A. M. Halász

THE RECEPTION OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE IN HUNGARY BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

Anglo-Hungarian literary relations date back to a comparatively long past and research in this field has always been one of the main lines of Anglistics in Hungary, mainly that of the English Department of the University of Debrecen, which did pioneer work in this field. It is remarkable, however, that the period between the two World Wars has not been examined yet from the point of view of literary relations between Hungary and Britain and America, respectively. This fact is the more peculiar as the period in question is exactly the age when for the first time in the history of Anglo-Hungarian literary relations English and American literatures appear on the Hungarian literary scene as the most influential among the foreign literatures which the Hungarian reading public had access to in the form of translations. It is self-evident that the translation of a literary work into the language of another literature does not mean its full reception; it is, as it were, the material precondition which sets the mechanism of reception into action. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile studying the translated literature of a certain period because the quantitative and qualitative factors of the translations published give a very instructive insight into the specific conditions of the receiving literature in

the period in question.

It is characteristic of the general state of translation literature in Hunagary that interest in foreign literatures is suddenly revived in the years following the First World War. This is proven by the sudden increase in the number of translations. While in 1913 translations of 106 belletristic works were published (a fifth of the whole output of belles-lettres), in 1928 this number triples and constitutes approximately one half of the total number of belletristic publications. As to the distribution of translations, it is remarkable that in the first half of the twenties works of French origin prevail, partly classics, partly works of acknowledged contemporary authors. In comparison with their number the quantity of translated trash literature is insignificant. The French predominance, however, did not last long. During the period 20-25 the number of belletristic works translated from English increases and reaches the number of the books translated from French; at the same time the works translated from German are small in number and of a comparatively low artistic level.

It is very instructive to note the qualitative distribution of the English translations, especially if compared with later developments. Between 1920-25 the bulk of the published translations consists of classics and of books for the young; even these are mainly new editions of translations published before the war. The explanation of this tendency can be found above all in business considerations: in the chaotic post-war years publishers were not willing to take

the risk of introducing new forein authors, instead they pressed the publication of well-known writers, who sold well.

For this reason the publication of classics in Hungarian seems to follow the traditional line begun in the past century and at the turn of the century, respectively. Old and new translations of Dickens' and Thackeray's novels, books by W. Scott, Shakespeare's dramas figure among the publications. It is interesting to note that the full reception of O. Wilde takes place just in these years. At that time Wilde passed more or less for a classic whose reception had begun before the war and was completed in the twenties. His collected works appeared between 1921-28 in 40 volumes.

The first manifestation of the new interest in American literature is the renascence of some American classics, such as E.A. Poe, who, after a long pause, appears again on the Hungarian book-market with two volumes of short stories. However, it was only *The Mystery of Marie Roget* and *The Narrative of A.G. Pym* that captured the attention of the Hungarian reading public and ran through two editions. The rest of his work had no success in Hungary, not even the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in the translation of M. Babits, the leading Hungarian poet in the interwar period. The other American writer rediscovered in the first half of the twenties was Bret Harte. After the Hungarian publication of his book *The Luck of Roaring Camp* in 1875, which was a world-wide success, his name figures for the first time in 1922 with the short story *The Idyll of the Red Gulch.*

Beside these rediscoveries the first half of the twenties acquainted the Hungarian readers with Victorian authors, who had been inaccessible before. Browning's *Pippa Passes*, *The Egoist* by Meredith and *The Cloister and the Hearth* by Charles Read are translated and published, together with 19th century American fiction, such as Washington Irving's *Rip van Winkle* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. These last named authors, however, never achieved the popularity of American evergreens such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Tom Sawyer* or Cooper's *Leather Stocking*, which by the beginning of the 20th century had become stock and type of the literature for the young.

When speaking of the first half of the twenties, mention should be made of the translations of poetry, the more so as with progressing time their appearance on the book market becomes more and more scarce, finally they disappear altogether. At that time there still were publishing houses which took the risk of bringing out poetry in translation with the cooperation of outstanding Hungarian poets, such as Lőrinc Szabó and Árpád Tóth, who translated Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*, Milton's *Sonnets* and *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso* and *Lycidas*. The hundredth anniversary of Byron's death encouraged several publishers to publish his best-known works in Hungarian: *Childe Harold*, *Manfred*, *Beppo*, *Mazeppa*, *Cain*.

As to contemporary literature, there are some characteristic facts worth mentioning. First of all, it is remarkable that in the post-war years publishing in Hungary conciously endeavours to join in the stream of world literature

again and to make up for the lag caused by the war at an increased pace. For this reason it is mainly authors having gained recognition in their own countries in the years preceding the war who are introduced to the Hungarian public, authors, whose reception in Hungary had hardly begun or had been hindered by the outbreak of the war. The second remarkable point is that Hungarian translation literature mirrors the main lines of English and American fiction of the given period in a fairly capricious way. The leading novelists of the early 20th century, A. Bennett, H.G. Wells, J. Galsworthy and J. Conrad became known in Hungary without exception, but with a varying intensity, in a varying degree and from varying aspects.

As to Bennett, it is characteristic that whereas his works of literary rank were not translated at all, his novels written solely for entertainment purposes went through numerous editions, in cheap paperback form. Well's reception had begun comparatively early when *The Invisible Man* came out one year after the publication of the original, in 1898. A number of his science-fiction writings appeared before 1913 (*The War of the Worlds*, 1899;* *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1901; *The Time Machine*, 1909, etc.), but the series of publications continued as late as 1920 when *The First Man in the Moon* came out. However, from that time on Wells, who had been granted civic rights in Hungary as the world-famous author of fantastic thriller, continued his triumphal march with his novels concentrating on social issues, dealing with

---

* The dates given indicate the dates of the Hungarian publications.

the problems of the man in the street, and coloured by a deep social sympathy. In fact, he had become so popular that even his utopian views on a unified world-state, on the endless development of science and technology, on the implementation of a just and rationalistic society by the 'brains trust' were eagerly consumed by Hungarian readers. Well's popularity is best demonstrated by the fact that the serial publications of his novels made up the bulk of translations from English between 1920-25, moreover, none of his novels stopped at the first printing and one of them, *The Passionate Friends* (1922) ran through four editions. Galsworthy began his career in Hungary with *The Country House* in 1914 and his works kept on being translated in the post-war period (*The Patrician*, 1923; *Dark Flower*, 1925; *The Silver Box*, 1925; *The Island Pharisees*, 1927), curiously enough with the exception of the very novel which established his world fame. The first part of *The Forsyte Saga*, *The Man of Property* had not been translated until 1932, the year of the Nobel Prize, marking at the same time Galsworthy's heyday in Hungary. It seems that in the 20s Galsworthy, the naturalist playwright and the subjective rebel against the English caste system was appreciated in Hungary more than the later Galsworthy, the wisely ironic chronicler and critic of the English upper-middle class.

In the case of Joseph Conrad, attempts were made to pay off the war debts and in the year of Conrad's death, in 1924, readers were presented with the first Hungarian translations, that of *The Arrow of Gold* and of *Almayer's Folly*. Since Conrad also belonged to the group of novelists who had

become known in their home countries before the war, the publication of his works fits into the general pattern of Hungarian reception, since, however, even in the English-speaking world he was not a widely read and popular novelist, the publication in Hungarian cannot be explained by a world-wide success as in the case of the other authors listed above. It seems more than probable that the attention of the Hungarian publishers was drawn to him by the commemorations following his death. The selection of the novels chosen for publication seems to support the assumption that the publishers aimed at a compromise between cultural mission and business considerations and for this reason the choice fell on the first and on one of the late Conrad novels, whose common characteristic may be found in the fact that they are among Conrad's comparatively easily accessible works, in which the adventurous surface story and the magic of the romantic requisites are predominant. It should be noted, however, that the cultural mission fulfilled by the Hungarian translation met at the same time the demand of a high-brow élite, which, although numerically not sufficient to necessitate more than one printing of the above novels, provided the basis of further publications in Hungarian, such as *The Outcast of the Islands*, (1926), *The Shadow Line*, (1927), *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, (1929).

The reception of American literature in the first two decades of the century was far more restricted than that of English literature. Attempts were made to introduce some of the novelists belonging to the naturalist school. Hamlin

Garland's *The Tyranny of the Dark* and two novels by Upton Sinclair--*The Jungle*, *Samuel the Seeker*--had been published in pre-war times (1907 and 1908), the introduction of Frank Norris, the initiator of sociological naturalism, however, took place as late as 1923 when the second part of his 'wheat-trilogy', *The Pit* was published. Although *The Pit* was a best-seller in its time, it struck no chord with the Hungarian reading public, whereas Norris' disciple, Jack London became an unequalled success. Between 1918-1925 more than 40 volumes were brought out by various publishing houses; some of the volumes, such as *The Call of the Wild* went through five editions between 1921-25. Jack London's popularity can be accounted for by the exotic setting and by the adventurous romanticism of his novels. If we line up, however, the English and American authors who became favourites with the Hungarian readers in the given period--Wells, London, Galsworthy and G.B. Shaw, whose plays were also brought out in serial publication partly before, partly after the war--and if we search for a common feature in their oeuvre, we can discover it in what we may call their anti-capitalistic attitude. This is certainly a very broad definition in that it comprises elements as disparate as the protest of the early Galsworthy against the English caste system, the Fabian socialism of Wells and Shaw and Jack London's muddled proletarian revolutionism, but it is undoubtedly relevant for the reason that it gives an astonishing picture of the cultural profile of the early inter-war period, namely, it shows that the very authors whose ideology was in sharp contrast

with the official right-wing policy dominant in inter-war Hungary appeared in the widest circulation. If we try to find an explanation for this striking phenomenon, it seems to be a fair assumption that in the new and unsettled historical situation following the war and the 1919 revolution the average reader was particularly responsive to the kind of literature which recorded the everyday facts of the age, the drab reality of industrial civilization, the dreary world of the little man with a naturalistic precision, but at the same time, offered a popular and easily accessible world interpretation, and, moreover, some attractive ideas for a way out of the actual mess, such as Wells' utopian conceptions, Shaw's Fabianism, Jack London's romantic prophecies on the 'naked, free and wild' natural life rooted in man's biological being. The Hungarian reader enjoyed reading books of this kind written in a colourful, enthralling tone and in an unsophisticated narrative style making no particular demands on the reader and requiring neither special literary literary training nor a refined taste for new and unusual devices of artistic expression.

* * *

During the decade 1926-1936 slightly different trends appeared in the output of translation literature and its relationship to the original literatures. First of all, the number of publications of classics decreased and the range of assimilation of classic authors hardly widened. Among

the few classic works mention should be made of the appearance of Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1930), E. Berrett-Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1936) and the first and very probably unique translation of Disraeli: *David Alroy* (1929). The stock of American classics brought out in Hungarian is expanded by Melville's *Moby Dick* (1929); the date coincides with the time of Melville's universal recognition in America and Europe.

From a quantitative aspect contemporary novels of some literary value dominate the book market; at the same time, there is a gradually increasing tendency towards the publishing of what the German terminology classifies as 'Trivialliteratur', i.e. light literature and the works of authors unrecorded in literary history, who must have been fashionable in their time but have been forgotten by now. As time goes on, best-sellers gain more and more ground at the expense of classical publications. This trend is particularly marked by 1931, when, in the wake of the general financial depression, the whole output in literary publication diminished a great deal. When circumstances returned to normal, by the mid-thirties a fairly stable proportion had become established, with best-sellers topping the list and the second place being usually shared in equal measure by classics and contemporary fiction, while now and then modern novels gain ascendency over classical works, This phenomenon can be accounted for by the fact that in the period of the inner stabilization of the Horthy-régime the enterprising spirit of the publishers began to rise again and they willingly ventured on a larger

scale introduction of modern English and American literature. In order to counterbalance the risk involved in following an untrodden path, the publishers brought out books which in their own countries as well as in other areas had already proved successful and, therefore, their success in Hungary could also be taken for granted. A distinctive feature of this new wave of reception was that this time it was not the great authors of yesterday but novelists contemporary in the strict sense of the word that gained admission to the Hungarian book market, almost simultaneously with their publication at home. Another remarkable fact is that from that time on public interest seems to focus on the American novel rather than on its English counterpart. The cause of this change of roles may be found in new trends developing within the original literatures themselves.

The English novel was just undergoing the last phase of its polarization with the break between the modern novel as represented by Joyce, V. Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster and the traditional novel practised by reliable and talented second-rate authors becoming complete. Parallel with this there began a process of stratification within the reading public itself. The intellectual novel detached its narrow élite public and the rest split into smaller groups, each with its preference for the traditional novel, for light literature, for the detective story, etc. At the same time American literature was living through one of its richest periods producing a variety of literary schools and a number of outstanding novelists. American writers gained acceptance

and achieved popularity even in Britain, perhaps because they were able to fill the gap between the intellectual novel inaccessible to the average reader and the traditional novel lacking originality. Therefore, it is small wonder that from the second half of the 20s on, the American writers attracted the liveliest attention in Hungary too.

The English avant-garde writers--apart form occasional publications in periodicals--remained almost entirely unknown in Hungary for a fairly long time, which is comprehensible because none of these writers were easily 'exportable', first of all on the account of the linguistic difficulties of the translation. Not only could they not aspire to a wide ranging popularity but even professional criticism, which carried weight with the educated reader, received their experimental aspirations with some reservation. In consequence, no attempt has been made at their transplantation into Hungarian, with the sole exception of D.H. Lawrence, but, in all probability, the publishers undertook the venture to launch him not on account of the artistic value of his books but on account of the erotic aura surrounding his name, which promised good business. It is interesting to note that in Lawrence's case we are confonted with a phenomenon which used to be frequent in older times but was quite exceptional in the period in question, notably, that an English author was introduced in Hungary through German mediation, first with the *Plumed Serpent* (1929), then with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1933. The German mediation seems to be supported by the curious fact that the Hungarian translation omitting some of

the 'sexiest'passages came out in the same year as the German version with a title which was a literal translation of the German title (*Lady Chatterley und ihr Liebhaber*) and not that of the original. It seems to be the case that it was not Hungarian prudery that forced the translator to produce a mutilated version of the original, but he simply translated the clipped German text. This also meant the end of Lawrence's reception until 1945; the '*succes de scandale*' responsible for his fame abroad did not suffice to create the basis even for a restricted popularity. It is not surprising, therefore, that only Babits and the élite literary publishing house, *Nyugat* deemed Lawrence worthy of appearing in a collection of English short stories *Mai angol dekameron* (Present Day English Dekameron, 1935) among the leading English authors.

The consequence of the polarization of the English novel and of the English reading public can also be traced in Hungarian translation literature. The readers of the English avant-garde--if there were any--were recruited from among those who were able to read their novels in the original. Within the wide masses of the readers dependent on Hungarian translations certain signs of differentiation can be observed. From among the traditional novelists, Galsworthy, the Nobel Prize winner of 1932, attracted the widest public. *The Forsyte Saga* and its sequels appear invariably on the publication lists from 1932 to 1943 in various editions. The cheap edition, launched by *Franklin* in 1932, circulated each volume at a price of P 2.50, which proves that *The Forsyte Saga* had become a popular and attractive novel easy to sell even to

people in narrow circumstances. Not less successful was Maugham's career. Strangely enough, *The Painted Veil* seems to be the first novel that drew the attention of the publishers to him, in spite of the fact that Maugham's name had been known since the early years of the century. *The Painted Veil*, however, got into print very quickly, in the very year of the publication of the original, in 1925 and went through several editions in a comparatively short time. The easy readability and the romance-like story did not fail to impress the readers and from that time on Maugham became a stock author of the Hungarian publishers, with many of his books brought out at low prices such as *The Moon and Sixpence* (1929), *Cakes and Ale* (1930), *the Narrow Corner* (1932) and the series of publications continued well into the 1940s.

It must have been the success of *The Forsyte Saga* that induced the publishing house *Singer & Wolfner* to bring out the new English saga novel, Hugh Walpole's *The Herries Chronicle* in eight volumes between 1932-34. But the bulky family history could not repeat the success of Galsworthy's novel, although Walpole was already a known author, through the translation of the first *Jeremy* novel in 1928, which had also been published in an edition for the young. *The Herries Chronicle* announced in advance with noisy propaganda did not find an echo similar to that of *The Forsyte Saga* among readers because the fresco-like presentation of the 200 year-span story did not offer the same illusion of true-to-lifeness as the minutely documented realistic sketch of the more or less familiar yesterday of the Forsytes.

The representatives of the English second line attracted no special attention, except for two successful historical novels by Robert Graves, *I, Claudius* (1935) and *Claudius the God (1936)*. R. Aldington's celebrated war novel, *All Men Are Enemies* (1933), Frank Swinnerton's *Nocturna* (1929), which had been included in the World Classics series launched by Oxford University Press and John Collier's *His Monkey's Wife* (1935), which passed for a special literary delicacy in its time, were not received as favourably as in Britain.

In fact, Galsworthy and Maugham were the only English novelists in this period who managed to create a more or less constant reading public of their own and if we try to find out what circles this reading public was recruited from then we must look for them among the educated readers who were all in favour of a quasi-serious subject-matter concerned with social issues, but did not go in for radical social criticism, let alone for its proletarian-centered variety. They preferred reading about the sophisticated world of the upper-middle-class and while attaching some importance to literary value, they wanted mostly to be pleasantly entertained. They were averse to sharp and offensive ways of posing problems, but all the more willing to delight in the polished and witty, ironically softened criticism offered by both Galsworthy and Maugham. This assumption seems to coincide with the fact that Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1935), which also deals with the aristocratic 'bright young set' of the roaring twenties, passed almost entirely unnoticed and failed to achieve any popularity, probably on account of its black humour and

bitterness.

The American novelists appealed to a circle of readers even wider than that of Galsworthy and Maugham and, presumably, their public was different from that of the English writers. From the point of view of the reception, two questions are relevant: first, who were the writers selected for publication? And second, which of them came up to the expectations attached to their publication? The mass-invasion of the modern American novel into Hungary began, properly speaking, with S. Lewis' Pulitzer Prize in 1926. At this time professional publishers were already well-informed of the events of literary life abroad and they were after authors whose names were hallmarked by official and professional recognition, by literary awards or other tangible signs of success. In Lewis' case the sensation was heightened by his refusal of the Pulitzer Prize awarded for *Arrowsmith* and it seems to be more than probable that the clamour created around him prompted the publishers to introduce him to the Hungarian readers. It is remarkable, that although S. Lewis had been a widely known and much translated novelist not only in America but in a great number of European countries since the appearance of *Main Street* in 1920, his name never appeared on the Hungarian publication lists and the date of publication of his first novel coincides exactly with the year of the Pulitzer prize. The first translation, however, was not *Arrowsmith* but *Babbit*, which enabled Lewis to top the list of the most frequently translated and most frequently published novelists in Hungary. From that time on each year

brought a new Lewis novel (*Mantrap*, 1927; *Arrowsmith* in 15,000 copies between 1928-41; *Dodsworth* in 10,000 copies between 1929-37, which is an enormous number by Hungarian standards) and from 1930, the year of the Nobel Prize on, his earlier novels also began to be translated from *Our Mr. Wrenn* in 1931 to *It Can't Happen Here* in 1936.

Lewis' overwhelming success encouraged the import of several other American novelists of the naturalist school. Booth Tarkington was discovered 20 years after his appearance on the American scene, but instead of his realistic novels his early sentimental romances were published, such as *The Beautiful Lady* (1928). In the case of Upton Sinclair it is more a renascence than a discovery. His *Oil* (1928) overshadowed all his former success and the five editions of this novel were a mere introduction to his amazing popularity in the 40s, which will be dealt with later. It is remarkable that the way to Dreiser's reception was also paved by S. Lewis. *An American Tragedy* (1930) was selected for translation in the year of Lewis' Nobel Prize and its success provided the basis for the publication of several other novels by Dreiser, such as *Sister Carrie* (1933) and *Jennie Gerhardt* (1934), which appeared in Hungarian some 20-30 years after the original publications. Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* (four printings between 1933-1944) proved to be a best seller. All the books of the Nobel Prize-winning authoress were brought out in very cheap editions and met with the same warm reception as in other European countries, due to their exotic settings, and to the pathetically philanthropic tone prevailing in the

presentation of Chinese life.

All these successful enterprises encouraged the publishers to venture farther into the undisclosed but promising territories of American literature. Sherwood Anderson was translated with various success. *Dark Laughter* (1927) in spite of its being notorious as a 'sex-novel', was less successful than *Poor White* (1929), which went through two editions. *Tar* (1930) was Anderson's last appearance in the inter-war period. His novels concentrating on inner processes and penetrating in psychological or even pathopsychological depths did not appeal to the average reader. Dos Passos appeared with two novels on the publication list: *Manhattan Transfer* (1928)and *Forty-second Parallel* (1934). His reception, however, in spite of the timeliness of his message, was hindered by his unorthodox and not easily accessible narrative technique. Even expert literary criticism was baffled by Dos Passos' experiment: "... Innovation also has its frauds. The cinema style of the American Dos Passos for example is merely a bluff based on appearances"--this is the judgement of an outstanding Hungarian critic of the period. Hungarian readers seem to have coped with the construction of the New York novel--witness the second, cheap edition in 1931--but the USA trilogy proved to be indigestible and so the second part, *1919* did not find its way to Hungary until 1943 when a mutilated version was published. The Hungarian translation of his first outstanding novel, the antimilitaristic-pacifistic *Three Soldiers* appeared, for political reasons, not in Hungary but in Czechoslovakia in 1937. At the same time

two novels by Thornton Wilder followed radically different directions--*The Bridge of San Luis Ray* (1928) and *The Woman of Andros* (1930)--achieved a success sufficient for several printings, in spite of the fact that neither of them constituted easy reading; moreover, the former novel was also experimental in its own way. The success may have had various causes, first of all, the great fame of *The Bridge of San Luis Ray* and, in connection with it, the snobbery of certain layers of the reading public, who deemed it compulsory to decorate their book-shelves with novels passing for the last word in literature. (This assumption, however, seems to be contradicted by the remarkable failure of Hervey Allen's *Anthony Adverse* (1935), the world's greatest best-seller before *Gone with the Wind*. It appears that besides international fame, Hungarian public taste also played a role in determining the fate of a book.) Another explanation may be offered by the exceptional quality of Wilder's novels amidst the dominance of the sociologically oriented naturalism with its aspiration to factual information and to plain communication. In Wilder's person the public met an author with exquisite formal and artistic culture, responding eagerly to the charm of the Catholic and Latin South and presenting a world totally different from the earth-bound soberness of the Yankee world.

Similar factors may have played a part in the publication of Willa Cather's historical novel *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1935), which also expresses neo-romantic, Catholic nostalgia. The obvious course for the publishers would have

been to select for publication W. Cather's novels which had established her reputation in her home country. The 'lost generation' of the First World War remained unknown in inter-war Hungary, with the sole exception of Hemingway, who appeared at that time as the author of *A Farewell to Arms* (1934). His first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* was not published until 1937; the most significant of Hemingway's novels whose publication would have been above all indicated, *For Whom The Bell Tolls* was forbidden to the Hungarian readers for political reasons. As to the two translated novels, their theme had lost actuality by the time they reached Hungary and, therefore, did not attract special attention.

On the grounds of these facts, it seems to be obvious that on the whole, it was the American realists who achieved the widest range of reception, novelists who criticised American civilization, the standardized American way of life and exposed the social antagonisms hidden behind the facade of economic prosperity--authors who in this phase of their creative careers professed progressive leftist ideas, from S. Lewis' rather vague anticapitalist attitude to Upton Sinclair's syndicalism. Those of them who became favourites with the Hungarian reading public used the traditional naturalistic narrative methods in that they subordinated artistic considerations to precise, journalist-like documentation, to the straightforward formulation of their message. The reading public consuming their works must have been recruited from among people sympathizing with their ideas and wanting to satisfy their intellectual curiosity by reading serious books

concerned with topical problems of public interest. These books had to contain stories dealing with real problems, however, with problems of no indirect concern for the Hungarian reader. The drab and dreary reality of American life described by the late American naturalist represented a new and strange world for the Hungarian public, a world attractive on account of its exotic quality. The main attraction of the American novels in the years preceding World War Two was, however, that they did not confront the reader with the much more acutely painful and disturbing problems of contemporary life. In this way, reading American literature was a sort of escapism, which explains, at least partly, why Hungarian literature had been pushed into the background for a long while by the continually increasing number of foreign books, to the extent that by the end of the Horthy-era the quantity of works translated from foreign literatures had doubled, whereas that of Hungarian fiction hardly increased.

As to the reception of entertaining literature, the list of imported novels ranges over a varied scale. Among the writers we find best-selling authors of the literary kind, such as R. Hughes with his *High Wind in Jamaica* (1933), Nordhoff and Hall with *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1932), J. Hergesheimer with *The Party Dress* (1935); humourists like Erskine with *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1928), Linklater with *Juan in America* (1935), the Canadian Leacock and, last but not least, Wodehouse, whose success with *Leave it to Psmith* (1929) was so lasting that his books were translated and published serially up to the mid-forties. Other fashionable

light-weight novelists like Michael Arlen, Fanny Hurst, Edna Ferber aroused moderate interest; the American Aldrich, however, created the greatest sensation of the period in question with her sentimental pioneer novel *A Lantern in Her Hand* (1931), the favourite reading of the wide masses of women readers.

The only publication of high literary level were two anthologies published by *Nyugat* containing an excellent selection of contemporary English and American short stories with the title *Mai angol dekameron* (Present Day English Dekameron, 1935) and *Mai amerikai dekameron* (Present Day American Dekameron,1935). Each anthology featured outstanding authors of the period, such as Huxley, Joyce, Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Edith Sitwell and Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, respectively. After a long interval poetry in translation appeared on the scene again, with an anthology of English poets (*Angol Költők*, 1930) including prominent representatives of English poetry from Pope to O. Wilde and with an American anthology of verse with the title *Amerika uj lirája* (Modern American Poetry, 1935) in which poets of rank such as Aiken, Crane, Cummings, E. Dickinson, J.G. Fletcher, R. Frost, A. Lowell, M. Moore, A. MacLeish, E.A. Robinson, C. Sandburg appear together with poets of ephemeral fame.

* * *

In the next and last phase of the period investigated, that from the years directly preceding the outbreak of the

war to the end of the Horthy-era, we witness some peculiar facts. While the German influence became stronger and stronger in the political arena, it did not extend to the area of literary relations at all, just the contrary: in 1937 the number of belletristic works translated from German diminished significantly in comparison with the output of the previous years and remained at the same low level throughout the years to come. At the same time the number of publications of English and American origin was constantly rising, paradoxically enough, especially from 1941, when Hungary officially declared war on America. Even the quantity of French books, whose presence on the Hungarian book-market had been negligible since the mid-twenties, showed a sudden rise from 1942 on. When examining the qualitative distribution of the publications translated from German, we find a predominance of German literature written by exiles followed by apolitical works from within the Reich. From among the representatives of the official 'Blut- und Bodenliteratur' only one or two appear on the publication lists. In this way the paradoxical situation emerged that whereas the literature of the German ally found hardly any access to Hungary, the penetration of the literatures of the 'hostile' Western countries was stronger than ever.

As to the influx of English and American literature, two interesting features stand out. Firstly the unprecedented wide ciculation of a small number of books, a phenomenon which made the last phase of the Horthy-era the age of best-sellers. It is difficult to explain why each year brought its sensa-

tional best-selling success, considering the fact that novelists as gifted as Cronin and Bromfield very probably had existed in the previous decades, too, without becoming super-best-selling authors. By way of explanation it might be assumed that advertising business in the American style with its fully developed armament as well as the film industry turning successful books immediately into motion pictures and popularizing them above national boundaries succeeded in manipulationg the taste of the easily swayed public to an extent unknown before. The question why just novelists of the Anglo-American world had become the superstars of the book market may find an answer on the one hand in the law of great numbers, or on the other hand in the famous American magazine culture, which had bred a special stock of experienced and gifted writers knowing all the tricks of the trade, that is the genuine raw material for a best-selling author. On the part of the reading public nothing is more comprehensible than the wish to escape from the worries of daily life overshadowed by the threat of the war in the thrilling and glamourous world offered by the best-sellers. The vogue of the best-seller was a world-wide phenomenon at that time anyway, so the Hungarian reading public joined a general trend when they bought and consumed novels by Cronin, M. Mitchell, Bromfield, Daphne du Maurier, Rachel Field in editions of 20,000 to 50,000 copies.

The second striking feature of the English-American book import is a remarkable rise in the literary level of the translated works, especially from 1940/41 to 1944. As to the

publishers, they seemed to adopt a new business policy inasmuch as, when satisfying the requirements of profits by the mass publication of best-sellers, at the same time they tried to serve cultural causes with the same determination and took great care to make sure that the English-American material getting access to Hungary be of artistic value and serve the education of the readers. This trend asserted itself in the selection both of classics and of modern authors. After a long period of stagnation the publication of classics received a new impetus: novels never published in Hungarian came out with the contribution of translators of note, actually outstanding Hungarian writers and scholars acting as interpreters of Anglo-American culture. Mention should be made first of all of *Wuthering Heights*, Thomas More's *Utopia* and Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*. The same goes for classic works that had already been published in the past century but in not quite adequate and by that time obsolete translations, such as Ch. Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Dicken's *Hard Times*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, G.B. Shaw's *Mr Trefusis*, etc. Moreover, after a fairly long interval, poetic anthologies began to appear in an expert selection and in highly artistic translations: G. Halász: *Az angol irodalom kincseshâza* (1942) (The Treasury of English Literature), which, apart from poetry, comprises also dramatic and prose passages, and Cs.L. Szabó: *Három költő* (1942) (Three Poets, a Selection of Poems by Byron, Shelley and Keats).

In the field of modern English and American literature

a twofold tendency can be observed. On the one hand, attempts were made at catching up with recent developments and at introducing authors who, on the grounds of their rank attained in their home countries, would have deserved being translated long before, but to the rather business-oriented publishing policy of the preceding period the publication of their works did not appear to be a profitable business venture. In this way, after a delay of about fifteen years the Hungarian reader was given the opportunity to get acquainted with some of the great novelists of the 20s: V. Woolf (*The Waves*, 1937), E.M. Forster (*A Passage to India*, 1941) and Aldous Huxley, who became a favourite with the high-brow reading public. It was *Two or Three Graces* that set the process of reception going in 1935, after that each year brought a new Huxley sensation, from *Antic Hay* (1936) to *After Many a Summer* (1941). All of Huxley's novels ran through at least three to four editions and the series of publications continued even in 1944, the most critical year for Hungary in the history of World War Two. The leading English novelist of the 30s proved to be so attractive that the Hungarian reading public accustomed to traditional narrative technique eagerly swallowed even the chronological experiment of *Eyeless in Gaza* (1937). Huxley's success was not equalled by anybody else; nevertheless, it is certainly to the credit of the Hungarian publishers that they made the public acquainted with Rose Macaulay, considered to be the greatest English authoress after Virginia Woolf (*Keep Up Appearances*, 1937), with two short stories by David Garnett, which created quite a sensation in their time:

Lady into Fox and *The Man in the Zoo* (1937), with Rebecca West's *Thinking Reed* (1937) and *St Joan of Arc* (1937) by Victoria Sackville-West, an authoress belonging to the Bloomsbury group. On the other hand, attempts were made to revive novelists whose reception had begun in past decades but had come to a standstill due to lack of interest novelists like Erskine with *The Brief Hour of Francois Villon* (1940), J. Conrad with *The Mirror of the Sea* (1944), E. Waugh with *Black Mischief* (1942), W. Cather with the historical novel *Shadows on the Rock* and *Saphire and the Slave Girl* (1944), Hemingway with *The Sun Also Rises* (1937) and T. Wilder with *Heaven's My Destination* (1942). Apart from this, it should be noted that publishers showed a preference for the progressive American leftist novelists of earlier times and began to bring out their books again; Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and *Jennie Gerhardt* (1942), Dos Passos' *1919* (1943), Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1942), S. Lewis' *The Trail of the Hawk* (1943) and most of all Upton Sinclair, and not only the Lanny Budd stories but a number of others, old and new alike, such as *Oil* (1944), *Mountain City* (1943), *Co-Op* (1944), *Little Steele* (1938), *The Flivverking* (1944), *The Wet Parade* (1943). This conspicuous leftist renascence seems to be rather incompatible with the official intellectual atmosphere in Hungary in the 40s when the German influence reached its peak and the policy of the country shifted to the extreme right.

The selection of literature contemporary in the strictest sense of the word was also determined by a high literary standard and a thorough knowledge of what was happening in

English and American literature. This is to be appreciated all the more as from the mid-thirties on it was more difficult to keep step with developments than before when the Anglo-American novel rested in the hands of some outstanding novelists. In the prose fiction of the period in question there was no well-defined line in predominance and there were no outstanding creative talents who could have passed for leading figures.

In relation to their reception in Hungary, the authors selected for translation can be divided into two categories. One group comprised writers whose publication did not involve any risks on the publishers' part because the novelists in question were authors known and respected all over the world, thus, their success abroad guaranteed, as it were, the profitability of their publication in Hungary, both in cultural and financial respects. For the same reason, their discovery for the Hungarian book market did not require any special flair or professional expertise. This holds true first of all of Huxley and next of Priestley. In his person, after a long time, a writer emerged who held the undivided attention of the British reading public. He was considered to be the voice of Great Britain and, therefore, he had fans everywhere in the civilised world and enjoyed great popularity in Hungary, too, among readers sympathizing with the British world. (*Good Companions*, 1937; *Faraway*, 1937; *Let the People Sing*, 1940). In 1940 Steinbeck continually appeared on the best-seller lists of the Hungarian publishing houses with *The Grapes of Wrath*, going through four editions between 1940-44.

The translation of his earlier novel *To A God Unknown*, encouraged by the success of *The Grapes of Wrath*, was far less popular, and *Of Mice and Men* (1943) in its turn, became a box-office success only in the dramatic version. The forties witnessed the publication of 'noble' best-sellers, such as Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* (1940), J. Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1940) and *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1940), Howard Spring, who made his name all of a sudden with *O Absalom* and *Fame is the Spur* (four to six printings between 1940-44), Hutchinson's *Testament* (1940) and C.B. Forester's *Captain Hornblower* (1941).

The second group of authors deserve our attention for the reason that their works were neither obvious export articles nor well-proven world successes, thus, although they were known in their home countries, their publication cannot be explained away by material considerations, instead, it definitely points to the fact that at that time the publication of foreign literatures was controlled by experts of great erudition. Among the authors belonging to this group mention should be made of Graham Greene, who had just appeared on the scene as a promising young talent and fulfilled the hopes attached to him with *The Power and the Glory* in 1940. The Hungarian translation appeared a year later, although Greene did not become known to the wide masses of the reading public until later, when the film version of *Gun For Sale* was released. Charles Morgan was not an author of international popular appeal either, nevertheless, three of his important novels--*The Fountain* (1937), *Sparkenbroke* (1943)

and *The Voyage* (1943)--were published.

From among the American authors making their appearance just about that time, O'Hara was introduced with his first novel *Appointment in Samarra*, although with a delay of four years, in 1938, Marjorie Rawling's novel *The Yearling*, awarded the Pulitzer Prize, was published almost simultaneously with the original, in 1941. Some other remarkable facts should also be recorded: John Marquand, who was known before only as the author of thrillers, emerges as a 'serious' author with *H.M. Pulham, Esq* (1944). As to Saroyan's publication, it would not deserve special attention in itself, considering that he ranked high in Europe, and that he was even regarded by many as the greatest living American novelist. What strikes one as incredible is that it was just his *Human Comedy* (1944) that gained access to Hungary, a novel conceived in the experience of the war and inspired by patriotic feelings, by an almost sentimental enthousiasm and love for the American fatherland--Hungary's enemy. In the same way, it is astonishing that at a time when Nazi racism and anti-communism were the key-words of the official ideology, a novel like *Native Son* (1941) should have appeared by Richard White, a dedicated communist at that time and the leading figure in the struggle against Negro racial discrimination.

If we try to find an explanation for these peculiar phenomena, we must look for possible causes in the economic and social changes taking place in the last phase of the Horthy-era. As is known, the publication of foreign literatures had always been the province of large share companies,

controlled by experienced businessmen with a thorough knowledge of the book market. As a consequence of the official swing to the extreme right in the country these businessmen were forced to leave their posts which were taken over by new, politically reliable cadres with good connections but with very little expertise. In this way, they had to rely to a great extent on the advice of experts--publishers' readers, translators,critics--in one word, of professional men of letters. At the same time and for the same political reasons, many personalities of the cultural and literary life had to earn their living as free-lancers. The only course open for them was to offer their services to the publishing houses where they could find occasional jobs as translators, readers or advisers. They may have had less business acumen than their predecessors but they were all the more intent on supplying the Hungarian public with reading material of artistic and intellectual value, the more so as, due to the restricting and oppressing influence of the government's cultural policy, the native literature of the 40s was hardly able to meet this demand.

The data investigated show that the reception of English and American literature reached its peak both in quantity and in quality exactly at a time when Hungary was at war with Great Britain and the USA, and when the official propaganda used every effort to discredit 'destructive' Western ideological and cultural influences. The widest reading public was attracted by authors who conveyed liberal, bourgeois-humanistic or even socialist ideas, i.e. trends totally opposed to

the official ideology forced on the country. These phenomena seem to demonstrate that throughout the 25 years of the Horthy régime there existed an intellectual opposition in the country, which consciously and consistently refused to let their tastes be manipulated by right wing cultural policy. Instead, they satisfied their intellectual demands by reading the literatures coming from the Western democracies representing for them a political, social and cultural ideal.

R E F E R E N C E S

Berend, I., Ránky, Gy. 1973. *A magyar társadalom a két világháboru között* (Hungarian Society between the Two Wars). Budapest: Uj Irás

Eisinger, Ch.E. 1965. *Fiction in the Forties*. 1965

Gál, I. 1972. *Babits és az angol irodalom* (Babits and English Literature). Debrecen

Hackett, A. 1967. *70 Years of Best-Sellers, 1895-1965*. Bowker

Halász, G. 1959.*Válogatott irásai* (Selected Works). Budapest

Havási, Z. 1965. *A könyvtár és a tudomány szerepe a társadalmi tudat alakulásában* (Scholarship, Library and Social Consciousness). Szeged: Diss

Hoffman, F. 1951. *The Modern Novel in America*, Chicago

Kovács, M.:1970. *A könyv és könyvtár a magyar társadalom életében 1849-1945-ig* (The Book and Library in Hungarian Life, 1849-1945). Budapest

Kunitz-Haycraft. 1942. *Twentieth Century Authors*. New York

Molnár, E. 1971. *Magyarország története* (A History of Hungary). Budapest

Reed, E. 1946. *The Novel Since 1939*. London

Scott-James, R.A. 1964. *Fifty Years of English Literature 1900-1950*. London

Snell, G. 1961. *The Shapers of American Fiction (1798-1947)*. New York

Szerb, A. *Hétköznapok és csodák* (Everyday and Miracles). Budapest s.a.

Szerb, A. 1971. *Gondolatok a könyvtárban* (Thoughts in a Library). Budapest