

In 2011 the Manuscript Collection launched a new series under the title of GOOD/READS (OLVASNI/VALÓ). In the breaks between major chamber exhibitions, we display manuscripts that are not only easy but also fun to read, being topical, entertaining and uplifting. The target audience is our researchers who can enter a very different world when amidst their deep study they stand up to take a break in the exhibition area. They could see Rudolf Mészáros's letter about Ferenc Liszt's visit to Hungary, an album by László Festetics, the translations of Kelemen Mikés, a poem by Demeter Lakatos, a parody called Jusuphias compiled by the editors of Magyar Szemle (Hungarian Review) and our collection's recently acquired so far unknown poetry of Sándor Reményik. Short summaries of displays are available on the national library's blog at <http://nemzetikonnyutar.blog.hu>. This is an introduction to the "youngest" contributor, more specifically, to Reményik's poetry.

VISIONS:

SÁNDOR REMÉNYIK'S UNKNOWN POEMS IN PROSE



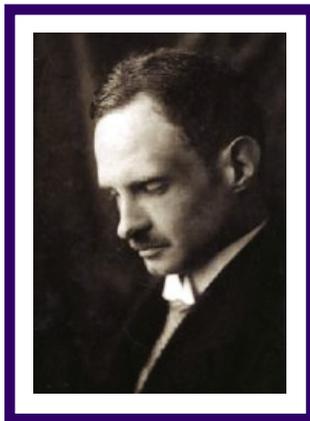
Sándor Reményik died seventy years ago, on 24th October 1941. The Manuscript Collection remembered this anniversary in its June 2011 display of the Good/Reads series.

*"...there are poets who are stronger human beings than artists, who grab us within the first minutes with their nice and noble personality, with their monumental humanity, with the depth and sophistication of their inner lives and we are captivated even before we should think of the strengths of their art. Sándor Reményik is one of them."*¹

Sándor Reményik was born in 1890 in Kolozsvár (today: Cluj) in a family from Upper Hungary. After the Lutheran elementary school, he did his secondary studies in the Reformed school of Kolozsvár. He started his higher education at the Law Faculty of the Franz Joseph University but, due to ill health, he was unable to pass his final exam. Thus he did not obtain a degree to provide him with a type of "middle class" occupation that was in line with his family tradition. As his mother noted in her diary, "rather than going out to work, he went through years of reflective and pensive moods." This was the hard and tortuous way of finding his way, burdened by vulnerability, shame and a serious lack of confidence. He was concerned with his mission in life, which according to his form teacher Sándor Imre, he described as follows: "In the seventh form they were to write about the tasks they saw ahead of themselves... Sándor Reményik did not mention a job or occupation at all, but gave strong self-criticism and something that struck me as a

*dedication to serve the nation in any way it would need him."*²

Reményik's first poem was published by the *Új Idők* (New Times) periodical in 1916. His first volume of poetry came out in 1916 under the title of *Mistletoes*. Nevertheless, he did not have a straight route as a poet. He had to fight himself: he was full of moral responsibility and the dream of serving his nation, as well as a deep lack of confidence.³ This is strange, as he was always aware of his talent and he wrote to his friend as early as 1913: "I can sense the gigantic forces rumbling inside me, and there is no ordinary buoyancy in my writing. Whatever I feel and plan in my head is expressed smoothly without any hitches and starts budding. When I write, it is like a virtuoso playing the piano..."⁴



Sándor Reményik's portrait

Reményik had made attempts at writing before landing on the world of poetry. He produced studies, articles and reviews, and from 1910 onwards short prose pieces as well, some of which were published by the Kolozsvár-based *Erdélyi Szemle* (Transylvanian Review) and the Upper Hungarian *Dobsina és vidéke* (Dobshina and its Region). These

pieces came out in a collection in Kolozsvár in 2009 under the title *Blood Drops in the Snow*. Most of his early writing however remained in manuscript, in his letters to Lajos Olosz or in the family's possession. Some of these have recently been purchased by the Library, from which a small selection was now put on display. Reményik himself entitled the group of his pieces in the 1918 *Erdélyi Szemle* as **Visions**. Thinking the name further, the poet and personal friend, Lajos Áprily interprets in a study (*The Redeeming Poem*) the

prose texts as already suggesting the later poet – mature in his ideas, content and internal growth. This is a decisive period in Reményik’s life: we can trace the road to developing into a poet. In the rhythmic prose of his visions, the richness of his imagination and the expressive strength of his style are often at extreme heights. The refined form suggests that the works were intended for publication, but his timidity and lack of confidence did not allow him to be contented.⁵

The young Reményik is not looking for moods, and does not think highly of beauty, but is forming a moral world view in himself and is trying to meet definite goals in each of his pieces. Therefore, he does not have the courage for long to give himself over to his dreamier, more emotional lyrical self. Formally, he feels he has to move on; finally he finds true harmony and peace in complete dedication to poetry.

“A year ago I would have laughed anyone in the face predicting that I would write poetry. And now, and this again might sound ridiculous, I feel that in all my efforts I was always searching solely for this form...”⁶

Sándor Reményik apparently developed into a poet from being a prose writer. ‘Apparently’ because even when he was producing his *Visions* he was a poet, a veritable poet. It was in those stories that his poetic breakthrough happened on a large scale. At the end of the crystallization process launched by *Visions*, the poem as a genre is born in 1916, and the first volume comes out as soon as 1918. He makes the happy announcement in a letter at the time, “from now on my intention is to give my whole self to literature, that is, to poetry... my conviction is that this is my life’s content and happily found redemption.”⁷

By acquiring the manuscripts, our library has obtained the following Reményik texts:

Prose texts:

Blood drops in the snow, Kolozsvár, 5 Oct, 1914; (published in *Dobsina és vidéke*, 1915/12); On a little girl’s death, Kolozsvár, 27 Jan, 1915; The old screen, Kolozsvár, 25 Febr, 1915; Butterfly in the dust, Dobshina, 11 July, 1915; Someone coming on the dead leaves, Kolozsvár, 3 Aug, 1915; Clock, clock, clock on the wall, Kolozsvár, 19 Dec, 1915; The one I celebrate, n. p., n. d.; Little girls, n. p., n. d.

Poems:

Silent cannons, Kolozsvár, 3 June, 1915; The endless cloak, n. p., n. d.; Midnight leaves, n. p., n. d.; Frost in May, n. p., n. d.; Near

sunset, n. p., n. d.; Papillons, n. p., n. d.; Serenade, n. p., n. d.; Final will, n. p., n. d. (a variation on the text in *Wooden beads*)

Our exhibition pays tribute to the memory of the poet through his two so far unknown texts: *Butterfly in the Dust* and *Papillons*. This is the rough translation of the former, “a poem in prose.”

Butterfly in the Dust

A few hours ago the storm came. The sun faded so quickly that the butterfly didn’t even notice. Its light wings were struck down by the heavy blast and they spread on the muddy ground....

The wet sand is already drying out in the faint rays.

Having fled their beds, young streams are returning, and the humiliated flowers are raising their attentive heads in slow movements.

Only the butterfly is not rising.... It’s motionless. It’s lying in the dust with its wings spread out.

Around it, pieces of stone chipped off, roots turned out, distant dross swept in a heap...sad and bleak...

But the butterfly’s dust is untouched: unmitigated and fresh.

It was not brushed away by the wind, not washed off by the rain, did not stick in the dust.....

There are some of us here who are not scared off by the butterfly’s fate, who would be willing to fall into the dizzying whirlwind when candles are blown out, when boughs break...

As virgins we could take no more than the untarnished colours of some unbroken dreams

to the other shore. Then it would be good to lie defeated...

To lie in the dust and with mute colours to beam proudly at the victorious wind and the conquering grey.....

(Dobsina, 11 July, 1915)

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¹ Sándor Sík, Shepherd’s fire, 19367

² Shepherd’s fire, 1940

³ “Thus my old problem is uncertainty regarding myself... and my spirit.” (Letter to Lajos Olosz, 5 Dec, 1914) “I do not doubt so much the truths I feel but rather my own capacities.” (Letter to Lajos Olosz, 6 Febr, 1922)

⁴ Letter to Lajos Olosz, 26 July, 1913

⁵ “Poetry that is trashy and insufficient, is unable to find an artistic form for itself...: this is my craft.” (Letter to Lajos Olosz, 26 July, 1913)

⁶ Letter to his brother-in-law, Kálmán Imre, 20 July, 1916

⁷ Letter to his brother-in-law, Kálmán Imre, 9 Aug, 1916