

**Glant, Tibor. 2013. *Amerika, a csodák és csalódások földje*. Az *Amerikai Egyesült Államok képe a hosszú XIX. század magyar utazási irodalmában* (America, the Land of Wonders and Disappointments - the Picture of the United States of America in the Hungarian Travel Literature of the Long Nineteenth Century). Debrecen: University of Debrecen Press. 259 pp.**

**Reviewed by Susan Glanz, St. John's University**

Travel literature is a way of informing readers with stories of unfamiliar lands, unknown or little known traditions and exotic people. Travel writing, as Tibor Glant's book well illustrates, shows the changing picture of America as drawn by Hungarian travelers and emigrants for their homeland Hungarian readers in the "Long Nineteenth Century" of approximately 1789-1914. Travel accounts by Hungarians visiting the United States have been studied before but not in this overarching fashion. Glant analyzes the picture drawn in over eighty books and several scholarly articles written in the period, basically divided into two groups, of those written before The American Civil War and those published after 1870.

The first chapter of Glant's book summarizes the history of travel writing and explores the genre's interdisciplinary nature, as it draws on several disciplines including geography, history, political sciences, sociology, ethnography (or anthropology), literary studies, cultural studies, journalism, and even zoology and botany. The second chapter introduces the Hungarian writings, or in fact translations, about America before the Civil War (1861-1865). The first book about America, published in Kolozsvár in 1694, was not a travelogue but a translation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Puritan Priest Increase Mather's (1639-1723) account of his missionary work amongst American Indians. The first American travel book translated into Hungarian was the Irish writer Isaac Weld's (1774-1856) *Travels Through the States of North America*, which was the sixth in an eight volume series of travel writings translated and published in Budapest between 1816 and 1819.

Turning to Hungarian authors, Glant divides these pre-Civil War travelers to America into three groups: travelers of the Age of Reform, crudely defined as the period between 1830 and 1850; Post-1848 Hungarian War of Independence emigrants, also known as the Kossuth emigrants; and the travelers of the early Dualist period (referring to the 1860-1877 north-south American dispute over slavery) of the 1860s. The writings of those in the first two of the three groups are discussed in this chapter, while the writings of Count Béla Széchenyi (1837-1908), describing the transition to the post-Civil War era, are discussed in Chapter Three. The writings of the first group, which includes Sándor/Alexander Farkas Bölöni (1795-1842), Károly Nendtvich (1811-1892), and Agoston Haraszthy (1812-1869), emphasize the American political process, describe positive experiences and on the whole show America to be The Land of Opportunity. The writers of the so-called Kossuth emigration were of about the same age as those of the first, Reform writers, but their works were published several decades after their



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emigration or travels to America. Since by this time the political landscape in Hungary had changed, compared to around 1850, into an era of absolutist rule, these writers now emphasized either Kossuth's early 1850s tour of America, or their own eye-witness impressions, but not the political processes observed by their "predecessors" of the Reform era.

As said, the analysis of Széchenyi's book makes up the third chapter of Glant's study. Béla Széchenyi was the son of István Széchenyi (1791-1860), whom Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894), leader of the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution, called "the greatest Hungarian." Béla Széchenyi's book, published in 1863, though titled *My American Travels*, is not really about America or the author's travels there during 1862, but rather a collection of theoretical musings on political issues, like the importance of the freedom of press. The fourth chapter investigates how American Indians were depicted in Hungarian travel literature. The first Hungarian travelers were not very interested in Indian affairs, whereas the post-Civil War Hungarian travelers wrote about the plight of the Indians, and except for Jenő Bánó (1855–1927), they all wrote about the Indians in sympathetic terms.

Chapters Five and Six examine Hungarian writers' American travelogues published between 1880 and 1914. Chapter Five provides the historical and political background for the changing picture presented to the Hungarian public in these books. The 1870s brought closer the political relationship between the United States of America and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the two countries opened embassies in each other's capitals. In those years, regardless of this inter-state political rapprochement, communication between European countries and the U.S. strengthened thanks to the newly laid transatlantic cable, and as Hungarian emigration to the U.S. increased, the Hungarian government faced this reality with conflicting interests. While these Hungarian emigrants remitted money back home, which improved the standard of living of their Hungarian relatives and their surroundings, the government feared the loss of cheap agricultural labor. In retrospect, the Hungarian government's view turned out to have been factual regarding both these counts.

To deal with the implications of U.S.-ward Hungarian emigration, the government founded in 1907 the "United States Immigration Commission," for the aim of studying the origins and consequences of the U.S.-bound immigration of its citizens. The Commission ended its work in 1911 and published its findings in a document called *Report*. The data published in the *Report* (387) showed that the 338,151 *Magyars* who entered the U.S. between 1900 and 1909 remitted \$42,193,906.62 back to Hungary. Because of its fear of losing cheap agricultural workers in significant numbers, the Hungarian government's official policy was to discourage emigration and encourage return migration to Hungary. While most governmental publications depicted a realistic-to-harsh picture of the difficulties faced by the Hungarian emigrants, immigrant letters sent back from America painted their lot in more positive colors and thus encouraged further emigration. As the communication between the two countries was further improved, news from and about America reached increasingly wider Hungarian audiences. By now both pulp literature and high literary works by American authors (e.g., Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain) were translated into Hungarian, and popular Hungarian authors like Mór Jókai (1825-1904) and Kálmán Mikszáth (1847-1910) wrote stories set in America.

Late into the nineteenth century, not only did the number of Hungarian travelers to the U.S. increase, but their backgrounds were now more diverse as were their reasons for visiting America and writing about their travels. These writings are analyzed in Chapter Six. While Tibor Glant divides the books published in this period into ten categories, I will discuss only a few of these. The three world fairs that were organized in the U.S., in 1876 in Philadelphia, in 1893 in Chicago and in 1904 in St. Louis, inspired five Hungarian authors to write about American life. Although they were mostly critical about certain aspect of this life, two of them, Zsigmond Falk (1870-1935) and Károly Vértesi (1843-1917), did not at all speak English, so one might doubt the depth of their understanding of American culture.

Official representatives of various Hungarian ministries also traveled to the U.S. and some published their findings in books or in official reports. Count Imre Széchenyi (1825-1898, Béla Széchenyi's cousin), István Bernát (1854-1942), Iván Ottlik (1858-1940) and Zoltán Szilassy (1864-1932) published detailed scholarly studies of American agriculture; and others wrote about American industry. The books on agriculture all discuss homestead acts, landholdings issues, use of new machinery and -- although these topics normally fall out of the scope of "agriculture" -- the American education and public health systems, including specific examinations of issues like sanitary regulations.

Scientists who visited the U.S. wrote to specialized Hungarian audiences. For example, Dr. René Berkovits, a medical doctor, wrote about medical care, nurse and midwife training and about financed research in the U.S. Gusztáv Dirner, also a medical doctor, did not publish a book about his tour of America but wrote a five-part series of reports on the medical conditions on immigrant ships. Geography Professor Béla Jenő Cholnoky (1899-1992) and his student Pál Teleki (1879-1941) -- later the Hungarian prime minister (in 1920-1921 and 1939-1941) -- were guests at the New York Geographical Society Conference in 1912. Cholnoky published several studies on America, and his photographs are now available on the net (<http://hagyatek.cholnoky.ro/kulfold-album/?wppa-album=27&wppa-cover=0&wppa-occur=1>). Teleki did not write a book on his tour, but he taught the first university course on America's economic geography in 1921-1922.

Two Hungarian women also published travel books. The travelogue of Mrs. István Jakabffy (in Hungarian: Jakabffy Istvanné) was published in 1893 and that of Mrs. Béla Mocsáry (Mocsáry Bélané), née Mária Fáy (1845-1917), who toured the U.S. in 1896, appeared in 1902. The books of both are more traditional travel accounts in their descriptions of beautiful landscapes and tourist sites. Mrs. Jakabffy also wrote about American politics, understandably as she was the wife of a member of the Hungarian Parliament, and she wrote critically about the situation of Irish homeless people and about racial discrimination. By contrast, Mrs. Jakabffy was positively impressed by the status of women in the U.S. as equal partners in family and social life who could express their views and be listened to more than could their Hungarian counterparts.

With the end of -- and to some extent already during -- World War I Hungarian-Americans were cut off from their relatives and friends in the old country, and the American emigration quota system closed the door to new immigrants. American popular culture inundated Europe and Hungary, and Hungarian travel writing about the U.S. largely ceased and restarted only in the late 1920s. The last chapter of Tibor Glant's book therefore summarizes the changes in Hungarian travel writing about America since the 1920s to the 1990s as well as describes some of the issues concerning the starting of an American Studies department at the University of Debrecen in the 1960s.

Travel writing falls between a memoir and an essayist book or article because it is often no less about the author than about the journey and the destination. This book, which is a wonderful read, is not only a contextual analysis of the books it surveys, but also an exploration of Hungarian history, politics, and culture as reflected through the American travels and immigrations of its men and women of letters, professionals, thinkers and leaders throughout the Long Nineteenth Century.