



EAST – WEST CULTURAL PASSAGE

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Foreword

In the current social, political, and cultural global context, the concept of identity, both individual and collective, has been undergoing a permanent process of redefinition. Therefore, the articles in this volume propose an examination of identity (in its broadest definition) with a view to uncovering its multilayered significance at literary and cultural crossroads between the East and the West: the “identity” of contemporary education (“Philosophies of Education”), identities in popular culture and literature (“When the East Meets the West”; “Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Choice;” and “Identity and Belonging”), and the “identities” of literary works expressed in terms of narrative structure, characters, and plot (in the short stories and novels by Alice Munro, Ian McEwan, and Zadie Smith). By discussing the tenets of the German and English educational philosophies in the 18th- and 19th centuries from a comparative perspective, Corina Beleaua creates a bridge across time to the contemporary educational process, arguing for an educational reform in the 21st century that should foreground the students’ self-discovery, as well as dialogue and openness towards one another, suggesting the study of literature as a way to achieve these goals. Ting-Ting Chan’s article focuses on how the hyphenated identity of a Taiwanese-American director, Ang Lee, has impacted his depiction of the American family from a cross-cultural perspective in the movie *Taking Woodstock*. Similarly, Anca-Luminița Iancu also approaches the issue of identity in popular culture, as her article examines the intricate connections between gender and racial/ethnic identity in interethnic relationships in the movies *Something New* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. Likewise, Alexandra Mitrea’s article centers on various aspects of redefining key elements of racial and cultural identity in Caryl Phillips’ novel *Cambridge*, pointing to the complexity of such concepts as belonging and Englishness.

As far as the “identities” of literary works are concerned, Sorin Ștefănescu’s article looks at the connections between narrative construction and the theme of family identity in Alice Munro’s short story “Deep-Holes.” In her article, Monica Cojocaru examines the changing “identity” of Ian McEwan’s short prose by looking at its chronological and thematic evolution. In a similar vein, Cătălina Stanislav analyzes three novels by Zadie Smith in order to uncover the most salient features of her “plotless” fiction in terms of character construction and themes.

The two book reviews that conclude the volume also focus on the larger theme of identity. In *Transcultural Imaginings: Translating the Other, Translating the Self in Narratives about Migration and Terrorism*, Alexandra Glavanakova looks at contemporary migrant writing through a transcultural lens in order to uncover the complex connections between identity construction, Otherness, and terrorism. In *The Non-National in Contemporary American Literature: Ethnic Women Writers and Problematic Belongings*, Dalia M. A. Goma interrogates the concept of nation as a monolithic construct in her examination of the multifaceted “imagined transcultural communities” in contemporary ethnic American writing by women.

The Editors

Trans-Atlantic Pedagogical Dialogue –
Philosophies of Education

CORINA-MIHAELA BELEAUA

University of Georgia

Abstract

Educational systems around the world are in a continuous reform. Even if there are local differences among them, it is undeniable that they share common values that lie at the foundation of the educational process of each individual. The present essay aims at portraying some of the prevailing values that pedagogues in America and Europe have been sharing for the last centuries, together with the ones needed nowadays. I will argue for a renewal in the conceptualization of the importance of literature, showing the urgency for adopting an educational system based on “cultivating humanity” through books and “global intelligence,” through openness toward others (Spăriosu 197).

In the first part of the essay, I will present the philosophies of the main German educators of the 18th and 19th centuries, by focusing on the three main targets they consistently discuss: **moral development, aesthetic freedom/ play** (regarded as a deliberate activity) and **self-discovery through reading**. The second part of the essay will build a framework of some of the English and North American philosophies of education in the 19th century. I will emphasize the German legacy, together with new institutional ideals, such as the ideal of unity found in Newman’s, Ruskin’s, Arnold’s and Dewey’s reforms. Lastly, I intend to highlight the contemporary educational tendencies focusing on the return to the individualistic ideal, through play and self-discovery, through aestheticism and freethinking. These trends situate the student at the center of the pedagogical act, by directing him toward the truth translated in **harmony, self-discovery** and proper **dialogue** with the other. I will use a theoretical framework inspired by Martha Nussbaum and Mihai Spăriosu, in order to restate the need for educational reform and global education.

Keywords: philosophies of education, pedagogy, moral development, aesthetic freedom, self-discovery, play, global intelligence.

When the East Meets the West:
Ang Lee's Cross-Cultural American Family in
Taking Woodstock

TING-TING CHAN
Independent Scholar

Abstract

This article focuses on Taiwanese filmmaker Ang Lee's *Taking Woodstock*, a film that directly addresses political and social aspects of a rather turbulent time in the US during the 1960s. I argue that the director's view of 1960s America in this cinematic representation reflects a particularly Taiwanese cultural ideology—the worship of the US as a superpower. Lee, as an example of transnationality himself, fittingly illustrates how intricately sociohistorical contexts and political diplomatic relations shape an individual's multifaceted cultural identity, political views, and national ideology in an era when Western thought and lifestyle have found a way to merge themselves with local Taiwanese ones. *Taking Woodstock* represents Lee's idealized view of the American society, a utopia that he longed for as a Taiwanese teenager. By focusing on family (one of Lee's signature themes), *Taking Woodstock* shows a different view of America from an East Asian perspective. Lee's *Woodstock* represents a Taiwanese ideology impacted by US-Taiwanese diplomatic relations, cross-pacific media transmission, state intervention, and pseudo-imperialist cultural invasion in Taiwan.

Keywords: Ang Lee, family, filial piety, Confucian values, film related to the Vietnam War, cross-cultural, Taiwan, *Taking Woodstock*, transnational, individualism

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Race, Ethnicity, and
Women's Choices in
Something New and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

ANCA-LUMINIȚA IANCU
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

Abstract

The movies *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) and *Something New* (2006) interrogate various ethnic and racial traditions and expectations concerning interracial and intercultural relationships from the female perspective. The two romantic comedies illustrate how the female protagonists' decisions to date and marry men outside their ethnic and racial communities create tension and resistance among their family members and circle of friends, revealing an array of cultural and racial differences. By looking at the subtle ways in which these movies depict the challenges posed by interethnic dating/marriage in terms of gender, race, class, and ethnicity, especially in the female protagonists' family environment, this essay sets out to explore how the protagonists' choices to transcend cultural and racial borders may represent a new attempt to assuage the concerns regarding the complexity of interethnic relationships by including the option of individual female choice and agency.

Keywords: interethnic relationships; American film and culture; choice and gender, ethnic and racial identity; transcending ethnic and racial borders

Identity and Belonging
in Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge*

ALEXANDRA MITREA
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Abstract

The issue of identity as well as that of belonging has been Caryl Phillips's constant concern. In *Cambridge*, Phillips constructs characters who redefine their ethnic, racial and cultural identities in keeping with the bonds of kinship they develop as adults when they get married or have children. He sets before the reader characters with very limited agency – such as women or enslaved people – who preserve their dignity by embracing specific cultural identities of their own choosing.

Keywords: cultural identity, gender, race, social class, history, power, Christianity, abolitionism, Englishness

“Brevity is the soul of wit”:
Ian McEwan’s Short Prose

MONICA COJOCARU
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu

Abstract

Though often relegated to ancillary scholarly inquiry and overshadowed by the popularity of the novel typically at the centre of academic consideration and appreciation, short prose has captured the attention of contemporary critics who have rehabilitated it as a living form of literature and a valid subject for academic debate. Making his literary debut with two collections of short stories largely regarded as ‘shock lit,’ Ian McEwan has staged repeated comebacks to short prose throughout his career, a form that he has remodelled and refined in different manners and contexts. Centring on the writer’s early short stories as well as his more ‘mature’ novellas and his integration of the short story form into his lengthier works, my article discusses McEwan’s career-long interest in the short form and the ways in which he handles the genre, evolving from his initial shocking tales devoid of all morality to more ethically infused and self-reflexive renditions of short fiction.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, short story, novella, literature of shock, narrative ethics, metafiction

Multiculturalism and Hybridity in Zadie Smith's Novels

CĂTĂLINA STANISLAV
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Abstract

This essay analyzes three novels by Zadie Smith in terms of content, influences and critical perception. My aim is to explore these novels and show how construction of characters, the depiction of the day to day life of banal existences, the disconnectedness that sometimes arrives in mid-life, issues of race and discrimination are a substitute for plot. Smith tends to do something new with every novel she writes, but she still has a couple of recurring themes and elements. Thus, through a comparison of the three novels, I will illustrate how Zadie Smith's narrative, through its influences and its construction of characters offers the perfect example of "plotless" fiction, as well as how this type of novel is more permissive in terms of style and more open to experimentation than novels with well-delimited plots.

Keywords: Zadie Smith, hybridity, multiculturalism, plotless, discrimination, personal history, posthumanism, 21st century literature