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The BBC's Shylock

The portrayal of Shylock in the BBC production of "The Merchant of Venice" was supposed to represent a return to Shakespeare's original conception of him as an "alien Jew." But no Jew in Venice in that period could have spoken with a Yiddish accent. He would probably have been descended from Jews who had lived in Italy for centuries and would have spoken Spanish as well as Italian fluently.

Also, it is arguable that Italians use their hands in gesture more than Jews and both groups have similar "Mediterranean temperaments." In fact, the contrast of the gesticulating Jew with an East European accent compared to the cool, calm, imperious Anglified Christians in this production shows only too well how the three British Jews who produced, directed and acted in it have learned their roles and been truly assimilated.

This production tells us more about contemporary British culture than about Shakespeare's Venice.

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