
Abstracts

Mary Janell Metzger, “Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew”: Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity 52

Recent readings of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, which have been concerned primarily with the play’s representation of difference, especially that of gender, religion, or race, often leave Jessica out of their analyses. Yet Jessica, as both a Jew and a willing Christian convert, enables the play to resolve the problem posed by the equations of white Christianity and national identity in the emerging discourse of English imperialism: how to render the Jew’s difference as a difference of nature and as a difference of faith involving the act of will implicit in Christian baptism? Only by taking Shylock’s measure in the light of the gender, racial, and religious ideologies that integrate his daughter into Venetian society can we account for the play’s early modern representations of racialized Jews and of the Christians who imagined them. (MJM)

Paula Bennett, Phillis Wheatley’s Vocation and the Paradox of the “Afric Muse” 64

Traditionally, criticism on Phillis Wheatley has emphasized her conformity to neoclassic conventions, failing to explore the depth of her commitment to Western culture or her resistance to colonial society. Building on recent studies that have focused on Wheatley’s use of double voicing to mediate racial and political issues in her poetry, I examine how Wheatley exploits neoclassic conventions to rage at the limitations she felt prevented her from practicing her vocation fully. Wheatley sought to authorize her poetry in a culture that refused to legitimize her talent and accomplishments. Throughout her oeuvre she insists on her paradoxical identity as an “Afric muse” and stresses the peculiar spiritual and epistemic authority this oxymoronic identity gives her. Wheatley could not condemn her forcible transport to America, despite her abhorrence of slavery. Enlarged as well as oppressed by her society, she experienced a clash of competing ethnic allegiances that for her became a fructifying authenticity. (PB)

Andrea Most, “We Know We Belong to the Land”: The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* 77

In the early twentieth century, a period of mass immigration, Jewish assimilation into mainstream American society was largely a theatrical venture. The musical theater, a predominantly Jewish field that portrayed a variety of American experiences, offers powerful illustrations of theatrical strategies of Jewish assimilation. The groundbreaking Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!* (1943), created during one of the most anti-Semitic periods in United States history, exemplifies how ethnic outsiders demonized a racial other in an effort to be considered white and thus to be included in the utopian (theatrical) community of America. (AM)

Jonathan Freedman, Angels, Monsters, and Jews: Intersections of Queer and Jewish Identity in Kushner’s *Angels in America* 90

The discursive ligature between the Jew and the sexually transgressive is crucially revised in Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*. Kushner creates a powerful series of metonymies between the queer and the Jew that suggest their affinities but refuse to reify a unitary queer-Jewish identity. The center of this imaginative project is Kushner’s Roy Cohn, who both illustrates and transforms the image of the queer Jewish power broker that circulated in American anti-Semitic discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But Cohn’s fate in the play suggests that the author’s attitude toward Jewishness is conflicted, and the play’s turn to Christian imagery confirms the suggestion. To fulfill laudatory

political ends, Kushner deploys a typological vision common in American imaginative production and fulfills a pattern of assimilation equally common in American Jewish experience. I conclude by turning to Walter Benjamin, one of Kushner's sources, for a different model of identity formation that might avoid this fate. (JF)

Henry Staten, *Ethnic Authenticity, Class, and Autobiography: The Case of Hunger of Memory* 103

Richard Rodriguez's autobiographical *Hunger of Memory* (1982) is assigned to Chicano-Chicana literature because the book tells a story of growing up the child of Mexican immigrants, but Rodriguez rejects the term *Chicano* for himself and denies that it is possible or desirable for Americans of Mexican descent to retain an identification with their culture of origin. Rodriguez has been widely criticized as a sellout to white bourgeois culture, but his life narrative shows that his rejection of Chicano identity is rooted in the class-and-race ideology of his Mexican parents and thus in the contradictions of Mexican history. Chicano-Chicana nationalism assumes a simple dichotomy between the proletarian *mestizo* or *mestiza* and the bourgeois white oppressor. Rodriguez's family history, however, points toward race and class divisions within the population of Mexican descent that call into question the monolithic conceptions of Chicano-Chicana identity on the basis of which Rodriguez has been attacked. (HS)

Marta E. Sánchez, *La Malinche at the Intersection: Race and Gender in Down These Mean Streets* 117

Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) challenges binary notions of whiteness and blackness by valorizing a third term—*mestizaje*. And yet the novel enlists dominant views of female gender and sexuality to affirm the protagonist's ethnic male identity. In my Chicana feminist reading of this Puerto Rican text, I import the reinterpreted figure *La Malinche* and its companion figure *La Chingada*—prevailing tropes in Chicano and Chicana literature and discourse of the 1960s—to illuminate the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. These intersections are key to social analyses that transcend binary conceptions of race and paradigms of dominant and subaltern. (MES)