



1968

## An Interpreter's Guide to Rainer Maria Rilke

Joseph A. Leese '68

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An Interpreter's Guide to  
/ Rainer Maria Rilke  
by

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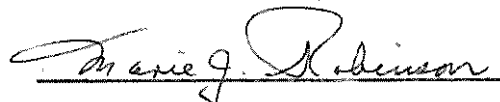
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Project Adviser

Dedicated

to

Dr. Marie J. Robinson

Mr. John M. Burt

and

Miss Vera M. Roads



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## Introduction

"Interpretation is the art of communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety."<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Lee's definition of interpretation seems to be the logical starting point in the formulation of an interpreter's guide. Miss Lee has stated that the oral interpreter of literature must communicate a work creatively in the same spirit with which it was written. By this we understand that the interpreter is responsible for much more than the mere oral reading of words; he must discover and be able to elicit the intellectual and emotional meaning of the words and of the selection as a whole. The interpreter must employ certain tools of analysis to uncover, as much as possible, what the author has woven into a particular work. Only then is he ready to communicate the work in its aesthetic entirety.

The interpreter's task is not an easy one. He must gain a basic knowledge and understanding of the author and from this foundation, he must strive to discover the intended meaning of the chosen selection. He must recognize that the author went through a period of youth, adolescence, and adulthood, a life cycle that was "normal" or "common." But he must realize that during these stages the author underwent certain unique experiences. No one else experienced exactly the same thing at the same time in precisely the same manner. His words are, in a sense, a result of his experiences and in order

for us as interpreters to understand his words we must understand his experiences. We must analyze the author's life, first in general and then all the particular important events of his life. We can see that by analyzing the literary work as well as the life of the author, we experience a more complete understanding of the intellectual and emotional quality of the literature. By this process the interpreter is fulfilling his responsibility to the creative artist. When this background is understood, the interpreter is ready to take on the responsibility that he has to the audience. He is ready to recreate the author's achievement through his oral reading of the artist's work. Only when he fully understands this achievement can the interpreter decide how he will use his personal techniques to do this.

The interpreter's job is often complicated by limited time and informative data. In the ideal situation the interpreter would read several books about the author before attempting any of his works but, unfortunately, this is usually not practical, especially in a classroom situation. Too often the interpreter must rely on the scanty biographical material presented in anthologies or is forced to skim through several tables of contents and indices in order to find specific facts which are alluded to in a literary work. This, of course, would not give him the necessary background knowledge, which is usually gained only through a complete reading of a biography or work of criticism. Problems of this type cause one to speculate on possible aids to the interpreter. Just what type of material would be helpful to the interpreter in his attempt to discover everything a writer has put into a particular work of art?

In the preceding discussion we have pointed out that the interpreter needs to know something about the life of the writer: his youth, his time, his travels, his associates. A brief but informative discussion of these individual aspects of an author's life would prove helpful to the interpreter. But we understand that the interpreter not only must investigate the writer's life, but also he must analyze the writer's works, of course paying particular attention to the selection being interpreted. Here too, the interpreter would be aided by individual discussions of certain aspects of the writer's style. Separate compositions considering a writer's theme or themes, form, and representative works would be quite useful. By bringing together under one cover discussions on particular phases of an author and his work, the interpreter would be provided with a resource unit and a valuable guide to his interpretation.

A guide to the interpretation of a specific author's work would not be an exhaustive study of the author or of his material. It would simply be a resource unit upon which the interpreter could rely for pertinent facts obtainable in a short time. Neither would an interpreter's guide dictate how a selection should be presented. Once the interpreter "knows" the man and the selection, he is ready to apply his own techniques in recreating a piece of literary art for an audience. His interpretation is merely guided and limited by certain facts about the author and his work; the interpreter's guide should provide these facts.

An interpreter's guide would enable the interpreter to attempt the more difficult and challenging writers who too often are avoided

because of their abstract complexity. Yet these same writers nearly always provide the most rewarding material for the interpreter and the audience once the breach of understanding has been made. This is especially true in the case of the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke. His work is often very difficult to understand at first, but once one does realize the significance of his words, the reward is worthwhile. This reason provides justification for an aid to the understanding of Rainer Maria Rilke in the form of an interpreter's guide.

Rainer Maria Rilke is considered by many to be one of the three outstanding poets of the twentieth century along with Yeats and Eliot. And it has only been in the latter half of the twentieth century that Rilke's work has been given international attention by both critics and average readers. "There can be hardly another European poet of whom so much has been written during the last ten or twenty years as Rainer Maria Rilke; none in whom interest has been, in the full meaning of the word, international."<sup>3</sup> Some of the more recent writings on Rilke available in English leave something to be desired by the interpreter. There are only a few actual biographies available and these often present a semi-abstract treatment of Rilke as a whole, which is of little help to the interpreter. By scanning through criticisms on Rilke one is able to pick up bits of information about his life and outstanding experiences. However, this method of gathering information is not practical for the interpreter.

This guide is divided into two parts: the man and his work. Each part is separated into independent discussions of phases of

Rilke's life and work. It is the writer's hope that this organizational method will facilitate the finding of specific facts as well as provide an over-all impression when the guide is read as a whole. The guide includes a life chronology and a listing of published works.

An emphasis will be placed on Rilke's life experiences, since the origin and development of Rilke as a thoughtful artist are extremely important considerations for the understanding of his works. When reading his poetry, one soon realizes that Rilke is not, for the most part, speaking for humanity, but for himself. Professor Siegfried Mandel has made the comment that even during Rilke's lifetime "it was impossible to ferret out the man hidden in the thickets of his poetry."<sup>4</sup> Rilke seems always to be at the center of his poetry.

The reader (interpreter) must keep in mind that Rilke's sole function in life is that of a lyrical poet. "He never occupied a salaried or wage-earning position, had very few possessions; yet he never starved and always had a roof over his head; he traveled extensively in Europe and Northern Africa, was welcomed in the home of the noble and rich, became the friend of some of the greatest writers and artists of Europe and the counselor of hundreds of people in their moments of joy and distress."<sup>5</sup> Rilke did not care about outward accomplishments; he was concerned only with an overt expression of an inner conflict. His life was centered more around his actual work than around any popular success of that work. This entanglement with the inward direction of life gives the reader his first clue as to the approach that must be taken in order to come

closer to an understanding of Rilke. Rilke's life is full of clues to an over-all understanding of his work. It is felt this interpreter's guide will bring to light many of these "clues" and thus provide the interpreter with a basis for his interpretation. The magnitude of such a task is made clear enough when one considers Rilke's goal in writing: "to express the inexpressible."



Introduction- Notes

<sup>1</sup>Charlotte I. Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Lee, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>F. W. Von Heerikuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work (New York, 1952), p. ix.

<sup>4</sup>Siegfried Mandel, Rainer Maria Rilke: The Poetic Instinct (Carbondale, Illinois, 1965), p. xv.

<sup>5</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet (Princeton, 1956), p. v.

## Part I -- The Man

### Chapter I

#### His Time

Rainer Maria Rilke was born in the turbulent nineteenth century, which was marked by wars and revolutions from beginning to end. These revolutions not only brought about the overthrow of existing political institutions, but also resulted in radical changes in the various parts of the mental and spiritual life of the Europeans. Those things which had been talked about by eighteenth century aristocrats and social philosophers, "the emancipation of the individual from tradition and superstition, the new humanitarianism, the daring freedom of the human mind, the changed relationship between ruler and governed" were nearly realized by the nineteenth century middle class.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in order for such innovations to work, many of the traditional mental, spiritual, social and political structures had to be shattered. It is important to note, however, that this was not a century remembered as a time of destruction; this was a century of expansion.

Aspects of the mental and spiritual life faced so glorious and yet so formidable an expansion that it was no longer possible for workers in one field to follow developments in others. This expansion was peculiarly glorious in that its possibilities seemed infinite, surpassing all hitherto known forms of adventure; and peculiarly formidable because bridges had to be burnt, the human personality in its ancient harmonious conception to be discarded, and a complete surrender made to the immense richness of the fields of knowledge that were being explored.

The popular tendency to "burn bridges" and view life from the vantage point of a hopeful, new philosophy left many people unsteady and confused, not knowing whether to rely on the past or rejoice in the thought of a new era. In the earlier centuries there was at least the sense of security; this comforting sense vanished with the eighteenth century. During the middle 1800s individuals became more and more conscious of their dying "community," of losing the sense of unconditional belonging which every culture before them had taken for granted. This trend started when the conception of individual personality as the central force in governing the universe was de-emphasized. With the Industrial Revolution came the concept of "mass labor" or "mass man," and the individual was supplanted by the faceless, machine-tending robot. People could no longer relax, assured in the knowledge that they belonged to someone, something, somewhere. But actually not much time was spent contemplating the feelings of the heart. Technology had put material wealth within the reach of almost everyone and there was no time for such contemplation.

By 1848 industrialization and technology, railways and telegraphs had made their appearance and changed the whole tempo of life. Things became more and more comfortable as new possibilities were constantly being discovered.

For the fifteenth century humanist, the discovery of each single manuscript had been preceded by an onerous journey under primitive conditions (which had prevented a one sided intellectual development); in the nineteenth century, a railway system had made even the remotest corners of Europe accessible and manuscripts and works of art were at everyone's disposal in

libraries and museums. Art lovers traveled from Munich to Madrid, from Paris to Copenhagen. It was possible to learn to know the most different cities in a short time, the most diverse landscapes with their characteristic beauties and the peculiarities of their populations.

3

The increase in prosperity caused the masses of the bourgeoisie to incline toward optimism, toward a belief in progress. But progress and success was measured only in light of material gain. The society that was meanwhile coming into being had the aspect of a fairy-tale -- a materialistic fairy-tale -- with uncharted boundaries, demanding multifold knowledge and adaptational forms, hitherto unnecessary and therefore unknown." <sup>4</sup>

New knowledge and new research methods demanded revisions in the educational system of the nineteenth century. Instead of the solid and relatively few truths that students had studied in the past, they were now confronted with so great a mass of facts that few individuals were able to digest them all. As soon as the more elementary examinations had been passed, specialization became necessary almost as a means of economic self-preservation. Attention was focused on the exact sciences (where it remains even today) on the supposition that they were the more useful. The social sciences and theology also experienced a startling growth. Linguistics, history, and ethnography had given rise to an enormous number of new facts and viewpoints that overwhelmed the comparatively static surveyable picture held until the end of the eighteenth century. History was regarded as a tool for gaining insight into an unlimited profusion of periods, civilizations, and cause-effect relationships. To many it

served as a substitute for the loss of tradition in modern society.

The nineteenth century was a time of action and the mental life was left to the intellectuals, among whom only the technicians were useful in the progressive movement. The technicians were, as a result, classed with the cultural barbarians who cared only for money. A split developed between the men of action and the men of thought. This schism was quite clear in the area of religion. "For those in the stream of the modern movement, the religious life tended to become either subjective and unstable or, more usually, to be repudiated altogether. Men lived so much in the world of visual progress that for the time being they needed nothing else." 5 For others who still placed a great emphasis on the spiritual life, this was a time of re-examination which was necessary in order to adapt to the new social order.

Those men who were not obsessed by the materialistic pursuit of money became independent, deep and "nervous." Many of the philosophers, poets, and artists experienced the conflict of the times in deep, isolated bitterness. Even among these non-technical intellectuals there was further separation into groups: those who were fanatical adherents to knowledge on the one side, and those who adhered to feeling on the other. This mental imbalance among the population was expressed in the literature of the nineteenth century.

The literature of Rilke's time expressed a synthesis of three different styles: Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism. German Romanticism, running from 1790-1830, was a continuation of the Storm-Stress idea and to a large extent also a reaction against German Classicism. German Romanticism and German Classicism were

often united under the name of German Idealism. German Romanticism was irrational, imaginative, colorful and fantastic; German Classicism was objective, calm and restrained.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, there was an extreme variety of works in which a chaos of moods and inspiration sought to express itself. The romantic ideals appeared less often in the late 1800's as the political struggle against Metternich and burning social problems caused the intellectuals to be more concerned with "reality." Within the period of Realism, man was considered objectively from a social, scientific, and political point of view. This new approach soon gave rise to the more extreme expression of Naturalism. In the last decades of the 19th century literature was used as a weapon. "The poets wrote pamphlets, novels and dramas in order to show the misery of the proletarians, gluttony of the capitalists, the inescapability of scientific facts, the brutality of life."<sup>7</sup>

As the twentieth century approached the poet continued to accept his new sense of responsibility. Once the poet thought of himself as an accessory to his community; he entertained or decorated or sang praises. In the 1800s literary artists thought of themselves as pariahs, outcasts abandoned by the community and they either rejoiced or howled.<sup>8</sup> By 1910, and increasingly since, they have come to think of themselves as personal witnesses, bearers of revelation, self-ordained priests. The artist began to offer not only his work, but also the gospel according to his own living. We are here introduced to the idea of literature as being more than an image of life; it was becoming a comment on that image. There also arose a desire to bring together science, the thing known and measurable, and human

life, the incalculable entity. The importance of showing  
 ficance of the relationship between science, human nature, and society  
 was finally realized. Never before had literature been so obsessed  
 with dedication to its mission.<sup>9</sup>

The poet's mission was overshadowed in the early 1900s by  
 political activities. Since Marx and Engels published the Communist  
Manifesto in 1848, the impetus of socialism was great. The decade  
 of the 1890s was the greatest period of expansion in the history of  
 European Socialism. "Socialism was rooted in a materialistic concep-  
 tion of life; according to its tenets, will-power was fiercely  
 directed on the future seizure of social power and the longing for  
 happiness and brotherly love saw in this millenium so excitingly  
 beautiful a prospect."<sup>10</sup> Brotherly love was certainly lacking in  
 the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of  
 the twentieth, when war was imminent. The impotent generation of  
 that time thought it better to let it come than to go on with the  
 perpetual waiting. Perhaps the nineteenth century man's first loss  
 of faith was when he began to realize that life could not be improved  
 by technical advances alone.

## Chapter I- Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hans Kohn, The Twentieth Century(New York, 1949), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>F. W. Von Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work(New York, 1952), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Werner P. Friedrich, An Outline History of German Literature  
(New York, 1951), p. 113.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>8</sup>Twentieth-Century Culture, ed. Robert Phelps(New York, 1965),  
p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>Philo M. Buck, The World's Great Age(Norwood, Mass., 1936),  
p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 19.



## Chapter II

### His Youth

#### Introduction

In times of cultural unrest, a child's life follows a course lacking in the stability and security that comes from a period of social calm. The earlier years of Rilke's life must be viewed in the context of his time -- definitely a time of unrest. The standards upon which Rilke's parents based the upbringing of their son were an outcome of what the late nineteenth century society viewed as acceptable. In Rilke's particular case his parents were even more concerned about the dictates of society than was usual. They allowed their personal values and idiosyncrasies to play an important part during Rilke's formative years. Freudian psychologists have long held that the experiences of childhood are crucial so far as later developments in personality are concerned. It is their opinion that in the first five or six years the basic life pattern is set up. Florence Goodenough suggests that there is some evidence "that one-half of an individual's ultimate mental stature has been attained by the age of three years."<sup>1</sup> The conflicts of youth are directly linked with later conflicts in that they are already partly the outcome of the general unrest which forcibly affects life and education. Certainly the importance of this period of youth cannot be overlooked. To apply this principle to Rilke, we can see expressions of his childhood experiences constantly recurring throughout his works. For this reason, an examination of his youth -- his birth, his parents, his education -- would be valuable.

## Birth

Rilke was born in Prague on the fourth of December, 1875. Both parents had hoped for a girl to make up for the loss of Ismene, their daughter who died previously at an early age. However, they were thankful that their son, born two months premature, was well-formed and healthy. The date of Rilke's birth fell on a Saturday, the day of Holy Mary. His mother saw in this a happy omen and included in her son's long list of Christian names that of the Queen of Heaven. Rilke was baptized Rene Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria.

The Rilkes of Prague were thought to be descended from an ancient, noble line of Corinthian Rulkes, who lived during the middle ages. Since reliable data went back only to the middle of the 18th century, the rest of the legend had to be spun out of conjecture. All of the known facts about the 18th century were due to the research of Rilke's uncle, Jaroslav. Later in his life, the claim to a noble past "served the convenience of making him confident and comfortable among a host of titled acquaintances; rather than being a pauper poet, his lineage made him an equal."<sup>2</sup> Rilke's childhood interest in his genealogy is understandable since his youth had centered in the family legend. Siegfried Mandel later comments that "Rilke had little reservation about regaling people with his genealogical improvisations; but in his poetry there is a pleasantly contrasting humility."<sup>3</sup> His claim to a noble ancestry -- himself being the last in the line -- gave him the self-confidence that he needed in order to become a devoted poet. It is disillusioning to note that after Rilke's death, it was discovered that his

noble descent was an unfounded legend and that the Rilkes of Prague were in reality descendents from Sudeten German peasants and tradesmen.

Even in his earliest years Rene Rilke was what one might call a "show child." He was extremely precocious and enjoyed performing before guests of the family. His early interests lay in poetry and painting: "Rene was trained to memorize, recite, copy poetry, and paint; he liked best to paint villas and castles on islands."<sup>4</sup> The subjects of these beginning paintings often reappeared in his poetic works; examples of this would be in the setting of "The White Princess" and landscapes from the "First Poems" and "Early Poems." Rene was also fond of creating caricatures in painting and in prose and poetry. Ewald Tragy immediately comes to mind as an example of the interest in caricatures. He enjoyed painting, but his strongest interest lay in writing: "Little Rene was impelled by an inner urge to write verses and his ambition in this respect was high. The date of his earliest poems is not known but it is placed considerable before 1885."<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning Rene was encouraged in his verse writing by his mother while his father merely discounted these interests as being unmasculine triflings. It seems, however, that this was not the only question on which Rilke's parents disagreed. In a letter to Ellen Key dated April 3, 1903, Rilke made clear the situation of his youth. "My childhood home was a cramped rented apartment in Prague; it was very sad. My parents' marriage was already faded when I was born. When I was nine years old, the discord<sup>6</sup> broke out openly and my mother left her husband." The precocious

child Rene could not avoid being strongly influenced by both parents who were so different and yet so much alike.

### Mother

Phia Entz was the daughter of a wealthy merchant who lived in a miniature baroque palace in Prague. The house had a great effect on little Rene's imagination and perhaps partly accounts for his love of "lofty rooms and long white corridors." While living in the little palace, Phia's dream of being a grand lady seemed quite within reach. In marrying Josef Rilke, an ambitious young soldier, she was sure her chances for a noble life would be enhanced. Unfortunately this was not the case for she was soon faced with the reality that she was married to a salaried railroad employee and forced to live in a rented house. The complete realization of such a situation would have been too much for Phia Rilke to endure had she not escaped into a world of make-believe. "Her buoyant imagination was strong and vivid enough partly to conceal from her the drab realities of a small and cramped existence. She was able to create for herself an atmosphere of unreality in which she could perform the empty gestures of a grand lady at ease in the world of aristocratic living." 7

Rilke himself, while reflecting on his childhood in a letter to Ellen Key dated April 3, 1903, states that "Our little household which was in reality middle class, was supposed to deceive people and certain lies passed as a matter of course." 8

Rudolf Kassner observes that Rilke's passion for truthfulness had its roots in his mother's tendency to make believe. 9

Rilke's father gave his wife a free hand in running the household and as a result everything was done in order to give the impression that the home was "distingue." Rilke's mother always dressed in black like a dowager princess and when a party was to be given, Rilke's nursery room was cleared in an attempt to impress the guest with the ample room. Little Rene then was forced to sleep in a cot behind a screen. "Behind the black wall-screen with its embroidered golden birds he lay in his cot, his heart beating with fear lest some dancing couple should discover him." <sup>10</sup> At such festivities new and cheap wine was poured from bottles with dusty labels and high sounding inscriptions. Happenings such as these could not help but fill the child's heart with misgivings about his place in the household.

His mother's personality and sense of values more than any other factor were responsible for Rene Rilke's unfortunate childhood. Throughout his life Rilke was anxious about his health, though there was never anything fundamentally wrong with him. This feeling can be traced to his mother's obsession with the idea of protecting his health. "The fear that the boy might catch a cold, that he might be in a draught, that his bed might be hard, or his glands swollen were the constant preoccupation of his doting parents; which in the boy turned to undue anxiety about himself." <sup>11</sup> Perhaps due to this over protection, Rilke was quite susceptible to disease. He was absent 200 times in second grade and missed the last two quarters in third grade.

It was difficult for Phia to accept the fact that she had lost her little daughter and had been given a boy to take her place.

Rather than accept the situation she pretended that Rene was her girl. "In keeping with her congenital disregard of reality she brought her boy up as if he were a girl. Until his fifth year he wore long curls and was dressed like a girl; his toys were dolls

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whose hair he combed." The little boy Rilke

of simulation and often played along with his mother. According to a story told by his mother, he once knocked at her door when he had been naughty and appeared with his hair braided into pigtails and his sleeves turned up, saying: "Ismene (the little girl who had died) stays with her dear mother, Rene is a good-for-nothing, I 13  
have sent him away, girls are more affectionate, aren't they."

Those that knew Rilke in later life never fail to mention his characteristically feminine sensibilities. We will later see that most of his adult associates were women. This emotional disorientation was to remain with him throughout life.

In keeping with her time and station in society, Phia Rilke constantly displayed external gestures of religious devotion. F.W. Van Heerikhuizen maintains that "she had not a grain of true religious feeling but pranced round to every saint's effigy in the vicinity." 14  
This debased form of Christianity was what his mother presented to Rilke in his childhood. "He was on a familiar footing with God, Jesus, Mary and the Saints. He was made to kneel in prayer until he lost all sensation of where his knees ended and the 15  
hard bench began." It was natural that he should rebel against this exaggerated display of religion by his mother who even asked that he kiss the wounds of Christ on the crucifix. The figures of his childhood belief -- Mary, Christ, the Saints, and the Angels --

later became unrelated fragments that recur continually in his works. In light of the religious situation of Rilke's youth, Siegfried Mandel states: "His poetry was to record a search for an ideal mother, a personal religion, antagonism toward Christ, and a fondness for the patriarchal God of the Old Testament. The emancipation from his mother's enveloping religious mania was gradual but he retained an affection for the baroque splendor of Prague's churches and castles and the sensuous liturgical lyricism of Catholic expression."<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to tell to what degree his mother's superficiality and lack of true love hurt him. We do know that between the years of 1892-1896 when he was seriously considering becoming a poet for a living and needed a great deal of motherly affection, she let him down. Rilke called her "an utterly shallow woman with no true affection for him."<sup>17</sup> A short poem in Early Poems also serves to indicate his true feelings about his mother.

Poor saints of wood  
to whom my mother brought her gifts;  
Mute and proud, they were amazed  
behind their hardwood benches.

For her searing troubles  
they certainly knew no gratitude,  
solely knew the candle-gloss  
of their icy masses.

But my mother came  
and brought them flowers.  
My mother picked these flowers,  
all of them, out of my life,

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After her separation from the family, Rilke's mother restlessly went from one health resort to another, pathetically trying to appear young, unattached, wealthy and distinguished. A final comment was

made by Rilke about his mother in a letter to Lou Salome (see later discussion) in 1904. In the letter he expresses the feeling of horror at the sight of the woman "who cannot grow old; who is empty as a garment, ghostlike and dreadful. And to think that I am her child." <sup>19</sup> Phia Rilke survived her son by five years. Though he saw her rarely after the separation and met her for the last time in 1915, Rilke continued to write his mother dutifully, though with little warmth.

#### Father

Rilke's father, Josef, also took part in a form of self-delusion, though it was based on a somewhat more realistic view of life than that which Phia Rilke held. Young Rilke could never understand why his parents did not know each other better; since they both attached an infinite amount of value to externals, it seemed to him that a deep relationship would naturally result. Like his wife, Josef Rilke had suffered a great disappointment. He had trained for the army and had taken part in the campaign against Italy in 1850. His hope was to become an officer, but because of a recurring throat ailment, his dream was never realized. A civilian post in the service of the railroad fell far short of his romantic expectations, and it was difficult for him and impossible for his wife to become reconciled to the situation. Though in reality Josef Rilke held a bourgeois position in society "he clung to the illusion of being a dashing officer, an elegant cavalier who never failed, equipped with cane and gloves, to promenade in the afternoon on the 'Graven,'



20

Prague's most fashionable street." Josef's gentlemanly carriage and striking manners gained him the respect of many people.

Josef had high hopes for his son's future. If Rene could become an officer, his own disappointment would lose some of its sting. At an early age he began to prepare Rene for the idea of entering a military school by buying him dumbbells, a rocking horse, and lead soldiers. "In the midst of his dolls the child's soul would swing between simulated girlhood and actual boyhood. Now he would put his dolls to bed, talking to them like a mother, now he fancied himself a general leading his men into battle and being decorated." <sup>21</sup> Rilke was aware of his father's ambitions for him, yet he felt his father was true and sincerely loved him. Rilke later expressed his father's love for him as "a kind of speechless anxiety" against which he was <sup>22</sup> practically defenseless. In a sense his father became his ideal but it was an unattainable one due to his mother's influences.

As we shall later discuss, Rene Rilke was a failure as a military student, much to his father's disappointment. After that he was then forced to defend himself against his father's solid, bourgeois principles. The life of a poet was hardly what Josef Rilke would have called a "good job." In his later life there can be seen in much of Rilke's work a wish to succeed in the eyes of his father whom he sincerely loved and secretly admired. It seems obvious that Rilke is pleading his cause before his father in the "Fourth Duino Elegy."

Am I not right? you, who on my account  
tasted so bitterly of life, my father;  
Who paid the price for the first, troubled flow

of my necessities, as I grew up;  
 Who, with the tang of so obscure a future  
 Pre-occupied, my dim and upward gaze  
 Tested; my father; you whose fear in me  
 I felt in all my hopes since you are dead  
 And offered up, for my small share of fate,  
 Your treasure of serenity, such treasure  
 Of quietude as you, the dead, possess,  
 Am I not right?

23

Rilke seemed separated from his father and yet when Josef died in 1906, the son wrote to his mother that he had been "the truest help, the most loyal friend, from year to year winning me nearer to submissive affection."<sup>24</sup>

#### Education

Rilke's parents separated in 1884, when he was nine. He continued to stay with his mother until September of 1886 when he entered the Mährisch-Weiskirchen Military School at St. Polten. The school -- the same one attended by James Joyce and Thomas Mann -- was no better or worse than other institutions of the same kind; its aim was

"to raise young lads for a soldier's life with an emphasis on strict discipline."<sup>25</sup> Much of the day there was occupied with bodily endurance exercises, athletics, swimming, riding and fencing. From four o'clock in the morning when the bugle sounded until the evening when the lights went out in the dormitories "everything had to be shared, every game, every opinion, every thought, every aim, every obedience."<sup>26</sup>

Needless to say, neither Rilke's body nor his soul had been conditioned for the exhaustive routine of the military school. His soft upbringing, his susceptibility to disease, his lack of make companion-

ship and boyish exercises, his strong yearning for love and affection, his urge to write poetry, and his religious bent were all factors that worked against any success he might have experienced at the school.

Though his father was constantly urging him on, Rilke considered the four years at the military school the most dreadful of his life. The young boys only escape was expressed in aloofness which was interpreted by the other boys as conceit and only served to destroy any feeling of comradeship. He not only failed in his relationship with the other boys, but he also found it difficult to do well in his subjects; and he was constantly becoming ill as a result of physical exertion. During this time, his mother was constantly writing him hysterical letters which tended to complicate his situation. It is no wonder that Rilke later called the academy a "Dostoevskian House of the Dead." 27 His hate for the military academy might also have been expressed in this short selection in "Early Poems":

Were you a child in joyous band,  
You truly cannot comprehend  
how much I came to hate the day  
as ever hostile danger.  
I was so strange and lonely,  
that only in the pallid, flowering  
nights of May could I find  
secret bliss.

During the day, I bore, in artless ways,  
the smarting gyve of coward duty.  
But at eventide I would from out the circle creep,  
-- they did not know. A butterfly,  
my longing set off on its journey,  
as, gently, it went forth to ask  
the distant stars about its home.

This indicates how little Rene Rilke was able to maintain his emotional

control during his six year stay at the academy. In a letter to Clara (see later discussion) written on March 11, 1907, Rilke speaks of his secret visits to the little churchyard of the academy. "I did experience the true life in the little corner of the academy's churchyard, where I was safe from my companions and from the utterly unsocial effects of their ruthlessness which, scissors-like and with unequivocal precision, clipped you out of the whole picture of the environmental mass."<sup>29</sup>

When Rilke tried to find some consolation in his mother's religion, he soon learned the saint-like sentiments and poses only result in humiliation and frustration; neither Mary nor the conventional angels could answer his prayers. The true Rilke at this time is revealed in such poems as "The Grave," "Resignation," "The Churchyard," "The Orphan," and "All Saint's Day," in which death and the transitoriness of things are the outstanding themes.<sup>30</sup> Bernard Murchland in Commonweal (December 15, 1961) suggests that Rilke's military episode might symbolize the depersonalization and mechanization of life today.

Rilke left the school on June 3, 1891. His failure at the military academy was a decisive factor in Rilke's life, and he dwelled on it until his death. "He had to continually banish recollection of that time to the background of his conscience in order to retain his self-esteem which rested only on subjective achievements."<sup>31</sup>

After leaving the academy, Rilke went through a period of uncertainty, as he was still unwilling to give up the prospects of a military career. During that summer he went on long walks in Prague wearing his uniform because it gave him a feeling of great prestige. His father -- still against the idea of his becoming a poet -- decid-

ed that since young Rilke could not be a soldier, he should be trained for something useful; and he sent his son to a commercial school in Linz. Rilke felt humiliated at having to attend a business school, although he was relatively happy and respected there. The instructors spoke of him as a "pillar of the Institute."<sup>32</sup> He left Linz after only a year; most scholars feel that this was probably the result of a broken love affair, although details about this episode are not available.

Rilke's next educational experience was sponsored by his Uncle Jaroslav who agreed to pay for a classical education at the University of Prague. During the years 1892-1895 Rilke took advantage of the opportunity of learning "what to read." He read and wrote incessantly; his sole publication in the grammar school days was the collection of verses, Life and Songs. Valery Von David-Rhonfeld, his grammar school love, provided him with the womanly encouragement he needed; yet even she was dropped when he discovered her to be a "superficial person." After leaving the university, Rilke, filled with confidence and knowledge, set out to prove to his parents that he could make a living as a poet.

Driven by a need for personal success and recognition by parents and relatives, the nineteen-year-old Rene flooded Prague with newspaper articles and reviews, rushed into print with poems, stories, and even stormed onto the stage. Spontaneity and superficiality went hand in hand as he tried to capture and captivate the public.

### Conclusion

Information about Rilke's early years is difficult to obtain, since only a few childhood experiences were recorded by the poet. These few incidents may serve as indicators of a broader psychological context, when interpreting his works. His childhood experiences are directly responsible for shaping certain thought or views, which are expressed in his works. It is important to realize that these thoughts were not developed by rational analysis or philosophic contemplation. W. L. Graff maintains that Rilke's views "remain steeped in sensuous experiences which are by many underground channels connected with childhood dreams and adolescent ambitions."<sup>34</sup> He calls Rilke's ideas "alogical intuitions." Rilke himself recognized the fact that his thoughts were outcomes of his experiences, yet he believed no one experience precipitated a particular view. "He calls them (his ideas) lyrical totals which cannot be itemized, because the single components and their interpenetration are usually too remote and too numerous to be clearly identifiable."<sup>35</sup> Rilke experienced an unfortunate childhood, yet his sense of optimism survived all shocks. Later, after establishing many friendships and traveling expensively, Rilke was able to review his past and come to a more complete understanding of himself, something which was fundamental to so sensitive a poet.

## Chapter II- Notes

<sup>1</sup>Florence Goodenough, "The Measurement of Mental Growth in Childhood," Manual of Child Psychology, ed. Leonard Carmichael (New York, 1946), p. 467.

<sup>2</sup>Siegfried Mandel, Rainer Maria Rilke: The Poetic Instinct (Carbondale, Ill., 1965), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Mandel, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>F. W. Von Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work (New York, 1952), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet (Princeton, 1956), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Mandel, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Graff, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Mandel, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Graff, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Graff, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Graff, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup>Mandel, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Graff, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup>Graff, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, Ewald Tragy, trans. Inge D. Halpert

(New York, 1961), p. ix.

<sup>21</sup>Graff, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Magda Von Hattingberg, Rilke and Benvenuta(New York, 1949),  
p. 8.

<sup>23</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies, trans. J. B. Leishman  
and Stephen Spender(New York, 1963), p. 43.

<sup>24</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup>Graff, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup>Von Hattingberg, p. 134.

<sup>27</sup>Von Hattingberg, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>29</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, vol. I,  
trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton(New York, 1948),  
p. 267.

<sup>30</sup>Graff, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>33</sup>Mandel, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup>Graff, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 4.



## Chapter III

## Travels

## Introduction

After the containment that was demanded by his years of intensive study between 1892-1895, Rilke was eager to travel around and see some of the people, places and things he had been reading about. From this time until his death Rilke rarely stayed in one place longer than two years. "He wandered about from place to place, encountering numerous people but always holding the most inward part of himself in reserve."<sup>1</sup> His constant movement went along with his seeming noninvolvement and his desire to be alone -- with people around him. His non-rootedness is a causative factor in Rilke's creativity; he needed new sights and sounds and people to stimulate his profound insight. "Rilke once spoke of his need for space around his feelings and a large portion of his life might be considered a flight from intimacy to seek refuge in the impersonal coldness of space."<sup>2</sup> His travels took him through Germany, Italy, Russia, France, Scandinavia, North Africa, and Switzerland; but of these countries, the three which had the greatest effect on him were Italy, Russia, and France (the city of Paris in particular).

## Italy

Florence, Venice, Viareggio, Tuscany, and Rome were the cities which displayed their sun-drenched beauty to Rilke during his four trips to Italy in 1898, 1903, 1912 and 1920. Rilke was caught up in

the sensuous beauty of the Italian past which was full of revelation for him. "He saw the Renaissance as a glorious spring upon which his own time would follow as a summer."<sup>3</sup> Of the artist of this period he preferred Botticelli, whom he later thought was a "stray and distant brother of the Russians." Italy was the first distant country that he visited, and it was here that his "real works" began. But after traveling to other parts of Europe and Scandinavia, he became disenchanted with Italy:

Italy no longer suited him. Its bright lights, strong colors, and sharp contours did not invite close observation. The Italian skies with their picture postcard sunsets seemed to him singularly empty, deserted, sapped dry. There was nothing to investigate there. He felt the Italian past had left no room for the present.

4

Reflections of his Italian experiences may be seen in The Book of Hours. His trips to Russia are linked to his Italian travels in this book of verses.

#### Russia

"...that soundless journey."

Rilke's first journey to Russia in 1899 was inspired by Lou Andreas Salome (see discussion) whom he met on a visit to Munich in 1897. His trip to Russia fit into his whole development from an exploratory standpoint. His proximity to the Slavic world in Prague oriented his mind in the direction of the enormous nation to the north. Prior to the journey he studied the language, the literature, and the history of Russia; he was especially interested in the history

of Russia; he was especially interested in the history of its art. Anything specifically Russian proved fascinating to the impressionable young poet. This intensive research opened up new approaches to the vast reality of "a people and land that seemed to correspond to his longing for pristine truth and patient growth."<sup>5</sup> In fact, Rilke's ideal of the "eternal Russia" had taken shape in his mind before he ever set foot in Russia. Among the writers that aided him in the construction of such an image were Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dreksin. "This view of Russia as the land of the future, the typical symbol of his own deeply felt need of endless patient growth, remained Rilke's all his life."<sup>6</sup>

Rilke found an inner satisfaction in his journey to Russia; "it was there that he had felt, like a revelation, the great breath and width of life, a real life that freed him from the sentimentally overstressed artificiality of the artistic surrounding in Germany."<sup>7</sup> The grandeur of the plains satisfied his need for expansion and space; and the absence of the colorful Italian-type images gave him a sense of peace. The influence of Russia might seem diametrically opposed to that of Italy, yet he felt the two countries complemented each other. "As the Renaissance had appealed to his sense of beauty and his individualistic pride, so Russia appealed to his feeling for the dark, mystical unity of things, to his wish to relinquish himself in a fanatical humility, and to his feeling of brotherly kinship with all men."<sup>8</sup> He also expressed the idea that the formal perfection of Florentine art served as a preparation for the finer simplicity and depth of Russian art.

The weeks that he spent in the Russian capital during his second visit in 1900 were spent in closer contact with the people in an attempt to widen his circle of acquaintances; he visited churches and monasteries and browsed through numerous museums. The Book of Hours, especially the selections entitled "Monkish Life" and "The Pilgrimage" are closely connected with these Russian experiences.

Rilke expected much of his soundless journey to Russia: "I believe that Russia will give me the words for those religious depths of my nature that have been striving to enter into my works since I was a child."<sup>9</sup> He saw in the simple reverence and piety of the Russian people a fulfillment of his desire. The religion that he saw practices there was very different from the superficiality of his mother's beliefs. The Russian people were resigned to their hard lot, and their dark, imageless and hence unbounded piety.<sup>10</sup> Actually he was less interested in the individuals he met than in the Russian type: "the patiently waiting being that is chiefly concerned with slow maturing."<sup>11</sup> This type could easily symbolize his own slow but constant development. Rilke also identified with Tolstoy who represented the grey-haired artist of Russian poverty, love and humility. The full significance of his journeys to Russia is summed up in a sentence Rilke wrote in the early 1920s: "Russia has made me what I am, from there my nature issued forth all that is home to my instinct all my inner origin is there."<sup>12</sup>

#### Paris

After the invigorating and enlightening trips to Russia, that land of open space and homely charm, Rilke suffered a terrible dis-

appointment when, in 1902, he came to the city of Paris. The city symbolizing beauty and love became for him a city of the damned. He was terrorized by the disease, poverty and death which lurked in every corner. Instead of being enchanted by the beautiful gardens of the Tuileries and Luxembourg, he was appalled by the haggard-looking people that sat on the park benches.

Where do these people live, he wants to know, where do they sleep and of what do they think when they sit for days in the public gardens? When they talk to themselves, what words are they using? Do they still speak in sentences or does everything rush out of them madly, as from a burning theatre, everything that was in them.

13

Being an artist and aware of colors, smells and sounds, Rilke was soon conscious of the fact that Paris smelled like "iodoform, pommes frites, and fear."<sup>14</sup> Many of these things are noticed by other sensitive people who visit Paris, yet with Rilke there was an unbelievable sense of identification. In a letter to Lou Salome he cried out in pain:

Oh, Lou I have tormented myself for days.  
For I understand all there people, and  
although I swerved around them in a great  
arc, they had no secret from me. It tore me  
out of myself into their lives, right  
through their lives, through their greatly  
burdened lives. I often had to tell myself  
aloud that I was not one of them, that I  
was to go on again, away from this frightful  
city in which they were to die.

15

But Rilke could not leave the city immediately; his strong sense of

identification expressed itself in a feeling of responsibility.

Was not he, the poet of the God that revealed himself in solitude and nature, bound to give his love to the despised fringes of metropolitan life as a necessary contribution to a new world picture which was to be less false and flat than the traditional? Was it not he who was to give meaning to their existence, and to his own fears, by transmuting them into art?

16

The question he faced in this city was whether he as the poet could discover some hidden sweetness in death. This problem haunted Rilke for the rest of his life and his works reflect this preoccupation with death.

Paris served as his base from 1902 to the beginning of World War I. There were productive years with the publishing of "The Book of Pictures," "Stories of God," "The Tale of Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke," "Book of Hours," "New Poems," and the semi-autobiographical work, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. The "Notebooks" strongly reflect his Paris experiences.

#### Conclusion

In a letter of March 17, 1926 to a lady friend, Rilke evaluated the relative meaning of Russia, Italy, and Paris for his poetic development. "Italy in its clearly variegated fullness of forms, was the primer, so to speak, of my mobile existence... Russia became in a sense the foundation of my mode of experiencing and aperceiving while Paris was the basis of my will to shape and form."

## Chapter III- Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Bernard Murchland, "A Poet for Now," Commonweal, December 15, 1961, p. 321.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 322.
- <sup>3</sup>F. W. Von Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work(New York, 1952), p. 95.
- <sup>4</sup>H. F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man(Seattle, 1960), p. 81.
- <sup>5</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet(Princeton, 1956), p. 115.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>7</sup>H. W. Belmore, Rilke's Craftsmanship(Oxford, England, 1954), p. 181.
- <sup>8</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 97.
- <sup>9</sup>Nora Wydenbruck, Rilke: Man and Poet(New York, 1950), p. 59.
- <sup>10</sup>Graff, p. 122.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 117.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 122.
- <sup>13</sup>Peters, p. 72.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 75.
- <sup>15</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 161.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 158.
- <sup>17</sup>Graff, p. 131.

## Chapter IV

## Associates

## Introduction

Rilke's extensive travels made it possible for him to meet many people in all stations of life; his supposed noble heritage, combined with his strange sense of identification, gave him ease and confidence among rich and poor alike. He studied these people and explored their "countless variations," yet he remained in most cases solitary and introspective, never fully committing himself to anyone. Rilke was not a recluse; he was instead a poet, peering at the world of man from a vantage point in his world of creation. This was the terrible dichotomy with which he had to deal: he had to be with men, "learning" of them, and still be apart enough to avoid the involvement that would stunt his creativity.

The few people who did become close to him in later life exerted an influence on Rilke that was important in his development as a creative artist. Lou Andreas Salome, Clara Westhoff, August Rodin, and Magda von Hattingberg played important roles in the poet's adult life, more so than his other acquaintances. They experienced Rilke's sensitivity and came to understand his need for love and affection, offered only at appropriate times.

## Lou Andreas Salome

It was in Munich, in 1897, that Rilke met Lou Andreas Salome, his first true love. Lou was considerably older and more worldly



than the young Rilke, who, in naive wonder, was struck by her blond beauty, by her intelligence, and by her keen interest in philosophy. It was these same characteristics that had, in 1882, enchanted the great philosopher Nietzsche and led him later to propose to her. Lou listened to Nietzsche's innermost ideas but failed to reciprocate his feelings. She later published a book about Nietzsche. In the case of Rilke and Lou, however, feelings were reciprocated, for she became his mistress and traveled with him for almost three years; until the fall of 1900 all of his love poems were directed to Lou. At this time Lou married a Professor Andreas; and though the relationship was never severed, it was doomed from the very beginning. W. L. Graff describes it as "a sort of inexplicable and mutually acknowledged vassalage from which consummation was excluded and which even<sup>1</sup> proved to lack genuine community of mind and interest." This lack of feeling between Lou and her husband allowed her to give of herself to other men.

Lou's effect on Rilke as a poet and as a man were far-reaching and lasting. She helped to change Rene Rilke from a provincial talent to a cosmopolitan artist. "Fifteen years older than Rene and author of several works of fiction and philosophy, her fund of experiences was<sup>2</sup> richer but just as disturbed as Rene's." Lou even went so far as to suggest he change his name from Rene to Rainer. She felt that "Rainer" sounded more masculine and German. It was also Lou who made the young poet "more conscious of his achievements and potentialities, thus heightening his self-assurance and sense of responsibility."<sup>3</sup>

Both Lou's advice and her services as a model helped Rilke solve many of his problems.

His relationship to his mother and to childhood, his concern with pre-natal existence in the womb and beyond, his feeling as it were of blood-relationship with death, his wonderment at birth, bloom and decay, his anxieties and dreams, his creative throes, his sexual be-polarity anchored by one pole in his dolls and by the other to his rocking-horse, his struggle with craftsmanship versus inspiration, his tension between the masculine world of action, and his feminine productivity -- these and similar matters were focal problems upon which Lou was able to throw much light.

4

Lou's diagnoses often aided him in putting his experiences and troubles in proper perspective, enabling him to better understand himself. Yet her self-confidence in the face of all the problems of life was something which Rilke was never able to achieve or understand. "She moves fearlessly midst the most burning mysteries, which are nothing to her...She has life on her side, recognizing in harmless as well as in frightful matters the one force which disguises itself yet always purports to be generous even when it causes death."<sup>5</sup> This strength of character made Rilke very dependent on Lou, even to the extent that once later in their relationship he said he hated her because she was so great. Some of the most characteristic passages in The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge and the Duino Elegies are direct outcomes of Rilke's experiences with Lou Andreas Salome. Rilke corresponded with Lou intermittently for the remainder of her life; some of these letters, which lend themselves very well to interpretation, may be found in the two volumes, Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Jane Greene and M. D. Herter Norton.

## Clara Westhoff

The Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke also contains copious correspondence between Rilke and his wife Clara, whom he married in March of 1901. Unfortunately the marriage was not successful and Rilke and his wife separated after only one year and the birth of a daughter, Ruth. Clara was a sculptress and Rilke was a poet; both were more concerned about their work than their relationship to one another. Again Rilke was vacillating between the world of human passions and the realm of creativity, which in his case, had to be kept separate. "Woman, with her human limitations, threatened the perfect freedom he needed for his work; hence he never ventured far beyond the threshold of love and found that that did not suffice him." <sup>6</sup> Mr. J. B. Leishman says of the one year Rilke spent with his wife: "If only he could remain poised upon a kind of perilous but infinitely stimulating brink, falling but never quite fallen in love..." <sup>7</sup> Clara was first his partner in solitude, then his traveling companion, and in the end, little more than one of his correspondents.

His relationship to Clara was linked with another woman and place: Paula Becker and the artist colony of Worpswede. Paula was a painter friend of Clara and remained a life-long associate of both Rilke and his wife. Worpswede was an art colony on the heath in southern Germany. It was here Rilke met Paula Becker, Clara Westhoff, and other young artists. He enjoyed the atmosphere of the loosely bound community which imposed no obligations on him. "Each member

was striving after his own individual purposes and all derived benefit from being young and enthusiastic." <sup>8</sup>

### Rodin

As Rilke had lavished all his love and admiration without reservation on Lou Salome, so too he idolized August Rodin, the French sculptor. As early as 1900 he had ardently desired to know Rodin at close quarters. When financial worries became too much for Rilke, he left his wife and young daughter and eagerly accepted a commission to write a monograph on Rodin, which was published in 1903. After some traveling, Rilke returned to Paris to act as Rodin's secretary between 1905-1906.

From Rodin, Rilke learned many things; two of the most important were the need for incessant industry and the concentration upon minute particulars. Rodin constantly repeated the statement: "It is necessary to work all the time." <sup>9</sup> He exemplified close, patient observation. The observation in Rodin's case was primarily focused on "things", as was the case with Rilke during the early 1900s. Rilke's work during this period gives evidence to his new interest in "things:" two verses on Apollo, three verses on Buddha, the group of poems on the cathedral at Chartres, and various verses dealing with Roman fountains and buildings. New Poems published in 1907 is almost entirely concerned with "things."

He revered Rodin, not merely as a great artist, but also as a master of the artist's life, which Rilke explained as life in a more intense and concentrated form. "...this absolute one-sidedness, this concentration on his own creative art, is something to be rever-

enced, for it means complete absorption in his own God-given world  
 down to its ultimate roots and up to its highest peaks." <sup>10</sup> Rodin  
 inspired Rilke to create for himself: "He must now achieve some-  
 thing as a man, must try to transform his art into something real." <sup>11</sup>  
 Yet the poet had to face different problems than those encountered  
 by the sculptor. Rilke would watch Rodin work from day to day with-  
 out having to wait for moments of inspiration, wishing for such  
 genius in his work. The plastic arts, however, involved much more  
 manual work and technique. But no matter how incompatible were  
 their two worlds of art, the hard work and mutual close observation  
 benefited both men.

#### Benvenuta

During the month of January, 1914, Rilke received a letter from  
 a professional pianist by the name of Magda von Hattingberg expressing  
 the joy and consolation she had received from the "Stories of God."  
 The years between 1910 and 1914 had been lonely ones, and Rilke  
 eagerly responded to the letter from the young woman. He began to  
 send letters every day, confiding in her the story of his entire life:  
 the military academy, his first love, his unhappy marriage. Later  
 the letters became declarations of love. The entire episode with  
 Magda von Hattingberg lasted only four months; yet during this time  
 he wrote the most passionate letters of his life (excellent for  
 interpretation). "Dear, dear heart, are you not in truth my virgin-  
 al mother, my child, my dear, dear girl -- you with your golden  
 armour on which everything false and base must splinter." <sup>12</sup>

It wasn't until after two months that Rilke and Miss Hattingberg were able to meet; then Rilke greeted her as "Benvenuta" or "welcomed one." "Is it possible? -- Did God send you to me in the years of my mortal need to give me strength to survive?" <sup>13</sup> Rilke felt that Benvenuta's coming was a reward for his patience during the preceding years. Unfortunately the relationship followed the path of his other loves: "...started with exalted expectation, passed through a brief moment of passion, and ended in disillusionment." <sup>14</sup> Rilke proposed to Benvenuta, but she rejected him, feeling that he was too God-like, too unearthly to be the father of her children. Despite the disillusionment Benvenuta caused Rilke, it was through her that he discovered the dream-like world of music. Before this time he had always regarded music as something which only God could appreciate. The books written by Magda von Hattingberg entitled Rilke and Benvenuta and Letters to Benvenuta would give the reader further insight into this exciting four-month relationship.

#### Others

In addition to those who became intimate friends of Rainer Maria Rilke, there were the individuals whose influence and aid made his life as an aloof poet more fulfilling. In this group we could place two writers, a painter and a Princess. Paul Valéry's work was an important inspiration to Rilke: "He talked of how wonderfully Valéry was able to express the relation between the body and soul, exactly in the way he, Rilke, had long experienced it." <sup>15</sup> Before Valéry was able to put his thoughts into words he had to remain silent for over twenty years; Rilke faced a similar form of reticence before he

was able to create the Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus. Rilke corresponded with Valery after the war until his death. Like Valery, the painter Cezanne served as an example for Rilke.

Rilke seemed to find in Cezanne's life and achievement the fullest, the final confirmation of that conception of the artist as an incessant and dedicated 'worker' striving to realize an ideal of almost unattainable perfection, perpetually dissatisfied in his achievements, which he had first learned from Rodin, and which had been held in some degree by so many French poets, writers and painters.

16

Rilke frequently mentioned the fact that Cezanne had failed to attend his mother's funeral because he was too involved in his work.

Ellen Key, a school mistress for 19 years and a writer, was responsible for making Rilke's works known in Scandinavia. She also arranged for him to visit Denmark and Sweden. Though Rilke described her in warm terms, she failed to fulfill his desire for a "strong, motherly woman." "She had a heart of gold, a sanguine, impulsive temperament and a quick brain, but her mind lacked direction and depth. Her affections radiated out to the whole of humanity -- to all children, all lovers, all mothers." <sup>17</sup> Miss Key wrote Misused Womanhood, The Individual and Socialism, and The Century of the Child. She spent most of her life attacking Christianity and its symbols.

Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis was Rilke's patroness from 1910 until his death. She convinced him to accompany her on a journey through North Africa and allowed him to stay at her home, the castle Duino, where the "Elegies" were conceived. Rilke described

her home as "a miracle of beauty and peace amidst lovely and noble scenery." <sup>18</sup> The Princess, more so than any other person, understood Rilke's need for solitude.

### Conclusion

Though Rilke always stood above and outside human relationships, his correspondence reflected a deep, sincere concern for his associates. The interpreter should be aware of the beauty and profound thought which is expressed in his letters. In addition to those volumes of correspondence which have already been mentioned there are The War Time Letters, Letters to a Young Poet (especially fit for interpretation) and Correspondence in Verse with Erika Mitterer.



## Chapter IV- Notes

- <sup>1</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet(Princeton, 1956), p. 84.
- <sup>2</sup>Siegfried Mandel, Rainer Maria Rilke: The Poetic Instinct (Carbondale, Ill., 1965), p. 19.
- <sup>3</sup>Graff, p. 88.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 84.
- <sup>6</sup>F. W. Von Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work(New York, 1952), p. 58.
- <sup>7</sup>Bette Richart, "Rilke's Angel," Commonweal, February 14, 1958, p. 516.
- <sup>8</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 134.
- <sup>9</sup>Nora Wydenbruck, Rilke: Man and Poet(New York, 1950), p. 95.
- <sup>10</sup>Magda Von Hattingberg, Rilke and Benvenuto(New York, 1949), p. 46.
- <sup>11</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 161.
- <sup>12</sup>Von Hattingberg, p. 98.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 8.
- <sup>14</sup>H. F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man(Seattle, 1960), p. 138.
- <sup>15</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 372.
- <sup>16</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, New Poems, trans. J. B. Leishman (New York, 1964), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>Wydenbruck, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup>Von Hattingber, p. 70.

## Chapter V

## Philosophy

## Introduction

A poet's life experiences, including travels and associates, are responsible for the shaping of certain thoughts about crucial issues: life, God, love, and death. Because most of Rilke's later and more impressive poetry is of an introspective nature, his philosophy on these issues is significant.

## Life

For Rilke, life was a paradox: "the terribleness and bliss of life are as a single face that merely looks this way or that depending on his distance from it or his mood."<sup>1</sup> He felt that the only safe way to avoid the terror that life held for him was to maintain himself somewhere between the young lover's blissful concept of life and the loathing of life experienced by the diseased and starving street walker. Such non-involvement on the part of a poet could have proven disastrous. Nevertheless, Rilke refused for many years to compromise either his life or his art, one for the sake of the other. Finally, after his long period of waiting, he concluded that his true satisfaction and bliss could only come through his work, through creating. "In one of my poems that is successful, there is much more reality than any relationship or affection that I feel; where I create, I am true."<sup>2</sup>

Rilke wrestled with a bothersome and painful confusion of the

fundamentals of human life. Finding these basics so completely incomprehensible, Rilke set out to find some sweetness in death that would give meaning to life. He was concerned only with life here and now and so repudiated all speculation on heaven and hell. Understanding could only be based on the present; the past and the future were to be disregarded. He quickly perceived that the present was full of suffering, and so suffering became what Rilke had to understand and had to be able to praise. It became the poet's thesis "that despair is the creative basis of hope."<sup>3</sup> It would have been the satisfaction of Rilke's entire existence if he could have presented a total affirmation of this world including beauty, agony, and death.

#### God

Siegfried Mandel describes Rilke's lifetime relationship to God as follows:

Rilke's childhood god, a product of a peculiar blend of his mother's orthodoxy and spiritualism, was resisted briefly in adolescence by rebellious atheism, reshaped into the mythological god of Rilke's early diaries, sought as a pantheistic immanence in the monk's viewed in Rilke's "Stories of the Dear Lord" anthropomorphically as a doddering old man, and animistically as a spirit of emotion, metamorphosed into the angels of the Duino Elegies and finally lost in a host of vague synonyms in Rilke's last years. <sup>4</sup>

As is apparent after reading this quotation, Rilke's views on God went through some changes. Christ, on the other hand, remained the same in Rilke's eyes after his initial rebellion against the ex-

aggerated and bigoted display of religion by his mother. Her type of religion did not prepare him for the brutality of life. Once, while at the military academy, he had allowed himself to be hit in the face in an effort to follow Christ's example; but neither God, nor Christ, nor the Angels came to his aid.<sup>5</sup> In a poem of 1893 Rilke emphatically denied the divinity of Christ, feeling that Christ's allowing Himself to be worshipped as God was an expression only of His pride.<sup>7</sup> In The Young Workman's Letter, written in 1922, this idea is carried to its fullest extent and Rilke repudiates Christ as the Redeemer and Mediator, and reduces the cross to a mere road sign. "He saw the Christ figure as a captive of the bourgeois society which he despised, a pitiful inconsolable figure who could help neither himself nor others, and a figure who pointed to the beyond instead of showing how life ought to be lived to the fullest."<sup>8</sup>

In his writings it seems that Rilke vacillates between belief and non-belief in God. Perhaps some of this confusion results from the fact that Rilke viewed God as something in the making. "But I spoke gently of him (God). I said that his shortcomings, his injustices and everything inadequate in his power were due to his development. That he was not completed." Rilke believed that there was something above all men, but the something was created by man. He forgot logic and reason and relied instead on his intuitive perception. Rilke's God is dark and "he ascends out of his (God's) warmth -- that is all he knew."<sup>10</sup>

He is far more akin to Brahma or to the Atman of the Upanishads: great as the universe and tiny as a mustard seed -- all pervading and ever present -- the soot in the stove, the wind in the chimney, the young bird fallen from the nest -- the God who is eternally becoming, but formed by man, dependent on man.

11

It becomes apparent that Rilke's God tends to be more like Creation than a Creator. The creator role, he felt, should be played by man, especially the poet. "He felt himself taken into a community building God, the God in being, who was originating only in the hearts of men and in their works."<sup>12</sup> Rilke felt that the prayers which he sent to God were sheer creativity and that they would serve to build God if He did not exist.

Being an artist and concerned with creating, Rilke believed that he had a particular responsibility for making God. "He is a mere direction of the heart, an unfinished, a future God, for the creation and realization of whom the artist has a special mission."<sup>13</sup> Some say that Rilke visualized God as the creative power synonymous with art. He once noted that when the pious man says "God is," and the sorrowful man feels "God was," the artist smiles and says "God will be."

### Love

Love, which Rilke well understood, requires "Responsibility, meticulous cultivation, and draining reciprocity."<sup>14</sup> This is probably the reason he was never able to commit himself totally to any individual for any length of time. He once said that he loved no one

since the act of loving was fear. "Sometimes I think that what is possible between two human beings cannot at bottom amount to very much; the infinite is always in the single individual -- there lie the miracles, the achievements, the conquests, and perhaps something of all that has taken place."<sup>14</sup> Rilke's concept of love is colored by his non-committal nature; rather than speaking of the sensuous beauty of love, he dwells on the idea of its being a ritual and a ceremonious relationship. We must keep in mind the fact that Rilke left his wife and daughter to fend for themselves after only a year and it is more than likely that he was suffering from conscience pangs. There is also a striking absence of love between the sexes as a poetic theme. He continually reiterates that love must be a companionship without domination and possessiveness. Rilke's wife pointed out that he would have been hard to satisfy in love, "for Rilke there has to be eternity in every caress, pure duration in a kiss."<sup>15</sup> Rilke linked love and death together regarding both as an extension of human life into the infinite. The passion that is aroused in love should not be satisfied by the object that stimulated it but be transformed into something infinite. Rilke was particularly fascinated by the death of young lovers, for he felt that they alone had experienced only the blissful side of life.

#### Death

Rilke spent his entire life fighting against the idea that death is separate from life. He called death "the invisible side of life."<sup>16</sup> Another one of his artistic causes was to return death to its rightful owner; to life. This he would try to accomplish through art

rather than religious faith. Death is more than when someone dies; "Death is when someone lives and does not know it. Death is when someone cannot make up his mind to die -- much is death, you cannot bury it." <sup>17</sup> Ultimately it was his goal to defeat death by facing it and giving it form. He did not say that

...one should love death, rather than one should love life so wholeheartedly, so completely without calculation and selection, that involuntarily one always includes him (the other side of life) and loves him too. For only because we have excluded death from our consciousness has he more and more become the stranger and because we have alienated him has he become an adversary. It is thinkable that he is much closer to us than life itself....What do we know of him?....I think our effort should be to presuppose the unity of life and death so that it would gradually become apparent.

18

Rilke was appalled by what he termed the "unauthentic, counterfeit death." He loathed the custom of embellishing death with trivial make-up which he believed "turned the undertaker's parlor into a beauty salon where dead girls are groomed as for an evening party." <sup>19</sup> He promoted the concept of one's "own" death. "He is horrified to see that death, like life, has become cheap and vulgar, has lost its ancient terrible grandeur. People no longer die their own individual deaths just as they no longer live their own lives. They conform. They die in hospitals, a ready-made mass-produced death." <sup>20</sup> In The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, many varieties of deaths and fears are elaborately worked out in Rilke's effort to give this mystery form.



Rilke has been accused of depriving death of its real seriousness; certainly integrating death with life would not bring such results. Yet in a letter from Dr. Hammerli who cared for the dying poet in Switzerland, we hear that "his only wish was not to see anyone who might make him realize the seriousness of his condition which he purposefully concealed from himself."<sup>21</sup> Rilke did not believe in an immortal spirit but accepted death as a just price for the gift of life.

### Conclusion

To condense into a few pages Rilke's total philosophy on such important issues as life, love, death, and God would be an impossibility which the writer recognizes. It is hoped, however, that the guiding principles have been presented in the preceding discussion. The poet's philosophy is intimately connected with his work and cannot be ignored when seeking an understanding of the man.

## Chapter V- Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Walter Kaufmann, From Shakespeare to Existentialism:  
Studies in Poetry, Religion and Philosophy(Boston, 1959), p. 207.
- <sup>2</sup>Siegfried Mandel, Rainer Maria Rilke: The Poetic Instinct  
(Carbondale, Ill., 1965), p. 116.
- <sup>3</sup>Bernard Murchland, "Rilke's Dual Affirmation of Life and  
Death," Commonweal, March 13, 1959, p. 627.
- <sup>4</sup>Mandel, p. 40.
- <sup>5</sup>F. W. Von Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and  
Work(New York, 1952), p.56.
- <sup>6</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a  
Modern Poet(Princeton, 1956), p. 61.
- <sup>7</sup>Mandel, p. 16.
- <sup>8</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, The Book of Hours, trans. A. L. Peck  
(London, 1961), p. 30.
- <sup>9</sup>Mandel, p. 39.
- <sup>10</sup>Nora Wydenbruck, Rilke: Man and Poet(New York, 1950), p. 61.
- <sup>11</sup>Von Heerikhuizen, p. 104.
- <sup>12</sup>Graff, p. 271.
- <sup>13</sup>Mandel, p. 84.
- <sup>14</sup>Theodore Homes, "To Be Transformed," Poetry, April-September  
1959, p. 60.
- <sup>15</sup>Bernard Murchland, "A Poet for Now," Commonweal, December 15,  
1961, p. 323.
- <sup>16</sup>Graff, p. 229.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>18</sup>H. F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man(Seattle, 1960), p. 152.

<sup>19</sup>Graff, p. 231.

<sup>20</sup>Peters, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup>H. W. Belmore, Rilke's Craftsmanship(Oxford, England, 1954), p. 627.

## Part II -- His Work

## Chapter VI

## Poetry

No one could better sum up Rilke's feelings on poetry than he himself did in a passage from The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. The writer feels justified in quoting the entire passage because of its profound significance and beauty.

For verses are not, as most people imagine, simply feelings (those one has early enough) - they are experiences. For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and to partings one had long seen coming; to days of childhood that are still unexplained, to parents whom one had to hurt when they brought one joy and one did not grasp it; to childhood things that so strongly begin with such a number of profound and grave transformations, to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to nights of travel that rush along on high and flow with all the stars -- and it is not yet enough if one may think of all this. One must have memories of many nights of love, none of which was like the others, of the screams of women in childbirth, closing again. But one must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance

and gesture, nameless and no longer  
to be distinguished from ourselves --  
not till then can it happen that in a  
most rare hour the first word of a  
verse arises in their midst and goes  
forth from them.

1

One notes that there is nothing temporal about Rilke's origin of verse. He does his best to root out all references to time, transforming the work into an immortal creation. A work of art to him was something in space, not of the "here and now," but a part of the "ever and never." His themes were drawn from the realm of feelings, giving them a universal and timeless quality.

The poet believed that experiences and memories had to be intensely experienced, thus suggesting the intimate involvement Rilke felt with his verses. Rilke's pseudonyms such as Pierre Dumont, Ewald Tragy, and Malte Laurids Brigge emphasize the close relationship between the poet and his works. His poems express an intensification of his feelings that support a world of inwardness and reflection. Rilke sought equivalents for his inward visions in the world of Nature so that men could understand his feelings. This is where he encountered the problem of "expressing the inexpressible" and "knowing reality."<sup>2</sup> A similar problem was faced by Baudelaire, Mallarme, and Valery.<sup>3</sup> In New Poems he examines "things" hoping to find a way to express his inner turmoil. The expression was finally achieved through the angel of the Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus.

Not only is Rilke's work characterised by its inward reflection but also by a certain amount of mysticism. His desire to bring

together man and God, making each dependent on the other is in tune with the mystical speculation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

What will you do, God, if I die?  
 I am your jug (if I should break?)  
 I am your drink (if I should spoil?)  
 I am your garment, and your trade,  
 With me you lose your meaning.

I know that God cannot live an  
 instant if I become naught, he needs must give up the ghost.

4

This mystical experience finds its most complete expression in the Sonnets to Orpheus and The Duino Elegies which he wrote when "possessed by the angel."

Thoughts such as these are not new to us today. Modern man is becoming more and more introspective. The psychoanalyst is now in great demand. People are taking more time to look at themselves and to search out aids to arriving at a more complete understanding of themselves. Rilke's poetry is such an aid and its significance certainly holds more to the future than to the past. Because of their complex nature, few readers comprehend all his poems, but almost any man will respond to some of them.

## Chapter VI- Notes

<sup>1</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge,  
trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York, 1964), pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Bette Richart, "Rilke's Angel," Commonweal, February 14,  
1958, p. 516.

<sup>3</sup>Erich Heller, The Artist's Journey into the Interior  
(New York, 1965), p. 98.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald Gray, The German Tradition in Literature 1871-1945  
(Cambridge, England, 1965), p. 247.

## Chapter VII

## Substance

Keeping in mind Rilke's thoughts on the origin of verse, let us briefly examine the substance of the poetry in Rilke's four stages of development. In the early period including those works written before 1897, Rilke was merely concerned with proving himself as a writer. He dealt with the traditional themes that would appeal to the masses: the knight on the battlefield remembering his loved one, appeals to the Virgin Mary, young maidens, and the beautiful things in life. Rilke dismisses the writings of this period: "He asserts that the stuff poets write when very young counts for nothing; only after years of silent meditation and painful experiences can a poet hope to find the first words of a poem." <sup>1</sup> With the majority of poets, however, it is during their youth that they write some of their most outstanding poetry.

The second period in the poet's development includes roughly the years between 1897 and 1908. During this time Rilke met Lou, took two trips to Russia, and served a year as Rodin's secretary. Nearly all of the works of this period may be classed as "things." The unity Rilke saw expressed in Rodin's creations of bronze or stone had a great effect on his choice of material. Poems such as "Early Apollo," "Pieta," "The Cathedral," and "The Buddha," reflect this emphasis on material "things." The poems of this period do not present a deliberate and systematic philosophy but neither are they impersonal descriptions. The ideas or ideals which Rilke would later express were merely being formulated at this time. The images which



were later used to express a philosophy were the animal, the child, the hero, the young dead, the lover, and the angel. During this middle period Rilke was developing into a philosophic poet. After leaving Rodin, he stated that he had finished the "work of the eye"<sup>2</sup> and was now ready to begin the "heart-work."

The third stage commenced with the writing of The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge in 1910 and ended with the final triumph of the Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus in 1922. These two works are noted as triumphal because it was through them that Rilke was able to praise life, all of life, including its most terrifying aspect -- death. But it is not that simple. Many thoughts had been growing in Rilke ever since the painful experience of writing the "Notebooks." Most of these ideas broke the surface at the same time and were quickly consummated in the "Elegies" and the "Sonnets." Some of the ideas that troubled Rilke are expressed by other writers in the following ways:

...a dual affirmation of hope and failure,  
peace and anxiety, novelty and emptiness.

3

...man's loneliness, his transience, his suffering, his anguish in love and his hankering after the limitless and the boundless.

4

...a search for the profound, the true relationship of things and ideas, a desire to live near the deep sources of life.

5

...man's regeneration in terms of humility, compassion and brotherhood.

6

...a unifying principle in life that will reconcile us to whatever comes after it.

7

To give such thoughts poetic expression Rilke endeavored to search beyond the boundaries of the German language for the external symbols of his internal insights and visions.

After the triumphant third period, "the poet's last four years followed upon the "Sonnets" and "Elegies" like a tender and meditative coda upon an heroic allegro." <sup>9</sup> Rilke was satisfied; he no longer was involved in his inner search for the right words. He seemed to revert back to his interest in things of the earth. "Rilke decides to sing the landscape to whose silent assistance he owed the completion of his great cycle (Duino Elegies)."<sup>10</sup> Not until this time was the poet able to face the experiences of his childhood. "Now in the last four years of his life, this wound is finally healed, he is at last able to 'sublimate' his childhood, to conquer it and to retrieve it for his remembrance as a strong and happy memory."<sup>11</sup>

Throughout all four periods of development, Rilke employs many symbols: the knight on horseback, Narcissus, the unicorn, the young virgin, Orpheus, the act of falling, and many other images. Two symbols, however, predominate: angels and dolls. Since childhood, he had been fascinated by these two symbols, and they take on greater significance in his later poetry which deals with an affirmation of life and death. Both the Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus contain references to these symbols.

#### Angels

The angel of Rilke's childhood acted as a guardian. To the young poet the angel was like a mother who changed the phantoms of the night into harmless things.

He was the nameless bird whose wings came when he (the child) woke up in the night and cried. When nightmares made the boy fear that his sleep was like death, it was the angel who lifted him up from the darkness of his heart and hoisted him upon all towers like scarlet flags and draperies.

12

As Rilke matured he questioned the presumed power and loving interest of the angel. It was probably during the critical years of 1910-1912 that the conception of the "terrible" angel of the "Elegies" was developed. This angel was something completely of his own creation; to it he attributed all of the completely divine powers he longed for.<sup>13</sup> Rilke wanted to stand off and view the world from the angel's vantage point. He desired to experience the intense feelings which in the angel are not directed outward but are concentrated in the heart.<sup>14</sup> Rilke tried to project this idea of a concentration of feeling in the "Second Elegy" in which he speaks of the powers of a concave mirror. The poet also envied the angel's freedom of movement in space. "He (the angel) is glorious because He is at home in that vast open world that knows neither past, present, nor future, but only pure space or pure being."<sup>15</sup> The only way Rilke saw to achieve this freedom in space was through death, but this was too great a price to pay. The closest he came to death and free communion with the angels occurred during his periods of solitude and creativity, when he felt "possessed by the angel in that state of ecstasy."<sup>16</sup> Rilke wrote the Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus in such a "possessed state;" it was only then that he was able to achieve the glory of praising life and death.

## Dolls

It was obvious that he needed a counter-weight to the terrifying, superhuman figure of the angel. He needed another symbol, a symbol of pure outwardness, fully visible, all matter and no spirit -- hence the direct opposite to the angel -- a creature, moreover, whose relationship to man was similar to man's relationship to the angel. He found it in the figure of the doll.

17

Like the angel, the doll had appeared in Rilke's poetry before it assumed its role in the Duino Elegies. Also, as in the case of the angel, it is more than likely that the doll-image arises from Rilke's childhood. Rilke made some interesting comments about the dolls of his childhood:

By virtue of its creative magic the child has breathed a soul into the doll body and the two have become inextricably one.

18

The doll in its utter unresponsiveness and silence caused man for the first time in his life to face empty space and to feel its horror.

19

The doll doesn't love and often leaves some with the idea that they are incapable of being loved.

20

We invest our first love in something incapable of love.

21

The German word for doll is "puppe;" it has three meanings. The lowest form of "puppe" is "that lifeless creature on whom we wasted our first innocent love." The second meaning is marionette,

22

which is nothing more than a lively doll. Rilke noted that the relationship between the poet and marionette is the same as that between God and man. The highest form of "puppe" is the chrysalis, a stage in the development of a winged creature, such as a butterfly. During Rilke's struggle with the angel, the doll symbol assumed more and more prominence until, in the "Forth Elegy," both images were joined. At one time Rilke even expresses the wish to become a doll if being human meant "to appear" more than "to be." He believed that at least the doll was genuine.

## Chapter VII- Notes

- <sup>1</sup>H. W. Belmore, Rilke's Craftsmanship(Oxford, England, 1954), p. 170.
- <sup>2</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus, trans. C. F. Macintyre (Los Angeles, 1964), p. ix.
- <sup>3</sup>Bernard Murchland, "A Poet for Now;" Commonweal, December 15, 1961, p. 323.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Belmore, p. 224.
- <sup>6</sup>Werner P. Friederich, An Outline History of German Literature (New York, 1951), p. 236.
- <sup>7</sup>Belmore, p. 224.
- <sup>8</sup>Friederich, p. 236.
- <sup>9</sup>Hans Egon Holthusen, Rainer Maria Rilke: A Study of His Later Poetry(New Haven, Conn., 1952), p. 48.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>12</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet(Princeton, 1956), p. 263.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup>H. F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man(Seattle, 1960), p. 128.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 129.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 127.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>18</sup>Graff, p. 296.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Peters, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

## Chapter VIII

## Style

Rilke's style is an unfolding one, starting from an insignificant beginning and developing in depth and maturity up to his final years. The development of his style followed in the steps of his maturing personality. Actually, Rilke only wanted one thing of poetry and that was to overcome poetry, to go beyond it.

The poetry of Rilke's first period was the production of a gifted but inexperienced youth. "...lonely in spite of many contacts, deprived of the stimulating intercourse with congenial or admired friends, not widely read, inexperienced and as yet untravelled. Nor was he in love."<sup>1</sup> His inexperience was expressed in a shallow, borrowed style, an imitation of the writers of the day: Liliencron, Lenau, Heine, Morike, and C. F. Meyer. Rilke's language was clumsy and insincere. It was of a "lighter texture, expressive of delicate moods; their ending was not so deliberate and could break off almost anywhere." Rilke was experimenting with different types of form at this time. He later disowned his early works because of their clumsiness and lack of sincerity. "Rilke somehow could not sing out, the song was stifled in his throat, and his marvellous technical facility, coupled with this unhappy character, might have turned out to be more of a handicap than an asset had he not striven so hard to find a balance in later years."<sup>2</sup>

The style of the second period, including the years from 1898 to 1907, was marked by a gain in originality and firmness. His range and versatility had increased but he still lacked assurance:



"He is wavering between short, middle and long forms, between simple statements or descriptions, and ornate periphrases." It was during this period that the poet's own melody began to emerge, though his language was still somewhat superficial and he was too concerned with word beauty.

The triumphant third period when the Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus were written will be discussed in more detail from the standpoint of form and language. But before going into that phase of the poet's development, a few things should be pointed out in regard to Rilke's fourth period which ran from 1922 until his death.

With the chief task of his life accomplished, the urge after expression in the great cyclical manner is now appeased, and is followed by a mood of delight in small, song-like poems. The passion and fervor of his elegiac manner peters out, the reflective enterprise, the grand rehearsal of the problem of Being, which had given birth to the Sonnets and Elegies, changes once more into pure sense -- intuition into a purely lyrical mood.

3

### Form

Rilke had a natural talent with form and so was able to do a great deal of experimenting. When he began writing poetry, there existed traditional forms based on classical or national models and less well-defined forms and even free verse. Rilke chose freely from nearly all of these forms, especially in his early works, yet handled them in so novel a manner as to produce quite unusual effects.

Before turning finally to the sonnet and the elegy, Rilke's collections were a "conglomeration of short and longer poems, none of them of great length, strung together rather loosely by dominating motives<sup>4</sup> and the idea inspiring them."

The Italian renaissance sonnet is a short poem of fourteen lines, generally five feet to the line. This rather severe form offers great dramatic possibilities within a small space and because it is so short, the end has a definite relation to the beginning. This form was somewhat foreign to the German language, however, and it is strange that Rilke chose to work with it. "It may seem paradoxical that he should find such liberation in one of the most artificial and restricted poetical forms. The sonnet compelled Rilke to condense the roaming looseness of his modulating works into sharply outlined individual poems."<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Rilke also took some liberties with the Italian sonnet: only eight of the fifty-five Sonnets to Orpheus have five feet per line and they vary in length. "In Rilke's hands the sonnet is no longer an almost archaic 'classical form.' As a form, it did not interest him at all, only as a vehicle for his poetic thought..."<sup>6</sup> A few of Rilke's experiments were earlier tried by the poets Valery and Mallarme.

The other form Rilke was fond of was the elegy. The elegy was originally a poem of indeterminate length, written in elegiac meter: an hexameter followed by a pentameter. Rilke disregarded this meter and merely adhered to the idea that an elegy was a longer poem of a mournful or heroic character. In the Duino Elegies the Fourth and the Eighth are in blank verse, the rest in a free, irregular

meter. Rilke was particularly interested in the solemnity imparted by the form and meter of the elegy. It is interesting to see how Rilke adopted these two classic forms and applied his personality to make them alive and distinct.

### Language

The language Rilke uses is that of German poetry modified in such a way that the reader immediately becomes aware of the extremely personal nature of each word. Rilke used the language in such a unique way that his style almost developed into an idiom, much to his translator's chagrin. "One immediately notices the unmistakable character of his language, by its partiality, self-containedness and self-sufficiency but intensely personal and idiomatic, even in a sense, idiopathic, quality of his lyricism."<sup>7</sup> Rilke seems to have softened the German language, made it more intimate, inward and spiritual.<sup>8</sup> Both his prose and his verse has a typically feminine timbre which may be an outcome of his girlish upbringing. Rilke is certainly a master in delicate shadings and soft expressions. H. W. Belmore, author of Rilke's Craftsmanship, comments that "an admixture of Slav blood as well as his early surroundings accounts for his personal melody which is soft, slow and musical."

Rilke's creativeness is expressed in his choice and use of words. "Rilke can mass words and isolate them, contrast them by sound as well as by meaning, underline their particular quality by rhythm or enjambment, evoke and exhaust their inherent sound, music and significance to the fullest and finest effect they are capable of yielding."<sup>9</sup>

The poet frequently uses alliteration, and assonance to define his inner feelings. In Rilke's poems there is no contrast between image and plainstatement; all becomes imagery. These images he uses to communicate the darkness and inadequacy of human reality.

## Chapter VIII- Notes

- <sup>1</sup>H. W. Belmore, Rilke's Craftsmanship(Oxford, England, 1954),  
p. 172.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup>Hans Egon Holthusen, Rainer Maria Rilke: A Study of His Later  
Poetry(New Haven, Conn., 1952), p. 147.
- <sup>4</sup>Belmore, p. 8.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Holthusen, p. 9.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Belmore, p. 190.

## Chapter IX

## Three Major Works

Rainer Maria Rilke has been called the patron-saint of the loneliness of modern man, but with the poet it was almost a self-imposed loneliness. He set himself off as an omniscient observer, as the prophet and interpreter of the secret nature of man. He courageously assumed the burden of men's lives, the agony and loneliness of which almost proved too much for him. Nearly all of Rilke's adult life was spent searching and waiting for the outward equivalents of his inner vision, that vision being to give meaning to life. It was during the writing of The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge that Rilke first realized his destiny as a poet. Something began to grow inside of him which did not break the surface until twelve years later, in 1922, when over a four-week period he gave total expression to his vision. The creation was titled Duino Elegies. Without taking a second breath, fifty-five Sonnets to Orpheus came to Rilke between the second and the twentieth of February. These three works express all that Rilke deemed important in life.

The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge

Rilke started working on the "Notebooks" in February of 1904 while living in Rome, though it was in Paris that the idea was conceived and the work was completed. In the French capital the poet was struck by the desolate lives of the poor and the terrible sense of solitude that permeated all classes. Paris came to symbolize all

that Rilke hated and feared and it was through the act of writing about these fears that he hoped to liberate himself from them.

The "Notebooks" were completed in 1910 and they are almost the equivalent of Rilke's diary during the years 1904 to 1910. The first quarter of the book in fact is mainly a direct transcript of his diary entries and letters. Rilke was a poet and prose was not his proper medium. And yet the media "forced him to objectify his feelings and to control his craft."<sup>1</sup> Rilke presents the thoughts from his diary in prose form as if they were the reflections of a young Danish poet who has a frightful aversion to big cities like Paris.

The "Notebooks" is the story of a young Dane who is slowly being destroyed by Paris struggling with questions he cannot answer and terror he cannot subdue. As his health declines and his nerves become sensitized to the point of agony, the ordinary conventional boundaries between the real and the unreal, truth and illusion, become more and more indeterminate.

2

In the second half of the book, the diary entries refer to people and events that the Danish youth does not know; these might represent Rilke's own reflections on his reading at the time.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is in the second part of the book that the character Malte becomes more independent of Rilke's personality.

It was because Rilke was so intimately involved with Malte's story that it proved to be very hard to write. "Soon after he had started it Rilke discovered, as he would again with Duino Elegies, that it was quite beyond his power to finish the task. Try as he

might he could not bring himself to gaze steadily into the dreadful depths that had opened up in Paris." <sup>4</sup> The poet had to examine all the phantoms of his childhood and the terrors of his adult life in order to overcome their power. He not only had his fears to deal with, but also the greatness of the suffering around him. As the story develops Malte (Rilke) takes on more and more suffering until finally, like the Christ in his poems, he finds perfect fulfillment. <sup>5</sup> Rilke's philosophy includes recognizing and accepting all that gives pain, which in turn will lead to a type of self-fulfillment, death being the supreme consummation of that fulfillment. This idea is further illustrated in the story through the life of Gaspara Stampa. This woman has been bereaved of her loved one but still her love endures, thus there is a reversal of suffering into glory. <sup>6</sup>

After finishing the "Notebooks" Rilke believed that he would never write again. He called the work a "water-shed," but one in which all the waters had run back one way so that on the other side there was nothing but aridity. <sup>7</sup> He even expressed some regret at having written the work.

...it had to be, I was so indescribably under obligation to write it, no question of choice. But now I feel a little like Raskolnikov after the deed, I don't know at all what is to come now, and I am a little horrified when I reflect that I have written this book.



### Duino Elegies

The work of a born poet like Rilke could not have been completed with a prose creation, though at the time, he was sure that The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge represented all he could give. For two years it almost seemed as if he were right, but then, in 1912, when at Duino Castle, he encountered the angel and conceived the cycle of the "Elegies." At that time Rilke was full of anguish and his soul was sick, yet he transformed this very sickness into poetry and for this reason the verses occupy a unique place in his work. All of the ideas that he had ever harbored are discussed once more in these elegies. The "Elegies" are about Rilke's life but more than that, they are about man's life in general. The poet is mainly concerned with the limitations and deficiencies of human nature, yet at the same time he is praising existence despite these drawbacks. His real purpose in these verses was to find man's place in this world. Of utmost importance in determining such a place is discovering the meaning of love and death for "upon the proper appreciation of these will depend the very quality of our lives." <sup>9</sup>

The first three Elegies were written in 1912 at the beautiful castle Duino which was built high on a cliff overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Rilke called the spot "a mighty symphony of great landscape." <sup>10</sup> The castle served as an ideal stimulus from Rilke who knew that, according to legend, Dante had written some of his works there. It was at Duino that he set down the First Elegy which introduced the themes of the Elegies:

...the contrast between the Angels and Man; the recognition of Man's transitoriness, and the suggestion that this limitation may also be the condition of a special kind of activity; the insistence on the destinies of the great lovers and of the early departed, and, although he is only incidentally mentioned, of the Hero, as keys to the true meaning of life and death, or rather, to their ultimate identity.

11

The First Elegy serves to point out the limitations of man; he goes on to suggest that perhaps good will result from completely understanding these limitations. Rilke then proceeds to examine these limitations in depth. The Second Elegy is mainly concerned with the contrast between the angel and man. The angel possesses a continuous self-awareness, while man has only a fragmentary and intermittent self-awareness. Young lovers do catch a fleeting glimpse of eternity; but, as a rule, man must be content with an incomplete understanding of himself. The Third Elegy also had its beginning early in 1912 at Duino and was completed about a year and a half later in Paris. The transitoriness of love both for mother and maidens is discussed in this elegy, placing emphasis on the physical basis of life which is often so confusing.

It was two and a half years later when Rilke wrote the Fourth Elegy and during this lapse of time two events occurred: the encounter with "Benvenuta" and the beginning of World War I. This is the most bitter and negative of all the Elegies in which Rilke dwells on the divided and distracted nature of the mind. Because of man's inability to achieve undivided consciousness, he is constantly oscillating between what he is doing and what he might be doing. Rilke feels that

because man doesn't concentrate on any one thing, he is playing his role less successfully than a puppet which does the job it is supposed to do. These thoughts on human inadequacy probably were stimulated by the fact that Rilke was unable to help the dying or feed the hungry during the war years.

The final six elegies were finished in 1922 at Duino though parts of them were written at an earlier date. The Fifth Elegy was written last as was inspired by Picasso's painting of "Les Saltinbanques" or "Acrobats."

Picasso's six figures are stylised, timeless, and motionless; they are standing in the middle of a landscape, and it is impossible to say whether they are arriving or departing, beginning, or ending their performance. Rilke's acrobats are definitely about to begin; they are standing on a threadbare carpet, perhaps in some Parisian suburb, and a number of spectators have gathered round. In many ways the acrobats, both in the exercise of their profession and in their relationship with one another, seem to Rilke symbolic of human activity as a whole.

12

Toward the end of this elegy, Rilke gets back to the idea that the true meaning of love can only be understood in relation to death. The close relationship between love and death is further exemplified in the Sixth Elegy which deals with the death of the young hero. The Sixth Elegy also introduces the symbolic fig tree to point out man's wasted effort in glorious flowering rather than in the bearing of fruit. The Seventh Elegy goes on to praise existence, suggesting that the best of life can be realized only by giving the highest possible significance to each moment. This high note of optimism

is followed in the Eighth and Ninth Elegies with further lament over man's limitations. Rilke does seem to accept the transitoriness of human life as a necessary condition. In the final Elegy Rilke recognized man's limitations and suffering, then proceeds to celebrate a triumph over the situation. The poet believed that an affirmation of life could only be expressed after enduring the hard and painful aspects of life. One of the main purposes of the Elegies was "to keep life open towards death and to show the true meaning of love and other human activities as well as pain and sorrow." This final Elegy draws together thoughts expressed in the other verses and sounds a final note of optimism for man's existence.

#### Sonnets to Orpheus

As was already mentioned, the creation of the Sonnets to Orpheus directly followed the Duino Elegies. In many cases the ideas expressed in the Sonnets seem like fragments chipped from the Elegies and developed more fully from a different standpoint. Rilke commented upon the relationship between these two works; "The Elegies and the Sonnets sustain one another at all points and I deem it an infinite grace that I have been able, with the same breath, to swell these two sails; the little rust-colored sail of the Sonnets and  
 13 the gigantic white canvas of the Elegies." Whereas the predominant theme of the Elegies was lament, the Sonnets are concerned with praise. Rilke's plan was to glorify human achievement and show  
 14 how it is regarded by the Angels, Orpheus and the poet." Rilke entreats the reader to go through a transformation or a rebirth from within. In a sense, he calls on the reader to make a pledge

not to be distracted by overt events and concerns, but rather to  
 15  
 listen to one's own inner rhythm.

It might be helpful to point out those factors which influenced Rilke during, and just preceding, the writing of the Sonnets to Orpheus. Three events stimulated the writing of these verses: an encounter with Paul Valéry's poetry, the death of a talented young girl and the finding of an engraving of Orpheus in a shop window. Both Rilke and Valéry believed that "art is the principle of order  
 16  
 in an otherwise meaningless universe." The two works by Valéry that influenced Rilke the most were "L'Ame et la danse" and "Le Cimetière marin." Generally Rilke wrote in the spirit of Valéry's language: "a combination of clear thought with deep feeling pro-  
 17  
 fessed with a certain elated urgency." In regard to the death of the talented young girl by the name of Wera Knoop, Rilke said very little. Evidently he was particularly interested in this girl because she continued to express herself artistically, even though she was becoming more and more incapacitated as a result of her disease. She illustrated perfectly his desire to convert suffering into self-fulfillment. The engraving of Orpheus with the lyre which Rilke noticed in a shop window in Switzerland gave him the figure around which he built the Sonnets. Orpheus was also chosen because of his great mythological significance.

Orpheus represents the ideal poet, since his song is the purest form of praise. Rilke envied Orpheus because according to mythology the musician was a mortal and yet he was able to visit the land of the Gods. Rilke wanted to be among men but have the power to be outside of human fate. A better understanding of the Sonnets might

be gained by first considering the mythological story of Orpheus.

The very earliest musicians were the gods. Hermes made the lyre and gave it to Apollo who drew from it sounds so melodious that when he played in Olympus the gods forgot all else. Pan made the pipe of reeds which can sing as sweetly as the nightingale in spring. The Muses had no instrument peculiar to them, but their voices were lovely beyond compare. Next in order came a few mortals so excellent in their art that they almost equaled the divine performers. Of these by far the greatest was Orpheus. There was no limit to his power when he played and sang. No one and nothing could resist him. Everything animate and inanimate followed him.

On one famous expedition he proved himself most useful. He sailed with Jason on the "Argo," and when the heroes were weary and the rowing was especially difficult he would be aroused to fresh zeal and their oars would smite the sea together in time to the melody. He also saved the Heroes from the Sirens by playing a tune so clear and ringing that it drowned the sound of those lovely fatal voices.

Where he first met and how he wooed the maiden he loved, Eurydice, we are not told. They were married but their joy was brief. Directly after the wedding as the bride walked in a meadow with her bridesmaid, a viper stung her and she died. Orpheus' grief was overwhelming. He could not endure it. He determined to go down to the world of death and try to bring Eurydice back. He dared more than any other man ever dared for his love. He took the fearsome journey to the underworld. There he struck his lyre, and at the sound all that vast multitude were charmed to stillness. No one under the spell of his voice could refuse him anything. They summoned Eurydice and gave her to him, but upon one condition: that he would not look back at her as she followed him, until they had reached the upper world.

Upon stepping out into daylight, Orpheus turned around. It was too soon; she slipped back into the darkness. Desperately he tried to rush after her but the gods would not consent to his entering the world of the dead a second time, while he was still alive. He

was forced to return to earth alone in  
utter desolation. He wandered over the  
land of Thrace until a band of maenads came  
upon him. They slew the gentle musician  
tearing him limb from limb.

18

Rilke became very much involved in this myth and its significance  
to the Sonnets; some critics say that this myth replaced Rilke's  
lost religious faith. He put his faith in Orpheus, the figure that  
aided him in showing that life and death are interdependent states.

## Chapter IX- Notes

<sup>1</sup>H. F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man(Seattle, 1960), p.84.

<sup>2</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to Merline 1919-1922, trans. Violet M. Macdonald(London, 1951), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ronald Gray, The German Tradition in Literature 1871-1945 (Cambridge, England, 1965), p. 264.

<sup>4</sup>Peters, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup>Gray, p. 266.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>7</sup>W. L. Graff, Rainer Maria Rilke: Creative Anguish of a Modern Poet(Princeton, 1956), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup>Gray, p. 269.

<sup>9</sup>Bernard Murchland, "A Poet for Now," Commonweal, December 15, 1961, p. 322.

<sup>10</sup>Magda Von Hattingberg, Rilke and Benvenuta(New York, 1949), p. 109.

<sup>11</sup>Eudo C. Mason, Rilke(London, 1963), p. 89.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>13</sup>Peters, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>Gray, p. 288.

<sup>15</sup>Peters, p. 168.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>17</sup>H. W. Belmore, Rilke's Craftsmanship(Oxford, England, 1954), p. 215.



<sup>18</sup>Edith Hamilton, Mythology(New York, 1942), pp. 103-104.

## Chapter X

## Material For Interpretation

(arranged according to date of publication)

The War-Time Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke. Translated by M. D. Herter Norton.

These letters could be used quite effectively by the interpreter in preparing a program around the theme of "War." Rilke expresses beautifully some universal feelings about the horrors of war. The text contains no introduction, but information about this period is readily available.

Poems. Translated by Jessie Lemont.

This is a collection of short poems drawn from seven of Rilke's books: First Poems, Early Poems, The Book of Pictures, New Poems, The Book of Hours, Sonnets to Orpheus and Later Poems. This text would be most useful to the interpreter who wishes to illustrate how Rilke's poetry changed as he matured, since the selections are taken from the four periods in Rilke's development. The text contains no information about Rilke or the significance of the selected works.

Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke Vol. I & II. Translated by Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton.

These two volumes contain letters to many different individuals

between the years 1892-1926, thus covering most of Rilke's adult life. The interpreter will be especially interested in the letters to Rilke's wife, Clara, and those responding to the young people who asked him for advice. A few of these letters have been used by the writer quite successfully in contests. The introduction is not very helpful, but the translators do include notes on the letters.

Letters to Benvenuta. Translated by Heinz Norden.

This collection contains some of the most expressive letters ever written by Rilke. "Benvenuta" was Rilke's nickname for Magda von Hattingberg, a concert pianist whom he loved passionately for four months. Louis Untermeyer has written an interesting foreward and there is also a touching note for the reader from "Benvenuta."

Ewald Tragy. Edited by Inge D. Halpert.

This is a German text with a brief but informative introduction in English. Ewald Tragy is a semi-autobiographical work which was published in 1896. In this work Rilke purged himself of a spiritual condition prevalent in his early years.

Letters to Merline (1919-1922). Translated by Violet M. Macdonald.

These letters written to Baladine Klossowska ("Merline") are not quite as interesting as are The Letters to a Young Poet, though they do touch on some of the same questions. The correspondence is important because it brings out Rilke's attitude during the time of "waiting" for the Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus.

The text includes a brief introduction by J. B. Leishman.

From the Remains of Count C. W. Translated by J. B. Leishman.

These poems came to Rilke during the late autumn of 1920. Because they were not what he had been expecting, he pretended that they had been dictated to him by a certain Count C. W.. The interpreter will find this collection less difficult to understand and present orally. Leishman has written a fine introduction showing the significance of these poems to the poet's life.

Correspondence In Verse With Erika Mitterer. Translated by N. K. Cruickshank.

This text provides the interpreter with some rather unique material for oral reading. These letters in verse were written over the years 1924 to 1926 to an eighteen year old American girl. Some of Rilke's most intimate and personal poetry appears in these letters.

Letters to a Young Poet. Translated by M. D. Herter Norton.

These letters sent to a young poet over the years 1903-1908 show what Rilke was going through in his own relationship to life and work. The interpreter will find these letters excellent for oral presentation due to their profound beauty and significance. The second part of this text provides material showing the relation between the letters and Rilke's life.

Selected Works (Prose). Translated by G. Craig Houston.

These are significant prose works written between 1902-1922. "The Young Workman's Letter" is particularly valuable in gaining an understanding of Rilke's view on God. A few of these are essays on important philosophical questions. This material would be fine for use in interpretation.

Letters to Frau Gudi Nolke. Translated by Violet M. Macdonald.

These letters were written during Rilke's stay in Switzerland in the latter part of his life. The letters are not very interesting on the whole and probably would not be as effective for oral interpretation. No background material is provided except notes on a few of the letters.

Poems 1906 to 1926. Translated by J. B. Leishman.

This text will allow the interpreter to examine some of Rilke's later poems after his triumph with the "Elegies" and "Sonnets." Mr. Leishman/ includes another excellent introduction discussing Rilke's life and the development of his style.

The Lay and Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke.

Translated by M. D. Herter Norton.

This is a beautiful piece of work that might make a nice choral reading program. It was written in 1899 on "one stormy night" and might be classes as a romantic, rhapsodic account of one of Rilke's early ancestors. Mr. Norton points out in his introduction that "Even in the Second World War 'The Cornet'

went to the front in various pockets of the new soldiery." The work was very popular in Rilke's time and I feel sure it would appeal to the audience of today.

The Book of Hours. Translated by A. L. Peck.

The Book of Hours is composed of three sections of loosely assembled poems dealing with one theme. The work was first published in 1905. It was a direct outcome of his recent trips to Russia and dealt with the deep religious convictions he saw demonstrated there. Eudo C. Mason, author of a critical work on Rilke, has written an excellent introduction to the text. This material would be more difficult to cut and present orally, since the real message is gained only from a complete reading.

Selected Poems. Translated by C. R. Macintyre.

This is another collection of works from different periods in the poet's development. The poems are very short and notes on the verses appear at the end of the book.

Duino Elegies. Translated by J. B. Leishman~~y~~ and Stephen Spender.

This is Rilke's masterpiece. The "Elegies" are very difficult to understand and the interpreter should be careful about select-  
int material for oral reading. The translators include a commentary on each of the elegies which is very helpful. Both the German and English version are included in this text. The predominant theme of the "Elegies" is lament over the limitation and deficiencies of human nature.

Sonnets to Orpheus. Translated by C. F. Macintyre.

These fifty-five sonnets are considered by many to be Rilke's finest work. They came to him in February of 1922 when he was supposedly "possessed by the angel." The interpreter should be sure that he completely understands these verses before attempting to present them orally. In the work Rilke praises all of life, including agony and death. Mr. Macintyre includes an interesting introduction on the substance and form of the "Sonnets." He also provides notes on each sonnet.

The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. Translated by M. D. Herter Norton.

This is a prose semi-autobiographical work written in 1910. It is the story of a Danish youth, a morbid and poor artist, who has a frightful aversion to the godless, big city of Paris. The Dane, of course, is Rilke and the first quarter of the book is mainly a direct transcript of his diary entries. The work contains some beautiful passages about life, love, and work. The text contains some helpful notes.

New Poems. Translated by J. B. Leishman.

New Poems is a collection of the best works of Rilke's middle period when he was concerned with "things." This interest is a direct outcome of Auguste Rodin's influence. The work was published in 1907, a year after Rilke left the job of being Rodin's secretary. Originally there was a New Poems I and a New Poems II which were

later combined. In these poems Rilke is attempting to apprehend the essence of things both animate and inanimate. This book contains an excellent introduction explaining the importance of New Poems in Rilke's development. There are 175 selections presented in both German and English. The selections are quite short but it would be easy for the interpreter to group many poems together around a common theme. The collection contains a title and first line index.



## Chapter XI

### Conclusion

It has been the writer's purpose to construct a resource unit to Rainer Maria Rilke that would serve as a guide to the interpreter. This would seem of value since, although Rilke's work is highly relevant to modern man, it is also quite complex and personal. Even though Rilke was speaking primarily for himself, he does reflect the hopes and fears, the experiences of good and evil, and the inner searching of twentieth century man. The writer was particularly impressed with the depth of feeling conveyed by this poet who never remained intimately involved with any one person for very long and who traveled from city to city making none of them his home. There is little doubt that Rilke set himself apart from men, perhaps even above men. He strives for a position somewhere between men and the angels. The paradox is that from such a position, above and outside of man, he is able to reflect on the deeply personal experiences of his own life as well as those of other men.

Rilke tried to express the inexpressible and for many people his works achieve this goal. Unfortunately there are many more, especially in America, who have not yet learned to appreciate Rilke. Here the interpreter is presented with a challenge: to employ his personal talents as an expressive oral reader of Rilke's works, presenting them in their "intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety." Such a presentation is bound to move many listeners and bring them to a closer understanding of this great poet. It is hoped that this interpreter's guide will inspire the interpreter and

aid him in his choice and preparation of a reading from Rilke's works. Only from a thorough understanding of the particular work, will he be able to communicate to an audience the thoughts and images of Rainer Maria Rilke.

## Appendix

The following table may be found in its complete form in the book, German Literature Since Goethe edited by Ernst Feise and Harry Steinhauser. The writer has included these few pages to give the reader an idea of how Rilke's work fit into the literature of his time.

Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1895	*Ernst Jünger Fontane <i>Effi Briest</i> Hauptmann <i>Florian Geyer</i> Wedekind <i>Erdegeist</i>	Hardy <i>Jude the Obscure</i> Rimbaud <i>Poésies complètes</i> Wilde <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> Yeats <i>Poems</i>	*Paul Hindemith, composer *Carl Orff, composer
1896	Hauptmann <i>Die versunkene Glocke</i>	Chckhov <i>The Seagull</i> France <i>Histoire contemporaine</i> (4 vols. —1901) Fogazzaro <i>Piccolo Mondo Antico</i> Housman <i>A Shropshire Lad</i> Merezhkovski <i>The Death of the Gods</i>	†Anton Bruckner (*1824) composer
1897	George <i>Das Jahr der Seele</i>	Barrès <i>Les Déracinés</i> Gide <i>Les Nourritures terrestres</i> Mallarmé <i>Divagations</i> Merezhkovski <i>The Peasants</i> Régner <i>Jeux rustiques et divins</i> Rostand <i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i>	
1898	*Bertolt Brecht (†1956) Hauptmann <i>Fuhrmann Henschel</i> Holz <i>Phantasus</i> (2 vols. —1899)	*Hardy <i>Wessex Poems</i> Huysmans <i>La Cathédrale</i> James <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> Shaw <i>Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant</i>	
1899	Fontane <i>Der Stechlin</i> George <i>Der Teppich des Lebens</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Theater in Versen</i> Schnitzler <i>Der grüne Kakadu</i>	D'Annunzio <i>La Gioconda</i> Ibsen <i>When We Dead Awaken</i> Kipling <i>Stalky and Co.</i> Moréas <i>Stances</i>	
1900	Hauptmann <i>Michael Kramer</i> <u>Rilke <i>Vom lieben Gott und anderes</i></u> Spitteler <i>Olympischer Frühling</i> (4 vols. —1904) Wedekind <i>Der Marquis von Keith</i>	Brieux <i>La Robe rouge</i> Conrad <i>Lord Jim</i> Chekhov <i>The Three Sisters</i> Deledda <i>Il Vecchio della Montagna</i> Dreiser <i>Sister Carrie</i>	*Ernst Krenek, composer *Hermann Reutter, composer *Hans Ulmann, sculptor *Kurt Weill (†1950) composer
1901	Hauptmann <i>Der rote Hahn</i> Thomas Mann <i>Buddenbrooks</i> (2 vols.) Schnitzler <i>Leutnant Gustl</i>	Bang <i>The Gray House</i> Bazin <i>Les Oberlé</i> Chekhov <i>Uncle Vanya</i> Galdos <i>Electra</i> Kipling <i>Kim</i> Norris <i>The Octopus</i> Shaw <i>Caesar and Cleopatra</i> Strindberg <i>The Dance of Death</i>	†Arnold Böcklin (*1827) painter *Werner Egk, composer
1902	Hauptmann <i>Der arme Heinrich</i> Hesse <i>Gedichte</i> Huch <i>Aus der Triumphgasse</i> <u>Rilke <i>Das Buch der Bilder</i></u> Strauß <i>Freund Hein</i>	Conrad <i>Typhoon</i> D'Annunzio <i>Francesca da Rimini</i> Gide <i>L'Immoraliste</i> Gorki <i>The Lower Depths</i> Lagerlöf <i>Jerusalem</i> (2 vols.) Merezhkovski <i>Leonardo da Vinci</i> Strindberg <i>A Dream Play</i>	*Ernst Wilhelm Nay, painter

Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1903	Hauptmann <i>Rose Bernd</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Das kleine Welt-theater; Elektra</i> Huch <i>Vita somnium breve</i> (= Michael Unger) Heinrich Mann <i>Die Göttingen</i> (3 vols.) Thomas Mann <i>Tonio Kröger</i> <i>Tristan</i> <u>Rilke <i>Von der Armut und vom Tode</i></u> Wedekind <i>Die Blicke der Pandora</i>	Burlesque <i>The Way of All Flesh</i> Blasco Ibañez <i>La Catedral</i> James <i>The Ambassadors</i> London <i>The Call of the Wild</i> Shaw <i>Man and Superman</i> Zola <i>Les Trois Évangiles</i>	*Boris Blacher, composer
1904	Hesse <i>Peter Camenzind</i> Heinrich Mann <i>Flöten und Dolche</i> <u>Rilke <i>Cornet</i></u>	Barrie <i>Peter Pan</i> Chekhov <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> Conrad <i>Nostromo</i> Hudson <i>Green Mansions</i> James <i>The Golden Bowl</i> Strindberg <i>To Damascus</i> (3 parts, since 1898)	
1905	Heinrich Mann <i>Professor Unrat</i> Morgenstern <i>Galgenlieder</i>	Gorki <i>The Mother</i> Marinetti <i>Manifesto of Futurism</i> Merezhkovski <i>Christ and Antichrist</i> (trilogy of novels, since 1895); <i>Peter and Alexis</i> Rolland <i>Jean Christophe</i> (10 vols. —1913) Shaw <i>Major Barbara</i> Synge <i>Riders to the Sea</i> Wilde <i>De Profundis</i>	*Karl Amadeus Hartmann, composer †Adolf von Menzel (*1815) painter
1906	Hauptmann <i>Und Pippa tanzt</i> Hesse <i>Unterm Rad</i>	Galsworthy <i>The Man of Property</i> Pascoli <i>●di e Inni</i> Shaw <i>The Doctor's Dilemma</i> Sinclair <i>The Jungle</i>	
1907	George <i>Der siebente Ring</i> Carl Hauptmann <i>Einhart der Lächler</i> Hesse <i>Diesseits</i> Miegel <i>Balladen und Lieder</i> Mönnert <i>Aeon</i> (3 vols. —1911) <u>Rilke <i>Neue Gedichte I</i></u>	Artsybashev <i>Sanin</i> Bazin <i>Le Bld qui lève</i> Conrad <i>The Secret Agent</i> Rolland <i>Beethoven; Michelange</i> Strindberg <i>The Ghost Sonata</i> Synge <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	*Wolfgang Fortner, composer
1908	<u>Rilke <i>Neue Gedichte II</i></u> Schäfer <i>Anekdoten</i> Schnitzler <i>Der Weg ins Freie</i>	Andreyev <i>The Seven That Were Hanged</i> Barrie <i>What Every Woman Knows</i> Bennett <i>The Old Wives' Tale</i> France <i>L'Ile des Pingouins</i> Hardy <i>The Dynasts</i> (3 parts, since 1903) Maeterlinck <i>L'Oiseau bleu</i> Romain <i>La Vie unanime</i>	*Karl Hartung, sculptor

Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1909	†Detlev von Liliencron (*1844) Busch <i>Schein und Sein</i> Thomas Mann <i>Königliche Hoheit</i> Montbert <i>Der himmlische Zecher</i> <u>Rilke <i>Requiem</i></u> Wassermann <i>Caspar Hauser</i>	Barrès <i>Colette Baudoche</i> Caudel <i>Cinq grands odes</i> Galsworthy <i>Strife</i> Gide <i>La Porte étroite</i> Pound <i>Exultations</i> Wells <i>Tono-Bungay</i>	
1910	Carossa <i>Gedichte</i> Däubler <i>Das Nordlicht</i> (3 vols.) Hauptmann <i>Der Narr in Christo; Emanuel Quint</i> Heinrich Mann <i>Die kleine Stadt</i> Morgenstern <i>Palmström</i> <u>Rilke <i>Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge</i> (2 vols.)</u> Spitteler <i>Olympischer Frühling</i> (revised)	Meredith <i>Last Poems</i> Péguy <i>Notre Jeunesse</i>	
1911	Hauptmann <i>Die Ratten</i> Heym <i>Der ewige Tag</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Alkestis; Jedermann</i> Kaiser <i>Die jüdische Witwe</i> Sorge <i>Der Bettler</i> Sternheim <i>Die Hose</i> Werfel <i>Der Weltfreund</i>	Caudel <i>L'Otage</i> Dreiser <i>Jenny Gerhardt</i> St. John Perse <i>Éloges</i> Wharton <i>Ethan Frome</i>	*Georg Meistermann, painter
1912	†Georg Heym (*1877) Barlach <i>Der tote Tag</i> Benn <i>Morgue</i> Heym <i>Umbra vitae</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Ariadne auf Naxos; Der Rosenkavalier</i> Sternheim <i>Bürger Schippel</i> Strauß <i>Der nackte Mann</i>	Alain-Fournier <i>Les Grands Meaulnes</i> Caudel <i>L'Annonce faite à Marie</i> de la Mare <i>The Listeners</i> France <i>Les Dieux ont soif</i> Shaw <i>Pygmalion</i>	
1913	George <i>Der Stern des Bundes</i> Hauptmann <i>Festspiel in deutschen Reimen</i> Kafka <i>Der Heizer</i> Kellermann <i>Der Tunnel</i> Thomas Mann <i>Der Tod in Venedig</i> <u>Rilke <i>Das Marienleben</i></u> Trakl <i>Gedichte</i> Werfel <i>Wir sind</i>	Apollinaire <i>Alcools</i> Lawrence <i>Sons and Lovers</i> Proust <i>A la Recherche du temps perdu</i> (—1928) Shaw <i>Androcles and the Lion</i>	*Heinz Trökes, painter
1914	Leonhard Frank <i>Die Räuberbande</i> Hauptmann <i>Der Bogen des Odysseus</i> Kaiser <i>Die Bürger von Calais</i> Heinrich Mann <i>Der Untertan</i> Schröder <i>Deutsche Oden</i> Sternheim <i>Der Snob</i>	Andreyev <i>He Who Gets Slapped</i> France <i>La Révolte des anges</i> Frost <i>North of Boston</i> Joyce <i>Dubliners</i>	

Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1915	Döblin <i>Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun</i> Edschmid <i>Die seels Mündungen</i> Hesse <i>Kmulp</i> Meyrink <i>Der Golem</i>	Bunin <i>The Gentleman from San Francisco</i> Conrad <i>Victory</i> Dreiser <i>The Genius</i> Masters <i>Spoon River Anthology</i> Maugham <i>Of Human Bondage</i> Richardson <i>Pilgrimage</i> (9 vols. —1927) Woolf <i>The Voyage Out</i>	
1916	Benn <i>Gehirne</i> Brod <i>Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott</i> Kafka <i>Die Verwandlung</i> Unruh <i>Ein Geschlecht</i>	Barbusse <i>Le Feu</i> Blasco Ibañez <i>Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis</i> Moore <i>The Brook Kerith</i>	
1917	Goering <i>Seeschlacht</i> Kaiser <i>Die Koralle</i> Heinrich Mann <i>Die Armen</i>	Hamsun <i>Growth of the Soil</i> Joyce <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> Pasternak <i>My Sister Life</i> Shaw <i>Heartbreak House</i> Valéry <i>La jeune Parque</i>	
1918	Barlach <i>Der arme Vetter</i> Döblin <i>Wadzecks Kampf mit der Dampfmaschine</i> Hauptmann <i>Der Ketzer von Soana</i> Kaiser <i>Gas I</i>	Blok <i>The Twelve</i> Hopkins <i>Poems</i>	
1919	Hesse <i>Demian</i> Wassermann <i>Christian Walmschaffe</i>	Anderson <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> Cabell <i>Jurgen</i> Supervielle <i>Poèmes</i>	
1920	†Richard Dehmel (*1863) Ernst <i>Komödianten- und Spitzbubengeschichten</i> Hauptmann <i>Der weiße Heiland</i> Jünger <i>In Stahlgewittern</i> Kaiser <i>Gas II; Der gerettete Alkinades</i> Schaeffer <i>Helianth</i> Sternheim <i>Europa</i> Strauß <i>Der Schleier</i> Werfel <i>Spiegelmensch</i>	Lewis <i>Main Street</i> O'Neill <i>The Emperor Jones</i> Pirandello <i>Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore</i> Undset <i>Kristin Lavransdatter</i> (3 vols. —1922) Valéry <i>Le Cimetière marin; Odes</i> Wharton <i>The Age of Innocence</i>	



Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1921	Hauptmann <i>Indipohdi</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Der Schwierige</i> Toller <i>Masse Mensch</i>	Moore <i>Heloise and Abelard</i> Shaw <i>Back to Methuselah</i> A. N. Tolstoi <i>The Path of Suffering</i> (—1924)	
1922	Barlach <i>Der Findling</i> Brecht <i>Trommeln in der Nacht</i> Carossa <i>Eine Kindheit</i> Hesse <i>Siddharta</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Das Salzburger große Welttheater</i> Ina Seidel <i>Das Labyrinth</i>	T. S. Eliot <i>The Waste Land</i> Joyce <i>Ulysses</i> Lewis <i>Babbitt</i> Rolland <i>L'Âme enchantée</i> (7 vols. —1933) Valéry <i>Charmes</i> Woolf <i>Jacob's Room</i> Yeats <i>Later Poems</i> Martin du Gard <i>Les Thibault</i> (8 vols. —1940)	
1923	<u>Rilke <i>Deutscher Elegien; Sonette an Orpheus</i></u> Salten <i>Bambi</i> Werfel <i>Verdi</i>	Cather <i>A Lost Lady</i> Huxley <i>Antic Hay</i> Mauriac <i>Génitrice</i> M. Ilay <i>The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems</i> Pasternak <i>Themes and Variations</i> Romain Rolland <i>Knock</i> Shaw <i>St. Joan</i>	
1924	†Franz Kafka (*1883) Barlach <i>Die Sündflut</i> Carossa <i>Rumänisches Tagebuch</i> Döblin <i>Berge, Meere und Giganten</i> Hauptmann <i>Die Insel der großen Mutter</i> Kafka <i>Ein Hungerkünstler</i> Thomas Mann <i>Der Zauberberg</i> (2 vols.) Schnitzler <i>Fräulein Else</i> Spitteler <i>Prometheus der Dulder</i>	Forster <i>A Passage to India</i> Webb <i>Precious Bane</i>	
1925	Hauptmann <i>Veland</i> Hofmannsthal <i>Der Turm</i> Kafka <i>Der Prozeß</i> Kolbenheyer <i>Paracelsus</i> (3 vols. since 1907) Heinrich Mann <i>Der Kopf</i> Neumann <i>Der Patriot</i> Zuckmayer <i>Der fröhliche Weinberg</i>	Dreiser <i>An American Tragedy</i> (2 vols.) Fitzgerald <i>The Great Gatsby</i> O'Casey <i>Junio and the Paycock</i> Superville <i>Gravitations</i> Woolf <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	*Hans Werner Henze, composer
1926	†Rainer Maria Rilke (*1875) Grimm <i>Volk ohne Raum</i> Hauptmann <i>Dorothea Angermann</i> Kafka <i>Das Schloß</i>	Babel <i>Red Cavalry</i> Bernanos <i>Sous le Soleil de Satan</i> Gide <i>Les Faux-monnayeurs</i> D. H. Lawrence <i>The Plumed Serpent</i>	

Date	German Literature	Other Literatures	German Artists
1926	Thomas Mann <i>Unordnung und frühes Leid</i> Neumann <i>Der Teufel</i>	T. E. Lawrence <i>Seven Pillars of Wisdom</i> O'Casey <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> St. John Perse <i>Anabase</i>	
1927	Benn <i>Gesammelte Gedichte</i> Brecht <i>Hauspostille</i> Hauptmann <i>Till Eulenspiegel</i> Hesse <i>Der Steppenwolf</i> Kafka <i>Amerika</i> Zweig <i>Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa</i>	Cather <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> Garcia Lorca <i>Canciones</i> Mauriac <i>Thérèse Desqueroix</i> E. A. Robinson <i>Tristram</i> Woolf <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	
1928	Brecht <i>Die Dreigroschenoper</i> Carossa <i>Verwandlungen einer Jugend</i> Le Fort <i>Das Schweisstuch der Veronika I</i> Kaiser <i>Die Lederköpfe</i> Reim <i>Krieg</i> Schnitzler <i>Therese</i> Seghers <i>Der Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara</i>	Benét <i>John Brown's Body</i> Garcia Lorca <i>Romancero gitano</i> Huxley <i>Point Counterpoint</i> D. H. Lawrence <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> Malraux <i>Les Conquérants</i> O'Neill <i>Strange Interlude</i> Sandburg <i>Selected Poems</i> Sholokhov <i>And Quiet Flows the Don</i>	
1929	†Hugo von Hofmannsthal (*1874) †Arno Holz (*1863) Brecht <i>Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny</i> Döblin <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> George <i>Das neue Reich</i> Jünger <i>Das abenteuerliche Herz</i> Remarque <i>Im Westen nichts Neues</i> Schäfer <i>Gesammelte Anekdoten</i> Werfel <i>Barbara oder die Frömmigkeit</i>	Bridges <i>The Testament of Beauty</i> Cocteau <i>Les Enfants terribles</i> Faulkner <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> Giraudoux <i>Amphytrion 38</i> Hemingway <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> Wolfe <i>Look Homeward Angel</i> Woolf <i>Orlando</i>	
1930	Grimm <i>Der Richter in der Karu</i> Hesse <i>Narziss und Goldmund</i> Kästner <i>Ein Mann gibt Auskunft</i> Le Fort <i>Der Papst aus dem Ghetto</i> Musil <i>Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften I</i> Ina Seidel <i>Das Wunschkind</i>	Auden <i>Poems</i> Dos Passos <i>U.S.A.</i> (3 vols. —1936) Eliot <i>Ash Wednesday</i> Pound <i>A Draft of XXX Cantos</i> Edith Sitwell <i>Collected Poems</i>	
1931	†Arthur Schnitzler (*1863) Broch <i>Die Schlafwandler I, II</i> Leonhard Frank <i>Von drei Millionen drei</i> Hesse <i>Der Weg nach Innen</i> Kästner <i>Fabian</i> Le Fort <i>Die Letzte am Schafott</i> Schickele <i>Das Erbe am Rhein</i> (3 vols. since 1925) Zuckmayer <i>Der Hauptmann von Köpenick</i>	Faulkner <i>Sanctuary</i> Garcia Lorca <i>Poema del cante jondo</i> O'Neill <i>Mourning Becomes Electra</i> Woolf <i>The Waves</i>	

## Chronology of Rilke's Life

1875 - 1926

- 1875 Rilke was born in Prague on December 4, of German parentage. Rilke's father, Josef, who had hoped to be an officer in the Austrian army, was an inspector of railroads in Prague. His mother, Sofia(Phia) Entz, was the daughter of a well-to-do businessman.
- 1884 Rilke's parents separated. Phia Rilke became responsible for the boy's education.
- 1886 Rilke entered the military school at St. Polten in preparation for a military career. His mother, against her husband's wishes, encouraged Rilke's youthful attempts to write poetry.
- 1891 Rilke left Mahrisch-Weisskirchen because of constant illness and intended to take up a business career. He entered the school of commerce at Linz. A Viennese journal published his first poem.
- 1892 Rilke worked in his uncle's law firm and decided to study law.
- 1893 Rilke had a love affair with Valery David-Rhonfeld. He wrote and published a great deal of poetry hoping to convince his relatives that he could earn his living as a writer.
- 1894 Rilke won a twenty-mark prize in a poetry contest for his poem "Evening;" published his first book of poems, Life and Songs, now forgotten.
- 1895 Rilke studied philosophy, literature, and history of art at the German University of Prague. In December he published his book of poems, An Offering to the Lares, later included after much revision in his collected works.
- 1896 Rilke wrote plays, stories, and poems. His play, Now and in the Hour of Dying, was performed in the Deutsches Volkstheater in Prague. He published "Wegwarten" (Wild Chicary), "Songs Given to the People;" and another book of poems, Crowned with Dreams. He became acquainted with such well-known writers as Ludwig Ganghofer, Detlev von Liliencron, Max Halbe, Wilhelm von Scholz, Theodore Fontane, and others who encouraged his literary endeavors.
- 1897 Rilke moved to Munich where he met Lou Andrea Salome, fourteen years his senior. They soon became lovers. When Lou moved to Berlin in the fall, Rilke followed her. Lou prepared him

for his forthcoming journey to Italy. In December he published Advent, a book of poems now included in his collected works. This date marks the end of the first period of his poetic development.

- 1898 Rilke traveled to Italy: Florence, Arco, Viareggio. In Italy he met Stefan George, who criticized him for having published so much. In Viareggio he wrote his "Maiden Songs." He published a two act play, Without the Present, and a collection of short stories, At the Edge of Life. He wrote the first version of "The White Princess."
- 1899 Rilke traveled to Russia with Lou and her husband from April to June. He made the acquaintance of Pasternak, Tolstoy, and Prince Trubetzkay. He published "Two Stories of Prague" and a book of poems In My Honor. He wrote in "one stormy night" The Tale of Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke; also wrote in seven successive nights "The Tales of God;" also wrote the majority of the poems contained in The Monkish Life. He studied Russian and the history of Russian art.
- 1900 Rilke took his second journey to Russia with Lou from May to August: Moscow, Kiev, Tula, visits with Tolstoy. Upon return from Russia he visited Worpswede where he met the artists Otto Modersohn, Fritz Mackensen, Heinrich Vogeler, Paula Becker, and Clara Westhoff.
- 1901 In March, Rilke married Clara Westhoff. Their daughter, Ruth, was born December 12. The couple lived at Westerwede near Bremen. There, between September 18 and 25, he wrote "The Book of Pilgrimage." He sent the manuscript of "The Book of Pictures" to his publisher.
- 1902 Rilke wrote reviews, newspaper articles, and a monograph on "Worpswede." He repeated his requests for work or money. He was unable to support his family as a free lance and so, accepted a commission to write a monograph on Rodin. In August he left for Paris. He published "The Last Ones," three sketches, his play "Daily Life," and "The Book of Pictures."
- 1903 Rilke traveled to Italy. He stayed in Viareggio between April 13 and 20 and wrote "The Book of Poverty and Death." He returned to Paris where he felt lonely and isolated. He corresponded with Lou Andreas Salome about his Parisian nightmares. Rilke began planning for the "Notebooks." In September he left Paris for Rome. He published his monograph, "Auguste Rodin."
- 1904 Rilke traveled to Scandinavia. Upon invitation of Ellen Key, he spent June to December in Denmark and Sweden. He

published Stories of God and the first version of The Tale of Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke.

- 1905 After a brief reunion with his family in Oberneuland, he fell sick and spent March in a sanatorium near Dresden. He met Countess Luise Schwerin, whose friendship and patronage supported him during these difficult years. Through her he met his other patrons, Baron Uexkull and Karl von der Heydt. In September Rodin invited him to come to Paris. He published Book of Hours.
- 1906-7 Rilke's father died. He left Paris in July and visited Flanders. He spent winter and spring on Capri as the guest of Mrs. Alice Faehndrich. Upon the latter's suggestion, he translated Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese. He published New Poems I. He returned to Paris in May.
- 1908 Rilke went to Capri again in the spring. He spent the summer in Paris continuing his work on "Malte." He published New Poems II. This date marks the end of the second period of his poetic development.
- 1909 From Paris he traveled to Chartres and Province. He published Early Poems, a revised version of his first verses.
- 1910 Rilke spent January to March in Leipzig as guest of his publisher, Kippenberg. He put the finishing touches on the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. This year marks the beginning of his friendship with his great patroness, Princess Mary von Thurn und Taxis, and with Andre Gide. In the late fall he traveled to North Africa.
- 1911 Rilke spent January in Egypt: Cairo and Karnak. He spent April in Paris. In the winter he was a guest of Princess Taxis at Castle Duino where he conceived the cycle of the Duino Elegies.
- 1912 Rilke stayed in Venice from May to September. He held frequent meetings with Eleonora Duse. In the winter he traveled to Spain: Toledo, Cordoba, Seville, Ronda, Madrid.
- 1913 Rilke spent the spring in Paris. In the summer he traveled through Germany. In late autumn he went to Paris where he wrote the "Third Duino Elegy." In the 1913 he made his friendship with Magda von Hattingberg ("Benvenuta"). He published First Poems.
- 1914 Rilke stayed in Paris until July 20. He translated Gide's Return of the Prodigal Son. He left Paris for Munich, not suspecting that he could not return. His books, papers, and personal possessions were in Paris at the outbreak of the war.

- 1915 There was held a public sale of Rilke's property in Paris. He wrote the "Fourth Elegy" in November while at Munich. He was drafted into the army and served as a clerk in the archives of the Austrian War Ministry in Vienna from December to June 1916.
- 1916 Rilke was discharged from the army upon petition of his friends. He translated twenty-four Sonnets of Louise Labé.
- 1917-18 Rilke stayed in Munich with an occasional journey to Berlin. He waited here for the war to end.
- 1919 Rilke left Germany for Switzerland on a lecture tour upon invitation of Swiss admirers. He read his works in Zurich, Lucerne, Basel, and Winterthur. In Winterthur he met Hans and Werner Reinhart whose friendship lasted for the rest of his life.
- 1920 Rilke traveled to Venice and Paris. In October he went to Switzerland where Colonel Ziegler put Castle Berg am Ircherl at his disposal. He tried, unsuccessfully to work on the Duino Elegies.
- 1921 In the company of his friend Baladine Klossowska("Merline"), Rilke discovered the little medieval "Chateau de Muzot sur Sierre," which Werner Reinhart rented for him and gave him as a permanent home.
- 1922 At Muzot in February, he completed the cycle of the Duino Elegies and wrote at the same time fifty-five Sonnets to Orpheus. This date marked the end of the third of his poetic periods of development.
- 1923 Rilke spent most of this year at Muzot where his friends visited him: Princess Taxis, Kippenberg, Werner Reinhart. He spent the end of the year in the Sanatorium Valmont sur Territet.
- 1924 On April 6, Paul Valéry visited Rilke at Muzot. Rilke's wife, Clara, whom he had not seen since 1918, and many of his other French, German, and Swiss friends also visited. From November 24 to January 8, 1925, Rilke was again at Valmont for treatment of an unknown disease. He published three of his French poems in Valéry's journal, Commerce.
- 1925 Rilke spent January to August in Paris. He met with André Gide, Charles du Bos, Edmond Jaloux, and other French writers. He discussed the French translation of "Malte" with Maurice Betz. He went to Valmont in December.
- 1926 From July to August Rilke stayed at Ragaz. He spent October to November at Muzot. He published Vergers suivis de quatrains valaisans. On November 30 he went to Valmont where his illness

was finally diagnosed as leukemia. He died December 29 and was buried in the cemetery of Raron on Sunday, January 2, 1927.

This chronology was originally presented in H. F. Perter's book, Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man. The writer has made some additions and omissions.

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