

## A PASSIONATE LOOK AT BOHUSLAV REYNEK IN FRANCE TODAY

“The naked, ‘off-screen’ voice of the departed can never fall silent forever,” wrote novelist and essayist Sylvie Germain at the end of a beautiful book on Bohuslav Reynek’s house in Petrkov. “It echoes through time like a bird soaring aloft on the wind, halfway between remembering and forgetting, between a muddled dream and bedazzlement. The range of Bohuslav Reynek’s voice and gaze took flight in Petrkov but extends well beyond, in slow waves and spirals.”<sup>1</sup>

Observers of the destiny and promotion of Czech literature in France can only be touched and astonished by the magnitude of these waves rippling out from the poetry and art of Bohuslav Reynek (1892-1971), especially in the last decade. The range of which his name is gradually taking possession and the phenomenon of the action carried out in France to spread word about the work of Reynek and his wife Suzanne Renaud (1889-1964) is astonishing since, it must be said, the two poets remain intimately linked in the treatment of their posterity. When Annick Auzimour, one of the driving forces behind the movement born around their work in the 1980s, is asked about what motivates her, she bluntly, radically speaks of the duty to remember, an idea that is thriving—and often overused—in France today. In the name of the duty to remember, individuals or groups are committed, if only during a fleeting commemoration, to preventing the symbolic disappearance of people or events that history has often relegated to oblivion or that time might wipe out from the shifting sands of collective memory. In this case, it is a matter of working on the resurgence of “dear voices that have fallen silent”, to extract them from an “off-screen” presence and give them back a territory, an audience, an existence.

It would be quite hasty, even today, to undertake certain personal or “accidental” initiatives that are less worthy of inclusion in a history of Czech literary studies in France than large-scale official actions. How could this be done, given the importance of such initiatives? The work Romarin and “the Dauphiné friends” have accomplished for over fifteen years follows a tradition where the idea of individual mission dominates. Was not this idea the main driving force, over and above the scientific interest alone, behind the trailblazers who have been working to increase knowledge of the Czechs, their culture and their literature in France since the nineteenth century? Their history has yet to be written.

The main lines of the (re)discovery of Renaud and Reynek, which began firming up the 1980s, prompt further reflection on the scope of this type of commitment, part of a literary and cultural history that is being written between France and the Czech lands.

\* \* \*

In the early 1980s, the duty to remember Renaud began gaining ground in Grenoble, which she considered her hometown despite having been born in Lyon. It was a matter of saving her from a symbolic death. In 1983, Grenoble architect Pierre Dalloz, who was married to Henriette Gröll, a painter and friend of Renaud’s, gave a paper entitled “Un grand poète, la dauphinoise Suzanne Renaud” before the Académie delphinale. Dalloz gave the manuscripts he had in his possession to Grenoble’s municipal library and urged others to do the same. Soon afterwards, he also donated works by Reynek. Three years later, his first initiatives led to the publication in Grenoble of 300 copies of Renaud’s book of poetry *Ailes de cendres et autres poèmes*.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Germain, *Bohuslav Reynek à Petrkov: un nomade en sa demeure*, St-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Piro, 1998, pp. 128-129.

<sup>2</sup> Grenoble: éd. Cahiers de l’Alpe de la Société des écrivains dauphinois, 1986 (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. Pardubice, 1932; dans la traduction de B. Reynek [*Křídla z popele*], Petrkov, 1935).

The only book that had been published in France was the first (*Ta vie est là...*<sup>3</sup> from 1922, of which there is just one copy in the Grenoble library). Dalloz wanted to establish her rightful place in French letters. From the outset, in addition to the literary value, another motivation came into play and remains essential today: the local and somewhat regional dimension of interest in Renaud.

In the early 1980s, all sorts of friends joined forces to safeguard her and Reynek's memory. Today, their descendants have often picked up the torch. This community, which already existed during Renaud's lifetime, has maintained a loyal relationship with the mythical Petrkov, where the poet, locked behind the Iron Curtain, suffering from cold and isolation, lived in melancholic exile. Dalloz says she "was very unhappy when she thought of Dauphiné" and "withdrew into silence and solitude."<sup>4</sup> Thanks to his early efforts, the long-standing community of the faithful began to open up about the couple and revealed certain aspects about their life, especially the ten years they spent sharing their time between Grenoble and Petrkov (1926-1936).

Initiatives involving Reynek, and, very soon afterwards, his wife, are no exception to this very local dimension. Notable works of his, including prints—traces of pre-war exhibitions in Grenoble, purchases at small sales in the 1950s, but also, very often, Christmas presents he sent to friends in Dauphiné—are in private collections in Grenoble.

In 1985, the Maison Stendhal hosted the first Renaud-Reynek exhibition, which featured etchings and drypoints from private collections in Grenoble and the surrounding area. The small, still-amateurish catalogue opened with testimonials and tributes by Dauphiné residents. And then, without leaving the regional, non-institutional ambit of family and friends, the initiative born around Renaud and Reynek crossed Dauphiné's borders into the much broader area of artistic and literary ties between France and the Czech lands. Dalloz was a major player in the Grenoble movement around Renaud and Reynek. Around 1985, another key figure followed in his wake: Annick Auzimour, a mathematician and close friend of the couple's, with whom she had spent a summer month in Petrkov in 1963. She "delocalised" the movement. Several works with very small print runs were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including 100 copies of *Bohuslav Reynek graveur poète*<sup>5</sup> and a collection of popular Czech poems and ballads translated by Renaud, *Romarin ou Annette et Jean*<sup>6</sup>, after which the association created the following year was named.

In December 1993, ten years after Dalloz's seminal paper, Ms. Auzimour founded the Association Romarin-Les Amis de Suzanne Renaud et Bohuslav Reynek. This gave an official existence to a community that had come into being long before. It also notably transformed the processes and goals of the actions in favour of Renaud and Reynek, recalling that in the cases of writers and artists, the duty to remember can only be fulfilled through their works and their reinscription in the history of literature and art. Romarin's activity focuses mainly on publishing and follows precise guidelines: the priorities are bilingualism, respect for the literary text and the need to establish critical editions.

New collaborators—university professors or researchers—were soon cooperating with Romarin, notably, in 1994, Barbora Bukovinská, whose degree work served as the basis for publishing

---

<sup>3</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Saint-Félicien en Vivarais, 1922; in the translation by B. Reynek [*Zde tvůj život...*], Petrkov, 1926.

<sup>4</sup> *Suzanne Renaud-Bohuslav Reynek*, Grenoble: Maison Stendhal, 1985, pp. 44-45, from Pierre Dalloz's paper "Un grand poète dauphinois: Suzanne Renaud" (1983).

<sup>5</sup> Saint-Laurent du Pont: Le Verbe et l'Empreinte, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Grenoble: Cahiers de l'Alpe de la Société des écrivains dauphinois, 1992.

Renaud's *Œuvres*<sup>7</sup> in two volumes (1995 and 1999). The editorial level grew much more professional, emphasizing work on establishing texts and advanced biographical and bibliographical research, in a traditional literary history perspective. The focus also shifted. Now the aim was to reach a wider audience. Subsidies from the French and Czech ministries of culture were obtained to achieve it. Romarin's noteworthy publications include the bilingual *Had na sněhu–Le Serpent sur la neige*<sup>8</sup> and *Dětem. Un poète parle aux enfants*<sup>9</sup>, Halas's poems translated by Suzanne Renaud. Romarin also focused on artistic output. The major Reynek show at the Musée de Grenoble (November 1997-January 1998), a Romarin initiative, was accompanied by two publications—the group catalogue *Bohuslav Reynek: L'image dans l'œuvre poétique et graphique*<sup>10</sup> and *Bohuslav Reynek: Regards du Dauphiné*<sup>11</sup>—as well as conferences, speeches, symposia, etc. The loyal Czech group also gradually expanded to include, of course, the Reyneks' sons Jiří-Michel and Daniel, Jiří Šerých, Josef Mlejnek, Věra Jirousová, Václav Jamek and others.

\* \* \*

The duty to remember Suzanne Renaud and Bohuslav Reynek has made great strides since the 1980s, leading from a local desire to testify, associated with a bibliophilic phase, to a more ambitious editorial phase including better dissemination, without always avoiding the (predictable) tendency to panegyrics and thesaurisation. Perhaps a new phase more specifically involving research is taking shape. Romarin has just completed the special issue of the Université Stendhal journal devoted to Reynek.<sup>12</sup> It bears the traces of the previous steps: a concern not to forget the Dauphiné; laudatory tendencies; and bibliographical and chronological appendices, the fruit of the long biographical, bibliographical and genealogical survey carried out on Renaud and Reynek over the last ten years. But at the same time, it includes much more specialized critical studies touching on specific aspects of Reynek's poetry and aesthetics. There is a certain agreement between the relocation—leaving Grenoble and the networks of friends without abandoning them—access to the of the universal character of Reynek's work, now dissociated from his wife's, and the need to approach the field of research. It is now a matter of finding other keys to giving Reynek his rightful place in Czech and Franco-Czech literary history and the history of poetry and art in general.

Romarin encourages us to appreciate the many paths taken by “Bohemian studies”, especially, as in this case, when the players are not Czech (which has not been so common in France), and the importance of the modest, particularist connections between the French and Czechs. To the question whether Romarin's work is of interest to researchers, must we not answer in the affirmative? Not only do the publications and works make Ms. Auzimour and her association indispensable, but this approach also makes up a significant part of Reynek's literary vibrancy. Certain inclinations can pass for excessive in a researcher's eyes, but are they not infinitely appealing if the point of view of passion, a passion that convinces and unites, is adopted?

\* \* \*

---

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Renaud, *Œuvres-Dilo 1* (Grenoble, Romarin, 1995), bilingual edition of S. Renaud's poetry translated by B. Reynek, and *Œuvres 2, Les Gonds du silence* (Grenoble, Romarin, 1999), in French only. Both volumes have introductions and annotations by A. Auzimour and B. Bukovinská.

<sup>8</sup> Grenoble: Romarin, 1997, translated and with an introduction by Xavier Galmiche.

<sup>9</sup> Grenoble: Romarin, 1998.

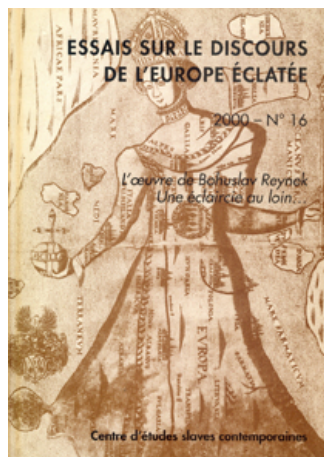
<sup>10</sup> Grenoble, Romarin, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Annick Auzimour, *Bohuslav Reynek: Regards du Dauphiné*, Grenoble, Romarin, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *L'œuvre de Bohuslav Reynek: une éclaircie au loin...* Centre d'études slaves contemporaines de l'Université Stendhal-Grenoble III, *Essais sur le discours de l'Europe éclatée* (16), 2000.

However, in its desire to raise awareness of the two creators' work as comprehensively as possible, Romarin will not be able to revolve around one centre for long: the translation of Reynek's poetry has not been addressed until now. The lack of Reynek texts is not only due to hitherto unsuccessful attempts to find translators in French, which is ironic considering that he was a great translator himself. Reynek's reputation of being untranslatable in French, and probably in other languages as well, is almost legendary, which thickens the mystery around his poetry. In the issue prepared for the Université de Grenoble journal, an article by Jan Vladislav, "Serait-il impossible de traduire Bohuslav Reynek en français?" ("Can Bohuslav Reynek Be Translated into French?") seems to agree with this idea. But it should be noted that French translators have not hesitated to tackle, with varying degrees of success, other difficult poets. One need only mention Vladimír Holan, whose new translations appear on a regular basis. However, the concern with integrating Reynek into a "Franco-Czech" world, as Romarin understands it, would require the translation of poems—no doubt by a poet.

Catherine Servant<sup>13</sup>  
8 December 2000



---

<sup>13</sup> Head of Czech studies at Inalco, Paris. Lecture delivered on 8 December 2000 at Université Stendhal de Grenoble on the occasion of the publication in the same year of the journal (no. 16), *Essais sur le discours de l'Europe éclatée. L'œuvre de Bohuslav Reynek, une éclaircie au loin*, co-published by Romarin and the Centre d'Études slaves de l'Université Stendhal. The lecture was delivered in Czech under the title *O jednom vášnivém pohledu na Bohuslava Reynka v současné Francii* at the International Congress of Czech Literary Studies on the theme "Czech Literature at the End of the Century", Prague, 3-8 July 2000 (Charles University/ Czech Academy of Sciences).