his thoroughly human outrage and jealousy, underscored by his shame that he had given in to her, a degree of insightfulness Milton adds to his biblical prototype:

Of what I now suffer
She was not the prime cause, but I myself.

Samson's passion bursts forth when Dalila begs to touch his hand:

Not for thy life, lest fierce remembrance wake
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint.

Yet he is forced to acknowledge the truth of her defense, agreeing that he had been false to himself before she betrayed him. Like Job, to whom he is often compared, Milton's Samson seeks to penetrate the divine reasons which explain how he has brought such misery upon himself. He ends like Job, reaffirming his faith in an unfathomable God. The giant who atones by bringing the pagan temple down upon himself and his enemies is, like the Old Testament original, passionately extravagant to the end.

Samson Agonistes differs most from his biblical antecedent in his sensitivity and introspection which dignify him and ultimately raise him to tragic stature. For all his newfound depth and breadth of character, however, Milton's protagonist retains his Judaic authenticity. At the same time, it is impossible to miss in this seventeenth-century dramatic poem the immediacy of the anguish, the frankness of the tortured senses and the incisiveness of the questions directed to God. Like Shylock, Samson comes through his work as a recognizable human being. Both figures are patently the forefathers of those Jews on the twentieth-century stage who, while remaining faithful to their own particular identities, come to have a resonance and an applicability that transcend them.⁴³

The human intensity of Milton's Samson is thrown into relief by comparison with the more numinous and fabulous Hebrew personae that Jean Racine depicted somewhat contemporaneously. Milton studied the Bible and the commentaries as an unorthodox Protestant; Racine, as a Jansenist whose morality was based on the notions of divine grace and predestination. In preparing to write *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1690), Racine read widely in the Hebrew Bible and in

Jewish history.⁴⁴ There are textual borrowings from the Old Testament in both plays. Although the plot lines are entirely dissimilar, central to each play is a challenge hurled at Jehovah by ruthless human beings. In *Esther*, the treacherous Haman plans to rid the earth of the chosen people. In *Athalie*, where, as critics like to point out, "God is the principal character,"⁴⁵ Baal worshippers led by Jezebel's daughter Queen Athalia almost triumph over the House of David. Both *Esther* and *Athalie* are concerned with the breaking and re-establishment of the Covenant between God and His people.⁴⁶ Indeed, the representation of the Divine is of central importance, for the god in both these plays is the terrible God of the Old Testament who gives the law and whose power makes itself manifest even in the hearts of apostates and idolaters.

Despite their specifically Hebrew source, the dramatic personae in both works acquire levels of identity that tend to surpass their Jewishness altogether or to impose a codified Christian view upon it. The first claim is especially substantiated by the eponyms of the plays. Racine takes more liberties than Milton with the human nature of his Israelites, endowing them with traits borrowed from the Greco-Roman tradition. While Esther and Athalia retain many of their scriptural qualities, they also bear the hallmarks of the talent responsible for some of the most unforgettable women in French dramatic literature. Racine's genius in animating psychology is superbly illustrated when the bedazzled Esther makes a lightning recovery from her audience with the overwhelming Ahasuerus, then adroitly maneuvers to undo Haman and save her people. Again, the dramatist's extraordinary skill fashions the arrogant Athalia's surprised discovery and wavering indulgence of her emotional vulnerability before Joash. In this climate of internal turmoil and destabilization, there is scarcely room for ethnic considerations. It is small wonder that both Bettina Knapp and Roland Barthes perceive the struggles that rage both within these women and between them and their antagonists as mythic conflicts of masculine and feminine forces.⁴⁷

There is one noteworthy exception to the supra-Hebrew women in these plays. She is Jehoshabeath, the wife of the high priest in *Athalie*. Her minor role allows us a glimpse of the compassionate materfamilias who dares acts of courage but bends her will to her husband's, an image reminiscent of the "woman of valor" in Proverbs.

Of course these women are not the only Jewish characters in their respective plays. In fact, it is in the delineation of Mordecai, Jehoiaada and Joash, all of whom serve as spokesmen for God the Father, that the Jewishness of the Racinian personae is most Christianized. We must not forget that the Jansenist-educated poet was writing for the

edification of the young ladies at Saint Cyr. The male Jews in these plays are Old Testament figures conceptualized and esteemed by an ardent Catholic. Mordecai, the stubborn seer, Jehoiada, the prophetic, manipulative priest, Joash, the noble child pretender to the throne of Judah attest the Church's position that redemption comes through a Hebrew figure. It is no coincidence that the savior figures belong to the House of David from which Christ descended. In the dramatic conclusion of the first act of *Esther*, the heroine prays to the God who has sworn a holy alliance with her people. At the exact middle of that prayer, Racine, whose attention to symmetry was meticulous, has Esther remind God of "the saint whom you promise and whom we await."

While the riches of the biblical plays, especially the complex *Athalie*, demonstrate that Racine achieved far more than his royal patron asked for,⁴⁸ they constitute preeminently apologia of Christian doctrine. Paradoxically, at the heart of *Athalie*—a play where changes in human fortune are both enacted and predicted—lies a tenet common to Janesist theology and to Judaism: only those men are just and triumphant whom God chooses to be just and triumphant. In much different fashion, but no less than Milton, Racine found in his Jewish characters the embodiment of his own passions and persuasions.

By the end of the seventeenth century then, several theatrical conventions were firmly entrenched. On stage, the Jew never doffed the cloak with which he had been fitted out when he made his debut in Church drama, a reversible mantle of source and curse. Through the middle ages and the Renaissance, theological attitudes engendered two groups of stage Jews. On the literal level there were the scriptural Israelites who, as we have seen, underwent modification during the Reformation in response to its unorthodox notion that the Old Testament figures represented not the antecedents of the New Testament, but contemporary Christians. The second prefabricated image of the Jew is more symbolic but no less rooted in Christian ethic. Grotesque and treacherous, stereotyped Jews provided on the stage "an indispensable reference group, enabling Christians to know themselves as Christians and to incarnate good by contrast with evil."⁴⁹ The oddity about these sturdy roles and images is that they flourished for hundreds of years in the very countries from which Jews had long been exiled. If the theatre from medieval times through the end of the seventeenth century holds a mirror to nature, its dramatization of Jews—the exalted and the infamous alike—reflects not external reality, but human nature, certain of whose primal needs were satisfied by myths about the Jews.

II

During the Age of Reason and the early nineteenth century, the theatre turns away from church and court and blossoms into an exuberantly social institution. The triumph of the middle class is everywhere apparent—from the exaggerated modes in acting and costume, to lively exchanges between spectators and actors, to the rise to supremacy of the actor-manager. The plays themselves are typically long on spectacle and intrigue, while almost without exception, dramatic personae have the depth and intensity of pasteboard. Despite isolated skirmishes between classicists and romantics, the boards become increasingly the domain of the well-made play, a crowd-pleasing conception at which nineteenth-century dramatists like Eugène Scribe prove uncommonly adept and prolific. As theatre grew more and more popular and lucrative, there was an insatiable demand for plays. The absence of copy- or stage-right laws permitted a deluge of French plays in England, where they were eagerly translated, performed and imitated (William Archer referred to the early nineteenth century as "the winter solstice of English drama"). Nor was that the end of it. An account of plays on the American stage from 1752 to 1821 shows that New York, Boston and Philadelphia audiences might just have well attended the theatre in London or Paris.⁵⁰

But we are getting ahead of the story, for while the well-made comedies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were liberally populated by Jews, as we shall see, the era begins on quite a different note. The vast social, economic and political changes which radically altered the fortunes of European Jews—recall and resettlement, emancipation (Jews were first granted full citizenship in France in 1791), increased social mobility—seem to go all but unnoticed in dramatic literature. Indeed, at first Jews are conspicuous by their absence, particularly in France. It is surprising, for example, that there is no Jewish character in Lesage's *Turcaret* (1709), a comedy built around the universal need for money and unscrupulous, heartless means of getting it. And it is nothing short of astonishing that Voltaire's prodigal vilification of Judaism does not spill over into his plays.⁵¹

M. J. Landa records a similar phenomenon on the English stage. He suggests that Charles II's protection of the small number of newly returned Jews may have dissuaded playwrights from acknowledging their resettlement (1655) as the theatres reopened. Restoration plays were nonetheless much more apt than their French contemporaries to contain disparaging references to Jews, as well as slight but abusive

caricatures which are patently formulaic rather than a matter of intentional maliciousness. So one finds the routine slurs and disagreeable bit roles in plays by Webster, Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, Dryden, Congreve and Colley Cibber.

The conspicuous disjunction between the roles of the Jew in society and on stage is particularly evident in the relatively tolerant American colonies. The very first Jew to appear on the American stage was Shylock, in a 1752 production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Williamsburg, Virginia. The first American play to contain a Jewish character, Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), had him describe himself "as a forger and a crook, as one who cheated the Gentiles because Moses so commanded."⁵² Shown in New York, Philadelphia, Hartford and Boston, Rowson's play evidently "satisfied theatregoers' predilections for Jews as stage-villains."⁵³ The early American stage accepted without question European plays and their freight of attitudes and stereotypes.

Yet surprisingly, the essentially undistinguished theatre of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did contribute to modifying traditional roles and images. The most promising development was the stage's very gradual responsiveness to Jews in society, eventually including those in the audience. Of major importance is evidence that dramatists saw and cared that their depiction of Jews was not only inaccurate, but offensive.⁵⁴ Smollett countered his negative image of the Jew in *Roderick Random* (1748) with the incredibly altruistic and generous Joshua Manasseh of *The Adventures of Count Fathom* (1753). Sheridan's *The Duenna* (1775) made sport of a sly apostate, Isaac Mendoza, tricked into marrying the titular governess whose highest praise for Mendoza was that he is "so little like a Jew, and so much like a gentleman." But the following year in *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan's moneyman Moses earned the favor of Sir Oliver Surface and of the audience as he guided the former through the labyrinth of high finance so he could redeem his misguided nephew. The best known volte-face was Richard Cumberland's. Having created a disagreeable Jew in *The Fashionable Lover* (1772), he overcompensated with Sheva, protagonist of *The Jew* (1794). Cumberland's effort is noteworthy in that he consciously sought to rehabilitate the image of the Jew "according to the new doctrine of human perfectibility . . . and the sentiment of universal tolerance associated with the era of the French Revolution."⁵⁵

The popularity of *The Jew*, both in England and in the United States, bespeaks a growing tolerance of the sympathetic stage Jew. Unfortunately, the impossibly good Sheva rings no truer—either as a human being or as a Jew—than his opposite number, Barabas. Cumberland

land's endeavor demonstrates that it was as possible to create a character without any Jewish depth in a society where there were plenty of models as where there were none.

Cumberland's play is one of many which reflect the spirit of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (1779). The German work, translated into English in 1780 and French in 1783, was iconoclastic not only in its enlightened and generous Jewish protagonist, but in its view that the best religion is the one which forms the most virtuous men. The fact that Lessing modeled his Nathan on Moses Mendelssohn adds another reason to believe that the Jew in society was beginning to project his image on the Jew in the theatre. It is heartening that the benign Jewish characters began to prepare the way for others in the drama of succeeding decades. Although benignity is not the same thing as dimension, apparently the Jew had to show he could be nice before he was entitled to substance and versatility.

Playhouses during the rather extensive period under consideration here were not by any means monopolized by contemporary works. The classical repertory provided an ideal showcase for changing concepts of characterization. For that reason, the fortunes of Shylock at this time serve as some index of the ambivalence which continued to cling to the image of the Jew. In 1741, Charles Macklin broke the mold which had turned out decades of comic Shylocks. Macklin's masterful reinterpretation of the role stunned audiences unacquainted with Shylock's depth and strength. His performance, which ranged from melancholy through malevolence to agitated silence, won the acclaim of audiences and critics, wringing from his initially opposed theatre manager the concession, "Macklin, you *was* right."⁵⁶ Macklin's "rightness" served as the foundation for subsequent moving and more sympathetic portrayals of Shylock by Edmund Kean and Henry Irving.

It is instructive to compare how Shylock was faring on the continent. Of the many French reworkings, it is the adaptation Alfred de Vigny wrote, almost ninety years after Macklin's breakthrough, that compels our attention. Vigny's version is important partly because of his literary eminence, and partly because of his attitude toward Hebrews. Like all the Romantic poets, he was drawn to Old Testament subjects. Unlike the others, Vigny felt such an extraordinary affinity with the patriarchs that in major poems written between 1820 and 1839, he depicted himself as Jephthah, as Moses and Joshua, and as Samson. However, Vigny's Shylock, created right in the midst of that period, is a throwback to the sixteenth century. The poet diminished both the play, which he rewrote in three acts, and its Jew. Shylock is rendered petty (he bites his lips when he fears Antonio will not con-

clude the loan in the first place) and mean (he refuses Bassanio's repayment on an absurdly flimsy alibi).⁵⁷ Although Vigny's work went into rehearsal at the Ambigu-Comique in 1830, it was not performed, a setback attributed to two other updates of *The Merchant of Venice* for which Paris audiences were having difficulty restraining their derision.⁵⁸ Alfred de Vigny's perpetuation of the stereotyped image must not be regarded as exceptional or superannuated. It is essential to note the deathlessness of the Jew-villain even as we record the embryonic amiable types springing up just outside his shadow.

A couple of ostensibly superficial techniques adopted in this era deserve credit for furthering the development of the stage Jew. For one, the Jew acquires a dialect. If one recalls the glibberish which passed for Hebrew on the medieval stage, that may appear more a revision than an innovation. True, in the eighteenth century, the accent and the jargon continue to mark the Jew as alien and ridiculous. The broken speech does not invariably defame an already sullied reputation however, for there are plays like Desaugiers's *Jew* (1823) which sets forth an honest and charitable character who "talks funny." Still it is in itself an unbecoming attribute and one easily understands M. J. Landa's denunciation of it. In describing O'Keefe's *The Young Quaker* (1783), to which Landa imputes "the most repugnant stage Jew of the century," the exasperated theatre observer barely contains his wrath at the play's use of cant. Landa's anger is fully justifiable, yet a late twentieth-century perspective invites us to wonder if the stage dialect at this time, unlike its medieval antecedent, was an exaggeration of the actual difficulties Jews resettling in England and France had with their new language. The introduction at the end of the eighteenth century of special speech patterns to characterize the Jew on stage, however clumsy and offensive initially, begs to be viewed in retrospect as a notable harbinger. The gimmick will be refined into an art in the twentieth century, practiced by none more skillfully than by Jewish entertainers who based their funny patter on authentic Yiddish phonetics and cadences.

Disguises were a second bit of stage business that caught on with great success in the stylized theatre of light comedy and farce. Among them numbered many variations of the gentile who passes himself off as a Jew. The subterfuge was first employed by John Webster in *The Devil's Law Case* (1618) where a Christian adopts a Jewish identity the better to accomplish his nefarious deeds. But in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the tactic gains a whole repertory of uses, provoking a gamut of responses. The first is predictable. When the respectable gentleman of Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) goes to a masked ball as a Jew, he is promptly maligned as a ragman and moneylender. Jewish masquerade serves an unusual and equiv-

ocal function in Henry M. Milner's thoughtful *The Jew of Lubek* (1819). The eponym is not a Jew at all, but rather an Austrian aristocrat who, having been denounced for treason, adopts the guise so as to escape his past. Gentile characters in this melodramatic universe also assume Jewish disguises in order to assist a maiden's escape, remain undetected as a responsible guardian, and frequently and most ironically, to gain admission where they otherwise would be barred.⁵⁹

The Jewish disguise figures among the many contrivances employed in these platitudinous entertainments. While neither the artifice nor the plays in which it appears have great artistic value, the distinctly modified attitude which made possible the use of the masquerade impresses this writer as a milestone in the evolution of the stage Jew. It would be excessive to interpret as philo-Semitic the gentile's willing adoption of a contemporary Jewish identity; nonetheless, until the Age of Enlightenment, the practice would have been unthinkable. When we read, for example, that an ambitious hero type, learning that servants of his innamorata have orders "to admit only an old woman, a rustic and a Jew, impersonates all three characters,"⁶⁰ it is clear that the Jew has been accepted as a type among types. However ambiguous his image, he has moved into society. On stage he is still unique—and so he will remain, for that is his value to drama. But he is no longer an abstraction.

Masquerading as a Jew must be seen in a new light. As the practice was employed in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theatre, it perpetuated the tradition of the Jew as deceiver and wrongdoer, albeit on a vastly reduced scale. That is not to imply that it is somehow preferable for the Jew to be depicted as a smuggler than as a prisoner of wells. However, the gentile who does in Jewish guise the mischief that he and everybody watching him knows he is perfectly capable of doing without the masquerade openly acknowledges that the Jew represents impulses that, however guilty, are nevertheless universal. Or as Victor Hugo's surprised blackguard puts it—in grudging admiration—when his self-serving motives are easily penetrated by a Jewish moneylender, "You are my conscience dressed up like a Jew."⁶¹ Behind the mocking, mimicking and misrepresentation in the roles and images of Jews on the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stage, one can dimly but unmistakably discern the silhouettes of genuine human beings. That is a giant step forward.

III

While the gradually humanized stage Jew continues to develop through the nineteenth century, it is his antipodes who command

center stage. By mid-century, two monstrous newcomers had slunk from the pages of popular novels to theatrical renown. Between them, Isaac of York (*Ivanhoe*) and Fagin (*Oliver Twist*) resuscitate virtually every medieval myth connected with the Jew—the ubiquitous, scorned Isaac with his inexhaustible store of wealth and cunning (and his beautiful daughter, of whom more presently), Fagin the trafficker in stolen goods and feeder on the innocence if not the blood of little boys, a villain whose evil eclipses the mere bestiality of a Bill Sykes. The theatricality of Scott's and Dickens' novels is confirmed by the impressive number of stage adaptations they inspired and the prestige of the actors drawn to animate the Jewish roles, among them John Ryder and Beerbohm Tree, Fagin, and Edmund Kean, Isaac.⁶²

With Fagin and Isaac as pacesetters, the odious Jew makes a triumphant return engagement in the second half of the nineteenth century. He is the bad conscience of the man who murders him for his gold in *Le Juif polonais*, a huge success at its Paris première in 1869 and a starring vehicle for leading actors in London and New York where it was known as *The Bells*. He is the bad conscience of his people in countless dramatizations of the wandering Jew. And he is the importunate infidel, spectacularly depicted in *Torquemada* (1882) by the Hugolian flair for juxtaposing antitheses:

Through the door at the back, wide open, come a frightened and ragged crowd between two rows of halberds and pikes. They are the deputies of the Jews, men, women and children, all covered with ashes and in tattered clothes, barefooted, with ropes about their necks. Some, mutilated and enfeebled by torture, drag themselves along on crutches or stumps; others, deprived of their eyes, are led by children. At their head is the Grand Rabbi, Moses-ben-Habib. All have the yellow badge prescribed for their race on their torn apparel. At some distance from the table, the Rabbi stops and falls on his knees. All behind him prostrate themselves. The old men strike the floor with their foreheads. Neither the King nor the Queen looks at them. They seem to be gazing at vacancy, above all these heads.⁶³

The contemporary Jew was scarcely more sympathetically delineated. Gyp, in her "Smart Set" sketches, spins him out into multiple, ludicrous caricatures.⁶⁴ He becomes the venal writ server called Solomon Isaac in Boucicault's *London Assurance* (1841) and the unctuous purveyor-of-all-goods of identical character traits in Zola's *The Rabourdin Heirs* (1874). He belongs to the fraternity of Jewish fences who spring up in Fagin's wake, like Melter Moss of Tom Taylor's phenomenally successful melodrama, *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863). More soberingly, he is the Baron de Horn in Lavedan's *The Prince d'Aurec* (1892). The Baron is a millionaire, of course, whose faults do not include lack of

self-assurance. He makes the mistake of voicing his conviction that "times have changed; today we are the true aristocrats" within earshot of more traditional nobility who spare themselves nothing to shove the arrogant Jew's words down his throat.⁶⁵

There can no longer be any question about ingenuousness in the use of stock types. Authors knew exactly what they were doing—and why. Dickens explained to the woman who voiced a protest about Fagin that

he is called "The Jew," not because of his religion, but because of his race. If I were to write a story, in which I pursued a Frenchman, or Spaniard, as "the Roman Catholic," I should do a very indecent and unjustifiable thing; but I make mention of Fagin as the Jew, because he is one of the Jewish people, and because it conveys that kind of idea of him, which I should give my readers of a Chinaman by calling him a Chinese.⁶⁶

Dickens' point is abundantly clear. Other men (except the Chinese) are endowed with race, nationality and religion, but a Jew from any angle is a Jew, a fact which, at least in literature, transmits all one needs to know about him. Alexandre Dumas *fills* is even more specific; he records as a given that "it is agreed that a Jew in the theatre must always be grotesque,"⁶⁷ a prescription he himself took pains to ignore.

In 1886, preparing to lecture to the learned Society for Jewish Studies on "The Jew in Theatre," author Abraham Dreyfus asked Adolphe d'Ennery, a boulevard favorite, if he had written any plays with Jewish characters. D'Ennery responded:

No, and the reason for it is very simple. I believe that in the theatre one must not fight public opinion. The first duty is to please the audience, that is, to respect its tastes and habits. If I had put a Jew on stage, naturally I would have been obliged to make of him a usurer or a crook or a traitor, or some sort of nasty type. I would have found that disagreeable, since I am myself of Jewish origin. So what did I do? I completely eliminated the Jew. You won't find a single one in my plays. By contrast, you will find in them a number of Catholic missionaries who throw themselves into the midst of fires to rescue children in peril.⁶⁸

America's first Jewish playwrights, Mordecai Manuel Noah, Jonas B. Phillips and Isaac Harby responded to the axiom Dumas cites in much the same way d'Ennery did, avoiding the depiction of Jewish subjects. No rehabilitated Jewish personae came from the first Jewish playwrights in England (e.g., Leopold Lewis, Alfred Sutro, Charles Salaman) or from d'Ennery's colleagues in France (e.g., Georges de Porto-Riche, Catulle Mendès).

Instead, Alphonse Daudet's adaptation for the stage of his novel, *The Kings in Exile* (1879), demonstrates the production of stage Jews from formulas, both old and new. The novel's Catholic second-hand dealer turns into a Jewish rag peddler on stage. His daughter Sephora, who has inherited her mother's Semitic charms, becomes, unexpectedly, the novel's resolute immoralist. Given full Jewish pedigree in the playscript, Sephora's exotic allure and pernicious determination define her as an exemplar of a new theatrical type, the *belle Juive*. She is a creature irresistible but troublesome, at the very least, to the men (usually Christian) who love her.

The *belle Juive* makes a triumphant debut on the late nineteenth-century stage where she undergoes an interesting development. Often she is named Rebecca, inevitably recalling the heroine of *Iranthoe*, that majestic paragon whose beauty of face and person melted the most hardened bigot.⁶⁹ In 1873, some fifty years after Scott's novel which had inspired numerous stage adaptations, Alexandre Dumas fils wrote a play entitled *Claude's Wife*. Significantly he named his Jewish protagonist Rebecca. The characterization of Dumas's Rebecca sheds light on Scott's heroine and, in the process, on the new sorority of *belles Juives*.

Dumas's play concerns the love between the gentile Claude, one of theatre's most wretchedly mismatched men, and the virtuous daughter of his associate Daniel. Since legal and religious considerations deem that nothing can come of this unhappy state of affairs, the playwright packs Daniel and Rebecca, who are fortunately early Zionists, off to Palestine. (Although he solved the lovers' problem, Dumas created one for himself; his play brought down upon his head the wrath of nationalistic French Jews, while simultaneously inflaming the anti-Semitism of Edouard Drumont.) Thereon ensues a crucial moment. As she leaves France forever, the heroine is permitted to declare her love for Claude in a speech that manages to be simultaneously chaste and passionate. She assures her beloved that although she could not be his wife during this lifetime, she will be so in eternity. Then she ends on a very curious note: "My religion does not authorize such hopes, but my heart goes beyond it and I know things will be thus."⁷⁰

In Rebecca's confident assertion about the attainability of contradictory goals lies one of the values that inform the *belle Juive* whom she announces. A venerable tradition of contraries attaches to the Jewish woman. She is a virgin mother, the Mother of God, but she belongs to a deicidal race. She is a worshipper of Christ, if we are to believe Chateaubriand, but one who does not live by His word. Out of these prototypical polarities develops a more generalized and earthy ambivalence. The Jewess as virgin temptress begins to represent the

desire for mutually exclusive goals of which the most intriguing is the longing to possess while preserving the desired object intact. That is quite literally the image we see both in *Iranthoe* and in *Claude's Wife*.

In both works, marriages which are made to look irresistible if not inevitable do not, in fact, materialize. The Rebecca in each case instead devotes herself to an idealistic cause loftier than matrimony. No doubt Scott's Rebecca, who will sublimate her feelings in missionary work, is meant to personify the perfect faithfulness and purity of the Virgin. Dumas's heroine is up to something rather more mundane. She hypothesizes in glowing detail the conjugal life she and Claude would have shared, ending with the conviction that it will all still come true. The ambivalence surrounding the earlier Rebecca—untouched but yearning, untouchable but yearned for—reflects the Christian ethic. In Dumas's play the ambivalence associated with the Jewess is translated into psychological terms. It is not just the wish to attain contradictory goals that we see here, but the faith that such a desire can be fulfilled. Dumas suggests a sort of *folie à deux* in which the participants believe they can solve their dilemma through the agency of the Jewish woman. How Rebecca is to bring this off the playwright does not say, but it is clear he wants us to think she can. Rebecca is, after all, a name associated biblically with proven managerial ability.

What is important is the shift of role and image ascribed to the Jewess in *Claude's Wife*. The enigmatic icon of positive and negative values gives way to the woman who shares and even implements the universal desire to have things both ways, a notion that sticks to her in the popular mind.⁷¹ Significantly, as far back as the Old Testament, the inherent ability of the literary Jewess has been rooted in her spunk and her healthy libido (e.g., Esther, Judith, Jael). While the *belle Juive* makes the most of those established attributes, her enormous energy and appeal have little to do with the idealized virtue that once attached to the Jewish woman.

The *belle Juive* evolves into a bold, proud and occasionally vulgar woman, sometimes more accurately described as a *Juive fatale*. Invariably handsome, she turns exploitative, canny about money and determined not to be done out of it, as in Léon Hennique's *Esther Branded* (1887) and Edmond de Goncourt's *Manette Salomon* (1896). She is reworked from the Bible, again simultaneously alluring and destructive in Darzens's *Christ's Lover* (1888), Wilde's *Salomé* (1893) and, later, Giraudoux's *Judith* (1931). She embodies an extreme form of the Shavian New Woman—spirited, willful and often unprincipled in getting her own way, like Rachel Silberchatz in Ghelderode's *Pantagloize* (1929) and Judith in Donnay's *The Return from Jerusalem* (1903).

*The Return from Jerusalem*⁷² is the unrelenting dramatization of Donnay's conviction that what he calls Aryan-Judaic relationships are unworkable. To make his point, the playwright shows how an accomplished and arrogant Jewess manipulates the lives of the Christian men who fall in love with her. Although she has converted to Catholicism as an expedient, Judith remains devoted to Zionism. When her lover leaves his wife for her, Judith sees the opportunity for a trip to Jerusalem. Palestine galvanizes the heroine's Judaism which, upon her return to Paris, becomes the center of her life and foyer, leaving precious little room for her hapless gentile lover. He, predictably and not unjustifiably, objects. What is neither predictable nor justifiable is the scope and fervor of the "Aryan's" scathing indictment of the entire Jewish people. Of course Donnay is playing with loaded dice by demonstrating the incompatibility of two people who would be constitutionally unsuited to one another regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Nonetheless, the play contributes to a genuine turning point in the tradition of the Jew in the theatre. Here are four acts which put the Jewish heroine center stage, developing her character, probing her psyche, displaying her strengths as well as her wickedness, four acts which also afford her gentile victim ample reason and opportunity to vent his resentment of her and what she represents. Clearly, something radical has happened to the prescribed image of the Jew and the accepted understanding of how the stage may, to use Donnay's own term, "talk about the Israelites."

The Return from Jerusalem cannot stand alone as a landmark work. Rather it forms part of a representative group of turn-of-the-century plays which treat Jews and Jewish topics in an entirely new light. The consequence of works by dramatists like Donnay, Ancey, Savoir and Nozière, Bernstein, Pinero, Jones and Zangwill transcends their modest artistic value. They are the vanguard of modern drama about Jews. That *The Return from Jerusalem* and some, though by no means all, of its contemporaries are blatantly anti-Semitic will come as no surprise to students of the Jew in drama.⁷³ Yet even the overt prejudice with its topical accusations is symptomatic of a transformation in theatre. For the depiction of Jews in *The Return from Jerusalem* et al. emanates not from conventional cultural attitudes, but from the actualities of the epoch. Donnay and his colleagues wrote in the highly charged climate of the years 1894-1906. Essentially they were all treating one of the most perplexing questions churned up by the Dreyfus Affair—Jewish assimilation. It is thoroughly understandable that opinions about assimilation were running high; however, to discover dissenting, passionate, contemporary points of view providing the conflict in drama is unprecedented. Donnay's play and its coevals signal

a theatre that has begun to reflect its society and to comment on it.

That breakthrough demands an explanation. It is unlikely that the time-honored or recently modified roles and images of the Jew gave way to more authentic imitation as the result of higher Jewish visibility in society and in theatre audiences. In his 1886 lecture, Abraham Dreyfus emphasized the point that theatregoers' enslavement to convention was a matter of habit absolutely unrelated to their personal sympathies and antipathies. The gentile spectator, he said, would be astonished to see that a Jew in an adjacent seat did not share his hilarity at a standard maligning reference from the stage.⁷⁴ Nor is there reason to credit the emerging group of Jewish playwrights with the remodeling of Jewish characters and subjects. For example, Israel Zangwill's characterizations in *Children of the Ghetto* (1899) provoked this assessment from Max Beerbohm:

When the conflicts come—a conflict between a young man and the old man whose daughter he loves, a conflict between the young man and the girl—one does not care twopence about them because none of the conflicting characters has drawn one breath of life or contains one drop of blood. The young man, we know, is a millionaire and a lax Jew; the old man is a strict Rabbi; the girl accepts the hand of the young man. But that is all we know about them.⁷⁵

The emergence of verisimilitude and psychological substance in Jews on stage is, rather, one result of the energizing revolution in theatre which blazed up in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The iconoclastic dramaturgy and often shockingly truthful subjects of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg and Shaw loosened the strangleholds of conventional plot and characterization and undermined countless entrenched attitudes toward the theatre and its role in society.

The turning point in the representation of the Jew on stage was not the emancipation of the Jew, but the emancipation of the theatre. In the plays of the first generation of iconoclasts, the focus was trained on social issues and ideologies. In the plays of those dramatists who followed in their wake and treated Jewish subjects, the emphasis was on those topics relevant to societies where Jews lived among gentiles: nationalistic sentiment, integration, assimilation, intermarriage, the conflict between generations, and the psychology of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

As the plays previously mentioned indicate, integration provoked numerous works espousing varying points of view toward the conviction widespread among gentiles and Jews alike that the most expedient way for Jews to get on in society was to disappear into it.⁷⁶ In *The Baptism* (1907), Savoir and Nozière explore the motivations and for-

tunes of the four members of the Bloch family who convert to Catholicism, each for a different reason, and the two who do not. There is no question that Jews in *The Baptism* are treated satirically. So are the Catholics who seek to exploit them. Savoir and Nozière, who professed the influence of Ibsen, invite audiences to see Jews as people among other people and to observe that "the Jewish middle class is afflicted by a certain number of faults and absurdities more or less the same as all middle class people."⁷⁷

Arthur Wing Pinero treats assimilation from the point of view of the Jew as social climber and parvenu. His characters, sketched out in *Iris* (1902) and *Letty* (1904), are important primarily because they reinvented the new stage image of a young Jewish man and, in the process, pave the way for Galsworthy's *Loyalties*.

The related question of intermarriage animates a large number of plays, thereby giving voice to an even larger number of attitudes. This exchange about the genealogy of H. A. Jones's practically perfect young minister, Judah Llewellyn, speaks eloquently for one point of view:

Jopp: Welsh, isn't he?

Papworthy: A Welsh father and a Jewish mother.

Jopp: Celt and Jew! Two good races! Just the man to give England a new religion, or to make her believe in an old one.⁷⁸

René Fauchois's *Exodus* (1904) makes a "vehement defense" of Judaism as well as an earnest appeal for casting off old prejudices. Its idealism can be gauged in the dénouement where a young couple who have decided to intermarry are asked by her Jewish father whether a child they might have will be Christian or Jewish. "Neither," responds the daughter, to which her fiancé adds, "A man"—a retort echoed almost verbatim in 1968 by the assimilated Alexey in Elie Wiesel's *Zalmen, or The Madness of God*.

The varying reactions to plays about assimilation permit some idea of how faithfully the stage was reflecting public opinion. It is useful to contrast the receptions of Heijermans' *The Ghetto*, presented in London in 1899 and in Paris in 1901. This is an early problem play in which a Jewish boy defies his orthodox father and marries their gentile maid. M. J. Landa sniffed that the play, which ran in London only a fortnight, "is not a play to appeal to English audiences, or to English Jews; its themes are religious revolt and intolerance."⁷⁹ Max Beer-bohm, who hated the play, loved what it had to say: "Here, surely, we have the makings of a most fascinating conflict—the conflict of youth and passion with the patriarchal idea; the old theme of father

against son, intensified and made more poignant by the fact that it is a Jewish son against a Jewish father."⁸⁰ By contrast, Emile Faguet wrote that in Paris, *The Ghetto*

... not only interested, but captivated and gripped the public. . . . It is the victory of youth and love over the old racial and religious hatreds, something like a *Romeo and Juliet* that ends well.

It is the escape from the ghetto, no longer physical, but moral, and I don't know if that responded to latent aspirations in the auditorium, but the success was enthusiastic, the applause frequent and unanimous. . . .⁸¹

A comparable difference in opinion greeted Israel Zangwill's dramatized conviction that America would provide the climate of tolerance in which intermarriage would produce "peace to all ye unborn millions." That is the curtain line of Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* which had a long run in the United States after its Washington premiere in 1908. In London, where it appeared first in Yiddish (1912), then in English (1914), Zangwill's easy acceptance of mixed marriage provoked a torrent of protest and denunciation.

In the innovative productions of the first independent theatres at the close of the last century and the beginning of this, there appears the promise or the embryo of characters destined to play major roles in the twentieth century. Pierre Wolff's *Jacques Bouchard* and Louis Müllem's *A New School* shared the bill at Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris on May 2, 1890. While there are no Jewish personae in these plays by Jews, they are shot through with a self-conscious mordant irony and cerebral humor as unmistakable as those in the works of Proust, Kafka or Bellow; they announce the figure of the Jew as comic and as artist. *Altusverus*, another Heijermans play also produced by Antoine, features a young man who by accepting baptism escapes the pogrom that annihilates his family, but who must thereafter live with his father's curse and the survivor's guilt. In 1906, the Court Theatre in London staged Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* whose Leo Schutzmacher, freely accepted by his colleagues, distinguishes himself from them chiefly by his inability as a Jew to imitate the Englishman's unreliability in financial dealings.⁸²

Alongside the special types—George du Maurier's Svengali (*Tribly* came to the theatre in 1894), who even as an updating of the Jewish sorcerer must be considered *sui generis*, and Shaw's Mendoza (*Man and Superman*, 1903), who declares himself "an exception to all the rules"—the Jew on the popular stage remains, reliably, the money-man. Shylock has become a parvenu. Sidney Grundy's eponymous Old Jew (1894) controls his world by the simple expedient of buying as much of it as he can lay his hands on. Paul Claudel, writing from

and ostensibly about America, invents the enterprising Thomas Polack Nageoire (*The Exchange*, 1894). Audiences clucked their tongues at the arrogance of arriviste financier Isidore Lechat (*Les Affaires sont les affaires*, 1903, presented at the Haymarket as *Business Is Business*, 1905, and then in countless spin-offs in the United States), whose ethnic traits are so hackneyed that Mirbeau does not bother to make a single explicit reference to Lechat's Jewishness.

As the Preface to this volume points out, playwrighting relies heavily on the inferences packed into a character's ethnic heritage. The focus of this study does not permit more than the simple acknowledgment of the fact that the Jew is but one of the theatre's stock characters. One of the reasons that the personification of the Jew stands out is that it has travelled indefatigably over so many centuries. By the time the Jew reaches the modern stage, his image is surrounded by a great accumulation of baggage. Even when he does not open it, the simple fact of it, communicated by his identity, bespeaks his history of endurance, of wandering, in short, of uniqueness.

IV

The theatre of the twentieth century has received warmly the rich legacy of the stage Jew, finding imaginative ways to use his characteristic differences and alienation as universal metaphors. In the process, the Jew has been transformed from object to subject. From the Jew, a persona defined even as late as in Dickens' England by the conventions attached to his clanhood, he is with ever more frequency and variety cast as the Jew who . . . a definer of convention, or whatever. As we have noted, Shylock was the first stage Jew to experience and articulate the worries troubling the society in which he lived. By the turn of the present century, the Jew as a humanized, sympathetic protagonist, still a rarity in Europe, had made a modest but promising debut on the American stage.

An example is provided by George H. Jessop's *Sam'l of Posen*, a silly melodrama about a group of rascals. Sam'l, one of the mob, is comic because he is overdrawn and irrepressible. He is also kind, scrupulously loyal and honest, traits that rarely typified the stage Jew. Jessop's play was a tremendous hit when it opened in New York in 1881. Apparently its appeal was not limited to audiences at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, for it was revived over and over again and triumphed from New York to San Francisco. Sam'l provided a starring role for one M. B. Curtis, who "took the audience by storm in his Jew garb . . . and moved the risibilities of the audience at will."⁸³

In London, *Sam'l of Posen* opened—and closed—on July 4, 1895. Landa explains, "Samuel Plastrick, as played by Mr. M. B. Curtis, that puzzling afternoon in 1895, was beyond the grasp of London's playgoing *cognoscenti* and *intelligentsia*. . . . Not that Sam'l was absolutely novel. But it was still a law in the theatre that people were to laugh at the Jew behind the footlights, not *with* him."⁸⁴

One of the surest ways to teach audiences to laugh *with* the Jew was to make certain they understood he was laughing at himself. That was something he was very likely to be doing in variety shows and music hall sketches. The impressive number of Jewish comedians and comedienne, first in vaudeville, later in radio, who "moved the risibilities of the audience at will" handily accomplished the necessary audience conditioning. The resounding success of the Jewish entertainer is an early indicator of the magnetism of the modern theatre for Jews, who make their mark in every aspect of show business in the twentieth century.

Audiences changed too. After the enormous waves of migration westward from Poland, Austria-Hungary and Russia, Jews were more prevalent than ever in Western societies. Like the other arts, the stage of the early twentieth century reflected the tastes and concerns of the newcomers, perhaps functioning more effectively as a mirror of society than it ever had. Notwithstanding, we need to bear in mind Murray Roston's astute observation that "the depiction of the Jew tells us more about the latent emotional patterns of his creator than about the historical circumstances of the contemporary Jew."⁸⁵

Roston's comment is one of the elements that figures in the way we assess Jewish characters as they are increasingly created by Jewish dramatists. One cannot dismiss the significance of the fact that Jews are finally making plays about Jews, even though for Jewish authors, the stage—with the notable exception of the Yiddish theatre—has not served the same function as the novel where Jews have been, from the start, compulsive chroniclers of their own hypersensitivities and nightmares. However, to the attitudes toward Judaism which color the creative imagination, one must add the "latent emotional patterns" of Jews in the audience who are apt to take personally the works of Jewish playwrights and to see themselves judged on stage. Hence even popular comic characters as innocuous as Abe Potash and Mawruss Perlmutter and the Jews in *Abie's Irish Rose* have been variously dismissed as specimens of the offensive "stage Jews, with hooked nose, flapping hands, singsong English and Yiddish expletives,"⁸⁶ and praised for being "traditionally Judaistic in mood because of their preoccupation with achieving decency in the face of life's brutalities."⁸⁷

While the evolution of Jewish images on the modern stage is largely

the work of Jewish playwrights, there are at least two assumptions which must be resisted. The first is that Jewish dramatists have a built-in advantage in characterizing Jewish personae. However likely that preconception may appear, it proves unreliable. Jewish authors have demonstrated that they are entirely capable of spawning shallow types with no ethnic substance. By contrast, one of the most sensitive and fully developed portraits of a Jew in contemporary drama is that of Sidney Brustein, the creation of black playwright Lorraine Hansberry.

A second erroneous supposition is that Jewish playwrights will present Jewish characters in a positive light. Henry Bernstein's *Israel* (1908) provides an early example of the fallacy of that expectation. Here a rabidly anti-Semitic young aristocrat insists on challenging a banker named Gutlieb to a duel purely because he wishes to make a statement about the encroachment of Jews on French society. Improbably, Gutlieb turns out to be the young man's father, a revelation Bernstein uses not to broaden the son's tolerance, but to motivate his melodramatic suicide. His inability to cope with his heritage comes as no surprise, as one of the longest scenes in the play has been devoted to his eloquent recital of grievances against Jews, a catalog worthy of Drumont. What is especially intriguing in the published script of *Israel* are the specifications of dialogue the author wished suppressed in performance. The cuts are lines that either reflect poorly on the play's anti-Semitic priest or flesh out the figure of Gutlieb. Whatever Bernstein was attempting in *Israel*—one suspects it was to appeal to the box office at a time when opinions about the Affair were still running high—kept him from developing strong Jewish characters. Neither Gutlieb nor his son demonstrate sufficient psychological truth to be convincing in their patently fascinating situation. Bernstein's play invites reproach at least as much for that lack of substance, which betrays the author's disinterest in his own characters, as for its ostentatious display of anti-Semitism.

Clearly, Bernstein's *Israel* is not in the vanguard of twentieth century approaches to characterizing the Jew. Rather, both Jewish and gentile dramatists tap with frequent success the possibilities for fresh and interesting Jewish personae. In our pluralistic century, the potential for such creation becomes virtually inexhaustible. These are the riches which are to be explored in the pages that follow. While observations about authors' backgrounds are offered when they seem relevant, this book has no all-embracing theories to defend or debunk about the ethnicity of playwrights and its influence on their characters.

Rather, the focus is on the diversity of Jewish roles and images, a diversity which already distinguishes the theatre by the third decade

of the century. Juxtaposing works from that era which depict Jews forcefully helps make the point that the authenticity of the stage Jew and his pertinence to the role in which he is cast have little to do with whether or not his creator is Jewish. Three exemplary plays, written within an eleven-year span in disparate parts of the world, are *Loyalties*, *Chronicles of Hell* and *Awake and Sing!*

John Galsworthy's *Loyalties* (1922) is the landmark play *The Return from Jerusalem* was not, a fair-minded study of problems in Jewish integration into gentile society. It portrays Ferdinand de Levis, "young, rich and new," in his quest for acceptance into the *haut monde*. By the end of the first scene, we know how achingly new de Levis is. The son of a carpet dealer, he already belongs to three exclusive clubs and is knocking on the door of the most select, the Jockey Club. At the country estate where he has been invited for a weekend, he exhibits a naive candor and pride that, along with his garish dressing gown, offend even the butler. De Levis' determination to make his way as a Jew among the elite preoccupies him entirely. The upper-class Brits, for their part, seem ready to receive him. His host expresses the prevailing sentiment, "I like Jews. That's not against him—rather the contrary these days."⁸⁸

Yet the Jew's upward mobility forces the gentry to reckon with a threat he unintentionally but inevitably poses to the establishment's values and loyalties. Galsworthy's balanced scenario includes spontaneous outbursts of the conventional, barely dormant anti-Semitism which feeds de Levis' paranoia, as well as the genuine bewilderment of the ruling class which accepts the validity of the young man's efforts, even as it resents his "getting on so." Nonetheless, his aggressive social climbing widens many a narrow-minded view. Even a mindlessly prejudiced society girl, Margaret Orme, comes to see a reality she never before imagined, in this conversation with a lawyer:

Margaret. There are more of the chosen in Court every day. Mr. Graviter, have you noticed the two on the jury?

Graviter. No: I can't say—

Margaret. Oh! but quite distinctly. Don't you think they ought to have been challenged?

Graviter. De Levis might have challenged the other ten, Miss Orme.

Margaret. Dear me, now! I never thought of that.⁸⁹

Galsworthy's keen perceptions and even-handedness enable us to empathize with sharply conflicting points of view. In one of the most painful moments in the play, a ne'er-do-well who has always been ferried through his peccadilloes on the unquestioning faith of his

peers finally must confront his immorality which has victimized de Levis, among others. It is a tribute to the incisiveness of the characterizations that we can appreciate how richly deserved is this facing up, and how much more humiliating, having been brought about because of a Jew.

The figure of the Jew in *Loyalties* functions on several levels as an *agent provocateur*. The play accepts as a given de Levis' right to move up in a society that prides itself on fair play. As he looks for reparation of the wrong done him in the process, de Levis, like Shylock before him, "craves the law"; he asks only for justice and, again like Shylock, wonders, "Shall I have it?" In the course of the action, the dean of celebrated attorneys learns that his first duty lies not to friend, client or even to England, but to the law. *Loyalties* also accepts as a given de Levis' loyalty to Judaism, while demonstrating that the Jew's seeking entrée among the privileged throws into question many of their allegiances—class, professional, social, marital and personal. De Levis' bid provokes a re-examination of the very warp and woof of that stratum of society. In the Jew's pursuit of acceptance, he asks for no more than he has earned a right to expect. He never tries to appear to be what he is not. The play shows that however painful the process, those who consider themselves superior may do well to emulate that example. At the same time, *Loyalties* suggests to the upward bound Jew, for surely de Levis is intended as a representative figure, that *noblesse oblige* is for him, no less than for those born into the ruling class, a matter of patience, tolerance and good will.

While *Loyalties* reflects the society for which it was written, Michel de Ghelderode's *Chronicles of Hell* (1929) looks rather like a page snatched from Rabelais or a scene extracted from Breughel or Bosch. This frenzied one-act "tragedy bouffe" which assaults all the senses takes place in a decaying palace in "bygone Flanders." It depicts the chaos and corruption raging in the district of a recently murdered bishop and the struggle for power among the degenerate churchmen responsible for his death. In what appears the least likely spot for a Jew, Ghelderode makes one the center of attention.

He is Simon Laquedeem, a renegade who has risen in the Church to become an auxiliary bishop. The contradictory connotations of his name befit him ideally. In fashioning this priest who stands over and above the other ecclesiastics, Ghelderode twists together strands of numerous Jewish images. Laquedeem is doubtly alienated, an apostate feared and detested by his fellow clerics. He is a colossus of strength and determination, the only one who intrepidly challenges the resurrected bishop Jan in Eremo and literally tries to wrestle his power from him. Nowhere does Laquedeem embody the Old Testa-

ment more directly than in his historical consciousness. He alone has witnessed the entire bizarre career of the triumphant impostor, Jan in Eremo, from its mysterious inception. As much as the other priests revile Simon, they beg him to tell Eremo's story.

In a highly unusual, if scatological, innovation, Ghelderode uses the body of his Jewish protagonist as a metaphor. The subtext of *Chronicles of Hell* concerns the accumulation and the passing on of power. This motif is introduced by the rumbling of a thunderstorm and the snarling of a threatening crowd which persist throughout. Jan in Eremo has been choked by a poisoned host which is stuck in his throat; he struggles mightily against swallowing it. Simon Laquedeem suffers from digestive difficulties. The terms he uses to describe his malaise augurs its role, "My stomach! . . . Calvary of a stomach! . . . The thorns, the nails, and the lance in it."¹⁰ Simon is not crucified, of course, but at the end, the function of his intestine serves as the ultimate metaphor for the elimination of the heretical bishop and for the evacuation of the depleted.

By any standards, Simon Laquedeem's is a unique role and an uncommon image. Whatever repugnance *Chronicles of Hell* may inspire, it would be an error to underestimate the indispensability of its Jewish protagonist. And it would be impossible not to respond strongly to the sight of him as the curtain falls, crouching in his cassock, "his rabbinical face expressing demoniac bliss."¹¹

The only possible parallel between the decaying palace in bygone Flanders and a certain modest apartment house on Longwood Avenue in the Bronx is that both are inhabited by Jews. Values diametrically opposed to Ghelderode's are incorporated into the plot and personae of Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* (1933),¹² the earliest quintessentially Jewish play outside the Yiddish theatre. It bears the unmistakable stamp of authenticity, exactly what one would wish from a Jewish dramatist writing a slice of Jewish life problem play, now forever associated with the great Jewish actors who brought it to life in 1935: Stella and Luther Adler, John Garfield, Morris Carnovsky and J. Edward Bromberg.

Five decades after its première, *Awake and Sing!*'s excellence still resides in its large cast of Jewish personae, a compelling mix of stereotypes (Hennie, the *belle juive*; Uncle Morty, the pleasure-loving money-man) and its introduction of characters just acquiring literary identity. At the head of the list is Bessie Berger, indefatigable dispenser of seltzer and sensible advice, and prototype of that gorgon of subsequent American-Jewish fiction, the *Yiddishe mamma*.

By endowing his characters with historical depth, Odets suggests that the matriarch's extraordinary capabilities may have compensated

for the ineptitude of the bewildered immigrant or first-generation male, less prepared than the shtetl-bred woman to cope with "life in America." As Bessie reasonably puts it, "If I didn't worry about the family, who would?" In the Old World, men like Jacob and even Myron Berger and Sam Feinschreiber, spiritually attuned to changeless values may have filled the role of the patriarch. In America, their idealism withers into a source of impotence and frustration. Myron tries to become the American equivalent of the Talmudic scholar: he goes to law school. Although he abandons his studies for clerking in a haberdashery, he remains the incurable dreamer for whom the Messiah will surely come in the form of a hair restorative or a winning sweepstake ticket. The opportunism professed by Moe Axelrod, crippled physically and emotionally by wartime combat, is the transparent façade of his quest for genuine human warmth. And the play's young rebel, Ralph, takes his place in the vanguard of the disgruntled, ambitious intellectuals in the exodus from Longwood Avenue to Yama Yama, the rigors of which will be detailed more frequently in Jewish-American novels, and in films based on them, than on stage.

This ill-assorted trio of plays is deliberately put together to argue the preferability of taking Jewish characters on their own terms, a consideration to which the ethnicity of the playwright is, as we see here, of variable relevance. "Why is this character Jewish?" is a more feasible and profitable question than "What does this author's background indicate about his portrayal of Jewish characters?" The first query leads to Galsworthy's choice of the Jew to represent one of the forces responsible for provoking a re-examination of English conscience and values, an assessment he obviously supported. The same question leads to Ghelderode's reworking of the monstrous Jew to foil the equally corrupt but less dynamic personae in *Chronicles of Hell*. There is less chance that we would pose the question of *Awake and Sing!* since Odets, writing a Jewish story, uses Jewish characters literally, not figuratively, just as Sean O'Casey, writing a remarkably similar play a decade earlier, used Irish personae in *Juno and the Paycock*. Since in all three cases the Jewish images are aesthetically solid and integral to the success of the play, there seems little reason to probe the writers' personal biases for a response to the second question. By and large, considering together works as diverse as these three is less rewarding than grouping plays thematically so as to contrast the dramatic treatments of the Jew in a given role. The latter organizing principle operates in the chapters to follow.

Strikingly, in both the proliferation of contemporary images and the updating of stock figures in the drama of our century, the original nonconformity of viewpoint, values and allegiance that particularized

the Jew on the medieval stage continues to distinguish him. Only the manifestations and the dramatic uses of the differences which mark him off have changed prodigiously. The most convincing documentation lies in the persistence—indeed, in the multiplication—of Jewish roles in modern drama, roles which depend upon those differences. That basis for literary identity was conceded by Abraham Dreyfus, who understood, even if he could not accept, the logic of the traditional posture that "if the theatre represented Jews who were indistinguishable from Christians, these Jews would not appear to be Jewish. . . . Indeed, why would they be Jews?"⁶³

The revolution and evolution of Jewish roles and images, already in flux in the early decades of this century, were galvanized by history. Particularly since the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel, the word "Jew" has earned unfamiliar and indelible connotations. Since the second World War, dramatists in the West have been especially ingenious in reshaping the tradition of the stage Jew. Their innovations can be considered in two large categories: updates of time-consecrated images, and newly minted ones. In the chapters to follow, we explore the range of these modified and fresh images. Both groups demonstrate how in the last four decades, the Jew on stage has become not only a recognizable human being, but with ever greater frequency, a representative of contemporary mankind.

In 1949, Leslie Fiedler provoked a lively debate with an essay in *Commentary* about the persistent stranglehold of the legendary Jew villain on Western literature. He proposed loosening his grasp through the dissemination of more pertinent "myths," reflecting more contemporary realities:

In all the countries of the West, and pre-eminently in America, we [Jews] have been passing in the last three or four generations from the periphery to the center of culture; more and more, the myths of the Jew will be the handiwork of Jews or of Gentiles whose sensibilities have been profoundly conditioned by ours.

Indeed, in this apocalyptic period of atomization and uprooting, of a catholic terror and a universal alienation, the image of the Jew tends to become the image of everyone; and we are perhaps approaching the day when the Jew will come to seem the central symbol, the essential myth of the whole Western world.⁶⁴

This is a book about how splendidly Fiedler's prophecy has been fulfilled.