

The Journal of Religion and Theatre

<http://www.rtjournal.org>

**Published by the Religion and Theatre Focus Group of the
Association for Theatre in Higher Education**

The Journal of Religion and Theatre is a peer-reviewed online journal. The journal aims to provide descriptive and analytical articles examining the spirituality of world cultures in all disciplines of the theatre, performance studies in sacred rituals of all cultures, themes of transcendence in text, on stage, in theatre history, the analysis of dramatic literature, and other topics relating to the relationship between religion and theatre. The journal also aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge throughout the theatrical community concerning the relationship between theatre and religion and as an academic research resource for the benefit of all interested scholars and artists.

All rights reserved. Each author retains the copyright of his or her article. Acquiring an article in this pdf format may be used for research or teaching purposes only. No other type of reproduction by any process or technique may be made without the formal, written consent of the author.

Submission Guidelines

- Submit your article in Microsoft Word 1998 format via the internet
- Include a separate title page with the title of the article, your name, address, e-mail address, and phone number, with a 70 to 100 word abstract and a 25 to 50 word biography
- Do not type your name on any page of the article
- MLA style endnotes -- Appendix A.1. (Do not use parenthetical references in the body of the paper/ list of works cited.)
- E-Mail the article and title page via an attachment in Microsoft Word 1998 to Debra Bruch: dlbruch -at- mtu.edu. (Please replace the -at- with @.)
- Or send by regular post with the article on a zip disk, Mac format, in Microsoft Word to:

Debra Bruch, Ph.D.
General Editor, *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*
Department of Fine Arts
Michigan Technological University
1400 Townsend Drive
Houghton, MI 49931

DEADLINE: May 1st of each year

**White, But Not Quite:
The Jewish Character and Anti-Semitism
Negotiating a Location in the Gray Zone
Between Other and Not**

Written by
David Bloom

It is hard to describe the feeling -- the haunting quality -- the degree of its intensity, somewhere between a *deja-vue* and a possible connection with a collective consciousness; it is even difficult to pinpoint when in the discussion I became aware of the feeling. I only know it was there and it stayed with me. A feeling of being erased, and yet not feeling entitled to halt the process of erasure. The discussion revolved around a 1994 production in Chicago of *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Peter Sellars. Sellars set the production in present day Venice, California and cast Antonio and the Venetians as Latinos, Portia and her retinue as Asians, and Shylock and the Jews as African-Americans. I did not understand why I felt usurped when the location of the Jew was replaced by the African-American. David Richards writes in his review of the production for the New York Times, "Mr. Sellars argues in a director's note that such innovations extend 'the metaphor and the reality of anti-Semitism' to include 'parallel struggles and their related issues' ".¹ Why should this directorial choice trouble me? As words were circulating in my mind, words that might begin to express to my colleagues my troubled feeling, the subtext implied in the intonation of the comment that the Goodman Theatre's subscription base was outraged by the production, stopped the words from forming in my mouth.

I am after all a privileged middle-class Jewish woman. I have only a few times in my life felt the effects of anti-Semitism, and then only in its mildest forms. My experiences of discrimination pale in comparison to those of these other Others. My place in that location of the Other as a Jew, not as a woman, slipped away. I did not feel entitled to claim a location, not even share the space, with the Asian, the Latino, and the African-American from the Goodman Theatre production. In her book, *Black, Jewish, and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin, and Other Myths of Identity*, Katya Gibel Azoulay writes, "Identities take

¹ David Richards, "Sellar's Merchant of Venice Beach," Review of *The Merchant of Venice* in *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 1994, C1+.

shape or surface at the moment when their potentiality are denied"². I think perhaps the troubled feeling stems from the sense that this production in Chicago denied the potential of my Jewish identity.

In this paper I will attempt to analyze the roots of this feeling: the ambiguous location of the Jewish character in mid- to late twentieth century theatre, and the ambiguous location of anti-Semitism at the end of this century. I maintain that this location lies somewhere between the Other and the Not, a location that marks Jews as white, but not quite.

Jewish Identity as Not White

In a very literal sense, all Jews are not white. Ilsa M. Glazer reminds us in her article "A Cloak of Many Colors: Jewish Feminism and Feminist Jews in America," that people of different global locations see Jews as a people who are not necessarily white. "Jews who migrated to America came mostly from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East and therefore tend to be Caucasian. Those who migrated to the modern state of Israel from sub-Saharan Africa, India, and elsewhere have made that country a multiracial and multicultural mosaic united by religion"³. News reports in 1996 of Ethiopian Jews living in Israel who were outraged upon learning that their donated blood had been discarded due to what was perceived as a unacceptably high risk of possible HIV transmission, brought the literal multi-colored dimension of the Jewish people to the headlines.⁴

Historically however, the identification of Jews as not white has not been a factor of their skin color. Azoulay notes that in "Virginia's laws pertaining to miscegenation, one finds evidence that Jews were not conceptualized as merely a religious group, but were specifically marked as a nonwhite race"⁵. The American theatre followed this trend of viewing Jews as non-

² Katya Gibel Azoulay, *Black, Jewish, and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin, and Other Myths of Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 52.

³ Ilsa M. Glazer, "A Cloak of Many Colors: Jewish Feminism and Feminist Jews in America," in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Jo Freeman (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1995) 632.

⁴ See Elaine Ruth Fletcher. "AIDS Fears Shake up Israel; Ethiopian Immigrants Stunned by Blood Scandal." *San Francisco Examiner* 25 Feb. 1996, Fifth ed.: A6. Goldberg, Nicholas. "A Fury in Israel/Ethopian Jews Riot, Protesting 'Racist' Policies." *Newsday* 29 Jan. 1996, Nassau and Suffolk ed.: A3. Schmemmann, Serge. "Ethiopian in Israeli Riot Over Dumping of Donated Blood." *New York Times* 29 Jan. 1996, Late ed.: A3.

⁵ Azoulay, 63.

white. Ellen Schiff describes the typical (stereotypical) characters found in the popular comedies and vaudeville acts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when she writes that "The era's dramatized personae included a whole variety of ethnic caricatures which exploited the traits familiarly associated within the Irish, Germans, French, Swedes, and that irresponsible burlesque concoction, the stage Negro. The Jew[ish character] figured as an ethnic among ethnics".⁶ Even the Jewish entertainers during that time claimed their place next to other "non-white" immigrants. Schiff continues:

It is note worthy that so many of the entertainers whose names come immediately to mind as the early great Jewish comedians and comediennes--Tucker, Brice, Cantor, Jessel, Burns--launched their careers with a bag of borrowed tricks that bespoke their awareness of themselves and their audiences as ethnics. With other diversions, they offered 'Dutch' (German) dialects routines, Irish imitations, Yiddish parodies and, with remarkable regularity, blackface.⁷

The Jews as non-white also permeate Christian history. Sander Gilman when discussing the Otherness that has marked Jews as racially different throughout Christian societies in his book *Jewish Self-Hatred*, argues:

The association of the Jews with Blackness is as old as Christian tradition. Medieval iconography always juxtaposed the black image of the synagogue, of the Old Law, with the white of the Church. The association is an artifact of the Christian perception of the Jews which has been simply incorporated into the rhetoric of race. But it is incorporated, not merely as an intellectual abstraction, but as the model through which Jews are perceived, treated, and thus respond as if confronted with the reflection of their own reality.⁸

This phenomenon of what I call racialized ethnicity is by no means unique to the Jewish (and other) immigrants to America. Richard Ned Lebow's book *White Britain and Black Ireland*:

⁶ Ellen Schiff, "Shylock's *Mishpocheh*: Anti-Semitism on the American Stage. *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 84.

⁷ Schiff, 85.

⁸ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986) 7.

The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy, documents the ways in which the Irish native was racialized to be Black by Imperial Britain. And, on a more private/domestic front, Anne McClintock, in her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, details the fascination aristocrat Arthur J. Munby held for working women in the late nineteenth century. "Munby refers frequently to the 'racial' otherness of working-class women".⁹ His drawings of Caucasian working-class women with blackened skin are yet another example of the degree to which the Other's racial identity is not dependent on their literal skin color.

The Shift from Non-White to Not-Quite

It appears, from a sociological and historical perspective, that we can verify the Otherness of the Jew. This is especially true before World War II, but the landscape for the American Jew shifted dramatically after the War - after accurate events of the Jewish Holocaust were revealed. Karen Brodtkin Sacks' article "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" details this shift in status, from non-white to white, among the Jewish immigrant population. She points out the fallacy of the claims of her parents' generation that "Jews overcame anti-Semitic barriers because Jews are special".¹⁰ She does not credit the Jew's ability to 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps' as the sole reason for their change in status; rather she gives credit to "the post war boom, the decline of systematic public anti-immigrant racism and anti-Semitism, and governmental affirmative action extended to white males".¹¹ She notes as well the degree to which African-Americans were excluded from this process. "Like most chicken and egg problems," Sacks ponders, "it's hard to know which came first. Did Jews and other Euroethnics become white because they became middle class? That is, did money whiten? Or did being incorporated into an expanded version of whiteness open up the economic doors to a middle class status?".¹² This process of whitening went hand in hand with the willingness of Jews to be assimilated into the mainstream American/Christian middle-class.

⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 108.

¹⁰ Karen Brodtkin Sacks, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" in *Race*, eds. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994) 85.

¹¹ Sacks, 85.

¹² Sacks, 86.

Yet, assimilation is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it brings the opportunity for upward mobility and the privileged status Sacks depicts. On the other it carries with it, as Azoulay describes, "the terror of being swallowed. . . . There is an unavoidable parallel to be drawn between Jews seeking entry into circles that exclude Jews, and African Americans who were light enough to pass as white. In both cases, all links to one's kin and history had to be carefully concealed".¹³ David Theo Goldberg in his book *Racial Subjects* describes the paradoxical impact of assimilation. "As Jews become less Jewish by becoming more assimilated, more embedded in capitalist social formation, they are reified as more Jewish, as white capitalists--gold digging, conniving, self-and group-promoting, representative of and foreign to the American way".¹⁴ In other words, at the same time that Jewish immigrants are freed from pre-World War II class constraints, the Jew is once again subject to discrimination, as his/her new image is viewed through the lens of the negative stereotype. White, but not quite.

The Location of Jewish Characters in Two Twentieth-Century Plays

How does this location between the Other and the Not manifest itself in dramatic text? Two twentieth-century plays depict the ambiguous location of Jewish soldiers in a military context, *Home of the Brave*¹⁵ by Arthur Laurents and *Somewhere on the Border*¹⁶ by South African playwright Anthony Akerman.

Home of the Brave tells the story of Private First Class Peter Coen (Coney) whose encounters with anti-Semitism within his barracks and the Japanese forces in the Pacific lead to a mental breakdown. The play takes the form of a medical detective story, as Army Doctor, Captain Bitterger, tries to discover the cause of PFC Coen's emotional and physical trauma. The play begins in the Army hospital, and goes back and forth between flashback scenes of Coney's unit at their base in the Pacific and on a Japanese-occupied island the Pacific. The soldiers were asked to volunteer for this dangerous mission in order to create a map of the Japanese-occupied island for a future American invasion.

¹³ Azoulay, 62, 65.

¹⁴ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 133.

¹⁵ Arthur Laurents, *Home of the Brave* (New York: Random House, 1946).

¹⁶ Anthony Akerman, *Somewhere on the Border in South Africa Plays*, ed. Stephen Gray (London: Heinemann-Centaur, 1993) 2-140.

Coney's simultaneous otherness and whiteness, Jewish and assimilated identities, are revealed early in the play during a brief interchange he has with Private Finch. The two plan to open a bar/restaurant in Kansas when they get out of the Army.

- Coney: Does your mother know who I am?
Finch: Of course.
Coney: I mean, does she know my name?
Finch: Well, sure she does!
Coney: Oh.
Finch: What did you think?
Coney: I don't know. I just wondered.
Finch: You can be an A-1 jerk sometimes. The whole family knows about you and Mom's so het up, I think she's got ideas about mating you and my sister.¹⁷

What is interesting about this interchange is that Coney self-inscribes his not-whiteness, and Finch defines him as white. Coney's self definition as the Other reveals Jewish anti-Semitism, although in this case, it is a small example. Sander Gilman explains this phenomenon and notes that it is common to many non-privileged peoples:

Self-hatred results from outsiders' acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group--that group in society which they see as defining them--as a reality. . . . On the one hand is the liberal fantasy that anyone is welcome to share in the power of the reference group *if* he abides by the rules that define that group. . . . Thus, outsiders hear an answer from their fantasy: Become like us--abandon your difference--and you may be one with us. On the other hand is the hidden qualification of the internalized reference group, the conservative curse: The more you are like me, the more I know the true value of my power, which you wish to share, and the more I am aware that you are but a shoddy counterfeit, an outsider. . . . The more one attempts to identify with those who have labeled one as different, the more one accepts the values, social

¹⁷ Laurents, 23.

structures, and attitudes of this determining group, the farther away from true acceptability one seems to be. . . .The ideal state is never to have been the Other, a state that cannot be achieved.¹⁸

Coney's self-inscription as Other shows the degree to which he accepts the image of himself put forth by the majority non-Jewish (white) community.

After the Major asks the soldiers to consider volunteering for the mission, the four men discuss their options. It is clear that they are all apprehensive about the risks involved. Coney moves to a position of whiteness, certainly in terms of a 1945 American audience, when he is the first to volunteer for the mission.

The tension on the island leads to an argument among the soldiers. Both Coney and Finch are relegated to an outsider's position. Their fellow soldier, T.J., accuses Finch of being a "kike lover." Other soldiers hurl numerous anti-Semitic comments at Coney, such as "Jew Boy" and "You lousy yellow Jew bastard".¹⁹ Given that the soldiers are fighting the Japanese, the "yellow Jew" locates Coney outside of the majority position not merely as a coward, but also as a Jew, and, by implication, as an Asian. The sound of gunfire interrupts the conflict, and Mingo's line "Come on, break it up. Why don't you jerks save it for the Japs?" resituates the soldiers once again as white, at least in relation to the enemy.

In an extremely tense moment when the soldiers are under attack, Finch realizes he has misplaced the map case. Despite the approaching Japanese soldiers, Finch and Coney remain behind to look for the case. Their anxiety mounts, and Coney implicates his friend when he says,

Coney: You'll get us both killed! You dumb Arizona bastard!

Finch: I'm not asking you to stay, you lousy yellow--*(He cuts off. They both stand dead still, staring at each other) -- jerk! (He turns and begins looking again for the map case. Coney waits a moment, his head bowed in hurt. Finch spots the case)*

Finch: Here they are! I knew I-- *(A shot rings out. He clutches his belly and falls.)*²⁰

¹⁸ Gilman, 2-3.

¹⁹ Laurents, 52-53.

²⁰ Laurents, 64-65.

Coney admits during his therapy sessions with Captain Bitterger that he viewed Finch's comment "you lousy yellow --" as Finch revealing his true anti-Semitic feelings. Coney tells Bitterger that when he witnessed Finch's death his first reaction was relief and joy. From Coney's point of view his physical paralysis stems from the guilt he feels about being glad that his friend was killed, because at the moment of the Fitch's death Coney suspected he was in fact anti-Semitic. In the final scenes playwright Laurents signals Coney's imminent physical and mental recovery when Captain Bitterger persuades Coney that his guilt is unwarranted. The initial reaction of *all* soldiers upon witnessing the death of a fellow soldier, Bitterger explains, is one of relief. Coney's paralyzing guilt lifts and he once again moves in the direction of whiteness and universality. In addition, the issue of Finch's anti-Semitism (true or imagined by Coney) evaporates.

Coney, in both his own eyes and the eyes of the soldiers around him, occupies the position of the Other in relation to his fellow white non-Jewish soldiers, and the position of the Not in relation to the Japanese enemy. The ebb and flow of Coney's movement in and out of the majority position duplicates the movement of the assimilating Jew, depending on the people with whom they interact and the degree to which they conceal their Jewish identity.

Somewhere on the Border (1982) by South African playwright, Anthony Akerman, describes the violence that takes place when a white South-African Army unit advances into Angola to halt the progress of what they believe to be Soviet-backed terrorist forces. Stephen Gray notes in his introduction that the play's inspiration was an attack in 1978 of a village by South African forces. The village was populated by Namibian refugees, and "160 men, 295 women, and 300 children were killed".²¹ This is a complex play that highlights many issues including, race relations, colonialism, rebellion, and military aggression, and anti-Semitism. Like Coney in *Home of the Brave*, David Levitt, a Jewish soldier, encounters both anti-Semitism and an attack by the rebel forces. Levitt's position as white is in relation to the black actor onstage, and the black attacking forces offstage. His position as Other, as with Coney, is shown in relation to his fellow white South-African soldiers, most of whom at one time or another in the play, make blatant anti-Semitic comments to or about Levitt. However, Levitt is not the only soldier subjected to abusive treatment by the commanding officer Kotze and the other soldiers, Doug Campbell the

²¹ Stephen Gray, Introduction in *South Africa Plays*, ed. Stephen Gray (London: Heinemann-Centaur, 1993) 2.

presumed communist/pacifist is likewise relegated to an inferior Othered position. Campbell, citing his pacifist beliefs, had "put in a no-show" when it was time for his obligatory military service.²² He was subsequently caught and is now part of a white South African Army unit stationed somewhere on the southern border of Angola. In fact, due to the abusive treatment all the soldiers receive from Kotze, each of the soldiers occupy at one time or another a less than privileged position, a position that is defined as not white. For example, when Kotze enters the barracks and sees the soldiers' living quarters in a state of disarray, he proclaims "I try and treat you like white men and look what happens".²³

The potential movement from Other to white for Levitt and Campbell differ significantly. Akerman hints at Campbell's movement to a solidified privileged position (in the eyes of his fellow soldiers) during the end of Scene Five when he is the only soldier that can successfully disembowel a sack used in bayonet practice. This admired act of violence begins his movement from pacifist to aggressor, from Other to Not. Levitt position however, is in almost constant flux. As the play opens, he is standing guard at night at the Army training camp where the soldiers are stationed. Mowbray, another soldier in the unit, physically and verbally attacks Levitt. The confrontation is initially rooted in Mowbray's anger over an earlier incident in which Levitt refused to give him a cigarette. The tension escalates quickly:

Mowbray: I don't like you. It's not personal. I just hate Jews.

Levitt: Take that back.

Mowbray: Here, I'll thump you, Levitt.

Levitt: Take it back!

Mowbray: You sailing for a nailing, Jewboy.

Levitt: You making me lose my temper.

Mowbray: I gob in your face.

Mowbray shows Levitt a ball of spit on the end of his tongue.

Mowbray: I land this greenie right on your Jewboy nose.

Levitt: You forcing me to.

²² Akerman, 12.

²³ Akerman, 8.

Mowbray spits in Levitt's face. Levitt lashes out at him. They end up on the ground with Levitt on top of Mowbray.

Levitt: You asked for it.²⁴

Certainly in Mowbray's eyes, Levitt's Othered status is secure. The commanding officer Kotze breaks up the fight and equalizes both Levitt's and Mowbray's location as white in relation to the African rebel forces the unit is preparing to attack. Kotze, looking out into the darkness warns his soldiers, "Watch it! It's black and dangerous".²⁵

Levitt's fluctuating location persists into Scene One of Act Two when the unit is about to cross over into Angola and attack the rebel forces. Levitt reveals that he will not cross the border into Angola. Badenhorst, a fellow soldier, situates Levitt on the side of the enemy, as he views Levitt's refusal to fight with them as traitorous. Campbell as well, who has by now given up his pacifist beliefs, will not support Levitt,

Levitt: I'm asking you straight. You were the big rebel. You've got the black friends. You didn't believe in this war. Have you changed your mind?

Campbell: Hey Dave, don't lay this heavy trip on me.

Levitt: I just thought you had principles.

Campbell: Within myself I've got principles. But like here we've just got to survive.²⁶

Mowbray, sensing Levitt's uneasiness over the impending battle and the potential consequences of his decision, hurls an empty beer can as if it were a grenade against the wall, barely missing Levitt. Levitt "dives to the floor" and begins "sobbing hysterically" saying, "I won't die for those bastards. . . . This whole fucking war's fucking mad".²⁷ Ultimately Campbell and other soldiers come to Levitt's aid as they share and understand his anxiety. However, after Levitt is taken to the sick bay, Kotze deftly returns Levitt to the position of Other when he

²⁴ Akerman, 7.

²⁵ Akerman, 7.

²⁶ Akerman, 43.

²⁷ Akerman, 45.

says, "In Israel those Jewboys neuk up the Arab good and proper, but here they a dead loss".²⁸ As soldiers take Levitt to the sick bay, rebel forces attack the Army unit and Levitt is shot and killed off stage. His death signifies the degree to which his inability to assimilate to this South-African Army culture leads directly to his erasure.

The play ends as the Army unit has attacked what they thought was a rebel village and the soldiers realize that they had in fact murdered innocent families and children.

The Shifting Position of Anti-Semitism

Ben Halpern, in an article entitled "*What is Anti-Semitism*" defines the term as "a hostile attitude toward the Jew (regarded as a threat) that develops into a tradition and becomes institutionalized. Such threats can vary in terms of intensity and can be expressed by minor fringe groups or through major political forces".²⁹ Many writers, including Gary Tobin and Sharon Sassler, acknowledge that "overt discrimination has decreased dramatically in the past forty years. . . . [Nonetheless] anti-Semitic beliefs and attitudes remain quite strong and are expressed in a variety of ways".³⁰ Anti-Semitism can take the form of a mild facial expression, to the desecration of a synagogue. Tom W. Smith, director of the General Social Survey at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago writes, "As with racial intolerance, anti-Semitism has decreased appreciably since World War II. . . . [But] Jews are still recognized as an ethnic and religious out-group and are evaluated and treated as such. While stereotypes have ebbed and social distance has narrowed, anti-Semitic prejudices still survive and anti-Semitic activities are all too common".³¹ Smith's research indicates, "about one in every five Americans willingly expressed anti-Semitic sentiments".³² In fact, in the United States between January and May of 2002, the Anti-Defamation League received 626 anti-Semitic incident reports, which is an 11% increase over the same five-month period in 2001.³³

²⁸ Akerman, 48.

²⁹ Ben Halpern, "What is Anti-Semitism?" *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 252-253.

³⁰ Gary A. Tobin and Sharon L. Sassler, *Jewish Perceptions of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988) 2.

³¹ Tom Smith, "Anti-Semitism Decreases But Persists." *Social Science and Modern Society* 33.3 (1996): 2.

³² Smith, 2.

³³ This and more information about anti-Semitic incidents can be found at the web site for the Anti-Defamation League, <http://www.adl.org>

Despite the fact that many American Jews have been integrated into American culture, as Gary Tobin notes

American Jews remain concerned about anti-Semitism. Jews carry with them a collective knowledge of past anti-Semitism in other places and other times. . . . The sense of marginality, coupled with the history of Jewish marginality in other times and places, strongly influences the way Jews assess anti-Semitism in the United States. For most Jews, there continues to be a 'them' and 'us,' even though the 'us,' is in some ways part of the 'them.'³⁴

This sense of marginality intensifies when anti-Semitism persists in society but its existence is absent from much of our representational culture. The example of replacing Jews with African-Americans in Peter Sellars' production of *The Merchant of Venice* is not the only example in which African-American discrimination took the place of anti-Semitism. In the 1949 film version of Arthur Laurents' play *Home of the Brave*, directed by Mark Robson, Peter Coen's character was changed to Moss, an African-American soldier. With this change, as Bosley Crowthers notes in his May 13, 1949 review of the film "the movie [now] centers around the drama of the relations of a Negro soldier with four other men on a perilous mission to a Jap-held island".³⁵ Not only did Crowthers neglect to mention the possible significance of this change, in terms of a marginalization of anti-Semitism, he did not note that it was historically inaccurate. President Truman did not order the desegregation of the Armed Forces until 1948. Mr. Crowthers is not alone. Of the six reviews I found of the Peter Sellars' production, only one reviewer tackled the issue head on. Sheridan Morley writes, "Mr. Sellars starts out from the not entirely breathtaking discovery that there is a Venice in California as well as Italy so, hey, let's do the show right there during the recent race riots, let's have a black Shylock because if he's just Jewish I guess it might not show right away".³⁶

³⁴ Tobin, 1, 73.

³⁵ Bosley Crowthers, review of *Home of the Brave* in *New York Times* 13 May, 1949: 2331.

³⁶ Sheridan Morley, "Who's Afraid of Maggie Smith?" review of *The Merchant of Venice* in *The Spector* 26, Nov. 1994: 62.

In the program notes, as reviewer David Richards remarked, Sellars argued that he wanted to extend "the metaphor and the reality of anti-Semitism".³⁷ I think my troubled feeling came with the awareness that the metaphor was not extended but rather was replaced. The casting decision in the 1947 film *Crossfire* is another example worth noting. This movie was based on Richard Brooks' novel *The Brick Foxhole*. According to the film's director Edward Dmytryk, "the book had a number of subplots, one of which concerned the murder of a homosexual by a sadistic bigot".³⁸ In the film version the murder victim was changed to a heterosexual Jew, and homophobia was replaced with anti-Semitism, effectively erasing homophobia as an issue worthy of film representation at that time. This casting decision, along with the decision in *Home of the Brave*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, serves to declare one form of discrimination as worthy of cultural representation over another.

My mind is filled with ideas of how to tackle the challenge Sellars attempted to meet - to expand rather than replace the metaphor and reality of anti-Semitism. Obviously, to maintain a Jewish identity in the play and then expand the metaphor via multiracial casting would be one choice. Perhaps a director could comment on the degree to which anti-Semitism both continues in practice and is marginalized, by including one or two visually marked Jewish characters in the ensemble. These characters, who would have no lines, would constantly be prevented from speaking, exist always on the periphery of the action, and would be dismissed with physical gestures. As theatre practitioners, we must guard against duplicating the exclusionary practices that, albeit perhaps unconsciously, underlie the final production concept that grew out of Mr. Sellar's desire to "extend" the metaphor of anti-Semitism. Practices that exile Jewish characters and the issue of anti-Semitism to the invisible gray zone between Other and Not.

Davida Bloom, Ph.D.
Department of Theatre
SUNY Brockport
350 New Campus Drive
Brockport, NY 14420

³⁷ Richards, C1.

³⁸ Edward Dmytryk, *It's a Hell of a Life But Not a Bad Living* (New York: Times Books, 1978) 89.

Works Cited

- Akerman, Anthony. *Somewhere on the Border*. *South Africa Plays*. Ed. Stephen Gray. London: Heinemann-Centaur, 1993. 2-140.
- Anti-Defamation League Online*. 19 Aug. 2002. <<http://www.adl.org>>
- Azoulay, Katya Gibel. *Black, Jewish, and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin, and Other Myths of Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Crowther, Bosley. Rev. of *Home of the Brave*. *New York Times* 13 May, 1949, 29:1
- Dmytryk, Edward. *It's a Hell of a Life But Not a Bad Living*. New York: Times Books, 1978
- Gilman, Sander L. *Jewish Self-Hatred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.
- Glazer, Ilsa M. "A Cloak of Many Colors: Jewish Feminism and Feminist Jews in America." *Women: A Feminist Perspective*. Ed. Jo Freeman. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1995. 632-640.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Gray, Stephen. Introduction. *South Africa Plays*. Ed. Stephen Gray. London: Heinemann-Centaur, 1993. vi-xiv.
- Halpern, Ben. "What is Anti-Semitism?" *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981): 252-262.
- Laurents, Arthur. *Home of the Brave*. New York: Random House, 1946.

Lebow, Richard Ned. *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Morley, Sheridan. "Who's Afraid of Maggie Smith?" Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*. *The Spector* 26, Nov. 1994, 62.

Richards, David. "Sellar's Merchant of Venice Beach." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice* *New York Times*. 18 Oct. 1994, C1+.

Roberts, Kenneth. *Why Europe Leaves Home*. 1922. New York: Arno Press, 1977.

Sacks, Karen Brodtkin. "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" *Race*. Eds. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994.

Schiff, Ellen. "Shylock's *Mishpocheh*: Anti-Semitism on the American Stage." *Anti-Semitism in American History*. Ed. David Gerber. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. 79-102.

Smith, Tom. "Anti-Semitism Decreases But Persists." *Social Science and Modern Society* 33.3 (1996): 2-3

Tobin, Gary A. and Sharon L. Sassler. *Jewish Perceptions of Anti-Semitism*. New York: Plenum Press, 1988.

Works Consulted

Brustein, Robert. "The Merchant of Venice Beach." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*. *The New Republic* 5 Dec. 1994, 31-34.

Dalfiume, Richard M. *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969.

Deutscher, Isaac. *The Non-Jewish Jew*. London: Oxford UP, 1968.

Erdman, Harley. *Staging the Jew*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Frankenberg, Ruth. *White women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Friedman, Lester D. *The Jewish Image in American Film*. Secaucus, New Jersey, Citadel Press, 1987.

Harap, Louis. *Dramatic Encounters*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.

Hentoff, Nat, Ed. *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism*. New York: Richard W. Baron, 1969.

Hyman, Paula. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

Kemp, Edward. "Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and sexism plague the mystery plays. How does a modern playwright junk the propaganda without losing the plot?" *New Statesman* 23 Jan. 1998, 38-39.

Kroll, Jack. "Chicago--My Kind of Theatre." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*. *Newsweek* 22 Oct. 1994, 33-35.

LaCapra, Dominick, Ed. *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.

Landa, M. J. *The Jew in Drama*. London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1926.

Lazare, Lewis. "The Merchant of Venice." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*. *Variety* 24 Oct. 1994, 78.

Patai, Raphael and Jennifer Patai. *The Myth of the Jewish Race*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989.

Schiff, Ellen. *From Stereotype to Metaphor: The Jew in Contemporary Drama*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.

"Shakespeare and Prejudice." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice* *The Economists* 26 Nov. 1994, 98.

Raden, David. "American Blacks' and Whites' Preferred Social Distance From Jews." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 138.2 (1998): 265-267.