

ABSTRACTS

Staging Working-Class Culture: George A. Baker's *A Glance at New York* (1848)

Zoe Detsi-Diamanti

Using George A. Baker's *A Glance at New York* (1848) as the first instance of US working-class subculture, this essay examines the complications in the popular theatre's language of republicanism and national identity with reference to mid-nineteenth-century social, political, and economic developments. At a time when the issue of national identity was reaching a point of profound crisis as new hierarchies emerged in the name of class, race, and ethnicity, the popular theatre reflected the most "vulgar" aspects of Jacksonian democracy and promoted a kind of "plebeian" heroism that united all the "b'hoys" into a concrete, class-defined cultural sphere. While the middle classes strove harder and harder to maintain their cultural hegemony and the illusion of national homogeneity, the popular theatre of the time posed the question of whose "national" culture best expressed American life after all. It began to seriously contest the middle-class' concept of republicanism and liberal individualism and the standards of industrial morality and egalitarian prosperity through the depiction of social tensions and an "other" national and class consciousness. (ZD)

"A Pair of Handsome Legs": Women on Stage, Bodies on Show, in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Theatre

Theresa Saxon

This paper examines women's bodies in performance in nineteenth-century New York, analysing the fraught development of women's theatrical and social roles. Coinciding with a burgeoning women's rights movement, the stratification of theatre across New York, although clothed in the costume of class, can be critically illuminated through an examination of wider debates which interpolated stratified gendered behavior into concepts of social permission and propriety. At the same time, by the 1870s, "leg shows," disguised in a range of costumery, from ballet to burlesque, proliferated across all stages. Such a transition, from breeches to legs potentially stripped working women on the stage of the power of transgression and subversion, and fed a vociferously voyeuristic appetite. But, ultimately such performances of flesh also displayed a spectacle that embodied anxious negotiations of social codes, sexuality, and desire. (TS)

“No one innocent”: Lowell, Brecht, and *Benito Cereno*

Ann Walsh

Benito Cereno, Robert Lowell's historical drama adapted from Herman Melville's novella, was first staged as part of the trilogy *The Old Glory* in 1964, at a time of American racial unrest on an unprecedented scale. This essay employs a Brechtian reading of the play to view Lowell's adaptation as an exemplar of epic theatre, adopting a didactic stance as it examines the socio-political underpinning of the calamitous encounter between Cereno's slave-ship and the American vessel. Through a purposeful manipulation of the source text, Lowell uses the play's historical context as the stimulus for a provocative meditation on the complex roots of twentieth-century American racial conflict. (AW)

Gendering the Mind: Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* and Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*

Gabriella Varró

The parallels between the works of Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard are just recently being discovered in drama criticism, and analyses in the field move from the ways both playwrights stage masculinity through their shared interest in family drama and generational patterns to their mutual fascination with experimental techniques. This paper aims to contribute to this ongoing critical discourse by focusing on the dramatization of the human psyche in a selected work by each author. Both playwrights investigate the mind in gendered terms; moreover, this approach is reinforced through various semiotic levels in the plays, such as setting, theme, and the realm of cultural myths. Besides looking at each author's delicate portrayal of psychological processes (and various forms of deviance), the authors' indebtedness to modernist and postmodernist techniques in representing the psyche will also be noted. (GV)

The Dramatization of Cross-Identity Voicing and the Poetics of Ambiguity

Teresa Botelho

Focusing on four plays—Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and David Henry Hwang's *Trying to Find Chinatown* and *Yellow Face*—this essay reads them as examples of a movement in American ethnic drama and theatre that has been responding to the creative limitations of essentialized categories of being and belonging, by engaging in cross-identity voicing, validating and dramatizing the voices of others

outside one's self-ascribed positioning, and thus transcending traditional cultural sovereignty biases. It also examines the strategies used by both playwrights to question the stability of constructed identities and the limits of the performativity explanation, while examining how both use the formal tropes of documentary theatre to call into question concepts of univocal truth and authenticity. (TB)

Fragmentation and Discontinuity in *Three Tall Women*

Anna Suwalska-Kolecka

The study focuses on the two large issues of the postmodern sense of the self and the structure of dramatic space. Albee employs the motif of squared double identity: the three tall women from act 1 prove to be in act 2 the same person but at different stages of her life. The split of the main character into three separate selves, who are rather unwilling to recognize their similarity, emphasizes the fragmented nature of human identity. A parallel idea of discontinuity emerges from the construction of the dramatic space which displays ontological ambiguity and which undergoes further transformations when through dialogue it openly reveals its theatricality. *Three Tall Women* bears close similarities to Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, where Krapp, listening to his voice recorded on the tape, confronts his younger self. Both plays reflect a contemporary tendency to destabilize the notion of any fixed identity and provide a diachronic split in the main character and various manipulations of dramatic space, which are closely bound with the fractured nature of postmodern culture and its partial narratives. (ASK)

Melancholia-Machine: Perversity and Loss in *The Play About the Baby*

Robert F. Gross

The Play About the Baby remains neglected by interpreters of Albee's work because its austere schematic mode of presentation seems to keep everything on the surface, making acts of interpretation seem superfluous. Therefore, rather than trying to interpret the play, it is more useful to ask, following the suggestion of Gilles Deleuze, what it *does*. The play is a drama-machine that produces loss and asserts the centrality of loss to the constitution of selfhood. This loss is achieved by the deployment of perversion, both sexual and linguistic, against Boy and Girl's innocence. The use of perversion ultimately even questions whether there was ever any state of presence that preceded loss. These tactics seem to suggest a wider

set of sexual possibilities, but the tactics are ultimately subordinated to the production of melancholia through loss, a subordination that traps the work in a world of severely limited possibilities and encounters. (RFG)

Transgressing the Limits of Interpretation: Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy)

Boróka Prohászka Rád

The essay looks at Edward Albee's *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* (*Notes toward a Definition of Tragedy*), employing Victor Turner's and René Girard's interdisciplinary theories of ritual, scapegoating, and drama as well as concepts and terms of current theories on subjectivity formation. The analysis focuses on the protagonist family's drama as a Turnerian liminal situation within which the Grays are displaced from their former subject positions and find themselves lacking any new basis for constructing new identities for themselves. The essay also argues for a reassessment of Girard's concept of the single scapegoat, interpreting all three family members as sacrificial victims within the context of their betwixt-and-between state. The essay also sets out to identify those elements of classical tragedy that Albee re-actualizes, demonstrating that through the merger of styles, linguistic registers, and genres *The Goat* transgresses the limits of traditional tragedy and subverts any attempt at fixing the play within the limits of a single valid interpretation. (BPR)

Moving Target: Comic Calculation and Affective Persuasion in Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*

Eric Weitz

Because the comic—in the form of utterances intended to evoke laughter—relies on shared prejudice between joker and audience, its discursive potential has often been dismissed along with any notion that comedy might have a meaningful part to play in political negotiation. Edward Albee's *The Goat* exploits the time-honored comic situation of marital infidelity by making the “other woman” a farmyard animal, while simulating situation-comedy patterns to position the central character as an easy joking target. Sharing at first in the ridicule of a sexual practice inscribed by Western culture as deviant, the spectator's footing may alter by degrees toward empathy as the play's tone shifts toward tragic sacrifice. Albee ultimately leads us to a point beyond recognizable genre and experience to a “queer”—which is to say, beyond accommodation by dominant discourses—moment, thereby giving the spectator much to think about with regard to culturally inscribed prejudices against non-heterocentrist lifestyles. (EW)