

LENKE MÁRIA NÉMETH

LEHEL VADON: *WALT WHITMAN: A HUNGARIAN  
BIBLIOGRAPHY.*

Eger: Department of American Studies, Eszterházy Károly College,  
Líceum Kiadó, 2005. 244 pp.

An outstanding contribution to the study of American literature and American literary scholarship in Hungary, Lehel Vadon's *Walt Whitman: A Hungarian Bibliography* constitutes a new volume in the author's scholarly endeavour to launch a bibliographic series on the reception of American literature in Hungary. Dedicated to the compilation and publication of bibliographies that comprise all the facts and data pertaining the appearance of American literary works in Hungarian translations as well as Hungarian scholars' critical responses to them, Vadon has published an awe-inspiring one-volume *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig* [*A Bibliography of American Literature and Literary Scholarship in Hungarian Periodicals till 1990*] (1997) (It was issued by Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola in Eger.) In a constant effort to provide the ever-increasing community of the Hungarian students of American literature with as complete records of publications as possible, the compiler used 1619 periodicals and journals to collect bibliographical details in this edition, relevant parts of which served as a source material for the Whitman bibliography.

A mark of a true scholar and teacher, I believe, is the ability to recognize the unexplored gaps in the studies he pursues and provide the much needed works. Thus, a most remarkable asset of Vadon's enormous research work is that breaking his massive bibliographies into smaller, easily accessible units, he has launched author-and-theme-based series for the benefit of Americanists. The Whitman volume under discussion was

preceded by bibliographies on major representatives of American literary expressiveness such as Ernest Hemingway (1999) and Edgar Allan Poe (2004), and is a companion piece of a theme-based book on the American Renaissance (2005). Catering for the specific research interests of scholars and students alike, these user-friendly books make it available, even for the uninitiated, at a quick glance, several aspects of the reception of American literature in Hungary (fluctuations of interests, literary and political alike, the invaluable work of Hungarian poets, critics, translators, and many others).

Just as the previous volumes in the series, the Whitman bibliography is divided into two main sections of primary and secondary sources. As Vadon claims in the preface, “the material has been collected from books printed in Hungary as well as Hungarian books printed beyond our border,” and also from periodicals and newspapers as listed in his 1997 massive bibliography. The volume contains 2,015 fully described bibliographic details on Whitman and covers a period of nearly a century from 1914 to 2004 (see entries pp. 8 and 237, respectively). Arranged clearly and systematically, the first main part, “Walt Whitman in Hungarian” is subdivided into four units, three of which list entries on Whitman’s poems in Hungarian translations and editions, books, and periodicals, while the fourth registers Whitman’s essays in Hungarian publications. The secondary-sources section, “Hungarian Publications about Walt Whitman,” however, has seven subheadings including a bibliography, books, studies, essays, and articles, followed by shorter writings and other publications, and then concluding with book reviews, and poems written to and in connection with Whitman.

Vadon’s comprehensive bibliography, however, offers much more inviting activities than merely looking at the statistical data and the significance of the huge amount of information presented there. Given the fact that the “American bard” of the nineteenth century, who paved the way for twentieth-century modern poetry not only in his home country but also in Europe, was both sneered and ignored by his contemporaries (the celebrated “patrician” poet James Russell Lowell described Whitman as a “rowdy, a New York tough, a loafer”), it is intriguing to trace Hungarian poets’ and critics’ mounting, sometimes wavering, interest in Whitman. As documented, Hungarian poet, prose writer, essayist, Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936) was the first to translate some of Whitman’s poems (“Beautiful Women,” “To a Locomotive in Winter,” “To One Shortly Die”) and to publish them in *Modern Költők* (*Modern Poets*) in

1914, merely twenty-two years after Whitman's death. An early contributor to the highly influential literary journal of *Nyugat* (1908–1941), which was the cradle of modern poetry in Hungary, Kosztolányi, undoubtedly, had a major role in acquainting Whitman with Hungarian poets and public alike.

Though three editions of Whitman's poems were issued in the 1920s, it was not until 1955—exactly a hundred years' delay—that Whitman's unique work *Leaves of Grass* hailed by Ralph Waldo Emerson “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom” was issued in Hungary. Less than a decade later, in 1964 *Fűszálak. Összes Költemények (Leaves of Grass. The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman)*, an annotated version was published with the afterword and notes of László Országh, lexicographer and founder of American Studies in Hungary. Then followed a nearly twenty-year lapse in issuing collected poems of Whitman, a fact that an in-depth study of the reception of Whitman's works in Hungary will, perhaps, investigate in the future. Nevertheless, the large number of entries—starting from 11 to 1723—in the part listing poems in books testifies to a constant interest in Whitman's poems.

As regards the section entitled “Hungarian Publications about Walt Whitman,” the fairly low number of entries (146) there is puzzling, especially when compared to the impressive number of items (1869) listed in the primary sources section. It is conspicuous that with the exception of an individual edition in 1986 (entry 2; p 229) and short essays and articles in various publications in 2003 and 2004 (entries 76 and 77; p 237), no record pertaining to Whitman appears. A circumstance that deserves much attention and careful analysis for researchers of reception theory or those engaged in surveying reading habits of the public and determining policies of publishing.

An invaluable sourcebook as well as an indispensable reference book, Vadon's bibliography serves many purposes. As argued here, the ample information that the fully described bibliographical items provide is beneficial for a host of people including publishers, teachers of literature, translators, librarians, researchers of comparative studies of literature and culture, among others. Last but not least, a most fascinating aspect of Vadon's pioneering work is that his bibliography opens up deep and sweeping vistas for research both within and beyond the borders of American studies.