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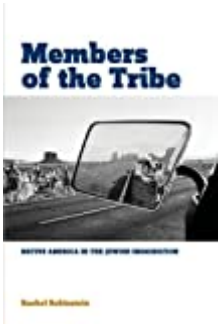

Rachel Rubinstein. *Members of the Tribe: Native America in the Jewish Imagination.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010. viii + 252 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8143-3434-8.

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Modernity and the Tribe: Jewish and Native American Encounters in the U.S.

Rachel Rubinsteinâs deft work of scholarship proves a welcome contribution to literature about the Jewish encounter with modernity and the central role of Jewish identity in the formation of American culture and cultural consciousness. *Members of the Tribe* also provides a useful overview of the often conjoined history of Jewish and Native American representation in the United States while cogently analyzing the importance of the relationship between Jew and Indian in the creation and subversion of the American national narrative. As her title suggests, Rubinsteinâs text provides nothing less that a subterranean glimpse of the often forgotten history of âNative America in the Jewish imagination.â Her work joins the ranks of a series of recent scholarly tomes (including Jonathan Freedmanâs *Klezmer America* [2007] and Eric Sundquistâs *Strangers in the Land* [2005]) that introduce the category of Jewish identity into the wider discourse of comparative ethnic studies. However, at the same time that it puts Jewish and Native American identity into conversation, Rubinsteinâs book–like the very strongest works being produced in American Jewish literary and cultural studies today–focuses intensely on the particularity of texts and experiences that make up Jewish life in America.

What is the origin of the romance between the Jew and the Native American? In *Members of the Tribe*, Rubinstein locates the complexity of the Jewish encounter with the Native American squarely in the dialectic between Enlightenment universalism and tribalism so central to Jewish life during the modern period. Native American literature and culture have long proved fascinating to Jewish writers, artists, and intellectuals precisely because, like Native Americans, Jews were engaged in their own difficult process of negotiating tribal identity against the pressures of acculturation to a liberal, universalist nation-state. Rubinstein argues that the âmultiple and polyvalent Jewish identifications with and projections of Indians are driven, more than by a desire to fix a marginal racial identity as âwhiteâ and therefore âAmerican,â by what [she] consider[s] to be a historically unresolved Jewish dialectic between liberalism and tribalism, staged in a distinct American political and

cultural arena that permits Jews to be *both* individuals and members of a tribeâ (pp. 18-19). Rubinsteinâs focus on the âhistorically unresolved Jewish dialectic between liberalism and tribalismâ allows her to avoid some of the pitfalls of critical whiteness studies, a discipline that reads most Jewish encounters with other ethnic and racial groups as simple attempts to reinforce the whiteness of the Jews against the difference of the marginalized.

Throughout *Members of the Tribe*, but particularly in her introduction, Rubinstein impressively melds intellectual history with attentive textual criticism. In addition to situating Jewish identification with the Indian in the history of Jewish responses to the Enlightenment, she also points out the ways in which Jewsâ âimaginative engagements with Indians pointed the way not always or only forward to an ever-elusive Americanness but also frequently âbackâ to an equally dynamic Jewishnessâ (p. 9). According to Rubinstein, the Jewish preoccupation with the figure of the Indian arose out of a simultaneous desire to lay claim to an indigenous American identity and to explore the particularities of Jewish difference. She draws a further correlation between Jews and Indians in the American imagination by arguing that Americaâs national narrative is predicated on a discourse of vanishing Native Americans and vanishing Jews. In order to consolidate American cultural identity, these problematic others within would either have to be removed/destroyed (as in the case of many Native Americans) or assimilated (as in the case of many Jews).

The content of Rubinsteinâs book is wide-ranging, transhistorical, and fascinating. Rubinstein displays a facility with texts that range from Menassah ben Israelâs seventeenth-century relation of the myth of the Lost Tribes to Ben Katchorâs contemporary reworking of the myth in his graphic novel, *The Jew of New York* (1998). In her first chapter, Rubinstein provides an overview of some of the many instances in which Jews have donned what she calls âredfaceâ in order to address their place in the American body politic. Here, she points out that Indians provided a way of working out a relationship to modernity–both for Americans more generally and for Jewish Americans in particular. Next, Rubinstein looks at the role of the Indian in Yiddish literary modernism as a way of working out a similar relationship to both modernism and modernity proper. To many Americans, Indians provided a metaphor for a healthy and uniquely American modernity in opposition to the pathology of the immigrants flooding U.S. shores during the early years of the twentieth century. How, then, could the Jews reappropriate Indianness to signify their own, often ambivalent commitment to modernity? In her chapters devoted to the role of âred Jewsâ and âred Indiansâ in 1930s political works, Henry Rothâs fascination with Indianness, and the conflation of Native Americans and the Palestinian dispossessed in contemporary works by authors such as Michael Chabon, she provides lucid answers to this question and many others.

At times, in her attempt to provide an overview of Native America in the Jewish imagination, Rubinstein skims the surface of some of the texts she is critiquing. *Members of the Tribe* is such a strong work that the reader wishes for it to be both lengthier and more detailed in its analysis of and engagement with the wide variety of texts that Rubinstein mentions. Further, Rubinstein at times neglects to address the problematic ethics of racial ventriloquism or masquerade she introduces. *Members of the Tribe* could do with more analysis of the power politics at play when a Jew dons redface or a Native American identifies his/ her cultureâs genocide with the Holocaust.

On the whole, however, Rubinsteinâs work makes an invaluable contribution to both Jewish and American studies, making a striking argument for the role of both Native Americans and Jews in what she calls âliterary nation-buildingâ (p. 21). And, by illuminating the unique role of Native Americans in the Jewish imagination, Rubinstein provides her readers with an extraordinary account of how modern Jews have negotiated between tribal âblood-longingsâ and secular Enlightenment values. This remarkable book is a must-read for those interested in transethnic criticism and the Jewish encounter with modernity.