

researched concept of “solidarity across difference” in Theodore Dreiser’s non-fiction, and ending with Laurence Gervais-Linon’s investigation of the paradoxical nature of gated communities, to name just a few. The collection’s very eclecticism and essential interdisciplinarity do, however, result in somewhat erratic jumps between the subjects covered by the contributors, whereas the assessment of “e pluribus unum” and “e pluribus plura” professed by the title is only marginally present in some of the texts. Nevertheless, the volume’s impressive range shows the wealth of contemporary American Studies research which encompasses not only conventional ventures into literary and cultural quarters but also highly illuminating explorations of political thought, architecture, jazz, the methodology of teaching and transformations of American academia. All in all, it is undoubtedly an inspiring volume that fittingly demonstrates the breadth and depth of American Studies and the increasing diversity of research conducted in Europe.

Agnieszka Kotwasińska
University of Warsaw

Jerzy Durczak and Paweł Frelik, eds., *(Mis)reading America: American Dreams, Fictions and Illusions*. Kraków: Universitas, 2011. 472 pages.

The volume *(Mis)reading America: American Dreams, Fictions and Illusions* offers a rich and varied perspective on different aspects of American culture. The collection is divided into five sections dedicated respectively to readings of American identity, explorations of the past, interpretations of dystopian futures or alternative histories, reflections on ethnic literatures and media analyses. The overall emphasis of the collection, as already suggested by its title, is on the idea of constructing, interpreting, misinterpreting and remapping the image of America. The idea of a metaphorical, but also physical cartography is strongly present in the first essay the opening section. Andrea O’Reilly Herrera’s article, indeed entitled “Cartographies of Knowledge: The Remapping of American Literature and Culture,” suggests the emergence of a perspective on American studies that is increasingly transnational in scope, emphasizing experiences of mixed and hybrid forms of national or personal identity. This view emerges in opposition to the increasing visibility, found in contemporary American politics, of a discriminatory and intolerant discourse. On the other hand, Maciej Masłowski’s piece concentrates on the notion of reading and interpreting America, focusing on two different modes of interpretation, represented respectively by seventeenth-century Puritan hermeuntics and the con-

spiracy theories that have flourished in American culture and may be found in literature as well, exemplified by Pynchon's or DeLillo's texts. Masłowski locates a connection between these aspects in the idea of a Manichean and deeply interconnected world. In both cases, an act of interpretation is implied in an attempt to "read" an elusive American identity.

This attempt to read, interpret and define American identity is projected towards a sometimes very recent and often traumatic past in the second section of the book. This part of the collection begins with Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis's reflection on the role of houses in literary representations of the decay of the Southern aristocracy, in particular in association with the characters of spinsters. In these narratives, exemplified for instance by Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the houses become powerful symbols of patriarchy, sexuality, secrecy, decay and different forms of deviance, reinforcing the gothic textual frame. Subsequently, Justyna Kociatkiewicz addresses issues related to historical fiction in her discussion of Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*, a novel controversial for its treatment of the Rosenberg trial, whereas Jerzy Kamionowsky takes into consideration readings of 9/11 by Toni Morrison and Amiri Baraka. In the subsequent section, the focus shifts from reflections on the actual past to "visions of the future and pasts that never came." Significantly, the opening article by Anna Gilarek compares two alternative histories dealing with a dystopian Nazi presence in the United States: Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*. Gilarek's conclusion to her analysis of these two works is that while depictions of a totalitarian America can be considered far-fetched misinterpretations, the dominant discourse of the U.S. as an open, pluralistic society also represents a misconception, as shown by the persistent presence of nativist and xenophobic movements throughout American history, which render the fictional evocation of a Fascist America less far-fetched than it may appear at first. Dystopia is also present in Kamil Rusiłowicz's reading of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. This novel is juxtaposed to the cinematic genre of the catastrophic film, which throughout the decades embodied different collective fears before entering a post-apocalyptic perspective in the aftermath of 9/11. Rusiłowicz indicates that both *The Road* and the more recent catastrophic movies point to a condition of trauma from which America has not recovered yet, reflecting a deepening sense of uncertainty.

The following section of the book contains articles dedicated to ethnic literature with an emphasis on the construction of minority identity, as in Ewa Antoszek's paper dealing with the struggle to define the female self in Chicana literature, going beyond the impositions of traditional Catholicism or of the legacy of conquest and colonial exploitation. Latino literature is also present, this time in a Puerto Rican angle, in Jerzy Duczak's

paper. Durczak analyses the work of Junot Diaz in parallel with that of the representative of another minority, the African American Claude Brown. Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* and Diaz's *Drown* are placed within the broader tradition of the coming-of-age/autobiographical novel. Durczak contrasts these two texts written forty years from each other, illustrating how the two ethnic coming-of-age stories ultimately embrace diverging views of the United States, since the former endorses the notion of American success whereas the latter rejects it, emphasizing a bleak sense of alienation.

The fifth part of the volume, which concentrates on media representations, explores different aspects of visual culture in America, including, in Zofia Kolbuszewska's article, a study of Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man*. Kolbuszewska considers the film as a reinvention of the American frontier mythology. She locates in this representation a form of "neobaroque imago," which stresses elements of hybridity as well as of tensions between majority and minority discourse.

(Mis)reading America weaves together disparate strands and elements to create a multifaceted yet harmonious collection of articles that offer new directions to read and interpret America and its cultures. It encompasses reflections on the distant past represented by the legacy of Puritan America and attempts to imagine possible dystopian futures. It includes analyses of different elements of American literature, going from classics of the traditional canon to the recent narratives of disparate ethnic minorities, as well as considering different genres, media and trends. Many articles reflect on the consequences of 9/11, which, along with the theme of interpretation that gives the volume its title, is also a recurring motif in the collection. Thus *(Mis)reading America*, the work of mostly Polish scholars of American studies, is a thoughtful meditation from an external standpoint on the past and present of U.S. cultural identity.

Francesca de Lucia

CONTRIBUTORS

Jerzy Kamionowski teaches history of English literature and courses on feminist and African American literary theory and practice at the Chair of Modern Languages at the University of Białystok. He is the author of *Głosy z "dzikiej strefy"* (*Voices of the "Wild Zone,"* 2011) on the poetry of three women writers of the Black Arts Movement generation: Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Audre Lorde. He has published articles on women and African American writers as well as on postmodern novelists. He has also co-edited three volumes of critical essays on American women poets.

Francesca de Lucia, a Swiss and Italian double citizen, holds an M.A. from the University of Geneva, a diploma in American Studies from Smith College, and a Ph.D. from the University of Oxford, where she worked with professor Paul Giles. Her thesis was entitled "Italian American Cultural Fictions: From Diaspora to Globalization." She has published articles on various aspects of ethnicity in American literature and film.

Ewa Luczak is Associate Professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. Her publications include *How Their Living Outside America Affected Five African American Authors: Toward a Theory of Expatriate Literature* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), *In Other Words: Dialogizing Postcoloniality, Race, and Ethnicity* (co-edited with Justyna Wierchowska and Joanna Ziarkowska, Peter Lang, 2012) and *Czarno na białym: Afroamerykanie, którzy poruszyli Amerykę* (co-edited with Andrzej Antoszek, Warsaw University Press, 2009).

Katarzyna Nowak is Assistant Professor at the Department of English, University of Wrocław, Poland, where she teaches American literature and culture. She is the author of *Melancholic Travelers: Autonomy, Hybridity, and the Maternal* (Peter Lang, 2007) and co-editor of *Interiors: Interiority/Exteriority in Literary and Cultural Discourse* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). She has published papers on postcolonial literature and theory, gender studies and opera studies.

Alicja Piechucka is Associate Professor in the Department of American Literature and Culture at the University of Łódź. Her academic interests include American modernist poetry and contemporary American prose. Much of her research focuses on comparative studies of American and French literature. She is also interested in the visual arts and American visual culture. She teaches, among others, courses in American literature and painting. A literary critic, she is a regular contributor to *Nowe Książki* and *Tygiel Kultury*.

Milton Reigelman has been Senior Fulbright Lecturer on American Literature at the University of Warsaw and Kiev State University. In 2007 he and Paweł Jędrzejko co-chaired the International Melville/Conrad Conference in Szczecin and then co-edited two