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ORSZÁGH LÁSZLÓ—VIRÁGOS ZSOLT: AZ AMERIKAI  
IRODALOM TÖRTÉNETE

(A History of American Literature.) Budapest: Eötvös József  
Könyvkiadó, 1997. 394, [2] pp.

László Országh's work titled *Az amerikai irodalom története* (A History of American Literature) published in 1967 represented a milestone both in Hungarian literary studies and in the development of American Studies in Hungary. It functioned as a significant step in the realization of a scholarly program outlined in the form of a manifesto titled *Az amerikanisztika feladata Magyarországon* (The Mission of American Studies in Hungary) in *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok* (Hungarian Studies in English) in 1965. In his essay the "father of American Studies" in Hungary defined the most important tasks required for the establishment and development of high standard and professionally sound American Studies programs and research efforts. Professor Országh not only laid down the foundations of a new discipline, but he established a school along with creating a program whose crucial objectives he realized himself. One of these tasks included the compilation and publication of a scholarly work focusing on the history of American literature. This seminal effort not only marked a milestone in Hungarian book publishing, but it was a significant contribution both to Hungarian literature and culture. The fact that the book was written in an age when the contemporary political and scholarly establishment assigned the United States and the study of its culture and literature into the "tolerated" category of the infamous tripartite evaluation scheme ranging from "state supported" through "tolerated" to "forbidden" further reinforces the

work's bibliographic value and high esteem in Hungarian cultural history.

Since the author was requested by the Gondolat Publishing House to follow the form and size-related guidelines of its already released books focusing on Bulgarian, Czech, Slovakian, and classic Greek literary history, the form of Országh's work suggests that its primary aim is the education of the interested general public. While Országh's book successfully realizes the latter objective, the *A History of American Literature* as a pioneering effort bridging the gap in contemporary philological and literary studies goes far beyond a science propagation and popularization function. It is a synthesis of Professor Országh's scholarly efforts in literary history, a high standard work built on the solid foundation of the author's vast knowledge and extensive professional background. The clear, logical structuring of the accurate and scientifically sound content knowledge, the all inclusive and extensive bibliographic section, the deep and engaging portrayal of the careers of the leading literary figures and the thorough illustration of the respective social, cultural, and historical developments make Országh's work a truly outstanding scholarly achievement and the first and so far only Hungarian language survey of the three and a half century history of American literature. The author discusses the historical periods and the development of the American nation along with analyzing the economic and social forces impacting American literature in a vivid and enjoyable style. In describing the leading figures and achievements of American literature Országh testifies to the possession of a sensitive and sophisticated aesthetic taste as well.

This work of Országh has always been considered an indispensable resource for researchers, college and university professors and students, in addition to appealing to the interested general public. Professor Péter Egri in a tribute to his Department Chair's achievements in literary history described the never fading, always current appeal of Országh's work with the following words: "Országh's *A History of American Literature* sparks both the interest of the reader and the professional researcher through its pioneering topic selection, summarizing capability, the involving description of respective literary trends, the content's solid foundation in history and cultural history along with its clear and lucid structure, in addition to

the restrained, yet concise and painstaking logic of the authorial approach.”

The astuteness of the Eötvös József Publishing Company to honor the significant mission of Hungarian book publishing by making available Országh's work at the ninetieth anniversary of the author's birth cannot be overestimated. This volume, however, was not a simple reprint of the previous one as Országh's work contained only a twenty page overview of the development of post World War Two American literature until 1960. The publisher's objective of accurately informing the reader on the complex and varied developments in American literature in the past half century was realized in the best possible manner through the invitation of a former Országh student, Zsolt Virágos, a professor at the Department of North American Studies at Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen, to summarize the history of American literature in the post-1945 era. Virágos as one of the most outstanding representatives of the Országh school has provided several significant contributions towards the preservation and promotion of Országh's intellectual heritage and achievements in literary history and criticism. The rightness of Virágos's long pondered decision to continue the milestone work written thirty years earlier by his teacher was justified by his impressive professional background, his dedication to Országh's achievements, the mutually shared literary critical and aesthetic judgment criteria along with his professional humility and devotion towards the respective task. Consequently, Virágos's endeavor resulted in the extension of the autonomous life of Országh's landmark effort as the added section follows the original formal and structural guidelines, along with its intellectual spirit thereby making it an integral part of the initial work

Called upon to describe the history of American literature in the past 50 years in 140 pages, Virágos encountered a daunting yet challenging and stimulating task. Following Országh's structuring philosophy, he discusses more than two hundred literary figures and their significant works. Furthermore, he describes the profound changes impacting American society, culture, and politics, while retracing the respective development trends and highlighting the significant and defining tendencies in fiction, poetry, and drama in a concise and logically structured manner. In addition to being very informative and richly documented this extensive closing chapter

adhering to the proportional and structural guidelines of the original work employs a well-justified selection criteria and prioritizing system as well.

Unfortunately, the abundant photographs, pictures, illustrations, and the extensive bibliographical section of the original volume were not included in the newer edition.

The new enlarged volume was published in May 1997 and it can be considered the most significant book publishing achievement of that year. Its reception was similar to that of the original as in a short period it was sold out and in December 1997 was published again.

Zsolt Virágos dedicated his contribution to the book to his one-time master Professor László Országh. The names on the title-page—mentor and disciple—show a pleasing symbolic authorial cooperation and continuity in the history of American Studies in Hungary.

