

The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke Study Guide

**The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke by Rainer
Maria Rilke**

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Book 1, Rainer Marie Rilke : Chapter 1, Hours & Pictures

Book 1, Rainer Marie Rilke : Chapter 1, Hours & Pictures Summary

This book is a selection of the author's poems. These have been arranged under the titles within which they were originally published. One main feature of the edition used to create the summary is the reality of translation. The poems have been provided in both their original German and also, on a facing page, in their English translation. The change makes a dramatic difference. The verse form in the original language is often exemplary; whereas, the English versions typically lack the rhyming quality of the original.

The introduction is very helpful to those who are not already familiar with the Bohemian Rilke. His part of Bohemia was a German-speaking Czech area. This is land that later became Czechoslovakia. More recently still, Czechoslovakia has been dismantled into the Czech and Slovak Republics. The Austrians and German peoples were all speaking German. The German speaking peoples of Austria united politically first, which created the Austrian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bavaria is not part of Austria, but is what is now known as the South of Germany. This is a Catholic region, and it borders on Austria. It was the Austrians, not what are now called the Germans, that "annexed" Rilke's part of Czech Bohemia with the First World War. The Bohemians were unhappy, as it was forced submission and coercion rather than real choice. The native reaction was similar to that of British rule of Ireland - it was endured and often resented but did have some benefits. As a consequence of the political changes of the last quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the poet is sometimes called a German, sometimes an Austrian and at times, a Bohemian or even a Czech.

Book 1, Rainer Marie Rilke : Chapter 1, Hours & Pictures Analysis

The poems have are in a chronological order. The first comes from The Book of Hours which was published in 1905. The poem rhymes beautifully in German, but not in the same way in its English translation. Both versions- the original German and the English, have two stanzas. The first is 8 lines long, the second is 5 lines. Rilke begins by proclaiming he is anxious. This is done in a way that is specific to the German language. In German, a person can explain that he or she is the one who is having a feeling in a way that is a noun. This isn't really how it works in English. For this reason, the English translation of the poem is titled "I am the Anxious One," but in the German, that entire phrase is one word: Angstlicher, with two little dots above the "A" that is called an "umlaut." The second stanza of the poem focuses more upon relationship:



here the poet is a dreamer. He describes himself as wishing to be the very dream of another. The poem closes, after going stellar, in the City of Time. Again, this is an occasion when the linguistic difference is significant. "City of Time" is a transliteration - this is precisely what was written in German. The translator has written: "...the strange and distant city, Time." (p. 3). "City of Time" is an English version of the German way of writing, speaking and meaning; whereas, the translation is conceptually more English. This type of complexity, caused by the difference in English and German continues to be a factor throughout the book.

The excerpts come from three different books. The first of these is The Book of Hours. There are two samples from this book. One, which has been described in some detail, is called [I am, O Anxious One. Don't you hear my voice]. The second is labeled [I find you, Lord, in all Things and in all]. This second piece makes the observation that the divine can be found in all things in life.



Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 2, New Poems

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 2, New Poems Summary

The selections from New Poems are much more extensive than those of the preceding chapters. This is an amazing body of work. These poems were published in 1907 & 1908. The first of these, include short poems only.

The changes that take place as an effect of translation will not be emphasized. Here, readers are to understand that the English form is dominant. At the same time, this is recognized as a bit of a fiction - an illusion created by the summary writer's and the English readers' limitations. There are 3 poems about individual animal species. There is the panther - the poem writes of a restless captive, a powerful yet caged feline. The animal's motion is most notable. There is expressed pain about how the creature's will has been trapped by the bars of his cage.

These are followed by two images about people. The first of the two people is the poet's father, from the time his father was a young man before Rainer was born. The next portrait is about the poet himself. These conclude with a poem titled Spanish Dancer.

Next is the Gazelle. This is a 4-stanza poem. In the German form, there is rhyme. In the first stanza, the first and last line of the stanza rhyme. Between them is a rhyming couplet. In the second stanza, the first two lines form a rhyming couplet; the second two lines make another couplet. The third stanza has 3 lines rather than 4. The first line rhymes with the third. The middle line of the third stanza rhymes with the first line of the last stanza. The last two lines of the stanza are also perfectly rhymed. In the case of the this poem, the translator has succeeded in preserving some of the rhyme. The first and third lines of the first stanza rhyme imperfectly; the second and fourth lines rhyme perfectly.

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 2, New Poems Analysis

In reality, these poems pay homage to the animals that are the subjects. The animals serve as metaphors- the panther as a symbol of natural power and the predatory instinct, but this animal is all locked up in a zoo cage. The gazelle is a graceful herd vegetarian, not bright but beautiful, relatively gentle and rather innocent. The swan - beautiful, large, powerful is a special water fowl, not so much when contrasted to the panther but it can escape such an animal. The swan is also used a symbol of fidelity because swans mate for life making them a perfect symbol of "marriage."



Next there are two poems about the human condition. Each is rather short, amounting to approximately half a page in length. After those are two about nature - one is about weather, the other involves a time of day.

The next section of poetry shows a major change. The themes are more mythic and legendary in their proportions. The poetry itself is significantly longer. The first of these is dedicated to a stream of the female tradition. In the ancient world there were women termed 'heterae.'" These were woman who held a strange social position. Their reputation comes through history as having been a bizarre blend of proto-feminists, exceptionally gifted women, gender benders who associated with men and dressed like them, women who managed to overcome restrictive roles but were also marked by cultural sexual mores - there was the whisper of prostitution or the suggestion that these women may have been more sexually promiscuous.



Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 3, New Poems II

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 3, New Poems II Summary

Many of the women who were socially among men frequently and publicly were often unmarried and tended to be more highly educated than the so-called normal women of their culture. Rainer has created a poem dedicated to this special type of women.

This poem is more than three times the length of the previous one. It also has only four stanzas. The first of these is 32 lines long. The second is only 4 lines long. The third stanza is 9 lines long. The final stanza has 7 lines.

The next poem is titled Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes

Like the one immediately before it, this poem is based upon the poet's imagination combined with knowledge of the literary tradition that comes from the Grecian region of the Mediterranean Sea. This poem is a few pages long. As the title suggests it honors the ancient Greeks.

Alcestis follows. The first line of the English version is, "Then all at once the messenger is there," which nicely matches the first line of the next stanza, "But by this time he had broken through the shell / of his terror; and he thrust out both his hands / from the jagged holes, to bargain with the god." Here readers have the power of the classical theme in poetry.

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 3, New Poems II Analysis

To use a powerful image: the divine poet is like a disciple drunk on the wine at Christ's last supper. He [or she] is definitely really there, and very much with Jesus as God in mankind, but has overindulged and it shows. Rilke has been into the literary tradition again, and in the depths of this poem he cries out "Creon! Creon!" Whose name has been passed down to the people as being the name of a fictional character from the most famous Greek tragedies written by Sophocles: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone.

The next poem is the Archaic Torso of Apollo. Here, the poet is like many a museum visitor. The modern perception of the statue of a god personified. Apollo was the god of the Sun, of healing and of music. His oracles answered questions on his behalf, but unlike the Sun of our present day understanding, in the form of Apollo, the Sun readily took on the guise of a living man, embodied by his worshipers in statues as a



handsome, well-built man. The final line of the poem is strange, but does follow: "You must change your life," (p. 61). In an era where Sun worship simply means laying out in the Summer in order to absorb plenty of the Sun's rays, it strikes a chord of the psyche to see a symbol from the time when the Sun had outright religious temples on a par with modern churches and Hebrew temples and Mosques. Such a statue holds a strange and powerful place in the mind of the museum visitor and the poet and the reader.

Next is Black Cat, which in the German is Schwarze Katze. It is only four stanzas long, rather like the first poems in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. A poem called *The Flamingos* is followed by the Buddha in Glory. This final poem contains images of "infinite space" and "a billion stars go spinning through the night," (p. 69).



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 4, Requiem

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 4, Requiem Summary

The first poem in this section is "Requiem for a Friend." This is a poem that includes love, letting go, and straightforward grieving. It is pages long. There are a few stanzas. There is a new aspect to this one. This poem has paragraph indentations. The English version of the poem opens with, "I have my dead, and I have let them go," (p. 73). Further on down in the same stanza, at the first indentation, the line reads, "I thought you were much further on. It troubles me / that you should stray back, you, who have achieved / more transformations than any other woman," (p. 73). He writes in the early part of this poem about the fears that came up when the character to whom the poem is dedicated died. He writes that this is the main concern of the living. He goes on to write that the one who died might well also have frightened the one who died. This friend's name is finally given: this is a woman named Paula. Rilke writes of this fear she had, conjoined to dreams of his own during the night. He writes of waking up and feeling she was visiting, "...like a thief climbing in my window," (p. 73).

The poem moves after this to a discussion of traveling. The poet, or his narrative character, is moved to do so because of his communication with this ghost, or this memory of Paula. This shows when the poet asks Paula, "Tell me, must I travel?," (p. 75). Soon enough he writes of speaking to women who are out enough - who chat from their own doorways where they can access neighbors, passers by and their own homes and children. From this position they can interact and supervise. They can guard the door, stay at home and yet be at least a little bit out, a bit more open, a bit more interactive and freer. Then, the poem moves into a discourse of fruit and the appreciation of life. Rilke's narrator writes from this perspective - it isn't clear whether this Narrator is another woman, or is a man. Ultimately, there is over a page during which the poet describes how he will appreciate life's fruits and how he admired Paula for her ability to do so during her life. After that, he speaks directly to her death again, asserting that he is willing to look her death in the face.

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 4, Requiem Analysis

Later on, the same poem reads, "And so you died, as women used to die, / at home, in your own warm bedroom, the old fashioned / death of women in labor / ...the lament that we omitted. Can you hear me? / For this suffering has lasted far too long; / Do not return. If you can bear to, stay / dead with the dead. The dead have their own tasks," (p. 87). This is a unique example of the author's work in another manner. The Requiem to a

Friend is longer, running several pages in length. It is also the only piece taken from the book *Requiem* and used as its representative in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*.

The tone of the work is one of pondering, along with grieving. There is fondly remembering the dead and there is capturing and preserving feelings for the future. Perhaps the editor is right to have observed that something about this process may be like pressing flowers into books where they become keepsakes. Something is certainly lost, but likewise, there is something preserved.

The author's poetic skills are certainly showing here, as elsewhere in the text. Like much poetry there is a psychological movement in the chosen words between being in the moment and in touch with the activities of the day and then connection with the more intellectual traditions. The influence of the written word and the knowledge caused by formal education are evident in the author's work.

The tone is varied, depending upon the section of poetry. The author uses poetry to express his own sorrows and regrets. The use of poetry as a vehicle for the safe expression of deep and often troubled emotions is rather commonplace. In truth, all emotions have a safe harbor in poetry. In *Requiem* the old standard grief is eulogized.



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 5, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 5, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge Summary

These excerpts are from 1910. Each one has been written in prose, rather than as poetry. This is rather unusual but not unprecedented in the modern history of poets. The first piece of writing is titled "For the Sake of a Single Poem," and is about poetry. He writes of how the poems written in one's youth lack some of the vigor of the kinds of works that can be written from the more mature perspective. The second piece about faces is called "Faces." Like the preceding ones, it is most of one page long. It refers to rapidly shifting facial expressions, and about how even vast numbers of things often only appear to be infinite. Limitless often means "more than we could count." There is a paragraph about a woman who has "fallen into herself." The next one of these is also short and begins, "I am lying in my bed, five flights up, and my day, which nothing interrupts, is like a clock-face without hands," (p.95). This writing is about personal fears. The rhythm of the writing is different in the German and in the English.

Following this there is one called "The Bird Feeders." Here, the poet emphasizes the value of these. He also discusses how they indicate a certain wisdom. He mentions how it is that only birds go to bird feeders. There are two paragraphs. The second one begins, "Only don't ask the women anything when you see them feeding the birds," (p. 99). The author uses the process of feeding birds as a metaphor as a way of interpreting one's relationship with God and also with the reality as a writer of "fleeting experiences." The entire piece ends with Rilke explaining that feeding birds is a good activity, even when the birds are apt to have forgotten the entire experience shortly thereafter. He implies that this is the case whether one means women feeding birds or an individual relating to God.

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 5, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge Analysis

Each of these poems are straightforward in that the page-long pieces of prose are about what they are called. Fears, which is the third one, considers the ways that adults sometimes react to the difference in our lives between childhood and being an adult. The prose ends with an apt point. The poet expresses that when he really does get in



touch with his own childhood he discovers that it doesn't provide the idyllic bastion from adult life that one might hope. He concludes by fatalistically writing that having grown up has not helped the way he had hoped that it would. Many harbor such hopes. For some these are actualized but for others the truth is more akin to what Rilke has written of here, that while one anxiety or trouble may have been overcome it seems another lurks around the corner to take its place.

There are a few more short pieces in this section. The longest is five pages long. Following "The Bird Feeders" is "Ibsen," then "The Temptation of a Saint," "The Prodigal Son" - this is the longest one. It is all about how Rilke believes that the truth was that The Prodigal Son grew up well loved, felt a bit trapped by that, and went out into the world seeking to discover what he would do when he did not feel bound by those who love him. These poems work more on the dual level of describing a short scene from real life and intentionally using symbolism.



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 6, Uncollected Poems

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 6, Uncollected Poems Summary

This batch of 12 poems comes from the years 1913 - 1918. Some have their own titles; whereas, others have been named by their first line. It is divided into 3 parts, each with its own Roman Numeral. As usual, there has been some loss between the translations, but much of the value has been transferred successfully.

The poem "Ariel" is so named after a fictional character. Ariel was a character in a play, "The Tempest," written by the English playwright Shakespeare. "Ariel" is two stanzas long, the first far longer than the second.

After Ariel there is "Straining so hard against the strength of night." Here are a few lines from late in the poem: "We ignore the gods and fill our minds with trash. / For gods do not entice. / ... / ...Nothing is so mute / as a god's mouth..." (p. 127).

Writing is as much a natural expression as speech. Like speech, this second nature can be cultivated and can come to be well recognized. One of the greatest compliments that can be paid to any writer is for readers to report that despite the disadvantages of the printed word - the author's "voice" has somehow made itself apparent. Personality, style of expression, uniqueness - every great writer achieves this. The only alternative for a high quality writer is the ability to be an invisible mimic of others. Rilke has achieved this. By this point in the book, readers have had enough exposure to be able to identify this.

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 6, Uncollected Poems Analysis

A later poem in this group is "To Holderlin." The "o" has an umlaut, which these are two dots, which are part of the letter in some of the Germanic languages. The very first stanza is a reference to speed and to the whole idea of motion. It is very much like being at work: "We are not permitted to linger, even with what is / most intimate.," (p. 141). There is a time when being focused and busy is joyful, and then there are times when it is quite a trial or tribulation. These is one of those times. It is reflected and represented perhaps too much by the current world where speed seems to have come to mean everything. Still, the reason that it has appeared in Rilke's poetic piece "To Holderlin" is that even going back to ancient times, there has been such hustle and



bustle. This problem of those who are rushing through some part of their lives is not new. Rilke shares this truth.

The last piece from this group of uncollected poems is called "To Music." It is brief and is a new formulation. Here, the author has produced a more poetic work once again. What is markedly distinctive about it, is that it doesn't rhyme in German, let alone in English, even though it has been created and printed in a generalized poetic form. The piece is written in very brief phrases, and the length of the lines is diverse. The writing is set carefully upon the page, showing that modern poets think about the printed lay out of their works. In ancient days, when the practice of writing was still young and rarely used, poets would not typically think much about this.



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 7, Duino Elegies

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 7, Duino Elegies Summary

This book is dedicated to the elegy, which is a specific poetic form, so much so, that the ancient Greeks had a goddess Elegis, who was Mistress of the elegiac verse form. The tone of these poems is distinctive when contrasted with that of the others. The timing is also different. They are listed as written in both 1912 and 1922. The entire group runs approximately 50 pages, with the German on the left-hand page and the English translation printed out on the right hand side. The elegies are named by their number. Each of these is a few pages long.

The first one introduces the topic of angels. Once again poets seem like men and women a bit tipsy or drunk from the wine of Christ or the nectar of some other deity, however minor or backdated. The poet Blake was of a similar ilk, in that he writes poems that are intensely spiritual and that passionately engage both angels and demons—yet all the while, half of it is fiction - but which half? The whole thing is covered over with a swathing "poetic license." Here, another poet has done something akin to that, in that, Rilke is intentionally writing about angels but without the restraint or restrictions placed upon scriptural writers or others forced to work in pure nonfiction.

The first elegy asserts, "Every angel is terrifying." In the German version this is expressed as, "Ein jeder engel ist schrecklich," (p. 151). The poet, or the narrative poetic character, is wondering which angel might hear his cries. Here, is Rilke's description of supplication - man cries out in hope, fear and trembling for assistance from God - prepared to receive it from "sent angels." Feelings of unworthiness emerge along with guilt and remorse. The poet moves on, the images grow spacious and remain descriptive.

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 7, Duino Elegies Analysis

The second stanza begins, "Yes- the springtimes needed you. Often a star / Was waiting for you to notice it. A wave rolled toward you, " (p. 151). The words grow increasingly dramatic. Rilke's emotive language moves readers. The second page includes, "But when you feel longing, sing of women in love; / for their famous passion is still not immortal. Sing / Of women abandoned and desolate (you envy them, almost) / who could love so much more purely than those who were gratified /...[next stanza, first lines] Voices. Voices. listen, my heart, as only / saints have listened: until the gigantic call lifted them / ...[next page]...Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living /



they are moving among, or the dead [this is one of those drunken comments]. The eternal torrent / whirls all ages along in it, through both realms / forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar," (p. 155).

The second elegy begins, "Every angel is terrifying," (p. 157). The imagery moves again: this time the author calls the mountains and other glorious scenes of the natural world "pampered favorites" (p. 157). Later on, there are two stanzas in which lovers are discussed and described. This is one of the themes. However, at the end of this elegy, Rilke shows his poet's stripes. Here, like many a philosopher, the man's mind has been influenced by literary and religious traditions. He refers to the gods at the end of the poem even though he has been writing of angels for two elegies now. This is when readers can sense that he may have over indulged; his perception has been enriched, but to a point where his perception is skewed in a whole new way. A way that might not be quite right. God...Jesus the Christ...the gods of Olympus...

There are ten elegies among the selections from this book. Each is similar in terms of its length and the mode. Every one of these elegies tends towards longer lines, pentameter or more. They do not have as much rhyme as many of the other poems. They are not short. Some have only one or two stanzas, but some have more. The chapter is followed up by an appendix, which contains some original drafts of the same material and other poems not found during the main part of the Duino Elegies.



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 8, Sonnets to Orpheus

Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 8, Sonnets to Orpheus Summary

The poems in this section are dated 1923. The entire group is labeled not by name but by a combination of numbers. First there is a Roman Numeral and then there is another number. There are excerpts from I & II. The Selections does not include the entire set of numbers from either those listed as Roman Numeral I or Roman Numeral II.

The first one has 4 stanzas. The first two stanzas have 4 lines each; the next two have 3 lines each. The tone is dramatic: Orpheus is called upon during the first stanza. The power of living, majestic trees and of other forces of nature are evoked. Evoked- means the feeling of them being around. Invoked means- one becomes that very energy, oneself. Once Orpheus has been called, animals gather and they listen in silence. At the end, some mysterious you is referred to: "you built a temple deep inside their hearing" (p. 227), which could perhaps be referring to God.

The next poem writes of a "diaphonous girl" who becomes a symbol of his listening: a feminine aspect of Rilke's mind. It is explained in the Introduction that Rilke has a very strong feminine bent of his mind - he is quite heterosexual but he was raised as someone who would have been equally or more treasured had he been a girl, rather than a boy. He was intentionally often placed into "female things" and "roles." This affected his mentality deeply. Here this appears, perhaps subtly - in this twofold manner of the girl as intriguing "other," but she enters into his mind and "sleeps within him" as an innate and important part of himself...or so overcome by her that he loses himself to his sense of what and who she is. By the end of the second poem, Rilke is writing - questioning her death....

The piece that follows has three basic characters: there is the song, the god and the mortal man. The poet exhibits frustration regarding the limits of being human. Being a god is easier, and a god can effect the lyre, and can be relied upon to make good music. This sonnet has the same form of 4 stanzas, the first 2 having 4 lines each, while the last two have 3 lines a piece.

The next one reminds readers that these are about Orpheus. Although he has died as a man, Orpheus continues to live in music and his life should be remembered through live roses rather than dead ornaments.



Book 1, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 8, Sonnets to Orpheus Analysis

The next is I - 7. Rilke continues to write of Orpheus. "Praising is what matters! He was summoned for that," (p. 235) the first line exclaims. Invisible to man due to his death, but constantly perceivable through the lyre instrument, the poet explains, is Orpheus. The poet tells that Orpheus invigorates the singing of a mortal man, rather than the man himself but is also somehow a god.

I-8, and I-25 were hardly written in order. Even so, the editors have placed these together, perhaps because a new flow is created in which the two can be seen together. Praising and lamentation - praise and grief have been united. Here, dedicating devotion to a memory with a reputation intact seems to be the concern. This is the theme of I-8, and the female character found in it, passes over and is found again in I-25 where in the first line she is referred to as "dear girl," (p. 239).

After that, the sonnets headed up with Roman Numeral II (2), begin. Their form is consistent with the predecessors in that they consist of 4 stanzas. The first two have 4 lines each; whereas, the second two stanzas have 3 lines a piece. The first of these has the Arabic Numeral 4 attached to it. This one is about the function of the mind: a creature of the imagination - a possibility is conjured. The gentle yet discernible power of this potential, this idea, is the subject of this poem.

The next sonnet included is II-8, showing again that the editors have selected from the original to include only a part of the author's works. Here, the subject is childhood playmates, as told clearly in the first line. The end line, inclines towards the previous poem, because Rilke refers to the unreality of the situation...the breezing thought that has given rise to the poem but at the same time suggests that there isn't even a real memory associated with it, but only the idea of one.



Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 9, More Sonnets to Orpheus

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 9, More Sonnets to Orpheus Summary

"Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were behind you, like the winter that has just gone by," (p. 243). This is the first line in II-13. Later, he suggests that the invisible you towards whom the poem is directed remains "dead in Eurydice." Here, readers are advised to not take the death as literal. However, there is a reason why they might be inclined to do so. Eurydice is dead, after all, and to that extent, this is about participating in the Otherworld and the realms therein. This sonnet relies upon the same structure as the others.

In this next selection, taken for discussion here in the summary, the quotation comes from the middle realm of the sonnet. Rilke is writing about things, knowledge, and emotions. In the third stanza he writes, "If someone were to fall into intimate slumber, and slept / deeply with Things-: how easily he would come / to a different day, out of the mutual depth," (p. 247). This is a case where the poet is describing a path to enlightenment. One way or another, the author describes relationships. He suggests that learning can be improved through relationships, having them - being in them...and that the type of relationship influences what manner of learning takes place. This covers all manner of things, ranging from business to marriage and romance. Leaders often admit that success in leadership is normally the result of "people skills" as much as it is a consequence of other attributes.

In II-24, the tone is different. This poem contemplates the divine and sets it against mortality. He writes of the gods, and of how humans created the gods. This has happened in some cultures; it represents every believer's ultimate fear - that the atheists are right: that mankind created god - that our God is what the scientists call The Big Bang nowadays. Then, Rilke's humility appears quite quickly; he is a humble believer; he has submitted to God - he is not the "Rebel Demon" at all. The sonnet ends with an upbeat affirmation of daring. Here, rather than God or Eurydice, Death is the star.

Book 1, The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke : Chapter 9, More Sonnets to Orpheus Analysis

Death, this fact of life; this separator, this disconnection, this strange force that unifies the living through what appears to be an unstoppable consequence of life itself is temporary in nature. Death, though not a god, has been personified, as well being



viewed impersonally and objectively. Here the poet takes readers through an incredibly succinct tour of theological debate and philosophy. Rilke is even able to express how it is that, as members of human society, there can be frightening degrees of conflict about these matters. The comment on it, here, is probably as long as the sonnet itself.

Orpheus is directly referred to in II-28 which has been chosen as an example from the book bearing that title. These sonnets have been strung together by the editors. At times, the placement is careful and implies that the editors have been quite cautious in their selections from the original. These are, after all, representatives of the sonnets in the order in which they were first published. This is not the full batch. At times, they come across as having not been intentionally placed together, but in other cases, it shows that their combination has been quite intentional. At times the feeling flows but in other scenarios it doesn't.

The last of these sonnets is "The Silent Friend." Here, Rilke pays homage to friendship. He observes how it can be quite powerful even when little or nothing is said between people. "Nourishment" comes after silence according to the poet here. This is an intense and rather odd poem. The friend is located at changing distances. The poet is writing to this "silent friend." The poet gives advice - "If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine," (p. 255). Yet, the poet also actively cherishes this same friend - whose presence is conjured and outspokenly valued. Once again, Rilke is showing a relational attitude towards the written piece, even though it was done while alone, and is in and of itself, a rather solitary behavior.

With this, readers have developed some sense of Rilke's sonnets. It is worth noting that these are radically unlike William Blake's in that they are short and bear the 4, 4, 3, 3 line stanzas. The lines are rather uniform in length. Rilke's sonnets to Orpheus are much shorter than are those written by the English poet Blake. As such, the translator has succeeded in preserving the poetic meter and meaning of the poetry but has lost much of the rhyme. That Rilke even used this kind of sonnet structure shows that he was a trained poet, rather than being among the masses who learned a little poetry in school but never did much with it, and even that is a success compared to those who really know nothing about how to write and to read poetry correctly.



Characters

Narrator

This is most exceptional character. It is a literary device. At the same time, this provides a fulcrum to the poetry itself. Here, reader meets writer and vice versa. The character of the narrative voice is flexible. It is individual in each poem. The first example of its appearance as a grammatical entity, per se, is in the very first poem of the book. "I am, O Anxious one. Don't you hear my voice?," (p. 3). Here, the mysterious and clear grammatical connection between the "I" and the "you" is present. Later in the same poem, this type of arrangement occurs again. "If you are the dreamer, I am what you dream," (p. 3). What readers can tell is that there is this "I" and this "you." Every reader functions within a role of the "you" and yet simultaneously stands outside of and beyond the poetry. In that regard it is a bit like playing the role of the "you."

Meanwhile, the author plays the role of the "I." To some extent he may also be the "you." The "I" may be the narrative voice. Here, readers face a common question: is the poet the narrator, or is the poet wearing masks? Ten pages later, the Narrator writes objectively, but still includes readers and perhaps an imaginary companion- someone who is in the role of the "you" required for interaction. In the poem "Evening," there is the invisible narrative voice in that the description is rather objective. "The sky puts on a darkening blue coat/.../you watch," (p. 13).

In the New Poems, during the long poem: "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," the Narrator has the powers of 3rd person omniscience- which means that this ephemeral entity can tell readers what a poem's characters are thinking, as well as what they are doing. To some degree, it makes sense to view this as a different Narrative character from the one found in the first poem. Again, this poet is the same but has changed due to the years between the first poem and this one. Because of this, it might be safe to write that the Narrator is both the same entity and is a different narrative character.

Orpheus

Orpheus appears in Sonnets to Orpheus. His name does not occur in each and every one of the sonnets, but in many of them. He also occurs in the poem Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes. During the sonnet labeled I-5, readers are shown this clearly, "Erect no gravestone to his memory; just / let the rose blossom each year for his sake. / For it is Orpheus. /.. / When there is poetry, / it is Orpheus singing.../... / ...don't you understand?," (p. 233). Here is the combination of the character of Orpheus, as a third party used together with the character "you" mentioned above.

Orpheus is not ever described during the poetry in the same manner that he would be in a dictionary. However, he is introduced accurately by the poet. For those who do not already know, Orpheus was an actual person. He lived in Greece before the life of



Jesus the Christ. Orpheus was not a religious figure; he was famed for being a musician. During the era and culture within which he lived, music always included many elements of poetry. In fact, this has not changed; however, the form of the music and of the lyric or song poem, has experienced some alteration according to the development of different instruments and verse forms and rhythms associated with one kind of music or another. Obviously, the lyric is not an integral part of every musical form, but is with respect to many. In the simplest of terms: it makes sense that a poet would pay such homage to Orpheus.

dear girl

This female entity is a center piece of this poem. She is called in many ways, but not by name. "Dear girl" is simply the first of the phrases used by which to address her. The poet addresses her in six ways, through the first two stanzas alone. The first five are all in relation to his own feelings for her. After that, there is a reference to her as a dancer.

She continues to be addressed in the later stanzas, but how this is done is not the same. Now she is described in relation to her own blood. Here, the poet gets into a description of natural rhythms that seem to indicate the recurrence of a woman's menstruation. There are shadows, and repetitious darkness. This could simply be nightfall and the dark times. It could just be the woman's menstruation. It could be the life in the shadows. In the end, Rilke describes how, despite the "down" of all this, the entire experience and female entity's energies emerge into the Spring. For this reason, it seems that this darkness might not be anything "evil" but simply is about cycles of life, and the pattern of night and day which repeats and in that respect is after the same manner that each menstrual period just ends but then repeats.

Women

Here, women as a group are written of. This poem comes from the book Appendix to Duino Elegies. As such, it is an elegy. The poet asks about women, invites women in. Rilke begins by telling the women how he wishes they were in the same situation as the boys are in during the poem. Here, the women as a group function as the "you" of the poem.

In the first stanza the women are "the Women;" whereas, by the third stanza these same people are referred to as "you" as the poet's narrative voice continues to ask them questions. Women as a group are also characters in The Bird-Feeders and in the Requiem.

King Augustus

This King is referred to in one of the Elegies. These have been selected from the book Duino Elegies. He is written of as "King Augustus the Strong," (p. 175). He is only mentioned once in the elegy, and this is the poem in which the mention of him stands



out so markedly. Rilke writes a line in which the ability of King Augustus to crush a pewter plate is compared to the way that time as "Duration" crushes all things and all men.

Angel

This character appears very briefly further on in the same elegy as King Augustus. This angel is a little boy, which he is called earlier in the elegiac form of poem. He is seen as having healing powers in the line, "Oh gather it, Angel, that small-flowered herb of healing," (p. 177). Rilke calls this same entity "lovely darling" and "you" later on in the same poem.

Children

Children are characters in a number of the book's poems. This includes The Fifth Elegy. Called only "a girl" - this might be a child, in the poem The Gazelle. Children are included obtusely, where the "you" is actively directed to "childhood hours" in the poem Before Summer Rain. They also appear in other poems.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Here, the poet practices what is normally a visual art. He creates a self-portrait. In doing so, he drops the masks of the narrative voice and the characters that he creates to act within that narrative. He describes himself. This is the only poem in The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke the he does this.

Rilke's Father

This is poetic portrait of the poet's father. As the title clearly shows, the poet is describing what his father was like when young. He paints an image of a handsome fellow dressed in a military uniform. At the end of poem, Rilke explains that he has written this based on a photograph. This locates the poem in history.



Objects/Places

Photograph

This item is a photograph of the poet when he was a young man. The poet uses it to create a written image that is based upon the fleeting moment captured by the camera. Part of the image of youth, of course, is that here is a man, quite possibly a single man who is not a father. Here is a soldier dressed in a uniform. Here is a man who is young enough that his son, who was a grown man at the time of writing the poem, can see in himself...It is the search in the father for a peer, or for himself, and for a friend over and above his role as the father.

The Sky

The sky first appears as both an object and a place in the book's first chapter. It is in the opening line. This recurs. The sky is used as a reference point in numerous other stories.

Time

This appears in the first selected poem of the book. In this instance, it is specifically treated as a location. It is the name of a city, and yet it is also Time as an urban center rather than as the abstract concept that is somehow simultaneously visceral. Time is the main medium through which we perceive change.

Stone

This rudimentary item occurs in the poem *The Blindman's Song* and in many others scattered throughout *The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*. While there are tremendous differences between one stone and another, except when they are all of the same kind, the same word is still used. The poet uses it as a general term.

card

This is a playing card, rather than a gift card. It is used in the poem to describe the way that an unnamed figure, possibly God, has the main character of the poem. The Drunkard has turned into the playing card of some Higher Power. The character is rather fearful that even if he is kept, because the Higher Power wins him, that he will simply be cast aside and cast out "into the mire" (p. 17).



Soul

This intangible yet vital essence of a living, and perhaps even a dead person, is first mentioned in The Dwarf's Song. This item- which is somehow purely a quality of human kind, yet as a known, also an object, is referred to in many other poems throughout the book.

Panther

This is an animal after which one and only poem in the book is named. It appears during the beginning selections taken from New Poems. This is a four legged, feline mammal. It is one of the more powerful big cats. The poem is about the restless activity of one of these creatures in captivity. Mammals are notoriously restless animals that move so much they appear to be wasting energy. These come in a variety of colors, tawny with spots and also in a dark haired form - sometimes they are even black. These are predatory - meat eaters.

Gazelle

This is also a four legged mammal. Unlike the panther, these are grazers and vegetarians by nature. They are rather large and are known for being graceful. The poem named for it is actually about one. They are herd animals.

Cup

This item used to hold fluids when a person intends to drink something. It is referred to in conjunction with a woman who is the focal point of the poem Going Blind. Such a piece of dish ware is commonplace by virtue of its type.

Harpsichord

This musical instrument comes up in "The Last Evening," which is taken from the New Poems. This is an instrument that is typically used laterally. It is set on a special kind of table or tripod. The piano is a gigantic variant of the harpsichord. There are many kinds of these: they are percussion instruments, but the keys have been set up so that tiny hammers are rigged for each string. By pushing down a key quickly and with some force using one's fingers, the hammer joined to that key will strike the matching wire and a noise is made.

Themes

Worldliness & Translation

The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke has been crafted in the German language and then translated into the English. The author has written poetry of such high quality that many critics would like it to be able to read the poetry, thus translations are made. This includes English. The editors have been especially conscientious and helpful in this particular case because they have chosen to include German copies of the text and also English versions. While for those who read only one of these two languages it may seem like wasted space, but for those who care about what has been gained or lost through translation, this is a Godsend - a great boon.

Rilke's poetry emerged on Continental Europe. Here, German is just one of the many languages spoken. French was a major international language for centuries. However, during the 20th century it began to be supplanted by English. Precisely because it is growing as one of the international languages, the use of English makes sense in order to reach a broader audience. For this reason, an English translation of Rilke's poetry is seen as highly important.

The other main reason for translating Rilke's poetry into English is to service those nations in which English is the prevailing language. Countries such as America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand are themselves a giant literary market. Academics endeavoring to teach young people what excellence in poetry is, and how to create it can better do so, when supplied with translations of Rilke's work.

The final reason is to cultivate "wordliness" within the literary community. For this reason, Rilke's work is able to represent the Germanic tradition, whereas writers such as Rumi represent the Arabians and Yeats separates the Irish from the English. In every case, great efforts have been made to produce high quality poetry either in English originally, or through the art of translation. Through translation, greats become better known, poems and stories from the world's finest gain accessibility and recognition.

Journeys in and for Self-awareness

The expressions in Rilke's poetry involve numerous journeys of the mind through the emotions. Thoughts and feelings are not everything, but often enough they serve as the very gage by which people judge whether or not their lives are worth living. Much of Rilke's poetry is subjective, or is designed to arouse the readers. The type of arousal in this case is more emotional than sexual as he is not an erotic poet. Often, the subjectivity that occurs within the poem is designed to facilitate the readers' feelings of intimate relationship and that by doing so, the ability of the reader to be aroused by the poet is strengthened.



The main reason, other than the purely relational one, behind the poet's use of emotion, is to describe journeys in self-consciousness. This functions on two levels. One reason is for the poet to share what has been experienced or what "could be." The other reason is to affect the readers' minds. This includes their emotions. Again, while most people will admit that emotions are not "everything," they are very important in life. People get into and out of all manner of events due to the way they are emotionally affected. People tend to move towards emotional pleasure and away from emotional pain. In some cases, people stick with emotional pain and with the events that seem connected with it. Other times they are able to completely change the situation by what they do or whom they are with. Many emotional challenges are easy enough to cope with; others are more pernicious and take longer to heal from or to work through.

To further clarify this, an example will be used. This comes from "Requiem For a Friend." The quote is intended to show exactly what the previous paragraph claims: "...and wanted it, after all that, to be happy. / Finally, you forced it: it was happy, / .../ And you thought, / because you had grown used to other measures, / that this would be for just a little while. / But now you were in time, and time is long. / And time goes on, and time grows large, and time / is like a relapse after a long illness," (p. 81). Here readers can relate to this and can do so about a variety of areas of their lives.

20th Century Poetic Genius

Rilke does not overtly brag during his poetry. This is noteworthy because there are poets and poetesses who do and who have (e.g. someone such as Walt Whitman). At the present time - 2008, this poet is exceptionally popular in America. Time often makes a good judge and in this case, time is allowing humanity to sift through the latest batches of poets to determine which are the best and which, it turns out, are the so-called "chaff" to be sloughed off. Rilke is turning out to be the wheat rather than the chaff.

For those who don't know that old saying, the reality is that history and professionals within the industry are judging Rilke's work as of such high quality that his name and his work should be ranked in the literary traditions of Europe and "the West." This is the "stream" of information and knowledge that is deemed important enough to teach to future generations as the best representation of 20th century poetry to come from Europe. It doesn't take long to realize this means that Rilke's work represents not only his own personality, time and place, but also his generation and the first half of the 20th century. His late poetry was created during the 1930s.

The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke can be used as a university level textbook. There are younger students who can handle it, and because of this it could be used as a text in some limited cases for high schools. Here it will be used for what it is: examples of Germanic European poetry of the early 20th century.



Style

Point of View

Rainer Maria Rilke is one of the most prominent poets of the 20th century. This comes from a European bias. The good news is that this limitation of perspective is now recognized for what it is. The author was born prior to the invention of the airplane but had probably heard of aircraft such as the hot air balloon and possibly even the zeppelin. He had also heard of gliders through his education if only through the story of Icarus, who died while using a flying machine built by his father - the device was mainly but not exclusively a glider.

It is explained during the introduction that the author was exceptionally close to the feminine and to the female mind and way of life. This occurred intentionally through his mother, who treated him very much "like a girl." Rather than there having been some "stigma" attached to this as may have been found in male culture once he reached adolescence, this "likeness to girls" was viewed very strictly as a good thing. For this reason readers may assume that Rilke has an affinity with the female mind and female behavioral practices that is higher than that of the average male person. The author often writes characters in the poems that have female perspectives and male perceptions of events in other characters. Suffice it say that "part of the psyche" of the poet Rilke is female, not the flesh but the mentality. Scientists today might have loved to run an EKG to see if the poet's brainwaves registered on normally female levels or not.

The poet's point of view is also definitively European. Rilke came from a country that changed hands and names during the course of his own lifetime. He was born in a German speaking part of the kingdom of Bohemia. This changed, as Bohemia went from being heavily influenced by Austria to being annexed as part of Austria. This change was not particularly welcomed by the Bohemians, and their temperament showed that it had been forced upon them from the dominating forces. By the end of his life, the same poet was considered to be "from Germany," although the location of his birth had not changed. Observe that the changes in the names of his homeland are intimately associated with the World Wars of the 20th century. These are the most potent forces that shaped Rilke and his poetry.

Setting

The poems are set in a variety of locations. This brings up an unusual issue. The poetry is set in a kind of cultural and psychological landscape that is different from ordinary places. The author is well learned, and this shows in his writing. The "place" of much of the writing is more "the mind," "the emotions" and in "relational space" than it is located in precise physical sites such as a a given city or town. There are numerous examples of this throughout the book.



During *New Poems*, "Buddha in Glory" starts off referring to a "center [and] core," (p. 69) as locations; whereas, the finale of the same poem is about what remains of the individual, the eternal that shall still be "here" or "there" when "all the stars are dead," (p. 103). One of the sections of excerpts from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, there are a few descriptions of how Rilke uses and creates "space" and a sense of "location" in his work. "Your theatre came into being. ...this life almost without spatial reality,...So you...sought equivalents in the visible world for what you had seen inside," (p. 103). Later during the same piece, the author does refer to "towers had come in and whole mountain-ranges," (p. 103). During the poem "Lament," in a chapter of *Uncollected Poems*, the closest thing to a geographical location provided is: a lonely path, "the tree of jubilation," (p. 137) , and "invisible landscape, you that made me more known to the invisible angels," (p. 137). One case, later in *The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, is "childhood's dark abyss," as a location. These all show what is meant by the ephemeral sense of location that can be found in Rilke's poems. He uses some words that indicate geographical locations, but most of them are very abstract. Of course, the author also makes many references to emotional and psychological, even spiritual "places." These, too, are a combination of intangible and perceivable but only partially geographical in their existence. As such, the author generates a simultaneous sense of place and of anywhere. This is also the kind of writing that makes some states of consciousness so familiar that they are described as places even though they are not places in the purely geographical sense of the term.

Language and Meaning

This area is particularly challenging to discuss only because of the process of translation. The author and the translator have both worked extensively to convey the meaning of the poetry through two languages. For those English speakers living in an English speaking culture, it is not entirely possible to get every grain of significance from the original language when working with the material out-of-context. For those who speak and read German, the poetry is available without the filter of translation. For those who can work with both, there is an advantage to this. Since the majority of readers of the book summary are native speakers of English, this section will focus on the English word usage.

The poet cultivates the readers' sense for certain aspects of life. These are: mental states and heightened emotions, or at least emphasized emotions more than everything else. The images that he creates in the poetry are done to this effect. One excellent example of this is presented in the poem *Lament* found in *The Book of Pictures*. "I think there were tears / in the car I heard pass / and something terrible was said /.../ I would like to step out of my heart / and go walking beneath the enormous sky," (p. 9). Later, in *New Poems*, the following stanza provides another clear indication of what this means. Here is the first stanza of the poem *Going Blind*: "She sat just like the others at the table. / But on the second glance, she seemed to hold her cup / a little differently as she picked it up. / She smiled once. It was almost painful." Here, there is some connection to physical reality, and there is something relational. Yet, is the emotion and the sense of that almost painful smile that makes the deepest impression upon the readers.



Rilke repeats this tendency throughout the entire work. Many would observe that this is one way readers can tell it is poetry—for what it does convey and what it does not. That being said, there is some kind of an exception. This tendency to heighten emotion and mind states with the written image holds true in the case of those selections taken from the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge.

Structure

The structure of the book is rather straightforward. The book is laid out chronologically, with the author's earliest poems at the front, and those he wrote latest in his life set at the back. This gives a strong sense of sequence. The overall layout is still somewhat artificial because it is a "selected works" book, rather than a "complete works" compendium. The idea of such a book is that it gives readers an opportunity to read some of his works.

Each chapter has an opening page with brief information about the dates of the poems. The first three chapters are from books of poetry. These are all short poems. The fourth is an excerpt from *Requiem*. This is also poetry. It sets itself apart easily by consisting of a much longer work of poetry. The excerpt lasts pages. Unlike all the preceding cases, the whole excerpt is one stanza of poetry. Here, rather than the usual divisions of stanza, what readers get are paragraph indentations. There is one stanza break between page 73 and 87. There is some rhyme in the German, which is essentially lost during the translation into English. The sacrifice is great, but probably well worth it in order to gain access to the meaning of Rilke's poetry and the main essence of his lines. Nonetheless, it would be ideal if the translator was able to convert the meter, rhyme, and meaning from one language to another. This, however, is a monumental task.



Quotes

"We are not permitted to linger, even with what is / most intimate," (p. 141).

"...that strange and distant city, Time," (p. 3).

"O wandering spirit, most wandering of all!," (p. 141).

"Only don't ask the women anything when you see them feeding the birds," (p. 99).

"With all the subtle pains of Fragonard / no more of their red and white could be expressed / than someone would convey about his mistress," (p. 67).

"...and leave you (inexpressibly to unravel) / your life, with its immensity and fear," (p. 13).

"That was the deep uncanny mine of souls. / ... / Down this path they were coming / His senses felt as though they were split in two:" (p. 49)

"You drove it on, you pushed it forward, you dragged it / up to the hearth, as one would drag a terrified / animal to the sacrificial altar;" (p. 81)

"When it was done, you wished to be rewarded, like children when they have swallowed down the draught / of bittersweet tea that perhaps will make them well," (p. 81)

"He, the one who was recognized, had no longer thought, preoccupied as he was, that a love could still exist," (p. 115)

"The Vast Night....I didn't exist., " (p. 129) [the line ends with '!'. Not all the lines of poetry do that; therefore I left it in and added the standard ',' after it...since we are dealing with poetry]

"Her strong hand is above me, and if she should hold me under, / submerged in fate, I would have to learn how to breathe / down there. Even her most lightly-entrusted mission," (p. 215)

Topics for Discussion

Which of the chapters is your favorite? Describe why.

Do you think it is important that the editors have included both the German and English versions of the selections? Defend your answer.

Do you think Rilke is one of the greatest poets of the 20th century? Why or why not.

Give one reason why you think that Rilke is so popular among English-speaking readers nowadays.

Do you think Rilke is serious when he writes of Angels?

What are the implications, if any, of Rilke's writing about God and Angels?

Do you think poetic translators should have to be able to recreate the same rhymes and meter of the original author? Why or why not?