

Twenty five Years in Serving the American Studies Community

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I

The occasion for the preparation of this historical overview was provided by the fact that in 2015 the Department of American Studies of the Eszterházy Károly College, as of 2016 Eszterházy Károly University (henceforth: Department) celebrated the 25th anniversary of its founding. Such a milestone offers an opportunity to look back at past achievements and evaluate the perspectives of the very discipline the respective organizational unit was dedicated to serve. The fact that the quarter-centennial celebration was held during the month of November, celebrating Hungarian science, is far from a mere coincidence. The Department not only contributed to the scholarly level research and instruction of American Studies, but enriched Hungarian scholarship as well.

II

The international and domestic background behind the establishment of the Department

The establishment of the Department was made possible by several factors. The end of the Cold War reinforced the United States' leading role in the cultural and geopolitical arena, while as a result of the regime change in Hungary and Central Europe the North American cultural context became a legitimate research topic. People who threw off the yoke of state socialism were eager to become familiar with the foundations of the market economy, and the knowledge of American culture seemed like a significant stepping stone for the achievement of this goal. American Studies as a research topic and scholarly discipline has gained prevalence primarily after World War Two in Western Europe. The popularity of the discipline was partly based on the leading geopolitical role of the United States along with the financial, scientific, and cultural support provided by such organizations as the Fulbright Commission. The often cited "mandatory interdisciplinarity" of American Studies entails the combination of history, sociology, and literary and cultural studies in its research apparatus. Yet, the tools of scholarly inquiry are not

restricted to the humanities demonstrated by the applicability of natural sciences to the examination of the leading works of American literature. Among others Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) establishing a bridge between natural sciences and the humanities reflects Aristotelian inspiration in treating literature as a living organism. Furthermore, the critical use of the heat death or entropy theories offers fruitful perspectives for interpreting social, cultural, and literary developments ranging from Edgar Allan Poe's poetry via Henry Adams' life-writing to post-modern fiction.

American Studies in Hungary can look back at a more than half a century long history. The founding father of the discipline is Professor László Országh, whose studies at Rollins College in Florida in the beginning of the 1930s inspired him to expand the scope of university programs dedicated to the exploration of English language and literature to that of the United States. The main guidelines or tenets of the discipline were laid down in his seminal work *Bevezetés az amerikanisztikába* (Introduction into American Studies) in 1972. Following the principle of interdisciplinarity the author elaborated a research and instruction framework emphasizing the humanities, history, literature, and the research and teaching of American English. Országh aware of the fact that American Studies was a young, and hardly-cultivated discipline in Hungary pointed to significant international achievements as sources of potential inspiration for Hungarian scholars (9).

The spread of American Studies in Hungary was simultaneous with the abovementioned regime change and the modification of the discipline's scholarly paradigm on the international scene. Accordingly, in the 1980s the concept of *New American Studies* replaced the previous consensus-based WASP (M) oriented model. Consequently, American Studies has not been treated as a unified homogeneous field of inquiry, but as an entity comprised of parallel cultures reflecting ethnic and cultural diversity.

Thus, the so-called grand narratives (history, culture, literature) were shifted on to a post-structural foundation while the main research questions focused on power and hegemony. Furthermore, high-culture oriented explorations gave way to the examination of cultural and societal fault lines. Consequently, traditional research methodologies were complemented with the tools of cultural anthropology, critical multiculturalism, feminist theories, and sociology.

While Hungarian researchers have developed a familiarity with the flagship publications of the discipline including the *American Quarterly* (launched in 1949), the *America Norvegica* (1966) and the *Journal of American Studies of Cambridge* (1967), the EAAS (European Association of American Studies) Conference held in Budapest in 1986, the establishment of the Hungarian Association for American Studies, and its membership in EAAS obtained in 1992 provided a great motivation

for the discipline's further domestic development. In 1993 the Department launched the *Eger Journal of American Studies* (EJAS) dedicated exclusively to the publication of scholarly treatises, bibliographies, and book reviews within the field. The EJAS followed the path of The *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS) established under the name of Hungarian Studies in English in 1963 and renamed as above in 1995. The HJEAS is published twice a year under the direction of the Institute of English and American Studies of Debrecen University, while the latest addition to discipline-specific scholarly forums, the *AMERICANA* electronic journal is maintained by the Institute of British and American Studies of Szeged University.

A brief history of the Department of American Studies of the Eszterházy Károly College

The establishment of the Department of American Studies was a timely response to an increasing need for gaining more and more information about the United States at a scholarly level. The founders, Lehel Vadon, László Dányi, and Csaba Czeglédi laid the first milestones on a road, which eventually led to significant scholarly and cultural results. The development of the Department was helped by grants provided by the Embassy of the United States and other various international sources. The respective funds contributed to the creation of a Departmental Library, the elaboration of new educational materials, and the promotion of pedagogical innovations. Said efforts were also supported and augmented by study trips to Austria, the Netherlands, and the United States.

The establishment of the Department of American Studies in the Eszterházy Károly College reflected the guidelines laid down by Prof. László Országh. The departmental curriculum followed the prescribed concept of mandatory interdisciplinarity and mapped out such strands of research and instruction as literature, national history, and the questions of American English.

One urging task was meeting the requirements of the existing canon and at the same time expanding it to meet the rising demands. Consequently, while the original curricula contained the works of Dead White Euro-American Males, or in the words of J. Hillis Miller "prioritized texts," new texts or study materials had to be discovered as well. One such step was the launching of bibliographical research aimed primarily at the reception of the works of American authors in Hungary. Although, reflecting pre-1989 curricular requirements, instruction was primarily literature and civilization oriented, courses on the historical and political development of the United States, and the inclusion of the tenets of Canadian Studies helped the respective curricula to meet contemporary demands.

Until the introduction of the Bologna Reforms in 2006 American Studies functioned as an independent undergraduate program. During this time the cultural and literary canon was expanded to include female, African-American, and Native American writers. Instructors of the Department have become professionally integrated in the world-wide American Studies scholarly community via study trips and participation at domestic and international conferences and other scientific forums. Accordingly, the study trip to the Conference of the Austrian Association of American Studies (1994), the HAAS conference in Budapest (1995) and the HUSSE Conference in Pécs (1997) along with the 2001 HUSSE conference held in Eger deserve mention. During this time the Department expanded its international cooperation network with study visits to Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, or student and instructor exchanges with Vilnius Pedagogical University. We were also active in international projects with Canadian and Dutch partners focusing on the introduction of legal assistant training in Eger and exploring the details and the applicability of the achievements of teacher training in Holland respectively.

Although after 2006 American Studies could not function as a separate undergraduate major, it continued as a specialization within the English Studies program. We are pleased that the popularity of the specialization is continuous and the launching of the disciplinary M.A. program under the leadership of Prof. Lehel Vadon further widened the Department's professional profile. Two professors of Debrecen University: Zoltán Abádi-Nagy and Zsolt Virágos provided invaluable help for the accreditation of the program in 2008 and its implementation in 2009 at first as a part-time scheme, but next year it was expanded to a full-time schedule. The M.A. program aims to train experts equipped with the highest possible level of subject content knowledge along with professional proficiency in the English language thereby enabling graduates to meet the continuously changing demands of the labor market and productively function in a multicultural society.

For humans twenty-five years is a substantially long period, and it is not different with organizations or organizational units either. The well-known seven-year interval between fundamental changes of the human body applies to institutional structures as well. Yet despite the staff changes the Department has remained committed to its mission and its original instruction and research goals.

Following the guidelines of Professor Országh we have assigned special priority to research and the dissemination of the respective scholarly achievements. While the prevalence of basic research continued, the organization of the Intercultural Studies research group in cooperation with the Institute of Intercultural Psychology and Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Science signaled the onset of applied research efforts as well. The research group organized two conferences, whose

proceedings were published both in traditional printed and electronic format. Recently, the Department's research profile characterized by bibliographical research, and the exploration of ethnic and minority literatures until 2006, has been expanded to include transculturation, narratology, American history, life-writing, crime and gender studies.

The instructors of the Department have produced several books and other scholarly publications. One of the greatest achievements is Lehel Vadon's 2007 landmark work titled *The Bibliography of American Literature and Literary Scholarship until 2000*. This three volume magnum opus was preceded in 1997 by the publication of *The Bibliography of American Literature and Literary Scholarship in Hungarian Periodicals until 1990*. In 1996 Judit Kádár published her anthology titled *Critical Perspectives on English Canadian Literature*. András Tarnóc's *The Dynamics of American Multiculturalism: A Model-Based Study* appeared in 2005.

Among other significant milestones I would like to mention the following works: Zoltán Peterecz: *Jeremiah Smith and the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary*, (London: Versita, 2012), Judit Kádár: *Going Indian: Cultural Appropriation in Recent North American Literature*. (Valencia UP, 2012). and András Tarnóc: *Erőszak és megváltás: Az indián fogságnapló, mint az amerikai eredetmítosz sarokköve* (Violence and redemption: the Indian captivity narrative as the cornerstone of the American myth of origination, EKF Liceum 2015). In 2016 we welcomed the publication of Zoltán Peterecz's second book, titled *A kivételes Amerika* (America, the exceptional nation, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2016)

We have significantly expanded our international professional connections as well. In the past two decades we hosted Fulbright scholars, (2009: Paul Swann, Temple University, 2010: Laverne Gaskins, Valdosta State University, 2011: Jerry Blitefield, Dartmouth University 2014: Gabriel Melendez, University of New Mexico) Our instructors participated in ERASMUS teaching programs, in Lithuania, Turkey, and Bulgaria, while two of our instructors (Judit Kádár, Zoltán Peterecz) have received Fulbright scholarships in 2012 and 2015 respectively.

In addition to research and teaching the Department actively participated in the organization of conferences and professional forums. The 1998 HAAS conference had two main themes: the challenges posed by the multicultural paradigm and the literary and cultural legacy of Hemingway. Our Department was responsible for the American Studies section of the 2001 Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English. Furthermore, our Department was active in the field of Canadian Studies demonstrated by hosting the Young Canadianists' Forum in 2001, or arranging the 2007 Canada 4U workshop and seminar. In addition to sharing the results of basic research efforts we utilized our applied research experiences in two conferences sponsored by the Intercultural Studies Research Group titled *Mi/*

Más (One/Another). Both events arranged in 2008 and 2010 explored the gender-based, ethnic, and cultural aspects of social diversity and tolerance respectively. In 2012 the Department organized the 9th Conference of the Hungarian Association for American Studies focusing on the social, cultural, and political changes of North America in the post-1960s era. In December 2014 a seminar-conference titled *La Frontera/Borderlines* on the theme of crossing cultural and racial borderlines was jointly organized with the Fulbright Commission, and our Department made a significant contribution to the 13th HUSSE conference organized in 2017 as well.

The nurturing and guidance of talent and participation in the student scholar movement are also major components of our professional profile. We have regularly participated in the National Talent Program grant projects enabling our students to take part in the institutional and national rounds of the Scientific Students' Associations Conferences. In 2011 Attila Takács ranked second, in 2015 Dorottya Szabó ranked 3d, and in 2017 Dalma Boros achieved third place at the national conference level. Moreover, in April 2016 our MA student Ágnes Bodnár earned the title of Best Presenter at the Intertalent UNIDEB international student conference. In the past decades the instructors of the Department made significant steps in promoting their careers in the form of earning scholarly qualifications and advanced degrees. Lehel Vadon earned his PhD degree in 1994, and obtained habilitation in 2000, Csaba Czeglédi earned his Candidate (CSc) title in 1998, András Tarnóc received his PhD in 2001 and his habilitation in 2013, Judit Kádár earned her PhD in 2003, and obtained her habilitation 10 years later, while Zoltán Peterecz received his PhD in 2010. In the coming years we expect two of our young colleagues Renáta Zsámba and Barna Szamosi to earn their advanced degrees.

Throughout its functioning one of the Department's strengths was the successful collaboration between many generations of researchers, senior scholars, midcareer professionals, and those at the beginning of their scholarly career. We are proud to have been a milestone on the road paved by László Országh whose study trip to Rollins College Florida laid the foundation of American Studies in Hungary. Yet we must provide an answer to the question posed by Zoltán Abádi-Nagy in 2009: Does Hungary, or the Hungarian society need American Studies and what is the exact role or mission of the discipline?

All in all, we have two major tasks ahead of us: the teaching of the English language and the transmission of scholarly knowledge. We also heed the call for the promotion of scholarly research, the protection of the English and Hungarian language from harmful slang developments, the promotion of quality assurance and the publication of the results of our scholarly research in Hungarian language. In the words of our colleague in Szeged University András Csillag, we are dedicated to the value-oriented teaching of American civilization.

III

As of January 1 2017 the Department of American Studies was converted into the Institute of English and American Studies. Although the organizational format changed our commitment towards the research, instruction, and popularization of the major achievements of North American civilization has not altered. We continue to function as the North American Studies Section of the Institute. We are continually responsible for the instruction of the subjects and courses related to the American Studies specialization of the undergraduate English Philologist B.A. program and the post-graduate disciplinary American Studies M.A. program. Our research focus was expanded to include crime fiction, gender studies, and Native American literature in addition to autobiographical literature and Hungarian-American economic and diplomatic relations. Moreover, we have received the approval of the Hungarian Education Authority (OH) for offering the American Studies program to foreign students.

American Studies at the second decade of the twenty first century

Although the emergence and subsequent popularity of American Studies coincided with the rise of the United States as a global empire, in the second decade of the new Millennium it appears to be a discipline or scholarly inquiry in search of a mission. The shift from a consensus based approach in social sciences to acknowledging the constant social, political, and cultural tensions took place in the 1960s. American Studies, whose milestones were marked by Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx and other great names of the consensus period, gave way to New American Studies emphasizing such terms as challenge, decentering, inequality, and cultural strife. As the American Century drew to a close in the wake of 9-11 observers of American Culture had to become accustomed to such terms as decline, or the waning of the American mission concept and of exceptionalism.

The very term, American Studies, had always carried a connotation, a primary focus on the United States. However, the world's fascination with "America" seemed to have weakened. Paradoxically one reason is the globalization process as the main aspects of American culture tend to be around us. What previously was only imagined after reading the letters of immigrants to their loved ones left at home, or was only accessible via the movie screen now is brought to instant virtual life by the touch of a keyboard.

One way to increase the attraction of American Studies is remodeling or improving the teaching schedule. While the original curricular structures emphasizing literature, history, and civilization-related studies must be retained, the respective canons have to be broadened. Consequently, the mandatory interdisciplinarity

should entail the new perspectives of social studies, the bottom-up view of social history and the inclusion of non-WASP (M) authors in the literature instruction schedules. In the latter case the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990) played a pioneering role, while the works of Howard Zinn and Ronald Takaki helped to meet the first objective. Therefore, African-American and Native American authors have become staples of literary curricula, but other literary and cultural productions including Asian-American, Chicano, Puerto-Rican, Cuban have to be examined as well. Instruction of American history can be enlivened by the inclusion of the voice of the average American while the structure, main aspects, and achievements of American business, or subjects related to popular culture (the history of Hollywood, American Music) offer a promising teaching theme as well.

Roger Williams' observation, in his seminal work, *Key into the Language of America* (1643) "A little Key may open a Box, where lies a bunch of Keys." provides inspiration for us, researchers and instructors of American Studies in the 21st century. Williams had already recognized the continuously changing nature of American culture and considered his work only as a key to unlock the mystery of the very subject. While throughout the centuries history, literature, and linguistics provided several keys, we hope to find new ones in our continuing journey to disclose and understand the secrets of North American civilization.

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