

**REWRITING THE AMERICAN CULTURESCAPE**

Florian Andrei Vlad, Universitară Publishing House, 2020  
ISBN:978-606-28-1049-8 (243 pag.)

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Written in the exemplary manner of modern Cultural Studies, or, better yet, American Studies, the book of Florian Andrei Vlad makes for a valuable addition to philological studies looking at four American fiction writers that, “in principle, support a patriarchal, monologic American cultural narrative in a long tradition of white, male voices from John Winthrop, the Founding Fathers, all the way to, and past the War on Terror narrative”, as the author himself summarizes on the back cover of the book.

Starting from the theoretical notion of Appadurai’s culturescapes, the book defines the concept as seen by the critic, describes the notion and uses it to refer to American culturescape in order to define the complex cultural mechanisms used to reconstruct and deconstruct the American setting. F.A. Vlad chooses four American post-war and contemporary writers to illustrate the American cultural scape in what he calls a break in the traditional story of American exceptionalism, America as ‘chosen nation’, ‘City upon a Hill’ predominant narrative. The chosen writers are: Kurt Vonnegut, John Updike, Philip Roth and Don DeLillo.

Regarding narrative constructions and discourses on America and American identity, time wise, F.A. Vlad covers colonial times, 4-6 July 1776 - the ‘new nation’ of the Founding Fathers, and follows discourse transitions and transformations well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The book is divided into four chapters, each zooming in on to one of the above mentioned writers, preceded by an Introduction. It starts from the hypothesis that Americans have initially tried to define themselves as an emergent nation, forged in the New World. This model was the model of a Christian settlement where people depended on and helped one another, as newcomers from other parts of the world, and, therefore, extensions of their former homelands and heritages. America, thus, appears as a “Second Creation”, as Nye calls it in the Introduction of the present volume: “there could be no American narratives until the revolutionary period, and

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even then it would take a generation to develop stories that could replace the colonial sense of European political and religious origins” (Nye quoted in Vlad (17)).

This initial rendering of America moves further on to identity definition in terms of America as ‘melting pot’, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A homogeneous territory, an assimilationist stance and a desire to be accepted and incorporated into the fabric seem to be the drivers of this emerging nation. Another pervasive metaphor of these early times, especially at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is that of the ‘frontier’ in connection to the idea of discovery, of pioneering and the conquest of new territory and pushing of boundaries. America is not only a place of instant mix into the existing setting, but a budding nation of fierce people, first pushing West, then pushing all sorts of other frontiers and sturdily shaping the so-called American Exceptionalism discourse of the brave New World.

The constant pushing of boundaries to conquer land and people, the fall of former European powers and the new ways of seeing the world without clearly defined, even porous borders, led to constant challenges directed against centers of authority and gave stronger voice to the postmodern sense of relativism and to skepticism (Vlad, 20).

The advent of globalization, the acceptance and fostering of difference, new issues such as gender, race, ethnic origin are brought into the limelight and begin to dent the “monologic, patriarchal American identity” (Vlad, 20). In this sense, the four authors under scrutiny in the present study will subscribe to this imagery of America as mosaic, as “salad bowl”, as “patchwork quilt”, or the “Pizza of innumerable *stagioni*” (Vlad, 20). America becomes this multi culturescape; the works of Vonnegut, Updike, Roth and DeLillo “show dramatic changes [...] as they do not support one patriarchal metanarrative, but take issue with it in ways that are to be examined individually and in successive contexts” (Vlad, 21). The set intention to see how these four writers contributed to the “rewriting of a previously mainstream, united-we-stand American identity, in which the American dream had provided the main impetus, in which Americanism had become a prevailing ideology” (Vlad, 14) is then followed through in each chapter, dedicated to each author, in turn.