

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE LANGUAGE OF RILKE WITH
EMPHASIS ON HIS EARLY AND LATER
POETRY

A Thesis

Presented to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

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August 1969

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To
K.W. Maurer
this thesis
and my gratitude

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis an attempt has been made to trace the development of the language of Rilke. This is important because the ever-growing number of studies of Rilke focus on his life, his message, or his influence on literature, leaving the area of his language relatively untouched. The approach chosen has been to examine his poems in chronological order, with emphasis on the early and the later work. It was not fortuitously that Rilke became the poet of change. His oeuvre was the product of a unique cycle which marked the conscious development of a new kind of language and could thus present old meanings in new ways. It also created the new forms of expression required by the times.

There are three major phases in the development of Rilke's language: (1) the unconscious element of nature, with consequent intuitive reactions on the poet's part (2) increasing self-awareness, with emphasis on intellectual responses, (3) restoration of unity and harmony

by means of the fusion of the two; intuition which uses the intellect. However, all three phases must be seen as part of a continuing process of growing and constant searching for larger dimensions of being. The growth of his language cannot be broken down into clearly defined periods, but must be seen as an onward movement.

In Rilke's early poems there is a discrepancy between his ideals and his achievements. The constant struggle to reconcile different and opposing elements has begun. Many of the early poems are in the shape of his major themes, but the language to express them is not yet his. Rilke soon recognized that he had to fashion his own instruments, create his own atmosphere, and build up his own resources of language. It is important to note his Geoeffnetsein to all impressions and experiences, for it was this responsiveness that made his steady progress in depth possible.

During the middle period the influence of Russia, of Rodin, and of Cézanne were important for the writing of Das Stundenbuch, Neue Gedichte, and Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. It was a time of ripening, of struggle and crisis, of long, barren periods but also of enduring achievement. Das Stundenbuch is characterized by the transformation which will later dominate the Elegies. Malte was written from innermost necessity. The

novel served to clarify the issues within himself so that he could come to terms with life, even in its most repugnant and painful aspects. In Neue Gedichte, Rilke won through by harnessing his sensibilities to his own ends, but the price he had to pay was renunciation of much that was natural to him.

The later poetry encompassed in sublimated form all that Rilke had thought and experienced, and the separate elements of language have become more explicitly assimilated and harmonized. The Duineser Elegien recapitulate all that has gone before. There is a change in the language, as there is in feeling and thought. In order to transform them into the language of poetry, Rilke had to rearrange the elements of language in relation to his material. In Sonette an Orpheus a consciousness of pure relatedness and of spontaneous transformation sweeps the poems along. The technique is to visualize and verbalize transformation as a continuous process. In Letzte Gedichte, language becomes more intellectual, sometimes abstract; yet a characteristically personal element asserts itself as well. At this stage, Paul Valéry helped to confirm Rilke in his own discoveries and in the direction his poetry had taken.

It appears that everything before 1910 helped to bring the crisis of Rilke's life to a head, and everything

after 1910 contributed to its solution. In the later poems, Rilke found his way back to the freedom and intuition of the early poems, but with sureness. Rilke's language fits into no system; its evolution was a dynamic, on-going process. Nothing could ever be repeated, but early themes re-emerge to be treated in new and different ways.

The key to understanding the development of Rilke's language is relationship. Continuity in growth runs parallel to extension of experiences, and the changes are reflected in his language. The later poetry engages the whole of Rilke's life. It forms part of a dynamic stream of movement, backward and forward looking. Understanding the end depends upon understanding the beginning, and vice versa. One determines the other. The new is related to the old, and the end is linked to the beginning. The continuity is never broken.

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In recent years many studies of Rilke have appeared. With few exceptions, the interest has been centred on the poet's message, on his life, or on his significance as a poet. The most relevant area, his language, has had to take second place; it has remained relatively new ground for the student of Rilke. A notable exception is H.W. Belmore's book, Rilke's Craftsmanship. The author's method has been to examine and analyze each element of Rilke's language separately and in detail, giving a cross-sectional view. The object of our enquiry is to examine the development of Rilke's language chronologically, with emphasis on the early and late poems. Since it is beyond the scope of our study to examine the whole body of his œuvre, the very important middle period has been touched on briefly, keeping in mind our purpose of relating the end to the beginning.

In examining the wealth of biographical and critical material on Rilke, one is struck by the extreme quality of the reaction to him. Nora Wydenbruck describes the two widely diverse methods of writing about Rilke:

The first is the hagiographical one, --- inspired by the author's love and admiration of the subject and therefore stresses all the fine and lovable sides of the latter's character and personality. --- The opposite method is to write a critical and analytical biography, giving prominence to all the human weaknesses of the subject and imputing more

or less despicable motives to all his actions and reactions.¹

Too often the writer will present Rilke in a semi-abstract way, looking at the separate and distinct parts without recognizing the contradictions. The result is an over-simplification. Our best recourse lies in the letters of Rilke, where we come closest to his actual life and where the separate, often conflicting areas of his personality are apparent, as well as the organic links between them. Intuition which uses the intellect may cross many boundaries, and in the final analysis this is what the reader of Rilke's poems must rely on to give order to the inexhaustible riches which his life and work challenge us with.

Few German poets have mastered the instrument of language as Rilke has done. In his interpretation of experience, he crossed the threshold of a new age, the technological one, where no guidelines exist and where traditional models are no longer valid. His language had to be more than a new way of expressing old meanings. The old images and objects were no longer stable and secure. Man had to begin again without an image, - the 'Tun ohne Bild' of the ninth Elegy:

Hier ist des Saeglichen Zeit, hier seine Heimat.
Sprich und bekenn. Mehr als je
fallen die Dinge dahin, die erlebbaren, denn,
was sie verdraengend ersetzt, ist ein Tun ohne Bild.
Tun unter Krusten, die willig zerspringen, sobald
innen das Handeln entwaechst und sich anders be-
grenzt. I, 718-19

The specifically modern nature of Rilke's poetry lies in his way of determining reality as something beyond any given situation. In his expression of being - Dasein - he discovers new values of language and breaks through the barriers of convention to new formulations. Rilke's own valuation of Trakl's poetry, as expressed in a letter of Feb. 22, 1917, touches on the essence of his own art:

Das Traklsche Gedicht is fuer mich ein Gegenstand von sublimer Existenz. Nun erschuettert mich erst recht, wie die von Anfang an fluechtende, in Ihrer Beschreibung leise ausgesparte Gestalt imstande war, das Gewicht ihres fortwaehrenden Untergangs in so genauen Bildungen zu beweisen. Es faellt mir ein, dass dieses ganze Werk sein Gleichnis haette in dem Sterben des Li-Tai-Pe: hier wie dort ist das Fallen Vorwand fuer die unaufhaltsamste Himmelfahrt. In der Geschichte des Gedichts sind die Buecher Trakls wichtige Beitraege zur Befreiung der dichterischen Figur. Eine neue Dimension des geistigen Raums scheint mit ihnen ausgemessen und das gefuehlsstoffliche Vorurteil widerlegt, als ob in der Richtung der Klage nur Klage sei -: auch dort ist wieder Welt.

Erhard Buschbeck, Feb. 22, 1917,
Brief 255

Such phrases as "Gegenstand von sublimer Existenz," "wichtige Beitraege zur Befreiung der dichterischen Figur," and "neue Dimension des geistigen Raums" apply in even greater measure to Rilke's own poetry than to Trakls.

Man alone has the power to create with language, and Rilke claimed this as the glorious function of the poet. He termed this earth the home of "das Saegliche" and the

poet's power to multiply the living force of language as "Sagen." He recognized the immensity of this responsibility and accepted it without reservation. His life unfolded as an on-going preparation for this task; a preparation which could never be finished and the course of which can be traced in the language of his works. In the later poems we come face to face with Rilke's extreme effort to say the unsayable, to find the language which will contain the thought and experience which are "unsaeglich". Manfred Hausman has this to say on what is beyond language:

Aber wie ist es dann moeglich, das, im wortwoertlichen Sinne, Unsagbare dennoch zu sagen? Ist das nicht ein Widerspruch in sich selbst? Nun, es gibt in der ganzen Welt nur einen Bereich, in dem das Unmoegliche zur Moeglichkeit, in dem der Widerspruch zum Spruch wird: den Bereich der Kunst, in unserem Fall den Bereich der Dichtung. Ein Gedicht erweist sich erst dann als ein Gedicht, wenn es eben diese Unmoeglichkeit vollbringt. Die Ueberwindung des Widersinns macht das Wesen eines jeden Gedichtes aus. Ein Gedicht steht ueber den Natur- und Denkgesetzen. Es ist ein Wunder.²

The poet conveys emotions and shares experiences by ordering words in a special kind of way, so that they convey more than ordinary excitement, order and rhythm. We do not realize that our deepest feelings are not unique, but that we share them with others of all times all over the world. The poet performs an exclusive service by putting us in touch with those who have felt as we do.

The poet finds the words for universal sorrows, joys and longings, and through him we can take our place among the souls of the centuries. He has the special faculty of listening and seeing into the very essence of things, where the final truth, the ultimate reality, lie. What Rilke gives us is solitary and pure, all of a piece, close to earth and close to God. In his introduction to a volume of translations of Rilke poems, Lewisohn states:

Whoever in this age has heard in sudden fear the silences of God, whoever has known that he was not living his life nor faring toward his death, whoever awoke to the evil of the machines mastery, has sooner or later come upon the fact that there had lived in the world a poet who had spoken of his horrors, his fears, his repudiations, with incomparable loveliness and power.³

PART I

THE EARLY POEMS

Das ist mein Streit:
Sehnsuchtgeweiht
durch alle Tage schweifen.
Dann, stark und breit,
mit tausend Wurzelstreifen
tief in das Leben greifen -
und durch das Leid
weit aus dem Leben reifen,
weit aus der Zeit!

I, 103; 1897

RILKE AND ART

In a chapter on Sprache und Werk, Fritz Klatt traces Rilke's development as a poet:

R.M. Rilke hat sich von einem schwaermerischen Dichter zu einem der ernstesten und unsentimentalsten "Arbeiter" in den Bergwerken des Geistes entwickelt. Von den fruehsten Gedichten bis zu jenen Versen, die nach den Elegien entstanden sind, geht dieser Bogen.--- Er spricht die Sprache noch um ihrer selbst willen und laesst sich fuehren von ihr und fuegt sich ein ihre Klangkraft.¹

Das Sagbare ist erschoeepfend gegeben. Rilke ist damit einer der grossen Lehrmeister in der Exaktheit der modernen deutschen Sprache geworden. Seine ganze Arbeit, alles, was er schrieb, wurde immer mehr Bemuehung, immer klarer und deutlicher zu sagen, was ist, auch an immer mehr Dinge mit Worten heranzukommen, die bisher noch nicht gesagt waren. Was er ueber die Liebe und den Tod ausgesagt hat, ist ganz neu. Er hat sich da naeher und dichter herangewagt als fruehere. Es sind Erkenntnisse, Erfahrungen, nicht Gefuehle, die er in Worte zu bringen versucht.²

Rilke came to be the interpreter of modern man in his state of loneliness. He stood as the opposite of the mass-mind and of the civilization of machines and ideologies. His discoveries and innovations in language extend human sensibilities and the capacity for their expression. But it was not by chance that he became a master of language who succeeded in making the improbable obvious, and who was able to synthesize a period in history, inwardly and outwardly, in his art.

The components of an authentic poem interpenetrate so that they must be treated as one. Form and substance, music and meaning, cannot be separated. To Rilke, the writing of a poem was a total and organic creative act, and everything in it had to be primary and necessary. Herbert Read's definition of organic form will clarify this statement:

Organic form: When a work of art has its own inherent laws, originating with its very invention and fusing in one vital unity both structure and content ---³

This oneness of poetry is a triumph over time. Rilke refers to his poems as "lyrische Summen,"⁴ namely the end products of the thoughts and feelings that overwhelmed him at the time of writing. It was his intention to give his words the plasticity and concreteness which sculptor and painter - Rodin and Cézanne - were able to

give their craft. But Rilke's material was language. His medium was the word which does not submit to the same techniques as will the raw material of the earth. So Rilke's period of apprenticeship was much longer. His method had to be an approach from within, a gradual permeation of all the elements of language until he could transform and assimilate them in such a way that thought and means of expression were in harmony.

A study of the language of Rilke cannot be carried out in isolation. As his language grows and develops, other aspects of the poet grow as well. In the second poem of Das Stundenbuch, Rilke describes his manner of growth as concentric, like the rings in a tree:

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich ueber die Dinge ziehn.

I, 253

It had perhaps better be described as spiral, concentric, but ever rising. At each stage of progress, Rilke was prone to discredit his earlier work:

Jene leider vorhandenen Proben sind in der Tat fuer nichts heranziehbar, sie sind nicht, in keiner, keiner Weise, der Anfang meiner Arbeit, vielmehr das hoechst private Ende meiner kindlichen und jugendlichen Ratlosigkeit.

Robert Heinz Heygrodt, Dec. 24, 1921,
Brief 332

Rilke, then, does not see his early poems as the starting

point for his later work. Nevertheless, the reader should not accept Rilke's pronouncements too literally, but rely on personal intuition when examining these works. Although Rilke's early efforts show a discrepancy between his ideals and his achievements, there is nevertheless much in these poems that will help us to an understanding of the unity of his work. Basically, the same motifs pervade all his works; the same complex of emotions and thoughts is evident from his *Juvenilia* to his final triumph in the *Sonnets*. The transformations taking place must be looked for in the first poems in order to understand the total formation. During his lifelong struggle to reconcile different and opposing elements, Rilke developed an unmistakably personal idiom of his own. He says:

Was man mit einundzwanzig Jahren schreibt, ist ein Schrei. - denkt man bei einem Schrei daran, ob er haette anders geschrieen sein muessen? Die Sprache ist noch so duenn um einen in diesen Jahren, der Schrei dringt durch und nimmt eben nur mit, was an ihm haengen bleibt. Die Entwicklung wird immer die sein, dass man sich die Sprache voller, dichter, fester macht (schwerer), und dies hat dann freilich nur Sinn fuer einen, der sicher ist, dass auch der Schrei in ihm unablaessig, unaufhaltsam zunimmt, so dass er spaeter, unter dem Druck unzaehlicher Atmosphaeren, aus allen Poren des fast undurchdringlichen Mediums gleichmaessig austritt.

N.N. Dec. 26, 1911, Brief 143

Rilke's earliest poems were, for the most part, caught

up in beauty and in confidence that for him it was right and glorious to be a poet. He tells about his feelings and observations, and calls them experiences. He is infatuated with metaphor and flooded with emotion. Not his first poem, but a characteristic one is:

Ich moechte einst im Fruehling sterben,
wenn neues Leben rings sich ruehrt,
nicht wenn die Blaetter sich entfaerben,
nicht wenn die Erde muede wird.
III, 72; 1893

Rilke's early efforts were not original, and cannot be compared to the youthful work of a poet like Hugo von Hofmannsthal. What is moving is the deep, unexpressed secret between the lines, the youthful perceptions and insights which could not yet be transformed into poetic language. Only the mature man could find expression for these vaguely conceived themes. The problem of his youth is clearly expressed in the lines:

Ein Aar, dem niemand Halt gebot,
ist Sehnsucht. Ueber Tal und Huegel
schwebt er auf mondbeglaenztem Fluegel
zu der Erfuellung Morgenrot.
III, 123; 1894

In poems such as "Das ist die Sehnsucht: wohnen im Gewoge/ und keine Heimat haben in der Zeit," I, 145, written in 1897, we may already detect a half-conscious pondering of the significance of his mission. To live 'in fluctuation' is a tragic state of homelessness. The

feeling of loneliness is there, the longing for something more than the world of the imagination. This poem and many others are in the shape of his final and major themes, themes which needed the massive language of his later days for articulation.

The latent capacity to write Duineser Elegien and Die Sonette an Orpheus was always there. However, before Rilke could handle their chosen themes, he had to become a 'complete' poet, master of all the tools of his art. Influences are valid, and important to our study to a degree, insofar as they developed those aspects of his personality which were incomplete. Russia, for example, helped Rilke release what he already possessed. Rodin showed him what he lacked and led him to discipline his technique through work. The reorientation would no doubt have taken place in another way. The change had already taken root in him before influences became evident. It corresponded to an inner necessity which would have found suitable expression in some way. The important thing is that Rilke kept himself open to all experiences and impressions. He absorbed "Bildung;" his thought progressed in depth, but always he remained a law unto himself. By conscious effort, he became a master of the German language in a way that other poets, some of whom were his superior in works, could not do. But he realized

that technique could only be a starting point:

Es ist mir spaeter oft aufgefallen, wie sehr die Kunst eine Sache des Gewissens ist. Nichts braucht man so sehr in kuenstlerischer Arbeit wie das Gewissen: es ist der einzige Masstab. --- Darum ist es sehr wichtig, in jenen fruehen Jahren das Gewissen nicht zu missbrauchen, nicht hart zu werden an der Stelle, auf der es liegt. Es muss leicht bleiben bei allem; man darf es ebenso wenig fuehlen wie irgendein inneres, unserem Willen entzogenes Organ. Den leisesten Druck aber, der von ihm ausgeht, muss man beachten, sonst verliert die Waage, auf der man spaeter jedes zu schreibende Vers-Wort wird pruefen muessen, ihre aeusserste Beweglichkeit.

Herrn von W., Oct. 21, 1907,
Brief 85

When we study Rilke, the key is language. In his poetry language does what it has rarely done before. Rilke is the poet who begins again at the beginning. If we follow his work from the early poems to the mature productions, we observe the development and growth of a specific and characteristic language. With the passage of time, and under the compulsion of almost overwhelming experience, it becomes more subtle and powerful. There are new discoveries and extensions, but the new formulations are always related to what has gone before. The end is unmistakably linked to the beginning. The early poems have the self-sufficiency and self-containedness which is perfected in degree in Neue Gedichte, Duineser Elegien, and Die Sonette an Orpheus. They have the purely individual and personal mark of Rilke, but in the

later poems the language becomes more spiritual, more intimate, more inward-looking, yet also more precise and factual.

First Volumes

Rilke published his first volume in 1894 under the title of Leben und Lieder. The poems of this collection are conventional and immature, but the titles and themes are revealing. They show the young Rilke's concern with the phenomenon of transformation, of slow, creative change. Vorbei, III,9, already points to the "wohnen im Gewoge" of Die Fruhen Gedichte. Themes of "Fruehling," "Abend," "Kindheit," "Zigeuner," "Sehnsucht" express the feeling of movement and change. 'Wachsen' strikes a keynote in Rilke's work, and these poems represent a period of his 'Wachstum'. As such, they may not be ignored. Before Rilke can progress beyond the experiences he is living, he must release them by writing about them. The last group of poems in the collection, entitled Empor, points to a higher plane:

stieg so allmaehlich von Stufe zu Stufe
wieder zum Kreise der Menschen empor.
III, 93

It is interesting to note Rilke's own attitude toward these poems, in a letter to Das Deutsche Dichterheim in 1895, the year following publication:

Mein Buechlein "Leben und Lieder," dessen Sie in Nr. 22 Erwaehnung taten, enthaelt viele vor fuenf bis sechs Jahren entstandene Gedichte, mit denen ich mich heute am allerwenigsten einverstanden erklære. --- Gleichwohl kann ich, gestuetzt auf massgebende Beurteilungen, behaupten, dass das Gute, das auf den Blaettern sich findet, nicht nur Beifall, sondern auch die Zuerkennung seiner Eigenart verdient. Ich erinnere Sie nur an die Ballade "Fuerst Poppov," ---

V1, 1201

In 1896 Rilke published three small volumes, called Wegwarten which were intended to be a gift to the people. The gesture was evidence of Rilke's desire to express himself, and to participate in the lives of the common people. The first volume consisted of Rilke's lyric poems; the second contained the play Jetzt und in der Stunde unseres Absterbens; and the third was an edited collection of lyrics by Rilke's contemporaries. The mood of the poems in the first volume is to bring light and joy into the lives of the poor, in the manner of the wild chicory flower:

Paracelsus erzaehlt, die Wegwarte werde alle Jahrhunderte zum lebendigen Wesen; und leicht erfuehlt die Sage sich an diesen Liedern; vielleicht wachen sie zu hoeherem Leben auf in der Seele des Volkes.

V1, 1205

At a time when the basic beliefs of the industrial age repudiated the sentimentality of the lyric, Rilke felt an intuitive unity with those who felt most oppressed

by the machines. The simple melody of the folk-song is in these poems: the girls in the "Roggenfeld," the child's song at the well, the mother before the figure of the Virgin. The verses run into helpless waves of youthful feeling:

Meine Tage gingen golden
durch der Seele Heiligtum,
und auf meiner Traeume Dolden
wiegte sich der Falter: Ruhm.
III, 123

"Stimmung" is all important. The second volume, Jetzt und in der Stunde unseres Absterbens, represents an extreme form of Rilke's fascination with the horrific. His concluding remarks justify his preoccupation with "Klage":

--- und du siehst auf und sagst mir, Freund
aus dem Volke: "Du hast nicht Wort gehalten.
Im 1. 'Wegwarten' Heft hast du uns Licht,
Trost versprochen und hier malst du uns
Nacht und Weh? ---" Ich entgegne: "Freund
aus dem Volke, hoer eine ganz kleine Geschich-
te: zwei einsame Seelen begegnen sich in der
Welt. Die eine Seele toent Klagen; sie fleht
die Fremde um Trost. Und leise neigt sich ihr
die Fremde und raunt: 'Auch mir ist es Nacht' ..."
--- Ist das nicht Trost?
VI, 1206

These two features, Rilke's commiseration for the poor, and his awareness of the horrid and gruesome, are present in one form or another in all his work, although they undergo important changes. Evident also in this early

work is Rilke's own peculiar skill in rhyme. The language is limpid, musical, sentimental, but lacking in power. The sense of conflict is present, but it is juvenile and superficial, lacking the depth and power of his later work.

If the thought content of Rilke's earliest poems strikes us as childlike and impersonal, we would do well to look at a very early piece of prose work, Der Wanderer. Gedankengang und Bedeutung des Goethe'schen Gedichtes.

This remarkable essay was written in 1893, as a school assignment. Rilke's analysis of Goethe's poem shows him at a moment of acute self-realization. Of the wanderer, "der strebende Juengling," he says:

Es soll dies unzweifelhaft auch die Unruhe seines Inneren kennzeichnen die ihn stets weitertreibt, die ihn auch das Anerbieten zu bleiben ausschlagen laesst, - jene Unruhe, die durch das Streben nach Wissen in die Seele gepflanzt wird, und die sich gewoehnlich zeitlebens nie mehr verlaesst. - Nur, wen nie das glaenzende Irrlicht ununterbrochenen Wissendrangs - in die Suempfe der Ohnmacht verlockt, nur dem kann jener sich in sich selbst beglueckende Friede zuteil werden, wie jener gluecklichen Mutter in der Naehe von Cumae. --- Und ich will, komm ich gen Cumae, die Schwelle, die heilige, kuessen, - und weiter dann ziehen - ein armer, ratloser Wanderer. -

V, 286-7

We sense the urging of the schoolboy's innermost sense in the direction of "Wandern." This was to imply an

exclusion from normal existence which he both welcomed and lamented, but which was to be part of his way of life to the end.

Erste Gedichte

Erste Gedichte includes three collections of poems: Larenopfer (1895), Traumgekroent, (1896), and Advent (1897). From book to book the language ripens, the depth of thought increases, the symbols mature. A characteristic beginning poem, written well before 1895, is:

Die falben Felder schlafen schon,
mein Herz nur wacht allein;
der Abend refft im Hafen schon
sein rotes Segel ein.

I, 48

Rilke is not yet a personality here, but already something genuinely Rilkean comes through. The musical vibration of the vowels, the word-painting in 'die falben Felder schlafen schon' and 'der Abend refft im Hafen schon' are possible only for an original talent which concentrates on the essence of the thing. As a boy, Rilke withdrew into himself with his presentiment of reality. Under the constraint of art, his spirit created the work, and his talent found the words for it. In the beginning the words are hesitant, inexact, often exaggerated, but already loaded with memory. He does not yet clearly

distinguish "Erleben" and "Erfahren." A wealth of "Erlebnis" will be necessary before the symbols can be united into a whole. Rilke's choice must be to concentrate on that whole, or risk being swept away by fragments. In Traumgekroent we feel the deepening of impressions:

Die muede Herde trollte trabend
vorbei, der kleine Hirte pfiff, -
und in die Hand das Haupt vergrabend,
empfand ich, wie der Feierabend
in meiner Seele Saiten griff.

I, 76

We sense the mystic "Weltangst" already taking shape, being articulated.

The themes in these poems remain traditional. In Abend the lonely soul is enveloped in the play of light and changing colors:

Einsam hinterm letzten Haus
geht die rote Sonne schlafen,
und in ernste Schlussoktaven
klingt des Tages Jubel aus.

Lose Lichter haschen spaet
noch sich auf den Daecherkanten,
wenn die Nacht schon Diamanten
in die blauen Fernen saet.

I, 20

This poem shows the beginning of Rilke's unusual technique. Foreign words - "Schlussoktaven," "Diamanten" - are used for their delicate, emotive value. They enter into

natural interplay with the German words. The tranquil feeling of evening is evoked by the slow tempo of "Einsam hinterm letzten Haus." Corresponding images, as "rote Sonne" and "blaue Fernen" occur but are still limited and carefully defined. "Lose Lichter haschen still" gives a foretaste of Rilke's mature word-music.

Many of Rilke's later predilections and obsessions are already discernible. Der Junge Bildner, I, 21, gives a premonition of the essential hostility between life and great work - "eine alte Feindschaft zwischen dem Leben und der grossen Arbeit", I, 655 - which runs through the Requiem poems later on:

Die Unrast trieb ihn heim, die arge:
Er bildete mit nassem Blick
sein armes, fahles Lieb im Sarge,
und das - das war sein Meisterstueck.

The language has implications of the awesome solitude, the homeless wandering, the constant renunciation which are the price Rilke must pay for his art.

During the time of Erste Gedichte Rilke is gathering feelings and memories. He has begun to treat the recurring themes - the child, the beggar, the mothers, the poor. His thoughts about God and about death have begun to define themselves and to take on form. He writes "Engel" poems:

Auf einem schmalen Schollenhuegel
kniet, ganz versteckt im hohen Mohn,
mit staubigen, gebrochnem Fluegel
ein Engelchen aus rohem Thon.

Das fluegellahme Kindchen floesste
mir Milleid ein, - das arme Ding ---
Da sieh! Von seinen Lippen loeste
sich leicht ein kleiner Schmetterling. -
I, 23

This poem gives us Rilke's beginning thoughts about death and the function of the angel. The employment of adjectives in exactly the right way - a distinctive mark of Rilke's art - is already pronounced: "schmalen Schollenhuegel," "fluegellahme Kindchen." Similarly, in Der Junge Bildner we have "armes, fahles Lieb" and "nassem Blick."

Rilke writes about the Smichov factory workers, about old parks and graveyards, about ugly tenements, about popular folk songs. We feel the disintegration of the world picture into a quantity of images has begun. Trotzdem, I, 35, shows Rilke's inherent love of life, in the contrast between Schopenhauer's "Kerker voll Trauer" and Rilke's own joyous conclusion:

--- in Kerkereinsamkeiten
weck ich meiner Seele Saiten
gluecklich wie einst Dalibor.

The line "gluecklich wie einst Dalibor" shows how Rilke is beginning to use names to illuminate a poem, or to give a shade of meaning which only this particular name

can supply. The poem Im Sommer, I, 47, uses names to contribute local colour as well as sound value: "Zlichov," "Smichov," "Moldauwogen," "Loreley," "Slovane," are part of the language which defines and limits the setting of the poem. The ballad-like Rabbi Loew, I, 61, uses old Jewish names in a rhythmic chant: "Weisser Rabbi," "hoher Liva," "Jehova Kinder," "Beth Chaim," "Bocher." Life and death, the spiritual and the earthly, are presented in close association. Im Herbst, I, 66, ends with the unexpected noun "Valladolid," which does not rhyme and cannot be accepted as part of the language, although it does provide the right shade of meaning. In later poems, as in Die Flamingos, I, 629, Rilke uses equally startling and unusual names but there he is able to blend and assimilate them.

A love of literature brings with it a special pleasure in the sound of names. When listening to the language of Rilke's poems, this pleasure is just as pronounced in the sound of the nouns he chooses. The reason for the particular noun chosen is to convey exactly the right image. Wintermorgen, I, 27, has many nouns, all of them exact and concrete, calling up a clear-cut image of a sparkling winter morning. In fact, the robust, vigorous tone is unusual in Rilke's language:

Der Wasserfall ist eingefroren,

Die Dohlen hocken hart am Teich.
Mein schoenes Lieb hat rote Ohren
und sinnt auf einen Schelmenstreich.

Die Sonne kuesst uns. Traumverloren
schwimmt im Geaest ein Klang in Moll;
und wir gehn fuerder, alle Poren
vom Kraftarom des Morgens voll.

"Kraftarom" - a composite of Rilke's own making - serves to describe the crisp air. The alliteration of "hocken hart" and "Schelmenstreich" is part of the vigorous unity of the poem.

Der Bau, I, 13-17, gives us an astonishing flash of the later Rilke. His love of a home and of the past permeates the old house, as expressed in Rilke's tender diminutives: "Stuebchen," "Raedchen," "Braeutchen," "Pfoertchen," "Muetterchen." The adjectives in this poem are graphic and expressive, quite unlike the ornate and lavish ones in other poems of this period: "reiche, weite Steinterassen;" "kleine, heimliche Balkone;" "weitgewoelbte Decken;" "kleine, stille Erker." Rilke uses unusual syntax in "Nischen rings, die umgebauten," where adjective follows noun. The hidden corners of the old family home, the alcoves, the spinning-wheel, events of birth, marriage and death that have taken place here, are intimately joined in this poem, presenting the on-going life of the generations. Not yet have the things acquired the magic

suggestiveness of a cosmic relationship, as in Neue Gedichte, but the atmosphere is warm and fertile.

Mein Geburtshaus, I, 41, is a somewhat similar portrayal of a warm and happy home. The theme of feeling as the measure of being occurs here, and continues in every phase of Rilke's work. Feeling is remembrance, intensification, and realization. In that it identifies remembrance as a significant mood of feeling, this poem provides the pattern for many later poems. The feeling of homelessness we sensed in Leben und Lieder now gives way to warm, happy memories. The very title Larenopfer, or offering to the 'Lares', the household gods, suggests this.

The many poems of the Czeck land and its people evoke a nostalgia for "Heimat." Volksweise, I, 39, is like a fragrant dream:

Mich rührt so sehr
boehmischen Volkes Weise,
schleicht sie ins Herz sich leise,
macht sie es schwer.

The sensation of being homeless is already deep-seated with Rilke. Verbs like "rührt," "schleicht," "singt," "klingt," "faellt" penetrate to the core of his loneliness. Unforgettable lines as:

Wenn ein Kind sacht
singt beim Kartoffeljaeten,

are charged with the emotion of remembrance. The humble potato is again referred to in Mittelboehmische Landschaft: I, 68

Im hellsten Licht
keimt die Kartoffel; dann
ein wenig weiter Gerste, bis der Tann
das Bild begrenzt.

Old, simple nouns like "Kartoffel," "Gerste," "Tann," build an inner structure from which

aus Fichten ragt der Hegerhuette Bau; -
und drueber
woelbt sich ein Himmel, blank und blau.

There is an intrinsic unity between the great dome of sky to the humble cottage among the pines. Once again, the adjectives strike a characteristically Rilkean note:

wogender Waelder/beschatteter Saum,---
die falbe Flaechen hoher Aehrenfelder,---
so goldig-rot ein Kirchturmkreuz herueber.

They are lavish and ornate, but they provide vivid splashes of colour which concentrate attention on specific points in the landscape. Later on, Rilke exhibits a new element of discipline in the flow of his feelings, and the air of timeless knowledge of cosmic space is intensified. But always, as here, he shares the joys and sorrows of everyday life.

There is really not an essential degree of difference between the poems of Larenopfer and later ones.

Consider two early poems about autumn:

Herbststimmung

Die Luft ist lau, wie in dem Sterbezimmer,
an dessen Tuere schon der Tod steht still;
auf nassen Daechern liegt ein blasser Schimmer,
wie der der Kerze, die verloeschen will.

I, 35

Im Herbst

Ein Riesenspinngewebe, zieht
Altweibersommer durch die Welt sich; -
und der Laurenziberg gefaellt sich
im goldig - braeunlichen Habit.

I, 66

Then compare two others in Buch der Bilder:

Herbsttag

Herr: es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr gross.
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren lass die Winde los.

Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben.

I, 398; 1902

Herbst

Die Blaetter fallen, fallen wie von weit,
als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gaerten;
sie fallen mit verneinender Gebaerde.

Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen
unendlich sanft in seinen Haenden haelt.

I, 400; 1902

To complete the picture, turn to a late poem, written in 1924:

Herbst

Oh hoher Baum des Schauns, der sich entlaubt:
nun heisst gewachsen sein dem Uebermasse
von Himmel, das durch die Aeste bricht.

Ein Aeusserstes: das wir wie Vogelflug
uns werfen durch das neue Aufgetane,
das uns verleugnet mit dem Recht des Raums,
der nur mit Welten umgeht. ---

Aber ein Heimweh meint das Haupt des Baums.
II, 180: 1924

The first two poems already bear the unmistakable stamp of Rilke. Adjectives are many and varied, but unselective and not highly original: "nassen Daechern," "blasser Schimmer," "gescheuchter Bekassinen," "goldigbraeunlichen Habit." Nouns are unusual and composite: "Blaetterleichenschau," "Riesenspinngewebe," "Strahlenkruecken." Foreign words are mingled with native German ones: "Bekassinen," "Laurenziberg," "Habit," "Valladolid." The sign of death is on the landscape, but that is as far as it goes. The next two poems are only a few years removed in time of composition, but both move to a more sublime existence, from earthly to supernatural. An extension has taken place in Rilke's language and widened its capacity for expression. A new consciousness has been opened up by his heightened inwardness.

The language is more spiritual but at the same time more factual. Distance between subject and object are gone. All is one in the "Weltinnenraum" of which Rilke is becoming increasingly and consciously aware. In Herbsttag, God is invoked as the giver of the final sweets of fruition: "Befiehl den letzten Fruechten voll zu sein --." In the last stanza comes the sombre note: "Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr --." This is a more meaningful "Herbst," a spiritual time of harvest. Rilke sees and grasps this extension of meaning in a reverent, intuitive way. The theme of "Herbst" as it was presented in Larenopfer has moved to a new and heightened plane. Similarly in Herbst: "Die Blaetter fallen --- als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gaerten." In a few simple words, the analogy takes us from the actual falling of leaves to the cosmic cycle. The everyday is moved to the supernatural, the earthly is joined to the spiritual, and the key word "fallen" takes its place in endless space. "Und in den Naechten faellt die schwere Erde --." The language rises abruptly to a great falling of the earth, and then to a universal falling: "Wir alle fallen ---." The final intensification - "Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen/ unendlich sanft in seinen Haenden haelt" - places immanence beside transcendence, and the falling

in the safe hands of the great One. The late poem, Herbst of 1924, sees all opposites resolved, and the metaphor of "Baum des Schauns" has been broadened to include the total unity. "Unsres Saums Wellen-Befuehle suchen nach Bezug." Not before the late poems does the word "Bezug" appear in Rilke's language. In this poem adjectives are entirely absent. Poetic devices are used sparingly; the accent is on expression of deep feeling, rather than on structural and verbal harmony.

This examination shows that the place where Rilke has advanced to in inner development corresponds to the quality and form of his language. Looked at in this way, it can be seen that each new stage of development carries within it the seed of the next and more elevated phase. Rilke's language comes to assume an extended range of spiritual possibilities. Comparison of early, middle, and late poetry will bear this out. In Larenopfer we have An der Ecke:

Der Winter kommt und mit ihm meine Alte,
die an der Ecke stets Kastanien briet.
I, 30

In Buch der Bilder is Pont du Carrousel:

Der blinde Mann, der auf der Bruecke steht,
grau wie ein Markstein namenloser Reiche,
er ist vielleicht das Ding, das immer gleiche,
um das von fern die Sternenstunde geht,
und der Gestirne stiller Mittelpunkt.
I, 393

In Neue Gedichte a startling comparison presents itself in Eine Sybille:

Einst von Zeiten, nannte man sie alt.
Doch sie blieb und kam dieselbe Strasse
taeglich. Und man aenderte die Masse,
und man zaehlte sie wie einen Wald.
I, 568

Finally, there is Emmaus in Spaete Gedichte:

Noch nicht im Gehn, obwohl er seltsam sicher
zu ihnen trat, fuer ihren Gang bereit;
und ob er gleich die Schwelle feierlicher
hinueberschritt als sie die Maennlichkeit;
II, 55

A tremendous extension of language is observable; an increasing consciousness, a ripening of expression. Rilke's language is becoming "voller, dichter, fester" as he had desired that it should. Gradually, it is stripped of daily involvement and placed in the realm of pure expression. The sweet word - music of An der Ecke is replaced by ever more precise relationships, until every word comes to assume its own significance, apart from its sound. The degree of inner tension depends upon the creativity of the poet, and Rilke becomes in truth the shepherd of words, "der Hirte des Worts." By means of language, he transforms the sensual into the spiritual and so into a new reality. For this reason it is futile to approach a study of Rilke's language without first becoming intimately acquainted with the

whole body of his oeuvre. Form and meaning cannot be separated. From the corpus of words which is the form of a poem, the meaning radiates.

Traumgekroent, published a year after Larenopfer, is an example of flawless rhyming and brilliant verse-making. Paul Zech calls these poems "Kunstuebungen," or poetic exercises. He goes on to say:

Er tat, was er konnte, und dichtete nicht fuer die Eroeberung irgendeines Zipfelchens Ruhm. Er zerrieb sich in Erregungen und fand erst die Sprache von Uebermorgen, nicht die Ewigkeit. Er spannte den Bogen fortwaehrend straffer. Er geriet auf dem polaren Spannungsfeld der Seelenkraefte, an ein Uebertragungsorgan, dessen Funktionen ihm noch reichlich ungelaeufig waren. Das unabaenderlich Fanatische und das sphaerenhafte Symbol hatten hier ihre Wurzeln. Da war mit reizvollen Referaten nichts mehr getan. Nichts mehr mit balladesker Daemonie, sympathischen und gedankenmagnetischen Ueberredungen. Er musste frei von allen Reflexbewegungen, sein Ich endlich entbloessen. --- musste er vom Ich zum All die logische Entwicklungskurve aufdecken und die Kreuzungen der Erregungflaechen mit seinem Blut speisen.⁵

Growth is evident everywhere in these poems. Rilke is striving for hardening self-discipline and the perfecting of his language. He is forming the thoughts about a God whom the artist can help to build. We sense the solitary yet splendid pride out of which will come the humility of the monk of the Stundenbuch. The poem which provides the motto for this collection, Koenigs-

lied, is a summing up of Rilke's current feelings:

Darfst das Leben mit Wuerde ertragen,
nur die Kleinlichen macht es klein;
Bettler koennen dir Bruder sagen,
und du kannst ein Koenig sein.
I, 73

Increasing concentration and coherence of thought is evident in these lines. Rilke is expressing a conscious pride in humility: to be loved and honoured by children, and be a brother to beggars is to be a king indeed.

Except for the motto poem, Koenigslied, these poems are untitled but are arranged in cycles of Traeu-
men and Lieben. This compact arrangement counteracts some of the dangers of youthful effusiveness. Although it has to be understood as a transitional collection, there is a new unity about it. Rilke tries to range his poems like the pearls of a necklace, rather than drop them one by one, as he laments in a later poem:

Perlen entrollen. Weh, riss eine der Schnuere?
Aber was huelf es, reih ich sie wieder ---
II, 42

We find in these poems the beginning of Rilke's tendency to end his poems with an unfinished line. Earlier poems generally close with a question, exclamation, or a definite end-stop statement. Some examples of open-endedness are:

Und dann in der Stube, ein leiser, leiser
Lavendelduft --- I, 76

Winter kam und Weh - und beide
blieben aus --- I, 77

am Herzen jene Blume nur, die rote,
trug es dich auch? ---
I, 95

das Auge voll staunender Fragen ---
Es ist lang, - es ist lang ---
I, 98

Adjectives become richer, more ornate, frequently composite. In Koenigslied Rilke uses "rotgoldener Reif," "Leuchtender Sonne," "goettliches Schweigen." Other instances:

Mir ist: Die Welt, die laute, kranke,
hat juengst zerstoert ein jaeh Zerstieben,
- - - - -
auf goldnen Sonnenfluegeln sachte
umschwebt mich gruener Waldestrost.
I, 79

Wenn das Volk, das drohnentraege,
trabt den altvertrauten Trott,
- - - - -
Wandeln nach den glanzdurchspruehten
Fernen, lichten Lohns bewusst; -
um die Stirne kuehle Blueten
und von kinderkeuschen Mythen
voll die sabbatstille Brust.
I, 79

Again, we have "weltenweiter Wandrer," I, 82 "wunder-
weisse Naechte," "kapellenloser Glaube," and "dichten

Demantstaube," I, 85 "einen sonnenblanken, wipfelroten
Fruehherbsttag." I, 87

Rilke may incorporate the adjective with the
substantive to form a composite noun, as "Goetterbilder-
marmorweisse," I, 87, "Silberfunkekleid," I, 93, "Opfer-
kerzen" and "Raederrinnensaeumen." I, 80, Such nouns
are heavy and somewhat awkward. Equally ornate, but
loaded with a wealth of meaning are "Quellenquirlen,"
"Fohrenfluestern," "Silberkahn," "Bluetenbaeumen." I, 95
But at the same time, strong, simple nouns are coming
into their own. In Koenigslied, I, 73, Rilke balances
with good effect pairs of nouns like "Leben - Wuerde,"
"Bruder - Koenig," "Sterne - Schweigen," "Wehmut - Wonne,"
and "Purpur - Hermelin."

The verb is the part of speech best suited to convey
the poet's act of perfecting feeling. Rilke uses verbs
simply and sparingly for their relational function: to
express disagreements, disparities or antitheses. In
Nach einem Glueck, I, 95 one simple verb carries the
action in each stanza; i.e. "hoer," "seh," "trug." In
Die Nacht liegt schwer, I, 81, the words "liegt," "hoer,"
and "traegt" carry the relationship with "schauen,"
"vergass" and "schwebt" in a supporting role. In these
poems we also have the beginning of Rilke's later
technique of using a prefix to reinforce the transitive-

ness of a verb: "vertost, umschwebt," I, 79 "Sie weiss, wenns ihr entstieg," I, 82, "erklang," I, 88, "betreut," I, 91, "erschlafft," I, 93, "gepresst," I, 92, "ergoss." I, 84. Adverbs are used less extensively but they, too, are heavy with their own meaning: "glueckverschneit, elfenschlank." I, 91 Foreign words occur here and there as: "Zur Zeit, als einmal dir die Gouvernante/ den "Werther" aus den Haenden nahm." I, 89 Flowers are named specifically and accurately. The flower named must carry the right color and sound for the poem, as: "der Tag der weissen Chrysanthemem," I, 88 "Ein Maitag --- von weissem Jasmin," I, 88 "Zyklamen --- Lilien- samen --- Feuerlilie," I, 93 "Die Rose hier, die gelbe ---." I, 77 Alliteration is used liberally, often along with vovelling or assonance: "Quellenquirlen," "Blueten- baeumen," "Staub und Strauch." I, 95 Rhyme, too, is sometimes employed as in Mein Herz gleicht der ver- gessenen Kapelle, I, 75, where we have "Kapelle - Geselle - Opferstelle - Welle - Schwelle," interspersed with "Mai - entzwei - Sakristei - Sehnsuchtsschrei - herbei - frei - entzwei - Reih - vorbei." But just as often rhyme is fluid and harmonious, as in Weltenweiter Wandrer.

I, 82

Rilke endeavours to express a wealth of meaning with a great many words, often words that the reader

cannot understand unless he senses the emotional experiences that make them weighty. In Traumgekroent Rilke attempts to express the mystic unity of the things which he has begun to experience. There is increasing emphasis on the subjective. Longing runs through all the poems, a longing that stands in the place of a mother. The undertone is one of loneliness, homeless yearning, and nostalgia for his faith, for angels, for prayers. Nothing exists for Rilke but his art, and his poems are reflections of this.

The third collection in Erste Gedichte Rilke called Advent. The poems are grouped into four cycles, Gaben, Fahrten, Funde, and Muetter. They are uniformly lovely, depending on ornamental, skilfully-woven words. Conflicting interests are being amalgamated so that Rilke's own melody is now clearly distinguishable. The historical moment of these poems in Rilke's development is important, for he will not again surrender to beauty with such continuous confidence. His senses are fully awakened now; the world flows freely past them but the gentle stirring is hardly perceptible.

The motto poem, Advent, I, 101, describes a pine tree growing in the winter woods. The wind drives "die Flockenherde wie ein Hirt," and the tree "lauscht hinaus --- / streckt sie die Zweige hin - bereit, / und

wehrt dem Wind und waechst entgegen/der einen Nacht
der Herrlichkeit." This poem carries a prophetic signi-
X ficance of Rilke's worn long struggle for fulfilment,
as does the first poem of the group called "Gaben:"

Das ist mein Streit:
Sehnsuchtgeweiht
durch alle Tage schweifen.
Dann, stark und breit,
mit tausend Wurzelstreifen
tief in das Leben greifen -
und durch das Leid
weit aus dem Leben reifen,
weit aus der Zeit!

I, 103

The presentiment expressed is to become reality, for
"Streit" and "Leid" will be Rilke's constant companions.
In Du meine heilige Einsamkeit, I, 103, he praises the
solitude so necessary for his work. The words are very
old, very simple, but he permeates them with his own
intense desire:

du bist so reich und rein und weit
wie ein erwachender Garten.
Meine heilige Einsamkeit du -

Words like "rein" and "heil" do not attain their full
power in Rilke's language until the Sonnets, but he
already feels for them here. The graphic expressiveness
of the adjectives during this time can be seen:

Ein weisses Schloss in weisser Einsamkeit.
In blanken Saelen schleichen leise Schauer.

Many of the poems of the Gaben group turn on the themes of "Koenig," "Schloss," "Palaeste," and connote an area of aristocratic fancy which leads to unreality:

Es kommt in prunkenden Gebreiten
der Abend wie ein leiser Gott.
Den Rappen vor! Jetzt will ich reiten
durch purpurbunte Einsamkeiten
in buegelleichtem Traeumertrott.

Ich atme tief. Ich werde Kaiser.
Mein heller Helm ist losgeschnallt,
und meine Stirne streifen Reiser
und rauschen so. Und leiser, leiser
hallt Huf und Ruf im roten Wald.

I, 113

The words "Abend" and "Einsamkeiten" express reality, but no line can be drawn between real and unreal. Adjectives like "prunkenden," "purpurbunte," "buegelleicht;" verbs like "reiten," "hallt," "rauschen;" the adverb "leiser" combine to evoke a scene that is visible, audible, and palpable.

In Ich liebe vergessene Flurmadonnen, I, 104, the poet's desires permeate everything, overflowing into "Madonnas," "Maedchen," "Kinder," "Sternen," "Naechte":

und die Tage, wenn sie mir Lieder bringen,
und die Naechte, wenn sie in Blueten stehn.

Rilke's experiences were fundamentally in movement and in time, but his art was to express those experiences as form in space - "Gestalt im Raum." He writes:

--- Ich lag
im Silberhimmel zwischen Traum und Tag.
I, 131

Nouns like "Himmelsrain," "Schienenreihn," "Bahnhueter-
haeuschen," I, 109 show how Rilke expressed what he
felt in contour. A fascinating example of transformation
of movement into contour is the recurring use of "Haende"
in the poems called Funde.

noch immer ihre Haende falten, I, 123

Du, Haende, welche immer geben, I, 125

Das sind die Haende mit den schmalen/Gelenken, --- I, 126

--- zu zweien gehn/und sich bei den Haenden halten, I, 126

und deine Haende werden reicher
mit jedem Wink, mit jedem Gruss. I, 127

There is the unusual noun "Handineinanderlegen," I, 129

and the lovely lines:

ohne Kronen und mit leeren
Haenden -
aber jung. I, 128

The last lines of the last poem conclude with the folding
of hands:

Da weiss sie: Das Leben ist fremd und fern-
und faltet die alternden Haende.
I, 141

Love ripens from springtime in these poems: "Ein
Tor geht irgendwo/ draussen im Bluetentreiben." I, 125

Then comes the weariness of summer - "Bist du so mued?
Ich will dich leise leiten." I, 127 Then fall - "Der
Tag hat alle Traeume mir zerrissen", I, 128, and
finally only remembrance:

Kannst du die alten Lieder noch spielen?
Spiele, Liebling. Sie wehn durch mein Weh
wie die Schiffe mit silbernen Kielen,

vergessene Goetter in wartender Gnade
meine muede Erinnerung.

I, 136

Die Fruenen Gedichte

In 1900 the volume Mir zur Feier appeared. This
was later revised and published as Die Fruenen Gedichte.
The collection is a continuation and completion of what
he had begun in Advent. There is no line of demarcation,
but the language is more conscious, frequently dark in
tone, even tragic, and the surrender to images is less
ingenuous. At this point it is useful to think about
Guenther Werner's assessment of the decisive elements
in Rilke's language:

Zwei Grundzuege bestimmen so Rilkes Dichter-
sprache: das Schaffen einer voellig neuen
Ausdrucksebene durch geringste - doch be-
staendige - Veraenderungen und Verschiebungen
der Wortwahl, des Wortsinns, der Wortstellung
--- und innerhalb dieser Ebene das Verwischen
aller Grenzen des Aussen und Innen. Beide
Stroemungen entspringen derselben Quelle: der
innersten Mitte des Dichterherzens, in der

die verklaerte Ruhe des Seins zugleich stuerzende Bewegung ist und in der die Wirklichkeit des Geistes in der ewigen Verwandlung des Aussen und des Innen in gepausten "wendenden Punkt" erfahren wird.⁶

It is remarkable that Rilke was able to see what was blocking his progress at different stages, and to take a new course when he had exhausted the possibilities of the old one. He is becoming less a spectator and more a participant in life. The difference between "Erleben" and "Erfahren" is becoming more easily distinguishable. The very fact that he now writes under the name "Rainer" rather than "René" is significant. The choices are being made, the way is becoming clearer. He sets out a conscious program for the development of his art, much as he did earlier in Koenigslied, but in a more mature way:

Ich moechte werden wie die ganz Geheimen:
Nicht auf der Stirne die Gedanken denken,
nur eine Sehnsucht reichen in den Reimen,
mit allen Blicken nur ein leises Keimen,
mit meinem Schweigen nur ein Schauer schenken.
Nicht mehr verraten und nicht mehr verschanzen
und einsam bleiben; denn so tun die Ganzen.

I, 153

The knowledge of the necessity of restraint and solitude for personal triumph in his art is evident, along with a feeling of pride in his dedication to the highest. But mixed with the pride is humility, for he realizes

that to gain all he must lose himself in everything. The order of the world is contained in symbols, and the ultimate unity is to become one with the symbols. The importance of silence in comprehending this unity is expressed many times:

Vor lauter Lauschen und Staunen sei still,
du mein tieftiefes Leben;
du weisst, was der Wind dir will,
eh noch die Birken heben.

Und wenn dir einmal das Schweigen sprach,
lass deine Sinne besiegen.
Jedem Hauche gib dich, gib nach,
er wird dich lieben und wiegen.

Und dann meine Seele sei weit, sei weit,
dass dir das Leben gelinge,
breite dich wie ein Feierkleid
ueber die sinnenden Dinge.

I, 154

Werner points out that it was precisely because Rilke was able to give himself over to a state of silent receptivity that he could get to the root of his errors and bring his creative powers into balance. He writes:

Die vollendetsten Werke sind jene, in denen
das Schweigen eingeht in seine Worte, sie um-
huellet und ihre Raume unendlich erweitert,
und in denen die Verzueckung sie nur, wie
fernes Wetterleuchten aus dem Weltinnenraum
sie zuweilen beglueht.⁷

Our deepest convictions are, in the final analysis, inexpressible. No one knew this better than Rilke. It was necessary for him to conceive his poems in silence, and

always there was the reaching out beyond what words could express. The overwhelming compulsion of experience made his stock of words inadequate. Ernst Barlach's assessment of language and silence has meaning in relation to Rilke:

Es geht nicht mit Worten zu, es faengt mit Stillschweigen an. Die Zunge ist dabei das allerueberfluessigste, und was am letzten gilt - es laesst sich nicht sagen, hinter die Zunge und hinter den Worten faengt es an.⁸

Rilke's deep sensitivity about his art extends to an anticipation of the future:

Ich geh jetzt immer den gleichen Pfad:
am Garten entlang, wo die Rosen grad
Einem sich vorbereiten;
aber ich fuehle: noch lang, noch lang
ist das alles nicht mein Empfang
und ich muss ohne Dank und Klang
ihnen vorueberschreiten.

I, 149

We sense that Rilke is losing his childlike surrender to the moment. He must pass by what is of fleeting importance "bis die kommen, die seliger sind/lichte, stille Gestalten." I, 150 The premonition of the future includes the conviction that the path into the interior, the "Binnenland," may lead to peace and to more ecstatic images:

Ich bin so jung. Ich moechte jedem Klange,
der mir vorueberrauscht, mich schauernd schenken,

der Tag mich in die Binnenlande leitet.
I, 147

Important for our purpose are two poems in Die
Fruehen Gedichte which Rilke devotes to the words he so
loved:

Die armen Worte, die im Alltag darben,
die unscheinbaren Worte lieb ich so.
Aus meinen Festen schenk ich ihnen Farben,
da laecheln sie und werden langsam froh.

sie sind noch niemals im Gesang gegangen
und schauernd schreiten sie in meinem Lied.
I, 149

The feeling of fellowship for the poor, which was so apparent in Erste Gedichte, has in some measure transferred to things and words. Words are to be his wealth, but he did not come by his riches through inheritance. At the time Rilke began writing, the language of poetry was becoming ever more abstract and artificial because it was cut off from the life-giving forces which a popular tradition can give. The poet who is close to the people can draw on the simplicity of language and on direct, natural utterance. Rilke had to build up gradually his own reserve of language. The most promising way was to take the old, simple words - "die im Alltag darben," - words that stand for a wealth of common experience, and give them special meaning by superimposing his own emotions and experiences on them. He rejected

the 'concepts' that people have made of words; concepts which render everything prosaic and lifeless by killing the meaning and magic in things:

Ich fuerchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort.
Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus:
Und dieses heisst Hund und jenes heisst Haus,
und hier ist Beginn und das Ende ist dort.

Ich will immer warnen und wehren: Bleibt fern.
Die Dinge singen hoer ich so gern.
Ihr ruehrt sie an: sie sind starr und stumm.
Ihr bringt mir alle die Dinge um.

I, 194

Rilke's concern was not with the language of 'concepts' but with the language of the human heart and soul which expresses the nuances and correspondences of moods and feelings. The essential relationships come through in the juxtaposition of images like "Acker-Strom," "Wald-Berg," "Mensch-Tier," "Stall-Palast." Rilke's resolve is "nicht auf der Stirne die Gedanken denken," I, 153, but to conserve himself and wait with patience, in silence and solitude, until the language he yearns for comes:

Du musst das Leben nicht verstehen,
dann wird es werden wie ein Fest.
Und lass dir jeden Tag geschehen
so wie ein Kind im Weitergehen
von jedem Wehen
sich viele Blueten schenken laesst.

I, 153

The brevity and succinctness of these lines borders on

the aphoristic. They suggest the attitude of openness which Rilke constantly strove for in order to be truly receptive. The effectiveness of his language is no longer based on ornamental words with facile, ready made associations, but on a sure mastery of the tools of language. He has achieved a balance, a distribution of weight and accent, a firm yet varied melody:

Das ist dort, wo die letzten Huetten sind
und neue Haeuser, die mit engen Bruesten
sich draengen aus den bangen Baugeruesten
und wissen wollen, wo das Feld beginnt.
I, 166

Some of the most beautiful language of Rilke's poetry may be found here, in Lieder der Maedchen, and Gebete der Maedchen zu Maria. It is vibrant with newly awakened, hardly comprehended feeling. The stream of desire flows in unbroken intensity:

Eh der Garten ganz beginnt
sich der Guete hinzugeben,
stehn die Maedchen drin und beben
vor dem zoegernden Erleben,
und aus engen Aengsten heben
sie die Haende in den Wind.
I, 176

Each word vibrates with an inner certainty and necessity, and the tension compares only with the Sonnets. Words grope for a hitherto unknown tenderness to express the feelings of self and of desire which Rilke experienced

as intensely and passionately as a youth:

Ich war einmal so kinderkuehl:
da traf mich alles wie ein Bangen.
Jetzt ist mir jede Angst vergangen,
nur diese waermt mir noch die Wangen:
ich fuerchte mich vor dem Gefuehl.

I, 185

The purity and clarity of this language can only reflect the poet's own soul and the feeling that arose from it. His fear is "vor dem Gefuehl." He is now far removed from the security of childhood. The unreality of the "Maedchen" corresponds to the inner reality for which he is trying to find words. Rilke goes inward, not outward, to discover the reality of feeling, and with his ever-increasing command of language he achieves the fusion between inner and outer. Consider these lines:

Wie wir auch alles in der Nacht benannten, -
nicht unser Name macht die Dinge gross:
es kommen Pfeile, stark und atemlos,
aus Bogen, welche sich zu Spielen spannten.

Und so wie Pilger, welche unvermutet,
da eines letzten Vorhangs Falten fielen,
den Altar schaun, darauf der Becher blutet,
und nicht mehr rueckwaerts koennen aus dem
Heile:
so in die Kreise stuerzen sich die Pfeile
und stehen zitternd mitten in den Zielen.

I, 196

The tragic attitude of "und nicht mehr rueckwaerts koennen aus dem Heile" is related to the consciousness of subsiding into his feelings, and of being driven by

strange forces. We sense that just when his wealth of language is nearing completion, the imagery may be too great to express. Rilke wanted intuitive perfection, but during the time of preparation his intellect demanded a total and conscious exertion which was in conflict with this. The fifth Elegy tells us something of this problem:

Und ploetzlich in diesem muhsamen Nirgends,
die unsaegliche Stelle, wo sich das reine ^{ploetzlich}
unbegreiflich verwandelt - , umspringt ^{Zuwenig}
in jenes leere Zuviel.
Wo die vielstellige Rechnung
zahlenlos aufgeht.
I, 704

Each time the "vielstellige Rechnung" is nullified, the poet is threatened with new dangers. Technical perfection of language is meaningless if it expresses only unavailing repetition. A late poem, Eros, written in 1924 after his ultimate success, expresses the same tragic attitude. It is as if Rilke had seen perfection, but when he found the means to express it, it already seemed empty and superfluous:

Masken! Masken! Dass man Eros blende.
Wer ertraegt sein strahlendes Gesicht,
wenn er wie die Sommersonnenwende
fruehlingliches Vorspiel unterbricht.

Wie er unversehens im Geplauder
anders wird und ernsthaft --- Etwas schrie ---

und er wirft den namenlosen Schauder
wie ein Tempelinnres ueber sie.

II, 158

When Rilke revised Die Fruhen Gedichte in 1909, lines in various poems were changed. The meaning remained the same, but a development in language and the resulting technique in handling it may be noted. In Mir zur Feier he wrote:

Senke dich, du segnendes Serale,
das aus feierlichen Fernen fliesst!
Ich empfang dich, ich bin die Schale
schimmernd, wie aus einem Goldopale,
die dich schoen und scheu umschliesst.

III, 258

In the revised edition this passage reads:

Senke dich, du langsames Serale,
das aus feierlichen Fernen fliesst.
Ich empfang dich, ich bin die Schale,
die dich fasst und haelt und nichts vergiesst.

I, 195

The first passage is overloaded with ornamental alliteration. This has been largely remedied in the later version by omitting the decorative but redundant fourth line, and by making a new fourth line from the original fifth line. However, the new line substitutes the firm and meaningful "die dich fasst und haelt und nicht vergiesst" for the alliterative "die dich schoen und scheu umschliesst." In the first line "segnendes Serale" has

become "langsames Serale," another instance of the way in which Rilke has toned down and balanced alliteration.

In Mir zur Feier Rilke writes these lines:

Ich bin zu Hause zwischen Tag und Traum.
Dort wo die Kinder in die Stille stammeln,
dort wo die Alten sich im Abend sammeln,
und heisse Herde hellen ihren Raum.

III, 209

In the new version, the adjectives and verbs are more realistic, and the effect is one of quiet assurance.

Ich bin zu Hause zwischen Tag und Traum.
Dort wo die Kinder schlaefern, heiss vom Hetzen,
dort wo die Alten sich zu Abend setzen
und Herde gluehn und hellen ihren Raum.

I, 151

"Kinder in die Stille stammeln" has become "Kinder schlaefern, heiss vom Hetzen;" "wo die Alten sich im Abend sammeln" is more simply "die Alten sich zu Abend setzen;" and the somewhat contrived "heisse Herde hellen" is "Herde gluehn und hellen." In the first edition we have this poem:

Weiss - weiter Weg, der sich in Licht verlor,
und Sonnenwucht auf allem Weingelaender.
Und dann auf einmal: wie ein Traum - ein Tor,
breit eingebaut in unsichtbare Waende.

III, 223

Rilke revised this to read:

Blendender Weg, der sich vor Licht verlor,

Sonnengewicht auf allem Weingelaende.
Und dann auf einmal, wie im Traum: ein Tor,
breit eingebaut in unsichtbare Waende.
I, 164

The enjambement which is part of Rilke's characteristic language, is shown in these lines:

Schau, wie die Zypressen schwaerzer werden
in den weiten Wiesen. Und auf wen
die Gestalten mit den Steingebaerden
warten in den wachsenden Alleen?
III, 222

In the revised version, the enjambement occurs at the end of three lines, and is used as part of Rilke's natural cadence rather than as an artistic device:

Schau, wie die Zypressen schwaerzer werden
in den Wiesengruenden, und auf wen
in den unbetretbaren Alleen
die Gestalten mit den Steingebaerden
weiterwarten, die uns uebersehn.
I, 163

Die Fruenen Gedichte stand as a first peak in Rilke's work. The angel's significance in relation to the self has been established; in fact, the angel of Gebet, I, 160, has much in common with the angel of the Elegies:

Ernster Engel aus Ebenholz:
Du riesige Ruh.
Dein Schweigen schmolz
noch nie, in den Braenden
von Buesserhaenden.
Flammenumflehter!

Deine Beter
sind stolz:
wie du.

The proud, hard angel wrestles with souls, but the soul becomes greater for the struggle. We anticipate the thought in Der Schauende of Buch der Bilder:

Sein Wachstum ist: der tiefbesiegte
von immer Groesserem zu sein.
I, 460

The aim in life is to be defeated by ever greater adversaries. Similarly, the beginning of a serious and determined search for God can be seen in the last poem in the collection:

Du darfst nicht warten, bis Gott zu dir geht
und sagt: Ich bin.
Ein Gott, der seine Staerke eingesteht,
hat keinen Sinn.
Da musst du wissen, dass dich Gott durchweht
seit Anbeginn,
und wenn dein Herz dir glueht und nichts
verraet,
dann schafft er drin.

I, 200

"Durchwehn" requires an attitude of pure receptiveness and of complete submission to impressions before the long process of creation can begin. God is an essential to be deeply experienced. Rilke is concerned with expressing what reaches far beyond the sensually perceived, and the vigorous language and massive structure

of this last poem points to a new form of language.

Das Buch der Bilder

In 1902 the first edition of Das Buch der Bilder appeared. Most of these poems were written at Berlin-Schmargendorf and Worpswede; some were written earlier at Munich; and when the second edition came out in 1906, thirty-seven new poems were added, some of which were written in Paris as late as 1906. The dates of the poems, then, range from 1898 to 1906. Each poem bears a title and is a separate, distinct entity. A 'picture book' is an apt title, for the poems are a series of images.

This collection may well be taken to mark a watershed. Some of the early poems belong to the past, others form a period of transition, still others are in the manner of the Stundenbuch, and here and there are "Ding" poems which point to Neue Gedichte. Because it is such a diverse and uneven assortment, it is a crucial and indispensable source for the study of the development of Rilke's language. Many suggestions of later poems may be found here, many key words are beginning to be heard again and again. The earlier poems are primarily visual, but the soul is increasingly involved without disturbing the independence of the object perceived.

Rilke's eyes are wide open. He sees in a new, conscious way, yet intuition remains the central force. The later poems are often visionary, reflective, even hymnical in expression. A deepening of nuances is traceable; also an increase in experimentation and an ever surer mastery of the dynamics and possibilities of language.

Immediately apparent is the evident variation in the length of these poems. Some, like Fortschritt, I, 402, and Pont du Carrousel, I, 393, are short and concentrated, in the manner of Neue Gedichte. The construction is deliberate, the language moves heavily with its numerous clauses and quite unornamental, yet effective, alliteration and assonance. On the other hand, Das Juengste Gericht, I, 415, runs to great length - about one hundred and fifty lines. Here intuition is held fast in the wealth of impressions and feelings. Rilke cannot compress the grand and awesome vision. He attempts to vary the poem by changing the metre and the length of line. In another long selection, Die Zaren, I, 428, Rilke divides the poem into sections. Neither device is successful, disturbing the continuity and balance of the poem.

Contrasts are evident in every area of the language of Das Buch der Bilder. Rilke ranges from reflective contemplation in Fortschritt, I, 402, to youth-

ful passion in Der Knabe, I, 386, to the wild rhythm of the storm in Aus einer Sturmnacht, I, 460 to peaceful contemplation of a landscape in Aus einem April. I, 371, In Die Stimmen, I, 447, the language is harsh and grating; in Ritter, I, 372, conscious word and sound play creates a contrast of light, bright outer space and grim, concentrated inner space. A comparison of the two cyclic poems, Die Stimmen, I, 447, and Die Zaren, I, 428, becomes startling. Die Zaren is centred around one image but there are many distracting highlights presented with all the ornate eloquence of Das Stundenbuch. Die Stimmen is a severely austere, stylistic cycle of poems, unique among Rilke's poems. Each separate song of a 'Stimme' is a peak in itself, self-sustained, terse and forceful. The language is direct and simple. Most of the words are monosyllabic. The poem says what Rilke wants to say, but the almost agonizing self-restraint silences the melody.

It remains impossible to separate what Rilke says from the way he says it. The persuasiveness of his ideas depends on the forcefulness of his language. We sense a new consciousness emerging, a listening out and into the world. As in Die Fruhen Gedichte there is premonition of the future:

Mit deinen Augen, welche muede kaum

von der verbrauchten Schwelle sich befreien,
hebst du ganz langsam einen schwarzen Baum
und stellst ihn vor den Himmel: schlank, allein.
Und hast die Welt gemacht. Und sie ist gross
und wie ein Wort, das noch im Schweigen reift.
I, 371

The language is closely related to his developing
"Raumgefuehl." The eye, later also the ear, are the
space-creating senses. The lovely dialogue poem, Die
Blinde, expresses it best:

Meine Stirne sieht, meine Hand las
Gedichte in anderen Haenden.
Mein Fuss spricht mit den Steinen, die er
betritt,
meine Stimme nimmt jeder Vogel mit
aus den taeglichen Waenden.
Ich muss nichts mehr entbehren jetzt,
alle Farben sind uebersetzt
In Geraeusch und Geruch.
Und sie klingen unendlich schoen
als Toene.
Was soll mir ein Buch?
In den Baeumen blaettert der Wind;
und ich weiss was dorten fuer Worte sind,
und wiederhole sie manchmal leis.
I, 465

Rilke is striving for the same highly developed degree
of receptivity which the blind reveal, where all the
remaining senses are sharpened and acutely sensitive.
The passionate longing to know the "Weltinnenraum" is
now apparent. The things are waiting to be discovered
in new and different ways. To receive these new im-
pressions, Rilke must wait and listen. "Warten" und
"Lauschen" tend to be frequently recurring words. The

lonely journey into "Raum" is like the relationship of "Einsamkeit" and "Weltraum." Der Lesende I, 457 shows us this contrast of inner and outer space. There is the lonely man, turned away from the world, receiving nothing, and the solitary man, open to everything. By embracing solitude, the poet can transcend the mortal confines and enter into the relatedness of movement in space:

Dort draussen ist, was ich hier drinnen lebe,
und hier und dort ist alles grenzenlos;
nur dass ich mich noch mehr damit verwebe,
wenn meine Blicke an die Dinge passen
und an die ernste Einfachheit der Massen, -
da waechst die Erde ueber sich hinaus.
Den ganzen Himmel scheint sie zu umfassen:
der erste Stern ist wie das letzte Haus.
I, 458

Those who live in extreme conditions of existence - the widow, the beggar, the orphan, the leper whose songs he sings in Die Stimmen - can most easily move into this position of relatedness and receptivity to all. In Ernste Stunde I, 405 Rilke listens into the night, surrendering to the hope and pain which may enter freely into his receptive heart. In Fortschritt I, 402 he strains for utter involvement with every level of feeling:

Mit meinen Sinnen, wie mit Voegeln, reiche
ich in den windigen Himmel aus der Eiche,
und in den abgebrochnen Tag der Teiche
sinkt, wie auf Fischen stehend, mein Gefuehl.

Rilke asks only for the word, the humble but exact word to express the shared experiences of the world. By sharing suffering, he also comes to share the hope of the world. The words "Tor" and "Tuere" imply an entering into, an opening. They are at this stage an important part of Rilke's language:

Aus ihrem Leben geht jede Tuere
in einen Dichter
und in die Welt.

I, 374

Du bist ein grosses, hohes Tor,
und aufgehn wirst du bald.

I, 410

With this goes the idea of "Weg" and "Wandern:"

Mir faellt ein junger Ritter ein,
der weit in Waffen geht.

I, 373

Life is valid only when it is "verbunden mit vielen/
Kreisen des weithin wachsenden Raumes" I, 472

In Zum Einschlafen zu Sagen, Rilke speaks of the listening attitude so necessary in order to be truly open to impressions. The poet must first become quiet. Silence and solitude bring the stillness he needs to listen "herein und hinaus/in dich, in die Welt, in den Wald." I, 391 Another valuation of silence as the original, characteristic act of the spirit, is in Musik.

I, 379

When articulated, the work of art is somehow entrapped and diminished: "Der Klang ist wie ein Kerker." So the temptation to silence is almost inseparable from the poetic act:

Gib mir ein Schweigen, dass die Seele leise
heimkehre in das Flutende und Viele,
darin sie lebte, wachsend, weit und weise,
eh du sie zwangst in deine zarten Spiele.
I, 380

These lines moreover demonstrate the firmness of Rilke's language and his increasing compression of thought. He uses adverbial clauses - four in this one stanza - along with the participles "Flutende," "Viele," "wachsend" in close succession. Alliteration is used more skilfully than ever before. The closeknit manner which characterizes his late poetry is beginning to appear. Zum Einschlafen zu Sagen, I, 391, a cradle song vibrating with restrained music, is an example of regular rhythm, symmetrical rhyme scheme, and good use of alliteration and vowelism. Bangnis, I, 396, uses Rilke's two main devices, contrast and repetition, to create atmosphere. "Welken Wald" is repeated heavily, over and over, and the simple but expressive qualifying words evoke the feeling of "Bangnis," as: "der runde Vogelruf," "der grosse Wind," "breit wie ein Himmel," "die Minute --- ist bleich und still." The poem Gebet, I, 401, uses

insistent repetition to ask searching questions: "Spielen denn meine Sinne noch zu sehr mit Licht?" "Liegen sie (the hands) nicht wie Werkzeug da und Ding?" "Wuerde sich denn mein Angesicht noch immer stoerend von den Gegenstaenden abheben?"

In Buch der Bilder the idea of 'the last' emerges frequently. The time has come when the past loses its weight, and the soul is integrated with all that has gone before. This can be felt in Der Saenger Singt von Einem Fuerstenkind, I, 437, and in Die Zaren. I, 428, In Der Letzte, I, 395, it gives a prosaic quality to the picture of Rilke's homeless loneliness, and links it with the knights who were his predecessors. He is powerless to do anything with this rich heritage:

Denn was ich fortstelle,
hinein in die Welt,
faellt,
ist wie auf eine Welle
gestellt.

I, 396

The idea of "Welle" relates back to the "wohnen im Gewoge" of Die Fruenen Gedichte. Often, we can find the embryo of a later poem in this context. The concern for the handicapped, which Rilke shows in Die Stimmen is given new voice in a poem of Spaete Gedichte, i.e. Gebet fuer die Irren und Straeflinge.

Ihr, von denen das Sein
leise sein grosses Gesicht
wegwandte: ein
vielleicht Seiender spricht.

draussen in der Freiheit
langsam bei Nacht ein Gebet:
das euch die Zeit vergeht;
denn ihr habt Zeit.

II, 34

The humility of Ernste Stunde with its penetration of testimony to include the whole world, comes through again in Die Spanische Trilogie, II, 43, also in Spae-te Gedichte:

Auf dieser Wolke siehe: die den Stern
so wild verdicht, der eben war - (und mir),
aus diesem Bergland drueben, das jetzt Nacht,
Nachtwinde hat fuer eine Zeit - (und mir),
aus diesem Fluss im Talgrund, der den Schein
zerissener Himmels-Lichtung faengt - (und mir);
aus mir und alledem ein einzig Ding
zu machen, Herr: aus mir und dem Gefuehl,

The "Hirt" of the second part of the Trilogie is strangely reminiscent of the man on the bridge in Pont du Carrousel in whom are "viele wirre Wege hingestellt."

Rilke's words in the Trilogie are:

Warum muss einer dastehn wie ein Hirt,
so ausgesetzt dem Uebermass von Einfluss,

dass er gelehnt an einen Baum der Landschaft
sein Schicksal haette, ---

The idea of the poet as a shepherd of language was conceived in Buch der Bilder and continues in varying forms

to the end. In September, 1914 he wrote this poem:

Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens. Siehe
wie klein dort,
siehe, die letzte Ortschaft der Worte, und
hoeher,
aber wie klein auch noch ein letztes
Gehoeft von Gefuehl.
II, 94

Lacking a great tradition, Rilke had to forge his own instruments, create his own atmosphere, build up his own reserve of language. The process was an arduous and a lonely one. In Der Lesende, I, 457, Rilke writes about the dichotomy of outer and inner worlds. In a late poem, written in 1921, he is able to say about the poet:

Der Dichter einzig hat die Welt geeinigt,
die weit in jedem auseinanderfaellt.
II, 246

Thus, the embryo of later, more tellingly expressed ideas, can be discovered here in quite early poems.

The melody of the angels is in Schutzengel: I, 381

Du bist der Vogel dessen Fluegel kamen
wenn ich erwachte in der Nacht und rief.

In Der Engel, I, 380, the angels have "muede Munde" and "helle Seelen ohne Saum." Like the poet, the angel is at home neither in the spiritual nor the earthly realm. Their weariness is Rilke's own. In Die Verkuendigung, I, 409,

he addresses the angel in the tone of the later Stunden-
buch:

Du bist nicht naeher an Gott als wir;
wir sind ihm alle weit.

ich bin der Tag, ich bin der Tau,
du aber bist der Baum.

In Die Aschanti I, 395 the dancers, who have lost all
that is primitive and elemental in their blood, are
compared with the constant animals:

O wie sind die Tiere so viel treuer,
die in Gittern auf und niedergehn,

und sie brennen wie ein stilles Feuer
leise aus und sinken in sich ein,
teilnahmslos dem neuen Abenteuer
und mit ihrem grossen Blut allein.
I, 395

Is this not an anticipation of Der Panther in Neue Ge-
dichte? Or we might compare Rilke's words about solitude
in Buch der Bilder and in Neue Gedichte: In Der Einsame,
I, 393 Rilke sees only the contrast between his art,
which sees the "Ferne voll Figur," and the "ewig Ein-
heimischen:"

sie aber lassen kein Gefuehl allein,
und alle ihre Worte sind bewohnt.
I, 393

A few years later, in Der Einsame of Neue Gedichte, I, 639
he sees complete and conscious solitude as a total way

of life: "ein Turm soll sein aus meinem Herzen."

Conclusion

In his search for words Rilke reminds us of the prophet and the magician. Subconsciously, somewhere in the unity that comprises life and death, he found words that came from somewhere beyond and extended into the sphere of the transcendental. Like the magician, Rilke took what was in the visible world and made something more of it.

Er ruft es an. Es schrickt zusamm und steht.
Was steht? Das Andre; alles, was nicht er ist,
wird Wesen. Und das ganze Wesen dreht
ein raschgemachtes Antlitz her, das mehr ist.
II, 150

These lines were written in February, 1924, as he looked back upon his life's work. Klatt writes this about Rilke's feeling of mission in the world:

Was immer er sah oder hoerte oder fuehlte
oder was sich als seelische Regung zur
Deutung anbot, wurde ihm Problem in der
Ebene der Worte. Er hat sich damit eingestellt
in die Arbeit der Generation, die fuer Forschung
in einem Sinn, wie es frueher gar nicht moeg-
lich gewesen waere, sich in einer selbstlosen
Leidenschaft einsetzte, die zur Ehre der Wissen-
schaft lebte und sich selbst gering achtete und
durchscheinend gemacht und laesst uns erkennen,
was hoffnungsreich dahinter steht und was uns
ausrichtet auf das, was in der Welt fuer uns
zu tun ist.⁹

The way is hardly begun in Buch der Bilder. There

are many new notes in these poems, and many variations of old chords. Most of the poems have a character and a necessity about them, an assurance of a thing organically created. Only by setting them against the background of contradictions can their unity be grasped. Perhaps the constant struggle to communicate the self to the moment and to the poem is best expressed in Der Schauende: I, 459

Wie ist das klein, womit wir ringen,
was mit uns ringt, wie ist das gross;
liessen wir, aehnlicher den Dingen,
und so vom grossen Sturm bezwingen, -
wir wuerden weit und namenlos.

Fritz Dehn has described Rilke's early work in a striking analogy with the elements of music:

Die fruehen Gedichte: das war die Stimme eines einzelnen wie eine Violine; das Buch der Bilder; schwere, dunkle Klaenge des Cello. Das Stundenbuch: Orchestralmusik. Das alles war Darstellung der Seele. Der Schauende dagegen im eminenten Sinne, der an nichts als das Objekt Hingegebene, ist der Gestalter der Neuen Gedichte. Der zuvor dichtete und sang, stand dem Aussen nicht voraussetzungslos gegenueber; nicht nackt, - sein Kleid war die Suessigkeit seiner Sehnsucht, die Schwermut seines Wissens, der betende Andrang seines Herzens. Hier steht einer schauend vor den Dingen, der all solches Gewand abgelegt hat; der im Schauen eine neue Geburt sucht; der Wirklichkeit nicht schon hinzubringt zu den Dingen, sondern sie erst von ihnen her erfahren will.¹⁰

The next stage in Rilke's development is about to take shape, but the continuity is never broken.

PART II

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

NEW DIRECTIONS

If Die Fruehen Gedichte are taken as the most characteristic poems of Rilke's early language, then the corresponding place in the later work may be ascribed to Die Sonette an Orpheus. The long period in between is a time of ripening development of the poet's own idiom. It is a time of struggle and crisis; of long, barren periods, but also of achievement. This period sees the writing of Das Stundenbuch, of Neue Gedichte, and of Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. The letters of this period are of particular importance, because they express the facts of Rilke's life and the direction of his thought. In the letters we may perceive how Rilke learns that: "alles Wirkliche ist schwer, voller Wahl, ganz und gar unverantwortlich." Kippenberg, Feb. 7, 1910, Brief 116

DAS STUNDENBUCH

Das Stundenbuch is not a work of transition but a summing up of Rilke's struggles, intentions and insights. It was the final expression, beyond which Rilke could not go at the time. The three books of which it is comprised, lie across Rilke's last German period and his first

French period, but the underlying influence that nourished it was primarily Russia. The first book owes much to Baudelaire and Kierkegaard, and the third book bears the influence of the sculptor Rodin and perhaps also of the French language, with its clarity and precision. But it was Russia that helped Rilke to understand the meaning of "Stunde," or hour of prayer, as it applies to the poet. For Rilke it meant a time of deliberate solitude, of withdrawal into himself and waiting for inspiration. He learned that it is the nature of the poet to be lonely, for his plane of being is a higher one than that of other people. That is why he is a poet. Rilke tried to enlarge the scope and unity of what the senses can perceive by placing himself in a state of "Offenheit" or pure receptivity. He set himself to be consciously receptive to the impressions of Russia, to absorb them into every fibre of his being, to store them away to be used at various times in the future. The bond between intuition and the senses had been broken, but the writing of poetry was not yet an act of the will, as in Neue Gedichte. The hour of inspiration must still be waited upon and what comes to Rilke in this "Stunde" is more than religious feeling and more than "Stimmung." It is true that the religious depths of his nature, which have been striving for release since his childhood, are now

being expressed. Russia gave him the words for it. The first book of the three, Das Buch vom Moenchischen Leben, came to him in the autumn of 1899. Rilke wrote the sixty-six poems over a period of twenty-five days, but actually in the space of some twenty-four inspirational hours. They are the articulation of prayers that have long lain upon his heart. There is a vastness about them like the Russian landscape, but the God he praises is not the deity of the Russian peasants, but a 'becoming' God who is dependent upon man to be formed and enlarged. Rilke seeks the metaphysical here, in the essence of the things: "Ich finde dich in allen diesen Dingen," I, 266, and "Die Dinge toenen vom Ur-Ding Gott." I, 284

Rilke's deep experience of the spiritual comes in waves: in the three books of Das Stundenbuch, in the two Requiems, and in the Duineser Elegien and Die Sonette an Orpheus. Feeling is gradually transformed into seeing, and the mystical imagery of God is transformed into silent comprehension of an all-pervasive Being, the central thing of which is death. The development of felt imagery to visual ones is determined from within, rather than from without. Rilke's language runs through all the possibilities of mystical metaphor and each of the three books expresses a separate form of mystical experience.

The first, Das Buch vom Moenchischen Leben, expresses

"ein Kreisen um Gott." I, 253 It is an inexhaustible,
spiritual "Nemengebung." God is "Dunkelheit," I, 258,
"das Verschwiegene, I, 308, "das Leise," "das Unergruend-
liche," "die Wurzel," I, 254, "der Nachbar," I, 255, "der
Zweite meiner Einsamkeit, die ruhige Mitte .." I, 263,
"du sanftestes Gesetz, --- du grosses Heimweh, ---du
Wald, -- du Lied, -- du dunkles Netz, --." I, 268

Every possible relationship is explored. The endless
movement between spiritual and human is re-inforced by
this simple piling up of names. The endlessness of God
is portrayed in the chain of imagery, and the gap which
feeling must bridge is thereby lessened. God is the
greatest of the great:

Du bist so gross, dass ich schon nicht mehr bin
wenn ich mich nur in deine Naehel stelle.
I, 269

The relationship reaches the degree where God is depen-
dent on man in similarly mounting images:

Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)
I, 275

God is revealed in the minutest experiences. He goes
through the poet's soul as hoarfrost blankets the waiting
woods:

Oft wenn ich dich in Sinnen sehe,

verteilt sich deine Allgestalt:
du gehst wie lauter lichte Rehe
und ich bin dunkel und bin Wald.

I, 282

The opening poem of the first book gives us a glimpse of the dynamism, of the inspiration which visited Rilke.

Da neigt sich die Stunde und ruehrt mich an
mit klarem, metallenen Schlag:
mir zittern die Sinne. Ich fuehle: ich kann-
und ich fasse den plastischen Tag.

I, 253

The next poem contains Rilke's own statement of the living process which he considers his life and art to be:

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich ueber die Dinge ziehn.
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht voll-
bringen,
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiss noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke,
ein Sturm
oder ein grosser Gesang.

I, 253

The thirty-four poems of the second book, Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft, were written in the autumn of 1901 over a period of ten days. In these poems, God has undergone a subtle change. He has become identified with the wind, "ein Wehen." Man has dissipated himself in the turmoil of life, has emptied out his soul and forgotten God. Man's task is clearly defined:

Fuer dich nur schliessen sich die Dichter ein
und sammeln Bilder, rauschende und reiche,
und gehn hinaus und reifen durch Vergleiche
und sind ihr ganzes Leben so allein ---
Und Maler malen ihre Bilder nur,
damit du unvergaenglich die Natur
die du vergaenglich schufst, zurueckempfaengst:
I, 315

Here the theme of the ninth Elegy is anticipated. The relationship to the things is a reality which man must somehow approach: "Du bist der Dinge tiefer Inbegriff, / der seines Wesens letztes Wort verschweigt." I, 327
It is a dynamic process, with receptivity, "Offenheit" opening the way from man to God.

Da muss er lernen von den Dingen,
anfangen wieder wie ein Kind,

Eins muss er wieder koennen: fallen,
geduldig in der Schwere ruhn,
I, 321

The things will reveal themselves to those who desire them. The genuine poor, the children, the lovers, all those in extreme circumstances are closest to the things and to God, as is the pilgrim in his yearning:

Und meine Haende, welche blutig sind
vom Graben, heb ich offen in den Wind,
so dass sie sich verzweigen wie ein Baum.
Ich sauge dich mit ihnen aus dem Raum.
I, 339

Each poem is a new attempt to define God, until the limit of words is reached and the language becomes mystical.

The third book, Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode, took shape in eight days in 1903. Rilke had met the sculptor Rodin in 1902, and although the close association with him did not begin until 1905, there is a different air about this book. God has almost disappeared, and in his place there is a sensuous awareness of all the things in which God is. In spite of the title, the book is concerned more with life and procreation than with death. The main theme is the denunciation of the great cities and the glorification of the poor. The balance between human beings and the things is the basis of the imagery and the transformation of form as image flows into image. Of the poor, Rilke writes:

Sie sind so still; fast gleichen sie den Dingen.

Sie sind wie Waechter bei verhaengten Schaetzen,
die sie bewahren, aber selbst nicht sahn, -
getragen von den Tiefen wie ein Kahn,
und wie das Leinen auf den Bleicheplaetzen
so ausgebreitet und so aufgetan.

I, 339

Every human being approaches the worth of the things as his potential is developed in the fruit:

Denn wir sind nur die Schale und das Blatt.
Der grosse Tod, den jeder in sich hat,
das ist die Frucht, um die sich alles dreht.

I, 347

The image of "Frucht" opens up a new depth of relatedness

between nature and spirit.

It is significant that many of Rilke's 'storm' poems run parallel to the writing of Das Stundenbuch. The storm is analogous to the rapid-flowing inspiration that gave rise to these poems. It represents the swift synthesis of all the images in a powerful force that sweeps all before it. God is in the storm. To be defeated by him is to be exalted after all. Rilke could experience in the upheaval of nature the same unity which he felt intuitively:

Wie ist das klein, womit wir ringen,
was mit uns ringt, wie ist das gross;
liessen wir, aehnlicher den Dingen,
uns so vom grossen Sturm bezwingen, -
wir wuerden weit und namenlos.

I, 459

The poems of Das Stundenbuch are of unequal length, of various metrical schemes, all unrhymed and untitled. They are divided into three books according to a general theme and linked by a strong thought-progression, a current that drives on until its force is spent. The theme in each book modulates from poem to poem, and a general rhapsodic tone binds all together. The density of texture and the heavy beauty of the language results from the lavish use of four devices: rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and vovelling. Rilke also uses clauses extensively now. Where other poets might avoid clauses

because they retard and interrupt the thought, Rilke needs them to describe and express with accuracy and detail. The reader needs to pause and reflect in order to comprehend the wealth of qualities Rilke has in mind. Adjectives serve this purpose too, but they are now part of the total structure, an element of Rilke's poetic thought rather than an ornamental device. Similarly, metaphors and metaphorical language do not signify a separate device but are part of Rilke's thoughts about God.

Rilke's word-power is by now considerable. The Russian journey liberated emotion. His language is now equal to expressing all this in an original way. Rilke does not yet practise the stern economy of Neue Gedichte, but neither does he display his eloquence for decorative purposes. Not yet does he search for one precise word to say exactly what he means. He still tries to convey a wealth of meaning by using many words, unrelated words, each one loaded with meanings and associations which the reader is not aware of.

Malte Laurids Brigge

Once a phase in Rilke's life is finished, he cannot repeat himself. Das Stundenbuch was as far as he could go in the direction of "Innerlichkeit." The abstractions

of "God" and "Ich" now largely disappear. The next step Rilke had to experience was the writing of Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. He began writing it in 1904: it was not published until 1910. Not until then could he go on to other things. In his poems, Rilke is now cultivating greater objectivity, but in this prose work he must once more surrender to a subjective treatment of his problems and conflicts with the world. We find Rilke's own statement of his inner necessity to write this book in a letter to Clara:

Warum ich mich zurueckhalte ---? - es mag sein, dass es um des Malte Laurids willen geschieht, den ich zu lang aufgeschoben habe. Bis dorthin bin ich so weit mit ihm eines, als ichs sein muss, um die Notwendigkeit zu ihm zu haben und die Zustimmung zu seinem Untergang. Zu weit darf ich nicht ueber sein Leiden hinaus, sonst begreif ich ihn nicht mehr, sonst faellt er mir fort und ab, und ich kann ihm nicht mehr die ganze Fuelle deines Todes geben.

Clara, Sept. 8, 1908, Brief
103

This was written in 1908. In 1907, between October 9th and 24th, we have Rilke's letters on Cézanne. The discovery of the work of this strange French artist had been with Rilke since 1901. When he finally came to write about it, in this series of almost daily letters, his words reveal much of his own thought about art. He writes:

Es ist gar nicht die Malerei, die ich studiere (denn ich bleibe trotz allem Bildern gegenueber ungewiss und lerne nur schlecht gute von weniger guten unterscheiden, und verwechsle bestaendig fruehe mit spaet gemalten). Es ist die Wendung in dieser Malerei, die ich erkannte, weil ich sie selbst eben in meiner Arbeit erreicht hatte oder doch irgendwie nahe an sie herangekommen war --- Aber innerhalb meines Lebens ist diese unerwartete Beruehrung, so wie sie kam und sich Platz schaffte, voller Bestaetigung und Bezug. --- Diese Arbeit, die keine Vorlieben mehr hatte, keine Neigungen und keine wachlerischen Verwoehntheiten, deren kleinster Bestandteil auf der Waage eines unendlich beweglichen Gewissens erprobt war und die so unbestechlich Seiendes auf seinen Farbeninhalt zusammenzog, dass es in einem Jenseits von Farbe eine neue Existenz, ohne fruehere Erinnerungen, anfang.

Clara, Oct. 18, 1907, Brief 84

Thus, in letter after letter, Rilke approaches Cézanne's work from every angle. Rilke was not a painter and the things that would move painters are not mentioned by him. He recognizes the kindred spirit in Cézanne. This artist had chosen painting over poetry in his youth, and by painstaking study of nature he was able to tame his romantic inclinations and become a classical artist. Rilke ultimately found a new formulation for what he wanted to say in Malte through his study of Cézanne's work. He writes:

Erst musste das kuenstlerische Anschauen sich so weit ueberwunden haben, auch im Schrecklichen und scheinbar nur Widerwaertigen das Seiende zu sehen, das, mit allem anderen Seienden, gilt. Sowenig eine Auswahl zugelassen ist, ebensowenig ist eine Abwendung von

irgendwelcher Existenz dem Schaffenden erlaubt.
Clara, Oct. 19, 1907, Brief 83

Rilke came to know both fear and courage: fear of death and courage to face life; fear of failing (as Malte failed) and courage to accept the challenge of life. He understood Malte's fate better, for the letter continues:

Und mit einem Mal (und zum ersten) begreife ich das Schicksal des Malte Laurids. Ist es nicht das, dass diese Pruefung ihn ueberstieg, dass er sie so lange instinktiv aufsuchte, bis sie sich an ihn haengte und ihn nicht mehr verliess? Das Buch vom Malte Laurids, wenn es einmal geschrieben sein wird, wird nichts als das Buch dieser Einsicht sein, erwiesen an einem, fuer den sie zu ungeheuer war.

As he laboured at this 'heavy' book, Rilke was able to clarify the issues within himself and find a firm base from which to look at the questions of the time. Only by coming to grips with the crisis of the individual could he move on to the crisis of mankind. Yet he carried the book on his heart for two more years before he could complete it. In the previously quoted letter to Clara, of September 8, 1908, he writes:

Denn eigentlich haette ich ihn [Malte] voriges Jahr schreiben muessen, fuehl ich jetzt; nach den Cézanne-Briefen, die so nah und hart mit ihm sich beruehrten war ich an den Grenzen seiner Gestalt angekommen: denn Cézanne ist nichts anders als das erste, primitive und duerre Gelingen dessen, was in M.L. noch nicht

gelang. Der Tod Brigges: das war Cézanne's Leben, das Leben seiner dreissig letzten Jahre.---
hilft mir, so weit Ihr koennt, zur ruhiger
Zeit, dass ich meinen Malte Laurids mache: ich
kann nur durch ihn durch weiter, er liegt mir
im Weg:

Brief 104

Rilke had to go down into the nightmare depths of Malte before he could bridge the gap between subject and object. At the core of his problem was the need to come to terms with the repugnant things of life. In Malte, he gives expression to the infirmities of the flesh and of the soul, and so they become purified. The gestation of inner experience is an on-going thing in Rilke's life. Every impression sinks to the depths of his subconscious, there to mature and ripen. Once 'ripe', it emerges unexpectedly from time to time, even when he is far from the source. This is the way in which the sinister and terrifying aspects of Paris appear in Malte, and then, fifteen years later, in the fifth Elegy.

During this same period, 1903-1910, we have, to help us, a series of ten letters to a young poet, Franz Xavier Kappus. These letters, too, illuminate the key things in Rilke's life and their special meanings for him. The reflections set down were Rilke's own, not philosophical pronouncements borrowed from others. As such, they form an important source of information in tracing the development of his language.

Rodin

Nora Wydenbruck attributes Rilke's 'conversion' to classical ideas and ideals to his meeting the sculptor Rodin. She writes:

It was a peculiarity of his nature that he needed to be led to the positive elements of beauty by the people he admired; left to himself, he tended to gravitate to its negative aspects - those of decay and disintegration - and only towards the end of his life he became capable of creating the synthesis of joy and sorrow, birth and death.¹

Rodin's advice to Rilke was to keep on working all the time and to have patience. As J.B. Leishman describes it:

Rodin's il faut toujours travailler came to him like a revelation - that poetry, if it was to be worth anything, must be as laborious as sculptures; that he must resist the temptations to write facile poems, laments and confessions, and must instead concentrate with minute attention upon things and persons (real or legendary) outside himself, and having apprehended their significance, attempt to convey it in the fewest and fittest words.²

Rilke took Rodin's advice to heart and enlarged upon it in his own way. The positive and virile personality of Rodin helped to round off and complete Rilke's own. He began to impose severe discipline on himself, and was able to rise above the morbid romanticism of his beginnings to the serenity of his late verse. It was

Rilke's fate to meet Rodin at this particular time of his development, and also to suffer disillusionment later because he placed him on a pedestal.

The impact of Rodin can be pieced together from the many letters which Rilke devoted to his impressions of the overpowering man. He writes to Clara:

Er geht wie ein Stern. Er ist ueber alle Masse.
Clara, Sept. 15, 1905, Brief 37

and a few days later:

--- was sind alle Ruhe-Zeiten, alle Tage
in Wald und Meer, alle Versuche, gesund
zu leben, und die Gedanken an alles
dieses: was sind sie gegen diesen Wald,
gegen dieses Meer, gegen das
unbeschreiblich getroste Ausruhen in
seinem haltenden und tragenden Blick,
gegen das Anschauen seiner Gesundheit
und Sicherheit. Es rauscht von Kraeften,
die in einen einstroemen, es kommt eine
Lebensfreude, eine Faehigkeit zu leben ueber
einen, von der ich keine Ahnung hatte. Sein
Beispiel ist so ohnegleichen, seine Groesse
steigt so vor einem an wie ein ganz naehr
Turm, und dabei ist seine Guete, wenn sie kommt,
wie ein weisser Vogel, der einen schimmernd
umkreist, bis er sich zutraulich auf die Schul-
ter niederlaesst. Er ist alles, weithin alles.
Clara, Sept. 20, 1905, Brief 38

To Arthur Holitscher, in December, 1905:

Und da ist mein Leben. Ein wenig als Sekretaer
Rodins, sehr verwerfliche franzoesische Briefe
schreibend, vor allem aber bei seinen er-
wachsenen Dingen und in seiner grossen heiteren
Freundschaft dieses lernend, langsam lernend:
leben, Geduld haben, arbeiten und keinen Anlass

zur Freude versäumen.

Holitscher, Dec. 13, 1905, Brief 40

The same love and adoration is evident in Rilke's monograph on Rodin:

Rodin war einsam vor seinem Ruhme.
Und der Ruhm, der kam, hat ihn
vielleicht noch einsamer gemacht.
Denn Ruhm ist schliesslich nur der
Inbegriff aller Missverstaendnisse, die
sich um einen neuen Namen sammeln.

V, 141

Rilke's misfortune, as a poet, probably was that he lacked the cynicism of the man of the world, who expects nothing, and also the detachment of the saint, who allows for everything. His personal tragedy was one of hypersensitivity. Wydenbruck writes:

In the life of a poet, or of any creative artist, no problem is more difficult to solve than that of the individual's relationship to society. At times his work demands that he should live like a hermit, at others, he must lie fallow and absorb what the surrounding world can give him. The historian, the philosopher or the theologian can retire into solitude, but the poet, whose task consists in expressing the emotions of the human soul, must not shut himself away from human kind. Therefore, one cannot help feeling that the seemingly unkind fate which forced Rilke to spend so great a part of his life as a homeless wanderer, accepting the help and shelter offered him by more fortunate people, was in reality a blessing for him. Only through the human contacts that were forced upon him in this way was he enabled to attain the universality that characterises his genius.³

After Rodin, Rilke writes poetry that is objective, cleared of all uncertainty, lifted out of time and set in space forever. The poems of this time are mostly visual, showing a finely-honed power of observation and a structural discipline that was not there before. In the presence of Rodin, Rilke felt the dynamic creativity of a craftsman at the height of his power. A sculptor's work is constant, disciplined, does not wait for inspiration. Rilke tried Rodin's method and technique in Neue Gedichte with marked success, but then gave it up and reverted to his own creative temperament.

Neue Gedichte

Neue Gedichte are the reverse side of Malte and, to a degree, of the Stundenbuch as well. The roaming looseness of the Stundenbuch poems has given way to concentrated, individual poems, each complete in itself. The sonnet form is adapted so that it is hardly recognizable. It limits Rilke's material and compresses his thought into a narrow confine. To find freedom, he seeks limitation! The influence of the sonnet form is so strong that it marks the general tonality of the poems. Rilke's language is always characterized by flexibility, and form was nothing more than a useful scheme to be followed in principle, but adapted to fit each individual case. He

handles form as he does language, with patience and perseverance, conquering it from within until he is the complete master of it. Any technique is justified if it helps translate idea into sound and meaning, but it is only a starting-point. In Neue Gedichte, more than anywhere else, poetic devices are used to convey meaning, and they interact in a more complex and subtle way than ever before.

Rilke did not at any time confine himself to a single style. In Neue Gedichte too, there are ranges of language and a proliferation of styles. The technical and aesthetic insights which he gained from Rodin were invaluable to him. Rodin's craft showed him the necessity for projecting concentrated emotion into a clear image. Rilke's own writing about Rodin's sculptures show how he is looking at objects as focused entities, in isolation. Consider these lines about Rodin's Man with a Broken Nose:

Man fuehlt, was Rodin anregte, diesen Kopf zu formen, den Kopf eines alternden, haesslichen Mannes, dessen gebrochene Nase den gequaelten Ausdruck des Gesichtes noch verstaerken half; es war der Umstand, dass es auf diesem Gesichte gar keine symmetrischen Flaechen gab, dass nichts sich wiederholte, dass keine Stelle leer geblieben war, stumm oder gleichgueltig. Dieses Gesicht war nicht vom Leben beruehrt worden, es war um und um davon angetan, als haette eine unerbittliche Hand es in das Schicksal hineingehalten wie in die Wirbel eines waschenden, nagenden Wassers.

These observations reinforced Rilke's own sense of the isolation of things. The result of working out these ideas was the "Ding-Gedicht," a term which is associated with Neue Gedichte. H. W. Belmore writes:

--- the character of Rilke's "Dinggedichte" is not that they treat of things, but rather that they deal with all subjects, including persons, as if they were things.⁴

Among these poems are examples of intensely disciplined thought, expressed in the simplest poetic form, usually in three or four short stanzas. They required much more revision than did the 'inspirational' works. In each poem a single figure of speech is extended ever inward until the distinction between viewer and object vanishes. There is no diffusion of metaphors or similes, and little that is decorative. Rilke takes us to the centre, the innermost core, the "Mitte" where the image petrifies, like Rodin's sculptures. Rilke felt he had achieved a detached presentation of reality, yet it is objectivity in a limited sense. Feeling is still the focal point. By projecting his own personality in "das Ding," he was able to lose the self-consciousness that disturbed him and blocked his expression. At this point in time, it was the only way he could write without being insincere.

The break that Rilke made with the past is best

expressed by these lines from Requiem fuer Wolf, Graf von Kalckreuth:

--- O alter Fluch der Dichter,
die sich beklagen, wo sie sagen sollten,
die immer urteilen ueber ihr Gefuehl
statt es zu bilden; die noch immer meinen,
was traurig ist in ihnen oder froh,
das wuessten sie und duerftens im Gedicht
bedauern oder ruehmen.

I, 663

Like the poets whom he chides here, Rilke, too, had faced the danger of disintegrating into his own sensibilities. In Neue Gedichte he won through by harnessing his sensibilities to his own ends. Each poem is disciplined, like a piece of Rodin's sculpture; a work of art in itself, rounded, complete and self-contained. Intensity and elegance come together in balanced language and artistry. Rilke is particularly sensitive to the relationships and interactions of words.⁵ Every word is chosen to support, reflect, and explain the others. Rilke places the colourless with the vivid, the simple with the complex, and his word pictures are shaped to a clear sharpness. The similes are precise, yet profound. The language is accurate, giving the reader the means to experience the thing or the sensation as Rilke did.

Rilke is now so secure in his expression that he can say what he has to say with ease and assurance. He

has rearranged the elements of language so that it is unmistakably his own. Other poets of the time were able to adapt the traditional German language. Rilke could not. His material and personality were different in so many ways that what worked for other poets would not work for him. Rilke lifted his language out of the sphere of common speech so that every word, every interval is quite unlike its counterpart in everyday language. There is a tension in Neue Gedichte, as if words struggling beneath the surface. The letters of this period have the same firmness and determination, showing how Rilke pulled himself together to achieve the hardness necessary at the time.

Rilke has called himself an "Augenmensch" and so he was. But he goes farther, presenting also the ideas and sensations, associations and emotions, that add another dimension to the visually observable. He transcends the visual and blends all the spheres into what is poetry, rather than description. His vocabulary is richer and more varied than ever before. Nouns are a key element, and Rilke creates them at will when the exact one is not available. He makes them from verbs or adjectives, or uses infinitives or participles as nouns. Verbs and adjectives are also important. Adjectives are colourful, chosen to give the poet's vision from within

and without. As important as his exacting choice is the way Rilke uses them. He places an adjective with a noun to which it does not relate - "fruehe Flanke," I, 485, - or he may combine it with another adjective or an adverb as "rosagrau," or "ruhiggelb," I, 507. The word "rein" first appears in Neue Gedichte and is used more and more frequently, with great versatility. It takes on so many different shades of meaning that it functions as a new word. Rilke uses it as a serious and expressive modifier, referring to a thing, a relationship, a state of being, or a direction, depending on the trend of thought or the context in which it is used. On the other hand, the word "leise," which occurs so frequently in Das Stundenbuch, now is rarely found. "Verwoehnt" and "geschont" are used effectively, as adjectives, adverbs, or in participle form.

There is wide variety in the poems of Neue Gedichte. In Der Panther, I, 505 the long-drawn vowels and the recurrence of nouns describing action - "Voruebergehn, Gang, Schritte, Kreise, Tanz" - create a visual surface for the poem. In Leda, I, 558, the vicarious transformation takes us into the swift moment of absolute, metamorphosed existence. Such objectification of feeling is the uniqueness of the "Dinggedicht." In Die Flamingos, I, 629, alliteration and word-shading are important.

Symbol, simile, analogy and personification are lightly and softly linked. Here Rilke brings in the name of the painter Fragonard, as elsewhere he does Duerer, I, 637, and Patenier, I, 532. He seems to measure his powers against those of the plastic artists. But painters and sculptors work with the stuff of the earth, and Rilke's raw materials are "die armen Worte." Through words, he recreates sounds, metaphors present visual images, illusions of motion give perspective, and the inward-pulling of the reader to the object creates a psychological effect. Through the things, we may see with open eyes the true being of the world.

The two parts of Neue Gedichte are separate in that Part II reaches out a little higher, a little deeper, a little wider. Two poems representative of the two parts are Blaue Hortensie, I, 519, and Rosa Hortensie, I, 633. Blaue Hortensie uses humble, everyday similes as "wie in alten, blauen Briefpapieren" and "Verwaschnes wie an einer Kinderschuerze." In Rosa Hortensie the borderline between visible and invisible is crossed. The fading of the flower's colour is symbolic of the passing of the soul:

Sind Engel da, es zaertlich zu empfangen,
wenn es vergeht, grossmuetig wie ein Duft?

The object of Blaue Hortensie is the fading blue colour

of the flower. Rilke assembles all the objects that recall this peculiar shade of blue, and the accumulation of these images creates the vision. Visual and emotional are blended, as "verweint and ungenau" and "dem nichts mehr geschieht" with "blauen Briefpapieren" and "Kinderschuerze." However, the visual sphere predominates. In Rosa Hortensie the emotional images take precedence. The process of fading, the dissolution of colour is the theme.

Conclusion

Neue Gedichte form a poetic enclave apart from Rilke's other poems. A new tone is set. Will and intellect are finding voice. The faculty of quiet observation has grown, and he has re-established and re-oriented his talents. He has turned from the yearning of Die Fruehen Gedichte and the ambiguity of Das Stundenbuch. Neue Gedichte bear witness to Rilke's concentration on craftsmanship, but remoteness of language is the price he sometimes has to pay. In a letter to Baron Uexkuell, he defends the hard objectivity of the poems and insists that Das Stundenbuch already had a degree of the same determination:

Vielleicht sind Maengel meiner Natur
oder nachzutragende Versaeumnisse meiner
Entwicklung die Ursache jener harten Sach-

lichkeit und Ungefuehlsmaessigkeit des Dar-
gestellten: vielleicht sind gefaelligere
Wege denkbar: ich muss auf meinem, schweren,
weiter. Glauben Sie nicht, lieber Freund,
dass schon das Stunden-Buch ganz erfuellt
war von der Entschlossenheit, in der ich
(einseitig, wenn Sie wollen) zugenommen
habe? Die Kunst nicht fuer eine Auswahl
aus der Welt zu halten, sondern fuer deren
restlose Verwandlung ins Herrliche hinein.

Clara, Sept. 15, 1905, Brief 109

The two Requiems of 1908, for Paula Becker-Moder-
sohn and for Wolf, Graf von Kalckreuth, already show
the change in the current of Rilke's poetry. The Requiem
for Paula is an intense, sorrowful, emotion-charged
poem. He accuses Paula of having returned into time and
settled for the human task after all. The key to the
Requiem for Wolf is contained in the searching question
"Wer spricht von Siegen? Ueberstehn ist alles." I, 624
This was also the key to Rilke's life, for patience
and endurance were his watchwords to the end.

At the close of this middle period, the first two
Elegies had already formed themselves at Muzot in 1912.
With them, Rilke achieved a summit he had not yet
touched. Without either rhyme or alliteration, their
austere beauty and immense concentration of meta-
physical ideas reaches out to the limits of what can
be expressed by words.

PART III

THE LATER POETRY

Siehe, ich lebe, Woraus? Weder Kindheit
noch Zukunft
werden weniger..... Ueberzaehliges Dasein
entspringt mir im Herzen.
I, 720

Reorientation

In his later poetry, Rilke turns to a jubilant summary of all that has gone before; a summary in which he celebrates the 'heart-work' which is given to man alone to do. The essential creativity of man amounts to "ueberzaehliges Dasein," and it is this that gives him the final advantage. All that Rilke has seen, and thought, and experienced is transformed and sublimated into "das Unsaegliche" and "das Namenlose." Nothing has been lost. Rilke has persevered through the land of sorrow and "Klage," and won through to the synthesis of all powers in harmony. Everything leads to "Raum," endless space, where the angel functions. The word "Bezug" is first used in the Elegies, and from then on it is an important personal word of Rilke's. It means relationship in an artistic, philosophical and even metaphysical sense. All things are related in the "reinen Bezug," I, 759, "unendlichen Bezug," II, 55, "der klarste Bezug," I, 734, "in wirklichem Bezug." I, 738.

The same theme appears in every successive work - the theme that feeling is reality, is endless remembrance, is the true measure of being and of knowledge. Feeling creates "Raum," and Rilke's choice of words, metaphors, analogies, even of syntax is governed by space in which all things exist in relationship.

With Rilke's poems, we may move in either direction. The language of the early poems clarifies and illuminates the later work. Conversely, the later poems help us to understand what Rilke articulated imperfectly in the early work. The "Mitte" which Rilke refers to so often is the essence, the main body of language which he must hold to. It is like the torso of Apollo: the language of his poetry emanates from the main body, from "jene Mitte die die Zeugung trug." I, 757. The later poems had to wait to be written until Rilke could assemble the language to give shape to the profound thoughts they express. The importance of the thought now transcends perfection of form, but when thought and form are as closely related as in Rilke's later work, neither can be looked at in isolation.

Rilke's poems are about life, and they express what Rilke held to be most important after a lifetime of thought and experience. The image rules the sphere of poetry, and experiences can be translated into

images more easily than can thoughts, valuations, and visions. For the latter, a new plane of language is necessary. W.L. Graff sums it up this way:

In retrospect, his mature symbols very often present the best formulae for the characterization of moods which in their earlier stages lacked full articulation.... A progressive thickening of substance which ultimately reveals the fruit contained in the seed.¹

Rilke's deepest law of life was to give himself over to the process of "Wachsen" and "Werden" - growing and becoming. By placing himself in a position of "Offenheit" - receptivity - he could sense the "Wehen" of a higher being and so enter into a spiritual "Weite" which approaches the cosmic. He writes to Herr Kappus:

Es ist aber klar, dass wir uns an das Schwere halten muessen; alles Lebendige haelt sich daran, alles in der Natur waechst und wehrt sich nach seiner Art, und ist ein Eigenes aus sich heraus, versucht es um jeden Preis zu sein und gegen allen Widerstand.

- - - - -
Lernzeit aber ist immer eine lange, abgeschlossene Zeit, und so ist Lieben fuer lange hinaus und weit ins Leben hinein-: Einsamkeit, gesteigertes und vertieftes Alleinsein fuer den, der liebt. --- es ist ein erhabener Anlass fuer den Einzelnen, zu reifen, in sich etwas zu werden, Welt zu werden, Welt zu werden fuer sich um eines anderen willen, es ist ein grosser, unbescheidener Anspruch an ihn, etwas, was ihm auserwaehlt und zu Weitem be-ruft.

Kappus, May 14, 1904, Brief 24

On March 17, 1922, after he had completed the Sonnets

and the Elegies, Rilke writes to Countess Sizzo:

Schreiben zu koennen ist, weiss Gott, nicht minder "schweres Handwerk," um so mehr, als das Material der anderen Kuenste von vornherein von dem taeglichen Gebrauch abgerueckt ist, waehrend des Dichters Aufgabe sich steigert um die seltsame Verpflichtung sein Wort von den Worten des blossen Umgangs und der Verstaendigung gruendlich wesentlich zu unterscheiden. Kein Wort im Gedicht (ich meine hier jedes "und" oder "der," "die," und "das") ist identisch mit dem gleichlautenden Gebrauchs- und Konversations-Worte: die reinere Gesetzmassigkeit, das grosse Verhaeltnis, die Konstellation, die es im Vers oder in kuenstlerischer Prosa einnimmt, veraendert es bis in den Kern seiner Natur, macht es nutzlos, unbrauchbar fuer den blossen Umgang, unbeeuerbar und bleibend.

Graefin Sizzo, March 17, 1922, Brief
359

Such utterances testify to Rilke's advance. An inevitable consequence of this development is that new problems are posed and execution becomes more difficult. The capacity to write the later poems was always there, but for long years Rilke lacked the means to do so. The quality of language that sufficed in his early poems soon proved inadequate. In his early writing, Rilke approached language from the outside, through form. In his later poems, he had mastered it from within, assimilating and harmonizing the disparate elements. In Die Fruenen Gedichte language expressed his emotion, or "Sehnsucht:"

Ich moechte werden wie die ganz Geheimen:
Nicht auf der Stirne die Gedanken denken,
nur eine Sehnsucht reichen in den Reimen,
mit allen Blicken nur ein leises Keimen,
mit meinem Schweigen nur ein Schauern schenken.
I, 153-4

NEW DEPARTURES

The break with early poems, where intuition and subjectivity were the determining factors is expressed in these lines from Requiem fuer Wolf, Graf von Kalckreuth:

---- O alter Fluch der Dichter,
die sich beklagen wo sie sagen sollten,
die immer urteilen ueber ihr Gefuehl
statt es zu bilden;

I, 663

Rilke's desire now was to collect impressions and sensations and then process them into an independent work of art which could stand free, without reference to his own life, thoughts or feelings. In 1914, Wendung expresses Rilke's conviction that he had concentrated too much on visual experience, and that to achieve his purpose he must fuse subjective and objective elements:

Denn des Anschauens, siehe, ist eine Grenze.
Und die geschautere Welt
will in der Liebe gedeihn.
Werk des Gesichts ist getan,
tue nun Herz - Werk
an den Bildern in dir, jenen gefangenen, denn du
ueberwaeltigtest sie: aber nun kennst du sie nicht.
II, 83-84

There is evidence here of the most striking and significant transformation of all, and the beginning of a gestation which would ripen inwardly those "Bilder, jene gefangenen" which he had caught in the "Dinggedicht." It all forms part of a process of growing, of constant search for a larger dimension of being. Space, "Raum," is at the root of all things. It consumes and pulls all separate entities into itself. Rilke's experience of movement in space is the key to his feeling about the universe. It explains why, in the end, it was Orpheus who symbolized the poet's vocation. The poet is in the centre of things, and the inner world, which applies to his poetry, encompasses all other realms as well. Everything flows together in the poet. This inner world, "Weltinnenraum," is a place of endless movement. Here the poet finds anonymity and a reality which eluded him in the outer world. More and more Rilke strives for knowledge of movement, "Bewegung," in space, where the transformation of the sensual into the spiritual, and of the spiritual into the sensual takes place, and where all the powers are joined in harmonious reality.

What Rilke has said about falling, as it applies to ripe fruit, autumn leaves and broken pearls, applies to life itself as it does to language. His constant

endeavour was to bring language to a state of ripeness, to make it "voller, dichter, fester," to strip it of daily involvement and bring it to a state of pure expression which would render the true state of being. Soon after the Stundenbuch, Rilke came to distrust the harmonious music of his verse. He compares his search for the exact relationship of words to the lonely challenge of mountain climbing:

Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens. Siehe,
wie klein dort,
siehe: die letzte Ortschaft der Worte, und
hoher,
aber wie klein auch noch ein letztes
Gehoeft von Gefuehl.---

II, 94

Here, too, he meets the silence so necessary before poetry can emerge:

--- Ach, der zu wissen begann
und schweigt nun, ausgesetzt auf den
Bergen des Herzens.

II, 94-95

Rilke's most successful works are those where silence has entered into his language, enveloped it, and extended its meaning. In the lonely heights, the great bird wheels silently and the secret, sure-footed mountain animals stare without a sound. Heaven is very close:

--- Nichts ist so stumm
wie ein Gottes Mund. Schoen wie ein Schwan
auf seiner Ewigkeit grundlosen Flaeche:
so zieht der Gott und taucht und schont
sein Weiss.

II, 53

Rilke's later poetry fulfilled the demands he set for verse in a much quoted passage in Malte where he says this about the poetic function:

Ach, aber mit Versen ist so wenig getan, wenn man sie frueh schreibt. Man sollte warten damit und Sinn und Suessigkeit sammeln ein ganzes Leben lang und ein langes womoeglich und dann, ganz zum Schluss, vielleicht koennte man denn zehn Zeilen schreiben, die gut sind. Denn Verse sind nicht, wie die Leute meinen, Gefuehle (die hat man frueh genug), - es sind Erfahrungen. Um eines Verses willen muss man viele Staedte sehen, Menschen und Dinge, man muss die Tiere kennen, man muss fuehlen, wie die Voegel fliegen, --- Und es genuegt auch noch nicht, dass man Erinnerungen hat. Man muss sie vergessen koennen, wenn es viele sind, und man muss die grosse Geduld haben, zu warten, dass sie wiederkommen. Denn die Erinnerungen selbst sind es noch nicht. Erst wenn sie Blut werden in uns, Blick und Gebaerde, namenlos und nicht mehr zu unterscheiden von uns selbst, erst dann kann es geschehen, dass in einer sehr seltenen Stunde das erste Wort eines Verses aufsteht in ihrer Mitte und aus ihnen ausgeht.

VI, 723-25

In Wendung, written in 1914, we sense the poetic crisis in Rilke. Disciplined observation, as in Neue Gedichte, implied renunciation of much that was natural to him. Now he gives up the pursuit of immediately apprehendable details and writes nothing until such

poetry comes to him which represents synthesis and springs from forgotten memories gathered in the course of a lifetime. There can be no forgotten memories until memories have been stored. For Rilke it was very hard to wait patiently. His urge to be constantly creative conflicted with the slow gathering of memories for later use. Always there was fear, fear that he might not be fruitful enough because he lacked the resources of the gathered and forgotten memories which he evokes in Malte. The new orientation to "Herz-Werk," however, brought with it the most marked ascent of all. Putting things into sharp relief, as he had done in Neue Gedichte, helped to bring out the "Mitte" which is his centre of gravity, or focus. His anxious questioning during this period is evident in his poems:

Hab ich das Errungene gekraenkt,
nichts bedenkend, als wie ich mirs finge,
und die grossgewohnten Dinge
im gedraengten Herzen eingeschraenkt?
II, 81

The year 1921 marks the end of the most painful and frustrating period of waiting in Rilke's life. He spent the winter of 1920-21 at Castle Berg in Switzerland, under propitious circumstances, but nothing came of it. He writes to Graefin M. in November:

Ein Fremder, der hier eintraete - sein erstes

Wort waere: Wie muss sichs hier arbeiten lassen! - Werd ichs koennen? Meine Furcht (meine Feigheit, wenn Sie es so nennen wollen) ist genau so gross wie meine Freude, - aber diese Freude ist wirklich immens.

Graefin M., Nov. 25, 1920,
Brief 306

We sense Rilke's lack of self-confidence on the very eve of his fulfilment. It is to be the last winter of his constrained relation to his work. The conflict between life and art was not yet finished. Rilke could not feel at home in life, and in art he felt secure only during moments of inspiration. At the end of that winter in Castle Berg, Rilke writes again to Graefin M.:

Jeder erhebt schliesslich nur einen Konflikt im Leben, der sich nur immer anders vermuemt und anderswo heraustritt -, der meine ist, das Leben mit der Arbeit in einem reinsten Sinne zu vertragen; wo sichs um die unendliche inkommensurable Arbeit des Kuenstlers handelt, da stehen die beiden Richtungen wider einander. --- Da doch letzten Grundes meine Produktivitaet aus der unmittelbarsten Bewunderung des Lebens aus dem taeglichen unerschöpflichen Staunen vor ihm hervorgeht (wie waere ich sonst zu ihr gekommen?), so saehe ich auch darin eine Luege, sein mir Zustoemen irgendwann abzulehnen; jede solche Versagung muss auch schliesslich innerhalb der Kunst selbst, mag sie potentiell noch so viel durch sie gewinnen, als Haerte zum Ausdruck kommen und sich raechen; denn wer sollte auf einem so empfindlichen Gebiet ganz offen und zusagend sein, wenn er dem Leben gegenueber eine misstrauische Haltung hat! - So lernt man, ach, wie langsam, das Leben geht ueber lauter "Anfangsgruenden" hin - wofuer kann mans dann am Ende ein klein wenig?

Graefin M., March 10, 1921,
Brief 320

THE ENCOUNTER WITH VALÉRY

Before Rilke was equal to writing the Elegies and Sonnets the long, slow gestation in silence had to take place. He had to perfect his craftsmanship and assemble the massive language capable of expressing the new themes. Influences concern us only to the degree that they have helped to develop those aspects of Rilke's language and personality which were incomplete. Russia enabled him once to release what he already possessed. Rodin showed him where he was lacking and helped him to develop his technique through the discipline of work. Cézanne brought understanding of relationship. Now, in 1921, Rilke was ready for the encounter with the work of Paul Valéry. The change had already taken root in him before the encounter took place; it corresponded to an inner necessity which was bound to find expression. The reorientation would have taken place nonetheless. But the very fact that Rilke had progressed to the point where he could respond to Valéry, where he was looking for just such an example to guide him made the encounter a momentous one. Valéry extended Rilke in a new area of growth which had already begun.² Other factors combined in the summer of 1921 to draw him to Muzot, where he settled at the end of July.

Paul Valéry was a poet who had arisen in the same

difficult time as Rilke. His life had taken a different course; his attitudes were different, but he shared Rilke's sharp awareness of beauty. Valéry had ripened during a twenty-five year period of silence, and in 1921 he was writing poetry in which his world feeling had become spiritualized without losing its intuitive nature. For Valéry, sensory and spiritual elements had merged and become interrelated in a flow of poetry which was synonymous with an inner freedom. Like Rilke, he concentrated on the language of poetry. The words, and not his will, must have their way. The poet's task is to search out the living words, to let them move from likeness to likeness, to write poetry for the sake of the words. Like Rilke, Valéry erected obstacles to poetic expression - and in so doing he achieved greater creative freedom. We may sense a similar feeling in Rilke before Valéry entered the picture. In a letter of 1919, he has this to say about the emotional outbursts of the Expressionists:

Der Expressionist, dieser explosiv gewordene Innenmensch, der die Lava seines kochenden Gemuets ueber alle Dinge giesst, um darauf zu bestehen, dass die zufaellige Form, in der die Krusten erstarren, der neue, der kuenftige, der gueltige Umriss des Daseins sei, ist eben ein Verzweifelter, und die Ehrlichen unter ihnen mag man auswueten und gewaehren lassen. --- Es ist so begreiflich, dass die Menschen ungeduldig geworden sind, - und doch, was tut jetzt mehr not als Geduld, Wunden

brauchen Zeit und heilen nicht dadurch dass man Fahnen in sie einpflanzt.

Anni Mewes, Sept. 12, 1921, Brief 291

In the light of these expressed views of Rilke's, it is not surprising that Valéry made such an impact on him. Rilke's own account of Valéry in a letter of November 1921, is most illuminating:

--- waere mir dann noch Paul Valéry eingefallen, ein Wichtigstes, das Sie nicht versaeumen duerfen. --- ich kenne ihn, seinen Inhalten nach, erst seit diesem Fruehjahr, aber seither steht er mir unter den Ersten und Groessesten, - ja, Grossen. Das ist ein Mann, etwa aus der Umgebung und, wie wohl zu sagen erlaubt sein muss: Schulung Mallarmés, der zeitig mit merkwuerdigen, an die Erscheinung Lionardos frei angeschlossenen Betrachtungen und einzelnen Gedichten hervortrat, damals nicht unbemerkt blieb, - dann aber zwei Jahrzehnte oder etwas mehr, aller Produktivitaet absagend, mathematischen Studien gehoerte und erst um 1919 wieder vor der Deffentlichkeit erschien. Vollendet. Ein Dichter, der sich in jenen Beschaeftigungen nur neue Masse und Praezisionen geholt zu haben scheint, um das Grossartige seines Gefuehlsraums und die Lage der darin erlebbaren Dinge unbestreitbar auszusprechen.

Knoop, Nov. 26, 1921, Brief 330

DUINESER ELEGIEN

The most noticeable change in the Elegies is in language. This language matured in Rilke during the long, barren years when he waited for the power to complete them. There are signs of it in those poems published in Spaete Gedichte and Letzte Gedichte which

stuermisch entzueckten Gefuehls und ploetzlich,
einzelnen,
Spiegel: die die entstroemte eigene Schoenheit
wiederschoeepfen zurueck in das eigene Antlitz.
I, 689

The language here is suddenly intensified and continues so until almost the breaking point, when the word "ploetzlich" and then "einzelnen" bring release and return the Elegy to its original slow tempo.

Nothing in the language is superfluous. There is concentration; every word carries such significance that no other would serve the purpose. Each word must stand in perfect relationship to all others. Such is Rilke's reverence for words at this point. In Erste Gedichte he used ornate words, awkward composite words, often for their decorative effect. In Die Fruenen Gedichte and in Buch der Bilder he chooses more carefully from a selective vocabulary. In the Stundenbuch the vocabulary is still less ostentatious, the diction simpler, and in Neue Gedichte he has the facility of choosing one precise word to express the exact meaning. Nouns and verbs have now displaced adjectives and adverbs in importance. In the Duineser Elegien a new atmosphere pervades. The words are different from those used before. Old, simple words recur as: Herz, Engel, Gesicht, Mutter, Nacht, Baum, Vater, Blut, Gott, Tag,

Held, Sterne, Raum, Schicksal, Erde, Ding, Hand, Tier, Tod, Vogel, Kind, Gefuehl. Words such as these carry a wealth of common human experience as well as of poetic associations, but Rilke gives them his own peculiar meaning which may easily escape us. When Rilke superimposes his own emotions and experiences on words like "Engel" and "Raum," their meaning is extended to something we have not known before. Recurring as they do, and offset by words and phrases of a subtler, more complex nature, they add strength and simplicity to the texture of the Elegies.

There is only one way to unlock the language of the Elegies, and that is by entering into the life of Rilke. Heerikhuizen has this to say about the Elegies:

It is the drama of a soul which in its perplexing wealth, consistency and purity, mysteriously became the mirror and pattern of cultural occurrenceⁱⁿ its entirety. Only because Rilke's art was so purely individual, "New Poems" signifying merely a partial deviation, was it able to attain this general validity. The content of the drama (and once again: life and work are utterly inseparable, though this detracts from the independence of the work itself no more than it detracts from the truth, apart from literature, of that which has been experienced), the data, are the laborious and spasmodic release of mature intuition, the final release of the human life out of the perplexity into which it had fallen on reaching adulthood.⁴

The Elegies are a matter of ripeness and intuition, and

not of intellectual ability or even of reflection. They are about life. Looked at in this way, they are easier to understand than the Stundenbuch and Neue Gedichte. Nevertheless, the vocabulary has undergone such a profound change that if we do not first take the important step into Rilke's life, the language may well seem obscure. Rilke himself, when asked about the Elegies, declared that they reached to infinite heights above and beyond him. They are his extreme effort to say "das Unsaegliche." To do this in poetic language is sometimes even beyond such a master as Rilke had become, and sometimes he comes close to prose in his expression:

--- Aber Lebendige machen
alle den Fehler, dass sie zu stark unterscheiden.
Engel (sagt man) wuessten oft nicht, ob sie unter
Lebenden gehn oder Toten.

I, 688

Here, as elsewhere, the conjunction adds to the prosy language. This close proximity of poetry to prose is not new in Rilke's work. Requiem Clara Westhoff gewidmet, written in 1900, is an early example of this.

Form determines the texture and style of the Elegies. We use the term 'form' as the total of the elements used in translating thought into poetic language. The elegiac form was best suited to express the solemnity of experience and the pent-up emotions of the years of silence.

But Rilke modifies the elegiac form, as he later does the sonnet form, to suit his thought. Forerunners to this work, but weak forerunners, may be found in the two Requiems of 1908, for Paula Becker-Modersohn and for Wolf, Graf von Kalckreuth. The Fuenf Gesaenge of 1914 also have parallel rhythms. But before the material of the Elegies could be produced, misery and desolation had to return again and again, for prolonged and agonizing periods.

The importance of the message transcends everything else in the Elegies. They sum up Rilke's thought from earliest childhood and recapitulate all that has gone before. In Neue Gedichte Rilke learned to use form as the final compression of his experience into shape. This helped him give direction to his inner forces. In the Elegies, he had to do two things: incorporate very complex thought and express strong emotion. Although he suspends many of the devices he uses in Neue Gedichte, his mastery over form was of great help in accomplishing this task. Whereas in Neue Gedichte Rilke avoided the expression of emotion, in the Elegies the regular movement of language is frequently disturbed by eruptions of feeling. Lyrical passages contrast with opaque and heavy ones, and everywhere the sheer weight of thought and experience contribute to the density of language. Many a

line in the Elegies has material to spare for an entire poem.

Although they are long poems, the Elegies are short for what Rilke has to say. The early poems are not characterized by condensation. A phrase like "durch schmale, schmachtende Spalten," I, 55, shows how Rilke used words for effect, when the meaning did not require them. In Neue Gedichte he writes on a different plane, compressing his thought and outlining a situation with a bare minimum of words. The Elegies carry condensation yet further, with a wealth of meaning only partly expressed. Indeed, what Rilke leaves out is as expressive as what he articulates in words:

Und wir: Zuschauer, immer, ueberall,
dem allen zugewandt und nie hinaus!
Uns ueberfuellt. Wir ordnens. Es zerfaellt.
Wir ordnens wieder und zerfallen selbst.
I, 716

Rilke's thought ranges from idea to idea with breathtaking rapidity, touching only the essentials. The rest is left in silence. The authority of silence is well known to Rilke.

--- Uns, die Schwindensten. Ein Mal
jedes, nur ein Mal. Ein Mal und nicht mehr.
Und wir auch
ein Mal. Nie wieder.

I, 717

Silence runs parallel to the majestic flow of language in this, the ninth Elegy. In the first Elegy, Rilke finds solitude and human silence a necessary prelude to experiencing the sounds of nature. He must be ruthless, like the angel, for however much he needs human companionship, it drives him out of touch with the endless and ultimate silence of the "Innenraum." In the closing lines, Rilke invokes the name of Linos, who, like the poet, stands outside fate, but whose mystic song enables the dead to sense each other in space by silent movement through all dimensions. In the second Elegy, all things in nature conspire to silence - perhaps because they are ashamed of men, perhaps because they hope for them. The eighth Elegy Rilke calls his 'silent Elegy'. Here he laments the loss of "Erinnerung," namely primal memory which is a recollection from within. The fate of man is to be ever opposite:

Dieses heisst Schicksal: gegenueber sein
und nichts als das und immer gegenueber.
I, 715

This is the fate that Rilke anticipated in Die Fruehen Gedichte, but there it remained imperfectly articulated:

Das ist die Sehnsucht: wohnen im Gewoge
und keine Heimat haben in der Zeit.
- - - - -
--- Bis aus einem Gestern
die einsamste von allen Stunden steigt,

die, anders laechelnd als die andern Schwestern,
dem Ewigen entgegenschweigt.

I, 145

In the Elegies, Rilke brings us his thoughts about life and death and love. To transform these thoughts into images and make them into poetry, he needed a language entirely his own. The traditional language of German poetry, which his contemporaries adapted, would not do for him. Rilke's material was different, and to find accurate expression for what he had to say, the elements of language had to be rearranged in relationship to his material. The language resulting is both new and old. The time-honoured-words- adjectives like "rein" and "heil," verbs like "lieben" and "halten" - are used in a new way, yet their original meaning is also called up. It is condensed but suggestive. It seems to come from a strange region, often inaccessible to us and transcending us.

Three important features of Rilke's language in the Elegies are his use of clauses, of the subjunctive mood, and of questions. Lyrical poets generally avoid the first two, and Rilke's extensive use of them shows how he thinks and feels differently. He needs clauses and the subjunctive mood to express accurately and exhaustively what he has to say. His poetry does not just give the results of a process, but the process

itself. And all the while there is questioning and searching for accuracy. If necessary, he will heap clause upon clause to give an idea clarity and precision.

In Buch der Bilder we have passages such as:

Und seine Haende halten, wie erschlafft,
sein braunes Haupt, das schwer ist von den
Saeften,
die ungeduldig durch das Dunkel rollen,
und sein Gewand, das faltig, voll und wollen,
zu seinen Fuessen fliesst, ist stramm ge-
strafft
um seinen Armen, die, gleich starken Schlaeften,
die Haende tragen, welche traehmen sollen.
I, 413

Six clauses impede the flow of language. This involved train of thought is common in the Elegies, but the difficult, intricate sentences are alternated with short, simple ones. In the fourth Elegy an intense thought, heavy with emotion, is barely carried in eleven lines:

Hab ich nicht recht? Du, der um mich so bitter
das Leben schmeckte, meines kostend, Vater,
den ersten trueben Ausguss meines Muessens,
da ich heranwuchs, immer wieder kostend
und, mit dem Nachgeschmack so fremder Zukunft
beschaeftigt, prueftest mein beschlagnes Auf-
schaun, -
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 fuer mein bisschen
Schicksal,
hab ich nicht recht?

I, 698

In the same Elegy are scattered short, elliptical

sentences:

"Die ist voll."

"Hier. Ich bin davor."

"Ich bleibe dennoch."

"Es gibt immer Zuschauern."

Questions are much used by poets, but often they tend to be rhetorical, used for suggestive purposes. Rilke's Elegies form one searching, unanswerable question. He addresses himself to God, to Fate, to the Angel. The questions are weighted with meaning; they erupt from the depths of anguish. In early poems, Rilke used questions extensively. Der Nachbar consists entirely of questions, except for the concluding line:

Fremde Geige, gehst du mir nach?
In wieviel fernen Staedten schon sprach
deine einsame Nacht zu meiner?
Spielen dich hunderte? Spielt dich einer?
I, 392-3

In the Elegies, questions play an even more significant part: "Hab ich nicht recht?" I, 698 "Habt ihr Beweise?" I, 691 Four of the Elegies begin with searching questions, and the fourth Elegy ends with this series:

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
- - - - -
von einem schoenen Apfel? I, 699

--- und manchmal
schreckt ein Vogel und zieht, flach ihnen
fliegend durchs Aufschau'n,
weithin das schriftliche Bild seines ver-
einsamen Schreis. -
I, 724

The similes in the Elegies are equally spiritual. They are unusual and the more striking because they are unexpected:

reinlich und zu und enttaeuscht wie ein Postamt
am Sonntag
I, 722

--- und selbst den eigenen Namen
wegzulassen wie ein zerbrochenes Spielzeug.
I, 688

Repetition of words and phrases is another significant element in Rilke's language. In Buch der Bilder we noted its effect in Herbst where the word "fallen" is repeated many times, and in Bangnis where the phrase "im welken Walde" recurs. The repetition is not refrain-like, and in the Elegies it is massive, often emotional:

sondern die Naechte! Sondern die hohen, des
Sommers,
Naechte, sondern die Sterne, die Sterne der
Erde.
O einst tot sein und sie wissen unendlich,
alle die Sterne: denn wie, wie, wie sie ver-
gessen!
I, 710

In this passage the transposition of language - "sondern

die hohen, des Sommers, Naechte," - has a further enlarging effect. There are many such transpositions in the Elegies. They are not used for the sake of novelty but to heighten the language and give it majesty or, by contrast, a sombre tragic colouring:

Wo, ach, hin sind die Jahre, I, 694

Den sie von weitem erkennt, ihren Juengling,
was weiss er I, 693

O Baeume Lebens, o wann winterlich? I, 697

New words appear and persist in the Elegies. Two such words are "entwoehnt" and "verschont" and derivatives of them:

man entwoehnt sich des Irdischen sanft I, 688

Fruehe Geglueckte, ihr Verwoehnten der Schoepfung
I, 689

--- erleichtert gewoehnt er
sich in dein heimliches Herz --- I, 694

--- oder dass mein gebrauchtes
Gesicht in ihnen sich schont. I, 691

fuehlt sich unendlich verwoehnt und entbehrt
nichts.
I, 703

Nur die jungen Toten, im ersten Zustand
zeitlosen Gleichmuts, dem der Entwoehnung,
folgen ihr liebend. I, 723

The use of names in the Elegies is subtly different from their use in earlier works. They are more intimate in character, often related to a private experience in Rilke's life. Here, too, they become intelligible only if the reader takes the important step into Rilke's life. In the first Elegy, examples like "Gaspara Stampa," "die Tafel in Santa Maria Formosa," "Linos," are all charged with associative meaning. Unusual names are frequently used: "Tage Tobiae," "Chartres," "Bilder von Karnak," "Seele der Etrusker," "Pschent-Rand" are only a few examples. The names of flowers occur less frequently now, but they point up more than ever Rilke's passion for accuracy. In the tenth Elegy he writes:

siehe, zeigten vielleicht auf die Kaetzchen
der leeren
Hasel, die haengenden, oder
meinten den Regen, der faellt auf dunkles
Erdreich im Fruehjahr.-
I, 726

Rilke had first written "Weide" in place of "Hasel." He explains the change in a letter:

Es gibt also keine "haengenden" Weidenkaetzchen
--- Die Gedichtstelle, die ich auf die sach-
liche Richtigkeit hin kontrollieren wollte,
steht und faellt damit, dass der Leser mit dem
ersten Gefuehl, gerade dieses Fallende der
Kaetzchen ergreife und auffasse, --- Ich weiss
also, was ich wissen musste und vertausche im
Text "Weide" gegen "Hasel."
Aman-Volkart, June, 1922, Brief 365

The adjective, the participle, and the interjection have acquired new significance in the Elegies. The adjective has always been an important element, and it evolves and changes as Rilke's language grows. We have noted its lavish use and ornate character in Erste Gedichte and Die Fruhen Gedichte. In Buch der Bilder it has become an organic element, used more sparingly to qualify and restrict. In the Elegies, adjectives are emotionally charged, and have gained in imaginative expressiveness and inherent mystery: "dunkelen Schluchzens," "der riesige Ruf," "wuergendem Wachstum," "unvordenklicher Saft," "teilnahmslosen Teich," "auf unsaeglichem Teppich," "der grimmigen Einsicht," "milden, muldigen Bildern." "Leise" was a favourite adjective in early poems. It rarely occurs at this stage. Instead "rein" is used with new and ever changing shades of meaning:

in ihr reines Gesicht nicht aus dem reinen Ge-
stirn? I, 693

Faenden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes,
schmales
Menschliches, einen unseren Streifen Fruchtlands
zwischen Strom und Gestein.
I, 692

--- fuer einen reinen Vorgang. I, 699

ein erworbenes Wort, reines, den gelben und blauen
I, 718

ein reiner bejahender Tag.
I, 709

Rilke's ways of emphasizing the participle are different and peculiar to his own language. He uses the participle as a participle proper, but also as a noun, as an adjective or adverb, or in combinations of these uses. Accumulated, they produce an effect of grand, sweeping intensity. In the Elegies, they express novel ideas and sensations and lend an original meaning to them:

es bleibt uns die Strasse von gestern
und das verzogene Treusein einer Gewohnheit
I, 685

Of the interjection, Wolfgang Kayser has said:

Ein kundgegebener Ausruf des Schmerzes, des Jubels, der Klage, stellt demnach, das Urphaenomen des (sprachlich) Lyrischen dar; in der Interjektion Ach! wurzelt sozusagen alle Lyrik.⁵

Rilke uses the interjection economically but very effectively. In the Elegies, they convey joy and sorrow and deep emotion as never before:

--- O Laecheln, wohin? O Aufschaun. I, 690

O des Blutes Neptun, --- I, 693

Wo, ach, hin sind die Jahre, --- I, 694

Wo, o wo ist der Ort --- I, 704

Ach, in den andern Bezug, wehe ---
I, 717

The Elegies cover such immense spaces of thought and experience that contrasts in language are needed to diversity the tempo, the pitch, and the tone. The seventh Elegy opens majestically, emphatically:

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,
I, 709

Then the lyrical tone takes over:

Hiersein ist herrlich. Ihr wusstet es, Maedchen,
ihr auch,
die ihr scheinbar entbehrtet, versankt -
I, 710

In the celebrated ninth Elegy, a series of short lines, marked by sustained alliteration, gives a light and quiet interval before the concluding organ tones of praise to the angel:

Zwischen den Haemmern besteht
unser Herz, wie die Zunge
zwischen den Zaehnen, die doch
dennoch, die preisende bleibt.
I, 719

In the Elegies, alliteration may not occur for long stretches, and then be used profusely where it can contribute to the final, exhaustive expression of thought. It is profoundly linked to the inner meaning of language, so that it is part of it and not merely a decorative device:

--- Und verschluckte den Lockruf
dunkelen Schluchzens.

I, 685

It may add to expression by stressing unusual thoughts:

--- sondern die ganze
lautlose Landschaft ---

I, 696

und fallen ein auf teilnahmslosen Teich.

I, 697

The adjectives "lautlos" and "teilnahmslos" are underlined by the alliteration. Frequently Rilke combines alliteration with vowel sounds: und niemals Nirgends ohne Nicht: I, 714

Und sie leitet ihn leicht durch die weite
Landschaft der Klagen,

I, 724

mitten im Schicksal stands, im vernichtenden,
mitten
im Nichtwissen - Wohin stand es, ---

I, 712

Vowel sounds have always been a feature in Rilke's work, and with the later poems his technique is masterly. In Erste Gedichte we find entire poems modelled on a single vowel sound:

Das ist mein Streit
Sehnsuchtgeweiht
durch alle Tage schweifen.
- - - - -
weit aus dem Leben reifen,
weit aus der Zeit!

I, 103

Here Rilke extracts from the "ei" sound the many possibilities relevant to his theme. Compare this with the skilful use of the "ae" sound in the seventh Elegy:

--- Aber nicht sie nur
kaeme --- Es kaemen aus schwaechlichen Graebem
Maedchen und staenden --- Denn, wie beschraenk
ich,

I, 710

or the "au" and "ei" sounds in the tenth Elegy:

Schaukeln der Freiheit! Taucher und Gaukler des
Eifers!

I, 722

or the sombre "u" sound in the third Elegy:

O des Blutes Neptun, o sein furchtbarer Dreizack.
O der dunkle Wind seiner Brust aus gewundener
Muschel.

I, 693

Assonance is closely related to vowelism. Rilke uses

it to bind his words together, creating greater density through the relationship of sounds. Often, as in "Tauer und Gaukler," it is a natural concomitant of the rhyme, alliteration, and vowel music in the poem.

The beginnings and endings of the Elegies are masterly examples of Rilke's mature skill with language. The opening words are given importance in that they set the tone and atmosphere of the poem. Four of the Elegies - the first, fourth, fifth and ninth - begin with a searching question. This is fitting, for the whole work is an inquiry into, and a lament about the state of extreme loneliness and confusion which Rilke has endured. Not until this point in time has Rilke attained the linguistic power necessary to give shape and form to the feelings generated by the great conflict. The questions are urgent, linked with his feeling of insignificance, but they also carry infinite expectations:

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hoerte mich --- I, 685

O Baeume Lebens, o wann winterlich? I, 697

Wer aber sind sie, sag mir, die Fahrennden, diese
ein wenig
Fluechtigern noch als wir selbst, --- I, 701

Warum, wenn es angeht -----
sich sehnen nach Schicksal? I, 717

The second, third and eighth Elegies begin with a remarkably compressed and definite statement:

Jeder Engel ist schrecklich. I, 689

Eines ist, die Geliebte zu singen. I, 693

Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur das Offene.
I, 714

The sixth, seventh, and tenth begin with a flood of intuitive certainty, as if the sorrow experienced has become fruitful. Only a richly experienced life can develop such maturity of sorrow, and the length and majesty of these openings befits the complex thought:

Dass ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen
Einsicht,
Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engel.
I, 721

The endings are even more clearly set off. They are significant in thought, making the poet's most profound statement, while the language brings the poem to an artistic conclusion. The integration of thought is completed in each case by characteristic language.

Schliesslich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr---
I, 688

Faenden auch wir ein reines, verhaltenes, I, 692

tion for this final synthesis of sensuality and deep religious feeling. We must, therefore, approach a study of his language as one would the study of a living organism. There is a continuity in its growth which runs parallel to the extension of Rilke's life experience. His language cannot be broken down into clearly defined units, but must be seen as movement, as development, as constant changing of form. There is nothing hard and fast or static about it. Relationships are the key to language, as they are the key to life. Language cannot be studied apart from meaning. It is a process at work, a process that includes thought and feeling. It should be understood as a unity. Integration is another thing; it implies parts that can be examined separately. This cannot be done with a whole such as language is.

Rilke's later poetry engages the whole of his life again. It is part of a dynamic stream of movement, backward-looking and forward-looking at once. The understanding of the beginning depends upon an understanding of the end, and vice versa. The one determines the other, forming a whole which is bigger, impersonal, universal. The impressions of Malte and Neue Gedichte emerge again but they are different; they have lost their heaviness. What has changed is Rilke's depth of understanding, and this is reflected in the language he uses.

The Sonnets must be taken as a whole, just as Rilke's life work constitutes a whole. Taken in isolation, certain sonnets express the ultimate in dazzling joy, but in the context of the whole they are balanced by quieter, more reflective ones, and those in which the outlook appears as disconsolate. Joy is tempered by recollection of sorrow. The extremes of feeling cannot be maintained at full strength, and the result is a rhythm that is natural because it is human.

In the Sonnets, we do not find the startling isolation of certain images so evident in earlier poems. Images appear momentarily and abruptly. The weight of thought is translated into song. The result is an unevenness in language, which shows its basic spontaneity and is in contrast with the perfection of Neue Gedichte. The ideas, phrases and images of the sonnets were shaping themselves through the years, but the poetry could not be released until Rilke had isolated his personal difficulties and could give himself over to spontaneous utterance. In January, 1922, Rilke wrote:

Solang du Selbstgeworfnes faengst, ist alles
Geschicklichkeit und laesslicher Gewinn -;
erst wenn du ploetzlich Faenger wirst des Balles,
- - - - -
erst dann ist Fangen - Koennen ein Vermoegen,-
nicht, deines, einer Welt. Und wenn du gar
zurueckzuwerfen Kraft und Mut besaessest,
- - - - -

--- Aus deinen Haenden tritt
das Meteor und rast in seine Raeume.
II, 132

Not until the poet becomes receptive, becomes catcher of the ball, can he release the meteor from his hand and into space.

Receptivity or openness, is the key to spontaneous response. Rilke calls it "Offenheit." It is a state of silence, a listening to what he names the "Urgeraeusch." Mandel sees in it a state of "perfect telepathic hearing." He says:

Although man has cried louder than the storms and seas, there must be an over-balance of silence in the universe with its toneless stars to permit us to hear the crickets. When do we become listeners to the most ancestral of sounds, when do we resolve the conflict between the artifice of language and the totality of contact with nature?⁶

The gods speak through nature, if man will but listen and understand. Rilke admires the capacity of the Greeks to be receptive in Sonnet XXIX, Part II:

Stiller Freund der vielen Fernen, fuehle,
wie dein Atem noch den Raum vermehrt.
Im Gebaelk der finstern Glockenstuehle
lass dich laeuten. -----

Ist dir Trinken bitter, werde Wein. I, 770

Just as "Offenheit" is necessary to receptivity,

Near the end of his life, Rilke says it again in 0[^]

Lacrimosa:

Wie wird es deutlich und wie nah, dein Schmerz-
land,
unter des strengen Himmels Einheit. Wie ein
in seinem Liegen langsam waches Antlitz,
das waagrecht denkt, Welttiefe gegenueber.
II, 183

Rilke has made a life experience of death, and the Sonnets are a metaphor that express his experience and conviction. The vitality of these poems is rooted in Rilke's reaction to the world around him, as it stood after the upheaval of the war; in his reaction to himself and his state of development; and above all, in his intrinsic way of life. In the Elegies, "das Unsaegliche" weighed upon him. In the Sonnets a consciousness of "reiner Bezug" - pure relatedness - and of spontaneous transformation sweeps him along. Orpheus becomes his symbol through recapitulation of the mythical vision, but the poems are not a re-telling of this myth. They are praise of "Verwandlung" as the key to life's meaning. The old symbols recur, but the language is different, charged with private meanings and associations:

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Uebersteigung!
O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!
Und alles schwieg. Doch selbst in der Ver-
schweigung
ging neuer Anfang, Wink und Wandlung vor.
I, 731

The old joys of the senses and the intuition, the old sorrow and pain are reborn together in a final unity. There is no more struggle between intellect and intuition for intuition has regained its freedom. It is a world of paradox; it signifies freedom within the widest control, beyond the reach of the inhibiting intellect. Through "Ruehmen," praise, the paradoxical becomes complementary:

--- Sein Herz, o vergaengliche Kelter
eines den Menschen unendlichen Weins.
- - - - -
Er ist einer der bleibenden Boten, I, 735

"vergaengliche Kelter" complements "unendlichen Weins," and "bleibenden" stands beside "Boten." So also:

Nur im Raum der Ruehmung darf die Klage
gehn, - - - - -
Jubel weiss, und Sehnsucht ist gestaendig,
I, 736

Life and death are related in a happier, more earnest way than in the earlier works. In Die Fruehen Gedichte we have only a presentiment of reality; now we are given the mature experience of life, distilled from intuition. Death has become one with sorrow, and life with the rebirth. Death and life are organically linked, for death plays a part in life, and life is in death. Rilke feels at home in the land of "Klage" because of

his own long experience of sorrow, and his joy at re-
birth is both earthly and unearthly:

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.

I, 736

At the level of life and at the level of art, Rilke's
own progression may be traced through three major phases:
as an unconscious part of nature, reacting intuitively;
as a time of increasing self-awareness when he was
vulnerable because he reacted intellectually; finally
as a fusion of the two, a restoration of unity and
harmony through understanding. Rilke is describing this
very process in Sonnet XII, Part II:

Wolle die Wandlung. O sei fuer die Flamme
drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit ^{begeistert,}
Verwandlungen prunkt.
I, 758-9

Progress cannot take place without movement for:

Was sich ins Bleiben verschliesst, schon ists
das Erstarre;

Then comes "Trennung," "durchgehn," and "wandeln im

Wind:"

Jeder glueckliche Raum ist Kind oder Enkel von
Trennung,
den sie staunend durchgehn. Und die verwandelte
Daphne
will, seit sie lorbeern fuehlt, dass du dich
wandelst in Wind.

The next Sonnet in the group, with its rise and fall
of rhythm, is also very close to the central idea of
"Verwandlung."

Sei allem Abschied voran, als waere er hinter
dir, wie der Winter der eben geht,
Denn unter Wintern ist einer so endlos Winter,
dass, ueberwinternd, dein Herz ueberhaupt
uebersteht.

Sei immer tot in Eurydike -, singender steige,
preisender steige zurueck in den reinen Bezug.
Hier unter Schwindenden, sei, im Reiche der
Neige,
sei ein klingendes Glas, das sich im Klang
schon zerschlug.

- - - - -
Vorrat der vollen Natur, den unsaeglichen
Summen,
zaehle dich jubelnd hinzu und vernichte die
Zahl. I, 759-60

Two thoughts are expressed again and again; the
hope for mitigation of pain through acceptance of fate,
and the continuity of life through transformation. In
the Elegies it was "Bleiben ist nirgends;" now staying
is everywhere, staying is transformation. The poet's
function is to say this, to verbalize the transformation.
Orpheus is the symbol for this, the personification of

the surging vitality and the relatedness among the elements. For when the earth has forgotten:

zu der stillen Erde sag: Ich rinne.
Zu dem raschen Wasser sprich: Ich bin.
I, 771

The magic in the sonnets is in the language. "Engel," a favourite word in the elegies, occurs only once, but other plain words predominate: Tod, Herz, Gott, rein, Erde, Baum, Ohr, Maedchen, Schicksal. Rilke must penetrate into the essence of the thing to draw out its exact 'name' in a magical sense. The poet must name and praise. That which is nameless is lifeless. The name conjures up associations which link it with everything else. The poet cannot settle for das Ungefuehre, the approximate; giving the right name is the function and nature of art. Rilke's relationship with words was so sensitive that the meaning sought out the right word, and not the word the meaning.

The names used in the Sonnets are exact and suggestive of the precise shade of meaning: der Zauber von Erdrauch und Raute I, 734 suggests the rich world of the dead. The flower "Bienensaug" grows in the ancient Roman sacrophagus in Sonnet X, Part I. It is unusual but poetical, homely and remote. The old, plain nouns are used in close harmony with rich composite nouns

and sometimes with foreign words. In Sonnet V, Part I, "Metamorphose" fits naturally with "Orpheus." In Sonnet V, Part II, "Anemone" is balanced by "Blumenmuskel." In Sonnet XII, Part I, "Antennen fuehlen die Antennen/ und die leere Ferne trug," gives balance to the heart reaching out and beyond for signals from somewhere. Compound nouns are rich with meaning and association: "Doppelbereich," "Rosseblut," and in Sonnet XVII, Part I, this series occurs:

Sturmhelm und Jägerhorn,
Spruch von Ergrauten,
Maenner in Bruderzorn,
Frauen wie Lauten

When a particular noun is needed, Rilke creates one, but less often than in earlier poems. The noun must be precise rather than ornamental: "Fuehlung," I, 739 "Ruehmung," I, 735, "Genist," I, 731, "Beschwerer," I, 760, - the latter denoting people who impose their weight as does a paperweight, or "Briefbeschwerer." The noun "Bezug" is used in various situations, denoting exact shades of relatedness: "der klarste Bezug," I, 734, "reinen Bezug," I, 759, "wirklichem Bezug." I, 738

The adjective "rein," a personal word for Rilke, is used with ever intensified shades of meaning, as "reine Spannung," "rein eingetauschter Weltraum," I, 751,

"reinen Bezug," I, 759, etc. Graphic adjectives abound:
"die schmale Leier," I, 732, "unendlicher Empfang,"
I, 753, " [der] ruehmliche Teppich," I, 765, " [das]
muerrische Schicksal," I, 767, " [die] uebertriebene
Nacht." I, 766. For additional effect, Rilke may pile
modifier upon modifier:

klar zu werden, wach und transparent,
doppeldeutig, sonnig, erdig, hiesig -:
O Erfahrung, Fuehlung, Freude -, riesig!
I, 739

The prefix "ueber" also makes for intensification of
language: "ueberschreiten," I, 734, "uebertrieben,"
I, 766, "ueberwinternd, dein Herz ueberhaupt uebersteht."
I, 759. The present participle often serves as a modi-
fier. Rilke uses it in the comparative form: "singender
steige, preisender steige," I, 759, and even in the
superlative: "deine leidendste Erfahrung." I, 770
In Sonnet XII, Part I, present participles are used as
nouns, adding to the metaphorical character:

Wir sind die Treibenden.
Aber den Schritt der Zeit,
nehmt ihn als Kleinigkeit
im immer Bleibenden.

Alles das Eilende
wird schon vorueber 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.

I, 745

The need for condensation is such that Rilke resorts to short, concise sentences for economy of words:

"Da stieg ein Baum." I, 730. "Sie schlief die Welt."

I, 731. "Ein Gott vermags." I, 731 "Das genuegt." I, 738

"Die Erde schenkt." I, 738 When the end of such a sentence is also the end of a stanza, a firm, rounded quality results. Often, Rilke enhances the effect by combining one or more longer sentences with several short ones:

Wir gehn 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 staerken.
Was wissen wir von ihrem Teil an dem?

I, 739

Here three short sentences combine with one that is three lines long, and includes the enjambement of "Eifersucht/der Toten." Elliptical sentences are also popular with Rilke. What is left unsaid, what the reader must supply, is as important as what is said: "Und schlief in mir." I, 731 "Du mein Freund bist einsam,

weil ---." I, 741 "Schreien den Zufall." I, 768 In
Sonnet XI, Part I we have:

Weg und Wendung. Doch ein Druck verstaendigt.
Neue Weite. Und die zwei sind eins.

Aber sind sie's? Oder meinen beide
nicht den Weg, den sie zusammen tun?
I, 737-38

The reader must complete the idea that horse and rider,
seemingly one, are really worlds apart, as the ellipti-
cal allusion, "Namenlos schon trennt sie Tisch und
Weide," implies.

As in the Elegies, Rilke often uses a question to
open and set the tone of a Sonnet:

Hoerst du das Neue, Herr
droehnen und beben? I, 742

Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein --- I, 734

Deep, searching questions are scattered throughout:

Ach, der Erde, wer kennt die Verlust? I, 752

Ist die Kindheit, die tiefe, versprechliche,
in den Wurzeln - spaeter - still? I, 769

Was ist deine leidendste Erfahrung? I, 770

Unusual word order often will stress a passage or give
relief to a particular word. Like the participle, it
extends the meaning of the sequence:

Manche, des Todes, entstand ruhig geordnete
Regel, I, 757

Nun wie das Gruene, das Blaue heisse,
duerfen wir fragen: sie kanns, sie kanns!
I, 744

treiben sie ihre, des Kreischens, Keile. I, 768

Enjambement is very much a part of Rilke's rhythm.
A distinctive counter rhythm results when a sentence
ends at the beginning of a line.

--- Ins reine, ins hohe, ins thorig
offene Herz traete er anders, der Gott
wirklicher Milde. I, 756

Schon, horch, hoerst du der ersten Harken
Arbeit; wieder den menschlichen Takt
in der verhaltenen Stille der starken
Vorfruehlingserde. Unabgeschmackt
scheint dir das Kommende.
I, 767-68

Here "Arbeit" and "Vorfruehlingserde" receive particular
emphasis due to enjambement. Rilke often separates nouns
and adjectives in this way:

--- An der Kreuzung zweier
Herzwege steht kein Tempel fuer Apoll. I, 732
Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden
Reichen erwuchs seine weite Natur. I, 734

Sonnet XV, Part II is the sonnet to the fountain. It is
linked by enjambement and participles, making for a
flowing rhythm:

--- Und im Hintergrund

der Aquaedukte Herkunft. Weither an
Graebern vorbei, vom Hang des Apennins
tragen sie dir dein Sagen zu, das dann
am schwarzen Altern deines Kinns

vorueberfaellt in das Gefaess davor.

I, 760-61

The Sonnets are not linked by narrative or by metrics, but rather by pictorial ideas, and by language which extends from sonnet to sonnet. The metaphors and similes change, but the theme of yearning in spite of separation remains constant. As an example for the continuity of a sequence, Sonnets XII to XV, Part I may be singled out. In Sonnet XII there is the analogy of the antennae of the heart, reaching for relatedness:

Ohne unsern wahren Platz zu kennen,
handeln wir aus wirklichem Bezug. I, 738

The final triplet of this sonnet establishes the link between it and the next:

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

I, 738

And Sonnet XIII begins:

Voller Apfel, Birne und Banane,
Stachelbeere --- Alles dieses spricht
Tod und Leben in den Mund --- Ich ahne ---
Lest es einem Kind vom Angesicht, I, 739

The fruit conveys life and death into the mouth. It becomes

--- langsam namenlos im Munde?
Wo sonst Worte waren, fliessen Funde,
aus dem Fruchtfleisch ueberrascht befreit.

Word and sound have become taste-sensing joy. In Sonnet XIV the theme of sense and sensuality continue in the image of real and symbolic fruit:

Wir gehen um mit Blume, Weinblatt, Frucht.
I, 739

In Sonnet XV taste is transferred to sound, and sight to movement. The taste becomes the dance, the dancers become the orange:

--- Wenig Musik nur, ein Stampfen, ein Summen-:
Maedchen, ihr warmen, Maedchen, ihr stummen,
tanzt den Geschmack der erfahrenen Frucht!
Tanzt die Orange.
I, 740

The magic is "das Ruehmen." Orpheus can work any transformation through praise. Images are transformed into objects just by the naming of them:

Alles wird Weinberg, alles wird Traube,
I, 735
ruehme er Fingerring, Spange und Krug.
I, 734

The sum of Rilke's despair is contained in the

sixth Elegy:

--- Wir kennen den Kontur
des Fuehlens nicht: nur, was ihn
formt von aussen.
I, 697

In the Sonnets, the same feelings bring forth a rich symbolism. Orpheus, who neither lacks nor desires anything, has everything that Rilke longs for but can never have:

Singe die Gaerten, mein Herz, die du nicht kennst;
wie in Glas
eingegossene Gaerten, klar, unerreichbar.
Wasser und Rosen von Ispahan oder Schiras,
singe sie selig, preise sie, keinem vergleich-
bar. I, 765

In Neue Gedichte, Rilke had pursued the very essence, which may endure but for an instant. In so doing, a wealth of feeling was lost. The war did further violence to his sensitivity of perception. Yet for those who can still see and respond, life remains fruitful.

Was haben Augen einst ins umrusste
lange Vergluehn der Kamine geschaut:
Blicke des Lebens, fuer immer verlorne.
I, 752

The lovely things in life eventually return. "Erinnerung" - recollection - perpetuates a living moment, and through it the cherished symbols, as the anemone, the rose, fountains, mirrors, statues, fruit, the dance, return

to delight Rilke:

Siehe die Blumen, diese dem Irdischen treuen,
denen wir Schicksal vom Rande des Schicksals
leihn,
I, 760

This sonnet speaks of the flowers, and relates them to man and to the world - "was sind wir den Dingen fuer zehrende Lehrer." The last line suggests a world paradoxically evanescent, yet indestructible: "allen den stillen Geschwistern im Winde der Wiesen."

The Sonnets are rich in metaphors, similes and analogies. They suggest a world of meaning, and are of a more delicate and spiritual nature than ever before:

Ruehmen, das ists! Ein zum Ruehmen Bestellter,
ging er hervor wie das Erz aus des Steins
Schweigen.
I, 735

--- Die Erde
ist wie ein Kind, das Gedichte weiss;
I, 744

ploetzlich liegt er wie Ruhm in der Luft.
I, 754

The analogy of the anemone is particularly significant in terms of the "Offenheit" which made the Sonnets possible:

Wir, Gewaltsamen, wir waehren laenger.

Aber wann, in welchem aller Leben,
sind wir endlich offen und Empfaenger?

I, 754

Migliera, written in 1907, articulates the same ideas,
but less perfectly:

--- wir koennen also so
am Abend zugehn wie die Anemonen,
die Tiefe eines Tages in sich schliessend
- - - - -
das ist es, was wir sollen, zugehn lernen
ueber Unendlichem.

II, 206

Rilke writes to Lou Andreas-Salome in June, 1914:

Ich bin wie die kleine Anemone, die ich einmal
in Rom im Garten gesehen habe, sie war tags-
ueber so weit aufgegangen, dass sie zur Nacht
nicht mehr schliessen konnte. --- Ich bin auch
so heillos nach aussen gekehrt, darum auch
zerstreut von allem, nichts ablehnend, meine
Sinne gehen, ohne mich zu fragen, zu allem
Stoerenden ueber.

Lou, June 26, 1914, Brief 218

In this way, by looking at nature, Rilke gains deeper
understanding of his human condition. Rilke's Sonnets
contain many nature analogies:

Rose, du thronende ---
--- die volle, zahllose Blume,
der unerschoepfliche Gegenstand.

I, 754

Blumen, ihr schliesslich den ordnenden
Haenden verwandte ---

I, 755

The latter instance, the analogy of the wilting cut flowers and the hands of the maidens, relates back to the lovely "Maedchenlieder" of Die Fruenen Gedichte. Both the flowers and the maidens are revived by life-giving water. "Verwandlung" is visualized through this bold interplay of images and personifications.

Orpheus is hardly mentioned in the second part of the Sonnets, but he is no less present. He is in all things. Rilke sees himself in the same way, related to all as a thread in a great tapestry is part of the design:

Meide den Irrtum, dass es Entbehrungen gebe
fuer den geschehnen Entschluss, diesen: zu sein!
Seidener Faden, kannst du hinein ins Gewebe.
- - - - -
fuehl, dass der ganze ruehmliche Teppich gemeint
ist.

I, 765

Rilke blends intent and technique to a high degree of perfection in the Sonnets. His intent is to praise transformation; his technique is to visualize and verbalize transformation as a continuous process. Transformation is present everywhere in Rilke's language. Verbs become nouns, nouns become substantives, transience becomes permanence, time becomes literal. The drinker becomes the wine; the dancers become the orange, feeling becomes its name. Reality is turned into a metaphor:

"Sieh den Himmel, heisst kein Sternbild Reiter?" I, 737
Rilke looks for an enduring analogy for man.

Lightness is a distinguishing mark of the Sonnets. Rilke still makes use of his many devices for creating density, but he uses them differently, not massed as before. There is an immediacy about the way thought is translated into poetic language. In some of the more rapid-flowing Sonnets, there is little use of alliteration, vowelling or assonance. Sonnet XXII of Part II has only the recurrence of "ei":

Wir sind die Treibenden,
aber den Schritt der Zeit,
nehmt ihn als Kleinigkeit
im immer Bleibenden.
I, 745

The twenty-third Sonnet of Part II makes use of enjambement, but no other device:

O erst dann, wenn der Flug
nicht mehr um meinetwillen
wird in die Himmelstillen
steigen sich selber genug,
um in lichten Profilen,
I, 745

The slower-moving Sonnets contain many of Rilke's characteristic devices for creating density, but because of the way they are used, the language remains light in spite of them:

doch den Maschinenteil
will jetzt gelobt sein.
I, 742

Elsewhere, the longer line gives a slower, more reflective rhythm:

Alles Erworbene bedroht die Maschine, solange
sie sich erdreistet, im Geist, statt im Gehorchen zu sein.
I, 757

Direct utterance is used to give a simple, direct, compelling metre:

Da stieg ein Baum. I, 731

Tanzt die Orange. I, 740

Sonnet XX of Part I marks an impressive example of expression through rhythm:

Herueber vom Dorf kam der Schimmel allein,
an der vorderen Fessel den Pflock,
um die Nacht auf den Wiesen allein zu sein;
wie schlug seiner Maehne Gelock

an den Hals im Takte des Uebermuts,
bei dem grob gehemmten Galopp.
Wie sprangen die Quellen des Rossbluts!
I, 743-4

The heart-beat of the lonely animal in the night comes through in the strong emphasis on every stressed syllable, and the sound of hoof-beats runs through the entire poem.

Rilke's use of alliteration is not a separable device but forms an integral part of the language. Often it is intimately connected with vowel sounds, and both alliteration and vowel sounds are enhanced thereby. There are many instances of alliterative word pairs: "Weg und Wendung," I, 737; "Sternbild unserer Stimme," I, 736; "Mädchen zum Manne," I, 764. In "Persisches Heliotrop" Rilke expresses his delight in vowel harmony:

Denn sieh: wie süssere Worte nachts in Sätzen
beisammenstehn ganz dicht, durch nichts getrennt,
aus der Vokale wachem Violett
hindueftend durch das stille Himmelbett-:

I, 630

The sound of "a" adds speed in "zu dem raschen Wasser sprich: Ich bin," I, 771, and to "Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt/wie Wolkengestalten, I, 743. Sharp, accurate incision is denoted by the "ei" sound in "schneidet sie steifer den Stein," I, 757. "O" expresses hopelessness in "Bis es nach schrecklichem Pochen/ trat in das trostlose offene Tor." I, 747. Fulness is in "Vorrat der vollen Natur," I, 760. In "Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden/Reichen erwuchs seine weite Natur," I, 734, we have delicate transparency, and the realm of the dead lies heavy in "alles Geschaute/ und der Zauber von Erdrauch und Raute." I, 735. Where the Sonnet begins with an invocation, vowel sounds set the

tone of the poem:

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Uebersteigung!
I, 731

O diese Lust, immer neu, aus gelockertem Lehm!
I, 767

O Brunnen-Mund, du gebender, du Mund,
I, 760

Rose, du thronende, denen im Altertume---
I, 754

Assonance goes along with vowel music as part of Rilke's word-painting: "Frauen wie Lauten," I, 741. The unsurpassed lines that conclude the Sonnets are an example of both:

Und wenn dich das Irdische vergass,
zu der stillen Erde sag: Ich rinne.
Zu dem raschen Wasser sprich: Ich bin.
I, 771

In October, 1907, Rilke writes to Clara:

Der Maler duerfte nicht zum Bewusstsein seiner
Einsichten kommen (wie der Kuenstler ueberhaupt):
ohne den Umweg durch seine Reflexion zu nehmen,
muessen seine Fortschritte, ihm selber raetsel-
haft, so rasch in die Arbeit eintreten, dass
er sie in dem Moment ihres Uebertritts nicht
zu erkennen vermag.

Clara, Oct. 21, 1907, Brief 86

Rilke knew that inspiration alone does not create language. Language is perfected only after long periods of striving for knowledge and technique. The preparatory

work cannot be passed by. Inspiration joins the sum of the poet's labours and an unconscious work of creation may emerge. The Sonnets are such a creation. In them we have clear thought and deep feeling, combined in joyous urgency and expressed in the form of Rilke's language.

SPAETE GEDICHTE AND LETZTE GEDICHTE

In Volume II of Saemtliche Werke we find Sammlung der verstreuten und nachgelassenen Gedichte aus den Jahren 1906 bis 1926. These are the poems published separately as Spaete Gedichte and Letzte Gedichte, along with previously unpublished poems. The poems, written at various periods between 1912 and 1922, run parallel to the years of frustration and despair which followed Neue Gedichte. They were years of a new, developing language; years when Rilke felt he had lost the "Mitte" - the focus or centre from which he could function. The conflicts attendant upon this tortuous search for new elements of language are expressed with powerful concentration in many of these poems. The language becomes increasingly intellectual, sometimes abstract, yet personal emotion asserts itself more and more.

In this group we find a series of Biblical poems

in which Rilke finds release by projecting himself into the title figure. Auferweckung Lazarus, Christi Hoellenfahrt, and Der Tod Moses are the most notable. Confession-type poems are rare with Rilke. The subjective element is stronger, but by contrast, the language is concise and exact. Every word, every phrase, is chosen for the precise shade of meaning it can give. The clarity and purity of the language is reminiscent of Die Fruhen Gedichte, but it has maturity now. Rilke speaks with certainty, and only of necessity. There are longer intervals between poems written than ever before. Rilke has accepted the idea that only what is essential should be said, and that a poet's worth is not measured by his productivity but by the quality of his "Sagen." Each poem must help in its own way to express the unity of outer and inner reality, and the mystery of being. These poems arouse emotions - sometimes of fear but more often of love. With Rilke, confusion and lament are accompanied by purification and release. The inner conflict is being resolved.

Heerikhuizen sums up this period in Rilke's development:

Before 1910, everything had contributed, step by step, to exacerbate the crisis of his life; after that year everything contributed to its solution.⁷

Rilke's recovery during this period suffered many setbacks, but the checks in his advance are important too, because they contributed to the grandeur of the final outburst. The early poems were written in the language of intuition. Then he tried consciously to subjugate the laws of human life to his will. They defeated him, but in the process they also demolished his obstacles of pride and fear. When these obstacles were gone, Rilke could again find his way back to the freedom of intuition.

Letters written at the beginning and at the end of this period show Rilke's urge to push out the boundaries of language and express a new dimension of inner space. He writes to Lou in December, 1911, about his feeling toward art:

--- es ist das Furchtbare an der Kunst, dass
sie, je weiter man in ihr kommt, desto mehr
zum Aeussersten, fast Unmoeglichen verpflichtet;
Lou, Dec. 28, 1911, Brief
144

This passion to transcend his own language at every stage intensified until the outpouring of 1922. In January, 1923, in the relaxed aftermath, he writes to Lou:

Seltsam abgestumpft bin ich, war es, zu meiner
Erstaunung, schon im Sommer-, gegen die Land-

schaft selbst, deren so tief erfahrene Grossartigkeit ich mir angestrengt und absichtlich vorhalten muss, um noch an ihr teil zu haben. Geht wirklich so weit die Abflachung unserer Sinne unter der immer angesetzten Gegenwart der sie beruehrenden Umgebung?

Lou, Jan. 13, 1923, Brief
374

This is indicative of the two years of relative inactivity which followed the Elegies and Sonnets. The Elegies had been the cord on which he ranged "die entrollten Perlen" of his poems, and the Sonnets were like a bright light that had risen after a long darkness. After this great work was done, Rilke could shed the burden of his anxiety and turn to inner gardenings. The new direction he will take is already suggested in the Sonnets:

Schon, horch, hoerst du der ersten Harken
Arbeit; wieder den menschlichen Takt
in der verhaltenen Stille der starken
Vorfruehlingserde. Unabgeschmackt

scheint dir das Kommendx. Jenes so oft
dir schon Gekommene scheint dir zu kommen
wieder wie Neues. Immer erhofft,
nahmst du es niemals. Es hat dich genommen.
I, 767-8

The writing of the Sonnets brought Rilke yet closer to the French language which he had always known and loved. He worked on translations of Valéry and Verlaine, and the poems that do appear are more than ever akin to Valéry's. Nature analogies appear again

extols in Der Magier. II, 150 The poet is like the magician, the weaver of spells, like Valéry's Charmes. The poet penetrates to the essence of things and binds words to his will.

Three poems, ascribed by Ernst Zinn to the twenty-third of February, 1922, throw further light on Rilke's state of mind. He now remembers his childhood with gentleness, and he blames his adult bewilderment not on barrenness but on profusion. In Neigung he proclaims "Alles ist Ueberfluss," II, 139-40, and:

--- Wie koennten wir jemals Verkuerzte
oder Betrogene sein: wir mit jeglichem Lohn
laengst Ueberlohnnten ---.

This poem is a grateful acceptance of relatedness, analogous to the inclination of the hills to the Rhône valley:

wo sich ein Huegel langsam, mit sanften Ge-
laenden
zu der empfaenglichen Wiese neigt,

Manchen ist sie wie Wein, II, 139, written on the same day, is a testimony to Rilke's response to art. The cryptic nature of the lines is characteristic of this period. The reader is assumed to be acquainted with Rilke's terminology and use of metaphor. Unity of life and death is part of the realm of pure contradiction,

Gedulden unter dem Blau!
Was wir dem Schweigen verschulden,
macht uns das Reifen genau!
Auf einmal lohnt sich der Glaube:
Dory Von der Muehll, Feb. 7, 1923,
Brief 377

In 1924 another spontaneous, if smaller flood of poetry welled up. Some of these poems of 1924 contain traces of both the Elegies and Sonnets, but the language is more peaceful. The vulnerability of human beings is accepted. This poetry is not a decline; rather it is as if Rilke were continuing in a volplange, without conscious use of his combative powers. The poem Da dich das gefluegelte Entzuecken, II, 157, outlines Rilke's hope of future achievement:

Mitzuwirken ist nicht Ueberhebung
an dem unbeschreiblichen Bezug,
immer inniger wird die Verwebung,
nur Getragensein ist nicht genug.

Deine ausgeuebten Kraefte spanne,
bis sie reichen, zwischen zwein
Widerspruechen --- Denn im Manne
will der Gott beraten sein.

Rilke's attitude to life is one of dignity, part of the surrender "der Tiefbesiegte, von immer Groesserem zu sein." I, 460 But facile adoration of nature is past:

Starker Stern, der nicht den Beistand braucht,
den die Nacht den andern mag gewaehren,
- - - - -

bis zuletzt verkläert und nie verkohlend,
niedersinkt, wohin die Sonne sank:
tausendfachen Aufgang ueberholend
mit dem reinen Untergang.

II, 482

Other poems of this group are Vorfruehling, Eros,
Der Magier, Das Fuellhorn, Welt war in dem Antlitz der
Geliebten, Durch den sich Voegel werfen ---, An der
sonngewohnten Strasse, Die Frucht. The language is
deliberate in tone, clear, composed and robust; ripened;
rich in imagery; disciplined in rhythm; close to life.
Die Frucht, II, 148, embodies the new feeling of com-
pleteness and shows how far Rilke has ventured into
new spaces. In this poem he tries to express the feeling
of the flower and the struggle in the swelling fruit.
He sees through the outer shell to the dynamic beginning,
and to the triumphant end, which has within its core
the seed of another beginning. It is a majestic cycle;
an ascent "wider den teilnahmslosen Raum," and a falling
back "zurueck in seinen Mittelpunkt." All relationships
have been resolved and oriented toward a new "Mitte":

Schwerkraft

Mitte, wie du aus allen
dich ziehst, auch noch aus Fliegenden dich
wiedergewinnst, Mitte, du Staerkste.

Stehender: wie ein Trank den Durst
durchstuerzt ihn die Schwerkraft

Doch aus dem Schlafenden faellt,

wie aus lagernder Wolke,
reichlicher Regen der Schwere.
II, 179

A new dimension of poetry has been created. The object is isolated from its environment, presented so that abstract properties are personalized and specific ones made abstract. In Schwerkraft, weight falls from the sleeper like rain. In Handinneres, II, 178, hands walk on water. Nothing is what it seems, but possesses a ritualistic meaning. Rilke's unmistakable stamp is in the transience and momentariness of experience. For him, renunciation meant giving up the ordinary life and turning himself so that the "Innenraum" absorbs the external into a "Weltinnenraum." Rilke uses the analogy of the swing to show how the poet must overshoot or transcend his original position.

Da schwang die Schaukel durch den Scherz.-,
der Schatten wars des Baums, an dem sie haengt.
- - - - -
So lass uns herrlich einen Baum vermuten,
der sich aus Riesenwurzeln aufwaertsstammt,
durch den unendlich Wind und Voegel fluten
und unter dem, im reinen Hirtenamt,
die Hirten sannen und die Herden ruhten.
II, 176

This is the larger picture of the poet's function. Such thoughts are also expressed in:

Schaukel des Herzens. O sichere, an welchem
unsichtbaren

Aste befestigt. Wer wer gab dir den Stoss,
dass du mit mir bis ins Laub schwangst.
Wie nahe war ich den Fruecten, koestlichen.
Aber nicht Bleiben
ist im Schwunge der Sinn. Nur das Nahesein, nur
am immer zu Hohen ploetzlich das moegliche
Nahsein.

II, 254

Instead of "Selbstgeworfnes fangen," instead of "Mit-
wirken," Rilke has transcended both to take part in:

Ballspiel fuer Goetter. Spiegelspiel, in dem
vielleicht drei Baelle, vielleicht neun sich
kreuzen,
II, 255

In the same poem, Rilke affirms that it has all been
worthwhile:

Nur dies. Und dafuer war die lange Kindheit,
und Not und Neigung und der tiefe Abschied
war nur fuer dieses. Aber dieses lohnt.

Physical and spiritual are one in the "Weltinnenraum,"
where being is experienced through the highest degree
of intuition. This is the ultimate reality. The dividing
realities of life - as inner, outer; man, woman; body,
soul; life, death - are merged in a greater unity.
Contradictions become pure, "rein," for they are comple-
mentary parts:

Brau uns den Zauber, in dem die Grenzen sich
loesen,
immer zum Feuer gebeugter Geist!

Diese, vor allem, heimliche Grenzen des Boesen,
die auch den Ruhenden, der sich nicht ruehrte,
umkreist.

II, 466

Vorfruehling, II, 158, shows Rilke as the recorder of the minute changes and delicate nuances in nature. It is as if he were the "Antennae" which he praises in the sonnets, registering and expressing every variation with sensitivity and accuracy, relating every experience to his art, pushing the language ever outward. This is vision, rather than just observation. In Vorfruehling the obstacle to movement, the "Haerte" of winter, has gone:

Haerte schwand. Auf einmal legt sich Schonung
an der Wiesen aufgedecktes Grau.
Kleine Wasser aendern die Betonung.
Zaertlichkeiten, ungenau,

greifen nach der Erde aus dem Raum.

II, 158

The essence of spring lives and works in Rilke, the music of its movement is in the language. Only the keenest perception can see "seines Steigens/Ausdruck in dem leeren Baum." Sensual and spiritual perception have become one.

The early symbols of Rilke's language recur in these poems, but in a broader sense. The fountain images appears again in Vergaenglichkeit, II, 159, expressing

the ascent into life and the descent into death, or renewal. "Bleiben" and "halten" are key words. We must understand his question:

Aber Verfall: ist er trauriger, als der Fontaene
Rueckkehr zum Spiegel, den sie mit Schimmer
bestaubt?

in order to grasp the significance of the conclusion:

Halten wir uns dem Wandel zwischen die Zaehne,
dass er uns voellig begreift in sein schauendes
Haupt.

The words of transience run through the poem: "Flugsand der Stunden," "fortwaehrende Schwindung;" "nicht mehr tragenden Saeulen."

The compression of language surpasses that in any previous poetry. It is as if the focus, the "Mitte," has moved outward into a new region, and the yearned for vision, the far-off unattainable, is miraculously turned toward him:

So fasst uns das, was wir nicht fassen konnten,
voller Erscheinung, aus der Ferne an -
II, 161

In "Handinneres," II, 178, the essence of feeling is caught through illusion. The use of the verbs of wandering and change capture the tenderness of the hands and their power to transmit innermost feeling by

contact: "geht," "haelt," "empfaengt," "wandelnden,"
"wandert," "ankommt," as well as the nouns "Wege,"
"Verwandlerin," and "Ankunft."

These late poems still show fluctuations and variations. New turning points occur; new points of advance and transcendence are reached. Rilke wished to see life through in spite of whatever terror or pain it might hold:

Unaufhaltsam, ich will die Bahn vollenden,
- - - - -
durch die beginnliche Not
neuer Geburt zu entgehn?

II, 184

It is like a cry for a new breathing space, a new beginning, a rebirth. Another turning-point can be sensed in:

Jetzt waer es Zeit, dass Goetter traeten aus
bewohnten Dingen. - - - - -
Noch einmal sei es euer Morgen. Goetter.
Wir wiederholen. Ihr allein seid Ursprung.
Die Welt steht auf mit euch, und Anfang glaenzt
an allen Bruchstellen unseres Mislingens ---

II, 185

The language varies with the mood of the poem. Vollmacht, II, 187, and Elegie, II, 271, offer such a contrast in mood. Vollmacht echoes the thought of Sonnet II, Part II. It is an urge for experience:

--- in den Lueften der Fruethe

fuehlten den graden Betreff!
Solches war uns bestimmt. Leichte
beschwingte Erscheinung.

Elegie feels that the descent into the 'all' is near:

---- Nicht-Sein. Weisst du's, wie oft
trug uns ein blinder Befehl durch den eisigen
Vorraum
neuer Geburt --- Trug: uns?
II, 273

Opposites run through this poem: praise and lament;
memory and intimation; melancholy and rhapsody:

niemand verhuefje uns je wieder zum Vollsein, als
der
einsame eigene Gang ueber der schlaflosen
Landschaft.

The magical act of naming, so characteristic of Rilke,
is never more evident than in the late poems. He is
like the magician:

Er ruft es an. Es schrickt zusamm und steht.
Was steht? Das Andere; alles was nicht ist,
wird Wesen. ----
II, 150

The abstract is made concrete, the concrete abstract,
by "das beschwoerende Wort." By penetrating into lan-
guage and binding words to his will, he shrinks the
world into the essence. The opening lines of the poems
give the key word, define it by analogy, then elaborate
and transform it:

Musik: du Wasser unsres Brunnenbeckens,	II, 267
Quellen, sie muenden herauf, ---	II, 162
Schaukel des Herzens. O sichere, an welchem unsichtbaren ---	II, 254
Nacht. Oh du in Tiefe geloestes Gesicht an meinem Gesicht.	II, 178
Mitte, wie du aus allen dich ziehst, ---	II, 179
Dumpfe Erde: wie hiess es, ihr jeden Stein entringen als wie ---	II, 145
Schweigen. Wer inniger schwieg, ruehrt an die Wurzeln der Rede.	II, 258
Dies ist Besitz: dass uns vorueberflog die Moeglichkeit des Gluecks.	II, 152
Falter, ueber die Kirchhof-Mauer heruebergeworfen vom Wind,	II, 168

Elsewhere, Rilke sets the tone of the poem by beginning with an interjection, as "Ach" or "O":

O hoher Baum des Schauns,	II, 180
Aber die Winter!	II, 183
Ach, nicht getrennt sein	II, 184
Ach, wie beschaeftigt wir sind	II, 282
Ach, im Wind geloest,	II, 490

He may begin with a searching question:

Warum vergessen? ---	II, 286
Wie geschah es? Es gelang ---	II, 155

Entging ich je --- Bereich? II, 154

Welcher bist du, mein lieber Stern?
II, 211

Occasionally, Rilke experiments with a new structure of poetry. An unusual example is

Taube, die draussen blieb, ausser dem
 Taubenschlag
 II, 318

where the lines can be read in several ways. The ideas in this poem are as bold and daring as the structure, yet the lines are tightly interlocked. By transcending the limitations of language, he makes the limitations more meaningful. Just as the dove that has left its home, or the ball - "Ach der geworfene, auch der gewagte Ball/fuellt er die Haende nicht anders mit Widerkehr" - have felt strangeness and terror, so the poet, too, must venture into the "Ueberall" and return greater for it.

The highest symbol for Rilke remains "der Hirt," the shepherd. It is an intimate expression of the poet's function as shepherd of the word. This is expressed in one of Rilke's last poems, written August, 1926. It begins:

Nicht Geist, nicht Inbrunst wollen wir entbehren:
eins durch das andre lebend zu vermehren,
sind wir bestimmt, und manche sind erwählt,

go when expressed in another language, can broaden the whole experience. Nuances in one language are impossible to duplicate in another. Rilke admired the enchanting quality with which Paul Valéry was able to express the relation between body and soul. Rilke had experienced it in much the same way. He could appreciate the physical as well as the spiritual, for many of his impressions were received through the body. Only through the body can we participate in the world. The body enriches the soul and should be valued for this. Rilke wished to experience these rich sensations in the life of the French language. By doing so, he found new contrasts of subtlety, and boldness, and new words, sometimes more exact words, to express thoughts and feelings.

Rilke's originality does not lie in his ideas. His views may be open to attack, but this does not detract from their value. His ideas were genuine and, at the time of their inception, they were necessary to him. His strength lay in the subtle and persuasive way he articulates his thoughts. Moreover, Rilke's instinctive creation did not always correspond with his deliberate thinking. He says what he must say. This was his way of life. Survival is all - "Ueberstehn ist Alles." Patience, "Geduld," practised in a positive way makes growth and transformation possible. For transformation,

"Verwandlung," to take place, the poet must be open and receptive as the anemone, waiting, enduring and working.

Rilke created to live, and when language failed him, he, like Valéry, fell silent. The temptation and the need for silence often presented itself. He had learned that what mattered was to say the essential. With the war, the essential was in danger, and Rilke resorted to silence. So eloquent is silence that what Rilke did not say during the last three years of the war expressed more than words could convey. This was not a silence to spare himself, as was the case at other, less crucial times. Silence can be a luxury, can be "Schonung," and this only the gods may enjoy:

Ueber dieQuelle geneigt,
ach, wie schweigt Narziss;
und in den Waeldern schweigt
schweifende Artemis.

O welches wehe Los:
reden trotzdem;
fluestert man liebend bloss,
hoerts Polyphem.

II, 133

Again we have the lines:

--- Nichts ist so stumm
wie ein Gottes Mund. Schoen wie ein Schwan
auf seiner Ewigkeit grundlosen Flaeche:
so zieht der Gott und taucht und schont sein
Weiss.

II, 53

Such silence is the prerogative of the gods. Man is not justified in sparing himself for his own sake.

Certain key words are constant throughout Rilke's work. As his language develops and transcends itself in a widening spiral, we may see transformations in the meanings of many key words. One such word is "Nacht." In Der Fremde, I, 626, "Nacht" is the synthesis of searching and wandering. In Die Grosse Nacht, II, 74, the original idea has been penetrated and transformed until everything appears in a new way. The word "Engel" can only be followed in all its subtle changes by entering into Rilke's life. In Die Fruhen Gedichte, Rilke has already shaken off the yoke of the guardian angel: Ernster Engel aus Ebenholz, I, 160. As Rilke's spirit grew, the angel waned. The soul grew conscious of its power but also of its impotence. The angel of ebony became a wrestler with the soul in a struggle that can only end in victory for the angel. But the soul, the "Tiefbesiegte von immer Groesserem," is exalted by the defeat. In Neue Gedichte, the angel demands everything of the soul, driving it to its extremity. An example is Der Engel, I, 508. Then, in the Elegies, the angel has become absolute and is indifferent to the situation of man:

Ueber uns hinueber spielt dann der Engel. I, 699

Man feels yet more powerless because nothing is demanded of him. The relationship has changed from one of subordination to longing on the part of man for the unattainable:

Wer, wenn ich schrie, hoerte mich denn aus der
Engel
Ordnungen? - - - - -
- - - - - Denn das Schoene ist nichts
als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch
grade ertragen,
I, 685

The symbol of the rose has never left Rilke's poetry. Like "Engel," "Raum," "Nacht," and other key words, it gathered many associations and meanings, some of them contradictory. In the earliest poems, the rose represented festive, sentimental love; or it stood for longing; or for the grave. In Neue Gedichte it was the work of art, the transcendental flower that mirrored what was heavenly. In the late poems, it came to represent "reiner Widerspruch," the pure contradiction that sums up Rilke's own life. Both Orpheus and Narcissus are related to the rose, the medium in which all opposites are reconciled and all tensions are resolved. Now everything belongs to the great unity - life and art, abstract and concrete, staying and parting, sensuality and spirituality, isolation and participation. The rose is a surrogate, expressing for Rilke both exterior

tenderness and interior will. In Ankunft, II, 188,
written in June 1926, it symbolizes the birth-bed:

ploetzlich gegen dir ueber, werd ich im Auge
geboren.

The final rose epitaph:

Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust,
Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel
Lidern.

II, 185

achieves the equilibrium of the last paradox for Rilke.

Words had unlimited possibilities in Rilke's hands.
Let us take the word "Winter." The strands of thought
Rilke has expressed in the fourth Elegy, in the Sonnets,
and elsewhere, are drawn together in the late poems:

Aber die Winter! Oh diese heimliche
Einkehr der Erde. Da um die Toten
in dem reinen Rueckfall der Saefte
Kuehnheit sich sammelt, ---

II, 183

Here, the hibernating strength of winter is expressed.
Winter is a time of secret withdrawal to a place where
the past can nourish the roots of the future. Lament
is done with. Rilke has only praise and tranquillity.
He has returned to intuitive perception, and to under-
stand the language of the late poems, the reader too

must be guided by intuition.

CONCLUSION:

The important thing about the language of the late poems is that the dense, closed style of the "Dinggedicht" was left behind. New elements have entered in. Devices are used more sparingly and the language is lighter because alliteration, vowelism and assonance are used less. Personal emotion comes to the surface as it did in early poems, and we have more interjections and exclamation marks. Abstractions occur more frequently. Rhythmical repetition is used and new words are coined. The accent is on expression rather than on structural and verbal harmony. The inner being, the hidden existence is praised in language more spiritual than ever before. The perceptible and experienced are sublimated into "das Unsaegliche." Thus, Rilke's language is developed as a living, organic growth, and as such, it fits into no system of thought or philosophy. Rilke's language moves away from any confining structure.

Two letters, one to Kappus in 1903, the other to Hulecwicz in 1925, will show the continuity of Rilke's thoughts about life and art. To Kappus he writes:

Wie die Bienen den Honig zusammentragen,
so holen wir das Suesseste aus allem
und bauen Ihn. Kappus, Dec. 23, 1903, Brief 21.

To his Polish translator he writes, twenty years later:

- - - unsere Aufgabe ist es, diese vorlaeufige,
hinfaellige Erde uns so tief, so leidend und
leidenschaftlich einzupraegen, dass ihr Wesen
in uns "unsichtbar" wieder aufsteht. Wir sind
die Bienen des Unsichtbaren.

Hulewicz, Nov. 13, 1923,
Brief 410

The poet must listen to the things, and see into the life of them, for there the final truth, the ultimate reality is to be found. The plastic artists could do this more easily than the poet, because their medium is the stuff of the earth, whereas the poet must wrestle with language. Rilke spent his lifetime developing his own, unique language. What he has given us is solitary and pure, all of one piece, related to the earth and to God. It is a language that grew and ripened through the stages of Rilke's development:

Oh ich weiss, ich begreife
Wesen und Wandel der Namen;
in dem Innern der Reife
ruht der urspruengliche Samen,

nur unendlich vermehrt.

Dass es ein Goettliches binde,
hebt sich das Wort zur Beschwoerung,
aber, statt dass es schwinde
steht es im Gluehn der Erhoerung

singend und unversehrt.

II, 256-7
Christmas, 1923

NOTES

Quotations from Rilke's work are from Saemtliche Werke, 6 vols., ed. Ernst Zinn, Insel-Verlag, Wiesbaden. They are documented in the text, immediately following the quotation, as: Wintermorgen, I, 27.

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³Thirty One Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, introd. and trans. Ludwig Lewisohn. New York: The Buchhurst Press, Bernard Ackerman Inc., 1946, p. 7.

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⁴F.W. Van Heerikhuizen, Rainer Maria Rilke, His Life and Work, trans. Fernand G. Renier and Anne Cliff. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1951, pp. 247-8.

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⁷Heerikhuizen, p. 303.

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⁴Briefe aus Muzot, 1921-1926. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1937, p. 220.

CHRONOLOGY IN BRIEF

- 1875 - Rilke born, Dec. 4.
- 1886 -91 - Military school at St. Poelten and Maehrisch-Weisskirchen.
- 1894 - Leben und Lieder.
- 1896 - Wegwarten.
Larenopfer.
Acquaintance with Jacobsen.
- 1897 - At Schmargendorf-Berlin.
First Russian journey.
Die Weisse Fuerstin.
- 1900 - Mir zur Feier.
Second Russian journey.
Das Buch vom Moenchischen Leben.
At Worpsswede with Vogeler.
- 1901 - Married Clara Westhoff.
Ruth Rilke born.
Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft.
- 1902 - Das Buch der Bilder.
Meeting with Rodin.
First stay in Paris.
- 1903 - Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode.
Second stay in Paris.
- 1904 - Malte Laurids Brigge begun.
Visit to Rome.
Visit to Scandinavia - Ellen Key.
First poems of Neue Gedichte written.
- 1905 - Secretary to Rodin.
- 1906 - Estrangement with Rodin.
Met Kippenberg.
Das Buch der Bilder arranged.
- 1907 - Work on Neue Gedichte. Auguste Rodin. Ein Vortrag.
Met Cézanne.

- 1908 - Publication of Neue Gedichte.
- 1909 - New edition of Mir zur Feier as
Die Fruhen Gedichte.
Two Requiems.
- 1910 - Malte Laurids Brigge completed.
Met Marie von Taxis und Thurn.
- 1911 - Travel to Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt.
- 1912 - At Castle Duino.
First two elegies written.
Marienleben.
- 1913 - Travel to Spain.
Work on Elegies.
- 1915 - Work on Elegies.
Enlisted, Nov. 24.
- 1916 - Discharged, June 9.
- 1921 - At Castle Berg, Zurich.
Muzot rented.
- 1922 - Duineser Elegien completed.
Die Sonette an Orpheus written.
- 1923 - Rest cure at Schoeneck.
- 1924 - Translated Valéry.
New harvest of poems.
Cure at Val-Mont.
- 1925 - Muzot again.
At Sanatorium Val-Mont.
- 1926 - French poems.
Summer at Muzot.
Died, Val-Mont, Dec. 29, 1926.

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