

Bohuslav  
**Reynek**  
THE WELL AT MORNING



*Translated by Justin Quinn*

Selected Poems and Graphic Artworks, 1925–1971

## **The Well at Morning**

Selected Poems and Graphic Artworks, 1925–1971

### **Bohuslav Reynek**

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Translated from the Czech by Justin Quinn

With essays by Martin C. Putna, Justin Quinn, and Jiří Šerých

Published by Charles University, Karolinum Press

Cover and graphic design by Jiří Voves

Typesetting by Karolinum Press

First English edition

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Illustrations © 2017

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Martin C. Putna

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Jiří Šerých

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Justin Quinn (Bohuslav Reynek, Martin C. Putna, Jiří Šerých)

David Wheatley (Suzanne Renaud)

Photos © 2017

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ISBN 978-80-246-3425-8 (pb)

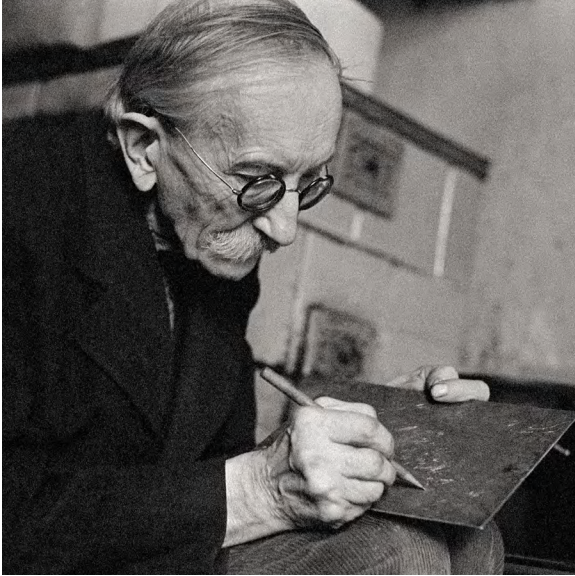
ISBN 978-80-246-3426-5 (ebk)

This book was kindly supported by the Ministry of Culture  
of the Czech Republic.



Charles University  
Karolinum Press

[www.karolinum.cz](http://www.karolinum.cz)  
[ebooks@karolinum.cz](mailto:ebooks@karolinum.cz)



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bohuslav Reynek (1892–1971) was born in the village of Petrkov, in the Czech-Moravian Highlands. He translated widely from French and German literature and began writing poetry in the 1910s, publishing his first book in 1921. During this period he was part of the Roman Catholic apocalyptic sect run by Josef Florian, and while the fervor of these early years would wane, Reynek would remain a Christian to his death. He was also an artist, and his etchings and engravings are remarkable for the manner in which they combine religious themes with detailed observation of his immediate rural surroundings.

In 1926 he married the French poet Suzanne Renaud, with whom he had two sons. From the late 1920s to the beginning of World War II, they divided the year between Czechoslovakia and her home town of Grenoble. After the Communist putsch of 1948, Reynek's farmstead was taken from him, and he and his sons were reassigned to it as day laborers by the authorities. While always well-known as a translator, it was not until the 1960s that his importance as both a poet and artist become more widely recognized. This is the first appearance of Reynek's work in English in book form.

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SELECTED POEMS



## A FOOL

In my village, I'm the fool.  
Sad dogs know me – sad white school  
of sleepy dogs that drift away  
into the distance. They don't bay.  
They keep me happy from afar –  
cloudish dogs is what they are  
that run about the sky's massif.  
And we're all drunk on grief.  
Where we wander we don't know.  
Ancient shepherd, as I go,  
bless my soul with your great gifts  
of moon and these long wakeful shifts,  
heavy, gashed time and again  
like a bleeding heart. Amen.

## SIGNS OF AUTUMN

September's here again, sweetening my blood  
again like wine. Lament, a quiet flood,  
grows in my heart: rosehips grow ever redder,  
hundreds of hearts. And so my soul can better  
rest when the labour of the harvest's quit,  
a hazy veil of fire comes down on it  
like a sudarium of spider webs.  
Dawn flames my face in silence, and night ebbs.  
My mouth is parched for it – the wounds deep –  
and begs: O Lord, this late summer will  
my soul, a swallow blue, rise steep  
in air and fly to new lands, dipping its bill  
along the way to sip from seas of peace?  
And with each word my blood is sweetened further.

## HOAR-FROST

Weary autumn pastures. Down they sink,  
and butterflies stiff with cold now drink  
dawn's dew.

Lifting their wings. They can no longer fly –  
a nacreous green on flowers sealed-up and dry,  
they flame.

I, too, am tired. A mushroom on the wayside  
crimped white like folds of fabric on a bride –  
I pick

and peel it. Hand is scented rich and sere.  
My heart is heavier than it was last year,  
with love.

I peel it. Scent. And then I see white flocks  
in my soul's eye, and tending this livestock  
is autumn.

So clean and good and early, autumn stands,  
fixing on its head with icy strands  
a veil.

## SPRINGTIDE

A chaffinch in a tree  
of cherry sings merrily  
spring's *introit*.

Its blazing bobble dwells  
in leaves, alive, and swells  
in scarlet.

The flowers are flares of white.  
The chaffinch has gone quiet  
and turned sky-gazer.

My eyes close on the day:  
an orb revolves in grey  
and red and azure.

Russet, it radiates,  
emerging from the straits  
of pain's blood-tide.

I want it, here amidst  
these canopies of bliss,  
ungratified.



## BALLAD

On my outstretched palm a strange guest has landed.  
A kind of dove? A crystal smoothly sanded?

Is it some milky quartz? Perhaps a lark  
that has alighted, radiance in this dark?

An owl that gazes burns, soft plume on plume?  
Bewilderment that streams from poppy bloom?

No. It is the fruit of the serpent's tree.  
Eve placed it on the palm, unhappily.

Fruit of my death, blessed by a cross, this host  
is very hard and Satan fears it most.

## THE MORNING...

The morning shows a dove in shade,  
white as a new egg, passing fairness.  
And then amidst the lengths of hair-grass  
a hare that hides in the frosted glade,

master of scent, in misted wold.  
These two have set the blood on fire.  
The wailing of the blood sings higher,  
caught by the heart that ails with cold.

Two consolations thus colliding,  
like slender mirrors. Figures traded,  
a rose burst from them, and then faded  
in rays of light that scorch and frighten;

its sparks that fly, that cobwebs catch,  
this rose consumed in air now warm,  
now fire that has no face or form –  
fire, most merciful Jack Ketch.