



## The Jew of Seville

*Victor Sejour, Norman R. Shapiro*

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Before he was twenty years old, Louisiana-born Victor Sjour expatriated himself to Paris, where his acclaimed dramas would appear alongside those of Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo. Sjour's mother was a free woman of color and his father was Haitian. Sjour grew up a free Creole of color in antebellum New Orleans, but was deeply affected by the alienation and discrimination he encountered as a person of mixed descent. Sjour's inventive transposition of the discrimination of mid-nineteenth-century America to other historical incidents of racial persecution was a device in his fiction and drama, creating a provocative and political metaphor for those whose lives blur the lines of racial and religious identity. Now, for the first time, two of Sjour's plays, "The Jew of Seville" and "The Fortune-Teller", have been translated from the French for contemporary audiences. "The Jew of Seville", a five-act verse drama first performed in 1844, is the story of Jacob Eliacin, a Jew, during the Spanish Inquisition. Eliacin had been humiliated and beaten by the uncle of his Christian lover, Bianca. The couple had fled to Greece, where Bianca had died in childbirth. Eliacin, who amassed great wealth, had assumed the name Digarias, and had raised daughter Ins a Christian. Twenty years later, as the play opens, Digarias is now a prominent member of the court at Seville, where Ins encounters and is seduced by Don Juan in a sham marriage. When he discovers Don Juan's treachery Digarias demands that the nobleman marry his daughter. But a self-serving Moor reveals the truth of Digarias' identity to Don Juan, who then publicly refuses to marry a Jew's daughter. After this humiliation, Digarias retreats to plot revenge which will have dire consequences for Ins. With a stirring verse translation by Norman R. Shapiro and a thoroughly engaging introduction by M. Lynn Weiss, "The Jew of Seville" is an important and provocative addition to the non-English writings of American-born authors, a historical drama that highlights the discrimination not only of Sjour's time but of ours as well.

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