



# **Assimilation in America: A Good or a Bad Word?**

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## **Petr Anténe**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### American Academia under the Threat of Assimilation in Ishmael Reed's *Japanese by Spring*

In his 1993 satirical campus novel *Japanese by Spring*, Ishmael Reed illustrates the dangers of assimilation by focusing on the fictional Jack London College at the time of the Culture Wars. Whereas the predominantly conservative college is seemingly torn apart between the supporters of monoculturalism and multiculturalism, even some of the multiculturalists may lean towards assimilation. For instance, the protagonist, an African American instructor and a former supporter of affirmative action named Chappie Puttbutt, willingly rejects his past in order to obtain tenure. Besides denouncing African Americans and dreaming of moving to an all-white neighborhood, Chappie decides to learn Japanese in reaction to the rising influence of Japan in globalized economy. In Reed's satirical hyperbole, Chappie is eventually denied tenure and soon after, the college is bought by a Japanese corporation. Although the new administration seeks to Japanize the campus, Chappie again defects to those in power. This paper will highlight the author's strategies of providing a corrective vision to Chappie's corrupted assimilationist views, such as the insertion of the character of Ishmael Reed into the text of the novel. Therefore, while Steven Weisenburger's 1995 study *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel, 1930-1980* discerns a new mode of satire in post-war American literature, one that lacks specific targets and fixed norms or corrective goals, Reed adheres to the traditional satirical mode that aims to punish vice and uphold liberalist norms.

## **Patrycja Austin**

Rzeszów University, Rzeszów, Poland

### Cultural routes and roots in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and selected short stories

"As strange as it sounds, when the sky is overcast, when the clouds are low, something about the coastal landscape here, the water and the grass, the smell of bacteria when I visit the mudflats, takes me home." In Lahiri's most recent novel one of the twin brothers goes to the US to study oceanography while the other remains in Calcutta. Their lives, however, are never separated, neither are the two cultures. In the beaches of Rhode Island Shubhash finds resemblance to the delta lowlands surrounding Calcutta and he also notices the rhizomic roots of spartina growing along the shore. Around this image Lahiri builds a net of meanings pertaining to the intermingling of cultures in the neo-colonial era: one hierarchical, vertical, openly defiant; the other more accommodating, based not on binary oppositions and, in effect, more sustaining. This paper will look at the trajectory Lahiri has made in her take on cultural assimilation from her earlier stories until *The Lowland*.

## **Juraj Bakoš**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### Burying the Hatchet: Ben Bova's "Ya'aa'tey" to the First Navaho on Mars

A planet to our liking—is a terraforming of Mars a new level in assimilation? Will the inevitable colonization of Mars put an

historical end to assimilation efforts (and needs) on Earth or will it spin off just another spiral of interplanetary acculturation? Is the ground the Indians have covered from their metaphoric persecution in Serviss's *Edison's Conquest of Mars* in the late 19th century to their symbolic small step on regolith in Ben Bova's *Mars* from the end of the 20th century adequate to the change in how are they perceived by the mainstream society over this period? Is a Navaho geologist in the first manned mission to Mars a product of an exorbitant political correctness or a true asset to the expedition expected to deal with a desert-like surface of a hostile planet? These are only some of the questions that arise in the mind of a reader immersed into the science fiction concerned with the possibilities of life on Mars. The red planet has become a laboratory for human thinking since it has been considered a possible abode of extraterrestrial life more than a hundred years ago. That specific world has provided a unique canvas for caricature and high-pitched stylization of various phenomena in terrestrial society. In this paper, we will look closer on the portraits of the Native Americans sketched in the novels of American writers Garrett P. Serviss and Ben Bova.

## **Diana Benea**

University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania

### Identity Construction and the Question of Assimilation in Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*

My paper examines the complexities and paradoxes of identity construction and representation in *Disgraced* (2012), a recent play by the Pakistani-American writer Ayad Akhtar. Illustrative of the writer's general thematic concern with the intricacies of Muslim identity in the post-9/11 world, as well as the intercultural and



interreligious tensions at the heart of our increasingly global society, the play engages with the question of assimilation at different levels. Firstly, the paper aims to trace the journey undertaken by the protagonist, the successful lawyer Amir, from the celebratory narrative of full assimilation/ Americanization dominating his portrait in the first scenes (“an American” sharing the same idea of “the good life,” in the words of his friends) to an acknowledgment of the complicated equation of his hybrid identity as a Pakistani-American still indebted to his ethnic and religious background (perceived as “tribal,” “in his bones,” difficult to “root out”), which surfaces during a heated dinner conversation on conflicting understandings of Islam and Islamophobia, especially in the wake of 9/11. Secondly, I argue that Amir’s journey can also be analyzed through the lens of the symmetrical structure of the play – opening with a Western representation of a Muslim subject (Amir as the “assimilated” subject of his wife’s painting), and concluding with the subject confronting that specific representation, after his dramatic downfall. Finally, I conclude that Akhtar’s protagonist illustrates the ambivalent condition of a self inscribed at the intersection of multiple positionalities and allegiances, where such notions as past/present, belonging/ unbelonging, tradition/ assimilation have to be constantly (re)negotiated.

## **Mark A. Brandon**

University of New York in Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

### **From Mum Bett to Franz Boas: Race and Human Equality in American Intellectual Culture**

This paper explores the Enlightenment concept of basic human equality in United States history and culture. Since Jefferson, the

notion of equality has always been fraught with hypocrisy, but also charged with cultural power, even to the point of questioning racial and gender inequity. Later, in the nineteenth century, proponents of scientific racism mocked (and maybe feared) the idea of universal equality, which they viewed as naïve when compared to their version of “science.” In the early twentieth century, important intellectuals, such as Franz Boas, returned to the simple, equalitarian foundation, albeit in a new way. By the 1950s and 1960s, much of the Civil Rights Movement still found inspiration in the old formula of equality, even though it was marred by years of duplicity. This paper argues that the idea of the “equality of man” has become an influential (though not uncontested) cultural formula in the United States that has promoted assimilation. It is a recipe that is different from “racial” rights, “national” rights, or “multiculturalism.” Could this old and tested principle still be the best way forward.

## **Veronika Briatková**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### Coming to terms with the assimilation and identity of Native Americans in *Bleed Into Me* by Stephen Graham Jones

Stephen Graham Jones (1972-) has written science fiction, crime fiction, and horror fiction works, some of which offer commentary on the lives of Native Americans living in the United States of America today. At the centre of this paper will be stories from his book *Bleed Into Me* (2005). This includes stories of Native Americans living in a present-day society in which they feel or are perceived as *the other*. Although the non-Native-American and the Native-American characters occupy the same space, the United States of

America, their mutual interaction represents them as living in two different cultural spaces. Native American characters in these stories seem to be unsure of their identity because they feel this identity does not come from within, but from a source that is located outside of themselves. The meaning of the word assimilation and its interpretation also needs to be addressed because it is important to consider whether assimilation can be good, bad, both, or neither. Texts will be analysed through close reading and by interpretation using cognitive narratology. The analysis aims to reveal how the difference between what is happening and what is perceived to be happening is created and how this difference influences the interpretation. These literary texts offer at least two different points of view, revealing something about the source of identity in an individual. The chosen texts and their narrative techniques create worlds in which the question of whether assimilation has made things better becomes a question that these individuals do not seem to know how to answer or interpret.

## **Andrea Crhonková**

University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

### **“Finding America”: Assimilation of Female Immigrants in Early Jewish American Fiction**

In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, there was a great wave of Jewish immigration, mainly from the Central and Eastern Europe, to the United States. Almost half of these immigrants were women. The struggle of the female characters for assimilation into American culture as depicted in early Jewish American Fiction is the main issue addressed in the paper. The books used for the analysis are Anzia Yezierska's collection of short stories *Hungry*

*Hearts* and Henry Roth's novel *Call It Sleep*.

Ten short stories in Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts* narrate about the quest of the young female Jewish immigrants to achieve the American dream. The book focuses on the problems of acculturation and assimilation which protagonists experienced in the new environment. In Henry Roth's novel *Call It Sleep* two female characters, protagonist's mother and her sister, demonstrate a different attitude towards assimilation and being part of American culture. Even though the Jewish women's immigration to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century did not differ much from the experience of the other immigrant women, their experience was still influenced by their religion and gender. The paper analyses their search for acceptance and different approaches towards assimilation. However, the attempts to assimilate were not always successful and in the majority of the cases they were accompanied by the sense of disillusionment, the loss of a dream, doubts, and inability to separate oneself from the past that made the process more difficult.

## **Stephen Delbos**

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

### Passports & Poems: Assimilation in The New American Poetry

This paper examines the practice of editorial assimilation in the seminal poetry anthology *The New American Poetry*, edited by Donald Allen and published by Grove Press in 1960. In it, Allen claims to bring together for the first time the disparate strands of the American post-war avant-garde. My paper will read the anthology through a nationalist lens, showing how Allen's editorial practices

were arbitrarily exclusionary on the basis of nationality, effectively nationalizing a transnational movement. Allen's correspondence with Scottish poet Gael Turnbull, for example, reveals that Allen was willing to include him if he would apply for American citizenship. Allen did include the Scottish poet Helen Adam and British poet Denise Levertov, however, because they had lived in America for extended periods and had taken American citizenship. Thus assimilation is inherent to one of the most influential poetry anthologies of the 20th century. By claiming the post-war Anglophone poetic avant-garde for America, Allen in effect assimilated what was a decidedly transnational movement, with poets writing, living and publishing in several countries. Elucidating the complexities of Allen's editorial decisions, this paper puts *The New American Poetry* and Allen's practices of assimilation in a Cold War context, suggesting the larger forces at play in the conception of the anthology. Keywords: The New American Poetry, post-war poetry, poetry and nationalism, transnationalism

## **Anna Dziama**

University of Rzeszów, Rzeszów, Poland

### **On 'Jewish English': the case of Americanized Jews and their languages**

This paper examines the Jewish American community in terms of their language cultural identity. It also presents a phenomenon of 'Jewish English' defined by Steinmetz (1981:14) as [...] a form of Yiddish- and Hebrew- influenced English used by Jews, regardless of the extent of its hybridization. Especially, the article seeks to answer the question to what extent Yiddish and Hebrew admixture influenced the American variety of English and served as one of the

factors in the assimilation process and as a tool of preserving communal/religious life of Jewish diaspora in the USA. Furthermore, Gold (1985a:283) claims that Hebrew and Yiddish are archistratal languages in Anglophone countries, and they may be potential sources of influence on the English used by Jews. Undeniably, the impact of, especially, Ashkenazi Jews and their Yiddish culture referred as Yiddishkeit on – chiefly – Northern American culture is so immense that the introduction of such neologisms as klutz ‘a clumsy person’, kvetch ‘to complain habitually’, maven ‘an expert’, mazel tov ‘good luck’, schmuck ‘a stupid or foolish person’, nosh ‘a snack’ and schlep ‘to pull’ have become part of the American lexicon.

## **Iwona Filipeczak**

University of Zielona Gora, Zielona Gora, Poland

### **American identity according to Bharati Mukherjee – the concept of “mongrelization”**

In this presentation I would like to outline Bharati Mukherjee’s idea of American identity, the perspective she has developed since she became a naturalized US citizen. Mukherjee criticizes both Canadian and US policy of multiculturalism, which, in her understanding, “implies the existence of a central culture, ringed by peripheral cultures” (Mukherjee “American Dreamer”). She warns against establishing such hierarchy: central vs. peripheral, against “cultural balkanization”, and against “us” vs. “them” mentality. To manifest her ideology she rejects hyphenation and prefers to be called American instead of Asian–American. In the result she has been read as favoring assimilation. Yet the writer distances herself from this word, and from the concept itself; for her cultural contact always involves exchange of cultural elements, transformation of identity

that works in both directions, in other words, hybridization. The word Mukherjee uses to describe this process is “mongrelization”. She frequently uses it in public contexts: in her essays as well as on her faculty website, where it is set in opposition to the concept of multiculturalism.

Drawing on Mukherjee’s essays and interviews, in the presentation I will explain what exactly the writer means by “mongrelization”, what connotations the word has for her, and why she decides not to use the word “hybridity”, which has been present in academic discourse for some time now. Examples from the writer’s prose will illustrate her notion of American identity today.

## **Brenda Flanagan**

Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, U.S.A

### The Problematic of Becoming American

The famous American writer, James Baldwin, reminded us in his essay, *Many Thousands Gone*, that “The making of an American begins at the point where he himself rejects all other ties, any other country, and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land.”

To become American is, then, to reject one’s past. While this is a legal necessity, it is emotionally and psychologically impossible and unfeasible. This paper argues that the definition of what constitutes “an American” is so fluid, that assimilation itself becomes problematic.

# Jakub Franěk

Charles university, Prague, Czech Republic

## Arendt on Nationalism and European Nation State

This paper explores Hannah Arendt's critique of nationalism and the European model of the nation state. Arendt's interpreters (e.g. M. Cannovan) often argue that Arendt regards West European *civic nationalism* – in contrast to Central and East European *tribal nationalism* which she clearly condemns – as a positive phenomenon that is actually indispensable for the functioning of modern democracy. While such interpretation may seem plausible in the light of the *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt's later works (most importantly *On Revolution*) reveal that her critique of nationalism goes much deeper. Arendt, as I argue, regards nationalism in all of its forms as a fundamentally tribal and hence anti-political movement. More importantly, she is highly critical of the European model of democratic nation state itself. A viable model of a political formation that could accommodate democratic politics in modern world is for Arendt represented not by the European nation state, but by decentralized federal republic epitomized by the United States.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part is devoted to Arendt's critique of nationalism. The second part shifts attention to Arendt's dichotomy between nation state and federal republic. The final part examines the relevance of Arendt's critique of nationalism in the light of recent political developments such as the quest for common European identity, the persisting problems of European states with the integration of immigrants, or the recent rise of anti-Muslim and xenophobic sentiments across Europe.



## **Andrea Hoffmannová**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### The Success of Assimilation? Jumpha Lahiri's characters and their search for identity

The contribution examines the characters of Jumpha Lahiri fiction, namely characters of the short stories from the highly acclaimed collection *Interpreters of Maladies* with the aim to show the shift in the perception of own identity with the comparison to the first generation of immigrant writers.

## **Lada Homolová**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### The Enemy of My Enemy is... the Result of an Unsuccessful Assimilation Process

Percival Everett's *Watershed* (1996) features two main protagonists – an African American hydrologist and a Native American little person – that first become friends and then also partners in crime with a common goal to expose a conspiracy that had caused the anthrax poisoning of the local Native American reservation's water source. As the familial and social backgrounds of both the characters are gradually unveiled in the novel through the combination of the present event narrative and flashbacks from the past, it soon becomes obvious that even though they both come from completely different environments, it is still easier for them to accept and bond with each other and each other's culture than with the major Anglo-conformist society.

In my paper, I would like to compare the level of assimilation of the protagonists and their families and show that even though it differs in many ways and categories, because of the racism and general hostility the characters have been experiencing from the white Americans they are paradoxically, as a result, given something in common to which they can both relate, which pushes them closer together and eventually gives their life a completely new purpose.

## **Jan Horáček**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### Obama's Immigration Reform: Toward Integration?

American people are often described as a nation of immigrants. In fact, immigration has been repeatedly identified as the cultural and economic foundation of the United States. However, the growth in the number of illegal immigrants and their deteriorating circumstances in America indicate that the system needs a comprehensive overhaul. In November 2014, President Obama announced new steps that would address current immigration policy. His executive actions on immigration are intended to render a more effective system by granting illegal immigrants an opportunity to register and earn their right to reside legally within the US. While some welcome it as an honest attempt to reform the system, others believe such policies would adversely affect the country. Controversy aside, Obama's reform establishes a new framework that can dramatically affect America's demographic structure. Additionally, it is highly questionable whether these steps will contribute to the containment and removal of immigrants with criminal backgrounds. What is even more important is that it could have a detrimental impact on immigrants who have achieved a certain degree of assimilation into American society. It is therefore worth investigating

the underlying principles of the reform to determine whether it may ultimately result in the integration or deportation of undocumented immigrants.

## **Stanislav Kolář**

University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

“One Must Not Be a Greenhorn:”

### The Process of Assimilation in Abraham Cahan’s Fiction

Dramatic internal and external conflicts between assimilative forces and resistance to them, as reflected in Abraham Cahan’s fiction, closely echo the theoretical approaches to “the odd couple – pluralism and assimilation”, to use Philip Gleason’s expression from his book *Speaking of Diversity*. In other words, they mirror varying concepts of Americanization and Americanism in the light of increasing immigration to the United States. This paper attempts to show that although Cahan was well aware of the inevitability of the assimilation of Eastern European Jewish immigrants into American culture, his view of their “melting into the mainstream” was a critical one. Cahan depicted the process of assimilation as a process of gain (usually, though not always, material gain) and loss. His Jewish immigrant characters pay too high a price for their Americanization; their effort to conform to America often results in their uprootedness, alienation from Jewish religion and culture, and estrangement in interpersonal relations resulting in their all-pervasive sense of loneliness, feelings of emptiness, disillusionment and overall lack of fulfillment. Surprisingly, among these rather solemn topics of Cahan’s fiction we can also find certain comic elements, though they are deployed only sporadically. The paper examines all the above-mentioned aspects of Cahan’s fiction – not

only in his most significant novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*, but also in his novellas *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* and *The Imported Bridegroom* and his short stories which served as a preparatory phase for his major work.

## **Jaroslav Kušnír**

Prešovská univerzita, Prešov, Slovakia

### From Immigration to Transnationalism:

Kiana Davenport's *House of Many Gods* (2006)

In one of her recent novels, *House of Many Gods*, Kiana Davenport depicts love relationship between Anna, a Hawaiian girl, and Niki, a Russian boy, which she further develops into a metaphor pointing out a parallel between European and Hawaiian history and their impact on the formation of Hawaiian cultural identity. In my paper, I will analyze protagonists's immigration status in several territories which points out their dislocations which, however, further enable them not only to oscillate between different cultures, but also to give their views on both Hawaiian and American from the perspective of their status of transnational characters occupying a transnational space between Hawaii, the USA, and Europe. This will also point out a specificity of transnational character of Hawaiian cultural identity.

## David Livingstone

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### The Banjo Strumming: the Assimilation or Appropriation of Traditional African-American Music through the Blackface Minstrel Tradition

African-American folk music has been subject to ongoing waves of assimilation, or better said appropriation, since its beginnings. The banjo, the quintessential American instrument, was of African origin and recreated in the New World by slaves. Their rhythms and instrumentation gradually mixed with the folk songs of Northern European immigrants. The Blackface Minstrel tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries appropriated and exploited African-American music and culture while at the same time popularizing the banjo and turning it into a 'respectable' white, middle-class instrument. The overt racism inherent in Blackface Minstrelsy inevitably resulted in an almost complete rejection of the tradition starting in the 1950s not only amongst African-Americans but among liberal whites. The cultural value of the music of this period, which includes major artists such as Stephen Foster and Al Jolson, has become a subject of controversy. Should this music be celebrated or condemned? Can and should racist, politically incorrect songs such as *Old Folks At Home* (the official state song of Florida) be edited and made more presentable to a contemporary audience or should they be ignored all together? Can the Blackface Minstrel tradition be somehow redeemed without closing one's eyes to the racist problematics?

## **Berndt Ostendorf**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Austria

### **New Orleans, Creolization and All That Jazz**

New Orleans was founded in 1719, situated on the margin of three European colonial empires and three core cultures, France, Spain and Anglo-America. During the remaining century European settlers interacted (and mixed) with enslaved Africans, with free people of color, with Native Americans, and with migrants from Spain, Mexico, Canada, Germany, the Caribbean, the U.S. and Cuba. At the turn of the century there was massive immigration from France after the French and from St. Domingue after the Haitian revolution—doubling the population. After the Louisiana Purchase (1803) this francophone creole gumbo was over-layered by an anglophone American port city with Irish, German, Jewish and later Italian immigrants creating a complicated political urban arena with a byzantine caste system and complicated racial order, but also with a range of unique subcultural fusions across the color line. As an urban space and in terms of culture formation New Orleans has more in common with the fractal Caribbean than with North America. The Civil War and Reconstruction threatened to force the Caribbean city into an American mold, particularly in terms of race relations and public policy. But this pressure to assimilate to standards of anglo-conformity also energized culture formation processes that may best be described as antagonistic creolization. Over time this layering of historical scapes has given us Mardi Gras, the Second Line, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Jazzfunerals, Mardi Gras Indians, Gospel music and a unique set of cuisines which represent a cultural counterpoint and a permanent challenge to Anglo-Saxon habits of the heart. The cultural result of these processes of creolization has been to make New Orleans the cradle of jazz -- the only truly American art form. Jazz is a true creole. Sadly hurricane Katrina continues to impact

municipal, state and national politics of deferred recovery in a city divided by race, weighted down by corruption and crippled by inner city poverty.

## **Vincent N. Parrillo**

William Paterson University, Wayne, U.S.A.

### **Assimilation and Pluralism in the United States: Are They Dual or Dueling Realities?**

The arrival in recent decades of tens of millions of immigrants to the United States from Africa, Asia and Latin America has set off alarm bells for some Americans. They fear these newcomers are unlike previous immigrants, claiming that many do not want to assimilate or even learn English. Worried that American culture is threatened and that the fabric of American society is unraveling as “ethnic tribalism” becomes stronger, nativists cry out to make English the official language and to pass restrictive legislation limiting the numbers who enter the country. How real is the “battle” between assimilation and multiculturalism? What similarities and dissimilarities are there between past and present when it comes to the nation’s changing demographics? Is this an issue of integration into, or disintegration of, the national culture.

## **Michal Peprník**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### Are the Assimilating Indians the Vanishing Indians? From Passing to Survivance

The paper argues that James Fenimore Cooper's American Indians are not just Noble Savages or Vanishing Indians but display a surprising variety of assimilation or acculturation. Therefore the paper employs John Berry's sociological typology of acculturation to classify and analyze several important American Indian characters in Cooper's novels and demonstrates that some of these characters may not always fit the sociological categories and call for a more literary conceptualization, offered by Gerald Vizenor in his concept of survivance.

## **Raeschelle Potter-Deimel**

Vienna, Austria

### Assimilation, Conformity to design Rudiments of The American Way of Life

There were numerous periods of assimilation in America. Forced or free-willed conformity always followed design for specific reasons. The ultimate design, now representative of the American way of life, remains phenomenal. It was developed in a relatively short period of time and spread an unsurpassed aura around the world. Viewing the way in which that design and aura came about is intriguing.

When strangers from the Old World sighted new land Empires and countries of the Old World, recognizing unending riches there, quickly set out to conquer and hold the land for themselves.



Excursionists and frontiersmen only survived through reciprocal forms of assimilation, a process mainly forgotten in historical recollection.

Old World conflicts accelerated problematic population growth on the new continent. Yet, reports reaching the Old World labeled it, *the land of milk and honey*. It offered refuge to the ‘Salzburgers’ and other destitutes suffering under whims of cruel Imperial proclamations and religious oppressions. They all met in *the land of plenty*. Old World countries, recognizing the power in numbers there, proclaimed *punishment by banishment* upon downtrodden landsmen. First labeled ‘Americans’ were often forced into religious assimilation under diverse faiths. Many labored on mission plantations. Soon assimilation of religious and then political preference ruled the troubled young country.

America, through conflicts and warring, somehow developed its own cultural traditions. In awe of this Europeans, in growing desperation and numbers, continuously sought entry and assimilation into the land which already included, among others, Czechoslovakians, Austrians, and Hungarians. However, new Emigrant Acts were passed and America’s borders grew less inviting. The presentation pinpoints surprising details on founders and rudiments of America’s ultimate aura. It was designed, promoted and became recognized within its cultural traditions, around the world – *the American way of life*.

## Elżbieta Rokosz-Piejko

University of Rzeszów, Rzeszów, Poland

### “A Shameless Assimilationist” in the State of Evolution – the Issue of Assimilation in Richard Rodriguez’s Autobiographical Texts

*Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* published in 1982 was so strongly assimilationist, that Mexican-American communities were appalled, calling Rodriguez *pocho* – traitor – and accusing him of betraying himself and his people. Since the book’s publication Rodriguez has published two more collections of autobiographical essays, which deal with the question of cultural identity as well as race and ethnicity, i.e. *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992) and *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (2002). Back in 1992 Ruben Martinez reviewing *Days of Obligation* for *LA Weekly* stated that “If Richard Rodriguez remains an ‘assimilated man,’ then the terms of assimilation – American ‘culture’ itself – have changed.” In my presentation I would like to discuss the way in which Rodriguez’s attitude to assimilation, to Mexico, to America itself and to his own place/position in it seems to have evolved (as has the critical reception of his views) through the two decades which passed between the launching of the first and the third text. I believe Rodriguez’s case illustrates the evolution the very idea of assimilation has gone through in the American social context, and provides interesting argumentation for the discussion over the role the racial factor plays in the assimilation process.

# Ondřej Skovajsa

Purkyně University, Ústí nad Labem, Czech republic

## Multilateral Double Consciousness and Multilateral Laughter

The paper elaborates on Marc Black's article "Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness" (2007) which finds links between U.S. racism and international colonialism, and offers precious insights for critical dialogue. For Marc Black, "unilateral double consciousness," that is, "this double-consciousness" famously described by W.E.B. DuBois (1903) and experienced only by the oppressed, is – of course – "unhealthy" and "harmful". When the colonists and whites, however, develop ways to "see their own positions from the perspectives of people of color," then a fruitful interracial dialogue may start. Marc Black, drawing on Fanon's "boomerang effect," Paulo Freire's "comradship" (1992), and Lilia Bartolome's notion of "empathetic boarder crossing" (2004), develops strategies for "race-conscious struggles against white supremacy." As tactics of colorblindness and political correctness have been failing, "multilateral double consciousness" seems as a viable way to face the tragic reality of today's world, such as mass incarceration and police shootings of African Americans, islamophobia, and Czech racism.

In the spirit of Marc Black's article, the paper contributes with the notion of "multilateral" Rabelaisian bodily laughter. By having strong oral, pre-modern qualities – it subverts the dichotomies, hierarchies, and fixities of modern identities which include the invention of "race" and "nation state." If such laughter becomes truly multilateral, freely and frequently changes its target, and targets the one who laughs as well (!), it may serve the critical function which was described by Henri Bergson. Moreover, the Rabelaisian laughter is more corporeal than Bergson's and – by revivifying our perceptivity – it may lead to its counterparts of empathy and sympathy.

# Miriama Svítková

University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic

## The Quest for Cultural Identity vs. Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Stories

Under the pressure of assimilation, the South Asian immigrants in the short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri experience both internal conflicts and conflicts within the society. This paper examines how the attempts to maintain their own cultural identity slow down the process of integration into the American society, bringing about the feeling of loneliness and isolation. The clash of these two cultures is especially significant in their customs and traditions; the food and the clothes become the signs of ongoing assimilation or on the contrary, the resistance to it. Nevertheless, it is not only the first generation point of view on the U.S. that we obtain from these short stories. The importance of cultural heritage is reflected in the way parents raise their children and in their emphasis on the importance of the knowledge of the South Asian history and acknowledgment of the cultural background and roots of Asian Americans. The opinions of the second generation of immigrants on the assimilation are to a certain extent influenced by American educational and cultural institutions and give rise to conflicts within the immigrant homes. This paper also compares the relationships within the South Asian society and the American society, contrasting the importance of family with the individualism. Loneliness, human relationships, barriers in communication and isolation as the recurring themes and motifs in *Interpreter of Maladies* are also in focus of this paper.

## **Simona Škurková**

Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

### Assimilation in Madison Smartt Bell's Historical Fiction

My paper discusses historical novels by Madison Smartt Bell, a contemporary writer from the South of the United States. His historical fiction deals with the experience of racial discrimination, segregation and the assimilation process that took place in Haiti in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues even nowadays. Similarly to the United States, the assimilation was one of the most important shaping processes in the colony of Saint Domingue which later became the first black republic – the Republic of Haiti. In his famous Haitian Revolution trilogy, Bell examines the significance of the assimilation experience for both black and white protagonists and compares them with regard to histories of segregation and experiences of racial prejudices. My paper will also explore the influence of Madison Smartt Bell being born and raised in the South of the United States for the choice of the subject matter (legacy of slavery, racial prejudices, assimilation) for his trilogy. The assimilation of Bell's protagonists will be demonstrated on the example of three characters from the above mentioned Haitian Revolution trilogy: Dr. Antoine Hébert, fugitive slave Riau, and the leader of the Revolution Toussaint Louverture.

## **Zuzana Tabačková**

Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra, Slovakia

### From *Syrian Yankee* to *I, the Divine*: The Question of Assimilation in Arab American Writing

The paper explores the notion of assimilation to American culture in

the writing of Salom Rizk and Rabih Alameddine. Even though both of these authors are referred to as Arab Americans, each one of them takes a different standpoint toward assimilation. While Rizk is often referred to as a strong proponent of assimilation to American culture, Alameddine's fictional biographies could be viewed as clear demonstrations of his in-betweenness. Each one of the two authors searches for his true homeland but while Rizk, the "Syrian Yankee", finds it in America; Alameddine's home is neither in the USA nor in his Arab homeland. These contrasting attitudes are also reflected in the language. Rizk's *Syrian Yankee* is written in fluent and idiomatic English while the language of Alameddine's novel *I, the Divine* is significantly deterritorialized.

## **Hana Weisserová**

AAU, Prague, Czech Republic and UNL, Nebraska, U.S.A.

### **Immigrant fiction: Czech-American women biographies and (post)memory**

Numerous Czech(-American) women biographies became initially published, recognized and studied primarily in the US (e.g. works by Heda Kovály, Edith Bauer, Cecilia Sternberg, Vilma Iggers, Zdenka Fantlová, Helga Weiss-Hošková.). The neglect, delay and "homeland" problematic reception cannot be explained only by former bans, collective guilt, amnesia or CEE stagnant gender discourse disparaging the humanities, but also by the authors' transnational family roots and problematic post-war national canonization. Nevertheless, the Western reception reinforces the impact of the narratives and helps to create "postmemory" (Hirsch 2008) which is corrective and empowering; gives weight to the author's voices and re-sharpens the global critical perspectives on totalitarian legacy.

These narratives are shaped and initiated by the authors' direct traumatic experiences often leading to their exile. Their stances vacillate between establishing a connection and breaking it up while creating cultural imports, alternating local traditions and customs, challenging national memories, notions of liberal democracy and socialism, and shaping assimilation discourse. Narratives also dismantle transgenerational conflicts and negotiations on global citizenry, as well as challenge "memory studies", including the concept of post memory that concerns passing traumatic past memories onto the second/next generation (generation without the direct experience) as their own memories. Finally, these narratives resonate with US immigrant fiction presenting gender-and-generation-specific projections, re-inventing national spirit, heritage and cultural memory.

## **Antonín Zita**

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech republic

### **Beat It: The Beat Generation and Mainstream Acceptance**

The group of authors known as the Beat Generation was vilified by a significant portion of the public and critics; Norman Podhoretz, writing in the late fifties, famously called the Beats and their supporters as being "against intelligence itself" (318). The media attention not only led to a hysterical discussion of youth's morals, but also spawned a caricature of the Beats and what they represented – the beatnik. Soon after entering the spotlight, the Beats were marginalized and ignored by the popular media and academia alike.

However, the Beats reentered the mainstream culture later in the century by earning recognition for representing the first counterculture movement, helping pave the way for the civil rights movement, and experimenting with literary forms. The Beats made

their breakthrough in the academia as well: ever since Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari mentioned the Beats in their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the writers became the subjects of a revived academic interest. Currently, numerous courses on the Beats are being taught and new editions of Beat literature are being published. The Beats have been assimilated into the mass culture.

One question that needs to be asked is: How exactly did this happen? The proposed paper will discuss the Beat Generation writers in terms of popular and academic reception from two different time periods: mid-twentieth century and today. Basing the theoretical foundations on the works of Stanley Fish and Stuart Hall, the paper will discuss the initial resistance as well as the current acceptance through the lens of assimilation, claiming that while the Beats were simply too different and controversial in the fifties, the change of values in the general society due to the civil rights movement made assimilation and subsequent appropriation and commodification possible.











# Assimilation in America: A Good or a Bad Word?

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