

Réka M. Cristian. *Cultural Vistas and Sites of Identity: Essays on Literature, Film and American Studies*. Szeged: Americana eBooks, 2011.

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Réka M. Cristian's recently published *Cultural Vistas and Sites of Identity: Essays on Literature, Film and American Studies* provides an unconventional journey into the world of American Studies. This digital-issued publication displays the author's recent academic interests on American drama, modernism, the Sixties, film theories and the American film. Firstly, *Cultural Vistas* reflects the increasing importance of digitalized academic publications, being among the first of its kind. As Shelley Fisher Fishkin, former President of the American Studies Association, argues in her 2011 article on "Deep Maps: A Brief for Digital Palimpsest Mapping Projects," published in the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, digital volumes have irrevocably begun to make inroads into the academic canon and as "publishers increasingly experiment with publishing digital-only monographs, the norms for counting digital publications towards promotion and tenure are likely to change" (Fishkin 25).

Cristian's free-access e-book — issued in .prc and .epub format to make it accessible not only to the PCs but also to other technological gadgets — is an elegant compilation of different texts (written within interdisciplinary contexts) raising intriguing questions about film, gender studies, American drama and identity theories, all within the aegis of

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transnational studies. The well-argued aim of the book is enclosed in a witty parabola on Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* in the introduction, "The Road Now Taken: Cultural Vistas in American Studies," which is in fact more than an overview of the state of the discipline: it advocates the new methodological shift involving digital humanities and new media (similar to the *Hacking the Academy* project she references) for the discipline of a *new* American Studies.

Cultural Vistas is divided into two parts: the first consists of a discussion of 'identity topics' in literary works (*Getting Home Alive* by Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* by Edward Albee, and *How I Learned to Drive* by Paula Vogel) from the standpoint of gender and postcolonial studies. The latter part scrutinizes similar identity issues in film through the lens of synergic authorship and author-function, cosmopolitanism and the Middle-Worlder in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Frida* and *Babel*.

In the first part of the book, entitled *Literary Vistas*, the first essay named as "Border Stories and Posthegemonic Identities. Reading *Getting Home Alive*" focuses on the concept of border as a powerful metaphor both in literature and American Studies and also as an attribute to identity making. Cristian uses the term 'postcolonial' to describe the specificities of American culture instead of 'ethnic' in the description of identity construction. She argues interestingly that postcolonial and post-national identities are not mutually exclusive and can be reunited under a "Middle World syncretism." The second essay, "Identities at Thresholds in *How I Learned to Drive* and *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?*" explores the thresholds of characters identity in Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* (1997) and Edward Albee's *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?*. Cristian's choice of these 'paradigm dramas' reflects a double aim: she intends to push forward the interpretative boundary of the dramatic genre into that of the

larger discipline of American Studies and to challenge mainstream critical readings by providing new interpretations to two controversial plays about unusual identity forms.

In the *Cinematic Vistas* part, the essay entitled “The Roman Springs of Mrs. Stone. Authorship in José Quintero’s and Robert Allan Ackerman’s Adaptations of Tennessee Williams’s Novel” focuses on the figure of the author especially through the dramatic poet characters by testing and questioning the Americanization of author theory in the film adaptations of Williams’s only novel. The following text, “Who’s Afraid of Adapting Albee? Synergic Authorship in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*,” pivots around the notion of synergic authorship, defined as a an alternative authorship. The underlying question of identity reappears in the “Negotiating Identity in Julie Taymor’s *Frida*,” where Cristian smartly highlights Frida’s “negotiated identity,” which is the result of a multitude of subtle negotiations of Kahlo as radical artist, activist, and exquisite woman represented by her (art) body displaying her multiple identities through a myriad of intra- and extradiegetic images.

Reaching out beyond the national parameters, Cristian’s discussion comes full circle by highlighting in “Transnational Negotiations in Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel*” “the contemporary crisis of trust”. These transnational narratives link up, Cristian convincingly suggests, to the greater contemporary theories and methods in American Studies that tend to embrace comparative studies, critical internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial studies and therefore help to test the paradigm of “Post-Nationalist American Studies.” Cristian’s statements seem well-argued, provided the reader independently reapplies the notion of transnational histories within a wider American context.

In the era of different post-essentialisms, post-studies, and transnational turn(s), the “new” American Studies Cristian calls for can hardly do without the methodologies offered by innovative media. This *digital-born* aptly puts forward its unconventional views on the topics discussed and by its very mode of publication. Cristian has definitely taken a road less

traveled by the majority of academics in the humanities insofar, but one which will hopefully be more crowded in the future for the benefit of all who enjoy the free flow of knowledge worldwide.