

2017

THE JÁNOS ARANY MEMORIAL YEAR



The Hungarian Parliament and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences declared the year 2017 a János Arany Memorial Year to celebrate the bicentenary of his birth. The Memorial Year was officially inaugurated on the 2nd of March in Nagyszalonta, by the President of the Republic of Hungary János Áder. The national library was the first institution in Budapest to join the initiative with several projects including the presentation of its rich collection related to the poet.

– Exhibition, accompanying events, publishing and restoration projects, institutional cooperation –

The most valuable Arany documents at the Manuscript Collection of NSZL are the two half leather bound volumes of the *Toldi trilogy* donated by the family to the national library (at the time part of the National Museum) in 1899, and the manuscript unit of *The Death of King Buda*. At the beginning of the 20th century, NSZL completed this collection of donations by purchasing several valuable manuscripts preserved in the legacy of Arany's contemporaries, friends and colleagues like Pál Gyulai, Károly Szász, Gábor Egri and Imre Madách, including *The Minstrel's Sorrow*, *Consecration of the Bridge*, *Becky Scarlet*, *Family Circle* and *Duel at Midnight*. It made possible that our exhibition "Others only get their laurels leaf by leaf". *Treasures, Cult, Reception History* under the curatorship of Zsuzsanna Rózsaferi and Mónika Borbély, and inaugurated at the end of April by the President of the Republic, could organize the poet's entire life and work around the *Toldi Trilogy* from his childhood in Nagyszalonta to the years at the Academy of Sciences and Margaret Island. Nearly two hundred manuscripts as well as first and special editions, contemporaneous photographs, drawings, paintings and sculptures, including the works of "Arany's sculptor" Alajos Stróbl, presented the oeuvre and its reception.

We emphasized the exceptional duality of the poet, something the President of Republic also mentioned in his inauguration speech: Arany was characterized by incredible energies and precision both in his poetry and office work. The documents on display proved that as vice-notary of Nagyszalonta, teacher, journal editor,

President of the Kisfaludy Association and Secretary of the Academy, he did his duties with the same care as when he researched sources for his poetry, the most beautiful part of our National Classicism.

The title of the bicentenary exhibition was borrowed from a poem Sándor Petőfi wrote on 4 February 1847 upon reading the manuscript of *Toldi* and sent to Arany, expressing his respect for the still unknown poet and foreseeing the cult we also presented in the exhibition as indicated in the subheading. A manuscript of this poem was exhibited in our event, as Petőfi's younger brother in 1880 left to the national library his notebook with poems from 1847, including this one.

The reception of the oeuvre in literature and fine arts was another aspect we decided to highlight to present the relation of later poets to Arany, as well as the inspiration of *Toldi* and *The Death of King Buda* in works of fine art borrowed from partner institutions for this occasion.

There is hardly any Hungarian poet without a paraphrase or reference to Arany in their life-work: Endre Ady, Mihály Babits, Gyula Juhász, Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Reviczky, Árpád Tóth, György Faludy, István Vas and Sándor Márai all make the spirit of Arany live in their emblematic odes and paraphrases. Their relation to the poet is reflected by their poems: for some of them, Arany is an "iron reserve", for others a "silver bridge" or a "golden fund". And finally, the link that leads from him and to him, as Antal Szerb wrote, gained new interpretation with the poems of nearly 100 contemporary writers (who in Krisztina Rita Molnár's words, wear Arany's DNA-chain) published in periodicals and books during the Memorial Year. National Széchényi Library turned to writers' associations within and outside of the Hungarian borders



to ask our poets to submit their works also in manuscript. The Collection of Historical Interviews made video interviews with a row of contemporary poets on the influence of Arany in poetry and translation. The manuscripts as well as the interviews were on display in our exhibition.

*

Several events and activities complemented the exhibition during the Memorial Year, including the Night of Museums with special focus on the anniversary. In addition to the guided tours led by the curators, visitors were also invited to take part in special tours with literary historians László Szörényi and László Boka, poet Krisztina Rita Molnár and musician Dániel Gryllus. They talked about the life-work of Arany reflected in the artworks, manuscripts and first editions exhibited, and added their personal thoughts on the poet. The day concluded with the midnight performance of *Family Circle* by Dániel Gryllus.

After our summer activities, we also prepared an autumn series of five events with the title *Arany (Golden) Autumn*. The first evening, on 15 September, was dedicated to the public rehearsal of *Gilding*, a poetry recital that the Örkény Theatre brought to our library. As the subheading of the title *Poets on János Arany* reveals, it included poems from Arany's time to the present day, by poets who evoked his personality, life-work and spirit. The next event, on 29 September,

was linked to the Night of Researchers. We opened the show-case of the *Toldi trilogy* and presented to our guests the manuscripts more closely, explaining the circumstances of their creation, publishing and characteristics, the handwriting of Arany and how the manuscripts entered our library. Our event of 13 October focused on reception history with two con-





temporary poets remembering Arany with their works on the bicentenary: Lajos Parti Nagy guided a special tour at our exhibition, Krisztina Rita Molnár invited our guests to re-create verses of *Toldi* in a poetry workshop. On the 27 October event of the *Arany (Golden Autumn)* series, Mátyás Stróbl, the grandson of Alajos Stróbl held a presentation of the sculptures the artist made of the poet, sharing family stories and personal memories. The evening was closed with the poetry show of our colleague, performing artist Annamária Sudár: "...*Father of all of us*" – *János Arany, the teacher*".

The October session of our culture dissemination series *Library Salon*, already in its seventh season, was also dedicated to Arany. Our guest, poet, literary translator and university lecturer Ádám Nádasdy talked about his translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, perhaps the most famous one after Arany's classic. He shared with us his experience of this work of re-creation as linguist and translator. In the second half of the evening, the Teatro theatre company presented the life of Arany with a selection of his poems.

The autumn series of events closed on 25 November 2017 with the final of the National Arany Poetry Recitation Contest and the cultural and craft workshops of the János Arany Family Day. The patron of honor of the Poetry Recitation Contest was poet Sándor Kányádi. Our visitors liked very much both the Contest and the

Family Day that took place in our library that celebrated 215 years of its foundation on that very day.

Our events as well as our exhibition, were accompanied by thematic activities lead by museum educator Erika Andrási, with the participation of nearly 3000 visitors including students.

The closing event of the János Arany Memorial Year at NSZL was planned to be the conference of our regular Research Session at the end of November with topics organized around the bicentenary. In view of the great success, the exhibition was prolonged until the end of the year, but regardless of that, the conference drew great interest with Péter Dávidházi, László Szörényi, and Mihály Praznovszky as guest lecturers. Apart from these renowned literary historians, eleven colleagues of our library presented their results in research, with special regard to Arany's oeuvre, his relations with the contemporaries, image, cult, reception in theatre, music and fine arts.

*

During the Memorial Year, the NSZL Publishing House published several quality volumes related to the events. As early as the inauguration day, visitors could have in their hands the folder with the facsimiles of the most important documents displayed, as well as the facsimile edition of *The Ballads of János Arany Illustrated by Mihály Zichy*, a joint publication with

HAS Library and Information Center and Kossuth Publishers. The bilingual (Hungarian and English) catalogue of the same title as the exhibition, was published by the summer of 2017. Before that, for the Festive Book Week, the anthology of contemporary poets *24 Carats* was published with poems submitted for the exhibition. And within a project of institutional cooperation, NSZL compiled an essay collection with Universitas Publishers and the HAS Institute of Literary Studies (“*Scholars of the nation, write books to honour his name!*”).

NSZL plans to continue publishing books on Arany in 2018, too, including a volume of the correspondence between Arany and Petőfi, the 10th volume of our series *Bibliotheca Scientiae et Artis* with the selected and edited material of our conference, and a new collection catalogue that presents the Arany-documents of Nagyszalonta and the history of the local Arany Cultural Association.

”Foreign policy”, restoration program, institutional cooperation

Apart from our Library’s individual events and activities, one of the most important results of the János Arany Memorial Year was that in 2018, we can take part in the restoration project of the unique documents and manuscripts located in Nagyszalonta. Part of these items was taken there after the death of the poet, and now are in poor condition. In the course of 2017, the Directorate of Research organized several tours to Nagyszalonta for our colleagues to photograph and describe (from restorer and collection aspect) the legacy and prepare its receiving at NSZL. Within the cooperation framework between National Széchényi Library and Petőfi Literary Museum, our restorers will do the cleaning and protection work for the paper-based documents, and the specialists at PLM assume the restoration of other objects and relics. The work at NSZL may end in June 2018, and then the autographs go back to the Arany Palace next to the Truncated Tower, to be kept in the safe-deposits manufactured especially for this purpose. The so-called master copies, together with copies of items belonging to the NSZL Manuscript Collection, will be displayed in the renewing local permanent exhibition.

Another important achievement of the Memorial Year is that the institutions in possession of the most significant Arany-related documents (especially the HAS

Library and Information Centre, NSZL, the HAS Institute of Literary Studies, Nagyszalonta, Nagyköros and Petőfi Literary Museum) signed a cooperation agreement in 2017 about the creation of a central web portal (knowledge base) before June 2018, the end of the prolonged Memorial Year. The central web portal is to include the literary and private writings of the poet, as well as his official autographs (as notary and secretary of the Academy etc.) to make them electronically available for the public and the researchers.

*

In view of these achievements we can conclude that our contribution to the Memorial Year was of high quality and well received. Seven thousand visitors saw our exhibition between April and December 2017 and at least one and half thousand people participated in the related events. These figures prove that our commemoration was worthy of Arany’s memory and cult. We had several types of reprography, educational material and souvenirs manufactured for this occasion, and offered successful museum education activities. In addition to our five publications already on the shelves and the three volumes planned, we gave dozens of radio and television interviews about the Arany oeuvre, promoting the work at NSZL as public collection and research center.

Zsuzsanna Rózsafalvi
rozsa@at.oszk.hu

“Arany, you Gold of Gold!” – János Arany poetry recitation contest

National Széchényi Library, in addition to its mission of keeping national memory, pursuing academic research and knowledge dissemination, considers very important to address students in public education, as they are the readers and researchers of the future. In this spirit, we regularly organize competitions for students in Hungary and the historical Hungarian regions of the neighboring countries. In the previous years, we commemorated Ervin Lázár (2006–2007), the centenary of the periodical *Nyugat* (2007), the Renaissance Memorial Year and King Matthias (2008), and the centenary of István Örkény (2012). In 2017, we called for entries for a poetry recitation contest on the occasion of the János Arany Memorial Year.



We borrowed the title of the event from a letter of Sándor Petőfi to Arany of 31 March 1847 that greets the poet with a wordplay of his surname that means “gold”. The logo we used for the promotion of the contest both online and print was inspired by a portrait of Arany made by Petőfi in 1847 and kept in the Manuscript Collection of National Széchényi Library with a signature of Arany. For a motto, we chose the poem *Vanity* by Sándor Kányádi, patron of the contest: “*I dare not wish more just a bench at the metro station Arany János Budapest*” (translation: Andor Derzsi Elekes)

After the preparation works that started in the summer of 2016, we announced the three-tier poetry recital contest in January 2017, on the press breakfast of the *Day of Hungarian Culture*, together with our partners, the Association of Teachers of Hungarian Language and Literature and the Association of Hungarian Readers. The official call for entries was published on the NSZL website’s Arany Memorial Year subpage in March 2017.

In the call for two age-groups (upper school, lower secondary school, or secondary school / main grammar school or vocational secondary school), we asked the participants to bring two entire poems or excerpts of larger works of Arany learnt by heart. One of the poems had to be chosen from our list, the other was of free choice. The compulsory list for the first age-group included excerpts from the 12 cantos of Toldi, and for the second, we compiled ten poems, including

rarely heard ones like *Emlények [Memories]*, *Névnapi gondolatok [Thoughts for a Patron Saint’s Day]*, and *Vigasztaló [Comforting Words]*.

Each school was entitled to enter one student for both age-groups until 9 October 2017. The regional semifinals were held at the following seven institutions, with the support of National Széchényi Library: Ciszterci Szent Imre Secondary School of Buda, Dr. Kovács Pál County Library and Community Space Central Library of Győr, II. Rákóczi Ferenc County





and Town Library of Miskolc, Móricz Zsigmond Town and County Library of Nyíregyháza, Csorba Győző Library of Pécs, Somogyi Károly Town and County Library of Szeged, Vörösmarty Mihály Library of Székesfehérvár.

In the regional semifinals, more than 250 students took part, 48 of whom entered the final held in National Széchényi Library on 25 November, the János Arany Family Day. (Before the semifinals, of course, all the schools organized their own contests which assumes the participation of thousands of students within and outside the borders of Hungary.)

In the morning of the final, we welcomed students, parents and teachers with a buffet breakfast, and then the inauguration ceremony followed. The greeting speech was delivered by Géza Szócs poet, Chairman of the National Library Board and the Hungarian Pen Club. The contest took place in two venues. The chairpersons of the jury for the upper-grade and the secondary school groups were Gábor Csőre, Jászai Mari award-winning actor and Csilla Csorba, curator of the János Arany Memorial Year, respectively.

In the award ceremony, after the words of evaluation of both chairpersons, all the students and teachers were given presents. Then followed the special awards, and finally the three first prizes in both groups: the

winners received summer camp tickets, packages of books and CDs as well as other prizes in an overall value of 2 million forints, thanks to the generosity of the institutions, foundations, publishers, artists and patisseries partnering with NSZL who organized the event with enthusiasm and dedication. The list of the winners is available on our website <http://www.oszk.hu/arany-janos-szavaloverseny/donto>, and you can see some of the performances on our YouTube channel (<http://bit.ly/aranyszavaloverseny>)

The poetry recitation contest of the 2017 *János Arany Memorial Year* was a proof of our conviction that “A poem is something you have to tell.”¹

Annamária Sudár
sudara.at.oszk.hu

¹ *Valaki jár a fák hegyén. Kányádi Sándor egyberostált versei*, Budapest, Magyar Könyvklub, 1998, 6.