

The Evolution of American Studies in Hungary, 1970s to the present

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Abstract: This article traces the evolution of American Studies in Hungary from its early institutional beginnings in the 1960s through the decades of state socialism and into the post-1990 period of academic pluralism. It situates the emergence and delayed institutionalization of the field within the political constraints of Kádár-era Hungary and the epistemic frameworks that shaped American Studies internationally during the Cold War. By juxtaposing the “respect mode” of Old American Studies with the critical “attack mode” of New American Studies, the essay demonstrates how political censorship and epistemological suspicion converged to marginalize the discipline before 1990. Drawing on institutional history, intellectual history, and personal experience, the article documents the gradual consolidation of American Studies through programs, departments, professional associations, journals, and conferences. It concludes by surveying the contemporary Hungarian Americanist landscape, characterized by theoretical diversity, interdisciplinary breadth, and international integration, and argues that the field’s current vitality is inseparable from its historically hard-won intellectual and institutional autonomy.

Keywords: *American Studies in Hungary; Cold War cultural politics; gender and feminist scholarship; academic censorship; post-1990 academic transformation*

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1. Overview of events, 1960s to the 1990s

I will begin with a short overview of the earliest events. The starting point should unquestionably be László Országh, the grand old man of American Studies in Hungary, our most significant all-round multidisciplinary Americanist. Literary historian (English and American alike), linguist, and lexicographer, Professor Országh launched American Studies in Hungary with his pioneering *Az amerikai irodalomtörténetírás fejlődése (The Evolution of American Literary History)* in 1935, followed by schoolbooks for high school learners of English, scholarly works on the English novel and Shakespeare, readers in English and American literature for universities (we have to remember, these were not only pre-internet times, but pre-mimeograph and pre-xerox times as well), Hungarian–English and English–Hungarian dictionaries (we all grew up on the Országh dictionaries, to serve as the grounds for later dictionaries, which were all revisions of the Országh dictionaries), English–English wordbooks and lexicons, books on the methodology of lexicography—and the list goes on.

Silenced by the Communist authorities in the fifties and early sixties, Országh left a thirty-year gap between his first book on American literature studies and his next: his history of American literature, published in 1967, soon to be followed by his introduction to American studies in 1972. The “giant of English and American Studies in Hungary,” as Zoltán Abádi Nagy puts it, he was “beaten the hardest by the storm of communist ideology” (2009: 16). For in 1949, all departments of classical philology and Western languages were shut down at non-Budapest-based universities, including the Debrecen Department of English, to be reinstated after 1956 only, when in 1957 Országh brought back the Debrecen department from the dead (Abádi Nagy 2009: 16).

Országh’s revival mission was completed when, in tune with the practice at American universities at the time, Országh established the institutional teaching of American Studies in Debrecen from the 1960s on, bringing together the separate disciplines with a focus on American literature, history, and language and linguistics. The Debrecen English department soon developed into a veritable center for American Studies, with scholars who became major players in the field, like Zoltán Abádi Nagy and Zsolt Virágos, as well as Charlotte Kretzoi, Lehel Vadon, Péter Egri, and Tibor Glant, who all received their initial career push from Professor Országh.

The Országh model was soon followed by the Department of English at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, where Charlotte Kretzoi, Mária Újházy, István Geher, Gyula Kodolányi, Aladár Sarbu, Tibor Frank, and Zoltán Kövecses joined forces and taught American literature, history, and linguistics from the early/mid-seventies.

At this point, I will take a personal detour. I began teaching at ELTE in 1977, offering American literature and Civilization (as they were called at the time) courses. By the early eighties, several faculty members of the then English Department made serious efforts to set up some institutional framework to include American Studies in our curricula—or, God forbid, even launch an American Studies section. (It would have had to be established within the English Department because, in Kádár’s Hungary, the U.S. could only be discussed, at the most, in a colonial manner, from a corner of the English departments.)

The idea of pursuing knowledge directly relating to the U.S. was still anathema: it was considered a subversive act, a revolt against the established order—somewhat like America itself. We were under constant surveillance: our lectures were bugged and reported (by both colleagues and students, I must add). We received conclusive evidence of both the bugging and the reporting after the regime change. First, we found a little listening device somehow left on the wall in the room of a very trusted colleague, who could listen to what was going on in several lecture halls and seminar rooms by just turning its dial. Later, as the Communist State Security archives were opened, books began to appear on informants all across the humanities, revealing the name of a friendly and rather liked colleague, who regularly wrote reports on some of us (which I also found in my own dossiers, allowing me to identify the informant whom I had considered a friend).

Back to American Studies at ELTE. I recall a lunch in 1980 or 1981, which we had in the old *Bagoly* cafeteria of the Pesti Barnabás building of the university. After a never-ending series of comprehensive oral exams, Zoltán Kövecses, Tibor Frank, and I were trying to talk the then head of the English Department into accepting the possibility of establishing at least a separate section for American studies within the English Department. I remember well his facial features as he uttered the official verdict with absolute conviction: "no way."

Then there were other serious but failed attempts pursued by Charlotte Kretzoi and Tibor Frank through the 80s. Yet, while during the years of state socialism no institutional framework could be set up at universities, we managed to make concerted efforts on the international scene to show that American Studies was being researched and taught in the Soviet bloc. Two pioneering international conferences come to mind.

In the spring of 1980, Tibor Frank organized a huge conference, *The Origins and Originality of American Culture*, giving the floor to over a hundred speakers from West and East. The conference proceedings were published by Akadémiai Kiadó later (see Frank, 1984). The opening ceremony was already very special, not only because the avant-garde ensemble called *Új Zenei Stúdió* (New Music Studio) was playing Bartók's *Contrasts (for violin, clarinet, and piano, 1938)*—written for Benny Goodman originally but here with László Horváth on the clarinet—as well as a John Cage piece, but because this music proved to be a little too experimental and subversive for the Soviet delegates. So much so that when the Cage piece involved the sending of paper planes and the brewing of coffee on stage, the whole Soviet delegation—some twenty scholars—left the great hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in protest that American non-music was performed as the overture to a conference of serious Marxist scholarship. The other conference was less subversive but more of a first: it was the biennial conference of the European Association of American Studies, held for the first time behind the Iron Curtain, in Budapest, 1986.

These were also the pioneering years in Hungarian feminism. It was in the early 1980s that I started to smuggle into my classes some supposedly subversive ideas (ideas that at the time were censored in print) about the Civil Rights Movement, affirmative action, equal opportunity, gender segregation, reproductive rights, sexual aggression, date rape, sex roles, pornography, prostitution, among others. (That they were indeed considered subversive by the authorities has recently received its conclusive evidence, when in my state secret agency files, I found that my "spreading dangerous ideas about women" was recorded by informants as early as 1981.) My

first feminist collection of ten books was confiscated at Budapest's Ferihegy Airport in January 1982 and then "accidentally recycled," as the friendly police interrogator informed me when I was summoned to the Police Headquarters.

In the early 1980s there were no slots in the curriculum for teaching gender, so one had to find covert (I could say, sneaky) ways to do that. I devised two such outlets for feminist ideas: the first within the framework of undergraduate "American Culture and Society" classes, within which I taught topics on American women's history; the second being American literature classes, focusing on women writers, women's literary traditions and genres, and patterns in women's writing.

In the early 1980s, I taught several classes at ELTE with such angles. I insisted on introducing the *Seneca Falls Declaration* next to *The Declaration of Independence*, Dickinson side by side with Whitman, and Gertrude Stein next to F. Scott Fitzgerald. I recall a particularly memorable class in a culture course. We were discussing two somewhat (at least in those times) scandalous reading assignments, "The Bitch Manifesto" and Anne Koedt's essay on the myth of vaginal orgasm, in the presence of an unannounced inspector, an intimidated older woman colleague, sent by the suspicious department chair. As I heard later, he was not amused.

I remember other spirited discussions too: for example, of Emily Dickinson's female epistemology, the female utopia in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and female slave narratives. In each of these cases, the woman writer appeared as equal to her male counterparts, and the students who never really had a chance to contemplate such issues before were shocked into agreement.

I had the chance to further commit myself to teaching gender after 1985 at József Attila University (JATE), Szeged (now University of Szeged, SZTE). Here, Bálint Rozsnyai, then Chair of the English Department, who, having launched an American Studies "specialization program" in 1985, invited me to participate. Now I could teach courses explicitly on feminism, the Women's Movement, and women's culture and literature. The slow thawing that permeated the political climate of the whole Soviet bloc had its beneficial effects in academia too, in the sense that the American Studies curriculum became more diverse and more politicized. Courses with titles like "The Feminist Movement and Feminist Thought" or "Feminist Studies: Myths of Womanhood" seemed to happily satisfy this new interest in ideas on pluralism, radicalism, and the personal as political. Our students' curiosity about personal politics and its intellectual aspects was amplified by the presence of a growing body of American exchange students from the University of Oregon, with an insatiable interest in the situation of women in East-Central Europe, among others.

For two or three years I was involved in the JATE-Oregon Exchange, giving surveys of contemporary East-Central European culture, where women's issues were duly highlighted. Just by serendipity, the inquisitiveness of the Americans was met by an outstanding generation of Hungarian students—among them, Anna Fenyvesi, who grew into prominence not only as a linguist and the Director of the School of English and American Studies in Szeged, but as the current editor-in-chief of *Hungarian Cultural Studies* as well.

I was soon involved in the founding of the first full-fledged Department of American Studies at ELTE—but that had to wait for the new winds of political change in the fall of that *annus mirabilis* of 1989 and the historic spring of 1990. The political changes now allowed, for the first time, for the establishment of a separate academic unit for the teaching of American studies. First came a phone call from Zoltán Kövecses, then the two of us sat down to discuss the possibilities, preparing the whole packet for the launch of a new department: proposals, curricula, syllabi, book lists, and other documents. Gyula Kodolányi, a longtime member of the English Department, joined in and brought his familiarity not just with American literature but also with the new political scene. The three of us, Kövecses, Kodolányi, and I, made the necessary visits to university and government administrators to learn that we enjoyed the support of the Ministry of Culture. By the summer of 1990, it all fell together, and the members of a veritable department were lined up: Zoltán Kövecses, Gyula Kodolányi, Tibor Frank, Enikő Bollobás, Éva Federmayer, with Zsófia Bán, Tamás Magyarics, and Erzsébet Mészáros to come on board a year later. ELTE's Department of American Studies, the first such full-fledged department in the country, was officially launched in June 1990, with the backing of the new government of József Antall, the Soros Foundation, and the U.S. Embassy.

So arrived the 1990s, which most of us welcomed with a sigh of relief. The decade brought an end to state censorship: no more was short-sighted politics blocking the teaching of the culture of a world power; no more could apparatchiks prevent the publication of a book or article for ideological reasons. Nobody would write police reports on what we did or said, in the classroom or, supposedly, among "friends."

So, this would be the timeline of the evolution of American Studies in Hungary:

1957	Department of English reinstated by László Országh at KLTE (Kossuth Lajos University, the University of Debrecen today)
mid-1960s	courses on American literature, history, language and linguistics in Debrecen
1970s	courses on American literature, history, language and linguistics at ELTE (Eötvös Loránd University), Budapest
1985	American Studies Specialization launched by Bálint Rozsnyai at JATE (József Attila University, the University of Szeged today)
1990	American Studies Program in 1990 at ELTE, headed by Zoltán Kövecses, to turn into a full-fledged major in 1994
1990s	American Studies major launched in Debrecen and Szeged

The 1990s also witnessed the proliferation of American Studies at other colleges and universities, among them, the Eszterházy Károly Teacher's Training College in Eger, Janus Pannonius University of Pécs, the University of Pannonia, the College of Nyíregyháza and Berzsenyi Dániel College in Szombathely.

With the introduction of the so-called Bologna system in 1997, American Studies came to be taught as a specialization at the BA level, and as a separate major at the MA level in Budapest, Debrecen, and Szeged. Then in the late 1990s, American Studies PhD Programs were launched in Debrecen, Budapest, and Szeged. In addition to teaching American Studies, universities launched several journals—some devoted to both English and American scholarship, others to

American topics exclusively. Among the former, I need to mention *Hungarian Studies in English* (KLTE, 1963–73), *Papers in English and American Studies* (KLTE/DE, 1980–2009), *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (University of Debrecen, 1995–), *AnaChronist* (ELTE, 1995–), *Focus – Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* (PTE, 1998–), *Pázmány Papers in English and American Studies* (PPKE, 2002–). The two journals publishing American topics only are *Eger Journal of American Studies* (EKTF, 1993–) and *Americana* (SZTE, 2005–).

In 1994, the Hungarian Association for American Studies (HAAS) was established, providing an academic and, in a way, social framework for scholars in the field, with its chief function to organize conferences every other year. That same year, HAAS joined the European Association for American Studies (EAAS). The biennial conferences of HAAS have brought together all Hungarian American Studies scholars—in literature, language, history, education, and culture—allowing them to enter into dialogue about specific topics. Here is a list of HAAS conferences since 1994, together with the respective conference topics.

HAAS 1 Budapest, ELTE, 1994. HAAS joins EAAS. *Everyday Values in American Studies*

HAAS 2 Eger, 1998. *Multicultural challenge in American culture*

HAAS 3 Debrecen, 2000

HAAS 4 Budapest, ELTE, 2003. *The 1950s*

HAAS 5 Budapest, ELTE, 2004. *American Studies as Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*

HAAS 6 Pécs, 2006. *American Studies: Frontiers, Borderlines, Frames*

HAAS 7 Szeged SZTE, 2008. *American Studies in Hungary and Beyond*

HAAS 8 Debrecen 2010. *Images of America: Responses to a Changing Social, Cultural, and Literary Landscape*

HAAS 9 Eger, EKC, 2012. *Trends in American Culture in the Post-1960s Period*

HAAS 10 Budapest, PPKE, 2014. *Crossing Boundaries*

HAAS 11 Pécs, University of Pécs, 2016. *The Americas: Global Challenges and Responsibilities*

HAAS 12 Budapest ELTE, 2018. *Understanding America in a Time of Change*

HAAS 13 Debrecen, DE, 2019. *Renegotiating American Identities*

HAAS 14 Szeged, SZTE, 2024. *America Beyond Crisis: Regeneration, Coping, Healing*

HAAS 15 Eger, EKV, 2026. *The American Legacy of 250 Years: Continuity and Change in the United States of America*

(<https://sites.google.com/ieas-szeged.hu/haas/conferences?authuser=0>)

2. Historical and theoretical background

I will move on now to the political and epistemic aspects of the evolution of American Studies, highlighting how they affected American Studies in Hungary.

The first question one must deal with is why the idea of researching and teaching topics directly relating to the U.S. was such anathema in the 1970s and the 1980s. Why was it considered such a subversive act, a revolt against the established order?

I believe there were political as well as epistemic reasons. The political reasons consist in the consequences of the pact János Kádár made with the Hungarians. Kádár, party chief responsible for Hungary's thirty-plus years of goulash communism, learned a bitter lesson from the uprising of 1956: that special methods were needed to make Hungarians swallow communism. Thus, a soft version of dictatorship was invented. In return for benefits unparalleled in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungarians became Kádár's accomplices in the common effort to live better. Kádár's political gesture was what we might call the significant wink; "You promise me that no more '56s occur, and in exchange, I will make you a star country, the happiest barrack in the communist bloc," the wink said.

Many Hungarians soon became party to the deal. Censorship was imposed not only from above but also self-imposed. For example, journalists and historians went along with never referring to the revolution of 1956 or to the Hungarian minorities in the neighboring, supposedly "brotherly" countries. Television commentators enthusiastically condemned Israel's "aggression" in 1967. These same reporters spoke about the brotherly help to the "Czechoslovak people" in 1968, as well as the "Afghanistani people" in 1981.

What did Hungarians receive from Kádár for looking the other way? To put it simply, they received the soft eiderdown of liberal totalitarianism (liberal in the Orwellian sense). Party membership was not forced: only about every sixth person of the wage-earning population was a card-holding member of the Socialist Workers' Party—which came to ca. 800,000 in a population of 10 m. Travel was "liberalized" (again in the Orwellian sense): every third year Hungarians were allowed to travel to the West (unless their passport applications were refused, as mine was for many years), and once every three years, they could exchange their Forints for a maximum \$70 USD in the seventies, and then to \$300 USD in the eighties.

They were not expected to work terribly hard either, at least, not in their state jobs (which just about everyone had to have). As the saying went, "They pretend to pay us, we pretend to work." That is, they enjoyed job security without being demanded to work hard or provide quality work; they were provided with existential security in the form of their evening beer and Sunday Wiener Schnitzel. They could afford certain other luxuries as well: they could work their vegetable gardens over the weekends, and, provided they paid full price for the cars three or five or eight years in advance, they could in due time own a Trabant or Skoda or Wartburg.

Kádár bought the collaboration of a nation with peanuts. His pact fostered a set of mentalities, among them the mentality of playing along and understanding the significant wink. Among many other fields, American Studies became the victim of this mentality of making trade-offs and concessions. Scholars and academics in positions of power who could have stood up for American Studies did not even try—not risking being perceived by the authorities as unhappy

with the current situation. Playing along with the cultural commissars, these university administrators understood the limits and borders very well; they knew where the walls were and did not even go close to them. Because in this case the deal was, you can teach American topics, you can write your studies on these topics (all this will go practically unnoticed in the grand scheme of things anyway); but to make American Studies part of the formal curriculum, to put it in the window for everyone to see it, that will not be allowed, they insisted. (For more details on the political constraints on cultural life during the Kádár-era, see my "The Future of our Past.")

In addition to these circumstances relating to Kádár's Hungary, other factors, those rooted in the epistemic make-up of American Studies as practiced in the U.S., also played along. This is the era of "Old American Studies," as scholars call the first, Cold War phase of the discipline. It was dangerous territory in East-Central Europe both because of its idealized message concerning "the meaning of America" and its structuralist-phenomenological methodology. As the first generations of American Studies scholars—coming primarily from history and literature, but also from anthropology, linguistics, and other fields in the humanities and social sciences—were looking for a shared framework about "America," they found in those grand claims of the "myth-and-symbol school" about which there was consensus. Its elements include the "New World," "American exceptionalism," "nature's nation," the "American Adam," as well as the "American mind," developed in various forms in intellectual history such as Puritanism, Transcendentalism, Individualism, Progressivism, Pragmatism, and Liberalism.

This framework was in place for the first twenty years or so, as memories of World War II were raw for Americans and Europeans alike. Indeed, for this war generation, nowhere was American exceptionalism more conspicuously visible than in the role the U.S. had played against Hitler and his allies, literally saving the world. The unambiguously positive stance the U.S. took on the war stage brought about a tremendous scholarly interest in that culture: people wanted to know what exactly those special qualities were that allowed for the victory of good over evil. As Harry Allen, one of the pioneers of American Studies in Britain, recalled, "Hitler made Americanists of all of us" (quoted in Pells, 1998: 112). This is what I call the "respect mode."

Given this respect mode of the first phase, American Studies was forbidden fruit for Central and East Europeans. First, this was the height of the Cold War, and American Studies was the product of the Cold War, from the other side of the—cold—trenches. Clearly, here the "meaning of America" was not to be explained in the respect mode, by such *figurae* as the American Adam, the Virgin Land, the city upon a hill, the different drummer, or the errand into the wilderness. Second, at this time, non-Marxist theoretical frameworks—such as structuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalytic and myth criticism—were not tolerated in the Eastern bloc. They were understood to be products of so-called bourgeois ideology, ignoring the Marxist significance assigned to "social reality," and explaining phenomena in terms of linguistic, mythic, psychoanalytic, or consciousness models, not grounded in traditional social reality. Only by the eighties did Marxist aesthetics become exhausted in their hegemony, allowing, somewhat belatedly, various versions of structuralism to prosper.

Back to the U.S. In the American Studies of the 1980s and '90s, a decisive epistemic change was going on, bringing about what was later called "New American Studies." The old grand narratives were slowly being replaced by new *fabulae*, narratives that were de-centered (or had

many centers), de-privileged, and de-hegemonized, exhibiting traits of diversity and post-coloniality, and reflecting an awareness of the social and discursive processes that produce the controversial realm of reality. American scholars across the field began to explore especially the constructions of gender, race, sexuality, and class, starting with the production of marked configurations—the African American, the woman, the homosexual—but soon going on to the absent traces of inscriptions of race, gender, and sexuality. It became clear that the naturalized, thereby unmarked categories such as whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality were equally produced through discourses, texts, practices, and institutions. The grand metanarratives of a supposedly monolithic culture came to be discredited and taken apart by what I call the attack mode. Among the new and radically alternative scholarly configurations, literature came by a new primacy among the multifarious texts and discourses studied by Americanists. Literary scholars gained visibility and a newly respected position for their expertise as readers of texts and discourses, their ability to register linguistic signs of social situatedness and agency (or lack thereof). For according to the postmodern episteme, the scholar's job is not to uncover how things "really" *are*, but rather how things are being produced or constructed—as well as perceived, represented, imagined, or fictional. This task needs professional readers, such as those trained in the reading of literature.

In Hungary, the cultural commissars did not quite follow this trajectory of American Studies, the paradigm shift it was going through; for if they had, they would have allowed its emergence in Hungary when in the 1980s the respect mode became ironic, to be replaced by the attack mode. What never really reached the authorities so desperately trying to censor Americanists was the fact that at that time "Old American Studies," instrumental in constructing the scholarly vision of the idea of America, was being dismantled. If they had only realized that it was American Studies itself that, in the U.S. and Western Europe, went through a paradigm shift and became unapologetically critical, they could have actually even used this intellectual fodder for their desired critique of the U.S.—its hegemonies, imperialism, racism, sexism—and they might have supported it.

The opening of the Iron Curtain in Hungary and the taking office of the first democratically elected government in 1990 coincided with the emergence of the postmodern episteme and the institutionalization of the attack mode of New American Studies in the U.S., allowing academics in Hungary too to work within this new framework. After the decisive changes of 1990, state censorship completely disappeared. Since the regime change everything could appear, every opinion has had its outlet, every idea could be discussed, whether scholarly or political. Diversity and pluralism have ruled the widest spectrum of research topics in American Studies as well. With Marxism insisting that art is a reflection of reality, and structuralism insisting on art ordering and making sense of reality, a big leap was indeed necessary to conceptualize—without the appropriate thinking and discussion process leading up to it—art as not a representation of something outside, but as one of the many discourses that produce what we perceive as reality. Today, the poststructuralist-postmodern epistemic framework provides the natural theoretical space for American Studies scholars in Hungary too to step out into the transnational arena (see Cristian).

3. The current situation

Finally, a short overview of the current situation. The fields of interest have grown extremely diverse, as well as the circle of those who practice—research and teach—the respective branches of American Studies. Below, I list these fields, together with their practitioners (in alphabetical order), Hungarian scholars with PhD's and teaching at various Hungarian universities. These academics publish regularly on their topics; most of them have monographs to their names as well.

- American English (Réka Benczes, Veronika Jávör-Szelid, Zoltán Kövecses),
- American studies theories (Enikő Bollobás, Réka M. Cristian),
- American history (László Borhi, Sándor Czeglédi, Dániel Cseh, Júlia Fodor, Tibor Glant, Andrea Kökény, Csaba Lévai, Tamás Magyarics, Éva Mathey, Zoltán Peterecz, Károly Pintér, Éva Eszter Szabó, Livia Szélpál, Zoltán Vajda, Balázs Venkovits),
- Migration studies (Éva Eszter Szabó, Balázs Venkovits),
- U.S.–Hungarian diplomatic relations (Máté Balogh, László Borhi, Tibor Glant, Tamás Magyarics, Éva Mathey, Zoltán Peterecz),
- Hungarians in the U.S. (Réka Bakos, Anna Fenyvesi, Balázs Venkovits),
- inter-American studies (Réka M. Cristian, Éva Eszter Szabó),
- African-American studies (Imola Bülgözdí, Éva Federmayer, Ágnes Zsófia Kovács, Dorottya Mózes, Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszká, András Tarnóc),
- American drama and film studies (Réka M. Cristian, Zoltán Dragon, Lenke Németh),
- American visual culture studies (Zsófia Bán, Zoltán Dragon),
- literary theory (Zoltán Abádi Nagy, Enikő Bollobás, Péter Csátó, Lilla Farmasi, Pál Hegyi, László B. Sári),
- American fantastic and science fiction studies (Emma Bálint, Vera Benczik, Korinna Csetényi, Norbert Gyuris, Annamária Hódosy, Anna Kérchy, Ildikó Limpár, Anikó Sohár),
- Native American studies (Judit Ágnes Kádár, Szatmári Judit),
- American popular culture studies (Vera Benczik, Ildikó Limpár),
- American children's literature (Anna Kérchy),
- American ethnic studies (Mónika Fodor, Judit Ágnes Kádár),
- age-ageism studies (Mária Kurdi), and just about all the subfields within
- American literature studies (Zoltán Abádi Nagy, Zsófia Bán, Vera Benczik, Enikő Bollobás, Imola Bülgözdí, Réka M. Cristian, Éva Federmayer, Mónika Fodor, Pál Hegyi, Judit Ágnes Kádár, Katalin G. Kállay, Ágnes Zsófia Kovács, Mária Kurdi, Ildikó Limpár, Gábor Mezei, Lenke Németh, Márta Pellérdi, László B. Sári, Judit Szathmári, Szlukovényi Katalin, András Tarnóc, Ágnes Zsófia Tóth, Gabriella Vöő).

We have indeed come a long way in Hungary. American Studies as a discipline has lived through turbulent times in the past decades, reaching a height none of us would have predicted forty years ago. I think I can speak for all of us when I say, it has been life's honor and privilege to be part of it all.

4. Conclusion

The history of American Studies in Hungary is, in many respects, a history of delayed recognition—of a discipline whose intellectual legitimacy was long acknowledged in practice but denied institutionally. As this overview has shown, the obstacles American Studies faced before 1990 were the result of direct political censorship, and of a complex convergence of political compromise, self-censorship, and epistemic mistrust. The Kádár regime's "significant wink" fostered a culture of accommodation in which the open institutionalization of American Studies appeared unnecessary, risky, or simply undesirable, even to those who might otherwise have supported it.

Concurrently, the discipline's international profile did little to ease its situation in East-Central Europe. The grand narratives and idealizing impulses of Old American Studies made it an easy target for ideological suspicion, while the later critical turn of New American Studies arrived too late—and largely unnoticed by cultural authorities—to alter official perceptions. Ironically, by the time American Studies became openly critical of American hegemonies, exclusions, and power structures, it might have aligned far more comfortably with the ideological expectations of the socialist state. History, however, did not allow for such synchronization.

The political transformation of 1989–90 finally removed these constraints, enabling American Studies to emerge as a fully institutionalized, theoretically plural, and intellectually self-reflexive field. Since then, Hungarian Americanists have not only caught up with international developments but have also contributed decisively to them, expanding the discipline's scope across literature, history, linguistics, cultural studies, visual culture, gender studies, ethnic studies, and beyond. The proliferation of programs, doctoral schools, journals, conferences, and professional networks testifies to a field that has come into its own.

Looking back from the vantage point of the 2020s, the present diversity and vitality of American Studies in Hungary are inseparable from the discipline's earlier struggles. What once appeared marginal, suspect, or subversive has become a space of critical inquiry, methodological innovation, and transnational dialogue. To have witnessed—and participated in—this transformation has indeed been a privilege for all of us, one that underscores not only the resilience of a scholarly community but also the enduring value of intellectual freedom.

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