

## **A Unique Achievement that Cannot Be Repeated**

**Vadon, Lehel. *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája Magyarországon 2000-ig. [American Literature and Literary Scholarship in Hungary: A Bibliography to 2000]* Eger: Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, Amerikanisztika Tanszék, Líceum Kiadó, 2007. 3 vols. 1275 +1118 +1243 pp.**

Gabriella Varró

Professor Lehel Vadon's bibliography of American literature and literary studies in Hungary up to 2000 is a unique achievement that has been long awaited and anticipated, and is also very much welcome. Although relatively few responses came to greet the publication of this three-volume avalanche of bibliographic facts and figures that pays fitting tribute to the width and depth of American literary scholarship in Hungary, scholars, students and lovers of American literature across Hungary and around the world should all stand in awe and certainly bow to this superb accomplishment. The gigantic work that encompasses more than 3600 pages reflects both the enormous effort and the faithful devotion of its author that have gone into the making of this superb bibliography. The large span of time spent on its compilation (Professor Vadon dedicated over 25 years of his life just to gather the materials and conduct the research for the volumes), the scale of the study (there have been over 2,270 periodicals consulted [Vol. III: 1113–1173 lists all of these by the title], close to 20,000 omnibus volumes researched and several million library card catalogues reviewed) and the clear arrangement and structure of the volumes, all attest to the meticulous care and attention with which this work was brought to life.

The immense material contained in these three lexicon-size publications also throws light on the scale and degree of development American literary studies as a scholarly discipline and field of research has gone through in this country over the past half century. In the introduction to the massive bibliography the compiler situates his work

within the context of an ambitious and grandiose program set forward by Professor László Országh back in 1965. Országh, whose name has been intertwined with the foundation of American Studies in Hungary (among other things), in a programmatic tract of his entitled “The Objectives of American Studies in Hungary” delineated the tasks that Hungarian universities had to face and confront in the mid-1960s. It is certainly illuminating to take Országh’s essay into hand especially for scholars involved in American Studies scholarship in Hungary, since it highlights the enormous step forward this field of study has undergone up to the end of the millennium. Back in 1965 Országh called attention to the scarcity of American Studies-related research in the country and pinpointed the areas where immediate action was necessary. He expressed impatience, among other things, over our lagging behind other European countries respecting the knowledge and scientific research of American literature, culture, civilization, history, etc. The legendary professor listed the existence of two anthologies of American literary history and one volume of essays (most probably a reference to the book edited by László Kardos and Mihály Sükösd with an introduction by Országh himself entitled: *Az amerikai irodalom a huszadik században* [*American Literature in the twentieth century*] Budapest: Gondolat, 1962.), plus nearly a dozen essays on American literature published in several Hungarian journals that English major university students or other devotees to American letters could consult if they wanted to look at American literature through the lens of Hungarian scholars. Yet, even these rudimentary results were significant compared to the sheer lack of American Studies scholarship or the suppression of American literature due, as Országh revealed, mostly to an anti-American bias in earlier historical periods (24).

Needless to say, in the 1960s it was not only a heroic but also a politically charged deed to promote the study of American literature, culture or history, and thus it was no surprise that Országh and the cause of American Studies did not find numerous followers, or that the very establishment of the field ran into considerable difficulties. Yet, implicitly defying the political climate in the context of which he had to work Országh laid down a complex program that had three important foci pertaining to American literature. (1) The composition of new literary histories of the United States by Hungarian scholars; (2) the systematic and programmatic development of American Studies scholarship, research and education in Hungary; and (3) the compilation of a bibliography of American literature similar to the work Albert Tezla had

performed in order to popularize Hungarian literature in the United States. Professor Országh's call for this concerted action for the maintenance and corroboration of this discipline (at the time relegated into the tasks of the English Departments of universities across the country) was not only listened to but also duly answered. As Zsolt Virágos writes in his foreword to Országh's selected works, from the vantage point of the present we can state that all of Országh's propositions have been realized (10).

Professor Vadon, who himself was originally a student of Országh (which in Hungary in our scientific area has evolved to be a shorthand for "outstanding scholarly worth") and certainly a continuer of Országh's legacy in his own special area, did not only hear but understood clearly the relevance of this calling. Although there is really no comparing the unenviable state of affairs Professor Országh delineated and the current situation of American literature and literary scholarship in Hungary, without Professor Vadon's magnificent study we would hardly be able to assess the gap between the 1960s and the 2000s.

In the age of digital technology it is not only surprising but also unbelievable that anyone would be willing to flip through paper catalogues by the million, page through thousands of magazines or travel around to neighboring countries to do more of the same on the former territories of historic Hungary. But Professor Vadon did exactly this for the simple reason that he was dedicated to fulfilling a dream and a promise, and secondly because the sources he was working from were not available digitally. Neither is it possible that they would ever be. We simply have to admit that it is highly doubtful that anyone else would have been willing or able to carry out the task the objectified result of which we can literally hold in our hands today. For many of us who still believe in the power of the printed word these volumes are awe-inspiring, they are like delicacies that we are allowed to taste only rarely and on special occasions. Yet, hopefully, the three books will not sit idly on the library shelves of Hungarian universities, but they will be regularly consulted and researched by college students, scholars, or the general public, people interested in American literature. Now that this great work is done it is mainly the responsibility of teachers and educators in higher education to call attention to the wealth of information that lies within these volumes.

On a somewhat sadder note it is also my persuasion that with the increasing growth of digitalization and the spread of digital technology

the production of hand-made, manually researched materials is rapidly drawing to a close. In the age of the scanner, the pendrive, the internet the scholar holding a book in hand, or sitting in a library thumbing through a journal is also becoming a rarity, just like this printed bibliography. Whether this is something to applaud or feel sad about is another thing, since I am also one of those who are captivated by an old journal, and are fascinated by the unique smell of old paper, the special buzz of libraries.

In 2007 Ingrid Parent, current president-elect for the International Federation of Library Association, discussing the potential worth and future of national bibliographies against the background of the technological revolution and the rise of the global village contended:

Major reference works appear only online; it is becoming increasingly difficult to find national bibliographies on CD-Rom, never mind on microfiche or in print; most electronic publications are searchable in full-text; the publishing world is shrinking through consolidation and mergers, yet self-publishers are growing in numbers; the content strategy of Google Scholar has sparked fierce debate while continuing to attract the collections of major libraries ... the list goes on. (2)

Clearly Parent's focus is the compilation of national bibliographies that have been formalized by international rules and guidelines, and have been gradually compiled by teams specialized in the task. The difference between the two undertakings under scrutiny (that examined by Parent and the one by Professor Vadon) is striking for Professor Vadon was pretty much a lone ranger in the field of bibliography-making in Hungary when he started his several decade-long work, and the rules and format of the future work he himself had to determine and establish. Yet, the realities Vadon's 2007 publication is competing against is much the same as those described by Parent. As I see it, the realities and challenges of the digital age would be relatively easy to meet simply by the digitalization of the *Bibliography*, which in one strike could also solve the problem presented by the need for constant updating. To put it differently, Professor Vadon's magnificent bibliography indeed calls for digitalization to serve the altered needs of the new age library users, and the accelerated lifestyle of the present.

Even though we can safely state that there will never come another scholar who would make bibliographies the way Lehel Vadon has done here, the need for bibliographies remains unquestionable. Here are a couple of reasons why we have to take these volumes into hand: (1) The volumes present an exhaustive list of American literary masters, who

themselves featured in interviews, articles, book chapters written by Hungarians. The work might give apropos to discover forgotten voices and figures of American literature, and to extend our attention to those realms. (2) This bibliography offers a full list of the works of the listed authors if partial or full translations were published in journals, literary or cultural magazines or in separate publications. People studying these volumes can get a glimpse at the translation history of these literary pieces, and may even immerse themselves in comparative analyses of these translations across various time periods. (3) Interesting data on the production history of some of these literary works can be followed up on by means of bibliographical data on stage, television and radio adaptation of the literary masters. These allow a peep into a special history of Hungarian popular culture as well as an indirect look into the workings of political decision-making and propaganda. (4) The detailed study of these bibliographical entries might direct students and scholars to topics that have been lurking buried even in a single bibliographical note: possible research topics for comparative literary analysis, complexities and alternatives in translation, the history of critical literature pertaining to a single American author from Hungarian scholars or foreign scholars published in our country. The bibliography in its present form is also a thought-provoking asset for a study of the sociology of reading, reading habits, taste, etc. The volumes are suggestive in multiple ways of long-forgotten research perspectives that have once been initiated but never came to fruition. (5) The publication is also doing a great favor to those, who aim to research the translation history of a single literary piece, or simply wish to find out about the existence of an American literary work in Hungarian. (6) Turning the pages of this bibliography presents excellent opportunity for isolated researchers involved in similar fields to find out about each other's works, and thus broaden their horizon. Cross-cultural research, relations, exchange are really the central yield of this work, which gives a wonderful illustration to the principle of interculturality in each and every entry.

Yet, the uses and possible benefits of these volumes do not stop here. Prompted by whichever of the above and further motivations even, I hope that these volumes would inspire many both within and outside of our borders.

A word of praise about the structuring of the volumes is also due here. The standard bibliographical section of the three volumes enumerate American authors in alphabetical order. Names are followed by dates of

birth and death (if known), and a photo of the author, where such was available. Within each entry then Vadon distinguishes the primary and secondary sources related. The primary sources listed first are arranged alphabetically again, plus are separated from each other according to literary genres. Various Hungarian translations of a given work are also arranged in the chronology of Hungarian publications, or the original English language publications come first set in chronology, to be followed by the available Hungarian translations also arranged in chronology. Secondary sources (critical literature on authors and works) also follow thematic classifications and are grouped around bibliographical categories of: bibliography, books, monographs, essays, articles, news, review essays of books, drama criticism, review, etc. Secondary works by the same author are chronologically listed. If this clear arrangement would not do for some reason, the index at the end of each volume offers further help for users in navigating in the ocean of data.

Lehel Vadon's new bibliography should indeed fill us with pride over the great work that has been accomplished in the field of American Studies and American literature specifically. The 58 items that provide a list of doctoral dissertations, Ph.D.s, habilitation theses, candidacies, and academic doctorates written in Hungary (III: 1050–1054) pertaining to American literature and culture, as well as the 96 item enumeration of the works of Hungarian authors on American literature published abroad attest to the excellence associated with American literary scholarship and American Studies scholarship conducted in Hungary both at home and around the world.

I wish to emphasize, however, that these three volumes are not devoted exclusively to the reception of American literature in Hungary. The standard bibliographical entries also include writings on science, American culture and civilization that though can be closely tied to American literature are not literary works *per se*. There is moreover an Appendix attached to Volume III itemizing the books on American history, culture, society, economy, military politics, politics, travel, as well as on American minorities written by Hungarian scholars supplemented by the Hungarian translations of books by foreign authors on the same, and at times including further disciplines. Volume III also gives a full list of the writings related to Hungarian-American relations produced in the country in the period under scrutiny starting on page 901. We can safely say then that the scope of these volumes extends well beyond the reception study of American literature and literary studies,

covering the entire spectrum of writing and scholarship related to the United States available in our country.

It was indeed fitting that the publication of the grand bibliography of Professor Vadon was scheduled to the one hundredth anniversary of Országh's birth, thus giving a proper tribute to and honoring the mentor with the completion of a project he himself initiated originally. Vadon's *Bibliography* did not merely complete the task but took the originally foreseen agenda to a much higher level. For the service that has been done to the discipline of American Studies in Hungary I hereby express my gratitude to Professor Lehel Vadon on behalf of all committed to the field.

### Works Cited

- Országh, László. "The Objectives of American Studies in Hungary."  
Reprinted in *Országh László válogatott írásai*. [*Selected Writings of László Országh*.] Ed. Virágos Zsolt. Debrecen: Orbis, 2007. 22–28.
- Parent, Ingrid. "The Importance of National Bibliographies in the Digital Age." Internet: [archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla73/papers/089-Parent-en.pdf](http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla73/papers/089-Parent-en.pdf)
- Virágos, Zsolt. Előszó. in. *Országh László válogatott írásai*. [*Selected Writings of László Országh*.] Ed. Virágos Zsolt. Debrecen: Orbis, 2007. 7–13.