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## Exploring American Cultural Territories and Ages: An Innovative Perusal

Cistelean, Ioana, 2021b, *American Cultural Paradigms- X-rays on Trauma, American Dream& Immigrants' Fiction in USA*: Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană

Cistelean, Ioana, 2021 a, *Modern American Literature – Profiles, Texts & Text Interpretation*, Oradea: Editura Universității din Oradea

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The 21<sup>st</sup> century provides a generous background for researchers to investigate and question the nature, the structure, the auctorial intentions, the value of art works, as it provides the theoretical tools and the body of knowledge to facilitate a diversified, intricate approach to works in any fields of creativity, to any products conceived by human imagination; consequently, when examining literary achievements, it is noticeable how they almost always display their documentary force, becoming, as Ioana Cistelean has observed, “a mirror of the past and of the present” with inevitable “big influence on the future” (Cistelean, 2021, a: &). As books commonly mediate between the text and its reader in a process of “active negotiation as communication takes place” (Lodge et al., 2008: 23), theoretical discourses come to foreground the knowledge we acquire by reading them as well as the avenues that can be followed in order for us to discover not only the inherent meaning but also the answers of the text by submitting it to different levels of exploring, understanding and appropriating its essential components, mostly in case of prose writing: theme, motif, content, characters, plot, chronotopes/setting, point of view of the narrative, literary devices. It is the main task (and challenge) of any “disciples in Letters and all genuine and passionate lovers of literature” (Cistelean, 2021 a: 22), and the collection of carefully carried out studies on the writings of well-selected representatives of *Modern American Literature* is an intelligently conceived guidebook for practising a kind of reading that can lead to a deeper understanding of any literary work in truth.

Keeping in mind that any narrative is “a form of understanding and exploration” (Parrinder, 2006: 4), the author opted for a user-friendly format of presenting her critical views on the works of the twelve selected writers, namely, each author’s titles submitted to her examination are historically contextualized, both by age references and by a particular mention of their major published works, and aesthetically dimensioned (e.g. Poe’s Gothic

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formula, Twain's humour and satire, Morrison's identity experiences, or Melville's modernism). Likewise, each text, be it a whole short story (E. A. Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Sherwood Anderson), a fragment of a longer text (Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, J.D. Salinger, Toni Morrison, Raymond Carver), certain drama scenes/acts (Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller) is followed by suggestion for possible approaches to, and interpretation of the text- *Text Interpretation Hints*- which provides students with theoretical instruments in their endeavour to disentangle the intricacies of a literary piece.

Ioana Cistelecan's research on issues of 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture - *American Cultural Paradigms- X-rays on Trauma, American Dream& Immigrants' Fiction in USA*- scrutinizes those literary instances that best render the big picture of American culture that "acts and reacts as a melting pot paradigm, a generous habitat where trauma, crisis and American dream are continuously co-dependent and intertwined." (Cistelecan, 2021b: 10), so that the selected authors and works should faithfully mirror the theory course developed here, namely a pluri- and interdisciplinary juxtaposition of facts meant to generate a "new understanding of cultural forms and activities" (Bal et al., 1995: 15). The students (or any other category of readers) are confronted with a diversity of discourses to prismatically tackle the concepts that conflate the titles referred to in the study. The trauma theory – *Trauma & Trauma Fiction. Context & Paradigm*-, asserting that "trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (Cistelecan, 2021b : 29), is basically circumscribed to "authors of 9/11 fiction" (31) - J.S.Foer, Don DeLillo, Jay McInerney, John Green - whose novels are closely read and interpreted from this perspective, namely how the 9/11 tragedy affected "the society in general" (39), and how novelists chose to turn their characters into carriers of such a collective trauma.

Two chapters cover a category of fictional narratives that give students (and readers) an inside view of the American society, of the American nation and individuals, thus facilitating "access to personal experiences very different from our own" (Parrinder, 2006: 1) and completing the larger maps of cultural paradigms that define a certain literary genre; on the one hand, there is the *Western Short Story* which "exploits and arch plot (single protagonist) or a mini-plot (multiple characters)" and "combines aspects of the crime, society and diverse actions genres in which the protagonist is both condemned and exalted by the society" (Cistelecan, 2021b: 114), as demonstrated by a detailed scanning of two novelists works, Stephen Cranes's and Bret Hart's short stories. On the other hand, there is the local knowledge that students can acquire from the literature of the South, an area that "played a major role in the local colour movement" (143), referred to in *The Southern Local Colour Paradigm*, the chapter that focuses on the *regional realism*, distinctive through its "characters, dialect, customs, topography and other features particular to a given region" (143), as demonstrated by reviewing and rereading texts of Kate Chopin in *The Southern Feminine Touch*(153-167).

The pages dedicated to the definition and practice of the American

Dream, describe it as both “a socioeconomic promise of material success and (...) also a sociopolitical one (...), meaning something more profound and aspirational than simple material comfort”(169), such as it is followed and demonstrated by two seminal novels, F.S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, in which the protagonists have failed in achieving the supreme goal as the authors opted for the exposure of “the disillusionment of the *American dream*”(178).

What is specifically national, group or individual identity, is constructed and validated through narratives and everyday practices that can emphasize the differences and peculiarities of people(s) in a historical and geographical dynamics that enables identity “to come to the fore in a world where nationalities are easily confused” (Parrinder, 2006: 23), of which an almost traditional example has become America, *the Mother of Exiles*. Ioana Cistelecan garners a number of contemporary writers to reinforce the constant contribution that the literature of the immigrants (European, Asian, African, Jewish Americans) has made to the American belles-lettres in the entire immigration history of the nation; she chooses to evince how voices of immigrants got through the writings of authors such Mario Puzo, Khaled Hosseini, James Baldwin and Bernard Malamud, who all represent *The American Immigrant Novel*, “a genre of American novel which explores the process of assimilation and relationship of American immigrants towards American identity and ideas”(224).

The present study foregrounds the author’s constant concern for convincing students that a good theoretical approach to the understanding of literary texts always reveals an unexpected presence of other cultural details that were generated by various historical circumstances and reactions; theory and theoretical discourse invite people “to look at things differently, and to take advantage of the most powerful and innovative thinking and writing available” (Bal et al., 1994: 16).

## References

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