

JUDIT SZATHMÁRI

AMERICAN LITERATURE IN HUNGARY

(Vadon Lehel: Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig. [Lehel Vadon: A Bibliography of American Literature and Literary Scholarship in Hungarian Periodicals to 1990.] Eger: EKTF Líceum Kiadó, 1997. 1076 pp.)

When holding such a massive volume of information for the first encounter one may shy away and be discouraged by the amount of data it includes. As established by the title, Lehel Vadon's *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a Magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig* explores such a vast scholarly field that we have to acknowledge the scope of such an extensive, detailed and thorough research. Although the title does not explicitly reveal, it may be concluded that the starting point of research is the very first interaction between the American homeland of literary products and the Hungarian reception of and response to them. Knowledge of the exact point of departure however is not relevant to conclude that *Bibliography* offers an insight on how academia and scholarly interest correspond in the two continents and overcome the literal as well as the figurative distance separating the countries.

The explicit distinction between “literature” and “literary scholarship” suggest an extensive pool of academic data. The reader may at once realize that Vadon's work does not exclusively target a scholarly audience but also offers insights for the “less” professional

audience. His designation of *Bibliography* is that it serves as a “textual first aid” for scholars, librarians and students alike.

Researching periodicals bears the implication that detailed and analytical examination of publications either not available or often neglected by less careful readers was achieved by the author. Experience in teaching and instructing students of college and university level in the field of American studies has taught many to accept the fact that unless a volume’s title overtly displays its relevance to any assignment the student is to meet the requirement of, few people devote their time and energy to search for less obvious sources to help fulfill their task. For the average student such information becomes available only when presented with the exact publication information on yet unknown, still existing works. In this respect Vadon’s *Bibliography* serves as a reference book not only to compensate for the lack of research knowledge but also to assist scholars in the field of American studies.

Some of the journals and magazines listed by the author here are long, if not forgotten, but less frequently utilized by today’s readers of American literature. From the 19th century to the 1990s, the latest entries in the volume, the range varies with regard to popularity and availability. The 1619 periodicals, the sources for bibliographic data cover the range of publications from their very first appearance to current periodicals. The immense research carried out by Lehel Vadon is most impressive in the range of secondary sources where one encounters women’s magazines, literary journals, and daily newspapers. As the list demonstrates, sources are not exclusively literary in the strict sense of meaning, yet they reveal Hungarian interest in various American literary products. While, on the one hand not all of the daily publications could have been included this is, of course not due to a biased standpoint. On the contrary, in order to achieve a broader interpretation of *Hungarian* Lehel Vadon also researched periodicals published beyond the Hungarian border.

In 864 pages the first and largest unit of *Bibliography* contains bibliographical information on American authors in alphabetical order. The names of individual authors, annotated with pennames and pseudonyms thus proving invaluable help for researchers function as subchapters. Entries on authors include date of birth and death, if known, and more importantly designations of the genres the excelled

in. This latter fact is inevitable since many of the names are not well-known in Hungary, and if they do sound familiar for the reader, one may often find less popular, new genres listed under the name. Many of the entries are on characters in the American literary scene not even familiar to the American reading public any more.

Bibliographic information is divided into categories of primary and secondary sources, explicitly separating the two lists, thus aiding the reader to distinguish works by and on any given author. An impressive and true proof of scholarly achievement is the collection and categorization of secondary sources, where the data gathered ranges from literary products written to or about the given author to literary essays on his or her work, as well as various media interviews on the given author.

Consecutive to the first unit is a separate one, devoted to unknown authors. For the sake of more effective assistance, the chapter is further divided along various genre categories the works listed here belong to. Closely related and thematically excellently positioned is the chapter on folk literature.

Chapter three presents an impressive list of American Indian folk literature, following the traits of the oral tradition of the original inhabitants of the land. It is a justification of the Hungarian interest in the “exotic” world of the American continent, and, by the same token, a response to the need of widening the literary scene often limited to the Western ideas of written literary products. Until the appearance of new trends of criticism with regard to American literature surfaced supported by contemporary schools of thought, the date of beginning had been set by the conquerors of the native population. Western cultures’ tendency to think in terms of written format diverted attention from the abundance and variety of already existing oral forms of literature. This chapter is a tribute to the relevance of native presence in the American scene. True, European and Hungarian interest also encouraged the incorporation of such literary products, yet one may be surprised to find such entries on literary products so much debated by those responsible for the formation of the American Canon.

The same chapter explores Black folklore and a comparative view of the two subtitles suggests much about how Hungarian social acceptance of minority cultures, with special focus on their literary

acceptance developed in the twentieth century. While American Indian folklore translations are all published in the 1970s, black folklore precedes it by forty years. *Bibliography*, as these two subchapters demonstrate reestablishes not only the literary but also the social climate of opinion. Knowing that the folk pieces had been filtered by the American audience before they reached Hungary, they provide an insight into both countries' literary scenes.

The last section, which proportionally almost equals the first, offers a general bibliography arranged according to genres. One significant and useful phenomenon is the inclusion of book reviews of all the fields discussed in this section. It is especially invaluable help for scholarly research and opens new possibilities for scholars to pursue. Part of the general bibliography section is the subchapter on Hungarian-American relations, which is the reinforcement of the idea already suggested by the title. It strengthens the mutual bond of the two countries' literary world.

The sixty two page appendix by its extent suggests the variety of periodicals examined by the author. Listed in alphabetical order they are easy to check when in need of further information based on earlier entries in any of the first four sections. With the titles of periodicals the author truly proves that his research was thoroughly designed and carried out in a scholarly manner. The variety of periodicals leaves no doubt that in no sense had there been bias in employing sources. Neither in terms of time, some may consider early periodicals outdated, nor in academic expectations. Hungarian reception of American literature is not confined to exclusively scholarly publications. This latter fact also sets a new challenge to today's students to broaden the scope of their research.

Even though the table of contents and the introduction provide clear instructions on how to utilize *Bibliography*, the amount of data calls for a detailed index. The one forming the last part of this work is invaluable as much of the information appear in multiple numbers. Due to the variety of literary categorization an entry may be listed under different headings. The main theme of any given publication determines its place in the relevant chapters, yet those with multiple focuses are placed in all the categories they are related to.

Dedicated to László Országh, founder of American studies in Hungary, *Bibliography* pays tribute not only to Lehel Vadon's

professor but also is an outstanding academic achievement. The field of American studies is enriched by the insight *Bibliography* offers and opens new prospects for future researchers.