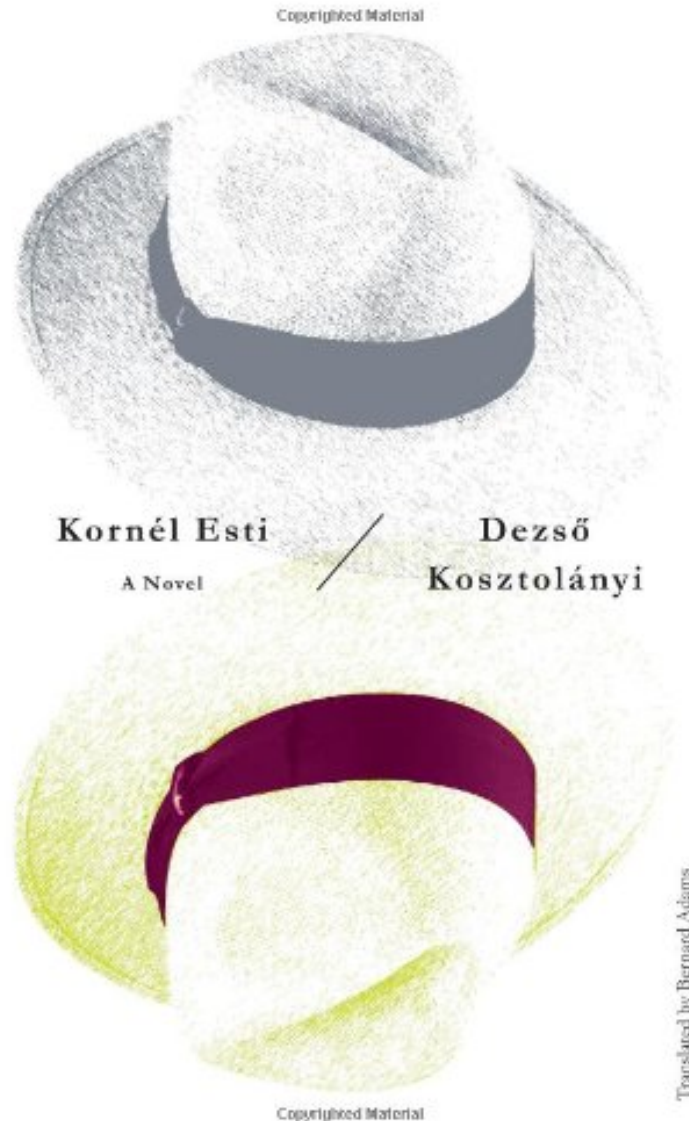


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Dezső Kosztolányi
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Dezső Kosztolányi : Kornel Esti (Ndp; 1194) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kornel Esti (Ndp; 1194):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Hungarian spice, charm, and cynicismBy R. M. PetersonThis is an odd book, even by Hungarian standards. At the beginning of it, Kornél Esti is introduced as the doppelgänger of the author Dezs? Kosztolányi. They both were born March 29, 1885, and Kornél Esti is Kosztolányi's roguish, devil-may-

care id. The book begins as though it were a novel, a psychological one, perhaps, that explores issues of identity, like a light-hearted "Jekyll and Hyde". But before the midway point it has settled into a series of stories or episodes from the life of Kornél Esti. Most of the stories partake of fantasy or farce. There also are generous doses of social criticism and satire, directed at Hungarians from the provinces and from Budapest, at Germans, and at such pre-WWI phenomena as Central European luxury hotels. Throughout, Kosztolányi displays the sort of gently ironic, mocking humor that, in my experience, is characteristic of Hungarian writers. The overall insouciance, however, does not completely mask an underlying dark, even evil, streak. Here is a typical excerpt, which is a description of the eponymous hero: "He didn't understand life. He had no conception of why he had been born into the world. As he saw it, anyone to whose lot fell this adventure, the purpose of which was unknown but the end of which was annihilation, that person was absolved from all responsibility and had the right to do as he pleased--for example, to lie full length in the street and begin to moan without any reason--without deserving the slightest censure." In reading KORNÉL ESTI I was reminded very much of another noted Hungarian author of the first part of the twentieth century, Gyula Krúdy. Certain aspects of the book also brought to mind Kafka, whose span of life (1883-1924) basically paralleled that of Kosztolányi (1885-1936). The concluding story is excellent. Many of the earlier stories are charming, one about a kleptomaniac translator is devilishly clever, but a few are, frankly, boring (perhaps they simply haven't aged well). KORNÉL ESTI was published in 1933, and it was the last of Kosztolányi's books. It is thought by some to be his best work, but I prefer "Skylark" (the only other of his books I have read).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Surreal, hilarious, profound
By Joel Marks
This book is just brilliant. It is not a novel with a plot so much as a set of episodes, some surreal and many hilarious, in the life of the wacky (fictitious) writer Kornél Esti. The book begins with a gimmick involving alter egos, and I wasn't sure if this was going to hold my attention. But as it turned out, this has very little bearing on the rest of the book, so far as I can make out. Instead I found myself simply enjoying the bizarre, sometimes profound, sometimes moving, sometimes charming tales of the singular Esti. This book also serves as testimony to the huge talent of the true author, Deszö Kosztolányi. "Kornél Esti" could not be more different from his down-to-earth and tragic "Skylark," yet both are masterpieces (and both do contain humor as well as tragedy).

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. "Whom can I admire...if not you, my brother and my opposite? I need you. Help me, otherwise I'll die."
By Mary Whipple
Written in 1933, but only recently translated into English, Kornel Esti is Dezso Kosztolanyi's last book, a unique combination of wild romp, thoughtful contemplation of life's mysteries, and dark commentary on life's ironic twists. Dezso Kosztolanyi (1885 - 1936), a poet, fiction writer, and journalist, creates a narrator who is also a writer, telling us from the outset that the narrator, now forty, has suddenly decided to reconnect with his oldest friend from childhood. The two friends are complete opposites--the narrator, timid and repressed, is utterly lacking in confidence, while Esti is outrageous, afraid of nothing, and iconoclastic. Author Dezso Kosztolanyi, his narrator, and Kornel Esti were all born on the same date, March 29, 1885. Esti looks just like the narrator and is clearly his alterego and maybe the author's, too. When they first reconnect, the narrator tries to rekindle the friendship, but Esti accuses him of being "sentimental, as always." The narrator continues to appeal to him, however: "You have changed, [Kornel]. When we were children, you were the grown-up, you were the leader, you opened my eyes. Now you're the child." Each has followed his own philosophy and pattern of life as far as he can, and neither one is happy. The narrator is too staid; Kornel Esti is out of control. Since they are both writers, the narrator suggests that they make a deal to write something together. "Make me whole again," the narrator begs, "like you used to...Let's be joint authors." They agree that Kornel Esti will simply talk about what's happened to him in his life, a "biography in the form of a novel," and the narrator will record his observations in shorthand. It makes no difference whether the episodes are true or not--"A dream is also reality. If I dream that I've been to Egypt, I can write an account of the journey." What follows is a series of eighteen metafictional episodes, ranging from Kornel Esti's first day of school, in 1891, through a symbolic tram ride at the end of the novel, a brief chapter in which the author's entire philosophy is summed up through Esti's late-in-life experiences on an overcrowded tram. In between are moments of high comedy, poignant drama, and shocking cruelty, all reflecting aspects of Esti's life, either real or imagined, and all contributing to the broad panorama of human existence. Eventually, he waxes philosophical--on sleep vs. insomnia, on paranoia vs. schizophrenia, on gentleness as "roughness in disguise," on the obligations of family, on one's need to feign interest and sympathy toward the misfortunes of others, and on boredom, even with those to whom one once felt extremely close. These commentaries are all incorporated neatly within episodes which entertain on the level of story, though the reader has no idea which episodes and their conclusions are real and which are fictional. And that, perhaps may be part of what this novel of episodes may be all about. By blurring the line between reality and fiction, the author raises the question of whether it makes any difference whether events actually happened. Ultimately, I found myself re-imagining events and episodes and seeing them in new ways, and I could not get this book out of my head. For a book that is almost eighty years old, but feels absolutely new and unique, that is an amazing achievement. Mary Whipple

A great masterpiece never before available in English, Kornél Esti is the wild final book by a Hungarian genius. Crazy, funny and gorgeously dark, Kornél Esti sets into rollicking action a series of adventures about a man and his wicked doppelgänger, who breathes every forbidden idea of his childhood into his ear, and then reappears decades

later. Part Gogol, part Chekhov, and all brilliance, Kosztolányi in his final book serves up his most magical, radical, and intoxicating work. Here is a novel which inquires: What if your id (loyally keeping your name) decides to strike out on its own, cuts a disreputable swath through the world, and then sends home to you all its unpaid bills and ruined maidens? And then: What if you and your alter ego decide to write a book together?

From Publishers Weekly A collaboration between an unnamed narrator and his wild prankster of a friend, this collection of vignettes follows the adventures of the sometimes poet Kornél Esti from a Budapest coffee shop to his unlikely interactions with a Bulgarian train guard and other charmers, mostly of the early-20th-century, ink-stained variety. Esti, "a half-baked literary freak," is smart, funny, and exciting, apparently everything the narrator is not—"I paid dearly for our friendship," the narrator says. Kosztolányi (1885–1936) skillfully draws the narrator's admiration and envy of Esti, leaving the reader feeling the same sense of wonder for the ersatz hero that our increasingly invisible storyteller has. One can't help being charmed by the duo, one with "determined eccentricity" and the other with begrudging admiration, and Adams's clean translation, with helpful footnotes, makes this nearly 80-year-old novel feel almost modern and easily entertaining. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. From Booklist Originally published in 1933 and identified as a novel, Hungarian author Kosztolányi's tale is actually a collection of linked stories, each chapter a first-person, picaresque narrative and a wicked allegory, full of pungent comedy, occasionally at the reader's expense. It has a simple premise: as all children do, a boy meets id, and boy and id reek havoc. They part, the maturing young man increasingly mortified by this doppelgänger. Time passes. Past 40 and nostalgic, the man finds his bohemian "friend," and they agree to write something together. Bernard Adams garnered a PEN Translation Fund award for this first English version of Kosztolányi's last book. In uncluttered prose he captures the unreliable narrator's arch tone. Even the most famous Homeric epithet gets a vicious twist: "Dawn, rosy-fingered, with dirty nails." Not for everyone in the same way that Kafka and Borges leave some readers cold, Kornél Esti is kin to the work of those great souls. Like their best writing, this extraordinary book might change a reader's life. --Michael Autrey "Each of these stories displays a mastery of texture, nuance, and pacing that is absolutely first rate." - Christopher Byrd, *The Daily Beast* "Kosztolányi was a ringleader in the 20th-century flowering of Hungarian literature, a poet who reformed the language, and a fiction writer of world class." - *The Guardian* "One of the most important and glittering writers of a Hungarian golden age, Kosztolányi is multicolored and ineffable, like a rainbow. At the end of his life, the virtuoso Kornél Esti appears." - Peter Esterházy "If anyone ever truly wanted to write the history of the Hungarian people, the author would certainly take that Dantean first sentence of Kosztolányi's Kornél Esti as the work's epigraph: in a word, the most wondrous first sentence ever written in the Hungarian language." - László Krasznahorkai "A tender comedy tinged with the absurdity of life, the thrill of sociability, and the imminence of death, which I guess is exactly the kind of book I like." - Chad Harbach