# John Lithgow’s portrayal of Roald Dahl in Giant exposes the author’s antisemitic controversy



Mark Rosenblatt's new play, "Giant," currently showing at the Harold Pinter Theatre, delves into the complex persona of Roald Dahl, the renowned author known primarily for his children's literature. The production has attracted attention not only for its theatrical merit but also for its provocative exploration of Dahl's controversial views, particularly an antisemitic book review he authored in 1983, which condemned Israeli military actions in Beirut.

Set against the backdrop of this incendiary review, the play presents a fictional narrative where Dahl, portrayed by John Lithgow, interacts with various characters in a bid to navigate the fallout from his published opinions. Lithgow's performance has been widely acclaimed, characterised as both "transcendent" and "magnificently towering." He embodies Dahl's charm and wit while revealing the more disturbing facets of his personality, gradually shifting from a playful figure to one that resembles a "gigantic bully," as described in the Daily Mail.

The narrative unfolds with the arrival of Dahl's British publisher, Tom Maschler, played by Elliot Levey, and American representative Jessie Stone, portrayed by Aya Cash. Their visit, intended to persuade Dahl to issue an apology, highlights the collision between commercial interests in literature and moral accountability. Maschler's care for sales takes precedence over the political implications of Dahl's statements, while Stone articulates her dismay for Dahl's lack of sensitivity towards the Israeli people and their historical context.

Rosenblatt's work prompts audiences to grapple with the enduring question of whether an artist's character should impact the interpretation of their art. The challenging dialogue culminates when Dahl dismissively remarks, "Even a stinker like Hitler didn’t just pick on them for no reason," an assertion that ignites intense scrutiny of his worldview.

This ambitious portrayal serves not only as a character study but also as a lens through which broader societal conflicts are examined. The play, directed by Nick Hytner, combines elements of humour, shock, and deep reflection, making it a significant piece of contemporary theatre.

"Giant" runs at the Harold Pinter Theatre until August 2, drawing audiences into a complex exploration of morality, creativity, and the legacies of artistic figures. The production stands as a compelling testament to the multifaceted nature of art and the artists who create it.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.allthatdazzles.co.uk/post/review-giant-royal-court> - This review discusses Mark Rosenblatt's play 'Giant' at the Royal Court Theatre, highlighting its exploration of Roald Dahl's antisemitic views and the performances of John Lithgow and other cast members.
2. <https://thetheatretimes.com/mark-rosenblatts-giant-at-the-royal-court-provocative-drama-about-anti-semitism-is-a-superb-play-of-ideas/> - An analysis of 'Giant' that delves into the moral complexities of the play, focusing on Dahl's antisemitism and the interactions between characters like Dahl, Jessie Stone, and Tom Maschler.
3. <https://www.inkl.com/news/giant-at-the-royal-court-review-shocking-challenging-roald-dahl-play-is-spectacularly-good> - A review praising 'Giant' for its unflinching confrontation of Roald Dahl's antisemitism, with a focus on the performances of John Lithgow and Romola Garai.
4. <https://www.vogue.com/article/mark-rosenblatt-giant-west-end> - Vogue's coverage of 'Giant' discusses the play's setting in 1983, the imagined lunch meeting between Dahl and his publishers, and the performances of John Lithgow and Romola Garai.
5. <https://www.officialtheatre.com/harold-pinter-theatre/giant/> - Information about the 'Giant' play, including its plot, cast, and reviews, highlighting John Lithgow's performance as Roald Dahl and the play's exploration of separating art from artist.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/giant-review-roald-dahl-john-lithgow-b2619923.html> - A review from The Independent discussing John Lithgow's portrayal of Roald Dahl in 'Giant' and the play's examination of Dahl's antisemitism.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14670075/Funny-shocking-thought-provoking-John-Lithgows-towering-performance-brings-big-unfriendly-giant-Roald-Dahl-life-West-End.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data