

Part II ("cross section") presents the lifework of individual writers. A given writer is discussed only once, and therefore authors are classified into groups by virtue of age, etc. Biographies are hardly given at all; the more important works, however, are listed, at places even without evaluation, which makes the book encyclopaedic, but useful. If I have counted correctly, Jenő Heltai born in 1871 is the oldest and János Sebeők born in 1958 the youngest of the writers considered. In the volume more than fifteen hundred(!) Hungarian men of letters are mentioned over five hundred pages, which in itself results in crowdedness and raises the question of completeness. The section on Hungarian literature outside Hungary was made in just the same way, and here there is no breakdown of material. Interestingly enough, it seems that the presentation here offers somewhat more perspective, perhaps because the author did not aim at completeness.

Mention is made of the various writers who have produced works adapted for film and even television, yet the newer types of mass communication are not allotted enough space in the volume, despite the fact that here we may speak of real success from the point of view of both our writers and the public. One might further consider whether this topic could be dealt with separately.

The thematic bibliography of "Literary information" containing more than 300 entries is equally important for readers both in Hungary and abroad. The writers are presented in alphabetic order (which is difficult to notice). The list of those who have received literary awards is also useful. It is unbelievable but true that more than 600 such awards were distributed in the period under discussion. Nonetheless, not everybody received one. . . .

It would be advisable to publish this useful book in a foreign language (in English or German) in an adapted form. Then too, it would need to be updated just as now, when we consider that while the book was published in 1982 its material really closes with 1981. The book's material makes highly informative reading, offering good orientation to the reader.

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**Hunyadi Brunauer, Dalma—Brunauer, Stephen
Dezső Kosztolányi**

München, 1983. 250 pp. (Veröffentlichungen des Finnisch-Ugrischen Seminars an der Universität München. Herausgegeben von Gerhard Ganschow. Serie C, Miscellanea. Band 15.)

If we share Gottfried Benn's view that "keiner der Großen Romanciers der letzten hundert Jahre war auch ein Lyriker", we may regard Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936) as a writer of exceptional significance and should be glad to have the first full-length study to appear in English on his work.

The chief merit of this book consists in its wide scope: all the works of Kosztolányi are taken into consideration. For lack of space we wish to concentrate on the two longest chapters dealing with lyric poetry and narrative fiction, and shall not comment upon the much shorter sections devoted to the biography, plays, essays, and translations of the Hungarian writer.

The first thing that strikes the reader in the Brunauers' appraisal of Kosztolányi's poetry is how often they reject statements made by other critics (from Hungary). In principle, there is nothing objectionable in this, for scholars living far from Hungary may have a different perspective and a wider horizon. The trouble is that the originality of their interpretations is often due to misunderstanding. A case in point is Kosztolányi's polemic essay on Endre Ady. D. H. and Stephen Brunauer believe that Kosztolányi's first volume of poetry,

Négy fal között ('Within Four Walls') was "enthusiastically reviewed by Endre Ady" (p. 5.). No expert on Hungarian literature would agree with such a statement. This need not in itself be a cause of criticism, but it is somewhat surprising that our authors give us no reason for their interpretation, and do not quote the passage from Ady's review which Kosztolányi regarded as an unjust underestimation of his book. Ady compared his fellow poet to Károly Szász, the prolific but untalented versifier of the second half of the 19th century. By 1907 Szász had a very low reputation, especially among younger intellectuals; so Ady's comparison was undoubtedly derogatory. In fact, one could trace the origin of Kosztolányi's later attack upon Ady back to the older poet's review of *Négy fal között*. Once Ady's opinion of Kosztolányi's first volume is grossly misinterpreted, it comes as no surprise that Kosztolányi's polemic essay on Ady, published in 1929, is not treated objectively. It is not even mentioned that some other writers (Frigyes Karinthy, Milán Füst, Sándor Márai) also expressed doubts about Ady's stature; and so Kosztolányi's reservations about the aesthetic value of some Ady's poems were by no means exceptional. What is more, the Brunauers seem to be unaware that the point of Kosztolányi's essay is not so much an attack made upon an older poet as the definition of a new, less rhetorical conception of poetry.

How is it possible that despite the authors' obvious admiration for Kosztolányi's work, their book fails to convince the reader of the real values of the Hungarian writer? There are four possible reasons for this:

1. Our critics do not seem to be familiar with certain methods of literary scholarship. The book's vocabulary may remind the reader of the impressionistic essays of *la belle époque*: "subject", "theme" and "mood" are the key-words, and the meaning of these terms remains undefined. No attempt is made at structural analysis, and most poems are simply labelled "sad", "happy", "moving" or "beautiful". Kosztolányi's first and rather insignificant volume of poetry is treated as a major work, because "all subjects which occupied him during the rest of his career as a poet appeared already in those poems", and his second and far more important volume is praised in a similar vein: "Married love and fatherhood provided him with some of his finest poetic subjects" (p. 22.) One could go on citing other passages, but I think that these two illustrations suffice to show that the authors are not very well-versed in literary theory. Because they lack a coherent terminology, their interpretations are far from reliable.

2. The second reason is bound up with the conception of literature our critics seem to hold. They do not discriminate between mediocre and first-rate works, and because of this the reader will find their aesthetic standards very low, and may unjustly dismiss Kosztolányi as a minor writer. If this is so, the book has missed its aim, because it will not make readers turn to Kosztolányi's works. In my opinion not many serious readers would feel inclined to read a poet described in the following terms: "He wrote the greatest number of the most beautiful poems to his wife and to his child. He is the family poet *par excellence*" (p. 31.). I fully agree with the Brunauer's high esteem of Kosztolányi's work, but I have the impression that they misrepresent the kind of poetry they try to describe, and their book may lead to misunderstandings.

In any case, I would prefer a much higher standard in evaluation. Our critics are far too generous with their praise. They devote much attention to juvenile or insignificant poems, while they give no analysis of *Ének a semmiről* ('A Song upon Nothing'), the final poem in the last volume of verse published in the poet's life. To do justice to Kosztolányi as a poet it should be admitted that his verse is extremely uneven, much of it is second-rate, but some of the late pieces make him a major poet, because "keiner auch der großen Lyriker unserer Zeit hat mehr als sechs bis acht vollendete Gedichte hinterlassen", to quote again Benn's seminal essay *Probleme der Lyrik*.

3. Because of their inability to see the difference between lesser and major works, the authors give a somewhat static picture of Kosztolányi's literary career. In their view *Számadás* ('Summing up'), the last volume of Kosztolányi "has no more inner cohesion than any other volume of poetry does" (p. 77.). This is a strange statement about a volume that has a more close-knit structure than most books of poetry. The only possible explanation is that our critics have missed the point of the volume, the contrast between the final poems in the collection: *Hajnali részegség* ('Dawn Intoxication'), a poem about transcendence, and *Ének a*

semmiről, an expression of post-Nietzschean nihilism and of a sense of having been thrown into the world.

The chapter on Kosztolányi's late poetry is indeed the weakest part of the book: the finest poems, the cycle of seven sonnets called *Summing up* and the short Expressionist lyrics *Őszi reggeli*, *Vörös hervadás*, *A vad kovács* (Breakfast in Fall, Red Withering, The Wild Blacksmith) are not analyzed at all, his three-line poem *Októberi táj* ('Landscape in October'), which exerted a great influence on later Hungarian poetry, is not even mentioned, and his *ars poetica*, *Esti Kornél éneke* ('The Song of Kornél Esti') is misread: the authors believe that "the title of the poem is misleading, because it is not sung by Esti", forgetting that in the later poetry of Kosztolányi the speaker would often address himself in the second person. For such a misinterpretation there is only one explanation: our critics' knowledge of works on Kosztolányi is very uneven. A rather insignificant short book published in a small town in 1938 is frequently quoted, whereas important books (e.g. Ágnes Heller's) and outstanding articles (by János Barta, Attila József, G. Béla Németh, István Örley, Dezső Tandori) are not even listed in the bibliography.

If the works of Kosztolányi could not bring home to our critics how much he changed his style in the second half of his career, some of his commentators may have convinced them of the radical transformation which Kosztolányi's writing underwent in the early 1920's. The Brunauers' claim that "it is impossible to show any *development*" (p. 102.) in the works they examine seems to be at least far-fetched, especially if one remembers that in his later years the poet-novelist changed even his vocabulary, and rewrote some of his earlier texts.

4. How can such misunderstandings be explained? For there are obvious misunderstandings in this book, especially in the chapter on narrative fiction. Let it suffice to mention but three examples. The heroine of *Pacsirta* ('Lark') is an ugly girl who lives with her parents. When she leaves home to visit relatives, her father suddenly realizes that he hates his daughter. Our critics maintain that "the extremely exaggerated ugliness of Lark is the only factor spoiling the perfection of the little masterpiece" (p. 145.). Antal Novák, the hero of *Aranysárkány* ('Golden Kite') believes himself to be an exceptionally conscientious teacher. Suddenly his only child, Hilda elopes with a boy, and a few days later he is beaten by some of his ex-students. First he makes plans for a revenge, but little by little he comes to the conclusion that he has made serious mistakes, and commits suicide. The Brunauers' view is that this hero "moves from insight to ignorance, to a complete misconception of himself" (p. 148.). The heroine of a third novel, *Édes Anna* ('A. Édes') is a perfect maid cruelly treated by her mistress. For a long time Anna seems to be content with her hard life, but after a huge party given by the lady of the house the maid murders her employers. The commentators argue that the novel has a crucial weakness, because "the climactic event, the double murder, is unexplained" (p. 170.). The trouble with these interpretations is that they are made without paying attention to the type of novel Kosztolányi tried to write. A close friend of the analyst Sándor Ferenczi, he took a passionate interest in the unconscious, and his psychological novels are explorations of hidden motives.

In their preface D. H. and Stephen Brunauer declare that their intention is to place Kosztolányi "in the context of Hungarian and world literature" (p. 2.). That task seems to have proved too difficult for the authors of this book. They have failed to analyze important cross-cultural factors which would help the reader understand a writer virtually unknown to the English-speaking world. If they had examined the social and intellectual *milieu* of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the influence of Rilke and the *haiku* from, Nietzsche and psycho-analysis, the theory of linguistic relativity, and the various *avant-garde* movements, their book might have become a timely and pioneering study of a writer who in the last 15 years of his life developed an exceptionally condensed yet lucid prose style, wrote a highly original antinovel *Esti Kornél* ('K. Esti'), and a number of short poems which could be regarded as fine Expressionist lyrics. As it is, this book does not serve its purpose, and cannot be compared with the best works written by other critics on a writer whose work should be known to all readers of literary works of art.