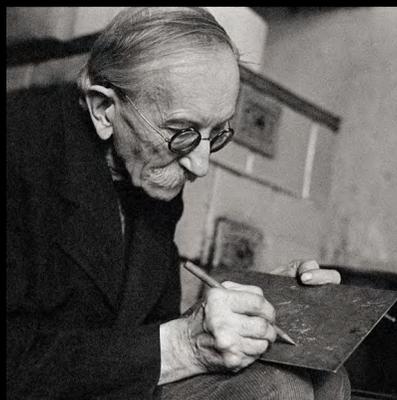


Bohuslav  
**Reynek**  
THE WELL AT MORNING



*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

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Justin Quinn

Jiří Šerých

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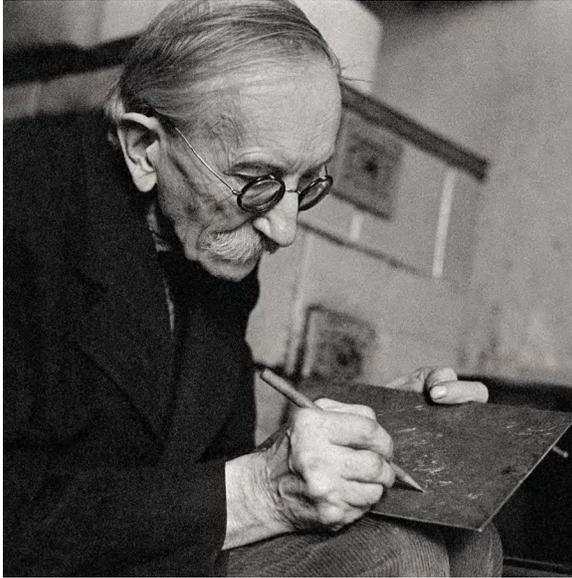
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

## CONTENTS

### SELECTED POEMS

A Fool	/13	At Home	/40
Signs of Autumn	/14	A Memory	/41
Hoar-Frost	/15	Hay Rick in Winter	/42
Springtide	/16	Advent in Stará Říše	/43
Ballad	/17	Twilight	/44
The Morning...	/18	Job in Winter	/45
Pilgrimage to La Salette	/19	A Dead Cat	/46
Dawn in Winter	/20	But Still the Levins	/47
Idyll, Morning	/21	Quince on the Table	/48
Mid-Winter Longing	/22	Wet Snow	/50
Three Goats	/23	Swallow	/51
Cockerels	/24	At Home	/52
Carpenters in the Wind	/25	Frost	/54
Hair	/26	Rue L...	/55
Spider	/27	Door	/56
Fly	/28	Through the Dark	/57
Gathering Potatoes	/29	Paths of Home	/58
Yellow Bedstraw, a Blessing	/30	November	/60
Snow Across the Threshold	/31	Windows on Streets	/62
The Well at Morning	/32	Goose in Mist	/64
Hawkmoths at Evening	/33	Saint Martin	/65
Light Breeze	/34	Sticks in a Fence	/66
Initials	/35	Looking Forward	/67
Evening	/36	Christmas, 1970	/68
Shadows	/37	The Angel of Distress	/69
November	/38	Swallows Flown	/70
Goats in the Field	/39	Match in a Puddle	/72

GRAPHIC ART /75  
(with commentaries by Jiří Šerých)

FOUR POEMS BY SUZANNE RENAUD

Harvest Moon /128  
Tom Thumb /129  
Wearish Old Tree /130  
Day of the Dead, 1938 /131

ESSAYS ON BOHUSLAV REYNEK

Bohuslav Reynek /135  
/ From Catholic Counterculture  
and the Apocalypse to a Highland Farm  
(Martin C. Putna)  
Reynek's Journeys /151  
(Justin Quinn)  
Bohuslav Reynek's Graphic Art /163  
(Jiří Šerých)  
Czech Titles OF English Poems /172  
List of Illustrations /175  
Translator's Acknowledgements /176



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.

## PILGRIMAGE TO LA SALETTE

Green freshet, happy boon,  
becomes your brother soon;  
the wildlife's scent in leas;  
haws, black thorns and beech trees;  
small flowers, their names unknown,  
wedged long ago in stone,  
quietly, their flames brightening.  
The sky is chalice lightning,  
and autumn earth is gold  
and red leaves on the wold.  
Steam rises in the blue.  
The hills below Obiou,  
(now aged and white) are steep.  
With us: the cattle, sheep,  
a dog, two mules, a maid,  
partridges in the glade...  
A holy mount for prayer,  
the church door open. Go there,  
the chilling grief, the ache.  
And in Our Lady's wake  
(or rather that of light  
in whose veils flowering white  
a moon in mist's wide lake),  
tar reeks and blackly blooms;  
clean humble earth resumes  
its shape – her prints are gone.  
To your woe they lead on.  
Eternal, exposed crest,  
this Virgin's fort be blessed.

## DAWN IN WINTER

The gloom. Small light the lamp releases,  
in ash-grey fog, damask and white.  
The rhythm of the silence eases  
the lamp off like a boat, in light.

My drowsy thought can't tell at all  
where it might find and have its fill;  
it searches for at least a wall  
to steady itself for a while.

Here only is the fruit's light gold,  
and here the strong wall is the frost.  
Mint scents the bread of hope's each fold –  
the motte, the keep that can't be lost.

At this so gently through the glass  
dawn comes. A limpid soul it stands.  
It puts a rose into my vase  
and pours some blood upon my hands.

We laid out food upon our board  
in praise of what is wildly chaste;  
ironic cloth – its shadow horde  
as cold as lips that have death's taste.