

PÉTER EGRI

VADON, LEHEL. *AZ AMERIKAI IRODALOM ÉS
IRODALOMTUDOMÁNY BIBLIOGRÁFIÁJA A MAGYAR
IDŐSZAKI KIADVÁNYOKBAN 1990-IG*

[A Bibliography of American Literature and Literary
Scholarship in Hungarian Periodicals till 1900]. Eger,
EKTF Líceum Kiadó, 1997. 1076 pp.

This massive volume of bibliography created by Lehel Vadon, Chair of the Department of American Studies of Eger's Eszterházy Károly College, is both a breath-taking enterprise and an outstanding scholarly achievement.

First of all, the mere size and scope of the undertaking are impressive: the bulky volume lists 9,920 itemized entries; in exploring the relevant data in the periodical literature, Vadon pored through 1,619 periodical publications, incorporated 9,920 numbered data, explored the totality of pertinent material available in what used to be pre-World War One historic Hungary, he drew upon and registered the evidence of Hungarian periodicals issued in other countries. Thus, in the enormous field of his subject, he aimed at completeness.

Secondly, his investigative searchlight penetrated hidden nooks and corners over an exceedingly long period: from the first Hungarian periodicals published up to the year 1997.

The Hungarian version of this review was published in *Filológiai Közöny*, 2000. XLVI. No. 1–2. The present publication was translated by Professor Zsolt Virágos at Professor Péter Egri's personal request.

Thirdly, on this vast and apparently chaotic wilderness he has imposed an exemplary order: the volume is logically segmented, its arrangement is lucid and based on solid structural premises.

The detailed, though never lengthy introductory chapter (35–47)—a separate disquisition in its own right—offers a helpful description of the undertaking’s thematic range and clarifies the principles of its structural layout.

The second large structural unit of the volume (49–864) contains the personal entries, which range from Edward Abbey to Eugenia Zukerman. In the personal bibliography the distinction between the primary and secondary sources is rigorously maintained. The same principle of organization recurs in the treatment of each author, which makes the arrangement of the material especially attractive, for the reader/researcher will find in the same entry what our dailies and journals have published both by and about, say, Hemingway. It was a felicitous idea to have the names of the respective authors included in the table of contents: the alphabetical list immediately arouses interest and helpfully draws the attention of the user, facilitates reader orientation, and readily offers the kind of initial information that most users need.

With regard to this latter unit of the book I might add, by way of supplement, that on the evidence of András Benedek’s O’Neill monograph (Budapest: Gondolat, 1964. 137) the American playwright’s drama *Különös közjáték* [Strange Interlude] was first published in *Színházi Élet* [Theater Life] in 1929, and so was *Amerikai Elektra* [Mourning Becomes Electra] in 1937, both translated into Hungarian by Zsolt Harsányi.

The bibliography’s third unit (865–867) references the works of unidentified authors: novels, short stories, sketches, feuilletons; even a reportorial account is separately listed.

The fourth part (868–871) presents folkloristic material, successively arranged as American folk-poetry, Native American oral poetry, and African American folk-poetry.

The fifth chapter (872–940) is made up of a bulky general bibliography. As such, it serves as a counterpart of the personal entries. This unit, to quote the author, “includes the kind of literature (studies, essays, articles, book reviews and other kindred publications)

that focus on American literature in a general sense and not on individual authors or their works. Texts on particular authors were also accommodated in the general section only if this was justified by the nature of the texts, that is, mainly in those cases when their themes also pertain to more general issues” (39).

The multifaceted comprehensiveness of the general bibliography is manifest in its various subcategories: prose, poetry, drama, theater, literary history, literary theory, criticisms, Hungarian-American links, reception, comparative studies, bibliography, publishing, press, book reviews on literary anthologies in Hungarian, and finally, miscellaneous writing not readily classifiable in the other categories.

In subsequent editions it might be expedient to streamline the terminology and to use “epic genre” instead of prose, “lyric genre” instead of poetry because drama, as dictated by the logic of the tripartite breakdown, appears as the third dominant generic class, and the majority used by other authors, it still seems expedient to avoid unnecessary overlaps and abrupt shifts in generic focus. *Omnis determinatio est negatio*. It also appears useful to ponder whether or not the more general classes (bibliographies, literary theory) should be given more priority and be moved higher in the list.

The concluding part of the volume is an appendix (941–1076), which provides alphabetical information on the periodical literature surveyed, in which asterisks mark the titles of dailies, weeklies, journals, and annual publications with a special focus on American literature. The appendix also accommodates a general name index, as well as a separate alphabetical register of the names of the translators mentioned in the volume.

Fourthly, Lehel Vadon’s bibliography, which is dedicated to his one-time mentor Professor László Országh, is an exemplary work, almost uncharacteristically thorough, painstakingly accurate, and professional. The relevant data in the respective dailies, weeklies, journals, and yearbook were not gleaned from other bibliographies; in exploring them, the author had physical contact with each item, he held them all in his own hands. He did indispensable research, among other places, in the National Széchényi Library, the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Arts and Sciences, in the libraries of Kossuth University in Debrecen, in libraries and archives in Pozsony

(Bratislava) and Kassa (Košice), but also in U.S. libraries: Grand Canyon University, Arizona State University, Florida State University, as well as the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

All in all, Mr. Vadon's work—a single-handed achievement—offers more than it promises: in supplying the dates of the respective authors' birth and death, for instance, the volume assumes the features of an American literary encyclopedia; when explaining initials and variants of personal names and supplying pen names, it moves in the direction of a literary lexicon; by enumerating English and Hungarian textbooks (40–46) use to check data, a large amount of American Studies *book* material is specified and, as a result, the user of the work gets a glimpse of American cultural history. In providing all this additional information, the volume also offers extra dimensions beyond the 1990 time limit and it almost extends to the end of the millennium. The bibliography's latest data are from 1997, the year of its publications.

It is hoped that, by reaching beyond the volume's assigned time frame, Lehel Vadon was actually gearing up for a couple of new undertakings: the extension of the *periodical* bibliography and work towards the publication of a *book* bibliography. This, of course, would have to encompass the research and published work of László Ország, Zoltán Abádi-Nagy, Zsolt Virágos, and other Hungarian experts of American Studies. Although it is only natural that the more urgent and difficult task of exploring the periodical material should have been given proper priority, the completion of a book bibliography would also be more than worth the candle.

When László Ország published his *Bevezetés az angol nyelv- és irodalomtudomány bibliográfiájába* [Introduction to the Bibliography of English Linguistic and Literary Scholarship; *Műhely* 7: 63–63]—also published in Budapest as a separate off-print in the following year—, in the introduction to his work he observed that “the objective of the present bibliographical outline is to offer a first-aid to those who wish to receive orientation in the fields of English literary scholarship and linguistics” (3). It was a similar incentive that motivated the publication in 1972 of his textbook entitled *Bevezetés az amerikanisztikába* [Introduction to American Studies]. In the preface to his bibliographical volume Lehel Vadon makes the following

remark: "This book is intended to serve as a philological first-aid by satisfying the bibliographical needs of Americanists and librarians, and hereby facilitating their work" (36). The time gap between 1943 and 1997 is considerable. Yet the need to provide a bibliographical first-aid is well discernible in both ventures, which thus ring a pleasing intellectual rhyme between mentor and disciple.