

EDITOR'S PREFACE

MA, that is *Today*, was the title of the literary and art review introduced seventy years ago, in 1916, by Lajos Kassák, the most outstanding representative of the Hungarian avant-garde, whom Vasarely considered his precursor as a painter, and who is highly regarded both as poet and prose-writer in Hungary. The present selection also bears this title, and, with slight variations, it appears in French, German, and Russian as well. We considered the presentation of contemporary Hungarian literature our task, to the extent that we made our selection from among the products of the few most recent years. To pay homage to some recently deceased writers, however, a sample of their more important works is also included, as well as that of a twentieth-century classic, Dezső Kosztolányi. Beside poetry—the dominant genre of Hungarian literature until the present or the recent past—our volume includes short stories and a mere representation of the essay and the novel, yet, due to constraints of space, the drama is completely missing.

It follows from these limitations that some outstanding authors, mainly the ones whose exclusive or main literary form is the novel or the drama, are not represented in this volume. Two exceptions have been made: an excerpt from a novel by Miklós Szentkuthy, that may well evoke the desire to see it continued, is included; still it reflects the main characteristics of the entire work, even of the total *œuvre* of the author. The other exception is the work of the novelist Géza Ottlik, who is also an excellent theorist of his own literary form, thus we have included one of his essays.

The great literary rebirth of the early twentieth century centred around the periodical called *Nyugat* (West), published from 1908 until 1941. One of the leading figures of this group beside Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Zsigmond Móricz, Árpád Tóth and Gyula Krúdy was Dezső Kosztolányi, an outstanding poet, novelist, essayist, translator as well as journalist. His *œuvre* displays, in harmonious coexistence, a keen interest in linguistics and psychology, a sense for the grotesque and the melancholy, sensitivity and rationalism; an affinity for *l'art pour l'art*, and Hungarian and even in the broader sense European patriotism, as well as a flair for ethical and aesthetic problems.

Gyula Illyés, who started out with the second generation of the *Nyugat*, then during the thirties joined the populist literary movement, also cultivated several literary forms; beside his poems, his dramatic works

and his prose are also important, among them his sociographic essay *People of the Puszta*, an excellent biography of Petőfi (both have been published in English), and several essayistic and autobiographical novels. The second generation of the *Nyugat* also included László Cs. Szabó. Primarily an essayist, he was the most outstanding representative of the branch of Hungarian literature existing on foreign soil that emerged following the First and Second World Wars. As is well known, according to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon Hungary had lost two-thirds of her territory, thus one-third of her indigenous population became citizens of neighbouring states. The rich literature of the Hungarian minority in these areas is represented by Gizella Hervay who had repatriated from Transylvania a few years before her death, and by the also Transylvanian Sándor Kányádi.

The literary careers of the poets Sándor Weöres, László Kálnoky, István Vas and the novelist Miklós Szentkuthy started with the third generation of the *Nyugat*; as well as that of the prose-writer Sándor Tatay from the afore-mentioned populist literary movement. After the war, the periodical titled *Újhold* (New Moon) was published in the spirit of both the *Nyugat* and of Mihály Babits, with the participation of János Pilinszky, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, György Rába, Iván Mándy and György Somlyó. The populist movement affected the start of the literary careers of Ferenc Juhász, László Nagy, Imre Csanádi and Sándor Csoóri.

Although the literary careers of the majority of our authors did not start until after 1945, the effects of these traditions and precedents may be felt even today. Apart from this, their points of reference include peaks of world literature that lay far apart, and the forms of their works as well as the experiences and attitudes expressed through them are extremely diverse. Only a taste of this diversity, and also of the common features manifest in these divergences, can be offered here. Above all, however, we wish to offer good literature to our readers.