

LÁSZLÓ DÁNYI

THE FIRST HIT FOR “MULTICULTURAL HEMINGWAY
HUNGARY”

Lehel Vadon ed. *Multicultural Challenge in American Culture
— Hemingway Centennial.*

Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1999. 339 pp.

How can such seemingly unrelated notions as multicultural and Hemingway and Hungary be connected? Well, if you daringly decide to punch those words on your keyboard and seek hits on a search engine, and then you sit back and relax thinking that such terms should never match, you will be astonished to see the results. More than 700 hits will pop up, and the first reference out of those will be to the volume in the title.

The Hungarian Association for American Studies held its biannual conference in Eger in 1998, and the proceedings of the event were published in a substantial volume in 1999. The conference and the volume tried to achieve a threefold task.

Firstly, at the end of the 20th century which is frequently referred to as the “American century” scholars of American studies felt obliged to explore those issues that had shaped the non-American awareness concerning American social consciousness. (Out of the 17 essays only one was written by an American, Donald E. Morse, the rest were from the pen of Hungarian Americanists.) The volume addresses significant concepts and theorists bearing on current understandings of ethnicity and gender as culturally constructed “others” and the mechanisms by which these understandings are maintained, eg. by binary oppositions that derive from dualistic linguistic structures and totalizing monocentric habits of thought. It also includes essays on poly-

centricity and the ramifications of the postmodern condition, furthermore it analyzes the impact of culture studies, new historicism and gender theory in contextualizing literary texts, redefining the canon and restructuring priorities.

Secondly, as the Hemingway (1899–1961) centennial was celebrated in the year of the conference, four essays in the volume are devoted to Hemingway's art. By considering the significance of race, ethnicity and gender and by focusing on re-reading Hemingway's fiction and on reshaping the Hemingway canon the essay writers present issues that fit into the thematic thread of multicultural challenge.

Thirdly, Eger—Hungary, the venue of the conference, the organizers, who are teachers at the first Department of American Studies in Hungary, the majority of lecturers being Hungarian scholars of a variety of disciplines and the publication of the proceedings are all encouraging signs that American Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study which is alive and active in Hungary, in addition, the research carried out by Hungarian scholars can contribute to the development of the methodology of American Studies.

The Hungarian perspective creates a frame for the volume itself. In the first article Zsolt K. Virágos, whose works are frequently quoted and referred to in other essays of the volume, analyzes the dilemmas of Hungarian scholars when they need to answer the question whether they are ready to discuss restructured priorities of American society both in a cultural and in a moral sense. He observes the metaphoric shift from the melting pot based on consensus to the boiling pot stirred by conflict through Hungarian eyes. The writer states that multiculturalism is not an exclusively American phenomenon, and Hungarian scholars being distanced from the American scene can detach themselves from dogmatism concerning multiculturalism. He adds that participating in the multicultural context is performed on the existential level. The last two parts of the essay deal with canon formation, the boundaries of American multiculturalism and with multiculturalism as a learning process through which we can acquire the skill of reading other people's image banks. The changing assessment of the canon is illustrated by taking a closer look at the appreciation of such African-American writers as Frederick Douglass and Richard Wright.

The closing article by Lehel Vadon offers a complete, 128-page-long Hungarian bibliography of Hemingway's works. It makes the records available for the first time, which may provide a great impetus for those wishing to study Hemingway's works in Hungarian. It includes both primary and secondary sources—selections from novels, short fiction, articles, reports, letters and other works. The bibliography proves the compiler's meticulously accurate work. An additional achievement of the list is quoting the date for the first publication in English and the inclusion of the entries by unknown authors. The periodical and newspaper sources of the research are listed in a book by Vadon entitled *Az amerikai irodalom és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiája a magyar időszaki kiadványokban 1990-ig*, which is an indispensable and unique database.

What comprises the volume in between equals in quality with the two articles of the frame. Tibor Frank's "'Through the looking glass' a century of self-reflecting Hungarian images of the United States (1834–1941)" spans over more than a hundred years of Hungarian-American relations and describes the changing images and icons of America in the eyes of those Hungarians who encountered and were exposed to American culture. Among the important and influential visitors he refers to Sándor Bölöni Farkas, Ágoston Haraszthy, Lajos Kossuth, Aurél Kecskeméthy, Iván Ottlik, Emil Zerkowitz, Zoltán Bíró, Mrs. Ferenc Völgyesi and Géza Zsoldos. Their experiences and impressions vindicate the constant redefinition of America, and the malleability of American cultural and social icons. The chronological time travel whizzes through images like America—the China of the 19th century, the country of the future, American democracy as a contrast to oppressive régimes in Europe, a world based on self-control, the country of religious freedom and economic vitality, American diligence and wealth as opposed to Hungarian idleness, lack of prejudice, civil equality. All in all, during the period observed America functioned as a model to be followed for the strengthening Hungarian middle class.

Enikő Bolobás explores the way liberal pluralistic education can open new vistas in the study of American culture. She starts the essay with a historical outline of canon formation and an analysis of the recuperation of the two ancient Greek patterns for education in recent canon wars. She traces the alterations of timelessness and change, of

permanence and temporariness, of the authoritative and the investigative and of the prescriptive and the exploratory. According to the writer the beneficiary effects of liberal pluralism initiated the rediscovery of literary works and the exploitation of the seemingly blurred and vague implications of texts. Liberal pluralism remodels the structure and our understanding of American literature and culture.

Leonard Bernstein's Jewish origin and identity permeate his *Kaddish-Symphony*. Péter Csató considers the work as a new way of communication through which certain characteristics of the Jewish mind might be observed. The analysis proves the writer's expertise and erudition in music as he compares differences and alterations in tonality to social, historical and philosophical questions. The final part of the essay clusters around the significance of the God figure related to the eternal question of the vindication of murdering God.

New dimensions of multicultural education are presented in Pál Csontos' essay. After providing a definition for ebonics ("black sounds") and quoting numerous examples to it he examines the way ebonics has become a part of political discourse. Among the several effects of the appearance of ebonics in political discourse he emphasizes the link between ebonics and Afrocentricity.

What commences after Csontos' writing on ethnicity is an essay dealing with another issue on the multicultural palette which is gender related questions. The essay on hate crimes by Krisztina Danko starts with a summary of a fatal incident that caused the death of a gay student in Wyoming. The writer relates hate crimes to gender issues and describes the legal aspect of gay rights on the political agenda. She concludes that Americans project their own value judgments concerning sexuality onto gender issues.

Being American and ethnicity are the main themes for Mónika Fodor's essay. She defines pluralism and then describes two processes—the first one being the social process of becoming both American and ethnic and the second process which is becoming either American or ethnic. Americanization and religion are also factors dominantly forming both an identity and a community.

Judit Ágnes Kádár's essay stretches the boundaries of the earlier pieces by extending the scope of observation to the Canadian social consciousness. She applies the multicultural and multivocal challenge to Canadian grand narratives. The long title itself contains a multitude

of allusive terms that could be explored in depth, but within the confines of the essay they are only anticipated. The analysis of works by Robert Kroetsch, Ruby Wiebe, Jack Hodgins and Bowering expands on such contextual and literary theoretical notions as the mythic connotations of the West, intertextuality, historiographic metafiction and discourse analysis. She concludes that the iconoclastic distortions imposed on the original narratives may destabilize the central focus of the narratives aiming at the single truth.

Centralizing and decentralizing themes and the metaphors of centripetality and centrifugality are the recurring concerns of three of the essays in the volume. Éva Miklódy defines the multiform relationship of the marginal black writing with the central and dominant Anglo-Saxon writing. In the second essay Ágnes Surányi provides us with strategies to approach the representation of all-black communities in Toni Morrison's works. Finally, András Tarnóc's essay encapsulates four points of the convergence of parallel cultures: evolutionary process, mythmaking patterns, therapeutic self-justification and the prevalence of centripetality over centrifugality. Unlike the two previous essayists, Tarnóc extends the scope of his observation by examining patterns of minority aesthetics in both African-American and Chicano cultures.

The genre spectrum of the volume is widened by Klára Szabó's essay on two approaches to American cultural diversity in one-act plays. Horovitz's and Shange's plays offer two different perspectives on representing otherness. The former remains an outsider whereas the latter's focus resides in the inner core.

Beside Vadon's aforementioned bibliography, Donald E. Morse's essay sets the tone for the second part which is illustrated with portraits of Hemingway and with photos at Key West, where 'Papa' lived. Morse reveals the Hemingway hoax which is the result of creating multiple, parallel universes and intermingling three characters, who are guises of Hemingway figures. The analysis of the recuperated Hemingway characters in the Möibus strip of Joe Haldeman's *The Hemingway Hoax* (1990) presents incidents in Hemingway's life and discusses different opinions by Hemingway biographers.

The perspective of intertextuality is a critical perspective which sheds new light on texts, and enables the critic to observe channels

through which texts can communicate with each other. Ádám Molnár practices this method of analysis when comparing Hemingway's and Carver's works. He also introduces us to the classification of intertextual connections by referring to hypertextuality and paratextuality.

When on a Fulbright grant, Gabriella Varró grappled with reviewing the manuscripts of Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* which are three times longer than the published version of the novel. That significant difference in proportion made her meditate over understanding re-reading. Re-reading triggers the nascence of several layers of interpretations of the text, namely re-reading gender, race, Eden and the concept of art.

The editor of the volume succeeds in compiling a memorable collection of essays which records the issues that scholars at the end of the 20th century were dealing with. In their heterogeneity of topics—race, gender, ethnicity and conflict—all the scholars write about one homogeneous geo-political entity which is the United States. All the essays are firmly based in and supported by theories on multiculturalism. Not only do they absorb ideas from secondary sources but they are argumentative as well. Those who want to plunge into multicultural studies should refer to the rich reservoir of works cited after the essays. The volume manages to capture the essence of an era in American culture, and by offering a pluralistic and cross-cultural approach to American literature, it makes an outstanding contribution to American studies.