

## INTRODUCTION

This volume presents American literature as a field inviting varied intercultural discourses. This is not unsurprising in that literature is a form of cultural expression, and the American cultural mosaic is a composite of diverse influences.

The attempts that have been made to define Americanness have disclosed the heterogeneous nature of the American nation. Michael Walzer observes that

Americans have homesteads and homefolks and hometowns, and each of these is an endlessly interesting topic of conversation. But they don't have much to say about a common or communal home. Nor is there a common *patrie*, but rather many different ones – a multitude of fatherlands (and motherlands). For the children, even the grandchildren, of the immigrant generation, one's *patrie*, the “native land of one's ancestors,” is somewhere else. The term “Native Americans” designates the very first immigrants, who got here centuries before any of the others. (334)

History demonstrates that America as a nation was repopulated by non-natives arriving in the New World voluntarily, in search of freedom, or involuntarily, in bondage. The two dynamics gave rise to socio-political hierarchical structures that were supported by the maintenance and employment of essentialist race, gender, and class conceptualizations.

Notwithstanding that disparate individual social and political status, the experiences of all newcomers in the New World have commonality in terms of mainly confrontation with differing cultures and the resultant endeavors to cultivate and maintain group cultural heritage, i.e. customs, literary traditions, oral traditions, religious beliefs, rituals, value systems, philosophies, music, paintings, and languages. Although with the passage of time white supremacist Anglo-American cultural practices were predominant, imposing English as the official American language and elevating White Anglo-Saxon

Protestantism to the ecclesiastical and political ranking, cultural pluralism within the American nation continues to advance.

Cultural pluralism in America invoked multicultural and intercultural studies. For a considerable period, the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism, employed interchangeably, and perhaps erroneously, were deemed to be synonymous. Later on, cultural theoreticians began to differentiate between the two conceptualizations (*Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* 244 and *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* 153). While multiculturalism is concerned with coexistence of cultural groups, interculturalism accentuates the reconciling, mutually interacting processes between different cultures and the resulting circumstances.

The discernment, definition, and systematization of multiple cultural phenomena are outgrowths of intercultural studies. In terms of language, several varieties of English have been identified. For instance, African-American Vernacular Speech, Chicano English or New York Latino English are established upon the basis of cultural and ethnic background, while Arabish (Arabic English), Chinglish (Chinese English), Hinglish (Hindu English), Dunglish (Dutch English), Poglish (Polish English), and Spanglish (Spanish English) are portmanteaus describing the effects of interactions between English and other languages. With regard to the religious sphere, calls for ecumenical communication and inter-faith dialogue emerged from the formation of American interdenominational churches and theologies. In addition, American literary canon has been enriched by the recognition of such particularities as African American, Arab American, Asian American, Chicano, Jewish American, and Native American literatures. Identity studies, in turn, have brought about conceptualizations that note the intercultural nature of American identities. Concepts such as W. E. B. Du Bois's "double consciousness", Gloria Anzaldúa's "new mestiza", Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" and "the Third Space" raise awareness of the multi-faceted conception of American selves, at the same time undermining the essentialist notions of the self as unchanging and pure. Where cultures meet, be it as a result of colonialism, slavery, migration, globalization or diasporas, the mutual exchange of cultural elements leads to the formation of hybrid identities marked by ambiguity and ambivalence, and therefore not easily identifiable.

The studies undertaken and presented by the authors within this volume encompass a wide spectrum of American literary intercultural discourses. **Alaa Alghamdi** portrays the unique literary expressivity that contemporary Arab women writers, Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi, Farzaneh Milani, Simin Tehran, Hissa Hillal, and Joumana Haddad, have developed in their efforts to maintain the significance of their own oral traditions, to challenge derogatory Western stereotypes, and to demarginalize their voices within their own patriarchal cultures. **Reygar Bernal** explores the phenomenon of Spanglish,

an example of linguistic hybridity. Apart from the discussions of its linguistic, social, and cultural significance, Bernal investigates also the literary importance of Spanglish in narrative works by Puerto Rican Ana Lydia Vega and the Dominican-American Junot Díaz, literary essays by the Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa and poems by the Spanish-born Cuban-American Richard Blanco. Issues of cultural hybrid identities permeate the article of **Sonia Caputa**. She looks at the complex experience of Polish immigrants and their descendants focusing especially on expressions of nostalgia and mourning for the land of their ancestors in short stories of a contemporary Polish-American writer Anthony Bukosky, which were published between 1986 and 2008. **Iwona Filipczak** discusses problematic hybrid identities in *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by the contemporary Indian-American author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, arguing that even “culinary fiction” may be seriously engaged with issues of political import, such as the need of constant renegotiation of American identities. **Urszula Gołębiowska** analyzes Henry James’s travelogue *The American Scene* (1907) and tale *A Round of Visits* (1910) as portraiture of the dilemmas that American expatriates face upon returning from Europe to a land that has undergone fundamental socio-political and cultural changes. **Agnieszka Gondor-Wiercioch** examines the transformation of subject position from that of a radical to moderate feminist that the contemporary Chicana writer Ana Castillo exhibits through her novels *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, 1986; *Sapogonia*, 1990; *So Far from God*, 1993, and *The Guardian* (2007). Employing Homi Bhabha’s notions of “hybridity” and “the Third Space,” **Magda Hasabelnaby** elucidates the Arab American literary pursuit to reconcile two seemingly disparate culturally determined identities reconstructed in two works of the Syrian American writer Mohja Kahf – collection of poetry entitled *Emails from Scheherazad* (2001) and the novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Incorporating black theological concepts of “interfaith dialogue” and “extended family,” **Agnieszka Łobodziec** ferrets out the critique of institutionalized black patriarchal religious separatism and the attention given to black theological call for spiritual interdenominational unity depicted in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* (1997). **Akshaya K. Rath** demonstrates how India experience influenced Allen Ginsberg’s writing. Mainly in Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals* (1970) but also in his later poems Rath traces the impact of Buddhist and Hindu mythical beliefs on Ginsberg’s poetics and his rebellion against American capitalist and imperialist ideology. **Xiaohong Zhang and Xiaomin Chen** present a cross-cultural comparison of Western and Chinese modes of literary confession. Focusing on the impact of American confessional poetry upon the Chinese literary scene in the 1980s and a discourse of women’s poetry in particular, the Authors are interested in the political potential of Chinese confessional poetry.

**Works cited**

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