



Shylock's Jewish Way of Speaking

By Nahma Sandrow

A Festschrift in honor of David Roskies

In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies (July 2020)

For the online version of this article:

<https://ingeveb.org/articles/shylocks-jewish-way-of-speaking>

SHYLOCK'S JEWISH WAY OF SPEAKING

by Nahma Sandrow

Abstract: *For an experimental production of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, some of Shylock's speeches were rendered in Yiddish, necessitating a consideration of how Shylock's choice of words would be informed by the larger context of the play and the parameters of the character. The essay also explores the valence of Yiddish words and accent in English-language performance today and how a Jewish way of saying things might lead us to reread this classic work.*

Stephen Burdman, founder and Artistic Director of the New York Classical Theatre, had long suspected that giving Shakespeare's Shylock a Jewish way of speaking would make the character more human (though not necessarily nicer), intensify the audience's sense of his position as despised outsider, and generally add another dimension to the play. To explore this approach to *The Merchant of Venice*, he organized a workshop under the auspices of The Shakespeare Society.

Burdman was not the first to think about how Shakespeare's Jew should speak Shakespeare's lines. Several highly respected Shylocks of our time, Patrick Stewart and David Suchet, have confronted the question. "What is truly strange and exotic in Shylock," according to Stewart, "is his foreignness. And this lies in his language." Stewart's Shylock would cope by speaking in an "accent more cultured, more refined, more native than the natives." Suchet, on the other hand, sensed a foreign sound even in Shakespeare's original text and insinuated into his delivery a foreign flavor: "a very slight accent, [not placed] in any particular area. I just wanted to make it foreign." (Both actors can be heard on YouTube discussing their theories and performing excerpts from the play.)¹

¹ Stewart's performance can be found here: Shakespeare Teaching Videos, "Patrick Stewart on Shylock," *Youtube video*, 8:48, March 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UOdMHW7J2Q>. Suchet's performance: Matt Bracksiek, "shylock3.1pt1.mpg," *Youtube video*, 6:49, September 20, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-35G7DOFrOo>. Their comments in conversation with director Trevor Nunn can be found here: Matt Bracksiek, "shylock-actors-discuss.mpg," *Youtube video*, 10:43, September 20, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU_zqBIITDM. A transcription of their comments is recorded in John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare: An Actor's Guide* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 211–26.

But Burdman went further. “An accent,” he reasoned, “means there is a second language behind the words, so let’s hear the second language.” For him this second language is Yiddish. Some sixteenth-century Venetian Jews spoke Judeo-Italian dialects, and some Ladino. But there were Ashkenazi Jews living there too. Burdman imagined a backstory in which Shylock moved to Venice from Central Europe, at that period home to the majority of Yiddish speakers. (Shylock actually mentions trading in Frankfurt.) Thus his first language was Yiddish, and verisimilitude would suggest that he mix occasional Yiddish words and phrases into Shakespeare’s English text.

The Merchant of Venice has been translated into Yiddish more than once, starting in 1894. In 1901, Yosef Bovshover’s version became the very first Yiddish translation of Shakespeare to be published in the United States, and was immediately produced by the great star Jacob Adler. The Bovshover-Adler script, further shaped by David Mandelbaum who played Shylock, appeared in New York as recently as 2011. In 1947, Maurice Schwartz produced “Shylock and His Daughter,” *Shaylok un zayn tokhter*, dramatized from a Hebrew novel by Ari Ibn Zahav. Because Shakespeare’s Shylock is actually a minor character in what is meant to be a comic subplot, and appears in five scenes only, all Yiddish adaptations of the play tended to compress the romantic main plot so as to emphasize Shylock and his daughter Jessica. All the same, of the many Yiddishized Shakespeare plays, either directly translated or adapted to Jewish settings, “The Merchant of Venice” remained one of the less popular.

In 1903, Adler appeared in an uptown English-language production speaking his lines in Yiddish—an experiment so successful that it was revived two years later. “American” critics praised it. The *New York Herald* concluded, under the headline “Mr. Adler Scores in Shylock Role,” that bilingualism “interfered but little with the general enjoyment of [Shylock’s] important scenes.” Downtown, Yiddish-speaking Jews watched these ventures anxiously. Shakespeare in Yiddish was more than an aesthetic venture; it asserted to the world Yiddish theater’s claim to have become an institution of western high culture. Thus the critics from *Di yidishe gazeten* and *Di idishe velt* called Adler’s success proof that Yiddish “can be classic, that it sounds good, and that it can convey even Shakespeare’s imagery,” and proclaimed that “It is simply a pleasure to hear how [smooth and beautiful] a Yiddish monologue sounds on the English stage when it comes from the mouth of a great actor.”²

For Burdman, the language had a purely theatrical function; he posited a selectively Yiddish-speaking Shylock as a way into the character and his world.³ (Similarly the film *A Serious Man* (2009), a portrait of a modern Jew’s painful struggles with faith, begins with a Yiddish prologue in order to create a mystical atmosphere, and the characters in the film *Son of Saul* (2015), set in Auschwitz, speak Yiddish—and nine other languages—to make the historical setting feel more realistic.) For theater professionals pursuing a risky experimental concept such as this, The Shakespeare Society subsidizes a week of workshop rehearsals culminating in a public presentation followed by open discussion. The workshop was held from October 20 through 26, 2015 at one of New York City’s many no-frills rehearsal rooms: the director, actors, diction coach, and me (with dictionaries), sitting around a table for a week of close readings and re-readings.

Our challenge lay in choosing exactly where the character would lapse—or rise—into Yiddish words, and of course in choosing which words. Every choice had to be justified by

² Quoted and documented in Joel Berkowitz, *Shakespeare on the American Yiddish Stage* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 267-8.

³ When Sydney Walker played Shylock at the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center in 1973, he spoke a few Yiddish words to Tubal.

Shakespeare's intention and Burdman's directorial interpretation: what was Shylock's motivation? In the course of the week of rehearsals, we worked through Shylock's five scenes in order. I will trace the process in roughly the same order, pausing occasionally to illustrate some of our choices and discoveries.

Shylock first enters in Act One Scene 3. Bassanio, a Venetian aristocrat, presses him to lend money to Antonio, who is offering good security: three thousand ducats for three months. Shylock is taking his time about agreeing. First the original text.

(Enter BASSANIO and SHYLOCK)

SHYLOCK

Three thousand ducats; well.

BASSANIO

Ay, sir, for three months.

SHYLOCK

For three months; well.

BASSANIO

For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.

SHYLOCK

Antonio shall become bound; well.

BASSANIO

May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?

SHYLOCK

Three thousand ducats for three months and Antonio bound.

Now our version including a direct Yiddish translation.

(Enter BASSANIO and SHYLOCK)

SHYLOCK

Three thousand ducats; well.

BASSANIO

Ay, sir, for three months.

SHYLOCK

For three months; well.

BASSANIO

For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound.

SHYLOCK

Antonio shall become bound; well.

BASSANIO

May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?

SHYLOCK

Dray toyzend dukaten af dray khadoshim un Antonio farbinden.

Thus Shylock speaks Yiddish almost immediately after his very first entrance. Combining languages from the start establishes the convention, ensuring that the audience will accept it naturally. Reinforcing the ease of the shift, these are words that the audience will certainly understand. If they had to stop even for a second to figure out the meaning, their concentration would be broken; they would be dragged out of the onstage reality. But this phrase they will get almost subliminally: first of all, they have just heard it in English, and second, it is composed almost entirely of English cognates. *Dukaten* is effectually the same word in both languages, and *farbinden* too is a cognate, though stretched a bit further. In fact, *dray toyzend dukaten* will be repeated several times in the course of the play, so that the audience will come to feel an ominous rising pressure without even noticing that the words are in a foreign language.

Only *khadoshim* for “months” gives an English speaker no clue as to meaning, and for that reason we considered using the cognate *monatn* instead. *Monatn* certainly sounds less foreign than Hebrew-derived *khadoshim*. But *monatn* is *Daytshmerish*, a form of the language that is more German-inflected than standard Yiddish. More important: although the audience are thinking about the stage action, not about the language, when they hear *khadoshim*, they unconsciously feel the foreign-ness of the character: his identity as the “other” on the Venice Rialto. And the harshness of the *kh* sound makes their first impression of the character harsh. So we simply trusted that the one incomprehensible word would be carried along by the rest of the phrase and serve the playwright’s intention.

Above all, it is the character of Shylock himself that justifies the use of Yiddish right at the start, as he figures out his ducats. Realistically, Shylock might automatically do his mental calculations in his native language. Moreover, though Bassanio begs for a decision, Shylock seems to be deliberately using words Antonio doesn’t understand in order to toy with him,

mystify him, rub it in that he is at the Jew's mercy—thus further antagonizing the audience. In this interpretation, Shylock is actually using his own status as outsider, which makes him not more sympathetic but perhaps more human. Finally, for Shakespeare and his audience, Jews and money are a natural association.

In I-3, Shylock uses only the occasional Yiddish word or phrase. But because his next appearance, in Act Two Scene 5, takes place in a more intimate atmosphere, at home with his daughter Jessica, it felt natural that the proportion of Yiddish to English should grow. Besides, Shylock himself is expanding in our imagination.

The very sound of his speech subliminally reinforces our sense of his foreign-ness. As soon as he enters his house, he calls his daughter by name, which he pronounces not Jessica but *Yesika*. Indeed, throughout the play, he pronounces such names as Jacob, Laban, and Hagar, familiar to English-speakers with long *a*'s, the Yiddish way: *Yankev*, *Loun*, and *Hoger*. Similarly, Shakespeare's "What, Jessica" and "Why, Jessica, I say!" become *Nu, Yesika* and *Vus, Yesika*, which don't so much communicate substance as establish a sound and a relationship. Furthermore, cognates proliferate in the scene, such as *mayn kind* for "my child," *vild kats* for "wildcat," and *shluft* for "sleeps," all sufficiently close to English for meaning to slip through painlessly. (We used so many more cognates in the course of the play, including *lakh* for "laugh," *vinter un zumer* for "winter and summer," and *halb a milyon* for "half a million," that I will not continue to specify them.)

Later in the scene comes this exchange:

SHYLOCK

I am bid forth to supper, Jessica:
There are my keys. But wherefore should I go?
I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon
The prodigal Christian. Jessica, my girl,
Look to my house.

SHYLOCK

I am bid forth to supper, Yesika:
There are my *shlislen*. But wherefore should I go?
I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to *shpayz* upon
The prodigal Christian. *Yesika, mayn kind*,
Look to my house.

Shlislen is an unfamiliar word, not a cognate, but the audience can understand from stage action. A homely household object with homely associations, the word functions to make the man more real. Also handing over his keys is evidence of how he trusts his daughter, who is about to betray that trust. Technically *shpayz* (food) does not fit grammatically, but its sound evokes the English "despise," and it can be dramatically spat out of the actor's mouth. Similarly, a bit later in the scene:

SHYLOCK

Hear you me, Jessica:
Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum
And the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,
Clamber not you up to the casements then...

SHYLOCK

Hear you me, *Yesika*:
Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum
And the vile *skripen* of the wry-necked fife,
Clamber not you up to the casements then

Strictly speaking, *skripen* is a cognate of the English “scrape” and thus is normally applied to fiddling, but onomatopoeia plus the actor’s delivery should make the sense clear. The audience probably grasp it anyway, realizing from context that *skripen* describes the sound made by a twisted musical instrument. Both meaning and sound conveys Shylock’s scorn for the gentiles’ merrymaking. Jessica closes the scene with a typical Shakespearean couplet:

JESSICA

Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost,
I have a father, you a daughter lost.

JESSICA

Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost,
I have a father, you a *tokhter* lost.

Tokhter is an easy cognate, its meaning additionally obvious from the preceding clause. It rings true that she speaks Yiddish because she is at home, speaking to her father in her mind. Possibly she is mimicking him in a bitter private joke. The shared insiders’ language makes their relationship, and its subsequent betrayal, all the more painful.

I should point out that in almost every case, the selected Yiddish words and phrases are the same number of strong beats as the English they replace. This preserves the rhythm, both in the passages of iambic pentameter—a steady pulse whose movement Burdman likens to a heartbeat—and even in prose, enabling the actor to give line readings that do no violence to the original.

We next see Shylock in Act Three Scene 1. Jessica has run away with her Christian lover. The Venetians know that and jeer at his pain. “Doubled over in pain,” as Burdman describes him, Shylock lets his guard down, allowing his deepest language to burst out.

SHYLOCK

My own flesh and blood to rebel!

SOLARINO

[Pretending to believe that Shylock is talking about his own sexual urges]

Out upon it, old carrion! Rebels it at these years?

SHYLOCK

I say, my daughter is my flesh and blood.

Throughout Shakespeare's text, Shylock has a habit of repeating himself. Here Burdman makes use of this tic. The words are cognates and virtually comprehensible to English speakers, but the repetition serves not only to dramatize the degree to which the Venetians are pitilessly banded against Shylock, leaving him desperate to explain himself, but also to justify and highlight the use of Yiddish.

SHYLOCK

My own *fleysht un blit* to rebel!

SOLARINO

Out upon it, old carrion! Rebels it at these years?

SHYLOCK

I say, my daughter is my flesh and blood.

Soon, goaded by their mockery, Shylock launches into his most famous speech.

SOLANIO

Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that good for?

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If we tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

When preparing for the workshop, Burdman expected that the process would transform this soliloquy almost entirely into Yiddish. Instead, a few carefully placed Yiddish interpolations functioned to move the drama onward beat by beat.

SOLANIO

Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that good for?

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and *far vus*? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, *seykhl*, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same *vinter un zumer*, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If we tickle us, do we not *lakh*? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a *Yid*, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, *rakhe*. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

As the speech builds, the Yiddish drives emotional transitions. *Far vus* detonates the declaration: “I am a Jew.” Yiddish words keep erupting, as “Jew” rises to *Yid* and “revenge” (*rakhe*) climaxes the speech, setting on track the character’s fate to come. Most of the Yiddish words are understandable, either as cognates or because they repeat the English. True, *rakhe* is *Daytshmerish*, and we could have used the Hebraic-Yiddish (or *loshn-koydesh*) *nekome*. However, *nekome* is three syllables, enfeebling the punch of the short sentence that climaxes the passage. Moreover, with its snarling open vowel and harsh *kh*, *rakhe* is more powerfully actable.

By the end of the scene, shaken by Jessica’s desertion and his humiliation, exhausted by his own passion, Shylock is intimately alone with fellow Jew Tubal.

SHYLOCK

... nor no in luck stirring but what lights on my shoulders; no sighs but of my breathing;
no tears but of my shedding.

TUBAL

Yes, other men have ill luck too: Antonio, as I heard in Genoa,—

SHYLOCK

What, what, what? Ill luck, ill luck?

TUBAL

Hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis.

SHYLOCK

I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true?

Shylock has lost control. Whole Yiddish phrases, some entirely incomprehensible, tumble out of his mouth.

SHYLOCK

...nor no in luck stirring but what lights on my shoulders; *ken ziftsen nor fun mayn eygenem otem; ken treren nor fun mayn eygenem fargisn.*

TUBAL

Yes, other men have ill luck too: Antonio, as I heard in Genoa,--

SHYLOCK

What, what, what? Ill luck, ill luck?

TUBAL

Hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis.

SHYLOCK

Danken got, danken got. Is't true, is't true?

Incomprehensible, yes. Yet, carried along by Shylock's passion, and clear about the plot, the audience can follow. In fact, not understanding every word makes the atmosphere smolder the worse.

As he exits soon after this exchange, Shylock tells Tubal they will meet at their synagogue. We substituted *shul* for "synagogue." This raises an issue that plagues translators from Yiddish. The Jewish way of naming elements of religious practices is generally Hebrew pronounced with a Yiddish cadence. A translator should be consistent: if "table" renders *tish* and "love" renders *libe*, then "phylacteries" must render *tfilin*. But to English-speakers, "phylacteries" sounds weirdly foreign. People who actually use phylacteries and prayer shawls or mourn in ritual fashion normally use the words *tfilin*, *talesim*, and *shiva* even when they are speaking English; I have never in my life heard the word "phylacteries" in conversation. The words "synagogue" and "temple" are familiar to American Jews, but most traditionally observant American Jews still use the Yiddish *shul*. So here we inserted *shul* as natural to Shylock and Tubal, an insider word that the two outsiders share, and later, by the same reasoning, used *shabes* for Sabbath.

Act Three Scene 3 yields examples of several different approaches. Shylock calls Antonio's jailer *nishtik*; the original is *naughty*, which in Shakespeare's time meant "bad," with nothing childlike about it; we thought the sound of *nishtik*, as well as context, made clear it is an insult. We tried adopting Yiddish syntax as well as vocabulary to convey foreign-ness: for "I have sworn an oath [to have his pound of flesh]," our Shylock insisted "I have an oath *geshvorn*" (which employs a very close cognate as well). Very rarely, we used a Yiddish word instead of a direct translation. Shylock snarls, "Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause;/ But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs." Instead of the Yiddish word for "fangs," we chose "Beware *mayn bays*." *ays* literally means "bite," which is an easy cognate, and furthermore allows the actor to "bite," producing by onomatopoeia a dramatically menacing sound. Finally, in the trial scene (Act Four Scene 1), we went so far as to add on our own a word that is not in Shakespeare at all. Offered a bribe to relinquish the pound of flesh he is entitled to, Shylock responds,

If every ducat in six thousand ducts
Were in six parts and every part a ducat
I would not draw them; I would have my bond.

We added one word, just the one word "no," to explode at the crucial moment, revealing Shylock's rage and sealing his fate.

If every ducat in six thousand ducts
Were in six parts and every part a ducat – ***neyn!*** -
I would not draw them; I would have my bond.

Shifting between languages can in itself be considered a Jewish way of saying things. Traditional Jews quote from Torah, Talmud, or prayer book in Hebrew or Aramaic and then automatically gloss in the vernacular. Furthermore, it has been typical of the Jewish experience to live in several worlds and know several languages. Many Yiddish plays contain dialogue in several languages, for the sake of verisimilitude in dramas of daily life, as well as to entertain audiences who relished misunderstandings and verbal puns.

Other recent translations from English to Yiddish and vice versa yield additional insights into the Jewish way of saying things onstage and its relationship to the Yiddish language. In 2015 the New Yiddish Rep produced Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," translated by Joseph Buloff with emendations by Shane Baker and David Mandelbaum. The translation "felt" particularly felicitous, and Baker suggests that that's because Miller seems to have thought of his characters as American Jews; certainly the original dialogue rings with echoes of an underlying Yiddish. Contrariwise, in H. Leivick's Yiddish drama *Shop*, the characters are understood to be speaking varieties of more-or-less Americanized Yiddish. My translation resisted imposing conventional markers of American Jewishness: accent, diction, or vocabulary. Nevertheless, in English, the characters often sounded like Jews. Moreover, the elevated and poeticized English spoken by a certain character supposed to be a thoughtful intellectual sounded in translation like the dialogue in the plays of Clifford Odets, who wrote only in English but grew up in a Yiddish-speaking environment.

From the start, Burdman crafted his workshop for a New York audience, on the theory that even gentile New Yorkers are used to the sound of Yiddish and may actually know a few words. Ironically, however, the public presentation demonstrated that some Yiddish words

cannot be used seriously, at least not in New York, precisely because they are familiar. We had no reason to believe that the audience were largely Jewish. But they laughed at the word *shnorer*, which is only a direct translation of the English *beggar*. Similarly, although the plural form *ganovim* for “thieves” sailed past, the more familiar singular noun *ganif* got a laugh. The audience heard *ganovim* as simply a word in a foreign language, but *ganif* as a familiar Jewish way of saying “thief.”

The laugh was a conditioned reflex to words now associated with stand-up routines and comical mothers in sitcoms. Did the laughter reveal guilty pleasure in sharing an in-group code? Nervous acknowledgement of the language’s perceived obsolescence? Incongruity between registers (Yiddish low versus English high) or between social worlds (embarrassing roots versus successful assimilation)? Incongruity, especially when it pops up suddenly, is often theorized to be the primary source of comedy. Whatever the trigger, such a laugh at such a moment derails the drama and destroys the scene.

The creators of the new Yiddish opera “Hatuey: Memory of Fire” (2018) took a very different approach. When a character exclaimed, “Oy vey oy vey” at a very somber moment, the authors Elise Thoron and Frank London were surprised, even shocked, by the laughter it elicited. But they kept the line in because the familiarity provided “relief from the intensity of the greater piece.” Moreover, precisely because it “took people out of the narrative”—an alienation that they consider “built-in” in any case when hearing an opera in a semi-familiar language with supertitles—they felt it also allowed audiences to “get deeper inside the production and connect with it.”

Accent is a related question in performance. A Jewish accent, which in practice is a Yiddish accent, possibly preserved over generations from Yiddish-speaking grandparents or great-grandparents, would have been inappropriate, even destructive, when John Michalski, playing Shylock, spoke English. Michalski worked with a coach to pronounce Yiddish words properly; the only complication lay in resisting the pull of German, more familiar to them both. But a Jewish/Yiddish accent, which—combined with syntactical order and a certain vocabulary—is most obviously what people mean by a “Jewish way of saying things,” brings unfortunate associations, comical or sentimental, as with *oy vey*. It signals Jewishness rather than an individual. For our audience, Yiddish language, as opposed to Jewish accent, provided both Jewish identity and liberation from stereotype. The goal was for Michalski to speak the Yiddish interpolations as would a native Yiddish speaker and the original English as purely as any other Shakespearean actor, integrating the two languages into one seamless text.

By making such a supremely unsympathetic character as Shylock seem all the more Jewish, does using Yiddish encourage anti-Semitism? When the great Yiddish actors Jacob Adler, Rudolph Schildkraut, and Maurice Schwartz played Shylock they were aware that to non-Jewish audiences, Shylock represented all Jews. Should he be played as dignified or pathetic, a natural aristocrat or a simple victimized merchant, a lonely foreigner in sixteenth-century Venice or the semi-mythical Eternal Jew? Is the contract for a pound of flesh a bitter joke or vengeful and cruel? In fact, Maurice Schwartz was so conscious of the implications of the role, even to a Yiddish-speaking audience, that in “*Shylok un zayn tokhter*,” he added the line “I cannot spill blood. I am a Jew.” Invited in 1959 to revive the show, Schwartz refused because he felt the play encouraged anti-Semitism—a considerable sacrifice, especially as it became harder and harder to make a living in Yiddish theater.

For his part, Burdman acknowledges that audiences react to the character according to the biases they bring to the theater. But for him, theater “can both transcend language and use language to find deeper meaning.” Thus when Shylock speaks Yiddish in the first scene, the

audience may be “tempted to anti-Semitism.” But the Yiddish, and the grounding it gives to the actor, will so “humanize” the character that later, when in extremis he reaches for *mame loshn* (the mother tongue), the audience will feel for him. Speaking in a Jewish way deepens Shylock. No longer The Jew, or even The Other, he becomes a man.

Burdman intends to mount a full production in the next few seasons.