

This is a biography for Wilde fans who want to be reassured that he is still “unquestionably heroic” (213). In other words, it is a book for those who believe that *aimer c’est tout pardonner*. But scholars and fans alike must acknowledge Wilde’s broken, questionable, and unheroic aspects, too. These contradictions include the fact that he edited a feminist journal but behaved caddishly to his wife, and that he admired the US Confederacy because he saw the Southern Cause as similar to Ireland’s. One of the most urgent tasks facing today’s critics is to accurately portray the complex ambiguities that beset his life and work. For me, Frankel’s admirably crisp prose and smooth, predictable argument reveal too little of the flawed human being who set the world on fire and immolated himself in the process.

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JONATHAN HSY. *Antiracist Medievalisms: From “Yellow Peril” to Black Lives Matter*. Arc Medievalist. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2021. Pp. 170. \$110.00 (cloth).  
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Jonathan Hsy’s fabulous new book, *Antiracist Medievalisms: From “Yellow Peril” to Black Lives Matter* begins with what feels like a confession. Hsy began writing the book assuming that his primary audience would be the predominantly white scholars that encompass the field of medieval studies. But as his imagined readership began to shift, he realized he wanted his book to be in conversation with “communities of color working collectively to advance racial justice” (x). This, I believe, is the strength of the book, that it is the product of the tensions that come from doing the work of advancing racial justice—decentering whiteness, celebrating communities of color, and centering how these communities have thrived despite oppression. From the preface to the last pages of the book, which include further readings and resources on antiracism and equity, *Antiracist Medievalisms* functions to create community and solidarity and to reject white supremacy.

The preface contains a succinct but powerful definition of antiracist medievalism as the “critical analysis of the Middle Ages, as well as the artistic reinvention of medieval pasts in literature and culture—to trace efforts by communities of color to critique longstanding systems of white supremacy and to advance new forms of social justice” (xi). With this definition in mind, Hsy builds upon the work of scholars in Asian American studies and comparative ethnic studies (and carefully acknowledges these citational genealogies) to center a *critical* analysis that both celebrates the accomplishments of the activists, artists, and scholars he discusses and also reminds us of their humanity. He points out how, in some instances, antiracist medievalisms have perpetuated racism and stereotypes. One example is found in chapter 1, where he discusses the Chinese American medievalism of Wong Chin Foo. Although Wong creates solidarity with African Americans as fellow disenfranchised people of color, he also theorizes what is described now as “honorary whiteness,” which is tied to his desire to assimilate, and he practices a form of ethnocentrism (36–37). Hsy, however, takes great care to remind the reader that the problem is and always has been white supremacy and the ways that white supremacy purposely pits communities of color against one another (37). Throughout his careful analyses, Hsy always brings the reader back to the main root of the problem—white supremacy.

In each chapter, Hsy concentrates on different ways that communities of colors have experienced and have pushed against oppression, as the front half title of the chapters so succinctly point out (“Progress,” “Plague,” “Place,” “Passing,” “Play,” “Pilgrimage”). Because I cannot do justice in a short review to the careful analysis that each chapter covers, I focus on chapter 3,


which I find to be the most powerful and the most representative of the spirit of celebration, solidarity, and anti-white supremacy that the book as whole represents.

In “Place: Indefinite Detention,” Hsy discusses the anonymous lyrics carved into the wooden walls of the Angel Island Immigration Station. Produced by Asian detainees (seventy percent of the detainees were Chinese), the poems “adapted medieval lyric forms (conventionalize in the Tang Dynasty) for a new geopolitical environment” (64). The chapter begins by contextualizing the poems through an exposition of the Angel Island Emigration Station (1910–1940). Unlike Ellis Island where the majority of European immigrants were processed within hours, Angel Island was built to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—the detainees were segregated by gender, separated from their families, held in crowded wooden barracks, and painfully interrogated. The very walls of the wooden barracks became a point of catharsis as the detainees began to carve poems that critique their dehumanization. Despite several attempts to dismiss and get rid of them, deemed graffiti by the emigration officials, the poems persevered.

Hsy, then, carefully describes several of the lyrics in order to draw out for an English-speaking audience how they use Tang Dynasty forms to convey the injustice of incarceration. The poems not only build on early Chinese forms of writing, but they build on each other, and are often paired so that they echo or revise one another, creating a “collaborative community of poets while also attesting to the lived presence of bodies sharing a physical space” (73). Hsy ends by describing how activists preserved and recovered the poems. In the 1930s, both Tet Yee (aka Yee Tet Ming) and Smiley Jann wrote as many of the poems as they could in notebooks; in the 1970s, Alexander Weiss, a Jewish American and former child refugee who escaped the Nazis and became a park ranger, saw them and grasped their significance (he did not know Chinese, but he understood nonetheless). Weiss searched out Asian American activists such as George Araki and Mak Takahashi to document the lyrics, and fought to preserve them as poetry instead of continuing the racist tactic of dismissing them as graffiti. Through this context, Hsy shows how Angel Island becomes “a thickly layered site of interethnic solidarity, resilience, and resistance to injustice” (78).

The chapter embodies the very same tactics that Hsy celebrates in the book. Although the last section of the chapter specifically shows how Asian American and Jewish solidarities were essential for the preservation of the poems, the chapter’s careful analysis of the poetry as a collective experience vis-à-vis the pain and humiliation of detention creates new forms of solidarity. This time it is between Asian Americans who lived through the Chinese Exclusionary Act and detention in Angel Island and the Black and Brown immigrants experiencing the modern white supremacist apparatus of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE, which relies on similar tactics as the Angel Island Emigration Station to degrade and dehumanize migrants from the Global South.

In *Antiracist Medievalisms* Hsy puts into practice the very notions of celebration, solidarity, and critical analysis that he sets out to uncover. I could not put it down, and I recommended it without reservations. His critical apparatus is now a model for my own work on Caribbean medievalisms, I have every intention of teaching his chapter on Angel Island when I teach Tang Dynasty poetry in my early world literature class, and my graduate courses on critical race studies will have the book as a required reading. Indeed, *Antiracist Medievalisms* has raised the standards for scholarship on medievalism for the better of all our communities.

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