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**Dezső Kosztolányi's German Poetry
Translations in the Light of Volume II of
*Modern Poets***

**Preparing the Critical Edition of Volume II of
Modern Poets for Publication**

Doctoral Dissertation Theses



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I. Background of the Research and Problem Statement

As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, and with even greater intensity in the second half of that century and the first half of the twentieth, literary translation came to play an increasingly significant role in shaping the relations between national literatures and world literature. Turning to early twentieth-century Hungarian translation literature, it is not difficult to arrive at the somewhat general conclusion that Dezső Kosztolányi played a decisive role in this process, whose translational activity constitutes an integral part of his oeuvre.

Kosztolányi, who translated works of prose, drama, and poetry alike, understood translation not merely as linguistic transfer, but as cultural mediation through which the Hungarian readership could become acquainted with numerous significant works of world literature. To illustrate the richness of his translational activity, it is sufficient to note that the number of his verse translations amounts to several hundred, and, considering his entire oeuvre, may reach into the thousands.

This dissertation forms part of the critical edition series of Dezső Kosztolányi's translations, primarily preparing the critical edition of the German verse translations of the second, 1921 edition of the anthology *Modern Poets* (*Modern költők*). This volume represents a significant undertaking of Kosztolányi's early but already mature creative period, whose structural and selection principles reflect the influence of several contemporary European anthologies, particularly, in the German context, the collections of Hans Benzmann and Hans Bethge.

The dissertation consists of two major parts. The first, theoretical and philological section examines Kosztolányi's views on translation theory, his relationship to the German language, as well as the genesis and editorial history of the various editions of *Modern Poets*. Within this framework, the study presents the differences between the editions, the issues surrounding German-language authors and source texts, while also undertaking a textological analysis of the poems and their variants, as well as exploring aspects of reception history.

The second part functions as a critical edition and commentary: it presents the material of the volume, including biographies, poems, and textual variants, records their textual transmission, and provides analytical commentary.

The 1914 first edition selected poetry from seventeen national literatures and published fifty poems by twenty-four German-language authors. The 1916 edition appeared with essentially unchanged textual material regarding the German corpus, featuring only typographical and editorial modifications. A significant transformation was brought about by the expanded, three-volume 1921 edition, the second volume of which focused exclusively on German poetry: it contains one hundred and sixty poems by thirty-two German authors, with a prominent place given to the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke.

The history that emerges around the 1914 and 1921 editions of *Modern Poets* offers a revealing cross-section of the Hungarian publishing industry of the period, in which legal considerations, publishing interests, and authorial intent operated in close—and often tension-filled—interdependence. Among other things, this dissertation

attempts to examine the circumstances of publication in a comprehensive manner, reconstructing and interpreting the related processes of publication history and their broader context.

The aim of the research was the exploration, systematization, and philological analysis of the source material, as well as the preparation of the methodological and textual-critical foundations of a critical edition.

The formulation of the research problem is justified by the fact that a critically oriented scholarly treatment of the German-language translations within Kosztolányi's oeuvre has not yet been undertaken. This dissertation seeks to provide a partial contribution to this field of inquiry. Although a comprehensive examination of the German verse translations would require the analysis of all translations produced and published during Kosztolányi's lifetime, the scope and methodological framework of the present study necessitated the delineation of a more narrowly defined corpus.

The editorial principles do not in all respects fully follow the unified practice of critical editions of Kosztolányi's texts, since the primary aim of this work is

not the establishment of a definitive text, but rather the grounding of a preliminary philological and analytical investigation. The textual basis of the edition is in all cases the textual state of the 1921 edition, taking into account its variants traceable up to 1936, on the assumption that authorial direct or indirect textual control may be presumed until that point. The presentation of the texts follows the original structure of the volume, supplemented for clarity by subsequent numbering, and, in the case of interconnected poems, by a sub-numbering system.

The German source texts are presented in parallel with the translations; however, due to the diversity of source editions and textual variants, the dissertation does not undertake a comprehensive text-critical identification of the German originals. The sources are presented under the heading “Textual Sources” in chronological order, using a unified system of abbreviations, the list of which is provided at the end of the dissertation. The analytical section, entitled “Notes,” contains the examination of the poems in terms of content, versification, and style. The system of annotation distinguishes between text-critical

notes and factual notes: the former are attached to the main text, while the latter are presented in the appendix.

The significance of the research lies in its contribution to a more nuanced understanding of Kosztolányi's translational activity, as well as to the study of Hungarian translation history and cultural mediation. The exploration of sources, textual variants, and philological relations enables a more precise interpretation of the *Modern Poets* anthology and further facilitates the positioning of Kosztolányi's role as a cultural mediator within the broader context of modern Hungarian literature and translation studies.

II. Research methods

The theoretical framework of the research is grounded in the findings of philology, textual scholarship, editorial studies, and translation studies. The dissertation examines German verse translations with particular attention to their sources, textual variants, translational features, and editorial-historical contexts.

The analysis draws on key scholarly works on Kosztolányi's translations, in particular the studies of Zsuzsanna Arany, Ildikó Józán, Anikó Polgár, György Rába, and Mihály Szegedy-Maszák. A common premise of these approaches is that literary translation is to be understood not merely as linguistic transfer, but as a form of cultural mediation and an independent literary achievement.

György Rába's comparative analysis focuses on the issues of translational fidelity, style, and the relationship between source and target texts. Anikó Polgár interprets translation as cultural re-creation, and in her typology she classifies Kosztolányi as an example of an integrative strategy. Ildikó Józán emphasizes the historical embeddedness of translation theory, and in the case of Kosztolányi highlights the autonomous literary status of translations. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák examines the principles of selection in translation, with particular regard to the distinction between primary and secondary translations. Zsuzsanna Arany situates Kosztolányi's translational activity in a biographical context, emphasizing its cultural and linguistic background.

The primary method of the research is philological source analysis and textual criticism. Within this framework, all relevant periodical publications, book editions, and other documents connected to the corpus under investigation were collected, systematized, and collated. Source texts were identified on the basis of titles, semantic and lexical correspondences, as well as formal and poetic features such as verse form, meter, and rhyme.

The comparative analysis of source and target texts made it possible to reconstruct translational procedures, textual variants, and translational strategies.

In the course of textual-critical work, the principle of *ultima manus* was applied, according to which the last authorial version approved by the author is considered authoritative. Accordingly, the primary textual basis of the analysis is the 1921 edition of *Modern Poets*, as it most fully reflects Kosztolányi's final editorial intentions.

Text handling is fundamentally based on critical editorial traditions. The translations are presented in parallel-text format, enabling comparison between source and target texts. The order of poems follows the original structure of the volume, while numbering and subgrouping

serve clarity and navigability. Sources are listed chronologically using a unified system of abbreviations, while the analytical section is based on stylistic, metrical, and thematic examination. Annotation concerning textual variants and factual notes follows the structure of critical editions and is clearly separated.

The aim of the investigation is to establish a reliable philological foundation for the critical study of Kosztolányi's German verse translations, and to contribute to a more precise interpretation of his translational oeuvre and his role as a cultural mediator.

III. Research results

The primary philological and textual-critical foundation of the research consists of the volumes of the critical edition of Kosztolányi's oeuvre, to which the present dissertation seeks to contribute through its findings and conclusions. The significance of the critical edition lies in the fact that, by reconstructing the genesis, variants, and publication history of the texts, it provides a reliable

scholarly basis for literary-historical and interpretative research.

The most important scholarly contribution of the dissertation is the establishment of a critical edition, which creates and systematizes a textual corpus comprising the German verse translations contained in *Modern Poets*, the source texts, as well as the associated textual variants. Although a comprehensive examination of Kosztolányi's German verse translations would require the analysis of the entire corpus of translations produced and published up to 1936, the scope and methodological framework of the present study necessitated the delineation of a well-defined and coherent corpus. Through this complex process of source collection and systematization, the work establishes a philological foundation that may serve as a point of departure for further Kosztolányi research.

Its novelty also lies in the fact that it offers a complex reconstruction of the genesis of the volume, examining it through the combined perspectives of scholarly, legal, and editorial history.

A further significant result of the study is the analysis of textual revision practices, with particular

attention to the ways in which the author replaced foreign lexical elements with more Hungarianized forms. This observation opens new perspectives for the interpretation of translational and editorial procedures. In the following, a few examples are taken from the biographical entries on Conrad Meyer:

MK1 - 1914	MK2 – 1921
Conrad Meyer	
stúdiumokkal (studies)	tanulmányokkal (studies)
diszkrét (subtle)	finom (subtle)
objektivitást (objectivity)	tárgyilagosságot (objectivity)
perspektívájából (from the perspective of)	távlatából (in a broader context)

A further novelty of the research lies in the successful identification of the sources of certain photographs included in the volume, which not only enhances the accuracy of the documentation but also contributes to the exploration of the publication's visual material.

IV. Publication activity

Publications

“On the Margin of Copyright Law – A Poet’s Struggle with Publishers: The Problem of Copyright Enforcement in Relation to the Editions of Dezső Kosztolányi’s Modern Poets Anthology”, *Kortárs*, 69(7–8), pp. 98–110 (2025)

“The Personal Nature of Translation: Dezső Kosztolányi’s Translations from German. Subjectivity and Objectivity in Modern Hungarian Literature”, in: *The Personal Nature of Translation – In Memoriam Lóránt Kabdebó* (conference volume), forthcoming (2026)

Conferences

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities – Autumn University: TEI-XML Encoding of Dezső Kosztolányi’s Poem “Solitude”, Budapest (2021)

Personality, (New) Objectivity and Imagery: The Personal Nature of Translation – On Dezső Kosztolányi’s Translations of German Poems, Budapest (2022)

Other Scholarly Publications Related to Kosztolányi

“Semantic Fields of the ‘Head’ in Kosztolányi’s The Bloody Poet”, *Ambroozia Literary Journal*, 15(2), pp. 1–12 (2025)

“Life, Art, and Literature in the Shadow of Trianon: Dezső Kosztolányi and the Treaty of Trianon”, in: Dániel Molnár, Dóra Molnár (eds.), *Proceedings of the Trianon Doctoral Conference Series, Doctoral Students Association of Hungary (DOSZ)*, pp. 88–94 (2023)

Conferences

Trianon Doctoral Conference Series: The Impact of the Treaty of Trianon on the Life, Art, and Literary Activity of Dezső Kosztolányi, Pécs (2022)

Body/Parts Conference Series: The Semantic Range of the “Head” in Kosztolányi’s “The Bloody Poet”, Budapest (2024)