

RAINER

Duino Elegies

MARIA

The Sonnets to Orpheus

RILKE

Edited and Translated by

STEPHEN MITCHELL

Duino Elegies
AND
The Sonnets to Orpheus

Rainer Maria Rilke

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

Stephen Mitchell

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A Note on Using This eBook

This is a dual language edition. To be brought to the corresponding original German text, simply click or tap on the English-language heading at the beginning of each elegy or sonnet. To return to the translation, simply tap or click on the German heading. Notes for the foreword and selected explanatory notes for phrases in the text as well as more general notes are provided in English. To access the notes, again, simply tap or click on the link Notes (Notizen) at the end of each verse. These are blind notes, referring to a particular phrase; references to words and phrases in the poems also include line numbers; by tapping those, you will be returned to place you left off reading.

Foreword

The Duino Elegies are widely acknowledged to be the greatest poem of the twentieth century; The Sonnets to Orpheus, in their subtler way (string quartets to the Elegies' full orchestra), are at least as great. Is it possible to speak of them and not speak in superlatives? "I have always found the Elegies hard to compare or even read with our own best poems," Robert Lowell once said.

Entire books have been written about each of these masterpieces. My job here is to write a brief foreword telling the story of their composition. The most useful place to begin is with the angel of the Elegies.

Rilke wrote about angels all his life. His earlier angels are lovely: supple-meaning and light-winged, as even the most graceful Leonardo or Raphael angel can't be, since, rather than in the gravitas of paint, these angels are embodied in the invisible element of words. The most charming of the early angels is the speaker in a poem called "Annunciation" (it is Gabriel, of course, though Rilke doesn't name him). Standing in front of Mary in the little room that has suddenly overflowed with his presence, the angel is so enchanted by her ripening beauty that he forgets the message he was sent to announce.

But even in these poems there are hints of the later Rilkean angel. The strongest hint appears in "The Angel," from New Poems. Like Jacob's angel, the figure here is the embodiment of challenge, who "with tilted brow dismisses / anything that circumscribes or binds." The poem ends with an image of life-transforming and self-shattering confrontation. If you were to give yourself over to this angel, Rilke tells the reader, some day, some night, the angel's light hands

kämen denn ... dich ringender zu prüfen,
und gingen wie Erzürnte durch das Haus
und griffen dich als ob sie dich erschüfen
und brächen dich aus deiner Form heraus.

would come more fiercely to interrogate you,
and rush to seize you blazing like a star,
and bend you as if trying to create you,
and break you open, out of who you are.

But it is in the Elegies that the image of the angel becomes truly awe-inspiring. Once you begin to live inside the poem, Rilke's angels seem more and more

stunningly authentic. You have the sense that they are not a mere literary symbol, that whatever reality it is that sings its dark music through the classical German dactyls of the verse, it is something that Rilke has penetrated into, not invented.

Rilke had always been a prolific poet. But the completion of his famous novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, in Paris in 1910, had left him shattered and hollow. The book had immersed his imagination in the most difficult realities that he associated with big-city life: loneliness, poverty, alienation, illness, paranoia, despair. His hero's, and his own, sense of ego boundaries grew so paper-thin that, in a weird variation of the Golden Rule, he found himself involuntarily taking on the spiritual devastation of his neighbors, of the whole city. By the time he had finished, he was exhausted. He wandered around Europe for two years, confused, more restless and unhappy than usual, terminally stuck. He wrote a few poems, but they were nothing much. He thought of giving up poetry, of enrolling in medical school. Nothing seemed to make sense.

Then, in the winter of 1912, he received an invitation from a wealthy friend, Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, to spend a few months at one of her homes, Duino Castle on the Adriatic Sea. She stayed for a while with a large party of family, guests, and servants then left him there alone.

One morning in late January—the story comes to us from Rilke, through the princess's memoir of him—he received a troublesome business letter, which he had to take care of right away. Outside, a violent north wind blew, though the sun was shining. He climbed down to the bastions, which, jutting out to the east and west, were connected to the foot of the castle by a narrow pathway along cliffs that dropped off two hundred feet into the sea. He walked back and forth, absorbed in the problem of how to answer the letter. Then, all at once, he stopped. From the raging wind, what seemed to him an inhuman voice, the voice of an angel, was calling: "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' hierarchies?" He took out the notebook that he always carried with him and wrote down these words, and a few lines that followed, as if he were taking dictation. Then he climbed back up to his room, set his notebook aside, and (I love this detail) with true Germanic thoroughness, orderly even in the face of cosmic inspiration, first answered the business letter and then continued the poem. By the evening, the whole of "The First Elegy" had been written.

What kind of event was this? That Rilke actually heard the voice of a nonphysical intelligence coming from the storm is possible. That the voice was Rilke's own is certain: it speaks with the poet's "I," in the gorgeous classical rhythms of Rilkean verse. But there is no either/or here. In such intensities of

experience, the very idea of outside or inside is irrelevant; psychic resonance spreads through the whole universe of matter; what is given by God is given by the innermost self. Whatever the voice was, angel and self, it came from the depths of life, and it came with an incontrovertible sense of mission. Rilke knew that this poem was to be his own justification.

The angel of the Duino Elegies is a figure of total fulfillment, total innerness. In a letter of 1915, Rilke talks about his experience of the Spanish landscape as his own personal analogy to angelic perception:

There, the external Thing itself—tower, mountain, bridge—already possessed the extraordinary, unsurpassable intensity of those inner equivalents through which one might have wished to represent it. Everywhere appearance and vision merged, as it were, in the object; in each one of them a whole world was revealed, as though an angel who encompassed all space were blind and gazing into himself. This, a world seen no longer from the human point of view, but inside the angel, is perhaps my real task.

“The First Elegy” begins with the voice that Rilke heard in the wind, his own uncried cry of longing and intimation:

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.

Commenting on this passage in a letter written thirteen years later, Rilke describes the angel in greater detail:

The “angel” of the Elegies has nothing to do with the angel of the Christian heaven (it has more in common with the angel figures of Islam). The angel of the Elegies is that creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, which we are accomplishing, already appears in its completion. For the angel of the Elegies, all the towers and palaces of the past are existent because they have long been invisible, and the still-standing towers and

bridges of our reality are already invisible, although still (for us) physically lasting. The angel of the Elegies is that being who guarantees the recognition in the invisible of a higher order of reality.—Therefore “terrifying” for us, because we, its lovers and transformers, still cling to the visible.—All the worlds in the universe are plunging into the invisible as into their next-deeper reality; a few stars intensify immediately and pass away in the infinite consciousness of the angels—, others are entrusted to beings who slowly and laboriously transform them, in whose terrors and delights they attain their next invisible realization. We, let it be emphasized once more, we, in the sense of the Elegies, are these transformers of the earth; our whole existence, the flights and plunges of our love, everything, qualifies us for this task (beside which there is, essentially, no other).

The primary description of angels in the Elegies—and by far the most beautiful description of them in all literature—appears at the beginning of “The Second Elegy.” (The reference is to the apocryphal Book of Tobit, in which the archangel Raphael, appearing in human form, offers himself as a guide to the young man Tobias on an important journey.)

Every angel is terrifying. And yet, alas,
I invoke you, almost deadly birds of the soul,
knowing about you. Where are the days of Tobias,
when one of you, veiling his radiance, stood at the front door,
slightly disguised for the journey, no longer appalling;
(a young man like the one who curiously peeked through the window).
But if the archangel now, perilous, from behind the stars
took even one step down toward us: our own heart, beating
higher and higher, would beat us to death. Who are you?

Early successes, Creation’s pampered favorites,
mountain-ranges, peaks growing red in the dawn
of all Beginning,—pollen of the flowering godhead,
joints of pure light, corridors, stairways, thrones,
space formed from essence, shields made of ecstasy, storms
of emotion whirled into rapture, and suddenly, alone,
mirrors: which scoop up the beauty that has streamed from their face
and gather it back, into themselves, entire.

Here the angel becomes pure metaphor, protean, lucid, breathless. Critics have written long essays about these glorious lines, with their mixture of love and dread

and almost unbearable longing. Ultimately, though, there is not much one can say. One can only point and admire.

“The Second Elegy” was finished by the end of January 1912, along with the first stanza of the Tenth; the next year Rilke wrote three-quarters of the Sixth, and then the Third; and the Fourth in November 1915. But even when the momentum became sporadic and, after 1915, stopped altogether, with only four Elegies completed, the certainty of his task remained. It would be a long, excruciating lesson in patience.

When life occurs at this level of intensity, biography turns into myth. The myth here resembles that of Psyche and Eros. The god appears, then is gone; and the abandoned soul must spend seven years wandering in his traces. Finally, she arrives. The god enters, she is caught up in a fulfillment beyond her most extravagant hope. After this, a happy ending seems unnecessary.

Rilke moved from city to city during and after the war, holding to his certainty and his despair. When at last, at the Château de Muzot, he found the protected solitude he needed in order to plunge back into himself, he had no suspicion that another masterpiece would arise along with the rest of the Elegies, as their prelude and complement.

On February 2, 1922, he disappeared into the god. It was, he later wrote, “a hurricane in the spirit.” For days and nights at a time he stayed in his upstairs room, pacing back and forth, “howling unbelievably vast commands and receiving signals from cosmic space and booming out to them my immense salvos of welcome.” By February 5, he had written the twenty-six poems of the first part of *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, “the most mysterious, the most enigmatic dictation I have ever endured and achieved; the whole first part was written down in a single breathless obedience.” By February 9, he had finished the Elegies. By February 23, he was left with an additional Elegy that replaced the existing Fifth, the brilliant essay on God and sexuality called “The Young Workman’s Letter,” four shorter poems, and thirty-eight more Sonnets.

This is surely the most astonishing burst of inspiration in the history of literature. Inspiration, because it seems fundamentally different from what other modern poets, even the greatest ones, have known as the process of writing, with all its rawness and groping toward the genuine. There was nothing tentative here. These poems were born perfect; hardly a single word needed to be changed. The whole experience seems to have taken place at an archaic level of consciousness, where the poet is literally the god’s or muse’s scribe. We are in the presence of something so intensely real that all our rational categories are useless. Who can

respond to it without a shudder of awe? Rilke himself did. On February 9, he wrote to his publisher:

My dear friend,
late, and though I can barely manage to hold the pen, after several days of huge obedience in the spirit—, you must be told, today, right now, before I try to sleep:
I have climbed the mountain!
At last! The Elegies are here, they exist....

So.

Dear friend, now I can breathe again and, calmly, go on to something manageable. For this was larger than life—during these days and nights I have howled as I did that time in Duino—but, even after that struggle there, I didn't know that such a storm out of mind and heart could come over a person! That one has endured it! that one has endured.

Enough. They are here.

I went out into the cold moonlight and stroked the little tower of Muzot as if it were a large animal—the ancient walls that granted this to me.

In a sense, completing the Elegies meant leaving them behind. The tragic gives place to the rhapsodic; lament modulates into ecstatic appreciation of what can be achieved within our human limitations. “Praise this world to the angel,” Rilke says in “The Ninth Elegy,”

not the unsayable one,
you can't impress him with glorious emotion; in the universe
where he feels more powerfully, you are a novice. So show him
something simple which, formed over generations,
lives as our own, near our hand and within our gaze.

And in The Sonnets to Orpheus he sings in utter acceptance of everything that is alive and earthly. Have there ever been poems so radiant with sensuous experience? The taste of an apple, a horse galloping across a meadow, a flower opening at dawn—all are so intensely present in their ephemeral beauty that outer turns into inner, sense into spirit. The wholeness, the transfigured body of these poems, is a return

to the simplest human experiences of seeing and breathing, beyond thought: the immense, vibrant, dangerous world that every child lives in. Though it is transcendence, it leaves nothing behind. It is pure precisely because it goes nowhere.

Rilke's angels, those desolating perfections, are not central to the later Elegies, and in the Sonnets they don't appear at all. They were no longer necessary. Through his long years of patience, he had exorcised them. By the end of the Sonnets, Rilke is no longer addressing Orpheus, the primal poet. He has become Orpheus and can speak to his personal self from the center of the universe. The cycle is completed. Life resolves in a single breath, and the tree of song that sprang up in the first line of the first Sonnet is transformed into the serene, rooted I am that is the Sonnets' last word, the word uttered at every moment by each particular form, and also the name of God.

[Notes](#)

Duino Elegies

(1923)

The property of Princess Marie von Thum und Taxis-Hohenlohe
(1912/1922)

THE FIRST ELEGY

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror,
which we still are just able to endure, and we are so awed because it serenely
disdains

to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.

And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note of my dark sobbing. Ah,
whom can we ever turn to
in our need? Not angels, not humans,
and already the knowing animals are aware
that we are not really at home in
our interpreted world. Perhaps there remains for us some tree on a hillside, which
every day we can take into our vision; there remains for us yesterday's street
and the loyalty of a habit so much at ease
when it stayed with us that it moved in and never left.

Oh and night: there is night, when a wind full of infinite space gnaws at our
faces. Whom would it not remain for—that longed-after, mildly
disillusioning presence, which the solitary heart so painfully meets. Is it
any less difficult for lovers?

But they keep on using each other to hide their own fate.

Don't you know yet? Fling the emptiness out of your arms into the spaces we
breathe; perhaps the birds
will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.

Yes—the springtimes needed you. Often a star
was waiting for you to notice it. A wave rolled toward you out of the distant past,
or as you walked

under an open window, a violin
yielded itself to your hearing. All this was mission.

But could you accomplish it? Weren't you always distracted by expectation, as if
every event

announced a beloved? (Where can you find a place
to keep her, with all the huge strange thoughts inside you going and coming and
often staying all night.)

But when you feel longing, sing of women in love; for their famous passion is still not immortal. Sing of women abandoned and desolate (you envy them, almost) who could love so much more purely than those who were gratified. Begin again and again the never-attainable praising; remember: the hero lives on; even his downfall was merely a pretext for achieving his final birth. But Nature, spent and exhausted, takes lovers back into herself, as if there were not enough strength to create them a second time. Have you imagined Gaspara Stampa intensely enough so that any girl deserted by her beloved might be inspired by that fierce example of soaring, objectless love and might say to herself, "Perhaps I can be like her"? Shouldn't this most ancient of sufferings finally grow more fruitful for us? Isn't it time that we lovingly freed ourselves from the beloved and, quivering, endured: as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that gathered in the snap of release it can be more than itself. For there is no place where we can remain.

Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart, as only saints have listened: until the gigantic call lifted them off the ground; yet they kept on, impossibly, kneeling and didn't notice at all: so complete was their listening. Not that you could endure God's voice—far from it. But listen to the voice of the wind and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence. It is murmuring toward you now from those who died young. Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church in Naples or Rome, quietly come to address you? Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission, as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa. What they want of me is that I gently remove the appearance of injustice about their death—which at times slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onward.

Of course, it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer, to give up customs one barely had time to learn, not to see roses and other promising Things

not to see faces and other promising things
in terms of a human future; no longer to be
what one was in infinitely anxious hands; to leave
even one's own first name behind, forgetting it
as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.
Strange to no longer desire one's desires. Strange
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away in every direction. And
being dead is hard work
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel
a trace of eternity.—Though the living are wrong to believe in the too-sharp
distinctions which they themselves have created.
Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living they are moving among, or
the dead. The eternal torrent whirls all ages along in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.

In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us: they are weaned
from earth's sorrows and joys, as gently as children outgrow the soft breasts of
their mothers. But we, who do need such great mysteries, we for whom grief is
so often
the source of our spirit's growth—: could we exist without them?
Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus, the daring first
notes of song pierced through the barren numbness; and then in the startled
space which a youth as lovely as a god had suddenly left forever, the Void felt
for the first time that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps
us.

THE SECOND ELEGY

Every angel is terrifying. And yet, alas, I invoke you, almost deadly birds of the soul,
knowing about you. Where are the days of Tobias, when one of you, veiling his radiance, stood at the front door, slightly disguised for the journey, no longer appalling; (a young man like the one who curiously peeked through the window).
But if the archangel now, perilous, from behind the stars took even one step down toward us: our own heart, beating higher and higher, would beat us to death. Who are you?

Early successes, Creation's pampered favorites,
mountain-ranges, peaks growing red in the dawn
of all Beginning,—pollen of the flowering godhead, joints of pure light, corridors, stairways, thrones, space formed from essence, shields made of ecstasy, storms of emotion whirled into rapture, and suddenly, alone, mirrors: which scoop up the beauty that has streamed from their face and gather it back, into themselves, entire.

But we, when moved by deep feeling, evaporate; we breathe ourselves out and away; from moment to moment our emotion grows fainter, like a perfume. Though someone may tell us: "Yes, you've entered my bloodstream, the room, the whole springtime is filled with you ..."—what does it matter? he can't contain us, we vanish inside him and around him. And those who are beautiful, oh who can retain them? Appearance ceaselessly rises in their face, and is gone. Like dew from the morning grass, what is ours floats into the air, like steam from a dish of hot food. O smile, where are you going? O upturned glance: new warm receding wave on the sea of the heart ...
alas, but that is what we are. Does the infinite space we dissolve into, taste of us then? Do the angels really reabsorb only the radiance that streamed out from themselves, or sometimes, as if by an oversight, is there a trace of our essence in it as well? Are we mixed in with their features even as slightly as that vague look
in the faces of pregnant women? They do not notice it (how could they notice) in their swirling return to themselves.

There is a faint, almost imperceptible, but unmistakable, trace of our essence in the night air

Lovers, if they knew now, might utter strange, marvelous words in the night air.

For it seems that everything hides us. Look: trees do exist; the houses that we live in still stand. We alone fly past all things, as fugitive as the wind. And all things conspire to keep silent about us, half out of shame perhaps, half as unutterable hope.

Lovers, gratified in each other, I am asking you about us. You hold each other. Where is your proof? Look, sometimes I find that my hands have become aware of each other, or that my time-worn face shelters itself inside them. That gives me a slight sensation. But who would dare to exist, just for that? You, though, who in the other's passion grow until, overwhelmed, he begs you: "No more ..."; you who beneath his hands swell with abundance, like autumn grapes; you who may disappear because the other has wholly emerged: I am asking you about us. I know, you touch so blissfully because the caress preserves, because the place you so tenderly cover does not vanish; because underneath it you feel pure duration. So you promise eternity, almost, from the embrace. And yet, when you have survived the terror of the first glances, the longing at the window, and the first walk together, once only, through the garden: lovers, are you the same? When you lift yourselves up to each other's mouth and your lips join, drink against drink: oh how strangely each drinker seeps away from his action.

Weren't you astonished by the caution of human gestures on Attic gravestones? wasn't love and departure placed so gently on shoulders that it seemed to be made of a different substance than in our world? Remember the hands, how weightlessly they rest, though there is power in the torsos.

These self-mastered figures know: "We can go this far, this is ours, to touch one another this lightly; the gods can press down harder upon us. But that is the gods' affair."

If only we too could discover a pure, contained,

human place, our own strip of fruit-bearing soil
between river and rock. For our own heart always exceeds us, as theirs did. And we
can no longer follow it, gazing into images that soothe it or into the godlike
bodies where, measured more greatly, it achieves a greater repose.

[Notes](#)

THE THIRD ELEGY

It is one thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas, to invoke that hidden, guilty river-god of the blood.

Her young lover, whom she knows from far away—what does he know of the lord of desire who often, up from the depths of his solitude, even before she could soothe him, and as though she didn't exist, held up his head, ah, dripping with the unknown,

erect, and summoned the night to an endless uproar.

Oh the Neptune inside our blood, with his appalling trident.

Oh the dark wind from his breast out of that spiraled conch.

Listen to the night as it makes itself hollow. O stars, isn't it from you that the lover's desire for the face of his beloved arises? Doesn't his secret insight into her pure features come from the pure constellations?

Not you, his mother: alas, you were not the one who bent the arch of his eyebrows into such expectation.

Not for you, girl so aware of him, not for your mouth did his lips curve themselves into a more fruitful expression.

Do you really think that your gentle steps could have shaken him with such violence, you who move like the morning breeze?

Yes, you did frighten his heart; but more ancient terrors plunged into him at the shock of that feeling. Call him ...

but you can't quite call him away from those dark companions.

Of course, he wants to escape, and he does; relieved, he nestles into your sheltering heart, takes hold, and begins himself.

But did he ever begin himself, really?

Mother, you made him small, it was you who started him; in your sight he was new, over his new eyes you arched the friendly world and warded off the world that was alien.

Ah, where are the years when you shielded him just by placing your slender form between him and the surging abyss?

How much you hid from him then. The room that filled with suspicion at night: you made it harmless; and out of the refuge of your heart you mixed a more human space in with his night-space.

And you set down the lamp, not in that darkness, but in your own nearer presence, and it glowed at him like a friend.

There wasn't a creak that your smile could not explain, as though you had long
known just when the floor would do that ...
And he listened and was soothed. So powerful was your presence as you tenderly
stood by the bed; his fate,
tall and cloaked, retreated behind the wardrobe, and his restless future, delayed for
a while, adapted to the folds of the curtain.

And he himself, as he lay there, relieved, with the sweetness of the gentle world you
had made for him dissolving beneath his drowsy eyelids, into the foretaste of
sleep—: he seemed protected ... But inside: who could ward off, who could
divert, the floods of origin inside him?

Ah, there was no trace of caution in that sleeper; sleeping, yes but dreaming, but
flushed with what fevers: how he threw himself in.

All at once new, trembling, how he was caught up
and entangled in the spreading tendrils of inner event already twined into
patterns, into strangling undergrowth, prowling bestial shapes. How he
submitted—. Loved.

Loved his interior world, his interior wilderness, that primal forest inside him,
where among decayed tree trunks his heart stood, light-green. Loved. Left it,
went through his own roots and out, into the powerful source where his little
birth had already been outlived. Loving, he waded down into more ancient
blood, to ravines

where Horror lay, still gluttoned with his fathers. And every Terror knew him,
winked at him like an accomplice.

Yes, Atrocity smiled ... Seldom

had you smiled so tenderly, mother. How could he help loving what smiled at
him. Even before he knew you, he had loved it, for already while you carried
him inside you, it was dissolved in the water that makes the embryo weightless.

No, we don't accomplish our love in a single year
as the flowers do; an immemorial sap
flows up through our arms when we love. Dear girl, this: that we loved, inside us,
not One who would someday appear, but seething multitudes; not just a single
child,

but also the fathers lying in our depths
like fallen mountains; also the dried-up riverbeds of ancient mothers—; also the
whole

soundless landscape under the clouded or clear

boundless landscape under the clouded or clear
sky of its destiny—: all this, my dear, preceded you.

And you yourself, how could you know
what primordial time you stirred in your lover. What passions welled up inside
him from departed beings. What
women hated you there. How many dark
sinister men you aroused in his young veins. Dead
children reached out to touch you ... Oh gently, gently, let him see you
performing, with love, some confident daily task,— lead him out close to the
garden, give him what outweighs the heaviest night

Restrain him

[Notes](#)

THE FOURTH ELEGY

O trees of life, when does your winter come?
We are not in harmony, our blood does not forewarn us like migratory birds'.
 Late, overtaken,
we force ourselves abruptly onto the wind
and fall to earth at some iced-over lake.
Flowering and fading come to us both at once.
And somewhere lions still roam and never know, in their majestic power, of any
 weakness.

But we, while we are intent upon one object,
already feel the pull of another. Conflict
is second nature to us. Aren't lovers
always arriving at each other's boundaries?— although they promised vastness,
 hunting, home.

 As when for some quick sketch, a wide background of contrast is laboriously
 prepared
so that we can see more clearly: we never know the actual, vital contour of our own
emotions—just what forms them from outside.

 Who has not sat, afraid, before his heart's curtain? It rose: the scenery of
 farewell.

Easy to recognize. The well-known garden,
which swayed a little. Then the dancer came.
Not him. Enough! However lightly he moves, he's costumed, made up—an
 ordinary man
who hurries home and walks in through the kitchen.

 I won't endure these half-filled human masks; better, the puppet. It at least is
 full.

I'll put up with the stuffed skin, the wire, the face that is nothing but appearance.

 Here. I'm waiting.

Even if the lights go out; even if someone
tells me "That's all"; even if emptiness
floats toward me in a gray draft from the stage; even if not one of my silent
 ancestors

stays seated with me, not one woman, not
the boy with the immovable brown eye— I'll sit here anyway. One can always

watch.

Am I not right? You, to whom life tasted
so bitter after you took a sip of mine,
the first, gritty infusion of my will,
Father—who, as I grew up, kept on tasting
and, troubled by the aftertaste of so
strange a future, searched my unfocused gaze— you who, so often since you died,
 have trembled for my well-being, within my deepest hope, relinquishing that
 calmness which the dead
feel as their very essence, countless realms
of equanimity, for my scrap of life— tell me, am I not right? And you, dear women
who must have loved me for my small beginning of love toward you, which I
 always turned away from because the space in your features grew, changed,
 even while I loved it, into cosmic space,
where you no longer were—: am I not right
to feel as if I must stay seated, must wait before the puppet stage, or, rather,
gaze at it so intensely that at last,
to balance my gaze, an angel has to come and
make the stuffed skins startle into life.
Angel and puppet: a real play, finally.
Then what we separate by our very presence
can come together. And only then, the whole
cycle of transformation will arise,
out of our own life-seasons. Above, beyond us, the angel plays. If no one else, the
 dying
must notice how unreal, how full of pretense, is all that we accomplish here, where
 nothing is allowed to be itself. Oh hours of childhood, when behind each
 shape more than the past appeared and what streamed out before us was not
 the future.
We felt our bodies growing and were at times
impatient to be grown up, half for the sake of those with nothing left but their
 grownupness.
Yet were, when playing by ourselves, enchanted with what alone endures; and we
 would stand there in the infinite, blissful space between world and toy, at a
 point which, from the earliest beginning, had been established for a pure
 event.

Who shows a child as he really is? Who sets him in his constellation and puts the
measuring-rod of distance in his hand? Who makes his death
out of gray bread, which hardens—or leaves it there inside his round mouth, jagged
as the core
of a sweet apple? Murderers are easy
to understand. But this: that one can contain death, the whole of death, even
before
life has begun, can hold it to one's heart
gently, and not refuse to go on living,
is inexpressible.

[Notes](#)

THE FIFTH ELEGY

Dedicated to Frau Hertha Koenig

But tell me, who are they, these wanderers, even more transient than we ourselves,
who from their earliest days are savagely wrung out
by a never-satisfied will (for whose sake)? Yet it wrings them, bends them, twists
them, swings them and flings them and catches them again; and falling as if
through oiled slippery air, they land
on the threadbare carpet, worn constantly thinner by their perpetual leaping, this
carpet that is lost in infinite space.
Stuck on like a bandage, as if the suburban sky had wounded the earth.

And hardly has it appeared when, standing there,
upright, is: the large capital D

that begins Duration ..., and the always-approaching grip takes them again, as a
joke, even the strongest men, and crushes them, the way King Augustus the
Strong would crush a pewter plate.

Ah and around this
center: the rose of Onlooking
blooms and unblossoms. Around this
pestle pounding the carpet,
this pistil, fertilized by the pollen of its own dust, and producing in turn the
specious fruit of displeasure: the unconscious gaping faces, their thin
surfaces glossy with boredom's specious half-smile.

There: the shriveled-up, wrinkled weight-lifter, an old man who only drums now,
shrunk in his enormous skin, which looks as if it had once contained two men,
and the other were already lying in the graveyard, while this one lived on
without him, deaf and sometimes a little
confused, in the widowed skin.

And the young one over there, the man, who might be the son of a neck and a
nun: firm and vigorously filled with muscles and innocence.

Children,
whom a grief that was still quite small once received as a toy, during one of its
long convalescences....

You, little boy, who fall down
a hundred times daily, with the thud that only unripe fruits know, from the tree of
mutually constructed motion (which more quickly than water, in a few
minutes, has its spring, summer, and autumn)— fall down hard on the grave:
sometimes, during brief pauses, a loving look toward your seldom affectionate
mother tries to be born in your expression; but it gets lost along the way, your
body consumes it, that timid
scarcely-attempted face ... And again the man is clapping his hands for your leap,
and before a pain can become more distinct near your constantly racing heart,
the stinging in your soles rushes ahead of that other pain, chasing a pair
of physical tears quickly into your eyes.
And nevertheless, blindly,
the smile

Oh gather it, Angel, that small-flowered herb of healing.
Create a vase and preserve it. Set it among those joys not yet open to us; on that
lovely urn praise it with the ornately flowing inscription: “Subrisio Saltat.”

And you then, my lovely darling, you whom the most tempting joys
have mutely leapt over. Perhaps
your fringes are happy for you—, or perhaps the green
metallic silk stretched over your firm young breasts feels itself endlessly indulged
and in need of nothing.
You
display-fruit of equanimity,
set out in front of the public, in continual variations on all the swaying scales of
equipoise, lifted among the shoulders.

Oh where is the place—I carry it in my heart—, where they still were far from
mastery, still fell apart from each other, like mating cattle that someone has
badly paired;— where the weights are still heavy; where from their vainly
twirling sticks
the plates still wobble
and drop

And suddenly in this laborious nowhere, suddenly the unsayable spot where the
pure Too-little is transformed incomprehensibly—. leaps around and changes

into that empty Too-much;
where the difficult calculation
becomes numberless and resolved.

Squares, oh square in Paris, infinite showplace where the milliner Madame Lamort
twists and winds the restless paths of the earth, those endless ribbons, and,
from them, designs new bows, frills, flowers, ruffles, artificial fruits—, all falsely
colored,—for the cheap
winter bonnets of Fate.

.....

Angel!: If there were a place that we didn't know of, and there, on some unsayable
carpet, lovers displayed what they never could bring to mastery here—the bold
exploits of their high-flying hearts, their towers of pleasure, their ladders that
have long since been standing where there was no ground, leaning just on each
other, trembling,—and could master all this, before the surrounding spectators,
the innumerable soundless dead: Would these, then, throw down their final,
forever saved-up, forever hidden, unknown to us, eternally valid coins of
happiness before the at last genuinely smiling pair on the gratified carpet?

THE SIXTH ELEGY

Fig-tree, for such a long time I have found meaning in the way you almost completely omit your blossoms and urge your pure mystery, unproclaimed, into the early ripening fruit.

Like the curved pipe of a fountain, your arching boughs drive the sap downward and up again: and almost without awakening it bursts out of sleep, into its sweetest achievement.

Like the god stepping into the swan.

..... But we still linger, alas, we, whose pride is in blossoming; we enter the overdue interior of our final fruit and are already betrayed.

In only a few does the urge to action rise up so powerfully that they stop, glowing in their heart's abundance, while, like the soft night air, the temptation to blossom touches their tender mouths, touches their eyelids, softly: heroes perhaps, and those chosen to disappear early, whose veins Death the gardener twists into a different pattern.

These plunge on ahead: in advance of their own smile like the team of galloping horses before the triumphant pharaoh in the mildly hollowed reliefs at Karnak.

The hero is strangely close to those who died young. Permanence does not concern him. He lives in continual ascent, moving on into the ever-changed constellation of perpetual danger. Few could find him there. But Fate, which is silent about us, suddenly grows inspired and sings him into the storm of his onrushing world.

I hear no one like him. All at once I am pierced by his darkened voice, carried on the streaming air.

Then how gladly I would hide from the longing to be once again oh a boy once again, with my life before me, to sit leaning on future arms and reading of Samson, how from his mother first nothing, then everything, was born.

Wasn't he a hero inside you, mother? didn't his imperious choosing already begin there, in you?

Thousands seethed in your womb, wanting to be him, but look: he grasped and excluded—, chose and prevailed.

And if he demolished pillars, it was when he burst from the world of your body into the narrower world, where again he chose and prevailed. O mothers of heroes, O sources of ravaging floods! You ravines into which

virgins have plunged, lamenting,
from the highest rim of the heart, sacrifices to the son.

For whenever the hero stormed through the stations of love, each heartbeat intended for him lifted him up, beyond it; and, turning away, he stood there, at the end of all smiles,—transfigured.

Notes

THE SEVENTH ELEGY

Not wooing, no longer shall wooing, voice that has outgrown it, be the nature of your cry; but instead, you would cry out as purely as a bird when the quickly ascending season lifts him up, nearly forgetting that he is a suffering creature and not just a single heart being flung into brightness, into the intimate skies. Just like him you would be wooing, not any less purely—, so that, still unseen, she would sense you, the silent lover in whom a reply slowly awakens and, as she hears you, grows warm,— the ardent companion to your own most daring emotion.

Oh and springtime would hold it—, everywhere it would echo the song of annunciation. First the small questioning notes intensified all around by the sheltering silence of a pure, affirmative day. Then up the stairs, up the stairway of calls, to the dreamed-of temple of the future —; and then the trill, like a fountain which, in its rising jet, already anticipates its fall in a game of promises And still ahead: summer.

Not only all the dawns of summer—, not only how they change themselves into day and shine with beginning. Not only the days, so tender around flowers and, above, around the patterned treetops, so strong, so intense. Not only the reverence of all these unfolded powers, not only the pathways, not only the meadows at sunset, not only, after a late storm, the deep-breathing freshness, not only approaching sleep, and a premonition ... but also the nights! But also the lofty summer nights, and the stars as well, the stars of the earth. Oh to be dead at last and know them endlessly, all the stars: for how, how could we ever forget them!

Look, I was calling for my lover. But not just she would come ... Out of their fragile graves girls would arise and gather ... For how could I limit the call, once I called it? These unripe spirits keep seeking the earth.—Children, one earthly Thing truly experienced, even once, is enough for a lifetime.

Don't think that fate is more than the density of childhood; how often you
outdistanced the man you loved, breathing, breathing after the blissful chase,
and passed on into freedom.

Truly being here is glorious. Even you knew it, you girls who seemed to be lost, to
go under—, in the filthiest streets of the city, festering there, or wide open
for garbage. For each of you had an hour, or perhaps
not even an hour, a barely measurable time
between two moments—, when you were granted a sense
of being. Everything. Your veins flowed with being.
But we can so easily forget what our laughing neighbor neither confirms nor
envies. We want to display it,
to make it visible, though even the most visible happiness can't reveal itself to us
until we transform it, within.

Nowhere, Beloved, will world be but within us. Our life passes in transformation.
And the external
shrinks into less and less. Where once an enduring house was, now a cerebral
structure crosses our path, completely
belonging to the realm of concepts, as though it still stood in the brain.
Our age has built itself vast reservoirs of power,
formless as the straining energy that it wrests from the earth.
Temples are no longer known. It is we who secretly save up these extravagances of
the heart. Where one of them still survives, a Thing that was formerly prayed
to, worshipped, knelt before— just as it is, it passes into the invisible world.
Many no longer perceive it, yet miss the chance
to build it inside themselves now, with pillars and statues: greater.

Each torpid turn of the world has such disinherited ones, to whom neither the
past belongs, nor yet what has nearly arrived.
For even the nearest moment is far from mankind. Though we
should not be confused by this, but strengthened in our task of preserving the still-
recognizable form.—This once stood among mankind, in the midst of Fate the
annihilator, in the midst
of Not-Knowing-Whither, it stood as if enduring, and bent stars down to it from
their safeguarded heavens. Angel, to you I will show it, there! in your endless
vision it shall stand, now finally upright, rescued at last.

Pillars, pylons, the Sphinx, the striving thrust of the cathedral, gray, from a fading
or alien city.

Wasn't all this a miracle? Be astonished, Angel, for we are this, O Great One;
proclaim that we could achieve this, my breath is too short for such praise. So,
after all, we have not failed to make use of these generous spaces, these
spaces of ours. (How frighteningly great they must be, since thousands of years
have not made them overflow with our feelings.) But a tower was great, wasn't
it? Oh Angel, it was— even when placed beside you? Chartres was great—, and
music reached still higher and passed far beyond us. But even a woman in love
—, oh alone at night by her window....

didn't she reach your knee—?

Don't think that I'm wooing.

Angel, and even if I were, you would not come. For my call is always filled with
departure; against such a powerful current you cannot move. Like an
outstretched arm

is my call. And its hand, held open and reaching up
to seize, remains in front of you, open
as if in defense and warning,
Ungraspable One, far above.

THE EIGHTH ELEGY

Dedicated to Rudolf Kassner

With all its eyes the natural world looks out into the Open. Only our eyes are turned backward, and surround plant, animal, child like traps, as they emerge into their freedom.

We know what is really out there only from the animal's gaze; for we take the very young child and force it around, so that it sees objects—not the Open, which is so

deep in animals' faces. Free from death.

We, only, can see death; the free animal

has its decline in back of it, forever,

and God in front, and when it moves, it moves already in eternity, like a fountain.

Never, not for a single day, do we have before us that pure space into which

flowers endlessly open. Always there is World

and never Nowhere without the No: that pure unseparated element which one breathes

without desire and endlessly knows. A child may wander there for hours, through the timeless stillness, may get lost in it and be shaken back. Or someone dies and is it.

For, nearing death, one doesn't see death; but stares beyond, perhaps with an animal's vast gaze.

Lovers, if the beloved were not there

blocking the view, are close to it, and marvel ...

As if by some mistake, it opens for them

behind each other ... But neither can move past the other, and it changes back to World.

Forever turned toward objects, we see in them the mere reflection of the realm of freedom, which we have dimmed. Or when some animal

mutely, serenely, looks us through and through.

That is what fate means: to be opposite, to be opposite and nothing else, forever.

If the animal moving toward us so securely in a different direction had our kind of consciousness—, it would wrench us around and drag us along its path. But it feels its life as boundless, unfathomable, and without regard

to its own condition: pure, like its outward gaze.

And where we see the future, it sees all time and itself within all time, forever

healed.

Yet in the alert, warm animal there lies
the pain and burden of an enormous sadness.

For it too feels the presence of what often overwhelms us: a memory, as if
the element we keep pressing toward was once more intimate, more true, and our
communion infinitely tender. Here all is distance;

there it was breath. After that first home, the second seems ambiguous and drafty.

Oh bliss of the tiny creature which remains forever inside the womb that was
its shelter; joy of the gnat which, still within, leaps up even at its marriage:
for everything is womb.

And look at the half-assurance of the bird, which knows both inner and outer,
from its source, as if it were the soul of an Etruscan,
flown out of a dead man received inside a space, but with his reclining image as
the lid.

And how bewildered is any womb-born creature that has to fly. As if terrified and
fleeing from itself, it zigzags through the air, the way a crack runs through a
teacup. So the bat

quivers across the porcelain of evening.

And we: spectators, always, everywhere,
turned toward the world of objects, never outward.

It fills us. We arrange it. It breaks down.

We rearrange it, then break down ourselves.

Who has twisted us around like this, so that no matter what we do, we are in the
posture of someone going away? Just as, upon
the farthest hill, which shows him his whole valley one last time, he turns, stops,
lingers—, so we live here, forever taking leave.

THE NINTH ELEGY

Why, if this interval of being can be spent serenely in the form of a laurel, slightly darker than all other green, with tiny waves on the edges of every leaf (like the smile of a breeze)—: why then have to be human—and, escaping from fate, keep longing for fate? ...

Oh not because happiness exists, that too-hasty profit snatched from approaching loss.

Not out of curiosity, not as practice for the heart, which would exist in the laurel too

But because truly being here is so much; because everything here apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.

Once for each thing. Just once; no more. And we too, just once. And never again.

But to have been this once, completely, even if only once: to have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing.

And so we keep pressing on, trying to achieve it, trying to hold it firmly in our simple hands,

in our overcrowded gaze, in our speechless heart.

Trying to become it.—Whom can we give it to? We would hold on to it all, forever ... Ah, but what can we take along into that other realm? Not the art of looking,

which is learned so slowly, and nothing that happened here. Nothing.

The sufferings, then. And, above all, the heaviness, and the long experience of love, —just what is wholly unsayable. But later, among the stars,

what good is it—they are better as they are: unsayable.

For when the traveler returns from the mountain-slopes into the valley, he brings, not a handful of earth, unsayable to others, but instead some word he has gained, some pure word, the yellow and blue gentian. Perhaps we are here in order to say: house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window— at most: column, tower.... But to say them, you must understand, oh to say them more intensely than the Things themselves ever dreamed of existing. Isn't the secret

intent of this taciturn earth, when it forces lovers together, that inside their
boundless emotion all things may shudder with joy?
Threshold: what it means for two lovers
to be wearing down, imperceptibly, the ancient threshold of their door— they too,
after the many who came before them
and before those to come, lightly.

Here is the time for the sayable, here is its homeland.
Speak and bear witness. More than ever
the Things that we might experience are vanishing, for what crowds them out and
replaces them is an imageless act.
An act under a shell, which easily cracks open as soon as the business inside
outgrows it and seeks new limits.
Between the hammers our heart
endures, just as the tongue does
between the teeth and, despite that,
still is able to praise.

Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one, you can't impress him with
glorious emotion; in the universe where he feels more powerfully, you are a
novice. So show him something simple which, formed over generations, lives
as our own, near our hand and within our gaze.
Tell him of Things. He will stand astonished; as you stood by the rope-maker in
Rome or the potter along the Nile.
Show him how happy a Thing can be, how innocent and ours, how even lamenting
grief purely decides to take form, serves as a Thing, or dies into a Thing—, and
blissfully escapes far beyond the violin.—And these Things, which live by
perishing, know you are praising them; transient, they look to us for
deliverance: us, the most transient of all.
They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart, within—oh endlessly—
within us! Whoever we may be at last.

Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us, invisible? Isn't it your dream
to be wholly invisible someday?—O Earth: invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?
Earth, my dearest, I will. Oh believe me, you no longer need your springtimes to
win me over—one of them, ah, even one, is already too much for my blood.
Unsneakably I have belonged to you. from the first.

~~.....~~
You were always right, and your holiest inspiration is our intimate companion,
Death.

Look, I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor future grows any smaller
..... Superabundant being
wells up in my heart.

[Notes](#)

THE TENTH ELEGY

Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight, let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels.

Let not even one of the clearly-struck hammers of my heart fail to sound because of a slack, a doubtful, or a broken string. Let my joyfully streaming face make me more radiant; let my hidden weeping arise and blossom. How dear you will be to me then, you nights of anguish. Why didn't I kneel more deeply to accept you, inconsolable sisters, and, surrendering, lose myself in your loosened hair. How we squander our hours of pain.

How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration to see if they have an end. Though they are really our winter-enduring foliage, our dark evergreen, one season in our inner year—, not only a season in time—, but are place and settlement, foundation and soil and home.

But how alien, alas, are the streets of the city of grief, where, in the false silence formed of continual uproar, the figure cast from the mold of emptiness stoutly swaggers: the gilded noise, the bursting memorial.

Oh how completely an angel would stamp out their market of solace, bounded by the church with its ready-made consolations: clean and disenchanting and shut as a post-office on Sunday.

Farther out, though, the city's edges are curling with carnival.

Swings of freedom! Divers and jugglers of zeal!

And the shooting-gallery's targets of prettified happiness, which jump and kick back with a tinny sound

when hit by some better marksman. From cheers to chance he goes staggering on, as booths with all sorts of attractions are wooing, drumming, and bawling. For adults only there is something special to see: how money multiplies, naked, right there on stage, money's genitals, nothing concealed, the whole action—, educational, and guaranteed to increase your potency

.... Oh, but a little farther,

beyond the last of the billboards, plastered with signs for "Deathless," that bitter beer which seems so sweet to its drinkers as long as they chew fresh distractions in between sips ..., just in back of the billboard, just behind, the view becomes real.

Children are playing, and lovers are holding hands, to the side, solemnly in the meager grass, and dogs are doing what is natural.

The young man is drawn on, farther; perhaps he is in love with a young Lament
..... He comes out behind her, into the meadows. She says:
—It's a long walk. We live way out there....

Where? And the youth follows. He is touched by
her manner. Her shoulders, her neck—,
perhaps she is of noble descent. But he leaves
her, turns around, looks back,
waves ... What's the use? She is a Lament.

Only those who died young, in their first condition of timeless equanimity, while
they are being weaned, follow her lovingly. She waits
for girls and befriends them. Shows them, gently, what she is wearing. Pearls of
grief and the fine-spun veils of patience.—With young men she walks
in silence.

But there, in the valley, where they live, one of the elder Laments answers the
youth when he questions her:—Long ago, she says, we Laments were a powerful
race. Our forefathers worked the mines, up there in the mountain-range;
sometimes even among men you can find a polished nugget of primal grief or
a chunk of petrified rage from the slag of an ancient volcano.
Yes, that came from up there. We used to be rich.—

And gently she guides him through the vast landscape of Lament, shows him the
pillars of the temples, and the ruined walls of those castles from which, long
ago, the princes of Lament wisely ruled the land. Shows him the tall
trees of tears and the fields of blossoming grief (the living know it just as a mild
green shrub); shows him the herds of sorrow, grazing,—and sometimes a
startled bird, flying low through their upward gaze, far away traces the image
of its solitary cry.— In the twilight she leads him out to the graves of the elders
who gave warning to the race of Laments, the sibyls and prophets.

But as night approaches, they move more softly, and soon the sepulchre rises up
like a moon, watching over everything. Brother to the one on the Nile, the lofty
Sphinx—: the taciturn chamber's
countenance.

And they look in wonder at the regal head that has silently lifted the human face
to the scale of the stars, forever.

Still dizzy from recent death, his sight

Still dizzy from recent death, his sight
cannot grasp it. But her gaze
frightens an owl from behind the rim of the crown. And the bird, with slow
 downstrokes, brushes along the cheek, the one with the fuller curve,
and faintly, in the dead youth's new
sense of hearing, as upon a double
unfolded page, it sketches the indescribable outline.
And higher, the stars. The new stars of the land of grief.
Slowly the Lament names them:—Look, there:
the Rider, the Staff, and the larger constellation called Garland of Fruit. Then,
 farther up toward the Pole: Cradle; Path; The Burning Book; Puppet; Window.
But there, in the southern sky, pure as the lines on the palm of a blessed hand, the
 clear sparkling M
that stands for Mothers—

But the dead youth must go on by himself, and silently the elder Lament takes him
 as far as the ravine,
where shimmering in the moonlight
is the fountainhead of joy. With reverence
she names it and says: —Among men
it is a mighty stream.—

They stand at the foot of the mountain-range.
And she embraces him, weeping.

Alone, he climbs on, up the mountains of primal grief.
And not once do his footsteps echo from the soundless path.

*

But if the endlessly dead awakened a symbol in us, perhaps they would point to
 the catkins hanging from the bare branches of the hazel-trees, or would evoke
 the raindrops that fall onto the dark earth in springtime.—

And we, who have always thought
of happiness as rising, would feel
the emotion that almost overwhelms us
whenever a happy thing falls.

Notes

Appendix to Duino Elegies

[FRAGMENT OF AN ELEGY]

Now shall I praise the cities, those long-surviving (I watched them in awe) great constellations of earth.

For only in praising is my heart still mine, so violently do I know the world. And even my lament

turns into a paean before my disconsolate heart.

Let no one say that I don't love life, the eternal presence: I pulsate in her; she bears me, she gives me the spaciousness of this day, the primeval workday for me to make use of, and over my existence flings, in her magnanimity, nights that have never been.

Her strong hand is above me, and if she should hold me under, submerged in fate, I would have to learn how to breathe down there. Even her most lightly-entrusted mission would fill me with songs of her; although I suspect that all she wants is for me to be vibrant as she is.

Once poets resounded over the battlefield; what voice can outshout the rattle of this metallic age

that is struggling on toward its careening future?

And indeed it hardly requires the call, its own battle-din roars into song. So let me stand for a while

in front of the transient: not accusing, but once again admiring, marveling. And if perhaps something founders before my eyes and stirs me into lament,

it is not a reproach. Why shouldn't more youthful nations rush past the graveyard of cultures long ago rotten?

How pitiful it would be if greatness needed the slightest indulgence. Let him whose soul is no longer startled and transformed by palaces, by gardens' boldness, by the rising and falling of ancient fountains, by everything held back in paintings or by the infinite thereness of statues— let such a person go out to his daily work, where

greatness is lying in ambush and someday, at some turn, will leap upon him and force him to fight for his life.

[ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE TENTH ELEGY]

[Fragmentary]

Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight, let me sing out jubilation and
praise to assenting angels.

Let not even one of the clearly-struck hammers of my heart fail to sound because
of a slack, a doubtful,
or an ill-tempered string. Let my joyfully streaming face make me more radiant; let
my hidden weeping arise

and blossom. How dear you will be to me then, you nights of anguish. Why didn't
I kneel more deeply to accept you, inconsolable sisters, and, surrendering, lose
myself in your loosened hair. How we squander our hours of pain.

How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration
to see if they have an end. Though they are really
seasons of us, our winter-enduring
foliage, ponds, meadows, our inborn landscape,
where birds and reed-dwelling creatures are at home.

High overhead, isn't half of the night sky standing above the sorrow in us, the
disquieted garden?

Imagine that you no longer walked through your grief grown wild, no longer
looked at the stars through the jagged leaves of the dark tree of pain, and the
enlarging moonlight no longer exalted fate's ruins so high
that among them you felt like the last of some ancient race.

Nor would smiles any longer exist, the consuming smiles of those you lost over
there—with so little violence, once they were past, did they purely enter your
grief.

(Almost like the girl who has just said yes to the lover who begged her, so many
weeks, and she brings him astonished to the garden gate and, reluctant, he
walks away,

giddy with joy; and then, amid this new parting,

a step disturbs her; she waits; and her glance in its fullness sinks totally into a
stranger's: her virgin glance

that endlessly comprehends him, the outsider, who was meant for her; the
wandering other, who eternally was meant for her.

Echoing, he walks by.) That is how, always, you lost: never as one who possesses,
but like someone dying

who, bending into the moist breeze of an evening in March, loses the springtime,
alas, in the throats of the birds.

Far too much you belong to grief. If you could forget her— even the least of these
figures so infinitely pained— you would call down, shout down, hoping they
might still be curious, one of the angels (those beings unmighty in grief)
who, as his face darkened, would try again and again to describe the way you kept
sobbing, long ago, for her.

Angel, what was it like? And he would imitate you and never understand that it
was pain, as after a calling bird one tries to repeat the innocent voice it is filled
with.

[Notes](#)

ANTISTROPHES

Ah, Women, that you should be moving here, among us, grief-filled, no more protected than we, and nevertheless able to bless like the blessed.

From what realm,
when your beloved appears,
do you take the future?
More than will ever be.
One who knows distances
out to the outermost star
is astonished when he discovers the magnificent space in your hearts.
How, in the crowd, can you spare it?
You, full of sources and night.

Are you really the same
as those children who
on the way to school were rudely shoved by an older brother?
Unharmd by it.

While we, even as children, disfigured ourselves forever, you were like
bread on the altar before it is changed.

The breaking away of childhood left you intact. In a moment, you stood there, as
if completed in a miracle, all at once.

We, as if broken from crags, even as boys, too sharp at the edges, although
perhaps sometimes skillfully cut; we, like pieces of rock that have
fallen on flowers.

Flowers of the deeper soil,
loved by all roots,
you, Eurydice's sisters,
full of holy return
behind the ascending man.

We, afflicted by ourselves, gladly afflicting, gladly needing to be afflicted.
We who sleep with our anger laid beside us like a knife

me, who sleep with our finger and thumb as like a knife.

You, who are almost protection where no one protects. The thought of you is a shade-giving tree of sleep for the restless creatures of a solitary man.

[Notes](#)

The Sonnets to Orpheus

(1923)

Written as a grave-monument
for Vera Ouckama Knoop

Chateau de Muzot, February 1922

FIRST PART

I

A tree ascended there. Oh pure transcendence!
Oh Orpheus sings! Oh tall tree in the ear!
And all things hushed. Yet even in that silence a new beginning, beckoning, change
appeared.

Creatures of stillness crowded from the bright unbound forest, out of their lairs
and nests; and it was not from any dullness, not
from fear, that they were so quiet in themselves,

but from just listening. Bellow, roar, shriek seemed small inside their hearts. And
where there had been at most a makeshift hut to receive the music,

a shelter nailed up out of their darkest longing, with an entryway that shuddered
in the wind— you built a temple deep inside their hearing.

Notes

II

And it was almost a girl and came to be out of this single joy of song and lyre
and through her green veils shone forth radiantly and made herself a bed inside
my ear.

And slept there. And her sleep was everything: the awesome trees, the distances I
had felt so deeply that I could touch them, meadows in spring: all wonders
that had ever seized my heart.

She slept the world. Singing god, how was that first sleep so perfect that she had no
desire
ever to wake? See: she arose and slept.

Where is her death now? Ah, will you discover this theme before your song
consumes itself?— Where is she vanishing? ... A girl almost....

III

A god can do it. But will you tell me how a man can enter through the lyre's strings?

Our mind is split. And at the shadowed crossing of heart-roads, there is no temple for Apollo.

Song, as you have taught it, is not desire, not wooing any grace that can be achieved;

song is reality. Simple, for a god.

But when can we be real? When does he pour

the earth, the stars, into us? Young man,
it is not your loving, even if your mouth
was forced wide open by your own voice—learn

to forget that passionate music. It will end.

True singing is a different breath, about nothing. A gust inside the god. A wind.

IV

O you tender ones, walk now and then into the breath that blows coldly past.
Upon your cheeks let it tremble and part; behind you it will tremble together
again.

O you blessed ones, you who are whole,
you who seem the beginning of hearts,
bows for the arrows and arrows' targets— tear-bright, your lips more eternally
smile.

Don't be afraid to suffer; return
that heaviness to the earth's own weight; heavy are the mountains, heavy the seas.

Even the small trees you planted as children have long since become too heavy;
you could not carry them now. But the winds ... But the spaces

V

Erect no gravestone for him. Only this: let the rose blossom each year for his sake.
For it is the god. His metamorphosis in this and that. We do not need to look

for other names. It is Orpheus once for all whenever there is song. He comes and
goes.

Isn't it enough if sometimes he can dwell with us a few days longer than a rose?

Though he himself is afraid to disappear, he has to vanish: don't you understand?
The moment his word moves out beyond our life here,

he has gone where you will never find his trace.

The lyre's strings do not constrict his hands.

And it is in overstepping that he obeys.

VI

Is he someone who dwells in this single world? No: both realms are the source of his earthly power.

He alone who has known the roots of the willow can bend the willow-branch into a lyre.

Overnight leave no bread on the table
and leave no milk: they draw back the dead—.

But he, the conjuror, may he settle
under the calm of the eye's lowered lid

to mix death into everything seen;
and may the magic of earthsmoke and rue be as real to him as the clearest
connection.

Nothing can trouble the dominance of
the true image. Whether from graves or from rooms, let him praise finger-ring,
bracelet, and jug.

VII

Praising is what matters! He was summoned for that, and came to us like the ore
from a stone's silence. His mortal heart presses out
a deathless, inexhaustible wine.

Whenever he feels the god's paradigm grip his throat, the voice does not die in his
mouth.

All becomes vineyard, all becomes grape, ripened on the hills of his sensuous
South.

Neither decay in the sepulcher of kings nor any shadow fallen from the gods
can ever detract from his glorious praising.

For he is a herald who is with us always, holding far into the doors of the dead
a bowl with ripe fruit worthy of praise.

VIII

Only in the realm of Praising should Lament walk, the naiad of the wept-for fountain, watching over the stream of our complaint, to keep it clear upon the very stone

that bears the arch of triumph and the altar.— Look: around her shoulders dawns the bright sense that she may be the youngest sister among the deities hidden in our heart.

Joy knows, and Longing has accepted— only Lament still learns; upon her beads, night after night, she counts the ancient curse.

Yet awkward as she is, she suddenly lifts a constellation of our voice, glittering, into the pure nocturnal sky.

IX

Only he whose bright lyre has sounded in shadows may, looking onward, restore
his infinite praise.

Only he who has eaten poppies with the dead will not lose ever again the gentlest
chord.

Though the image upon the pool often grows dim:
Know and be still.

Inside the Double World all voices become
eternally mild.

Notes

X

You who are close to my heart always, I welcome you, ancient coffins of stone,
 which the cheerful water of Roman days
still flows through, like a wandering song.

Or those other ones that are open wide like the eyes of a happily waking shepherd
 —with silence and bee-suck nettle inside, from which ecstatic butterflies
flittered;

everything that has been wrestled from doubt I welcome—the mouths that burst
 open after long knowledge of what it is to be mute.

Do we know this, my friends, or don't we know this?
Both are formed by the hesitant hour
in the deep calm of the human face.

XI

Look at the sky. Are no two stars called "Rider"?
For this is printed strangely on us here: this pride of earth. And look, the second
figure who drives and halts it: whom it has to bear.

Aren't we, in our sinewy quintessence,
controlled like this, now raced and now reined in?
Path and turningpoint. Just a touch possesses.
New expanses. And the two are one.

Or are they really? Don't both signify the path they ride together now? But table
and pasture keep them separate, utterly.

Even the starry union is a fraud.
Yet gladly let us trust the valid symbol for a moment. It is all we need.

XII

Hail to the god who joins us; for through him arise the symbols where we truly
live.

And, with tiny footsteps, the clocks move separately from our authentic time.

Though we are unaware of our true status, our actions stem from pure
relationship.

Far away, antennas hear antennas and the empty distances transmit ...

Pure readiness. Oh unheard starry music!

Isn't your sound protected from all static by the ordinary business of our days?

In spite of all the farmer's work and worry, he can't reach down to where the seed
is slowly transmuted into summer. The earth bestows.

XIII

Plump apple, smooth banana, melon, peach, gooseberry ... How all this affluence
speaks death and life into the mouth ... I sense ...

Observe it from a child's transparent features

while he tastes. This comes from far away.

What miracle is happening in your mouth?

Instead of words, discoveries flow out

from the ripe flesh, astonished to be free.

Dare to say what "apple" truly is.

This sweetness that feels thick, dark, dense at first; then, exquisitely lifted in your
taste,

grows clarified, awake and luminous,

double-meaninged, sunny, earthy, real—: Oh knowledge, pleasure—inexhaustible.

XIV

We are involved with flower, leaf, and fruit.
They speak not just the language of one year.
From darkness a bright phenomenon appears
and still reflects, perhaps, the jealous glint

of the dead, who fill the earth. How can we know what part they play within the
ancient cycle?

Long since, it has been their job to make the soil vigorous with the force of their
free marrow.

But have they done it willingly? we ask ...

Does this fruit, formed by heavy slaves, push up like a clenched fist, to threaten us,
their masters?

Or in fact are they the masters, as they sleep beside the roots and grant us, from
their riches, this hybrid Thing of speechless strength and kisses?

XV

Wait ..., that tastes good ... But already it's gone.

.... A few notes of music, a tapping, a faint hum—: you girls, so warm and so silent,
dance the taste of the fruit you have known!

Dance the orange. Who can forget it,
drowning in itself, how it struggles through against its own sweetness. You have
possessed it.

Deliciously it has converted to you.

Dance the orange. The sunnier landscape— fling it from you, allow it to shine in
the breeze of its homeland! Aglow, peel away

scent after scent. Create your own kinship with the supple, gently reluctant rind
and the juice that fills it with succulent joy.

XVI

You are lonely, my friend, because you are...
We, with a word or a finger-sign, gradually make the world our own,
though perhaps its weakest, most precarious part.

How can fingers point out a smell?— Yet of the dark forces that lurk at our side
you feel many ... You know the dead, and you shrink away from the magic
spell.

Look, we two together must bear
piecework and parts, as if they were
the whole. But be careful. Above all, don't plant

me inside your heart. I'd outgrow you. But I will guide my master's hand and will
say: Here. This is Esau beneath his pelt.

XVII

At bottom the Ancient One, gnarled root hidden deep, origin unbeheld
by those who branched up.

Helmet and horn of hunters, grandfathers' truths, men who betrayed their
brothers, women like lutes ...

Branch upon branch crowds close, none of them free....
Keep climbing higher ... higher ...

Still, though, they break. Yet this top one bends finally into a lyre.

Notes

XVIII

Master, do you hear the New quiver and rumble?
Harbingers step forth who blare their approval.

Surely no ear is whole amid this noise,
yet the machine-part still asks for our praise.

Look, the machine:
rears up and takes revenge, brings us to crawl and cringe.

Since all its strength is from us, let it, desireless, serve and remain.

Notes

XIX

Though the world keeps changing its form as fast as a cloud, still what is
accomplished falls home to the Primeval.

Over the change and the passing, larger and freer,
soars your eternal song, god with the lyre.

Never has grief been possessed, never has love been learned, and what removes us
in death

is not revealed.

Only the song through the land hallows and heals.

Notes

XX

But Master, what gift shall I dedicate to you, who taught all creatures their ears?
—My thoughts of an evening long ago, it was springtime, in Russia—a horse ...

He came bounding from the village, alone, white, with a hobble attached to one
leg,

to stay alone in the fields all night; how the mane beat against his neck

to the rhythm of his perfect joy, in that hindered gallop across the meadow.
What leaping went on in his stallion-blood!

He felt the expanses, and oh!

He sang and he heard—your cycle of myths was completed in him.

His image: my gift.

XXI

Spring has returned. The earth resembles a little girl who has memorized many poems.... For all the trouble of her long learning, she wins the prize.

Her teacher was strict. We loved the white in the old man's beard and shaggy eyebrows.

Now, whatever we ask about the blue and the green, she knows, she knows!

Earth, overjoyed to be out on vacation, play with the children. We long to catch up, jubilant Earth. The happiest will win.

What her teacher taught her, the numberless Things, and what lies hidden in stem and in deep difficult root, she sings, she sings!

XXII

We are the driving ones.

Ah, but the step of time: think of it as a dream in what forever remains.

All that is hurrying

soon will be over with; only what lasts can bring us to the truth.

Young men, don't put your trust into the trials of flight, into the hot and quick.

All things already rest: darkness and morning light, flower and book.

Notes

XXIII

Not till the day when flight no longer for its own sake ascends into the silent
 heavens
propelled by its self-conceit,

so that, in luminous outlines, as the tool that has come to power, it can float,
 caressed by the winds, streamlined, agile, and sure—

not till a pure destination outweighs the boyish boast
of how much machines can do

will, overwhelmed with gain, one to whom distance is close be what alone he flew.

Notes

XXIV

Shall we reject our primordial friendship, the sublime unwooing gods, because the
steel that we keep
harshly bringing to hardness has never known them— or shall we suddenly look
for them on a map?

All these powerful friends, who withdraw the dead
from the reach of the senses, touch nowhere against our wheels.
We have moved our banquets, our baths and our festivals, far away. And their
messengers, long since outstripped by our speed,

have vanished. Lonelier now, dependent on one another utterly, though not
knowing one another at all,
we no longer lay out each path as a lovely meander,

but straight ahead. Only in factories do the once-consecrate flames still burn and
lift up the always heavier hammers.
We, though, keep losing what small strength we have, like swimmers.

XXV

But you now, dear girl, whom I loved like a flower whose name I didn't know, you who so early were taken away: I will once more call up your image and show it to them, beautiful companion of the unsubduable cry.

Dancer whose body filled with your hesitant fate, pausing, as though your young flesh had been cast in bronze; grieving and listening—. Then, from the high dominions, unearthly music fell into your altered heart.

Already possessed by shadows, with illness near, your blood flowed darkly; yet, though for a moment suspicious, it burst out into the natural pulses of spring.

Again and again interrupted by downfall and darkness, earthly, it gleamed. Till, after a terrible pounding, it entered the inconsolably open door.

XXVI

But you, divine poet, you who sang on till the end as the swarm of rejected
maenads attacked you, shrieking, you overpowered their noise with harmony,
and
from pure destruction arose your transfigured song.

Their hatred could not destroy your head or your lyre, however they wrestled and
raged; and each one of the sharp stones that they hurled, vengeance-crazed, at
your heart softened while it was in mid-flight, enchanted to hear.

At last they killed you and broke you in pieces while your sound kept lingering on
in lions and boulders,
in trees and in birds. There you are singing still.

Oh you lost god! You inexhaustible trace!
Only because you were torn and scattered through Nature have we become hearers
now and a rescuing voice.

SECOND PART

I

Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete interchange of our own essence with world-space. You counterweight in which I rhythmically happen.

Single wave-motion whose
gradual sea I am;
you, most inclusive of all our possible seas— space grown warm.

How many regions in space have already been inside me. There are winds that
 seem like my wandering son.

Do you recognize me, air, full of places I once absorbed?
You who were the smooth bark, roundness, and leaf of my words.

Notes

II

Just as the master's genuine brushstroke is sometimes caught by a hurried page
that happens to be there: so mirrors will take into themselves the pure smiling
image

of girls as they test the morning, alone— or under the gleam of devoted candles.
And into their faces, one by one,
later, just a reflection falls.

How much was once gazed into the charred slow-dying glow of a fireplace:
glances of life, irretrievable.

Who knows what losses the earth has suffered?
One who, with sounds that nonetheless praise, can sing the heart born into the
whole.

III

Mirrors: no one has ever known how to describe what you are in your inmost realm.

As if filled with nothing but sieve-holes, you fathomless in-between spaces of time.

You prodigals of the empty chamber— vast as forests, at the close of day ...
And the chandelier strides like a sixteen-pointer through your unenterability.

Sometimes you are full of painting. A few seem to have walked straight into your depths— others, shyly, you sent on past you.

But the loveliest will stay—until, beyond, into her all-absorbed cheeks she lets Narcissus penetrate, bright and unbound.

IV

Oh this beast is the one that never was.

They didn't know that; unconcerned, they had loved its grace, its walk, and how it stood looking at them calmly, with clear eyes.

It hadn't been. But from their love, a pure beast arose. They always left it room. And in that heart-space, radiant and bare, it raised its head and hardly needed to

exist. They fed it, not with any grain,
but always just with the thought that it might be.
And this assurance gave the beast so much power,

it grew a horn upon its brow. One horn.
Afterward it approached a virgin, whitely— and was, inside the mirror and in her.

V

Flower-muscle that slowly opens back the anemone to another meadow-dawn,
until her womb can feel the polyphonic light of the sonorous heavens pouring
down;

muscle of an infinite acceptance,
stretched within the silent blossom-star, at times so overpowered with abundance
that sunset's signal for repose is bare-

ly able to return your too far hurled—
back petals for the darkness to revive: you, strength and purpose of how many
worlds!

We violent ones remain a little longer.
Ah but when, in which of all our lives, shall we at last be open and receivers?

VI

Rose, you majesty—once, to the ancients, you were just a calyx with the simplest of
rims.

But for us, you are the full, the numberless flower, the inexhaustible countenance.

In your wealth you seem to be wearing gown upon gown upon a body of nothing
but light;

yet each separate petal is at the same time the negation of all clothing and the
refusal of it.

Your fragrance has been calling its sweetest names in our direction, for hundreds
of years; suddenly it hangs in the air like fame.

Even so, we have never known what to call it; we guess ...

And memory is filled with it unawares which we prayed for from hours that
belong to us.

VII

Flowers, you who are kin to the hands that arrange (gentle girls' hands of present
and past),
who often lay on the garden table, from edge to edge, exhausted and slightly
bruised,

waiting for the water once more to bring you back whole from the death that had
just begun—and now
lifted again between the fast-streaming poles of sensitive fingers that are able to do

even more good than you guessed, as you lightly uncurled, coming to yourselves
again in the pitcher,
slowly cooling, and exhaling the warmth of girls

like long confessions, like dreary wearying sins committed by being plucked, which
once more relate you to those who in blossoming are your cousins.

VIII

You playmates of mine in the scattered parks of the city, small friends from a
childhood of long ago:

how we found and liked one another, hesitantly, and, like the lamb with the
talking scroll,

spoke with our silence. When we were filled with joy, it belonged to no one: it was
simply there.

And how it dissolved among all the adults who passed by and in the fears of the
endless year.

Wheels rolled past us, we stood and stared at the carriages; houses surrounded us,
solid but untrue—and none of them ever knew us. What in that world was real?

Nothing. Only the balls. Their magnificent arches.

Not even the children ... But sometimes one,

oh a vanishing one, stepped under the plummeting ball.

(In memoriam Egon von Rilke)

IX

Don't boast, you judges, that you have dispensed with torture and that convicts are
no longer shackled by the neck or heel.

No heart is enhanced, not one is—because a tender spasm of mercy twists your
mouths into a smile.

What the scaffold received through the ages, it has given back again, as children
give back their battered old
birthday toys. Into the pure and lofty and gatelike open heart he would differently
enter, the god

of true mercy. Sudden, huge, he would stride through and grip us dazzled with
radiance all around.

More than a wind for the massive confident ships.

And not any less transforming than the deep intuition that wins us over without a
sound

like a quietly playing child of an infinite union.

X

All we have gained the machine threatens, as long as it dares to exist in the mind
and not in obedience.

To dim the masterful hand's more glorious lingering,
for the determined structure it more rigidly cuts the stones.

Nowhere does it stay behind; we cannot escape it at last as it rules, self-guided, self-
oiled, from its silent factory.

It thinks it is life: thinks it does everything best, though with equal determination
it can create or destroy.

But still, existence for us is a miracle; in a hundred places it is still the source. A
playing of absolute
forces that no one can touch who has not knelt down in wonder.

Still there are words that can calmly approach the unsayable ...
And from the most tremulous stones music, forever new, builds in unusable space
her deified temple.

XI

Many calmly established rules of death have arisen, ever-conquering man, since you acquired a taste for hunting; yet more than all traps, I know you, sailcloths of linen that used to be hung down into the caverns of Karst.

Gently they lowered you in as if you were a signal to celebrate peace. But then: the boy began shaking your side, —and suddenly, from the caves, the darkness would fling out a handful of pale doves into the day ...

But even that is all right.

Let every last twinge of pity be far from those who look on— far not just from the conscience of the vigilant, steadfast hunter who fulfills what time has allowed.

Killing too is a form of our ancient wandering affliction ...
When the mind stays serene, whatever happens to us is good.

XII

Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame in which a Thing disappears
and bursts into something else; the spirit of re-creation which masters this
earthly form loves most the pivoting point where you are no longer yourself.

What tightens into survival is already inert;
how safe is it really in its inconspicuous gray?
From far off a far greater hardness warns what is hard,
and the absent hammer is lifted high!

He who pours himself out like a stream is acknowledged at last by Knowledge; and
she leads him enchanted through the harmonious country that finishes often
with starting, and with ending begins.

Every fortunate space that the two of them pass through, astonished, is a child or
grandchild of parting. And the transfigured Daphne, as she feels herself
become laurel, wants you to change into wind.

XIII

Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were behind you, like the winter that
has just gone by.

For among these winters there is one so endlessly winter that only by wintering
through it will your heart survive.

Be forever dead in Eurydice—more gladly arise
into the seamless life proclaimed in your song.

Here, in the realm of decline, among momentary days, be the crystal cup that
shattered even as it rang.

Be—and yet know the great void where all things begin, the infinite source of your
own most intense vibration, so that, this once, you may give it your perfect
assent.

To all that is used-up, and to all the muffled and dumb creatures in the world's full
reserve, the unsayable sums, joyfully add yourself, and cancel the count.

XIV

Look at the flowers, so faithful to what is earthly, to whom we lend fate from the very border of fate.

And if they are sad about how they must wither and die, perhaps it is our vocation to be their regret.

All Things want to fly. Only we are weighed down by desire, caught in ourselves and enthralled with our heaviness.

Oh what consuming, negative teachers we are for them, while eternal childhood fills them with grace.

If someone were to fall into intimate slumber, and slept deeply with Things—: how easily he would come to a different day, out of the mutual depth.

Or perhaps he would stay there; and they would blossom and praise their newest convert, who now is like one of them, all those silent companions in the wind of the meadows.

XV

O fountain-mouth, you generous, always-filled mouth that speaks pure oneness,
constantly— you marble mask before the water's still flowing face. And in the
background, the

slow descent of aqueducts. From far
graves, and from the sloping Apennines, they bring you all your syllables, which
pour down from your blackened, aging chin

into the basin lying underneath.

This is the intimate and sleeping ear, the marble ear, in which you always speak.

An ear of Earth. Just with herself alone does she talk this way. And if a jug slips in,
she feels that you are interrupting her.

XVI

Over and over by us torn in two, the god is the hidden place that heals again.
We are sharp-edged, because we want to know, but he is always scattered and serene.

Even the pure, the consecrated gift he takes into his world no other way than by positioning himself, unmoved, to face the one end that is free.

Only the dead may drink
from the source that we just hear, the unseen pool, when the god, mute, allows them with a gesture.

Here, to us, only the noise is offered.
And the lamb keeps begging for its bell because of a more quiet instinct.

XVII

Where, inside what forever blissfully watered gardens, upon what trees, out of what
deep and tenderly unpetaled flower-cups,
do the exotic fruits of consolation hang ripening? Those rare delicacies, of which
you find one perhaps

in the trampled meadows of your poverty. Time and again you have stood there
marveling over the sheer size of the fruit, over its wholeness, its smooth and
unmottled skin,
and that the lightheaded bird or the jealous worm under the ground had not

snatched it away from your hands. Are there such trees, flown through by angels
and so strangely cared for by gardeners hidden and slow that they bear their
fruit to nourish us, without being ours?

Is it true we have never been able (we who are only
shadows and shades), through our ripening and wilting so early, to disturb the
enormous calm of those patient summers?

XVIII

Dancing girl: transformation
of all transience into steps: how you offered it there.
And the arm-raised whirl at the end, that tree made of motion, didn't it fully
possess the pivoted year?

Didn't it, so that your previous swirling might swarm in the midst of it, suddenly
blossom with stillness? And above, wasn't it sunshine, wasn't it summer, the
warmth, the pure, immeasurable warmth that you gave?

But it bore fruit also, it bore fruit, your tree of bliss.
Aren't they here in their tranquil season: the jug, whirling to ripeness, and the even
more ripened vase?

And in the pictures: can't we still see the drawing which your eyebrow's dark
evanescent stroke
quickly inscribed on the surface of its own turning?

XIX

Somewhere gold lives, luxurious, inside the pampering bank, on intimate terms with thousands. Meanwhile, the wretched blindman begging here seems, even to a penny, just like some always-forgotten corner or the dustpile beneath a bed.

In all the most elegant shops money is at ease
and steps out in shiny costumes of furs, carnations, and silks.
He, the silent one, stands in the narrow breath-pause
made by money breathing as it slumbers or wakes.

Oh how can it close at night, that hand which is always open?
Tomorrow and each day Fate will arrive and hold it out: clear, squalid, at any
moment likely to be destroyed.

If only someone who could see, astonished at its long duration, would understand
it and praise it. Sayable only for the singer.
Audible only to the god.

XX

In between stars, what distances; and yet, how much vaster the distance that we learn from what is right here.

Someone, for example a child ... and beside him, his brother or sister— oh how incomprehensibly far.

Fate measures us perhaps according to what is real, so it seems to us not our own; think of how vast a distance there is from the girl to the loved and avoided man.

All things are far—and nowhere does the circle close.

Look at the fish, served up on the gaily set table: how peculiar its face on the dish.

All fish are mute ..., one used to think. But who knows?

Isn't there at last a place where, without them, we would be able to speak in the language of fish?

XXI

Sing of the gardens, my heart, that you never saw; as if glass domes had been
placed upon them, unreached forever.
Fountains and roses of Ispahan or Shiraz— sing of their happiness, praise them:
unlike all others.

Show that you always feel them, forever close.
That when their figs ripen, it is you they are ripening for.
That you know every breeze which, among the blossoms they bear, is intensified
till it almost becomes a face.

Avoid the illusion that there can be any lack
for someone who wishes, then fully decides: to be!
Silken thread, you were woven into the fabric.

Whatever the design with which you are inwardly joined (even for only one
moment amid years of grief),
feel that the whole, the marvelous carpet is meant.

XXII

Oh in spite of fate: the glorious overflowings of our existence, spouted upward in parks— or as stone-carved men who bear upon shoulders and backs the weight overhead, braced on the sheer edge of buildings.

Oh the bronze bell that, day after day, can lift its club to shatter our dull quotidian hum.

Or the only presence, in Karnak, the column, the column in which temples that were almost eternal have been outlived.

For us these abundances plunge past, no longer central but only appearing as haste, out of the horizontal yellow day and into the overwhelmed, dazzled night.

But this frenzy too will subside, leaving no traces.

Arcs of airplanes and those who drove them through space, none perhaps is in vain. Yet only as thought.

XXIII

Call me to the one among your moments that stands against you, ineluctably:
intimate as a dog's imploring glance but, again, forever, turned away

when you think you've captured it at last.

What seems so far from you is most your own.

We are already free, and were dismissed where we thought we soon would be at
home.

Anxious, we keep longing for a foothold— we, at times too young for what is old
and too old for what has never been;

doing justice only where we praise,

because we are the branch, the iron blade, and sweet danger, ripening from within.

XXIV

Oh the delight, ever new, out of loosened soil!
The ones who first dared were almost without any help.
Nonetheless, at fortunate harbors, cities sprang up, and pitchers were nonetheless
filled with water and oil.

Gods: we project them first in the boldest of sketches, which sullen Fate keeps
crumpling and tossing away.
But for all that, the gods are immortal. Surely we may hear out the one who, in the
end, will hear us.

We, one generation through thousands of lifetimes: women and men, who are
more and more filled with the child we will bear, so that through it we may be
shattered and overtaken.

We, the endlessly dared—how far we have come!
And only taciturn Death can know what we are
and how he must always profit when he lends us time.

XXV

Already (listen!) you can hear the first harrows; once more the rhythm of men
through the held-back silence of the resolute earth in early spring. What has so
often

come to you is coming once more,
vivid as if for the first time. Now, slowly, you await what you always hoped for but
never took. It always took you.

Even the leaves of wintered-through oaks seem in the twilight a future brown.
Breezes signal, then signal back.

Black are the bushes. Yet heaps of dung lie more intensely black on the ground.
Every hour that goes by grows younger.

XXVI

How deeply the cry of a bird can move us ...

Any cry that is cried out whole.

But children, playing in their open space— already their cries have become unreal.

They cry out chance. And into the silent seamless world, into which birds' cries fully (as men into dream-space) blend,
they hammer the hard-edged wedge of their noise.

Alas, where are we? Freer and freer,

like colored kites torn loose from their strings, we toss half-high-up, framed by
cold laughter,

slashed by the wind.—Oh compose the criers, harmonious god! let them wake
resounding, let their clear stream carry the head and the lyre.

XXVII

Does it really exist, Time, the Destroyer?
When will it crush the fortress on the peaceful height?
This heart, which belongs to the infinite gods forever, when will the Demiurge
violate it?

Are we really as fate keeps trying to convince us, weak and brittle in an alien
world?
And childhood, with all its divining voices, is it later, down to its first root, stilled?

Ah, the ghost of the transient
moves through the open, innocent heart like a summer cloud.

As who we are, desperate, driving, we still matter among the abiding powers as a
use of the gods.

XXVIII

Oh come and go. You, almost still a child— for just a moment fill out the dance-
figure into the constellation of those bold
dances in which dull, obsessive Nature

is fleetingly surpassed. For she was stirred to total hearing just when Orpheus sang.
You were still moved by those primeval words and a bit surprised if any tree took
long

to step with you into the listening ear.
You knew the place where once the lyre arose resounding: the unheard, unheard-of
center.

For its sake you tried out your lovely motion and hoped that you would one day
turn your friend's body toward the perfect celebration.

XXIX

Silent friend of many distances, feel how your breath enlarges all of space.
Let your presence ring out like a bell into the night. What feeds upon your face

grows mighty from the nourishment thus offered.

Move through transformation, out and in.

What is the deepest loss that you have suffered?

If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.

In this immeasurable darkness, be the power that rounds your senses in their
magic ring, the sense of their mysterious encounter.

And if the earthly no longer knows your name, whisper to the silent earth: I'm
flowing.

To the flashing water say: I am.

Appendix to The Sonnets to Orpheus

[I]

Praising is what matters! He was summoned for that, and came to us like the ore
from a stone's silence. His mortal heart presses out a deathless, inexhaustible
wine!

Don't be confused if kings are discovered rotting in their sepulchers, gnawed by
the worm— for a while the decay of body and head assailed him too with
intense alarm;

he, however, despising all doubt,
throttled the stench and with praise affirmed the daily by day and the nightly at
night,

for who knows what is transformed by the graces?
Kneeling from the maggots' marketplace, he lifted the Golden Fleece, unharmed.

[Notes](#)

[II]

The New, my friends, is not a matter of letting machines force out our handiwork. Don't be confused by change; soon those who have praised the "New" will realize their mistake.

For look, the Whole is infinitely newer than a cable or a high apartment house. The stars keep blazing with an ancient fire, and all more recent fires will fade out.

Not even the longest, strongest of transmissions can turn the wheels of what will be.

Across the moment, aeons speak with aeons.

More than we experienced has gone by. And the future holds the most remote event in union with what we most deeply want.

[III]

Brew us the magic in which all limits dissolve, spirit forever bent to the fire!
That fathomless limit of evil, first, which revolves also around those who are
resting and do not stir.

Dissolve with a few drops whatever excludes in the limit of the ages, which makes
our past wisdom a fraud; for how deeply we have absorbed the Athenian
sunlight and the mystery of the Egyptian falcon or god.

Don't rest until the boundary that keeps the sexes in meaningless conflict has
disappeared.

Open up childhood and the wombs of more truly expectant

generous mothers so that, shaming all that is empty, and not confused by the
hindering wood,
they may give birth to future rivers, augmenting the sea.

[IV]

Seek no more than what the stela knows, and the mild image sculpted in the stone:
almost cheerfully, with a lightness, as
though they were exempt from earthly pain.

Experience no further than the pure
direction in the world's withdrawing stream— ah, perhaps the icy jewels she wore
in that dimly lighted room.

Be all the more consoled by what you see in the elements that are most truly yours.
Wind consoles, and fire is consolation.

Here and There: you must be gripped by both, strangely without a difference.
Otherwise you drain the whiteness from the whitest cloth.

[M]

Imagine: they might have experienced through each other which of our miracles
can be shared—.

But while he gradually wrestled with growing older, she was as yet unborn, a still-
future child.

She, perhaps—still playing with her friends, it was she
whom he had foreseen with boyish longing and love, knowing the heart that
would one day hold him completely; and now a mere nothing parts them: a
decade times five.

Oh you bewildered god, you defrauded Hymen, how sadly you extinguish the
wedding-torch now
because it flung ashes onto that graying head.

Must he die in laments, and praise the beginning woman?
Or through his most silent yielding will he make her into that unmoving form by
which he is wholly exceeded?

Notes

[VI]

When everything we create is far in spirit from the festive, in the midst of our turbulent days let us think of what festivals were.

Look, they still play for us also, all of the Villa d'Este's glittering fountains, though some are no longer towering there.

Still, we are heirs to those gardens that poets once praised in their songs; let us grasp our most urgent duty: to make them fully our own.

We perhaps are the last to be given such god-favored, fortunate Things, their final chance to find an enduring home.

Let not one god pass away. We all need each of them now, let each be valid for us, each image formed in the depths.

Don't speak with the slightest disdain of whatever the heart can know.

Though we are no longer the ones for whom great festivals thrived, this accomplishing fountain-jet that surges to us as strength has traveled through aqueducts—in order, for our sake, to arrive.

[VII]

What silence around a god! How, inside it, you hear every change in the sparkling
fountain-spray on the marble pool, as it leaps up and falls back entirely.

And over the laurel a feeling: three, perhaps four

leaves that a butterfly touched. With a whirl it goes tumbling past, on the buoyant
breath of the valley.

And now you remember another day
when you felt it, already so perfect, here,

the silence around a god. But was it like this?

Isn't it spreading? Isn't it immense?

Isn't it pressing almost like a resistance

upon your resounding heart? Somewhere its beat is broken on a soundless lull in
the afternoon ...

There, He is.

[VIII]

We have overheard fountains all our days.
They sound to us almost like time.
But much more closely do they keep pace with eternity's subtle rhythm.

The water is strange and the water is yours, from here and from far below.
You are the fountain-stone, unawares, and all Things are mirrored in you.

How distant this is, yet deeply akin, long unriddled and never known, senseless,
then perfectly clear.

Your task is to love what you don't understand.
It grips your most secret emotion, and rushes away with it. Where?

Notes

[IX]

When was a man as awake as this morning is?
Not just flower and brook: the roof too rejoices.

Even its weathered rim, lit by the sky— finds it can feel: is home, is answer, is day.

Everything breathes in accord.
How tracelessly you have gone away, you cares of the night.

Its darkness was formed, in pure contradiction, from legions of light.

Notes

[FRAGMENTS]

[i]

Like held-in breath, serene and motionless stands the nymph inside the ripening
tree

[ii]

Look up. How calm the heavens are tonight.

[iii]

Lofty god of distant harmonies

I sense you everywhere deep in every Thing upon the gently patterned slope the
trees stand silent as when first they heard you sing

[iv]

Mirror, you doppelgänger of space! O mirror, into you go plunging the halves of
smiles / perhaps the sweetest; for how often the master's preliminary
brushstroke, upon the provisional page more fruitfully leaps up than, later, the
more controlled outline does on the ready background: So do you, O
unsayable presence, smile forth your morning's descent and freedom into the
ever-accepting mirrors

[v]

Forever, O nymph, how long / I have marveled at you, amazed, though you never
stepped into my sight from out of the closed-in tree—.

I am the time that is passing—you are the youngest age, all that you asked from the
gods has remained here, forever new.

Yours is the meadow, even now it sways from the leap with which you finally
vanished into the elm.

Once, in the christian dawn. And our earliest hope: for your sake isn't it planted
into the springtime?

Before we are moved by a girl, it is you that we think of

[vi]

..... of the brown

..... on the sonorous
dried-up earth of the forest
 drums the flight of the faun

[vii]
This is the silent rising of the phalli

[viii]
About my answer: I still don't know
when I will bring it forth.
But listen, a harrow that already creates.
Up there in the vineyard someone, alone, already speaks with the earth.

[ix]
Have you [?ever observed] the changing leaf-forms of the ivy

[x]
Protect yourself better
 protect yourself wanderer with the road that is walking too

[xi]
Gather us now to hear love's legends.
Tell us of its daring, exquisite throes.
Where it was right, all things could be summoned; here there are mostly
 abandoned vows.

Duineser Elegien

(1923)

Aus dem Besitz der Fuerstin Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe
(1912/1922)

DIE ERSTE ELEGIE

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem stärkeren Dasein. Denn
das Schöne ist nichts
als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen, und wir bewundern es
so, weil es gelassen verschmäh, uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist
schrecklich.

Und so verhalt ich mich denn und verschlucke den Lockruf dunkelen
Schluchzens. Ach, wen vermögen
wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht, und die findigen Tiere
merken es schon,
daß wir nicht sehr verlässlich zu Haus sind
in der gedeuteten Welt. Es bleibt uns vielleicht irgend ein Baum an dem Abhang,
daß wir ihn täglich wiedersähen; es bleibt uns die Straße von gestern und das
verzogene Treusein einer Gewohnheit,
der es bei uns gefiel, und so blieb sie und ging nicht.

O und die Nacht, die Nacht, wenn der Wind voller Weltraum uns am
Angesicht zehrt—, wem bliebe sie nicht, die ersehnte, sanft enttäuschende,
welche dem einzelnen Herzen mühsam bevorsteht. Ist sie den Liebenden
leichter?

Ach, sie verdecken sich nur mit einander ihr Los.

Weißt du's noch nicht? Wirf aus den Armen die Leere zu den Räumen hinzu,
die wir atmen; vielleicht daß die Vögel die erweiterte Luft fühlen mit
innigerm Flug.

Ja, die Frühlinge brauchten dich wohl. Es muteten manche Sterne dir zu, daß du
sie spürtest. Es hob
sich eine Woge heran im Vergangenen, oder
da du vorüberkamst am geöffneten Fenster,
gab eine Geige sich hin. Das alles war Auftrag.
Aber bewältigtest du's? Warst du nicht immer noch von Erwartung zerstreut, als
kündigte alles eine Geliebte dir an? (Wo willst du sie bergen,
da doch die großen fremden Gedanken bei dir
aus und ein gehn und öfters bleiben bei Nacht.)
Sehnt es dich aber, so singe die Liebenden; lange noch nicht unsterblich genug ist

ihr berühmtes Gefühl.

Jene, du neidest sie fast, Verlassenen, die du
so viel liebender fandst als die Gestillten. Beginn immer von neuem die nie zu
erreichende Preisung; denk: es erhält sich der Held, selbst der Untergang war
ihm nur ein Vorwand, zu sein: seine letzte Geburt.

Aber die Liebenden nimmt die erschöpfte Natur
in sich zurück, als wären nicht zweimal die Kräfte, dieses zu leisten. Hast du der
Gaspara Stampa
denn genügend gedacht, daß irgend ein Mädchen,
dem der Geliebte entging, am gesteigerten Beispiel dieser Liebenden fühlt: daß ich
würde wie sie?

Sollen nicht endlich uns diese ältesten Schmerzen fruchtbarer werden? Ist es nicht
Zeit, daß wir liebend uns vom Geliebten befreien und es bebend bestehn: wie
der Pfeil die Sehne besteht, um gesammelt im Absprung mehr zu sein als er
selbst. Denn Bleiben ist nirgends.

Stimmen, Stimmen. Höre, mein Herz, wie sonst nur Heilige hörten: daß sie der
riesige Ruf
aufhob vom Boden; sie aber knieten,
Unmögliche, weiter und achtetens nicht:
So waren sie hörend. Nicht, daß du Gottes erträgest die Stimme, bei weitem. Aber
das Wehende höre,
die ununterbrochene Nachricht, die aus Stille sich bildet.
Es rauscht jetzt von jenen jungen Toten zu dir.
Wo immer du eintratst, redete nicht in Kirchen
zu Rom und Neapel ruhig ihr Schicksal dich an?
Oder es trug eine Inschrift sich erhaben dir auf, wie neulich die Tafel in Santa
Maria Formosa.
Was sie mir wollen? leise soll ich des Unrechts
Anschein abtun, der ihrer Geister
reine Bewegung manchmal ein wenig behindert.

Freilich ist es seltsam, die Erde nicht mehr zu bewohnen, kaum erlernte Gebräuche
nicht mehr zu üben,
Rosen, und andern eigens versprechenden Dingen
nicht die Bedeutung menschlicher Zukunft zu geben; das, was man war in
unendlich ängstlichen Händen, nicht mehr zu sein, und selbst den eigenen
Namen wegzulassen wie ein zerbrochenes Spielzeug.

Seltsam, die Wünsche nicht weiterzuwünschen. Seltsam, alles, was sich bezog, so
lose im Raume
flattern zu sehen. Und das Totsein ist mühsam
und voller Nachhohn, daß man allmählich ein wenig Ewigkeit spürt.—Aber
Lebendige machen
alle den Fehler, daß sie zu stark unterscheiden.
Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter
Lebenden gehn oder Toten. Die ewige Strömung
reißt durch beide Bereiche alle Alter
immer mit sich und übertönt sie in beiden.

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Früheent-rückten, man entwöhnt sich
des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten milde der Mutter entwächst. Aber
wir, die so große Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft
seliger Fortschritt entspringt—: könnten wir sein ohne sie?
Ist die Sage umsonst, daß einst in der Klage um Linos wagende erste Musik dürre
Erstarrung durchdrang; daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah
göttlicher Jüngling plötzlich für immer enttrat, das Leere in jene
Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft.

DIE ZWEITE ELEGIE

Jeder Engel ist schrecklich. Und dennoch, weh mir, ansing ich euch, fast tödliche Vögel der Seele, wissend um euch. Wohin sind die Tage Tobiae, da der Strahlendsten einer stand an der einfachen Haustür, zur Reise ein wenig verkleidet und schon nicht mehr furchtbar; (Jüngling dem Jüngling, wie er neugierig hinaussah).

Träte der Erzengel jetzt, der gefährliche, hinter den Sternen eines Schrittes nur nieder und herwärts: hochauf-schlagend erschlug uns das eigene Herz. Wer seid ihr?

Frühe Geglückte, ihr Verwöhnten der Schöpfung, Höhenzüge, morgenrötliche Grate
aller Erschaffung,—Pollen der blühenden Gottheit, Gelenke des Lichtes, Gänge, Treppen, Throne,
Räume aus Wesen, Schilde aus Wonne, Tumulte
stürmisch entzückten Gefühls und plötzlich, einzeln, Spiegel: die die entströmte eigene Schönheit wiederschöpfen zurück in das eigene Antlitz.

Denn wir, wo wir fühlen, verflüchtigen; ach wir atmen uns aus und dahin; von Holzglut zu Holzglut geben wir schwächern Geruch. Da sagt uns wohl einer: ja, du gehst mir ins Blut, dieses Zimmer, der Frühling füllt sich mit dir ... Was hilft, er kann uns nicht halten, wir schwinden in ihm und um ihn. Und jene, die schön sind, o wer hält sie zurück? Unaufhörlich steht Anschein auf in ihrem Gesicht und geht fort. Wie Tau von dem Frühgras hebt sich das Unsre von uns, wie die Hitze von einem heißen Gericht. O Lächeln, wohin? O Aufschaun: neue, warme, entgehende Welle des Herzens—; weh mir: wir sinds doch. Schmeckt denn der Weltraum, in den wir uns lösen, nach uns? Fangen die Engel wirklich nur Ihriges auf, ihnen Entströmtes, oder ist manchmal, wie aus Versehen, ein wenig unseres Wesens dabei? Sind wir in ihre
Züge soviel nur gemischt wie das Vage in die Gesichter schwangerer Frauen? Sie merken es nicht in dem Wirbel ihrer Rückkehr zu sich. (Wie sollten sie's merken.)

Liebende könnten, verstünden sie's, in der Nachtluft wunderbar reden. Denn es scheint, daß uns alles verheimlicht. Siehe, die Bäume sind; die Häuser, die wir

bewohnen, bestehn noch. Wir nur
ziehen allem vorbei wie ein luftiger Austausch.
Und alles ist einig, uns zu verschweigen, halb als Schande vielleicht und halb als
unsägliche Hoffnung.

Liebende, euch, ihr in einander Genügten,
frag ich nach uns. Ihr greift euch. Habt ihr Beweise?
Seht, mir geschiehts, daß meine Hände einander inne werden oder daß mein
gebrauchtes
Gesicht in ihnen sich schont. Das giebt mir ein wenig Empfindung. Doch wer
wagte darum schon zu sein?
Ihr aber, die ihr im Entzücken des anderen
zunehmt, bis er euch überwältigt
anfleht: nicht mehr—; die ihr unter den Händen euch reichlicher werdet wie
Traubenjahre;
die ihr manchmal vergeht, nur weil der andre
ganz überhand nimmt: euch frag ich nach uns. Ich weiß, ihr berührt euch so selig,
weil die Liebkosung verhält, weil die Stelle nicht schwindet, die ihr, Zärtliche,
zudeckt; weil ihr darunter das reine
Dauern verspürt. So versprecht ihr euch Ewigkeit fast von der Umarmung. Und
doch, wenn ihr der ersten Blicke Schrecken besteht und die Sehnsucht am
Fenster, und den ersten gemeinsamen Gang, ein Mal durch den Garten:
Liebende, seid ihrs dann noch? Wenn ihr einer dem andern euch an den
Mund hebt und ansetzt—: Getränk an Getränk: o wie entgeht dann der
Trinkende seltsam der Handlung.

Erstaunte euch nicht auf attischen Stelen die Vorsicht menschlicher Geste? war
nicht Liebe und Abschied so leicht auf die Schultern gelegt, als wär es aus
andern Stoffe gemacht als bei uns? Gedenkt euch der Hände, wie sie drucklos
beruhen, obwohl in den Torsen die Kraft steht.

Diese Beherrschten wußten damit: so weit sind wirs, dieses ist unser, uns so zu
berühren; stärker stemmen die Götter uns an. Doch dies ist Sache der Götter.

Fänden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes, schmales Menschliches, einen unseren
Streifen Fruchtlands zwischen Strom und Gestein. Denn das eigene Herz
übersteigt uns noch immer wie jene. Und wir können ihm nicht mehr
nachschaun in Bilder, die es besänftigen, noch in göttliche Körper, in denen es
größer sich mäßigt.

Notizen

DIE DRITTE ELEGIE

Eines ist, die Geliebte zu singen. Ein anderes, wehe, jenen verborgenen schuldigen
Fluß-Gott des Bluts.

Den sie von weitem erkennt, ihren Jüngling, was weiß er selbst von dem Herren
der Lust, der aus dem Einsamen oft, ehe das Mädchen noch linderte, oft auch
als wäre sie nicht, ach, von welchem Unkenntlichen triefend, das Gotthaupt
aufhob, aufrufend die Nacht zu unendlichem Aufruhr.

O des Blutes Neptun, o sein furchtbarer Dreizack.

O der dunkle Wind seiner Brust aus gewundener Muschel.

Horch, wie die Nacht sich muldet und höhlt. Ihr Sterne, stammt nicht von euch
des Liebenden Lust zu dem Antlitz seiner Geliebten? Hat er die innige
Einsicht

in ihr reines Gesicht nicht aus dem reinen Gestirn?

Du nicht hast ihm, wehe, nicht seine Mutter
hat ihm die Bogen der Braun so zur Erwartung gespannt.

Nicht an dir, ihn fühlendes Mädchen, an dir nicht bog seine Lippe sich zum
fruchtbarem Ausdruck.

Meinst du wirklich, ihn hätte dein leichter Auftritt also erschüttert, du, die
wandelt wie Frühwind?

Zwar du erschrakst ihm das Herz; doch ältere Schrecken stürzten in ihn bei dem
berührenden Anstoß.

Ruf ihn ... du rufst ihn nicht ganz aus dunkeltem Umgang.

Freilich, er will, er entspringt; erleichtert gewöhnt er sich in dein heimliches Herz
und nimmt und beginnt sich.

Aber begann er sich je?

Mutter, du machtest ihn klein, du warsts, die ihn anfing; dir war er neu, du
beugtest über die neuen

Augen die freundliche Welt und wehrtest der fremden.

Wo, ach, hin sind die Jahre, da du ihm einfach mit der schlanken Gestalt
wallendes Chaos vertratst?

Vieles verbargst du ihm so; das nächtlich-verdächtige Zimmer machtest du
harmlos, aus deinem Herzen voll Zuflucht mischtest du menschlichem Raum
seinem Nacht-Raum hinzu.

Nicht in die Finsternis, nein, in dein näheres Dasein hast du das Nachtlicht
gestellt und es schien wie aus Freundschaft.

Nirgends ein Knistern, das du nicht lächelnd erklärtest, so als wüßtest du längst,
wann sich die Diele benimmt ...

Und er horchte und linderte sich. So vieles vermochte zärtlich dein Aufstehn;
hinter den Schrank trat
hoch im Mantel sein Schicksal, und in die Falten des Vorhangs paßte, die leicht
sich verschob, seine unruhige Zukunft.

Und er selbst, wie er lag, der Erleichterte, unter schläfernden Lidern deiner
leichten Gestaltung
Süße lösend in den gekosteten Vorschlaf—: schien ein Gehüteter ... Aber innen: wer
wehrte, hinderte innen in ihm die Fluten der Herkunft?

Ach, da war keine Vorsicht im Schlafenden; schlafend, aber träumend, aber in
Fiebern: wie er sich ein-ließ.

Er, der Neue, Scheuende, wie er verstrickt war,
mit des innern Geschehns weiterschlagenden Ranken schon zu Mustern
verschlungen, zu würgendem Wachstum, zu tierhaft jagenden Formen. Wie er
sich hingab—. Liebte.

Liebte sein Inneres, seines Inneren Wildnis,
diesen Urwald in ihm, auf dessen stummem Gestürztsein lichtgrün sein Herz
stand. Liebte. Verließ es, ging die eigenen Wurzeln hinaus in gewaltigen
Ursprung, wo seine kleine Geburt schon überlebt war. Liebend stieg er hinab
in das ältere Blut, in die Schluchten, wo das Furchtbare lag, noch satt von den
Vätern. Und jedes Schreckliche kannte ihn, blinzelte, war wie verständigt.

Ja, das Entsetzliche lächelte ... Selten
hast du so zärtlich gelächelt, Mutter. Wie sollte er es nicht lieben, da es ihm
lächelte. Vor dir hat ers geliebt, denn, da du ihn trugst schon,
war es im Wasser gelöst, das den Keimenden leicht macht.

Siehe, wir lieben nicht, wie die Blumen, aus einem einzigen Jahr; uns steigt, wo wir
lieben,

unvordenklicher Saft in die Arme. O Mädchen,
dies: daß wir liebten in uns, nicht Eines, ein Künftiges, sondern das zahllos
Brauende; nicht ein einzelnes Kind,
sondern die Väter, die wie Trümmer Gebirgs
uns im Grunde beruhen; sondern das trockene Flußbett einstiger Mütter—; sondern
die ganze
lautlose Landschaft unter dem wolkigen oder

reinen Verhängnis—: dies kam dir, Mädchen, zuvor.

Und du selber, was weißt du—, du locktest
Vorzeit empor in dem Liebenden. Welche Gefühle
wühlten herauf aus entwandelten Wesen. Welche
Frauen haßten dich da. Was für finstere Männer
regtest du auf im Geäder des Jünglings? Tote
Kinder wollten zu dir ... O leise, leise,
tu ein liebes vor ihm, ein verlässliches Tagwerk,—führ ihn nah an den Garten
heran, gieb ihm der Nächte
Übergewicht

Verhalt ihn

[Notizen](#)

DIE VIERTE ELEGIE

O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich?

Wir sind nicht einig. Sind nicht wie die Zugvögel verständigt. Überholt und spät,
so drängen wir uns plötzlich Winden auf
und fallen ein auf teilnahmslosen Teich.

Blühn und verdorren ist uns zugleich bewußt.

Und irgendwo gehn Löwen noch und wissen, solange sie herrlich sind, von keiner
Ohnmacht.

Uns aber, wo wir Eines meinen, ganz,

ist schon des andern Aufwand fühlbar. Feindschaft ist uns das Nächste. Treten
Liebende

nicht immerfort an Ränder, eins im andern, die sich versprochen Weite, Jagd und
Heimat.

Da wird für eines Augenblickes Zeichnung ein Grund von Gegenteil bereitet,
mühsam, daß wir sie sähen; denn man ist sehr deutlich mit uns. Wir
kennen den Kontur

des Fühlens nicht: nur, was ihn formt von außen.

Wer saß nicht bang vor seines Herzens Vorhang?

Der schlug sich auf: die Szenerie war Abschied.

Leicht zu verstehen. Der bekannte Garten, und schwankte leise: dann erst kam der
Tänzer.

Nicht der. Genug! Und wenn er auch so leicht tut, er ist verkleidet und er wird ein
Bürger und geht durch seine Küche in die Wohnung.

Ich will nicht diese halbgefüllten Masken, lieber die Puppe. Die ist voll. Ich
will den Balg aushalten und den Draht und ihr Gesicht aus Aussehn. Hier.
Ich bin davor.

Wenn auch die Lampen ausgehn, wenn mir auch gesagt wird: Nichts mehr—, wenn
auch von der Bühne das Leere herkommt mit dem grauen Luftzug, wenn auch
von meinen stillen Vorfahrn keiner mehr mit mir dasitzt, keine Frau, sogar
der Knabe nicht mehr mit dem braunen Schielaug: Ich bleibe dennoch. Es giebt
immer Zuschaun.

Hab ich nicht recht? Du, der um mich so bitter das Leben schmeckte, meines
kostend, Vater, den ersten trüben Aufguß meines Müssens, da ich heranwuchs,
immer wieder kostend

und, mit dem Nachgeschmack so fremder Zukunft beschäftigt, prüftest mein
beschlagnes Aufschaun,— der du, mein Vater, seit du tot bist, oft in meiner
Hoffnung, innen in mir, Angst hast, und Gleichmut, wie ihn Tote haben,
Reiche von Gleichmut, aufgibst für mein bißchen Schicksal, hab ich nicht
recht? Und ihr, hab ich nicht recht, die ihr mich liebtet für den kleinen
Anfang Liebe zu euch, von dem ich immer abkam,
weil mir der Raum in eurem Angesicht,
da ich ihn liebte, überging in Weltraum, in dem ihr nicht mehr wart.... : wenn mir
zumut ist, zu warten vor der Puppenbühne, nein,
so völlig hinzuschauen, daß, um mein Schauen am Ende aufzuwiegen, dort als
Spieler
ein Engel hinmuß, der die Bälge hochreißt.
Engel und Puppe: dann ist endlich Schauspiel.
Dann kommt zusammen, was wir immerfort
entzwein, indem wir da sind. Dann entsteht aus unsern Jahreszeiten erst der
Umkreis des ganzen Wandens. Über uns hinüber
spielt dann der Engel. Sieh, die Sterbenden, sollten sie nicht vermuten, wie voll
Vorwand das alles ist, was wir hier leisten. Alles ist nicht es selbst. O Stunden
in der Kindheit, da hinter den Figuren mehr als nur
Vergangnes war und vor uns nicht die Zukunft.
Wir wuchsen freilich und wir drängten manchmal, bald groß zu werden, denen
halb zulieb,
die andres nicht mehr hatten, als das Großsein.
Und waren doch, in unserem Alleingehn,
mit Dauerndem vergnügt und standen da
im Zwischenräume zwischen Welt und Spielzeug, an einer Stelle, die seit Anbeginn
gegründet war für einen reinen Vorgang.

Wer zeigt ein Kind, so wie es steht? Wer stellt es ins Gestirn und giebt das Maß des
Abstands ihm in die Hand? Wer macht den Kindertod aus grauem Brot, das
hart wird,—oder läßt ihn drin im runden Mund, so wie den Gröps von einem
schönen Apfel? Mörder sind
leicht einzusehen. Aber dies: den Tod,
den ganzen Tod, noch vor dem Leben so sanft zu enthalten und nicht böse zu sein,
ist unbeschreiblich.

DIE FÜNFTE ELEGIE

Frau Hertha Koenig zugeeignet

Wer aber sind sie, sag mir, die Fahrenden, diese ein wenig Flüchtigen noch als wir selbst, die dringend von früh an wringt ein wem, wem zu Liebe niemals zufriedener Wille? Sondern er wringt sie, biegt sie, schlingt sie und schwingt sie, wirft sie und fängt sie zurück; wie aus geölter, glatterer Luft kommen sie nieder

auf dem verzehrten, von ihrem ewigen Aufsprung dünneren Teppich, diesem verlorenen Teppich im Weltall.

Aufgelegt wie ein Pflaster, als hätte der Vorstadt-Himmel der Erde dort wehe getan.

Und kaum dort, aufrecht, da und gezeigt: des Dastehns großer Anfangsbuchstab ..., schon auch, die stärksten Männer, rollt sie wieder, zum Scherz, der immer kommende Griff, wie August der Starke bei Tisch einen zinnernen Teller.

Ach und um diese

Mitte, die Rose des Zuschauns:

blüht und entblättert. Um diesen

Stampfer, den Stempel, den von dem eignen blühenden Staub getroffen, zur Scheinfrucht wieder der Unlust befruchteten, ihrer niemals bewußten,— glänzend mit dünnster Oberfläche leicht scheinlächelnden Unlust.

Da: der welke, faltige Stemmer,

der alte, der nur noch trommelt,

eingegangen in seiner gewaltigen Haut, als hätte sie früher zwei Männer enthalten, und einer läge nun schon auf dem Kirchhof, und er überlebte den andern, taub und manchmal ein wenig

wirr, in der verwitweten Haut.

Aber der junge, der Mann, als wär er der Sohn eines Nackens und einer Nonne:

prall und strammig erfüllt mit Muskeln und Einfalt.

Oh ihr,

die ein Leid, das noch klein war,

einst als Spielzeug bekam, in einer seiner langen Genesungen

Du, der mit dem Aufschlag,
wie nur Früchte ihn kennen, unreif, täglich hundertmal abfällt vom Baum der
gemeinsam erbauten Bewegung (der, rascher als Wasser, in wenig Minuten
Lenz, Sommer und Herbst hat)— abfällt und anprallt ans Grab:
manchmal, in halber Pause, will dir ein liebes Antlitz entstehn hinüber zu deiner
selten zärtlichen Mutter; doch an deinen Körper verliert sich, der es flüchtig
verbraucht, das schüchtern kaum versuchte Gesicht ... Und wieder klatscht der
Mann in die Hand zu dem Ansprung, und eh dir jemals ein Schmerz
deutlicher wird in der Nähe des immer trabenden Herzens, kommt das
Brennen der Fußsohlen ihm, seinem Ursprung, zuvor mit ein paar dir rasch in
die Augen gejagten leiblichen Tränen.

Und dennoch, blindlings,
das Lächeln

Engel! o nimms, pflücks, das kleinblütige Heilkraut.
Schaff eine Vase, verwahr! Stells unter jene, uns noch nicht offenen Freuden; in
lieblicher Urne rühms mit blumiger schwungiger Aufschrift: 'Subrisio Saltat.'

Du dann, Liebliche, du, von den reizendsten Freuden
stumm Übersprungne. Vielleicht sind deine Fransen glücklich für dich—, oder über
den jungen
prallen Brüsten die grüne metallene Seide fühlt sich unendlich verwöhnt und
entbehrt nichts.

Du,
immerfort anders auf alle des Gleichgewichts schwankende Waagen hingelegte
Marktfrucht des Gleichmuts, öffentlich unter den Schultern.

Wo, o wo ist der Ort—ich trag ihn im Herzen—, wo sie noch lange nicht konnten,
noch von einander abfieln, wie sich bespringende, nicht recht paarige Tiere;—
wo die Gewichte noch schwer sind;
wo noch von ihren vergeblich
wirbelnden Stäben die Teller
torkeln

Und plötzlich in diesem mühsamen Nirgends, plötzlich die unsägliche Stelle, wo
sich das reine Zuwenig unbegreiflich verwandelt—, umspringt in jenes leere

Zuviel.

Wo die vielstellige Rechnung
zahlenlos aufgeht.

Plätze, o Platz in Paris, unendlicher Schauplatz, wo die Modistin, Madame Lamort,
die ruhlosen Wege der Erde, endlose Bänder, schlingt und windet und neue aus
ihnen Schleifen erfindet, Rüschen, Blumen, Kokarden, künstliche Früchte—,
alle unwahr gefärbt,—für die billigen
Winterhüte des Schicksals.

.....

Engel!: Es wäre ein Platz, den wir nicht wissen, und dorten, auf unsäglichem
Teppich, zeigten die Liebenden, die's hier bis zum Können nie bringen, ihre
kühnen hohen Figuren des Herzschwungs,
ihre Türme aus Lust, ihre
längst, wo Boden nie war, nur an einander lehnenen Leitern, bebend,—und
könnstens, vor den Zuschauern rings, unzähligen lautlosen Toten: Würfen die
dann ihre letzten, immer ersparten, immer verborgenen, die wir nicht kennen,
ewig gültigen Münzen des Glücks vor das endlich wahrhaft lächelnde Paar auf
gestilltem Teppich?

DIE SECHSTE ELEGIE

Feigenbaum, seit wie lange schon ists mir bedeutend, wie du die Blüte beinah ganz
überschlägst

und hinein in die zeitig entschlossene Frucht,
ungerühmt, drängst dein reines Geheimnis.

Wie der Fontäne Rohr treibt dein gebognes Gezweig abwärts den Saft und hinan:
und er springt aus dem Schlaf, fast nicht erwachend, ins Glück seiner süßesten
Leistung.

Sieh: wie der Gott in den Schwan.

..... Wir aber verweilen, ach, uns rühmt es zu
blühn, und ins verspätete Innre unserer
endlichen Frucht gehn wir verraten hinein.

Wenigen steigt so stark der Andrang des Handelns, daß sie schon anstehn und
glühn in der Fülle des Herzens, wenn die Verführung zum Blühn wie
gelinderte Nachtluft ihnen die Jugend des Munds, ihnen die Lider berührt:
Helden vielleicht und den frühe Hinüberbestimmten, denen der gärtnernde
Tod anders die Adern verbiegt.

Diese stürzen dahin: dem eigenen Lächeln
sind sie voran, wie das Rossegespann in den milden muldigen Bildern von Karnak
dem siegenden König.

Wunderlich nah ist der Held doch den jugendlich Toten. Dauern ficht ihn nicht
an. Sein Aufgang ist Dasein; beständig nimmt er sich fort und tritt ins
veränderte Sternbild seiner steten Gefahr. Dort fänden ihn wenige. Aber, das
uns finster verschweigt, das plötzlich begeisterte Schicksal singt ihn hinein in
den Sturm seiner aufrauschenden Welt.

Hör ich doch keinen wie ihn. Auf einmal durchgeht mich mit der strömenden
Luft sein verdunkelter Ton.

Dann, wie verbärg ich mich gern vor der Sehnsucht: O wär ich, wär ich ein Knabe
und dürft es noch werden und säße in die künftigen Arme gestützt und läse
von Simson, wie seine Mutter erst nichts und dann alles gebar.

War er nicht Held schon in dir, o Mutter, begann nicht dort schon, in dir, seine
herrische Auswahl?

Tausende brauten im Schooß und wollten er sein, aber sieh: er ergriff und ließ aus
—, wählte und konnte.

Und wenn er Säulen zerstiess, so wars, da er ausbrach aus der Welt deines Leibs in
die engere Welt, wo er weiter wählte und konnte. O Mütter der Helden, o
Ursprung reißender Ströme! Ihr Schluchten, in die sich
hoch von dem Herzrand, klagend,
schon die Mädchen gestürzt, künftig die Opfer dem Sohn.

Denn hinstürmte der Held durch Aufenthalte der Liebe, jeder hob ihn hinaus,
jeder ihn meinende Herzschlag, abgewendet schon, stand er am Ende der
Lächeln,—anders.

[Notizen](#)

DIE SIEBENTE ELEGIE

Werbung nicht mehr, nicht Werbung, erwachsene Stimme, sei deines Schreies
Natur; zwar schrieest du rein wie der Vogel, wenn ihn die Jahreszeit aufhebt,
die steigende, beinah vergessend, daß er ein kümmerndes Tier und nicht nur
ein einzelnes Herz sei, das sie ins Heitere wirft, in die innigen Himmel. Wie er,
so würbest du wohl, nicht minder—, daß, noch unsichtbar, dich die Freundin
erführ, die stille, in der eine Antwort langsam erwacht und über dem Hören
sich anwärmt,— deinem erkühlten Gefühl die erglühte Gefühlin.

O und der Frühling begriffe—, da ist keine Stelle, die nicht trüge den Ton der
Verkündigung. Erst jenen kleinen fragenden Auflaut, den, mit steigender
Stille,
weithin umschweigt ein reiner bejahender Tag.
Dann die Stufen hinan, Ruf-Stufen hinan, zum geträumten Tempel der Zukunft—;
dann den Triller, Fontäne,
die zu dem drängenden Strahl schon das Fallen zuvornimmt im versprechlichen
Spiel.... Und vor sich, den Sommer.

Nicht nur die Morgen alle des Sommers—, nicht nur wie sie sich wandeln in Tag
und strahlen vor Anfang.
Nicht nur die Tage, die zart sind um Blumen, und oben, um die gestalteten
Bäume, stark und gewaltig.
Nicht nur die Andacht dieser entfalteten Kräfte,
nicht nur die Wege, nicht nur die Wiesen im Abend, nicht nur, nach spätem
Gewitter, das atmende Klarsein, nicht nur der nahende Schlaf und ein Ahnen,
abends ...
sondern die Nächte! Sondern die hohen, des Sommers, Nächte, sondern die
Sterne, die Sterne der Erde.
O einst tot sein und sie wissen unendlich,
alle die Sterne: denn wie, wie, wie sie vergessen!

Siehe, da rief ich die Liebende. Aber nicht sie nur käme ... Es kämen aus
schwächlichen Gräbern
Mädchen und ständen ... Denn, wie beschränkt ich,
wie, den gerufenen Ruf? Die Versunkenen suchen
immer noch Erde.—Ihr Kinder, ein hiesig
einmal am offenen Dinn ...

einmal ergrirenes Ding garte nur viele.

Glaubt nicht, Schicksal sei mehr, als das Dichte der Kindheit; wie überholtet ihr
oft den Geliebten, atmend,
atmend nach seligem Lauf, auf nichts zu, ins Freie.

Hiersein ist herrlich. Ihr wußtet es, Mädchen, ihr auch, die ihr scheinbar
entbehrtet, versankt—, ihr, in den ärgsten Gassen der Städte, Schwärende, oder
dem Abfall

Offene. Denn eine Stunde war jeder, vielleicht nicht ganz eine Stunde, ein mit den
Maßen der Zeit kaum Meßliches zwischen zwei Weilen—, da sie ein Dasein
hatte. Alles. Die Adern voll Dasein.

Nur, wir vergessen so leicht, was der lachende Nachbar uns nicht bestätigt oder
beneidet. Sichtbar

wollen wirs heben, wo doch das sichtbarste Glück uns erst zu erkennen sich giebt,
wenn wir es innen verwandeln.

Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen. Unser Leben geht hin mit
Verwandlung. Und immer geringer schwindet das Außen. Wo einmal ein
dauerndes Haus war, schlägt sich erdachtes Gebild vor, quer, zu Erdenlichem
völlig gehörig, als ständ es noch ganz im Gehirne.

Weite Speicher der Kraft schafft sich der Zeitgeist, gestaltlos wie der spannende
Drang, den er aus allem gewinnt.

Tempel kennt er nicht mehr. Diese, des Herzens, Verschwendung sparen wir
heimlicher ein. Ja, wo noch eins übersteht, ein einst gebetetes Ding, ein
gedientes, geknietes—, hält es sich, so wie es ist, schon ins Unsichtbare hin.

Viele gewahrens nicht mehr, doch ohne den Vorteil, daß sie's nun innerlich baun,
mit Pfeilern und Statuen, größer!

Jede dumpfe Umkehr der Welt hat solche Enterbte,
denen das Frühere nicht und noch nicht das Nächste gehört.

Denn auch das Nächste ist weit für die Menschen. Uns soll dies nicht verwirren; es
stärke in uns die Bewahrung der noch erkannten Gestalt.—Dies stand einmal
unter Menschen, mitten im Schicksal stands, im vernichtenden, mitten im
Nichtwissen-Wohin stand es, wie seiend, und bog Sterne zu sich aus
gesicherten Himmeln. Engel,

dir noch zeig ich es, da! in deinem Anschauen steh es gerettet zuletzt, nun endlich
aufrecht.

Säulen, Pylone, der Sphinx, das strebende Stemmen, grau aus vergehender Stadt

oder aus fremder, des Doms.

War es nicht Wunder? O staune, Engel, denn wir sinds, wir, o du Großer, erzähls, daß wir solches vermochten, mein Atem reicht für die Rühmung nicht aus. So haben wir dennoch nicht die Räume versäumt, diese gewährenden, diese unseren Räume. (Was müssen sie fürchterlich groß sein, da sie Jahrtausende nicht unseres Fühlns überfülln.) Aber ein Turm war groß, nicht wahr? O Engel, er war es,— groß, auch noch neben dir? Chartres war groß—, und Musik reichte noch weiter hinan und überstieg uns. Doch selbst nur eine Liebende—, oh, allein am nächtlichen Fenster....

reichte sie dir nicht ans Knie—?

Glaub nicht, daß ich werbe.

Engel, und würb ich dich auch! Du kommst nicht. Denn mein Anruf ist immer voll Hinweg; wider so starke Strömung kannst du nicht schreiten. Wie ein gestreckter Arm ist mein Rufen. Und seine zum Greifen oben offene Hand bleibt vor dir offen, wie Abwehr und Warnung, Unfaßlicher, weitauf.

DIE ACHTE ELEGIE

Rudolf Kassner zugeeignet

Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur das Offene. Nur unsre Augen sind
wie umgekehrt und ganz um sie gestellt
als Fallen, rings um ihren freien Ausgang.

Was draußen ist, wir wissens aus des Tiers Antlitz allein; denn schon das frühe
Kind wenden wir um und zwingens, daß es rückwärts Gestaltung sehe, nicht
das Offne, das

im Tiergesicht so tief ist. Frei von Tod.

Ihn sehen wir allein; das freie Tier hat seinen Untergang stets hinter sich
und vor sich Gott, und wenn es geht, so gehts in Ewigkeit, so wie die Brunnen
gehen.

Wir haben nie, nicht einen einzigen Tag, den reinen Raum vor uns, in den die
Blumen unendlich aufgehn. Immer ist es Welt
und niemals Nirgends ohne Nicht: das Reine, Unüberwachte, das man atmet und
unendlich weiß und nicht begehrt. Als Kind verliert sich eins im Stilln an dies und
wird gerüttelt. Oder jener stirbt und ists.

Denn nah am Tod sieht man den Tod nicht mehr und starrt hinaus, vielleicht mit
großem Tierblick.

Liebende, wäre nicht der andre, der
die Sicht verstellt, sind nah daran und staunen ...

Wie aus Versehn ist ihnen aufgetan
hinter dem andern ... Aber über ihn
kommt keiner fort, und wieder wird ihm Welt.

Der Schöpfung immer zugewendet, sehn
wir nur auf ihr die Spiegelung des Frein, von uns verdunkelt. Oder daß ein Tier,
ein stummes, aufschaut, ruhig durch uns durch.

Dieses heißt Schicksal: gegenüber sein und nichts als das und immer gegenüber.

Wäre Bewußtheit unsrer Art in dem
sicheren Tier, das uns entgegenzieht
in anderer Richtung—, riß es uns herum
mit seinem Wandel. Doch sein Sein ist ihm unendlich, ungefaßt und ohne Blick
auf seinen Zustand, rein, so wie sein Ausblick.

Und wo wir Zukunft sehn, dort sieht es Alles und sich in Allem und geheilt für
immer.

Und doch ist in dem wachsam warmen Tier
Gewicht und Sorge einer großen Schwermut.
Denn ihm auch haftet immer an, was uns
oft überwältigt,—die Erinnerung,
als sei schon einmal das, wonach man drängt, näher gewesen, treuer und sein
Anschluß
unendlich zärtlich. Hier ist alles Abstand, und dort wars Atem. Nach der ersten
Heimat ist ihm die zweite zwitterig und windig.
O Seligkeit der kleinen Kreatur, die immer bleibt im Schooße, der sie austrug;
o Glück der Mücke, die noch innen hüpfet, selbst wenn sie Hochzeit hat:
denn Schooß ist Alles.
Und sieh die halbe Sicherheit des Vogels, der beinah beides weiß aus seinem
Ursprung, als wär er eine Seele der Etrusker,
aus einem Toten, den ein Raum empfindet,
doch mit der ruhenden Figur als Deckel.
Und wie bestürzt ist eins, das fliegen muß und stammt aus einem Schooße. Wie vor
sich selbst erschreckt, durchzuckt die Luft, wie wenn ein Sprung durch eine
Tasse geht. So reißt die Spur der Fledermaus durchs Porzellan des Abends.

Und wir: Zuschauer, immer, überall,
dem allen zugewandt und nie hinaus!
Uns überfüllts. Wir ordnens. Es zerfällt.
Wir ordnens wieder und zerfallen selbst.

Wer hat uns also umgedreht, daß wir,
was wir auch tun, in jener Haltung sind
von einem, welcher fortgeht? Wie er auf
dem letzten Hügel, der ihm ganz sein Tal noch einmal zeigt, sich wendet, anhält,
weilt—, so leben wir und nehmen immer Abschied.

DIE NEUNTE ELEGIE

Warum, wenn es angeht, also die Frist des Daseins hinzubringen, als Lorbeer, ein wenig dunkler als alle andere Grün, mit kleinen Wellen an jedem Blattrand (wie eines Windes Lächeln)—: warum dann Menschliches müssen—und, Schicksal vermeidend, sich sehnen nach Schicksal? ...

Oh, nicht, weil Glück ist, dieser voreilige Vorteil eines nahen Verlusts.

Nicht aus Neugier, oder zur Übung des Herzens, das auch im Lorbeer wäre....

Aber weil Hiersein viel ist, und weil uns scheinbar alles das Hiesige braucht, dieses Schwindende, das seltsam uns angeht. Uns, die Schwindendsten. Ein Mal jedes, nur ein Mal. Ein Mal und nichtmehr. Und wir auch ein Mal. Nie wieder. Aber dieses ein Mal gewesen zu sein, wenn auch nur ein Mal: irdisch gewesen zu sein, scheint nicht widerrufbar.

Und so drängen wir uns und wollen es leisten, wollens enthalten in unsern einfachen Händen, im überfüllteren Blick und im sprachlosen Herzen. Wollen es werden.—Wem es geben? Am liebsten alles behalten für immer ... Ach, in den andern Bezug, wehe, was nimmt man hinüber? Nicht das Anschauen, das hier langsam erlernte, und kein hier Ereignetes. Keins.

Also die Schmerzen. Also vor allem das Schwersein, also der Liebe lange Erfahrung,—also

lauter Unsägliches. Aber später, unter den Sternen, was soils: die sind besser unsäglich.

Bringt doch der Wanderer auch vom Hange des Bergrands nicht eine Hand voll Erde ins Tal, die Allen unsägliche, sondern ein erworbenes Wort, reines, den gelben und blaun Enzian. Sind wir vielleicht hier, um zu sagen: Haus, Brücke, Brunnen, Tor, Krug, Obstbaum, Fenster,— höchstens: Säule, Turm.... aber zu sagen, verstehs, oh zu sagen so, wie selber die Dinge niemals innig meinten zu sein. Ist nicht die heimliche List dieser verschwiegenen Erde, wenn sie die Liebenden drängt, daß sich in ihrem Gefühl jedes und jedes entzückt?

Schwelle: was ists für zwei

Liebende, daß sie die eigne ältere Schwelle der Tür ein wenig verbrauchen, auch sie,

nach den vielen vorher und vor den Künftigen, leicht.

Hier ist des Säglichen Zeit, hier seine Heimat.

Sprich und bekenn. Mehr als je

fallen die Dinge dahin, die erlebbaren, denn, was sie verdrängend ersetzt, ist ein
Tun ohne Bild.

Tun unter Krusten, die willig zerspringen, sobald innen das Handeln entwächst
und sich anders begrenzt.

Zwischen den Hämmern besteht

unser Herz, wie die Zunge

zwischen den Zähnen, die doch,

dennoch, die preisende bleibt.

Preise dem Engel die Welt, nicht die unsägliche, ihm

kannst du nicht großtun mit herrlich Erfühltem; im Weltall, wo er fühlender
fühlt, bist du ein Neuling. Drum zeig ihm das Einfache, das, von Geschlecht
zu Geschlechtern gestaltet, als ein Unsriges lebt, neben der Hand und im
Blick.

Sag ihm die Dinge. Er wird staunender stehn; wie du standest bei dem Seiler in
Rom, oder beim Töpfer am Nil.

Zeig ihm, wie glücklich ein Ding sein kann, wie schuldlos und unser, wie selbst das
klagende Leid rein zur Gestalt sich entschließt, dient als ein Ding, oder stirbt
in ein Ding—, und jenseits selig der Geige entgeht.—Und diese, von Hingang
lebenden Dinge verstehn, daß du sie rühmst; vergänglich, traun sie ein
Rettendes uns, den Vergänglichsten, zu.

Wollen, wir sollen sie ganz im unsichtbarn Herzen verwandeln in—o unendlich—in
uns! Wer wir am Ende auch seien.

Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: unsichtbar

in uns erstehn?—Ist es dein Traum nicht,

einmal unsichtbar zu sein?—Erde! unsichtbar!

Was, wenn Verwandlung nicht, ist dein drängender Auftrag?

Erde, du liebe, ich will. Oh glaub, es bedürfte nicht deiner Frühlinge mehr, mich
dir zu gewinnen—, einer, ach, ein einziger ist schon dem Blute zu viel.

Namenlos bin ich zu dir entschlossen, von weit her.

Immer warst du im Recht, und dein heiliger Einfall ist der vertrauliche Tod.

Siehe, ich lebe. Woraus? Weder Kindheit noch Zukunft werden weniger
..... Überzähliges Dasein
entspringt mir im Herzen.

[Notizen](#)

DIE ZEHNTE ELEGIE

Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht, Jubel und Ruhm
aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln.

Daß von den klar geschlagenen Hämmern des Herzens keiner versage an weichen,
zweifelnden oder reißenden Saiten. Daß mich mein strömendes Antlitz
glänzender mache; daß das unscheinbare Weinen blühe. O wie werdet ihr
dann, Nächte, mir lieb sein, gehärmte. Daß ich euch knieender nicht,
untröstliche Schwestern, hinnahm, nicht in euer gelöstes

Haar mich gelöster ergab. Wir, Vergeuder der Schmerzen.

Wie wir sie absehn voraus, in die traurige Dauer, ob sie nicht enden vielleicht. Sie
aber sind ja unser winterwähiges Laub, unser dunkles Sinngrün, eine der
Zeiten des heimlichen Jahres—, nicht nur Zeit—, sind Stelle, Siedelung, Lager,
Boden, Wohnort.

Freilich, wehe, wie fremd sind die Gassen der Leid-Stadt, wo in der falschen, aus
Übertönung gemachten Stille, stark, aus der Gußform des Leeren der Ausguß
prahlt: der vergoldete Lärm, das platzende Denkmal.

O, wie spurlos zerträte ein Engel ihnen den Trostmarkt, den die Kirche begrenzt,
ihre fertig gekaufte: reinlich und zu und enttäuscht wie ein Postamt am
Sonntag.

Draußen aber kräuseln sich immer die Ränder von Jahrmarkt.

Schaukeln der Freiheit! Taucher und Gaukler des Eifers!

Und des behübschten Glücks figürliche Schießstatt, wo es zappelt von Ziel und
sich blechern benimmt, wenn ein Geschickterer trifft. Von Beifall zu Zufall
taumelt er weiter; denn Buden jeglicher Neugier werben, trommeln und
plärren. Für Erwachsene aber ist noch besonders zu sehn, wie das Geld sich
vermehrt, anatomisch, nicht zur Belustigung nur: der Geschlechtsteil des
Gelds, alles, das Ganze, der Vorgang—, das unterrichtet und macht fruchtbar

.....

.... Oh aber gleich darüber hinaus,

hinter der letzten Planke, beklebt mit Plakaten des 'Todlos', jenes bitteren Biers,
das den Trinkenden süß scheint, wenn sie immer dazu frische Zerstreuungen
kaun ..., gleich im Rücken der Planke, gleich dahinter, ists wirklich.

Kinder spielen, und Liebende halten einander,—abseits, ernst, im ärmlichen Gras,
und Hunde haben Natur.

Weiter noch zieht es den Jüngling; vielleicht, daß er eine junge Klage liebt

..... Hinter ihr her kommt er in Wiesen. Sie sagt:
–Weit. Wir wohnen dort draußen....

Wo? Und der Jüngling folgt. Ihn rührt ihre
Haltung. Die Schulter, der Hals–, vielleicht
ist sie von herrlicher Herkunft. Aber er läßt
sie, kehrt um, wendet sich, winkt ... Was
soils? Sie ist eine Klage.

Nur die jungen Toten, im ersten Zustand
zeitlosen Gleichmuts, dem der Entwöhnung, folgen ihr liebend. Mädchen
wartet sie ab und befreundet sie. Zeigt ihnen leise, was sie an sich hat. Perlen des
Leids und die feinen Schleier der Duldung.–Mit Jünglingen geht sie
schweigend.

Aber dort, wo sie wohnen, im Tal, der Alteren eine, der Klagen, nimmt sich des
Jünglinges an, wenn er fragt:–Wir waren, sagt sie, ein Großes Geschlecht,
einmal, wir Klagen. Die Väter trieben den Bergbau dort in dem großen Gebirg;
bei Menschen findest du manchmal ein Stück geschliffenes Ur-Leid oder, aus
altem Vulkan, schlackig versteinerten Zorn.
Ja, das stammte von dort. Einst waren wir reich.–

Und sie leitet ihn leicht durch die weite Landschaft der Klagen, zeigt ihm die
Säulen der Tempel oder die Trümmer jener Burgen, von wo Klage-Fürsten das
Land einstens weise beherrscht. Zeigt ihm die hohen Tränenbäume und Felder
blühender Wehmut, (Lebendige kennen sie nur als sanftes Blattwerk); zeigt
ihm die Tiere der Trauer, weidend,–und manchmal schreckt ein Vogel und
zieht, flach ihnen fliegend durchs Aufschau, weithin das schriftliche Bild
seines vereinsamten Schreis.– Abends führt sie ihn hin zu den Gräbern der
Alten aus dem Klage-Geschlecht, den Sibyllen und Warn-Herrn.

Naht aber Nacht, so wandeln sie leiser, und bald mondets empor, das über Alles
wachende Grab-Mal. Brüderlich jenem am Nil, der erhabene Sphinx–: der
verschwiegenen Kammer Antlitz.

Und sie staunen dem krönlichen Haupt, das für immer, schweigend, der
Menschen Gesicht
auf die Waage der Sterne gelegt.

Nicht erfaßt es sein Blick, im Frühod
schwindelnd. Aber ihr Schauen

SCHWINGEND. ABER IM SCHAUEN,

hinter dem Pschent-Rand hervor, scheucht es die Eule. Und sie, streifend im langsamen Abstrich die Wange entlang, jene der reifsten Rundung,

zeichnet weich in das neue

Totengehör, über ein doppelt

aufgeschlagenes Blatt, den unbeschreiblichen Umriß.

Und höher, die Sterne. Neue. Die Sterne des Leidlands.

Langsam nennt sie die Klage:—Hier,

siehe: den Reiter, den Stab, und das vollere Sternbild nennen sie: Fruchtkranz.

Dann, weiter, dem Pol zu: Wiege; Weg; Das Brennende Buch; Puppe; Fenster. Aber im südlichen Himmel, rein wie im Innern einer gesegneten Hand, das klar erglänzende M, das die Mütter bedeutet—

Doch der Tote muß fort, und schweigend bringt ihn die ältere Klage bis an die Talschlucht,

wo es schimmert im Mondschein:

die Quelle der Freude. In Ehrfurcht

nennt sie sie, sagt:—Bei den Menschen

ist sie ein tragender Strom.—

Stehn am Fuß des Gebirgs.

Und da umarmt sie ihn, weinend.

Einsam steigt er dahin, in die Berge des Ur-Leids.

Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los.

*

Aber erweckten sie uns, die unendlich Toten, ein Gleichnis, siehe, sie zeigten vielleicht auf die Kätzchen der leeren Hasel, die hängenden, oder meinten den Regen, der fällt auf dunkles Erdreich im Frühjahr.—

Und wir, die an steigendes Glück denken, empfänden die Rührung, die uns beinah bestürzt, wenn ein Glückliches fällt.

Anlage für Duineser Elegien

[FRAGMENT EINER ELEGIE]

Soll ich die Städte rühmen, die überlebenden (die ich anstaunte) großen
Sternbilder der Erde.

Denn nur zum Rühmen noch steht mir das Herz, so gewaltig weiß ich die Welt.

Und selbst meine Klage

wird mir zur Preisung dicht vor dem stöhnenden Herzen.

Sage mir keiner, daß ich die Gegenwart nicht

liebe; ich schwinde in ihr; sie trägt mich, sie giebt mir diesen geräumigen Tag, den
uralten Werktag

daß ich ihn brauche, und wirft in gewährender Großmut über mein Dasein
niegewesene Nächte.

Ihre Hand ist stark über mir und wenn sie im Schicksal unten mich hielte,
vertaucht, ich müßte versuchen unten zu atmen. Auch bei dem leisesten
Auftrag säng ich sie gerne. Doch vermut ich, sie will nur, daß ich vibriere wie
sie. Einst tönte der Dichter über die Feldschlacht hinaus; was will eine Stimme
neben dem neuen Gedröhn der metallenen Handlung drin diese Zeit sich
verringt mit anstürmender Zukunft.

Auch bedarf sie des Anrufes kaum, ihr eigener Schlachtlärm übertönt sich zum
Lied. So laßt mich solange

vor Vergehendem stehn; anklagend nicht, aber

noch einmal bewundernd. Und wo mich eines

das mir vor Augen versinkt, etwa zur Klage bewegt sei es kein Vorwurf für euch.

Was sollen jüngere Völker nicht fortstürmen von dem was der morschen oft
rühmloser Abbruch begrub. Sehet, es wäre

arg um das Große bestellt, wenn es irgend der Schonung bedürfte. Wem die Paläste
oder der Gärten

Kühnheit nicht mehr, wem Aufstieg und Rückfall alter Fontänen nicht mehr, wem
das Verhaltene in den Bildern oder der Statuen ewiges Dastehn nicht mehr die
Seele erschreckt und verwandelt, der gehe diesem hinaus und tue sein Tagwerk;
wo anders lauert das Große auf ihn und wird ihn wo anders anfalln, daß er
sich wehrt.

[URSPRÜNGLICHE FASSUNG DER ZEHNTEN ELEGIE]

[Fragmentarisch]

Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht Jubel und Ruhm
aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln.

Daß von den klar geschlagenen Hämmern des Herzens keiner versage an weichen,
zweifelnden oder

jähzornigen Saiten. Daß mich mein strömendes Antlitz glänzender mache; daß das
unscheinbare Weinen

blühe. O wie werdet ihr dann, Nächte, mir lieb sein, gehärmt. Daß ich euch
knieender nicht, untröstliche Schwestern, hinnahm, nicht in euer gelöstes

Haar mich gelöster ergab. Wir Vergeuder der Schmerzen.

Wie wir sie absehn voraus in die traurige Dauer, ob sie nicht enden vielleicht. Sie
aber sind ja

Zeiten von uns, unser winter—

währiges Laubwerk, Wiesen, Teiche, angeborene Landschaft, von Geschöpfen im
Schilf und von Vögeln bewohnt.

Oben, der hohen, steht nicht die Hälfte der Himmel über der Wehmut in uns, der
bemühten Natur?

Denk, du beträttest nicht mehr dein verwildertes Leidtum, sähest die Sterne nicht
mehr durch das herbere Blättern schwärzlichen Schmerzlaubs, und die

Trümmer von Schicksal böte dir höher nicht mehr der vergrößernde
Mondschein, daß du an ihnen dich fühlst wie ein einstiges Volk?

Lächeln auch wäre nicht mehr, das zehrende derer, die du hinüberverlorest—, so
wenig gewaltsam,

eben an dir nur vorbei, traten sie rein in dein Leid.

(Fast wie das Mädchen, das grade dem Freier sich zusprach, der sie seit Wochen
bedrängt, und sie bringt ihn erschrocken an das Gitter des Gartens, den Mann,
der frohlockt und ungern fortgeht: da stört sie ein Schritt in dem neueren
Abschied, und sie wartet und steht und da trifft ihr vollzähliges Aufschau
ganz in das Aufschau des Fremden, das Aufschau der Jungfrau, die ihn
unendlich begreift, den draußen, der ihr bestimmt war, draußen den
wandernden Andern, der ihr ewig bestimmt war.

Hallend geht er vorbei.) So immer verlorst du;

als ein Besitzender nicht: wie sterbend einer,

vorgebeugt in die feucht herwehende Märznacht,

ach, den Frühling verliert in die Kehlen der Vögel.

Viel zu weit gehörst du in's Leiden. Vergäßest
du die geringste der maßlos erschmerzten Gestalten, riefst du, schrieest, hoffend
auf frühere Neugier, einen der Engel herbei, der mühsam verdunkelten
Ausdrucks leidunmächtig, immer wieder versuchend,
dir dein Schluchzen damals, um jene, beschriebe.
Engel wie wars? Und er ahmte dir nach und verstünde nicht daß es Schmerz sei,
wie man dem rufenden Vogel nachformt, die ihn erfüllt, die schuldlose
Stimme.

[Notizen](#)

GEGEN-STROPHEN

Oh, daß ihr hier, Frauen, einhergeht, hier unter uns, leidvoll,
nicht geschonter als wir und dennoch imstande, selig zu machen wie Selige.

Woher,
wenn der Geliebte erscheint,
nehmt ihr die Zukunft?
Mehr, als je sein wird.
Wer die Entfernungen weiß
bis zum äußersten Fixstern,
staunt, wenn er diesen gewahrt, euern herrlichen Herzraum.
Wie, im Gedräng, spart ihr ihn aus?
Ihr, voll Quellen und Nacht.

Seid ihr wirklich die gleichen, die, da ihr Kind wart,
unwirsch im Schulgang
anstieß der ältere Bruder?
Ihr Heilen.

Wo wir als Kinder uns schon häßlich für immer verzerrn, wart ihr wie
Brot vor der Wandlung.

Abbruch der Kindheit
war euch nicht Schaden. Auf einmal standet ihr da, wie im Gott
plötzlich zum Wunder ergänzt.

Wir, wie gebrochen vom Berg, oft schon als Knaben scharf an den
Rändern, vielleicht manchmal glücklich behaun; wir, wie Stücke
Gesteins, über Blumen gestürzt.

Blumen des tieferen Erdreichs, von allen Wurzeln geliebte,
ihr, der Eurydike Schwestern, immer voll heiliger Umkehr
hinter dem steigenden Mann.

Wir, von uns selber gekränkt, Kränkende gern und gern Wiedergekränkte
aus Not.
Wir wie Waffen dem Zorn neben den Schlaf gelest

... wie Wachen, dem Licht neben dem Schlaf gelegt.

Ihr, die ihr beinah Schutz seid, wo niemand schützt. Wie ein schattiger
Schlafbaum ist der Gedanke an euch
für die Schwärme des Einsamen.

[Notizen](#)

Die Sonette an Orpheus

(1923)

Geschrieben als ein Grab-Mal
für Wera Ouckam Knoop

Chateau de Muzot, Februar 1922

ERSTER TEIL

I

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!
O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!
Und alles schwieg. Doch selbst in der Verschweigung ging neuer Anfang, Wink
und Wandlung vor.

Tiere aus Stille drangen aus dem klaren gelösten Wald von Lager und Genist;
und da ergab sich, daß sie nicht aus List und nicht aus Angst in sich so leise waren,
sondern aus Hören. Brüllen, Schrei, Geröhr schien klein in ihren Herzen. Und wo
eben kaum eine Hütte war, dies zu empfangen,
ein Unterschlupf aus dunkelstem Verlangen mit einem Zugang, dessen Pfosten
beben,— da schufst du ihnen Tempel im Gehör.

II

Und fast ein Mädchen wars und ging hervor aus diesem einigen Glück von Sang
und Leier und glänzte klar durch ihre Frühlingsschleier und machte sich ein
Bett in meinem Ohr.

Und schlief in mir. Und alles war ihr Schlaf.
Die Bäume, die ich je bewundert, diese
fühlbare Ferne, die gefühlte Wiese
und jedes Staunen, das mich selbst betraf.

Sie schlief die Welt. Singender Gott, wie hast du sie vollendet, daß sie nicht
bekehrte, erst wach zu sein? Sieh, sie erstand und schlief.

Wo ist ihr Tod? O, wirst du dies Motiv
erfinden noch, eh sich dein Lied verzehrte?— Wo sinkt sie hin aus mir? ... Ein
Mädchen fast...

III

Ein Gott vermags. Wie aber, sag mir, soll ein Mann ihm folgen durch die schmale
Leier?

Sein Sinn ist Zwiespalt. An der Kreuzung zweier Herzwege steht kein Tempel für
Apoll.

Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehrt, nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch
Erreichtes; Gesang ist Dasein. Für den Gott ein Leichtes.

Wann aber sind wir? Und wann wendet er

an unser Sein die Erde und die Sterne?

Dies ist nicht, Jüngling, daß du liebst, wenn auch die Stimme dann den Mund dir
aufstößt,—lerne

vergessen, daß du aufsangst. Das verrinnt.

In Wahrheit singen, ist ein anderer Hauch.

Ein Hauch um nichts. Ein Wehn im Gott. Ein Wind.

IV

O ihr Zärtlichen, tretet zuweilen in den Atem, der euch nicht meint,
laßt ihn an eueren Wangen sich teilen, hinter euch zittert er, wieder vereint.

O ihr Seligen, o ihr Heilen,
die ihr der Anfang der Herzen scheint.
Bogen der Pfeile und Ziele von Pfeilen, ewiger glänzt euer Lächeln verweint.

Fürchtet euch nicht zu leiden, die Schwere, gebt sie zurück an der Erde Gewicht;
schwer sind die Berge, schwer sind die Meere.

Selbst die als Kinder ihr pflanztet, die Bäume, wurden zu schwer längst; ihr trüget
sie nicht.
Aber die Lüfte ... aber die Räume

V

Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Laßt die Rose nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Gunsten blühn.
Denn Orpheus ists. Seine Metamorphose
in dem und dem. Wir sollen uns nicht mühn

um andre Namen. Ein für alle Male
ists Orpheus, wenn es singt. Er kommt und geht.
Ists nicht schon viel, wenn er die Rosenschale um ein paar Tage manchmal
übersteht?

O wie er schwinden muß, daß ihrs begriffst!
Und wenn ihm selbst auch bangte, daß er schwände.
Indem sein Wort das Hiersein übertrifft,

ist er schon dort, wohin ihrs nicht begleitet.
Der Leier Gitter zwängt ihm nicht die Hände.
Und er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet.

VI

Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden Reichen erwuchs seine weite Natur.
Kundiger böge die Zweige der Weiden, wer die Wurzeln der Weiden erfuhr.

Geht ihr zu Bette, so laßt auf dem Tische Brot nicht und Milch nicht; die Toten
ziehts—.

Aber er, der Beschwörende, mische
unter der Milde des Augenlids

ihre Erscheinung in alles Geschaute; und der Zauber von Erdrauch und Raute sei
ihm so wahr wie der klarste Bezug.

Nichts kann das göltige Bild ihm verschlimmern; sei es aus Gräbern, sei es aus
Zimmern, rühme er Fingerring, Spange und Krug.

VII

Rühmen, das ists! Ein zum Rühmen Besteller, ging er hervor wie das Erz aus des Steins Schweigen. Sein Herz, o vergängliche Kelter eines den Menschen unendlichen Weins.

Nie versagt ihm die Stimme am Staube, wenn ihn das göttliche Beispiel ergreift. Alles wird Weinberg, alles wird Traube, in seinem fühlenden Süden gereift.

Nicht in den Grüften der Könige Moder straft ihm die Rühmung lügen, oder daß von den Göttern ein Schatten fällt.

Er ist einer der bleibenden Boten,
der noch weit in die Türen der Toten Schalen mit rühmlichen Früchten hält.

VIII

Nur im Raum der Rühmung darf die Klage gehn, die Nymphe des geweinten
Quells, wachend über unserm Niederschlage,
daß er klar sei an demselben Fels,

der die Tore trägt und die Altäre.— Sieh, um ihre stillen Schultern fröhlt das
Gefühl, daß sie die jüngste wäre unter den Geschwistern im Gemüt.

Jubel weiß, und Sehnsucht ist geständig,— nur die Klage lernt noch;
mädchenhändig zählt sie nächtelang das alte Schlimme.

Aber plötzlich, schräg und ungeübt, hält sie doch ein Sternbild unsrer Stimme in
den Himmel, den ihr Hauch nicht trübt.

IX

Nur wer die Leier schon hob auch unter Schatten, darf das unendliche Lob ahnend
erstatten.

Nur wer mit Toten vom Mohn aß, von dem ihren,
wird nicht den leisesten Ton wieder verlieren.

Mag auch die Spiegung im Teich oft uns verschwimmen: Wisse das Bild.

Erst in dem Doppelbereich werden die Stimmen
ewig und mild.

X

Euch, die ihr nie mein Gefühl verließ, grüß ich, antikische Sarkophage,
die das fröhliche Wasser römischer Tage als ein wandelndes Lied durchfließt.

Oder jene so offenen, wie das Aug
eines frohen erwachenden Hirten,
–innen voll Stille und Bienensaug– denen entzückte Falter entschwirrten;

alle, die man dem Zweifel entreißt, grüß ich, die wiedergeöffneten Munde, die
schon wußten, was schweigen heißt.

Wissen wirs, Freunde, wissen wirs nicht?
Beides bildet die zögernde Stunde
in dem menschlichen Angesicht.

XI

Sieh den Himmel. Heißt kein Sternbild 'Reiter'?
Denn dies ist uns seltsam eingepägt: dieser Stolz aus Erde. Und ein Zweiter, der
ihn treibt und hält und den er trägt.

Ist nicht so, gejagt und dann gebändigt, diese sehnige Natur des Seins?
Weg und Wendung. Doch ein Druck verständigt.
Neue Weite. Und die zwei sind eins.

Aber sind sie s? Oder meinen beide nicht den Weg, den sie zusammen tun?
Namenlos schon trennt sie Tisch und Weide.

Auch die stemische Verbindung trägt.
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun
der Figur zu glauben. Das genügt.

XII

Heil dem Geist, der uns verbinden mag; denn wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren.
Und mit kleinen Schritten gehn die Uhren neben unserm eigentlichen Tag.

Ohne unsern wahren Platz zu kennen, handeln wir aus wirklichem Bezug.
Die Antennen fühlen die Antennen, und die leere Ferne trug ...

Reine Spannung. O Musik der Kräfte!
Ist nicht durch die läßlichen Geschäfte jede Störung von dir abgelenkt?

Selbst wenn sich der Bauer sorgt und handelt, wo die Saat in Sommer sich
verwandelt, reicht er niemals hin. Die Erde schenkt.

XIII

Voller Apfel, Birne und Banane, Stachelbeere ... Alles dieses spricht
Tod und Leben in den Mund ... Ich ahne Lest es einem Kind vom Angesicht,

wenn es sie erschmeckt. Dies kommt von weit.

Wird euch langsam namenlos im Munde?

Wo sonst Worte waren, fließen Funde, aus dem Fruchtfleisch überrascht befreit.

Wagt zu sagen, was ihr Apfel nennt.

Diese Süße, die sich erst verdichtet, um, im Schmecken leise aufgerichtet,

klar zu werden, wach und transparent, doppeldeutig, sonnig, erdig, hiesig—: O
Erfahrung, Fühlung, Freude—, riesig!

XIV

Wir gehen um mit Blume, Weinblatt, Frucht.
Sie sprechen nicht die Sprache nur des Jahres.
Aus Dunkel steigt ein buntes Offenbares und hat vielleicht den Glanz der
Eifersucht

der Toten an sich, die die Erde stärken.
Was wissen wir von ihrem Teil an dem?
Es ist seit lange ihre Art, den Lehm
mit ihrem freien Marke zu durchmärken.

Nun fragt sich nur: tun sie es gern? ...
Drängt diese Frucht, ein Werk von schweren Sklaven, geballt zu uns empor, zu
ihren Herrn?

Sind sie die Herrn, die bei den Wurzeln schlafen, und gönnen uns aus ihren
Überflüssen
dies Zwischending aus stummer Kraft und Küssen?

XV

Wartet..., das schmeckt ... Schon ists auf der Flucht.

... Wenig Musik nur, ein Stampfen, ein Summen—: Mädchen, ihr warmen,
Mädchen, ihr stummen, tanzt den Geschmack der erfahrenen Frucht!

Tanzt die Orange. Wer kann sie vergessen, wie sie, ertrinkend in sich, sich wehrt
wider ihr Süßsein. Ihr habt sie besessen.

Sie hat sich köstlich zu euch bekehrt.

Tanzt die Orange. Die wärmere Landschaft, werft sie aus euch, daß die reife
erstrahle in Lüften der Heimat! Erglühte, enthüllt

Düfte um Düfte. Schafft die Verwandtschaft mit der reinen, sich weigernden
Schale, mit dem Saft, der die Glückliche füllt!

XVI

Du, mein Freund, bist einsam, weil...
Wir machen mit Worten und Fingerzeigen uns allmählich die Welt zu eigen,
vielleicht ihren schwächsten, gefährlichsten Teil.

Wer zeigt mit Fingern auf einen Geruch?– Doch von den Kräften, die uns
bedrohten, fühlst du viele ... Du kennst die Toten,
und du erschrickst vor dem Zauberspruch.

Sieh, nun heißt es zusammen ertragen
Stückwerk und Teile, als sei es das Ganze.
Dir helfen, wird schwer sein. Vor allem: pflanze

mich nicht in dein Herz. Ich wüchse zu schnell.
Doch meines Herrn Hand will ich führen und sagen: Hier. Das ist Esau in seinem
Fell.

XVII

Zu unterst der Alte, verworn, all der Erbauten
Wurzel, verborgener Born, den sie nie schauten.

Sturmhelm und Jägerhorn, Spruch von Ergrauten, Männer im Bruderzorn, Frauen
wie Lauten ...

Drängender Zweig an Zweig, nirgends ein freier...
Einer! O steig ... o steig ...

Aber sie brechen noch.
Dieser erst oben doch biegt sich zur Leier.

[Notizen](#)

XVIII

Hörst du das Neue, Herr, dröhnen und beben?
Kommen Verkündiger, die es erheben.

Zwar ist kein Hören heil in dem Durchtobtsein, doch der Maschinenteil will jetzt
gelobt sein.

Sieh, die Maschine: wie sie sich wälzt und rächt und uns entstellt und schwächt.

Hat sie aus uns auch Kraft, sie, ohne Leidenschaft, treibe und diene.

[Notizen](#)

XIX

Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt wie Wolkengestalten, alles Vollendete fällt heim
zum Uralten.

Über dem Wandel und Gang, weiter und freier,
währt noch dein Vor-Gesang, Gott mit der Leier.

Nicht sind die Leiden erkannt, nicht ist die Liebe gelernt, und was im Tod uns
entfernt,

ist nicht entschleiert.

Einzig das Lied überm Land heiligt und feiert.

[Notizen](#)

XX

Dir aber, Herr, o was weih ich dir, sag, der das Ohr den Geschöpfen gelehrt?—
Mein Erinnern an einen Frühlingstag, seinen Abend, in Rußland—, ein
Pferd ...

Herüber vom Dorf kam der Schimmel allein, an der vorderen Fessel den Pflock,
um die Nacht auf den Wiesen allein zu sein; wie schlug seiner Mähne Gelock

an den Hals im Takte des Übermuts,
bei dem grob gehemmtten Galopp.
Wie sprangen die Quellen des Rossebluts!

Der fühlte die Weiten, und ob!
Der sang und der hörte—, dein Sagenkreis war in ihm geschlossen.

Sein Bild: ich weih's

XXI

Frühling ist wiedergekommen. Die Erde ist wie ein Kind, das Gedichte weiß; viele,
o viele.... Für die Beschwerde
langen Lernens bekommt sie den Preis.

Streng war ihr Lehrer. Wir mochten das Weiße an dem Barte des alten Manns.
Nun, wie das Grüne, das Blaue heiße, dürfen wir fragen: sie kanns, sie kanns!

Erde, die frei hat, du glückliche, spiele nun mit den Kindern. Wir wollen dich
fangen, fröhliche Erde. Dem Frohsten gelingt.

O, was der Lehrer sie lehrte, das Viele, und was gedruckt steht in Wurzeln und
langen schwierigen Stämmen: sie singts, sie singts!

XXII

Wir sind die Treibenden.

Aber den Schritt der Zeit, nehmt ihn als Kleinigkeit im immer Bleibenden.

Alles das Eilende

wird schon vorüber sein; denn das Verweilende erst weiht uns ein.

Knaben, o werft den Mut nicht in die Schnelligkeit, nicht in den Flugversuch.

Alles ist ausgeruht: Dunkel und Helligkeit, Blume und Buch.

XXIII

O erst dann, wenn der Flug nicht mehr um seinetwillen wird in die Himmelstillen
steigen, sich selber genug,

um in lichten Profilen, als das Gerät, das gelang, Liebling der Winde zu spielen,
sicher, schwenkend und schlank,—

erst, wenn ein reines Wohin wachsender Apparate
Knabenstolz überwiegt,

wird, überstürzt von Gewinn, jener den Fernen Genachte sein, was er einsam
erfliegt.

Notizen

XXIV

Sollen wir unsere uralte Freundschaft, die großen niemals verbenden Götter, weil sie der harte Stahl, den wir streng erzogen, nicht kennt, verstoßen oder sie plötzlich suchen auf einer Karte?

Diese gewaltigen Freunde, die uns die Toten nehmen, rühren nirgends an unsere Räder.

Unsere Gastmähler haben wir weit—, unsere Bäder, fortgerückt, und ihre uns lang schon zu langsamen Boten

überholen wir immer. Einsamer nun auf einander ganz angewiesen, ohne einander zu kennen,

führen wir nicht mehr die Pfade als schöne Mäander,

sondern als Grade. Nur noch in Dampfkesseln brennen die einstigen Feuer und heben die Hämmer, die immer größerem. Wir aber nehmen an Kraft ab, wie Schwimmer.

XXV

Dich aber will ich nun, Dich, die ich kannte wie eine Blume, von der ich den Namen nicht weiß, noch ein Mal erinnern und ihnen zeigen, Entwandte, schöne Gespielin des unüberwindlichen Schrei's.

Tänzerin erst, die plötzlich, den Körper voll Zögern, anhielt, als göß man ihr Jungsein in Erz;
trauernd und lauschend—. Da, von den hohen Vermögern fiel ihr Musik in das veränderte Herz.

Nah war die Krankheit. Schon von den Schatten bemächtigt, drängte verdunkelt das Blut, doch, wie flüchtig verdächtigt, trieb es in seinen natürlichen Frühling hervor.

Wieder und wieder, von Dunkel und Sturz unterbrochen, glänzte es irdisch. Bis es nach schrecklichem Pochen trat in das trostlos offene Tor.

XXVI

Du aber, Göttlicher, du, bis zuletzt noch Ertöner, da ihn der Schwarm der
verschmähten Mänaden befiel, hast ihr Geschrei übertönt mit Ordnung, du
Schöner, aus den Zerstörenden stieg dein erbauendes Spiel.

Keine war da, daß sie Haupt dir und Leier zerstör.
Wie sie auch rangen und rasten, und alle die scharfen Steine, die sie nach deinem
Herzen warfen,
wurden zu Sanftem an dir und begabt mit Gehör.

Schließlich zerschlugen sie dich, von der Rache gehetzt, während dein Klang noch
in Löwen und Felsen verweilte und in den Bäumen und Vögeln. Dort singst
du noch jetzt.

O du verlorener Gott! Du unendliche Spur!
Nur weil dich reißend zuletzt die Feindschaft verteilte, sind wir die Hörenden jetzt
und ein Mund der Natur.

ZWEITER TEIL

I

Atmen, du unsichtbares Gedicht!
Immerfort um das eigne
Sein rein eingetauschter Weltraum. Gegengewicht, in dem ich mich rhythmisch
ereigne.

Einzig Welle, deren
allmähliches Meer ich bin; sparsamstes du von allen möglichen Meeren,—
Raumgewinn.

Wieviele von diesen Stellen der Räume waren schon innen in mir. Manche Winde
sind wie mein Sohn.

Erkennst du mich, Luft, du, voll noch einst meiniger Orte?
Du, einmal glatte Rinde, Rundung und Blatt meiner Worte.

II

So wie dem Meister manchmal das eilig nähere Blatt den wirklichen Strich
abnimmt: so nehmen oft Spiegel das heilig einzige Lächeln der Mädchen in
sich,

wenn sie den Morgen erproben, allein,— oder im Glanze der dienenden Lichte.
Und in das Atmen der echten Gesichter, später, fällt nur ein Widerschein.

Was haben Augen einst ins umrußte lange Verglühn der Kamine geschaut:
Blicke des Lebens, für immer verlorne.

Ach, der Erde, wer kennt die Verluste?
Nur, wer mit dennoch preisendem Laut sänge das Herz, das ins Ganze geborne.

III

Spiegel: noch nie hat man wissend beschrieben, was ihr in euerem Wesen seid.
Ihr, wie mit lauter Löchern von Sieben erfüllten Zwischenräume der Zeit.

Ihr, noch des leeren Saales Verschwender—, wenn es dämmert, wie Wälder weit ...
Und der Lüster geht wie ein Sechzehn-Ender durch eure Unbetretbarkeit.

Manchmal seid ihr voll Malerei.
Einige scheinen in euch gegangen—, andere schicktet ihr scheu vorbei.

Aber die Schönste wird bleiben—, bis drüben in ihre enthaltenen Wangen eindrang
der klare gelöste Narziß.

IV

O dieses ist das Tier, das es nicht giebt.

Sie wußtens nicht und habens jeden Falls –sein Wandeln, seine Haltung, seinen Hals, bis in des stillen Blickes Licht–geliebt.

Zwar war es nicht. Doch weil sie's liebten, ward ein reines Tier. Sie ließen immer Raum.

Und in dem Raume, klar und ausgespart,
erhob es leicht sein Haupt und brauchte kaum

zu sein. Sie nährten es mit keinem Korn, nur immer mit der Möglichkeit, es sei.
Und die gab solche Stärke an das Tier,

daß es aus sich ein Stirnhorn trieb. Ein Horn.

Zu einer Jungfrau kam es weiß herbei– und war im Silber-Spiegel und in ihr.

V

Blumenmuskel, der der Anemone Wiesenmorgen nach und nach erschließt, bis in
ihren Schooß das polyphone
Licht der lauten Himmel sich ergießt,

in den stillen Blütenstern gespannter Muskel des unendlichen Empfangs,
manchmal so von Fülle übermannter, daß der Ruhewink des Untergangs

kaum vermag die weitzurückgeschneitten Blätterränder dir zurückzugeben:
du, Entschluß und Kraft von wieviel Welten!

Wir, Gewaltsamen, wir währen länger.
Aber wann, in welchem aller Leben, sind wir endlich offen und Empfänger?

VI

Rose, du thronende, denen im Altertume warst du ein Kelch mit einfachem Rand.
Uns aber bist du die volle zahllose Blume, der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand.

In deinem Reichtum scheinst du wie Kleidung um Kleidung um einen Leib aus
nichts als Glanz; aber dein einzelnes Blatt ist zugleich die Vermeidung und die
Verleugnung jedes Gewands.

Seit Jahrhunderten ruft uns dein Duft seine süßesten Namen herüber;
plötzlich liegt er wie Ruhm in der Luft.

Dennoch, wir wissen ihn nicht zu nennen, wir raten ...
Und Erinnerung geht zu ihm über,
die wir von rufbaren Stunden erbatnen.

VII

Blumen, ihr schließlich den ordnenden Händen verwandte, (Händen der Mädchen von einst und jetzt), die auf dem Gartentisch oft von Kante zu Kante lagen, ermattet und sanft verletzt,

wartend des Wassers, das sie noch einmal erhole aus dem begonnenen Tod—, und
nun

wieder erhobene zwischen die strömenden Pole fühlender Finger, die wohlzutun

mehr noch vermögen, als ihr ahntet, ihr leichten, wenn ihr euch wiederfandet im
Krug,

langsam erkühlend und Warmes der Mädchen, wie Beichten,

von euch gebend, wie trübe ermüdende Sünden, die das Gepflücktsein beging, als
Bezug wieder zu ihnen, die sich euch blühend verbünden.

VIII

Wenige ihr, der einstigen Kindheit Gespielen in den zerstreuten Gärten der Stadt:
wie wir uns fanden und uns zögernd gefielen und, wie das Lamm mit dem
redenden Blatt,

sprachen als Schweigende. Wenn wir uns einmal freuten, keinem gehörte es.
Wessen wars?

Und wie zergings unter allen den gehenden Leuten und im Bangen des langen
Jahrs.

Wagen umrollten uns fremd, vorübergezogen, Häuser umstanden uns stark, aber
unwahr,—und keines kannte uns je. Was war wirklich im All?

Nichts. Nur die Bälle. Ihre herrlichen Bogen.

Auch nicht die Kinder ... Aber manchmal trat eines, ach ein vergehendes, unter
den fallenden Ball.

(In memoriam Egon von Rilke)

IX

Rühmt euch, ihr Richtenden, nicht der entbehrlichen Folter und daß das Eisen
nicht länger an Hälsen sperrt.

Keins ist gesteigert, kein Herz—, weil ein gewollter Krampf der Milde euch zarter
verzerrt.

Was es durch Zeiten bekam, das schenkt das Schafott wieder zurück, wie Kinder
ihr Spielzeug vom vorig alten Geburtstag. Ins reine, ins hohe, ins thorig offene
Herz träte er anders, der Gott

wirklicher Milde. Er käme gewaltig und griffe strahlender um sich, wie Göttliche
sind.

Mehr als ein Wind für die großen gesicherten Schiffe.

Weniger nicht, als die heimliche leise Gewahrung, die uns im Innern schweigend
gewinnt

wie ein still spielendes Kind aus unendlicher Paarung.

X

Alles Erworbne bedroht die Maschine, solange sie sich erdreistet, im Geist, statt im Gehorchen, zu sein.

Daß nicht der herrlichen Hand schöneres Zögern mehr prange, zu dem entschlossenem Bau schneidet sie steifer den Stein.

Nirgends bleibt sie zurück, daß wir ihr ein Mal entrönnen und sie in stiller Fabrik ölend sich selber gehört.

Sie ist das Leben,—sie meint es am besten zu können, die mit dem gleichen Entschluß ordnet und schafft und zerstört.

Aber noch ist uns das Dasein verzaubert; an hundert Stellen ist es noch Ursprung. Ein Spielen von reinen Kräften, die keiner berührt, der nicht kniet und bewundert.

Worte gehen noch zart am Unsäglichen aus ...

Und die Musik, immer neu, aus den bebendsten Steinen, baut im unbrauchbaren Raum ihr vergöttlichtes Haus.

XI

Manche, des Todes, entstand ruhig geordnete Regel, weiterbezwingender Mensch,
seit du im Jagen beharrst; mehr doch als Falle und Netz, weiß ich dich,
Streifen von Segel, den man hinuntergehängt in den höhligen Karst.

Leise ließ man dich ein, als wärst du ein Zeichen, Frieden zu feiern. Doch dann:
rang dich am Rande der Knecht, –und, aus den Höhlen, die Nacht warf eine
Handvoll von bleichen taumelnden Tauben ins Licht ...

Aber auch das ist im Recht.

Fern von dem Schauenden sei jeglicher Hauch des Bedauerns, nicht nur vom Jäger
allein, der, was sich zeitig erweist, wachsam und handelnd vollzieht.

Töten ist eine Gestalt unseres wandernden Trauerns ...
Rein ist im heiteren Geist,
was an uns selber geschieht.

XII

Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert, drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit Verwandlungen prunkt; jener entwerfende Geist, welcher das Irdische meistert, liebt in dem Schwung der Figur nichts wie den wendenden Punkt.

Was sich ins Bleiben verschließt, schon ists das Erstarrete; wähnt es sich sicher im Schutz des unscheinbaren Grau's?

Warte, ein Härtestes warnt aus der Ferne das Harte.

Wehe—: abwesender Hammer holt aus!

Wer sich als Quelle ergießt, den erkennt die Erkennung; und sie führt ihn entzückt durch das heiter Geschaffne, das mit Anfang oft schließt und mit Ende beginnt.

Jeder glückliche Raum ist Kind oder Enkel von Trennung, den sie staunend durchgehn. Und die verwandelte Daphne will, seit sie lorbeern fühlt, daß du dich wandelst in Wind.

XIII

Sei allem Abschied voran, als wäre er hinter dir, wie der Winter, der eben geht.
Denn unter Wintern ist einer so endlos Winter,
daß, überwinternd, dein Herz überhaupt übersteht.

Sei immer tot in Eurydike—, singender steige,
preisender steige zurück in den reinen Bezug.
Hier, unter Schwindenden, sei, im Reiche der Neige, sei ein klingendes Glas, das
sich im Klang schon zerschlug.

Sei—und wisse zugleich des Nicht-Seins Bedingung, den unendlichen Grund deiner
innigen Schwingung, daß du sie völlig vollziehst dieses einzige Mal.

Zu dem gebrauchten sowohl, wie zum dumpfen und stummen Vorrat der vollen
Natur, den unsäglichen Summen, zähle dich jubelnd hinzu und vernichte die
Zahl.

XIV

Siehe die Blumen, diese dem Irdischen treuen, denen wir Schicksal vom Rande des Schicksals leihn,— aber wer weiß es! Wenn sie ihr Welken bereuen, ist es an uns, ihre Reue zu sein.

Alles will schweben. Da gehn wir umher wie Beschwerer, legen auf alles uns selbst, vom Gewichte entzückt; o was sind wir den Dingen für zehrende Lehrer, weil ihnen ewige Kindheit glückt.

Nähme sie einer ins innige Schlafen und schliefe tief mit den Dingen—: o wie käme er leicht, anders zum anderen Tag, aus der gemeinsamen Tiefe.

Oder er bliebe vielleicht; und sie blühten und priesen ihn, den Bekehrten, der nun den Ihrigen gleicht, allen den stillen Geschwistern im Winde der Wiesen.

XV

O Brunnen-Mund, du gebender, du Mund, der unerschöpflich Eines, Reines,
spricht,— du, vor des Wassers fließendem Gesicht, marmorne Maske. Und im
Hintergrund

der Aquädukte Herkunft. Weither an
Gräbern vorbei, vom Hang des Apennins tragen sie dir dein Sagen zu, das dann
am schwarzen Altern deines Kinns

vorüberfällt in das Gefäß davor.

Dies ist das schlafend hingelegte Ohr, das Marmorrohr, in das du immer sprichst.

Ein Ohr der Erde. Nur mit sich allein redet sie also. Schiebt ein Krug sich ein, so
scheint es ihr, daß du sie unterbrichst.

XVI

Immer wieder von uns aufgerissen, ist der Gott die Stelle, welche heilt.
Wir sind Scharfe, denn wir wollen wissen, aber er ist heiter und verteilt.

Selbst die reine, die geweihte Spende nimmt er anders nicht in seine Welt, als
indem er sich dem freien Ende unbewegt entgegenstellt.

Nur der Tote trinkt
aus der hier von uns gehörten Quelle, wenn der Gott ihm schweigend winkt, dem
Toten.

Uns wird nur das Lärmen angeboten.
Und das Lamm erbittet seine Schelle aus dem stilleren Instinkt.

XVII

Wo, in welchen immer selig bewässerten Gärten, an welchen Bäumen, aus welchen zärtlich entblätterten Blüten-Kelchen reifen die fremdartigen Früchte der Tröstung? Diese köstlichen, deren du eine vielleicht in der zertretenen Wiese

deiner Armut findest. Von einem zum anderen Male wunderst du dich über die Größe der Frucht, über ihr Heilsein, über die Sanftheit der Schale, und daß sie der Leichtsinn des Vogels dir nicht vorwegnahm und nicht die Eifersucht

unten des Wurms. Giebt es denn Bäume, von Engeln beflogen, und von verborgenen langsamen Gärtnern so seltsam gezogen, daß sie uns tragen, ohne uns zu gehören?

Haben wir niemals vermocht, wir Schatten und Schemen, durch unser voreilig reifes und wieder welches Benehmen jener gelassenen Sommer Gleichmut zu stören?

XVIII

Tänzerin: o du Verlegung
alles Vergehens in Gang: wie brachtest du's dar.
Und der Wirbel am Schluß, dieser Baum aus Bewegung, nahm er nicht ganz in
Besitz das erschwungene Jahr?

Blühte nicht, daß ihn dein Schwingen von vorhin umschwärme, plötzlich sein
Wipfel von Stille? Und über ihr, war sie nicht Sonne, war sie nicht Sommer,
die Wärme, diese unzählige Wärme aus dir?

Aber er trug auch, er trug, dein Baum der Ekstase.
Sind sie nicht seine ruhigen Früchte: der Krug, reifend gestreift, und die gereifere
Vase?

Und in den Bildern: ist nicht die Zeichnung geblieben, die deiner Braue dunkler
Zug
rasch an die Wandung der eigenen Wendung geschrieben?

XIX

Irgendwo wohnt das Gold in der verwöhnenden Bank und mit Tausenden tut es vertraulich. Doch jener Blinde, der Bettler, ist selbst dem kupfernen Zehner wie ein verlorener Ort, wie das staubige Eck unterm Schrank.

In den Geschäften entlang ist das Geld wie zuhause und verkleidet sich scheinbar in Seide, Nelken und Pelz.

Er, der Schweigende, steht in der Atempause
alles des wach oder schlafend atmenden Gelds.

O wie mag sie sich schließen bei Nacht, diese immer offene Hand.
Morgen holt sie das Schicksal wieder, und täglich hält es sie hin: hell, elend,
unendlich zerstörbar.

Daß doch einer, ein Schauender, endlich ihren langen Bestand staunend begriffe
und rühmte. Nur dem Aufsingenden säglich.
Nur dem Göttlichen hörbar.

XX

Zwischen den Sternen, wie weit; und doch, um wievieles noch weiter, was man am
Hiesigen lernt.

Einer, zum Beispiel, ein Kind ... und ein Nächster, ein Zweiter—, o wie unfäßlich
entfernt.

Schicksal, es mißt uns vielleicht mit des Seienden Spanne, daß es uns fremd
erscheint;

denk, wieviel Spannen allein vom Mädchen zum Manne, wenn es ihn meidet und
meint.

Alles ist weit—, und nirgends schließt sich der Kreis.

Sieh in der Schüssel, auf heiter bereitetem Tische, seltsam der Fische Gesicht.

Fische sind stumm ..., meinte man einmal. Wer weiß?

Aber ist nicht am Ende ein Ort, wo man das, was der Fische Sprache wäre, ohne sie
spricht?

XXI

Singe die Gärten, mein Herz, die du nicht kennst; wie in Glas eingegossene Gärten,
klar, unerreichbar.

Wasser und Rosen von Ispahan oder Schiras,
singe sie selig, preise sie, keinem vergleichbar.

Zeige, mein Herz, daß du sie niemals entbehrst.

Daß sie dich meinen, ihre reifenden Feigen.

Daß du mit ihnen, zwischen den blühenden Zweigen wie zum Gesicht gesteigerten
Lüften verkehrst.

Meide den Irrtum, daß es Entbehrungen gebe
für den geschehnen Entschluß, diesen: zu sein!
Seidener Faden, kamst du hinein ins Gewebe.

Welchem der Bilder du auch im Innern geeint bist (sei es selbst ein Moment aus
dem Leben der Pein), fühl, daß der ganze, der rühmliche Teppich gemeint ist.

XXII

O trotz Schicksal: die herrlichen Überflüsse unseres Daseins, in Parken
übergeschäumt,— oder als steinerne Männer neben die Schlüsse hoher Portale,
unter Balkone gebäumt!

O die eherne Glocke, die ihre Keule
täglich wider den stumpfen Alltag hebt.
Oder die eine, in Karnak, die Säule, die Säule, die fast ewige Tempel überlebt.

Heute stürzen die Überschüsse, dieselben, nur noch als Eile vorbei, aus dem
waagrechten gelben Tag in die blendend mit Licht übertriebene Nacht.

Aber das Rasen zergeht und läßt keine Spuren.
Kurven des Flugs durch die Luft und die, die sie fuhren, keine vielleicht ist
umsonst. Doch nur wie gedacht.

XXIII

Rufe mich zu jener deiner Stunden, die dir unaufhörlich widersteht: flehend nah
wie das Gesicht von Hunden, aber immer wieder weggedreht,

wenn du meinst, sie endlich zu erfassen.

So Entzognes ist am meisten dein.

Wir sind frei. Wir wurden dort entlassen, wo wir meinten, erst begrüßt zu sein.

Bang verlangen wir nach einem Halte, wir zu Jungen manchmal für das Alte und
zu alt für das, was niemals war.

Wir, gerecht nur, wo wir dennoch preisen, weil wir, ach, der Ast sind und das Eisen
und das Süße reifender Gefahr.

XXIV

O diese Lust, immer neu, aus gelockertem Lehm!
Niemand beinah hat den frühesten Wagnern geholfen.
Städte entstanden trotzdem an beseligten Golfen, Wasser und Öl füllten die Krüge
trotzdem.

Götter, wir planen sie erst in erkühnten Entwürfen, die uns das mürrische
Schicksal wieder zerstört.
Aber sie sind die Unsterblichen. Sehet, wir dürfen jenen erhorchen, der uns am
Ende erhört.

Wir, ein Geschlecht durch Jahrtausende: Mütter und Väter, immer erfüllter von
dem künftigen Kind,
daß es uns einst, übersteigend, erschütterte, später.

Wir, wir unendlich Gewagten, was haben wir Zeit!
Und nur der schweigsame Tod, der weiß, was wir sind und was er immer gewinnt,
wenn er uns leiht.

XXV

Schon, horch, hörst du der ersten Harken Arbeit; wieder den menschlichen Takt
in der verhaltenen Stille der starken Vorfrühlingserde. Unabgeschmackt

scheint dir das Kommende. Jenes so oft dir schon Gekommene scheint dir zu
kommen wieder wie Neues. Immer erhofft,
nahmst du es niemals. Es hat dich genommen.

Selbst die Blätter durchwinterter Eichen scheinen im Abend ein künftiges Braun.
Manchmal geben sich Lüfte ein Zeichen.

Schwarz sind die Sträucher. Doch Haufen von Dünger lagern als satteres Schwarz
in den Aun.
Jede Stunde, die hingeht, wird jünger.

XXVI

Wie ergreift uns der Vogelschrei ...
Irgend ein einmal erschaffenes Schreien.
Aber die Kinder schon, spielend im Freien, schreien an wirklichen Schreien vorbei.

Schreien den Zufall. In Zwischenräume
dieses, des Weltraums, (in welchen der heile Vogelschrei eingeht, wie Menschen in
Träume—) treiben sie ihre, des Kreischens, Keile.

Wehe, wo sind wir? Immer noch freier,
wie die losgerissenen Drachen
jagen wir halbhoch, mit Rändern von Lachen,

windig zerfetzten.—Ordne die Schreier, singender Gott! daß sie rauschend
erwachen, tragend als Strömung das Haupt und die Leier.

XXVII

Giebt es wirklich die Zeit, die zerstörende?
Wann, auf dem ruhenden Berg, zerbricht sie die Burg?
Dieses Herz, das unendlich den Göttern gehörende, wann vergewaltigte der
Demiurg?

Sind wir wirklich so ängstlich Zerbrechliche, wie das Schicksal uns wahr machen
will?

Ist die Kindheit, die tiefe, versprechliche, in den Wurzeln—später—still?

Ach, das Gespenst des Vergänglichen, durch den arglos Empfänglichen
geht es, als wär es ein Rauch.

Als die, die wir sind, als die Treibenden, gelten wir doch bei bleibenden
Kräften als göttlicher Brauch.

XXVIII

O komm und geh. Du, fast noch Kind, ergänze für einen Augenblick die
Tanzfigur
zum reinen Sternbild einer jener Tänze, darin wir die dumpf ordnende Natur

vergänglich übertreffen. Denn sie regte sich völlig hörend nur, da Orpheus sang.
Du warst noch die von damals her Bewegte und leicht befremdet, wenn ein Baum
sich lang

besann, mit dir nach dem Gehör zu gehn.
Du wußtest noch die Stelle, wo die Leier sich tönend hob—; die unerhörte Mitte.

Für sie versuchtest du die schönen Schritte und hofftest, einmal zu der heilen Feier
des Freundes Gang und Antlitz hinzudrehn.

XXIX

Stiller Freund der vielen Fernen, fühle, wie dein Atem noch den Raum vermehrt.
Im Gebälk der finstern Glockenstühle laß dich läuten. Das, was an dir zehrt,

wird ein Starkes über dieser Nahrung.
Geh in der Verwandlung aus und ein.
Was ist deine leidendste Erfahrung?
Ist dir Trinken bitter, werde Wein.

Sei in dieser Nacht aus Übermaß
Zauberkraft am Kreuzweg deiner Sinne, ihrer seltsamen Begegnung Sinn.

Und wenn dich das Irdische vergaß, zu der stillen Erde sag: Ich rinne.
Zu dem raschen Wasser sprich: Ich bin.

Anlage für Anlage für Duineser Elegien

[I]

Rühmen, das ists! Ein zum Rühmen Besteller, ging er hervor wie das Erz aus des
Steins Schweigen. Sein Herz, o vergängliche Kelter eines den Menschen
unendlichen Weins!

Euch kanns beirren, wenn man in Grüften Könige aufdeckt, verfault und
verwürmt,— ihn hat der Hinfall der Häupter und Hüften zwar mit zehrendem
Weh bestürmt,

aber der Zweifel war ihm verächtlich.
Er zerrang den Gestank und pries
Tägiges täglich und Nächtiges nächtlich,

denn wer erkennt die verwandelten Gnaden?
Knieend aus dem Markte der Maden
hob er das heile Goldene Vließ.

[Notizen](#)

[II]

O das Neue, Freunde, ist nicht dies, daß Maschinen uns die Hand verdrängen.
Laßt euch nicht beirrn von Übergängen, bald wird schweigen, wer das 'Neue' pries.

Denn das Ganze ist unendlich neuer, als ein Kabel und ein hohes Haus.
Seht, die Sterne sind ein altes Feuer, und die neuern Feuer löschen aus.

Glaubt nicht, daß die längsten Transmissionen schon des Künftigen Räder drehn.
Denn Aeonen reden mit Aeonen.

Mehr, als wir erfuhren, ist geschehn.
Und die Zukunft faßt das Allerfernste rein in eins mit unserm innern Ernste.

[III]

Brau uns den Zauber, in dem die Grenzen sich lösen, immer zum Feuer gebeugter
Geist!

Diese, vor allem, heimliche Grenze des Bösen, die auch den Ruhenden, der sich
nicht rührte, umkreist.

Löse mit einigen Tropfen das Engende jener Grenze der Zeiten, die uns belügt;
denn wie tief ist in uns noch der Tag der Athener und der ägyptische Gott oder
Vogel gefügt.

Ruhe nicht eher, bis auch der Rand der Geschlechter, der sich sinnlos
verringenden, schmolz.

Öffne die Kindheit und die Schooße gerechter

gebender Mütter, daß sie, Beschämer der Leere, unbeirrt durch das hindernde Holz
künftige Ströme gebären, Vermehrer der Meere.

[IV]

Mehr nicht sollst du wissen als die Stele und im reinen Stein das milde Bild:
beinah heiter, nur so leicht als fehle ihr die Mühe, die auf Erden gilt.

Mehr nicht sollst du fühlen als die reine Richtung im unendlichen Entzug— ach,
vielleicht das Kaltsein jener Steine, die sie manchmal abends trug.

Aber sonst sei dir die Tröstung teuer, die du im Gewohntesten erkennst.
Wind ist Trost, und Tröstung ist das Feuer.

Hier-und Dortsein, dich ergreife beides seltsam ohne Unterschied. Du trennst
sonst das Weißsein von dem Weiß des Kleides.

[M]

Denk: Sie hätten vielleicht aneinander erfahren, welches die teilbaren Wunder sind—.

Doch da er sich langsam verrang an den alternden Jahren, war sie die Künftige erst, ein kommendes Kind.

Sie, vielleicht—, sie, die da ging und mit Freundinnen spielte, hat er im knabigen schon, im Erahnen, ersehnt, wissend das schließende Herz, das ihn völlig enthielte, und nun trennt sie ein Nichts, ein verfünftes Jahrzehnt.

Oh du ratloser Gott, du betrogener Hymen,
wie du die Fackel nach abwärts kehrst,
weil sie ihm Asche warf an die grauende Schläfe.

Soll er klagend vergehn und die Beginnende rühmen?
Oder sein stillster Verzicht, wird er sie erst
machen zu jener Gestalt, die ihn ganz überträfe?

[VI]

Aber, ihr Freunde, zum Fest, laßt uns gedenken der Feste, wenn uns ein eigenes
nicht, mitten im Umzug, gelingt.

Seht, sie meinen auch uns, alle der Villa d'Este
spielende Brunnen, wenn auch nicht mehr ein jeglicher springt.

Wir sind die Erben, trotzdem, dieser gesungenen Gärten; Freunde, o faßt sie im
Ernst, diese besitzende Pflicht.

Was uns als Letzten vielleicht glückliche Götter gewährten, hat keinen ehrlichen
Platz im zerstreuten Verzicht.

Keiner der Götter vergeh. Wir brauchen sie alle und jeden, jedes gelte uns noch,
jedes gestaltete Bild.

Laßt euch, was ruhig geruht, nicht in den Herzen zerreden.

Sind wir auch anders, als die, denen noch Feste gelangen, dieser leistende Strahl,
der uns als Stärke entquillt, ist über große, zu uns, Aquädukte gegangen.

[VII]

Welche Stille um einen Gott! Wie hörst du in ihr jeden Wechsel im Auffall des
 Brunnenstrahls am weilenden Wasser des Marmorovals.
Und am Lorbeer vorüber ein Fühlen: drei oder vier

Blätter, die ein Falter gestreift hat. An dir taumelt er hin, im tragenden Atem des
 Tals.

Und du gedenkst eines anderen Mals,
da sie dir schon so vollkommen schien, hier,

diese Stille um einen Gott. Ward sie nicht mehr?
Nimmt sie nicht zu? Nimmt sie nicht überhand?
Drängt sie nicht fast wie ein Widerstand

an dein tönendes Herz? Irgendwo bricht sich sein Schlag an einer lautlosen Pause
 im Tag ...
Dort ist Er.

[VIII]

Wir hören seit lange die Brunnen mit.
Sie klingen uns beinah wie Zeit.
Aber sie halten viel eher Schritt mit der wandelnden Ewigkeit.

Das Wasser ist fremd und das Wasser ist dein, von hier und doch nicht von hier.
Eine Weile bist du der Brunnenstein, und es spiegelt die Dinge in dir.

Wie ist das alles entfernt und verwandt und lange enträtselt und unerkant,
sinnlos und wieder voll Sinn.

Dein ist, zu lieben, was du nicht weißt.
Es nimmt dein geschenktes Gefühl und reißt es mit sich hinüber. Wohin?

[IX]

Wann war ein Mensch je so wach wie der Morgen von heut?
Nicht nur Blume und Bach, auch das Dach ist erfreut.

Selbst sein alternder Rand, von den Himmeln erhellt,— wird fühlend: ist Land, ist
Antwort, ist Welt.

Alles atmet und dankt.
O ihr Nöte der Nacht,
wie ihr spurlos versankt.

Aus Scharen von Licht
war ihr Dunkel gemacht, das sich rein widerspricht.

[BRUCHSTÜCKE]

[i]

So wie angehaltner Atem steht
steht die Nymphe in dem vollen Baume

[ii]

Sieh hinauf. Heut ist der Nachtraum heiter.

[iii]

Hoher Gott der fernen Vorgesänge überall erfähr ich dich zutiefst in der freien
Ordnung mancher Hänge stehn die Sträucher noch wie du sie riefst

[iv]

Spiegel, du Doppelgänger des Raums! O Spiegel, in dich fort stürzt die Hälfte der
Lächeln / vielleicht die süßesten; denn wie oft dem Meister der Strich, der
probende, auf dem vorläufigen Blatt blumiger aufschwingt, als später auf dem
bereiteten Grund der geführtere Umriß: So, oh, lächelst du hin, Unsägliche,
deiner Morgen Herkunft und Freiheit in die immer nehmenden Spiegel

[v]

Immer, o Nymphe, seit je / hab ich dich staunend bewundert ob du auch nie aus
dem Baum mir dem verschlossenen tratst—
Ich bin die Zeit die vergeht—, du bist ein junges Jahrhundert, alles ist immer noch
neu, was du von Göttern erbatst.
Dein ist die Wiese, sie schwankt noch jetzt von dem Sprunge, jenem mit dem du
zuletzt in die Ulme verschwandst.
Einst in der christlichen Früh. Und ist nicht, du junge, Dir unser erstes Gefühl in
den Frühling gepflanzt.

Eh uns ein Mädchen noch rührt, bist du die gemeinte

[vi]

..... Braun's
..... an den sonoren
trockenen Boden des Walds
trommelt das Flüchten des Fauns

[vii]

Dies ist das schweigende Steigen der Phallen

[viii]

Von meiner Antwort weiß ich noch nicht wann ich sie sagen werde.
Aber, horch eine Harke, die schon schafft.
Oben allein im Weinberg spricht
schon ein Mann mit der Erde.

[ix]

Hast du des Epheus wechselnde Blättergestalten

[x]

Wahre dich besser

wahre dich Wanderer mit dem selber auch gehenden Weg

[xi]

Laß uns Legenden der Liebe hören.

Zeig uns ihr kühnes köstliches Leid.

Wo sie im Recht war, war alles Beschwören, hier ist das meiste verleugneter Eid.

Notes

Notes

FOREWORD

[the princess's memoir of him](#): Princess Marie von Thum und Taxis-Hohenlohe, *Erinnerungen an Rainer Maria Rilke*, München: Oldenburg, 1933, pp. 40 f.

[There, the external Thing itself](#): To Ellen Delp, October 27, 1915.

[The "angel" of the Elegies has nothing to do](#): To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925.

[a hurricane in the spirit](#): To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, February 11, 1922.

[howling unbelievably vast commands](#): To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, February 15, 1922.

[the most mysterious, the most enigmatic dictation](#): To Xaver von Moos, April 30, 1923.

[the name of God](#): Exodus 3:14.

[DUINO ELEGIES \(1923\)](#)

The Elegies take their name from Duino Castle, on the Adriatic Sea, where Rilke spent the winter of 1911/1912 as a guest of his friend Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe (1855-1934); they are dedicated to her in gratitude, as having belonged to her from the beginning.

A year before his death, Rilke wrote to his Polish translator:

Affirmation of life-AND-death turns out to be one in the Elegies.... We of the here-and-now are not for a moment satisfied in the world of time, nor are we bound in it; we are continually overflowing toward those who preceded us, toward our origin, and toward those who seemingly come after us. In that vast "open" world, all beings are—one cannot say "contemporaneous," for the very fact that time has ceased determines that they all are. Everywhere transience is plunging into the depths of Being.... It is our task to imprint this temporary, perishable earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its essence can rise again, "invisibly," inside us. We are the bees of the invisible. We wildly collect the honey of the visible, to store it in the great golden hive of the invisible. The Elegies show us at this work, the work of the continual conversion of the beloved visible and tangible world into the invisible vibrations and agitation of our own nature ... Elegies and Sonnets support each other constantly—, and I consider it an infinite grace that, with the same breath, I was permitted to fill both these sails: the little rust-colored sail of the Sonnets and the Elegies' gigantic white canvas.

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

[The First Elegy](#) (Duino, between January 12 and 16, 1912)

ll. 1 f., among the angels' /hierarchies:

"There is really everything in the old churches, no shrinking from anything, as there is in the newer ones, where only the 'good' examples appear. Here you see also what is bad and

evil and horrible; what is deformed and suffering, what is ugly, what is unjust—and you could say that all this is somehow loved for God’s sake. Here is the angel, who doesn’t exist, and the devil, who doesn’t exist; and the human being, who does exist, stands between them, and (I can’t help saying it) their unreality makes him more real to me.”

(“The Young Workman’s Letter,” in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 313)

l. 5, the beginning of terror:

More and more in my life and in my work I am guided by the effort to correct our old repressions, which have removed and gradually estranged from us the mysteries out of whose abundance our lives might become truly infinite. It is true that these mysteries are dreadful, and people have always drawn away from them. But where can we find anything sweet and glorious that would never wear this mask, the mask of the dreadful? Life—and we know nothing else—, isn’t life itself dreadful? But as soon as we acknowledge its dreadfulness (not as opponents: what kind of match could we be for it?), but somehow with a confidence that this very dreadfulness may be something completely ours, though something that is just now too great, too vast, too incomprehensible for our learning hearts—: as soon as we accept life’s most terrifying dreadfulness, at the risk of perishing from it (i.e., from our own Too-much!)—: then an intuition of blessedness will open up for us and, at this cost, will be ours. Whoever does not, sometime or other, give his full consent, his full and joyous consent, to the dreadfulness of life, can never take possession of the unutterable abundance and power of our existence; can only walk on its edge, and one day, when the judgment is given, will have been neither alive nor dead. To show the identity of dreadfulness and bliss, these two faces on the same divine head, indeed this one single face, which just presents itself this way or that, according to our distance from it or the state of mind in which we perceive it—: this is the true significance and purpose of the Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus.

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, April 12, 1923)

l. 13, our interpreted world:

We, with a word or finger-sign,
gradually make the world our own,
though perhaps its weakest, most precarious part.

(Sonnets to Orpheus XVI, First Part)

l. 36, women in love:

Certainly I have no window on human beings. They yield themselves to me only insofar as they take on words within me, and during these last few years they have been communicating with me almost entirely through two forms, upon which I base my inferences about human beings in general. What speaks to me of humanity—immensely, with a calm authority that fills my hearing with space—is the phenomenon of those who have died young and, even more absolutely, purely, inexhaustibly: the woman in love. In these two figures humanity gets mixed into my heart whether I want it to or not. They step forward on my stage with the clarity of the marionette (which is an exterior entrusted with conviction) and, at the same time, as completed types, which nothing can go beyond, so that the definitive natural-history of their souls could now be written.

As for the woman in love (I am not thinking of Saint Theresa or such magnificence of that sort): she yields herself to my observation much more distinctly, purely, i.e.,

undilutedly and (so to speak) unappliedly in the situation of Gaspara Stampa, Louize Labé, certain Venetian courtesans, and, above all, Marianna Alcoforado, that incomparable creature, in whose eight heavy letters woman's love is for the first time charted from point to point, without display, without exaggeration or mitigation, drawn as if by the hand of a sibyl. And there—my God—there it becomes evident that, as a result of the irresistible logic of woman's heart, this line was finished, perfected, not to be continued any further in the earthly realm, and could be prolonged only toward the divine, into infinity.

(To Annette Kolb, January 23, 1912)

- l. 46, Gaspara Stampa (1523–1554): An Italian noblewoman who wrote of her unhappy love for Count Collaltino di Collalto in a series of some two hundred sonnets.

- l. 63, those who died young:

In Padua, where one sees the tombstones of many young men who died there (while they were students at the famous university), in Bologna, in Venice, in Rome, everywhere, I stood as a pupil of death: stood before death's boundless knowledge and let myself be educated. You must also remember how they lie resting in the churches of Genoa and Verona, those youthful forms, not envious of our coming and going, fulfilled within themselves, as if in their death-spasms they had for the first time bitten into the fruit of life, and were now, forever, savoring its unfathomable sweetness.

(To Magda von Hattingberg, February 16, 1914)

- l. 67, Santa Maria Formosa: A church in Venice, which Rilke had visited in 1911. The reference is to one of the commemorative tablets, inscribed with Latin verses, on the church walls—probably the one that reads (in translation): “I lived for others while life lasted; now, after death, / I have not perished, but in cold marble I live for myself. I was Willem Hellemans. Flanders mourns me, Adria sighs for me, poverty calls me. / Died October 16, 1593.”

- l. 86, through both realms:

Death is the side of life that is turned away from us and not illuminated. We must try to achieve the greatest possible consciousness of our existence, which is at home in both these unlimited realms, and inexhaustibly nourished by both. The true form of life extends through both regions, the blood of the mightiest circulation pulses through both: there is neither a this-world nor an other-world, but only the great unity, in which the “angels,” those beings who surpass us, are at home.

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

- l. 93, the lament for Linus: This ritual lament is mentioned in the Iliad, as part of a scene that Hephaestus fashioned on the shield of Achilles:

Girls and young men, with carefree hearts and innocent laughter, were carrying the honey-sweet grapes, piled up in wicker baskets; in their midst, a boy performed the ancient music of yearning, plucking his clear-toned lyre and singing the lament for Linus with his lovely voice, while the others moved to the powerful rhythm, their feet pounding in the dance, leaping and shouting for joy.

(Iliad 18, 567 ff.)

According to one myth, Linus was a poet who died young and was mourned by Apollo, his father. Other versions state that he was the greatest poet of all time and was killed by

Apollo in a jealous rage; or that he invented music and was the teacher of Orpheus.

The Second Elegy (Duino, late January–early February, 1912)

- I. 3, Tobias: A young man in the apocryphal Book of Tobit. The story portrays, in passing, the easy, casual contact between a human being and an angel: “And when he went to look for a man to accompany him to Rages, he found Raphael, who was an angel. But Tobias did not know that.... And when Tobias had prepared everything necessary for the journey, his father Tobit said, ‘Go with this man, and may God prosper your journey, and may the angel of God go with you.’ So they both departed, and the young man’s dog went along with them.”

Tobit 5:4, 16 (in the Codex Vaticanus)

- I. 12, pollen of the flowering godhead:

What is shown so beautifully in the world of plants—how they make no secret of their secret, as if they knew that it would always be safe—is exactly what I experienced in front of the sculptures in Egypt and what I have always experienced, ever since, in front of Egyptian Things: this exposure of a secret that is so thoroughly secret, through and through, in every place, that there is no need to hide it. And perhaps everything phallic (as I fore-thought in the temple of Karnak, for I couldn’t yet think it) is just a setting-forth of the human hidden secret in the sense of the open secret of Nature. I can’t remember the smile of the Egyptian gods without thinking of the word “pollen.”

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, February 20, 1914)

- II. 16 f., mirrors: which scoop up the beauty... :

The case of the Portuguese nun is so wonderfully pure because she doesn’t fling the streams of her emotion on into the imaginary, but rather, with infinite strength, conducts this magnificent feeling back into herself: enduring it, and nothing else. She grows old in the convent, very old; she doesn’t become a saint, or even a good nun. It is repugnant to her exquisite tact to apply to God what, from the very beginning, had never been intended for him, and what the Comte de Chamilly could disdain. And yet it was almost impossible to stop the heroic onrush of this love before its final leap: almost impossible, with such a powerful emotion pulsing in her innermost being, not to become a saint. If she—that measurelessly glorious creature—had yielded for even a moment, she would have plunged into God like a stone into the sea. And if it had pleased God to attempt with her what he continually does with the angels, casting all their radiance back into them—: I am certain that, immediately, just as she was, in that sad convent, she would have become an angel, in her deepest self.

(To Annette Kolb, January 23, 1912)

- I. 20, like a perfume: The reference in the original text is to ambergris or incense burning on a hot coal. (Ernst Zinn, editor’s note, SW 1, 792)
- II. 56–59, you touch so blissfully because ... / you feel pure duration: In a letter to Princess Marie about her translation of this Elegy into Italian, Rilke wrote, “I am concerned about this passage, which is so dear to me,” and after quoting it, he continued:

This is meant quite literally: that the place where the lover puts his hand is thereby withheld from passing away, from aging, from all the near-disintegration that is always

occurring in our integral nature—that simply beneath his hand, this place lasts, is. It must be possible, just as literally, to make this clear in Italian; in any paraphrase it is simply lost. Don't you agree? And I think of these lines with a special joy in having been able to write them.

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, December 16, 1913)

I. 66, Weren't you astonished: This is said to the lovers.

II. 66 f., the caution of human gestures / on Attic gravestones:

Once, in Naples I think, in front of some ancient gravestone, it flashed through me that I should never touch people with stronger gestures than the ones depicted there. And I really think that sometimes I get so far as to express the whole impulse of my heart, without loss or destiny, by gently placing my hand on someone's shoulder. Wouldn't that, Lou, wouldn't that be the only progress conceivable within the "restraint" that you ask me to remember?

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, January 10, 1912)

One of his most definite emotions was to marvel at Greek gravestones of the earliest period: how, upon them, the mutual touching, the resting of hand in hand, the coming of hand to shoulder, was so completely unpossessive. Indeed, it seemed as if in these lingering gestures (which no longer operated in the realm of fate) there was no trace of sadness about a future parting, since the hands were not troubled by any fear of ending or any presentiment of change, since nothing approached them but the long, pure solitude in which they were conscious of themselves as the images of two distant Things that gently come together in the unprovable inner depths of a mirror.

(Notebook entry, early November 1910; quoted in F.W. Wodtke, *Rilke und Klopstock*, Kiel diss., 1948, p. 28)

[The Third Elegy](#) (The beginning—probably the whole first section—: *Duino*, January/February 1912; continued and completed in Paris, late autumn 1913)

II. 26 ff., Mother, you made him small ... :

O night without objects. Dim, outward-facing window; doors that were carefully shut; arrangements from long ago, transmitted, believed in, never quite understood. Silence on the staircase, silence from adjoining rooms, silence high up on the ceiling. O mother: you who are without an equal, who stood before all this silence, long ago in childhood. Who took it upon yourself to say: Don't be afraid; I'm here. Who in the night had the courage to be this silence for the child who was frightened, who was dying of fear. You strike a match, and already the noise is you. And you hold the lamp in front of you and say: I'm here; don't be afraid. And you put it down, slowly, and there is no doubt: you are there, you are the light around the familiar, intimate Things, which are there without afterthought, good and simple and sure. And when something moves restlessly in the wall, or creaks on the floor: you just smile, smile transparently against a bright background into the terrified face that looks at you, searching, as if you knew the secret of every half-sound, and everything were agreed and understood between you. Does any power equal your power among the lords of the earth? Look: kings lie and stare, and the teller of tales cannot distract them. Though they lie in the blissful arms of their favorite mistress, horror creeps

over them and makes them palsied and impotent. But you come and keep the monstrosity behind you and are entirely in front of it; not like a curtain it can lift up here or there. No: as if you had caught up with it as soon as the child cried out for you. As if you had arrived far ahead of anything that might still happen, and had behind you only your hurrying-in, your eternal path, the flight of your love.

(The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, New York: Random House, 1983, p. 75 f.)

ll. 82, some confident daily task:

In the long, complicated solitude in which Malte was written, I felt perfectly certain that the strength with which I paid for him originated to a great extent from certain evenings on Capri when nothing happened except that I sat near two elderly women and a girl and watched their needlework, and sometimes at the end was given an apple that one of them had peeled.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, January 10, 1912)

The Fourth Elegy (Munich, November 22–23, 1915)

l. 27, It at least is full: This passage was influenced by Heinrich von Kleist's short essay-dialogue "On the Marionette Theater" (1810), which Rilke called "a masterpiece that again and again fills me with astonishment" (To Princess Marie, December 13, 1913). Kleist's character Herr C., in comparing the marionette and the human dancer, says that the marionette has two advantages:

First of all, a negative one: that it would never behave affectedly.... In addition, these puppets have the advantage that they are antigravitational. They know nothing of the inertia of matter, that quality which is most resistant to the dance: because the force that lifts them into the air is greater than the force that binds them to the earth.... Puppets need the ground only in order to touch it lightly, like elves, and reanimate the swing of their limbs through this momentary stop. We humans need it to rest on so that we can recover from the exertion of the dance. This moment of rest is clearly no dance in itself; the best we can do with it is to make it as inconspicuous as possible.

l. 35, the boy with the immovable brown eye: Rilke's cousin, who died at the age of seven. See note to Sonnets to Orpheus VIII, Second Part, p. 263.

Beside this lady sat the small son of a female cousin, a boy about as old as I, but smaller and more delicate. His pale, slender neck rose out of a pleated ruff and disappeared beneath a long chin. His lips were thin and closed tightly, his nostrils trembled a bit, and only one of his beautiful dark-brown eyes was movable. It sometimes glanced peacefully and sadly in my direction, while the other eye remained pointed toward the same corner, as if it had been sold and was no longer being taken into account.

(The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, p. 28)

l. 44, within my deepest hope:

As for myself, what has died for me has died, so to speak, into my own heart: when I looked for him, the person who vanished has collected himself strangely and so surprisingly in me, and it was so moving to feel he was now only there that my enthusiasm for serving his new existence, for deepening and glorifying it, took the upper hand almost at the very moment when pain would otherwise have invaded and devastated the whole

landscape of my spirit. When I remember how I—often with the utmost difficulty in understanding and accepting each other—loved my father! Often, in childhood, my mind became confused and my heart grew numb at the mere thought that someday he might no longer be; my existence seemed to me so wholly conditioned through him (my existence, which from the start was pointed in such a different direction!) that his departure was to my innermost self synonymous with my own destruction ..., but so deeply is death rooted in the essence of love that (if only we are cognizant of death without letting ourselves be misled by the uglinesses and suspicions that have been attached to it) it nowhere contradicts love: where, after all, can it drive out someone whom we have carried unsayably in our heart except into this very heart, where would the “idea” of this loved being exist, and his unceasing influence (: for how could that cease which even while he lived with us was more and more independent of his tangible presence) ... where would this always secret influence be more secure than in us?! Where can we come closer to it, where more purely celebrate it, when obey it better, than when it appears combined with our own voices, as if our heart had learned a new language, a new song, a new strength!

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, January 6, 1923)

1. 59, Angel and puppet: In Kleist’s essay the narrator goes on to say that

no matter how cleverly he might present his paradoxes, he would never make me believe that a mechanical marionette could contain more grace than there is in the structure of the human body.

Herr C. replied that, in fact, it is impossible for a human being to be anywhere near as graceful as a marionette. Only a god can equal inanimate matter in this respect. Here is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet.

I was more and more astonished, and didn’t know what I should say to such extraordinary assertions.

It seemed, he said, as he took a pinch of snuff, that I hadn’t read the third chapter of the Book of Genesis with sufficient attention; and if a man wasn’t familiar with that first period of all human development, one could hardly expect to converse with him about later periods, and certainly not about the final ones.

I told him that I was well aware what disorders consciousness produces in the natural grace of a human being. [Here follow two anecdotes: the first about a young man who by becoming aware of his physical beauty loses it; the second about a pet bear who can easily parry the thrusts of the most accomplished swordsman.]

“Now, my dear fellow,” said Herr C., “you are in possession of everything you need in order to understand the point I am making. We see that in the world of Nature, the dimmer and weaker intellect grows, the more radiantly and imperiously grace emerges. But just as a section drawn through two lines, considered from one given point, after passing through infinity, suddenly arrives on the other side of that point; or as the image in a concave mirror, after vanishing into infinity, suddenly reappears right in front of us: so grace too returns when knowledge has, as it were, gone through an infinity. Grace appears most purely in that human form in which consciousness is either nonexistent or infinite, i.e., in the marionette or in the god.”

“Does that mean,” I said, a bit bewildered, “that we must eat again of the Tree of Knowledge in order to fall back into the state of innocence?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “That is the last chapter in the history of the world.”

There is a complete translation of the essay in TLS, October 20, 1978.

l. 77, a pure event:

Extensive as the “external” world is, with all its sidereal distances it hardly bears comparison with the dimensions, the depth-dimensions, of our inner being, which does not even need the spaciousness of the universe to be, in itself, almost unlimited.... It seems to me more and more as though our ordinary consciousness inhabited the apex of a pyramid whose base in us (and, as it were, beneath us) broadens out to such an extent that the farther we are able to let ourselves down into it, the more completely do we appear to be included in the realities of earthly and, in the widest sense, worldly, existence, which are not dependent on time and space. From my earliest youth I have felt the intuition (and have also, as far as I could, lived by it) that at some deeper cross-section of this pyramid of consciousness, mere being could become an event, the inviolable presence and simultaneity of everything that we, on the upper, “normal,” apex of self-consciousness, are permitted to experience only as entropy.

(To Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, August 11, 1924)

[The Fifth Elegy](#) (Muzot, February 14, 1922)

This Elegy, the last one to be written, replaced “Antistrophes.”

I had intended to make a copy of the other three Elegies for you today, since it is already Sunday again. But now—imagine!—in a radiant afterstorm, another Elegy has been added, the “Saltimbanques” [“Acrobats”]. It is the most wonderful completion; only now does the circle of the Elegies seem to me truly closed. It is not added on as the Eleventh, but will be inserted (as the Fifth) before the “Hero-Elegy.” Besides, the piece that previously stood there seemed to me, because of its different kind of structure, to be unjustified in that place, though beautiful as a poem. The new Elegy will replace it (and how!), and the supplanted poem will appear in the section of “Fragmentary Pieces” which, as a second part of the book of Elegies, will contain everything that is contemporaneous with them, all the poems that time, so to speak, destroyed before they could be born, or cut off in their development to such an extent that the broken edges show.—And so now the “Saltimbanques” too exist, who even from my very first year in Paris affected me so absolutely and have haunted me ever since.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, February 19, 1922)

Dedication, Frau Hertha Koenig: The owner of Picasso’s large (84" × 90³/₈") 1905 painting *La Famille des Saltimbanques*, which she had bought in December 1914. The painting made such a deep impression on Rilke that he wrote to Frau Koenig asking if he could stay in her Munich home while she was away for the summer of 1915, so that he could live beneath the great work, “which gives me the courage for this request.” The request was granted, and Rilke spent four months with the “glorious Picasso.”

The other source for the Fifth Elegy is Rilke’s experience, over a number of years, with a troupe of Parisian circus people. See “Acrobats,” in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 288.

l. 14, the large capital D: The five standing figures in Picasso’s painting seem to be arranged in the shape of a D.

l. 17, King Augustus the Strong (1670–1733): King of Poland and elector of Saxony. To entertain his guests at the dinner table, he would, with one hand, crush together a thick pewter plate.

l. 64, “Subrisio Saltat.”: “Acrobats’ Smile.” During the printing of the Elegies, Rilke explained this in a note

on the proof sheets:

As if it were the label on a druggist's urn; abbreviation of Subrisio Saltat(orum). The labels on these receptacles almost always appear in abbreviated form.

(Ernst Zinn, "Mitteilungen zu R. M. Rilkes Ausgewählten Werken," in *Dichtung und Volkstum* 40, p. 132)

I. 92, Madame Lamort: Madame Death.

[The Sixth Elegy](#) (Begun at Duino, February/March 1912; lines 1-31: Ronda, January/February 1913; lines 42-44: Paris, late autumn 1913; lines 32-41: Muzot, February 9, 1922)

I. 8, Like the god stepping into the swan: Cf. "Leda" (New Poems).

I. 20, Karnak: Rilke spent two months in Egypt early in 1911 and was deeply moved by

the incomprehensible temple-world of Karnak, which I saw the very first evening, and again yesterday, under a moon just beginning to wane: saw, saw, saw—my God, you pull yourself together and with all your might you try to believe your two focused eyes—and yet it begins above them, reaches out everywhere above and beyond them (only a god can cultivate such a field of vision) ...

(To Clara Rilke, January 18, 1911)

In the team of galloping horses (I. 19) Rilke is referring to the battle scenes carved on the huge pillars in the Temple of Amun, which depict the pharaoh-generals in their conquering chariots.

I. 31, Samson: Judges 13:2, 24; 16:25 ff.

[The Seventh Elegy](#) (Muzot, February 7, 1922; lines 87-end: February 26, 1922)

II. 2 ff., you would cry out as purely as a bird:

The bird is a creature that has a very special feeling of trust in the external world, as if she knew that she is one with its deepest mystery. That is why she sings in it as if she were singing within her own depths; that is why we so easily receive a birdcall into our own depths; we seem to be translating it without residue into our emotion; indeed, it can for a moment turn the whole world into inner space, because we feel that the bird does not distinguish between her heart and the world's.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, February 20, 1914)

I. 7, the silent lover:

Learn, inner man, to look on your inner woman,
the one attained from a thousand
natures ...

("Turning-point," in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 129)

II. 34 f., one earthly Thing/truly experienced:

These Things, whose essential life you want to express, first ask you, "Are you free? Are you prepared to devote all your love to me, to lie with me as St. Julian the Hospitaller lay

beside the leper, giving him the supreme embrace which no simple, fleeting love of one's neighbor could accomplish, because its motive is love, the whole of love, all the love that exists on earth." And if the Thing sees that you are otherwise occupied, with even a particle of your interest, it shuts itself off; it may perhaps give you some slight sign of friendship, a word or a nod, but it will never give you its heart, entrust you with its patient being, its sweet sidereal constancy, which makes it so like the constellations in the sky. In order for a Thing to speak to you, you must regard it for a certain time as the only one that exists, as the one and only phenomenon, which through your laborious and exclusive love is now placed at the center of the universe, and which, in that incomparable place, is on that day attended by angels.

(To Baladine Klossowska, December 16, 1920)

1. 36, Don't think that fate is more than the density of childhood:

What we call fate does not come to us from outside: it goes forth from within us.

(To Franz Xaver Kappus, August 12, 1904)

1. 37, how often you outdistanced the man you loved:

Woman has something of her very own, something suffered, accomplished, perfected. Man, who always had the excuse of being busy with more important matters, and who (let us say it frankly) was not at all adequately prepared for love, has not since antiquity (except for the saints) truly entered into love. The Troubadours knew very well how little they could risk, and Dante, in whom the need became great, only skirted around love with the huge arc of his gigantically evasive poem. Everything else is, in this sense, derivative and second-rate.... You see, after this very salutary interval I am expecting man, the man of the "new heartbeat," who for the time being is getting nowhere, to take upon himself, for the next few thousand years, his own development into the lover—a long, difficult, and, for him, completely new development. As for the woman—withdrawn into the beautiful contour she has made for herself, she will probably find the composure to wait for this slow lover of hers, without getting bored and without too much irony, and, when he arrives, to welcome him.

(To Annette Kolb, January 23, 1912)

1. 71, in your endless vision:

For the angel of the Elegies, all the towers and palaces of the past are existent because they have long been invisible, and the still-standing towers and bridges of our reality are already invisible, although still (for us) physically lasting.... All the worlds in the universe are plunging into the invisible as into their next-deeper reality; a few stars intensify immediately and pass away in the infinite consciousness of the angels—, others are entrusted to beings who slowly and laboriously transform them, in whose terrors and delights they attain their next invisible realization. We, let it be emphasized once more, we, in the sense of the Elegies, are these transformers of the earth; our entire existence, the flights and plunges of our love, everything, qualifies us for this task (beside which there is, essentially, no other).

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

1. 73, Pillars:

... a calyx column stands there, alone, a survivor, and you can't encompass it, so far out beyond your life does it reach; only together with the night can you somehow take it in, perceiving it with the stars, as a whole, and then for a second it becomes human—a human experience.

(To Clara Rilke, January 18, 1911)

l. 73, pylons: “The monumental gateway to an Egyptian temple, usually formed by two truncated pyramidal towers connected by a lower architectural member containing the gate.” (OED)

l. 73, the Sphinx: See note to the Tenth Elegy, II. 73 ff., pp. 246 ff.

l. 84, a woman in love—, oh alone at night by her window: Cf. “Woman in Love” (New Poems).

l. 87, filled with departure:

I sometimes wonder whether longing can't radiate out from someone so powerfully, like a storm, that nothing can come to him from the opposite direction. Perhaps William Blake has somewhere drawn that—?

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, May 14, 1912)

[The Eighth Elegy](#) (Muzot, February 7/8, 1922)

Dedication, Rudolf Kassner: Austrian writer (1873–1959).

l. 2, into the Open:

You must understand the concept of the “Open,” which I have tried to propose in this Elegy, as follows: The animal's degree of consciousness is such that it comes into the world without at every moment setting the world over against itself (as we do). The animal is in the world; we stand in front of the world because of the peculiar turn and heightening which our consciousness has taken. So by the “Open” it is not sky or air or space that is meant; they, too, for the human being who observes and judges, are “objects” and thus “opaque” and closed. The animal or the flower presumably is all that, without accounting for itself, and therefore has before itself and above itself that indescribably open freedom which has its (extremely fleeting) equivalents for us perhaps only in the first moments of love, when we see our own vastness in the person we love, and in the ecstatic surrender to God.

(To Lev P Struve, February 25, 1926, in Maurice Betz, Rilke in Frankreich: Erinnerungen –Briefe–Dokumente, Wien Leipzig Zürich: Herbert Reichner Verlag, 1937)

ll. 2 f., Only our eyes are turned / backward: In describing his experience of “reaching the other side of Nature,” Rilke uses the mirror image of this metaphor:

Altogether, he was able to observe how all objects yielded themselves to him more distantly and, at the same time, somehow more truly; this might have been due to his own vision, which was no longer directed forward and diluted in empty space; he was looking, as if over his shoulder, backward at Things, and their now completed existence took on a bold, sweet aftertaste, as though everything had been spiced with a trace of the blossom of parting.

(“An Experience,” in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 291)

l. 9, Free from death:

Nearby there was one of the darker birdcalls, a more mature one, already sung inwardly, which was to the others as a poem is to a few words—how it shone toward God, already, already, how devout it was, how filled with itself, a song-bud still in the calyx of its sound, but already aware of its own irrepressible fullness, pre-blissful and pre-afraid. Or rather, the fear was entirely there, the indivisible pain common to all creatures, which is as simple as the blissfulness over there, on the other side, where all has been surmounted.

(To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, February 24, 1920)

l. 13, fountain: Here, as well as in the Ninth Elegy, l. 33, and Sonnets to Orpheus VIII, First Part, this is meant in its older sense of “a spring or source of water issuing from the earth and collecting in a basin, natural or artificial; also, the head-spring or source of a stream or river.” (OED)

l. 53 ff., Oh bliss of the tiny creature ... :

That a multitude of creatures which come from externally exposed seeds have that as their maternal body, that vast sensitive freedom—how much at home they must feel in it all their lives; in fact they do nothing but leap for joy in their mother’s womb, like little John the Baptist; for this same space has both conceived them and brought them forth, and they never leave its security.

Until in the bird everything becomes a little more uneasy and cautious. The nest that Nature has given him is already a small maternal womb, which he only covers instead of wholly containing it. And suddenly, as if it were no longer safe enough outside, the wonderful maturing flees wholly into the darkness of the creature and emerges into the world only at a later turning-point, experiencing it as a second world and never entirely weaned from the conditions of the earlier, more intimate one.

(Rivalry between mother and world—)

(Notebook entry, February 20, 1914; SW 6, 1074 f.)

The Ninth Elegy (Lines 1–6a and 77–79: Duino, March 1912; the rest: Muzot, February 9, 1922)

l. 7, happiness:

The reality of any joy in the world is indescribable; only in joy does creation take place (happiness, on the contrary, is only a promising, intelligible constellation of things already there); joy is a marvelous increasing of what exists, a pure addition out of nothingness. How superficially must happiness engage us, after all, if it can leave us time to think and worry about how long it will last. Joy is a moment, unobligated, timeless from the beginning, not to be held but also not to be truly lost again, since under its impact our being is changed chemically, so to speak, and does not only, as may be the case with happiness, savor and enjoy itself in a new mixture.

(To Ilse Erdmann, January 31, 1914)

ll. 9 f., the heart, which / would exist in the laurel too:

Hardly had she cried her breathless prayer
when a numbness seized her body; her soft breasts
were sealed in bark, her hair turned into leaves,
her arms into branches; her feet, which had been so quick,
plunged into earth and rooted her to the spot.

Only her shining grace was left. Apollo
still loved her; he reached out his hand to touch
the laurel trunk, and under the rough bark
could feel her heart still throbbing ...

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 548 ff.)

ll. 32 ff., house, / bridge ... :

Even for our grandparents a “house,” a “well,” a familiar tower, their very clothes, their coat, was infinitely more, infinitely more intimate; almost everything was a vessel in which they found what is human and added to the supply of what is human.

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

l. 59, the rope-maker in Rome or the potter along the Nile:

I often wonder whether things unemphasized in themselves haven't exerted the most profound influence on my development and my work: the encounter with a dog; the hours I spent in Rome watching a rope-maker, who in his craft repeated one of the oldest gestures in the world—as did the potter in a little village on the Nile; standing beside his wheel was indescribably and in a most mysterious sense fruitful for me...

(To Alfred Schaer, February 26, 1924)

ll. 68 f., to arise within us, / invisible:

The Spanish landscape (the last one that I experienced absolutely), Toledo, pushed this attitude of mine to its extreme limit: because there the external Thing itself—tower, mountain, bridge—already possessed the extraordinary, unsurpassable intensity of those inner equivalents through which one might have wished to represent it. Everywhere appearance and vision merged, as it were, in the object; in each one of them a whole inner world was revealed, as though an angel who encompassed all space were blind and gazing into himself. This, a world seen no longer from the human point of view, but inside the angel, is perhaps my real task—one, at any rate, in which all my previous attempts would converge.

(To Ellen Delp, October 27, 1915)

l. 77, our intimate companion, Death:

We should not be afraid that our strength is insufficient to endure any experience of death, even the closest and most terrifying. Death is not beyond our strength; it is the measuring-line at the vessel's brim: we are full whenever we reach it—and being full means (for us) being heavy.—I am not saying that we should love death; but we should love life so generously, so without calculation and selection, that we involuntarily come to include, and to love, death too (life's averted half); this is in fact what always happens in the great turmoils of love, which cannot be held back or defined. Only because we exclude death, when it suddenly enters our thoughts, has it become more and more of a stranger to us; and because we have kept it a stranger, it has become our enemy. It is conceivable that it is infinitely closer to us than life itself—. What do we know of it?!

Prejudiced as we are against death, we do not manage to release it from all its distorted images. It is a friend, our deepest friend, perhaps the only one who can never be misled by our attitudes and vacillations—and this, you must understand, not in the sentimental-

romantic sense of life's opposite, a denial of life: but our friend precisely when we most passionately, most vehemently, assent to being here, to living and working on earth, to Nature, to love. Life simultaneously says Yes and No. Death (I implore you to believe this!) is the true Yes-sayer. It says only Yes. In the presence of eternity.

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, January 6, 1923)

[The Tenth Elegy](#) (Lines 1-12: Duino, January/February 1912; continued in Paris, late autumn 1913; new conclusion, lines 13-end: Muzot, February 11, 1922)

Lou, dear Lou, finally:

At this moment, Saturday, the eleventh of February, at 6 o'clock, I am putting down my pen after completing the last Elegy, the Tenth. The one (even then it was intended as the last one) whose first lines were already written in Duino: "Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight, / let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels..." What there was of it I once read to you; but only the first twelve lines have remained, all the rest is new and: yes, very, very glorious!—Imagine! I have been allowed to survive until this. Through everything. Miracle. Grace.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, February 11, 1922)

[l. 20](#), market of solace:

Consolation is one of the many diversions we are subject to, a distraction, hence something essentially frivolous and unfruitful.—Even time doesn't "console," as people superficially say, at most it arranges, it sets in order—, and only because we later pay so little attention to the order toward which it so quietly collaborates that instead of marveling at what is now established and assuaged, reconciled in the great whole, we think it is some forgetfulness of our own, some weakness of heart, just because it no longer hurts us so much. Ah, how little the heart really forgets it,—and how strong it would be if we didn't withdraw its tasks from it before they are fully and truly accomplished!—Our instinct shouldn't be to want to console ourselves for such a loss, rather it should become our deep and painful curiosity to wholly explore it, the particularity, the uniqueness of precisely this loss, to discover its effect within our life, indeed we should summon up the noble avarice of enriching our inner world by precisely it, by its meaning and heaviness ... The more deeply such a loss touches us and the more intensely it affects us, the more it becomes a task, of newly, differently, and finally taking into our possession what now, in its being lost, is accented with hopelessness: this then is unending accomplishment which immediately overcomes all negative qualities that cling to pain, all laziness and indulgence that always constitute a part of pain, this is active, inward-working pain, the only kind that makes sense and is worthy of us. I don't like the Christian ideas of a Beyond, I am getting farther and farther away from them, naturally without any thought of attacking them—; they may have a right to their existence beside so many other hypotheses about the divine periphery,—but for me they contain above all the danger not only of making those who have vanished more indistinct to us and above all more inaccessible—; but also we ourselves, because we allow our longing to pull us away from here, thereby become less definite, less earthly: which nevertheless, for the present, as long as we are here and related to tree, flower, and soil, we in a purest sense have to remain, even still have to become! ... I reproach all modern religions for having provided their believers with consolations and glossings-over of death, instead of giving them the means of coming to an understanding with it. With it and with its full, unmasked cruelty: this cruelty is so immense that it is precisely with it that the circle closes: it leads back into a

mildness which is greater, purer, and more perfectly clear (all consolation is muddy!) than we have ever, even on the sweetest spring day, imagined mildness to be. But toward the experiencing of this deepest mildness, which, if even a few of us were to feel it with conviction, could perhaps little by little penetrate and make transparent all the relations of life: toward the experiencing of this most rich and complete mildness mankind has never taken even the first steps,—unless in its most ancient, most innocent ages, whose secret is all but lost to us. The content of the “initiations” was, I am sure, nothing but the communicating of a “key” that allowed people to read the word “death” without negation; like the moon, surely life has a side permanently turned away from us which is not its opposite but its counterpart toward completion, toward wholeness, toward the actual perfect and full sphere and globe of being.

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, January 6, 1923)

I. 21, the church:

The Christian experience enters less and less into consideration; the primordial God outweighs it infinitely. The idea that we are sinful and need to be redeemed as a prerequisite for God is more and more repugnant to a heart that has comprehended the earth. Sin is the most wonderfully roundabout path to God—but why should they go wandering who have never left him? The strong, inwardly quivering bridge of the Mediator has meaning only where the abyss between God and us is admitted—; but this very abyss is full of the darkness of God; and where someone experiences it, let him climb down and howl away inside it (that is more necessary than crossing it). Not until we can make even the abyss our dwelling-place will the paradise that we have sent on ahead of us turn around and will everything deeply and fervently of the here-and-now, which the Church embezzled for the Beyond, come back to us; then all the angels will decide, singing praises, in favor of the earth!

(To Ilse Jahr, February 22, 1923)

I. 62, the vast landscape of Lament:

The land of Lament, through which the elder Lament guides the dead youth, is not to be identified with Egypt, but is only, as it were, a reflection of the Nile-land in the desert clarity of the consciousness of the dead.

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

II. 73–88, But as night approaches ... / ... the indescribable outline:

Go look at the Head of Amenophis the Fourth in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin; feel, in this face, what it means to be opposite the infinite world and, within such a limited surface, through the intensified arrangement of a few features, to form a weight that can balance the whole universe. Couldn't one turn away from a starry night to find the same law blossoming in this face, the same grandeur, depth, inconceivableness? By looking at such Things I learned to see; and when, later, in Egypt, many of them stood before me, in their extreme individuality, insight into them poured over me in such waves that I lay for almost a whole night beneath the great Sphinx, as though I had been vomited out in front of it by my whole life.

You must realize that it is difficult to be alone there; it has become a public square; the most irrelevant foreigners are dragged in en masse. But I had skipped dinner; even the Arabs were sitting at a distance, around their fire; one of them noticed me, but I got away

by buying two oranges from him; and then the darkness hid me. I had waited for nightfall out in the desert, then I came in slowly, the Sphinx at my back, figuring that the moon must already be rising (for there was a full moon) behind the nearest pyramid, which was glowing intensely in the sunset. And when at last I had come around it, not only was the moon already far up in the sky, but it was pouring out such a stream of brightness over the endless landscape that I had to dim its light with my hand, in order to find my way among the heaps of rubble and the excavations. I found a place to sit down on a slope near the Sphinx, opposite that gigantic form, and I lay there, wrapped in my coat, frightened, unspeakably taking part. I don't know whether my existence ever emerged so completely into consciousness as during those night hours when it lost all value: for what was it in comparison with all that? The dimension in which it moved had passed into darkness; everything that is world and existence was happening on a higher plane, where a star and a god lingered in silent confrontation. You too can undoubtedly remember experiencing how the view of a landscape, of the sea, of the great star-flooded night inspires us with the sense of connections and agreements beyond our understanding. It was precisely this that I experienced, to the highest degree; here there arose an image built on the pattern of the heavens; upon which thousands of years had had no effect aside from a little contemptible decay; and most incredible of all was that this Thing had human features (the fervently recognizable features of a human face) and that, in such an exalted position, these features were enough. Ah, my dear—I said to myself, “This, this, which we alternately thrust into fate and hold in our own hands: it must be capable of some great significance if even in such surroundings its form can persist.” This face had taken on the customs of the universe; single parts of its gaze and smile were damaged, but the rising and setting of the heavens had mirrored into it emotions that had endured. From time to time I closed my eyes and, though my heart was pounding, I reproached myself for not experiencing this deeply enough; wasn't it necessary to reach places in my astonishment where I had never been before? I said to myself, “Imagine, you could have been carried here blindfolded and been set down on a slope in the deep, barely-stirring coolness—you wouldn't have known where you were and you would have opened your eyes—” And when I really did open them, dear God: it took quite a long time for them to endure it, to take in this immense being, to achieve the mouth, the cheek, the forehead, upon which moonlight and moonshadows passed from expression to expression. How many times already had my eyes attempted this full cheek; it rounded itself out so slowly that there seemed to be room up there for more places than in our world. And then, as I gazed at it, I was suddenly, unexpectedly, taken into its confidence, I received a knowledge of that cheek, experienced it in the perfect emotion of its curve. For a few moments I didn't grasp what had happened. Imagine: this: Behind the great projecting crown on the Sphinx's head, an owl had flown up and had slowly, indescribably audibly in the pure depths of the night, brushed the face with her faint flight: and now, upon my hearing, which had grown very acute in the hours-long nocturnal silence, the outline of that cheek was (as though by a miracle) inscribed.

(To Magda von Hattingberg, February 1, 1914)

1. 108, hazel-trees: Rilke had originally written “willows”; this was corrected on the advice of a friend, who sent him a small handbook of trees and shrubs.

What a kind thought it was of yours to introduce me so clearly and thoroughly to the elements of “catkinology” with your book and the explanatory letter; after this there is no need for further or more exact information: I am convinced! So (remarkably enough) there are no “hanging⁵” willow catkins; and even if there were some rare, tropical exception, I

still would not be able to use it. The place in the poem that I wanted to check for factual accuracy stands or falls according to whether the reader can understand, with his first intuition, precisely this falling of the catkins; otherwise, the image loses all meaning. So the absolutely typical appearance of this inflorescence must be evoked—and I immediately realized from the very instructive illustrations in your little book that the shrub which, years ago, supplied me with the impression I have now used in my work must have been a hazelnut tree; whose branches are furnished most densely, before the leaves come out, with long, perpendicularly hanging⁵ catkins. So I know what I needed to know and have changed the text from “willow” to “hazel.”

(To Elisabeth Aman-Volkart, June 1922)

APPENDIX TO DUINO ELEGIES

[[Fragment of an Elegy](#)] (Duino, late January 1912)

Written between the First and Second Elegies.

[[Original Version of the Tenth Elegy](#)] (Lines 1-15: Duino, January / February 1912; continued in Paris, late in 1913)

[Antistrophes](#) (Lines 1-4: Venice, summer 1912; the rest: Muzot, February 9, 1922)

See note to the Fifth Elegy, [this page](#).

Antistrophe: “The returning movement, from left to right, in Greek choruses and dances, answering to the previous movement of the strophe from right to left; hence, the lines of choral song recited during this movement.” (OED)

THE SONNETS TO ORPHEUS (1923)

These strange Sonnets were no intended or expected work; they appeared, often many in one day (the first part of the book was written in about three days), completely unexpectedly, in February of last year, when I was, moreover, about to gather myself for the continuation of those other poems—the great Duino Elegies. I could do nothing but submit, purely and obediently, to the dictation of this inner impulse; and I understood only little by little the relation of these verses to the figure of Vera Knoop, who died at the age of eighteen or nineteen, whom I hardly knew and saw only a few times in her life, when she was still a child, though with extraordinary attention and emotion. Without my arranging it this way (except for a few poems at the beginning of the second part, all the Sonnets kept the chronological order of their appearance), it happened that only the next-to-last poems of both parts explicitly refer to Vera, address her, or evoke her figure.

This beautiful child, who had just begun to dance and attracted the attention of everyone who saw her, by the art of movement and transformation which was innate in her body and spirit—unexpectedly declared to her mother that she no longer could or would dance (this happened just at the end of childhood). Her body changed, grew strangely heavy and massive, without losing its beautiful Slavic features; this was already the beginning of the mysterious glandular disease that later was to bring death so quickly. During the time that remained to her, Vera devoted herself to music; finally she only drew—as if the denied dance came forth from her ever more quietly, ever more discreetly.

(To Vera Knoop, Muzot, February 9, 1922)

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, April 12, 1923)

I myself have only now, little by little, comprehended them and found a way to pass them on;—with brief comments that I insert when I read them aloud, I am able to make the whole more intelligible; interconnections are established everywhere, and where a darkness remains, it is the kind of darkness that requires not clarification but surrender.

(To Clara Rilke, April 23, 1923)

... we, in the sense of the Elegies, are these transformers of the earth; our entire existence, the flights and plunges of our love, everything, qualifies us for this task (beside which there is, essentially, no other). (The Sonnets show particular examples of this activity, which appears in them, placed under the name and protection of a dead girl, whose incompleteness and innocence holds open the grave-door so that, having passed on, she belongs to those powers which keep the one half of life fresh, and open toward the other, wound-open half.)

(To Witold Hulewicz, November 13, 1925)

I say “sonnets.” Though they are the freest, most (as it were) conjugated poems that have ever been included under this usually so motionless and stable form. But precisely this—to conjugate the sonnet, to intensify it, to give it the greatest possible scope without destroying it—was for me a strange experiment: which, in any case, I made no conscious decision to undertake. So strongly was it imposed, so fully did it contain its solution in itself.

(To Katharina Kippenberg, February 23, 1922)

Today just one favor more, which I have been wanting to ask of you for a long time: could you eventually have printed for me one copy of the “Sonnets to Orpheus,” and perhaps also one copy of the “Elegies,” interleaved with blank pages, using paper that can absorb good ink without making it “bleed”? I would like to append brief commentaries here and there to the more difficult poems, for my own use and for the benefit of a few friends; it would be a curious work, in which I would strangely have to account for the place of this verse within my own inner proportions. Whether or not that happens, I would in any case be glad to have both books, especially the “Sonnets,” prepared in this way, so that I can make notes in it whenever I feel the inclination. (There is no hurry, of course!)

(To Anton Kippenberg, March 11, 1926)

FIRST PART

I (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

II (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

I. 1, almost a girl:

Siehe, innerer Mann, dein inneres Mädchen

Look, inner man, at your inner girl

(“Turning-point,” in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 129)

The deepest experience of the creative artist is feminine, for it is an experience of conceiving and giving birth. The poet Obstfelder once wrote, speaking of the face of a stranger: “When he began to speak, it was as though a woman had taken a seat within him.” It seems to me that every poet has had that experience in beginning to speak.

(To a young woman, November 20, 1904)

III (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

II. 3f., crossing / of heart-roads: “The sanctuaries that stood at crossroads in classical antiquity were dedicated to sinister deities like Hecate, not to Apollo, the bright god of song.” (Hermann Mörchen, *Rilkes Sonette an Orpheus*, Stuttgart: W Kohlhammer Verlag, 1958, p. 66)

I. 13, True singing:

It is not only the hearable in music that is important (something can be pleasant to hear without being true). What is decisive for me, in all the arts, is not their outward appearance, not what is called the “beautiful”; but rather their deepest, most inner origin, the buried reality that calls forth their appearance.

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, November 17, 1912)

I. 14, A gust inside the god. A wind.:

All in a few days, it was a nameless storm, a hurricane in the spirit (like that time at Duino), everything that was fiber and fabric in me cracked.

(Ibid., February 11, 1922, just after the completion of the *Elegies*)

Never have I gone through such tremendous gales of being-taken-hold-of: I was an element, Liliane, and could do everything elements can do.

(To Claire Studer-Goll, April 11, 1923)

IV (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

V (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

I. 5, It is Orpheus once for all:

Ultimately there is only one poet, that infinite one who makes himself felt, here and there through the ages, in a mind that can surrender to him.

(To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, July 29, 1920)

True art can issue only from a purely anonymous center.

(To R. S., November 22, 1920)

VI (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

I. 2, both realms:

Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living

ANGELS (they say) DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT IS THE LIVING
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.

(The First Elegy, ll. 92 ff.)

- l. 4, willow-branch: From Psalm 137, to Desdemona's song, to modern poetry, the willow has been a symbol of grief. Its association with the dead goes back at least as far as Homer:

But when the North Wind has breathed you across the River of Ocean,
you will come to a wooded coast and the Grove of Persephone,
dense with shadowy poplars and willows that shed their seeds.
Beach your boat on that shore as the ocean-tide foams behind you;
then walk ahead by yourself, into the Land of Decay.

(Odyssey X, 508 ff.)

- l. 10, earthsmoke and rue: Herbs used in summoning the dead.

But slowly growing beside it is patience, that delicate "earthsmoke."

(To Gudi Nölke, October 5, 1919)

- l. 11, connection:

The comprehensible slips away, is transformed; instead of possession one learns connection.

(To Ilse Jahr, February 22, 1923)

VII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

- l. 9, decay in the sepulcher of kings:

It is true, the gods have neglected no opportunity of exposing us: they let us uncover the great kings of Egypt in their tombs, and we were able to see them in their natural decay, how they were spared no indignity.

("On the Young Poet," in Ahead of All Parting, Modern Library, 1995, p. 293 f.)

VIII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

IX (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

X (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

- l. 2, coffins of stone: Used as troughs or basins in the fountains of Italian towns.

Da wurde von den alten Aquädukten
ewiges Wasser in sie eingelenkt ...
Then, eternal water from the ancient
aqueducts was channeled into them ...

("Roman Sarcophagi," New Poems)

- l. 5, those other ones:

(what is being referred to, after the Roman ones, are those other, uncovered sarcophagi in the famous cemetery of Aliscamps, out of which flowers bloom)

—Rilke’s note

l. 6, shepherd: See “The Spanish Trilogy,” in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, pp. 103 f.

l. 7, bee-suck nettle: *Lamium album*, white dead-nettle.

XI (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

l. 1, “Rider”:

—Look, there:

the Rider, the Staff, and the larger constellation called Garland of Fruit.

(The Tenth Elegy, p. 67.)

XII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

l. 7, antennas:

Oh how she [Vera] loved, how she reached out with the antennas of her heart beyond everything that is comprehensible and embraceable here—...

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, January 1922)

XIII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

Comme le fruit se fond en jouissance,
Comme en délice il change son absence
Dans une bouche où sa forme se meurt, ...

(Valéry, “Le Cimetière Marin”)

So wie die Frucht sich auflöst im Genusse,
Abwesenheit Entzücken wird zum Schlusse
in einem Mund, drin ihre Form verschwand, ...

(Rilke’s translation, March 14 and 16, 1921)

l. 9, “apple”:

At various times I have had the experience of feeling apples, more than anything else—barely consumed, and often while I was still eating them—being transposed into spirit. Thus perhaps the Fall. (If there was one.)

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, January 16, 1912)

XIV (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

XV (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

XVI (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

One has to know—or guess—that Sonnet XVI is addressed to a dog; I didn’t want to add a note to this effect, precisely because I wanted to take him completely into the whole. Any

hint would just have isolated him again, singled him out. (This way he takes part down below, belonging and warned, like the dog and the child in Rembrandt's Night Watch.)

(To Clara Rilke, April 23, 1923)

Now it is my turn to thank you, not for Pierrot, for God's sake no: it would be his ruin, Pierrot's ruin, the saddest story in the world. How could you even think I might adopt him, what kind of match could I be for his boundless homesickness? Furthermore, apart from the torment of helplessly looking on, I would have the additional torment of sacrificing myself for his sake, which I find especially painful where dogs are involved: they touch me so deeply, these beings who are entirely dependent on us, whom we have helped up to a soul for which there is no heaven. Even though I need all of my heart, it is probable that this would end, end tragically, by my breaking off little pieces from the edge of it at first, then bigger and bigger pieces toward the middle (like dog biscuits) for this Pierrot as he cried for you and no longer understood life; I would, after hesitating for a little while, give up my writing and live entirely for his consolation.

(To N. N., February 8, 1912)

I. 7, You know the dead:

"And I was about to (I feel quite cold, Malte, when I think of it), but, God help me, I was just about to say, 'Where is ...'—when Cavalier shot out from under the table, as he always did, and ran to meet her. I saw it, Malte; I saw it. He ran toward her, although she wasn't coming; for him she was coming."

(The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, p. 89)

II. 11f., don't plant / me inside your heart:

"In the end a responsibility would arise, which I can't accept. You wouldn't notice how completely you had come to trust me; you would overvalue me and expect from me what I can't perform. You would watch me and approve of everything, even of what is unworthy. If I want to give you a joy: will I find one? And if one day you are sad and complain to me—will I be able to help you?—And you shouldn't think that I am the one who lets you die. Go away, I beg of you: go away."

("A Meeting," in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 285)

I. 13, my master's hand:

In the poem to the dog, by "my master's hand" the hand of the god is meant; here, of "Orpheus." The poet wants to guide this hand so that it too may, for the sake of his [the dog's] infinite sympathy and devotion, bless the dog, who, almost like Esau, has put on his pelt only so that he could share, in his heart, an inheritance that would never come to him: could participate, with sorrow and joy, in all of human existence.

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, June 1, 1923)

XVII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

XVIII (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

XIX (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

XX (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

And imagine, one thing more, in another connection (in the “Sonnets to Orpheus,” twenty-five sonnets, written, suddenly, in the prestorm, as a monument for Vera Knoop), I wrote, made, the horse, you know, the free happy white horse with the hobble on his foot, who once, as evening fell, on a Volga meadow, came bounding toward us at a gallop—:

how

I made him, as an “ex-voto” for Orpheus!—What is time?—When is Now? Across so many years he bounded, with his absolute happiness, into my wide-open feeling.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, February 11, 1922)

There is also an account of the incident in Lou Andreas-Salomé’s travel diary:

As we were standing by the Volga, a neigh resounded through the silent evening, and a frisky little horse, having finished its day of work, came quickly trotting toward the herd, which was spending the night somewhere, far away, in the meadow-steppes. In the distance one could now and then see the shepherds’ fire blazing in the clear night. After a while a second little horse, from somewhere else, followed, more laboriously: they had tied a wooden hobble to one of his legs, in order to stop him from wildly leaping into the wheatfield.

(Briefwechsel, p. 611)

l. 13, cycle of myths:

It is done, done! / The blood-and myth-cycle of ten (ten!) strange years has been completed.—It was (now for the first time I feel it entirely) like a mutilation of my heart, that this did not exist. And now it is here.

(To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, February 10, 1922)

XXI (Muzot, February 9, 1922; inserted here as a replacement for the original sonnet; see p. 197)

The little spring-song seems to me, as it were, an “interpretation” of a remarkable, dancing music that I once heard sung by the convent children at a morning Mass in the little church at Ronda (in southern Spain). The children, who kept leaping to a dance rhythm, sang a text I didn’t know, to the accompaniment of triangle and tambourine.

—Rilke’s note*

If the Sonnets to Orpheus were allowed to reach publication, probably two or three of them, which, I now see, just served as conduits for the stream (e.g., the XXIst) and after its passage-through remained empty, would have to be replaced by others.

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, February 7, 1922)

It makes me uncomfortable to think of that XXIst poem, the “empty” one in which the “transmissions” appear (“The New, my friends, is not a matter of”) ..., please paste it over, right now, with this child’s-spring-song, written today, which, I think, enriches the sound of the whole cycle and stands fairly well, as a pendant, opposite the white horse.

This little song, which had risen into my consciousness when I woke up this morning, fully formed up to the eighth line, and the rest of it immediately afterward, appears to me like an interpretation of a “Mass”—a real Mass, gaily accompanied as if with hanging5

garlands of sound: the convent children sang it to I don't know what text, but in this dance-step, in the little nuns'-church at Ronda (in southern Spain-); sang it, one can hear, to tambourine and triangle!—It fits, doesn't it, into these interrelationships of the Sonnets to Orpheus: as the brightest spring-tone in them? (I think it does.)

(Does the paper more-or-less match? I hope it is the same.)

Only this—and only because that XXIst is like a blot on my conscience.

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, February 9, 1922)

[XXII](#) (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

[XXIII](#) (Muzot, February 13, 1922)

This Sonnet I have—at least temporarily—inserted as the XXIII, so that what has become the first part of the Sonnets now contains twenty-six poems.

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, March 18, 1922)

[XXIV](#) (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

[XXV](#) (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

(to Vera)

—Rilke's note

[XXVI](#) (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922)

l. 2, rejected:

Three years went by, but Orpheus still refused
to love another woman: so intense
his grief was, for his lost Eurydice;
or else because he had vowed to stay alone.
But many women desired him, and raged
at his abrupt rejection.

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X, 78 ff.)

l. 2, attacked:

From a nearby hill the frenzied women, bristling
in skins of savage beasts, at last caught sight
of Orpheus, as he sat absorbed in music,
accompanied by the sweet lyre. One of them,
her long hair streaming in the wind, cried out:
“Look! there he is, that man who shows us such
contempt.” And, with a yell, she hurled her spear
straight at the singing mouth ...

(Ibid. XI, 3 ff.)

l. 5, could not destroy your head or your lyre:

His limbs lay scattered; but the river Hebrus
took the head and lyre, and as they floated

down its stream, the lyre began to play
a mournful tune, and the lifeless tongue sang out
mournfully, and both the river-banks
answered, with their own, faint, mournful echo.

(Ibid. XI, 50 ff.)

l. 7, stones:

Another threw a stone; but in mid-flight,
overwhelmed by the beauty of the song,
it fell at his feet, as though to beg forgiveness
for its violent intention.

(Ibid. XI, 10 ff.)

l. 9, At last they killed you:

Such music would have moved to softness all
these stones and spears; except that the wild shrieking,
shrill flutes, the blare of trumpets, drumbeats, howls
of the enraged bacchantes had completely
drowned out the lyre's voice. Until at last
the unhearing stones reddened with poet's blood.

(Ibid. XI, 15 ff.)

SECOND PART

I (Muzot, approximately February 23, 1922; the last of the Sonnets to be written)

II (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

III (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

l. 7, sixteen-pointer: A large stag, with sixteen points or branches to its antlers.

IV (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

Any "allusion," I am convinced, would contradict the indescribable presence of the poem. So in the unicorn no parallel with Christ is intended; rather, all love of the non-proven, the non-graspable, all belief in the value and reality of whatever our heart has through the centuries created and lifted up out of itself: that is what is praised in this creature.... The unicorn has ancient associations with virginity, which were continually honored during the Middle Ages. Therefore this Sonnet states that, though it is nonexistent for the profane, it comes into being as soon as it appears in the "mirror" which the virgin holds up in front of it (see the tapestries of the 15th century) and "in her," as in a second mirror that is just as pure, just as mysterious.

(To Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, June 1, 1923)

V (Muzot, February 15, 1922; chronologically the first poem of the Second Part)

l. 7, so overpowered with abundance:

I am like the little anemone I once saw in the garden in Rome: it had opened so wide during the day that it could no longer close at night. It was terrifying to see it in the dark meadow, wide open, still taking everything in, into its calyx, which seemed as if it had been furiously torn back, with the much too vast night above it. And alongside, all its prudent sisters, each one closed around its small measure of profusion.

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, June 26, 1914)

VI (Muzot, February 15, 1922)

the rose of antiquity was a simple “eglantine,” red and yellow, in the colors that appear in flame. It blooms here, in the Valais, in certain gardens.

—Rilke’s note

Every day, as I contemplate these admirable white roses, I wonder whether they aren’t the most perfect image of that unity—I would even say, that identity—of absence and presence which perhaps constitutes the fundamental equation of our life.

(To Madame M.-R., January 4, 1923)

VII (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

By the brook I picked marsh-marigolds, almost green, a bit of quite fresh yellow painted into the calyx at the last moment. Inside, around the stamens, an oil-soaked circle, as if they had eaten butter. Green smell from the tubelike stems. Then to find it left behind on my hand, closely related through it. Girl friends, long ago in childhood, with their hot hands: was it this that so moved me?

(Spanish Notebook, 1913; quoted in Rilke und Benvenuta, Wien: W Andermann, 1943, p. 157)

VIII (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

1. 4, the lamb with the talking scroll:

The lamb (in medieval paintings) which speaks only by means of a scroll with an inscription on it.

—Rilke’s note

Dedication, Egon von Rilke (1873–1880): Youngest child of Rilke’s father’s brother. He also appears in the Fourth Elegy, p. 23.

I think of him often and keep returning to his image, which has remained indescribably moving to me. So much “childhood”—the sad and helpless side of childhood—is embodied for me in his form, in the ruff he wore, his little neck, his chin, his beautiful disfigured eyes. So I evoked him once more in connection with that eighth sonnet, which expresses transience, after he had already served, in the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, as the model for little Erik Brahe, who died in childhood.

(To Phia Rilke, January 24, 1924; in Carl Sieber, René Rilke: Die Jugend Rainer Maria Rilkes, Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1932, pp. 59 f.)

IX (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

X (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

XI (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

Refers to the way in which, according to an ancient hunting-custom in certain regions of Karst, the strangely pale grotto-doves are caught. Hunters carefully lower large pieces of cloth into the caverns and then suddenly shake them. The doves, frightened out, are shot during their terrified escape.

—Rilke's note

Meanwhile I went along on a dove-hunting expedition to one of the Karst grottos, quietly eating juniper berries while the hunters forgot me in their concentration on the beautiful wild doves flying with loud wingbeats out of the caves.

(To Katharina Kippenberg, October 31, 1911)

l. 4, Karst: A region along the Dalmatian coast (north of Trieste and not far from Duino Castle) known for its limestone caverns.

XII (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

l. 13, Daphne: A nymph pursued by Apollo and transformed into a laurel. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 452 ff.

XIII (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

In a letter telling Vera's mother about the unexpected appearance of the second part of the Sonnets, Rilke wrote:

Today I am sending you only one of these sonnets, because, of the entire cycle, it is the one that is closest to me and ultimately the one that is the most valid.

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, March 18, 1922)

The thirteenth sonnet of the second part is for me the most valid of all. It includes all the others, and it expresses that which—though it still far exceeds me—my purest, most final achievement would someday, in the midst of life, have to be.

(To Katharina Kippenberg, April 2, 1922)

l. 14, cancel the count:

Renunciation of love or fulfillment in love: both are wonderful and beyond compare only where the entire love-experience, with all its barely differentiable ecstasies, is allowed to occupy a central position: there (in the rapture of a few lovers or saints of all times and all religions) renunciation and completion are identical. Where the infinite wholly enters (whether as minus or plus), the ah so human number drops away, as the road that has now been completely traveled—and what remains is the having arrived, the being!

(To Rudolf Bodländer, March 23, 1922)

XIV (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

XV (Muzot, February 17, 1922)

XVI (Muzot, February 17/19, 1922)

XVII (Muzot, February 17/19, 1922)

XVIII (Muzot, February 17/19, 1922)

XIX (Muzot, February 17/23, 1922)

XX (Muzot, February 17/23, 1922)

l. 5, Fate:

What we call fate does not come into us from the outside, but emerges from us.

(To Franz Xaver Kappus, August 12, 1904)

l. 10, fish:

... I sank, weighted down with a millstone's torpor, to the bottom of silence, below the fish, who only at times pucker their mouths into a discreet Oh, which is inaudible.

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, January 14, 1913)

l. 13, a place:

Jacobsen once wrote how annoyed he was that his remarkable short novel had to be called "Two Worlds"; again and again he had felt compelled to say: "Two World." In the same way, it often happens that one is at odds with the outward behavior of language and wants something inside it, an innermost language, a language of word-kernels, a language which is not plucked from stems, up above, but gathered as language-seeds—wouldn't the perfect hymn to the sun be composed in this language, and isn't the pure silence of love like heart-soil around such language-kernels? Ah, how often one wishes to speak a few levels deeper; my prose in "Proposal for an Experiment" ["Primal Sound"] lies deeper, gets a bit farther into the essential, than the prose of the Malte, but one penetrates such a very little way down, one remains with just an intuition of what kind of speech is possible in the place where silence is.

(To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, February 4, 1920)

XXI (Muzot, February 17/23, 1922)

l. 3, Ispahan (mod., Isfahan) or Shiraz: Persian cities famous for their magnificent gardens. Shiraz also contains the tombs of the poets Hafiz and Sa'di.

XXII (Muzot, February 17/23, 1922)

l. 5, bell:

For me it was Easter just once; that was during the long, excited, extraordinary night when, with the whole populace crowding around, the bells of Ivan Veliky crashed into me in the darkness, one after another. That was my Easter, and I think it is huge enough for a whole lifetime...

(To Lou Andreas-Salomé, March 31, 1904)

l. 7, Karnak: See note on p. 235.

XXIII (Muzot, February 17/23, 1922)

(to the reader)

—Rilke's note

l. 3, a dog's imploring glance:

Alas, I have not completely gotten over expecting the "nouvelle opération" to come from some human intervention; and yet, what's the use, since it is my lot to pass the human by, as it were, and arrive at the extreme limit, the edge of the earth, as recently in Cordova, when an ugly little bitch, in the last stage of pregnancy, came up to me. She was not a remarkable animal, was full of accidental puppies over whom no great fuss would be made; but since we were all alone, she came over to me, hard as it was for her, and raised her eyes enlarged by trouble and inwardness and sought my glance—and in her own way was truly everything that goes beyond the individual, to I don't know where, into the future or into the incomprehensible. The situation ended in her getting a lump of sugar from my coffee, but incidentally, oh so incidentally, we read Mass together, so to speak; in itself, the action was nothing but giving and receiving, yet the sense and the seriousness and our whole silent understanding was beyond all bounds.

(To Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, December 17, 1912)

XXIV (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

l. 5, Gods:

Does it confuse you that I say God and gods and, for the sake of completeness, haunt you with these dogmatic words (as with a ghost), thinking that they will have some kind of meaning for you also? But grant, for a moment, that there is a realm beyond the senses. Let us agree that from his earliest beginnings man has created gods in whom just the deadly and menacing and destructive and terrifying elements in life were contained—its violence, its fury, its impersonal bewilderment—all tied together into one thick knot of malevolence: something alien to us, if you wish, but something which let us admit that we were aware of it, endured it, even acknowledged it for the sake of a sure, mysterious relationship and inclusion in it. For we were this too; only we didn't know what to do with this side of our experience; it was too large, too dangerous, too many-sided, it grew above and beyond us, into an excess of meaning; we found it impossible (what with the many demands of a life adapted to habit and achievement) to deal with these unwieldy and ungraspable forces; and so we agreed to place them outside us.—But since they were an overflow of our own being, its most powerful element, indeed were too powerful, were huge, violent, incomprehensible, often monstrous—: how could they not, concentrated in one place, exert an influence and ascendancy over us? And, remember, from the outside now. Couldn't the history of God be treated as an almost never-explored area of the human soul, one that has always been postponed, saved, and finally neglected ...?

And then, you see, the same thing happened with death. Experienced, yet not to be fully experienced by us in its reality, continually overshadowing us yet never truly acknowledged, forever violating and surpassing the meaning of life—it too was banished and expelled, so that it might not constantly interrupt us in the search for this meaning. Death, which is probably so close to us that the distance between it and the life-center

inside us cannot be measured, now became something external, held farther away from us every day, a presence that lurked somewhere in the void, ready to pounce upon this person or that in its evil choice. More and more, the suspicion grew up against death that it was the contradiction, the adversary, the invisible opposite in the air, the force that makes all our joys wither, the perilous glass of our happiness, out of which we may be spilled at any moment...

All this might still have made a kind of sense if we had been able to keep God and death at a distance, as mere ideas in the realm of the mind—: but Nature knew nothing of this banishment that we had somehow accomplished—when a tree blossoms, death as well as life blossoms in it, and the field is full of death, which from its reclining face sends forth a rich expression of life, and the animals move patiently from one to the other—and everywhere around us, death is at home, and it watches us out of the cracks in Things, and a rusty nail that sticks out of a plank somewhere, does nothing day and night except rejoice over death.

(To Lotte Hepner, November 8, 1915)

[XXV](#) (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

(Companion-piece to the first spring-song of the children in the First Part of the Sonnets)

—Rilke's note

[XXVI](#) (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

[XXVII](#) (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

l. 4, Demiurge: In the Gnostic tradition, a lower deity who created the world of time.

[XXVIII](#) (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

(to Vera)

—Rilke's note

[XXIX](#) (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

(to a friend of Vera's)

—Rilke's note

l. 3, like a bell:

With this bell tower the little island, in all its fervor, is attached to the past; the tower fixes the dates and dissolves them again, because ever since it was built it has been ringing out time and destiny over the lake, as though it included in itself the visibility of all the lives that have been surrendered here; as though again and again it were sending their transitoriness into space, invisibly, in the sonorous transformations of its notes.

(To Countess Aline Dietrichstein, June 26, 1917)

l. 4, What feeds upon your face:

Oh and the night, the night, when the wind full of cosmic space / feeds upon our face—

(The First Elegy, ll. 18 f.)

Breathe-in the darkness of earth and again
look up! Again. Airy and faceless,
from above, the depths bend toward you. The face that is dissolved
and contained in the night will give more space to your own.

("Overflowing heavens of lavished stars," in *Ahead of All Parting*, Modern Library, 1995,
p. 117)

l. 10, in their magic ring:

[The poet's] is a naïve, aeolian soul, which is not ashamed to dwell where the senses intersect [sich kreuzen], and which lacks nothing, because these unfolded senses form a ring in which there are no gaps.

("The Books of a Woman in Love," SW 6, 1018)

APPENDIX TO THE SONNETS TO ORPHEUS

My dear, hardly had Strohl sent me back the little book with the 25 Orpheus Sonnets when this thread proceeded further, into a new fabric—a quantity of additional Sonnets have arisen these past few days, perhaps fifteen or more, but I won't keep them all—I am now so rich that I can afford to choose! What a world of grace we live in, after all! What powers are waiting to fill us, constantly shaken vessels that we are. We think we are under one kind of "guidance"—but they are already at work inside us. The only thing that belongs to us, as completely ours, is patience; but what immense capital that is—and what interest it bears in its time!—Consolation enough for eighthundredthirtyseven lives of average length.

(To Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, February 18, 1922)

[I] (Muzot, approximately February 3, 1922; first version of Sonnet VII, First Part)

And I would appreciate it if you could replace the VIIth Sonnet with the enclosed variant (just the first stanza of the previous version remains—the rest always embarrassed me by its exaggerated pathos, and I have long since crossed it out).

(To Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, March 18, 1922)

l. 14, Golden Fleece: In some versions of the myth, Orpheus accompanied Jason and the Argonauts on their voyage.

[II] (Muzot, February 2/5, 1922; originally Sonnet XXI, First Part)

[III] (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

[IV] (Muzot, February 15/17, 1922)

l. 1, stela: cf. the Second Elegy, ll. 66 ff., and the notes on p. 228.

[V] (Muzot, February 16/17, 1922)

This Sonnet probably refers to Goethe, who at the age of seventy-four fell in love with the nineteen-year-old Ulrike von Levetzow.

l. 9, Hymen: Greek god of marriage, usually depicted as a handsome young man crowned with a wreath and holding a wedding-torch.

l. 12, laments: Goethe commemorated his love in a poem known as the Marienbad Elegy.

[VI] (Muzot, February 16/17, 1922)

l. 3, Villa d'Este: Italian Renaissance palace near Tivoli, famous for its fountains and terraced gardens.

[VII] (Muzot, February 16/17, 1922)

[VIII] (Muzot, February 17/19, 1922)

[IX] (Muzot, approximately February 23, 1922)

FRAGMENTS

[i] (Muzot, approximately February 3; written between Sonnets VIII and IX, First Part)

[ii] (Muzot, approximately February 3, 1922; related to Sonnet XI, First Part)

[iii] (Muzot, approximately February 4, 1922; written between Sonnets XVII and XVIII, First Part)

[iv] (Muzot, February 12 or 13, 1922; draft of Sonnet II, Second Part)

[v] (Muzot, February 16/17, 1922)

[vi] (Muzot, February 16/17, 1922)

[vii] (Muzot, February 17/19, 1922)

[viii] (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922; draft of Sonnet XXV, Second Part)

[ix] (Muzot, February 19/23, 1922)

[x] (Muzot, approximately February 23, 1922)

[xi] (Muzot, approximately February 23, 1922)

* This and the note to Sonnet XI, Second Part are the only two notes Rilke himself ever published. The others marked "Rilke's note" were handwritten in a copy of the Sonnets which he sent to Herr and Frau

Leopold von Schlözer on May 30, 1923.

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Index of Titles and First Lines

(German)

Aber, ihr Freunde, zum Fest, laßt uns gedenken der Feste
Achte Elegie, Die
Alles Erworbnе bedroht die Maschine, solange
Atmen, du unsichtbares Gedicht!
Blumen, ihr schließlich den ordnenden Händen verwandte
Blumenmuskel, der der Anemone
Brau uns den Zauber, in dem die Grenzen sich lösen
Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!
Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht
Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht
Denk: Sie hätten vielleicht aneinander erfahren
Dich aber will ich nun, Dich, die ich kannte
Dir aber, Herr, o was weih ich dir, sag
Dritte Elegie, Die
Du aber, Göttlicher, du, bis zuletzt noch Ertöner
Du, mein Freund, bist einsam, weil
Ein Gott vermags. Wie aber, sag mir, soll
Eines ist, die Geliebte zu singen. Ein anderes, wehe
Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Laßt die Rose
Erste Elegie, Die
Euch, die ihr nie mein Gefühl verließt
Feigenbaum, seit wie lange schon ists mir bedeutend
[Fragment einer Elegie]
Frühling ist wiedergekommen. Die Erde
Fünfte Elegie, Die
Gegen-Strophen
Giebt es wirklich die Zeit, die zerstörende?
Heil dem Geist, der uns verbinden mag
Hörst du das Neue, Herr
Immer wieder von uns aufgerissen
Irgendwo wohnt das Gold in der verwöhnenden Bank
Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden
Jeder Engel ist schrecklich. Und dennoch, weh mir
Manche, des Todes, entstand ruhig geordnete Regel
Mehr nicht sollst du wissen als die Stele
Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur
Neunte Elegie, Die
Nur im Raum der Rühmung darf die Klage
Nur wer die Leier schon hob
O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich?
O Brunnen-Mund, du gebender, du Mund
O das Neue, Freunde, ist nicht dies
O diese Lust, immer neu, aus gelockertem Lehm!

O dieses ist das Tier, das es nicht giebt
O erst dann, wenn der Flug
O ihr Zärtlichen, tretet zuweilen
O komm und geh. Du, fast noch Kind, ergänze
O trotz Schicksal: die herrlichen Überflüsse
Oh, daß ihr hier, Frauen, einhergeht
Rose, du thronende, denen im Altertume
Rufe mich zu jener deiner Stunden
Rühmen, das ists! Ein zum Rühmen Bestellter
Rühmen, das ists! Ein zum Rühmen Bestellter
Rühmt euch, ihr Richtenden, nicht der entbehrlichen Folter
Schon, horch, hörst du der ersten Harken
Sechste Elegie, Die
Sei allem Abschied voran, als wäre er hinter
Siebente Elegie, Die
Sieh den Himmel. Heißt kein Sternbild 'Reiter'?
Siehe die Blumen, diese dem Irdischen treuen
Singe die Gärten, mein Herz, die du nicht kennst; wie in Glas
So wie dem Meister manchmal das eilig
Soll ich die Städte rühmen, die überlebenden
Sollen wir unsere uralte Freundschaft, die großen
Sonette an Orpheus, Die
Spiegel: noch nie hat man wissend beschrieben
Stiller Freund der vielen Fernen, fühle
Tänzerin: o du Verlegung
Und fast ein Mädchen wars und ging hervor
[Ursprüngliche Fassung der Zehnten Elegie]
Vierte Elegie, Die
Voller Apfel, Birne und Banane
Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt
Wann war ein Mensch je so wach
Wartet ..., das schmeckt ... Schon ists auf der Flucht
Warum, wenn es angeht, also die Frist des Daseins
Welche Stille um einen Gott! Wie hörst du in ihr
Wenige ihr, der einstigen Kindheit Gespielen
Wer aber sind sie, sag mir, die Fahrenden, diese ein wenig
Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Werbung nicht mehr, nicht Werbung, erwachsene Stimme
Wie ergriefft uns der Vogelschrei
Wir gehen um mit Blume, Weinblatt, Frucht
Wir hören seit lange die Brunnen mit
Wir sind die Treibenden
Wo, in welchen immer selig bewässerten Gärten, an welchen
Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert
Zehnte Elegie, Die
Zu unterst der Alte, verworren
Zweite Elegie, Die
Zwischen den Sternen, wie weit; und doch, um wieviele noch weiter

Index of Titles and First Lines

(English)

A god can do it. But will you tell me how
A tree ascended there. Oh pure transcendence!
Ah, Women, that you should be moving
All we have gained the machine threatens, as long
Already (listen!) you can hear the first
And it was almost a girl and came to be
Antistrophes
At bottom the Ancient One, gnarled
Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were
Breathing: you invisible poem! Complete
Brew us the magic in which all limits dissolve
But Master, what gift shall I dedicate to you
But tell me, who are they, these wanderers, even more
But you, divine poet, you who sang on till the end
But you now, dear girl, whom I loved like a flower whose name
Call me to the one among your moments
Dancing girl: transformation
Does it really exist, Time, the Destroyer?
Don't boast, you judges, that you have dispensed with torture
Eighth Elegy, The
Erect no gravestone for him. Only this:
Every angel is terrifying. And yet, alas
Fifth Elegy, The
Fig-tree, for such a long time I have found meaning
First Elegy, The
Flower-muscle that slowly opens back
Flowers, you who are kin to the hands that arrange
Fourth Elegy, The
[Fragment of an Elegy]
Hail to the god who joins us; for through him
How deeply the cry of a bird can move us
Imagine: they might have experienced through each other
In between stars, what distances; and yet, how much vaster the distance
Is he someone who dwells in this single world? No:
It is one thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas
Just as the master's genuine brushstroke
Look at the flowers, so faithful to what is earthly
Look at the sky. Are no two stars called "Rider"?
Many calmly established rules of death have arisen
Master, do you hear the New
Mirrors: no one has ever known how
Ninth Elegy, The
Not till the day when flight

Not wooing, no longer shall wooing, voice that has outgrown it
Now shall I praise the cities, those long-surviving
O fountain-mouth, you generous, always-filled
O trees of life, when does your winter come?
O you tender ones, walk now and then
Oh come and go. You, almost still a child
Oh in spite of fate: the glorious overflowings
Oh the delight, ever new, out of loosened soil!
Oh this beast is the one that never was
Only he whose bright lyre
Only in the realm of Praising should Lament
[Original Version of the Tenth Elegy]
Over and over by us torn in two
Plump apple, smooth banana, melon, peach
Praising is what matters! He was summoned for that
Praising is what matters! He was summoned for that
Rose, you majesty—once, to the ancients, you were
Second Elegy, The
Seek no more than what the stela knows
Seventh Elegy, The
Shall we reject our primordial friendship, the sublime
Silent friend of many distances, feel
Sing of the gardens, my heart, that you never saw; as if glass
Sixth Elegy, The
Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight
Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight
Somewhere gold lives, luxurious, inside the pampering bank
Sonnets to Orpheus, The
Spring has returned. The earth resembles
Tenth Elegy, The
The New, my friends, is not a matter of
Third Elegy, The
Though the world keeps changing its form
Wait ..., that tastes good ... But already it's gone
We are involved with flower, leaf, and fruit
We are the driving ones
We have overheard fountains all our days
What silence around a god! How, inside it, you hear
When everything we create is far in spirit from the festive
When was a man as awake
Where, inside what forever blissfully watered gardens, upon what trees
Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
Why, if this interval of being can be spent serenely
Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame
With all its eyes the natural world looks out
You are lonely, my friend, because you are
You playmates of mine in the scattered parks of the city
You who are close to my heart always